

Indie Rock's Undead

Re-animating Keith Harris's "Did New York Kill Indie Rock?"

From various debates about the existence of an aughts nostalgia trend called “indie sleaze”¹ to some highly clicked-on think pieces about “the secret gay history of indie rock”² and producer Jack Antonoff’s infusion of indie rock conventions into today’s pop sound³, indie rock has recently been a renewed object of attention for music writers, industry professionals, and fans. Reading these takes, you get the sense that the consensus that indie rock is, if not conservative, at least risk-averse to the point of being basic. As Emma Madden writes,

Historically, indie rock has been the province of white, heterosexual males—a comparatively conservative genre that has kept many of its main players closeted . . . Its political disengagement has often expressed itself through a pose of disregard and emotional inertia; a self-conscious awkwardness, a restricted sexuality, a ceremonious stiffness. In other words: a heterosexual sensibility.

As Madden tells it, indie rock is dad rock for millennials, a genre that intentionally smooths any of post-punk’s edges into their most normie contours. (It’s interesting that Madden attributes the very same features Theo Cateforis attributes to 80s New Wave’s whiteness—stiffness, awkwardness—to heterosexuality instead.⁴ I would suggest seeing both as intertwined: this is a whiteness grounded in and sometimes campily sending up heterosexuality, and a heterosexuality grounded in whiteness.) In a similar vein, Therieau uses the figure of producer Jack Antonoff, Fun, guitarist and lead singer of Bleachers, as a lens to discuss the watering-down of indie rock’s aesthetics. “Antonoffication” is Therieau’s term for

1. See: https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgmkdq/the-indie-sleaze-revival-isnt-real-its-just-an-echo-chamber#:~:text=Indie%20sleaze%20isn't%20%E2%80%9Cmaking,that%20isn't%20really%20happening.https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/54603/1/wtf-is-indie-sleaze-comeback-tiktok-trend-y2k-chanel-saint-laurent-cobrasnake.https://www.tiktok.com/@elsewherespace/video/7153738919618546990?is_copy_url=1&is_from_webapp=v1&lang=en

2. Emma Madden, “The Secret Gay History of Indie Rock,” in Pitchfork, July 5, 2023 https://pitchfork.com/features/article/the-secret-gay-history-of-indie-rock/?utm_source=twitter&mbid=social_twitter&utm_social-type=owned&utm_brand=p4k&utm_medium=social

3. Mitch Therieau, “The Dream of Antonoffication,” in the Drift, July 10, 2023 <https://www.thedriftmag.com/dream-of-antonoffication/>

4. Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 2011.

the process of the dispersion of the aesthetics of indie rock out from a distinct subcultural enclave and into a general ether that suffuses and unites the major genres of today's Top 40 pop music. Which is to say, the complex process of cultural mediation through which all pop music today has become a little bit indie rock.

If "Smells Like Teen Spirit" made 1991 into what is purportedly the year punk broke mainstream US radio, this idea of "Antonoffication" marks the 2010s as the years that indie rock broke pop. And because this breaking point happened on streaming rather than on radio, Therieau argues that "indie rock" is taken up less as an iconic (and iconoclastic) musical style (as, say, punk was in the late 70s), and more as "content"—i.e., as fungible creative material valued primarily for its ability to drive platform use. As he puts it, "Indie rock has adapted to the streaming era . . . by dispersing into the digital ether and infusing nearly every other genre. Along the way . . . [it is] the most fitting allegory for the status of music under the regime of streaming." Spotify is full of music-as-content: music by fake artists, files designed to be streamed by bots to rack up artist fees, etc. With the style that Therieau identifies as "minimalist," the kind of indie rock Antonoff represents content-ifies pop by smoothing out any rough or weird sonic edges (remember Lady Gaga? Or The B-52s?) that could get in the way of either lyrics that constitute the musical equivalent of the doomscroll or toned-down songs designed to blend into the background. Far from injecting the mainstream with a jolt of rebellion, Antonoffication is the process where indie rock's purported stylistic conservatism helps domesticate pop into mere content.

