

## Capitalism, Creativity and Continuity in the Sonic Sphere

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### **What is creative?**

‘Creativity’ has become one of the central ideas of contemporary culture, not only because of its importance for aesthetic notions of subjectivity and self-expression but also because of its pivotal role in a range of powerful economic discourses and the institutional practices which they animate. A key legacy of the Romantic moment (Williams 1976: 82-4, 274-6) the idea of creativity has become fundamental to the economics of the ‘knowledge economy’ (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 87). Arguably, ‘creativity’ has become to postmodern capitalism what ‘efficiency’ was to the bureaucratic corporations of the twentieth century (see, for example, Boltanski & Chiapello 2007): that mysterious individual and collective quality which distinguishes the successful from the unsuccessful; the intangible source of value and profit which techniques of education, management and administration must all be deployed in order to cultivate. The idea of ‘the creative industries’ (a term which has in many English-speaking contexts replaced ‘the arts’ altogether), so central to current assumptions about the economic value of cultural work, is only one element of a much wider configuration of assumptions which understands ‘creativity’ to be an essential characteristic of the admirable individual and the functional organisation in almost all spheres of life (Negus & Pickering 2004).

The history of the idea of creativity is in part a history of different conceptions as to who or what is actually capable of exhibiting it. Who or what is the agent of creativity? What kind of individual or collective entity is capable of being creative and likely to be so? We can consider briefly several

different ways of addressing this question, if only for the sake of getting a sense of the variability of ways of doing so. It is worth reflecting here that this has never been an easy question to answer: ancient notions of spirit-possession or of divine inspiration can in part be understood as ways of accounting for the apparently mysterious nature of creative activity, which seems to depend upon the corporeal agency of specific individuals but not on their conscious intentionality. The early modern period arguably culminates, and gives birth to a recognisably modern concept of subjectivity, with the Romantic assertion of the uniqueness of the creative individual and the irreducible individuality of creativity of such. At the same time, even while Romanticism posited the possibility of the autonomous artist, it problematised any such possibility with its attempts to elevate the artist's social role: to that of either cultural / spiritual 'legislator' or expression of the 'spirit of the age' (Williams 1958: 47-8). By the early twentieth century, the latter idea had mutated into the modern conservatism of T.S. Eliot's influential assertion that literary innovation which has any value is always the expression of and a contribution to a pre-existing 'tradition' (Eliot 1919). It would be no exaggeration to suggest that for Eliot and his followers (e.g. F.R. Leavis), it is the tradition itself (or possibly 'culture') which is the wellspring and the agent of true creativity. All of these conceptions can be contrasted with the idea which emerges in the economics of Adam Smith (Smith [1776] 1999: 370) and which has only come to real political prominence in the era of neoliberalism, the idea that it is *the market* which somehow acts creatively and is the source of all desirable innovation. The assumption that market relations are inherently more dynamic, innovative and creative than other types of social relations underpins, for example, the entire neoliberal programme to impose them upon sectors which are devoted to the delivery of public services by non-commercial means and which cannot be easily transferred to the private sector for practical or political reasons (Leys 2003).

In music culture, both popular and academic discourse contains one particularly distinctive answer to the question ‘who or what is creative?’ For many commentators, the answer to this question would be ‘the scene’. The idea of the ‘scene’ in music culture has a slightly different significance to that which is implied by terms such as ‘the art scene’ or ‘the literary scene’, which tend to designate the totality of interacting practitioners concerned with a particular art form in a particular time and place. Music scenes tend to be understood as genre-specific and as relatively self-contained subsets of a much wider set of cultural and commercial relations; importantly, the term tends also to be understood as comprehending the participatory roles played audiences for music, as well as producers and promoters of various kinds, more explicitly than do those other usages of ‘scene’.

