# 'TRANSGRESSION AND MUNDANITY: THE GLOBAL EXTREME METAL MUSIC SCENE'

Keith Daniel Harris

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# ABSTRACT

Extreme Metal musical genres have challenged conventional notions of 'music' by developing an impenetrable sound that verges on formless noise. Extreme Metal music is produced, disseminated and consumed by musicians and fans who shun publicity within a set of obscure institutions that ensure the music's global 'underground' circulation. Within the confines of obscurity, musicians and fans explore in a highly 'transgressive' manner such themes as death, war and the occult, sometimes flirting with neo-fascist and racist discourses.

This thesis develops the concept of 'scene' as a method of investigating Extreme Metal music and practice. The concept is theorised through an engagement with a wide variety of literatures, notably subcultural theory, theories of community and critical theories of space. The concept is developed so as to provide an 'holistic' method of drawing on a wide variety of incommensurate literatures and conceptual frameworks.

Through the concept of scene, this thesis examines how the Extreme Metal scene is 'experienced' by its members. Detailed ethnographic, interview and other data are presented from case studies in Israel, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It is argued that scene members explore transgressive experiences that constantly threaten to exceed the confines of the scene. Yet the scene is also a 'safe' space, within which members experience the communal pleasures of 'mundanity'. Members orient their practices so as to experience the pleasures of both transgression and mundanity. They manage the resulting tensions by the practice of 'reflexive anti-reflexivity' – the wilful refusal by members to explore the contradictory consequences of their practices. Reflexive anti-reflexivity also ensures that scene members never attend to power relations within the scene, leading to the marginalisation of women and those from certain ethnic backgrounds. The thesis concludes with some reflections about the problematic role of the Extreme Metal and other music scenes in providing means of experiential 'survival' within a fraught modernity.

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**Attached Illustrative Material:**

    C90 Cassette – Track listing given in appendix four.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCING THE SCENE

### Introduction

Heavy Metal is one of the most controversial musical cultures ever to have existed. Its notoriety has ensured that even those who have heard very little Heavy Metal music may well have an opinion on it. In the 1980s Heavy Metal was one of the most popular musics in the world, attracted condemnation from right and left and was the subject of media- and state-sponsored 'moral panics' (Miller 1988; Richardson 1991). The two principal academic studies of Heavy Metal, by Robert Walser (1993) and Deena Weinstein (2000), show the way in which Heavy Metal in the 1980s provided a counter-hegemonic challenge to dominant culture through playing with some of the most highly charged themes available in Western culture, including the occult, sexual excess and substance abuse. Yet, even at the height of its popularity in the 1980s, Heavy Metal had begun to fragment to form a musical culture that went much further in its musical and lyrical challenge to the 'acceptable' norm – Extreme Metal.

Extreme Metal[1] encompasses a set of closely related musical genres and attendant practices that have challenged the orthodoxies of Heavy Metal. In contrast to Heavy Metal's notoriety, Extreme Metal is remarkably obscure – so obscure that most people will never hear of it. This is somewhat surprising, given that Extreme Metal is, in every respect, more radical and challenging than Heavy Metal. In the early 1980s 'Thrash Metal' bands such as Venom applied the speed and simplicity of Punk to Metal. Thrash engendered a variety of ever more radical Extreme Metal genres. Bands such as Death and Possessed created 'Death Metal' out of Thrash Metal. Vocals became less and less intelligible, songwriting became more complex and musical 'riffs' (chord sequences) sounded increasingly austere and 'dark'. By 1986–87 Death Metal as we know it today had emerged as a distinct style. Death Metal, played by bands such as Cannibal Corpse and Morbid Angel, features growled vocals and fast, complicated guitar work with few solos. Death Metal lyrics (decipherable only with the aid of a lyric sheet) deal with themes such as violence, war and the occult. 'Doom Metal' also emerged in the 1980s, with bands such as St Vitus and The Obsessed playing extremely slow forms of Metal, often based on long songs with highly repetitive guitar riffs. Doom Metal was refined further in the 1990s, as bands such as My Dying Bride and Paradise Lost employed exaggeratedly 'depressed'

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[1] Some examples of Extreme Metal (including all of the songs for which lyrics are quoted in this thesis) are presented on the attached tape, the track-listing to which is presented in appendix four.

vocals and tortuous song structures. In the 1980s the term 'Black Metal' had begun to be used to refer to overtly Satanic bands and in the early 1990s Norwegian bands such as Emperor developed it as a distinct form of Extreme Metal. Initially, Black Metal was characterised by extremely rapid playing and an unusually trebly guitar sound, often using very simple riffs, song structures and forms of production. Black Metal has embraced Satanism wholeheartedly and is sometimes (but not always) played by people with quasi-fascistic views. Another Extreme Metal genre of note is 'Grindcore'. Grindcore was developed in the late 1980s by bands such as Napalm Death through a Punk-influenced radicalisation of Death Metal that utilises extreme speed. Songs are often extremely short – Grindcore albums may contain 40 to 50 songs.

The above-mentioned genres are frequently referred to collectively as 'Extreme Metal'. All share a radicalism and a marked difference from the commercially popular Heavy Metal of the 1980s. All forms of Extreme Metal share fans, musicians and institutions. The difference between Extreme Metal and most other forms of popular music is so pronounced that those who are not its aficionados may not see its considerable internal differences. Whereas Heavy Metal was at least intelligible to its detractors as 'music' (albeit of a degraded kind), Extreme Metal may not appear to be music at all and its attendant practices may appear terrifying and bizarre. Extreme Metal has also developed its own institutions and methods of distribution. In contrast to Heavy Metal's mainstream commercial reach, Extreme Metal came to be disseminated through small-scale 'underground' institutions, 'fanzines' and the trading of recordings by bands and fans. Nevertheless, Extreme Metal musical culture extends across the globe, with many bands from countries outside the 'core' of the mainstream music industry, such as Brazil, widely known.

Observers might well wonder: what is Extreme Metal? Why is it so obscure? Who plays and listens to it? Why do they play and listen to it? What does it *mean*? There have been few answers to these questions in the academic and non-academic literature. There has been a little coverage in the mass media (e.g. Cayton 1999; Heller 1992), in the music press (e.g. Steinke 1996; Wells 1998), by fiction and non-fiction authors (Moynihan and Søderlind 1998; Reynolds and Press 1995; Richter 1999; White 1999) and by academic researchers (Berger 1999b; Harrell 1994; Petrov 1995). However, on the whole, the notoriety of Heavy Metal has meant that subsequent developments have frequently been ignored (Friesen and Epstein 1994). The term 'Extreme Metal' is largely unrecognised and writing tends to focus on Black Metal, Death Metal or Thrash Metal. Often, these generic terms are assumed to cover various genres

(so Death Metal is treated as a part of Thrash Metal, for example) or the genres are assumed to be discrete (so Black Metal is discussed as entirely distinct from Death Metal).

Evidently, there is scope for sociological research on Extreme Metal. However, neither Extreme Metal's fascinating 'otherness', nor the apparent gap in the academic literature on the subject, is sufficient to justify a study of Extreme Metal. The project of sociology involves more than simple curiosity and a desire to examine the unexamined. Sociological enquiry is rather a process of 'reflexive' (Giddens 1984) questioning, in which the questions asked form part of a continuous process of reflection on how knowledge is obtained and on the epistemological status of such knowledge. This process of reflection contributes to the production of theory through a continuous movement between research, data analysis and theory building (Silverman 1985, 1993). For research on Extreme Metal to be justified, it must produce more than interesting anecdotes. The findings of research projects must contribute to a wider project of advancing human understanding. We therefore need to consider how a study of Extreme Metal might answer questions about the nature of practice in contemporary society.

In this chapter I introduce questions that stimulate such a sociological engagement with Extreme Metal. I begin the chapter by examining the questions provoked by a review of the literature on popular music. I then go on to look at the questions raised by the literature on subcultures and scenes. I conclude the chapter by outlining an 'holistic' framework for the treatment of sociological questions relating to Extreme Metal music and practice.

## Formulating Questions and Research Strategies – Popular Music Studies

Perhaps the most initially striking aspect of Extreme Metal culture is 'the music itself'. There are a variety of musical features that appear distinctive to particular Extreme Metal genres (Harrell 1994). What exactly is it that makes Extreme Metal distinctive? How did this distinctiveness emerge? How does Extreme Metal relate to other musics? Those who approach popular music studies from a musicology background have emphasised the importance of engaging with musical texts themselves (McClary and Walser 1990). A variety of useful approaches have been pioneered, which depart from the dry formalism of much academic musicology. Susan McClary (1991) has teased out the subtle interconnections between certain musical styles and gendered discourses. Philip Tagg's pioneering work (1982, 1998) has explored in great detail how particular musical structures signify – for example, how the 'tritone' is used to signify danger and mystery in the incidental music of detective films and television shows. Both Tagg and McClary have been heavily influenced by semiotics, a field of

research that has been particularly effective in tracing the interconnections between the body, sound and sexuality (Barthes 1977; Reynolds 1990; Reynolds and Press 1995).

Popular musicology offers a number of possible directions for the development of research questions on Extreme Metal. Philip Tagg (1994) has written that the raucous sounds of traditional Heavy Metal are connected to the infant's desire to dominate the soundscape. He has also suggested (personal communication) that Extreme Metal music is dominated by the use of the tritone – an interval demonised by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages as the *diabolus in musica*. This seems to account for the impression that Extreme Metal is an 'evil-sounding' music. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press (1995) have used semiotics to show how in some forms of Death Metal the emphasis on death and mutilation in the lyrics is mirrored by a musical style that revels in the breakdown of conventional musical structures into primal formlessness.

This kind of text-centred literature forces us to ask: what and how does Extreme Metal *mean*? How might its musical meanings relate to dominant discourses and other forms of structuration? Robert Walser's *Running With The Devil* (1993) seeks to answer these questions as they relate to Heavy Metal. His detailed reading of Heavy Metal texts leads him to place 'the dialectic of freedom and control' as the central element of the music and its culture. In the same way as Metal guitar solos transcend the narrow limitations of their accompaniment, so Metal fans escape the oppressive confines of deindustrialised capitalism through participation in Metal culture. Walser's study is by far the most comprehensive and thought-provoking of the few musicological studies of Heavy Metal. However, he virtually ignores Extreme Metal, instead focusing on the more popular Heavy Metal genres of the 1980s. His conclusions may apply to a musical culture that is massively popular, the target of moral panic and musically 'spectacular', reliant on lengthy solos and heavily influenced by classical music. How might his reading of Metal be applied to a musical culture that is underground, obscure, musically austere and heavily influenced by Punk?

Using very different musicological tools, Harris Berger (1997, 1999a, 1999b) has put together the most sustained analysis yet of Extreme Metal. Berger's focus is on the phenomenology of musical perception and he seeks to understand how musical forms are experienced. He rejects any purely textual analysis and instead uses musical transcripts to form the basis for extended dialogic investigation with musicians. His most extensive piece of analysis is of the song 'The Final Silencing' by the US Death Metal band Sin Eater (1999b). Together with the song's composer, Dann (sic) Saladin, he explores in microscopic detail how Saladin experiences the piece. In particular, he focuses on the piece's lack of tonal centre and bewildering array of tonal

structures. Complicated tonal structures appear to be a common feature of Death Metal (Bjornberg 1998). Berger's research shows how this complex tonality is given meaning by Saladin and is experienced as according perfectly with the lyrical aims of the song. The complexities of tonal structure help to evoke a range of emotions surrounding the theme of death. Berger builds on this musicological analysis to argue that the music provides a source of individual empowerment, responsibility and community among people who have suffered as a result of changes in the structure of capitalism[2]. There is considerable scope for more research along these lines. How might Berger's findings apply to a wider range of Extreme Metal genres? How might they apply to different Extreme Metal musicians and fans in different contexts? How far is Extreme Metal music tied in with the experience of the structure of capitalism?

The use of the musicological literature presents two major problems. The first is that musicologists frequently prioritise their readings of musical texts over the social practices surrounding the production and consumption of those texts (a criticism that, however, does not apply to Berger). Although popular musicology was founded on a critique of forms of musicology that abstract music from its social context (Chanan 1994; Durant 1984), musical texts are often subtly treated as analytically prior to their social contexts. For example, in delineating 'Heavy Metal' as the topic of his study, Walser means Heavy Metal *music*. Although he gives extensive consideration to the social practices surrounding Heavy Metal music, it is nonetheless the genre of Heavy Metal that takes analytical priority. The other problem arising from the musicological literature is the question of how *I*, a non-musicologist with a basic musicological training, may produce musicological analyses? It is clear that, without undertaking years of extra training, I simply would not be able to produce a study similar to that of Walser or Berger.

If we accept that music only has meaning within a set of social practices, then a sociological engagement with music is vital. Problems of disciplinarity mean that the work of musicologists often has limitations as sociology. Walser, for example, seems not to attend to the sources of his sociological data, giving few methodological details. What then can sociology offer the study of Extreme Metal? Simon Frith is probably the principal exponent of the sociological study of popular music. He has consistently asserted that popular music is something that *matters* to people and is hence the subject of intense struggles over its 'value'. In *Sound Effects*

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[2] Similarly, Jack Harrell finds in Death Metal 'an unofficial expression of industrialism's emotional isolation and violence' (1994: 91) and Anne Petrov argues that 'Death Metal could be seen as a direct

(1983) Frith looks at how rock music is reproduced through capitalist methods of production, yet carries with it ideologies that stress the opposition between music and commerce. By 'de-mystifying' rock in this way, Frith argues that popular music's value cannot be separated from the commercial conditions of its production. In *Performing Rites* (1996) Frith attempts to account for the source of music's value. He argues that 'Music constructs our sense of identity through the experience it offers of the body, time, and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural practices' (1996: 275). Part of popular music's pleasure is that through talking and constructing discourse about it, we create distinctions and identities for ourselves.

Frith's work is mostly at a theoretical level and it is striking how few studies have explored empirically the way popular music is used in everyday life. There are few real equivalents to 'audience studies' (Morley 1992; Radway 1987) in popular music research. The importance of musical pleasures in 'empowering' their audiences is widely acknowledged (Grossberg 1984), but has rarely been shown in action. Frith's argument that talk about music is part of music's pleasure and a source of productive distinctions has also rarely been demonstrated. All too often the talk of fans is recorded uncritically and treated as needing no further comment (Crafts et al. 1993; Vermorel 1985). There has been little recognition of the complex ways in which musical taste is performed discursively within interviews and other media (Carrabine and Longhurst 1999; Harris 1997). More work exists on sites and practices of consumption, such as record collecting (Straw 1997), tape trading (Binas 1998) and behaviour at rock concerts (Fonarow 1997).

Research on Extreme and Heavy Metal audiences is as poorly developed as other kinds of audience research in popular-music studies. There has been some quantitative work on the US Heavy Metal audience in the 1980s, which suggests that fans of Metal genres are predominantly white and working class (Epstein et al. 1990; Hakanen and Wells 1990). There is also some evidence that German Metallers are likely to be young, under-educated and live in rural areas (Niketta 1998). The antipathy of many women towards most forms of Metal has also been partially demonstrated (Shepherd 1991). The small amount of data suggesting that the audience for Metal genres is predominantly white, male, heterosexual and working class has now been taken as fact by many researchers and applied indiscriminately to all Metal genres. Yet, since most existing studies have taken place in the USA within very small sites of

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product of the ongoing urbanisation of suburbia, as one of the forms which suburban violence takes' (1995: 5).

consumption, I would argue that important questions regarding the demographics of the Extreme Metal audience remain unanswered.

The standard of qualitative research into Metal also raises questions. Weinstein (2000) and other writers on Metal (e.g. Kotarba 1994) may emphasise the empowering (if ambivalent) effect Heavy Metal has on its audience, but offer scant interview and other ethnographic information. Jeffrey Arnett's study *Metalheads* (1995) is an exception, in that it is largely based on extended interviews with Metallers. Unfortunately, he approaches his interviews with an unsophisticated, functionalist theoretical framework that limits the utility of the interviews. Like many other writers, Arnett sees finding pleasure in Metal as a form of survival in an insecure world. However, Arnett postulates that Metalheads resort to the music as a result of the failure of US society to 'properly' socialise its adolescent members. Arnett's book has the advantage of giving his subjects a voice, yet he does not attempt to understand the music that they like. The only study that presents an extended, systematically theorised look at the voices and practices of Heavy and Extreme Metal fans and musicians, together with a similarly systematic study of the music, is that of Harris Berger (1999b). However, his extremely detailed phenomenology makes it difficult for him to sustain a wider focus and he is forced to take on trust that all Metal audiences are demographically similar.

There is clearly a need to ask some basic questions of those who like Extreme Metal, using systematic sociological data-gathering procedures. Who are the people that enjoy Extreme Metal? How does the composition of its audience vary in different settings? What is the source of Extreme Metal's value to its fans? Why do people enjoy it? What are its key debates? How does it construct identities?

Research on popular music-making is far more developed than research on audiences. Ruth Finnegan (1989) has shown the prevalence and diversity of 'grassroots' music-making. Studies of local music-making, such as those by Finnegan and Sara Cohen (1991), reveal music's importance to many people as a means of self-expression in an increasingly atomised world. Music-making is both a 'normal' part of life for many people from all types of background and, at the same time, a way of participating in a practice that is somehow 'other' to everyday experience. Johan Fornäs et al. (1995) show how playing rock music in a band provides young people with an intense collective experience that teaches a variety of responses to the challenges of late modern life. Rock allows young people to form autonomous spaces that offer 'alternative ideals to those offered by family and school' (Fornäs et al. 1995: 253). H. Stith Bennett (1980) has shown how the practice of playing rock music in groups creates a strong

self-identity as 'musician'. While rock musicians start out as fans playing along with records, they become something very different in the process of learning the identity of musician. To be a rock musician is to participate in a practice that is rooted in everyday experience but, at the same time, attempts to exclude itself from that reality. The resulting practices of exclusion have made it particularly difficult for women to be accepted as rock musicians (Bayton 1989, 1997; Clawson 1999).

The popular music studies literature privileges the model of the rock band as an intensely interacting peer group that lives for rehearsing and performing. Such bands exist in Extreme Metal, but many do not conform to that model. For example, there are a considerable number of one-person Extreme Metal bands. Do bands that do not fit the conventional model of the rock band also create the spaces of autonomy and resistance that Fornäs et al. identify? Do members maintain an identity as 'musician'? In addition, much of the literature emphasises the importance of live performance in the lives of musicians and fans, as do Berger, Walser and Weinstein. But how do we account for the many Extreme Metal bands that rarely or never play live at all? What do they gain from involvement in making Extreme Metal music? More generally, how are Extreme Metal music-making practices learned? What groups of people are excluded from Extreme Metal music-making?

The literature on popular music tends to separate the study of musicians from the study of fans. Even if musicians have a tendency to create exclusive identities and spaces for themselves, as Bennett shows, musicians generally begin as fans playing along with records. Also, bands must have a close connection to non-musicians in order for them to have an audience. While it is true that musicians may strive to keep themselves separate from the mundanity of the audience, in practice they are symbiotically connected to it. Extreme Metal may provide a useful case study for the examination of the relationship between musicians and audiences, since it has few commercially successful bands and many bands selling small numbers of records world-wide. Does this create a closer relationship between fans and bands?

Another shortcoming of the literature on popular music-making is that it is all too often separate from the literature on popular music production. Famously, Theodor Adorno's work on popular music (1990) is predicated on the impossibility that industrially produced popular music could produce any value or possibility of resistance. Researchers have now begun to explore the workings of the music industry itself. Keith Negus (1992) argues that the music industry produces cultural texts collaboratively from the chaotic interaction between a number of departments within record companies. Part of this collaborative process is the often fraught

relationship between labels and performers, the latter searching for autonomy from what they perceive as the threatening workings of the industry. Negus also argues that 'pop music arises from a constant dialogue between production and consumption' (1992: ix). However, while Negus acknowledges the importance of artists and consumers in the study of production, neither has more than a token presence in his study.

Research into the large-scale industrial production of popular music does seem a little incongruous regarding Extreme Metal. There are very few Extreme Metal bands signed to large, 'major' labels; most are on small, independent ('indie') labels. Negus does not look at indie labels in his study, dismissing their frequent romanticisation and emphasising the interconnections between major labels and indies. Dave Hesmondhalgh (1998, 1999) has provided the most sustained research on independent record production in British rock and dance music. Since Punk, many have claimed independent record labels to be a more democratic, egalitarian and music-centred alternative to major labels. Hesmondhalgh argues that 'Countercultural discourse clearly overstated the opposition between...majors and independents. Nevertheless it is perhaps premature to dissolve the difference altogether' (1999: 243). Maintaining independence from major labels is clearly difficult in view of the tendency towards collaboration, yet independence retains democratising features.

While the vast majority of Extreme Metal music appears to be produced on indie labels, independence in Extreme Metal may not take the form it does in 'alternative' music and dance cultures. There has never been a surge of interest in Extreme Metal like that experienced by British dance music in 1989 or alternative rock in 1991, nor is there much evidence of an ideological policing of independence. What, then, are the politics of Extreme Metal production? How does independence work in Extreme Metal compared to other forms of music? How do we understand the relationship between production, texts and consumption in Extreme Metal? What are the economics of Extreme Metal? Does the proliferation of small labels and relatively obscure bands suggest a more 'democratic' musical culture? Does it suggest a closer relationship between bands, fans and labels? Perhaps the decentralised nature of Extreme Metal suggests a similarity with dance-music production?

A consideration of production shows that Extreme Metal cannot be separated from 'flows' of capital and power. The inescapability of dominating power relations is also demonstrated in the study of popular music and censorship. Post-war popular musics have provoked much anxiety in the State, the media and other sources of authority. From its very beginning, there was fierce opposition to Rock and Roll's supposed obscenity and corrupting power over youth (Martin

and Segrave 1993). Such opposition has resulted in periodic 'moral panics' ever since (Cohen 1987). Moral panic is a process in which the weight of state and media surveillance and power becomes tied to discourses of moral regulation (Thompson 1998). Although contemporary youth cultures tend to be more reflexive about the threat of moral panic (McRobbie and Thornton 1995), recent controversies about dance music show that the will to attack and censor popular music is by no means dead (Cloonan 1996). It would, of course, be possible to research and catalogue attacks on Extreme Metal. Yet Extreme Metal's obscurity testifies to the lack of well-publicised attacks on it, certainly by comparison with Heavy Metal. All forms of popular music presuppose a particular form of politics (Street 1986). What sort of politics does Extreme Metal produce? How can we explain the coexistence of a transgressive form of representation and a relative safety from the dangers of moral panic and state surveillance? What sort of relationship does Extreme Metal have with the State and other sources of power?

Two things should be clear from this chapter so far. First, looking at Extreme Metal through the literature on popular-music studies raises a host of potentially interesting research questions. But the second point is that various different areas of this literature marginalise particular aspects of popular music culture. It is important to be careful not to produce crude typologies of 'studies of musical texts', 'studies of production', 'studies of consumption' etc. Most studies of popular music do tacitly acknowledge the simultaneous importance of text, production and consumption (Laing 1999). Nonetheless, most studies of popular music give more emphasis (conceptual and substantive) to one primary area of analysis. Is this inevitable? Is it possible to research Extreme Metal culture in a way that will allow us to keep an open mind on the relative importance of its various aspects? In particular, is it possible to combine a sustained analysis of Extreme Metal music and an analysis of the social practices that surround it? These questions force us to turn away from substantive questions about Extreme Metal to methodological questions. I will argue that the crucial methodological question for this study is: how far is it possible to study Extreme Metal *holistically*?

The Search for an Holistic Framework

Percy Cohen defines 'holism' as:

> ...the notion that all of the institutions, beliefs and morals of a society are interrelated as a whole, so that the method of explaining the existence of any one item in the whole is to discover the law which prescribes how this item coexists with all of the others. (1968: 34)

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Holism provided the starting point for functionalists such as Parsons and Malinowski. Functionalism has now been widely discredited and its problems are well known – its tendency towards teleological explanations, its inability to understand change, its convoluted complexity and its empirical unwieldiness (Craib 1984). Still, I would argue that the holistic starting point from which functionalism developed is less objectionable. It does not seem unreasonable to argue that everything in society is interconnected and that, at some level, one aspect of society cannot be understood in isolation from other aspects. Of course, it does not follow that we can necessarily systematise and map this holism in its entirety, nor isolate its 'laws'. However, holism does encourage us to approach research with an inclusive attitude, founded on an awareness that although it may be impossible to analyse everything but that the goal of holistic understanding is useful if it is endlessly deferred. Cohen (1968) argues that functionalism can be useful in constructing models of society and presenting them as though they were totalities. This exercise is useful as long as we recognise that such models are only constructs – something that, for example, Parsons fails to do. The holism that I am advocating is thus a pragmatic one. Its *only* purpose is to address the shortcomings in existing forms of research by incorporating as much as possible into *this* research. The holistic approach taken in this study treats Extreme Metal as the locus for a huge range of practices, texts, institutions and social phenomena. It further assumes that the more we research, the fuller our understanding will be.

One place to begin the search for an holistic framework is in the literature on popular music, place and globalisation. Industrialisation and globalisation have made available a wide range of musical resources, which groups and individuals use in the construction of ethnicity, identity and location (Stokes 1994). Globalisation is facilitated by music's 'malleability' (Taylor 1997) and it is important in the creation and dissemination of new musical forms. Yet, in our contemporary globalised world, processes of musical export and import occur ever more extensively and rapidly, giving rise to new forms of appropriation and syncretism. Record companies from the developed world find new audiences in the developing world (Laing 1986). Musicians from the West appropriate non-Western music, sometimes collaboratively as 'world music' (Feld 1999; Keil and Feld 1994; Taylor 1997). Non-Western musicians and musicians from subaltern groups in the West create new syncretic forms, drawing on Western and non-Western music (Lipsitz 1994; Mitchell 1996). As Motti Regev (1997) has argued, popular musics have the potential to provide temporary resolutions to the apparent contradiction between participation in the global and the local. However, globalisation is by no means unproblematic. Global flows of music are facilitated by global flows of capital, which are subject to severe inequalities.

This literature opens up more interesting questions regarding Extreme Metal. Existing studies of Extreme and Heavy Metal have focused almost exclusively on North America. However, Extreme Metal is present in most areas of the world and it takes on distinct forms in particular places. What makes Extreme Metal more popular in certain places than others? How do tastes in Extreme Metal vary from place to place and how should we account for this? How is local identity articulated within such a global music? Are global inequalities in capital reproduced in Extreme Metal and with what results?

The literature on globalisation, music and place successfully incorporates different areas of popular-music research within an holistic perspective. Researchers in this area are concerned with how music is produced in one place and consumed in another. They are also concerned with the way these phenomena interact with global flows of capital, particularly those facilitated by the music industry and by copyright law. In studying global musics we become aware that not only is it impossible to limit our understanding of a particular music to a single site, but that we cannot limit ourselves to only one kind of analysis.

At a higher conceptual level, the literature on 'genre', as developed within popular music studies, provides another potential source for an holistic framework. In more traditional forms of musicology, genre signifies a mode of producing music (e.g. 'ballads'), whereas 'style' signfies the specific mode of producing those genres (e.g. 'Heavy Metal ballads'). Nonetheless, in both lay and academic forms of popular music writing, genre has taken on a more holistic meaning, covering both the music that is produced and the style in which it is produced. Theorists of genre have argued that genre constitutes a set of 'musical events' and the rules through which those musical events are constituted (Fabbri 1982b). According to Franco Fabbri (1982a), generic rules are defined by communities and include sociological and economic variables. Genre is both a set of musical events and the social processes and communities that constitute those events. Keith Negus argues that '...genre cultures [arise] from the complex intersection and interplay between commercial organizational structures and promotional labels; the activities of fans, listeners and audiences; networks of musicians; and historical legacies that come to us within broader social formations' (1999: 29-30). Similarly, Simon Frith (1996) argues that genres are produced through a complex interplay between music, markets and ideologies. Genres are not and cannot be static. Indeed, as Charles Hamm argues (1994), the genre within which a particular song is positioned can change from performance to performance. Furthermore, what constitutes a genre is the subject of considerable debate. As Walser shows (1993), the bands and songs to which the label 'Heavy Metal' should be applied

is forcefully contested by musicians and fans. Indeed, it can be argued that genres are constituted precisely through these struggles.

For all the usefulness of the concept of genre, at some point its holistic tendencies inevitably break down. Even if 'genre' encapsulates both a set of musical events and the social processes that define how those events are constituted, at some point either the musical events themselves or the processes that constitute them begin to take analytical priority. Taking genre as the basis of study in popular music privileges musical events as the starting point for analysis, reviving the problems encountered in musicological studies of popular music. However, if we privilege the social processes through which genre is constituted, then we are in danger of treating music simply as a contingent outcome of social debates.

An alternative concept to genre is 'discourse'. In his study of Punk music (1985), Dave Laing focuses on the production of discourse. He argues that discourse represents the point at which social conditions and signifying practices meet. Discourse is not simply what people say, it is the medium through which practices are constructed. Studies of the discourses of the music press (Toynbee 1993) or of fan talk (Harris 1997) are also studies of the practices through which popular music is produced and consumed. Some theorists argue that discourses provide the means by which genres are constituted. Johan Fornäs (1995b) has looked at how rock as a genre is contested and constructed by various competing discourses. Similarly, Walser argues that Heavy Metal should be understood as discourse. If we treat discourse as intimately connected to practice, then the study of discourse has holistic tendencies. Discourse can be said to pervade all areas of popular music text and practice – therefore, to study discourse is to study 'everything'. However, once again, this risks a reductive holism that treats other forms of analysis as subsidiary to the analysis of discourse.

Constructions of genre and discourse, whether produced by academics or non-academics, constitute the contexts within which a particular musical event or practice is imagined to be positioned. The contexts constructed by those involved in Extreme Metal music and practice may be seen as holistic, in that they may encompass music, music-making, fan activity and production. One term that is often used by Extreme Metallers is 'scene'. The term is used in a variety of ways to describe the context within which Extreme Metal music, practices and discourses are reproduced. Consider the following extracts from an interview I conducted as part of an earlier project (Harris 1997), with a young, male, British Death Metal fan:

...I go to loads of gigs now, I like the underground that's a good scene it's friendly social you wouldn't think so by looking at the people who go there but it is...I'm one of the youngest, in like most of the people I hang around with, but, there's also younger I've got friends who are younger than me as well who like in the scene as well

In this extract 'scene' is constructed in two slightly different ways to describe a small-scale context within which interaction takes place. It is not the only term used – the 'underground' is used in a similar way. The scene is used in a very loose way to identify the underground as 'a good scene'. It is also used more specifically to describe something of which he and his friends are members. In other extracts from interviews for the same study, scene is also used to describe something larger and more diffuse. Consider this extract from an interview with a fan of the Death Metal band Obituary:

I:      Right okay so, does it I mean there was rumours recently that they'd split up,
           [how does]

R:      [yeah yeah] they did split up

I:      yeah, does that make you sad?

R:      n n not really because, I don't think it's because like the musical scene has progressed so much I don't think Obituary could come with anything, very, you know significant if they if they, have new album it should be something new really really really like a big step, for Obituary to be, accepted for I mean I would I would accept them, anytime
           [but ]

I:      [right]

R:      in a scene it changes it change too much

Here, the interviewee argues that it was not sad that Obituary split up, since the 'musical scene' had developed to the point where the band could no longer come up with anything relevant or new. Here, 'scene' refers to a space within which music-making and consumption take place. The term also carries strong connotations of musical genre. But later in the same interview, the use of scene shifts slightly as she defines it more specifically:

R:      ...what I mean by music scene is, in general er commercial side of it business side of it and musical side of it, and that that that they're very important line between it you know between business and between musical scene, you know you know what I'm trying to say?

I:      Yeah   [yeah]

R:          [yeah] that that's what I and when I say music scene I consider both of that sides, when I said Obituary wouldn't do anything if they released a new album, I mean they wouldn't do anything in a in a whole scene in general, like in a business they wouldn't sell any records I really doubt people would buy their records for, maybe who are really core Obituary fans, really like

The scene has a 'musical side' and a 'commercial side'. The relationship between the two is confused in this account. There is a 'line between' the two, yet on the other hand the reason why Obituary shouldn't release another record is that they would be redundant in 'the whole scene in general'. For this interviewee, the scene is constructed as something that is a collection of texts *and* a collection of commercial institutions. But it is neither of these things alone. Similarly, for the other interviewee, the scene is a collection of people that socialise, but 'scene' is not used in any clear sense, and the 'underground' is another term that has similar connotations.

Scene appears to define something that may contain music-making, production, circulation, discussion and texts. The various uses of scene have an implicit holism that may provide a useful starting point for the building of a framework for the study of Extreme Metal. Taking an everyday term as a starting point in research avoids the temptation of building overly complex models. It allows us to retain a connection between lay and academic reflexivity. It also ensures that any research that arises out of the use of scene is at least potentially recognisable to members. In the next section I will look at how academic uses of the concept emerged from the concept of subculture.

From Subculture to Scene

Subculture is a concept with an older and more diverse pedigree than is often realised. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (1997) situate subculture within a diverse literature, ranging from Victorian studies of criminality to contemporary work on race and post-colonial theory. They show how various attempts have been made to define the concept more systematically, starting with the 'Chicago School' tradition of research into the sociology of deviance. According to that tradition, subcultures are transient yet tight-knit groups that exist on the margins of 'acceptable' society. They are *sub*cultures owing both to their lowly status in social hierarchies and to the fact that they are smaller than 'communities' and other groups. Subcultures such as marijuana smokers and jazz musicians (Becker 1973) were seen as sharing a frame of reference that was distinct to that of the wider society – they spoke and acted 'differently'. Subculture

members understand other members and themselves as 'other' to society. They are, as Gelder and Thornton put it, 'known to their members' (1997: 3). They map out certain spaces and territories as their own and outsiders are discouraged from entering.

The definition of subculture that has come to dominate the literature was developed by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s. At the centre of CCCS subcultural theory was an argument about the role of class in post-war Britain. Subcultural theorists challenged Marxist notions of social classes as homogeneous, large-scale groups, with limited possibilities of resistance. Instead, they developed a more complex Gramscian paradigm, which emphasised the importance of counter-hegemonic resistance to ideology within subcultures. One of the most influential works of subcultural theory was Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's collection *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976). The contributors to this work argued that subcultures emerged as collective responses to changes in the structure of capitalism. Through counter-hegemonic 'rituals', subcultures such as mods, bikers and skinheads 'give expressive form to their social and material life experience' (Hall and Jefferson 1976: 10). Such rituals vary from the skinheads' 'magical recovery' of a lost sense of working community through a preoccupation with territory and masculinity, to the Teddy Boys' use of an archaic form of dress to express an ironic preoccupation with social mobility. Subcultures used a variety of strategies, ranging from parody to outright aggression, to deal with the rapid changes sweeping post-war Britain. In this way, they 'penetrated' (Willis 1977) the contradictions of capitalism. However, in the end this penetration was always fleeting and doomed because it only occurred on the symbolic level, where it could easily be incorporated and deflected by dominant groups.

The subcultures studied by the CCCS theorists in the 1970s were characterised by distinctive and 'spectacular' 'styles'. A key question was how these styles were connected to the groups that produced them. Paul Willis (1978) developed the concept of 'homology', in order to describe the apparent 'fit' between style and subculture. He used the concept in his research on bikers, arguing that the early Rock and Roll music preferred by the bikers evoked feelings of relentless movement and fitted with the bikers' restless sexual energy. Dick Hebdidge (1979) drew on semiotics to explain the relationship between style and subculture. Although he also used the concept of homology, he emphasised the more purposive choice of transgressive, spectacular signs by subcultures. Assembled by 'bricolage', subcultural style produces a kind of 'semiotic guerrilla warfare'. Hebdidge showed how Punk's use of the swastika provided an active challenge to dominant forms of connotation by 'emptying' it of its meaning. Punk bricolage took items from different styles and literally tied them together, in order to dramatise

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a sense of apocalyptic crisis and change. Such strategies may be immensely shocking, yet remain so only for a short period as fashions become incorporated into commercialised styles. All subcultural theorists argued in different ways that subcultural resistance remains at the level of signification and is no substitute for 'real' resistance.

Subcultural theory provided the starting point for the sustained academic analysis of popular culture. Yet, despite this, it is remarkable just how few studies have followed the 'classic' CCCS definition of subculture. The CCCS conception of subculture has been subject to constant criticism for over 20 years. Such criticisms often focus on the narrowness of the CCCS subculture studies. Hall and Jefferson confessed that their book would deal only with those subcultures 'which have reasonably tight boundaries, distinctive shapes, which have cohered around particular activities, focal concerns and territorial spaces' (1976: 14). Whether less coherent spaces may also be treated as subcultural is left unclear. Hall and Jefferson admit that most working-class members do not join subcultures, since home, work and school are more significant. Middle-class members develop 'counter-culture' rather than subculture – something far looser and more diffuse. The CCCS concentrated on a narrowly defined version of subculture, in order to analyse a particularly tangible response to capitalist hegemony. To criticise classic subcultural theory for ignoring the everyday practices of the majority, as Gary Clarke has done (1990), does miss the point somewhat – subculture is a purposely narrow concept.

However, this narrowness remains problematic. Angela McRobbie (1991) long ago criticised the gender imbalance in traditional accounts of subculture. She points out that women have historically been less able to participate in the public sphere and that their semiotic activities tend to take place in the home. It is possible that women were present in the subcultures that the CCCS studied, but were ignored in the accounts (Miles 1998). Subcultural theory appears to valorise only a particular kind of male resistance. The narrowness of this subcultural analysis also leads to empirical difficulties. The internal homogeneity of subcultures is assumed – members appear to be identical in background and behaviour. The assumption that subcultures are predominantly working class was never properly substantiated. Much (although not all) subcultural research was done without substantial contact with subcultural members themselves. Hebdidge's study, for instance, is based purely on the scrutiny of media reports and the production of 'readings' from them. The subcultural members themselves are silent and lack any kind of reflexivity. They are 'read' as resistant, yet their own meanings are absent. Sue Widdicombe and Robin Wooffitt (1995) have shown that members of spectacular subcultures, which appear to be implacably resistant, may construct their identities through talk in ways that

do not conform with subcultural theory. Their interviewees actively sought to resist the implication that they were members of a subculture, a finding partially replicated in my own research (Harris 1997). Furthermore, as David Muggleton (2000) shows, subcultural theory's focus on 'style' risks treating subculture members as superficial 'clothes-horses', without any sustained engagement or commitment to the social formations that they create. Subcultural theory's lack of empirical research ignores the ways in which subculture members may play with a number of styles over their lifetime, yet still be committed to the discursive construction of some sense of continuity and 'authenticity'.

Subcultural research took as its subject those who were 'other' to capitalism. Subcultures were the subject of 'moral panic' from the State and media (Cohen 1987). However, the concept also *produced* that otherness through a rigid conceptual framework that read members' activities as implacably resistant. Their interaction within 'everyday' society was only weakly explored, as subculture was assumed to be their primary context for interaction and identity formation. Yet the otherness produced by media, state and academic constructions of subculture may be part of the process by which they are constituted (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). Constructions of subcultures as 'authentic' and resistant may collude with members' own constructions, designed to maximise 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1995).

What does the concept of subculture offer to the study of Extreme Metal? Although we should keep an open mind about the homogeneity or otherwise of Extreme Metal 'subculture', subcultural theory's connotations of a tight-knit, spectacular and class-based grouping are too rigid to be useful. A concept forged from research on neighbourhood gangs cannot be satisfactorily applied, for example, to the many isolated Extreme Metal 'bedroom' musicians. However, the concept does focus attention on an often-neglected problem – the relationship between musical structure and social structure. How is Extreme Metal music linked to those who consume and produce it and to society as a whole? The CCCS concept of homology offers a clear answer to such questions, but one that relies on a simplistic model of class structure and subculture. Nevertheless, it is worth asking of Extreme Metal: why these people and why this music? John Shepherd has attempted to reconstruct a kind of homology, asserting that 'because people create music, they reproduce in the basic qualities of their music the basic qualities of their own thought processes' (1982: 12). Even if we accept this assertion – which is certainly a bold one – it is hard to know how to map the way in which 'the social gets into music', as Shepherd puts it. Simple uses of the concept of homology, such as those offered by Willis or Shepherd's argument that the dominance of the keynote in Western music reflects the structure of society, seem unconvincing in a highly differentiated and heterogeneous social world, in

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which the sources of power are never clear. However, the work of musicologists like McClary and Tagg shows that music clearly 'means' things and that meaning relates to social structure. Work on small societies also shows that the assertion underlying the concept of homology may be correct (Feld 1984). While arguments about homology often seem clumsy and may ride roughshod over members' own meanings and reflexivity, nevertheless, the concepts of subculture and homology sensitise us to questions about the relationship between music and society.

In deconstructing the dominant order of signification in society, subcultures create enormous anxiety in society as a whole. The transgression of symbolic boundaries is an activity that is as alluring as it is dangerous (Stallybrass and White 1986). Extreme Metallers certainly seem to do this – Death Metallers revel in gory fantasies, Black Metallers use blasphemous imagery freely and Doom Metallers dwell on the inevitability of death. Transgression in Extreme Metal raises particularly difficult questions about the ethics of certain forms of representation. In the main, the CCCS spoke approvingly about subcultures, as they represented a form of resistance to capitalism. Extreme Metallers, particularly Black Metallers, cannot be 'approved of' so easily, even by the most naive of researchers. There is a profusion of sexist imagery and very few women are involved. There has also been considerable flirtation among Black Metallers with extreme right-wing 1 ideas and some even proclaim allegiance to Nazi ideology. What do we do about this? Is there such a thing as 'positive transgression' and 'negative transgression'? Can we separate the positive sides of Extreme Metal from its negatives?

Subcultural theory also presents an argument about 'space'. Subculture members are situated in clearly definable spaces, within which they behave in clearly definable ways, leading to the problematically narrow focus we have discussed. But it is certainly the case that Extreme Metal does, in certain spaces, 'look' like a subculture. For example, an observer at the Extreme Metal club held every Sunday night at the Red Eye pub in London would see a small group of people, most of whom know each other, wearing particular kinds of clothing and listening to a transgressive kind of music. However, alongside this sort of local subcultural space, there are Extreme Metal spaces that are far more diffuse and global. Subculture also ignores the many people who listen to Extreme Metal on a casual basis and do not 'look' like Extreme Metallers or associate with other fans. What sorts of spaces do they belong to? What does Extreme Metal 'look' like spatially?

Few researchers use the CCCS concept of subculture these days, yet its legacy lives on. Even when researchers do not use the term subculture at all, traces of the CCCS concept may still

appear. Donna Gaines (1990), for example, shows how teenagers in US suburbs are alienated and oppressed, and resist through such practices as listening to Heavy Metal and hardcore Punk music. Researchers also frequently define the space that they are studying as subcultural, even if their use of the term is more loosely or differently theorised to that of the CCCS. Robert Gross (1990), for example, uses the term to delineate a space for his rather banal analysis of Heavy Metal. Subculture is also widely used in the media and in the public sphere, further reducing its effectiveness as a conceptual framework. As Andy Bennett puts it:

> In introducing the term 'subculture' into the wider public sphere, the media have completed the process begun in sociological work of reducing subculture to a convenient 'catch all' term used to describe a range of disparate collective practices whose only obvious relation is that they all involve young people... (1999: 605)

*[handwritten margin note: but cf. the advocacy of holism]*

There have been few attempts to reclaim and re-theorise the term. One exception appears in the work of Marc Slobin (1993), who places subculture in a wider conceptual framework. He argues that people live at the intersection of three cultures: subculture, superculture and interculture. Subculture is the smallest unit, within which members interact, drawing on a number of semiotic and other resources and existing in a continuously interactive relationship with the other two cultures.

Increasingly, subculture is treated as an outmoded concept, not simply for its theoretical inadequacies but also because of a prevailing view that, even if it was ever a useful concept, it is inapplicable to contemporary society. A number of contemporary collections (Redhead 1993, 1998; Skelton and Valentine 1998; Swiss et al. 1998) have emphasised the newness of subcultural, musical and popular-cultural forms in the last two decades. Contemporary 'postmodern' society is characterised by such phenomena as: less commitment to membership of social groups; greater heterogeneity in society as a whole; the increased possibility for multiple social affiliations; the fragmentation of 'grand narratives'; increased globalisation; growing job insecurity; greater choice of popular cultures; the multiplication of centres of power and surveillance; the blurring of the line between 'popular' and 'unpopular' cultures; and the blurring of the line between 'conservative' and 'resistant' cultures. Such changes make it hard to maintain any notion of subculture as a social formation with coherence, a firm class basis or a clear notion of resistance. As David Muggleton asserts:

> Post-subculturalists no longer have any sense of subcultural 'authenticity', where inception is rooted in particular sociotemporal contexts and tied to underlying structural relations. (1998: 180)

*[handwritten margin note: ?no line of observed members?]*

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It is argued, therefore, that new concepts are needed to deal with such changes. Andy Bennett (1999) has suggested that in 'late modernity' identities and lifestyles are fluid and constructed rather than static and given. Subculture assumes a kind of essentialism that is no longer appropriate. Bennett attempts to understand urban dance music as a 'neo-tribe' rather than a subculture, a term introduced by Michel Maffesoli (1996). Neo-tribes are based on eclectic and endlessly changing patterns of consumption. They are temporary, affective alliances based around temporarily shared sensibilities. They are not based on commitment or on shared political/discursive positionings, but on shared affect and shared experiences of the body – as happens, for example, in 'mass' gatherings.

It would be hard to imagine a concept less similar to subculture than neo-tribe. It highlights precisely those aspects of sociality that subculture ignores. Although there is no question that such aspects must be considered in researching Extreme Metal, a 'neo-tribal' framework leaves out almost as much as a subcultural framework. For one thing, the concept is of little use as an analytical structure, since it is essentially a description of a form of sociality. Neo-tribe is a qualitative description of the forms of sociality and affect that arise from such things as dancing in nightclubs and going on protest marches. There is a kind of reductive essentialism here that treats a disparate range of activities as essentially alike. This approach does not help us to understand why someone would go on a march rather than go dancing. Nor does it help us to understand the texts and institutions that particular social formations create. Advocates of the neo-tribal approach also overstate the extent to which culture has changed in recent decades. Certainly, the type of subcultures that the CCCS described may now be exceptional, and looser formations are now more common, yet this does not mean that subcultural forms do not still exist.

The definitions of both neo-tribe and subculture are highly restrictive. Neither term recognises the possibility that a variety of forms of involvement and interaction may coexist within a particular space. The challenge in building a conceptual framework that would allow for the holistic study of Extreme Metal is to retain the 'spatialness' that concepts such as subculture provide, without excluding any class of people or interaction by defining that space too strictly. We cannot, *a priori*, assume that 'casual' fans of Extreme Metal and those who deal with little else are two totally different classes of people. Certainly, those who are most involved in Extreme Metal may despise those who are less so. As Sarah Thornton (1995) has shown, 'subcultural capital' is maintained through ideological and practical separations from people less involved in subcultures. In the academy there has always been a split between those who study subcultures and those who study 'fans'. The latter often attempt to reclaim fandom as

creative and empowering (Jenkins 1992). But reclaiming the potential of the feminised private sphere often obscures the close linkage between private, occasional and uncommitted consumption and public, intense and committed 'subcultural' practice. Those on the margins of groups that have been called subcultures may, in fact, have a crucial role to play in them (Fox 1987). It is true that, in the contemporary world, it may be possible to be a musical 'omnivore' (Carrabine and Longhurst 1999), participating in a number of musical cultures at once. However, this does not mean that musical cultures do not have an enduring quality of their own. It is necessary to understand how fluidity and fragmentation coexist with stability and coherence.

So how might the concept of 'scene' be a credible solution to these problems? Scene has an immediate advantage in that it has certain clear resonances – of people doing things together within a certain space – without its meaning being overdetermined like that of 'subculture'. Of course, that is not to say that the word is meaningless and has no history[3]. The term 'scene' originated in the theatre, denoting the space within which a particular action is performed. The metaphor of the theatre has long been important in Western thought, originating in ancient Greece. It is particularly important in Enlightenment ideas of 'public men' (Sennett 1996) coming together in 'public spheres' (Habermas 1989a), detached from the feminised private sphere. The public is a space of performance, artifice and power, the private a space of authenticity and nurture. This idea is challenged in postmodern critical thought. Gender is seen as 'performed' (Butler 1997) in a world of panoptic surveillance in which we are never 'off stage' (Foucault 1977). That the theatrical metaphor has been reworked in each intellectual era is a testament to its supreme adaptability. 'Scene' is also a rich and adaptable concept, raising all-important questions such as: is society 'enacted'? Who is the 'author'? Who is the 'spectator'?

The variety of possible uses of scene in the modern world has been shown by John Irwin (1997), who notes that the term can be used in two very different ways. It can be used in the sense of 'that's not my scene', connoting vague notions of lifestyle. It can also mean something much more definite and located that connotes something 'subcultural'. However, the two senses of the term are not necessarily contradictory. They both connote something that is shared, something we choose whether or not to participate in. The scene can be both a public, subcultural space, in which spectacular resistance is proclaimed, and a more general way of living in both private and public spheres. It can be both a space that we may enter and leave freely *and* a space that is always already there.

Scene is frequently used in vague ways in popular-music studies to provide a convenient way to delineate a subject area. Sarah Cohen (1991), for example, frequently refers to the 'Liverpool scene' in her study of music-making in Liverpool. More theorised and developed uses of scene are relatively rare. Barry Shank (1994) confines its use to local contexts of music-making, in this case in Austin, Texas. He argues that:

> A Scene itself can be defined as an overproductive signifying community; that is, far more semiotic information is produced than can be rationally passed. (1994: 122)

Shank's notion of scene has some things in common with the idea of neo-tribe. He focuses on affect, the body and the way individuals lose themselves within a mass, albeit a transitory one. He argues that:

> These are the necessary conditions for the development of a scene: a situated mass of transformative signs and sweating bodies, continually reconstructing the meaning of a communion of individuals in a primary group. (ibid.: #128)

Although, in practice, Shank concentrates on music-makers and live performance, his emphasis on the circulation of signs makes it possible for his definition of scene to incorporate both production and reception. Shank's concept of scene also helps to highlight conflict within scenes and to give attention to the position of scenes within capitalist economics. He argues that scenes are born through a struggle between 'the fierce desire to remake oneself through musical practice, and the equally powerful struggle to affirm the value of that practice in the complexly structured late-capitalist marketplace' (ibid.: x). Shank's book marries a detailed look at the locally situated practices that constitute the Austin scene with an appreciation of the way scenes create affect, pleasure and identity. He appreciates both the enduring quality of scenes and their constant struggle and change. Yet Shank's book, despite acknowledging the issue in footnotes and asides, largely ignores the way local scenes relate to national and global scenes. Moreover, it is unclear how Shank would deal with music-making that does not take place within the kind of intense, local scene that he describes.

Holly Kruse has argued that scene implies 'something less stable and historically rooted than a "community"' and that this allows us to look at 'the relationship between situated music practices and the construction of identity' (1993: 38). She posits that scenes are 'connected rather abstractly through shared tastes...and quite concretely through social and economic

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[3] In this paragraph I am drawing on Giovanni Porfido's ongoing doctoral work.

networks' (ibid.: 36). Although her use of the concept is less theoretical than Shank's, she does attend to the issue of how scenes relate to other scenes. In the case of alternative music, local scenes link up with other local scenes to create trans-local scenes. A record label may be based in one particular town but have links with networks of labels in other towns. In this way, local and trans-local identities and histories coexist.

For Will Straw scenes are distinct from older notions of a 'musical community' (1991: 373). Whereas the latter are based on 'a population group whose composition is relatively stable...and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage', a music scene is defined as:

> ..that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilisation... (ibid.: 373)

Music scenes continually form temporary musical alliances, both locally and trans-locally, and these can produce senses of community. Straw analyses scenes according to their particular 'logics of change', driven by scene members' struggles for prestige, which occur within the context of larger processes of social change. Straw's paper is important in that it characterises scenes as sites of heterogeneity and permanent change and he attempts to understand how different scenes relate trans-locally in his analysis of the alternative-rock and dance-music scenes. The 'logic' of alternative rock is that each local scene has a self-sustaining infrastructure, yet each local scene is musically similar to other local scenes. The logic of dance-music scenes is based to a far greater extent around autonomous local 'sounds'.

Mark Olson has criticised Straw for depicting scenes as 'merely empty vessels within which certain practices interact', without a 'productivity' of their own (1998: 271). Scenes, for Olson, are 'territorializing machines' (ibid.: 281) that are productive of particular kinds of flow and specific kinds of relationship to geographic location. Scenes 'mobilise' people in peculiar ways, based on migrancy, pilgrimage and diaspora, creating new ways of belonging. Scenes such as that of Seattle, Washington are based 'not upon already being there, upon an arrival, but in terms of a common desire to be there, a common belonging to a trajectory of investment towards a particular place: a movement' (ibid.: 283). Scenes can never be stable; they are in permanent motion.

Olson is correct to highlight the way in which spaces such as scenes are productive as well as produced. However, Straw's scene, as an 'empty vessel', has the advantage of being a more satisfactory framework for holistic research. Straw's concept of scene proscribes little, but sensitises us to the most important features of scenes. Thus, we might ask of the Extreme Metal scene: what are its logics of change? How do local scenes relate to one another and to national and global scenes? What are the sources of struggle within Extreme Metal?

The concept of scene may also be used to attend to important issues of difference and exclusion. Scene may connote performance, but it does not necessarily connote public performance within an exclusive and bounded space. Sara Cohen (1997) has shown how the concept of the 'Liverpool scene' may be used to deconstruct its gendered nature. Using the work of Judith Butler, she shows how gender is enacted in the Liverpool scene in ways that exclude or marginalise women. The scene concept may also be used to incorporate insights from research into feminised 'riot grrrl' scenes (Kearney 1997; Leonard 1997, 1998). Such scenes attempt to reflexively challenge conventional constructions of women in music and subculture. They do not denigrate the private sphere, they attempt to provide support and empowerment to young women struggling with their gender and eschew many of the trappings of the music industry, such as 'stardom'. The scene concept recognises that there are a number of possible models of scenic involvement. It is not a concept based on predetermined ideas of how a scene or involvement in it should appear. As a result, it allows us to ask such questions as: how is gender performed in the Extreme Metal scene? What is the position of women within the scene? How is ethnicity and class performed? How do different sorts of people gain or lose status within the scene?

The concept of the scene provides, potentially, a productive holistic framework for researching Extreme Metal. However, we cannot begin our research into Extreme Metal yet. A profusion of literatures has raised a profusion of questions. Even if we have identified our topic as 'The Extreme Metal Scene', there is no clear picture of what this term delineates, nor of the definition of scene. It is necessary, therefore, to define the concept of the scene and the research questions that this thesis will address.

Researching the Extreme Metal Scene

The formulation of research questions and conceptual frameworks presents a 'chicken and egg' problem. While a framework is needed, in order to delineate the subject area and research

questions, that framework must emerge from a study of that subject area. Even sociological methodologies which build theory in a dialogic relationship with field research (Glaser and Strauss 1968; Silverman 1985) require some conceptual 'leaps in the dark', even if such assumptions subsequently prove less than useful. The leap we need to make is in defining 'The Extreme Metal Scene', together with the questions we wish to ask of it. However, the act of defining a space may lead to the drawing of boundaries around it, which may provoke fruitless questions, such as 'is this a scene?' This danger is manifest in the work of Straw (1990), who denies that Heavy Metal constitutes a subculture, simply because it does not conform to his definition of 'subculture'. Moreover, asking 'is this a scene?' obscures the essential constructedness of conceptual frameworks. The act of defining the scene must be inclusive and draw attention to the process of definition.

Let us make the initial assertion that *all* musical and music-related activity takes place within a scene or scenes. By asserting that everything takes place within a scene, the question 'is this a scene?' becomes redundant. The assertion also creates an inclusive scene, encompassing everything from tight-knit local musical communities to isolated musicians and occasional fans, all contributing to and feeding from a larger space(s) of musical practice. Even the simple action of buying a CD means to become 'involved' in the scene, in however slight a way, by virtue of causing some sort of effect within it. One cannot make a rigid distinction between 'active' and 'passive' membership – the nature of 'membership' in the scene is a question that can only be resolved through research.

The consequence of this primary assertion is that everything within a scene may exist within a number of scenes. A musical text, for example, may circulate within a number of scenes at once. Also, texts and individuals may move through scenes on a variety of trajectories, as they also move along particular individual 'pathways' (Finnegan 1989) through life. Similarly, it follows that scenes with varying degrees of autonomy may exist within other scenes. Scenes themselves are constantly shifting, splitting and combining – any coherence can only be momentary.

The scene has no privileged 'centre' – not local music-making, not committed fans, not production, consumption or the texts themselves. Scene acknowledges that no analysis of popular-music culture is entirely satisfactory without an holistic analysis of all these factors. At the same time, holism does not predetermine the interrelationship of the elements of the scene. Scene is also pragmatic and holistic in its combination of a variety of theoretical perspectives. Scene is both an emergent feature of everyday interaction and a construct of the researcher. The

scene concept is a fairly flexible sign, gathering several types of analysis together. Yet one cannot assume that different types of analysis are collapsible into each other – on the contrary, they may be incompatible. Therefore, one possible way of drawing connections between the incommensurate empirical and theoretical elements of the scene is to use the concept of homology. Homology connects two completely different 'things' by suggesting that they are similar, perhaps modelled on each other, yet entirely different. For example, the use of scene in everyday life and the use of scene by the researcher are homologous. This use of homology ironises the CCCS use of the term and reclaims it as a non-reductive concept that represents the difference between scene and subculture.

I also wish to make some empirical assertions about the Extreme Metal scene itself. At the start of this chapter I outlined some of the key historical characteristics of the Extreme Metal scene using the concept of genre. I defined 'Extreme Metal' as a genre that has a close relationship to the genre of Heavy Metal and within which other genres such as Black, Death and Doom Metal exist. As I argued earlier, genre's analytical privileging of musical events is problematic. Nonetheless, the concept provides an indispensable starting point for the definition of the Extreme Metal scene. Although the use of generic terms such as 'Extreme Metal' is always contested, the definitions presented at the start of this chapter would be acceptable enough to most scene members to provide a reasonable starting point for analysis. The Extreme Metal scene overlaps considerably with constructions of the genre of Extreme Metal, but is not confined to it. The Extreme Metal scene is a global music scene that contains local scenes within it. It also contains other scenes based on the production and consumption of particular Extreme Metal genres, such as Black Metal and Death Metal. However, the considerable musical and institutional overlap between these scenes allows us to talk about the Extreme Metal scene as a totality. Furthermore, the Extreme Metal scene remains a part of a wider 'Metal' scene, which contains a wide variety of Metal styles, such as Heavy Metal. As Weinstein (2000) rightly points out, although Metal has fragmented since the 1980s, different Metal scenes still have much in common.

My definition of the Extreme Metal scene, while based on a series of major assertions, contains little empirical pre-supposition. The concept of scene infers nothing about the workings of scenes or the relationships between the constituent scenes and other practices of Extreme Metal. Moreover, while the concept of scene emerges from the assertion that everything takes place within a scene, I am not suggesting that it is necessarily useful to analyse everything in this way. The question is whether it is useful to treat Extreme Metal music and practice as

occurring within a scene. I therefore want to isolate two research questions that this study will seek to address:

> 1) What is added to our understanding of Extreme Metal music and practice by treating it as occurring within a scene?
> 2) How might the use of the conceptual framework of the scene allow us to address a potentially infinite series of research questions, emerging from disparate, often incommensurate paradigms and traditions?

In other words, all the questions we have asked in this chapter are useful and have their place, but asking any of them in isolation blinds us to the holistic character of the social and creates artificial analytical boundaries. It is, of course, impossible to do everything at once, but how might the conceptual framework of the scene generate 'results' that help us to address a multitude of questions? Might an holistic framework produce an holistic answer? The questions that this study will address are thus methodological and conceptual. Privileging these questions forces us to address the other substantive questions asked in this chapter, without privileging any one substantive literature.

