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Iron Maiden at Twickenham Stadium, July 2008: An ethnographer's diary

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On the way up we played the “Best of the Beast” compilation; for Chris¹ to hear it and me to remember. Iron Maiden, of course, have a number of memorable songs – with strong, melodic choruses – like ‘Run to the Hills’, ‘Fear of the Dark’, ‘Aces High’ and ‘2 Minutes to Midnight’ – quite unusual for a metal band. But to Maiden fans there really isn’t anyone else like them. They are unique, an institution, a band you can rely on – except for a bit of a wobble when lead singer, Bruce Dickinson, left for a time in the 90s – who never forget their fans and never take them for granted. The announcement of the *Somewhere Back in Time World Tour* epitomised that sentiment; a tour “for the fans” where Maiden would work through their back catalogue, selecting some songs that they had not played for twenty years, polishing them up like precious gems. It was no surprise then that such a tour – where fans would get to hear songs that they had not heard for years ‘live’ but also some would be hearing for the first time - sold out in no time at all. The Maiden tribe around the globe really does number in the millions. The choice of the 82, 000 capacity, Twickenham Rugby Stadium, was not a surprise as a choice because of the volume of tickets that would be sold, especially as this was to be the only concert that the band would play in the UK that year. Because of the concert layout, with the stage at one end, the capacity was “sold out” at 60, 000. The concert programme was to be the Lauren Harris band, Dutch symphonic metal outfit, Within Temptation, and then US noise-rockers Avenged Sevenfold (big Maiden fans themselves, we heard). The advance publicity, quoting bassist and founder Maiden, Steve Harris, said the band and their sound engineers had worked really hard to make sure the sound in the stands (where the majority of the audience would be) would be just as good as being in front of the stage or pitch-side. Our tickets were for the stands, quite high up in fact, so we hoped they were right about that (as it turned out they weren’t – but I’ll get to that later). Either way it didn’t matter because although we wanted to enjoy the concert our primary reason for being there was to mix with the fans and to explore what it was like to be a member of the Maiden tribe on a very special day.

But the choice of Twickenham stadium or ‘Twickers’ the “home of Rugby Union” was also interesting in lots of coincidental ways. First, not least because of the social and cultural history of class identity and class politics that inform the sport, from the bitter division between amateur, gentlemen players to its professionalization, the North/South divide and the cultural politics that still informs that geography, so that it is middle-classed in the South and very much working-class in the North. But also because of the classed-cultural politics of heavy metal itself and its association

(excuse the pun there) not with rugby but football or rather the football ‘crowd’ and football ‘fandom’. Not only did lead singer, Bruce Dickinson kick a rugby ball into the crowd at the beginning of the set but he also made a point of commenting on the venue, and its location in “lovely” leafy, Richmond-Upon-Thames, only then to refer to the band’s “bass player”, as hailing from “the other side of town”, to much laughter. Exploring these interconnections takes us into debates about subcultures, working class identity and resistance to social and cultural hegemony. But it also takes us into debates that challenge such ‘readings’ offering alternative scenarios of neo-tribes, post-subcultural identities, fandom and leisure cultures (or even ‘subcultures of consumption’). Indeed, it seems that it cannot be entirely coincidental that Iron Maiden – because of their history, their formation and their fandom, and, most importantly their success and longevity – in choosing to play Twickenham and inviting their fans there in considerable numbers, concatenate into themselves all the elements and all the contradictions that bedevil debates about subculture, class and leisure, most probably because - they do *actually* embody them!

At this point I want to take a necessary detour into academic debates about heavy metal and subcultural theory, as I have personally experienced them, as a sociologist and as, what Henry Jenkins calls, an ‘aca-fan’. It might be useful to view this as a kind of mental reverie of the passenger and co-pilot, as we head from the South West towards London, adrift in the mythical cartography of the road-map that lies abandoned in my lap. My defence for the deployment of this metaphor is the overwhelming sense I have that, while the landscape that constitutes ‘subcultural theory’ is clearly signposted by a number of classic texts, Hall and Jefferson’s (Eds) *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), Mungham and Pearson’s (Eds) *Working Class Youth Cultures* (1976) Paul Willis’ *Profane Culture* (1978) and Hebdige’s *Subculture: The meaning of style* (1979), the impact of these texts – both within and beyond the academy - and the intellectual project identified with the (now sadly closed) Birmingham CCCS school – a thrillingly intellectual synthesis of Gramsci, Marxism and structural linguistics, which attempted to ‘read’ a series of ‘spectacular’ youth style-formations, such as the Teds, Mods, Skins, and Punks, as forms of ‘coded’ resistance to class hegemony in post-war Britain – has taken on mythological dimensions, not just for me but in the minds of many others, as well. Witness, for example, how many academic spats there have been over it, how even quite recent academic articles seek to reclaim, defend or ‘bring back’ subcultural theory. One of the reasons for this has to be that this radical, neo-marxist sociological project, achieved the status of an intellectual orthodoxy within its own lifetime, finding its way into hundreds of academic textbooks, high and middle-brow commentary and hip-music-journalism.