It is notable that the idea of the ‘scene’, although originating in purely casual usage, has acquired full currency with a range of academic commentators on popular music culture (Straw 2005). In part this is because it is a term which fulfils a very particular function which critical vocabularies drawn from cultural studies, sociology and musicology have all struggled to carry out at different times: that of designating the recognisable but often unquantifiable coherence which obtains between different elements of the cultural formations within which music is produced, circulated and heard. The persistently inappropriate overuse of the term ‘subculture’ to designate almost any group of young people who happened to share musical tastes (particularly in the 1980s) (Muggleton & Weinzierl 2003) was arguably symptomatic not only of the romanticism with which researchers and journalists invested the idea of such groups as dynamic, rebellious (and, of course, creative) outlaws, but also the difficulty of finding any more suitable term to do this work. The terms ‘music discourse’ (Walser 1995), ‘rock formation’ (Grossberg 1992) and ‘sonic war machine’ (Goodman 2010) amongst others have all been variously proposed to do just this work.

### **The Power of *Scenius***

The idea of the scene itself as the source and agent of creativity has been famously given expression by Brian Eno's neologism, 'scenius', a term designating the collective creative intelligence of participants in a more-or-less distributed music scene, which punningly subverts the individualistic assumptions inherent in the Romantic theory of individual genius. Jason Toynbee's study of musical creativity also posits individual 'authors' as always necessarily 'social authors', nodes in creative networks - inhabiting a particular 'radius of creativity' (Toynbee 2000) - whose mutual relations are a necessary element of any possible creative innovation. What both of these terms give expression to is the idea of musical creativity as inherently collective in character, and as such inherently distributed, the effective product of oblique collaborations and mediated relays of influence between musicians, composers, producers, audiences, promoters, technicians, critics, journalists etc.

But what exactly *is* a 'scene' if it something more than the accidental aggregation of these diverse elements and something other than a fully self-conscious community of intention? In a classic discussion of the term, one of its most lucid exponents, Will Straw, quotes Barry Shank's definition of a scene as 'an overproductive signifying community' within which 'far more semiotic information is produced than can be rationally parsed' (Straw 2005: 412). 'A scene', Straw elaborates, 'resists deciphering, in part, because it mobilises local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions.' Strikingly then, the scene is defined by its mobile multiplicity and by its complex functionality, but not by any coherent sense of what its identity might consist in. Shank himself is even more vague on this point, referring only to 'that intensity of fan commitment and cultural production known as a scene' (Shank 1994: 122). The machinic and non-identitarian qualities of the 'scene' here described seem to anticipate Steve Goodman's very recent suggestion

(in explicitly schizoanalytic language) that ‘the appropriate term for such cultures, following Deleuze & Guattari, may be *sonic war machines*<sup>1</sup> (Goodman 2010: 194).

This rather leaves us in a position wherein we know what a scene *does*, but remain less clear as to what it *is*. This is arguably because the term is used to designate a particular productive configuration which is inherently multiple in nature: an ensemble of elements (institutional, economic, musical, corporeal), an ‘assemblage’ in the classic sense (Deleuze & Guattari 1988). At the same time, however, for it retain any coherence *as* a ‘scene’, these elements must function together successfully, distinctively, and consistently; their assemblage must tend, in other words towards the production of a certain plane of consistency. The scene must possess a specific singularity to be recognisable as a scene, but it also has to have a certain dynamism and porousness if it’s to exhibit any kind of vitality, operating at once as a commercial and symbolic economy (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Thornton 1995] in which both commodified resources and symbolic ‘capital’ are circulated, liquidated, invested and exchanged; and as a corporeal and affective *ecology* (Fuller 2007) whose mutually-dependent elements operate in condition of dynamic, often precarious metastability. The vitalist implications of this vocabulary are only an academic refinement of the popular categories and criteria which are used to discuss ‘scenes’, which are invariably judged in terms of their relative ‘health’, ‘vibrancy’, ‘vitality’ and which are habitually pronounced ‘dead’ if these qualities are not sufficiently in evidence.