Discourse about the aughts-nostalgia trend called "indie sleaze" likewise implies that contemporary indie rock has lost its edge. In an October 2022 TikTok post by the Brooklyn, New York venue elsewhere, the narrator explains indie sleaze as a youthful leftist revolt against American imperialism, Republican politicians, and worsening economic inequality:

We're in the middle of the Bush presidency. The Great Recession is almost here. 9/11 like just happened, and political unrest in the US is stronger than ever. Political trauma response is almost always the reason that these counter-culture movements begin . . . indie sleaze sprouts from this apathy of uncertainty, kind of like, 'What am I supposed to fucking do about that?'

According to this (not entirely accurate) explanation of indie sleaze, the indie scene at its peak was "counter-cultural," a reaction to US imperial aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan and the financial crisis. Though there were certainly some aughts indie artists with an overt political message and agenda—think queer/feminist acts like Peaches or Le Tigre—and others trafficked in political rhetoric and symbols (e.g., M.I.A.), the proto-indie scene of the early millennium was hardly countercultural or inherently left wing.⁵ The scene's

5. For example, The Stokes had a lead singer who was the son of the wealthy owner of a famous NYC modeling agency, and they were widely covered in both the North American and British mainstream music press. Infamous indie rocker Ariel Pink has long been rumored to have reactionary views, which he basically confirmed by attending the attempted coup on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. <https://variety.com/2021/music/news/ariel-pink-trump-rally-john-maus-1234880851/>

relative “I-can-party-hard-because-I-don’t-have-to-care-about-paying-my-rent-and-student-loans” hedonism is the thing most often praised nostalgically by indie sleaze evangelists. In this respect, “indie sleaze” represents mainly a relatively idyllic past when life was less austere. Perhaps this is why a key component of indie sleaze discourse is marking its end, clearly signaling the break between the bad now and the less bad then. Most of the main accounts of indie sleaze posit a turning point at which peak indie shifts into something different. Whether it’s the dawn of the Obama era in 2008 or the invention of the iPhone in 2012, there was what music blogger Matthew Perpetua calls a “vibe shift”⁶ as indie became less sleazy and more . . . respectable.

The popular music studies archive supports that periodization. In the early 2010s, multiple music critics noted the recent gentrification and domestication of post-punk’s descendants into “indie rock.” As Chris DeVille explains in a 2013 Stereogum piece on “indie rock gentrification:”

The music being touted under the indie banner got a lot softer and increasingly more accessible. Indie moved from “House Of Jealous Lovers” to Justin Vernon’s cabin in just half a decade, then was awkwardly stretched to fit bands that don’t pass the know-indie-when-you-hear-it test, from the post-emo pop wailers Fun. to the DMB-reminiscent Lumineers and Mumford & Sons.⁷

According to DeVille, in the latter half of the aughts indie’s vibe shifted from the dance floor to proto-cottagecore. This is a form of gentrification because, as his examples suggest, the emphasis shifts from the club (where one dances and parties in public, as one would to dance-punk band The Rapture) to the private home, and then the genre is taken to include anything vaguely bougie and middlebrow, such as Dave Matthews Band. Writing for *Vice* in 2014, Zachary Lipetz put it this way: “Now [indie rock’s] about being really reasonable and maintaining your lawn; metaphorical and literal.” By the mid-2010s, “indie rock” was music for middle-class white people rapidly gentrifying the city centers their parents and grandparents fled, its stylistic conservatism mirroring the bland architecture of the grey-and-beige box condos and apartments popping up in Brooklyn, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Denver, and cities across the US. From cabins to lawns, indie rock’s place was perceived to be as definitively bourgeois as it gets: the privately owned single-family home.

