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# A Manifesto for Metal Studies: Or Putting the 'Politics of Metal' in its *Place*[1]

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Abstract:
This paper proposes that Metal Studies can benefit from a knowledge of the struggles that have taken place in academia, between scholars and within and between different disciplines, over the issue of the role of the *consecrated* academic as mediator, critic, interpreter and advocate, in relation to popular cultural formations and the social and cultural groups identified with them. I explore how this dynamic is played-out in a number of periods identified with notable theorists and/or academic schools that give rise to a 'politics' that can inform a *possible* politics of metal studies. These include Gramsci's account of the 'traditional' and the 'organic' intellectual; Stuart Hall and the 'cultural politics' of the Birmingham CCCS school; Simon Frith on the 'political' pleasures of the 'fan-intellectual'; Charlotte Brunsdon's on the feminist, the housewife and the soap opera; Richard Middleton on 'vernacular practice' and the Low-Other; Matt Hills on the 'proper place' of Theory according to the academic-fan and the fan-academic. Finally, how these *conflicts of legitimation* can be placed within a revised model of Bourdieu's 'cultural field' as it applies to the academy and the habitus of *Homo Academicvs*. I conclude by suggesting that the role of the *metallectual* and the politics of metal studies needs to be tempered by an increased reflexive awareness of the metal-scholar in relation to their fandom and tested through a more explicit self-analysis of *class-habitus*, as both a guide to the limits of political judgments and possible interventions into metal music, metal fandom and the global metal scene.

Keywords:
Low Other, Appropriation/Exclusion, Organic Intellectual, Feminist Media and Cultural Studies, Academic-Fan/Fan-Academic, Vernacular Knowledge, Theory Club, Cultural-Classed Relations, Habitus, Self-Analysis

## Introduction

Metal and politics has a history. This history can be divided into four periods, each of which describes a relationship between heavy metal music and different groups of academics, and in a crucial period, heavy metal, academics and politicians. The first period is closely identified with the arguments of subcultural theory, broadly spanning the years from 1976-1984, where heavy metal music and its fans are dismissed as lacking any sort of potential to articulate a 'politics' of youth cultural resistance (Brown 2003; Phillipov 2012). The second period from 1984-1991, in stark contrast, sees heavy metal music and its fans politicized as a danger to youth and society as part of an elite-orchestrated campaign that takes on the dimensions of a mass-mediated 'moral panic' endorsed by academic 'experts', who feature in US Senate hearings and in a series of well-publicized criminal indictments and court cases, brought against prominent heavy metal bands and their record companies (Brown 2013). The third period, broadly from 1991 to 1999, is characterised by a number of key academic interventions (Gaines 1991; Weinstein 1991; 2000; Walser 1993; 2014), that seek to defend heavy metal against its political detractors, arguing that it is a classed-cultural response to the divisive economics of deindustrialization and Neo-liberal market globalization. As such it is largely defensive, inhabiting a phantasmagorical-world of demons, monsters and armoured-masculinity, despite its potential to symbolically articulate working class experience, especially in former industrial-heartlands (Berger 1999; Moore 2009; 2011). The fourth phase, from 2008 to the present, largely coincides with the rise of Metal Studies, an interdisciplinary field that identifies its object of study as that of a global extreme metal underground, made up of hundreds of interconnected global/local scenes, where black and death/thrash metal styles tend to predominate (Kahn-Harris 2007). This scholarship not only suggests that the typical class-profile of the metal fan has shifted, from working to middle class identifiers, it is also characterised by a focus on the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of extreme styles, evaluating them in high-art terms, drawing on classical and comparative literary models, or as exemplars of an anti-art 'lo-fi' avant-garde 'noise', best explained via deconstructionist anti-theory and post-literary philosophical-poetics.

What I want to argue is that the key to understanding these different periods is not their focus on politics or even the role that politics is seen to play/not seen to play in heavy metal music and fandom, rather it is the role of the academic as the judge and adjudicator of the significance of such politics (or their lack) that is the key factor in each case. In other words, what is central to such arguments is the role that the category of the political plays in evaluating the worth, significance and value of heavy metal music, which in turns depends upon how the political is being defined and by whom, in relation to such texts. While it is clearly the case that such politics are being defined differently in each period, nevertheless it is the key factor in their description and evaluation. However, such a political worth/lack of worth (or perceived danger) is also linked to a judgement about affect or impact, and this crucially turns on a judgement of the relationship of metal music to its fans or core audience. So what we have, in each account, is a *double-relationship*: first, of the academic to metal music culture and its perceived politics or lack thereof; second, the relationship of such politics (or their lack) to a perception of the fans or core audience ('headbangers') of such music. In all cases, what organises this relationship and gives it significance is the centrality of the academic critic/researcher, as privileged interlocutor or *consecrated* intermediary, who possess the requisite cultural capital that allows them to dismiss, valorise or despise, reject, praise or defend, the object of their professional 'gaze': metal music and its fandom.

As Phillipov (2012) has argued, past sub/cultural academics have dismissed heavy metal music/fandom in the name of a cultural politics of value, condemning its political-lack as the cause/symptom of its perceived gender/'race' essentialism/ exclusionism, whilst simultaneously performing/projecting a cultural tourism/gaze upon punk, hardcore, hip-hop, rap and EDM. In short, nobody wanted to be an *egg-head-banger* back in the mid-70s, in the first-wave of sub/cultural studies and championing of resistant-youth-styles, even less in the late 1980s/90s, when sub/cultural studies found a degree of academic-legitimacy, moving from class to gender, ethnicity and cultural-hybridity, not when there was post-punk, hip-hop, rap, EDM and indie, to project an academic-fan-identity/longing upon. Yet it is probable that we wouldn't have Metal studies if it were not for the pubic intervention of a few scholars who sought to defend this abhorred Other against its political and psychological pathologizing as a sexist/deviant subculture. Warts 'n' all in the case of Weinstein (1991; 2000), and for Walser (1993; 2014), via a musicology/cultural-politics that sought 'neither to denounce or defend wholesale heavy metal's politics of gender' but to place it within its structural/cultural context of capitalist-hegemony-patriarchy.

This paper seeks to reject the past-politics of sub/cultural theory and its account of music cultures, diagnosing these as a species of 'classed-cultural' projections of a radical object/project. Like rock critics, sub/cultural theorists project their longing/desires upon the music(s) they most admire, while seeking to guide its performers towards their political/aesthetic ideals. The reverse is they project their disappointment/disgust upon that which is seen to be the least amenable to their fantasies/desires. This is one reason why heavy metal, seemingly devoid of any progressive politics/musical-aesthetics, has been dismissed or denigrated by academics/critics for over forty-years. However, in the past decade this has begun to change. From 2008 we have seen a series of conferences and a list-serve called Music, Metal and Politics; work that explicitly engages with the idea that metal – once apparently bereft of politics – is now seen to posses a politics in its refusal to 'do politics' in conventional ways; metal's development of scenic-practices of 'reflexive anti-reflexivity' that insulate it against political divisions that threaten its unity, and metal as practising a 'corporeal' body-politics.