The notion of the ‘scene’ as the creative agent itself, as the machine which generates innovation and regulates its application, is particularly relevant (albeit not exclusively so) to an understanding of the creative dynamics which have characterised the production and reception of metropolitan

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<sup>1</sup> Keeping in mind that a ‘war machine’ for Deleuze & Guattari is not necessarily a military formation as such, but a mobile assemblage resistant to enumeration or capture.

electronic dance music in recent decades. Notoriously, these genres of music have provided scope for very few sustained high-profile professional careers for musicians and producers: typically, the most influential producers have tended to return to relative obscurity after producing a short run of important records, and rarely have any kind of significant public profile beyond them. Arthur Russell ( his recent retrospective canonisation notwithstanding: see Lawrence 2009), Grandmaster Flash, Derek May, Joey Beltram, Roni Size, Remarc, Alex Patterson, are examples which spring to mind immediately, but many more could be cited: each of them had a career stretching well beyond their period of greatest innovation and influence, but nothing comparable to that of musicians or composers in other traditions (rock, jazz, orchestral music, etc.) who made aesthetic interventions of equivalent importance.

Now, dance music aficionados have tended to celebrate this situation, understanding the forms of creativity which are enabled and valorised by their 'scenes' to be so inherently collective and distributed in nature that they simply cannot be limited for long in their points of focalisation to the names and bodies of specific individuals (e.g Reynolds 2008; Gilbert 2004). From this perspective, individual records are momentary affective crystallisations, emerging from a complex and constantly-changing matrix of experimental creativity which includes DJs, dancers and distributors as well as producers, which therefore cannot be expected to emerge with any regularity at precisely the same points. The inherently social nature of dance music's primary mode of consumption - on dancefloors - might well be understood as lending some credence to the notion that dance music culture exhibits a certain collective dimension which is inherent in *all* creativity, but is manifested with here a transparency and vividness which is greater than that typically found in other areas of cultural practice.

However, it is not fully clear that the modes of consumption typical of other forms of music (concerts, radio broadcasts, etc.) *are* radically less collective in nature, and this leaves open the question as to whether some other differences might be at work here. In particular, it could be argued that post-Disco dance musics, more than any other forms, have been dependent upon commercial institutions (record labels and clubs in particular) for their very conditions of existence. Their history being almost precisely coterminous with that of neoliberalism, these scenes have emerged in context characterised by the penetration of market relations into many new areas of social life and by the erosion of older forms of social solidarity (either those informing traditional forms of mutual support or social democratic institutions). Might it be that the rapidity with which key figures appear and disappear, and the inability of those figures to sustain long-term creative careers, is symptomatic of their vulnerability to the unchecked logic of capitalist deterritorialisation? In particular, we might speculate that older ‘scenes’ could nurture lifelong careers partly because their collective attention-spans were considerably longer. Most of the individuals mentioned above have continued to produce interesting records which have developed and built on the aesthetic innovations for which they were first noted; the difference between them and forebears such as Charlie Parker or Miles Davis might be as much as anything to do with the unwillingness of key sections of their audiences to tolerate anything less than radical novelty for more than a couple of years. The marked absence of a reflective culture of criticism from these more recent scenes (apart from some isolated strands of journalism and academic writing), in contrast with the rich press cultures which developed around jazz and rock, might also be a contributing factor as well as a symptom of the same problems.

To properly evaluate these speculations would require long-range comparative studies; what we can do here is to indicate and reflect upon some of the theoretical issues at stake in the questions that they raise. Is it impossible for contemporary music scene scenes to emerge, converge, sustain and

develop other than according to the manic pace of capitalist deterritorialisation? How can we begin to understand with a bit more subtlety and precision the relationship between music scenes and capitalism? Can we extrapolate from these examples a more general account of the collective, horizontal, rhizomatic character of creativity itself?