Knowing the questions to ask and the conceptual framework to use does not tell us what the attitude of the researcher should be. The researcher cannot and should not be a neutral, morally blank figure. As chapter three will show, research involves all sorts of highly charged emotional difficulties. One guiding principle of this research will be that the research process should display a critical awareness of dominating practices and power relations in the scene, without eclipsing the search for positive sides of the scene. The attitude to the scene, therefore, should be that termed 'generous critique' by Daniel Boyarin (1993), a constantly critical attitude that always looks for the positives nested in the negatives. Most accounts of Heavy Metal, however well intentioned, seem to ignore the diversity of Metal and assume that it is entirely static. Therefore, another principle of the research process will be the active search for change and heterogeneity in the scene. Furthermore, accounts of subculture often elide the reflexive ways in which members manipulate the contexts within which they move and the signs that they produce. Therefore, this research will also actively seek out reflexivity within the scene. The research will not seek to elevate Extreme Metal artistically nor reify its culture, but to recover its complexity in a world that tends to ignore it.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how Extreme Metal music and practice provides an interesting topic for research. The review of the literature on popular music studies shows how the topic can fruitfully be approached from a variety of perspectives. However, I argued that it is preferable to research Extreme Metal with an 'holistic' perspective, which will enable us to draw on a variety of literatures and approach Extreme Metal music and culture from a variety of angles. I argued that the concept of scene provides the most fruitful holistic perspective on Extreme Metal music and practice.

The assertions about scene drew on a small literature on scenes and subcultures. The concept of the scene as it will be used in this thesis is not, as yet, fully theorised. It is necessary to explore the viability and parameters of the concept. In the next chapter I will situate the scene within the wider traditions of sociological theory. I will pay particular attention to the epistemological and ontological questions at which this chapter has only hinted.

*is the method anti-analytic?*

# CHAPTER TWO

## SITUATING THE SCENE

### Introduction

*showed a preference*

In the previous chapter I argued that it was necessary to study Extreme Metal using an 'holistic' framework. I argued that 'scene' offers such a framework and directed this study's two principal research questions to assessing the advantages of using the concept in researching Extreme Metal music and practice. Taking 'the Extreme Metal scene' as our topic allows us to define a territory for research that does not overdetermine the outcomes of that research. It provides a method of connecting a diffuse set of Extreme Metal practices and texts in a way that does not ignore change, heterogeneity and reflexivity.

The conceptual work done in the previous chapter raises many issues in sociological theory. Most importantly, discussion of 'scene' raises questions regarding the use of concepts that delineate particular social 'contexts' within which individuals produce practice. Sociology tends to assume that human beings do not produce practice in a vacuum and practice is always, to some extent, constrained by the contexts in which they move. This assumption provokes such questions as: *where* does practice occur? What is the nature of the contexts within which individuals produce practice? How (and to what degree) do these contexts constrain and structure practice? To what degree do these contexts vary in scale and in the manner in which they constrain practice? To what degree do individuals move between a variety of these contexts within their everyday lives? In this chapter I will examine a range of sociological concepts that address such questions by defining the contexts in which individuals produce practice. The aim of this examination is to theorise the concept of scene more fully and to situate it within the context of social theory. As a result, the concept of scene may become applicable to more substantial issues in sociology, rather than being a contingent concept developed to ask questions about a particular empirical area. This examination will also allow us to make connections between the practices produced within the Extreme Metal scene and practices produced elsewhere within society.

*means what is soc.*

In this chapter I will situate the concept of scene within two literatures in particular – those of 'community' and 'space'. I will go on to argue that a variety of other 'spatial' concepts are also potentially useful in developing scene. As in the previous chapter, I will seek to find a way in which the concept of scene might draw on the insights given by a variety of irreconcilable

conceptual frameworks. The 'holism' that I advocated in the previous chapter will become a conceptual holism.

## The Concept of Community

Community is an old and venerable sociological concept that developed in sociology's 'classic period' and has only recently begun to be problematised. It is, moreover, one area of debate within which sociology can plausibly claim to be part of the 'reflexivity of modernity' (Giddens 1990). Community is a concept with powerful resonances among non-sociologists, and lay and sociological uses inform each other. To call something a community is to link it into an intense signifying chain with positive connotations such as locality, solidarity, closeness and mutual support. We do not have to accept the less reflexive, utopian uses of the term to recognise that it is the locus for a set of important debates that can make a vital contribution to the scene concept.

One key work in the development of the sociological concept of community is Ferdinand Tönnies' *Community and Association* (1955), a translation of the barely translatable *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*. Tönnies was writing within an emerging sociological tradition that sought to diagnose and offer some remedies to what it saw as the enormous and potentially destructive changes brought by modernity. His analysis focused on changes in the basis of the 'will' by which social relationships and their resultant forms of association are structured. He argued that, in modern times, 'rational will' had become more important than 'natural will'. Natural will is a rather obscure concept, but rational will bears a strong similarity to Weberian concepts such as rationality. Natural will forms 'Gemeinschaft' relationships, based on custom, reciprocity, care, friendship and feeling. Rational will forms 'Gesellschaft' relationships, based on reason, law, science, calculation and profit. Tönnies shows how this distinction is variously manifest in different types of social relationship, collectivity and organisation. It provides the basis of a powerful critique of capitalist modernisation. Society is no longer based on small-scale, organically developing communities, but on rational association and individualism.

Tönnies' work is easy to misinterpret, since both Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are 'ideal types':

> ...both names are in the present context stripped of their connotation as designating social entities or groups, or even collective or artificial persons; the essence of both Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft is found interwoven in all kinds of associations. (1955: 18)

Rather than translating Gemeinschaft as 'community', we should more accurately refer to Gemeinschaft-*type* community. Pure Gemeinschaft characteristics can rarely, if ever, be found in 'real' communities. Indeed, it is ironic that Gemeinschaft should form the basis of Tönnies' critique of capitalist modernisation, since, as defined by him, is almost unattainable. Nevertheless, Gemeinschaft can provide the spur for reflexive change through the exercise of will. For example, Gemeinschaft can arise from the popular realisation that Gesellschaft has been passed off as Gemeinschaft by the ruling classes. Gemeinschaft can also be something that is popularly 'felt' – for example, it can provide the basis for a 'national consciousness'.

Community, as used by Tönnies, is a three-fold concept: 1) an analytical concept, 2) a source of critique and 3) a reflexive feature present in everyday life. This tripartite scheme makes the concept very mobile and flexible, since all three elements rarely coincide. However, as we shall see later, the concept of community has become far less open and malleable in its more recent incarnations.

Other early social theorists were informed implicitly or explicitly by a concept of community in their attempts to diagnose the pathologies of modernity. Emile Durkheim (1984) schematised the transition from traditional to modern societies as the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity. Durkheim's scheme is based on a more complex set of ironies than Tönnies's and focuses more on the relationship of the individual to society. As Lukes (1973) argues, the examination of the relationship of the individual to society is perhaps the keystone of Durkheim's thought. In traditional small-scale societies, based on mechanical solidarity, there is little individual 'freedom', since the individual is dispensable to the group and the scope for human action is severely constrained by such mechanisms as 'repressive law' and the 'conscience collective'. The simplicity of the division of labour means that individual tasks can easily be replaced and small-scale units, such as villages, are economically self-sufficient. Society is thus made up of many similar, replaceable, small-scale 'segments', like those of the worm. As the division of labour becomes more complex, so individual functions become more specialised and different segments lose their self-sufficiency. Increasingly, the segments of society become functionally interdependent, like the organs of the human body. As people are pushed physically closer to each other, organic solidarity develops through the increasing of 'moral density'. The apotheosis of this process is the development of the industrialised city. A key irony in Durkheimian thought is that while individuals are pushed together physically and society becomes functionally interdependent, individual affective ties are weakened and individuals have greater freedom. While this development permits new freedoms and enables diverse social groupings to exist within society, it also encourages 'anomie' – the feeling of

total estrangement from society. Durkheim thus located the pathologies of modernity within the individual to a far greater extent than Tönnies. Similarly, Georg Simmel was preoccupied with the individual's experience of modernity, as exemplified within the city (Frisby 1985). In 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1971), Simmel characterises modernity as a succession of fleeting, 'shocking' experiences. In the face of the overwhelming nature of society, the individual suffers a constant inner nervosity and insecurity, causing an alienating retreat into the self.

Tönnies, Durkheim and Simmel, among others, identified a set of sociological problems to which the discipline still responds today. Modernity pushes people both together and apart, leading to a paradoxical excess of freedom and constraint. Early sociologists attempted to imagine how society might reconcile individual diversity and the need for human beings to avoid loneliness. Durkheim looked to the nation state to provide structures and new forms of solidarity to ease these problems. Tönnies' model of Gemeinschaft is only sketchily developed as a 'real' social structure. What early sociologists achieved was to set an agenda that was followed by subsequent generations of sociologists. Throughout the 20th century, researchers have attempted to locate and assess the possibilities for non-anomic social spaces within modernity, particularly within the city. Whether or not the term 'community' is actually used, a common set of typologies has frequently been invoked. These typologies locate Gemeinschaft-type characteristics within particular groups in small-scale areas. Whereas Tönnies did not closely identify Gemeinschaft/community with any particular space, a strong tradition within sociology has tied the concept to small-scale local groups, as opposed to large-scale society (Bulmer 1987). Sociologists have spent a great deal of energy locating areas where such communities have been preserved.

The location of preserved communities was a major agenda for the 'Chicago School' of research. Robert Park (1952) saw communities as highly developed spatial consequences of functional differentiation in the city. The complex procedures of zoning and functional differentiation occurring within the city over time result in community. Park, therefore, conflated a theoretical and a spatial definition of community (Saunders 1981). Subsequent definitions of community – within and without the Chicago School – have often automatically associated community with a particular small-scale area in a similar way. From the Chicago School onwards, it has been common to treat communities as the site of Gemeinschaft-type interaction. William Foote Whyte (1973), for example, looked at the neighbourhood of 'Cornerville' and found it to be far from anarchic and anomic, but rather tightly structured and full of networks of reciprocity and obligation. Subsequent researchers, in a variety of locations,

have also found small-scale urban environments that teem with Gemeinschaft. Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1962), for example, found persistent, tight-knit kin structures in Bethnal Green in the 1950s. 'Community Studies' (Bell and Newby 1971) is an area of research that has focused on this sort of 'urban community'.

Such studies stress the fragility of communities. Like 'salvage anthropology', this genre of sociology deals with the disappearance of community by honouring those places where it remains. Community is represented as a kind of leaky bulwark against the onslaught of an atomising modernity. Much of the Chicago School's research centred on phenomena such as 'taxi-dance' halls and gangs, yet these 'subcultures' were seen as fleeting and insecure compared with the rootedness of community (Gelder and Thornton 1997). Community has been strongly associated ever since with that which is enduring and locally situated.

In recent years community has increasingly been the subject of ever-more desperate attempts to rediscover it, such as the 'Virtual Community' (Rheingold 1993). It has also become the standard for new kinds of 'communitarian' politics (Etzioni 1992), which see in community an ethic of mutual support and self-reliance that is a bulwark against naked individualism (Bellah 1988). Community has become a nostalgic concept, invoking a stringently defined and very rare kind of social formation (Cohen 1997). In such cases, the narrowness and place-boundness of the concept make it hard to encompass difference and diversity. Certainly, classical social theorists saw diversity and individual freedom as highly ambivalent consequences of modernity (as do contemporary communitarians), tied to the increase in anomie. Yet Tönnies' answer of Gemeinschaft/community is 'ideal typical' and not necessarily prescriptive. The homogeneous and limiting community, opposed to diversity and difference, need only be one possible model in a world shot through with varying degrees of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. While community has frequently been applied to such a narrow class of phenomena that it is of very little use as an analytical tool, such uses of the concept do not exhaust its value, since it has also been used in ways that have a greater potential to encompass difference.

One way of creating a less restrictive concept of community is to qualify it, as Hunter and Suttles do with their concept of the 'Community of Limited Liability' (1972). Communities of limited liability are externally defined by 'official' agencies and can be anything from a borough council to a postal area. Within the modern city, people live in a 'mosaic' of such communities, yet active participation in or even recognition of such communities is a choice. People choose to be active in local politics, rail-user groups, police liaison committees etc. The differing areas covered by such groups ensure that there can be no single community or

community politics. Even broader than the Community of Limited Liability is the 'Expanded Community of Limited Liability', which consists of entities that are only occasionally visible, such as 'South London'.

For Hunter and Suttles, community is defined structurally as a shared location within a certain institutional structure. It is not necessarily the case that members of such communities think of themselves as part of such a community. However, Benedict Anderson (1991) shows how shared structural location can create a shared sense of belonging and identification. For Anderson, 'Imagined Communities' arise from thinking of oneself as being positioned simultaneously with others within a certain bounded entity. What is crucial here is the assertion that this sort of community can be built even out of shared location within a particular bureaucracy. It is an argument that goes against much of classic (particularly Weberian) social theory, in treating bureaucracy and rationalisation as potentially creative, rather than anomic or alienating.

Anthony Cohen (1985) also defines community as a shared sense of belonging. Community is a 'symbolic' construct created in the minds of its members. Cohen argues that:

> The quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further, that they think that sense may differ from one made elsewhere. (1985: 16)

For Cohen, a particular structural location does not in itself produce community. Rather, community is constructed in the minds of its members, shaping shared identities and shared senses of difference from other communities. Community is defined as much by exclusion as by inclusion.

All of the definitions of community we have looked at so far imply that community is somehow automatically and 'naturally' produced, either through shared meanings, shared structural location or a shared mode of interaction. There is little allowance made for members' reflexivity in such definitions. In contrast, for Scott Lash, modern 'reflexive communities' are the result of a voluntaristic impulse to come together:

> That is, if we are 'thrown' into the collective meanings and practices of the being-in-the-world of simple community, we reflexively 'throw ourselves' into the communal world of the youth subculture, as we decide to become involved in them. (1994: 147)

There is nothing 'natural' about reflexive communities. Rather they are created and worked on by the efforts and reflexivity of their members. Some of Lash's examples of reflexive community appear to be analogous to popular music scenes. However, although the concept appears to offer parallels with the concept of scene, we should not ignore the utility of other concepts of community that may help us in theorising scene. Community has been theorised in a startling number of ways, which can be typologised along a number of dimensions:

1) Community as shared meanings and practices of reflexivity. While this conflates two issues that are not quite identical, it is the most economical way of describing communities in which members are aware of themselves and construct their identities as members.

2) Community as shared practices. Communities based around hobbies are one example of this. Community refers here to a set of people who do the same or similar things and who, in so doing, come into contact with other people who do the same things. This type of community may develop a bureaucracy or institutional structures through which practices may be organised and regularised. It does not necessarily follow that there is any attendant consciousness of being part of a community on the part of its participants, although Anderson shows that this is certainly possible.

3) Community as shared structural location. This concept is similar to Hunter and Suttle's Community of Limited Liability. One can be a member of such communities simply by sharing a particular water supply or living in a particular country or being in a particular socio-economic grouping. To be part of this sort of community is again not the same as being conscious of one's membership in it, nor does it necessarily mean that practice will cohere around such a community.

4) Community as shared place. This concept is really a subset of 3) but I isolate it here to emphasise the historical importance of this dimension in previous definitions of community and to further emphasise the separability of place from other aspects of community.

5) Community as mutual obligation within face-to-face networks of reciprocity. This concept has strong similarities to Gemeinschaft-type interaction. Note that I have separated it from community as shared practice. Doing things in conjunction with other people is not the same as being involved in networks of reciprocity with them. However, one might frequently be expected to lead to the other.

6) Community as an ideal. Sociological concepts of community, such as Gemeinschaft or those developed by 'community studies', often treat community as an ideal. It is a dimension of community shot through with a sense of loss.

In practice, all definitions of community involve some combination of these dimensions. Indeed, some of these dimensions are virtually impossible to imagine isolated from the others. 'Imagined Community', for example, 'scores' highest on 3) and 1) and very low on 5). Conversely, some combinations of dimensions are hard to imagine, such as 2) and 3) without 1).

The Extreme Metal scene could profitably be analysed using these typologies. The scene may exhibit any combination of shared meanings, practices, properties and places, and these typologies could be used to examine the existence of communitarian ideals within the scene. Different areas of the Extreme Metal scene may at different times be situated at different places where these dimensions intersect. Any concept of community is useful, therefore, in the examination of the scene's practices – even if it is only to show the absence of some sort of definition of community. The concept of scene must allow us to draw on a range of concepts of community, without being beholden to any of them, in order for us to use the different insights that different concepts of community may bring to the contexts of Extreme Metal production, circulation and consumption. A major issue with regard to the concept of community is how to ensure it can encompass diversity. Any commitment to one particular definition of community will inevitably exclude some aspect of Extreme Metal practice. The scene cannot be defined as a particular sort of community, but it can encompass the possibility of a range of definitions of community. The question is how it might be possible to draw on these various, incommensurate concepts without drifting into mindless dilettantism. The next section deals with how we might conceptually develop the scene so that this is possible.

The Concept of Space

Community and scene are 'spatial' concepts in that they provide metaphors for a particular kind of location. Such metaphors have become increasingly common in sociology. Indeed, as Michael Keith and Steven Pile argue, 'There is a sense in which the geographical is being used to provide a secure grounding in the increasingly uncertain world of social and cultural theory' (1993: 6). Historically, space has connoted stasis, deadness and fixity. As Edward Soja (1989), following Michel Foucault, points out, time rather than space has generally been seen as the realm of creativity, multiplicity and change. If we are not careful, using spatial metaphors, such

as scene and community, may become a way of 'fixing' Extreme Metal music and practice, in an attempt to control a disturbing heterogeneity and fluidity. Contemporary discussions of space are useful to us in that they are predicated on difference and multiplicity. In contemporary critical social theory, space is an inescapable dimension of the social. As Doreen Massey (1994) points out with reference to positivistic schools of geography, space is not an isolated set of rules with its own logic. Space is not an entirely literal concept; it is not an easily viewable, containable, mappable *thing*. It is in addition an epistemological concept that escapes any simple material grounding.

A crucial implication of Soja's work is that space is multiple. Spaces do not 'follow' each other sequentially, but coexist simultaneously within and without each other. As Massey puts it:

> A first requirement of developing an alternative view of space is that we should try to get away from a notion of society as a kind of 3-D (and indeed more usually 2-D) slice which moves through time. (1994: 264)

Massey treats space as almost chaotic in its fundamental simultaneity:

> 'Space' is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations from every scale from local to global... (ibid.: 265)

A concept that encapsulates simultaneity and multiplicity is crucial for this study. As I asserted in chapter one, the global Extreme Metal scene coexists with locally based scenes that appear to overlap with the global scene but are not reducible to it. Furthermore, texts, individuals and practices appear to circulate simultaneously within a number of different scenes. Contemporary ideas of space thus allow us to consider how one 'thing' (a text, an individual, a scene) can 'be' in more than one 'place' at once.

Space can refer simultaneously to a central dimension along which the social is organised and to a social construct. Henri Lefebvre (1991), for example, refers to a triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. For Lefebvre, society 'secretes' a particular form of space – in contemporary society, for example, an objectifying, total 'abstract space'. However, representations of space can and do challenge this. Since the spatial practice of society is related to the mode of production of a society, challenging representations of space becomes an important political act. So, for example, the social unrest in Paris in 1968 can be seen as a way of creating a new kind of space. Lefebvre's use of the concept of space is multiple, constantly shifting between space as practice and space as representation – the

relations between these two aspects of space are engageable and disengageable. In a similar way, Keith and Pile (1993) draw on the work of Walter Benjamin to show how spaces can be both real and metaphorical. The late 19th century Parisian Arcades described by Benjamin did exist, but are used in metaphorical ways. Keith and Pile go on to argue:

> We are suggesting a more complex relationship between the so-called real and the so-called metaphorical: one does not merely cover the other, one is not more real than the other. (1993: 9)

Keith and Pile argue for a political use of space that is multiple rather than based on a single privileged standpoint. Locations of struggle and 'communities of resistance' can be simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic:

> These spaces of representation subvert the representation of spaces so that the ground we stand on becomes a mongrel hybrid of spatialities; at once a metaphor and a speaking position, a place of certainty and a burden of humility, sometimes all of these simultaneously, sometimes all of them incommensurably. (ibid.: 23)

The concept of space also opens up radical new perspectives on identity and the membership of social categories. As we saw, simultaneity allows us to think of things (texts, individuals etc.) as being in more than one place at once. Social theories of space question what it is to 'be' in a location at all and, in doing so, raise important questions of identity. Identities are often founded on essentialist states of being and exclusions of 'others'. Similarly, traditional concepts of identity cannot tolerate multiplicity or flux and are implicated in dominant systems of power. Keith and Pile draw on the work of bell hooks and Paul Gilroy to form a politics of identity based on an alternative spatiality that is no longer fixed or passive. Critical theories of space thus raise radical and disturbing questions of what it is to be a member, to belong to a certain space. As Giorgio Agamben poses the question:

> What could be the politics...of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being communist) nor by the simple absence of conditions...but by belonging itself? (1993: 85)

The concept of the scene must address such problematic questions by grounding itself on such critical spatial theories, but it must also provide a link into more material concepts such as community. Scene may potentially create a space that links a multiplicity of other spaces.

Space relates in complex ways to 'place'. As we have seen, space is an extremely complex, multifaceted concept. As such, it is a concept that can no longer be said to emerge reflexively from lay common sense – still (presumably) stuck in the Dark Ages, seeing space as static and

empty, and time as dynamic. However, sociological thinking on place still relates to lay discourses, at least on some level, in that both lay and academic places may be 'recognisable' to each other. Yet much of what was said about space also applies to place – it is multiple, and both 'real' and representative. The first point is particularly important. John Urry's analysis of the Lake District (1995), Massey's analysis of Kilburn (1994) and Keith and Pile's analysis of the London Docklands (1993) all show how a 'single' place is the locus of multiple definitions and attempts to mobilise it as a signifier. Moreover, places are not isolated and self-contained but penetrated by global networks. Gilroy's concept of 'diaspora' (1993) describes a space of constantly changing cultural interaction and exchange between places.

Space is also inextricably linked to time. As we have seen, the privileging of time over space has recently been questioned, in favour of an appreciation of their interconnectedness. Anthony Giddens (1984) describes how individuals and practices are continually positioned in time and in space. The basic domain of sociology is the study of how social practices become ordered across space and time. The relationship between space and time is, however, in a constant state of flux. In 'late modernity', for example, modern systems of communication foster almost instantaneous relationships between 'absent others' across vast distances in space (Giddens 1990). These forms of communication lead to a 'separation' of time and space, through a 'disembedding' of social systems from their location in space. Similarly, Harvey (1990) understands postmodernity in terms of greater 'time-space compression' as a result of modern systems of communication.

Time is an extremely difficult sociological variable to handle. A multiplicity of spaces, individuals and texts moving along a variety of trajectories at a variety of speeds can appear so chaotic that it becomes impossible to say anything about anything. If we are not careful, an appreciation of time can lead us to a dystopian vision of atomised individuals moving in society with no visible pattern. However, the concept of 'flow' provides some assistance in situating spaces in time without losing all sense of an overall pattern. Lash and Urry (1994) argue that, in recent years, flows have replaced structures as the central organising principle of capitalism. Whereas structure connotes stasis and fixity, flow connotes the movement of objects through time. As capitalism increasingly depends on the penetration of a range of markets throughout the world, capital and signs are circulated at an ever-greater velocity. We can then interpret contemporary space as a network of flows containing certain hubs. For instance, 'global cities', such as London and Frankfurt, act as hubs within the global flow of capital. The concept of flow also allows us to differentiate particular spaces. Whereas global cities are hubs from

which communication can occur at high speeds, 'wild zones', such as Bosnia or inner-city slums, are divorced from the network of flows.

Manuel Castells (1996) uses the concept of flow to build a complex theory of the interconnection between space, time and place in contemporary society. He proposes an emerging distinction between the 'space of places' and the 'space of flows'. The latter is defined as 'the material organisation of time-sharing social practices that work through flows' (1996: 412) and the former as '...a locale whose function, form and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity' (ibid.: 423). International hotels, for example, exist within the space of flows, as they are situated in globally extensive networks catering to people with similar global interconnections. The growing distinction between the two spaces is seen as important, since power and power elites are concentrated in the space of flows and the two spaces are increasingly disconnected. To return to Lash and Urry, spaces of places are increasingly becoming those 'wild zones' cut off from the networks of power and influence prevalent within the space of flows.

However, while the concept of flow allows us to understand the relationship of space to time without collapsing into an atomised chaos, we still have to recognise that time cannot be controlled analytically any more than it can be controlled practically. Any space we might describe may suddenly and unpredictably change out of all recognition. Chaos theory (Gleick 1993; Goodwin 1997; Parker and Stracey 1994) shows us how infinitesimally small changes to an apparently stable system can have enormous unintended consequences. It is common in sociology to talk of the unintended consequences of human action and an appreciation of chaos shows just how unpredictable and significant those consequences may be. Conversely, systems may be unpredictably resistant to large-scale attempts at change. As we saw, Tönnies argued that social formations are the result of human 'will'. Yet it seems that time acts 'wilfully' to subvert any chance of stability in either describing or intervening in a particular space.

The Scene 1 – Community and Space

Contemporary concepts of space emphasise the fluidity and heterogeneity of the social and problematise the boundedness and stasis inherent in spatial concepts that are based on more rigid criteria of membership. The concept may, therefore, provide an appropriate foundation on which to develop the concept of scene. Just as I asserted that all practice occurs within scenes, so all practice occurs within spaces. Individuals can be members of many spaces at once and spaces are constantly hybridising and changing. Of course, with a concept of space as fluid and

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multivocal as this, it becomes difficult to retain any sense of the structured, systematic and ordered materiality of space. In the work of some theorists of space (particularly Lefebvre), space veers close to being simply a shorthand for an epistemological standpoint. We are often left wondering – just what *is* space? Some definitions bear little resemblance to everyday uses of the term and can be used in ways that are decidedly 'non-spatial' in any traditional sense.

Of course, many theorists of space, such as Massey, combine intense theoretical abstraction with an appreciation of the materiality and empirical specificity of particular spaces. However, in their emphasis on complexity and multivocality, theorists of space frequently obscure the various ways in which spaces may become systematically structured and bounded. The various definitions of community that we examined earlier in this chapter have in common a profound appreciation of the bounded qualities of space. That boundedness may arise from systematic attempts by members of those spaces to produce boundaries, or from attempts by analysts to highlight the institutional boundaries of space. Although boundaries are always permeable, they are nonetheless an inescapable feature of space. Of course, as we saw, the appreciation of order and boundaries shown by theorists of community is all too often combined with a wilful ignorance of the less orderly aspects of space. Nevertheless, in drawing on the various definitions of community that I outlined, we become aware of the various ways in which spaces lose some of their chaotic multivocality and come to be ordered and relatively stable.

It is necessary, therefore, to draw on the concept of community, in order to recover a sense of the structured, bounded nature of spaces. The empirical constructedness and fluidity of the scene suggests that the concept may provide a means of drawing on both space and community. Scene is a spatial concept that must allow the use of a variety of spatial concepts, such as community. Just as space is both a conceptual construct and a 'product' of social interaction, so scene is both something that appears bounded and visible to its members *and* an analytical construct. In referring to 'the Extreme Metal scene' in this study, we are referring both to something with a 'real' existence and to a concept that the analyst has produced for particular analytical ends. It is the process of writing that produces the connection between everyday reflexivity and the reflexivity of the analyst.

Our concept of the scene allows us to argue that the different dimensions of community we outlined earlier *may* be present in a scene, but we cannot, *a priori*, predict which. Areas within the Extreme Metal scene may resemble communities in being based around a common geographical location; other areas may resemble communities in being reliant on networks of mutual obligation. Recognisable communities are the most visible areas of scenes and, in this

study, will provide the accessible 'way in' to the Extreme Metal scene. However, our concept also allows for the inclusion of isolated individuals, barely connected to other scene members. Thus, scene avoids traditional society–individual debates by positioning everyone in one or a multiplicity of scenes, simply by virtue of their human interdependence in the flow of space and time. The issue becomes, rather, how membership is negotiated within the multiplicity of scenes within which individuals are always already located.

The Scene 2 – Other Spatial Concepts

It follows that other spatial concepts may also be useful in developing the scene. Scene may provide a method through which seemingly incommensurate concepts may provide their particular insights into particular problems. The scene does not, however, attempt to 'reconcile' or merge these disparate concepts – as Nicos Mouzelis (1995) points out, reconciliation is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, the process of writing constructs a space in which the insights gained from the application of different concepts can be brought together under a sufficiently opaque and underdetermined sign. Scene may be theorised as an 'odd' concept that is both imperialist, in encompassing everything within it, but also radically decentred and anti-foundational. In this brief section, a number of useful 'spatial' concepts and literatures will be surveyed.

One important concept is 'social movement' (Lyman 1995), which refers broadly to forms of 'spontaneous' mass human organisation. While this term has more generally been applied to political movements like feminism or nuclear disarmament, it has also been applied to popular culture (Blumer 1995). Blumer terms 'expressive social movements' those movements not focused on political change. An important type of expressive movement is that referred to by Blumer as the 'fashion movement'. Fashion movements are based both on emulation of others and on differentiation from others and exert a powerful type of control on members. In the long term, such movements can 'help to lay the foundations for a new social order' (Blumer 1995: 81). The concept of social movement may help in the development of the scene by emphasising simultaneously its unceasing flux and disorganisation, and its ever-forward motion. It is, perhaps, the concept best suited to deal with the 'chaos' we described earlier.

An apparently less chaotic concept is 'social network' (Mitchell 1969). Social-network analysis focuses on the nature of small-scale relationships between individuals in particular settings. The focus is on the 'morphology' of networks, meaning the type of interlinkages between people, rather than on the phenomenology of relationships themselves. It is thus absolutely

opposed to, say, ethnomethodology, in self-consciously applying *a priori* categories to human experience, rather than deriving them from those experiences. Network analysis is valuable in forcing us to recognise that people are linked together in complex, yet systematic ways, and that the resulting networks may be 'mappable'. It is also important to recognise that scene membership *may* be achieved by virtue of membership of networks, although I am not arguing that scenes 'are' networks. Moreover, individuals may be involved in a multiplicity if networks:

> The network approach...deliberately seeks to examine the way in which people may relate to one another in terms of several different normative frameworks at one and the same time... (Mitchell 1969: 45)

Network analysis provides a way of appreciating the complexity and materiality of the 'membership' of scenes. Individuals are members of a variety of networks that are not confined purely to one scene. Scenes can be understood as the location of a multiplicity of intersecting networks that also extend into other scenes.

Another way to approach the complex relationships of scenes to other scenes and of members to multiple scenes is to draw on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'field' (1993). Bourdieu's work will be discussed in greater detail in future chapters. Briefly, Bourdieu treats fields as quasi-autonomous areas of society, consisting of a space of possible position-takings and expectations of members. Each individual is endowed from birth with a particular 'habitus', a set of dispositions and expectations that guide 'trajectories' through life. Individual trajectories pass through a succession of fields within which 'practice' occurs, both concurrently and consecutively. Bourdieu thus shows how individuals can produce practice within a plurality of fields. Furthermore, he examines 'sub-fields' within fields and attempts to understand the complex relationships of fields to one another. Bourdieu's criterion for membership of fields is simple: 'There is no other criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effects within it' (1993: 42). This criteria of membership is similar to our concept of scene in that it suggests that one can produce effects within a scene without being aware of it. Bourdieu also addresses the everyday phenomenology of fields by showing how they appear as a 'space of possibles', within which individuals gauge their own trajectories according to habitus. As future chapters will show, Bourdieu also offers a complex means of understanding how field and habitus relate to forms of power through his concept of 'capital'.

Talcott Parsons' concept of the 'social system' (1951) provides a very different way of approaching the relations of scenes to their constituent scenes and members with his conceptualising of the functioning of subsystems within systems. Parsons' central assertion is

that the structure of reality can only be understood as a system of interdependent yet separable parts engaged in a constant, complex interaction. All systems can be split into four functions – adaption, goal attainment, integration and latency ('AGIL'). Each function consists, in turn, of a four-fold system based around the AGIL system. Parsons' social theory has thus been described as a system of 'Chinese Boxes' (Rocher 1974). For this study, the detail and rationale behind Parsons' scheme is less relevant than the idea that everything, from the simplest 'unit act' to society itself, can be understood as homologous systems. In his 'holistic' attempt to systematise social life, Parsons applied the AGIL system even to the individual. In our study it could easily follow that if scenes exist within scenes, there is a regression of homologous scenes right down to the individual (and beyond!). This regression would lead us into extremely complex theoretical territory that might threaten the empirical usefulness of the concept of scene as a way of understanding Extreme Metal. Furthermore, it would threaten to separate the concept of scene from everyday reflexivity. The usefulness of Parsons' work is thus partly in providing a warning of the dangers of losing sight of the empirical rootedness of the concept of scene. Concepts of holism and homology drawn from systems theory can help us to build the concept of scene, but their use is only 'tactical', serving to confront a particular empirical problem.

One way to engage with systems theory without falling prey to its dangers is to draw on the work of Niklas Luhmann (1982). Luhmann attempted to reconstruct a systems theory that might be appropriate for a world characterised by a level of complexity that Parsons never fully appreciated. Luhmann argues that modern society is made up of a host of functionally differentiated sub-systems that have become relatively autonomous from each other. Modern society is a 'centreless society', within which 'the whole is less than the sum of its parts' (1982: 238). The function of systems is to 'reduce complexity' so as to 'enlarge and reduce (i.e. to provide a prepatterned and orderly access to) the complexity of external and internal environments...'(ibid.: 231—232). In a similar way, the scene is systematic, but should not be characterised in reductive terms – it should be seen as analytically 'centreless'. Luhmann reminds us that a complex and systematic social theory, such as that provided by the concept of scene, does not represent an orderly 'reality', but instead provides a useful way of approaching a complex and chaotic world.

Systems theory provides productive metaphors for envisaging the complex interrelationships of scenes within scenes and individuals within scenes. The theoretical literature on computer-mediated cyberspaces also provides new ways of understanding the multiplicity and complexity of scenic space. But, in addition, some thinkers have attempted to use cyberspace as a tool with

which to envision new spatial futures. Like the scene, cyberspace is a way of envisaging information (Benedikt 1991) and doing so in ways that are highly malleable and open to new forms of 'architecture'. A particularly intriguing feature of cyberspace is hypertext. Cyberspace is made up of nodes and hypertext allows each of them to open into a multiplicity of dimensions: 'The point thus becomes a control point in one of infinitely many potential cyberspaces, a navigation tool through actual or inferred information' (Novak 1991: 236). So Cyberspace 'looks' three-dimensional but, in fact, has potentially an infinite number of dimensions. In the same way, we can treat individual 'units' within the scene (individuals, texts, practices etc.) as potentially opening up further scenes, further dimensions of analysis. Since everything exists within a scene or scene, every piece of analysis of Extreme Metal texts, practices and institutions opens up a new perspective on a scene or scenes in a hypertextual way. Cyberspace shows us that the scene can be 'viewed' in an orderly fashion, yet this orderliness is not the end of the story (or even the beginning), but merely the entrance to new analytical worlds.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the principal concepts and literatures that will help us to build the concept of the scene. However, the list is by no means exhaustive. There are a variety of other spatial concepts that may help us in theorising the scene, such as 'social world' (Strauss 1987), 'art world' (Becker 1982), 'rhizome' (Deleuze and Guatarri 1988) and 'sphere' (Fornäs 1995a). These concepts will implicitly inform the concept of scene as used in this thesis. *Any* spatial concept can potentially help us in building scene, but if scene provides a method of drawing on a potentially infinite variety of literatures, then there can be no completely exhaustive 'literature review'. The concepts and literatures discussed in this chapter provide the primary reference points in developing scene, but they do not 'close off' the development of the concept.

The most important question is how this potentially infinite range of literatures can be drawn on to provide insights into the Extreme Metal scene. All concepts presume a certain epistemological perspective and it follows that to shift between concepts is to shift between those epistemological perspectives. These perspectives may be incommensurate, but it is only by finding some way of moving between incommensurate paradigms that we can develop a truly holistic framework. By writing under the sign of the scene, we create a constantly shifting and multiple scenic space, within which nothing is static and there is no stable ontology or epistemology. This is nonetheless a formidable task. In the next chapter we will examine the

problems involved in turning the concept of scene into a workable methodology for researching Extreme Metal.

# CHAPTER 3

## RESEARCHING THE SCENE

### Introduction

Advocates of 'analytic induction' (Silverman 1985) and 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss 1968) view theory-building as an emergent process inseparable from the development of methodology. The concept of scene introduced in chapters one and two has been developed to a high level of abstraction, with limited recourse to empirical data gathered through a formal process of fieldwork. However, the concept was developed over more than 10 years of less formal fieldwork. Any kind of involvement in everyday practice can be seen as a form of research. I have been listening to Extreme Metal since 1988. Compared with many scene members, my 'involvement' was peripheral. In 1988–90 my only involvement in the scene was through contact with friends who enjoyed this music and from 1990 until I began my PhD in 1996 I had no other source for this music other than the few recordings I could buy and a few gigs that I attended on my own. In terms of identity, however, a liking for Extreme Metal was always significant to me, something that marked me out as somehow 'different' and in which I took pride. Extreme Metal culture was a source of constant fascination and I would wonder about the people who made and listened to its music. This fascination led me to produce complex webs of meaning around the small number of texts to which I did have access. These webs of meaning constituted the 'context' that I imagined the music to inhabit. As Benedict Anderson points out (1991), the individual consumption of texts can allow the consumers to 'imagine' a kind of 'community'.

My interest in Extreme Metal continued during my training in sociological 'reflexivity' in the course of the 1990s. Reflexivity is a concept that will be discussed in more detail in future chapters. It constitutes the ability to monitor the emergent 'rules' of everyday interaction (Filmer et al. 1972; Garfinkel 1984). Reflexivity is something that everyone practises, but it is practised with particular intensity within sociology (Giddens 1990). As an undergraduate, I began to think about the possibility of researching Extreme Metal music and practice sociologically. My emerging sociological reflexivity stimulated me to consider the potential of the concept of scene as a way of understanding Extreme Metal. Scene was a term I had often seen used in the Extreme Metal media, as well as a number of other contexts. At the same time, I was exposed to academic conceptions of scene and alternatives such as subculture.

Thus, before I had even registered for a PhD I had developed the Extreme Metal scene as a research topic. However, the start of my PhD was not simply a continuation of this process but, rather, what Edward Said (1985) calls a 'beginning'. For Said, a beginning is not the unitary point of origin of an idea, but '...a consciously intentional, productive activity' (1985: 372) that 'unites a practical need with a theory, an intention with a method' (ibid.: 380). In other words, the beginning of my PhD was not the origin of my interest in Extreme Metal, nor of the concepts and methods I use within it. Yet it was the beginning of my intention to do things systematically, reflexively and self-consciously 'in a characteristic way' (ibid.: 12).

Beginning Research

Beginning my PhD involved, initially, two related tasks. One was to investigate the concept of the scene more systematically, particularly its relationship to other sociological concepts. The other was to engage with Extreme Metal music in a more comprehensive manner. I was aware that there were some Extreme Metal sub-genres of which I had only a sketchy knowledge, as my access to the music had always been severely circumscribed. The National Sound Archive in London, the only record library at the time with a stock of Extreme Metal[4], has only a small collection, which is erratically updated and, in any case, does not cover 'demo' tapes, 'underground' recordings and 'fanzines'. However, a few months after registration an opportunity arose that solved this problem. Sociological research is often founded on chance encounters and opportunities that offer access to new areas (Reimer 1977). In early 1997 I wrote to Nick Terry, Editor of the British Extreme Metal magazine *Terrorizer*, asking whether we could meet to discuss my thesis. In the course of our meeting, he offered me the chance to write for the magazine. The consequences for the research were enormous. I began to be exposed to a large amount of Extreme Metal music that I would not otherwise have heard and this exposure changed many of my ideas about Extreme Metal and the scene. I had previously restricted my purchases to styles and bands that I knew I would find enjoyable and I read Extreme Metal media paying little attention to styles that interested me less. In my first month writing for *Terrorizer* I was asked to review a number of Black Metal CDs, a style I had hitherto barely encountered. This forced exposure to new areas of Extreme Metal marked a departure from my previous engagement with the subject. The nature of engagement became one of systematic listening to a broad range of music and learning practices of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1979). As Pierre Bourdieu argues, within particular spaces and institutions 'taste' is structured by particular classificatory practices. Learning to contribute to *Terrorizer* involved

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[4] In 1999 the University of Salford opened the National Rock and Heavy Metal Archive. At the time of writing, the collection remains uneven.

learning such practices. In addition, I was exposed to a wide range of Extreme Metal scene members at concerts and conducted interviews with prominent musicians within the scene.

Beginning research involved adopting a new 'standpoint' within the scene, enabling the activation of a new kind of reflexivity. There can be no privileged standpoint on any social formation (Smith 1987). Different standpoints offer different advantages and disadvantages and are open to particular kinds of reflexive development (Collins 1991). Beginning my research involved shifting my standpoint from that of a casually interested fan interacting within the scene on my own, to that of a writer for a prestigious scenic publication. This new standpoint forced me to step outside the standpoints that had previously felt comfortable and committed me to the investigation of other, less familiar ones.

In the process of writing for *Terrorizer*, I encountered the complexity and breadth of the Extreme Metal scene. I had always been aware of the scene's global extent and its proliferation of sub-genres. However, writing for *Terrorizer* revealed the extent of the scene's complexity and yet, at the same time, that it was also a totality. I realised that it was necessary to describe sub-genres, such as Black Metal, both as indivisible parts of the Extreme Metal scene and as scenes in themselves, with some degree of autonomy. The same was true regarding local music scenes that are indivisible parts of the global scene with some degree of autonomy. I realised the importance of some kind of conceptual apparatus, within the framework of scene, that would allow me understand both the unity of the scene and the proliferation of other scenes within the scene. I also became aware of the intimate relation of production and consumption within the scene. I found, for example, that many fanzine writers were also in bands and that many band members also managed record labels.

Encountering the scene through writing for *Terrorizer* convinced me that it was necessary to research the scene 'holistically'. As I described in chapter one, holism is a perspective that emphasises the interconnectedness of the social. My reasons for embracing holism were pragmatic – I did not want, *a priori*, to exclude anything from my analysis of the scene. I therefore searched for a methodology that would enable me to research the Extreme Metal scene in an holistic manner. The holism of the scene necessitated an holistic methodology, which would acknowledge the various elements that constitute the scene. The 'beginning' of my research, therefore, required the development of a systematic methodology.

<u>An Holistic Methodology</u>

Holism requires a methodology that samples a 'cross-section' of the scene, reserving judgement on the relative importance of particular features of the scene and constantly looking for new aspects of the scene and 'deviant cases'. This methodology has to avoid reifying features of the scene into separate 'topics', without losing all analytic purchase through collapsing everything into everything else. It must also avoid the temptation to continually search for novelty, in order to avoid the dangers of neglecting the importance of 'everyday life' (Douglas 1971) and 'exoticising' the scene.

As I argued in chapter one, 'total', holistic knowledge of any social space is impossible, since no piece of research can encompass 'everything'. There will always be exclusions from any piece of research, owing to limits of time, resources and word-length. Even an holistic methodology must tactically 'sample' particular forms of data. Holism is not produced through a 'complete' study of the scene, but through the conceptual framework of scene, which provides a kind of 'map' within which we can place the results of fieldwork. Research takes place within a conceptual framework that shows how much we do not know.

The holistic conceptual framework that I described in chapter one is based on the use of scene to signify a continuous movement between incommensurate paradigms. It follows that an holistic methodology must allow for the movement between incommensurate methodologies. Methodologies highlight different aspects of the social. Every method is used in a different way, to different ends, by different methodologies, and the use of methodologies produces different results on different forms of data in different contexts. When united within the same methodological perspective, the difference between participant observation and interviewing, for example, may be simply a matter of tactics (Becker and Geer 1959). Mixing methods and methodologies in an holistic study may involve a daunting multidimensional matrix of different methodologies and methods used in different contexts. This matrix has to be transformed into a piece of diachronic writing.

What possible models are there for combining incommensurate perspectives on the social? In structuralist thought, symbolic systems consist of different elements combined into a whole through the process of 'bricolage' (Hebdidge 1979; Leach 1976; Levi-Strauss 1972). In many ways the writing of the scene may resemble a bricolage – a mythology consisting of a set of sometimes strikingly different perspectives. The problem with structuralism is that different

elements are seen simply as interchangeable aspects of an entirely coherent, holistic whole. A more promising strategy for combining incommensurate perspectives is provided by Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (1989) and Anthony Giddens's structuration theory (1984), both of which attempt to reconcile incommensurate perspectives, such as objective/subjective and structure/agency. However, it is not necessarily the case that incommensurate paradigms can be reconciled (Mouzelis 1995), since attempts at reconciliation generally involve the triumph of one particular perspective. In Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979), for example, the analysis offers only a poor appreciation of the phenomenological world. Another popular strategy is to treat different perspectives as 'triangulating' each other (Denzin 1989), leading to a more complete picture of the whole. The problem is that triangulation maintains the idea that an ultimate reality can be 'revealed' in research. It implies that methodologies are theoretically neutral data-gathering techniques, rather than the result of potentially irreconcilable theoretical perspectives. Methodologies produce accounts of the world that may differ radically in an epistemological sense and cannot easily be compared by triangulation (Bloor 1997) or any other strategy.

The fact remains that serious tensions between certain paradigms and methodologies cannot be wished away. For example, ethnomethodological uses of the interview were originally developed as part of a serious critique of their use in other methodologies (Cicourel 1964; Garfinkel 1984). The discourse analytic methodologies that have grown out of these critiques emphasise their difference from realist uses of the interview (Potter 1996; Potter and Wetherell 1987). Debates over the status of the interview highlight the most serious tension between paradigms – the tension between 'realism' and 'constructionism'. Realist epistemologies argue that, at some level, there is an independent 'reality' in the social world; constructionist epistemologies argue that the only world that exists is the world constructed by language. In order to produce a truly holistic methodology, it is necessary to find a way to draw on the insights of both epistemologies.

Martyn Hammersley (1992) has provided one way of combining incommensurate paradigms in research. He accepts the critiques of realist methodologies but wishes to construct a 'subtle realism', in which research attempts to 'correspond' to the phenomena it wishes to represent, rather than directly reproduce them. Within this perspective, interviews can be both 'topics' for research in the constructionist fashion, but also 'resources' for researchers to find out things about the world. Take the following extract from an interview with an Israeli Black Metal musician, in which he talks about his childhood:

...from all I remember I was only attracted to the dark side you know I played in all the fantasy games, Dragons Dungeons and Dragons things like that I always liked to play you know the evil characters, the evil priest and stuff like that.

In the context of the interview, this statement can be read as part of the process by which the interviewee 'constructs' an 'authentic' Satanic pedigree. However, we can also use this statement as a resource to discover things about the childhood of a Black Metal musician. From this perspective, the key point in this extract is that the interviewee would play fantasy role-playing games during childhood. 'Subtle realism' suggests that it is unwise to treat interviews and other forms of representation as simple avenues to 'the truth' about the authors of such statements – it would be naive to take the above statement as 'evidence' that the interviewee always chose evil characters in role-playing games as a child. Nevertheless, while we recognise that no simple truth 'out there' can be investigated through research, certain forms of data are less problematic than others. Some statements can indeed be treated as information about things happening beyond the interview, albeit information to be treated with caution. For example, obtaining data on the ages of scene members is primarily a matter of technique.

At stake in these different perspectives are particular sorts of answers to questions about the social world. Different epistemologies privilege 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions in different ways. For example, discourse analysis focuses on how the social world is reproduced within interaction. David Silverman (1993) argues forcefully that why questions are often asked prematurely in research, without sufficient attention paid to the how; indeed, he argues that the former emerges from the latter. Certainly, answers to why questions should only be advanced cautiously. For example, answers to the question 'why do people like Extreme Metal?' may only be tentatively advanced in this thesis. However, the problem with Silverman's approach is that it privileges the how as a preliminary question, whereas the why can be just as productive (Alasuutari 1995). The difficult question of how to combine incommensurate methodologies cannot be answered simply by giving certain perspectives analytical priority.

One answer to these problems is provided by Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein, who advocate 'analytic bracketing' as a methodological practice:

> This procedure amounts to alternately bracketing the whats, then the hows, in order to assemble a more complete picture of practice. The objective is to move back and forth between constitutive activity and substantive resources, alternately describing each, making informative references to the other in the process. (1997: 119)

Gubrium and Holstein advocate a form of analysis that is continually in motion, with no privileged analytical centre:

> Those engaging a renewed language of qualitative method are never permanently situated at a particular vantage point on empirical reality. Instead, they exchange analytic footings, moving step by bracketed step, from one representational site to another... (ibid.: 213)

Analytic bracketing is not based on a spurious resolution of irreconcilable tensions, but rather on a method of writing research. Gubrium and Holstein do not specify how analytic bracketing should be produced within a narrative. Are we to signal the movement from one position to another? How frequent should that movement be? How far should writing proceed as a seamless coherent flow? Certainly, the writing of a 'smooth' narrative is more pleasurable for the reader. It also reinforces the connections between different aspects of the scene. However, to write in a coherent flow would hide the shifting from one analytic perspective to another. This is not only a problem for an holistic study but for any study, as all research involves some kind of shifting between perspectives and 'voices'. Norman Denzin (1997) has called for the writing of 'messy texts', which remind us of the many-voiced multiplicity of 'reality' by subverting smooth linear narratives. Yet, in drawing on any methodology that, at some level, asserts an independent reality, we risk undermining any emphasis we might put on the constructedness of the social. For all the emphasis of the multiplicity of perspectives that constitute the concept of scene, any hint of realism may undercut the concept's emphasis of construction, resulting in a narrative that 'looks' little different to writing using cruder concepts such as subculture. Only contingent answers to this problem can be found. In writing this thesis, care has to be taken to weave a path between an excessively 'messy' text and an excessively coherent one. The movement between analytically bracketed methodologies can be neither too seamless nor too ruptured.

Methods

While there is more to methodology than a set of technical decisions, it is still necessary to make those decisions. I have found recent methodological writing to be less helpful in making these decisions than earlier, less methodologically sophisticated but more practical guides (Jackson 1987). The three principal methods used in the research were interviews, ethnography and textual analysis. I will address each of them in turn.

Authors such as Silverman (1993) have criticised the widespread use of interviews in social research. They contend that the analysis of 'naturally occurring data' is far less obtrusive and

far less abstracted from the normal contexts of interaction. However, interviews are useful in certain important respects. Many of my research questions necessitated the gathering of information that would have been hard to obtain in other ways. For example, interviews can be an efficient way of investigating the functioning of such scenic institutions as record labels. In these cases, interviews can be conducted and evaluated according to more traditional standards of interviewing technique (Whyte 1982), in which our primary concern is to obtain the maximum amount of information from informants.

Recent approaches to the interview emphasise its ethical dimension. Far from the antagonistic process of prising information from informants, the interview is seen as a social encounter in which two individuals strive towards a common understanding (Douglas 1985; Oakley 1981). Such interview practice often aims at giving a 'voice' to those with little power in the public sphere (Gilligan 1982). While such views are underpinned by an essentialism we would wish to reject, the principle of giving a voice to those who are not generally heard is an important one. Interviews with scene members should not simply give scene members a voice outside the scene, but also give voice to those generally silenced within the scene, such as women. Of course, we should also recognise that the interview relationship is often riven with complex power struggles, so that the goal of communion with the interviewee may be elusive (Song and Parker 1995). Nonetheless, interviews may provide a valuable dialogue between people with very different backgrounds (Luff 1999). Discourse analytic and conversation analytic approaches have focused on how interviews work as a joint accomplishment of interviewer and interviewee (Potter 1996). Discourse analysis of music fans has shown the complex ways in which members construct their identities and subcultural memberships in the flow of interaction (Harris 1997; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). Interviews subsequently used for discourse analysis are a kind of experiment in which interviewer and interviewee explore the 'interpretive repertoires' (Potter 1996) through which members construct their world. Within the interview, 'order is deliberately put under stress', so that 'respondents are required to demonstrate their competence in the role in which the interview casts them' (Dingwall 1997: 58).

A number of different interview practices and analytical perspectives on the interview are useful in this study. Each interviewee necessitated a different approach. In interviewing record-label managers I was primarily concerned to obtain detailed information about institutional practices. In interviews with musicians and fans I was primarily concerned to explore their use of interpretive repertoires. The relationship with each interviewee was very different as well. With some the interview was a friendly and relaxed encounter; one interview in Sweden segued

into a drinking session lasting several hours. Others were more fraught occasions, such as the British interview conducted in a pub where intrusively loud music was playing. Despite this, a certain amount of standardisation of interviews was necessary, partly to ensure that the more 'resource'-type questions were consistently asked. In addition, even if we see the interview as a unique interactional experiment, it is sensible to restrict at least some of its parameters. Another major reason to standardise was to ensure that decisions about who to interview and how and when and where to interview them were not so complex as to provoke paralysing indecision.

One decision made was to conduct all interviews face-to-face, semi-structured and tape-recorded. In the Extreme Metal scene it is very common for fanzines and magazines to conduct interviews as questionnaires by fax, e-mail or post, or to tape-record interviews over the telephone. Face-to-face interviews produce discourse in different ways from these other methods, allowing talk to proceed in unscheduled directions. Tape recording allows for subsequent transcription and the analysis of fine interactional detail. Semi-structured interviews ensure that certain topics are covered (some in quite specific ways), while still allowing considerable freedom in the structure of the interview. The interview-topic guide is shown in appendix one.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) have looked at the problem of developing an interview technique appropriate to the treatment of interviews as both topic and resource. They advocate 'active' interviewing, arguing that:

> Treating the interview as active allows the interviewer to encourage the respondent to shift positions in the interview so as to explore alternate perspectives and stocks of knowledge. (1995: 37)

Interviewing is not simply a matter of 'good listening' (although this is clearly important); it should be a process that 'tests' the interviewee. Constant 'narrative shifts' force the interviewee to explore a range of perspectives. The key to active interviewing is to develop a structure that allows for these shifts, without being too obtrusive and directive. I found that the best way to achieve this was to structure interviews as a kind of 'life history', in which I worked through the trajectories of scene members. I would often start the interviews with the question 'would you say you come from a musical family?' as I found this question helpful in turning attention towards family background and origins. The life-history structure meant that, at any point, I could explore a particular topic, but I could always return to the narrative without too much difficulty. The following example shows the respondent at the end of a long exegesis on the problems of bands which progress 'too far' musically:

R:      I just mention Dissection as er an example for a band that have a musical history and you can hear it in the music that they do

I:      OK, so, in the beginning of the nineties you really got into the music that you're listening to now

While there was always a danger of interrupting interviewees through the use of such techniques, most of the time the life-history approach supplied the right balance between structure and freedom. Structure was more necessary in some interviews than others. Some would refuse any structure and would shift rapidly from topic to topic. While this constant movement is interesting from an interactional point of view, in these cases I often had difficulty obtaining sufficient resource-type data without being unduly directive. Moreover, I tried to keep interviews within the length of one 90-minute tape, in order to avoid being too obtrusive and because attention would often wander beyond this point. At the other extreme were interviews in which the interviewee would show little conversational initiative, simply answering my questions as in a questionnaire. Although the failure to achieve rapport is interesting from an interactional point of view, I found it difficult to avoid frustration in such situations.

While there was a rationale behind the choice of interviewees, which will be explained in a subsequent section, various other factors constrained my choice of interviewees. A few people refused to be interviewed and in a few other cases subjects were too busy or too inconveniently located to be interviewed. I also restricted my choice by not interviewing anyone whom I had already met or talked to for any length of time. No interview can take place without the presuppositions of the interviewee – the interviewee interacts with the interviewer according to his or her impressions of them (Denzin 1989). I wished to ensure, at least, that the interviewee's ideas of who I was and what I required of them were not overdetermined. If we regard the interview as an experiment, it is important that the interviewee is not prepared for what he or she might encounter. Also, the interview is an intrusive activity and I felt more comfortable intruding in the lives of people I did not know and might not see again.

Contacts with interviewees were obtained from a number of sources, including record companies, the Internet, direct correspondence and recommendations from previous interviewees. In all cases I attempted to present myself as friendly yet 'professional', as both insider and outsider. I would introduce myself as someone writing a PhD about Extreme Metal who also wrote for *Terrorizer*. I would attempt to ascertain that the interviewee knew what was

meant by a PhD, perhaps rephrasing it as a university project. I would go on to explain that I was interviewing people throughout the scene and how I had heard of this particular person, and would then ask whether they were willing to be interviewed. I would also emphasise that the interview had nothing to do with *Terrorizer*.

The setting of the interview was a more flexible issue. To facilitate tape recording in a quiet location, I generally suggested meeting in private homes. I also preferred this location as I could observe interviewees' domestic situation. However, I conducted interviews in a variety of other locations, including pubs and bars, and I felt it advisable not to be doctrinaire on the location of the interview, in order that the interviewee should feel at ease. I also compromised on a number of occasions when friends or relatives were present during the interview. Such interviews often produced interesting data, as the non-interviewee interacted in subtle ways with the interviewee, but were strictly speaking not preferable from the point of consistency.

The complicated decisions and negotiations surrounding interviews were not simply technical issues, but part of a wider ethnographic process. Ethnography is a term associated with forms of research in which the researcher 'participates' in the everyday life of the researched in some respect. In some recent methodological works the word 'ethnography' has become almost synonymous with research of any kind (Denzin 1997). However, ethnography differs from structured forms of data-gathering, such as interviews, even if neither is more 'natural' from an epistemological point of view. Nonetheless, ethnography and structured forms of data collection are closely connected. Recruiting interviewees required an extensive knowledge of the scene that could only be acquired ethnographically. Within the scene there are few obvious 'gatekeepers' from whom it would be possible to arrange access to interviewees. After one year of ethnographic engagement with the scene as a writer for *Terrorizer*, I was able to make decisions about whom to interview and how to get in touch with them. Furthermore, the interviews themselves frequently ended up as ethnography. After interviews I would often stay and socialise with the interviewee, in some cases leading to friendship. I would also accept invitations from interviewees to attend rehearsals and gigs. Even where such rapport was not achieved, the circumstances surrounding the interview gave crucial insights into the lives of the interviewees. All these ethnographic experiences were written up in field diaries (Emerson et al. 1995).

Although it became clear early in the research that I could have conducted an entirely ethnographic project without any formal interviewing, I did not do this for two reasons. First, ethnography involves intensive research conducted in a particular 'location'. While I could

have made use of a fairly diffuse location, such as *Terrorizer* magazine, I wanted to look at the global scene. To conduct ethnography exclusively would have drawn attention away from the decentralised and diffuse nature of the scene and would have reinforced traditional representations of localised subcultures. The second reason was that interviews allowed for more detailed research on scene personnel. For one thing, ethnographic data can rarely be tape recorded, causing difficulty in examining the fine detail of interaction. Moreover, interviews are a safe environment for the asking of 'resource' questions about the background of scene members – questions inappropriate in everyday scenic interaction.

Part of the research was conducted in Israel and Sweden, where language was clearly an important issue. The intensity of global interaction in the Extreme Metal scene has made English a *lingua franca* within the scene. Moreover, in Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Israel, the small size of the country, together with sustained exposure to subtitled English-language television and cinema, leads to a generally high standard of English speaking among young people. Of course, English proficiency varied, although the standard was often near perfect in Sweden. On only two occasions, both in Israel, did people refuse interviews on the grounds of poor English ability. Of course, being able to conduct an interview in English does not mean that the issues arising from conducting interviews in a foreign language can be ignored. The potential for misunderstanding is very high. Yet these issues occur in all interaction, albeit to lesser degrees. Close attention to the detail of interaction is necessary regardless of the language in which an interview is conducted.