Just as this bland architectural style rose to ubiquity because it maximized developers’ profits, indie rock’s stylistic conservatism has its roots in market interests. As Jessica Hopper explains in this 2013 piece for BuzzFeed, “Selling out saved indie rock.” As the stratification between the 1% and the 99% grew after the turn of the millennium, the rise of Napster and Spotify contributed to the evisceration of underground music’s middle class: it was harder than ever before to make music a sustainable day job. When selling records and touring don’t pay the bills, licensing recordings to ads and TV shows looks

6. <https://www.thrillist.com/entertainment/nation/indie-sleaze-explained>

7. Chris DeVille, “Deconstructing: The O.C. and Indie Rock Gentrification,” in STEREOGUM, August 5, 2013. <https://www.stereogum.com/1426101/deconstructing-the-o-c-and-indie-rock-gentrification/columns/sounding-board/>

more attractive even to artists in a scene averse to selling out. As Hopper put it, “Decades of posturing and sanctimony were rendered moot once artists realized that corporate gigs were the only paying gigs in town, a (very) necessary evil.” As corporate execs came to be the main paying audience for indie rock, the genre’s sound grew to be more cleaned up—business both in the front and the back with a lot less party all around. Most of the artists Hopper’s article mentions—such as Wilco, Feist, Tegan & Sara, Lorde—have a very toned-down, guitar- and vocal-centric sound. Though this list of indie rockers is hardly a litany of straight white dudes, the musical vibe shared by these artists lacks the weirdness and edginess of canonical modern rock artists such as The B-52s, Bjork, Cabaret Voltaire, or The Dead Kennedys. Hopper describes this vibe in her observation of a recording session where a well-known indie vocalist recorded anonymous vocals for an agency that writes ad jingles: “So, kind of a Shins-y thing?” she asks. He nods. The song is sweet, pretty, California folk pop, with a little ukulele.” The descriptors “sweet,” “pretty,” and “folk pop” point toward a stripped-down yet upbeat sound that’s more interested in conforming to dominant norms than presenting any alternative to them. Saving ad producers the labor of editing out edgy sounds like the “liquor and drugs” or “sex machine” in Iggy Pop’s “Lust for Life” (which is featured on a Carnival Cruise ad)⁸, this bespoke jingle focuses on the most upbeat and anodyne (and white feminine) sounds in the modern rock spectrum because those are the feelings that advertisers want consumers to associate with their products and services. Gone are the days when mass produced commodities were the enemy and punk’s DIY business model let musicians support themselves by releasing records big industry players wouldn’t touch. In the asset economy⁹, where commodities and commodified labor are devalued and the only way to make money is through asset appreciation, the only way independent musicians can survive is by making music that reads like a good credit report—i.e., as only undertaking risks for which one can be privately responsible for their costs.

Punk debuted at the dawn of the West’s neoliberalization, and by the time it was thirtysomething both the music industry and the Global North’s overall relations of production had devolved to the point where the movement’s original aesthetics and political economy were neither ideologically coherent nor practically livable. Though the indie rock of the last two decades may look to punk, post-punk, and modern rock as its forebears, there is a widespread consensus that it no longer means, functions, or sounds the same as they did.

Pre-dating DeVille, Lipez, and Hopper’s pieces, Keith Harris’s 2012 *JPMS* article “Did New York Kill Indie Rock?” incisively calls out indie rock’s gentrification by emphasizing its complicity with the gentrification of aughts indie’s ground zero, Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The ground zero of the “millennial hipster” scene, Williamsburg was then like Bushwick is today: the hip area where all the cool clubs and venues are,

8. In a 2005 NPR segment, Slate advertising critic Seth Stevenson discussed survey results revealing that audiences thought this was the most egregiously “misused” song in any TV commercial. <https://www.npr.org/2005/06/06/4682461/the-songs-just-wrong>