### **The Hardcore Continuum**

Perhaps the most famous and theoretically-developed account of a music scene which exhibits precisely the characteristics which I have attributed to dance music scenes is that expressed by Simon Reynolds' influential concept of the 'hardcore continuum'. Since the early 1990s, this highly-respected journalist and cultural historian has documented the mutations undergone by a set of British urban dance genres all of which can trace a certain lineage to the moment at the beginning of the early 1990s when 'hardcore' (originally, 'hardcore techno' - and not to be confused with the 'hardcore punk' which achieved some popularity in the late 1980s) emerged as a unique amalgam of elements of reggae, ragga, U.S. techno, house and instrumental hip-hop. The persistence of certain sonic tropes and techniques (breakbeats, sub-bass, dancehall rhythms, minor pentatonic tonalities, particular signature synthetic sounds, such as the 'mentasm stab' derived from the Joey Beltram track of the same name) along with the regular radical reconfiguration of those elements into recognisably new patterns by new genres such as 'jungle', 'garage', grime', 'dubstep' and 'funky', has led Reynolds and other sympathetic commentators to view 'the hardcore continuum' as a 'scene' which clearly possesses a certain consistency (at the level of personnel and institutions, as well as aesthetics) but which is not limitable in terms of a particular genre or a particular cohort of participants, and which is characterised by a certain restless tendency towards sonic exploration and experimentation. Another key feature remarked by Reynolds is the marked tendency for the affective focus of this 'scene', its musics and its clubs, to swing periodically

between an aggressive hyper-urban masculinism and a more 'feminised' and aspirational aesthetic, and this is understood to be a consequence of the scene's inherent tendency for avant-gardism and macho heroics to be tempered by a recurrent populist demand for musics which satisfy dancefloors, many of which are peopled largely by young women who are not members of any musical cognoscenti and have no interest in becoming such.

If we address our key conceptual questions to this particular 'scene', then it becomes clear that the relationship between capitalism, creativity and continuity in this context is very complicated. One notable point here is that while they are always caught up in practices of commodity exchange, it doesn't always necessarily follow that music scenes are very closely integrated into processes of capital *accumulation*, except to the inevitable extent that they participate in the much wider capitalist economy. The production and circulation of commodities (drugs, clothes, records, etc.) has clearly been the very medium in which many music scenes have existed. Indeed, since the early twentieth century, it has arguably only been those which have made a very determined effort to function through other types of practice and institution (e.g. radical folk scenes) and above all those which have enjoyed massive levels of state sponsorship (notably the institutions of 'classical' music of the European orchestral tradition) which have existed at all outside of networks of commodity-exchange (Gilbert 1999). However, despite the tendency of commentators such as Reynolds to refer to such commercial practices as 'micro-capitalism', it is striking that such exchange is not necessarily geared towards the indefinite accumulation of capital in many cases. Most independent record companies, shops and radio stations, for example, have tended not to accumulate large cash reserves or portfolios of profitable investments, usually operating at profit margins which were only sufficient to provide their owners and operators with a modest income.

Although at certain points major record companies have invested in artists and genres deriving from the hardcore continuum, they have rarely if ever made sustained returns on these investments. Where they have even made short-term returns, these have often been generated through the time-honoured technique of selling records which deploy some of the distinctive sonic techniques typical of the output of this music scene, using them to add tonal colour to largely traditional and widely-recognisable pop song forms, thus depriving those experimental techniques of much of their affective impact (c.f. Dane Bowers & Victoria Beckham's 2000 single 'Out of Your Mind'). Perhaps we have here a way of re-thinking the always-problematic notion of the musical cultural 'underground' and its distinction from a 'mainstream'. Many commentators have expressed justifiable scepticism as to the objective validity of this distinction, even going so far as to posit the 'mainstream' as merely a discursive effect of those practices which seek to delimit and defend an effectively fictional 'underground' (most notably Thornton 1995). However, the distinction between those musical scenes and forms which *are*, and those which *are not*, dependent for their propagation not just upon commercial and promotional practices but upon institutions and processes oriented directly towards capital accumulation (notably, of course, as practiced by the major record companies) would seem to be a valid one here.