So what has changed? My suggestion is that a new generation of sub/cultural scholars have begun to recognise in the post (heavy) metal of extreme-metal-styles an aesthetic-sublime upon which they can both project their cultural/aesthetic capital – including the literary, the poetic, the post-structural – but also, I shall argue, a fantasised-Other of their own fandom. While this new scholarship is in many respects 'progressive' in seeking to valorise the aesthetic, literary and critical aspects of metal music within the academy, it also in the same gesture replicates many of the dominant tendencies of previous scholarship. Or rather it reproduces a similar set of relations between the academy and fandom, that enables the academic-fan and, more specifically, the fan-academic, to project onto extreme metal a politics that constitute its idealized class-identity as well as seek to critique and reform those aspects that don't meet its projected/desired ideals. A major reason for this is an increasingly widely held view that while metal fans in the past were mainly lower-class or blue-collar identifiers, this is no longer the case with the demographic profile of extreme metal fans reflecting a growing middle or upper middle-class profile, with the majority educated to

degree level or its equivalent (see Brown 2016 for a summary of this data). This shift or the strong perception of it taking place, makes it much more likely for the fan-academic to imagine that the typical extreme metal fan is more likely to be someone 'like them'. Despite this, this new class of academics end up reproducing a conventional, albeit highly selective, relationship to popular cultural forms, projecting onto them a 'political' reading that legitimates them in intellectual terms favourable to the rules of cultural hierarchy of the academy. Against these tendencies, both of which are located in a lack of analysis of class-habitus of the *intellectual*, this paper argues for a politics of conjunction/articulation: that popular music cultures are political when they become the subject of political claims/desires or the object/Other of fears. The role of the academic is therefore not to adopt the organic (aca-fan) intellectualism advocated by Nilsson (2009), Kahn-Harris (2011), Scott (2012) and others but to recognise the classed-cultural relations that both connects/divides the intellectual/class/formation from its object of desire/disgust.

### *A modest proposal*: towards a self-reflective *and* reflexive metal studies

What I propose is that metal scholars – and Metal Studies more widely – can benefit greatly from having a knowledge of the struggles that took place in academia, between scholars and within and between different disciplines, in the recent past over this issue: the role of academics or scholars - that is, the category of "intellectuals" – as mediators, critics, interpreters and advocates, in relation to popular cultural formations and the social and cultural groups identified with them. As I will show, these moments of conflict and contestation, debate, self-reflection and self-analysis, define with remarkably clarity and prescience many of the key issues that face a self-reflective and reflexive metal studies at this crucial juncture in its development. I am thinking here not simply of the profound impact of Western Marxism, post-colonialism, feminism and post-modernism on the academy and the great debates that occurred within and between these intellectual-political formations in the late 60s and 1970s, but more specifically of: Sub/Cultural studies, Popular Music studies, Feminist Media studies, Audience and Reception studies, and Fan studies.

The issue at the heart of this matter is, as popular music scholar Richard Middleton has posed it: 'whose music this is, or more specifically, who may speak about it?' (1999/2000: 78) and, I would want to add, with what 'authority'? This notion of authority is complex and multi-dimensional but in the first instance it refers to the hidden power-relations that authorize the academic to speak about or 'on behalf' of groups that lack such a voice: the Subaltern or the Low Other. We can find accounts of the Low Other in Feminism, Post-colonial studies, Post-modernism, and so on, wherein the very 'project of Western modernity is inscribed within […] this pathology', marked as it is by the 'impress of denial and desire' (p. 79-80). Indeed the formation of the bourgeois Subject and therefore the bourgeois academic reflects the construction of High/Low demarcations in a range of discursive domains, mapped on to a range of social groups, and so on. In each case there is a process of 'appropriation' and 'introjection', enabling a transformation of the Low as legitimate culture, accompanied by projection, externalizing the Low-Other beyond the boundaries of taste (ibid,). This can be contrasted with the cultural politics of the 'authentic' voice, one that is seen to speak with the vernacular 'authority' of experience, involvement and collective-memory of a subculture, music scene or fandom. It follows then that the 'politics' of metal scholarship revolves around the difficulty of these relations and how they are theorized in academic 'practice'. Middleton's solution to the problem of 'who can speak' is methodology, a methodology that can balance 'insider knowledge' with outsider academic 'objectivity', with the aim not to 'appropriate' but simply to 'participate' in the 'popular vernacular' (p. 79).

However, the heated debates that have taken place over the 'politics' of feminist methodology highlight one intractably difficult issue that is relevant to this discussion: that the act of identification with the oppressed does not in itself guarantee or even make possible the means by which an 'equal conversation' could be conducted. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) eloquently rhetorical question, posed at least in part[2] in relation to the arguments about whether white, middle-class feminists could ever speak for or about women of color and/or women of class, put it: *can the subaltern speak?* Her answer, of course, was: 'we' (or in practice 'you' – middle and upper-class white feminists) need to listen. But the problem of listening to the monologues of the oppressed (even if that were possible) is that someone in a situation of oppression is most likely to articulate a discourse marked by the authenticity of the experience of living with and coping with the structures and processes that reproduce that oppression, rather than be able to articulate or even identify the key mechanisms that underpin it. Of course, such discourses are likely to feature, residual and emergent elements

that could be fashioned into a more coherent explanatory narrative. Not surprising then that forms of academic radicalisms, such as Marxism and Feminism, have seized upon such partial articulations as evidence of the progressive instincts or inclinations of the oppressed, while ignoring other not-so progressive or even 'reactionary' elements; or they have sought to correct or contest such 'ideological' elements in the interests of the oppressed class as a whole or to seek a progressive alliance with the most advanced sectors of that class, etc.

Examples of metal scholarship, prior to the emergence of a self-consciously defined metal studies, that reflect these relations are Walser's (1993; 2014) 'Guns N' Roses N' Marx N' Engels' discussion; Moore's (2009; 2010) comparative critique of punk and metal's response to the politics of deindustrialization and Berger's (1999) 'uncomfortable' dialogue with the death metal musician, Dan Saladin, in the context of the deindustrialized wasteland of Akron, Ohio ('Once the tire capital of the world'). In each case the academic critic recognizes the potential politics of the metal musician and the metal fan that should follow from their 'authentic' vernacular experience of capitalist exploitation in the context of deskilling and global neo-liberalism. Yet in each case, although the music of metal offers a resource for survival in such a context, it does not offer a *realist* account of their collective oppression. As Berger comments: 'Death metal is neither an example of false consciousness nor a coping mechanism for the stresses of an unequal world. It is a promise unfulfilled' (1999: 294). For Moore, while punk 'directly and dramatically confronted the social system and its hegemonic culture', heavy metal choose to 'dwell' in a fantasmagorical world of 'demons, monsters, evil and destruction' and, like a millennial cult, offered its followers apocalyptic and Biblical prophesies of hell and damnation, rather than a coherent politics. As such, 'it may hold the keys to understanding the plight of working class youth in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly their failure, inability, or refusal to confront the social inequalities and injustices stemming from deindustrialization' (2010: 86).

A key question, that I will pursue, is whether the rise of the academic fan and Fan studies shifts the dynamics of these relations and in what ways? As Jenkins (1991) has suggested, the emergence of Fan studies, like that of Feminist Media and Cultural studies, can be broadly mapped on to two phases of academic practice. The first is the intervention of consecrated academics who '*come out*' as fans of previously denigrated forms of popular culture, such as soap opera. The symbolic aim of such interventions is to argue for the cultural value of the popular form and the defense of its fandom as a positive identity, a source of alternative community formation, creativity and critical practice. Fans, rather than cultural dupes of mass media forms, are expert readers of complex, polysemic media texts. However, the question remains of how much of this, in the case of the soap opera, is an appropriation and reconfiguring of the popular text as a 'feminist' text or a text *for* feminists. The second phase is the emergence of fan-academics; that is, those that started out as fans and then were able to parley or translate their fandom and 'insider knowledge' into academic consecration, in the form of MA and PhD qualifications. Here the question would be: are these fans the same kinds of fans, from the same or broadly similar social and cultural groups as the fans identified with the popular form when it had little or no *legitimacy*, when it was entirely excluded from the realm of value? These arguments clearly relate, as I will show, to the rise of 'metal studies'.