The collection of other kinds of data also formed part of a wider ethnographic process. Through writing for *Terrorizer* I received free copies of several hundred CDs and demos, and around 50 different fanzines. I also attempted to obtain copies of most of the Extreme Metal recordings highly rated by the magazine during the fieldwork period. To obtain these recordings I had to ask for free copies from record companies and, in the process, found out much about their functioning. In the more underground section of the scene I generally had to buy items myself. In the process, I had to learn how distribution and mail-order services worked and I began to correspond with scene members. Investigating the history of Extreme Metal music was more difficult. I possessed many key historical recordings, but there were many more I did not have. Through interviewing and socialising with scene members, I discovered which recordings were considered part of the Extreme Metal 'canon' and worthy of further investigation. However, investigating the canon was difficult owing to financial constraints on what I was able to buy. Moreover, some records and CDs are out of print and, indeed, some 'classic' demo recordings were never commercially released. I obtained these sorts of recordings from people I met in the

course of research. Tape-trading is an important institution within the scene and trading tapes with people allowed me to investigate how this institution worked. I also used the Internet as a resource, particularly for finding out background information about bands I was interviewing. I subscribed to a number of e-mail bulletin boards and used e-mail to communicate with scene members. In the process of using the Internet as a resource, I ethnographically engaged with its place within the Extreme Metal scene.

The analysis of texts presents similar methodological problems to the analysis of interviews. Discourse analytic and semiotic approaches (Barthes 1973, 1977) treat texts as discrete, contingent systems of meaning. This type of research rejects attempts to look 'outside' texts for explanations of context and authorship. Hammersley's distinction between topic and resource remains helpful in this regard. For this study, texts were useful both as ways of finding out about aspects of the scene and as topics of research in themselves. More flexible semiotic approaches explore the relationship between texts and their readers by showing how texts make certain types of reading more likely (Eco 1979; Hall 1993). Furthermore, 'ethnographies of reception' combine detailed analyses of texts with equally detailed research on how those texts are read (Liebes and Katz 1990; Radway 1987).

A more specific methodological problem is how to analyse musical texts. As we saw in chapter one, sociologists who neglect musical sound in their analyses of popular-music culture have been strongly criticised. However, it is almost impossible for non-musicologists such as myself to produce detailed analyses of the kind that Walser offers in his study of Heavy Metal (1993). No simple answer to this problem exists; however, I do have a rudimentary musicological training, which has allowed me to produce some tentative analyses of Extreme Metal texts. I was able to compare Extreme Metal with the analysis that Walser provides of Heavy Metal and I was also able to compare Extreme Metal with Harris Berger's ethnomusicological analysis of Death Metal (1999b). My ability to read musicology at least provided me with a point of departure in my own analysis. Furthermore, I worked for one day with the musicologist Dr Philip Tagg at Liverpool University to produce the analysis of transgression in Extreme Metal music that is presented in chapter four. Moreover, musical analysis should not be seen as the exclusive property of musicologists. The terms used within the Extreme Metal scene to talk about Extreme Metal music, and indeed the terms in use within other popular-music scenes, do facilitate an engagement with music. Analyses of Extreme Metal presented in the language of Extreme Metal discourse may provide a connection to everyday reflexivity that other musicological discourses cannot provide.

<u>Case-Study Methodology</u>

Although my engagement with the Extreme Metal scene will probably continue long after this thesis is finished, the more formal period of fieldwork was between February 1998 and spring 1999. When I refer to 'the scene' in this thesis, I refer to the scene during this period. Of course, the scene is never static and during a period of one year the scene is capable of quite marked movement. Once again, the problem is that of the synchronic versus the diachronic. Whereas sense might dictate focusing on a particular 'snapshot' of the scene in time, research cannot be undertaken synchronically and, in order to obtain anything like a data-rich picture of the scene, research must inevitably take place over a fairly substantial period of time. Furthermore, while the scene in this one-year period is at the heart of the research, constant reference is made to other synchronic slices of the scene.

The spatial boundaries of the research were more difficult to set. Research into a global space such as the Extreme Metal scene requires some kind of comparative case-study approach. One definition of a case study is:

> ...a detailed examination of an event (or series of related events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified general theoretical principle. (Mitchell 1983: 192)

Case studies claim validity according to their ability to generate theory and explain new things, rather than through statistical representativeness. Whereas, at one time, qualitative research had to defend itself from charges of unrepresentativeness, well-established procedures for carrying out case-study research and ensuring its validity and generalisability now exist (Altheide and Johnson 1994; Denzin 1989; Glaser and Strauss 1968; Schofield 1993; Silverman 1985, 1993). Such procedures build theory by using case studies to develop typologies through the continuous search for 'deviant cases' and repeated re-examinations and reformulations of the original theory. Broadly speaking, the research presented in this thesis conforms to such procedures. However, such procedures were less useful as detailed guidelines for the conduct of research than as ways of producing a particular attitude to research. The problem is that detailed methodological prescriptions are inherently flawed because research is inherently unsystematic and messy. My intense desire to research, together with a set of equally intense practical considerations, were far more powerful motivators in my research. In using the scene as a sampling framework for case-study research, the choices I made were sometimes orthodox and sometimes subject to more oblique criteria, but they were always my choices – to which I, rather than the methodological literature, am accountable.

Small-scale, local, ethnographic cases would have produced a misleading picture of what is a dispersed and decentralised global scene. The case studies chosen had to allow investigation of those scenic practices not necessarily dependant on local interaction, yet be small enough to allow some degree of analytical purchase. The areas chosen were Israel, Sweden and the United Kingdom. National and local difference is a key topic within the global scene and members often discuss the nature of local 'sounds' and scenes. Notwithstanding recent questioning of the boundedness of the nation state in a globalised world (Featherstone 1990; Lash and Urry 1994), nation states remain the key spaces delineating the limits of particular kinds of power.

Clearly, the UK was a convenient case-study area and writing for *Terrorizer* inevitably made my choice for me. It quickly became apparent that the case study would largely be confined to England. Metal has historically been weak in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and anything more than a cursory investigation into those scenes would have been impossible on practical grounds. Israel and Sweden are countries that are similar in terms of population size, albeit in vastly different geopolitical circumstances, and were chosen to provide two extremes for comparative purposes. Israel has a very small Extreme Metal scene and its bands are largely unknown within the global scene. Through my work at *Terrorizer*, I had met Yishai Swaerts, a musician, label owner and key figure in the Israeli scene, who enthusiastically encouraged me to visit, with the promise of co-operation in my research. I had also visited the country on previous occasions. The Swedish scene, conversely, is one of the most productive and well known in the world. Through *Terrorizer* I was aware of the key figures in the scene and how to gain access to them. In Extreme Metal terms the English scene comes somewhere between Israel and Sweden. It has produced many important Extreme Metal acts, but in the 1990s the size of the scene declined and the scene contains far fewer Extreme Metal bands and fans than formerly.

Each country itself contains a number of local scenes, necessitating further case studies. Deciding which of these to cover was least difficult in Israel, where the size of the scene enabled me to contact almost every band in the country. At the time of the research the Israeli scene had shrunk to such a degree that the scenes outside Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv area had become almost non-existent. In Sweden I conducted case studies in Gothenburg and Stockholm, cities that have strong local scenes producing extremely distinctive music. The difference between these scenes provided the core of the case study. Sweden's geographical size and the extent of the Swedish scene made it difficult to investigate Extreme Metal outside Gothenburg and Stockholm. Certain interviewees, who had lived outside Gothenburg and Stockholm, were

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able to provide some information, as were record-label managers who dealt with people throughout the country. In England the problems in choosing case studies were even more acute. The English scene is highly decentralised and there are few local scenes as such. I therefore focused on attempting to interview a well-chosen spread of scenic personnel. As I live in London, these interviews were conducted within the South-East, from Brighton up as far as East Anglia. As in Sweden, interviewees were able to give me information about the scene outside the South-East and my work for *Terrorizer* meant that I knew a considerable amount about the scene throughout the country.

Within each case-study area I tried to interview a reasonable balance of bands (of varying degrees of success and of different genres), record labels (large and small), fanzines and distributors. The importance of understanding scenic institutions meant that, for reasons of time, I felt obliged not to interview less-involved 'fans'. By privileging certain types of 'active' involvement in the scene, in which women form a small minority, this decision raised the problem of my sample having an inbuilt male bias, neglecting the (often feminine) nature of ordinary 'fandom' (McRobbie 1991). I needed to make a special effort to ensure that women were properly represented in the interview sample, but finding women to interview was extremely difficult. Interviewing women who have prominent positions within the scene was a simple matter. I also managed to contact female scene members through other interviewees. However, this approach still neglected the more marginal female scene members. One way of recruiting them might have been to approach them at gigs, but I did not feel comfortable as a man approaching women in this way. In the end, I decided to be content with the few interviews I had. I interviewed a total of six women, 12.5% of my sample. In any case, interviews are not necessarily the best strategy for the study of women in the scene. As Isobel Bowler (1997) has shown, interviews may, in certain circumstances, reinforce dominant power relations. Certainly, interviews are a common institution in the Extreme Metal scene in bringing the voice of men into the public sphere, whereas women stay in the private sphere. Thus, I chose to use unobtrusive forms of research and pay continuous attention to the gendering of scenic discourse. I constantly looked for CDs and demos by bands featuring women. At gigs and in other observational situations I paid special attention to male–female interaction.

The problems of including women in the sample were even worse regarding other scenic minorities. Throughout the global scene there are virtually no scene members of African or Chinese descent and very few of South Asian descent. In Israel, Sweden and the UK there are further absences of otherwise relatively populous minorities – few Asians in the British scene, few Turks in the Swedish scene and few Palestinians in the Israeli scene. Again, I did not feel

comfortable requesting interviews from strangers in any of the scenes I studied, resulting in interview samples that reproduced the marginalisation of certain ethnic groups in all three scenes. Moreover, the problem is even worse regarding homosexual scene members. Absolutely no openness about homosexuality exists within the scene and I found no possibility of recruiting interviewees in any simple way. There was only one openly homosexual interviewee and he only 'came out' to me in the course of the interview.

The large size of the case-study areas and the breadth of the sample meant that it was not always possible to fulfil the requirement to continue research until categories were 'theoretically saturated' (Glaser and Strauss 1968). While certain aspects of the scene were covered in great detail (as with much of the Israeli scene), other areas were only sketchily elaborated. Although the case-study approach allowed me to focus on my research topic, it does not escape the problems of holism that we discussed earlier. But this approach does strike a fair balance between preserving the decentralisation of the scene and allowing us to research certain aspects of the scene in detail. The case studies are also unconventional in not allowing strict comparisons in certain areas. For example, in Israel it was not possible to interview any fanzine editors as none existed at that time. In the UK I had problems gaining access to some of the better-known bands, leading to a greater concentration on less-successful bands. Certain interview 'quotas', such as women in the scene, could only be filled by combining the three case-study areas. So, in certain respects, the case studies combine together in a single case study. Furthermore, the case-study areas were by no means the only sources of data in this research. Fanzines, CDs and demos were collected from throughout the global scene. In order to explore the parameters of the scene, I actively sought out recordings and fanzines with unusual features or from unexpected sources, such as a demo tape from Pakistan.

An important issue arising from the case-study methodology in this thesis, which arises in all forms of qualitative research, is how to represent generalisations about the scene. The substantive chapters present generalisations about the scene drawn from my encounter with a vast amount of data. However, I am generally able to give only suggestive examples to illustrate the phenomena I describe. In some cases (notably, chapter six's examination of the institutions of the scene) I would not have been able to give examples without compromising confidentiality. In some sections of the substantive chapters I am only able to give examples gleaned from publicly available data, such as fanzines, magazines and websites, apart from a few exceptions when scene members gave me permission to reveal confidential details of the workings of their respective institutions. Furthermore, in chapter six I make a few quantitative

generalisations about the scene. Again, these quantitative generalisations stem from my engagement with a corpus of data too vast to be detailed effectively.

The generalisations presented about the scene in this thesis and, in particular, the quantitative generalisations made in chapter six, can never be fully substantiated. In the main, as I stated before, I have attempted to conform to the prescriptions of the literature on case-study methodology quoted above. I have attempted to make my argument internally consistent, to search for 'deviant cases' and to ensure that the most important conclusions made in this thesis are amply illustrated. However, the requirements of an holistic methodology are such that a vast amount of data can only ever be presented schematically and suggestively. The breadth of the generalisations made and conclusions drawn in this thesis necessitate that the thesis is written and, more importantly, read as a search for potential 'falsifications' (Popper 1972). In chapter 10 I will make some suggestions regarding how future research into the scene might be directed so as to challenge or support the conclusions that I make.

Transcription and Analysis of Data

Thirteen interviews were completed in Israel, 12 in Sweden and 16 in England. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. In order to increase the number of transcripts available to me at the analysis stage, I hired someone to complete around a third of the transcriptions. Had I not done this, I would have 'wasted' many of my interviews, owing to the difficulty of completing all the transcripts in the limited time available. Hiring someone to complete some of the transcripts had the additional advantage of providing a source of triangulation on my data. In the processes of briefing someone on how to do transcriptions and listening to the problems that arose, I had the opportunity to think and talk through issues that arose in transcription.

One such issue was deciding the level of detail required in transcription – a difficult problem. An interest in the interactional 'hows' of the interview necessitates a high level of accuracy to ensure that subtleties are not lost. However, the level of detail produced in conversation analytic and some discourse analytic transcripts takes a long time to produce. Moreover, commissioning someone else to produce transcriptions to such a high level of detail would have been extremely difficult. To profitably analyse this level of detail would also have taken many more months. The solution to this problem was twofold. First, although the transcripts that I

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commissioned were fully transcribed, for the two-thirds that I myself transcribed the goal of doing full transcripts of every interview was abandoned. While the interactional 'how' applies throughout interviews, for the purposes of this study 'how' questions were focused on areas that were seen to be more analytically interesting. Certain sections of interviews were most relevant from a resource perspective and could be briefly summarised. Such decisions were made in the process of transcription. Inevitably, this was a problematic process that resulted in the loss of interesting data, but over the course of 41 interviews much can still be preserved. I tried to transcribe verbatim all instances where speakers expressed opinions, where there were misunderstandings between interviewer and interviewee and where certain interactional techniques familiar from discourse analysis and conversation analysis appeared to be used (Sacks 1972; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). The second solution was to reduce the level of conversational detail transcribed. Extremely detailed transcripts are necessary when extremely close attention is paid to them and such close attention had to be sacrificed to the needs of holism. However, a high degree of accuracy was still important, not least for the ethical principle of recording accurately the words of interviewees. I decided to attempt to record every spoken syllable, to mark all pauses of between a few 10ths of a second and two seconds with a comma, to time and record longer pauses in whole seconds, and to record instances where interviewer and interviewee spoke at the same time. Full stops were used to mark instances where there was a clearly identifiable ending to a particular sequence. Question marks were used to mark questions that concluded with a clearly identifiable pause. Transcriptions not produced by myself were transcribed to a slightly lower level of detail, without timed pauses. In all transcriptions suggested hearings, inaudible words, physical actions, non-verbal sounds, deletions to protect confidentiality and overlaps were marked within square brackets.

In transcriptions produced by myself, 'resource'-type information was summarised in as brief and efficient way as possible. The following example is an extract from the transcript of an interview with an Israeli musician:

I:      ...Have you always listened to music?

R:      Yeah, every since I recall, ever since I recall myself I always liked music, the styles of course vary, from one period to another but er

I:      uh huh

R:      the love for music was always there

I:      And was it a musical family?

R:      Yeah, it was, er, belonging to my father's family had, an obligation to, to play a musical instrument or sing, at least, in one one step of your life or another so erm, cos all my father's, family is er, are musicians, and er

[Mizrachi family. Mother's side from Iraq; father's from Libya. His parents came to Israel in late 1930s. Father's side a big family of 10 children all with an interest or profession in music.]

Quotations from interview transcripts are presented throughout the substantive chapters of the thesis. Presenting the words of scene members in the thesis ensures that the analyses of interview data have some kind of accountability. In order not to totally 'disembody' the interviewees quoted, beneath each extract is a code directing the reader to some brief details about each interviewee presented in appendix two (although I have not shown the codes in this chapter since the extracts here are purely for illustrative purposes). Appendix two also shows which interviews were transcribed by someone else to a slightly lower level of detail.

The organisation and analysis of textual and musical data presented other problems. I read many scenic publications and listened to many CDs, but during much of the research process I had only a hazy idea of what to look for. I decided therefore to mark any piece of data that looked 'interesting' in some way. I would mark the relevant pages of fanzines and magazines and then underline the relevant quotation or article. With CDs I relied on a less systematic approach. As I stated before, I 'flooded' myself with Extreme Metal music. As I enjoy much of this kind of music, the constant process of listening resulted in certain CDs receiving more play. These CDs became the 'core' of my understanding of Extreme Metal music. As a collector of music, I also enjoyed the process of finding novelty in Extreme Metal music, such as recordings from unusual contexts. Such recordings ensured that my research would not be limited to a canon of Extreme Metal.

On completing the interviews, I stopped the more active process of data collection, although I continued to listen to music and to read scenic publications. I then began to catalogue my data in preparation for writing the substantive chapters of the thesis. I began by isolating five themes that I considered to be particularly important in the data: experience, transgression, structuration, change and music. I then read through all my data – transcripts, fieldnotes, marked sections of publications and significant recordings – in order to develop more detailed categories through which I could code my data. Coding is not simply an organisational matter, but a recursive process in which themes are identified and developed. I identified 15 codes

under the five headings. I then began to read through the data systematically, writing brief notes under the relevant heading when I came to a particularly salient example. These notes would be either a quotation, a reference to a quotation or a comment. After reading through five transcripts, I modified my initial coding scheme to produce 20 codes:

Experience:
- Constructions of identities, biographies and tastes
- Musical experiences and pleasures
- Relation to everyday life/other interests
- Humour/irony/play/gossip

Transgression:
- Transgressive discourses/music
- Transgressive practices
- Racism/sexism/homophobia

Structuration:
- Histories through scenic infrastructure
- Workings of scenic infrastructure
- Intra-scenic conflict
- Scenic minorities
- Place and the global
- Relationships to other scenes

Change:
- Constructions of 'the scene'
- Histories of scenic infrastructure and music
- Concerns about change/authenticity/heterogeneity
- Constructions of the canon

Music:
- Details of musical practice and lyrics
- Place of music within the scene

The coding scheme helped me to organise data from various sources efficiently. The substantive chapters of this thesis are based on this coding scheme. However, I found two

problems with this method of coding. First, the use of a ring binder did not allow for cross-referencing as would a computer programme such as *NUDIST* or *ETHNOGRAPH*. The links between codes had to be brought out through constant re-reading of my notes. This process undoubtedly meant that the more subtle interconnections between categories were missed. However, it also had the advantage that I was forced to engage continually with the entirety of my interview transcripts, rather than just computer-organised extracts. The second problem was that some codes were more specific than others. The codes 'histories through scenic infrastructure' and 'workings of scenic infrastructure' yielded pages of detailed notes that were extremely hard to organise. In retrospect, sub-codes would have helped me to isolate the workings of some scenic institutions more efficiently. Despite these problems, however, the coding scheme has provided the basis of the substantive chapters and has allowed me to produce a chapter plan relatively efficiently. In writing the chapters, I was able to use my notes to access relevant quotes and examples fairly easily.

## Managing the Relationship between Self and Other

Research involves complex and difficult relationships between the researcher, the researched and the potential audience for the research. Until fairly recently, such questions were posed almost exclusively as questions of research ethics. Deciding the researcher's ethical obligations is certainly no simple matter and involves difficult dilemmas (Bulmer 1982; Renzetti and Lee 1992). Although I promised confidentiality to my interviewees, how far they understood the implications of taking part in my research was never clear. Moreover, confidentiality could not be guaranteed to those interviewees who were famous within the scene, since quoting from their interviews would inevitably identify them, unless they were disguised to the point of meaninglessness. Neither is confidentiality sufficient to make research 'ethical'. Indeed, one might argue that the confidentiality of interviews disempowers scene members, who might read this research and might know the interviewees quoted, from challenging my conclusions. Interviewees who may wish to have their views known within the public sphere are also denied the chance by confidentiality. I faced other ethical dilemmas, such as how to treat gossip, how to treat personal letters and how to be clear about the purposes of my research without confusing people. Ethical issues were tackled case by case, generally in accordance with the British Sociological Association's ethical code of practice. One principle guided me through – I tried my hardest to act as an ethical human being and not do things with which my respondents or I felt uncomfortable. Ethnography should be motivated by a moral commitment to 'social justice', both as a topic for research and a resource in it (Altheide and Johnson 1997). Ethical

standards are never clear and absolute in research but, at the very least, one can avoid doing things that *feel* unethical and unjust.

Ethical issues are merely the most intense symptoms of a wider issue – how to relate to and represent the subjects of research. Research involves taking particular 'standpoints' on everyday life. The nature of any standpoint is both bound and enabled by ambiguously reproduced power relations (Giddens 1984; Jenks 1993; Smith 1987). No 'neutral' standpoint on any social formation exists. During my research I took up a number of standpoints within the scene, ranging from 'complete observer' to 'complete participant' (Denzin 1989), all of which involved a difficult series of negotiations with self and other (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991). My ability to shift between standpoints was a unique privilege, granted by my status as researcher.

At the start of my research I was a distant outsider to the scene. However, as a writer for *Terrorizer*, my standpoint on the scene as a researcher became extremely difficult and ambiguous. In writing for the magazine I held a position of power within the scene and gained much of the 'subcultural capital' that we will discuss in chapter seven (Thornton 1995). This helped give me access to those who might otherwise have been hard to reach, particularly the more famous bands. A number of interviewees specified that they had only consented to be interviewed because I wrote for *Terrorizer*. In such cases, I had to be careful to ensure that they did not believe the interview was intended for a *Terrorizer* feature. Moreover, such is the prestige of the magazine in certain quarters that, on occasion, I was treated as a (very) minor celebrity. In Israel, many people knew of my impending visit, leading to rumours such as that the Editor of *Terrorizer* was coming to do a feature on unsigned Israeli bands. Often, I faced the problem that scene members placed a considerable burden of expectation on me as a *Terrorizer* writer. Band members, particularly in Israel, often looked to me to review and publicise their music in the magazine – something that I was not always able to do. My own relationship to the magazine was also difficult. Although the Editor was fully aware of my comparatively limited knowledge of the genre when he commissioned me, I still felt insecure about my place on the magazine. It took me well over a year to feel that I was not fraudulent, despite the fact that I never received any criticism for my work. The fact that I wrote for *Terrorizer* often lead people to assume that I had a huge knowledge of Extreme Metal. It was hard to disabuse people of this assumption and, on a number of occasions, I felt compelled to lie about whether I had heard a certain recording. Only once I had completed a large section of my fieldwork and had a good general knowledge of Extreme Metal did I finally begin to feel more comfortable.

At the heart of the problem of writing for *Terrorizer* was the issue of how far to become an 'insider' within the scene. I was frequently treated by interviewees as a fellow scene member and often recorded comments such as 'you're a Metaller, you know what it's like'. Furthermore, in my life outside the scene, my choice of PhD topic often marked me out as a part of the scene. Certainly, taking part in the life of the scene was often exhilarating. I met and enjoyed the company of people I would otherwise not have met, enjoyed music I otherwise would not have heard and came to know some of the pleasures of 'belonging' to the scene. However, I was ambivalent about this membership. Politically, I found certain elements of the scene very hard to accept, such as the casual sexism and homophobia. Such things are by no means as common as one might perhaps expect, but they were enough to cause me difficulties. My Jewishness was also a problematic issue. While most people in the scene are not anti-Semitic, I would not have been comfortable revealing my identity to certain people. On one occasion, a member of an English Black Metal band told a humorous anecdote about how his bandmate pursued some 'Jew-boys' down the street with a pig's head. The response I chose to such incidents was to stay neutral, neither approving nor condemning. The problems with such a response are acute, as my supposed 'neutrality' could actually reinforce prejudices by allowing silences to be read as approval (Griffin 1991). However, my own capacity to change deep-rooted patterns of thought and behaviour was not great. Furthermore, upbraiding people would have jeopardised my access within the scene and might have provoked confrontation with the more extreme members of the scene. I also believe strongly that respect for the subjects of research applies equally to people of all views. Interviews, in their suspension of the 'normal' rules of interaction, force the interviewer, who may 'normally' wish to challenge the interviewee, to actually listen to the voice of the 'other'. For all its dangers, a temporary suspension of moral evaluation during the interview may be a strategy more amenable to sociological understanding (Jackson 1987).

The complex issues raised by fieldwork were also raised by the practice of writing this thesis. The practice of writing brings with it questions of power. Sociologists have attempted to address this problem by calling for researchers to be deliberately partisan (Becker 1971) or to do research based on empathetic relations with the researched (Oakley 1981). However, these approaches only apply if one's research subjects are unambiguously 'oppressed' in some ways – something that is not the case with the Extreme Metal scene. Moreover, wider issues around the practice of writing cannot be solved through partisanship. In recent years, ethnographers (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 1993) and feminists (Bell et al. 1993; Stanley and Wise 1993) have been strongly critical of the power relations inherent in writing. Writing can reinforce dominant power relations by representing 'subjects' as lacking any agency, as

incapable of representing themselves. The researcher writes 'about' the researched, representing him- or herself as the sole agency able to represent them. In response to such critiques, researchers have attempted to blur the distinction between researcher and researched, emphasising the vulnerability and uncertainty of the researcher (Behar 1996). A number of writers have attempted to radically undermine writerly authority, by exploring forms of writing that intermingle the voice of the other with the voice of the researcher (e.g. Crapanzano 1986; Denzin 1997; Ellis and Flaherty 1992). Such writers have attempted to develop a form of writing that renders some of the subjective flavour of everyday life, rather than rendering it as alien and disembodied.

In this thesis I have attempted, as far as possible, to avoid presenting my research as authoritative and 'objective', and to take account of my situated standpoint on the scene. I have also attempted not to demonise or 'exoticise' (Said 1995) scene members. Regardless of the more offensive views of certain scene members, in publicising certain practices I must still take into account the danger of provoking state and media surveillance. While I do not censor myself when writing about the problematic aspects of the scene, it is important that I show the reader how the more exotic and offensive practices of the scene take place within the context of the mundanity of everyday life. It is also vital to avoid the tendency of certain kinds of ethnography to emphasise the ethnographer's daring in entering exotic situations (Humphreys 1970). I have attempted instead to formulate a sober, politically oriented response to the scene, which takes into account the complexities and ambiguities of people's lives.

None of these worthy intentions 'solve' the problem of writing. Writing is inevitably an act that centres the writer. Poetics and postmodern texts may simply hide this centring in a play of signifiers. Academic discourse certainly has a long tradition of obscuring the vulnerabilities of the researcher and of fudging the complex relationships between self and other. Despite this, many conventions of academic writing guarantee that the writer asks difficult questions and maintains intellectual accountability. There is also a kind of austere pleasure to be had in a well-crafted academic work (Silverman 1997). Moreover, as I will argue in chapters nine and 10, the writer of a PhD thesis that is likely to be read by only a handful of people wields only limited power.

Nonetheless, we cannot ignore that the concept of scene, in laying great stress on the writer as the force that keeps the different layers of the concept together, does give inordinate power to the writer. Scene may be a concept rooted in everyday reflexivity, but my development of it as an holistic concept nevertheless risks ignoring the understandings that scene members have of

Extreme Metal music and practice. Against this tendency, the concept of the scene does produce a kind of de-centred narrative through its continuous shifting between incommensurate paradigms. Furthermore, I have attempted to draw attention to and problematise the concept at points within the narrative, particularly in chapters nine and 10.

My extensive use of the 'I' in this chapter also problematises narratorial authority. It is common in academic writing to avoid the use of the 'I' where possible. The passive voice and the ambiguous 'we' are more commonly used. The 'we' is less problematic, signifying a kind of partnership between reader and writer in the construction of narrative. However, the passive voice is a kind of 'voice of God', which implies that research is a disinterested and coherent process involving no personal difficulties. As we have seen, research was a fraught process involving a series of difficult decisions made on a mixture of pragmatic, theoretical, moral and accidental grounds. This chapter, while it does use the passive voice, draws freely on the 'I' so as to draw attention to the role of the researcher in research. However, I have also struggled against the 'I', to avoid the narrative turning into self-indulgent autobiography. Repressing the 'I' does, at least, encourage the writer not to be too introspective and to move towards the general from the particular. The 'austere' aesthetics of research that Silverman (1997) advocates encourages the researcher to ask hard questions and constantly examine the persuasiveness of his or her arguments. However, while the following substantive chapters are less explicitly reflexive about the process of writing and research, it is to be hoped that this chapter will encourage the reader to think critically about the constructedness of this narrative throughout the remaining chapters. This chapter will hopefully engender a critical approach to reading, enabling a more 'writerly' text (Barthes 1977).

The Structure of the Thesis

Although the substantive chapters are less than explicit in undermining the authority of the writer, they are structured in a non-conventional manner so as to preserve the holism of scene against the tendency towards the atomisation of popular music research into separate 'topics'. Furthermore, there is no attempt to write a 'history' of the scene or to identify 'key' Extreme Metal texts – this would be to impose a spurious order on an holistically interconnected scene. Instead, this thesis is structured so as to engender a continual sense of the scene's holistic interconnectedness. The chapters are intended to be read as a narrative, but not a linear one. Rather they recursively address and re-address the research questions in chapter one. The narrative is intended to produce an increasingly complex picture of the scene, but a complexity

that can be navigated through the identification of certain important practices that 'bind' the scene together.

In chapter four I introduce the 'ideal type' of the practice of transgression that is at the heart of scenic practice. Chapter five complicates this by showing how the scene is experienced in mundane as well as transgressive ways. Chapters six and seven introduce questions of power into the narrative, through an analysis of the forms of 'capital' that are circulated through scenic institutions. Chapter eight explores the practice of 'reflexive anti-reflexivity', which I argue is a crucial practice that binds the scene together. Chapter nine goes on to place the findings of the study into the context of social theory in order to better 'evaluate' the scene. Chapter 10 extends this practice of evaluation to the study itself and, in particular, to the concept of scene.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## TRANSGRESSION

### Introduction

In this first substantive chapter I will begin my investigation into the Extreme Metal scene by focusing on those 'extreme' aspects of the scene that may appear most noteworthy and extraordinary to non-members. In order to do this I will draw on the concept of 'transgression'.

### The Concept of Transgression

Transgression is a concept that has been developed within a variety of literatures. Structuralism has provided one of the most fruitful areas of the concept's development. There are a variety of structuralisms, but they are all based on the view that the plurality of signs in everyday life is ordered by 'deeper' governing structures. Structuralism is based on the belief that linguistic systems are both constructive of everyday reality and are structurally autonomous from it. Early structuralists, including Claude Levi-Strauss (1972) and Vladimir Propp (1968), attempted to isolate a symbolic order lying behind all forms of human culture. Distinct human cultures, in different parts of the world and at different points in history, are shown to have shared certain basic structuring principles.

The criticisms of these kinds of rigid structuralisms are by now well known. Structuralism long ago developed into more flexible kinds of post-structuralism (Barthes 1977; Culler 1975; Sturrock 1979). The project of reducing all cultures to a set of simple structures is an oversimplification. However, one element of classical structuralist thought continues to be productive – an interest in boundaries. Structuralism, as developed by Levi-Strauss and other anthropologists such as Mary Douglas (1984), treated binary oppositions as the structural building blocks of culture: oppositions such as good–bad, pure–impure, moral–immoral, clean–unclean. The boundaries between these binary oppositions are the source of anxiety. In traditional societies, binaries are rigidly policed and structure rigid taboos about sex and death. For example, menstruating women and dead bodies may be shunned as 'impure'.

Clearly, contemporary Western societies are far more complex than the societies that classical structuralists studied. Contemporary Western societies are not structured by clearly definable binary principles that extend uniformly over society as a whole. However, within all societies there are boundaries between that which can and cannot be practised. The legal system is the most visible arbiter of 'unacceptable' behaviour, but even behaviours that are not proscribed by

law may be treated as abhorrent. The boundaries of acceptable behaviour are contestable, but they may nevertheless be heavily policed, if not by state authorities then by more polymorphous 'disciplinary' forces of 'power/knowledge' (Foucault 1977a).

A key part of the structuralist argument is that there is a constant desire to 'transgress' boundaries as well as to protect them – indeed, the two desires are related. In traditional societies, transgression may be ritualised. For example, initiation rites may require initiates to retreat for a time from the everyday, ordered world, before returning to that world with a new status. Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) show how in the medieval carnival, the everyday order was literally turned upside down. Victor Turner describes transgressive behaviour that occurs 'in the gap between ordered worlds' (1974: 13) as 'liminal'. For Turner, liminal behaviour occurs in all societies and questions the symbolic order by showing the arbitrariness of boundaries. Liminal behaviour has always been the source of concern to authorities. However, liminal, transgressive practice had a place in pre-modern societies, if only for short periods of time. Indeed, periods of carnival were integral to the 'renewal' of the pre-modern world, creating a kind of 'cyclical' time (Jervis 1999). In modernity, as John Jervis argues, liminal transgressive practice has increasingly been legislated against. Turner shows how various modern groups, such as the 'hippies', have attempted to reconstruct the liminal at the margins of society. In modernity, transgression becomes 'exceptional' and rare behaviour.

The implication of much of the literature on transgression is that the transgressive can never entirely be eradicated. Turner argues that the experience of liminality is a human need, since it allows people to experience 'communitas' in which '...men confront one another not as role players but as 'human totals', integral beings who recognisably share the same humanity' (1974: 269). Liminality allows people to escape power and authority, if only for a time. Bakhtin similarly argues that carnival is life-affirming and liberating. In societies with strict taboos about sex and death, carnival revels in the body and in sex, death, decay and excretion. Carnival and other forms of transgression produce 'excess' – an overpowering of limits – which opens up the possibility of a world without boundaries, a world in which individuals lose themselves in an undifferentiated mass. George Bataille argues that transgression may exceed language itself and is based on an engagement with mortality and eroticism – the two most vivid and powerful ways of testing being and authority (Bataille 1985, 1993). Transgression involves the embrace of carnality and the inevitability of death, allowing humans to 'lose themselves' in the 'totality' – the infinity of death. Ironically, only through losing themselves in the totality can humans experience 'sovereignty' over their being. The sovereign lives a 'playful' life, above and beyond everyday utilitarian considerations. Bataille argues that '...to live sovereignly is to escape, if not

death, at least the anguish of death...The sovereign man lives and dies like an animal, but he is a man nonetheless' (1993: 219).

Transgression is fundamentally an ironic practice. For all that various theorists affirm that transgression involves individuals losing themselves within a formless totality, transgression is also one of the most intense ways of affirming individuality. For Bataille, the sovereign has glimpsed infinitude and the inevitability of the ultimate human destination – that which he calls 'NOTHING'. The sovereign, as the name implies, has also wrested control of their being from everyday engagement in utilitarian society – it is someone who has renounced their place within society. This renunciation is most apparent in Bataille's work on the mass murderer Gilles de Rais (1991), who found sovereignty through the absolute rejection of human obligation.

Few other theorists of transgression would come as close to advocating the dissolution of morality and communal solidarity as Bataille. Nonetheless, transgression emphatically does not involve some kind of amorphous celebration of communality and human interconnectedness, even if it is frequently practiced within some kind of collectivity. Transgression affirms and creates boundaries even as it challenges others. As Michel Foucault argues in his 'Preface to Transgression' (1977b: 30–52), the practice of transgression is bound up in the setting of 'limits'. He argues that '...a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusion and shadows' (ibid.: 34). The intimate relationship between the practice of transgression and the practice of setting limits can be seen in the ambivalence with which transgressive practice treats the 'abject' (Kristeva 1982). The abject is that which is formless, disgusting, terrifying and threatening. Abjection is associated with 'vile' bodily fluids, but may be displaced elsewhere – to women, to Jews, to animals etc. The abject has to be removed from orderly society and/or destroyed. Yet, as Stallybras and White argue, 'disgust always bears the imprint of desire' (1986: 191). As Julia Kristeva argues, the abject is deeply alluring, based on a desire to return to the primal formlessness of the mother–child union. This desire is intolerable, particularly for men in societies that emphasise the importance of self-control over the body (Theweleit 1987). Consequently, transgressive behaviour, while it revels in the abject, also displaces abjection elsewhere. In turn, those who transgress boundaries may themselves be treated as abject. Murderers and child abusers may be treated as so intolerable that they and all trace of them must be removed from society as completely as possible (Jenks 1998). Yet, at the same time, they also exert a strange fascination from those who do not indulge in this kind of transgressive behaviour (Jenks and Lorentzen 1997).

Although, as Bataille shows, the ultimate end to the practice of transgression is the formlessness of death, transgression is rarely practiced to this level. Rather, as Foucault argues, '...the

experience of transgression brings to light [the] relationship of finitude to being' (1997b: 49). Transgression will be treated in this thesis as a practice through which humans may experience the joys and terrors of formless oblivion, while simultaneously bolstering their sense of the limitedness of being. Transgression is ultimately an affirmation of individual potency, even while it involves the threat/promise of individual dissolution into the collective.

The use of the concept of transgression in this thesis will also attempt to reclaim some sense of transgression as the breaking of rules and laws. The major theorists of transgression posit emphatically that transgression is not the same as rebellion and breaking the law. Yet, while there is not necessarily a relationship between transgression and breaking rules and laws, they may frequently coincide. Transgression inevitably involves some kind of practice that would be seen as illegitimate by some group or another. This emphasis on transgression's rule-breaking quality may help to link the concept of transgression with the concept of 'resistance' as developed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Resistance may not be the same as transgression, but one could certainly understand as transgressive some of the subcultural practices studied by the CCCS. Furthermore, the process of moral panic, which leads to the marginalisation of subcultures, could be seen as a process of 'abjectification'. Nevertheless, transgression definitely differs from resistance in so far as transgression always contains the possibility of a movement towards totality and oblivion. Resistance provides a more tactical response to boundaries and limits, which necessarily depends on those limits being preserved – this is why resistance is so easily incorporated into commodified 'style'.

The use of the concept of transgression in the analysis of the Extreme Metal scene helps us to address two related issues. One is the examination of the possibilities for transgression within a modernity that tends to marginalise transgression. The second is the examination of the possibilities of resistance within a modernity that tends to incorporate resistance. These questions will be dealt with in detail in chapter nine. In this chapter I want to isolate those elements of the scene to which the concept of transgression can be most aptly applied. I will present three 'ideal types' of scenic transgression, abstracted from the historical flux and heterogeneity of the scene. I shall term these ideal types 'sonic transgression', 'discursive transgression' and 'practical transgression'.

<u>Sonic Transgression</u>[5]

Robert Walser's *Running With The Devil* (1993) provides the most complete musicological analysis of Heavy Metal. He argues that Heavy Metal music is based on a dialectical relationship between musical 'freedom' and 'control'. This dialectic provides a way for participants to understand the fraught relationship between freedom and control in contemporary capitalist society. Walser shows how Heavy Metal explores a wide and complex set of themes, drawing on a complex set of musical sources. One of his key findings was the crucial influence of Western classical music on Heavy Metal guitar styles. Heavy Metal also has deep roots in 'blues' music. The Heavy Metal genres examined by Walser, while apparently shocking and transgressive, were strongly connected to the mainstream of Western music, producing a kind of 'cross-cultural', iconoclastic dialogue.

The history of Extreme Metal music represents a systematic attempt to remove Metal from certain kinds of cultural dialogue. The blues roots of Metal are virtually imperceptible in Extreme Metal. Additionally, the connection with classical music has been weakened (although not severed). Instead, Extreme Metal has incorporated elements of Punk music. However, some forms of Extreme Metal have also attempted to loosen the ties to Punk. The scene's main 'logic' has been to close itself off, so that Extreme Metal engages in dialogue with one music above all – Metal.

Extreme Metal represents a sustained attempt to explore the potential of the most transgressive sides of Heavy Metal. As we shall see, certain sounds are simply unacceptable in the majority of Western music. However, these sounds were used in Heavy Metal, 'leavened' by the influence of classical music, blues and mainstream popular musics. Nevertheless, despite the constant attacks on Heavy Metal in the 1980s, Heavy Metal was not transgressive enough for the nascent Extreme Metal scene. The scene has transgressed a number of musical boundaries that were only gingerly explored by Heavy Metal:

a) Modes

Jon Fitzgerald defines modes thus:

> The so-called church modes were developed by the Greeks and used extensively in 'Western' music up until the end of the sixteenth century (and influenced Western

music well beyond that time). The church modes are eight-note scales encompassing one octave, and containing different patterns of tones and semitones. (1999: 120)

So ingrained are these tones in Western music that they commonly signify certain 'feelings' and associations.

Robert Walser points out that:

> Most Heavy Metal is either Aeolian or Dorian, for example, although Speed Metal is usually Phrygian or Locrian; most pop songs are either major (Ionian) or Mixolydian. (1993: 46)

Extreme Metal, of which Speed Metal is a part, is also dominated by the Phrygian and Locrian modes. In Fitzgerald's terminology, the Ionian and Mixolydian modes have the 'brightest' sounds, the Phrygian and Locrian the 'darkest' sounds, with the Aeolian and Dorian somewhere between the two. Thus, Extreme Metal genres use the darkest modes. Both Phrygian and Locrian are used sparingly in Western music. The Phrygian is associated with oriental musics, such as Flamenco. The Locrian is the only mode to contain a flattened fifth – the so-called 'tritone'. Famously, this interval was banned by the medieval Catholic Church and referred to as the *diabolus in musica*. Ever since, the tritone has been employed in classical music to signify evil and danger (for example, in Mussorgsky's *St John's Night on the Bare Mountain* (1867)). As Philip Tagg points out (1998), the tritone has also been used extensively in the music for detective and adventure films (a notable example being the main theme for the *Pink Panther* films of the 1960s–80s). Where Extreme Metal appears to differ from such musics is that it 'lightens' these modes to a far greater extent. In detective-film music, for example, a 'bluesy' flattened third is frequently added to the Locrian to create a 'burlesque' feel. Extreme Metal represents a sustained and austere exploration of 'darker' modes that have long been associated with danger and evil.

b) Guitars

The distorted guitar has always been the key signifier of Metal. Indeed, Metal bands were among the first to experiment with distortion in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Walser argues:

> ...distortion functions as a sign of extreme power and intense expression by overflowing its channels and materialising the exceptional effort that produces it. (1993: 42)

In Heavy Metal the oppressive dominance of distorted guitar is leavened by the liberating guitar 'solo', thereby producing the dialectic of freedom and control. In Extreme Metal solos take on a

diminished importance – they are briefer and many bands never use them. Sequences of guitar chords, or 'riffs', take on an even-greater importance in Extreme Metal. Combined with overdriven vocals and frequent bursts of speed, there is little to detract from the 'wall' of guitar noise.

One common Heavy Metal guitar technique is downtuning, in which the pitch of the guitar is lowered by one or two steps. Extreme Metal bands have taken downtuning to extremes, with the bottom E string often tuned as low as B or A. This level of downtuning requires the use of a heavier string gauge, together with specialist amplification and production techniques. Different Extreme Metal sounds are put together in different ways. Some may be based on extremely 'clear', compressed but still heavily distorted sounds, such as the famous 'Florida sound' of Death Metal, developed in the late 1980s at Morrissound Studios, Tampa, by the producer Scott Burns. During the same period Thomas Skogsberg of Sunlight Studios, Stockholm, pioneered a totally different Death Metal guitar sound. The 'Sunlight sound' utilised extremely downtuned guitars with a far 'fuzzier' form of distortion. This sound was characterised by its lack of clarity. Indeed, in some of the faster songs played by bands such as Dismember and Entombed, it can be difficult to hear chord changes. Black Metal guitars are generally not downtuned and are often played at a higher register and produced with considerable treble. When played fast, this trebly sound can be highly indistinct. Yet, no matter how indistinct Extreme Metal guitars may sound, feedback is hardly ever used.

c) Vocals

Heavy Metal vocalists employ forms of vocal distortion. As Walser explains:

> Heavy Metal vocalists project brightness and power by overdriving their voices (or by seeming to), and they also sing long sustained notes to suggest intensity and power; sometimes heavy vibrato is used for further intensification. (1993: 45)

Extreme Metal voices are also overdriven, but vocalists generally do not use sustain or vibrato. Neither is there any 'brightness' in their vocals. Extreme Metal takes vocal distortion further than Heavy Metal by abandoning practically all elements of melody in the voice. Instead, vocals are screamed or growled in ways that generally make lyrics impossible to decipher without the aid of a lyric sheet. There are a variety of vocal styles – indeed, vocal styles are often the most unique elements of a group's style. Generally speaking, Death Metal bands use growled vocals and Black Metal bands use screamed vocals. Vocals may also be semi-spoken, chanted or simply shouted.

d) Rhythm and tempo

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Most forms of Extreme Metal appear to stick to basic 4/4 time, but some forms employ greater rhythmic complexity. Some forms of Death Metal and Grindcore have incorporated unusual time signatures and Jazz influences. Whatever the time signature, Extreme Metal drumming is often exceedingly complex. Drummers often play intricate patterns using double-bass drums and generally make more of use the whole kit than Heavy Metal drummers.

Tempo is one of the most transgressive elements of Extreme Metal. Songs often range between 150 and 250 Beats Per Minute (BPM). Extreme Metal also pioneered the 'blast beat' – drumming at 300–400 BPM and above. With blast beats and other fast tempos, the drummer is generally restricted to simple bass–snare–hi-hat sequences. The tempo of the guitars may not necessarily match that of the drums. Often, guitars play to a more reasonable tempo, while the drummer plays blast beats. Conversely, guitarists often play 'tremolo' riffs of 500–600 BPM while the drummer plays at slower tempos. The use of tempos of 200 BPM and above can create an odd effect of stasis in the music. The heart cannot beat at more than 212 BPM and running is also difficult at this speed. This paradoxical stasis, together with the simultaneous combination of fast and slow tempos on drums and guitar, can make the music seem both fast and slow. Indeed, slowness can itself be practised to extreme degrees in some forms of Doom Metal.

e) Songwriting

Walser argues that 'melody is relatively less important in metal than in many other kinds of music' (1993: 50). However, Heavy Metal still retains recognisable melodic structures, particularly in guitar solos and vocals. In Extreme Metal, any conventional sense of melody is almost completely jettisoned. Instead, songs are put together from sequences of riffs, which often are only tenuously connected harmonically or modally (Bjornberg 1998). Songs may be punctuated by sudden changes in tempo and time signature. Song structures frequently eschew conventional verse–chorus–verse forms. Themes may be introduced once and never recapitulated, meaning that songs may lack a sense of progression from start to finish. This can create an unsettled sound, lacking the conventional forms of closure and cadence common in popular music (McClary 1991). In some forms of Extreme Metal songs may appear to be little more than an arbitrary collection of riffs. Yet Extreme Metal songs are not put together arbitrarily. Indeed, musicians within the scene take songwriting very seriously.

Not all forms of Extreme Metal practice these forms of sonic transgression identically. For example, some forms of Black Metal and Doom Metal may employ melodic keyboard parts,

even as they use extremely distorted vocals. Furthermore, the ways in which sonic transgression has been practised have changed throughout the history of the scene. For example, in the 1980s there was a far greater emphasis on fast tempos than today. Nevertheless, all forms of Extreme Metal are predicated on a commitment to practice at least some kind of sonic transgression, in the process producing 'extremity'. The scene has also established strict limits governing the 'acceptable' manifestations of sonic transgression. For all its exploration of transgressive sounds, the scene constantly emphasises musical control. Extreme Metal bands never improvise on stage and never use guitar feedback in song-writing. They also set strict limits on the use of solos, never letting them dominate the songs themselves. The extent to which Extreme Metal has excluded the Afro-American musical influences of Metal is striking. Not only is there virtually no detectable blues element in the music, there is a near-total absence of syncopation and other rhythms common in forms of Funk, Soul and other Afro-American-influenced dance music[6]. Those bands that have incorporated the aforementioned forms of music, such as the popular late-1990s 'Nu Metal' bands, are often strongly criticised.

This exclusion of Afro-American-originated musics will be explored in chapter seven. The point to make at this stage is that these musics, together with any other musical forms that involve improvisation and uncontrolled noise, are generally 'abjectified' within the scene. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press (1995) have identified fear of and attraction to the abject as a crucial theme in rock music. In Extreme Metal the abject is identified with musical forms that appear uncontrolled, limitless and are associated with the feminised body. Feedback, syncopation, excessive guitar solos and melody are all abjectified and have to be tightly controlled. As we have seen, Walser argues that the musical dialectic between musical control, as epitomised by the dominance of the riff, and musical freedom, as epitomised by the guitar solo, is a key theme in Heavy Metal. Extreme Metal reduces musical freedom still further, until it appears only in order that it can be controlled. Guitar solos, for example, are often exceedingly brief and tend not to advance songs musically. Extreme Metal often sounds close to being a formless noise, but backs away from doing so at the last moment. Of course, as Jacques Attali (1985) argues, all music is simply a form of socially organised noise. If noise were to become 'formless', it would cease to have any kind of social organisation – perhaps the ultimate end to transgression. This constant flirtation with the formless sonic abject produces dominance of the abject. In doing so, Extreme Metal upholds a form of masculinity that is based on a fear of feminine weakness.

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[6] The partial exception to this is Jazz, which is sometimes incorporated by the more 'technical' Death Metal and Grindcore groups. However, the Jazz forms that are incorporated tend to be more 'intellectual', free Jazz rather than forms more closely associated with Afro-Americans. Intriguingly, the renowned free-jazz musician John Zorn has collaborated with Grindcore drummer Mick Harris in the band Painkiller.

Deena Weinstein (2000) refers to Extreme Metal as 'musical fundamentalism'. Fundamentalism implies a return to first principles and, in the sense that Extreme Metal is a novel development within Metal, Weinstein is mistaken. However, if we treat fundamentalism as a yearning for discipline and a distrust of decadence, then fundamentalism describes Extreme Metal music very well. Fundamentalism also connotes a kind of obsessiveness. The abject cannot simply be controlled once; dominance has to be proven again and again. This obsessiveness produced Extreme Metal as its logical conclusion and produces thousands of identical-sounding recordings to this day.

## Discursive Transgression

For the purposes of this chapter, it is worth separating the sounds of Extreme Metal from other forms of spoken, written and visual discourse. The Extreme Metal scene produces such discourses through a variety of media: lyrics[7], song titles, fanzines and other publications, record sleeves, band names, and informal and interview talk with me. Certain transgressive discourses recur in different media.

Once again, there are continuities with the forms of transgression practised in Heavy Metal. Walser examines in detail Heavy Metal's preoccupation with violence, the occult and other 'dark' themes. He defends the genre from the criticisms of leftist academics and rightist state censors, arguing:

> In their free appropriation of symbols of power, and in their material enactments of control, of hanging on in the face of frightening complexity...heavy metal bands suggest to many that survival in the modern world is possible, that disruptions, no matter how unsettling, can be ridden out and endured... (1993: 159)

Walser acknowledges that Metal deals with dark fantasies, but posits that those fantasies 'stand for' certain very real problems in capitalist society and that, by controlling those unsettling fantasies, an element of empowerment and control over the threats of the modern world can be assured. This argument, also advanced in a different way by Harris Berger (1999b), depends on a sympathetic reading of Heavy Metal texts and fantasies as attempts to deal with contemporary anxieties in surprisingly complex, coded ways. This kind of sympathetic reading is not difficult, given that Heavy Metal texts tend to have a somewhat overblown quality that marks them out as fantastic. Extreme Metal texts, however, frequently revel in fantasies that are far more sinister.

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[7] The fact that Extreme Metal lyrics are generally impossible to decipher without the aid of a lyric sheet strengthens the case for them to be considered separately from the musical sounds of Extreme Metal.

Consider, for example, the controversial association between Heavy Metal and suicide. In the 1980s Ozzy Osbourne's song 'Suicide Solution' was attacked for promoting and encouraging suicide. In contrast, Walser's analysis of the song (1993: 148—150) finds it to be a more complex meditation on depression and self-destruction. Now, look at an Extreme Metal song that talks of suicide, 'Sacrificial Suicide', from the eponymous album by the US Death Metal band Deicide (Roadracer: 1990). The song contains the lines:

Damned to hell, end my life

Wrath of God – Satan

Sin my soul blessed with fire

Throne of stone – Satan

I must die, in my wake

Seventh gate – Satan

Suicide, end my life

I must die – Satan

These lyrics explicitly associate suicide with Satan and explicitly welcome the act itself. The lyrics are accompanied by Deicide's fast and dense form of Death Metal, which contains no levity or possibility for ironising the lyrics (as Walser argues happens in 'Suicide Solution'). Furthermore, the members of Deicide have proclaimed their Satanism in interviews, have inverted crosses branded on their foreheads and, at one time, claimed to have made a pact to commit suicide when they reached a certain age. Even more explicit invitations to suicide take place within Extreme Metal discourse. For example, a detailed guide to the most effective methods of suicide appeared in the second issue of the Swedish fanzine *Davthvs*.

Death, killing and mutilation provide a constant source of inspiration within the scene, particularly, of course, in Death Metal. The names of the bands themselves are an indicator of this: Cannibal Corpse, Death, Dismember, Obituary etc. Album titles speak for themselves – *Butchered at Birth, Cause of Death, Scream Bloody Gore* etc. – and album covers often depict scenes of torture and suffering. Some Death Metal and Grindcore bands use the destruction of the body as their major lyrical resource. One extreme example is the Grindcore band Carcass. Carcass lyrics are a catalogue of bizarre and disgusting things that can happen to the human body. They are often lengthy and use extremely explicit medical terminology. The following example is a verse from the song 'Cadaveric (sic) Incubator of Endo-Parasites', from the album *Symphonies of Sickness* (Earache: 1989):

The inset (sic) of rigor mortis, ulcerous corruption and decay

Saponified fats lather as soap as you slowly eat yourself away...

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Organs savaged by rotten enzymes, rennin and rancorous cysts
A festering abcess immersed in ravenous autolysis...

As Reynolds and Press suggest (1995), these lyrics treat the body and its manifold constituents as ludicrous and revolting but endlessly fascinating. The lyrics are 'a testament to the threat and the almost voluptuous allure posed by the abject' (ibid.: 95). Abjection is a key theme in Extreme Metal lyrics, but the way Carcass treat the abject is relatively rare. More commonly, the abject is something that has to be mastered and dominated. One extreme example of this dominance is found in the early lyrics of the US Death Metal band Cannibal Corpse. The following extract comes from the song 'Fucked with a Knife', from their album *The Bleeding* (Metal Blade: 1994):

No escape from your fate
Destined to be mine
Every night I wait to see
In the night, watching
Stalking your every move
I know when you're alone
All alone

Tied tight to the bed
Legs spread open
Bruised flesh, lacerations
Skin stained with blood
I'm the only one you love
I feel her heart beating
My knife deep inside
Her crotch is bleeding

She liked the way it felt inside her
Fucking her, harder, harder

Unlike the Carcass lyric, in which the gender of the body that is being destroyed and the agency by which it is destroyed is unknown, this lyric dwells on the ability of a male protagonist to control and conquer a subject female 'other'. Such explicit descriptions of sexual violence are extremely rare in popular music and are virtually unknown in Heavy Metal. In Death Metal they are also relatively uncommon and they only represent part of Cannibal Corpse's work (and their earlier work, at that). Yet this lyric represents two crucial traits of Extreme Metal discourse.

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One is an obsession with fantasies of control. The other is the unflinchingly explicit way in which violence is described. Like Carcass, Cannibal Corpse demonstrate one of the ways in which Extreme Metal discourse has systematically transgressed the boundaries of 'the acceptable' in art.

Walser suggests that Heavy Metal is ultimately empowering and acts as a form of social criticism. Conversely, Extreme Metal appears to offer no possibility of hope or redemption. Doom Metal bands have long dwelled on the inevitability of mortality and decay. Nick Terry (1998) has argued that Extreme Metal and Hardcore in the 1990s are characterised by an obsession with the apocalypse and millenarianism. War, particularly nuclear war, has long been an obsession in all forms of Metal. This obsession is not without a gleeful element. Some bands, such as the British Death Metal band Bolt Thrower or the Swedish Black Metal band Marduk, display in their interviews and lyrics a detailed knowledge of military tactics and technology. Indeed, Bolt Thrower were briefly sponsored by a war-gaming firm! Bullet belts and other military paraphernalia have long been associated with Metal. Many bands have shown an interest in swords and occasionally bands may wield them on stage. Of course, an interest in war and the military is not confined to Extreme Metal, being at least as common in Heavy Metal. Similarly, a tendency to dwell on death and the apocalypse is not found uniquely in Extreme Metal. However, in Extreme Metal these obsessions are taken further and accompanied by music that also offers little space, peace or hope.

Extreme Metal also continues Heavy Metal's interest in Satanism and the occult. A fascination with the devil has long been a feature of Rock and Roll – from Robert Johnson to the Rolling Stones. From its inception, Heavy Metal was closely associated with the occult, with Black Sabbath's lyrics, in particular, dwelling on such themes. Walser treats the fascination with the occult in 1980s Heavy Metal as part of an eclectic, postmodern use of symbols from a variety of ancient cultures:

> All can be consulted, appropriated, and combined, used to frame questions and answers about life and death. (1993: 154)

Walser suggests, rightly in my opinion, that it is misplaced to ask whether 1980s Metallers were 'really' Satanists – occult themes were simply a powerful resource for songwriting. However, the Extreme Metal scene is characterised by a far more sustained engagement with occult ideas. Whereas Heavy Metallers generally denied being Satanists or tried to evade the question, some Extreme Metal musicians, particularly Black Metallers, claim to be committed Satanists. While other forms of Extreme Metal have drawn on occult discourses, none has done so as systematically as Black Metal. Early Extreme Metal bands, such as Venom, were fascinated by

the occult, but for the most part the scene avoided a wholehearted engagement with such themes. This changed in the early 1990s when the Black Metal scene began to coalesce. Black Metal bands partly defined themselves by opposition to Death Metal's rejection of 'traditional' Metal imagery and occasional use of socially concerned lyrics about nuclear war and environmental degradation. They were also opposed to the deliberately downbeat dress of Death Metal bands, whose members often wore sweat pants and trainers on stage. Instead, early Black Metal bands dressed in denim, leather and bullet belts, and proclaimed themselves 'true' Satanists.

Lyrically, some Black Metal bands have been extremely overt in their commitment to Satanism. Consider the first verse of the eponymous title track from the Swedish band Dark Funeral's *The Secrets of the Black Arts* (No Fashion: 1996):

> Lucifer
> Show me the secrets enshrined
> The hidden source of eternal wisdom
> That dwells within the abyss
> Infernal majesty
> Guide me in my eternal search
> Lead me to the ancient empire
> Of dark treasures that once were lost

Most Black Metal lyrics do not speak of devil-worship in such reverential terms. In fact, Black Metal has drawn on a far wider set of lyrical resources than most other Extreme Metal genera. Black Metal lyrics are often self-consciously 'poetic' and dwell in opaque ways on mysticism, the occult and on ancient pagan cultures. In fact, for the most part, the lyrics are probably the least transgressive element of Black Metal. Instead, Black Metal concentrates its discursive transgression in less 'musical' areas. Once again, names are a separate medium. As well as band names, Black Metallers often give themselves pseudonyms. The 'infernal names' that Anton LaVey lists in *The Satanic Bible* (1969) are frequently employed: Ahriman, Euronymous and Fenriz have all been used as pseudonyms; Azazel, Behemoth and Marduk have all been band names. The use of names, particularly pseudonyms, is central to the adoption of a specific personality, regarded as important by Black Metallers. As one Israeli Black Metaller explained to me:

R       ...when you play Black Metal you don't play it like, you were a human,

I:      uh huh

R:      no no no [inaudible], you play it like you're a warrior.

To further this sense of the inhuman in Black Metal, some Black Metallers paint their faces with what has become known as 'corpse paint'. Corpse paint involves painting the face white, with dark black rings about the eyes and mouth. Of course, the Heavy Metal band Kiss have long painted their faces in black and white, yet Black Metal face-painting is intended to look more like a corpse or a warrior. Black Metallers also draw on other symbols such as the inverted cross, the pentagram and the baphomet (goat's head).

Black Metallers have also articulated a vision of the identity and purpose of Black Metal, which is less a coherent ideology than a common set of reference points and positions. Although Satanism is generally seen as essential to Black Metal, the meaning of Satanism is disputed. One thing that is universally shared is an opposition to Christianity. A common slogan is 'Support the war against Christianity'. There is not the same unanimity regarding why Christianity is to be opposed. For some, Christianity is opposed for its association with corrupt and hypocritical churches. As one scene member put it to me: 'I'm not anti-Christian, I'm anti human manipulation' [UK4]. For others, however, Christianity is an ideology against which Satanism is constructed. One common way of describing Christianity is as weak or submissive, as in the following interview extract:

R:      ...it's submission, total submission and er it's it's total opposite of the human nature I think. It's [sigh] the whole moral, Christian moral is complete opposite of the of the natural way for us to act, you know

I:      So what is the natural way for us to act?