Of course, members of music scenes are invariably involved in various forms of labour which arguably contribute to the overall production of value both by the music industry and capitalism more generally. Arguably the music industry has been at the leading edge of capitalist evolution for a long time in this regard, given its traditional reliance on the unpaid labour of early-career musicians, amateur journalists and promoters. Maurizio Lazzarato famously refers to this kind of work as 'immaterial labour' in his essay of that name (Lazzarato 1996), and this term is approximately coterminous with Hardt & Negri's understanding of 'biopolitical labour' (Hardt & Negri 2009: 231): in both cases, what is designated is a set of creative, relational activities which

are intrinsically necessary to the wider system of value-production. Whether that means that their activities are necessarily wholly subsumed by capitalism is another question: for Hardt & Negri the answer appears to be 'yes and no'. Capitalism works through and depends upon the real subsumption of social relations such that biopolitical labour finds itself produced and producing always already within a capitalist matrix; and yet neither the actual co-operative, creative activity which is that labour, nor its products, are necessarily dependent upon capital for their existence. Hardt & Negri suggest that today almost everyone in the planet is engaged in various kinds of intense creative activity - 'communication', as they call them (Hardt & Negri 2000) - which is in fact integral to processes of capital accumulation, even if they are not identical with those processes. The astronomical amount of creative and communicative labour absorbed globally by Facebook, and its growing importance to certain kinds of marketing, recruitment and business-networking, would be a good illustration of this principle. Of course, as Hardt & Negri themselves make clear, their thesis is simply a development of the classic Marxist hypothesis according to which capitalism actually tends to socialise the process of production, even while it promotes individualism and shallow consumerism on a personal level. From this neo-Marxian perspective, the world economy increasingly comes to look like a vast, interconnected, dense, vibrant network of activity, humming like a beehive with the creative energy of its 6 billion participants, atop which sits Capital like some great grey parasite.

The communist tradition since Marx, and including Hardt & Negri, has always argued that the creative power of socialised labour does not *need* capital in order to function; in fact, it thinks it probably works better when capital is removed from the picture (at least once the initial process of capitalist modernisation is complete), when what Hardt & Negri call 'the multitude' (this vast buzzing network to which we all belong, and which belongs to all of us) is free to interact, to innovate, to create without being limited by the dictates of commodification and profit-seeking. The

central role which Myspace has rapidly assumed within contemporary music culture is a perfect manifestation of this thesis: within half a decade, large sections of the music industry have found themselves obviated as musicians and audiences have ceased to be reliant upon them for the mediation of their relationships. Most importantly, these were precisely the sections of the industry which played no direct role in the creative process: marketing, A&R, distribution were precisely the points in the circuit of musical commodity production at which the most profits used to be made and the cultural authority of record corporations was exercised (Negus 1999), but they have shown never to have been fundamental to the creative process.

### **Creativity and Capitalism**

The noted music producer and cultural theorist, Steve Goodman - himself a key agent of the post-hardcore, post-jungle London music scene (producing and DJ-ing under the name Kode 9 and managing the influential *hyperdub* record label) - has warned against any easy romanticisation of urban music scenes such as that generated by the 'hardcore continuum', specifically dismissing any 'move to make grand claims regarding the spontaneous politicality of the so-called emergent creativity of the multitude...These sonic collectivities may emerge out of turbulent, underdeveloped urban ecologies, but their bottom-up nature does not in itself constitute an index of a moral or political higher ground. Caution should be shown, for example, in celebrating the pirate economics of music cultures. Preemptive capital is now ingrained enough that, through the convoluted geometry of viral marketing, cool hunters, sonic branding and journalism's voracious thirst for an angle, piracy is now perceived by some as just another corporate model, a new business school rhetoric for getting ahead of the curve' (194). Goodman's observations are essential here, although it is not clear that they actually stand as an argument against Hardt & Negri's position, which would not be to valorise 'the emergent creativity of the multitude' *for its own sake*, but simply for its

capacity to manifest the creative potential inherent in contemporary forms of collectivity: a potential which both Romantic and neoliberal ideologies of creativity function precisely by occluding.