While there is a recognition in metal studies that the original 'model' for mapping these conflicts of legitimacy and legitimation is Gramsci's (1971) account of the 'organic' intellectual and how it might inform the strategies of *metallectuals* in guiding the future practices of the metal scene and its 'politics' (Nilsson 2009; Kahn-Harris 2011), not enough attention has been given to the problem of the ways in which the 'traditional' and the 'organic' intellectual are institutionally intertwined, arguably more so now than ever before. At the same time, the strategies of 'organic' intellectuals in championing the value and importance of communities of culture outside the academy, can result in contradictory outcomes to the extent that academic legitimacy depends on a *misrepresentation* (conscious or otherwise) of such communities to gain acceptance by traditional intellectuals; or where the allegiance of organic intellectuals to such outsider communities results in the undermining of their academic credentials in the eyes of the traditional academy. What this suggests is that the legitimacy of the organic intellectual not only depends on the ability to contest traditional intellectual positions but also to be seen as a *legitimate* interpreter or cultural intermediary of cultural formations beyond the academy.

In what follows I explore how the positioning of the academic, between the academy and fandom or communities of culture beyond the academy, necessitates the development of strategies of intermediation that result in the formulation of a 'politics' that seeks to resolve the problem of the role of the academic and their relationship to popular cultural forms and

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audiences, which can be progressive or reactionary *to the extent to which* it is able to theorize that relationship as a reflection not only of the role and 'place' (proper or otherwise) of the academic within the academy – as a set of struggles and positions over power/knowledge – but also the extent of their self-conscious deliberation on their 'cultural positioning' within a gender, ethnic and class-habitus. Something of the set of difficulties to be negotiated here can be seen in the observation of Rosalind Brunt (1992) talking about studying popular cultural audiences:

> There is a danger of saying "I'm just the same as these people." I think actually that's a sort of elitism because it denies the way in which you're different […] I think one has to honestly say there's a contradiction and a problem there and not deny it. And what worries me more are academics who go on about being fans. I'm deeply suspicious of that, and I think it's more honest to say that yes I'm a fan but also I am differently located, and that has certain implications and responsibilities (p.80).

In what follows I explore how this dynamic can be seen to be *played-out* in a number of periods identified with notable theorists and/or academic schools that each, in their turn, give rise to a 'politics' that can inform an understanding of the *possible* politics of metal studies. First, I explore Gramsci's (1971) theorization of the politics of the 'traditional' and the 'organic' intellectual. Second, I examine the reflection upon this problematic by Stuart Hall (1992) and how this informs the 'politics' of the Birmingham CCCS school and their theorization of popular cultural forms, particularly post-war working class youth cultures. Third, I examine further critical reflections on this model by Simon Frith and the 'fan-intellectual' and the 'intellectual fan' (1992), in the context of a discussion of the 'politics' of cultural studies. Fourth, I turn to feminist media and cultural studies and the critical reflections of Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) on the problem of the relationship between the feminist, the housewife and the soap opera, and how this problematic can be seen to 'mirror' those that inform the formation of metal studies and its 'politics'. Fifth, I examine the account by Richard Middleton of the 'scholar fan' or 'critical-outsider' (1993; 1999/2000) in the context of research into popular music. Sixth, I examine the account of the 'politics' of the academic-fan or 'scholar-fan' and the fan-academic or 'fan-scholar' by Matt Hills (2002; 2004), in the context of fan studies. Finally, I place the insights from this work within a revised model of Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) cultural field and then examine the resultant 'problematic' of metal studies and its politics from this framework. I conclude by suggesting that the role of the metallectual and the politics of metal studies needs to be tempered by an increased reflexive awareness of the metal scholar in relation to their fandom and tested through a more explicit self-analysis of class-habitus, as both a guide to the limits of political judgments and possible interventions into metal music, metal fandom and the global metal scene.

## Putting Politics in its *Place*: Gramsci and the problem of the intellectual as a 'classed' formation

Gramsci's seminal formulation of the problem is his observation that the discussion of the 'politics' of the intellectual is characterised by 'a widespread error of method' that locates the 'criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups that personify them) have their place' (1971: 8). This leads Gramsci to distinguish between the 'traditional' and the 'organic' intellectual. Traditional intellectuals imagine themselves as an autonomous group and therefore fail to recognize their key role in perpetuating dominant ideas, whereas the organic intellectual is only too aware of this and seeks to use their position not only to 'struggle to assimilate and conquer ideologically the traditional intellectuals' but also to cultivate strong roots in 'their' community, engaging with local issues and struggles that connect to the people and their experiences. The problem, of course, is that the professional intellectual (with the partial exception of scholars like Gramsci) is drawn disproportionately from the middle and upper middle classes (petty bourgeois and high bourgeois) not the working class or the 'people' and therefore their 'politics' is about seeking an alliance or connection to such groups, rather than developing their role from a 'rootedness' in such communities. In addition, the struggles that beset the professional academic are most often one's concerned to negotiate their position within the academic hierarchy (gaining 'tenure track' or 'early career' status), most often in reference to a professional self-identity that, like the traditional intellectual, reflects an *idealized* classed-

culture of intellectual autonomy. The cumulative effect of this is to form the academic as a 'class-in-itself' rather than a 'class-for-itself'.

It is Stuart Hall (1992) who has reflected upon this most profoundly, in the context of the work of the Birmingham CCCS, when he talks about: 'the need to reflect on our institutional position, and our intellectual practice':

> there is no doubt in my mind that we were trying to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce an organic intellectual. [... ] We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope (to use Gramsci's phrase […]) that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjuncture ever appeared (p.102).

However, he goes on to say: 'More truthfully, we were prepared to imagine or model or simulate such a relationship in its absence' (ibid). The result of this was that the Birmingham school, as Michelle Phillipov argues, 'sought to uncover organic intellectual practices already existing within popular culture' (2012: 5). Thus, subcultural theory and the method of 'reading resistance' in youth style cultures became, in practice, 'a theoretical-political framework for categorizing 'radical' cultural activity' (Brown 2003: 209). Drawing a clear division between middle-class youth and working class youth, the CCCS sought to theorize working class youth cultures, Teddy Boys, Mods, Skinheads and Punks, as forms of subcultural resistance to class hegemony. But metal, despite emerging from the working class industrial heartlands of Britain, including most obviously Birmingham (where the CCCS post-graduate department was also located, in Aston) was more or less excluded from it. Why? Phillipov has part of the answer to this: that this identification with the subcultural was always legitimated via a political 'reading'; a reading that – as Hall following Gramsci indicates - was grounded in 'avant-garde theory' (which eschewed methodology) so as to offer a challenge to the traditional intellectuals. But it was a 'reading' that was projected on to some subcultures and not others. Mentions of metal are marginal to subcultural theory, unable to meet the criteria of being working class *enough* and therefore unable to qualify as a form of subcultural resistance, despite it obvious 'rituals'.