R:      Er like an animal.

        [S8]

Rather than being a literal personality, Satan is a potent symbol of man's (sic) lustful nature. Christian civilisation has repressed this true nature and, as a consequence, men neglect their true potential.

For Black Metallers Satanism is generally as much about personal empowerment and liberation as worshipping the devil. Some Black Metallers have participated in Satanic rituals of the sort pioneered by Anton LaVey's 'Church of Satan'. However, there remains a strong suspicion of anything that might turn Satanism into anything resembling a religion or written creed. As one female Black Metal musician put it to me:

...I'm not I'm not into all this like collecting up shitloads of fucking books and [] the occult. That doesn't make you a satanist. You're a satanist because you're a satanist. You don't you don't need anyone else's words to tell you what you are. Er I'm me, I don't need anybody else to tell me what I am.

[UK9]

Another common feature of Black Metal Satanism is a self-proclaimed misanthropy. This may be expressed in very extreme ways. For example, the US fanzine *Wheresmyskin* (no date or issue number)proclaimed: 'Kill everything holy, kill everything else, then kill yourself'. Dani, the lead singer of Cradle of Filth, is quoted in an interview with *Terrorizer* magazine as saying '...if I was in control of the world, I would wipe out half of it instantly and indiscriminately without any remorse' (April 1996: 28). Misanthropy involves a determined effort to set oneself apart from the world. Many Black Metallers claim to avoid social interaction as far as possible. One Swedish Black Metal musician told me: 'I'm only trying to fit into my own world' [S8]. This misanthropy is often related to a self-conscious elitism, based on contempt for the 'weakness' of most humans.

Such elitism is frequently accompanied by a yearning for a pagan past. Scandinavian Black Metal bands constantly invoke the Vikings. They mourn the arrival of Christianity in the Middle Ages, almost claiming themselves to be colonised people. Pagan society is constructed as lacking the 'weakness' that characterises contemporary society, being based on honourable conflict. Scandinavian bands are also fascinated by the Scandinavian countryside. The 'wildness' of the forests and mountains is contrasted with the effete cosmopolitanism of contemporary cities. These themes have also been incorporated by Black Metallers from other countries, with varying degrees of success. For example, the Israeli band Melechesh, who are of Turkish–Armenian–Syrian (Christian) descent, draw on an imagined Mesopotamian past. It is never entirely clear how far Black Metallers are aware of their 'inventing tradition' and that their construction of pagan pasts may be of dubious historical accuracy.

These myths can easily become connected to racism and fascism. The apparently uncritical celebration of pagan pasts, the obsession with the 'unpolluted' countryside and the distrust of the cosmopolitan city are common features in 19th- and 20th-century fascist and racist movements. Indeed, in the 1930s German Nazism contained a strong anti-Christian, mystical strain (Anonymous 1997). Many Black Metallers are fascinated by social Darwinism and eugenics. One female Black Metaller described her belief in these ideologies in the following terms:

...I mean just look at nature, the strong are surviving, you know, like the strong eats the weak, and that's just the way it is, you know. So you can't really go against that. I mean of course in modern day society has gone against it, you know, but I think that's a bit foolish because I mean it's natural selection, it's a law and there is a reason why it has been like this, you know, and why it's like that in the natural world, you know.

[UK6]

Unsurprisingly, there has been much interest in the Nazi period within the Black Metal scene and within the Extreme Metal scene as a whole. In many ways, the Nazis are *the* pre-eminent transgressive symbol of the 20th (and, indeed, 21st) century. One example is an album by the Swedish Black Metal band Marduk, entitled *Panzer Division Marduk* (Osmose: 1999). In interviews, the band have spoken of their obsession with tank warfare and with the German Panzer tank in particular. The album cover features the gun barrel of a Panzer tank pointing at the viewer and the music features artillery and battle sounds. The appropriation of Nazi symbols has always been a feature of Extreme Metal – for example, in the 1980s the US Thrash band Slayer named their fan club the 'Slaytanic Wehrmacht'. However, in Black Metal these appropriations have been accompanied by discourses that are highly conducive to the incorporation of Nazi ideologies. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, a number of Black Metal bands, such as Norway's Burzum and Poland's Graveland, have become involved in far-right politics and many others have expressed some sympathy with fascist and racist ideas. Black Metal has not become a Nazi movement, although, as Nick Terry puts it in *Terrorizer*:

> What makes it hard for us is distinguishing between those borrowings which play on the symbolism for artistic effect and those which are truly politically charged. (September 1998: 66)

The Black Metal scene is the most radically transgressive space within Extreme Metal, but commonalities exist between Black Metal discourse and other discourses within the scene as a whole. Christianity is widely reviled, as are other forms of authority. It is also common for scene members to proclaim a radical individualism, even if this is not associated with elitist misanthropy as in Black Metal. One Swedish scene member articulates a common view:

> I think there's too much bullshit about how you should act, that's bullshit, how you should be and all that. Just be yourself, if you are sick, you are sick, you know, it's nothing you can do about it.
>
> [S9]

This kind of individualism is similarly articulated in Punk and other alternative scenes (Duncombe 1997; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995).

The discursive transgressions of the Extreme Metal scene, like its sonic transgressions, are based on concerns about abjection. The abject is associated with human weakness, mortality and the voluptuousness of the human body. The abject is a source of fascination and of terror, leading to an obsessive, 'fundamentalist' preoccupation in Extreme Metal discourse with the details of the abject and of its control. Lyrics by bands such as Carcass and Cannibal Corpse show a delight in the abject but also a repetitive desire to control it. Extreme Metal discourse represents a departure from Heavy Metal discourse in that the fantasies it explores are less obviously 'fantastic'. Heavy Metal discourses are generally lurid, theatrical, baroque and often satirical. Extreme Metal discourses are detailed, repetitive and apparently serious. This progression mirrors a progression seen in 'horror' films from the 1970s to the early 1990s, as explicit 'slasher' movies replaced more traditional, gothic horror films (Badley 1995; Clover 1992; Crane 1994). In both traditional horror films and Heavy Metal, the abject is liberated and animated within a colourful fantasy world. In Extreme Metal the abject is repetitively examined, only to be destroyed and controlled.

Extreme Metal discourse is thus a discourse of obsessive control. This obsessive control is exerted over the body, over the threatening feminine, over weakness in general and over the fantastic. It produces the ideal scene member as male, non-black, self-contained and impervious to weakness. How do such representations relate to the transgressive bodies of scene members?

Practical Transgression[8]

In the 1980s there were a rash of cases in which pro-censorship groups tried to associate Heavy Metal with suicides of and murders committed by Metal fans. Some academics, sympathetic to the Metal scene, tried to defend the music against these accusations, arguing that however disturbed some Heavy Metal fans might be, Metal was generally a positive and empowering part of fans' lives. Regardless of the merits or otherwise of this argument, it cannot automatically be applied to the Extreme Metal scene. We have already seen how Extreme Metal discourses deal with dangerous themes, such as suicide, in a far more forceful and less 'fantastic' way than Heavy Metal. In terms of practice, the Extreme Metal scene also goes much further than Heavy Metal.

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[8] Of course, all discourse is produced through practice. However, I want to consider separately the sorts of transgressions that occur through the medium of the body.

Heavy Metal musicians were always associated with excessive drinking and the abuse of illicit drugs. The attitude to alcohol and other drugs within the Extreme Metal scene is more complex. On the one hand, some sections of the scene have embraced self-destructive behaviour even more fully than is seen in Heavy Metal. Some Thrash bands, such as Germany's Tankard, sing about little other than alcohol and mention little else in interviews. Some scene members delight in self-destruction. Consider this section from an interview with one female British Black Metal musician:

I:      What plans do you have for your life and for [name of band]?

R:      More Metal, more alcohol, more drugs, um, I don't know, let's just see how much I can fuck myself up before I die.

I:      You say you're an alcoholic, is that in the literal sense?

R:      I hope so [laughs] you know, there's no point in fucking, no point in kidding yourself, is there [laughs]

I:      You do drugs, is that what, dope or

R:      Whatever I can get my grubby little mitts on.
        [UK9]

While alcohol tends to be the drug of choice in the scene, cannabis is also extremely popular. Death Metal and Grindcore bands, in particular, are often heavy cannabis smokers and have celebrated the drug in songs and interviews. In 1997 the US Grindcore band Exit 13 recorded *Smoking Songs* – an album of covers of 1930s songs in praise of marijuana. What is interesting, however, is how rarely drugs such as ecstasy, heroin and cocaine appear within the scene. Some scene members who have a close relationship with Punk may have histories of speed and glue, but this is similarly rare. Furthermore, there are sections of the scene that abstain from alcohol and other drugs or use them only sparingly. The Black Metal scene, in particular, contains a strong element of asceticism.

Nor is excessive sexual indulgence generally celebrated within the Extreme Metal scene – a striking contrast with Heavy Metal. Black Metallers, in particular, may be very suspicious of overt displays of sexuality, even if those displays of sexuality involve images of women in subordinate positions. The popular British Black Metal band Cradle Of Filth have been criticised for featuring scantily clad female dancers on stage and images of naked women on their T-shirts.

Thus, while some forms of excessive indulgence are practised, often to self-consciously suicidal lengths, scene members also resist indulgence. The threat of the abject is raised in any loss of control over the body. Similarities abound with 'straight-edge' Punk culture – those punks who

are celibate, do not drink or take drugs and are vegan. Both scenes are based around ideologies of personal empowerment, independence and self-control (Wood 1999).

The same ambivalences about bodily excess exist with regard to dancing and movement. The academic literature on music has shown how music is experienced 'erotically' in the body (De Nora 1997). Music and dance can transgress the rigid separation of mind and body in Western culture (Chanan 1994). Outsiders who attend Extreme Metal gigs are often struck by the extreme forms of movement that are practised (Heller 1992; Petrov 1995). Audiences often headbang and 'mosh'. Moshing is a form of dancing involving intense and violent physical activity – slamming into other audience members and throwing mock punches and kicks. To outsiders, these activities may look like an uncontrolled battle. Audience members also 'stage-dive' – diving from the stage into the audience. Such activities represent some of the most extreme bodily responses to any form of music and carry with them the threat of injury. However, moshing, headbanging and stage-diving are also intensely controlled activities. Harris Berger describes moshing as 'the tension between violence and order' (1999b: 71). The violence is accompanied by 'the subtle awareness that this [is] a mosh pit and not a riot' (ibid.: 72). Berger points out that moshers are careful to take care of other moshers. In the mosh pits that I have observed and participated in, people who fell were quickly picked up. When someone stage-dives, they are always met by outstretched hands in the audience waiting to catch them. Those who do not control themselves and cause too much hurt may be forcibly ejected from the mosh pit.

It is tempting, then, to understand moshing as a kind of expression of communal solidarity. However, the emphasis on personal control also has a solipsistic side. William Tsitsos argues that for straight-edge punks 'the moshpit is a sort of proving ground in which those who are too weak must be forcibly eliminated' (1999: 412). According to Tsitsos, moshing is based on solipsistic movements, as opposed to the more communally oriented 'slamdancing'. How far Tsitsos's conclusions translate to Extreme Metal is unclear, but certainly the mosh pit, for all the carefulness of its participants, is a tough place to be. Moshers prove themselves unconcerned about both the possible injuries and the often-painful volume levels experienced near to the stage.

The emphasis on control also manifests itself in an avoidance of the mosh pit. Berger writes amusingly of the 'silent men' who stand, arms folded, at the edge of the mosh pit – a phenomenon also noted by Wendy Fonarow (1997) at alternative-music gigs. This phenomenon is partly explained by audience members being too old, tired or bored to enter the mosh pit. However, there are other reasons why people stand silently still. As we have seen, Extreme Metal is a music whose speed and lack of 'space' can produce a kind of paradoxical stasis. The

music also tends to be amplified to incredibly loud volumes at gigs. Moreover, Extreme Metal is a difficult music to reproduce in live performance and can often come out as an indistinct noise. If audience members are unwilling to mosh, the sheer wall of noise may 'paralyse' people, rooting them to the spot. It is virtually impossible to find a middle ground between frantic movement and no movement. Often, bands are also virtually static on stage. The speed and consequent technical demands of the music make impossible the sorts of expansive movements practised in Heavy Metal. Frequently, band members are only able to headbang or move their heads in a whirlwind motion. Only in slower forms of Extreme Metal is 'putting on a show', in a conventional sense, possible.

However, over and above the very real practical difficulties of movement to Extreme Metal, some scene members actively refuse to move. Some early 1990s Black Metal bands used the slogan 'No Fun, No Mosh, No Core' (the 'Core' refers to Hardcore Punk). Black Metallers were reacting to the contemporary popularity of Death Metal. At the time, Death Metal shows often resembled Hardcore shows in featuring large, communally oriented mosh pits. This communal solidarity, together with the bonhomie which Death Metallers frequently expressed in fanzines, was seen as being contrary to the 'seriousness' required to be a Satanic Metaller. As a result, Black Metallers adopted an exaggeratedly humourless attitude and de-emphasised moshing. This posture was quickly modified, but Black Metal concerts tend to be much less physical even today. Black Metallers also revealed a very real ambivalence towards the body and dance which affects the entire scene. As Tsitsos points out, the communal aspects of the mosh pit are, to some extent, in conflict with ideologies of personal control. Movement is extreme in the form of moshing, or solipsistic in the form of solitary headbanging or does not happen at all. Once again, scene members yearn for a deep, transgressive engagement with the body, yet actively resist it as well.

Transgression also involves practices that are transgressive in the more literal sense of breaking the law. Scene members have been involved in violent incidents of various kinds. A number of my informants and interviewees enjoyed recounting stories of fights with people within the scene. Nothing suggests, however, that this sort of behaviour and talk is any more or less prevalent within the Extreme Metal scene than in other spaces that are full of young men. Somewhat more unusual is the number of members who have had confrontations with the police as a consequence of political activity. The scene's proximity to Punk means that many scene members hold anarchist and anti-police views. A number that I spoke to had been involved in activities such as hunt saboteuring and had been arrested. Again, however, this sort of activity is certainly not confined to the Extreme Metal scene – indeed, it is derivative of other scenes.

Nevertheless, some manifestations of the violence and transgression practised by Black Metallers are unique to the scene. In the early 1990s the Norwegian Black Metal scene was accompanied by a level of violence previously unknown in Metal, which has been described in detail by Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind (1998). A number of churches were burnt down and a number of prominent Black Metal musicians were convicted of arson and spent time in prison. Moreover, there were also a number of murders associated with the scene. In 1994 Varg Vikernes (aka 'Count Grisnacht'), of the band Burzum, murdered the prominent musician and label owner Oystein Aarseth (aka 'Euronymous'), of the band Mayhem. Vikernes subsequently received a 21-year prison sentence. Another musician, Bard 'Faust' Eithun, a member of the band Emperor, was convicted of the apparently motiveless murder of a homosexual stranger. Violence and church burnings continue to occur sporadically elsewhere in the world. Swedish Black Metal, in particular, has been associated with a considerable amount of intimidation and violence, which forced one prominent musician to retire from the scene. Also, in 1998 Jon Nodtveit, of the band Dissection, was imprisoned for being an accessory to the murder of an Algerian[9] homosexual. Moynihan and Søderlind also show that a number of Black Metallers have become outright Nazis. In particular, Varg Vikernes is now openly involved in far-right politics.

In the 1990s the Norwegian and other Black Metal scenes pioneered the most extreme forms of transgression that have ever been practised in Metal. However, it is important to emphasise the both the tiny numbers of people involved in such activities and that such activities had virtually ceased by the late 1990s. Despite this, these forms of transgression remain a source of fascination throughout the Extreme Metal scene. Participants in the early-1990s Norwegian scene are still questioned about that period in fanzine interviews and Euronymous and Vikernes and other protagonists have semi-legendary status. That such a small group of people should have become so renowned is testament to the allure that the most extreme forms of transgression hold. Satanic terrorism comes the closest within the scene to achieving the pure sovereignty that Bataille yearned for. Whilst murder and arson involves an assertion of control over the abject, protagonists in such transgressions also come closer to surrendering control than protagonists in any of the other forms of transgressions practiced within the scene. The inescapable *telos* of violent terroristic activity is the oblivion of death or the surrender of self-control within the prison system.

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[9] It is unclear whether there were racial motives in this murder. The person who committed the murder to which Nodtveidt was an accessory was of Iranian origin.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined three ideal types of transgression, which are or have been practised within the Extreme Metal scene. The scene has taken the nascent transgressions practised within the Heavy Metal scene and radicalised them. These transgressions are accompanied by great ambivalence. The scene plays with the possibility of oblivion within the terrifying and alluring abject. But it plays with the abject only to reinforce control. The scene sets up rigid boundaries even as it transgresses others.

The problem with this chapter's ideal typical abstraction of forms of scenic transgression is that it removes these sounds, discourses and practices from the flux of everyday scenic life. In the following chapters an analysis of transgressive practices will be integrated into the analysis of the scene in all its heterogeneity. As we shall see, the scene's non-transgressive elements are just as important as its transgressive elements. This chapter's focus on transgression is also problematic in the sense that it implies that scene members are utterly transgressive beings. This chapter has given little voice to scene members themselves and has not examined how scene members construct and negotiate their place within the scene. In the next chapter I will begin to address this issue by examining what members get out of participation in a scene in which transgression is a major part.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## EXPERIENCE

### Introduction

As I argued in chapter four, transgression has become classified as exceptional in modernity. The exceptional nature of the transgressive sounds, practices and discourses that I discussed in chapter four may be the attraction for outsiders who become interested in the scene, whether as appalled censors or potential members – they are what make the scene 'interesting'. Scene members themselves may also wish to emphasise the transgressive, exceptional aspects of the scene. For example, many Black Metallers attempt to construct the scene as a totally transgressive space.

However, this construction of the scene does not give a sufficient appreciation of how the scene and its members participate in less exceptional practices. Nor does chapter four give a sufficient appreciation of the complexity and reflexivity of scene members. In this and subsequent chapters my account of the scene will be 'fleshed out' by engaging more thoroughly with the reflexivity of scene members. In order to develop such an account, the question 'what do members get out of the scene?' is fundamental. We cannot assume that 'transgression' is the sole answer. In this chapter I will show how members get a variety of 'experiences' out of the scene. I will examine the concept of experience in more detail later in the chapter. First, I will examine what scene members get out of the music of the scene.

### Music and Interview Talk

We might reasonably hypothesise that one answer to the question 'what do members get out of the scene?' might be 'pleasure from music'. One way of investigating the existence and nature of the musical pleasures that the scene offers is to listen to people's talk about music. Simon Frith (1983, 1996) has argued that part of the pleasure of popular music consists in talking about it. Indeed, a vast amount of talk about music occurs within the scene. During my research I would spend hours with scene members at gigs and other locations, talking about music. We also find a huge volume of writing about music in fanzines, magazines, websites and e-mail discussion lists.

My own research produced yet more talk about music, through my invitations to discuss music within the context of interviews. It is this form of talk about music that is most accessible for detailed analysis. Studies such as Susan Crafts et al. (1993) have shown how people's interview

accounts of the music they like can be passionate and moving. In my interviews with scene members there was a considerable amount of talk of this kind. Members often talk of music as an absolutely vital part of life, even as essential for life itself:

> ...I have always lived only for the music, you know, it's only for the hard rock and Heavy Metal.
> [S2]

> I:    So the music world was what
> R:    Oh music was my life, oh yeah music was my life since I was thirteen, or even younger I bought my first record when I was eleven
> [UK15]

> I:    How important is music to you then?
> R:    It's very important, very. Um I didn't have a, I didn't have a stereo when I lived in London and for the last few days we didn't have a, we didn't even have a tape recorder, and that was horrible. I I had, I almost went crazy, you know. When I don't listen to music I, I have to listen to music, I have to. I can't live without it, so it's very important.
> [S12]

These are the sorts of statements we might expect from scene members. However, it is notable that none of these extracts, with the partial exception of the first, are specific about what *sort* of music is so essential for life. In these and other interviews an attachment to 'music' appears to be discursively prior to an attachment to any specific form of Extreme Metal. Indeed, far from simply stating their attachment to Extreme Metal, scene members often emphasise the breadth of their musical tastes:

> I:    W what are you mostly into is it Death Metal or Black Metal or
> R:    (2) I like them all everything, from classical music, to Satan, Black Metal, I like them all, everything right through.
> [UK15]

> I mean I I enjoy a lot of calm music, all of er, I mean bands like, or artists like Enya or, all the records of Enya or this folk/pop band from, play like Irish music, I can't remember – Levellers, they're great, and other bands
> [S3]

...I I can't say I developed my own taste because, I if people play some music for me and I see oh it's good music or bad music so I listen to all kind of music, it's hard to say that, my taste is good music or bad music.

[S10]

This finding supports Eamonn Carrabine and Brian Longhurst's argument that contemporary musical taste is expressed as a musical 'omniverousness' (1999). Music is constructed in a utopian way – music is life and an absolute good. Music is placed at the discursive centre of these scene members' lives and Extreme Metal is constructed as a specific sub-set of a more general attachment to music. The reason generally given for the importance of Extreme Metal in a member's life is that it fulfils a particularly valuable function within a broader musical landscape:

...I like extreme music I also like soft music I like every sort of music but the music I do best is the brutal music.

[S9]

Within this account, Extreme Metal is particularly attractive as it enables him to engage deeply with music through playing it. Scene members commonly assert that they love music in general, but that Extreme Metal offers something that other musics do not. Often, the specific attraction of Extreme Metal is constructed as consisting in an ill-defined 'energy', which excites and charges up the body:

I:      Why do actually like the music you like? What it is about

R:      Cos it's got energy, it's got e, I've always liked stuff that's, like even like me mum's old sixties stuff, I used to like the heavier, what would, you know, be termed, I, I never liked ballads, I've never been one for ballads or soft stuff, I've always liked something with like

[...]

Yeah, stuff you can shout along to, stuff with a bit of a kick in it, you know what I mean.

[UK3]

I think it's just like, an extreme fast Death or Black Metal song or whatever yeah just like, stirs something inside of you, it's like fucking adrenaline you know what I mean.

[UK11]

Extreme Metal is constructed as having a vitality that 'stirs up' the body, but the emotions that this vitality is seen as expressing and through which it is expressed are constructed as 'negative'. Aggression, anger, violence and brutality are constructed as the essential elements of Extreme Metal and the source of the music's vitality:

I:      What was it about it that attracted you first?

R:      [phew] Th- just the speed, the the aggression and it was kind of of a fusion of what Punk and Heavy Metal as like one crazy intense vibe, you know.
        [UK4]

I:      Why [did you like] Thrash instead of the more mainstream

R:      Cos I was always really violent and it was just the most violent fucking Extreme Metal at the time and I just loved it, you know.
        [UK9]

Pleasure in Extreme Metal music comes through the excitement and vitality of violence and aggression. Scene members frequently explain this pleasure in terms of catharsis. Listening to Extreme Metal gives voice to aggressive emotions and, in the process, reduces depression and frustration in exhilarating ways:

I:      What was it that appealed to you about that sort of stuff, the Punk and the Metal? You said that Black Sabbath blew you away. What was it about them?

R:      I think it's something that's hard to define. I think it's really sub-subconscious type um reaction to the music. Um there's a lot of feeling [into] it, there's a lot of aggression, there's a lot of soul and passion in it. Um basically it's like a release of tension [and] emotions basically by listening to the music.
        [UK5]

Members often argue that this catharsis helps them to cope with difficult elements to their lives. This argument is frequently expressed in stories, as in the following:

        ....three years and we were playing Metal you know having long hair and rehearsing in the suburbs you know and stuff like that you had like, those hot shot kids much younger than us...beating people up robbing them and so on, I've been beaten up a lot of times by like fifteen people you know, five years younger than me

I:      hm

R:      that pisses you off you get angry and I'm not gonna write that fucking suburb kids beat me up instead I, I write lyrics for for like for a song like [name of Death Metal

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song] you know, you get pissed off you have to deal with your aggressions, you write lyrics that put into aggressive music you can every show you can live that aggression out, and you can become a much calmer person I think, cos otherwise otherwise I think if you're not going to be able put your aggressions out that way, you're going to be you're going to be drinking in a bar and hitting the first person that say anything wrong about you.

[S9]

Extreme Metal helped this interviewee deal with the anger that stemmed from the trials of his everyday life. However, he rejects the possibility that he might have written a specifically 'realistic' response to his circumstances. Extreme Metal does not respond to the specific details of specific situations in specific ways, but through an ill-defined aggression, which provides a 'fantastic' way of coping with anger. The musician quoted above plays a form of Death Metal with extremely violent lyrics. But the violence depicted in these lyrics is generally not explicitly directed at anyone in particular.

As we saw in chapter one, there are a variety of forms of Extreme Metal. However, despite this diversity, talk about musical affect is remarkably homogeneous in describing the attractive elements of Extreme Metal as aggression, brutality, energy etc. Within the scene, the language available to talk about the nature of musical attraction and pleasure is very limited. While scene members may love to talk about music, the scene offers only limited tools for talking about how music makes scene members feel. Similarly, the scene offers only limited tools for talking about why scene members like particular forms of music. Members are often extremely reluctant to talk about the relationship between music and self:

I:      What attracted you to Burzum's music?

R:      I just liked it, I thought it was really good, you know. It's hard to explain, I mean why do you like chocolate, why do you like coffee, you know? It's just like matter of taste.

[UK6]

In this extract the interviewee is reluctant to say more about the music of Burzum than that it was 'very good'. There is no attempt to investigate the complex reasons why the interviewee found the music of Burzum pleasing. The reasons are relegated to the mysteries of 'taste' – mysteries that are apparently as uninteresting as why one might like coffee or chocolate. Another example of the reluctance to talk about the relationship between music and self can be found in an interview with a 19-year-old British male Extreme Metal fan conducted for the research project reported in Harris (1997):

I:      right, okay so, how what d'you what d'you think made you get into this sort of music?

R:      What made me [get] into it?

I:                      [yeah]

        why

R:      [inaudible]

I:      Why d'you think it appeals to you?

        (3)

R:      hh I don't think there is a reason it appeals to me it's just I like it you know it's not the

        sort of thing you can say, I like it because

I:      hm hm

R:      it's just, it's just there


Scene members frequently seem to be 'inarticulate' when talking about their relationship with music. Such issues appear to cause some discomfort to some scene members. But this does not mean that this sort of talk reveals nothing of what attracts people to Extreme Metal. In chapter three I argued that interviews are both a way of researching the discursive tools with which members tactically construct the world and a way of finding out about things that happen outside the interview. Used as a 'resource', interviews tell us that Extreme Metal makes members feel energised through the body. They also tell us that Extreme Metal allows people to explore destructive, transgressive emotions (something that Berger (1999b) also found). But beyond these general findings, an analysis of members' talk gives us little detailed 'resource' information.

However, if we treat interview talk as a 'topic', the apparent inarticulacy of members becomes less frustrating. While music is constructed as energising, cathartic and pleasurable, members are reluctant to delve into their reactions to the music to which they listen. Members resist being drawn into detailed, quasi-psychoanalytic discussions of music, emotion and feeling. This reveals an ambivalence about the relationship between music, the self and the body. The relationship is acknowledged to exist, but beyond that most scene members prefer to leave it alone.

## Music and Experience

To explain the ways in which members' relationships to music are constructed within the scene, we need to look more broadly at the question of what members get out of the scene. One way of approaching this question is to ask how members 'experience' the scene. The concept of experience comes from phenomenology. Phenomenology, as developed by Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schutz and others (Kocklemans 1967), is based on the argument that the world is

something that is 'intentionally' constituted through consciousness. In phenomenology no distinction exists between our consciousness and the world 'out there' – the only world that exists is the world that we experience through consciousness. But, as Schutz argues (1967), the world is an intersubjective one. We experience the world within an intersubjective 'lifeworld'.

Within the lifeworld, members produce interaction through their 'reflexivity'. Reflexivity can be understood as a dialogic interaction between consciousness and the 'other'. Phenomenologists differ in how they understand this process and, in particular, the status of 'the other'. Is the other itself constituted through consciousness or does it contain some kind of objective independence from consciousness? Regardless of how we might answer this question, we can at least observe the workings of reflexivity in the infinity of methods that we use to construct and manipulate the world. Reflexivity is deployed in an infinite number of tiny, interactive moments, in which we experience our being in the world. These moments are 'indexical', in that they can never be totally recovered by the analyses of others or by reconstruction after the event. We experience the world as a continuous flow of reflexively manipulated indexical moments. Through reflexivity, the world is continually brought into being through a dialogic movement between consciousness and the other.

Phenomenologically inclined sociologists attempt to understand the 'everyday life' of members (Douglas 1971), rather than focusing on large-scale social structures. Phenomenological sociology is most widely practised by ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts. As we saw in chapter three, ethnomethodology is empiricist, in that it focuses on what is considered to be the only truly describable area of society, that of micro-processes of interaction. An examination of such processes shows how reflexivity is used to accomplish the interactive experience of everyday life. In previous chapters I have noted my dissatisfaction with such studies as an exclusive methodological strategy. I want to add here that ethnomethodology lacks any kind of engagement with the affective, sensual quality of experience. Experience consists of all the multiple sensations that invade our consciousness. However, ethnomethodologists posit that such experiences can never be reconstructed; one can only show how members orient their reflexivity towards them in the process of interaction.

Yet some phenomenologists have engaged more thoroughly with experience and are less pessimistic about the possibilities of investigating it. Rather than simply investigating the mechanisms through which reflexive interaction is accomplished, it may be possible to attempt to partially 'share' the experiences of members. In his phenomenological study of *Metal, Rock and Jazz*, Harris Berger advocates and practises a form of 'humanistic ethnography', in which the goal is to increase the partial sharing of experiences:

When the experiences of the other...are taken on their own terms, taken with a high degree of sharing, felt with great affective power and (with that literary frame) marked as self, then a level of sharing has occurred and a kind of intimacy has been established. The self in all its political and historical concreteness is partially transcended. (1999b: 252)

Berger strives for a much greater engagement with members than the simple dissection of members' talk. His goal is to try to share members' 'musical experience'. Musical experience, as Berger defines it, is a broad concept:

...musical experience does not just refer to sound, but to any phenomena deemed 'musical' by the people who make it and listen to it. Such experiences do not exist solely in performance, but in the full range of settings...where musical life is carried out. (ibid.: 23)

The centrepiece of Berger's study is a minutely detailed examination of the way Dann Saladin, of the Death Metal band Sin Eater, experiences his song 'The Final Silencing' – the ways in which it moves him and articulates his emotions and history in all its complexity. He puts this analysis into the context of Saladin's life, the music scene in which he moves and the wider music scene in Akron, Ohio, where the composer lives. Berger then goes on to draw some perceptive conclusions about the nature of Metal experience within the context of deindustrialised US society.

Berger's familiarity with musicology and ethnomusicology enables him to focus on the experience of Death Metal texts more closely than I can. Conversely, his research into the wider Death Metal scene, in particular its institutional and economic aspects, is less extensive than mine. Furthermore, Berger's phenomenological focus leaves less space for the profusion of other theories and epistemologies that come under the sign of scene in this study. However, Berger does offer us a more extensive and profound way of asking the question 'what do members get out of the scene?' His work encourages us, instead, to ask the question 'what range of experiences are possible within the scene?' This question will be addressed in ways that are inspired by phenomenology, rather than directly beholden to it. Phenomenology will be used to engender a sensibility that strives to engage with how it 'feels' to be a scene member.

Examining interview talk that deals explicitly with members' relationship to music is only one way of examining musical experience. It allows us to share, albeit in a very limited way, the excitement members feel about their music. It also allows us to share, again in a limited way, the ambivalence shown by many within the scene towards exploring through talk the place of music within their lives. However, we need to examine musical experience in a broader context. Interview talk is not the only form of data available to us in the study of experience. Nor are the experiences discussed above – aggression, energy, catharsis etc. – necessarily the only

experiences available within the scene. Indeed, Berger's work teaches us that 'music' is not simply a set of sounds or texts and that 'experience' is not simply an individual's reaction to those sounds and texts. The nature of 'music' and of 'musical experience' is a far more open question. As we saw, Berger argues that musical experience refers to 'any phenomena deemed "musical" by the people who make it and listen to it'. Berger's phenomenology forces us to question any straightforward application of our own categories of 'music' and 'musical experience'.

However, phenomenological definitions of music also place limitations on us through their exclusive focus on members' own definitions. In previous chapters we have discussed the limitations of similar, 'constructivist' methodologies, such as discourse and conversation analysis, and have argued that we need to draw on 'realist' methodologies as well. Realist methodologies accept the need for researchers to impose their own definitions of categories such as 'music'. Therefore, inspired by Berger's phenomenology but departing from it, I want to treat *all* activities that take place in the scene as 'musical'. This means that all scenic experiences are musical experiences of some kind. As with the concept of scene, such a definition allows us to escape definitional boundary disputes over what is musical and what is not. This definition allows us to consider fully the experiential role of the huge number of institutions and practices, such as tape trading, record labels, concerts, bands, websites etc., which exist within the scene. Time spent participating in such institutions and practices equals if not exceeds the amount of time spent listening to and playing music. Moreover, music is played and listened to in the context of such institutions and practices and we cannot disengage music from them. Thus, members experience Extreme Metal music through the scene.

Mundanity and the Experience of the Scene in Everyday Life

The concept of experience and the concept of transgression highlight very different aspects of the social. Whereas transgression emphasises the exceptional, experience encompasses everything that happens within members' lives. The concept is particularly suited to the examination of 'everyday life'. Everyday life encompasses the 'normal', the 'routine' and the unexceptional. Henri Lefebvre (1971) argues that everyday life consists of 'recurrences' through which the world is 'reproduced'. He further argues that:

> The quotidian is what is humble and solid, what is taken for granted and that of which all the parts follow each other in such a regular, unvarying succession that those concerned have no call to question their sequence. (1971: 24)

This taken for grantedness ensures that the everyday is the terrain in which capitalist power is reproduced, through grindingly oppressive routines that nonetheless go unquestioned. Similarly,

Dorothy Smith (1987) shows how macro-processes are enacted and reproduced within micro-processes of interaction. Nevertheless, as other authors have shown (Cohen and Taylor 1976; de Certeau 1984; Willis 1990), everyday life is also the terrain in which power is manipulated and contested. Through the use of what Michel de Certeau calls 'tactics', members have the agency to shape meaningful, liberating, expressive cultures from oppressive, everyday routines. Music provides a powerful means of inserting this agency into everyday life in a multiplicity of ways. As Tia DeNora argues:

> ...music is in dynamic relation with social life, helping to invoke, stabilize and change the parameters of agency...By the term 'agency' here, I mean feeling, perception, cognition and consciousness, identity, energy, perceived situation and scene, embodied conduct and comportment. (2000: 20)

Everyday life, then, has no intrinsic nature; rather, it is a conceptual tool that highlights the experience of the unexceptional. The concept also draws attention to the ways in which individuals, who may spend their lives moving within a plurality of contexts, may nonetheless experience these contexts as part of an overarching everyday life. The experience of the scene is not necessarily an exceptional experience and, therefore, cannot necessarily be considered as separate from the experience of everyday life. At the very least, the experience of the Extreme Metal scene may affect the experience of everyday life outside the scene. For example, humming a song while walking down the street or having no money for clothes owing to the excessive purchase of CDs are possible intrusions of Extreme Metal music into everyday life. However, it is possible that the scene *may* be experienced as removed from the rest of everyday life. Indeed, as we shall see, members *may* actively attempt to construct the scene as disconnected from everyday life. The relationship between the scene and everyday life is not a settled one and is the object of contestation and negotiation.

Accounts of members' journeys through the scene attest to this complex relationship. Frequently, the scene is constructed as something removed from the rest of everyday life, as can be seen in accounts of members' initial attraction to Extreme Metal and their entry into the scene. A common theme in these accounts is the 'overwhelming' impact of encountering something entirely different from the rest their lives up to that point. Exposure to Extreme Metal generally comes suddenly, unexpectedly; it is a bewildering and exciting experience:

> First time I heard Slayer, I couldn't handle it, first time I heard Slayer the first album Show No Mercy, I was fucking completely stoned in a friend's house band called [name of band] we used to go and stay with them every week in [name of town], and they had the first Slayer album like I mean, done a bunch of bongs and a load of hot knives and stuff, and they put on Show No Mercy, and I'd heard about it I knew it was fairly,

totally fast totally manic, hardcore Metal, and I couldn't handle it man it was like, all this satanic stuff it's like woh what's going on here.

[UK10]

Accounts of entry to the scene are frequently constructed as rapid journeys from ignorance and horror at these strange new sounds to a knowledgeable mastery of them. Members show how the excitement generated by hearing Extreme Metal led them to a frantic search for more of it:

R:    and er, I was listening to a radio show and they played er, they they played a lot of Heavy Metal music on that programme you know [...] and er, one day they were interviewing a Danish guy, a phone interview they were interviewing a Danish guy this was in nineteen eighty-three, and they played a song from the guy's album, it was Metal Militia you know from Metallica

I:    hm hm

R:    so they played that one and Motorbreath, it just totally blew me away and I taped it,

[...]

then I tracked down the album the Kill Em All album, then then I went totally Thrash crazy from there really.

[S5]

The shock of being 'blown away' by Extreme Metal almost always leads to a frantic search for more of it. In the above extract, the experience of hearing one song on the radio led the interviewee to track down many more recordings of that type. The search for more Extreme Metal inevitably brings members into contact with scenic institutions. The following extract contains many of the features of the two previous extracts and shows how the interviewee came into contact with the institution of demo and tape trading:

R:    and then er [inaudible] Venom when I hear Venom, Venom my whole life changed till today so

[....]

I:    Well why did it in what way did it change your life why was it so important?

R:    OK, I received the it was the Welcome to Hell yeah?

I:    uh huh

R:    I put it on the stereo and you know everything was like Chhhhhhhhhh [inaudible], and I didn't understand nothing you know, I wa I was so scared I put the record outside and didn't listen to this record for maybe, two weeks something like this, and then I put it again on the record and tried to listen again, and you know it was it's very noisy you

know that Venom that Iron Maiden like the Motorhead and Iron Maiden but er when you get a band like Venom it, the old time it was very noisy and very

R2:     brutal

R:      powerful very brutal for somebody that never listen this kind of music, and then I know I get into this and try into this and I try to find lots of bands in this kind of style, and then I got er Slayer from a friend from America and he got demos from Slayer and Metallica

[IS13]

The shock of hearing Venom was initially repulsive, but it became beguiling. The search for more recordings of this type brought the interviewee into contact with tape trading, through which he heard other recordings. Becoming part of the scene can be an intoxicating process. The rapid and overwhelming exposure to a new form of music is combined with an exposure to a new social space, new forms of interaction and new institutions. In the following extract, the interviewee describes how the process of becoming involved in the scene takes on a momentum of its own, leading to the rapid acquisition of new forms of scenic expertise. Previously, he had described how he had begun corresponding with a more established British musician in the mid-1980s:

R:      .... and then he started taping me a lot of stuff and, you know he started taping me the whole Death Metal thing you know, which was all these re you know the Repulsion demos and Massacre demos [inaudible] bands like Macabre and this is like eighty-six, eighty- [seven]

I:              [right] at the start of Death Metal

R:      Yeah which I guess it was yeah, and I just it just freaked me out because I just found that kind of, music that I really really, [inaudible] cos it had everything you know all the bands that I ever liked like the aggression of er, of Hardcore bands you know just the energy

I:      hm

R:      together with like and this the guitar sounds were really really heavy and I don't really know why maybe because they were tuned down, that's when I learned about tuning down and stuff, and using heavier gauge of strings you know and having different tunings, and er it just sounded so brutal you know and often like these tapes were kind of you know, copied loads of times so these the quality was kind of really noisy and stuff which added to the attraction I guess, maybe the

I:      very exciting    [it seems]

R:                      [yeah] yeah it was yeah yeah I think it was the most exciting period for my (point) as a music fan, in my life you know

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I:      Was it, [was it ]

R:              [because] it felt like it was kind of being getting in part of the scene as well, because er I I started up my own Death Metal band [inaudible] called [name of band], then we did a demo

[S5]


This interviewee and the others quoted above emphasise that the process of getting involved in the scene could not have happened without the help of others. Receiving this help and contacting other scene members was an integral part of the experience of getting to know the music. However, other scene members construct this process differently. Some, particularly Black Metallers, emphasise that the process of discovering the scene happened with no outside help. This finding corroborates Widdicombe and Wooffitt's findings (1995) that 'subculture' members are anxious to emphasise that they discovered scenes themselves, rather than scenes discovering them. They argue that members attempt to maintain 'biographical authenticity' by resisting the 'category ascription' that subcultural involvement means conformity to group norms. In the following extract the interviewee emphasises how he became involved in scenic institutions only on his own terms:


I started [to get involved] mainly to promote the band, that was the main reason, because I wasn't, after a while I got interested in the whole movement, but it took a while before before I really got interested in in the whole scene, you know, because I I thought [inaudible] I am doing my own thing, I'm, who gives a shit about what other peoples [do] you know, but er later I I start start to realise that [someone wanna wanna] help me to promote my band, I better be loyal back to to them and support er the other bands as well.

[S8]


But even though this interviewee seeks to make his connection to the scene contingent, the extract still affirms the importance of the experience of a wide range of scenic institutions and the impossibility of disengaging from them. He accepts that he needed to maintain relations with other scene members, if only to help his band.


The dominant logic of the scene is to become heavily involved in it. The scene contains relatively few members whose engagement with Extreme Metal is limited simply to listening to music. For most members, involvement in the scene becomes the predominant interest and commitment of members' everyday lives – indeed, it can be said to constitute the centre of their everyday lives. The scene overwhelms members, leading them to ever-greater involvement and greater pleasures, but involvement also creates complex problems. Members still need to earn a

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living and maintain relationships with the non-scenic world[10]. At times, involvement in the scene can cause difficult clashes with other parts of members' everyday lives. Indeed, these clashes may be so difficult that the non-scenic world becomes 'the exceptional' – a terrain in which the taken-for-granted assumptions that guide practice within the scene do not hold sway.

For some members, the process of becoming involved in the scene can lead to estrangement from previously close friends. Non-Metal friends may react to Extreme Metal with incomprehension and banter:

> ...I've still got a couple of trendy friends and they come over they're like turn it off [name] it sucks s turn it off, they really don't like it...
> [UK11]

Estrangement from non-Metal friends can make it difficult for some members to find sexual partners. Since the scene is male-dominated, heterosexual scene members are forced to look outside the scene for a partner, which can be a difficult process:

> ...I meet a lot of girls but erm the minute they find out, what kind of person I am and what music I like, they just run out the door you know.
> [IS9]

This estrangement from the non-scenic world can force members to make difficult choices, sacrifices and compromises within the worlds of work and study. Take, for example, the following extracts:

I:      Did you go to university or anything like that?

R:      Er I went to sixth form, um and basically I was, they attempted to cajole me into going to university er because everybody thought it was the right thing to do er but I just decided that I'd I had so many ideas musically I wanted to do, I'd either do it now or probably never do it at all. So I mean, you know, four years at uni, it's a long time.

[...]

yeah, if if you don't do it, you'd never know. Er and and things just got to the stage whereby um music and er the underlying things behind it were the main driving force in what I wanted to do.

[UK2]

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[10] By 'non-scenic world', I mean everything that is outside the scene – including, of course, other scenes.

...I only went to university because I'd got the right A levels and there was a kind of parental like 'oh, you're gonna go there now, go to university' and um I could not stand it, the minute I walked in the place. I did bugger all. Um I mean effectively I wasn't actually sort of struck off for about a year and a half [inaudible] sort of stopped going. They kind of like sort of didn't realise half the time. Er but eventually it was like 'yeah, yeah' and I just dropped out of university basically and er because I was like, I don't know, I think I just didn't take to it really, further education. I was like, had my fill of it and I was just like, I was totally obsessed with Punk music and sort of, you know, early Metal stuff and basically wanted to er get involved in music.
[UK8]

I:      Would you say that musical activities kind of pushed everything else, like career and stuff, to one side?
R:      I think so. I've always been fixated on the music scene, ever since I was thirteen/fourteen there's always been [my life] more or less is the music scene and music and social life has always superseded work and careers throughout my life and it's no different now.
[UK7]

What is interesting in these accounts is that involvement in 'music' is constructed as opposed to a sustained involvement in university, work or a conventional career. Involvement in the scene may be so overwhelming that some scene members are unable to concentrate on other involvements. The members quoted above chose to sacrifice other opportunities and, in return, achieved a satisfactory scenic career that now constitutes their everyday lives. However, this is not always possible. Some requirements of the non-scenic world cannot be put aside so easily and this can be a source of great frustration to some scene members. This frustration is particularly common in Israel, where the lack of social security and the need to perform military service make it difficult to sustain a high level of involvement in the scene.

Many of these difficulties result from being deeply committed to a scene that makes many demands, particularly in terms of time, but within which, as we shall see in the next chapter, only a tiny minority are able to make a living. Virtually every scene member must earn a living by non-scenic means and, consequently, members find it difficult to prevent the rest of the world intruding on scenic involvements. Scene members have learned to limit the resulting difficulties by orienting their practice towards the experience of *mundanity*. The orientation of scenic practice towards the experience of mundanity provides a powerful 'logic' within the scene. The concept of 'logic', as used here, is derived from Will Straw's work on scenes (1991).

For Straw, a scene's logics represent the systematic ability of the scene's practices to produce change in certain consistent directions.

I define the logic of mundanity as the drive to experience 'everydayness' in all its regularity and unexceptionality. Most members attempt to make their experience of the scene 'normal', uncomplicated and suited to deal with the challenges of being involved in both the Extreme Metal scene and the non-scenic world. Members seek to be content with the experience of the scene as mundane and to make the rewards of participation worth the costs. The logic of mundanity leads practice towards the merging of the scene and everyday life. At its most developed, this logic ensures that the scenic and non-scenic elements of everyday life are closely integrated. In their accounts, most members do admit to struggling, at times, with the often-divergent demands of the scenic and non-scenic worlds, but for most the struggle is tolerable and worthwhile. In fact, what is more striking is how successfully the majority of scene members manage the complex relationship between the scenic and non-scenic worlds, even while most scene members discursively emphasise the distinction between the scene and the rest of the world.

*How* individuals orient practice towards the experience of mundanity varies enormously, depending, in part, on the various circumstances in which members find themselves. Some may experience mundanity by the successful exclusion of much of the non-scenic world – for example, through earning one's living from the scene. However, for most this is not possible. Those who experience the scene as mundane with the greatest degree of success achieve this by the reflexive management of the relationship between the scene and the non-scenic world, achieved through a particular kind of reflexively managed scenic *career*. Scene members use their reflexivity to negotiate careers through the scene along particular 'pathways' (Finnegan 1989). Most scene members tacitly recognise that, to be truly contented, members must aim to be contented throughout their everyday lives and not just within the scene. Members must attend to their lives as a whole, through the management of their lives as careers. Career, as I use the term, implies some sense of purpose, some sense of flow that knits together the various aspects of members' lives. A reflexively managed career does not imply rigorous planning so much as the existence of a set of robust, yet flexible, discursive and practical techniques and strategies, which will guide an individual through a variety of scenic and other spaces. A brief examination of a highly revealing incident will help to explain the importance of a reflexively managed scenic career.

While conducting fieldwork at the Dynamo Metal festival in the Netherlands, I met a British Death Metal musician whom I had previously interviewed. His band had recently released a self-financed CD and, when he saw that I had a backstage pass, he asked whether I could do him

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a favour. He wanted me to take two CDs and give them to the managers of two particular record labels. He then went on to complain, in highly disgruntled and bewildered tones, about how difficult it was to promote the band and how alienated he felt from the backstage area. This incident raises questions about scenic infrastructure and divisions of capital that will be attended to in chapter six. What is revealing here is the musician's lack of scenic knowledge. While bands do send unsolicited CDs and demos to large Metal labels, this is almost never successful. Generally, bands get signed by working to build up a following first, writing countless letters to fanzines and traders and sending fliers throughout the world. My acquaintance had failed to do this work. He had taken CDs to the festival in the hope that he would bump into someone who could help him. Although this would be reasonable as a complement to other promotional strategies, without them it was an ineffectual plan. Yet in other conversations he had revealed himself to be highly committed to music. He worked part-time at unskilled jobs in order to concentrate on the band. But even in this respect he had failed to capitalise on the resultant free time, admitting that the band only rehearsed once or twice a week. He also smoked a lot of cannabis and took other drugs on a regular basis. My acquaintance had failed to achieve a reflexively managed career, since he had not developed any kind of strategy, despite his evident love of the scene and desire to succeed. The areas in which he was highly committed and active and those in which he was less so undermined each other. However, despite his lack of comfort in the scenic world, he had relegated his non-scenic life to second place. The result was a lingering sense of dissatisfaction and bewilderment.

A reflexively managed scenic career is goal-oriented without being either dogmatic or unrealistic. It is pragmatic without being unprincipled. It is this balance that some members, such as the one above, fail to achieve. However, such members are in a minority. What is more striking is how successfully most scene members attend to the multiple spaces within which they move. Scene members maintain friendships outside the scene and have non-Metal interests and hobbies. Indeed, a number of scene members I interviewed were very involved in other pastimes, such as sport, comic collecting and car restoring. Furthermore, many scene members are voracious readers, particularly of books on fantasy, religion, horror, the occult and philosophy.

Another crucial space to which scene members attend is that of the family. Many accounts of scenes assume that generational conflict is a crucial aspect of them (Gaines 1990). Whether or not this is the case in other scenes past or present, generational conflict rarely appears in Extreme Metal scenic discourses and practices. Of course, some scene members have become estranged from their families – indeed, one interviewee had been imprisoned for the manslaughter of his abusive father. Nonetheless, such cases appeared very rarely in my interview sample and there is no reason to think that they are more common in the Extreme

Metal scene than elsewhere. More prevalent, in fact, is a ready display of affection for parents and family, even from those who produce transgression. Acknowledgements on album sleeves frequently contain expressions of musicians' gratitude to parents, as in the following example from an album by the US Satanic Death Metal band Pessimist, entitled *Cult of the Initiated* (Lost Disciple: 1997):

> I endlessly and profusely thank 'Pessi-Mom' and the 'Big Guy' for putting up with practice three times a week, for sleeping through countless parties and noisy late-night load-ins, for feeding and providing a crash pad for countless bands and other assorted derelicts...and for always supporting me 100% in everything I do...I love you both

Parents were frequently mentioned by interviewees as sources of support, both financial and emotional, and even as inspirations. During interviews, parents were occasionally present in the house or even in the room where the interview took place. Even those parents who disapproved of Extreme Metal themes offered support, which testifies to the efforts made by scene members not to antagonise them.

The generally harmonious relationships with parents and family may possibly stem from a deep conservatism. Strikingly, some of the most transgressive Black Metallers were unusually close to their parents. Moynihan and Søderlind (1998) recount how Bard 'Faust' Eithun lived in Oslo but committed the murder that led to his imprisonment whilst he was in his home town of Lillehammer on a visit to his mother. They also show that Varg Vikernes' mother is his main supporter and was actually involved in a plot to free him from jail. Many Black and other Extreme Metallers are married and have children. The support for the family within the scene is conceivably part of the ambivalence towards sexual excess and women that I discussed in the previous chapter. Certainly, including the family in extreme individualist and Satanic discourses evidences surprisingly few problems. For example, one Swedish Black Metal musician explained to me that having a family did not contradict his individualism as he aimed to be like an animal and animals have 'hoards' that they protect.

As we saw earlier, the requirements of earning a living or studying can be a source of frustration for some scene members. However, for other scene members the world of work and study can also be a space of personal fulfilment. While many of the more committed scene members sacrifice promising careers to become involved in the scene, other scene members have well-paid and satisfying jobs in a wide variety of industries. Few scene members 'drop out' in the way that is common in the Punk scene, for example. I didn't meet or hear of any scene members

who lived on the streets or in 'squats'. It is perfectly common for scene members to be secure in economic terms. It is also common for scene members to be educated to university level[11].

Most scene members manage the complicated negotiations of everyday life without excessive frustration and often with considerable success. Nevertheless, for many scene members the most effective way to manage the non-scenic elements of everyday life is to engage with the non-scenic world as little as possible. One Swedish scene member told me how he had very few friends, no television and little contact with the non-scenic world, concluding:

> ...I live in my small world and whatever happens outside, it doesn't bother me.
> [S3]

This quotation highlights how the experience of mundanity can frequently become the experience of solipsism. A solipsistic outlook or, at the very least, a capacity to be alone, is an important element of a reflexively managed scenic career. Unlike other scenes, the Extreme Metal scene is not based on collective experiences involving gatherings of large numbers of people. Of course, in many parts of the world, there are frequent gigs and some members do interact within the scene with small groups of friends. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, the scene is so small and so globally diffuse that its institutions have developed in such a way that isolated members can easily participate. Many scene members are content to be involved in the scene by going to gigs and listening to music at friends' houses. But the logic of the scene propels most members towards greater levels of involvement and, when this level of involvement is reached, members encounter institutions that are not locally based. The backbone of all scenic institutions is writing, by letter or e-mail. Bands develop reputations and obtain deals with record companies by writing fanzine interviews, corresponding with other scene members and by trading demos. With few exceptions, bands cannot get a recording deal or sell their recordings solely by playing live. Live performance can help a band to develop musically and to solidify a reputation, but it is not the principal route to a scenic career. Similarly, a non-musician within the scene finds quickly that greater involvement within and enjoyment from the scene cannot come without writing letters, contributing to bulletin boards, writing fanzines and hunting them down.

The mundane, solipsistic practice *par excellence* is collecting. Most scene members have extremely large collections of recordings – I saw a listing of one member's collection that totalled nearly 20,000 items. Members frequently have a staggering knowledge of the scene's

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[11] Some of the assertions in this paragraph will be discussed more fully in chapters six and seven. I also want to stress that I am not making quantitative generalisations here. Rather, I am emphasising that educated, financially secure scene members are absolutely unremarkable to other scene members.

music – generally covering two decades – and many appear to have at least heard something by even the most obscure bands. Indeed, obscurity for its own sake is valued within the scene. Tape traders commonly seek out obscure rehearsal tapes by bands that may never have formally released a recording. Will Straw (1997) has argued that record collecting is strongly associated with particular forms of masculine practice. However, it is a masculine practice that differs markedly from the sort of transgressive displays of male power that are so prominent within the scene:

> Forms of expertise acquired through deliberate labour of a bookish or archival variety are typically so dependent upon bureaucratised institutions of knowledge that they are poor supports for ideals of masculinity as transcendent strength. (Straw 1997: 7)

The pleasure of collecting comes from a desire to order and categorise:

> ...indeed, the most satisfying (albeit under-theorised) explanation of the masculine collector's urge is that it lays a template of symbolic differentiation over a potentially infinite range of object domains. (ibid.: 6)

Collecting involves a sustained commitment to the development and organisation of vast and detailed forms of scenic knowledge. Like other forms of scenic practice, it also involves participation in complex networks, the accessing of which, similarly, demands considerable commitment. My fieldwork produced many examples of the hard work that members put into the scene. In their homes members often have desks and filing systems that appear little different from other kinds of work spaces. One British scene member admitted to having written 300 letters a month at the peak of his involvement in the scene. The accounts of the more experienced members of the scene, who had established bands and other scenic institutions with good reputations, constantly emphasise the need to be focused, goal-oriented and hardworking, as in this account of the origin of a prominent Swedish Death Metal band:

R:      ...I played with these guys [name of musicians] and they were much younger than me just one year but still they were in high school very childish you know, and I had my goals set straight you know and they were like they didn't have any goals for their future they were just like playing around, having fun you know rehearsing but I was like I want to do good songs I was very, erm, I was very, I know what I was going to do you know, and I felt kind of, erm, trapped with guys that were so childish and didn't have any goals for their future.

I:      right

R:      so when I met [name of musician] and he was also very, into, into very much, making er a band coming up with a band that could get a record deal you know, so when I met with him I talked lots with him and you know he we decided, to, to erm, to work

together instead so I split [name of band] up and moved down to [name of city] where he lived.

[S9]

What is striking about this account is the opposition constructed between 'having fun' and having a successful career within the scene. The interviewee uses a discourse of work to describe the development of his band. When he met a more acceptable musical partner they decided 'to work together'. Work dominates reflexively managed scenic careers that are oriented towards mundanity. The accounts of those who manage scenic institutions constantly emphasise the need for and an expectation of 'professional' standards:

> ...my aim was to provide quality music with a fast reliable service which is what I wanted from a distro. If I ordered from someone I wanted stuff to come back straight away and not people sending out alternatives because stuff is not in stock so they just send you anything that they think you will like.
> [UK5]

> Er w we get er when we arrive at the venues we have a very good catering, sandwiches and all sort of stuff, you know, and then we get a hot meal before the show and [sigh] w we have put together a tour rider with all our demands. Sometimes we have to compromise of course but what is, w we want to be treated as professional band and if we're there to do a job, I mean I take it as a job, if we if we're to go on tour it's to do a job.
> [S8]

This discourse of professionalism is not, perhaps, what we might expect from a transgressive music scene. Discourses within other scenes frequently emphasise opposition towards the mundane world of work. For example, a frequently reported element of Punk discourse is its concern about 'selling out' and negative attitudes to those who make a living from music (Fox 1987; Traber 1997). As we shall see, making a living from the scene is problematised less in the Extreme Metal scene than in other scenes. Still, members commonly recognise that it is difficult to be professional within the scene:

> You have to be tough, you have to be really really tough, and I have learnt this over the years now. You must not be timid and you must not take any shit, you know. But as long as you're that, you know, that's fine. I mean I've learnt the tricks now.
> [UK6]

As Alex Kurtagic, who runs the British distribution service ('distro') Supernal Music, comments in the fanzine *Fitted Kitchens of the Living Damned*: 'Think and act like a suit and pretend to be a Metalhead for appearance's sake' (Issue 1, December 1998). A tacit admission in this and other such comments is that the necessity of orienting practice towards the experience of mundanity threatens to dominate the experience of the scene to the exclusion of all else. The scene necessitates professionalism and, to be professional, members have to import patterns of behaviour from outside the scene. The experience of mundanity always threatens to become the experience of work and, consequentially, the experience of boredom. One British scene member describes how he became jaded with the scene and, in response, reduced the level of his commitment:

R:     ...when I started with like [name of magazine] it just got too much because I was writing all these letters, I was working full-time at that time coming home and writing all these letters and I also doing reviews of demos, interviews with bands and er doing selling stuff as well and it just got too much. So basically I told a lot of people that were writing to me that um I would be cutting down my mail at the time. So there was a lot of people who got cut out that were just writing letters that were two lines long and stuff like that. It was totally uninteresting just to write back to them all the time. So a lot of them just got cut out and I just concentrated on the interesting people I wanted to write to.

I:     So a lot of letters before that were just writing almost for the sake of writing?

R:     Yeah a lot of it was, yeah.

I:     Just saying hello?

R:     Yeah, anything new what are you writing 'what have you been listening to recently that's hot off the press' and I just got bored of telling people all the time, you know. [UK5]

For this interviewee, the pleasure of contributing to the scene for the sake of contribution fades as it becomes simply routine. The pleasure that many scene members feel when they start to write letters and receive demos is threatened when letter writing becomes a daily chore. There is a danger that a scenic career may simply become a job like any other. This is particularly the case for those who earn a living from the scene, who may be unable to simply leave:

I:     What do you listen to at home? Do you listen to Death Metal?

R:     Er I don't listen to anything any more because you used to sit here eight hours or ten hours and

I:     You got fed up with it?

R:      Yeah. You know before I started with this thing, I played in four bands in the same time, one after the other just, well I stopped playing because it was too much, so I miss that part of it. Actu actually you shouldn't work with the thing you love

[...]

But I don't know what I would do otherwise so. I don't want to stand in the car factory

[S1]

The scenic logic that attracts people to the scene can ultimately be self-defeating. Members are attracted to the scene by the exciting experience of the music, which leads inexorably to greater scenic involvement. But the dominant logic of mundane scenic involvement can remove members from the pleasures that attracted them in the first place. From being an exciting exception to everyday life, the scene may simply become everyday life itself. While this guarantees stability and security, it also presents the danger of the experiential negatives of everyday life – boredom, oppression, exhaustion etc. Despite this, however, members tend to 'drop out' of the scene very slowly, if at all. Many members have been involved in difficult, often frustrating work for the better part of two decades.