9. Lisa Adkins, Martin Konings, and Melinda Cooper, *The Asset Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2020.

where all the cool people party and perhaps work and live and shop . . . and drive up rents as developers and landlords notice the “creative class”¹⁰ has moved into the neighborhood. Arguing that “New York . . . or more specifically Brooklyn, or more specifically Williamsburg” effectively became the Wall Street of indie rock, Harris’s article shows how the “indie rock” revival of the 2000s flipped modern rock from a platform for “provincial . . . misfits” into something more like the blue-chip art world. As Harris writes:

The danger is that the scrappy indie rock notion that art is something any loser can create in any unfashionable backwater has been replaced by the more traditional idea, long prevalent in the art world, that artists must migrate to major metropolitan centers, encounter likeminded peers and mentors, and become acculturated into the creative life.

Gone are the days when oddballs with little cultural and/or real capital from places such as Athens, Georgia, or Manchester, UK, can skyrocket up Billboard’s Modern Rock Songs chart; in 2012, indie rock success required a lot of both sorts of capital. (Recall, for example, that Strokes frontman Julian Casablancas is the son of a famous modeling agency owner.) In 2024 it’s especially hard to imagine anyone without family wealth being able to afford living in New York City while holding down a service industry or retail job that lets them focus primarily on their music career (as many of the musicians and artists in *Nomi Song*, the biopic of early 80s New Wave artist Klaus Nomi, do). Although indie rock’s punk and post-punk roots originated as a rejection of big business and privileged elites, millennial indie of the “Alternative Songs”¹¹ era is increasingly the province of the very same elites who can afford to buy a flipped condo in Williamsburg . . . or at least take an informal unpaid internship as one “becomes acculturated to the creative life.”

Harris focuses on the notion that New York City had become a de facto epicenter for indie acts in the new millennium. Citing a *Village Voice* article by Scott Plagenhoef, Harris notes that from 2002 to 2007—the key “indie sleaze” years—indie rock bands from Brooklyn had disproportionate success in the top 50 of the publication’s esteemed Pazz and Jop critics’ poll. In this case, the numbers lend support to the common wisdom that Brooklyn—specifically Williamsburg—was effectively synonymous with “indie rock.” Harris cites demographic and discursive reasons why those numbers seem to be as big as they are. First, demographics: “New York blossomed as a post-collegiate destination” in the late 1990s as largely white elites from across the U.S. and the rest of the world deposited all their cultural capital in the same place. Second, the discourse: “And then there were The Strokes . . . The Strokes looked the way the British press thought New York punk sounded.” Just as a decade earlier, when the music press used the “Nirvana changed everything” to misrepresent the re-centering of white men with

10. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/26/gentrification-richard-florida-interview-creative-class-new-urban-crisis>

11. When Billboard’s “Modern Rock Tracks” chart merged with Radio & Records’ “Alternative Songs” chart in 2009, the combined chart was renamed “Modern Rock Songs.” In 2020, that chart would split into “Alternative Airplay,” which tracked spins on alternative rock radio, and “Hot Alternative Songs,” which tracked sales and streams.

sufficient cultural capital as a revolutionary stylistic innovation in the genre, in the early aughts there was a prominent “The Strokes changed everything” myth that did the same thing. As Harris’s comment about the British press correctly points out, The Strokes were convenient poster boys for the rehabilitation of rock’s image for all the young bourgeois college graduates depositing their cultural capital in NYC. As the alt-rock radio bubble burst in the late 1990s, programmers responded by narrowcasting to their core audience: young white men. Chris Molanphy calls this “the bro-ification of alternative radio,”¹² as alternative rock becomes associated almost exclusively with white men with lowbrow taste, i.e., “bros.” The Strokes look and sound less like Fred Durst and more like what the foreign press might imagine cutting-edge American musicians look and sound like: rebels with a cause in jeans and black leather jackets . . . or The Ramones in designer clothes. (Calling The Strokes rebels is a bit of a stretch, when their most politically controversial song, “New York City Cops,” sounds like an episode of *Brooklyn 99* next to Le Tigre’s song from the same year criticizing the NYC police’s execution of Amadou Diallo.) The Strokes became a figurehead for rock’s (re)gentrification by elites like me, who had so little to do with alt rock that when I was walking to a philosophy grad seminar on DePaul’s Lincoln Park (Chicago) campus in 2001 or 2002 and saw a poster advertising a Linkin Park album release, I thought they must be a local band. The Strokes’ image as the quintessential New York Band at the vanguard of rock’s image rehabilitation only intensifies “the “rock is back” phenomenon [which] coincided with the September 11th attacks to present New York as an unlikely, triumphant underdog.” Between The Strokes’ September 2001 album release and 9/11, New York had made both rock music and being American something people with relatively high cultural capital could feel a little less embarrassed about liking.