I've documented this 'absence' of metal (Brown 2003), confined to a footnote in Hebdige (1979) talking about 'idiot dancing', belatedly appearing in Ellis Cashmore's (1984) account of *headbanging*:

> heavy metal generally failed to arouse the kind of hysteria or panic associated with most youth subcultures [...] they went to concerts, very big outdoor concerts, and they gave the appearance of being threatening without actually being threatening. That's all. It would be unfair to call heavy metal conservative: inert would be more accurate [...] Heavy metals didn't want to change society [...] They just wanted a little corner of it where they could introvert to their own sphere, escaping to a fantasy world in which they played imaginary guitars and shook their heads into states of concussion (p. 37)

What is ironic, in retrospect, about this is that within a year heavy metal in the United States was subject to an absolute storm of politically-motivated, mass-mediated 'moral panic'. So how was it possible for heavy metal to be political in this moment, perceived as a threat to rightwing/neo-liberal/morality/society, when the left-academic-avant-garde of sub/cultural theory had dismissed the genre and its fans as bereft of any politics, diagnosing the symptom of its lack of value in its 'lack of politics'?

Phillipov's (2012) answer, and it is certainly one that is even more clearly visible in the choices made by post-subcultural studies, is that this 'new model for intellectual work' that sought to 'read' certain 'popular culture practices' as 'resistant' and even 'progressive' actually arose out of an underlying tendency to 'value and celebrate the kinds of practices' that most closely aligned 'the subculturalist with the academic critic' (p.8). In other words, this political strategy led radical (*would-be* organic) intellectuals to persistently 'misrecognise their own cultural and political interests as those of [the] subcultural participants' (ibid) they studied. As she concludes, while 'attempts to break down boundaries between' the academic intellectual and the subculturalist are motivated by 'liberatory impulses' borne out of a 'fascination and identification with popular resistance', this strategy of the *would-be organic intellectual* elides the issue of the status of such intellectuals as 'possessors of cultural capital', while largely failing to 'acknowledge the cultural politics of studies as their *own*, and not the politics of the disempowered on whose half they claim to intervene' (ibid,).

Simon Frith, an intellectual fellow-traveller of the CCCS group but also a consistent critic of theory not anchored in methodology, clearly recognises this when he observes: 'the meaning of punk in Britain was, for all its participants, *whether they knew it or not*, made more exciting by Dick Hebdige's transformation of a disparate, noisy set of people and events into the fantastic theoretical narrative of subculture' (1992: 179, *emphasis mine*). For Frith, the perceived 'resistance through rituals' of this work is actually a 'ritualized resistance' of the intellectual (ibid,). From this perspective, subcultures are not a 'solution' to the 'problem of being young and poor and proletarian' but, on the contrary, a solution to the problem of 'being an intellectual'. He goes further in suggesting that,

> The cultural study of popular music has been, in effect, an anxiety-driven search by radical intellectuals […] for a model of consumption, for the perfect consumer, the subcultural idol, the mod, the punk, the cool commodity fetishist, the organic intellectual of the high street *who can stand in for them*! (ibid; *emphasis mine*).

So what we are observing here are 'academic not working-class fantasies', fantasies that project the anxieties of radical intellectuals who believe they have 'no place from which to speak (in which to rest)' (p.180). What is at stake in such writings are 'what it means to be male, to be white, to be middle class' (ibid,). The 'analytical consequences' of this 'class anxiety' has been 'the relentless politicizing of consumption', of music and style cultures, accompanied by 'vacuous sociological terms', such as 'resistance', 'empowerment', at the 'expense of aesthetic categories' (ibid,).

Phillipov's (2012) solution to this problem, as it relates to the (mis)treatment or (mis)reading of metal music and culture, is to reject all forms of political *reading* in favor of an *aesthetic* analysis of metal genres, such as death metal. However, what she fails to note here is that this politics of the subcultural and of popular culture, arises out of the 'problem' of aesthetic pleasure *itself* for the radical intellectual. This problem and its preferred solution, rejecting aesthetics in favor of a political reading, can be traced back to the radical feminism of media and cultural studies and the intellectual dilemma of how to reconcile a liking for popular women's genres, such as soaps, romance fiction and melodrama, with some measure of worth (Hollows 2000). In order to counter the problem that such genres were also ideological texts, feminist critics evaluated them in terms of their perceived proto-feminist 'politics' thereby displacing the issue of *pleasure in the text* to a critical/political reading. But as Frith (1992) suggests, the search for forms of music and culture upon which intellectuals can project their anxieties is underpinned by a *politics of pleasure*, which is, in effect, a 'play of identification' between the academic and the 'object of study' and is therefore inescapably grounded in a *pleasure of the political*; the pleasure of *identification* with the Other.


**Metal Studies, the Headbanger, and Heavy Metal**
I now want to turn to Charlotte Brunsdon's considered reflection on the cultural politics of: *The Feminist, the Housewife and the Soap Opera* (2001). What I want to suggest, through the exploration of this work, is how it offers metal studies a very clear set of issues and concerns that 'mirror' those that faced feminist intellectuals when they sought to legitimate the soap opera and to engage in some kind of 'imagined' dialogue with its female fans.

Brunsdon's starting point is the 'astonishing elevation of this genre from its despised cultural status up to the mid-1970s to its present central position on many syllabuses of media and communication studies […] How did this happen?' (2000: 1).

> just as it is possible to trace the growing respectability of soap opera as an academic area of study in the period from the mid-1970s on, it is also possible to show that it is in precisely this period that feminist critique moves from the streets to the academy […] Both soap opera and feminism have moved together from outside to inside the academy in the period since 1975 (p. 3).[3]

If we play a game of substitutions here, retaining the original text but making it metal-focused, we arrive at this:

> just as it is possible to trace the growing respectability of *heavy metal* as an academic area of study in the period from the mid-*2000s* on, it is also possible to show that it is in precisely this period that *metal studies* moves from the streets to the academy […] Both

*heavy metal* and *metal studies* have moved together from outside to inside the academy in the period since *2008* (p. 3; *emphasis mine*).

Is it not remarkable how prescient this is? But these parallels can be seen to go further and deeper, suggesting that feminist media and cultural studies can act as a paradigm for understanding the politics of metal studies. For example, Brunsdon goes on to argue that there is a 'reciprocity' to the processes in that: 'the constitution of television soap opera as a legitimate object of study' for feminists, and other academics, also describes the process within which 'the subject of this studying was constituted' (pp. 3-4). Put another way: 'the feminist intellectual, produces herself in this engagement with this popular television genre, just as she produces a text for media studies' (p. 4). It follows then that the constitution of *heavy metal*, as a legitimate object of study – to the extent to which this has been achieved[4] – is also the process in which the subject of this study is constituted. That is, the '*metal* intellectual produces herself in this engagement with the popular *music* genre, just as she produces a text for *metal* studies'.

However, she does so in relation to a more 'shadowy' figure: 'the television viewer', 'the housewife' or the 'ordinary women'. Crucially for our discussion, the feminist intellectual has an ambivalent relation with this figure since she 'both is and isn't the feminist herself' (p. 4). Or rather, she is her Other: since it is because of or *on behalf of* this 'ordinary woman' that research is conducted. Significantly, it is also onto this figure that 'recalcitrant feminine desires are projected', while at the same time, it is with this figure that 'unity is desired, assumed, and felt' (ibid). Thus, it follows that, the *metallectual* engagement with *heavy metal*, historically, has an ambivalent relation with the figure of the *metalhead*, the *headbanger* or the *metal fan*, since s/he both is and isn't the *metallectual* herself but is rather, the *academic metal* critic and the character in some way produced as her Other. At the same time, it is because of and, on behalf of this 'ordinary *metalhead*', that research is conducted. Yet, it is also upon this figure that recalcitrant *metallectual* desires (of 'vernacular' fandom) are projected, while it is also with this figure that unity is desired, assumed, and felt.

