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MODERN HEAVY METAL: Markets, Practices and Cultures
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“Metal for the Masses”: Or, will metal ever be mainstream again (and why we should want it to be....)

Metal “Pub” Quiz

- The Severed Head, The Trooper’s Retreat, The Shredder’s Rest...
- Q.666
- In which period was metal mainstream?
 - a. 1969-1976
 - b. 1984-1991
 - c. 1999-2001

Metal “pub” quiz

- Q. What is mainstream metal?
- A. Types of metal music that suck!!!
- Q. Why was it popular?
- A. Because metal that sucks is liked by people who don't like 'real' metal
- It's pop, lite, over-produced, watered-down
- It's also bands that sell-out and make music that sucksfor big bucks!

Mainstreaming

- Q. Are these fan-centered discourses adequate as explanations?
- A. No. But they makes us feel better!
- Wallach, Berger and Greene (2011) describe as heavy metal's: "complex, volatile relationship with the mainstream music industry" (p. 21).
- Proposal:
- Mainstreaming and "cross-over" are not the end-point of the process – they are part of it. They need more study.
- Aesthetic innovation and musical change in heavy metal are tied-up with the formation and demise of music "mainstreams."
- They are essential elements within a process that governs the formation and demise of musical fields and the levels of commerce and exchange that operate within them

Argument

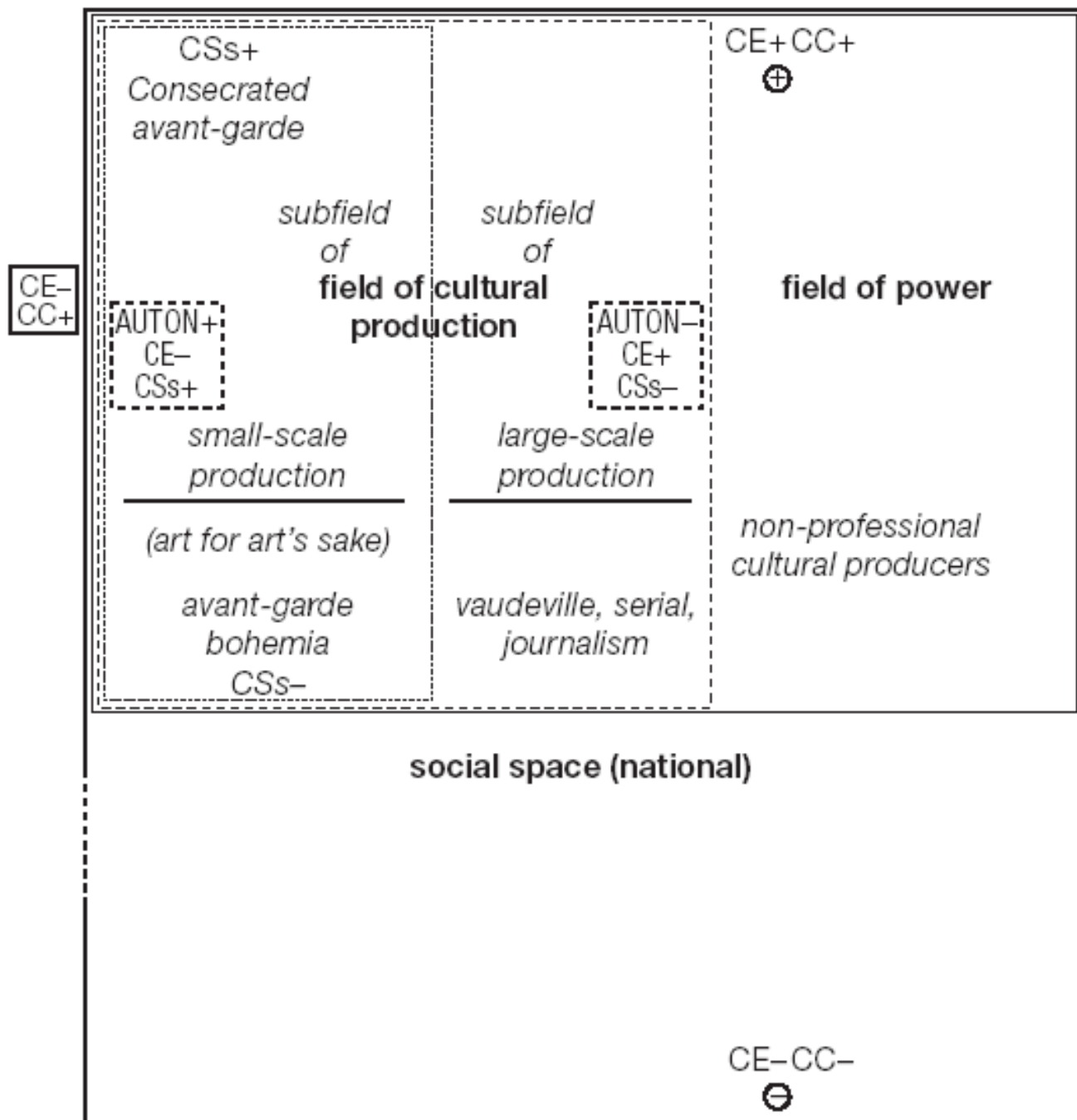
- Theorization of value & capital accumulation
- In popular music scenes (heavy metal)
- Extreme metal global underground scene (KKH)
- AgSIT model (Lena & Peterson)
- Relationship to mainstream
- “Controversial” industry phase
- Evaluation via application to “mainstreaming”
- Cycle of innovation and sub-genre change?