And yet, despite this admiration, I am one of the ‘heretics’ that mounted an intellectual challenge to this radical orthodoxy, in the name of post-Birmingham, post-subcultural or post-modernist theory. Looking back at that intellectual ‘moment’ and the texts that populated it, from Redhead’s *End of the Century Party* (1990), Sarah Thornton’s *Clubculture* (1995), Muggleton’s (2000) *Inside Subculture: The post-modern meaning of style*; and the many edited volumes, including *The Clubcultures Reader* (1997), *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (2003), *After Subculture* (2004) and *Youth Cultures: Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes* (2007), it seems a contradictory formation at best, in seeking to combine post-modern theory – that youth identities were fluid, constructed and mediated ‘neo-tribal’, ‘life style’ choices

– with an urgent demand for ‘new ethnographies’ of such groups. Yet, in a manner strikingly similar to the CCCS project, the theoretical ‘superstructure’ far outweighed the ethnographic ‘base’. Despite this, there was a strong and exciting sense in this work that it was attempting to respond to developments in popular music post-CCCS, suggesting that youth cultures were now either music-driven or combined music, lifestyle and leisure choices in entirely new ways, as in Redhead’s breathless description of his research focus: ‘from post-punk to indie through soccer terrace ‘folk’ songs to house/post house dance music’ (1997: x); a contemporary history that:

dates from the post-punk era of the late 1970s through the hidden origins of the summer of love back in the late 1980s to the internationalization – or globalization of sport – and music-influenced youth and dance club culture in the 1990s, involving a waning – in the UK at least – of ‘rock-ist’ culture and the rise of the DJ/producer (ibid).

My earliest work on heavy metal, to the extent that it made a contribution to this newly emergent academic field, was not stimulated by a commitment to post-modernism or neo-tribal theory - both of which it seemed to me abandoned any notion of class-identity – but borne out of a sense of frustration that the ‘classic’ CCCS work either ignored or excluded heavy metal from the history of postwar working class subcultures, rendering it virtually ‘invisible’; and the sense that it did so in ways that were entirely consistent with its theoretical project. This led me to try to unearth the ‘hidden history’ of heavy metal that the classic texts concealed (2003a; 2003b) and to develop a critique of the theoretical model that justified this erasure or absence (2007). In so doing I now recognise, in hindsight, that I may have ‘bent the stick’ to far away from subcultural theory towards a post-subcultural argument that is far from satisfactory, not least because notions of ‘resistance’ are almost entirely absent from it. It is also worth pointing out that, despite the focus on music-driven subcultures to be found in post-subcultural theory, its ‘post-rock-ist’ orientation meant that, it too, largely failed to note the many metal-genre-styles that emerged in the post-punk period and after, or the complex interrelation such sub-genre styles had with other youth musics (but see Kahn-Harris 2007).

So, what then, is this hidden history and, indeed, what does it have to do with Iron Maiden or Maiden fans attending Twickenham stadium, in 2008? The answer to this question is that, although heavy metal music and its distinctive fan culture - for many an identity indelibly ‘forged’ in the city within which the CCCS postgraduate research centre was located - was entirely absent in Hall and Jefferson (1976), Mungham and Pearson (1976) and Willis (1978), it does make a belated appearance in Hebdige (1979), as a single footnote! The significance of this footnote is that it is employed by the author to describe a youth style that is actually making a return to visibility, similar to the ‘return of the teddy boy’ then highly visible in ‘punk vs. Ted skirmishes’ in the late 70s, which is his main focus.

Heavy metal is, as the name suggests, a heavily amplified, basic form of rock which relies on the constant repetition of standard guitar riffs. Aficionados can be distinguished by their long hair, denim and ‘idiot’ dancing (again, the name says it all). Heavy metal has fans amongst the student population, but it also has a large working class following. It seems to represent a curious blend of hippy aesthetics and football terrace machismo (p.155).