Though he never explicitly thematizes it this way, Harris’s article points to ways that New York functioned as more than the center of aughts indie’s demographics and discourse. In the same way that David Harvey’s “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction” uses New York City’s financial crisis of the late 1970s as both a causal precursor and synecdoche for the neoliberalization of the Western world, Harris’s article can be read as using “New York” as a synecdoche for the neoliberalization of the music industry. As Harvey argues:

The management of New York’s fiscal crisis paved the way for neoliberal practices both domestically under Ronald Reagan and internationally through the International Monetary Fund throughout the 1980s. It established a principle that, in the event of a conflict between the integrity of financial institutions and bondholders on one hand and the well-being of the citizens on the other, the former would be given preference. It hammered home the view that the role of government was to create a good business climate rather than look to the needs and well-being of the population at large.¹³

12. <https://chris.molanphy.com/radio-friendly-unit-shifters/>

13. David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 610, *NAFTA and Beyond: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Global Trade and Development* (March 2007), 22–44.

Privileging the shareholders of private corporations over the public good of the citizenry, neoliberalism is an ideology and practice of privatization. From this perspective, as Margaret Thatcher infamously put it, “There is no such thing as society, just families and individual men and women.” According to Harvey’s account here, the federal government’s austerity-driven approach to New York City’s bankruptcy served as the defining precedent for the neoliberalization of the rest of the United States (and beyond). Each thing Harvey says it “established,” “hammered home,” and “resulted [in]” has to do with the redirection of money, attention, and moral worthiness away from the public and towards private markets.

With this idea of privatization in mind, it’s possible to read Harris’s article as an account of the privatization of the “scene” into a brand. A music scene is a community: it includes the musicians, industry workers, journalists, and fans whose paid and unpaid labor keeps the scene alive. Harris’s article depicts New York City as the last scene in the post-punk/modern rock/alt-rock/indie world. For example, Harris notes how “the differing production and performance requirements of hip hop and bedroom electronica undercut the traditional notion of a music ‘scene’ by making it easier for artists to be literally independent from traditional scene constituents, such as producers, studio musicians, labels, distributors, and so on. Between Digital Audio Workstations and MySpace, artists aren’t as dependent on others as they traditionally have been. But this independence is little more than private responsibility. Or, as Harris puts it, “Bon Iver may offer the most pernicious myth of all—that of the lonesome bard holed up in his cabin. Because ultimately, indie rock was a social network, fostering a realization that there were other likeminded people in your own town, and in other towns too.”

To paraphrase Thatcher, in this context there is no such thing as a scene, only individual artists and fans. Ryan Hibbett’s 2006 “What Is Indie Rock?” identifies a similar sentiment among fans of Lou Barlow, who was one of the leading popularizers of the term “indie rock” in the early 1990s. Reading several fans’ comments on Barlow’s *Another Collection of Home Recordings*, Hibbett finds numerous variations of the view that “because it exists in domestic rather than professional or commercial space, one supposes, it is nearer the truth.”¹⁴ Much as Thatcher thought anything outside the private domestic sphere was illegitimate, this angle on indie rock aesthetics considers the conditions and aesthetics of at-home production to be more ontologically and aesthetically genuine than work produced collaboratively as part of a scene. As another quote from Barlow suggests, as early as the 1990s punk’s DIY values got twisted from a critique of capitalism into a neoliberal idea of private responsibility. “There’s very few bands on the radio who haven’t been shaped by a producer,” a regretful Barlow tells *Uno Mas*. “Even Nevermind was a totally produced record. That’s just the way it is.” Rather than viewing producers as collaborators, as co-equal members of one’s scene, Barlow treats them as corrupting private individuals’ artistic integrity.