Global Metal Scene (KKH)

- “standing” or prestige within the scene is not primarily determined by economic success. Indeed, significant commercial success is often controversial:
- the institutions of the extreme metal scene [letter-writing and tape-trading, distros, record labels, bands and musicians, fanzines and niche magazines] provide the infrastructure through which members interact and through which capital flows and is accumulated. The key questions in assessing how the scene refracts power and capital are how far participation in the scene’s institutions requires resources from outside the scene and how far capital accrued within scenic institutions is convertible into forms of capital outside the scene (2007: 78).
- Slow metal=innovation

- This model is clearly redolent of Bourdieu's (1993) account of the cultural field of restricted (art) and large-scale (commercial) cultural production, in that mainstream or economically successful heavy metal is relegated to the commercial field (where accreditation is based on volume of unit sales) and extreme metal is located in an art-culture field (where accreditation is based on accumulation of symbolically specific capitals either through adherence to the aesthetic rules of the field ("mundane" sub-cultural capital) or by mounting an avant-garde challenge to those values ("transgressive" sub-cultural capital)).

The field of cultural production in the field of power and in social space



Key

Social space

_____...

Field of power _____

Field of cultural

production

Subfield of small-scale production ---

-

CE Capital – economic

CC Capital – cultural

CSs Capital – symbolic, specific

AUTON+ High degree of autonomy

AUTON- Low degree of autonomy

The HM Cultural Field

- **Metal**
- **Consecrated Avant-garde**
- E.g. Black Sabbath

Small-scale production

- Extreme metal:
- Thrash
- Death
- Black

- **EC-** **SSCC+**
- **Avant-garde Bohemia**

- **Heavy Metal**
- **Commercial Popular Metal**

• *Large-scale production*

- Hard rock
- Lite or glam metal
- E.g. Motley Crue, Def Leppard, etc.
- Nu-metal

- **SSCC-** **EC+**
- **Genre, formulaic, market-oriented**

Identity Crisis Phase

- Precipitated by the breakthrough of the thrash bands, Slayer, Anthrax, Megadeth and Metallica
- “assisted by the institutions of the heavy metal scene” (p.95);
- the near “commercial breakthrough” (p.83) of death metal bands, Morbid Angel, Cannibal Corpse, Carcass, Deicide, Obituary and Sepultura
- The latter, the only death/thrash metal band to break the UK Top 40 with Arise (1991) and the UK & US Top 20 with Chaos AD (1993) and Roots (1996), before imploding shortly thereafter....

| | Avant- garde | Scene- based | Industry- based | Traditionalist |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Heavy Metal | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| Thrash | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | |
| Death metal | ✗ | ✗ | | |
| Black metal | ✗ | ✗ | | |
| Grindcore | ✗ | ✗ | | |
| Nu metal | | | ✗ | |

| | Avant- garde | Scene- based | Industry- based | Traditionalist |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|

Heavy metal “most closely resembles” bebop, old-school rap, punk rock, and rockabilly “in the spectacular and contentious Industry-based phase of their trajectories” (Lena & Peterson 2008:709).

Genres that experience the explosive growth and aesthetic dilution characteristic of an Industry-based genre tend to suffer a crisis as their many casual fans find a new focus of attention [...] In response, some musicians explore new ways to revitalize a genre ideal, and new Avant-garde genres emerge from these efforts. For example, Bebop artists helped to spawn Hard bop, Cool jazz, Free jazz, psychedelic jazz, and third stream genres (p. 707).

| | Avant- garde | Scene- based | Industry- based | Revivalist Innovation |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Heavy Metal | χ | χ | E+(crisis) | χ^+ |
| Thrash | χ | χ | E+(crisis) =Return | χ^+ |
| Grindcore | χ | χ | E-(crisis) =Return | χ^- |
| Death metal | χ | χ | E-(crisis) =Return | χ^- |
| Black Metal | χ | χ | E-(crisis) =Return | χ^- |
| Nu metal | | | χ | |

| | Industry-based | Scene-based | Avant-garde | Revivalist Innovation |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Heavy Metal | χ | χ | χ | χ^+ |
| Hard rock/ Glam Metal | χ | χ | χ | χ^+ |
| Nu-metal | χ | χ | χ | χ^+ |