It is inescapably the case that the metallectual, to refer back to Middleton (1993), is made possible through the politics of the Low-Other, wherein the intellectual work to legitimate heavy metal as a subject worthy of academic study involves both appropriation and transformation *and* projection and exclusion, both of which are done in the name of the 'imagined' metal fan. Or as Middleton puts it: the bourgeois intellectual must 'come to terms with the Low within' in order to 'release the Low without' (p.80). The figure that arises out of this process is the 'scholar-fan', who 'can double as 'informant' from within the culture' but also act as a 'critical outsider', able to cross-check the scope and depth of their 'vernacular' participation against wider schemas and academic knowledge (1993: 180).

But what this model excludes is the 'ordinary' fan, since in many respects the dialogue sustained is *within* the mind of the intellectual or the 'intellectual fan'. Or as Frith argues: 'many fans of pop[ular] music who are not academics are certainly intellectuals [...] So in that sense I don't see a clear [...] division between fans and academics. I mean academics can be fans and fans can be academics' (p.184). But this claim elides the power relations that differentiate the fan from the academic, the academic-fan from the vernacular fan. In this respect, what we have here is an early account of the academic-fan and the fan-academic and the problem of the 'critical insider' or the 'auto-ethnographer'.


**Exploring the politics of the academic-fan and the fan-academic**
It is Matt Hills (2002; 2004), following on from the work of Henry Jenkins (1991),[5] who engages with the issue of the academic-fan and the fan-academic most perceptively. For Hills 'scholarly fans', fan-scholars, and scholar-fans, can all be counted as different types of media fans. Scholarly fans, 'typically educated to at least degree level and likely to be "young (or not-so-young) professionals" (i.e. in white-collar jobs), use academic practices of evidence (referencing), rigour and systematicity' (p. 141) in their work, although generally without citing academic sources; that is they replicate the practices of academics without fully reproducing academic norms.[6] Fan-scholars, meanwhile, are fans versed in media studies whom 'tactically' appropriate academic sources and terminology as a way of articulating their fandom; whilst scholar-fans are self-identifying fans who are also professional academics (ibid,).

According to Hills, the fan-academic 'uses academic theorizing within their fan writing and within the construction of [a] scholarly fan identity', whereas the academic-fan 'draws on their fandom as a badge of distinction within the academy' (p.142). Given that 'fan-scholars'

are educated to at least degree level and hold professional jobs, they 'make a mockery of the notion that 'theory' can only exist meaningfully and strategically 'outside' fan cultures and in its 'proper' academic place' i.e. 'the Theory Club'. This suggests the 'possibility that fan and academic identities can be hybridised or brought together not simply in the academy but also outside of it, in the figure of the fan scholar' (2002:15).

However, according to Richard Burt, this portrait of the fan-scholar as an 'oppressed, unjustly maligned victim of the dominant culture who nevertheless manages to "win" by discursive acts of rewriting' (1999: 13); that is, by 'appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests' (Jenkins 1991: 172), is in reality an 'academic fantasy' that seeks to project 'an anti-authoritarian model of the intellectual in terms of fandom and popular culture' (p.14). For Burt, what this does is conflate the critic, and the fan, indulging in the fantasy of 'perverse plenitude' (appropriation/projection) 'that the academic can cross over and adopt the extra-academic, popular position', indeed, 'can occupy all positions, be the virtuoso, the one who can […] do it all' (p.15), even though they are *contradictory*. Yet, although fan-academics may be 'adoring *and* critical' they typically describe themselves as 'a fan of fandom' 'or a fan of fans', and ultimately 'insist on reserving, for themselves, the ability to determine political significance' (ibid). What this means is that: 'all other critical [i.e. fan] perspectives [must] be read from the master perspective of the academic insofar as the academic is defined as the *political*' (p. 15; *emphasis mine*). And this is because 'the political', as we have seen, is always also, in the final instance, the 'intelligent'.

In summary then, the fan-academic offers a source of identity and prestige 'beyond' the academy and therefore represents a challenge to theory-production as exclusively taking place 'within' the academy or its 'proper place'. They therefore offer the possibility of a hybrid identity of the fan/academic. However, the problem is that academic fans only pretend equality since they project onto but continue to judge fandom in terms of its political 'lack' (for example, by not being feminist, or not being feminist *enough*), whereas, the academic fan appears to 'lack nothing' (ibid,).
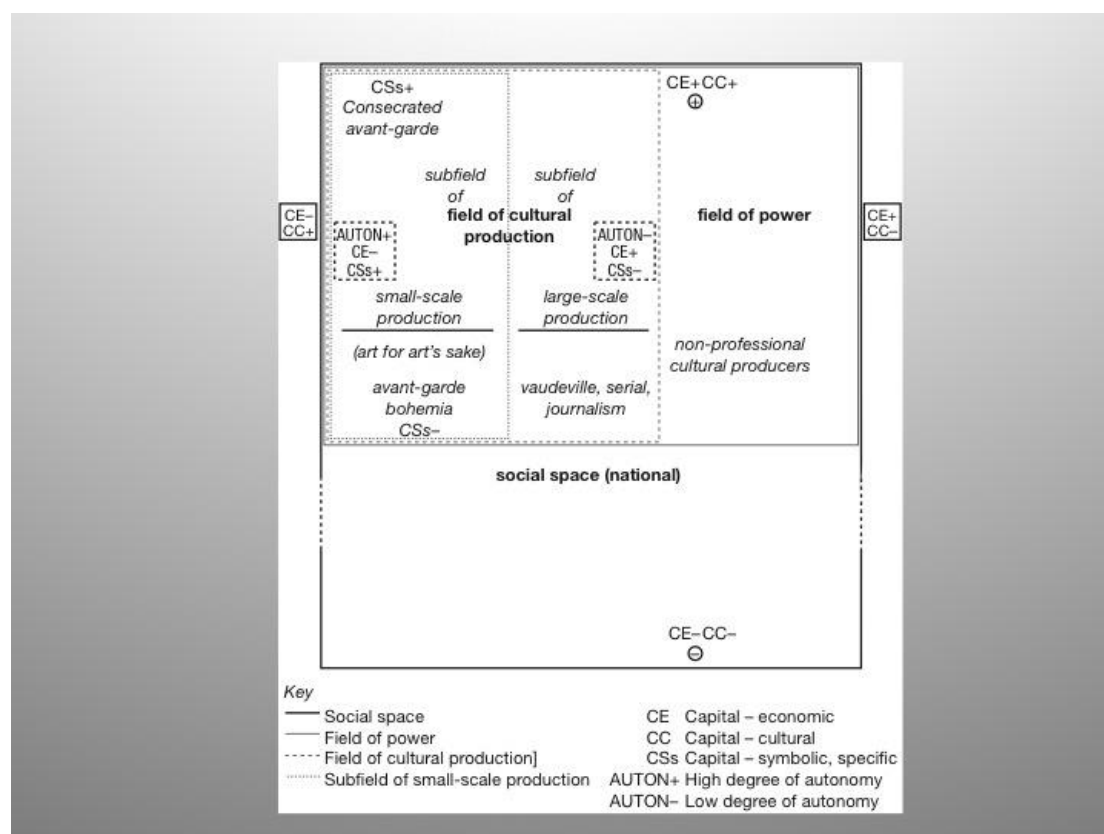


Fig. 1. The field of cultural production in the field of power and in social space (Bourdieu 1996). Source: Hesmondhalgh (2006: 213).


**Metal, the cultural field and *classed-cultural relations***


9

It is within the body of work of Pierre Bourdieu (1993; 1996) that we can find some explanation for this impasse, in particular via the theorization of the cultural field that allows the accumulation of cultural capital but whose continued existence depends on the maintenance of symbolic distance (via the exercise of symbolic violence) from the basely commercial, the crudely economic and the Low. In particular, I want to propose that it is possible to apply this model to the academic institution and the knowledge economy of 'intellectual work' and the intellectual 'career' (Bourdieu 1988).

