11 'Sound of Our Town'

Subcultures, sounds and scenes

The preceding chapter sketched some aspects of the consumption of popular music, and its fans, in relation to identity formation. A related area of study has been the nature and significance of youth subcultures, the initial focus of this chapter. Emerging out of the earlier study of 'youth culture', subcultural analysis was prominent in popular music studies through the 1980s and 1990s. Its theoretical utility was then challenged and displaced by 'post-subcultural' theory, with greater attention being paid to musical sounds and scenes. It is now appropriate, I argue, to view particular physical locations as scenes that include subcultures, and specific sounds, with these placed within an international music and leisure market. Goth provides an example of this conflation, which has been accentuated by the impact of the internet.

From youth culture to youth subcultures

The concept of youth culture developed in the 1950s. It assumed that all teenagers shared similar leisure interests and pursuits and were involved in some form of revolt against their elders. The emergence of a distinctive youth culture was linked to the growing autonomy of youth (particularly working-class youth) because of their increased incomes. Greater spending power gave youth the means to express their own distinct values and separate ideals and large markets were developed for teenage interests, most notably music and clothes. Advertising analyst Mark Abrams, in a pamphlet aptly titled *The Teenage Consumer* (1959), estimated that in Britain there was available 'a grand total of 900 million pounds a year to be spent by teenagers at their own discretion'. In real terms, this was twice the pre-war figure. In the US, the consumer potential of the new teenagers outstripped that of any other segment of the population, as between 1946 and 1958 teenage buying potential grew to an estimated 10 billion dollars. A further explanation for the prominence of this youth or teenage culture was the dramatic growth of secondary and university education in western countries, as young people spending longer periods in educational institutions encouraged youth separateness and solidarity (Coleman, 1961).

While academic sociology now began to display considerable interest in 'youth' as a social group, it was slower to more specifically explore the relationship

between music and its adolescent audience. Initially, as exemplified in the high culture perspective sketched in Chapter 10, youth were seen as a relatively passive consumer group, with 'youth culture' shaped by the burgeoning leisure industries. In the mid-1960s Hall and Whannell reflected British anxiety about the effects of the emergent teenage culture, especially in its imported American forms: 'Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and a lush grazing ground for the commercial providers' (Hall and Whannell, 1964). Similarly, in the US, the work of Riesman (1950) and later commentators acknowledged the varied bases for American youth's musical tastes, but still saw the majority of adolescents as fodder for commercial interests.

The 1960s saw the growth of a youth counterculture, with youth protests in the universities and on the streets against the establishment and the war in Vietnam. It seemed to some that a major division in society was the so-called 'generation gap', usually believed to be between the ages of 25 and 30. Youth were now viewed as a definite social block, belonging to a generational culture that transcended class, status and occupation. Popular music, particularly emergent genres such as psychedelic or acid rock, was regarded as an age-specific means of cultural expression, uniting young people and confirming their radical potential (Reich, 1967).

By the 1970s this view of a homogeneous youth culture, offering a radical challenge to the established social order, was obviously untenable. The radicalism of the 1960s' protest movement had become defused through its commercialization, including the marketing of 'alternative rock' by the major record companies and the counterculture's continued identification with middle class rather than working-class youth. The emphasis on an age-based youth culture obscured the key fact that a major shaper of adolescents' values and attitudes was the social class background of those involved. Rather than being part of a coherent youth culture, it became clear that youth consisted of a 'mainstream' majority and minority subcultures whose distinctiveness was shaped largely by the social class and ethnic background of their members. Sociological interest now concentrated on various youth subcultures, whose members were seen to rely on leisure and style as a means of winning their own cultural space and thus represented cultural oppositional politics at the symbolic level.