Transgression and the Mundane

We are a long way from the construction of the scene we presented in chapter four. It is hard to reconcile constructions of the scene as mundane with the scene as transgressive. But it is possible to argue that a *telos* of involvement in any scene is the integration of scenic practice into mundane everyday life. The challenges that scene members face in balancing the requirements of the scene and of the non-scenic world may be faced by *anyone* heavily involved in *any* scene that is oriented towards 'leisure-time' activity. One might expect to find that someone heavily involved in, say, English-civil-war battle re-enactments, faced many of the same frustrations and difficulties as Extreme Metal scene members. Of course, the scene is different from other scenes owing to the presence of transgressive practices and discourses, but we cannot assume that the texts, discourses and practices 'produced' by a scene necessarily affect its experiential character. The transgressive sounds, discourses and practices discussed in chapter four are so highly developed that their production has become a mundane, everyday matter. Indeed, using chapter four we could theoretically tell a prospective scene member how to produce transgression.

Notwithstanding the fact that the scene is oriented towards the mundane production of transgression, it does not follow that a distinct experience of transgression is not possible within the scene. The experience of transgression is the experience of something exceptional, removed from mundane, everyday experience. It is understandable, therefore, that transgression is felt

most intensely on entry to the scene. Nonetheless, it is still possible that transgression might be experienced in the midst of the mundane reproduction of the scene. Although the production of transgression may be routinised within the scene, the practice of transgression can never be completely contained. As we saw in the previous chapter, the 'logic' of transgression is to exceed, to burst boundaries and disturb. This is particularly the case regarding what I called practical transgression, in which transgression is produced through the body. Even long-standing scene members involved in the business side of the scene can still be excited by the experience of music through the body:

I:      You said half-jokingly, you sounded a little jaded with the music itself

R:      Nah nah, I I still get fucking off on good records yeah, for sure, yeah. I thought the [name of band that had recently played concert] were that good I needed, I literally felt the physical need to go and bounce round like a [inaudible] you know, and go down the pit, fucking fall off the stage and all that sort of shit. I'm still well up for that, you know.
        [UK7]

This quotation demonstrates perfectly how transgression rejuvenates, giving new life to those jaded by mundane practice. The logic of transgression pulls scene members towards both a mundane involvement in the scene and a transgressive abandonment of everyday life. It has an uncontainable quality, which has brought some scene members into the greatest difficulties with the non-scenic world. As we saw in the previous chapter, the most extreme forms of practical transgression have lead scene members to jail and to the morgue.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this (self-)destructive kind of transgression is seen by some as the apotheosis of the scene's meaning, yet it is nonetheless practised comparatively rarely within the scene. Scene members may be fascinated by the likes of Varg Vikernes, but few have emulated him. The mundane logic of the scene tends to hold its transgressive logic in check. The logics of transgression and mundanity are closely interrelated within the scene.

As we also saw in the previous chapter, a crucial element of transgressive practice within the scene is the fear of the abject and a desire to reinforce boundaries. Transgression carries with it the fear of excess and part of the logic of transgression is the control of that excess. The logic of mundanity does not arise independently of the logic of transgression, but reinforces transgression's self-limiting tendencies. One way in which transgression is limited can be seen through a reconsideration of the 'inarticulacy' shown by some members in interviews. As we saw earlier, the scene offers members only limited tools to discuss their experience of the music. By resisting or restricting talk on certain topics, members maintain control of the threatening

excess of language. At the same time, inhibiting detailed investigation preserves the 'mystery' of the scene and reinforces its transgressive potential. Rather than undermining transgression, mundane scenic practice ensures that transgressive practice is kept within safe limits, while nonetheless retaining its mystery and potency.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how the scene is dominated by two experiential logics, that of transgression and that of mundanity. In chapters seven and eight we will explore in more detail how the complex interrelationship between these two logics provides a crucial dynamic that shapes practice within the scene. In order to prepare for this exploration, the next chapter will examine the scene's mundane practices in more detail, with a consideration of how power and capital are circulated within the scene.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE SCENE AND CAPITAL

## Introduction

In chapter five we looked at the experiences that the scene offers to its members. I argued that members experience Extreme Metal through a complex set of scenic institutions and practices. However, we did not examine in detail the workings of these institutions and practices, nor did we look at how different scene members, in different circumstances, may orient their practices within the scene differently. In short, we did not examine how the scene 'works'. In this chapter I want to attend to the working of power within the scene and its relation to structures of power outside the scene. In doing so, I will draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, in particular, on his concept of 'capital'.

## Bourdieu and Capital

For Marx, capital derives from ownership of the means of production and inequalities in its distribution are the source of all forms of power (Marx 1976). Bourdieu extends the Marxian concept of capital to create a powerful metaphor for any kind of interest or resource. In *Distinction* (1979), Bourdieu shows how capital is not only owned but also embodied and displayed. The possession of capital endows members with power and prestige in society and is struggled over and contested. However, capital is not produced in a uniform way throughout society. Different forms of capital circulate within different 'fields'. Bourdieu defines fields as the arenas within which struggles to accrue and utilise capital occur (1993). Possession of particular sorts of capital within particular sorts of fields allows agents to have prestige and 'symbolic power' (1991) over the trajectory and nature of those fields. Bourdieu assumes that all agents want to accrue capital and argues that this desire leads to fierce struggles over the possession of capital within fields. While we might want to question Bourdieu's conflictual and economistic model of social relations, it is undoubtedly helpful in highlighting questions of power. Conflicts over capital inevitably lead to inequalities in the ownership of capital within fields. These inequalities allow those agents who do possess appropriate forms of capital to define the field and their place within it as they choose. However, the possession of capital in one field does not guarantee possession within others. In fact, within the 'field of cultural production' that Bourdieu analyses, ownership of economic capital is an impediment to ownership of 'cultural' capital[12].

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[12] We will examine Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' more closely in the next chapter.

Bourdieu's method of analysis is threefold. He first positions a field inside the overarching 'field of power' within society as a whole (a concept we will discuss in the next section). Second, he looks at how a field 'refracts' the circulation of capital and the hierarchies of power that originate in the field of power. A field's 'autonomy' is measured by its ability to turn to its own use the hierarchies from the field of power. Third, Bourdieu examines how fields are accessed by individuals possessing particular kinds of 'habitus' (1989). Habitus is a somewhat nebulous concept. It consists in an agent's sense of 'knowing how to go on' – how to behave and what to expect in life. It is both a phenomenological concept, in that it seems to be the product of agents' consciousness and experience, and a realist concept, in that habitus is seen as the product of an agent's position within the field of power. Bourdieu seems to suggest that, at least in part, an agent's reflexive experience of being in the world is produced by 'objective' social structures. For phenomenologists, experience and consciousness are reproduced in a continuous, indexical flow. They are utterly idiosyncratic and indexical. For Bourdieu, experience and consciousness are regular and routine enough to be identified as habitus. Nonetheless, a partial reconciliation between Bourdieu and phenomenology is possible. We can acknowledge the idiosyncrasy and indexicality of individual consciousnesses and experiences, while still recognising that, for some purposes, there are broad similarities between individuals. For many purposes, we do not need to investigate the idiosyncrasy of experience and we can use habitus as a kind of 'black box', within which the mysteries of consciousness and individual uniqueness are contained. Every habitus is unique, containing an agglomeration of experiences and histories, but people nonetheless act in fairly regular ways with regard to social structures.

The advantage of the concept of habitus can be seen in Bourdieu's examination of the behaviour of individuals within fields. The habitus produces 'dispositions', which direct people to act in particular ways. Within fields, capital is gained by knowing how to behave and certain forms of habitus enable people to perform particularly well in particular fields. For example, in the field of education capital is gained within schools and universities by knowing how to talk and act in particular ways (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Middle-class young people are brought up to perform well in this field and thus their habitus is easily convertible into capital. Habitus is also convertible into capital simply by the possession of a particular background. For example, women or black people may be excluded from some fields. Thus, different forms of habitus are convertible into different forms of capital within different sorts of fields in different ways. While all forms of habitus are convertible into capital in some sort of field, certain fields have more power in society as a whole. Habitus is thus convertible into power through the medium of fields.

Using the concepts of habitus and field, Bourdieu attempts to understand both the structural and the subjective dimension of human action. He is emphatic that 'There is nothing mechanical about the relationship between the field and the habitus' and that 'writers and artists endowed with different, even opposing dispositions can coexist, for a time at least, in the same positions' (1993: 65). Habitus helps us to understand that individuals will not necessarily enter those fields in which they may be predisposed to possess capital, nor will they automatically possess capital within them if they choose to do so. Moreover, people whose habitus may not lead them into certain sorts of fields may, nonetheless, be determined enough to enter those fields. The mysterious 'black box' of the habitus reminds us that, although structures and powers constrain us, wilful human idiosyncrasy can never be ignored. Bourdieu's work provides a powerful way to appreciate the objective and subjective dimensions of human experience. It also allows us to appreciate both the micro level of individual experience and the macro level of large-scale social structures.

I will loosely follow Bourdieu's threefold method in this chapter. I will treat the scene as a field, in the sense that Bourdieu uses it, although I will not do so dogmatically. I will first look at the relationship of the scene to the field of power. Then, I will examine how forms of capital from the field of power are refracted within the scene. Finally, I will look at how particular forms of habitus are convertible into capital within the scene.

## The Scene and Fields of Power

The concept of the field of power is one of the less transparent aspects of Bourdieu's theory. At times, the field of power is treated as *the* predominant field, producing power that is refracted in all other fields. However, elsewhere the field of power is treated as simply an effect of the 'field of class relations'. The use of field to describe the major structuring principles of power and capital is also complicated by the fact that, in some points in Bourdieu's work, field implies some sense of self-conscious space within which culture is reproduced. The fields of power and of class relations do not display such self-conscious qualities. Bourdieu's use of the field of power betrays his Marxian sympathies, by implying that the pre-eminent structuring principle of society is that of class relations. Of course, it is legitimate to emphasise that society is organised according to large-scale power structures, although one would at least have to add gender and ethnicity to class. However, privileging one particular field or one particular structure of power is ultimately a reductive method, which subverts Bourdieu's attempts to give full consideration to the idiosyncrasies of fields of individual habitus. Following Foucault (1980), I would argue that capital and the power that derives from it should be treated as polymorphous and multifaceted, rather than as originating in one pre-eminent structure. Having said that, some fields are more effective than others in influencing other fields. Moreover, some fields are more

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populous and globally extensive than others. Therefore, it is more appropriate to refer to 'fields of power' that have a particular efficacy in influencing the trajectory of other fields, than to isolate one pre-eminent field of power. Such fields of power include the nation state, certain global industries and certain political groups.

How do we incorporate field into a scenic conceptual framework? In chapters one to three I argued that everything occurs within scene. However, it is more helpful in *this* context to restrict the use of scene to musical and youth-cultural spaces other than the Extreme Metal scene and to refer to those particularly important spaces within which power and capital are reproduced as fields of power. We are interested not only in the relationship of the Extreme Metal scene to fields of power, but also to other scenes.

In order to consider the relationship of the Extreme Metal scene to fields of power and to other scenes, we need first to look at how the 1980s Heavy Metal scene, from which the Extreme Metal scene developed, related to other scenes and fields of power. The 1980s Heavy Metal scene was noteworthy for the sustained attention it attracted from a nexus of fields of power, including state and religious organisations. This was particularly the case in the USA, where Heavy Metal was a *bête noire* for the 'religious right' (Miller 1988; Walser 1993; Weinstein 2000). A classic 'moral panic' (Cohen 1987) developed around Heavy Metal, stimulated by powerful political groups that saw it as a dangerous influence on the nation's youth. The Parents' Musical Resource Center (PMRC), founded in the early 1980s sought to provide 'information' about the dangers posed to young people by certain forms of music (Chastagner 1999). Considered foremost among these dangerous musics were Rap and Heavy Metal. In 1985 the PMRC's influence on the political process culminated in a series of senate hearings, to which a number of Heavy Metal musicians were called to give evidence. This inquiry resulted in the music industry being pressurised into putting labels on records, warning of 'offensive' lyrical content.

The strongest charge made against Heavy Metal was that it caused murder and suicide. In a number of US murder trials, Heavy Metal was cited as the 'cause' and, on occasion, being under the influence of Heavy Metal was accepted as a 'diminished-responsibility' defence in criminal trials (Richardson 1991). Christian groups claimed that subliminal messages and 'backwards messages' on Heavy Metal recordings could lead impressionable young people to murder and suicide. The most notorious case occurred in 1990, when the band Judas Priest were sued for causing the suicide of two young men from Reno, Nevada, through the placing of backwards messages on their 1978 album *Stained Class*. The case collapsed when evidence showed that the supposed backwards messages were produced accidentally and that the young men in question had histories of disturbed behaviour that preceded their involvement in Heavy Metal.

Although Heavy Metal was criticised by right-wing and Christian groups throughout the world, these attacks were much less significant and received far less publicity than in the USA, where Heavy Metal was clearly a major focus of moral panic in the 1980s.

Attacks on Heavy Metal did not come only from right-wing groups with links to powerful authorities. Heavy Metal was also the focus of considerable anxiety in more liberal quarters. Jeffrey Arnett's book *Metalheads* (1995) was written in response to liberal worries about Heavy Metal. Whereas right-wing groups saw Heavy Metal music as inherently negative and predatory, Arnett suggested that Heavy Metal was a symptom of a disturbing alienation among US youth. While Arnett's conclusions do not lead him to recommend censorship, his work still represents a view held widely by both left- and right-wing observers – that Heavy Metal cannot in and of itself be worthwhile. Robert Walser (1993) shows how leftist critics have ridiculed Heavy Metal as sexist, inarticulate and infantile. For example, Richard Smith (1995) sees Heavy Metal as an utterly ludicrous and totally unreflexive product of adolescent insecurity about masculinity.

Right wing groups wielded the full force of various fields of power, including the State, religious organisations and the media, in their attacks on Heavy Metal. The attacks from leftist critics and from critics within the music press were slightly different. Such 'gatekeepers' wield considerable 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1979), which is transferable within a number of music scenes and, indeed, the wider scene of youth culture. The result was that Heavy Metal became a scene that possessed virtually no cultural capital that was transferable to other scenes. However, the Heavy Metal scene was not defenceless in these cultural battles. Its popularity ensured that the music industry was generally supportive – providing Judas Priest with legal representation, for example. Despite the scene's low cultural capital, the industry also ensured that Heavy Metal music was widely played on radio and television and that there was a constant stream of new product.

Extreme Metal inherited many of Heavy Metal's problems. Although, in many respects, Extreme Metal represents a departure from the scene that spawned it, those outside the scene rarely make the distinction. Consequently, Heavy Metal's low cultural capital and tendency to be attacked by powerful groups have been transferred to the Extreme Metal scene. Martin Cloonan (1996) has recounted some attempts to censor Death Metal in the United Kingdom. In 1991 Nottingham's Earache records had stock seized by police in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to prosecute the label for obscenity. In the same year customs' officials tried unsuccessfully to prevent Oxford's Plastic Head Distribution from importing the album *Like an Ever Flowing Stream* (Nuclear Blast: 1991) by the Swedish band Dismember. They argued that the lyrics of the song 'Skin Her Alive' would incite the listener to violence. Isolated incidents of

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this kind have occurred throughout the world, although none have been given a high profile by the media. For example, the US band Cannibal Corpse had to produce 'censored' versions of their cover art in order for their albums to be stocked in various countries.

The Christian right has rarely attacked Extreme Metal and such attempts have been isolated and erratic. For example, one Christian schoolteacher in Germany made a concerted attempt to ban Cannibal Corpse from playing certain venues during their 1995 tour. Although she had some success, since then the band has toured Germany without problems. On the whole, attacks on Extreme Metal have been woefully and sometimes ludicrously ill informed. In 1996, in a speech that received some media coverage, US presidential candidate Bob Dole attacked Cannibal Corpse as part of a general attack on the media. The attack rebounded when Dole admitted he had never heard the band. In 1999 presidential candidate Gary Bauer attacked a number of 'anti-Catholic' artists, including 'the homosexual music group Rotting Christ'. Rotting Christ is a Greek Black Metal band with no known connections to homosexuality.

Global differences in the treatment of Extreme Metal abound. As Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind show (1998), when the events surrounding the mid-1990s Norwegian scene came to light, there was considerable coverage in that country's press. The Norwegian police also made a concerted attempt to investigate the scene. Yet these were at least responses to actual crimes and there was no concerted and hysterical attempt to 'ban' or restrict the music. Many of those imprisoned in Norway have since been released and made music undisturbed by state or media surveillance. In countries more marginal to the global scene, the situation has sometimes been more serious. A number of Israeli scene members complained of police investigations and surveillance following articles accusing Black Metallers of being Nazis and of sacrificing animals. The most serious incident regarding Extreme Metal occurred in Egypt in 1997. A large group of upper-class Egyptian young people were arrested under blasphemy laws and accused of devil worship after Extreme and Heavy Metal recordings were found in their homes. Most were released fairly quickly, but potentially they faced heavy sentences. The arrests were the product of a cultural war between Islamic hardliners and the more Westernised sectors of Egyptian society (di Giovanni 1997). We may assume that Extreme Metal is most imperilled in countries where liberal democracy is weak and/or there is a high degree of cultural conflict.

In short, then, Extreme Metal has been the focus of attacks from fields of power, but in most cases these attacks have been isolated and unsystematic. Other than in Egypt, Extreme Metal has not been the focus of a sustained campaign. We could say more accurately then that individuals and institutions from within fields of power have attempted to utilise those fields to mount attacks, but the full institutional force of those fields has not been successfully mobilised.

As we saw, Heavy Metal possessed a low degree of cultural capital and was attacked and ridiculed by leftist music critics. Extreme Metal's cultural capital is a little higher than that of Heavy Metal. Some forms of Extreme Metal have been praised by music critics. For example, the late-1980s wave of British Grindcore bands received considerable coverage in the British music press, culminating in a *New Musical Express* cover story on the band Napalm Death. The British DJ John Peel has played Grindcore and some Death Metal on his show on BBC *Radio 1*, a mainstream, publicly funded station. In some countries where Extreme Metal is particularly popular, some forms of Extreme Metal have almost become part of the mainstream. In Scandinavia, for example, a number of Extreme Metal bands, such as Sweden's Dark Tranquillity have been nominated for domestic record-industry awards.

Still, much of the writing on Extreme Metal, particularly within the British music press, has treated it as an amusing curiosity. For example, an article on Grindcore in *Q* magazine (March 1989) playfully contrasted Grindcore's extreme music and the musicians' quiet home lives (Deevoy 1989). Conversely, some horrified articles amplifying the neo-fascist elements of Black Metal have also appeared (e.g. Steinke 1996; Wells 1998). The overall effect of music-press attitudes, whether benignly amused or censorious, has been to deny the Extreme Metal scene legitimacy and a place in the canons created by critics.

By comparison with Heavy Metal, Extreme Metal has faced far fewer attacks from fields of power. The Extreme Metal scene thus has a measure of 'protection' from flows of capital and power, although protection is never total and varies according to the protection from fields of power that local scenes have. One reason for this protection is that the Extreme Metal scene is far smaller and far more obscure than Heavy Metal was in the 1980s. The popularity of Heavy Metal, combined with its apparent obscenity, made it a tempting target for those who wished to control youth culture as a whole. Heavy Metal also became a convenient 'other' against which other music scenes could define themselves and claim cultural capital in the process. In contrast, there is little cultural or political capital to be gained from attacking or defining oneself against a scene as apparently marginal as the Extreme Metal scene.

The Extreme Metal scene's obscurity is of course not necessarily a defence against moral panic and attacks from fields of power. It does, however, reduce their likelihood. Inevitably, on occasion the scene is 'discovered' and its transgressive nature exposed. But, despite the fact that the scene is far more transgressive than Heavy Metal, isolated campaigns against Extreme Metal have not developed into full-blown moral panics. In processes of moral panic, 'signification spirals' (Thompson 1998) are set in motion, in which marginal and isolated phenomena become amplified by a variety of institutions to become the source of great controversy. Somehow, this

process is interrupted within the Extreme Metal scene. In a valuable article, Angela McRobbie and Sarah Thornton (1995) have argued that Stanley Cohen's model of moral panic (1987) – in which monolithic forces of power attack a defenceless subculture – needs urgently to be updated. Compared to, say, the 1960s and 1970s, power now operates more diffusely, giving diffuse opportunities for resistance. Subculture members have learned from other subcultures' experience of moral panic and reflexively tailor their practices accordingly. For example, through subcultural media subcultures use the threat of moral panic to gain cultural capital and to reinforce subcultural identity. Indeed, subcultures may actively provoke moral panic. Thornton (1995) has shown how British dance-music subculture was constituted through a reflexively produced reaction to processes of moral panic.

If we assume that the Extreme Metal scene is reflexively produced, then the scene's obscurity can be seen as the result of reflexive practices, oriented to ensure that obscurity is maintained. Obscurity ensures a kind of 'safety' from the processes of moral panic that so bedevilled Heavy Metal. However, obscurity also places limits on the scene. Failure to provoke moral panic removes the possibilities of some of the pleasures that the Heavy Metal scene provided. As Deena Weinstein (2000) shows, in the 1980s Heavy Metal fans were 'proud pariahs' who valorised their marginality. This pleasure in being demonised is rarely possible within the Extreme Metal scene. Furthermore, while obscurity provides protection from direct assaults on the scene, it does not necessarily provide protection from power and capital *per se*. Forms of capital circulate within the Extreme Metal scene, giving rise to hierarchies of power. This is the subject of the next section.

## The Workings of the Scene

Bourdieu argues that the possession of capital within a field gives members power within it. Power is conceived of as the ability to influence the direction of a field. 'Success' within the scene is thus the power to influence members by having one's words or music circulated widely, or through being able to circulate the music and discourses of others. The capital required to achieve success in the scene can take on a variety of forms. In the next chapter we will look at how 'cultural capital' produces prestige within the scene. In this section we will look at the more concrete forms of capital that provide 'resources' for members of the scene. Participation in the scene is easier if members can draw on such resources as money, time and the support of family, friends and other social institutions. The apportioning of such resources derives from fields of power. In this section we will examine how such resources are apportioned and how capital derives from them. In the next section we will look more fully at how habitus affects the apportioning of capital.

Resources and capital are circulated through the institutions of the scene. The scene's principal institutions are described below:

1) Writing and Trading

The postal system provided the medium through which the scene was built in the early 1980s, when members and fans of early Extreme Metal bands began to contact one another by letter. The early scene grew out of the global Punk scene, which developed at the end of the 1970s, facilitated by fanzines such as *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*. Such fanzines were set up with a global focus and contained addresses of scene members throughout the world and adverts from people wanting to correspond. Through much of the 1980s the institutions of the Extreme Metal scene overlapped with those of the Punk scene. As the scene developed in that decade, the small global network of correspondents grew into a more established scene, with letter writing as its principal institution. Metal magazines such as *Kerrang!* and *Metal Hammer* published pen-pal adverts. Through such magazines, fans of mainstream Heavy Metal began to discover the nascent Extreme Metal scene. As more and more Extreme Metal bands began to release recordings, so fans began to write to those bands. Bands also corresponded with fans and introduced them to other correspondents in the scene.

This world-wide network of correspondents was tied into networks of trading. For much of the 1980s there were very few Extreme Metal records and labels. Demo tapes, live tapes and rehearsal tapes were the predominant mode of transmission for Extreme Metal music. They were either traded for other tapes, or bands sold them directly at cost price. In the late 1980s some tapes would sell up to 2,000 copies, with tape trading resulting in an even wider circulation. Letter writers traded demo tapes, rehearsal tapes and live tapes with other traders. Tape trading and letter writing were most prevalent in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In that period the scene contained thousands of correspondents throughout the world.

Since correspondence and trading require relatively few resources drawn from fields of power, this institution facilitated an egalitarian scene. For example, International Reply Coupons are generally included in letters between correspondents to ensure that poorer correspondents can reply. Having said this, in some developing countries there are severe problems with the postal system. When ordering demo tapes, scene members generally enclose cash. While sending cash in the mail is less problematic in developed countries, some scene members refuse to order from, or send packages to, certain countries, such as Russia, where mail is frequently opened. By the late 1990s e-mail was rapidly becoming the main scenic method of communication. But e-mail does not necessarily make for a more egalitarian scene, even if it costs nothing to send

individual e-mail messages. E-mail is less available to scene members with small amounts of money and remains, for the moment, less accessible to people in developing countries.

Correspondence, through whatever medium, remains a widespread scenic activity, but has diminished in importance. Whereas, at one time, members needed to write to have any kind of sustained contact with the scene, in the 1990s outlets for Extreme Metal have proliferated, making the scene easier to access. Correspondence is still necessary for the more involved scene members, but its utilitarian function is no longer paramount. It is an activity that is pleasurable, with a high degree of protection from problems of capital. Letters continue to be sent, even when not strictly necessary. It is common, for example, when ordering a fanzine or demo tape, to receive a friendly letter in response inviting correspondence.

## 2) Networks of Distribution

The formalisation and accumulation of capital within the scene began in the 1980s, when some traders set up what became known as 'distros', in order to distribute demos, fanzines and, later, records and CDs. Initially, distros were little more than photocopied letters advertising a handful of items for sale at cost price or possibly to be traded for similar items. In the 1990s some of these distros developed into highly profitable firms. As the scene developed, more and more labels were formed, resulting in increasing numbers of 'professional' recordings being made available for sale. Since, as we will see, many labels are extremely small and obscure, and their products are not distributed in shops, distros became the main point of sale for Extreme Metal recordings.

Record shops began to sell Extreme Metal at the same time as the larger distros developed. Until the early 1990s Extreme Metal was only available in a few small, 'independent' record shops, such as Shades in London and Dolores in Gothenburg. The larger distros that developed in the 1990s, including House of Kicks in Sweden and Plastic Head Distribution in the UK, developed sophisticated networks for the distribution of Extreme Metal to record shops. Large chains, such as Tower Records, now stock a wide variety of Extreme Metal, including some very obscure labels. However, the mark-up on sales through some record shops is considerable. For example, in the UK CDs are commonly priced at £15 by chain stores and at £12 by distros and independent record shops. Extreme Metal has become widely available through outlets that are much easier to access than the tape-trading networks of the 1980s. In the process, Extreme Metal has made use of capitalist processes, by which transferable forms of capital are accumulated.

However, small distros, which are less dependent on the accumulation of capital, still exist. Given the quantity of recordings within the scene, members still need specialised distros that reduce choice and make obscure recordings more accessible. For example, three or four times a year the UK distro Black Tears produces a catalogue of 100–200 obscure Doom Metal recordings, each of which is carefully described. Distros such as Black Tears are not simply clearing houses for recordings, but institutions guided by a particular aesthetic. The catalogues of distros like Black Tears are close to being fanzines, with the added advantage that they make purchase of recommended recordings easy. Nonetheless, even when distros are unprofitable, they use money as their main medium of exchange and they have eclipsed trading, an institution involving no transferable capital accumulation, as the main source of Extreme Metal.

3) Record Companies

In the 1980s most Extreme Metal recordings were circulated through traded demo tapes. The few Extreme Metal records released in the early to mid-1980s tended to be released on larger labels and sold large quantities. There was a substantial gulf between the small number of visible Extreme Metal bands, such as Slayer and Venom, and the large number of 'underground' bands. By the end of the 1980s this situation began to change. A number of Punk labels, such as Earache in the UK and No Fashion in Sweden, began to release Extreme Metal recordings and some Heavy Metal labels, such as Germany's Nuclear Blast, also began to diversify into Extreme Metal. At the end of the 1980s we find a sudden proliferation of Extreme Metal recordings and labels, as bands that had become established through tape trading began to release albums. At the same time, scene members began to finance Extreme Metal recordings and issue them on small, grass-roots labels. In addition, some bands began to release records and, later, CDs on their own labels.

The number of record companies within the scene grew exponentially in the 1990s. The largest, such as Nuclear Blast, now sell 100,000–200,000 copies of their top-selling albums and have sub-labels and divisions based in other countries. Hundreds of small- and medium-size companies sell a few hundred copies of each release. A very small number of Extreme Metal bands, such as Slayer (signed to American Recordings, a division of BMG), are signed to major labels. However, to my knowledge, no label specialising in Extreme Metal currently has any kind of relationship with a major label.

In the 1990s the proliferation of labels and of CDs financed by bands eroded the institutions of demo tapes and trading. Formerly, the release of a CD or record was a guarantee that a band had spent several years developing their sound through releasing demo tapes and trading them. Today, CDs may be released by very inexperienced bands. The proliferation of labels and CDs

has had consequences for the circulation of capital within the scene. Before the early 1990s bands entered networks of capital circulation and accumulation very gradually, generally spending a considerable part of their early career trading their demos and building up a reputation. For example, the Swedish Death Metal band Entombed issued three demo tapes (two of which appeared under their former name, Nihilist) before the release of their debut album, *Left Hand Path* (Earache: 1990), which quickly sold around 100,000 copies. Now, with the erosion of tape trading and bands selling their recordings from an early stage, scenic activity involves an earlier and greater engagement with capital. Bands and labels have adopted business practices drawn from the wider music industry. Larger labels generally behave like large 'independent' labels in any other scene. Bands sign a contract for one or a number of albums and are either paid an advance, from which recording costs must be met, or have their recording costs paid for them, in return for a lower royalty rate.

Nevertheless, despite the proliferation of record companies within the scene, less capital-dependent practices of exchange persist. The working methods of some smaller labels may resemble those of larger labels, but many others still operate very informal practices. In their relationships with bands, the smallest labels generally have no standard procedure but function through a plethora of individually negotiated agreements. Some of the smallest labels pay no royalties, providing bands with a given number of CDs to sell or trade. For example, the Israeli bands on the *Israheller* compilation (Heller Productions: 1997) each paid their own recording costs and in return received 50 copies of the CD. Moreover, the close relationships between labels and distros mean that even the larger labels often use practices of trading, distributing their product through exchange deals with other labels and distros world-wide. A typical example is found in Sweden, where the House of Kicks distro, which owns the Black Metal label No Fashion among others, ships No Fashion CDs to distros in other countries in exchange for CDs released by labels associated with those distros. Many, perhaps most, labels are involved in distribution to some degree, with the result that smaller labels/distros can operate virtually a cashless system, in which the only cash income comes from direct mail-order sales through their distro. For example, Israel's Raven Music has released a number of CDs subsidised by the label's attached distro. The distro then trades Raven Music CDs for releases by bands on other labels, to be sold by mail order. In this way, even releases by bands on small labels can be widely circulated, without the need for a substantial financial commitment. Thus, although the scene has become more formalised and 'business-like', informal trading procedures still persist, reducing the possibilities for capital accumulation.

The venerable scenic practice of correspondence also persists as a primary means by which bands are signed to labels. Owing to the global diffuseness of the scene and the relative rarity of live performances, which we will discuss later in this chapter, most bands are signed to labels

without ever meeting the label staff. Even the largest Extreme Metal labels generally sign bands on the basis of a promising demo tape. Crucially, however, such is the volume of demo tapes that most labels receive, bands are more likely to be signed if they have made some kind of 'name' for themselves in the scene. Demo bands that have traded tapes and corresponded with other scene members may become known to label managers or to those who have influence on those managers. For example, the highly successful US Death Metal band Morbid Angel were signed in 1989 by the prominent UK label Earache on the basis of the personal recommendations of members of a number of bands already associated with the label. Those band members had heard of Morbid Angel through tape trading and correspondence with members of the US band.

## 4) Bands and Musicians

The structures of the bands in which Extreme Metal musicians play vary greatly. Some resemble the traditional stereotype of the rock band – a 'gang' of close male friends playing together for years. More commonly, Extreme Metal bands are characterised by a great fluidity of personnel, with members continually dropping in and out. In contrast to H Stith Benett's findings (1980), that the identity of rock musician is only possible inside a rock group, the identity of the Extreme Metal musician does not necessarily have to involve being in a group. Bands frequently have 'core' personnel, often a pair of songwriters, around whom other members revolve. The reasons why members leave vary. Occasionally, it is the result of personality clashes or musical disagreements. More commonly, it is simply that Extreme Metal musicians tend to orient their practice towards a wider scene than towards particular bands. This is particularly the case in locations with strong local scenes. Scandinavian scenes, for example, are notorious for the constantly revolving line-ups of their constituent bands. Scandinavian musicians are often associated with three or four bands simultaneously. For example, the Swedish guitarist Michael Aamodt used to play in the Death Metal bands Carcass and Carnage. He now plays in the Death Metal band Arch Enemy and the psychedelic Doom Metal band Spiritual Beggars. He has also played as a 'session' member on an album by the Swedish Doom Metal band Candelmass and has collaborated with his brother on an album by the one-off project band Armageddon. Within the scene there is a strong culture of international collaboration (for example, Aamodt's previous band, Carcass, were based in the UK). There are also a large number of one-person 'bands', with one songwriter/musician playing all instruments or drafting in session members according to need. Most famously, Varg Vikernes's band Burzum consisted only of himself.

In my interviews with musicians I found no common songwriting pattern. Some bands are dominated by one songwriter, who determines exactly what each member should play – Mike

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Aamodt writes all the music for Arch Enemy, for example. Other bands write collaboratively. Extreme Metal music is very difficult to improvise, owing to its dense sound and fast pace. Songs are generally built around successions of riffs, generally worked out before rehearsal. Bands collaborate on arranging songs, concentrating on the order and setting of riffs. Extreme Metal thus places certain limits on the nature of musical collaboration.

Thus, the nature of bands within the scene is fluid, with the informality of the 1980s scene preserved by the constant processes of collaboration and rotation. However, in other respects, bands have been implicated in highly routinised practices, in which capital is implicated. Bands have always invested large sums of money in high quality equipment and almost always hire rehearsal rooms rather than practising in bedrooms or garages. In Sweden, where studios are subsidised, bands often rent a rehearsal space on a permanent basis, or share it with another band. At all levels, bands generally rehearse two or three times a week. They also invest in expensive recordings. Demo tapes are often indistinguishable from 'proper' releases in terms of sound quality, and this was true even in the 1980s. Bands generally pay for as much time as possible in the most expensive studio they can afford. Although the scene contains an aesthetic of fast and 'dirty' production, particularly within Black Metal, this aesthetic is fairly marginal. Extreme Metal is a difficult music to record and, as a result, certain studios and producers specialise in Extreme Metal production. Sunlight Studios in Stockholm, Studio Fredman in Gothenburg and Morrissound Studios in Tampa are famous throughout the global scene and bands travel from around the world to record there.

Despite the highly developed nature of band practices, musicians should not be seen as a separate class within the scene. Just as distros and record labels tend to merge, so musicians are frequently involved in numerous other scenic activities. For example, Yishai Swaerts of Israel plays in the Death Metal band Betrayer, runs the label/distro Raven Music and also promotes Extreme Metal gigs in Israel. Nonetheless, the increased formality and accumulation of capital within the scene in the 1990s has produced tension in the relationships between bands and other scenic institutions. When labels take over promotion and distribution from the bands themselves, disputes may arise over how effectively the label provides those services. Also, as elsewhere in the music industry, bands can be forced into inactivity owing to disputes with record companies. Such disputes can be all the more difficult when bands are signed to labels outside their home country, since the band may never have met the staff of their record company. Litigation may not be a realistic solution to disputes. For example, one prominent Israeli band claimed that their foreign-based label continued to sell their CDs after telling the band that the title had sold out. The band attempted to litigate during the resulting dispute over royalties, but was ultimately defeated owing to the high costs and distances involved. The dispute prevented the band from releasing another CD for a number of years. The entry of

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capital into the scene thus increases the scope for conflict within the scene and raises the financial stakes of unsuccessful scenic relationships.

Partly as a response to these issues, some bands have employed managers. Some 'managers' are simply informal representatives of demo bands, who assist in writing letters and circulating tapes to distros and labels. Some distros and labels also manage bands in a more formal way. For example, the UK distro/mail-order outlet Copro manages a number of underground bands through their JMG agency. A few larger management companies, with a large range of non-Metal acts, have also signed Extreme Metal bands. Management companies can be invaluable in organising tours with other bands, enabling bands to bypass labels that may be unwilling or unable to support bands on tour. Nonetheless, management companies distance bands from the means of scenic production and increase the importance of financial capital within the scene.

Despite the increased amounts of capital circulating within the scene, most bands are unable to make a living from their music. The number of recordings that bands need to sell to make a living varies. However, my informants generally agreed that bands needed to sell 60,000–100,000 CDs to make a living and relatively few bands are able to achieve this. Most band members are amateurs who have other jobs or survive through social security or student grants.

5) Gigs and Gig Promotion

The Extreme Metal scene has never been based around live music-making. The scene has always been globally dispersed, with barely enough scene members living in any particular location to make it worthwhile to stage gigs. Even in locations with strong local scenes, there are not necessarily many gigs. In Gothenburg, for example, legendary throughout the scene for its productiveness, Extreme Metal gigs are infrequent and generally attended by less than 200 people. However, in some locations there are regular Extreme Metal clubs. In London, a pub called the Red Eye, with a capacity of 100–200, hosts an Extreme Metal club every Sunday. Different promoters take turns to book the bands for a particular Sunday and there are 50–100 people who attend regularly, most of whom know each other very well. The Red Eye provides a nurturing environment for bands to hone their skills by playing live and, in many ways, represents the epitome of the strong local scene. However, it is striking how few bands from this scene have forged stable careers within the global or, indeed, the UK scene. Most bands that play regularly at the venue are not signed to labels. Moreover, this scene is largely unknown within the global scene and many prominent UK scene members actively disparage the Red Eye and the bands that play there, arguing that the venue is a parochial 'dead end' for bands. A strong local scene does not guarantee access to the global scene. Nonetheless, for many local

scene members, involvement in a scene such as that based around the Red Eye is fulfilling in its own right.

The fact that local live performances are not a condition of success within the scene has meant that many bands have achieved success without ever playing live (e.g. Burzum). But most bands, as soon as they have developed some kind of reputation in the global scene, do yearn to play live. More successful bands often undertake long tours and try to play live as often as they can. Touring is very difficult within the scene. Few bands can guarantee large audiences in a variety of locations, since most Extreme Metal bands sell very few CDs. Most bands rely on record companies to support them in touring, but labels often have very limited resources available. Most tours are 'package' tours, with three or four bands collaborating to maximise their audience. Touring is generally only possible in areas where there are sizeable concentrations of scene members in close proximity, such as in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Central Europe. Many tours do not visit Scandinavia or the UK, owing to the extra travel expenses involved. In areas marginal to the scene, the scarcity of live performances may ensure relatively large audiences. In Israel, for example, bands may attract crowds of up to 1,000 – more or less the size of the entire domestic scene.

6) Magazines, Fanzines and Promotion

In the 1980s coverage of the most popular Extreme Metal bands in mainstream Metal magazines, such as *Metal Hammer* and *Kerrang!*, brought the scene to the attention of many potential members. However, these publications did not (and still do not) deal in detail with the Extreme Metal scene. Moreover, in most countries radio and television have only covered Extreme Metal in a very limited way. Fanzines developed to compensate for this lack of coverage and are still a crucial institution of the scene. As a medium of communication, fanzines produce a kind of intimacy between reader and writer (Duncombe 1997), which facilitates the formation of the scene as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). Most fanzines have circulations of less than 1,000 and often last no longer than three or four issues. They involve a considerable amount of work, although desk-top publishing has eased this burden somewhat and, consequently, fanzines are now produced more regularly and have more pages. Most fanzines are written in English and are circulated world-wide, but a considerable number are written in local languages such as Swedish. Fanzines generally have a global focus, although some do concentrate on local scenes. Fanzines may also concentrate on particular Extreme Metal sub-genres. Most fanzines consist of reviews and interviews. The interviews have always been conducted largely through postal questionnaires, making production cheaper and allowing for a global focus. Fanzines are also generally sold at little more than cost price.

Although the practices of fanzine production have remained fairly consistent, there have been certain changes since the 1980s. Earlier fanzines were primarily concerned with mapping the scene. On the whole, they were uncritically supportive of bands, with interviews dealing with little other than biographical and practical details. They encouraged the growing production of Extreme Metal and provided information on access points to other scenic institutions. In the 1990s fanzines began to develop more complex critical languages and to take on 'gatekeeping' functions. Some became dystopian voices of criticism of the scene. Some prominent fanzines, including *Isten* (Finland) and *Nordic Vision* (Norway), are highly sarcastic in tone and are as likely to criticise bands as they are to encourage them. In this way, fanzines have come to resemble more closely the wider music press (Toynbee 1993).

The increasing number of high-circulation fanzines that resemble fully fledged magazines, such as the USA's *Grimoire Of Exalted Deeds*, has also served to facilitate the entry of capital into the scene in the 1990s. In countries where Extreme Metal is more established, some magazines dealing with Extreme Metal have been published by large publishing companies – for example, *Aardschock* of the Netherlands. The UK's *Terrorizer* also has a large global circulation. Magazines differ from fanzines in that they use telephone or face-to-face interviews, have paid staff and are available from a wide selection of outlets. As with the growth of large distros, this has made it easier for members to access the scene. This growth has also provided opportunities for capital to be accumulated. Their wide circulation allows magazines to have considerable influence over the musical content of the scene and in determining which bands become successful. Whereas fanzines allow for a profusion of opinions, magazines tend to concentrate critical power.

The importance of magazines has obliged labels and bands to utilise increasingly complex promotional strategies. In the 1980s bands became known through letter writing, tape trading and interviews with small fanzines. While these practices remain important, now even the smallest record labels issue press releases and promotional photographs. In addition, CD releases are accompanied by huge 'mail shots' of CDs to fanzines, magazines and the few radio stations that play Extreme Metal.

The profusion of releases has also forced labels to be ever more proactive in their promotional strategies. Some labels have set up promotional offices and employed publicity companies to ensure that releases are promoted effectively in as many countries as possible. Advertisements are increasingly common, even in low-circulation fanzines. Record companies have also begun to release low-price compilation 'samplers', in order to publicise their bands. Indeed, some compilations are given away free with fanzines. Capital ownership has become increasingly important in the promotion of bands. Larger labels can consolidate their position through their

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greater resources and smaller labels have to work increasingly hard to get noticed. Nonetheless, the large number of small fanzines ensures that it is still possible for bands to become known through word-of-mouth reputation.

7) The Internet[13]

Unsurprisingly, scene members began to take advantage of the Internet as it developed in the 1990s. The Internet contains a plurality of bulletin boards (e.g. www.terrorizer.com) and usenet groups (e.g. alt.music.black.metal). There are also many official band websites (e.g. www.emperorhorde.com, devoted to Emperor), unofficial band websites (e.g. www.slaytanic.com, devoted to Slayer), sites devoted to particular Extreme Metal genres (e.g. www.blackmetal.com) and sites to devoted to particular local and national scenes (e.g. 'The Northern Metal Web', devoted to bands from northern England – www.shipley.ac.uk/north). Scene members have also created 'webzines' as an online equivalent to fanzines (e.g. *Necrosis* webzine – www.necrosismag.com). In order to catalogue the vast amount of information available, many gateway sites have been created (e.g. 'The Black Death Metal Bands Search Engine', www.soliton.fuw.edu.pl/cgi-bin/bdmbse).

Existing scenic institutions have made use of the Internet to varying degrees. Some large distros/mail-order outlets have created online 'stores' (e.g. Plastic Head Distribution – www.plastichead.com), while some small distros send out their lists by e-mail rather than letter and do not use the web at all (e.g. Black Tears). All but the smallest record companies now have websites. Some of these only give limited promotional information on their bands (e.g. France's Osmose records – www.netbeat.com/osmose). Other labels, particularly larger labels, have complex sites comprising online stores, online interviews and bulletin boards (e.g. the UK branch of Roadrunner records – www.roadrunnerrecords.co.uk).

In recent years the downloading of music from the Internet has become increasingly popular. Sites such as www.napster.com contain MP3 recordings from Extreme Metal bands and downloads are also traded through usenet groups and bulletin boards. Bands without record contracts often make sound files available on their websites. Some Extreme Metal labels are responding to the rapid development of MP3 by selling downloads themselves. Earache records, for example, have made most of their catalogue available for downloading through www.Emusic.com. Other labels allow sample tracks from releases to be downloaded from their sites (e.g. the US label Relapse – www.relapse.com).

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[13] The majority of the websites referenced in this section were accessed in summer 1999.

It is tempting to suggest that the Internet threatens to make existing scenic institutions obsolete. Certainly, the Internet appears to offer many of the 'functions' of existing scenic institutions. E-mail appears to 'replace' letter writing, webzines replace fanzines, online stores replace distros/mail-order outlets, band websites with free downloads replace demos, and online MP3 trading replaces tape trading. The Internet also offers new forms of sociality, such as usenet groups and bulletin boards, which might be seen to strengthen the construction of community within the scene. Furthermore, the Internet can also be said to perform certain functions in a more equitable and efficient manner than existing scenic institutions. Bulletin boards and usenet groups may make participation in scenic discourse easier for those who are currently marginal to the scene, such as women. MP3 sound files may undermine the power of labels, making it easier for scene members to acquire music and for new bands to make their music widely available.

However, at this stage it is difficult to predict how the Internet will affect the Extreme Metal scene. The Internet has certainly created new possibilities for global communication among popular-music fans, particularly through usenet groups and bulletin boards (Mitchell 1997). Certainly, the Internet has the potential to create new forms of community, new challenges to capitalist power and new forms of 'cyber' beings (Shields 1996). Yet there is no unanimity as to how the Internet might or might not transform popular-music production, distribution and consumption. Indeed, at this stage, researchers in the field of popular-music studies are still only outlining research programmes into popular music and the Internet (Jones 2000).

Furthermore, there is no unanimity within the scene itself as regards the likely impact of the Internet (Terry and Yates 2000). As yet, there is no evidence that downloaded sound files have significantly dented the revenues of record companies or distros – although some are clearly trying to prepare for this eventuality. Nor have existing offline scenic institutions 'disappeared'. Moreover, many scene members appear to passively resist making greater use of the Internet. A surprisingly large number of prominent scene members have no e-mail or Internet access. It is still possible to run a small label, a distro or a fanzine in the traditional manner. Some of those scene members who have made use of the Internet have only done so in a grudging fashion. For example, a number of prominent fanzines now have websites, but some of these sites only give information on how to order the fanzine, along with some selected extracts from back issues (e.g. the website of the Swedish fanzine *Davthvs* – www.algonet.se/~davthvs/). Elsewhere, the Internet has augmented particular aspects of existing institutions and practices rather than replaced them. Tape traders may make extensive use of usenet and e-mail to develop contacts, but still trade music by mail. Some scene members use e-mail for short, business-like communications, but reserve letter writing for more intimate scenic communication. Bulletin boards may be used to arrange meetings with fellow scene members at gigs.

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It may be that the Internet is more important for younger and newer scene members than for older, more experienced ones. Whereas, at one time, prospective members were obliged to 'search' for the scene, the Internet certainly makes the scene far easier to access. In addition, the Internet certainly makes the scene a 'faster' place. Correspondence that once took weeks may now take hours. Information that was once hidden is now instantaneously broadcast. However, as yet the impact of the Internet on the scene is far from clear and cannot be assumed to be beneficial. The slowness and obscurity of a scene based around the postal service did at least make for effective 'filters' to information. The Internet facilitates a huge flood of information, but makes discrimination harder. While the Internet might be thought to democratise access to an audience for newer bands, it may simply bury them under an avalanche of information.

The implications of the Internet for the accumulation of capital within the scene are thus extremely unclear. In the future it is possible that the Internet may contribute to the dissolution of the scene by making Extreme Metal just 'another' form of music within massive global flows on information with few clear boundaries. It is also possible that the Internet may provide a potent antidote to the accumulation of capital within the scene, by making it difficult for institutions to accumulate capital and facilitating access to the scene for marginal members. It is also possible that existing capital-rich institutions may use the Internet to consolidate their position in as yet unknown ways. However, at the time of writing, the Internet merely provides a powerful supplementary institution to the scene, without any clearly discernable net increase or decrease in flows of capital within the scene.

The Scene and the Accumulation of Capital

Notwithstanding the questionable impact of the Internet, the above discussion of the workings of the scene shows how the formalisation of the scene's informal networks in the 1980s and 1990s led to the accumulation of capital. Thus, there has been a historical shift in the way capital circulates within the institutions of the scene. In the 1980s the scene was small, fluid and informal. Participation in the scene demanded few resources from fields of power and produced few resources and forms of capital that could be circulated within fields of power. In the 1990s and onward, the scene became more formalised and forms of capital accumulated within it, resulting in a greater need for scene members to draw on resources deriving from fields of power.

Despite this accumulation of capital, the scene has remained small and obscure throughout its existence, ensuring that the total amount of capital in circulation has remained small compared to larger scenes. Nevertheless, the scene in the 1980s might have become less obscure and more

popular, thereby accumulating more capital. In the 1980s a few Extreme Metal bands, such as Slayer, achieved success within the burgeoning Heavy Metal scene. The Extreme Metal scene could have grown rapidly in popularity, assisted by the institutions of the Heavy Metal scene. One reason that the scene did not grow in this way was the great antipathy that scene members showed to the most popular forms of Heavy Metal and the close relationship that the scene had with the Punk scene. Instead, in the late 1980s, when the scene was on the cusp of a great surge in popularity, a split with the Heavy Metal scene was reinforced so as to develop a distinct Extreme Metal scene. The informal networks and institutions of the scene became highly formalised, ensuring the efficient circulation of Extreme Metal within the Extreme Metal scene alone. While the scene remained obscure, the access points into the scene multiplied for those willing to find them, and producing and obtaining music within the scene became easier. Although scene members made use of capital-accumulation practices drawn from fields of power, these practices were never used to market Extreme Metal outside the scene. Instead, the penetration of the scene by networks for capital accumulation was a by-product of the formalisation of scenic practice, undertaken to ensure the scene's integrity and obscurity.

Once networks of capital accumulation entered the scene in the early 1990s, logics of capital accumulation began to influence scenic practices in certain directions. Once institutions have a cash income, they need to adopt conventional money-management procedures – keeping accounts, paying taxes etc. Once institutions make profit, allowing their owners and staff to be paid, such institutions must continue to make profit and must orient their practices accordingly. The profit motive may come to dominate such institutions. Profitable bands may no longer have time to correspond with scene members. Profitable record labels cannot afford to sign and support bands that have little chance of providing some return on their investment. Profitable distros may not offer favourable terms for exchange or sale. Inevitably, power relations and hierarchies within the scene begin to emerge. Wealthier, more successful scenic institutions are able to promote their product more widely and so influence the overall direction of the scene. In the 1990s, with such a huge number of recordings within the scene, members needed to find ways to discriminate, thus making promotion and marketing even more important and giving greater power to gatekeepers within the scene. Those distros, labels and fanzines with the greatest amounts of financial capital have the greatest chance of ensuring that certain recordings will be heard. As a result of all of these changes, in the 1990s an increasing split emerged within the scene between the 'underground', which continued to operate on the basis of informal networks of reciprocity, and those larger scenic institutions that had to accumulate capital in order to survive.

Inequalities in the possession of capital are intensified by pre-existing inequalities resulting from scene members' relative positions within fields of power. Those in developing countries

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and those from poorer backgrounds within developed countries have fewer resources to bring to the scene. Members from richer backgrounds or who have better paid jobs are able to put more money into bands, fanzines and other institutions. In poorer countries finding the money to buy musical instruments and CDs can be extremely difficult. In some countries with high import taxes, foreign CDs can be prohibitively expensive. Scene members in countries such as Cuba write letters to prominent scene members in other countries asking for help in getting free CDs. The problem is exacerbated by the widespread use of the US dollar as the international currency of the scene. With the decline of tape trading, members must have access to US dollars, or another easily convertible currency, to be able to buy from foreign distros.

Time is another resource that members use within the scene and that can be conceived of as a form of capital. This form of capital is less available to some scene members. For example, in countries that have compulsory military service, members may be removed from the scene for considerable periods of time. In Israel all men are obliged to undertake three years of military service, between the ages of 18 and 21 (women serve for 18 months). Military service is extremely difficult to avoid and, for most, requires a commitment of time that precludes a sustained involvement in other activities. Consequently, some Israeli scene members employ a variety of strategies in an attempt to be exempted from military service, including pretending to be mentally unfit. Conversely, some members are able to utilise resources from outside the scene very effectively. In Scandinavian countries, for example, the generous and inclusive social-security systems that prevail enable some scene members to support themselves with state benefits while pursuing their musical activities. In Scandinavia and some other European countries there are also well-funded resources for youth musical activity. In Sweden bands can hire well-equipped rehearsal studios for a peppercorn rent, obtain grants for the purchase of equipment and participate in state-funded courses in popular musicianship.

Unsurprisingly, such inequalities have fuelled the emergence of hierarchies within the scene. These hierarchies have led some scene members from marginal locations to take the radical step of relocating to core locations (Harris 2000). However, these hierarchies are not necessarily explained by the unequal distribution of the forms of capital we have discussed in this section. This can be seen from a close examination of the 'cores' and 'peripheries' within the global scene. The core markets, where the greatest number of CDs are sold, are Germany and northern Europe, with some notable concentrations in other areas, including Greece. Yet these core markets do not necessarily produce the greatest number of successful bands and influential institutions. Conversely, some core markets, such as Scandinavia, produce an enormous number of successful bands, but are a relatively weak market for Extreme Metal products. Thus, there are multiple 'cores' within the scene, thereby mitigating the concentration of capital and narrowing the divide between core and periphery.

Furthermore, the cores of the scene do not necessarily coincide with the strongest cores of the global capitalist system. The scene tends to be strongest in locations that are 'marginal to the centre'. The scene is not well developed in locations that are highly marginal to global fields of power, such as developing countries and, particularly, the most deprived areas of developing countries (such as the inner cities). Nor is it strong in the central nodes of global flows of capital and power, such as metropolises like London. The scene is strongest in small towns and marginal cities within the most powerful countries, such as Tampa, Florida and Dewsbury in South Yorkshire, and in developed countries that are somewhat peripheral to global fields of power, such as Norway and Sweden. These 'marginal to the centre' cores are all locations in which scene members have sufficient wealth and other resources to be able to participate effectively within the scene, but the presence of resources does not in itself explain why this pattern has emerged. One possible reason is that these marginal to the centre locations make available few other youth-cultural activities. Marginal to the centre locations, such as suburbs, have been described as anomic and boring, producing disaffected youth attracted to the aggression of Metal (Gaines 1990). However, too many counter-factuals exist for us to accept this explanation wholeheartedly. Some of the core locations, such as Norway and Sweden, have thriving, state-supported networks of participation in a wide variety of youth-cultural activities, even in the smallest towns. The most important factor in the production of cores and peripheries is that cores within the scene become self-reinforcing. Gothenburg, for example, was marginal to the Extreme Metal scene until the early 1990s. The success of the Death Metal band Grotesque and the Extreme Metal shop Dolores stimulated the formation of a tight-knit clique of musicians. Bolstered by the support given to musicians in the city, bands began to form in a highly conducive environment. When some of these bands became successful, other scene members were encouraged to form bands. Studio Fredman, run by the producer Fred Nordstrom, became the focal point for the recording of Extreme Metal in Gothenburg. Many bands released their recordings on the Gothenburg label Black Sun. Overall, the result was a highly creative local scene. Once a number of bands began to earn a living from their music they were able to further contribute to the scene and capital, in the form of money, personnel and other scenic institutions, accumulated in the Gothenburg area. Thus, the accumulation of capital derived from fields of power can only partially explain why cores and peripheries have emerged within the scene.

Thus, even though it has begun to accumulate capital in the 1990s, the Extreme Metal scene remains relatively well insulated from flows of capital deriving from fields of power. Possession of such forms of capital does not automatically 'explain' features of the scene, such as its cores and peripheries. The scene's reciprocal networks of exchange remain strong. Irreconcilable splits have not emerged between more successful scenic institutions and others. The capital that

has accumulated within the scene remains small – the personal incomes of even the most successful scenic entrepreneurs are modest compared to those achievable in other popular-culture scenes. As we will see in the next chapter, Extreme Metal's cultural capital is not unproblematically convertible into other forms of capital drawn from fields of power.

## The Scene and Habitus

Habitus derives from an individual's demographic background. To understand how certain forms of habitus work within the scene, we must first examine the most common backgrounds of scene members. What is the demographic profile of a 'normal' scene member? In this section I will make some quantitative assertions on this subject. These assertions should be read as working hypotheses that await more detailed quantitative testing.

As we saw in chapter one, academic researchers have asserted that Metal fans are predominantly young, white, working-class males. However, a closer look at the backgrounds of Extreme Metal scene members reveals a greater diversity than one might expect. For one thing, the scene is not simply made up of young people. While the majority of active scene members are probably between the ages of 18 and 22, many are older. There are many members who have been involved since the beginning of the scene and are now in their late 30s. While age is never a crucial element in scenic discourse, those who were involved in the scene's development in the 1980s are accorded a good deal of respect and, as we shall see, those who entered the scene in the late 1990s are regarded with some suspicion.

The scene appears to be dominated by the children of those termed 'affluent workers' by John Goldthorpe (1969). Around two-thirds of my interviewees came from affluent working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds – the proportion was about the same in all three case-study areas. Among the scene members I interviewed, it was common for the mother to be a secretary and the father a skilled manual worker. I met very few poor scene members from educationally and socially 'deprived' backgrounds. Many scene members come from relatively wealthy middle-class backgrounds, although I met few from what could be considered rich backgrounds. This situation may vary across the globe. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Extreme Metal scene members in some developing countries, particularly in South America, come predominantly from 'shanty-town' backgrounds[14].

Any observer at an Extreme Metal show would immediately notice the numerical dominance of men within the scene. Yet many women are active in the scene and some have reached

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[14] Ricardo Miranda, personal communication (25/05/99).

prominent positions. Women run labels, fanzines and other scenic institutions. However, when they do become involved in the scene, women generally occupy ancillary, if important, roles. Many women work as press officers for record labels (a situation intriguingly similar to that in the music industry as a whole (Negus 1992)). In music-making, very few all-female bands exist. Female musicians tend to sing backing vocals, play keyboards or, sometimes, bass guitar.

The scene is also predominantly heterosexual. Openly gay scene members are extremely rare. I met only one openly gay man during my interviews (in Israel) and he did not have a prominent position within the scene. While organisations of gay Heavy Metal fans can be found, I have discovered absolutely no evidence of gay people organising within the Extreme Metal scene. The newsgroup alt.homosexuality.death.metal has contained only 'spam' messages every time I have checked. The only space where homosexuality is present within the scene is in the very occasional use of quasi-pornographic lesbian erotica in some record and promotional artwork. This use, of course, has very little to do with 'actual' lesbianism.

Certain ethnic and national backgrounds are more common than others within the scene. Those of black African descent are almost totally absent from the scene. I have found no evidence of Metal scenes in the Caribbean or sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of white South Africa. In the UK the only black people I have encountered within the scene are those with a close relationship with the hardcore Punk scene, where black people are somewhat more numerous. Those of Chinese descent constitute the other major ethnic absence. I have found little evidence of Extreme Metal scenes in mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan, although the 1989 Chinese film *Beijing Bastards* did show that some kind of Heavy Metal scene exists in China. Yet, apart from these two major exclusions, the scene is exceptionally ethnically diverse. There are popular scenes in Eastern Europe, Japan, South America and South-East Asia. In the more ethnically diverse European countries, people from diverse backgrounds enter and take part in the scene. The scene surrounding London's Red Eye pub is a magnet for expatriates from a wide variety of countries. Scene members often speak with pride of the global diversity of the scene and seek out small unknown local scenes in unexpected countries. During my fieldwork I received demo tapes from India and Pakistan, and heard rumours of scenes in Iran and Jordan.