14. Ryan Harlow, “What Is Indie Rock?” *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 28, no. 1, (February 2005), 55–77. ISSN 0300-7766 (print)/ISSN 1740-1712 (online)#2005 Taylor & Francis Ltd DOI: 10.1080/0300776042000300972

The sound of 2010s indie not only favored styles that people could literally do (just) themselves, it became, as Harris points out, its own type of cultural capital. “Local music,” he writes, “has become a marketing technique for cities to lure hip professionals, like brewpubs and bike paths.” The countless brewpubs that sprouted up in hip and/or gentrifying areas in the last two decades are widely represented and perceived as local, small, craft businesses with distinct, decidedly non-mass-produced identities and tastes/aesthetics.

As anyone who has been to more than one of these places could observe, however, they are all effectively fungible, with their takes on hoppy or hazy IPAs, their vaguely contemporary industrial aesthetics, and their bougie patrons. (The critical design collective K-Hole calls this phenomenon “mass indie”—“indie” aesthetics produced and reproduced at mass scale.¹⁵) Though the purported distinctiveness of this local flair is treated as a form of cultural capital that contributes to a city’s unique brand, craft brewpubs are effectively as fungible as the greige (grey + beige) cube apartments and condos that developers put up in gentrifying neighborhoods across the country. Similarly, local independent music scenes are co-opted into vectors of cultural capital used to market property developments and tourism. In this context, an indie music scene is less a place where people come together in community and more a market relationship.

Whereas DIY began as an alternative means of production, today “indie rock” indexes both a style of music and its associated market position. Harris’s 2012 proclamation of indie rock’s death marks the beginning of its nadir on the market of cultural capital; the style persisted but was not the place where exponential gains in cultural capital happened. Musically, in the 2010s the cutting edge veered far away from guitar music: this was the era of vaporwave, PC Music, hyperpop, trap, and reggaeton. Except perhaps for the surge of interest (and chart success) in Kate Bush’s “Running Up That Hill” after it was featured on the Netflix show *Stranger Things*, indie rock has not exactly been a viral sensation. Just as independent musicians following the original DIY business model face increasingly difficult industry conditions in the era of streaming and Ticketmaster/Live-Nation monopolies, “indie rock’s cultural capital as a style of music stagnated.”

Because indie rock had “died” in and around 2012 and its cultural capital stagnated for about a decade, by 2023 it was ripe for flipping into pop success. Olivia Rodrigo’s 2023 album *GUTS*, which drips with references to the 90s modern rock canon, debuted at the top of the US and UK album charts and a number of its singles also populated the top ranks of the Hot 100 and the BBC Official Singles Chart. The album received a similarly spectacular whirlwind of critical praise. Given its trajectory over the 2010s, indie rock’s market position in 2023 is roughly analogous to that of popular feminism’s ideal subject: a traditionally devalued resource capable, with the exercise of sufficient private responsibility, of resilient profitability. Though neoliberal cultural and economic reforms killed the original formulation of punk/post-punk/modern rock/indie as a scene that offered an alternative to the corporate mainstream, from the vantage of 2023 this looks less like a death blow and more like the first move in a cycle of creative destruction.