The reason Hebdige mentions these 'heavy metal rockers' (p.84), along with Northern soul, football fans and mainstream pop fans, is in order to illustrate the deeply conservative character of these youth cultural options, in comparison to punk.

What Hebdige is actually describing here, in late 1978, is the resurgence of heavy metal in the 'street visible' fandom of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal. We know this because their appearance – in exactly the same context – is noted by Cashmore (1984) who describes them as 'a mass following of youth, their denim clothes covered in studs and appliqué, their hair long and wild so as to swing freely when they shook their heads in time with the music – what they called 'head-banging' (p. 37).

Working my way outwards from the CCCS literature to other related texts on youth cultures, gender and popular music, I was profoundly struck by the way heavy metal fans, when they were identified, were described by employing metaphors and analogies to football crowds and collective expressions of a 'hetero-sexist' working class-masculinity. The earliest example of which is Frith and McRobbie's (orig. 1978) account of hard rock/heavy metal shows as: 'reminiscent of football matches and other occasions of male camaraderie' (1990: 375). Or Chambers' description of the heavy metal 'life-style' as 'closely tied to the immediate emotions of loud music, beer and communal maleness' (1985: 123):

At the Reading Festival, Knebworth and other sites, contingents of longhaired, denimed males could be seen consuming large quantities of beer and playing imaginary guitar runs in sycophant homage to their alter egos performing on the stage. The heavy metal audience was (and is) composed of a popular alliance of scruffy students and working-class followers; it appears to represent an unexpected marriage of hippy and rocker culture. Since 1970, this music and its public has come to occupy a prominent and permanent place in the musical tastes of the provinces (ibid).

Note the snippy relegation of metal fandom to the 'un-cultured' provinces of presumably, 'mass taste'. Although Chambers, like Hebdige and Cashmore, views heavy metal as a musical style 'untouched by the frenzied developments and transitory shocks of metropolitan change' (p.124), he does acknowledge that the late 70s saw 'the rise of a host of new, aggressively named groups: Motorhead, Iron Maiden, Whitesnake, Saxon' as well as the 'surprising' (given the aforementioned identification of the genre with a hetero-sexist masculinism) appearance of an 'all-female heavy metal band, Girlschool' (ibid). This view of heavy metal as a 'great force of political indifference [...] a dinosaur of youth culture, surviving its contemporaries and lasting seemingly without change into the 1980s' (Cashmore 1984: 263) was also clearly linked to its perceived commodified-character:

HM was, by this time, a complete industry; its items ranged from full-length feature movies (about 15, at the time of writing) through lapel buttons and T-shirts – these mundane items providing turnovers in the millions of pounds brackets. One of the features of heavy metal was the penchant of its devotees to collect memorabilia, particularly souvenirs of concerts, so a T-shirt bearing the legend "Black Sabbath, 1983 Tour" would signify the follower's presence at the event (p.263).

One of the strongest and theoretically-justified targets of the post-subcultural critique of the CCCS account of subcultural formation and subcultural resistance, was the idea that working class style cultures were created in a 'market-free' and 'media-free' space, that styles were made through an aggressive 'appropriation' of commercial commodities and media-images, re-worked into symbols of resistance, only to be then re-incorporated into the cultural-commodity system, sold-back as pre-packaged conformity and 'fashion' items. While the radical re-stylization of 'conventional' commodities – such as scooters, Doctor Marten 'work boots', Edwardian drape coats, braces and Parker coats – by exclusively working class youth, such as teds, mods and skins, is wholly convincing, from punk onwards this 'essentialist' model seems hugely inadequate. Or as Gary Clarke, writing in the early 80s, argues:

[T]he current diversity of styles makes a mockery of subcultural analysis as it stands [...] To name but a few examples: the revival of skins, mods, and teds; rude boys; suedeheads; a psychedelic revival; rockers - both the traditional type and the younger, denim-clad heavy metallists; Rastafarians; souldheads (short-haired blacks); disco; Ant-people; Northern soul; jazz-funkateers; Bowie freaks; punk (subdivided into Oi, "hardcore", or "real" punk, plus the avant-garde wing); futurists; new romantics; glam revivalists; beats, zoots, and so on (1990: 93).

Of course, none of these styles are exclusively working class, although many articulate a consciousness of class or a re-worked class-identity, what they have in common is a shared musical preference that is key to the look, delineated vales and leisure practices of the different groups. While we can also point to 'commodity-centred' subcultures, such as surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding, car-modding or motorised (or non-motorised) 'two-wheeling' – to name but a few options – one of the key elements that seems to describe the transition between the time of subculture and post-subculture, is the changing role of musical tastes, music scenes, music-making and music consumption, and how these elements interact with other practices.