As we have seen, Hardt & Negri follow a particular line of Marxist thought which sees this intense collective creativity as the real source of value and change in the world, and sees capital as having a merely parasitic relationship to it. From this point of view, capitalism has to facilitate collective creativity, by getting millions of people together and co-ordinating their activities in cities, corporations, state institutions, or global networks, and even by allowing intense zones of radical creativity to thrive in urban centres; but it only generates profits by feeding off this energy and channelling it solely into the production of commercial commodities (rather than, say, free public services, or innovative artwork, or open source software). It is certainly true, as Goodman indicates, that contemporary capitalism has refined extraordinary new techniques for the instantaneous capture of creative outputs by mechanisms of commodification and accumulation, anticipating their possible emergence and organising their commodity-status even before they have come into actual existence. However, it is not clear that this observation does anything to weaken the case for understanding these preemptive mechanisms of capture as dependent upon the creative power of the multitude for their efficacy, or as understanding that creativity as itself ultimately independent of those mechanisms, at least at the level of its virtual potency.

In the case of the 'hardcore continuum', it is quite clear that the institutions of the music industry played virtually no role in its emergence. This was a music made using cheap domestic recording equipment, distributed for the first few years of its existence and evolution exclusively by tiny record labels (most of them being effectively hobbyist projects, having little chance of generating a liveable income for their owners) (Reynolds 2008), consumed in illegal or semi-legal contexts at

unlicensed raves and venues, sold in small independent record shops and using as its almost exclusive communication medium a network of amateur pirate radio stations. As mentioned above, commentators such as Reynolds and Goodman have tended to designate these dense networks of commercial activity ‘micro-capitalism’, but it is not evident that levels of accumulation at any stage in the process were really adequate for it to be accurately described as ‘capitalist’ at all. And notably, it was only once this scene had established a notable public profile on the basis of the sheer attractive force which its sonic output exercised over an ever-widening population that capitalist institutions began to take any interest in it at all. So the creative autonomy of the multitude would seem to be well-illustrated by the example of this particular music scene, notwithstanding the immediate commercial objectives of many of its key participants.

In fact such a scene would arguably be a perfect model of the kinds of *non-capitalist* market exchange which some radical theorists of capitalism have evoked, arguing that it is a great mistake to assume that all market systems are necessarily capitalist in nature. From this perspective, a system of free market exchange need not necessarily involve high levels of capital accumulation (profits for capitalists) or exploitation (workers / producers generating profits for capitalists), and so is, in effect, not necessarily capitalist at all. In fact thinkers such as Fernand Braudel (Braudel 1984: 630) and Manuel DeLanda (DeLanda 1996) argue that capitalism always works at least partly through the creation of monopoly *anti-markets*; situations in which capitalists work to *shut down* the free circulation of commodities. Without doubt, the habitual ideological efforts of music industry intermediaries to direct, manage and homogenise public tastes can be seen in just these terms, as the attempts to prevent or at least limit a really free circulation of musics and recordings. Elsewhere I have discussed some of the limitations of DeLanda’s position (Gilbert 2010), but it serves us well here.

However, these observations actually do nothing to undermine the validity of Goodman's scepticism. For if the emergence of the hardcore continuum exemplifies the creative autonomy of multitude and the potential of non-capitalist market relations, it also demonstrates quite clearly that this creative autonomy in and of itself has very little political significance. Indeed, it may be merely a sociological banality to observe that in some sense, the co-operative creativity of millions upon which capitalism depends is itself not technically dependent upon capitalism, as long as this nominal independence is incapable of finding some meaningful political and institutional forms of instantiation. In the particular case of the hardcore continuum, the most notable feature of its politics has been the persistent *lack* of any political orientation to any of its constituent elements whatsoever. As I have argued elsewhere, 'given the social and and political radicalism characterising most of their immediate antecedents (acid house, with its origins in the black gay clubs of Chicago; hip-hop, only recently having left its 'golden age' of political consciousness; reggae, with its history of anti-capitalism and anti-racism), as well as the traditional radicalism of their core constituency - the multiracial poor of urban London - the music scenes of the [hardcore continuum in the 1990s] were *notable* for their detachment from any kind of politics, their embrace of competitive entrepreneurial values, and their defence of masculinist and heterosexist norms which other dance cultures were busily and visibly deconstructing at just that moment' (Gilbert 2009).