How does the concept of habitus help to explain the preponderance of certain backgrounds and the lack of others within the scene? The reasons for the lack of Extreme Metal scene members in, say, Iran may have rather less to do with habitus than with constraining factors emerging from fields of power. Moreover, as we saw in the last section, particular 'cores' within the scene are partially the outcome of self-reinforcing practices rather than habitus. Nor can habitus ever tell us exactly why a particular individual may like Extreme Metal. There is no easy explanation as to why one white, working-class male will enter the scene and another will not. Similarly,

there is no easy explanation as to why, say, one Israeli female will enter the scene, when so many do not. We have to accept the complexity of people's lives and dispositions. Only with regard to the very few scene members with whom I developed close relations could I even begin to suggest answers to 'why' questions with any kind of confidence. Even in those cases, so idiosyncratic were the 'reasons' that those members entered the scene that it would be unwise to attempt to draw firm conclusions from them.

What we can do is note that certain forms of habitus, engendered by certain backgrounds, seem to predispose a *dislike* of Extreme Metal. Habitus generates the horizons of our expectations, guiding our attraction towards that which seems to be 'natural' for us. For instance, as John Shepherd shows, women often have a strong aversion to Metal (Shepherd 1991). For some reason, the sounds and aesthetics of Extreme Metal can only be incorporated into 'the feminine' with difficulty. Weinstein argues that the absence of women within the scene is fundamental to Metal, since the music's aesthetic is founded on notions of 'power' and 'power...is culturally coded as a masculine trait' (2000: 67). The habitus engendered by homosexuality and by certain ethnicities also appears to present difficulties in incorporating Extreme Metal. That is not to say that all such forms of habitus work to exclude Extreme Metal in the same ways for the same reasons. In fact, the reasons why Extreme Metal fits so badly into the habitus engendered by certain backgrounds are extremely unclear and would be better approached through an examination of those forms of habitus rather than through an examination of Extreme Metal. As I argued in the opening section, the habitus is a mysterious, 'black box' concept, whose workings may be obscure, but whose effects are clear.

I must point out, however, that the dislike of Extreme Metal produced by certain forms of habitus is not an essential or 'natural' feature of those forms of habitus. Habitus may feel entirely fixed and natural, but is the result of members' phenomenological negotiation of their positions within fields of power. Thus, the dislike of Extreme Metal produced by certain forms of habitus is partly a consequence of scenic practices of exclusion, which become practices of self-exclusion. Most of these practices are unspoken and subtle. They ensure that certain scenic minorities find difficulty in reaching high levels of involvement within the scene. In part, this arises simply from the experience of being in a minority. We might reasonably assume that the experience of finding few people within the scene similar to themselves might dishearten prospective members. For example, Israeli scene members frequently express an acute sensitivity about their marginal position, both with regard to the global scene and to Israeli culture in general (Harris 1999). Take, for example, the following comment by an Israeli Black Metal musician:

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It's very very very frustrating....you put more than a European band into what you are doing and you get a lot less response...it's like we're stuck in the edge of the world. [IS9]

Few bands visit Israel and Extreme Metal is highly marginal in the country. When scene members become aware of the apparently vibrant scenes in other places, with bands who make a living from their music and tour across the world, the marginality of the Israeli scene leads to disenchantment and provokes many to leave the scene. In this way, the marginality of certain scenes may become self-reinforcing in the same way as the success of other scenes. Even when this disenchantment is expressed less vocally, scene members in marginal locations often seek to efface their marginal location. For example, I have shown elsewhere how the highly successful Death Metal band Sepultura achieved their success by not musically attending to their Brazilian location (Harris 2000).

In a slightly different way, marginality's self-fulfilling nature also helps us to understand the marginal position of women within the scene. As Angela McRobbie has shown (1991), female involvement in subculture is more problematic than male involvement as young women generally have less freedom to participate in the public sphere. However, involvement in the Extreme Metal scene does not depend on attendance in public at live shows – one can be an active member of the scene from one's home. Indeed, the 'insulated' scenic infrastructure of the feminist 'riot grrrl' scene is very similar to that of the Extreme Metal scene (Leonard 1998). As we have seen, the dominant model of involvement in the Extreme Metal scene is the autonomous member. The infrastructure of the scene assists men in entering the scene individually, yet very few women enter the scene on their own. Those women who do enter the scene tend to do so with partners, groups of female friends or, less commonly, with male friends. From the start of their involvement in the scene, then, women lack the autonomy of most male scene members. The marginality of female members is reinforced when women see few prominent female scene members and musicians, and have few role models to emulate. At gigs they see other women with their partners or female friends, often dressed glamorously, but they see few autonomous women who are not defined by their sexuality. Women who enter the scene with partners are often subtly marginalised in scenic interaction. On many occasions during my fieldwork I met male scene members with their partners, but their partners were not introduced and remained silent. In the Heavy Metal scene, to be a glamorous appendage of male scene members was an accepted role. 'Groupies' may have been the object of misogynistic treatment, but at least the role provided a space for women in the scene and produced a large number of female Metal musicians and fans. While women in the Extreme Metal scene often dress glamorously, the scene is far more ambivalent about overt displays of sexuality and does not celebrate the role of the groupie. Women, therefore, have absolutely no dedicated position,

even subordinate, within the scene. This means that the habitus of most female scene members becomes oriented to lower expectations of what is achievable within the scene.

Overt sexism is also found within the scene and actively serves to exclude women. Some forms of Heavy Metal, notably 'Glam Metal', demonstrated a certain willingness to play with gender roles, but ultimately reinforced women's subordinate position (Denski and Sholle 1992). As Walser argues (1993), a key element of Metal is the misogynist fantasy of a world without women. Metal masculinity is founded on notions of strength and power, embodied, as Weinstein shows (2000), in the 'pumped up' torso that many scene members aspire to. These masculinist themes have been taken to their 'logical' conclusion within some Extreme Metal texts, as we saw with the images of sexual violence in the lyrics of Cannibal Corpse. While the female scene members that I interviewed were eager to assert that they did not take such things 'seriously', we might fairly assume that such texts make identification with and attachment to the scene more difficult for prospective female members.

The practices of music-making within the scene also reinforce the exclusion of women. As Mary Ann Clawson argues (1999), the practice of rock music-making is largely implicated in practices of male socialisation – practices to which women find it extremely difficult to contribute. As Mavis Bayton has shown (1989), women in music scenes are often assumed to be 'not serious':

> ...when I play with um other bands, it's like I don't know why but the drummers none of them talk to me, but I don't know why if that's because they feel they can't communicate on the same level cos I'm a woman heh heh, but it's not been horrible it's just like if I was a bloke I'd get all the band coming up to me heh how you're doing, I mean some bands are really friendly and come up and chat but a lot of bands just don't heh
> [UK16]

Yet there are women involved in the scene who are not silent appendages of men and who are active in a wide variety of scenic institutions. Such women often strenuously attempt to prove that they are 'serious' about the scene, to the extent that they may echo sexist discourses:

I:     Why do you think there's so few women into Metal?

R:     Um because most women just fucking follow their boyfriends around, do you know what I mean, and just get into Metal because their boyfriends are into it and, I don't know really, I don't, it's just one of those, one of life's mysteries I guess, no reason women can't be into Metal but um it's obviously their own personal choice. If they'd

rather fuck around putting on make-up and talking about fucking shit in the toilets and pushing up their fucking wonderbras and PVC skirts, then you know, it's up to them, innit?

[UK9]

As in the Punk scenes studied by Lauraine LeBlanc (1999), women who enter the scene must abide by masculinist rules, undermining the generation of any kind of female solidarity and isolating women from each other. However, it does not necessarily follow that women in the Extreme Metal scene are totally cowed by the masculine domination of the scene. Rather, the minority of women in the scene are often quietly subversive of mainstream femininity – after all, they prefer aggressive music that 'nice girls' do not listen to. As Weinstein shows, women who are prepared to abide by the masculinist ethos of the scene can gain respect.

The absence of homosexuals from the scene is also related to dominant constructions of masculinity. Scene members may frequently use such prejudicial epithets as 'fag'. Homosexuality is associated with femininity and connotes weakness. So, music that scene members view as insufficiently aggressive may be described as 'gay'. However, such insulting constructions of homosexuality seem to be no more prevalent here than in many other youth-cultural spaces. Indeed, Heavy Metal seemed to be far more vocally homophobic. I know of no Extreme Metal bands that have written songs with homophobic lyrics and even the far-right elements of the scene do not seem to be as concerned with homosexuality as they are with ethnicity. Furthermore, the overtly gay scene members that there are seem to face no vocal prejudice. Extreme Metal gigs frequently take place at the Astoria 2 venue in London on Thursday nights, when they are followed by the popular gay nightclub G.A.Y., but there has never been any tension between the outgoing and incoming crowds. The absence of gays cannot be totally explained by reference to homophobia. As is the case for women, there is at least the potential for gay scene members to reach high levels of involvement within the scene. Moreover, as will be discussed in chapter eight, some of the imagery of Extreme Metal may be read as homoerotic. It is possible that there are many more male homosexuals involved in the scene than are 'out', but this assertion remains unverifiable. Lesbians have a slightly greater visibility within the scene, if only through the occasional use of lesbian pornographic images by some bands. While, as I have suggested, such constructions of lesbianism have much more to do with male fantasies than 'actual' lesbianism, nonetheless, they at least provide for the notional possibility of lesbian involvement within the scene.

The absence of certain ethnic groups is also linked to prejudice. The case study of the Israeli scene is instructive here. Israeli scene members frequently complain about prejudice exhibited by scene members in other countries. Since the rise of the Black Metal scene and the

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concomitant flirtation with far-right discourses, on occasion Israelis have faced active hostility. Some northern European distros have refused to deal with Israeli bands, distros and labels, sometimes on the dubious grounds that they are 'unreliable'. Some Israeli bands have received hate mail. The most extreme example of this was in 1991, when a prominent Israeli scene member received a letter bomb that is reputed to have been sent by Varg Vikernes. In scenic conflict, members outside Israel will occasionally make anti-Semitic comments in order to anger Israeli scene members. For example, one Israeli band, which had angered a Danish Death Metal band, received a bar of soap in the post with a note asking if they could 'find their ancestors in that'. However, such incidents occur infrequently and do not impede Israeli scene members to the extent that, say, sexism impedes female scene members. In general, racism is not as powerful a force within the scene as sexism. As we have seen, most scene members actively delight in the ethnic diversity of the scene. Nevertheless, for Israeli scene members such incidents are deeply hurtful.

Israeli members face active prejudice against them, but the same is not true for black and Chinese scene members, since they are almost totally absent. Given the presence of far-right views, we can safely assume that prejudice against such members would come from some quarters of the scene. However, the lack of Chinese and black scene members has nothing to do with overt prejudice, since very few have ever shown an interest in joining the scene. Again, self-exclusion plays a role. As Weinstein argues, the retrenchment of 'black' musics since the 1970s has served to create a powerful divide between black and 'white' musics. Similarly, it is possible to speculate that the strength of Chinese-language pop music – both in Chinese-speaking countries and within the Chinese diaspora – reinforces the divide between 'Chinese' and 'non-Chinese' music.

Prejudice towards people from marginal scenic backgrounds also reveals itself less directly, in a refusal to make allowances for the difficulties that some scene members may face. Many scenic institutions will not work with individuals in certain countries, including Russia and some Central American countries, after losing money in the post or being defrauded by people placing orders. Similarly, the few female bands within the scene are given no special encouragement. In 1997 the US label Dwell Records released a compilation of female bands entitled *Awakenings: Females in Extreme Music*. The collection was roundly criticised for the poor quality of the music, with no recognition of the value of the project itself. There appears to be little possibility of forming a supportive space for women within the scene.

The subtle and more overt practices of exclusion and self-exclusion that we have discussed in this section produce a 'normal' habitus of a scene member. Young, white, lower-middle-class males from a limited range of nationalities have a habitus that is pre-disposed to scenic

involvement and to seek out high levels of involvement within the scene. This habitus is never an absolute necessity, nor is it rigidly policed, yet it does force women and those from certain ethnic-minority backgrounds to work harder to become involved in the scene and this tends to discourage all but the most determined. Only those with a habitus oriented towards a deep commitment can survive this process. The marginality of certain forms of habitus is reinforced by discourses within the scene that frown on reflexive practices calling attention to difference. We will explore further this aspect of the scene in future chapters. For now, it is enough to state that scene members very rarely struggle actively against racism, sexism or any other kind of prejudice or division in the possession of power and capital. The only way for scenic minorities to become involved in the scene is to work hard and prove themselves to be worthy members of the scene. In principle, members from all sorts of backgrounds are able to achieve involvement in the scene.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the workings of the institutions and practices of the scene, focusing on the ways in which they circulate forms of power and capital. The scene has accumulated capital in recent years and has developed hierarchies and practices of exclusion. Yet, although it is far from egalitarian, the scene is not characterised by entrenched hierarchies. The scene produces a relative measure of insulation from fields of power and capital and from other scenes. This insulation also gives the scene a measure of safety from direct external threats, such as moral panics. In Bourdieu's terms, the Extreme Metal scene possesses a relatively high degree of 'autonomy' from fields of power.

Thus, given the scene's limited use of forms of capital from outside the scene, what are the most important forms of capital circulating exclusively *within* the scene? What hierarchies derive from such forms of capital? In the next chapter we will examine how the scene produces forms of capital that are unique to it. Through an examination of the workings of this form of capital, we will investigate how members use their reflexivity to discursively and practically construct the scene and their place within it.

# SUBCULTURAL CAPITAL

## Introduction

The previous chapter used the work of Pierre Bourdieu to examine how the scene refracts forms of capital drawn from fields of power. We saw how, in recent years, the scene has become more susceptible to the accumulation of capital and that, while certain forms of habitus are more easily convertible into capital than others, the scene possesses a degree of autonomy from fields of power. Bourdieu treats autonomy as a field's ability to prevent forms of capital drawn from other fields being converted into capital within it. Yet an autonomous field is not free from capital – for Bourdieu, *all* fields are reproduced through struggles over capital. It follows, then, that a field that is relatively autonomous, such as the Extreme Metal scene, produces its principal forms of capital indigenously. In this chapter I want to examine the forms of 'subcultural capital' that are indigenous to the scene.

## From Cultural Capital to Subcultural Capital

The form of capital that is most susceptible to indigenous production is that which Bourdieu terms 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1979, 1993, 1990). Cultural capital is capital that is accumulated through competence in various cultural practices. Cultural capital is generated by the habitus and is displayed almost unconsciously, through a kind of *savoir faire*. It is a highly transferable form of capital in that multiple fields require similar cultural competences. In the fields that Bourdieu discusses, such as education and art, bourgeois members have an inbuilt self-confidence, since they have learned the appropriate rules of behaviour in these fields from a very early age, whereas non-bourgeois members must learn them from scratch. However, although cultural capital *may* be transferable between certain fields, it takes on unique forms within others.

In order to produce a more comprehensive understanding of how power and capital are reproduced within the scene, we need to understand how the scene reproduces its own forms of cultural capital. Sarah Thornton (1995) has adapted Bourdieu's ideas to analyse how cultural capital works in dance-music cultures in the United Kingdom. She uses the term 'subcultural capital' rather than cultural capital. Subcultural capital is 'objectified' '...in the form of fashionable haircuts and well assembled record collections' (1995: 11) and is 'embodied' 'in the form of being "in the know", using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles' (ibid.: 11–12). Subcultural capital is founded on 'myths'

of classlessness and lack of hierarchies. However, the dance-music scene that she examines is, in fact, obsessed with making distinctions and producing hierarchies of status that translate into hierarchies of power: '...the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn't' (ibid.: 105). In the dance-music scene, subcultural capital is defined against 'the mainstream', as exemplified by 'Sharon and Tracey dancing round their handbags'. Far from being egalitarian, the dance-music scene defines itself against constructions of white, working-class femininity.

Subcultural capital is a useful concept in that it refers to a specific form of capital within Bourdieu's scheme, but it also allows us to import concepts that fit less easily with Bourdieu's work. Thornton's work marries an analysis of capital with an appreciation of issues of discourse and identity. Subcultural capital is gained by constructing and performing discourses and identities. In a similar way, Sue Widdicombe and Robin Wooffitt, in their ethnomethodological study of the talk of subculture members, show how 'identity talk' is a crucial element of subcultural practice (1995). I would further argue that subcultural capital is something that members attempt to *experience*, by utilising their reflexivity to construct identities. Subcultural capital is both a set of resources that can be utilised within the scene and a method of experiencing the scene. It is something that is both endowed by other scene members and claimed by scene members for themselves.

Subcultural capital is not necessarily convertible into other forms of capital. Rather, it rewards scene members with such intangibles as 'prestige' and 'status'. When subcultural capital has been endowed by others, members will be listened to and will have influence over the trajectory of the scene. This influence and prestige may, in turn, be convertible into the forms of capital we discussed in the previous chapter – for example, members and institutions that are endowed with subcultural capital may sell more recordings. But, in the main, the rewards of subcultural capital are rewards that are experienced intangibly. To possess subcultural capital – whether by claiming it for oneself or having it endowed by others – is to possess self-esteem and a real stake in the scene. No matter how it is claimed or rewarded, subcultural capital is *by definition* what everyone in the scene wants. Subcultural capital is thus something that is striven for and embodied by individual scene members. As scene members strive to gain subcultural capital, it becomes a routinised property of the scene. When I discuss forms of subcultural capital in this chapter, then, I am referring both to something that is produced by individual members and to a structural property of the scene as a whole. This perspective follows Anthony Giddens' notion of the 'duality of structure' (1984), an idea that is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. When I refer to subcultural capital being 'claimed' by members, I do not mean that it is some abstract structural property that members can draw on. Rather, when practices become routinised, as has the practice of subcultural capital, they may *appear* to be impersonal, abstract

structures that can be 'claimed' from. As a concept, then, subcultural capital is flexible enough to be described using a number of divergent metaphors. In this chapter subcultural capital will be described as being 'produced', 'claimed', 'displayed' and 'endowed'. This diversity reflects the concept's elusive nature, as it describes both practice and structure, objective and subjective.

In this chapter I will argue that there are two principal forms of subcultural capital circulating within the scene – mundane subcultural capital and transgressive subcultural capital. Transgression and mundanity are not simply experiences reproduced within the scene. They are experiences that are struggled over by scene members in their attempts to gain power, status and capital.

## Mundane Subcultural Capital

> Every one of us has heard the call
> Brothers of true Metal, loud and standing tall
> We know the power within us has brought us to this hall
> There's magic in the Metal, there's magic in us all
>
> (From 'Metal Warriors' by Manowar, from the album *The Triumph of Steel* (Atlantic: 1992))

This lyric, when put into the context of its triumphalist musical backing, celebrates the 'we', the 'us' present within the scene, all bound together by the 'magic' of Metal, all proud of their belonging. It celebrates the scene as a space within which individuality is dissolved within the collective (Maffesoli 1996). The scene is a space of what Michel Maffesoli calls 'puissance', a mysterious power that emerges when people of similar interests gather together. Puissance is something that is beyond words. It is present in the elusive 'atmosphere' reproduced through collective praxis.

The lyric effectively encapsulates the potential of what I will call mundane subcultural capital. At first sight, there appears to be little that is mundane about this celebration of puissance. Puissance seems to have little to do with the mundane, simple pleasures we discussed in chapter five and, in particular, with mundanity's solipsistic features. Yet, no matter how solipsistic mundane practices might appear they are nonetheless oriented towards producing effects within the collective space of the scene. In celebrating the scene as a collective space, 'Metal Warriors' by implication celebrates the mundane, individual practice that constructs and maintains that space. Mundane subcultural capital is oriented towards the possibilities of the collective puissance that is produced as a collective result of the mundane efforts of the totality of scene

members. Just as the practice of transgression is in reality nearly always limited practice but is based on the threatening possibilities of excess, so mundane subcultural capital may in practice be produced solipsistically but is nonetheless based on the possibilities that it may lead to the dissolution of self within the collective.

The unambiguous celebration of the scene found in 'Metal Warriors' is rare[15]. As we saw in the two previous chapters, the prevailing quietism of the Extreme Metal scene means that celebrations of this kind are almost frowned upon. Mundane subcultural capital is generally not claimed through loud proclamations of the collective power of the scene but through a sustained investment in the myriad mundane practices by which the scene is produced as collective practice. It is claimed through commitment and hard work. Through this hard work the scene offers the possibilities of 'community' that we discussed in chapter two.

A crucial element of mundane subcultural capital, as in all forms of cultural capital, is the demonstration of *savoir faire* within the scene. Scene members claim subcultural capital by knowing the complex histories of the scene and by having heard the music of its vast number of bands. We saw in chapter five how the process of developing scenic knowledge is one of the key pleasures of becoming involved within the scene. Knowledge of the scene is something that scene members actively attempt to display. In interviews scene members often emphasised the depth of their knowledge of the scene, as in the following extract from an Israeli interview:

> ...I wanted first to know very well the music that I listened to, and then come to more heavier stuff....I wanted to know the Heavy Metal scene better and then to come into more areas...I had no rush about things, so er first I wanted to to know very well the music that I listened to and then, come to more areas in Metal.
> [IS1]

This interviewee claims subcultural capital by demonstrating the care he has taken to acquire a profound knowledge of Extreme Metal and its roots in Heavy Metal. History is extremely important to scene members and members need to know the complex history of the development of Extreme Metal canons. These canons are produced through complex 'distinctions' between texts. In *Distinction* (1979), Bourdieu shows how cultural capital is gained through being able to distinguish between various cultural objects and their relative merits. In fanzines, magazines and other media of scenic discourse, members have developed highly complex practices of distinction. The exact nature of these distinctions and the canons produced by them falls outside the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, the

taxonomies produced by distinction are less important than the practice itself. That is not to say that distinctions are somehow random or meaningless. However, the indexicality of distinctions requires a more detailed study than is possible in this thesis.

In order to practice distinction, scene members must be able to display appropriately detailed scenic knowledge. Generic names are of comparatively minor importance in scenic discourse, since they only demonstrate a more general knowledge of distinction. Of course, a large number of generic and sub-generic terms are in common use. Within Death Metal, for example, sub-generic distinctions such as 'Technical Death Metal', 'Swedish Death Metal' and 'Black/Death Metal' provide useful ways of identifying the music of particular bands. They are of particular use to record companies in publicising the music of unknown bands. However, generic terms are not discursive productions amenable to the display of subcultural capital. They are imprecise and subcultural capital is displayed through precision. Instead, subcultural capital is displayed through knowledge of individual bands and albums. As I have argued elsewhere (Harris 1997), music is described by reference to other bands. Take, for example, this extract from a review of a demo by the US band Incantation from the Welsh fanzine *Mutilated Mag* (Issue 2, 1991):

> After leaving REVENANT, guitarist John McEntee joined up with Sal Seijo on guitar, Ronny Deo on bass, Peter Barnevic on drums and Will Rahmer of MORTICIAN on vocals, to form none other than INCANTATION. Formed in '89, they finally release a demo, and from what started as just a slight murmur, has evolved into some of the best grinding Death Metal to hail from New York, New Jersey area in a long time. Featuring four tracks, extreme stuff, in the vein of REVENANT, MORBID ANGEL, DERKETA and MASSACRE. Starting off with "Profinantion" through to "Devoured Death" which takes us onto side two for "Entrantment of Evil" and "Eternal Torture". Recorded in May 1990 at Stardust Studios with Ed Lotwis engineering (Of REVENANT fame!). A very clean and crisp production, bar the bass drum, which could have been a bit louder.

In this extract, Incantation is first placed in the context of a history of other bands and scene personnel. The band is then placed within a fairly non-specific generic space of 'grinding Death Metal'. Subcultural capital is claimed through the ability to place Incantation within a highly specific history of 'grinding Death Metal' in the New York/New Jersey area. The principal musical reference points for Incantation are four other bands. The only description of the music that does not rely on bands or generic names is in the final section describing the production. Without a detailed knowledge of Death Metal, the reader would have little idea of Incantation's sound. Even with this knowledge, the review gives little clue as to the musical merits or

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[15] Indeed, Manowar is a Heavy Metal band. However, the band is one of the few Heavy Metal bands that

otherwise of Incantation. The review functions to display the writer's impressive subcultural capital in knowing a complex set of distinctions. The reader, should they also know them, is given a chance to be complicit in the knowledge of distinctions. If the reader does not understand these distinctions, the review gives them the chance to develop this knowledge. Indeed, by reading criticism of this kind, anyone could, in theory, develop a detailed knowledge of the scene without ever hearing any of its music! Mundane subcultural capital is thus acquired and displayed through being able to place bands within a network of differences from other bands and being able to place those bands within complex histories of scene personnel.

Subcultural capital can also be acquired through a detailed knowledge of the institutions and practices of the scene. This knowledge is considerably more difficult to acquire than a detailed knowledge of Extreme Metal music, since it requires an active experience of the scene. The majority of my interviews with scene members were taken up with their complex explanations of the workings of the scene. In many ways, a detailed knowledge of scenic practice seems to produce more mundane subcultural capital than a detailed knowledge of the scene's music. We have already seen how scene members emphasise the amount of work involved in scene membership and the need to treat the scene as a 'career'. Statements emphasising hard work and reflexively managed careers are ways of claiming mundane subcultural capital. Mundane subcultural capital is produced through a commitment to work hard *for* the scene. Mundane scenic involvement is constructed as an altruistic commitment to the collective. The scene is constructed almost as though it were a charity or voluntary organisation. This altruism is demonstrated in the following extracts. The first describes how one scene member set up his own label and the second describes the aim behind one member's scenic activities:

> ...Um sat around with [name] who's er my partner in [name of label], we were round my house one night, and er we just got talking about the way the Metal scene going. Um we decided that, you know, we could we could do something for the scene as such, the bands we believed in.
> [UK2]

> ...The only thing I'm aiming for is to survive actually, it's that's all I want. I want to survive and to do the things that I I think is right for the for the scene.
> [S2]

have achieved considerable popularity within the Extreme Metal scene.

Members construct a kind of altruistic ethic within the scene, adherence to which allows members to claim subcultural capital. One British scene member explains the ethical principles behind his distro in the following extract (part of which was used in chapter five):

> I think [name of distro] has always been based around honesty and that was always my aim was to provide quality music with a fast reliable service which is what I wanted from a distro. If I ordered from someone I wanted stuff to come back straight away and not people sending out alternatives because stuff was not in stock so they just send you anything that they think you will like, that was never what [name of distro] was about. [UK5]

Given the geographical dispersion of the scene, much of the ethics of the scene revolves around being a reliable correspondent. Since disputes are hard to resolve over long distances, reliability and honesty are crucial in avoiding intra-scenic conflict. Considerable discussion occurs within the scene over which institutions are most reliable in their transactions. Those that do have a good reputation are rewarded with considerable subcultural capital and tend to grow and to last.

The entry of capital drawn from fields of power, which we discussed in the last chapter, makes the ethics of the scene considerably more complicated. Altruistic ethics are threatened when there is the potential for some members to make a profit. When money changes hands, the potential for being 'ripped off' increases. However, making money from the scene does not automatically preclude the generation of mundane subcultural capital, as is the case in, say, the Punk scene. While scene members are frequently poor, the Metal scene does not have the 'aesthetic of poverty' that is present in the global Punk scene (O'Conner 2000). The scene has no rigidly policed ideological opposition to commerce, as exists in other popular-music cultures (Frith 1983). Profit and commerce are tolerated *provided* that they are by-products of scenic practice, rather than ends in themselves. As long as the scene 'comes first' and an element of altruism is sustained, commercial imperatives are not necessarily problematic. Indeed, some argue that the introduction of the profit motive within the scene guarantees ethical practice. The distro owner quoted above continues:

> I've never seen the point in non-profit motives [laughs]. I mean what is the point? If you want to do something you might as well do it well. I can't see that you could provide a quality service with a on a non-profit basis. [UK5]

Profit and making a living from the scene may also be seen as a just reward for the accumulation of subcultural capital, as in the following extract from an interview with Trey Azagthoth, a member of the band Morbid Angel, in the Finnish fanzine *Isten 100* (1999):

> Do you earn money out of **Morbid Angel**? Can you live *alone* on it?
>
> "Yeah. I can live alone on it. I've lived alone on it ever since '89. But I don't live like, not, you know, rich as far as financially..."
>
> Oh I didn't mean that, but do you make ends meet?
>
> "Yeah, I do make ends meet. It has a lot to do with managing my money, a lot of *hard* work, you know, whatever."
>
> That's amazing.
>
> "Oh yeah!"

Making money from the scene produces certain obligations that must be met if members are to maintain subcultural capital. Successful members need to maintain an unselfish commitment to those who are less successful within the scene. All the successful distro owners that I interviewed emphasised that they paid themselves less than they could, preferring to plough profits into signing and releasing records by new bands. Owners of successful labels may be criticised for making money, but on the grounds that they have not continued to act ethically and altruistically within the scene. Commerce is rarely opposed in principle, but is frequently opposed in practice.

Long-standing scene members who have a reputation for ethical dealing and a commitment to the scene gain subcultural capital in the form of respect and fame. Respect translates into sales and increased attention paid to their respective institutions. Mundane subcultural capital is also acquired by musicians, but in a slightly more complicated way. Mundane subcultural capital is about contributing and sustaining the scene, not, principally, innovating within the scene. As Ruth Finnegan points out (1989), musical creativity is not necessarily the same as musical innovation. Innovation is an individual practice more suited to the claiming of the transgressive subcultural capital that we will discuss in the next section. Musical innovation is not necessarily productive of mundane subcultural capital. It is productive only in the sense that musical innovators open up new musical possibilities for other scene members. Principally, musicians accrue mundane subcultural capital by refining and developing existing styles. The vast majority of musicians and bands are not innovators but refiners. Within a vast musical landscape of similar bands refining similar styles, it is hard for musicians to accrue mundane subcultural capital by musical means alone. Those bands that accrue the greatest amounts of mundane subcultural capital are generally those that are most adept at working within scenic institutions. They are the bands that write the most letters and that are most skilled at forming

relationships with a wide range of scene members. Accruing as much mundane subcultural capital as possible by these means maximises a band's chances of having their music released by a prominent label with a high standard of production.

Mundane subcultural capital is not directly transferable into capital within other scenes. A sustained, ethical and knowledgeable contribution to the Extreme Metal scene means nothing to those outside it. However, mundane subcultural capital can be converted into those forms of capital we discussed in the previous chapter. Institutions possessing mundane subcultural capital generally become successful within the scene and this can lead to the accruing of forms of capital drawn from fields of power.

Transgressive Subcultural Capital

Transgressive subcultural capital is mundane subcultural capital's opposite. Mundane subcultural capital is accrued through an altruistic commitment to the collective. In contrast, transgressive subcultural capital is claimed through a radical individualism. In chapter five we saw how scene members emphasise their autonomy from and contingent attachment to the scene by constructing their 'biographical authenticity'. Transgressive subcultural capital is accrued through displaying uniqueness and a lack of attachment to the scene. Indeed, transgressive subcultural capital can be claimed through a critique of the scene and of mundane subcultural capital.

One of the strongest and most coherent critiques of mundane subcultural capital and the scene can be found in the above-quoted Finnish fanzine *Isten 100*. *Isten* first appeared in the 1980s and each issue is individually named and themed. *Isten 100* presents an extended critique of the scene and of what it calls 'Scene Metal'. The authors argue that the contemporary scene is so supportive that it is killing 'art' and they define Scene Metal as follows:

> 1) Music that exists merely because its makers think it's important for them to be a part of metal and the underground scene, and to make the relationship official as quickly as possible.
> 2) Music that is played by people who are really quite fascinated by the idea of making some music of their own, but have yet to find an emotion or an idea to express.

Supportive reviews and a plethora of labels ensure that most bands within the scene can produce, release and circulate music with relative ease. The writers of *Isten 100* complain that there is no proper criticism of 'boring', uncreative bands. The scene is thus seen as undiscriminating, homogeneous and bland:

Look at you!

You are cardboard people propped up in a scenery of a thousand years of greatness. Controlled by an industry that's only barely profitable but so deeply in love with itself it sups off its own excrement. You write, release and listen to songs about total war, but only brawl like a bunch of four-year-olds at best. And deep down inside, you're all in agreement, whatever you say.

Which is exactly why you love "metal", probably. Friend Metal. Life Metal. Scene Metal.

Consensus Metal.

[...]

Yes-man Metal. Objective Metal. No Metal At All.

The overall tone of *Isten 100* is bleak, but its content does suggest an alternative to 'Scene Metal'. Unlike most fanzines, it contains no reviews and only a few select interviews. The lack of reviews means that the huge number of mediocre Metal releases can be safely ignored. The interviews are largely with innovative, idiosyncratic characters who have pioneered new sounds. Implicit in *Isten 100* is a 'great man' theory of art, which argues that the best art is produced by 'geniuses' who have strived for autonomy from the conformist influences of their times. This is an unashamedly elitist viewpoint and, indeed, transgressive subcultural capital *is* elitist. Transgressive subcultural capital is not as freely available as mundane subcultural capital. It has to be fought for and is only selectively granted. It involves an attempt to be different, to challenge and transgress accepted norms within and without the scene.

The Black Metal scene is the scenic space in which members have claimed transgressive subcultural capital most assiduously – in particular, the Norwegian Black Metal scene of the early 1990s. As we saw in chapter four, this scene represented the most sustained attempt to transgress acceptable forms of behaviour. What is crucial to note here is that this scene was also oriented towards transgressing boundaries within the Extreme Metal scene itself. Early Black Metal bands spent considerable energy in insulting other bands and scenic institutions, in order to establish the notional existence of a tiny, 'true' 'elite'. This tendency continues to this day. Black Metal bands are far more vigorous in claiming transgressive subcultural capital than mundane subcultural capital. As in *Isten 100*, there is an assumption that the majority of people in the scene are mediocrities, with only a select few able to join the elite.

Norwegian scene members were rewarded with considerable subcultural capital. The activities and personalities of the early 1990s scene remain a source of fascination to this day. Characters

like Varg Vikernes and Euronymous are still revered for their total commitment to transgression. Similarly, those who are seen as musical innovators within the scene are endowed with transgressive subcultural capital. Bands that pioneered new styles, such as Bathory, Possessed and Venom, are admired. Many pioneering bands were active in the 1980s, a time when the scene is considered to have been at its most transgressive.

As we saw, scenic discourse produces mundane subcultural capital through critical languages that are primarily concerned with placing bands within systems of distinction. In contrast, transgressive subcultural capital is claimed through scenic discourses that involve a far more 'personal' engagement with music. In the 1990s the scene developed critical languages that came to resemble the 'auteur' forms of criticism that developed within rock discourse in the 1970s (Frith 1983). These languages produce writing about music that concentrates on how music makes the writer feel, as with the following example of a review of the album *High on Blood* by the band Deranged, which comes from the Swedish fanzine *Davthvs* (Issue 2, 1998):

> Shit shit shit shit shit this is fucking something that Dying Foetus here below could only dream of. Sorry Jason but "High On Blood" beats you in your own sport because here we are not talking about HATE I mentioned in your review, here we are talking about **H A T E** in its most unadulterated, pure, beatufiful [sic] form!...see, I am so upset I cannot even spell "beautiful"!
> Holy hell and her grandmother, I knew Deranged had potential and "Rated – X" ruled the shit out of any Swedish brutal death ensemble but "High On Blood" just has the kind of ferocity its leaves me speechless I lick the record.
> I'm in love.

In using the band Dying Foetus and the (sub-)sub-genre of Swedish brutal Death Metal as musical reference points for Deranged, this review contains elements of the scenic discourse examined in the previous section. However, the focus of the review is on how the music makes the reviewer feel. The review is highly personal, drawing on odd private jokes and strange constructions. It does not work as a means of gaining mundane subcultural capital, but as a way of showing the individual 'character' of the reviewer.

This review is typical of the efflorescence of critical writing within the scene in the 1990s. As transgressive subcultural capital became a more common form of 'currency' within the scene, members were encouraged to treat the scene as a forum for producing idiosyncratic forms of art. Bands began to experiment with incorporating a wide variety of musical influences into Extreme Metal. Writers began to draw on critical languages pioneered outside the scene. In this way, transgressive subcultural capital has more in common with forms of cultural capital

circulating in other fields than with mundane subcultural capital. Transgressive subcultural capital constructs art and individuality as the predominant ways of gaining capital. Potentially, at least, 'great art' produces forms of capital that can be transferable into and from other scenes. To a certain extent, transgressive subcultural capital is not subcultural at all. It is rather a particular version of a form of capital that exists wherever artists and other individuals seek to attack taboos and 'the mainstream'. Transgressive subcultural capital circulates within the Extreme Metal scene, but the attachment to the scene is contingent and pragmatic – to possess transgressive subcultural capital is to be *part of* the scene but not *of* the scene.

Transgressive and Mundane Subcultural Capital

We might think that gaining one form of subcultural capital precludes gaining the other. Indeed, some scene members who are committed to transgressive subcultural capital (such as the editors of *Isten*) would argue precisely this. Similarly, those committed to mundanity may strongly disapprove of those elements of transgressive practice that threaten the coherence of the scene. However, it is more helpful to treat transgressive and mundane subcultural capital as interdependent. For the most part, the two forms of subcultural capital are not in direct competition, since they are gained and circulated through distinct mechanisms. Mundane subcultural capital is far easier to claim than transgressive – any statement displaying appropriate scenic knowledge can be used. Scene members must work hard to claim transgressive subcultural capital, but its rewards may be greater than those offered by mundane subcultural capital. The most revered scene members are those who have committed themselves to transgressive individualism in some way. Those who are respected for their mundane commitment to the scene, such as label managers, can never quite achieve the same kind of admired notoriety. While mundane subcultural capital translates far more easily into forms of capital deriving from fields of power, it does not, unlike transgressive subcultural capital, have the potential to be translated into cultural capital circulating in other fields and scenes.

The fact is that both forms of subcultural capital are necessary to the scene. Transgressive subcultural capital requires an 'audience'. That audience is most readily available within a well-ordered scene and the scene can only be properly ordered with a system that awards mundane commitment. Conversely, although scene members may be content to commit themselves to the mundanity of the scene, they must still occasionally experience transgression, as we saw in chapter five. Thus, both forms of subcultural capital tacitly affirm the necessity of the other.

Furthermore, it is possible for members to claim mundane and transgressive subcultural capital simultaneously. As Thornton shows, subcultural capital is claimed through *not* doing certain things. She argues that:

Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard. For example, fledgling clubbers of fifteen or sixteen wishing to get into what they perceive as a sophisticated dance club will often reveal their inexperience by over-dressing or confusing 'coolness' with an exaggerated cold blank stare. (1995: 12)

The same is true within the Extreme Metal scene. New (generally young) members entering the scene are frequently disparaged. In Israel, for example, the ignorance of young scene members is a constant source of despair. One prominent Israeli scene member told me how he had met one young fan who was under the impression that the band Metallica had released a Black Metal album (in fact, the album in question was informally entitled *The Black Album* by fans due to its all-black sleeve):

...it's very frustrating the actual situation of the scene, it's very because er, you are dealing with people who don't know what Metal is, you know people who think that Metallica released a Black Metal album, it's ridiculous.

[IS1]

New members are seen not only as ignorant – precluding them from mundane capital – but also as slaves to 'trends' – precluding them from transgressive capital. 'Trend' is a word with entirely negative connotations within the scene:

...people in Israel they just jump on trends, I don't know there was a Punk thing in Israel like in, the late nineties er the late eighties [...] the early nineties and then the Metal scene started, and then er they progressed to trance I don't know how it happened.

[IS4]

'Trend-followers' cannot claim either form of subcultural capital. They are both ignorant and conformist. In contrast, scene members try to gain both transgressive and mundane subcultural capital by displaying both knowledge and individuality. The incursion of new members or new spaces onto the scene is something that scene members actively try to prevent, by keeping the scene 'insulated' in the ways we examined in the previous chapter. To enter the scene with any kind of capital, new members must work hard to achieve the required scenic knowledge. Moreover, they have to show themselves to be 'true' individuals rather than members of a group. Yet they must not, as Sarah Thornton points out, 'try too hard'. New scene members who try too hard to be transgressive are often ridiculed, as in the following anecdote:

...I met a guy in a nightclub, um he plays in a band round here [...] well he's just a little boy who doesn't know what he's doing and he came up and he said 'oh aren't you [name]?', I said yeah so we got talking about music and beer and all that innocuous sort of stuff and he says oh I'm into Satanism me, I said oh really and he goes yeah yeah yeah and he went on and on, he goes I've got the book of spells back at my house do you want to come and see, I said yeah go on then we'll have a look, so we went back to his place and no word of a lie he got this book out and it was a Penguin book of poetry and on the front it had a quote saying all poetry is magic and he honestly believed it was the book of spells.

[UK2]

The 'boy's' attempt to interest this prominent Black Metal musician and claim transgressive subcultural capital is met with ridicule. I heard many similar stories of the desperate attempts of new members to impress established ones. Such stories provide ways for more established scene members to claim both mundane and transgressive subcultural capital. New members provide a convenient 'other', against whom capital can be claimed.

The disparaging of new members reveals certain fundamental anxieties about the construction of scenic space and the nature of appropriate scenic behaviour. There is continual anxiety over how far the scene should welcome change and how far the scene should welcome heterogeneity. This anxiety is revealed in the obsession with 'trends'. Trends represent the prospect of change and the prospect of an influx of new members producing a greater heterogeneity within the scene. Change and heterogeneity weaken the mechanisms through which mundane subcultural capital is claimed. Those who invest most in mundane subcultural capital are most fearful of change and difference. In contrast, transgressive subcultural capital rewards individuality, unpredictability and innovation. In theory, then, those most committed to transgressive subcultural capital should welcome change and heterogeneity.

As we have seen, however, individual scene members orient themselves towards both transgressive and mundane subcultural capital by varying degrees, which provokes an ambiguous response to the prospect of change and heterogeneity. As Keith Negus points out (1999), in all musical genres there are tensions between genre as 'routine' and genre as 'transformative'. Genres are sites both of innovation and of stable creativity within strict limits. Within the Extreme Metal scene these very different views of creativity and innovation are negotiated in the context of the tension between the instability rewarded by transgressive subcultural capital and the homogeneity rewarded by mundane subcultural capital. In order to examine this tension more closely, I want to present a brief musical and discursive history of the Extreme Metal scene in the 1990s.

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By the early 1990s mundane subcultural capital had become the predominant form of capital circulating within the scene. The Death Metal music that dominated the scene had become extraordinarily uniform and other forms of Extreme Metal had been pushed to the margins of the scene. At that time, scene members emphasised their 'normality', wearing casual clothes and spending most of their time in correspondence with other scene members. Strict limits were placed on the circulation of transgressive subcultural capital. While Death Metal bands frequently wrote lyrics on transgressive themes and the music avoided all trace of melody, by that time such transgression had become routine. In other words, the production of such transgressive material had become a precondition for participation in the scene and, therefore, had almost ceased to be transgressive. At the same time, the scene was effectively insulated from the world, making difficult the public transgression of any non-scenic boundary.

Yet, while the scene was musically and discursively at its most mundane, homogeneous and static, in other respects the scene was able to incorporate difference and change. The early 1990s were the time of the scene's greatest growth. Coinciding with the decline of Heavy Metal, there was a rapid influx of new scene members, helped by the high profile of a few bands on the border of the Extreme Metal and Heavy Metal scenes. For example, the 1990 *Clash Of The Titans* world tour, featuring Slayer and Megadeth, was heavily promoted and many scene members date their entry into the scene to that time. The scene grew throughout the world, extending to places where Extreme Metal had previously been unknown, with the influx of new members particularly marked in 'marginal' countries, such as Israel. Moreover, bands from marginal locations gained capital from their marginality. Mundane subcultural capital was endowed on those who had overcome their marginality to interact successfully within the scene.

By 1993 this situation had begun to change significantly. The Black Metal scene that developed in Norway and elsewhere was principally oriented towards claiming transgressive subcultural capital. As I have argued, transgressive subcultural capital was not common currency within the scene in the early 1990s. The Norwegian Black Metal scene developed transgressive subcultural capital as a more potent form of capital in two ways. First, it developed its own, highly cohesive scene, to which practice was oriented and within which transgressive subcultural capital was amplified. Although the precise details of the violent events within the Norwegian Black Metal scene, described in chapter four, remain unclear, it seems likely that scene members were engaged in a process of one-upmanship, in which each attempted to be more transgressive than the other. Second, the Norwegian scene produced a very prominent model of what could be

achieved through transgression. In other words, it provided a highly visible alternative to mundane subcultural capital.

The Black Metal scene produced dramatic musical and discursive innovation. Criminality, racism and associations with the far right were new phenomena in Metal. The Black Metal scene challenged the Extreme Metal scene, previously committed to mundane stability, to incorporate new sounds and practices that were highly disruptive and potentially dangerous. Yet, at the same time, the Black Metal scene also claimed mundane subcultural capital. For one thing, most of its members were active in the institutions of the scene and were thus obliged to abide by its logic. But the Black Metal scene was also fearful of change and difference, even as it introduced considerable disruption and diversity to the scene. Like many revolutionary movements, the Black Metal scene looked backwards as much as it looked forwards. Black Metallers such as Euronymous and Varg Vikernes were not only critical of the early-1990s scene for not being sufficiently transgressive, but also for having 'betrayed' Metal. The Black Metal scene looked backwards to 1980s Metal and, in particular, to German Thrash Metal. The 1980s were seen as a 'golden age', during which Metallers were clearly identifiable as a subculture. Black Metal thus attempted to redefine mundane subcultural capital by criticising change, diversity and tolerance. The Black Metal scene exemplifies how transgression, as we saw in chapter four, is always founded on certain exclusions and limits even as it transgresses others.

The early-1990s Black Metal scene developed a logic of subcultural capital accumulation that has survived to this day. Whereas transgressive subcultural capital was formerly of lesser importance than mundane, the Black Metal scene ensured that the two now have equal importance. Although individual scene members do not necessarily have an equal commitment to both forms of subcultural capital, neither form of capital has come to dominate the scene.

Since the mid-1990s the scene has become a space both of difference and experimentation, and of nostalgia and stasis. The logic of mundane subcultural capital ensures that all existing Extreme Metal genres have been refined incrementally by scene members. However, there has also been a quite startling amount of radical experimentation within Extreme Metal. At the forefront of this experimental tendency have been some of the members of the early-1990s Norwegian Black Metal scene. Bands such as Ulver and Arcturus have incorporated classical music, 'trip hop', sampling, operatic singing, and Drum and Bass into their music. In addition, stimulated by Black Metal's preoccupation with myths of nationality, a variety of bands from all Extreme Metal genres have incorporated 'folk' musics into Extreme Metal. For example, Sepultura from Brazil collaborated with an Amerindian tribe and with the Afro-Brazilian musician Carlinhos Brown on their *Roots* album (Roadrunner: 1996) (Harris 2000). The Israeli

band Orphaned Land drew on Middle Eastern Jewish music on their albums *Sahara* and *El Norra Alila* (Holy Records: 1993 and 1996 respectively) (Harris 1999). The Swedish band Otyg have drawn on Swedish folk music on a variety of albums, the most recent entitled *Sagovinders Boning* (Napalm: 1999). There are many other such examples from places as diverse as Ireland, Latvia and Turkey. Some Extreme Metal bands have also refined their sound in less esoteric ways, coming close to producing a new form of 'alternative rock'. For example, the UK's Anathema were originally a Doom Metal band, but they now play a form of music with strong similarities to Pink Floyd and Radiohead. The Gathering, from the Netherlands, were a Doom Metal band, but now play a form of psychedelic/'gothic' rock. The music of such bands still circulates almost exclusively within the Extreme Metal scene. The scene's music has diversified to such an extent that some of its output cannot realistically be termed 'extreme'.

At the same time, the contemporary Extreme Metal scene has reacted with great hostility to the incorporation of other kinds of difference. In the mid-1990s a genre emerged that became known as 'Nu Metal'. Nu Metal draws on 'grunge', hardcore, Death Metal, rap and funk musics, with bands such as Korn, The Deftones and Coal Chamber mixing downtuned guitars and quasi-Metal riffs with alternately rapped, screamed and sung lyrics. The lyrics are similar to those prevalent in grunge music, focusing on the dysfunction of the singer. Nu Metal bands and fans wear baggy clothes, often made by sportswear manufacturers, and generally have short hair and a proliferation of body piercings and tattoos. By the late 1990s Nu Metal had become almost as popular as Heavy Metal had been in the 1980s, with a huge world-wide following, which included many female fans. The Nu Metal scene is dominated by bands from the USA, particularly southern California. Many Nu Metal bands are signed to major record labels, while its scenic institutions are comparatively weak.

The majority of Extreme Metal scene members are extraordinarily vehement in their denunciation of Nu Metal. Nu Metal has become an 'other' against which subcultural capital can be claimed, as in the following extract from an interview with a British musician:

> ...we haven't got some kind of er, ego or image or nothing like that do you know what I mean, well we don't give a fuck what we look like yeah we ain't gonna go, I dunno yeah yeah let's go and all get our nose pierced and fucking get some eyebrow rings and wear some baggy shit and you know what I mean [....] we're trying to stay totally clear from the fucking Korn, Limp Bizkit, New Wave or er, arse Metal that has been introduced [...] just don't want to be associated with trendy Metal man.
> [UK11]

The reasons for Nu Metal's pariah status are rarely articulated clearly. As the above extract suggests, one reason is the perceived 'trendiness' of the scene, particularly regarding its emphasis on visual image. Another extract from a British interview is also revealing:

> [Talking about Korn]...I don't like their, the way they portray themselves and the way they are and the way their music is it's just too, weak [...] it's like I don't get any feeling to it it's like with Death Metal bands I can see, someone got a good feeling in there you know they've got their hearts into it and shit you can hear it in the music and whatever
> [UK14]

In this extract Korn – the paradigmatic Nu Metal band – are, in some ill-defined way, 'weak', superficial and depthless by comparison with Death Metal's seriousness and commitment. Tied in with this is the argument that Nu Metal bands lack an engagement with the history of Metal. As the Editor's reply to a letter in *Terrorizer* puts it:

> ...In 1990, for example, Obituary were probably just as popular as Coal Chamber are now...but they also covered 'Circle Of The Tyrants' [a song by early Extreme Metallers Celtic Frost] and talked about Mercyful Fate and Slayer a lot in interviews. Ultimately, everyone has to be given a chance to find out about the past as well as the underground...and some of the options in today's market don't really allow that....Frankly, it's harder to talk to a West Coast Metal band who have virtually no memory of anything before 'Chaos AD' [1993 album by Sepultura] than it is to natter with veterans like Voivod or Bruce Dickinson, even if these legends are ten to twenty years older than the writers on this mag. (February 1999: 65)

Not only have Nu Metal bands removed themselves musically from Extreme Metal and, indeed, Heavy Metal music, but they have also refused to ally themselves discursively with the history of these scenes. Even if the scene has become musically diverse in the 1990s, that diversity is still founded on members paying due respect to the history of the scene. Since the display of this historical perspective is a crucial way of gaining mundane subcultural capital, Nu Metal bands have effectively excluded themselves from gaining capital within the scene.

The hostility to Nu Metal does not only stem from its lack of attendance to mundane subcultural capital and, in this crucial respects, exposes the limits placed on transgressive subcultural capital. While Nu Metal demonstrates the willingness to innovate by which transgressive subcultural capital may be claimed, it draws on two musical/discursive sources that are 'abjectified' within the scene. Nu Metal attends extensively to gender, drawing on grunge music

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to discuss ambivalence towards sexuality, masculinity and femininity. For example, self-loathing provoked by sexual anxiety is a common theme found in Korn's lyrics. The song 'A.D.I.D.A.S.', from the album *Life is Peachy* (Sony: 1996), contains the chorus, 'All day I dream about sex/All day I dream about fucking'. Such a preoccupation with sexuality is absolutely antithetical to the forms of transgression practiced within the Extreme Metal scene. Within the scene sexuality is something to be ignored, or conquered with an excessive masculinity. The fact that Nu Metal bands often conceal a rampant misogyny and fear of femininity behind their anxiety does not matter – the presence of femininity in any shape or form cannot be tolerated within the Extreme Metal scene. In this context, the large number of female Nu Metal fans serves to confirm the music's abjectification. Nu Metal also welcomes musical and other influences from black cultures. Nu Metal bands draw on rap and funk music, and the scene's 'sportswear' style is very similar to that found in rap culture. Such influences cannot be tolerated within Extreme Metal. They are never explicitly criticised on racial grounds but, like 'femininity', 'blackness' is something that must be totally removed and ignored[16]. Black Metal's commitment to transgressive subcultural capital brought change and difference to the scene, but came up against the limits of transgression within the scene. Nu Metal transgresses precisely those limits and, therefore, must be excluded from the scene. The scene thus reproduces a classic 'symbolic boundary', which defines Nu Metal as 'impure' (Douglas 1984).

Partly in response to the rise of Nu Metal, since the mid-1990s the Extreme Metal scene has begun to (re-)incorporate elements of traditional Heavy Metal. As we saw, Black Metal emphasised the imagined past of traditional Metal. This nostalgic tendency was consolidated by subsequent revivals of the Thrash and Power Metal genres, which existed at the border of the Extreme Metal and Heavy Metal scenes in the 1980s. By the early 1990s bands playing these forms of Metal had lost much of their capital, but, with a renewed emphasis on Metal history, these genres were easily incorporated into circuits of mundane subcultural capital. By the late 1990s bands such as Iced Earth, Nevermore and Hammerfall had achieved great popularity within the scene and some 1980s bands, which had been dormant or simply unpopular for much of the 1990s, such as Manowar, became active again. In some parts of the world, including Germany, Greece and South America, such bands became as popular as Nu Metal bands. These bands unapologetically stress 'Metal' as a signifier and assert the power of mundane subcultural capital (as in Manowar's 'Metal Warriors'). They also stress the transgressive power of long hair and an 'us and them' attitude to the non-Metal world.

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[16] Les Back (personal communication) has drawn my attention to a worrying parallel with the far-right music scene. In the 1990s far-right bands, such as Rahowa and other bands on the US label Resistance records, reflexively attempted to purge far-right music of 'black' influences.

What is remarkable about the contemporary Extreme Metal scene is the way in which reactionary and experimental versions of Extreme Metal coexist. That is not to say that all scene members embrace all styles of Metal – there is a certain amount of suspicion between the most reactionary and the most experimental members. Nonetheless, the scene has become a space that is conservative yet, at the same time, a space within which Metal genres form the basis of wide-ranging musical explorations. This musical *convivencia* is made possible by the equal weight given to mundane and transgressive subcultural capital. Although the possibilities for earning capital were formerly limited to a fairly narrow range of strategies, in the contemporary scene members can accrue capital by a variety of musical and discursive means. The scene maintains a delicate 'homeostatic' balance, which ensures that both transgressive and mundane subcultural capital are valuable in the scene and also that the means of gaining transgressive and mundane subcultural capital are not closely circumscribed. The 'fulcrum' for this balance consists in the limits placed on musical and discursive experimentation and the continuing emphasis on the gaining and maintaining of scenic knowledge.

Conclusion

The analysis of subcultural capital presented in this chapter helps us to complete the analysis of power within the scene. In the previous chapter we examined the complex relationship of the scene to fields of power. The scene has a relatively high degree of autonomy but, nonetheless, it allows members to accumulate forms of capital that are transferable into other scenes and to utilise capital from outside the scene as a resource within it. The 'indigenous' forms of capital we looked at in this chapter are not so easily convertible into capital within other fields or scenes. Moreover, subcultural capital does not work as a resource in the same, concrete way as the forms of capital we discussed in the previous chapter – it cannot, for example, be used to buy more advertising space or to record more albums. As a result, locating power relations within the scene by reference to divisions in subcultural capital is far from straightforward.

Subcultural capital becomes problematic when it builds on other divisions in capital. As I have argued, those who are endowed with subcultural capital may go on to gain other forms of capital through, for example, selling more records. Conversely, for those for whom participation in the scene is already difficult, such as women and those from certain marginal locations and ethnicities, subcultural capital may be particularly difficult to claim. Mundane subcultural capital, for example, requires so much in-depth knowledge that those from marginal countries or poorer backgrounds may find it difficult to accrue. Thus, subcultural capital becomes concentrated in the hands of those who possess other kinds of capital. Yet the 'economy' of subcultural capital is always complicated by the way it can be claimed for oneself, ensuring that at least potentially, the struggle for subcultural capital is a 'level playing field'. Furthermore,

both transgressive and mundane subcultural capital may attenuate divisions in capital in particular ways. Mundane subcultural capital engenders an ethic of collective support that helps to support marginal scene members. Transgressive subcultural capital's rewarding of individuality and idiosyncrasy is also potentially more accessible to those with low amounts of other kinds of capital, since it does not require detailed scenic knowledge. In and of itself, then, subcultural capital is more accessible and contestable than other kinds of capital.

Our use of Bourdieu's concept of capital in this and the previous chapter forces us to treat the scene as a kind of battleground, a site of struggle within which all musics and discourses represent claims for capital. Bourdieu's model produces, as I have stated, an economistic model of social action. Despite the fact that the habitus is a phenomenologically informed concept, the overwhelming impression that these two chapters present is of a scene structured by large-scale 'forces', meaning that we may lose sight of how individual members orient their practices. In these chapters I have barely referred to the complex ways in which interaction is managed, mentioning only in passing the 'reflexivity' we discussed in chapter five. In chapter eight, the final substantive chapter of this thesis, I want to look at how reflexivity works in the scene. The chapter will allow us to use the insights of chapters five, six and seven to reach a fuller answer to the question posed at the start of chapter five: what do members get out of the scene?

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## REFLEXIVE ANTI-REFLEXIVITY

### Introduction

In chapter five we asked what members gain from their participation within the scene. We partially answered this question by showing how the scene offers the experience of mundanity and transgression to members. In chapters six and seven we showed how the practices that produce the experience of transgression and mundanity are capital-maximising practices. What we have lost in chapters six and seven is the phenomenological focus of chapter five. *How* members orient their practices towards particular practices and *how* everyday life in the scene is negotiated is still unclear.

The phenomenological focus of chapter five sensitised us to the affective and sensual quality of the experience of the scene within everyday life. The focus was only tangentially on how experience is negotiated through the practice of reflexivity. As I argued in chapter five, reflexivity constitutes the continuous, indexical management of the flow of experience. In chapters five and three I argued that sociologies that focus exclusively on the detail of the workings of reflexivity are unacceptably narrow in focus. These sociologies necessitate an attention to the micro-level of interaction that is incompatible with a large-scale study such as this. However, a lack of attention to the micro risks neglecting the 'how' of interaction and may lead us to treat individual members as little more than ciphers for 'social forces'. The question is how can we examine the 'micro' workings of reflexivity within the scene, while still paying attention to 'macro' processes. In this chapter I want to show how we can investigate the interconnections between the micro and the macro within the scene through a reconsideration of the concept of reflexivity.

### Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity, as used by ethnomethodologists and phenomenologists, is too general. If, as it is argued, reflexivity is continuously practiced in all situations by all members, then reflexivity does not describe anything specific – it is simply a precondition for existence itself. However, sociologists influenced by ethnomethodology, but not beholden to it, have reconstituted the concept to refer to something more specific. Anthony Giddens (1984, 1990) accords reflexivity a central place in his social theory. He describes reflexivity as 'the continuous monitoring of action which human beings display' (1984: 8). Where he differs from ethnomethodologists is in his attempt to tie the micro operation of reflexivity into macro

processes of 'structuration'. Giddens argues that 'structures' ('rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction' (ibid.: xxxi)) are reproduced within the fine detail of everyday interaction. His concept of the 'duality of structure' describes how structures ranging over large expanses of time and space are both independent of individual actors and yet, at the same time, have no existence outside everyday interaction. Actors continually reproduce and manipulate structures through their reflexive management of everyday life.

The concept of the duality of structure paves the way for a more useful and specific concept of reflexivity. Giddens argues that the very nature of reflexivity has changed in modernity[17]:

> The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character...We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but where at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of that knowledge will not be revised. (1990: 28–29)

In modernity, reflexivity ensures that all structural principles are continually revised and redefined. The concept of reflexivity thus takes on some of the connotations of 'reflectivity', signifying the capacity to relentlessly question certainties, a process that reaches its apotheosis in modernity. To practice reflexivity in modernity is to acknowledge tacitly that the world is changeable and that structures are changeable. It is also to acknowledge that no certainties exist regarding the consequences of human action – the results of practice can never be fully anticipated.