In Bourdieu's (1993) account the established agents (or "high priests") who are dominant within the field, possess high levels of symbolic capital, which is manifest in their ability to exercise *consecratory power*, to confer legitimate value on objects and agents through their patronage. Given that the accumulation of symbolic capital operates inversely to the logic of commercial (or mass) production, i.e. via restricted or small-scale production, entry into the field and progress within it is limited. New agents therefore seek to gain value through the patronage or accreditation of the dominant agents of the field; or by seeking to acquire recognition by challenging their dominance through the development and possession of *symbolically-specific* capitals, which in the art world model would apply to the claims of the *avant-garde*.

So, the question is: How can this model of the cultural field be applied to the academy? And, in turn, how can the disciplinary treatment of heavy metal, prior to and after the emergence of metal studies, be understood within the logic of this field? (See Fig. 1) First, we have a cultural hierarchy of value: consisting of illegitimate, legitimate and *legitimable* culture (Fig. 2); that is, cultural work that has the possibility of attaining some legitimate measure of value. I derive this latter term from Bourdezian approaches to the cultural legitimation of rock music (e.g. Laermans 1992:252). The accepted high cultural works are typically disciplines with high academic status (most often theoretical systems or schools), followed by partially accepted work (those that claim an *avant-garde* status)[7] and at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy, work that struggles for legitimacy within the field. Which takes us to the importance of strategy (Fig.3): that is, *strategies of legitimation* conducted within the academic field.
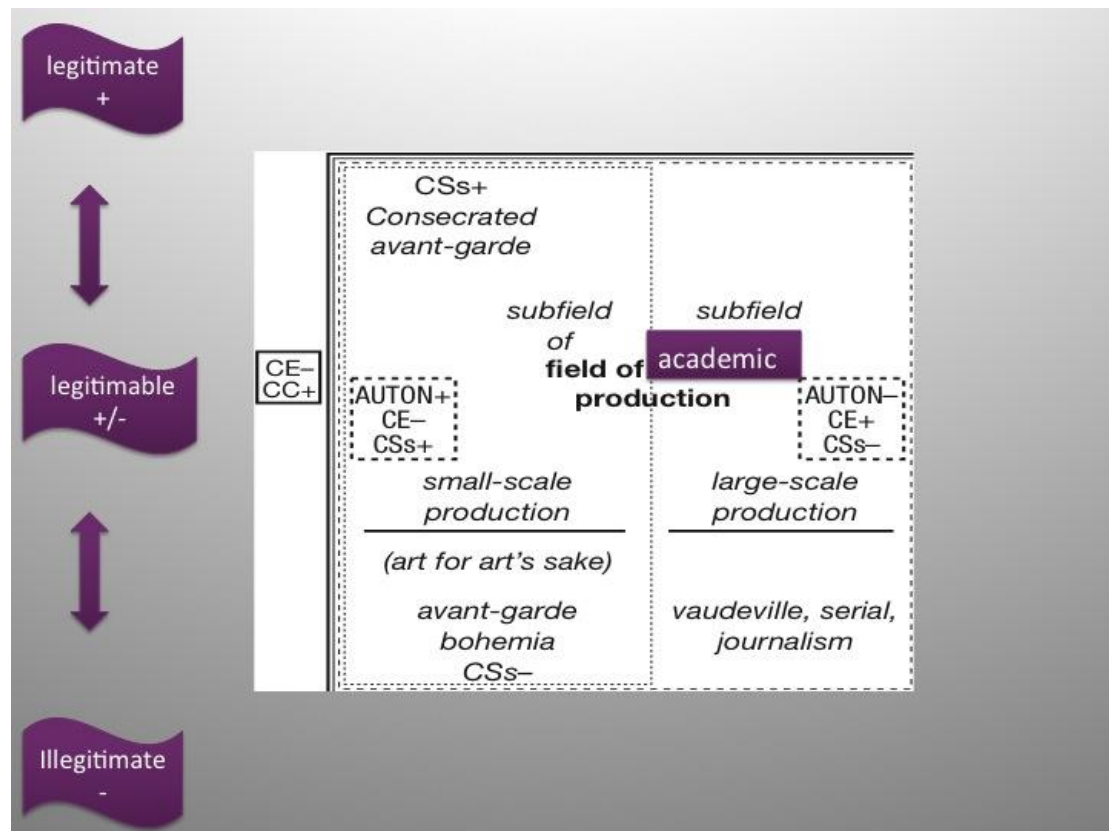


Fig. 2. The field of academic production

As we have seen, subcultural theory sought to challenge the traditional intellectuals by drawing on French 'left-bank' *avant-garde theory*, such as Althusserian Marxism, structuralism and semiotics, but excluded heavy metal from this theorization.[8] Whereas academic psychologists sought approval from traditional intellectuals by devising 'effects' methodologies that could prove heavy metal music and fandom 'delinquent' and 'dangerous' to society and 'cultural normality', therefore gaining patronage within the existing field of consecrated 'social science'. Whereas feminist popular media studies – and popular musicology – announced their fandom as (what Hills calls) a 'badge of distinction within the academy', seeking a critical/political legitimacy for a previously illegitimate form of popular culture (Fig.4).[9]
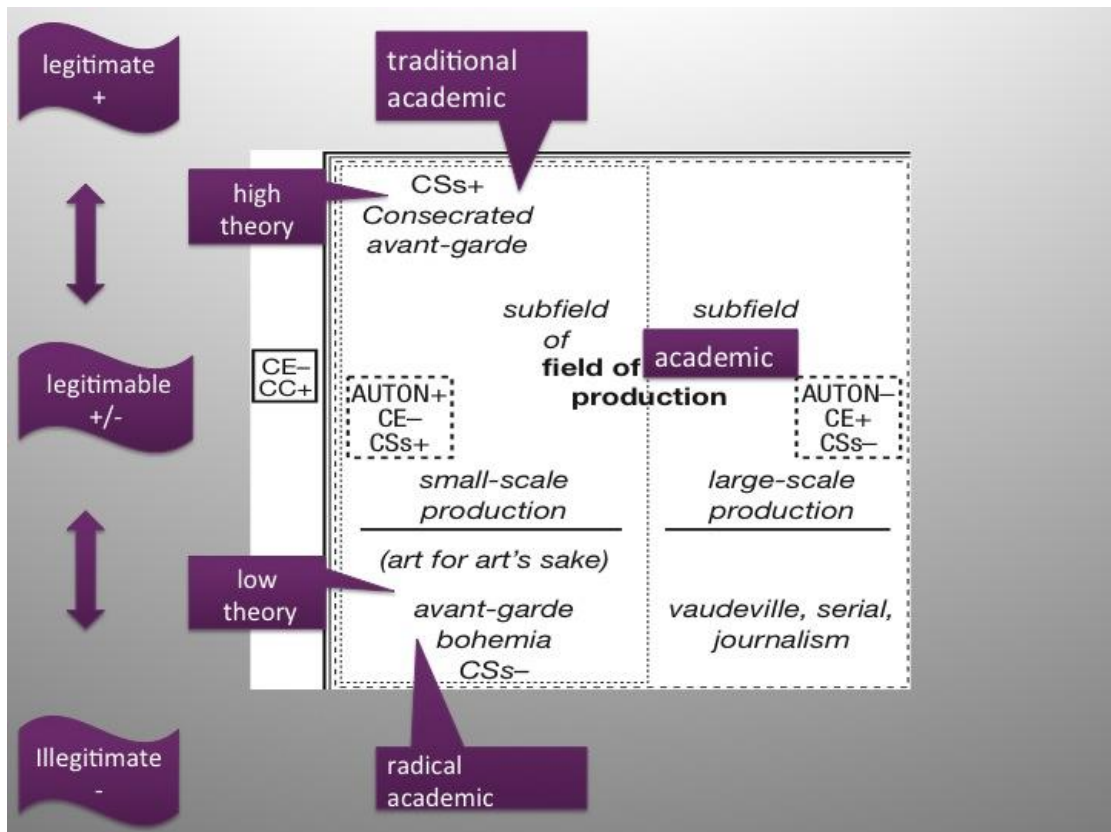