This brings us back to one of our initial questions about the relationship between creativity and individuality in music scenes. Typical of a dance music scene, the hardcore continuum has tended to offer little scope for the emergence of individual stars partly because of the inherently collective and distributed nature of its systems, but also because of its inability to generate cultural institutions or sets of values (loyalty, community-spirit, etc.) which could offer artists protection from the relentless dynamic of novelty-seeking which is always typical of leading-edge capitalism. Despite

the inarticulate intensity of its key participants' adherence to the idea of 'junglism' as 'a way of life' (Reynolds 2008), even the 1990s 'jungle' or 'drum and bass' scene (the single most notable and durable sub-scene of the hardcore continuum) did not generate enough group-cohesion to retain the attention of most its adherents for long. If the practices of the scene were not itself inherently capitalist, they nonetheless included no group strategies for the deflection of capitalist imperatives or the organisation of defensive institutions which could have made their participants less vulnerable to the wider social forces which inevitably impinged upon them. Lacking any motivation or resources to make a critique of wider social relations, the modes of behaviour and the ideological priorities typical of neoliberal culture and residual working-class masculinism simply went unchecked. This is not to make a value judgement upon the scene, but merely to observe the justifiability of Goodman's scepticism. To put this all very simply - the hardcore continuum might seem to contain all of the implicit resources for a radical, collectivist, radical-democratic, popular modernist, neo-communist cultural politics; and yet none of this radical potential has ever come close to the point of actualisation, which would seem to indicate that such potential in and of itself is of relatively little relevance. Or perhaps we should take this observation even further, and suggest that music scenes can just as well operate as sites at which the radical potential of the multitude is *neutralised* as sites at which it is manifested and expressed. Perhaps we can only properly understand a scene like the hardcore continuum by grasping its double-function as both an *expression* of this potential and a point at which it is *captured* and crystallised into politically impotent forms.

Such observations are important, especially in the field of music culture, because music's capacity to operate at the level of corporeal affect (Gilbert 2004) makes it a particularly important site for the generation of collective potential and for the exploration of 'possible worlds'<sup>2</sup>, of new ways of

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<sup>2</sup> I take this term from Lazzarato (2004).

feeling and being which can have wider social and political consequences (Attali 1985). By exactly the same token, as Goodman has demonstrated, music cultures are also potentially important sites at which such 'possible worlds' are contained by capital, commodified in anticipation of any possible actualisation (this being precise the typical power mechanism of what Deleuze calls the 'control society': see Deleuze 1995). The story of the hardcore continuum illustrates perfectly both the potential and the dangers inherent in this situation. Especially at the height of the 'jungle' era, this radically experimental music was widely celebrated for its hybrid mutation of sonic materials and styles from a range of cultural sources. Jungle was an inherently cosmopolitan music that seemed to make possible new modes of shared corporeal intensity; not just giving sonic expression to the polyglot reality of London working-class life, but deriving from it new ways of feeling and being together - on the dancefloor or in the city - which gave a new depth and substance to it. This was a truly 'vernacular' and 'visceral' cosmopolitanism (Bhabha 1996: Nava 2007). It is perhaps no accident that to date the racist Right - resurgent across Europe for much of the intervening period - has been entirely unable to make headway in this, Europe's largest and most populous city. The hardcore continuum has played a role in making available shared ways of experiencing the late-capitalist cityscape without which division and inter-communal resentments might have re-emerged much more easily. And yet on the other hand it is surely historically peculiar that a music scene which has played this role so effectively, and pushed musical forms in such daring directions, should have remained perpetually so apolitical, so open to the deterritorialising effects of capitalist flows and so uninterested in becoming a site for the emergence of new political subjectivities, even while its core constituencies have in many cases seen their real wages fall, their chances of secure employment decline and their life-chances shrink, compared with those of their parents. This surely serves as a great reminder that music scenes can be both fantastic expressions of the inherently collective nature of all creativity, and sites at which that creativity is preemptively dispersed into forms which offer little resistance to its own ongoing exploitation.

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