This concept of reflexivity has been explored in more detail by Scott Lash (1994). He suggests that 'reflexive modernisation' involves the 'empowerment of subjects'. He argues that there are two forms of reflexivity:

> First there is structural reflexivity in which agency, set free from the constraints of social structure, then reflects on the 'rules' and 'resources' of such structure, reflects on agency's social conditions of existence. Second there is self-reflexivity in which agency reflects on itself. (1994: 115)

In processes of reflexive modernisation, agency becomes freed from structure and agents are empowered to reformulate the rules and resources that constitute structure. Crucially for Lash, reflexivity is more present in certain areas of modern societies than others. For Lash, as for Giddens, reflexivity becomes a potential, rather than, as for phenomenologists, something that is

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[17] I do not necessarily accept the argument that reflexivity *has* changed in modernity. It may be that reflexivity has always worked as Giddens describes it. This question is, however, the subject for another study.

ever present. The reflexivity that Giddens and Lash describe is, in phenomenological terms, reflexivity about reflexivity – a contingent 'higher order' of reflexivity. The critical social theory that Giddens, Lash, and others have formulated aims to add to the overall process of reflexive modernisation through identifying those areas where reflexivity is most strongly present or where it should be nurtured.

Lash argues that one place in which reflexivity is extensively practiced is within the 'reflexive communities' that we discussed in chapter two. Community is important as certain forms of reflexivity in modernity tend to neglect the 'we' and deconstruct any sense of collectivity.

> We can see chances open up for new forms of the 'we' – grounded in the expert-systems, founded on the information and communication structures – which are vastly different from traditional communities. In turn, these new cultural communities offer possibilities of even more intensified reflexivity. (1994: 167)

Lash specifically associates reflexive community with subcultures and other communities formed around shared practices. He also associates reflexive communities with Bourdieu's 'fields'. He defines reflexive community in four ways:

> …first, one is not born or 'thrown', but 'throws oneself' into them; second, they may be widely stretched over 'abstract' space, and also perhaps over time; third, they consciously pose themselves the problem of their own creation, and constant re-invention far more than do traditional communities; fourth, their 'tool's and products tend to be not material ones but abstract and cultural. (ibid.: 161)

Reflexive communities are continually active, self-searching and contingent. They are founded on the breakdown of certainty that modernity engenders, but nonetheless avoid the atomisation of individuals. They offer the empowerment of reflexivity, without its concomitant insecurity.

## Reflexivity and Anti-Reflexivity

As I argued in chapter two, Lash's definition of reflexive community seems to be applicable to aspects of the Extreme Metal scene. Scene members 'throw themselves' into the scene; the scene is 'stretched' over time and space; scene members constantly debate what sort of space the scene should be; the scene's products are purely cultural; scene members seem to practice 'intensified reflexivity'. As we saw in chapter six, the scene has highly sophisticated networks for communication and information. Practice is continually reformulated in the light of information, in order to produce 'safety' and a homeostatic balance between transgression and mundanity. Conflicts are negotiated in ways that are not excessively divisive. As we saw in chapter seven, the cultural products of the scene, particularly in the 1990s, demonstrate a

sophisticated engagement with a variety of musical histories. In these and many other respects, the scene could be described as a reflexive community.

That the scene constitutes a reflexive community does not mean that all members practice reflexivity in the same ways all the time. Members' practice of reflexivity within the scene may only be partial and selective. In fact, my research encountered many instances that appeared to demonstrate an evident '*un*reflexivity'. Consider the following extract from an interview with the Danish Black Metal musician Peter Mesnickow, who also works for the record label Euphonious, which appeared in the Norwegian fanzine *Imhotep*:

> As some have probably noticed we (Euphonious Records/Voices of Wonder DK where I work) have placed an anti-nazi logo on our releases. This doesn't mean we are nigger-lovers or something like that. But since Voices of Wonder have been accused of being a nazi-label several times we just had enough!! (Issue 3, 1997: 38)

While all discourse is contradictory (Potter and Wetherell 1987), this statement is so extraordinarily schizophrenic that existing analytical tools barely seem to cope. The temptation would be to rely on a conventional lay explanation for this quotation – that Peter Mesnickow is a complete idiot. More sociologically, we could argue that in not attending to the obvious contradiction between printing anti-Nazi logos and using the term 'nigger lovers', Mesnickow is not being reflexive. However, I would argue that, on the contrary, Mesnickow *is* demonstrating his reflexivity, albeit in a highly partial way. By printing an anti-Nazi logo on their releases, thereby recognising and attempting to forestall the criticisms of anti-racists, he and the company for which he works are deploying reflexivity. In this extract, however, Mesnickow is also reflexively forestalling the potential criticisms of racists – that the label's staff are 'nigger lovers'. Yet, in attending to both potential criticisms, seemingly convinced that racists and anti-racists can be satisfied at the same time, Mesnickow's practice appears in the last analysis to be unreflexive. A crucial part of reflexivity is to attend to the unintended consequences of action and, in not attending to the possible critical reading of this extract as ludicrous, Mesnickow appears to demonstrate unreflexivity.

Below is another, less dramatic example of apparent unreflexivity:

I:      From what I read in fanzines, a lot of Swedish people in the Metal scene are very
        unhappy about immigrants in Sweden. What's your attitude to that?

R:      Immigrants in Sweden? Well um

I:      Do you have a problem with that?

R:      No. Er I I don't care where people live in on the whole globe, you know. Er I don't care
        er, of course I can always ask myself why just Sweden had to be er to have all the
        immigrants but I don't care actually because I want to go wherever I want to go and er I
        I I hope that people would respect me and treat me as a human being. I mean we we
        don't have any kind of war here so I can't imagine how it feels but er I've heard people
        who've, I even had a er have a few friends, so I'm definitely not Nazi or anything like
        that.

        [S2]


In the majority of this extract the interviewee draws on 'liberal' discourses to explain why he
'doesn't care' about the presence of immigrants in Sweden. However, in the midst of this he
reveals that he accepts as 'fact' the notion that Sweden has taken more than its share of
immigrants – a clear borrowing from racist discourses. His reflexive disavowal of racism is
made ambiguous. The extract shows an unwillingness to follow through the implications of
discourses. He is apparently unaware that claiming Sweden has taken more than its share of
immigrants at the very least makes his disavowal of racism problematic. I would not classify
this interviewee as definitely racist, but his reflexive construction of anti-racist discourse is
extremely limited.


My research into the Extreme Metal scene revealed many apparently unreflexive instances in
which the practice of reflexivity seemed to be absent, contradictory, ambiguous or limited. For
example, I met an ex-punk committed to anti-fascist practice, who subjected me to a long
speech about how 'Enoch Powell was right'. There is the strange case of the prominent
Norwegian Black Metal musician who has made many racist comments, but is, in fact, of
Moroccan descent. I uncovered many instances in which the partiality or absence of reflexivity
produced strange lacunae in Extreme Metal discourses. I found many puzzling examples of
members being reluctant to discuss certain issues. The January 1995 issue of *Terrorizer*
contained a feature on the Norwegian Black Metal band Emperor, which mentioned the
imprisonment of one of its members, but contained no explanation or discussion of this
apparently extraordinary episode. In another example, a British fanzine editor showed me some
of his artwork, which depicted stereotypical African 'tribesmen' spanking a white woman. I
casually mentioned that some might find the illustration racist. He replied 'they might do, but it
isn't' and would brook no further discussion. Similarly, the following extract from an interview
with a British female musician demonstrates a refusal to attend to issues of sexism:


I:      [Talking about misogynist lyrics in Death Metal] do you think that might be why I
        mean, that puts a lot of women, do you think that's the reason or is it
R:      Could do but I don't see it, as the way they're seeing it, so

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I:      right

R:      I don't know heh heh, know why they I think they just get, just kick up a fuss just to kick up a fuss

        [UK16]

In this extract the interviewee simply refuses to engage with the issues being discussed. Moreover, she renders any reflexive attempt to attend to sexist lyrics as 'kicking up a fuss'.

How do we understand the examples that I have quoted so far in this chapter? They apparently show scene members as ignorant, lacking in self-awareness, sexist, racist, politically naive or inarticulate. While this conclusion would certainly conform to the common stereotypes of Metallers, discussed by Robert Walser and Deena Weinstein among others, how can it be reconciled with the high levels of reflexivity in other areas of the scene? How do we understand the apparent coexistence of determinedly reflexive and unreflexive practices?

I would define unreflexive practice as a practice of ignorance, of failure to comprehend the complex consequences of human action. Unreflexive practice is practice that 'does not know better' and that leaves members with an inbuilt weakness against the effects of reflexive practice. Unreflexive practice has no defence against the flows of signs and capital that constitute the processes of reflexive modernisation described by Lash and Giddens. If unreflexivity is defined in this way, it is more difficult to see the above examples as instances of members failing to practice reflexivity. In fact, the examples we have described seem to be the result of members' active *suppression* of reflexivity – of 'anti-reflexive' practice. Whereas unreflexivity derives from a failure, anti-reflexivity is an accomplishment. Whereas unreflexive practices leave members defenceless against processes of reflexive modernisation, anti-reflexive practices simply refuse to admit that such processes exist. If reflexivity is founded on an appreciation of the contingent, ambiguous, unintended character of practice, anti-reflexive practice is founded on the illusion that the world is simple and obvious. We have seen in this section how members stubbornly take statements at 'face value', how contradiction is ignored and how it is assumed that listeners will receive discourse as the speaker 'intended'. Discourse is not to be explicated or examined, but simply accepted 'as it is'. Anti-reflexivity produces a simplistic world in which nothing need be examined and everything is just as it appears. Peter Mesnickow did not fail to be reflexive in demonstrating himself to be both an anti-Nazi and a racist – he practiced anti-reflexivity in order to suppress the very possibility that his position could be read as contradictory.

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Reflexive Anti-Reflexivity

Describing the practices we examined in the previous section as anti-reflexive is not unproblematic. Anti-reflexivity involves holding the reflexive world at bay through an active refusal to engage in reflexive practice. However, those who practice this apparent anti-reflexivity are perfectly capable of reflexive practice in other areas of their lives. Most of the individuals quoted in the previous section show ample reflexivity in other areas of their accounts. Therefore, we need to understand the coexistence of reflexivity and anti-reflexivity within the scene and how the relationship between the two practices is managed.

As we have seen, the precondition for the reproduction of the scene is the sustained practice of reflexivity. If the scene's 'logic' is reflexive, then it is difficult to separate apparently anti-reflexive practices from this logic. Anti-reflexive practices must always at some level be implicated in reflexive practices. It is more appropriate, therefore, to refer to the practices we discussed in the previous section as *reflexively* anti-reflexive. If unreflexivity is produced through a practice of 'not knowing better' and 'pure' anti-reflexivity is produced through a practice of 'not wanting to know', reflexive anti-reflexivity is produced through a practice of 'knowing better but deciding not to know'. Given the intense reflexivity of the scene and the intense reflexivity required to become involved in it, 'pure', unreflexive anti-reflexivity is virtually impossible to produce within the scene. Reflexive anti-reflexivity can therefore be defined as anti-reflexivity practiced by members who are capable of producing reflexive practice within the reflexive space of the scene[18]. In this section I want to examine the practice of reflexive anti-reflexivity in more detail, in order to understand more fully what this practice accomplishes within the scene.

In 1999 the Norwegian Black Metal band Immortal posed for publicity pictures for their album *At the Heart of Winter* (Osmose: 1999). The photographs appear in the insert to the album and were later reproduced in montage form as a poster in *Terrorizer* (July 1999). The poster is shown in appendix three. The two core members of the band are dressed in leather trousers and are adorned with spikes – both common elements of Metal clothing. They are also wearing 'corpse paint', a style of face painting pioneered by Black Metal bands but drawing (generally

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[18] It might be argued, of course, that all anti-reflexive practice is at some level reflexive. This is a another question that will have to wait for future studies. But whether or not 'pure' anti-reflexivity can ever exist, the term reflexive anti-reflexivity is still preferable in this study as it emphasises the complex interrelationship of reflexive and anti-reflexive practices within the scene.

unacknowledged) inspiration from the face painting of the popular Metal band Kiss and earlier Glam Rock bands.

One possible 'preferred reading' (Hall 1993) of these pictures is that the band appear laughable. There is a certain comic hubris in a Black Metal band apparently attempting to look 'evil' and warlike, but ending up looking ridiculous. Of course, such readings are not inevitable, but they are certainly invited by the pictures themselves. In interviews the members of Immortal have never shown any sign of being other than 'serious' in intent. It would, therefore, be very easy to read the pictures as the result of unreflexive practice, revealing a complete lack of awareness of the possible readings that a particular set of images may produce. Alternatively, one might read these pictures as 'camp'. Susan Sontag has defined camp as the 'love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (1982: 105). Camp is exaggeratedly stylised, knowing, playful and ironic. It is 'art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is "too much"' (ibid.: 112). Camp is a way of reading art in a playful, ironic way that dethrones 'the serious'. The apparently exaggerated seriousness of the Immortal photographs almost begs to be read as camp.

Given the close association between camp and homosexuality, it is hard to imagine that Immortal wanted their photographs to be read as such. Moreover, given the importance that 'seriousness' and 'the true' has in Black Metal, it is equally hard to imagine the band welcoming comic readings. Yet we cannot assume that either the band or their audience are oblivious to the connotations of these images. In fact, a highly developed appreciation of camp and the ridiculous is found within certain scenic discourses. Take, for example, this extract from the review of *At the Heart of Winter*, which appeared in *Terrorizer* alongside two of the pictures later reprinted on the poster:

> If our long-suffering designer Dave Tonkin has picked it right, above this review will be possibly the best (or worst, depending on your aesthetic sensibilities or lack of same) photograph you will see in Terrorizer this year, let alone last or next. You will agree, I am sure, that this photo is truly magnificent. Picked yourself off the floor yet? Stifled that belly-laugh? Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. (April 1999: 48)

The review sanctions laughter as an appropriate response to the pictures and the magazine further reinforced this response with the poster of the pictures that appeared two issues later. In my research I came across dozens of examples of members revelling in the humorous possibilities of the scene. Humour appears to be a perfectly appropriate response to Black Metal in particular:

...I always had a tongue in cheek attitude towards it [Black Metal]. When it first started out I just couldn't believe these things that these people were saying and that other people actually thought that they really seriously meant what they were saying half the time, um like Euronymous saying I wouldn't care if all my friends died and they just didn't, they just made me laugh, these sort of things. I didn't take them seriously.
[UK5]

[Describing a visit by a prominent Norwegian Black Metal band to his office]...and they came to the office and this was the middle of summer and I was wearing a pair of shorts and T-shirt and it was boiling, sweltering at eleven o'clock in the morning, they were all stood there going [makes devil sign] and they were all like covered in black with all these great big leather coats and I said 'aren't you fucking boiling' [laugh] you wankers [laugh]. But of course they were all like you know [gesture] and I just, I was ripping the piss out of them in the office and he was going 'no, no'
[UK7]

It was very amusing, it was hilarious. Like when you, when I for the first time heard a Black Metal song sung in Norwegian on er one of their early Darkthrone records, it was it was hilarious.
[S2]

Black Metal has also been the object of satire within some scenic publications. For example, the Swedish fanzine *Pure Passion* (Issue 1, 1997) printed a cartoon depicting 'A day in the life of a true Satanist'. The panels (depicting a man in corpse paint) were captioned as follows: 'Slaughtering Christian morons', 'Conference with Satan', 'Ritual sex orgies', 'Buy milk' and 'Wash the car'. The Norwegian fanzine *Mimmes Brun* (Issue 1, 1997) printed a fake interview with an imaginary band, 'Moon Rites', satirising many of the conventions of interviews with Black Metal bands:

**Ok, you and Moon Rites play Black Metal and...**
Actually not, we play Dark Forest Metal.
**Dark Forest Metal...? So you play the same style as Under The Fog**
No. Under The Fog plays Forest Fog Metal, which is something else.
**I suppose Under The Fog is not as Dark as you then?**
Well, they are Dark, but not like us. More Foggy I think.
**Your other band, Storm Funeral then, what kind of music do you play with them?**
We play Neo-Tormented Storm Metal exclusively.

Thus, reading elements of Extreme Metal and, in particular, Black Metal as camp, ridiculous and comic is perfectly acceptable within the scene. An analysis of this component of Metal has been missing from existing studies. Academics such as Walser (1993) and Weinstein (2000) have treated laughter as a threatening assault on Metal. Yet Extreme Metal has, from the beginning, contained camp and comic elements. Venom, generally considered to have 'started' Black Metal with the album *Welcome to Hell* (Banzai: 1981), used Satanic imagery to an unprecedented degree, but within the scene there was, and is, a clear consensus that the band were not 'really' Satanists and had a tongue-in-cheek attitude to Satanic imagery. Norwegian Black Metal bands are frequently contrasted with Venom in interviews:

> ...all the Black Metal bands in the 1980s, they used to sing sing a lot of the things that these Norwegian bands sing about, but you knew deep down that they never meant it. It was alright you know, it was safe. It was all, you know, y-you just knew Venom weren't Satanists, they were a Rock and Roll band, with these Norwegian bands, they were, I thought they were completely and utterly crazy and they were for real.
> [UK4]

So highly developed is the practice of reading elements of Extreme Metal as comic that some scene members initially had difficulty in reading Norwegian Black Metal as 'serious'. The following anecdote, from an interview with the manager of a British label, is highly revealing:

> Vikernes came in this office, stayed at my house – this is before he did any murders or anything....Um but he said a few comments like, when we were having pizza and stuff at Pizzaland down there, it was like, little things like, er just like out of the blue, he'd be telling like 'oh yeah, I'm the mail-order party, mail-order branch of er Norwegian Nazi party'. We were like 'mmm, whatever, do you want garlic bread?', bullshit he was on about and he's like 'no no no I've sold three flags, three swastika flags through my mail, that's my, I've sold three flags'. And we're like 'yeah yeah whatever you know bollocks you're talking about' and um you know, at that time it was like [inaudible] bravado crap he was talking about. But then it suddenly sunk in with us, it's like this guy, he's for real.
> [UK8]

Varg Vikernes' claims to be a Nazi were initially read as camp and comic. This reading turned to considerable shock when the interviewee eventually found out that Vikernes' activities simply could not be read in that way. We saw in previous chapters how the early-1990s Black Metal bands attempted to make Metal 'real' again and remove its mundanity. Strikingly, these bands were generally fervent fans of Venom, yet they reinterpreted the band as 'serious',

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problematising humour in the process. In the early-1990s Norwegian scene Black Metal was constructed as opposed to 'fun' and some bands claimed never to laugh, an attitude that has persisted among Black Metallers in some locations ever since. That these bands felt the need to actively oppose laughter is ample testimony to the importance of comic and camp readings within the scene. As we have seen, however, the bands did not entirely succeed and humour remains important within the present-day scene. Any 'true' Black Metal imagery, of the type used by Immortal, risks being read as camp and comic. Why then did Immortal authorise the release of the pictures?

We should not assume that humour and camp are incompatible with transgression. As Gavin Baddeley shows (1999), some strains of Satanism, such as that developed by Anton LaVey, demonstrate a deep appreciation of the comic. Furthermore, we should not assume that humour within the scene undermines 'the serious'. The serious and the humorous are instead closely intertwined in a complex relationship. In the interviews quoted towards the start of this section, the interviewees, having ridiculed Black Metal, went on to show that laughter did not stop them becoming more seriously attracted to the scene. Taking pleasure from such humorous anecdotes does not necessarily undermine the member's deep commitment to the scene. Similarly, a humorous reading of the Immortal publicity pictures does not necessarily undermine the band or deprive them of subcultural capital. The *Terrorizer* review of *At the Heart of Winter* went on to praise the album without reservations. The band's ludicrous imagery served, in fact, to inspire affection towards Immortal. Of course, it is not necessarily the case that Immortal wanted to be seen as humorous in any way. However, the costs of being seen as humorous were minimal and, therefore, did not need to be attended to reflexively. The band practiced reflexive anti-reflexivity through choosing to ignore certain possible readings, based on a reflexive evaluation of the risks of those readings.

Reflexive anti-reflexivity ensures that laughter is never overwhelming and the humorous never undermines the serious. Although, as we have seen, elements of the Extreme Metal scene, and the Black Metal scene in particular, are often seen as ludicrous, the full implications of humorous readings are left unexplored. Quite *why* the Immortal photos might be seen as amusing is left unsaid. The delight in camp never leads to a wholehearted reading of the scene as camp. Scene members still read the scene 'seriously', even as they acknowledge its campness and humour. In some cases this acknowledgement is explicit, as in the *Terrorizer* review of Immortal. In other cases this acknowledgement is made implicitly, through a reflexively anti-reflexive suppression of humour. This suppression of humour can be seen in a *Terrorizer* article on the band Manowar, written by Greg Whalen:

*...Manowar is more than just a band. It's a need, a calling, a way of life...a fucking legend.*

Some people don't understand this. They look at the furry loincloths, the leather waistcoats and the swords, and they laugh. But to mock is to miss the point completely: Manowar is not there to be scrutinised or studied. Manowar just *is*. (May 1999: 34)

Whalen does not deny that Manowar could be construed as amusing. However, he argues that to understand Manowar 'properly' one needs to remove laughter from one's critical vocabulary. The statement 'Manowar just *is*' is the very definition of anti-reflexivity, but to achieve this anti-reflexive practice one must actively use one's reflexivity. Reflexive anti-reflexivity allows scene members to tactically marginalise that which they 'don't want to know'. Members can 'play' in serious ways with imagery that might otherwise be ridiculed. They can enjoy the *frisson* of humour in the texts they produce and consume, without ever undermining their profound commitment to the scene and its texts. Reflexive anti-reflexivity can be, therefore, a 'playful' form of practice. Play is a form of practice in which signifiers are manipulated so as to destabilise ideas of fixed and unitary meanings (Derrida 1990). To play is not to enjoy discourses for their intrinsic 'meanings', but for their unstable and polysemic qualities. Play is acutely, gleefully reflexive, in celebrating the ability to manipulate discourse for one's own contingent and fleeting ends.

Reflexive anti-reflexivity may be playful, but it is not necessarily benign. I want to examine an incident that shows how reflexive anti-reflexivity can be damaging to some scene members. The incident began when a demo released by the Israeli Black Metal band Bishop of Hexen, entitled *Ancient Hymns of Legend and Lore*, received an uncomplimentary review in the prominent Norwegian fanzine *Nordic Vision* (Issue 7, 1996). In response, Bishop of Hexen's vocalist, Balzamon, wrote a letter complaining furiously about the bad review and concluding:

You hurt us really bad and we will never ever forget what you have done to us. We will never forget 'Nordic Vision'. Never!!

Melankol X, the fanzine's Editor, published the letter in the following issue, together with a heavily sarcastic and insulting reply that began, 'First of all you are from Israel and that alone is enough to hate you forever'. This incident acquired a certain notoriety and was frequently referred to during my fieldwork in Israel and elsewhere. In other fanzine interviews Balzamon has complained bitterly about his band's treatment in *Nordic Vision*, accusing Melankol X of racism. In another Norwegian fanzine, *Mimes Brunn* (Issue 1, 1997), Balzamon gave an impassioned defence of being an Israeli Black Metal musician and of being a member of 'the noble Jewish race'. In the Swedish fanzine *Nekrologium* (Issue 7, 1997) he is quoted as saying:

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'That vegetablebrain [sic] from Nordic-fucked-up-Vision can kiss my Jewish ass!' Clearly, Balzamon was attempting to draw on those same essentialist discourses of race by which he himself had felt injured.

Some Israeli scene members recounted the Bishop of Hexen incident in order to demonstrate the racism that Israeli scene members have encountered. However, many others told me that it demonstrated the idiocy of Balzamon in protesting against the review. When I told scene members elsewhere that I had visited Israel, Bishop of Hexen were frequently mentioned and ridiculed, on the grounds that Balzamon should not have complained and that, having done so, he deserved everything that followed. One contributor to the newsgroup alt.music.black.metal drew the following lesson (16/5/99): 'There will always be people who think you suck for whatever reason(s). Get used to it, and get over it'.

It appears, then, that many scene members regard this incident as noteworthy, but do not regard Melankol X's racist comment as its most important aspect. In fact, Melankol X has interacted in unproblematic ways with other Israeli scene members and enjoys good business and personal relationships with some of them. I had a report from a reliable source that Melankol X has said that he used racist language in order to 'wind Balzamon up'. Indeed, in a letter to me Melankol X described his response to Balzamon's letter as 'just an overdone way of replying to his not so smart letter' (26/5/99). Melankol X certainly takes pains to distance himself from overt Nazis in his fanzine and his writing tends to be hate-filled and playful towards the majority of the bands he reviews. Had Melankol X liked Bishop of Hexen's music, it is highly unlikely that their nationality would have received other than a passing mention. Since he did not, the apparent lack of taboos against racist language in the scene gave him ammunition in his humiliation of Balzamon. In this context Melankol X, who has reflexively dealt with Israelis within the scene at other spaces and times, reflexively 'chose' to be anti-reflexive and to draw on a racist discourse. His reflexively anti-reflexive statement produced an effective way of attacking someone he despised. Balzamon's attempted use of essentialist nationalism in his defence was of no value, since he failed to recognise that Melankol X had used racist discourses in a fundamentally playful manner.

I heard from a number of sources that Balzamon subsequently left the scene, a highly disgruntled man. His story shows the perils of failing to comprehend how reflexive anti-reflexivity works within the scene. Balzamon assumed that reviews are direct, personalised attacks, which have to be responded to with a similar vehemence. He showed little reflexive understanding of the complex processes of negotiation that constitute the scene. His second mistake was to treat Melankol X's racist statement as 'evidence' of an essential racism, necessitating a direct challenge. I am not condemning Balzamon's actions. In other spaces

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Balzamon's response to a bad review and to racial taunting might have been entirely appropriate. However, within the Extreme Metal scene his response was not only entirely ineffective but also unreflexive. Just as anti-reflexive practice, produced by individuals who are otherwise capable of acting reflexively within the reflexive space of the scene, can be characterised as reflexively anti-reflexive, so Balzamon's apparently reflexive attempts to defend himself from racist abuse can, within a reflexively anti-reflexive space, be characterised as unreflexive.

Music and the Politics of the Scene

The Bishop of Hexen controversy is just one of a number of highly revealing incidents involving the seemingly casual deployment of racist discourse within the scene. Another incident involved the Norwegian Black Metal band Darkthrone and has been described in detail by Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind (1998). In 1994 the band's principal member, Fenriz, asked their British label Peaceville to include the following statement in the 'sleevenotes' of their album *Transylvanian Hunger*:

> We would like to state that Transylvanian Hunger stands beyond any criticism. If any man should attempt to criticise this LP, he should be thoroughly patronised for his obvious Jewish behaviour.

Peaceville records has its roots in the 1980s anti-fascist Punk scene and did not feel they could simply ignore this statement. However, neither were they willing to censor the band. The compromise they offered was to comply with Darkthrone's request but to refuse to promote or advertise the album. A press release was issued explaining the incident and explicitly distancing the label from the band's opinions. The incident received coverage in the non-Metal music media (e.g. *New Musical Express*, 18/6/94). Darkthrone quickly capitulated and the album was issued without the offending item. Darkthrone issued a press release in which the band denied they had fascist or racist sympathies. The statement explained the use of the word 'Jewish' in the following way:

> ...Darkthrone can only apologize for this tragic choice of words, but PLEASE let us explain this. You see in Norway, the word 'Jew' is used all the time to mean something that is out of order, if something breaks down, if something is stupid etc. It's always been like this, we don't know why, it's just a coincidence in our slang language....

It is almost impossible to believe that Darkthrone had no idea that the pejorative use of the word 'Jew' could possibly be construed as offensive. Furthermore, as Moynihan and Søderlind point

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out, the denial that the band had racist or fascist sympathies was disingenuous, considering that Fenriz had previously made a number of fascist statements in fanzines. Moreover, when *Transylvanian Hunger* was finally issued, the phrase 'Norsk Arisk Black Metal' ('Norwegian Aryan Black Metal') was printed prominently on the sleeve. Yet other interviews with Fenriz seem to indicate a less-than-wholehearted commitment to racism and fascism, as in this quotation from an interview in *Terrorizer*:

> Q: To the casual observer, it would appear as though you change your philosophy as often as you change your socks. Would this be a fair assertion?
>
> A: Oh yeah, sure man. Every fortnight there's a new vision that comes to me under my pillow. I find a little note there with instructions and shit. It's really weird. The philosophy fairy, hahaha! (January 1999: 15)

Incidents have been reported to me of Fenriz interacting with Israeli scene members without problems. I would argue, therefore, that Darkthrone were cynically utilising reflexive anti-reflexivity in order to maximise the transgressive potential of racist discourse, without becoming irrevocably enmeshed in outright fascist activity.

Yet why attempt to avoid controversy at all? Why *not* permit others to take such quasi-fascistic signs at face value? If Darkthrone had gone down this route, the band would have become enmeshed in public controversy within and without the Extreme Metal scene. Moreover, their 'attitudes' would have been foregrounded at the expense of their music. Foregrounding attitudes is antithetical to Extreme Metal practice, as Darkthrone put it in their statement:

> Darkthrone is *absolutely not* a political band and we never were.
>
> [Emphasis in original]

Within the Extreme Metal scene the denial of political intent is a common defence used by those who have drawn on fascist and racist discourses. As one Black Metal musician told me, in an interview regarding the contiguity between his satanic views and fascism:

> ...I'm very much against all forms of politics. We don't take no part in any political [values], er I've never been interested in politics at all, so I don't really know what fascism really is about so I don't know.
>
> [S8]

Other scene members have used disparaging definitions of politics more aggressively, in order to deflect criticism. The album *The Fire and the Wind* (Osmose: 1999), by the British/New Zealand band Demoniac, features a song entitled 'Myths of Metal', which contains the chorus:

> Hitler Metal want to bang my fucking head
> And fist the living dead in the middle of the night alright
> I really want to bang my head and fist the living dead in the middle of the night my sign
> The Metal's in my blood and the power is here and now for you!
> HITLER METAL! SIEG HEIL!

Faced with their record being banned in Germany, the band released an apologetic statement explaining that the song was a tongue-in-cheek tribute to 1980s German Thrash Metal. On their website (www.demoniac.com) they were far less apologetic, printing the following statement under the lyrics to the song:

> For the NERDS...No this song is NOT about Hitler or any of your politics bullshit! If you don't get the joke, fuck off. This song is about banging to heavy fucking metal and having a good laugh. We don't give a fuck about Hitler. Fuck off if you don't have a sense of humour.

Politics is constructed here as a humourless and utterly incongruous hermeneutic that is entirely 'other' to Metal.

The use of the term 'politics' within the scene is restricted to interventions in the public sphere that are consciously and reflexively designed to have an impact on social institutions. With this perspective, virtually nothing within the scene is political. This definition of politics upholds an 'autonomous' view of music, which sees it as ideally removed from structuration and reflexivity. Such a view is part of a long tradition of idealist Western musical discourse, which has obscured the connections between music and society (Chanan 1994). Music is seen as non-verbal and hence unknowable and abstract (Durant 1984; Fornäs 1997). Anything 'political' is seen to sully the purity of music.

In chapter five we saw how members put 'music' at the discursive centre of their lives. We also saw that, phenomenologically, music means more than simply a set of sounds – it connotes all scenic activities. In other words, music connotes 'the scene'. Politics, on the other hand, connotes that which is outside the scene. Discourses emergent from spaces outside the scene are intrinsically threatening and members attempt to keep them at bay. Any attempt to draw on discourses and practices from outside the scene must be subordinate to the music:

...if you're gonna be a racist and if you're gonna be a fascist and if you're gonna make Metal, just make sure your Metal's good, before your mouth and before your ideas. Don't use your ideas to sell your album.

[UK9]

Scene members are often strongly criticised if their commitment to music is perceived to be subordinate to their commitment to politics. As the reviewer of an album by the Christian band Mortification acidly puts it in the British fanzine *The Crypt* (Issue 2, date unknown): 'I very much doubt that the primary motivation behind this band has anything at all to do with the love of music'.

Music and the scene can never be detached from power and capital and hence a space free from 'politics' – no matter what the definition – is impossible. As we have seen in previous chapters, scene members take advantage of certain forms of power and capital that derive from outside the scene, even as they resist other forms. Furthermore, the scene contains its own forms of power and capital that are no less potent. To discursively attend to forms of power and capital is to raise the spectre of politics, making any challenge or even discussion of power and capital extremely difficult. As a result, members may flirt with racism and sexism, and make use of forms of capital drawn from fields of power, confident in the knowledge that most challenges can be dismissed as 'political'. Thus, one sinister effect of reflexive anti-reflexivity is its highly efficient protection of the workings of power.

For those within the scene, particularly those occupying subordinate positions, who resent the way in which power is exercised and the casual discursive use of racism and sexism, it is extremely difficult to resist without becoming fatally reflexive – a reflexive challenge to power within a reflexively anti-reflexive scene is always already an unreflexive act. Those who have challenged power within the scene most effectively have generally been those with a close connection to the more explicitly political hardcore Punk scene and thus a degree of protection from ostracisation. The often close relationship between the Extreme Metal and the hardcore Punk scenes has mitigated the effects of power to some extent and has provided an effective (and 'non-political') resource for those wishing to challenge the accumulation of capital within scenic institutions and for those wishing to challenge racism. However, the Punk scene is a less than effective resource for those wishing to challenge sexism and homophobia. Attempts to deal with sexism and homophobia within the Extreme Metal scene have been extremely muted – there is simply no available haven or resource for people with strong views on these subjects who nevertheless enjoy Extreme Metal. Moreover, despite the influence of the Punk scene, those who resist the exercise of forms of power within the scene must generally do so without

relying on extra-scenic discourses. In the following example from the *Terrorizer* magazine e-mail list (15/4/99), a list member criticises another member for making a racist joke:

> No, I don't find racism amusing, just fucking moronic...There's a world of difference between political correctness and disgust for racist tossers.

The writer has to avoid the accusation that he might be 'politically correct'. Racism, therefore, becomes something 'moronic', rather than an affront to a particular political or ideological position.

Even if challenges to forms of power are difficult within the scene, reflexively anti-reflexive opposition to 'politics' also ensures that the scene has not become a bastion of the far right. The relationship to racist and fascist discourses and practices has remained a flirtatious one. We should not mitigate the real hurt caused to those, such as Balzamon, who suffer racist abuse. However, such incidents remain isolated and are not translated into concerted campaigns against, say, Jews within the scene. The opposition to politics is at least even-handed. In opposing anti-racist activity the scene also opposes racist activity. Members with the most overtly fascist and racist views, such as Varg Vikernes, have been pushed to the furthest margins of the Extreme Metal scene, into a closer accommodation with the Nazi music scene.

## Conclusion

Reflexive anti-reflexivity is not a practice that is shared unanimously by all scene members, nor has it been equally important in all periods of the scene's history. However, in recent years reflexively anti-reflexive practice has tended to marginalise other forms of reflexive practice. The close relationship that the Extreme Metal scene had with the reflexively political Punk scene in the late 1980s has become more distant. The close relationship that the Black Metal scene had with reflexive transgression in the early 1990s has also become more distant. As we saw in the previous chapter, Black Metallers who once burned churches are now producing postmodern forms of music, underpinned by reflexive anti-reflexivity. As other forms of reflexive practice have been marginalised, so those individuals or groups that cannot or will not partake in reflexive anti-reflexivity have inevitably become marginalised. Scenic minorities either accept that they cannot reflexively attend to difference or they leave the scene.

To slip briefly into a functionalist explanation, reflexive anti-reflexivity has come to dominate the scene because it fulfills a certain kind of 'defensive' function very effectively. We saw in previous chapters how the scene maintains 'homeostatic' 'safety' by ensuring a balance between the practices of transgression and mundanity. The reflexively anti-reflexive construction of

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music provides the mechanism through which this safe balance is achieved. Reflexive anti-reflexivity also functions as a means of defending forms of power and capital within the scene. It ensures that all attempts to challenge forms of power and to engage with difference are condemned as 'political'. It ensures that the scene does not develop a critical vocabulary that might challenge power within and without the scene. This means that scene members either 'have it all' or have nothing. Those who suffer from power and prejudice within the scene have little form of redress. Reflexive anti-reflexivity also ensures that scene members do not challenge practice outside the scene, just as the scene members themselves are not challenged. The defensive function of reflexive anti-reflexivity is particularly apparent in the examples given in the second section of this chapter. Here, reflexive anti-reflexivity is manifest in otherwise inexplicable contradictions, lacunae and absences. Members are barely self-conscious of this form of reflexive anti-reflexivity – it is a hidden and purely functional practice.

However, reflexive anti-reflexivity is not simply a defensive function of the scene. It is also the practice that ensures some of the most important, playful pleasures that the scene offers. Playful reflexive anti-reflexivity is practiced much more self-consciously than defensive reflexive anti-reflexivity. Within the scene members can, as we have seen, partake in both transgressive and mundane practice. They can draw on the most transgressive discourses present within Western culture – including racism – with negligible 'risk'. They can say the things that could less easily be said outside the scene, but still preserve the comforts of safety and mundanity. Members can 'have it all'. The scene is predicated on the 'illusion' that the world is a simple one, in which the unintended consequences of action are negligible and structuration does not exist. It is a 'safe' world, in which nothing matters except for a limited range of sounds, discourses and practices. True, maintaining this illusion requires constant reflexively anti-reflexive 'work', yet this work can itself be a source of playful pleasures. Members can laugh or be serious within the scene, safe in the knowledge that they are never irrevocably committed to any one practice or discourse.

In the following, penultimate chapter of this thesis I want to examine further *why* reflexive anti-reflexivity is pleasurable and to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of a space oriented towards this form of pleasure. I want to look at what those outside the scene can learn from the scene and what scene members themselves need to learn.

# CHAPTER 9

## EVALUATING THE SCENE

Introduction

In chapters four to eight I have presented a sustained analysis of the texts, practices and discourses that reproduce the Extreme Metal scene. I have argued that the crucial structuring principle of the scene is the commitment to the experiences of both mundanity and of transgression. This twin commitment is negotiated through the practice of reflexive anti-reflexivity, which ensures that neither transgressive nor mundane practices ever come to dominate the scene. Reflexive anti-reflexivity also ensures that the accumulation of power and capital, while never overwhelming, can rarely be directly challenged. I concluded the previous chapter by arguing that reflexive anti-reflexivity is also, in and of itself, a major source of pleasure within the scene. It allows members to experience all that the scene has to offer without ever having to attend to difficult questions and without ever having to exercise reflexivity in a thoroughgoing fashion.

In this chapter I want to tackle finally the question of why people are committed to the Extreme Metal scene. I still want to avoid asking why certain specific individuals are committed to Extreme Metal and not others – this question can only be answered through detailed study of individual biographies. I also want to avoid the question of why certain *types* of individuals are more likely to commit to the scene than others. As we saw in chapter six, overt practices of exclusion only partially explain this and a full answer to this question requires detailed research into why certain groups are more likely to exclude themselves. In asking 'why' people are committed to the scene, I am trying to identify the principal experiential pleasures that the scene offers its members. Individual experiences of the scene are unique, of course, but we can still ask what the scene offers *in general*. I will ask this question by putting the experiences the scene offers into the context of 'modernity'. Having tackled the 'why' question, I then want to go on to 'evaluate' the scene.

The Experience of Modernity

Ever since its inception, during a period of rapid social change in the 19th century, the project of sociology has been preoccupied with the experience of 'modernity'. Modernity signifies the period during which the world became dominated by industrialised capitalist production, which began in the 19th century in certain countries. The nature of modernity has changed radically since the 19th century and the impact of modernity has varied substantially in different parts of

the world. Furthermore, the changes of recent decades have lead some to talk of the present as a period of 'postmodernity', representing a radical break from modernity (Lyotard 1984). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter I will speak of modernity as signifying a set of processes that continue to have potency today. Rather than a radical break, I will consider the present phase of modernity to represent the intensification of some aspects of modernity and the reflexive questioning and reformulation of others. Nonetheless, I will refer to the present phase of modernity as 'postmodernity', owing to the term's rich connotations of epistemological and experiential fragmentation and also to the teleological connotations of alternative terms such as 'late modernity' and 'high modernity'.

In this thesis the concept of 'experience', as introduced in chapter five, has been crucial. The concept puts the affective quality of everyday life at the heart of sociological inquiry. Sociology has long been preoccupied with the nature of experience in modernity, even if the use of the explicitly phenomenological concept of experience is a more recent development. Sociologists have diagnosed the experience of modernity as 'fraught' and the discipline has attempted to suggest answers. Of course, we might argue that the experience of human existence itself is fraught but, nevertheless, that modernity presents unique experiential difficulties is undeniable. Drawing on sociological theories of modernity thus helps us to understand the difficulties of the world within which the Extreme Metal scene exists.

Karl Marx identified the key experiential problem of modernity as 'alienation' (Marx 1976) – the dissatisfaction caused by workers not having any stake (emotional or economic) in the fruits of their labours. The experience of alienation is one of profound disempowerment. Workers are unable to control their lives or (in some versions of Marxism) even to be reflexive about their conditions of existence (Althusser 1992). Capitalism has certainly changed since Marx was writing, but the problem of alienation persists. For all but a tiny minority, participation in capitalism still involves being alienated from the means of production (Callinicos 1989; Walton and Gamble 1976). Capitalism still involves hard work and routines that are often oppressive, with 'leisure' providing only an ineffective respite (Lefebvre 1971).

I would argue that concepts analagous to alienation appear in the work of other, non-Marxist sociologists. Emile Durkheim's concept of 'anomie' (1984) refers to the experience of alienation from one's fellows produced by modernity's increasingly complex division of labour. Members of society take on increasingly specialised roles within the division of labour and feel decreasingly like true stakeholders in society. Max Weber also diagnosed an experience similar to alienation in his analysis of bureaucracy (Weber 1964). He showed how modern processes of 'rationalisation' construct an 'iron cage' of bureaucracy, in which humans become dominated by bureaucratic systems not of their own making (Weber 1976). The complex bureaucratic

structures necessary for the effective functioning of capitalism become so all-encompassing that members' scope for freedom is severely constrained. Weber's 'despair' (Mommsen 1974) at this situation was compounded by the minimal possibilities that he saw for resistance. He hoped that 'charisma' might be an antidote to bureaucratic authority, but recognised that charisma generally becomes 'routinised' within modernity. The importance and difficulty of maintaining a critical freedom that might resist modernity has been a preoccupation for authors since Weber. Jurgen Habermas (1989b) has argued that 'systemic' imperatives within modern society are 'colonising' the 'lifeworld' of free communication, making it increasingly difficult to debate freely and, in doing so, to maintain control of the structures within which members of society move. Similarly, the 'Frankfurt School' of authors argued that capitalist rationality had become so dominating that it had ossified the historical dynamism of the dialectic (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997). Members of society lose their capacity to be critical through the ossification of dominating ideological processes. The result is a 'society without opposition', within which critical thought is severely circumscribed (Marcuse 1991). Like Weber, these critical theorists were deeply pessimistic about the potential for mental resistance against the awesome power of capitalist rationality (Jay 1973).

In short, then, social theorists from a wide range of backgrounds have shown how the experience of capitalist modernity is alienating and disempowering, resulting in the dominance of impersonal systems over which human beings have no control and against which there is little possibility of mental resistance. Social theorists have also shown us how the experience of modernity is one of 'fragmentation' (Frisby 1985). In pre-modernity individuals spent their lives in narrow contexts and were defined by their position in society. In modernity individuals spend their time fragmented between any number of radically different contexts. Individuals, particularly in urban centres, spend their time in fleeting, transitory relationships (Simmel 1971). The implication is that the experience of selfhood is itself fragmented. Most importantly, 'mind' is divided from 'body', as dominant discourses stress the primacy of the former and the lowliness of the latter (Jervis 1999; Stanley and Wise 1993). Processes of fragmentation are heightened in postmodernity. The experience of postmodernity is akin to 'schizophrenia' (Kroker and Cook 1988), as individuals are able to participate simultaneously in hitherto irreconcilable social spaces and can construct identities drawing on signs from hitherto irreconcilable eras and cultures (Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991).

In general, social theory dealing with the experience of modernity has been dystopian. Only in postmodernity have theorists come close to celebrating the experience of modernity and even then they generally do so ambiguously (Baudrillard 1988). Social theory shows us that the world in which we live is difficult, and that the achievement of pleasure and happiness is a triumph over adversity. The modern world certainly offers unending excitement and an almost

unlimited supply of new experiences and challenges. However, it is an exhausting world that, as we saw in the previous chapter, requires the constant exercise of reflexivity in order for us to have the chance of personal empowerment and happiness. Human experience is even more exhausting in postmodernity, as the world becomes ever 'faster' (Virilio 1986) and more overloaded with flows of information, necessitating constant decisions from almost limitless options. The constant practice of reflexivity becomes a necessity in modernity, meaning that nothing can ever be taken for granted. Indeed, John Jervis argues that selfhood in modernity is 'condemned' (1999: 69) to practice a reflexivity that is so insistent and all-embracing that it can reduce individuals to madness.

Social theory has shown us that the experience of modernity is one of 'survival'. Survival is produced by the reflexive construction of practices that resist modernity's disempowering alienation. One way of surviving is to practice transgression. As we saw in chapter four, the practice of transgression provides powerful experiential rewards that are not available through other practices. Transgression is one of the few sources of unrestricted agency in modernity[19]. While modernity disempowers individuals within alienating systems and structures, transgression allows individuals to feel utterly in control, utterly 'sovereign' (Bataille 1993) over their being through practices that resist instrumental rationality. While modernity fragments the self, transgression reunites it through intense experiences of the body. The experiences offered by transgression are profoundly necessary, but they are also profoundly problematic in modernity. As we saw in chapter four, whereas pre-modern societies contained spaces for transgression, such as the carnival, modernity has pushed transgression to the margins of society. This marginalisation has made transgression all the more alluring and, consequently, all the more threatening. Participation in transgression can result in complete exclusion from mainstream society, and risks state and other surveillance.

Modernity also demonstrates the opposite tendency – the assimilation of transgression to the point where it is no longer transgressive. As we saw, Weber shows how the transgressive potential of charisma becomes 'routinised' in modernity. The history of post-war British subcultures is characterised by ephemeral, marginal challenges being transformed into popular styles repackaged for utilitarian consumption (Hebdidge 1979). As the Frankfurt School recognised, 'politically' transgressive movements, such as Marxism, can become as alienating and disempowering as that which they initially oppose.

Thus, the logic of modernity is either to assimilate challenges through capitalist rationalisation or to marginalise them. Transgression therefore becomes a stressful and difficult way of

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[19] I am grateful to Chris Jenks for this point.

surviving modernity. In any case, it is possible to survive modernity through full participation in modern capitalist society. As Adorno and Horkheimer recognise:

> Even though the individual disappears before the apparatus which he serves, the apparatus provides for him as never before. (1997: xiv)

Full participation in capitalist society potentially offers comfort and security, at least for those in developed countries with a certain minimum income. A relatively stable existence, built around clearly demarcated patterns of work and leisure, may bring contentment through the mundane pleasures of quietly 'getting on with life'. The problem is the thin line between mundanity and disempowered alienation. Furthermore, capitalist modernity offers comfort at the expense of any critical outlook on everyday life and any commitment to address forms of oppression in society as a whole.

One way of enjoying the comforts of modernity without alienation and disempowerment may be to participate in modernity through the medium of 'community'. As we saw in chapter two, sociologists have looked to community and other similar spaces to provide means of survival in modernity. This literature shows us that community provides a way for individuals to affiliate to small-scale, 'human'-sized spaces, which are less alienating than large-scale, impersonal structures and systems. Such spaces provide the mutual support and meaningful interaction that is threatened by modernity. They provide a bulwark against endless change and a sense of safety and security. Participation in community helps to ensure that the experience of modernity becomes relatively simple.

Yet community does not escape the logic of modernity so easily. As we saw in chapter two, community has frequently been, both conceptually and in practice, something that is itself disempowering. Community has frequently been founded on a homogenisation and erasing of difference that is itself part of the logic of modernity. Community may simply become a microcosm of an alienating modernity. Furthermore, the comfortable experience of mundanity that community affords may simply become *too* comfortable. It may lead people to a passive acceptance of the world about them, a complete accommodation with power and oppression in modernity.

## The Experience of the Scene within Modernity

The Extreme Metal scene is situated in the context of a fraught modernity, in which the experiential alternatives present as many problems as they solve. Both mundanity and transgression provide powerful means of experiential survival. However, each experience tends

to preclude the other and neither experience is produced unproblematically. We have seen in chapters four to eight how the practices of the Extreme Metal scene are based on a determination to experience *both* transgression and mundanity. An over-reliance on either one of these experiences within the scene leads either to frustration or to (self-)exclusion from the scene. Those who have over-committed to transgression, such as some members of the Norwegian Black Metal scene, have either been marginalised by the scene or have ended up dead or in prison. Those who have over-committed to mundanity become bored or frustrated and leave the scene. Also, as we have seen, the logics of transgression and mundanity are to become assimilated within the alienating logic of modernity. Transgression is assimilated through the transformation of subcultural transgression into commodified style. Mundanity is assimilated when it becomes a form of capitulation to the logic of modernity. Yet within the Extreme Metal scene neither transgression nor mundanity loses its experiential potency. The 'insulation' of the scene means that transgression is never publicised enough to become assimilated. At the same time, the presence of transgression within the scene ensures that mundanity never dominates.

The main problem with transgression and mundanity as strategies for experiential survival within modernity is that each tends to overwhelm the other, yet tends to be assimilated in the absence of the other. The Extreme Metal scene provides a means of survival within modernity that ensures a kind of stable equilibrium between these experiential necessities. It offers many of the mundane, comforting, non-material rewards (and, for some, the material rewards) of participation in capitalist modernity, but produces these mundane experiential rewards through decentralised, communitarian structures, which resist alienation and fragmentation. These structures allow members to feel part of a supportive community in which they have a stake. The scene also ensures that members can participate in the non-scenic world and, as a result, scene members experience their lives as less unpleasantly fragmented. The scene also ensures that individuality, agency and difference live through the practice of transgression. It ensures that participation in communitarian structures never leads to members being crushed by the weight of the collective. Transgression allows members to voice their frustration at the alienation and disempowerment produced by modernity. It produces excitement, unpredictability and joyous experiences of the body.

As I argued at the end of the previous chapter, scene members can 'have it all'. They can experience the best features of modernity with relatively few negative consequences. As we saw, scene members manage this through the practice of 'reflexive anti-reflexivity', which performs two functions. One is to 'defend' the delicate balance between transgression and mundanity by ensuring that the scene is never overwhelmed by extra-scenic discourses and practices. The other is to produce the pleasurable illusion that the world is an uncomplicated and

safe place. This chapter shows why reflexive anti-reflexivity is so experientially powerful. Modernity is *not* safe, is *not* uncomplicated, is *not* stable. Yet reflexive anti-reflexivity allows scene members to experience modernity as the opposite. The practice limits the exercise of reflexivity, so that modernity never becomes a place of endless, impossible choices and negotiations. In short, then, the main reason the Extreme Metal scene is attractive to its members is that it not only allows members to experience safely the contradictory pleasures of modernity, but also provides the illusion that modernity itself is less stressful and difficult.

Evaluating the Scene

Given the above analysis, it is difficult not to be sympathetic to the experiential 'experiment' of the Extreme Metal scene. The experience of modernity is fraught and scene members generally manage not only to survive, but also to conduct meaningful, empowered and enjoyable lives. Surely, it would be churlish to deny members a happy experience of an unhappy world?

However, we are not absolved from making judgments about the scene. For one thing, the above analysis identifies the benefits that the scene *offers* its members. Not all members experience the scene in the same way and some members may be excluded from the experiential rewards offered by the scene. Moreover, the fact that the scene provides positive experiences for its members does not automatically mean that it sits positively within modernity as a whole. Within modernity, all actions have consequences, whether intended or unintended, that can cause harm to others. Within modernity, no individual and no space can ever be truly outside the workings of power and domination. Scene members try to pretend that the scene stands outside modernity, but we do not have to join in this pretence.

What we must do is 'evaluate' the scene. I do not mean evaluation in the simple sense of measuring the 'goals' of the scene against its success in achieving those aims. Nor do I mean evaluation in the sense of measuring the scene's success in achieving certain goals that are set somewhere outside the scene – for example, whether or not the scene is 'resistant'. What I mean by evaluation is a more open-ended examination of the 'value' of the scene. As the work of Simon Frith has shown, it is extremely difficult to identify where the value of popular-music culture does lie or should lie (Frith 1996; Pickering and Negus 1998). However, the examination of value is worthwhile as an end in itself. As Frith argues:

> For me, to describe culture properly is to make it more mysterious (not less). Understanding is not necessarily the only goal. Imagination is just as important. (1998: 128)

According to Frith, evaluation is not the measurement of popular-music culture against fixed standards. Rather, it entails a constant examination of the unstable standards of evaluation set by the analyst, by popular-music practitioners, by 'society' at large and by amorphous notions of 'the aesthetic'. Evaluation is a process through which the analyst becomes intimately engaged with the popular-music culture under investigation.

For all the instability of the process of evaluation, there are principles that will govern my evaluation of the scene. In chapter one I argued for a 'generous critique' (Boyarin 1993), which looks for the good as well as the problematic within the scene. That generous critique should preoccupy itself with an evaluation of the way power works within the scene. The power held by an individual or a group over others can lead to suffering, frustration and unhappiness. I take it as an ethical imperative that human beings should strive to limit and ameliorate the workings of power. Humans should act reflexively and never accept uncritically those societies or spaces where power flourishes. However, this consideration of power does not necessarily mean that only spaces and aesthetics that challenge forms of power are valuable. Arguing that power should always be challenged does not render worthless those practices that do not challenge power.

As we have seen, the scene both ameliorates and reinforces power. Power and the capital that buttresses it are never absolute within the scene. No classes of people are absolutely precluded from gaining capital, nor is any class of people accorded power by absolute right. Capital and, hence, power derive largely from accomplishments within the scene. The scene is certainly not a 'level playing field', but few other social spaces are so open to global participation and reflexive, decentralised control. The scene ensures that the distance between the top and bottom of hierarchies of inequality is relatively small. The problem is that the scene is also a space within which power, when it is gained, is rarely effectively challenged. As I have said, accomplishments within the scene are seen to be the only way to apportion capital. While power and capital from outside the scene are only poorly convertible into power and capital within it, no allowance is ever made for a *lack* of power and capital from outside the scene. When power and capital are amassed within the scene, members view it as 'deserved' and therefore beyond criticism. Scenic minorities, such as women and those of African descent, find it difficult to enter the scene. Scene members compound these difficulties by passively condoning sexism and racism within the scene. The scene is also a space that enables some members to access other spaces that concentrate power far more extensively. Those (admittedly few) owners of financially successful scenic institutions and those (admittedly few) members of financially successful bands accumulate power and capital that is readily transferable into power and capital within other scenes.

Returning for a moment to the previous section in this chapter, clearly the Extreme Metal scene does not offer a similar experience of modernity to all its members. A significant minority does *not* find the scene to be an easy, comforting space in which to 'have it all'. For those scene members who suffer most from the exercise of power within the scene, the negative experiential consequences of modernity are not alleviated to the same extent.

Nevertheless, in a world in which the exercise of power is rampant, the exercise of power within the scene is muted. The scene does allow members to produce practice within a space that only weakly and erratically reproduces the power relations that structure society as a whole. Of course, the Extreme Metal scene is not the only such space. Other scenes also mute the exercise of power, while at the same time reproducing it in subtle ways (e.g. Cohen 1991; Thornton 1995). The exercise of power within the Extreme Metal scene is not necessarily any more severe than in other contemporary music scenes. Although women are marginal within the Extreme Metal scene, women are also marginal within other music scenes (Cohen 1997). It is true that the Extreme Metal scene is unique among 'non-political' music scenes in that some members have flirted with far-right discourses. Yet, at the same time, the Extreme Metal scene, in its global extensiveness, is far more heterogeneous than many other scenes. That the scene has maintained its heterogeneity despite some scene members' close relationship to the far right is a demonstration that its mechanisms for the amelioration of power remain fairly robust.

An evaluation of the scene also requires an evaluation of its discursive practices, raising a difficult question – how do the discourses produced by the scene relate to the exercise of power? If the amelioration or reinforcement of the exercise of power is the standard against which we are evaluating the scene, how can we apply this standard to the scene's musical and other texts? Broadly speaking, postmodern and post-structuralist criticism is based on the notion that discourses are forms of power. Michel Foucault (1980), for example, refers to discourse as 'Power/Knowledge'. Power structures are reproduced not simply through brute force, but through forms of discourse that order the conceptual categories we use to think. Postmodern and post-structuralist notions of 'resistance' to power are thus based on the idea that power can be challenged discursively. Dick Hebdidge's *Subculture* (1979) argues that by the practice of 'style', post-war British subcultures constructed resistance to capitalist hegemony. Of course, Hebdidge also argues that resistance by stylistic means alone is always destined to failure (a qualification not made by more extreme post-structuralists). Still, the idea that resistance to power can take place through the texts and music produced by a scene is an important one.

As we saw in chapter four, resistance is not necessarily the same as transgression. The Extreme Metal scene produces highly 'transgressive' texts. But what is it that these texts are transgressing? Does this transgression qualify as 'resistance'? Certainly, many people in power

would look askance at much Extreme Metal. Extreme Metal ignores many important taboos, particularly with regard to the destruction of the body and to religion. It also shatters many musical taboos, particularly in its widespread rejection of melody. Both Robert Walser (1993) and Deena Weinstein (2000) conclude their studies by arguing that Heavy Metal provides a powerful challenge to capitalist hegemony. In different ways, they argue that Heavy Metal provides a way of challenging and dealing with the most unpleasant characteristics of capitalism, although it does not suggest any easy solutions. It might well be possible to apply these findings to Extreme Metal as well. The problem, as we saw in chapter four, is that transgressive texts, discourses and practices are based on a preoccupation with control of the abject that associates the abject with female sexuality, homosexuality and 'blackness'. Furthermore, at times this fear of the abject is translated into texts, discourses and practices that openly embrace the most virulent kinds of racism, sexism and homophobia. If one considers that racism, sexism and homophobia are produced by entrenched, large-scale power structures, and that 'resistance' is defined against those structures, it is difficult to conceive of these kinds of texts as resistant. From this perspective, much of Extreme Metal looks like a self-consciously 'shocking' dramatisation of deeply ingrained forms of power.

As we saw in chapter four, transgression inevitably constructs new limits even as it transgresses others. As Foucault points out (1977b), no move to transgress one form of discursive power can avoid being implicated in the construction of other forms of discursive power. One might argue that those scenic texts, discourses and practices that dramatise forms of power are 'by-products' of the scene's more resistant forms of transgression. To see racism, sexism and homophobia as simply by-products of transgression would be to assume that they cannot in themselves be transgressive. However, Foucault's argument that *all* discourses are forms of power/knowledge forces us to recognise that moves to transgress or resist forms of power inevitably produce their own forms of power. It follows, then, that structures of power/knowledge, such as sexist discourses, may be utilised as transgressive if directed at, for example, anti-sexist discourses. Feminist discourses set up their own structures of power/knowledge that are eminently transgressable. From this Foucauldian perspective, sexism, racism and homophobia within the scene must be seen as just as transgressive as those transgressive practices that are more obviously 'resistant'. The problem is that if power is 'everywhere', then all attempts at transgression are equally liberating, yet equally futile. Foucauldian perspectives may undermine any attempt to connect transgression to resistance and can disempower any kind of politics.

However, it is possible to argue that critiques of power/knowledge such as feminism, while producing their own structures of power/knowledge, remain generally weaker than the forms of power/knowledge they oppose. Furthermore, it is useful to distinguish between those forms of power/knowledge that have become institutionalised, supported by the forms of power and

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capital we discussed in chapters six and seven, and those that have not. Feminism, for example, is associated with relatively little state power and little financial capital, diminishing the penetration of feminist discourses into everyday life. Thus, when practicing sexism, racism and homophobia, scene members transgress relatively weak forms of power/knowledge. In addition, transgression within the scene is practiced *unevenly*. Transgression of the relatively weak forms of power/knowledge produced by critiques of forms of power/knowledge is more systematic than transgression of entrenched structures of power/knowledge, such as racism and sexism. The Extreme Metal scene is not polymorphously transgressive – scene members are assiduous in upholding some forms of power/knowledge, while they transgress others in a haphazard fashion. Whereas anti-sexism and anti-racism are frequently transgressed, they are very rarely practiced.