15. K-HOLE, “Youth Mode: A Report on Freedom” 2013. <http://khole.net/issues/youth-mode/>

Noting the vast differences between the conditions of production and consumption of 1990s modern rock and Rodrigo's GUTS, Jay Caspian Kang writes in *The New Yorker* that for Rodrigo's teen fans,

their parents grew up in a time when music was attached to specific scenes that were very much of a time and place, whether Seattle's grunge or the Midwest's indie rock or hip-hop from New York City. Rodrigo's album, by comparison, feels entirely frictionless—the expression of someone whose “scene” is the Spotify recommendation algorithm.¹⁶

According to Kang, the thing that distinguishes GUTS from, say, earlier post-punk revival acts like Interpol (with their clear and singular reference to Joy Division) or Radio 4 (named after a PiL song) is the broad heterogeneity of the album's references unified only by the personal perspective of an individual recommender system user. For example, the album's lead single, “Vampire,” looks by its title to be a reference to one of post-punk's most canonic songs (Bauhaus's “Bela Lugosi's Dead”), but with their seething individual aggrievement and “Starfucker, Inc.” echoing “famefucker,” the lyrics sound much more like a Nine Inch Nails song written for a teen girl to sing. This ambivalence is also found in songs such as “Get Him Back,” where the verses' combination of drumkit ostinato, rap-like delivery, and bass riffs evokes equally Luscious Jackson's “Naked Eye” and Cake's “Going The Distance.” Unlike Beyonce's 2022 house-channeling album RENAISSANCE, which tells listeners how to hear the references by, for example, giving songwriting credits to 90s artists, such as Robyn S, and building a narrative around house music's roots in Black and Latinx queer music scenes, how the references on GUTS land depends entirely on listeners' personal histories (whether that be the menu served by your personalized streaming playlists or your perspective as someone who did or did not live through the 90s as a modern rock listener). Kang's essay concludes on precisely this note:

Listening to “Guts” while driving my daughter to soccer practice in our van—an activity that can only really be described with self-effacing irony—I could still drag up the vestiges of my own adolescent rage. It was a pleasant experience—me, a quarter century removed from the intensity of teen-age feeling, and my daughter, hopefully at least ten years away from the same, both living through the nineties again.

Listening not as members not of a music scene, but as individually situated members of a middle-class family in their car, where they can feel safest of all and lock all their doors, Kang and his daughter have personalized experiences of the 90s.

As a private, personalized experience, indie rock is resiliently rebounding from the earlier reports of its death. In this respect, it's not surprising that the genre's mainstream rebound is led by young women like Rodrigo. As I have argued, neoliberal popular feminisms have remade stereotypical femininity into a figure of resilience: because patriarchy has historically put women at such a disadvantage, they have the opportunity to grow their human capital at rates unavailable to those historically advantaged by patriarchy. Just as Rodrigo's “Get Him Back” shifts from a narrative of wanting to win

16. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/why-gen-x-dads-can-appreciate-olivia-rodrigo>

back a lost boyfriend to one of exacting revenge upon him, women are now expected to resiliently overcome the gendered damage patriarchy does to them and transform it into positive human capital. Unlike the past narratives where The Sex Pistols, Nirvana, or The Strokes' breakout success is taken to mark a new and renewed wave of independent rock music, in 2023 it's a young woman of color leading indie rock's next "new wave."¹⁷ This is not evidence that indie rock has gotten less conservative and more proof that it has adapted to evolving forms of patriarchal racial capitalism.

In 2024, indie rock inhabits a different political-economic ontology than it did in the 1970s and 1980s: a music industry geared towards the mass production of commodities is very different from one geared toward the licensing of content, just as modernity's traditional high/low, masculine/feminine, white/Black status hierarchies function differently than neoliberal deregulations of status. Whereas punk and post-punk originated as counterhegemonic alternatives to the corporate music industry, today's indie rock literally exists in another political-economic dimension than that. The old music industry has basically died, and indie rock persists today, undead, in a different plane of political-economic reality. ■

17. On the figure of the "new wave" and its relation to punk, post-punk, and modern rock, see Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?*.