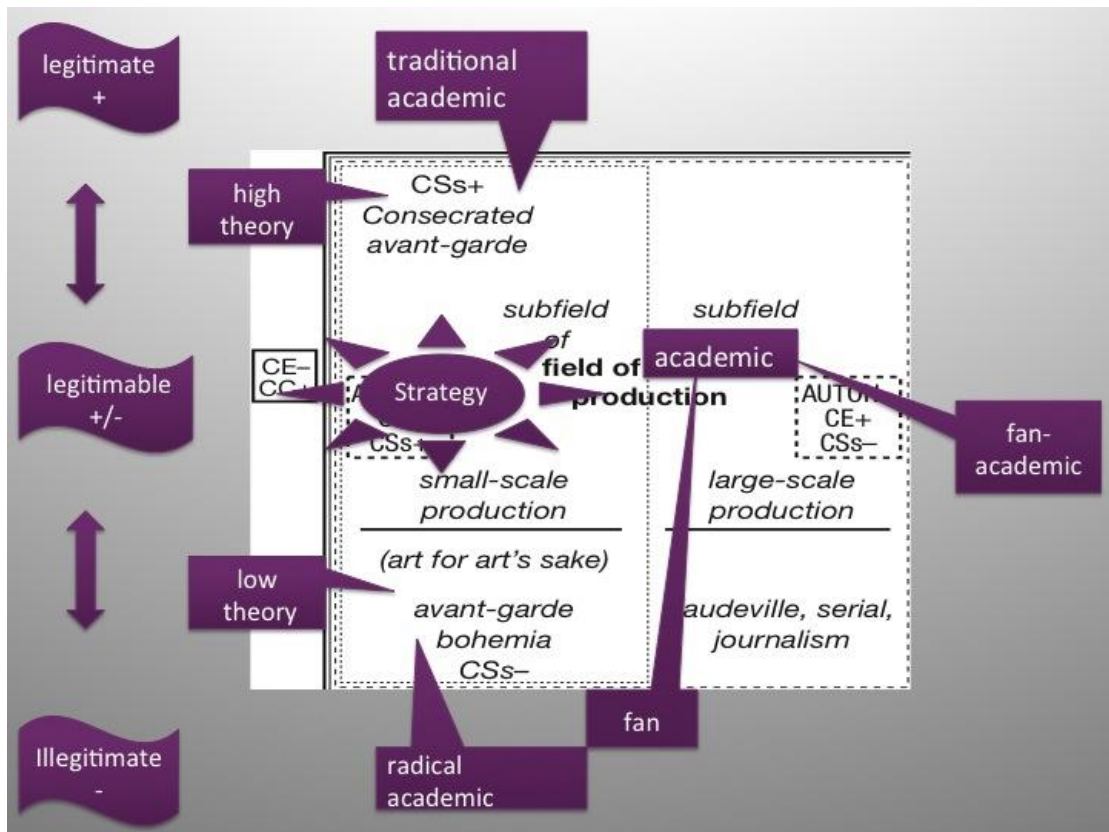Fig. 3. The consecrated avant-garde and the struggle for recognition.

Fig. 4. The strategy of the academic fan and the fan academic

This claim for legitimacy rested on the status of the academic intellectual and their theoretical authority to confer some value on the *merely* 'popular'. Although such a strategy was partially successful it was also vulnerable to the criticism of 'cultural populism' (a pejorative term, employed by Jim McGuigan (1992), to describe how the 'pleasurable consumption of popular culture' by 'active audiences' is presented as having 'resistive and subversive political potential' (Chandler and Munday 2011: 85). For example, McGuigan refers to the 'Soaping of feminism' and, as Brunsdon comments, the implication is that 'a soaped feminism is just a load of frothy bubbles' (2000: 213).

Thus the fan-academic, although offering the potential of a hybridized-identity, has the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the academic field because fan-academics challenge the authority of the Theory Club by seeking an alliance with fan-scholars and their object of fandom. This strategy is therefore inherently contradictory, since it valorizes and seeks to legitimate alternative forms of cultural capital, ones' located within the Popular and its commercial institutions and practices which are, importantly, located *outside* the academy and beyond its rules (Fig.5).
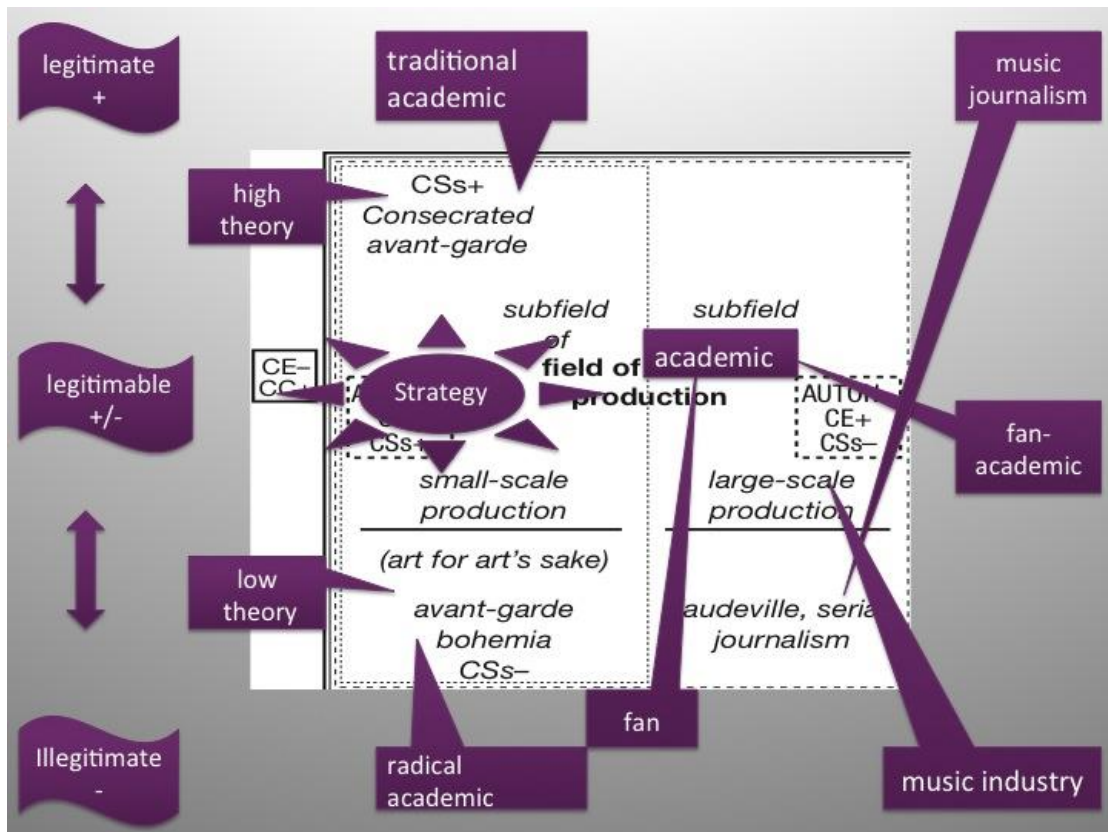
Fig. 5. Conflicts of legitimation of fandom in the academic and popular fields