Heavy metal is a case in point, where the shift in musical preference of a fraction of the working class led to a decisive shift in the musical syntax of rock style, demonstrating that progressive rock could be rearticulated from the middle to the working class, retaining part of its previous audience. The fact that music critics and popular music theorists, who witnessed this shift, interpreted it as the *commodification* of rock style into what Chambers and others described as: 'a "mindless" display of inflammatory technique and a degraded populism' (1985:124) or simply as 'empty virtuosity', revealed more about their own classed-values in being unable to recognise how a working class vernacular form that had been appropriated by the 'radical' middle-class 'counter culture' and thereby in the process acquired a more 'cultured' sensibility - including, literary, avant-garde, folk, jazz and classical inflections - had then, in turn, been re-appropriated by a new generation of mainly working-class musicians, such as Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple.

At this distance, it remains a moot point whether the largely negative reaction to the genres emergence –symbolised in its pejorative 'naming' by *Rolling Stone* rock critics – actually served to reinforce this class-identification among both musicians and fans and thereby go on to play a central role in maintaining its 'outsider' status in subsequent years. What is clear is that neither the class-composition of its audience nor the vocabulary of its musical syntax, have remained rigidly the same, although

there are key elements of continuity. One of these is the riff-based compositional style which forms the seed-bed for most styles (although not black metal or some varieties of progressive metal (Brown, in press). Recent evidence suggests that a recognisable fraction of the working class, male skilled-manual and the self-employed with City and Guilds qualifications – or what Savage (2006) and colleagues term ‘technical and minor-supervisory’ workers – constitute a recognisable core constituency, interested in the technical and musical aspects of the genre, including its guitar aesthetic and amplification technologies (a significant proportion of metal fans are amateur musicians and readers of ‘guitar tech’ magazines). However, over the years this core fraction has been subject to down-market and up-market shifts, recruiting both lower-middle class fans and lower-working class fans, in different periods of popularity and change. For example, during its initial period of popularity in the 1970s, heavy metal shared an audience with progressive rock, consisting of higher education students and aspirational working-class males; during the period of its resurgence, in the form of the NWOBHM, it was very much a lower-working-class defined genre. During its sustained period of success in the 1984-91 period, it recruited middle class fans, including, for the first time, large groups of females. This pattern of up-market and down-market identification has continued over a remarkably long period of time; most recently there is evidence to suggest that metal’s more avant-garde genres, such as 2nd wave black and progressive metal, including djent and drone, are once again attracting higher-educated, middle class fans.

All of which gets us back to Iron Maiden. Formed by bassist, Stephen Percy Harris, in Leyton, East London, their origins, formation and membership exactly mirrors the class-profile or image of heavy metal I have just sketched. Harris, who served an apprenticeship as an architectural-‘draughtsman’, a life-long West Ham United fan, has the club’s crest stencilled on his Fender Precision bass-guitar and the chant or mantra that many Maiden fans have adopted is a variant of the stadium chant, “Up the ‘ammers” (“Up the Irons”). Formed in 1976 and influenced musically by progressive rock and classic heavy metal, the band came to prominence during the (so called) New Wave of British Heavy Metal period, initially a hard rock revivalist movement that sought to reclaim the genre in opposition to punk it was, arguably, the key influence on the future diversification of metal into many sub-genres styles such as speed metal, cross-over, thrash, grindcore, death metal and black metal. Although NWOBHM was a regionally diverse, largely DIY movement of literally hundreds of (largely) amateur bands, out of it emerged a handful of names – Def Leppard, Saxon, Judas Priest, Motorhead and Iron Maiden – that would go on to define the next generation of heavy metal. Although signed to the then major EMI, it wasn’t until Dickinson took over lead vocals on the Number of the Beast (1982) album and subsequent World Tour that their success was assured (to date they have sold over 85 million records). Dickinson, often referred to as a “gentlemen and a scholar” by many fans (including the ones’ we spoke to) most probably because he attended Oundle public school, is a champion fencer, qualified commercial airline pilot, author and broadcaster, is also from a skilled-manual household (his father was an Army mechanic). Dickinson began singing in rock bands, in and around the East End of London, when he attended Queen Mary College, to study a degree in history.