Thus, what constitutes positive, experiential transgression for some scene members is, for others, a negative reinforcement of power relations and exclusion. However, this does not mean that we should automatically prejudice the more problematic kinds of transgression practiced within the scene. Transgression of anti-sexist and anti-racist discourses may not necessarily be problematic – if, for example, such transgression were to take place within a project of 'total' transgression of *every* discourse. Such a project would undoubtedly be nihilistic, in that it would render every discourse worthless and all politics impossible (Rosen 1969). However, nihilism does at least provide a continuous revelation of the fragile underpinnings of all discourses. This is a similar project to post-structuralism, which has been accused of being nihilistic but, nonetheless, provides one of the most searching critiques of existence ever produced. Post-structuralism is a form of total transgression, which reveals the way we see the world to be contingent, fragile and open to contestation (e.g. Derrida 1990). It provides a powerful, soul-searching antidote to political and intellectual arrogance and essentialism. Moreover, the work of post-structuralist feminists has shown that reclaiming an anti-essentialist politics is still possible (e.g. Butler and Scott 1992).

A relatively small step from the transgression practiced within the scene to a more complete kind of transgression would provide a searching, anti-essentialist critique. Yet this short step has never been taken, even if some scene members may have flirted with the possibility. Scenic texts and practices have been stubbornly unable to transgress racism, sexism and other forms of power. Something always halts scenic transgression at certain points. The problem is that total transgression is almost impossible to achieve. Transgression cannot be a permanent state, since it is necessary to make use of power/knowledge in order to exist. The drive to total transgression within the scene is limited in two ways. The first limit is where total transgression becomes total destruction. The work of Bataille (1993) shows that the only way to fully experience sovereignty is to kill another or to kill oneself. As we have seen, a very few scene members

have done this but, in the process, have brought their scenic careers to a rapid and premature conclusion. If everyone in the scene were to be this transgressive, there would be no scene – an intolerable prospect for scene members. The second limit on transgression is the point where it becomes intolerable. For scene members transgression becomes intolerable either when those outside the scene become alerted to the scene's presence, bringing the possibility of moral panic and the prospect of having to fight for the scene's survival, or when transgression involves a painful challenge to fundamental self-interest. Most scene members, most of the time, prefer to practice transgression only insofar as it remains comfortable. Total transgression *cannot* be comfortable and is thus avoided.

The ultimate 'failure' of transgression within the Extreme Metal scene is shared with other scenes. No scene has managed to combine transgression with a truly liberating critique of power. Even 'riot grrrl', a scene that has been highly successful in empowering female scene members (Leonard 1997, Leonard 1998), sets up highly elitist barriers between members and non-members. The barriers set up by the Extreme Metal scene are probably more rigid than those of many other scenes. We may find it upsetting that scene members seem to feel that forms of power/knowledge such as anti-sexism and anti-racism are more threatening than forms of power/knowledge upheld by more substantial power structures. Nonetheless, the more explicit transgressions of anti-racism and anti-sexism are inessential to the scene. They are *not* the most important forms of transgression practiced within the scene – one can easily imagine Extreme Metal without openly racist, sexist or homophobic texts. Much more significant are the scene's radical transgression of musical structures and its systematic exploration of the boundaries between death, life and the body. The scene has also explored the boundaries of 'the serious' and has shown how 'play' can be brought into unexpected areas. Furthermore, scene members' use of reflexive anti-reflexivity as a means of 'policing' transgression produces unique pleasures which are themselves playful and transgressive. These forms of transgression are unique to the Extreme Metal scene and could form the basis of a more searching anti-essentialist transgression.

More problematic is the grounding of transgression on control of the abject. As we saw in chapter four, control is absolutely essential to Extreme Metal texts, discourses and practices. The problem is not the preoccupation with control of the abject *per se*, but the constant slippage from 'the abject' into more concrete notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. What is required is a dissociation of the abject from particular kinds of bodies, subjectivities and practices. As they stand, the associations are just about contingent and disengageable enough for this dissociation to be imaginable (if admittedly unlikely). The work of the band Carcass, discussed in chapter four, demonstrates that within Extreme Metal there are possibilities for ambiguous explorations of abjection not based on notions of control (Harris Forthcoming).

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Where does this analysis of transgression leave resistance? I would argue that the term resistance would be better reserved for discursive and practical moves directed against large-scale structures of power/knowledge within capitalist modernity. Transgression may or may not coincide with resistance. Ironically, the most resistant aspects of the Extreme Metal scene are not its transgressive aspects. The mundane, communitarian, decentralised networks through which Extreme Metal is reproduced *do* represent a resistant (if uneven) challenge to capitalist monetary accumulation and, indeed, to homogenising notions of community. Within Extreme Metal texts resistance is produced erratically. We might argue, therefore, that the Extreme Metal scene would be more effectively resistant if its transgressive texts and resistant practices were more closely integrated.

Our evaluation of the scene does not produce any simple 'answers'. The scene provides both a repository and a critique of power. It has features to condemn and features to praise. However, we can argue that the problematic features of the scene do not somehow 'invalidate' it. The scene is not purely a source of 'evil' in the world. With the marginal exception of the church burnings associated with the early-1990s Norwegian Black Metal scene, the world is not notably a worse place in which to live because of the scene. Still, we do not have to be 'content' with the scene as it is. In the next section we will go on to look at how the scene might change in the future and what we might 'do' about the scene.

The Scene: Potentials and Prospects

The Extreme Metal scene *will* change – all scenes do. The question is which aspects of the scene will change. As we saw in chapter six, the Internet may have a dramatic impact on the workings of the scene. As we saw in chapter seven, the scene is in a constant state of musical and discursive struggle and evolution, bringing about interesting new musical fusions. How the scene might adapt to the increasing popularity of Nu Metal is another intriguing question. How the scene might continue to produce both experimental forms of Extreme Metal and more conservative forms is also worth investigating. Of course, whether the scene will continue to exist at all is a question that is asked by some within the scene. Some members, such as the writers of *Isten 100* quoted in chapter seven, believe that the scene is no longer a creative and dynamic space. Some formerly creative members of the scene have begun to investigate other music scenes –notably, Fenriz of Darkthrone is now exploring dance music. Some scene members worry that there are insufficient numbers of new members coming into the scene, that most young Metal fans prefer Nu Metal.

The important question for this study is how the future development of the scene might include a reflexive engagement with the problematic aspects of the scene that I have identified. Given that the fear of certain forms of difference and change appears central to the scene's existence, it is difficult to imagine such a reflexive engagement. Indeed, the importance of reflexive anti-reflexivity to scenic pleasures is such that to envisage a more thoroughly reflexive engagement with power and capital within the scene is almost tantamount to envisaging the dissolution of the scene. Is it possible then to be 'content' with the scene without a reflexive engagement with power and capital?

As we have seen, scenic practice is oriented towards ensuring that the scene's wider impact is negligible. The 'best' that the scene has to offer is that members 'use' the scene to achieve contented fulfilling lives within modernity. With the marginal exceptions noted, the 'worst' is that some members will feel frustrated and disempowered. These are hardly spectacular findings that necessitate urgent reflection on what 'we' should 'do' about the scene. Referring back to concepts we drew on in chapter three, in treating the scene as a 'sociological' problem, it loses its potency as a 'social' problem (Silverman 1993). It would be an absurd overreaction to isolate the Extreme Metal scene as a central terrain on which power and capital in capitalist modernity must be challenged. In fact, the scene's marginality is such that, prior to asking how the scene might be changed, we have to ask -- does the Extreme Metal scene really *matter*?

Clearly the scene 'matters' to its members, providing them with powerful means of surviving and finding pleasure in modernity. It is also a repository of interesting and important texts, practices and discourses. The question is whether these positive aspects of the scene are 'enough'. If we take it as axiomatic, as we have done in this chapter, that power is something that should be continually questioned, then the scene's texts, discourses and practices are not 'enough' for two reasons. The first reason is that, as we saw in the previous section, the scene is severely limited in its questioning of and resistance to power. The second reason is that, conversely, the scene *does* have important texts, discourses and practices, but their significance is lessened by their isolation. The scene is a repository of discourses and practices from which *everyone* can learn. The scene has much to contribute to debates about how to form communitarian spaces that allow for difference. It has much to contribute to debates about art and transgression. The scene's very real 'achievements' are virtually unknown because the scene is so strongly oriented towards maintaining its insularity. In other words, the problem with the scene is that it *doesn't* matter enough, but it definitely *should* matter more. As a result of its isolation, the scene has accumulated forms of power that are not acceptable. The scene should be 'opened' to dialogue, in order that these forms of power can be challenged and also that the rest of the world can learn from the scene. The scene has to be opened up to the processes of reflexive modernisation from which, at present, it is insulated.

However, this 'opening up' may be extremely difficult to bring about. It is hard to envisage a more 'open' scene maintaining its communitarian ethics and its highly reflexive institutions, since these are predicated on the insulation of the scene. The majority of members are contented within the scene – what possible reason might they have for changing it? Furthermore, opening the scene in this way brings with it the very real threat of moral panic and ridicule, which might either destroy the scene or further retrench its isolation.

What *is* possible is the introduction of new forms of reflexivity through the efforts of people coming to the scene from very different spaces. For example, in 1996 Nick Terry became the Editor of *Terrorizer* magazine. Terry's background is very different from that of most scene members. He had been a music journalist for a number of years, writing for alternative-rock magazines such as *Lime Lizard* and *The Wire*. He was imbued with a love of avant-garde musics, had a strong leftist agenda and was familiar with post-structuralist criticism. Since arriving at *Terrorizer* Terry has not made obvious efforts to lecture scene members. What he has done is to subtly introduce the concerns of critical music writing into Metal writing. He has discursively resituated Extreme Metal within a wider musical landscape, including avant-garde bands such as Einsturzende Neubaten and Japanese noise artists such as Merzbow, while reinterpreting traditional Heavy Metal as ironic and burlesque. He has ceased to celebrate and has subtly criticised the more anti-reflexive sides of Metal, and has gathered around him writers who are sympathetic to this agenda.

Also, in recent years there have been some notable and encouraging examples of sympathetic interest in Metal from people outside the Extreme Metal scene. For example, in 1999 the Israeli performance artists Anat Ben-David and Avi Pitchon used Extreme Metal music in their performance-art piece *Endforever*. In 1998 the Clementine Gallery in New York hosted an exhibition of paintings by Amy Hill, 'Metal Men', which featured studies of Metal musicians. In 1999 the British literary magazine *Granta* published a short story about Black Metal (Richter 1999). The efforts of such 'outsiders', together with the efforts of 'insiders' such as Nick Terry, help to resituate Extreme Metal within extra-scenic networks of cultural capital. They open the possibility for Extreme Metal to become part of networks of avant-garde and oppositional artistic practice and thereby provide challenges to scene members. However, at present, such work is rare and marginal and there exists a real danger that Extreme Metal will become just another artistic resource which non-scenic artists will appropriate, while disparaging the scene from which it emerges. Since scene members have no desire to earn cultural capital outside the scene, the scene is ripe for 'exploitation'. The mere fact that Extreme Metal texts circulate outside the scene is not sufficient to challenge problematic scenic practices and forms of power. What is needed is the sort of dialogue that *Terrorizer* provides.

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The role that academia can play in this process of dialogue is limited. The institution of academic publishing makes it extremely difficult to write concurrently for academic and non-academic audiences. I did encounter some scene members who had read the work of Robert Walser and Deena Weinstein, but most had never heard of them. Furthermore, while academic work may teach important lessons, the questions that academic texts attempt to answer may seem irrelevant to scene members. The academic 'scene' is almost as insulated as the scene itself, particularly in the United Kingdom and particularly in non-policy-oriented, non-quantitative sub-disciplines. Any serious attempt to change the scene from an academic perspective has to engage with the difficulty of connecting two insulated worlds. This connection cannot happen through writing alone. Academics can certainly participate in the scene and develop a critically informed practice. For example, both Deena Weinstein and I have written for scenic publications. It is difficult to introduce subtly a critical perspective on scenic practice in this way, but it can produce fruitful moments of dialogue nonetheless. Conversely, scene members who attend university may encounter academic work and this encounter may inform their reflexivity within the scene. Academics may also be able to nurture this process by encouraging critically informed writers to investigate the scene sympathetically.

Conclusion

This PhD thesis will not change the scene. Theses are read by a tiny number of people and issuing calls for action that few will hear is an ineffective and hubristic act. What this thesis has done is to clarify my own thoughts on the Extreme Metal scene. The thesis will provide a secure foundation for my attempts to influence practice within the Extreme Metal scene in the future. It will provide me with a resource for articles and possibly books that I may wish to publish within the academic and non-academic worlds. It will inform my negotiation of the complex process of critical dialogue with the Extreme Metal scene. However, this chapter has shown the difficulty of this task. Those of us who are not content with the scene as it is, who feel that the scene should matter more than it does, may have to accept that it may never change in ways we would like. It may be that the best critical response to the scene is a kind of affection that is constantly tempered with anxiety. There may be nothing that can be 'done' about the scene. Yet, at the very least, those of us who care about the scene, but also believe that it should change in certain respects, can keep our critical faculties alive and never become *too* comfortable.

This thesis should be regarded as an exercise in intense reflexivity, rather than an attempt to change a particular space through writing. The latter may follow from the former, but only indirectly. It follows, then, that the ultimate question for this thesis is not how we evaluate the scene, but how we evaluate this thesis. How do we evaluate this exercise in reflexivity? If it is

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to be measured against anything, this thesis must be measured against the tasks set for the concept of scene in the first three chapters. Therefore, in the concluding chapter we will move from evaluating the scene to evaluating the concept of scene. We will then examine how this study contributes to debates in the fields of sociology, cultural studies and popular-music studies.

# CHAPTER TEN

## EVALUATING THE STUDY

### Introduction

In chapter nine I situated the findings of this thesis within the context of social theories of modernity. These theories provided the basis for an 'evaluation', which sought to respond to the scene's more problematic features and to suggest how these might be addressed. In the final chapter of this thesis I will extend this practice of evaluation to the study itself. In the previous chapter the concept of evaluation was used to signify a reflexive questioning of the politics of the scene. In this chapter I will examine how successful the study has been in responding to the research questions I set out in chapter one. I will go on to examine the success of the study in stimulating further research questions within the wider field of sociology.

The practice of writing such an evaluation is highly problematic. A PhD thesis is a piece of writing that is evaluated by examiners and its narrative is based on convincing those examiners that the thesis is 'successful'. In part, writing a thesis is an exercise in writing a convincing, self-justifying narrative. While writing the preliminary chapters, there is an inbuilt temptation to ask only those research questions that are subsequently addressed in a satisfactory way. Less fruitful lines of enquiry and failures to address research questions can easily be erased in re-writes of early chapters. Strong pressures are exerted to efface the 'messiness' (Denzin 1997) of the research process. Yet a PhD thesis is also an intensive exercise of the writer's reflexivity and to be truly reflexive one must carry the process of reflexivity to one's own work. In this chapter I will attempt to reproduce both my uncertainties about certain areas of this thesis and also my satisfaction with those areas which, I feel, make an important contribution to sociological reflexivity.

### Evaluating 'Scene'

In chapter one I asked a panoply of questions about Extreme Metal music and practices. However, the two 'core' research questions for this study were conceptual and methodological:

1) What is added to our understanding of Extreme Metal music and practice by treating it as occurring within a scene?

2) How might the use of the conceptual framework of the scene allow us to address a potentially infinite series of research questions, emerging from disparate, often incommensurate paradigms and traditions?

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Both questions suggest that, in order to evaluate this study properly, we need to evaluate the concept of scene. The two questions are obviously interlinked, but for the purposes of this chapter I will consider them separately.

The first question asks: what is the 'added value' of the concept of scene? How far could the insights generated in chapters four to nine have been achieved without using the concept of scene?

One of the main advantages of the concept is that it facilitates a particular kind of narrative. 'Scene' is a concept with a limited genealogy within academia. The term's relative lack of academic connotations – compared to, say, 'subculture' – enables a more flexible and indeterminate way of reading. Furthermore, as I argued in chapter one, the concept of scene is used widely in Extreme Metal practice, producing a 'fit' between the narrative produced in this study and the narratives that members use in their everyday lives. The connection between my own reflexivity and the reflexivity of members could not have been achieved by the use of concepts foreign to the scene, such as subculture, or concepts that are used but are less flexible, such as 'underground'. This connection subtly subverts the 'self/other' distinction that, as we saw in chapter three, is an endemic problem in social research. The narrative of this thesis is potentially comprehensible to scene members themselves.

The use of 'scene' also facilitates a continuous movement between different forms of data gathered in different global locations. The case-study data from Israel, Sweden and the United Kingdom (and the data collected from other sources, such as fanzines) were not presented in separate chapters. Rather, the substantive chapters drew eclectically from each of the case-study areas, reinforcing my argument that the Extreme Metal scene works on a global basis. However, on occasion particular case-study areas were highlighted, in order to show how particular local scenes differed, thereby reinforcing my argument that local scenes exist in a complex relationship to other scenes. So, for example, in chapter eight I described how 'reflexive anti-reflexivity' is a crucial mechanism in the reproduction of the Extreme Metal scene as a whole. However, an example drawn from the Israeli case study showed how reflexive anti-reflexivity is not reproduced in identical ways in all local scenes.

The scene was not simply described by reference to geographical location. I also described how particular Extreme Metal genres form the basis of scenes that are reproduced within the wider Extreme Metal scene. The Black Metal scene was frequently cited as being representative of forms of Extreme Metal that are characterised by particular forms of practice and discourse. I also looked at other related music scenes and analysed their relationship to Extreme Metal. For

example, at the end of chapter seven I traced the complicated links between various forms of Extreme Metal, Nu Metal and traditional forms of Heavy Metal.

Using the term 'scene' to describe a variety of scenes, constituted through practice, location and genre, which are nevertheless integral parts of a wider Extreme Metal scene, facilitates a highly mobile narrative. Scene works as a kind of 'shorthand'. By describing as scenes a wide variety of contexts for Extreme Metal music and practice, we emphasise their interconnections and do not need to signal endlessly the differences between these contexts. This thesis has been written 'recursively'. Chapters move continually between a variety of Extreme Metal scenes, in order to build up a picture of the Extreme Metal scene as a whole. The narrative reads 'smoothly' and diachronically, while nonetheless facilitating a continuous comparative approach to case studies. To return to Norman Denzin's terminology, discussed in chapter three, this thesis is a 'messy text', but reads as though it were not.

The use of the concept of scene within a recursive narrative facilitates the holism discussed in chapter one. As I argued, holism is based on a recognition of the interconnectedness of the social and of the necessity of studying as many of the varied aspects of the subject as possible. The recursive narrative presented in this thesis does not isolate analytically discrete aspects of the scene, such as 'production' or 'consumption'. Instead, successive chapters draw an increasingly detailed picture of the practices that 'bind' the scene together. Throughout the narrative I develop the argument that, for all its heterogeneity and fluidity, the scene is bound together by capital-maximising, reflexively anti-reflexive practices that balance transgression and mundanity. Through the recursive narrative development of these concepts, the very structure of the thesis emphasises the interconnectedness of the discourses, texts and practices produced within a wide variety of contexts. In this thesis holism is not only a methodological principle, but also a way of constructing sociological narratives.

The holistic emphasis on the practices that bind the scene together does not construct the scene as homogeneous. In chapters one to three I stressed that a consideration of heterogeneity and difference was crucial in this study. According to my definition, the concept of scene is based on the assertion that no social space is without difference and no social space fails to manifest power relations. Since the concept of scene is not based on rigid membership criteria, it enables the identification of those members who lack power and visibility within the scene. Consequentially, this study has discussed, particularly in chapters six to eight, those scene members who are in a minority and who may lack power. The use of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital has helped to show how the scene is riven with power relations that render women, homosexuals and certain ethnic minorities as weak and small in number within the scene. The practices that bind the scene together have a tendency to create cores and peripheries within it.

In chapters one to three I also emphasised that a consideration of change was central to the concept of scene. Again, the indeterminacy of the concept of scene forces us to recognise the fluidity of the Extreme Metal scene. There are two principal ways in which this study has illustrated the fluidity of the scene. First, the emphasis on scenic 'logics' reveals the way in which the scene is a space of 'becoming', rather than of static states of 'being'. For example, in chapter five I showed how an over-reliance on practices oriented towards the experiential logic of mundanity may lead people out of the scene. The second way in which a consideration of change permeates this study is in my analysis of how the scene itself has changed over time. In chapter seven I showed how transgressive and mundane subcultural capital have been negotiated in different ways at different stages of the scene's development. The concept of scene emphasises how Extreme Metal music and practice is in a constant state of flux.

Along with a consideration of heterogeneity and change, the concept of scene also attunes us to reflexivity. Reflexivity is a crucial concept in this study. As I argued in chapters one to three, concepts such as subculture frequently ride roughshod over members' indexical, reflexive practices. In this study and particularly in chapter eight, members' reflexivity is at the heart of my analysis. However, conducting research through the concept of scene also forces us to address the routinised practices that structure everyday life. The concept avoids the twin dangers of ignoring reflexivity and an ethnomethodological lack of attention to the enduring quality of 'objective' social structures.

The scene's conceptual and methodological advantages have been put to use in constructing the 'generous critique' that I advocated in chapter one. The practices that bind the scene together provide a focus for political engagement. The emphasis on change, heterogeneity and reflexivity forces us to eschew simple polemics or celebrations. Critique is always counterpointed by an awareness of difference and uncertainty. This awareness has helped us to avoid simplistic evaluations and to focus instead on the intricate problematics of producing transgressive art within the context of a fraught modernity. In the process, the study has identified aspects of musical and cultural practice that have rarely, if ever, been identified in popular-music culture, such as the importance of mundane, often boring practices. Another novel finding has been the practice of reflexive anti-reflexivity and the importance of humour within the scene.

I did not set out to find these things at the start of my study. The 'findings' of the study spring from the advantages of conducting research through the conceptual framework of the scene. They are the result of conducting research through a concept that highlights the holistic, structured property of music and practice, while nonetheless recognising the importance of change, heterogeneity and the infinite variety of indexical, reflexive practices. They are also the

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result of giving the conceptual issues precedence over the substantive questions posed in chapter one. The two central research questions posed in this study concerned the adequacy of the concept of scene as a framework for conducting research, rather than specific substantive issues. These questions enabled me to adopt an open-minded approach that facilitated the development of grounded theory. I actively sought fluidity, heterogeneity and reflexivity, never quite sure what I would 'find'. Posing conceptual rather than substantive research questions produced more novel and profound results.

Of course, in chapter one I did ask a host of substantive questions about Extreme Metal music and practice. The concept of scene was intended as a lens with which to focus on these subsidiary research questions. The second research question asked how far the concept of scene might help to answer a diverse range of questions emerging from incommensurate substantive literatures and paradigms. I first want to deal with the ability of the concept of scene to enable movement between incommensurate paradigms. The substantive chapters do indeed examine a variety of questions generated by different paradigms. Chapter seven, for example, draws on the concept of subcultural capital elucidated by Bourdieu and by Sarah Thornton, but its emphasis on the manner in which subcultural capital is claimed, by discursive constructions of identity, also owes something to discourse analysis. Another movement between incommensurate paradigms can be found throughout the thesis, when 'readings' of certain discursive productions are contrasted with 'practices'. For example, in chapter eight I compare racist discursive constructions with everyday non-racist behaviour. This comparison creates an implicit contrast between discourse and 'reality' that is absolutely antithetical to most approaches to discourse. Another movement between paradigms can be found in my use of phenomenology. Although I analyse reflexive, indexical practices in some detail, I treat the institutional structures within which such practices take place as having a direct bearing on those practices. In contrast, phenomenological approaches treat institutional contexts as emergent from the process of interaction, rather than having any 'objective' bearing on those processes (Silverman and Gubrium 1994).

We find, then, a continuous and eclectic movement between paradigms within this study – a movement that is rarely signalled explicitly. This strategy was justified in earlier chapters and I do not intend to revisit it here. However, I do want to point to some of its limitations. In practice, certain epistemologies and theories have been used more than others, notably phenomenology and Bourdieu's work on capital. Some of the theoretical frameworks that I used to situate the concept of scene in chapter two were not drawn on explicitly in the substantive chapters – for example, chaos theory, network theory and certain theories of community. That is not to say that the work done to situate the concept of the scene was futile. Undoubtedly, the attempt to draw on a wide range of theories sensitised me to issues that might otherwise have

remained obscure. For example, Parsonian structural-functionalism has an implicit presence in the study, in enabling my understanding of the way scenes exist within scenes. Nonetheless, perhaps inevitably, certain theories and epistemologies have taken precedence over others. Furthermore, I have tended to find commonalities between theories, rather than live with their impossible tensions. For example, in chapter seven I argued that Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be reconciled with phenomenology.

Thus, the use of 'scene' has undoubtedly achieved eclecticism, but this eclecticism has encountered certain limits. As a result of the disparity between the detailed conceptual work of chapters one to three and the use of the concept in the substantive chapters, the concept of scene has become somewhat 'top-heavy'. The substantive chapters were written as a narrative and my stated intention to avoid continuous signalling of epistemological shifts has disguised some of the more subtle shifts and erased some epistemological eclecticism. However, in a sense it may be impossible to draw on 'every' epistemology and theory. The requirements of a narrative containing an appropriate amount of substantive detail preclude the continuous reworking of empirical material from all but a small variety of perspectives. It is possible that the analysis presented in this study may 'look' little different from analyses produced using other conceptual frameworks. The danger is that the study may *appear* both under-theorised and over-theorised. It may appear under-theorised in that the 'smoothness' of the narrative and the use of the single term 'scene' to encompass all aspects of Extreme Metal music and practice may elide the considerable complexity of the analysis. It may look over-theorised in that the volume of literatures reviewed in chapters one to three may 'overload' the concept of scene and elide the empirical groundedness of the substantive chapters.

Inevitably, using *any* one term to describe any one social space (even a social space that contains other social spaces) is problematic. The act of 'naming' a particular space suggests a fixity that may obscure the fluidity, heterogeneity and constructedness of Extreme Metal music and practice. The act of naming may produce an unintended homogeneity, stasis and essentialism, which may override all epistemological good intentions. The concept of scene makes this problem even more acute as, in drawing on realist epistemologies (even eclectically), the social construction of reality may be obscured. In taking the scene 'as a whole' as my object of study, the scene may appear to have 'drives' and agency of its own. All spatial concepts are implicated in the problem of reconciling the individuality and reflexivity of members with the routinised qualities of the spaces within which they move. As we have seen, ethnomethodologists have pointed out that any attempt to privilege concepts drawn from sociological reflexivity over members' own reflexivity inevitably obscures the indexical nature of practice.

A related problem is the difficulty of locating the 'I' within the narrative. Again, 'naming' the scene creates the danger of a 'drift' towards objectivism. For all chapter three's emphasis on the constructedness of research and the central role of the researcher in producing 'data', there is little room to stress this constructedness within the narrative. Although I do include the 'I' in the narrative, it generally appears as the locus for the extraction of data from the scene. For example, anecdotes and interviews were told to the 'I'. The tendency of narrative to obscure the constructedness of the scene magnifies the self/other distinction in problematic ways.

Another problem related to the concept of scene is its holistic intent. Holism is a deeply unfashionable term within sociology and, in the course of writing this thesis, it has become clear to me why this is so. The term has become indelibly associated with structural-functionalism. Critiques of structural-functionalism, such as ethnomethodology, rightly point out that it produces mechanistic narratives that completely ignore everyday reflexivity. Practice is treated as though it is produced by holistic social systems, rather than by indexical reflexive moments. The concept of scene certainly does not ignore these aspects of the social, but it is difficult to draw on holistic sociology without its concomitant problems. The attempt to find those principles that 'bind' the scene together risks becoming a search for the 'functionings' of holistic, bounded social systems.

One of the main reasons that I drew on holism was that it attunes the researcher to a vast range of potential research questions. Here we come to another aspect of my second research question – how far does the scene enable us to answer questions raised by disparate empirical literatures, particularly within popular-music studies? Inevitably, some literatures and research questions have been addressed less effectively than others. In attempting to answer the vast range of questions set out in chapter one, certain issues have received only superficial treatment. For example, my research on the place of women in the scene can only be read as suggestive. Another issue is that of 'homology' or, as I put it in chapter one, 'why these people and why this music?' This question has proved extremely difficult to answer within this study. These problems of 'inclusivity' within a holistic narrative are partially problems of space. I have far more material and far more to say about it than can be contained within a 100,000-word thesis. Yet, inevitably, the use of an holistic, recursive narrative, which attempts to isolate the structures that 'bind' the scene, moves the focus away from specific substantive questions. The holistic attempt to produce an overview of the entire scene brings with it a danger of superficiality and homogeneity. There *is* a case for separate substantive chapters on certain issues, even if they might disrupt a recursive narrative. For example, some might argue that the question of gender within the scene is important enough to demand a dedicated chapter.

My success in answering the second research question was somewhat more variable than my success in answering the first. However, none of the problems I have encountered necessarily mean that I would have approached the study differently. The disadvantages of the use of the concept of scene do not outweigh the advantages. From the outset I problematised holism by stating clearly in chapter one that holism was an 'impossibility'. The conceptual exertions of chapters one to three enable the concept of scene to 'live' with the inescapable problems of holism far more harmoniously than other, more conventionally holistic concepts. The first three chapters engage with the limitations and the possibilities of holism. Holism compels the researcher to actively search for difference, change and reflexivity and to keep in mind questions drawn from a wide variety of literatures. Holism compels the reader of the thesis to read the narrative 'actively', keeping in mind those questions. Chapters one to three encouraged the reader to treat this thesis as a 'writerly' text (Barthes 1977), open to contestation. While the danger is that the narrative will slide into essentialist stasis, the first three chapters encourage the reader to read the thesis *against* this tendency. This chapter further encourages this kind of writerly engagement.

To present this thesis as a writerly text is to suggest that its conclusions should be read as suggestive rather than final. The subsidiary research questions posed in chapter one may not be answered explicitly, but they are addressed implicitly. For example, chapters four and seven address the musicology of Extreme Metal in the context of an analysis of transgression and change, respectively. The political economy of Extreme Metal production is addressed through the analysis of capital presented in chapters six and seven. The relationship between the global and the local is manifest in chapter six's discussion of how capital-maximising scenic practices create cores and peripheries within the scene. The wider issues discussed in chapter two are also addressed through the analysis of 'mundanity', which shows the importance of communitarian experience within the scene. True, some of the literatures and research questions have been addressed less thoroughly than others, but none have been entirely neglected.

Thus, the problem of holism is less acute if the study is not read as a 'once and for all' 'answer' to the 'problem' of the scene. In chapter one I asked whether an holistic framework might produce an holistic answer. The tension between transgression and mundanity, as experiential logics linked to capital-maximising practices and negotiated through the practice of reflexive anti-reflexivity, is the major 'finding' of this thesis. This finding certainly does not 'explain' everything in the scene. However, it does provide a powerful set of explicanda, which allow us to connect a host of disparate research questions. This thesis has to be read actively, in order to bring these explicanda to bear on those research questions that are only answered implicitly.

This thesis may be read, therefore, as an extended prologue to future research on Extreme Metal music and practice. An emerging research topic such as Extreme Metal is better addressed through an holistic study, whose findings are then complicated by more 'micro' studies. This approach is preferable to building research on a topic with a variety of micro studies that are only tenuously connected. A host of micro studies would obscure the interconnections between research areas and would further atomise popular-music studies. My holistic approach is also preferable to the 'crypto-holism' of some studies, such as those by Robert Walser and Deena Weinstein, which take an entire topic area as the focus of their research, but do not problematise the holistic implications. A 'reflexive holism' is preferable precisely because it allows readers and writers to identify what has been neglected.

This thesis outlines a 'research program' (Lakatos 1978) that delineates the Extreme Metal scene as a research topic and offers some broad, suggestive findings about that space. Future research on Extreme Metal could offer micro studies within that framework, ensuring that research never loses sight of the 'bigger picture'. The findings of this study could provide a point of comparison for future research. Instead of being a discrete enclosed system, the findings of this study would be rendered 'falsifiable' (Popper 1972) by future studies. In the next section I offer some suggestions as to the future directions that this research programme might take.

## Future Research on Extreme Metal

There are two particular areas of research on the Extreme Metal scene that could benefit from considerable further attention. The first is research on scenic minorities of various kinds. Since the research for this study was focused on obtaining a detailed impression of how the scene 'works', the experience of those who are marginal to the scene was investigated less assiduously. I was only able to offer tentative findings about how women, homosexuals and certain minority ethnicities, such as those of African descent, relate to the scene. I do suggest that the capital-maximising practices of the scene work to marginalise a variety of minorities in similar ways. However, the experience of different minorities is not identical, nor are there identical reasons for the 'self-exclusion' of various minorities. There is a clear need for extended research on, for example, the 'secret histories' of female, homosexual, black and Chinese scene members. Lauraine LeBlanc's study of women in the Punk scene (1999) provides one model for this kind of research. Similarly, Murray Healy's study of gay skinheads (1996) considerably complicates research on that particular scene. Specialist studies of minorities within scenes should not be seen as tokenistic attempts to add minorities to existing research topics. Rather, the experience of minorities can force us to reconsider the way we look at a scene as a whole. The experience of minorities within the Extreme Metal scene may challenge

some of the key findings of this study. For example, to what extent do female scene members practice reflexive anti-reflexivity? How do they accrue forms of mundane and transgressive subcultural capital?

The second area to which future research on the Extreme Metal scene should be directed is the relationship of scene members to Extreme Metal music. This study has shown how scene members discursively render contingent their connection to Extreme Metal music. I have also argued that Extreme Metal scene members find pleasure within the scene through its balancing of transgression and mundanity within a fraught modernity. However, the question 'why do scene members like Extreme Metal?' has only been tangentially addressed in this study. Harris Berger (1999b) has shown the benefits of a detailed consideration of this question through a sustained investigation into the musical biography of one scene member. Detailed musicological analyses of Extreme Metal could provide valuable insights into the way in which particular musical variables are socially encoded within the Extreme Metal scene. Sociologically, questions of affect need to be addressed through micro-level studies, which have the space to consider the complexity of individual biography. Scene's conceptual eclecticism means that such small-scale studies need not become divorced from wider questions of Extreme Metal production, consumption and power. Such studies would also address questions of homology that I discussed above and in chapter one. They would help us to answer the question 'why this people and why this music?' and would deepen our understanding of the symbiotic relationship between music and practice that 'binds' the scene together.

In addition to these two particularly urgent areas of research, there are enormous possibilities for detailed study of the Extreme Metal scene. There is great scope for musicological analyses of Extreme Metal, building on the tentative reading I presented in chapter four. There is also great scope for case-study based explorations of the complexities of global/local relations within the scene (Harris 1999, 2000). The tentative generalisations I made about the class/age/gender/ethnicity composition of the scene could be tested by quantitative case-study research. There are also many other exciting projects that could be pursued: ethnographies of bands, closer analyses of the political economy of Extreme Metal production, studies of the relationship between Extreme Metal and other musical genres, studies of the discourses produced by Extreme Metal publications, and Extreme Metal and the Internet.

The Utility of Scene

This thesis does not simply contribute to research on Extreme Metal, but also offers insights into other areas of research. A more educated evaluation of the findings of this thesis would be possible in the context of other work in the field of popular music research. This study

contributes to the disparate areas of popular-music research that we discussed in chapter one – production, consumption, musicology, political economy and globalisation. This study challenges any simple notion that popular music provides intense experiences of the body, demonstrating that the mundane experience of popular music is just as important. How might this finding apply to other popular musics? The study also provides insights into the possibilities of a mode of popular-music production that avoids engagement with large multinational corporations, but also avoids paralysing debates about the 'ideology' of independence. How might other modes of popular-music production also provide this? The study shows how 'transgression' is encoded musically in ways that also create a musical 'abject'. How do other forms of musical transgression construct the abject? The Extreme Metal scene provides a way of producing music simultaneously within global and local contexts. This mode of production also facilitates the production of music that attends to locality while still contributing to a global musical practice. To what extent might other popular musics do this? In short, this study contributes to a variety of areas of popular-music research and provides valuable points of comparison to which future studies should attend. The more 'positive' aspects of the scene, such as its decentralised mode of production and the relatively harmonious relationship between the global and the local, could also provide 'models' for practice within other music scenes.

The development of the concept of scene in this thesis contributes to the concept's growing prominence within popular music studies. Taking 'scenes' as the principal domain of popular music research offers a means to avoid the atomisation of the discipline discussed in chapter one. The research programme outlined in the previous section could be developed regarding other forms of popular music. Situating popular music within a panoply of scenes may help to identify and elucidate the ways in which popular music practices cross-fertilise and hybridise. The analysis presented at the end of chapter seven could be replicated with regard to the interaction of other contiguous forms of popular music and would facilitate an understanding of the fluid interplay between popular musics. The practices 'binding' the scene that I discussed in this thesis could also stimulate research with regard to other music scenes. Do other scenes also produce transgressive and mundane subcultural capital? Do they also practice 'reflexive anti-reflexivity'?

This study also raises questions about the role of music in the politics of music scenes. In chapter eight I argued that 'music' was a major culprit in depoliticising the scene. We saw that, in many ways, the problem of Extreme Metal is very traditional – that of asserting that good music must be 'autonomous' from social structure. Extreme Metal shares with forms of Western art music, particularly avant-garde forms, a tendency to become isolated and irrelevant, as they remorselessly pursue the logics of their aesthetics. As Theodor Adorno commented:

In the process of pursuing its own inner logic, music is transformed more and more from something significant into something absent – even to itself. (1973: 19)

Avant-garde music, such as that of Schoenberg, 'sacrifices itself' (ibid.: 132) within a dreadful paradox:

Undoubtedly, such music preserves its social truth through the isolation resulting from its antithesis to society. The indifference of society, however, allows the truth to wither. (ibid.: 21)

The Extreme Metal scene reveals a problematic feature of musical practice. While music is always the subject of competing definitions and is bound up in structures of power and ideology (Attali 1985; Durant 1984), it can also be very effective in depoliticising and obscuring those structures. Extreme Metal may not be the only scene that elevates 'the music itself' above all. Do other scenes also exhibit this kind of reflexive anti-reflexivity? Within music scenes with overt agendas, such as the Contemporary Christian scene, the use of music is frequently the subject of great debate, since giving too much attention to what is seen as a dangerously opaque form is perceived to detract from the 'message' (Howard and Streck 1996). A strong interest in music may encourage a reflexive anti-reflexivity that political practice cannot contain. Is there a necessary contradiction between 'the political' and 'the musical' (or, perhaps, even 'the aesthetic')?

This depoliticising potential of music suggests that a comparative study of scenes would be extremely useful. Are scenes that do not cohere around music less likely to depoliticise? Are they more susceptible and responsive to political engagement? This raises wider questions about 'the political' in modernity. In chapter nine I argued that reflexive anti-reflexivity enables scene members to combine the experience of transgression with feelings of security, empowerment and comfort, even within an insecure disempowering modernity that tends to routinise or marginalise transgression. However, this accomplishment comes at the expense of any political attempt to attend to the consequences of power and capital both within and without the scene. To what extent might it be possible to balance transgression and mundanity while still retaining political efficacy? A comparative study of scenes would be a valuable way to identify scenic models that might retain their political efficacy.

The nature of reflexive anti-reflexivity is also an appropriate topic for future research using the concept of scene. Chapter eight raised fundamental questions about the nature of reflexivity in modernity. Can one ever practice 'pure' unreflexivity? Can one practice 'pure' anti-reflexivity? Does reflexivity always contain an anti-reflexive or unreflexive component? The framework of scene provides an ideal location in which to situate such questions. In chapter eight I showed

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that Balzamon's actions might have been reflexive in other scenes but were unreflexive within the Extreme Metal scene. The concept of scene highlights the way in which reflexive practice in one scene may be unreflexive, anti-reflexive or reflexively anti-reflexive within another. This raises further fundamental questions about reflexivity, notably: is reflexivity a purely relative concept? Can my concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity only ever be applied within one particular scene?

Apart from its utility in raising wider questions in social theory, the scene seems eminently suitable, methodologically and conceptually, for the conduct of research in a wide variety of areas. The concept is built on a set of principles – holism, an appreciation of reflexivity, fluidity and heterogeneity – that are widely applicable. The 'conceit' offered in chapter one, that any kind of practice occurs within a scene or scenes, may be applied to any other area of practice. The question is whether this conceit would be useful or not. There are two principal limitations on the usefulness of scene. The first is that the term 'scene' has an everyday resonance in music that it may not have in other spaces. As I argued earlier in this chapter, the use of the term creates a connection between everyday reflexivity and the reflexivity of the researcher. The lack of this connection in other spaces may reinforce the tendency of the concept of scene to produce an unintentionally essentialist narrative. The second limitation is that the concept may be less usefully applied to the very loosest of scenes. That brief encounters between strangers in any space can be said to take place within a scene is not necessarily a useful insight. The concept is probably most usefully applied to spaces with a degree of 'coherence' that is produced either by the visibility of such spaces to their members or by a common set of institutions that bind individuals together. The concept of scene seems to have most affinity with forms of artistic and cultural practice (such as cinema, theatre etc.) and with practices which individuals organise around common enthusiasms. Indeed, the spaces that might benefit most from this conceptual framework are those within which the term 'scene' is less often used. In such spaces, the term 'scene' would create a connection to everyday reflexivity but it would also disturb that connection, since the term may not necessarily be used in such an all-encompassing manner.

Conclusion

The same note of caution sounded at the end of the previous chapter should be sounded here. It is hubris to call for the development of research programmes within a PhD thesis that is likely to be read by very few people. The articles and book chapters that are intended to follow this thesis will be a more appropriate forum for such recommendations. Even then, it is unlikely that many people will follow my programmatic advice to the letter. Indeed, it is likely that the findings of this thesis, rather than the concept of scene that produced those findings, may provide the more effective stimulus for future research.

The possible lack of development of the concept of scene would not render this thesis a 'failure'. As I argued at the end of the previous chapter, the primary function of this PhD thesis is to provide an intense exercise in my own reflexivity. A crucial part of that reflexivity is to investigate the possibilities that this research and the concept of scene afford. This exercise in reflexivity will empower me in my future career as a sociologist. Armed with its findings and conceptual apparatus, I will now begin to carry its recommendations into action and to attempt to convince others of its utility. The translation of this exercise in my own reflexivity into the reflexivity of sociology and of society at large is not a given. Nonetheless, the production of the thesis will give me some idea of 'how to go on' (Wittgenstein 1968) within a fraught modernity.

# APPENDIX ONE – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

[Swedish example]

## Introduction

- Explain project + not like fanzine interview – may ask questions which seem a little funny + not for *Terrorizer*.

- **Explain confidentiality.**

## Personal background

- Age. Family/ethnic background. Have always lived here? Who do you live with?

- Job. Career plans. Money situation. Military service.

## Musical background

- Family musical history. Musical training [formal/informal].

## General musical taste

- Have you always listened to music? What did you listen to when you were younger – how have tastes changed? How did you get into it (see next section)?

- What sort of music do you listen to now? What specific artists? Who are special favourites? In Sweden? – What music don't you like?

- In general why do you think you like the music you like? What makes it special? What makes a good band?

- Many diff bands that sound similar – how do you tell difference? Why so many CDs?

- Do you think tastes will change?

## Musical life

- How and when did you get into Metal? Did friends play a role? [How did you get to know others?]

- Do they play a role now? Recommend things to each other etc.?

- What did/do other friends/peers/family think?

- How/when/where do you listen to music? How often? Mood play a role?

- Money a problem? How much do you spend? How many CDs/tapes? Where bought? Where stored?

- Habits regarding: Metal media, demos, letters, tape trading, record shops, distros, gigs, Internet/

- How does music fit into rest of life?

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Metal in Sweden + Scene

- How much contact with people all round the world? English a prob?

- Part of something bigger? A scene? A community?

- Know many people in Sweden? Locally?

- What makes it diff to be Metaller in Sweden? Is music diff? Opinions on Swedish music and scene. Is scene diff here? Does it vary across the country?

- Why is Metal so strong here (or not)?

[- History of Swedish scene]

- Why dominance of men? Why lack of immigrants?


- Gen attitude to Swedish culture and society? Do you like living here? Does Metal express what it is to be Swedish?


Identity and general attitudes

- How important is music to you in general? How would you describe yourself? As a Metal fan? Do you think this will change?

- Do people react to you in a certain way because you are a Metal fan? Some people say Metal is sexist/music for losers/too noisy? How do you feel about that?

- Attitudes to: Satanism, Christianity, immigrants etc.

- Trying to be Extreme? Trying to challenge everyday society?


Questions for musicians

- When did you start playing? When did you get into a band?

- Outline subsequent musical history including: personnel changes, bands played in, CDs/demos recorded, tours/gigs done.

- Where do you rehearse? How often? Who writes songs?

- Money problems? How finance rehearsals/recording/gigs?

- Relationship to record company. How found?

- How many gigs played? Where? To how many people?

- How many CDs/demos sold. Who bought them?

- Fanzine/magazine interviews? Reviews? [Can I copy them?]

- Activity in underground. Letter writing.

- Response from mainstream media?

- How diff is it to be a Metal musician?

- Probs writing English lyrics?

- What do you think now of each band/recording made?

- What sort of music are you/were you trying to make?

- Lyrical themes.


## Record shops/distros

- How shop came to stock Metal? Who in shop purchases? Distros/labels?

- Sales figures of Metal/particular titles?

- What countries are orders from?


## Labels

- History. Turnover. Sales. Money making?

- Signing policy. How do bands come to be signed?

- Financial arrangements with bands. Royalties, recording costs etc.

- Day-to-day relationships with bands – how often in contact?

- Promotion/marketing. What is budget? Do small bands subsidise bigger bands?

- Distribution.

- A Swedish business or part of world economy? Relation to scene/underground.

# APPENDIX TWO – INTERVIEWEE DETAILS

NB:

- The interviewee details are not given in the order in which the interviews were conducted.
- Not all interviews are quoted in this thesis.
- Fewer details are given for interviewees quoted in this thesis who could easily be identified by scene members. For example, location is not given for interviewees who live in unusual locations and could be identified in this way.
- The age given is the age of the interviewee when the interview was conducted.
- The place given is the place where the interviewee was living at the time of the interview.
- '*' denotes an interview not transcribed by the author.

## United Kingdom Interviews

UK1: Three males in their 30s, southern England, play in band and run prominent scenic institution.

UK2:* 26-year-old male, southern England, plays in Black Metal band and co-runs distro/label.

UK3: 28-year-old male, London, plays in Death Metal band and edits fanzine.

UK4:* 36-year-old male, southern England, edits fanzine.

UK5:* 34-year-old male, southern England, runs distro.

UK6:* 26-year-old female, involved scene member.

UK7:* 32-year-old male, southern England, runs label/distro.

UK8:* 36-year-old male, Midlands, runs label.

UK9:* 23-year-old female, London, plays in Black Metal band.

UK10: 30-year-old male, Midlands, plays in band and runs label.

UK11: 19-year-old male, London, plays in band.

UK12: Early-20s male, London, plays in Christian Death Metal band.

UK13:*30-year-old male, London, edits Extreme Metal magazine.

UK14: 23-year-old male, plays in Death Metal band, and 23-year-old female, scene member, London.

UK15: Mid-30s male, London, long-time scene member.

UK16: Early-20s female, London, plays in band.

Sweden Interviews

S1:*  Mid-40s male, Gothenberg, runs label.

S2:*  25-year-old male, Stockholm, runs shop/label/distro.

S3:*  23-year-old male, Stockholm, edits fanzine.

S4:*  25-year-old male, Gothenberg, plays in Death Metal band.

S5:  28-year-old male, southern Sweden, plays in various bands.

S6:*  25-year-old male, Gothenberg, plays in Death Metal band.

S7:  37-year-old male, Stockholm, runs label/distro.

S8:*  25-year-old male, Stockholm, plays in Black Metal band.

S9:  26-year-old male, Stockholm, record producer and plays in Death Metal band.

S10:  31-year-old male, Gothenberg, record producer.

S11:  38-year-old male, Stockholm, record producer.

S12:*  19-year-old female, southern Sweden, writes for fanzine.

Israel Interviews

IS1:    Mid-20s male, Tel Aviv suburbs, involved scene member.

IS2:    Three males in their early 20s, Jerusalem, play in Black Metal band.

IS3:    23-year-old male, northern Israel, involved scene member

IS4:    23-year-old male, Tel Aviv suburbs, plays in Death Metal band.

IS5:    23-year-old male, Tel Aviv, plays in Death Metal band.

IS6:    23-year-old male, Tel Aviv suburbs, session musician in various bands.

IS7:    17-year-old male, Tel Aviv, plays in Black Metal band.

IS8:    23-year-old male, Haifa, gay scene member.

IS9:    21-year-old male, Haifa, plays in Black Metal band.

IS10:   Eight males between 16 and 20 years old, from a variety of locations, most born in Russia, play in two Black Metal bands.

IS11:   26-year-old male, Occupied Territories, plays in Black Metal band.

IS12:   Two males in their early 20s, Tel Aviv suburbs, play in Black Metal band.

IS13:   Mid-30s male, Tel Aviv suburbs, long-time scene member
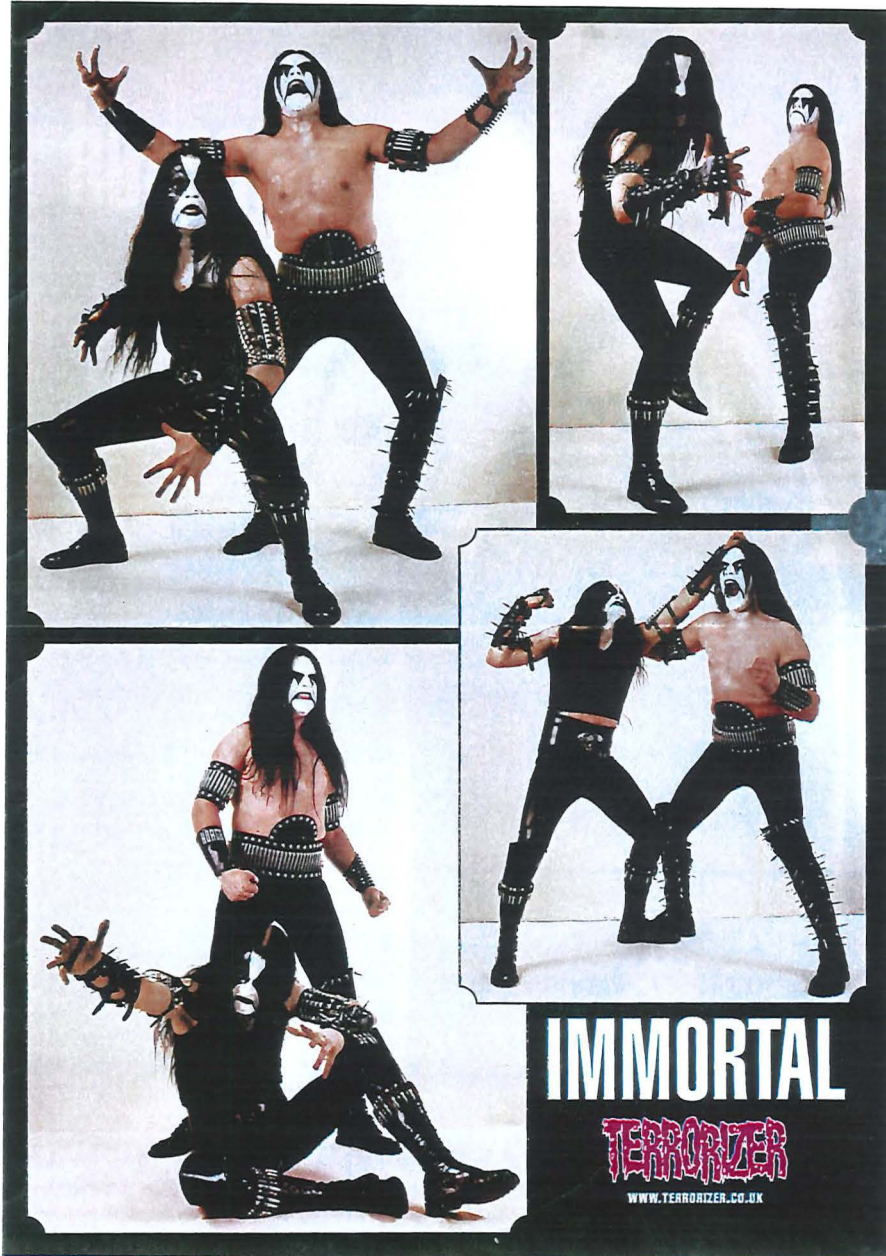
## APPENDIX FOUR – TRACK LISTING OF ACCOMPANYING TAPE

Given the obscurity of the scene and its music, there is a danger that readers of this thesis may never have heard any Extreme Metal music. This would disempower readers from engaging with the arguments of the thesis and contesting its findings. The cassette tape that accompanies this thesis is intended to help the reader in developing some sense of the musical context of the Extreme Metal scene.

In the process of researching this thesis I listened to hundreds of Extreme Metal recordings. Clearly, it would be impossible to provide the reader with other than a tiny fraction of the music that I encountered. Nor would it be wise for me to compile a cassette that attempted to represent the Extreme Metal 'canon'. Not only is the canon too extensive and too contested to be summarised in such a way, but in writing this thesis I have explicitly avoided detailing which bands and recordings constitute the canon.

The accompanying tape should not therefore be seen to constitute part of the 'argument' of this thesis – it is purely illustrative. It is intended to give readers some idea of the sounds of Black, Death and other forms of Extreme Metal. The tape also contains the few songs that I have discussed explicitly in the thesis. The tape should be listened to with a constant awareness that there are many absences. For example, there is very little Doom Metal and very little 1980s Thrash Metal.

The tape was recorded on non-professional equipment and in some cases the recordings have been taken from poor quality copies.

Side One

1) Venom, 'Black Metal', *Black Metal* (Neat: 1982).
Venom is mentioned in a number of chapters of this thesis. The British band is widely credited as the first Black Metal band and among the first Extreme Metal bands.

2) Deicide, 'Sacrificial Suicide', *Deicide* (Roadrunner: 1990).
An extract from the lyrics of this song appears in chapter four. Deicide's music exemplifies Death Metal's renowned 'Florida sound', developed in Tampa's Morrissound Studios by the producer Scott Burns.

3) Carcass, 'Cadaveric Incubator of Endo-Parasites', *Symphonies Of Sickness* (Earache: 1989).
Discussed in chapter four.

4) Cannibal Corpse, 'Fucked with a Knife', *The Bleeding* (Metal Blade: 1994).
Discussed in chapter four. Another example of the 'Florida sound'.


5) Dark Funeral, 'The Secrets of the Black Arts', *The Secrets of the Black Arts* (No Fashion: 1996).
Discussed in chapter four. A typical example of extremely fast, trebly Black Metal.


6) Korn, 'A.D.I.D.A.S.', *Life is Peachy* (Sony: 1996).
Discussed in chapter seven.


7) Manowar, 'Metal Warriors', *The Triumph of Steel* (Atlantic: 1992).
Discussed in chapter seven.


8) Demoniac, 'Myths of Metal', *The Fire and the Wind* (Osmose: 1999).
Discussed in chapter eight.


9) Immortal, 'Withstand the Fall of Time', *At the Heart of Winter* (Osmose: 1999).
The publicity photographs that accompany this album are discussed in chapter eight. Note that Immortal's style of Black Metal is slower and less trebly than some bands.


10) Orphaned Land, 'El Meod Na'ala', *El Norra Alila* (Holy: 1996).
Orphaned Land is mentioned in chapter seven, in reference to late-1990s Extreme Metal bands' use of 'folk' musics. In this song Orphaned Land set the lyrics of a Jewish prayer to both Metal and Middle Eastern musical styles, before combining the two styles in the final section.


11) Sepultura, 'Ratamahatta', *Roots* (Roadrunner: 1996).
Another example of a syncretic fusion of Extreme Metal and 'folk' musics. This track is a collaboration between the Brazilian band Sepultura and the Brazilian percussionist Carlinhos Brown.


12) The Dillinger Escape Plan, 'Destros's Secret', *Calculating Infinity* (Relapse: 1999).
This US band is one of a number of Grindcore bands that have drawn on Jazz and experimental musics.


13) Anal Cunt, 'Your Favourite Band is Supertramp' and 'You've Got No Friends', *I Like It When You Die* (Earache: 1997).

This US Grindcore band has attempted to be as gross, inane and shocking as possible within the confines of songs that last as little as a few seconds. These two tracks are fairly mild examples of the band's work.

<u>Side Two</u>

1) Slayer, 'Angel of Death', *Reign in Blood* (Def Jam: 1986).
One of the most famous tracks by this highly revered Extreme Metal band. The lyrics examine the career of the Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele and briefly made Slayer the subject of a minor moral panic.

2) Burzum, 'Dunkelheit', *Filosofem* (Misanthropy: 1996).
Burzum is the one-man band of the Norwegian Black Metaller, Nazi and convicted murderer Varg Vikernes, discussed in chapter four. His music is noteworthy for its extreme simplicity and lo-fi production values. The lyrics do not explicitly reveal any connection with the far right.

3) Napalm Death, 'Life?', *Scum* (Earache: 1987).
Napalm Death was one of the first Grindcore bands and certainly the most famous. At the time of this album's release, few bands had played songs as fast and as short as this.

4) Dismember, 'Skin Her Alive', *Like an Ever Flowing Stream* (Nuclear Blast: 1991).
This song is of interest for three reasons. First, it is a typical example of the early-1990s Death Metal sound produced by Thomas Skogsberg at Sunlight Studios, Stockholm. Second, as discussed briefly in chapter six, the British customs' authorities attempted to ban the album owing to the lyrics of this song. Third, the lyrics deal explicitly with the murder of a prostitute, providing an interesting contrast with the Cannibal Corpse track on side one.

5) Arch Enemy, 'The Beast of Man', *Stigmata* (Century Media: 1998).
The guitar soloist for Arch Enemy is Mike Aamodt, whose busy musical career is discussed in chapter six. Arch Enemy's musical style is a mixture of Death Metal and classic Metal influences, typical of contemporary Swedish bands. Produced by Fred Nordstrom at Gothenburg's renowned Studio Fredman.

6) Darkthrone, 'Transylvanian Hunger', *Transylvanian Hunger* (Peaceville/Music For Nations: 1994).
Darkthrone are discussed in chapter eight. The title track for the controversial *Transylvanian Hunger* album demonstrates Darkthrone's lo-fi style of Black Metal. Compare with the earlier Burzum track.

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7) Arcturus, 'Ad Astra', *La Masquerade Infernale* (Music For Nations/Misanthropy: 1997).

As I showed in chapter seven, in the late 1990s Extreme Metal bands incorporated a vast range of non-Metal musics. The members of Arcturus come from a variety of Norwegian Black Metal bands, but collectively produce a strange hybrid music incorporating elements of Black Metal, Western art music, electronic dance music and trip hop.


8) Paradise Lost, 'Gothic', *Gothic* (Peaceville: 1991).

As the title of this song recognises, the UK's Paradise Lost were one of the first Doom Metal bands to incorporate elements of 'gothic' rock into their music.


9) The Gathering, 'Liberty Bell', *How to Measure a Planet* (Century Media: 1999).

Another example of the diversity of Metal in the late 1990s. Dutch band The Gathering began as a conventional Death Metal band. By the time this song was recorded, they played a hybrid mixture of Doom Metal, gothic rock and psychedelia.


10) Mayhem, 'Deathcrush', *Deathcrush* (Deathlike Silence Productions: 1993).

[Originally released in 1987 on Posercorpse]

Widely considered to have invented Norwegian Black Metal, Mayhem became legendary within the Extreme Metal scene owing to the murder of guitarist 'Euronymous' by Burzum's Varg Vikernes (discussed in chapter four) and the suicide of vocalist 'Dead'. At the time of its original release, the simplicity and crudity of this song was a powerful statement against the increasing musical complexity and high production values of Extreme Metal.


11) Salem, 'Fucking Maniac [Live]', *Creating Our Sins* (Morbid: 1992).

[Originally released on the 1990 demo *Millions Slaughtered*]

This track by the first Israeli Extreme Metal band reveals the influence of both Grindcore and the work of Mayhem (with whom the band corresponded).

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