This model and its critical analysis offers insights into understanding how heavy metal, originally a subgenre of rock music with low cultural status (signified by its popularity among low social status, white male, working-class youth [Bryson 1996, 1997]), has become the object of academic enquiry. And, more importantly, a calculus for mapping the *symbolic strategies* of academics in their framing and treatment of this subject by identifying types of knowledge production that:

> 1. seek accreditation from established disciplines within the field by conforming to the rules of knowledge production and thereby gain approval from the established  "high priests";
> 2. seek to acquire symbolic capital on the basis of the possession of *symbolically specific* knowledge of metal music and culture, such as subgenre varieties;[10]
> 3. seek to gain recognition via the specialist treatment of an aspect of metal culture which is l*egitimable*  in high or avant-garde cultural terms (cf. Brown 2011: 231).[11]

However, (2) and (3), although they may lead to academic change through the challenge to established hierarchies of knowledge and expertise, conversely may lead to marginalization, as established cultural hierarchies seek to regain their dominance by exercising symbolic violence that effectively challenge the value or legitimacy of these 'new' forms of cultural capital as 'heretical' or low.

As we have seen, in the case of media and cultural studies, the 'feminist intellectual' was partly produced in a 'complicated and contradictory struggles to define a soap opera as a legitimate area of engagement for intellectual work' (Brunsdon 2000: 212). However, the necessity for a 'more explicit personal engagement' *as a feminist and a fan*, in 'combination with the originally derided object of study […] repeatedly threatens to undermine the cultural legitimacy of th[at] scholarship' (ibid,). This may also be the case with metal studies, in terms of its equally complicated relationship to heavy metal. As Hills (2002) points out, while some popular cultural forms can be 'revalued as "art" or as "authored" by their [cult fan] audiences', others tend to retain a stigma as 'low-culture' or as merely 'entertainment' (p. 145). The reasons for this are enduringly sociological, being to do with class and *classed*-cultural relations and how they inform the proximity of academic 'cultural capital' and fan 'cultural capital' in claims for legitimacy. The key aspect here is the *degree to which* fan audiences

share a similar 'interpretive community' in terms of their cultural politics and their levels of cultural capital (ibid,). Arguably, one of the reasons for the current level of legitimacy (or *legitimable* status) of metal studies (although it remains internationally and institutionally uneven) is this newly *perceived* alliance of classed-cultural relations. The question therefore that follows from this is: what has been lost in terms of the former outsider vernacular 'authenticity' of heavy metal and its fandom or rather *to what extent* has this newly emergent cultural alliance, between academics-fans and fan-academics, misrepresented or selectively appropriated heavy metal music andculture in the pursuit of academic accreditation.

In conclusion, I offer an outline of an (anti)manifesto that seeks to re-balance these issues in ways that are informed by the past relations of academics, politics and forms of popular cultural projection.


**A Manifesto for Metal Studies**

1. There is nothing intrinsically political about any popular music genre. For example, socially 'realist' lyrics may reflect a political sensibility but this does not make them 'political' in an objective sense: *content is not portent*.
2. What renders music genres/performers political is the context(s)that frame them: how they are seen to articulate a set of social relations/ meaning(s): authenticity or its lack; intelligence or its lack; artfulness or its lack, etc.
3. Advocate a theory of conjunction/articulation: that popular music cultures are political when they become: (a) the subject of political claims/desires (appropriation/ validation of Self): 'Taste-making'; or (b) the object/Other of fears (disgust/exclusion): 'Sick-making'. Such claims mobilise a symbolic capital of 'distinction' and its realization: distinction requires both *appropriation* and *exclusion.*
4. Cultures of classed formation form symbolic hierarchies of legitimate and *legitimable* taste: bad taste can be good, the abject sublime (but only within the 'rules' of the field and therefore within 'limits'). Classification not only classifies the class of things it hierarchically orders it also legitimates the system of classification on which such an ordering depends.
5. Metal Studies is a *legitimation strategy* that depends on the possession of (elite/certificated) cultural capital and its strategic mobilization: accumulation of elite (disciplinary) academic symbolic capital vs symbolically specific ('avant-garde') claims for 'distinctiveness' – subject to the limits of 'cultural populism'!
6. The role of the academic is therefore not to adopt the organic ('aca-fan/fan-academic') intellectualism advocated by Nilsson (2009), Kahn-Harris (2011), Scott (2012) and others (as 'advocate', 'critic', 'interlocutor') but to interrogate the *classed-cultural relations* that both connects/divides the intellectual/class/formation from its object of desire/disgust.
7. The *academic-fan* and the *fan-academic* cannot simply 'speak' on behalf of the fan however much they are 'insiders'.
8. Advocate a ('self-')analysis of class-habitus: taste formation is *classed/gendered/'raced'*. Metallectuals must ask themselves: 'To what extent can I "speak/not-speak" my relation to the system-of-relations' that order such hierarchies.
9. Recognise the conjunctural shift in elite-academic-relations, to economic and commercial capital, that currently inform research strategies and the gains/costs that advocacy/academic-fandom entails for the future of metal music and culture.

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**Notes**

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[1] This article draws on arguments first presented at *Metal Music Studies, ISSMS Conference: Metal & Politics*, 9 June 2016, Bournemouth University, and developed further in my keynote presentation 'Egg-head-banger? Critical reflections on a "career" in metal studies', to *Modern Heavy Metal Conference: Markets, Practices and Cultures*, 30 June - 1 July 2016, Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland. I would like to thank conference delegates, at both events, for the critical dialogue that followed these presentations and that led me to further refine my arguments here.

[2] Spivak begins her essay in dialogue with Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, from their public conversation 'Intellectuals and Power', challenging their view that 'the oppressed, if given the chance' and in 'alliance' with the progressive Left 'can speak and know their conditions' or that the scholarly labour of the 'intellectual' can simply 'represent' them or 'speak on their behalf'.

[3] It is arguably the case that the soap opera has become a legitimate area of academic enquiry because of the growing acceptance of feminist theory within the academy, but specifically within Media and Cultural Studies, and in that order.

[4] For Brunsdon, such legitimacy is measured by the centrality of the subject on syllabuses of a more traditional or established subject areas, which when combined offer a measure of consecration within the academy. See the discussion of Bourdieu below.

[5] Who is, in turn, in dialogue with Michelle De Certeau (1984).

[6] A relevant example here would be the site-owners and contributors to the web site *Encyclopaedia Metallum* (2002-Present).

[7] In this respect, Bourdieu distinguishes between the consecrated avant-garde and the merely 'fashionable'; that is work that claims to replace the 'outmoded'. For Bourdieu, these are permanent struggles that 'oppose the ever-emergent avant-gardes to the recognized avant-garde' (1990: 143).

[8] It is sobering to note here, as Bourdieu observes, that 'Althusser, Barthes, Deleuze and Foucault [...] held minor positions in the university system which often disqualified them from officially directing research' (1988: xviii).

[9] However, it is debatable to whom this 'badge of distinction' is announced and, more importantly, recognized as legitimate.

[10] For example, Keith Kahn-Harris' monograph, *Extreme Metal* (2007).

[11] A relevant example here would be *Metallica and Philosophy* William Irwin (ed), 2007.