Driving up from the South West, and trying to find the stadium once the motorway turned into the city cross-town traffic, was a bit of a nightmare. But we

finally found our way onto the major arterial road the fed the stadium only to realise that the one thing we had forgotten to do was purchase a car-parking pass when we bought our tickets on-line! Fortunately, we soon realised, driving between the roundabouts that served the mainroad through Richmond, that there were many local entrepreneurs who had anticipated the demand, and were able to offer all-day parking at the back of some garage or business, just off the main road. So we ended up, like many fans, walking up the main road to the stadium and, indeed, beginning to interact with fans getting cash for the parking at a nearby supermarket hole-in-the-wall:

‘Goin’ to see the Maiden, are ya’?

‘Yes’. I was wearing an X-L ‘Number of the Beast’ tee, and Chris a much slimmer-fit, ‘Killers’ one.

‘Is it your first time’?

We later found out that the question of ‘Are you a Maiden?’ was a favourite of fans, who were eager to welcome those new to the live experience into the spirit of the tribe.

Actually, having to walk up to the ground, rather than parking-up in the designated lot, was one of those unexpected mishaps that provided us with a much better perspective on witnessing the major venue arrival experience of most fans who were on foot, as we joined the main road into a growing crowd of black-shirted fans, who looked for-all-the-world like sports fans walking to their Saturday match. I have always found it striking on attending a metal gig at a small venue or a larger sponsored one, such as the many Carling Academy venues in major cities, that just before the concert there would suddenly be a startling number of metal t-shirts on show, worn by mainly young people, mostly men with long hair but also women, appearing all of a sudden from public transport and from the confines of local pubs, in a number and density that was striking in that they were not normally visible as a group in the day time or at any other times. This was not the first time that it struck me that this occurrence was similar to the prelude to a sporting event, although in this instance, there were no rival teams.

By the time we made it to the ground, Within Temptation were already in mid-set, we could hear their deep bass-tones booming out from the bowels of an adjacent stair-well, as we walked around to the rear of the stadium, surprised by the steepness of it and its austere block-concrete architecture, like an oversize multi-storey carpark, rising high-up into the summer sky and casting a long, cold-shadow, despite the fact that it was early July. We immediately fell into a conversation with a couple of guys, in their mid to late 50s we guessed, who were sitting on a concrete walled-fence section immediately framing the entrance to the ground. They told us we had missed the Lauren Harris slot and that it was pretty well attended and that, although she was clearly rock not metal, “the young women had talent (just like her dad)”. To the left of us, through the interior shadows was the walkway to the pitch area and the various stairs to the stadium seats. Any though we might have had of heading that way were short-circuited by the presence of numerous, big and day-glo jacketed security guards, standing against a sun-lit backdrop, black walkie-talkies in hand. To the right, in the strong sunlight away from the shadow of the steep-stadium-sides, was a large throng of Maiden fans milling up and down, dressed in a wide-variety of t-shirts, black-hoodies and jeans. Some were standing in beer-drinking clumps, laughing and smiling; others were queuing outside the many t-shirt vendors or other memorabilia stalls or fast-food mobile vans. The majority were male although there were a good number of females there, too. The majority of the men were in their forties or fifties,

some with whole families in tow; other men were in their thirties, twenties and here and there, teenage groups of mixed gender. Although there was plenty of long-hair on show, many of the men had short hair, while others were balding. Everyone was proudly wearing an Iron Maiden t-shirt, so that for all intents and purposes, it could have been a match day outside the ground, building up to the excitement of the kick-off. Although the band had commissioned a commemorative t-shirt for the event, featuring Eddie as a cadaverous rugby player in a tattered kit, the t-shirt that seemed most prominent was the souvenir one from their headline Sonisphere appearance from the year before. But there were many others, indeed a bewildering array of them, of the many different albums and concerts, all featuring in some form or another their mascot, Eddie the Head (Barnes, 2004).

How are we to make sense of the Maiden tribe? Are they an example of a neo-tribal 'leisure culture'? Certainly the experience of fandom at such events is defined by participation in a consumer culture, from t-shirt purchasing and concert souvenirs, to the price of the travel, the ticket, and the food and drink consumed on the day. Some fans had travelled from Europe for the concert and were proudly announcing the fact; others had come from Wales, the Midlands and the North. There was a strong sense of male-comradery, especially among the older fans, who demonstrated public affection for each other and also by striking up conversations with passers by. One of the most repeated conversations we heard or participated in was how many times each person had seen the band. It was a badge of honour. Overall there was strong sense of 'fandom', of belonging, of being part of a collective and of a 'collective happiness' – seen everywhere on people faces and their friendliness to each other – in being able to participate in such an event. Everyone was there to support the band and to celebrate their fandom. But how many of them, the following day or week, would be wearing their t-shirts, to work, to the supermarket, to pick up the kids from school? How many of them would be on the Maiden website or regularly receiving tour news and updates? How many were metal fans and how many just fans of Maiden? We didn't find the definitive answers to these questions. What we did confirm was that many of Maiden's fans, especially the older males, those who had first seen them as teenagers, were working class, had working class jobs, many skilled but also many un-skilled, glad to be 'away' with their mates for the day. There were also University students in attendance and we supposed, office workers and (maybe) professionals, although we didn't speak to any. The strong sense of inter-generational fandom (we saw a whole family together, parents, children and grandparents – although the grandparents were not wearing t-shirts) and the fact that the majority of fans were older means this 'snap-shot' cannot be said to apply to metal fandom in general.

The band ran onto the stage at around 8.15, as the twilight was descending. Large screens behind them and at either side of the stage showed footage of their tour so far, crowds in different countries, and their specially customised Boeing 757 "Ed Force One", piloted by Dickinson, landing at an airport somewhere. Then the "Churchill speech" was heard, echoing around the stadium: "We will defend our island. We will never surrender". And everyone knew what was coming next, as the band launched into 'Aces High', strobe lights flashed and Steve Harris immediately ran to the front of the stage to plant his foot on the monitor and point the neck of his bass out into the crowd, who roared with approval. The sound, coming from a speaker somewhere above our heads, was not particularly loud. So we were immediately surprised by how everyone around us, some leading it, began to loudly sing the words of the song. And they did this all night, standing and celebrating each song in turn. The set-list was mainly drawn from the 1980-1988 period, including 2 Minutes to Midnight,

Revelations, The Trooper, Wasted Years, Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Powerslave, Heaven Can Wait, Run to the Hills, Fear of the Dark, Iron Maiden and the encores were Moonchild, The Clairvoyant and Hallowed Be Thy Name. The stage set was the Powerslave Egyptian one and various album covers on the screens, Dickinson waving the tattered Union Jack during ‘The Trooper’ and Eddie making a number of appearances, mid song. There were flame-throwers during ‘The Number of the Beast’, moving light rigs and pyro-explosions, intricate musicianship during some of the longer songs and no less than three lead-guitarists! Standout moments were the opening song, ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, ‘Powerslave’ and the whole stadium singing ‘Wasted Years’, which really was, looking around, like a cherished football-terrace anthem. Indeed, at one point I turned around to see that the scoreboard was illuminated on the back-wall of the stadium, reading “Iron 0 : 0 Maiden”.

What are we to make of the themes of Iron Maiden songs, often deriving their names and subject matter from ‘middle-brow’ popular film and fiction, as well as well-known ‘high-brow’ classical and gothic literature, including poetry and ballads? Employing classical and historical themes, such as military action or heroism, provide songs with strong narrative subjects and themes, a sense of gravitas and mystique, argues Campbell (2009: 121). In one obvious sense, this is a clear example of *appropriation* of elite or high-brow themes to serve the purpose of the heavy metal song and to lend such songs a sense of drama. In almost all cases, classical and historical themes are drawn on in an irreverent or piece-meal fashion, often mixed with popular and middle-brow culture. For Walser (1993), this postmodernist pastiche and play with such themes allows fans the space to construct other connections and possibilities (p. 160), that are broadly anti-hegemonic. But the ambivalence of such songs, especially those to do with war, heroism and military conflict, mean that conservative themes of patriotism, nationalism and gender are also present. How such themes are actually interpreted by Maiden fans is far from uniform. What is clear though, is that such songs are deeply meaningful to them, whether this is as theatre, melody or ritual. Walking back from the stadium just like an “away crowd” in the middle-of-the-road, police cordons on either side, we heard some fans tell us that the loud-speaker in their section “blew” during the concert. But they carried on singing anyway.

Notes.

1. Christine Griffin, Professor of Psychology, University of Bath. As part of our research into metal as a *classed-culture* we conducted insider/outsider ethnographic fieldwork at Megadeth (Bristol Carling Academy) and Download Festival (2007); Defenders of the Faith Tour (Cardiff, 2008), and Lamb of God & Dimmu Borgir (Bristol, 2009). See Brown and Griffin (2009) and (forthcoming).

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