Subcultures: the view from Birmingham

As indicated in Chapter 10, general consumption patterns and modes demonstrate a structural homology between the audience and various social indicators. Such homology is evident at its most extreme in youth subcultures, although in a complex rather than a simplistic and reductionist manner. As the contributors to a major edited reader demonstrate, while there is no consensus about the definition of a subculture, they can be broadly considered to be social groups organized around shared interests and practices (Gelder and Thornton, 1997: Part 2). Subcultures often distinguish themselves against others; fractions of the larger social

group, they usually set themselves in opposition to their parent culture, at least at a cultural level.

Music is one of a complex of elements making up subcultural style. Its role in terms of pleasure and cultural capital is similar to that played out among more mainstream youth, but in an accentuated form. The relationship between popular music and youth subcultures was comprehensively explored in a number of influential studies during the 1970s and early 1980s. Collectively, these argued what became a frequently asserted thesis: that youth subcultures appropriate and renovate musical forms and styles as a basis for their identity and, in so doing, assert a countercultural politics. This perspective was primarily associated with writers linked to the influential Birmingham (UK) Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS), whose views became more widely accepted.

For the writers associated with the BCCCS, subcultures were regarded as 'meaning systems, modes of expression or life styles developed by groups in subordinate structural positions in response to dominant meaning systems, and which reflect their attempt to solve structural contradictions rising from the wider societal context' (Brake,1985: 8). Hebdige (1979), in what is now regarded as a classic text, starts from the premise that style in subculture is 'pregnant with significance', illustrating this through a comprehensive analysis of various spectacular subcultural styles: beats and hipsters in the 1950s, teddy boys in the 1950s and 1970s, mods in the early 1960s, skinheads in the late 1960s, rastas in the 1970s, glam rockers in the early to mid-1970s and, most visible of all, punks in the mid-1970s. In his analysis, subcultures rely on leisure and style as a means of making their values visible in a society saturated by the codes and symbols of the dominant culture. The significance of subcultures for their participants is that they offer a solution, albeit at a 'magical' level, to structural dislocations through the establishment of an 'achieved identity' – the selection of certain elements of style outside those associated with the ascribed identity offered by work, home or school. The expressive elements of this style offer 'a meaningful way of life during leisure', removed from the instrumental world of work:

> Subcultures are therefore expressive forms but what they express is, in the last instance, a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second class lives. This tension is figuratively expressed in the form of subcultural style.
>
> (Hebdige, 1979: 132)

The majority of youth were seen to pass through life without any significant involvement in such subcultures. Associated aspects of subcultural fashion and musical tastes may be adopted, but for 'respectable' youth these are essentially divorced from subcultural lifestyles and values. Members of youth subcultures, on the other hand, utilize symbolic elements to construct an identity outside the restraints of class and education, an identity that places them squarely outside conservative mainstream society. Membership of a subculture was seen to necessarily involve membership of a class culture and could be either an extension of, or in opposition to, the parent class culture (as with the skinheads). Writers such as Hebdige were at pains not to overemphasize this class dimension and to accord due analytical weight to both gender and ethnic factors.

Youth subcultures in the 1970s and early 1980s were an international phenomenon, but with marked differences. Subcultural styles in both Britain and the US essentially developed out of their immediate social context, reworking commercial popular culture into a subcultural style that reflected and made sense of their structural social location. This process was not so clear-cut in more culturally dependent societies. In Canada, for example, the situation was confused by the nation's historical links with Britain and France and the marked contemporary influence of its close proximity to the US, a situation contributing to Canada's problem of finding a sense of national identity. Canadian youth cultures were consequently largely derivative and any potential oppositional force in them was highly muted (Brake, 1985).

For the subcultural analysts of the 1970s, homology was central to the consideration of the place of music in youth subcultures: a 'fit' between the 'focal concerns, activities, group structure and the collective self-image' of the subculture and the cultural artifacts and practices adopted by the members of the subculture. The latter were seen as 'objects in which they could see their central values held and reflected', including music (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: 56). The most developed applications of the concept of homology to the preferred music of specific subcultures are Willis's study of biker boys and hippies, *Profane Culture* (1978), and Hebdige's various case studies in his hugely influential study *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Willis argued that there existed a 'fit' between certain styles and fashions, cultural values and group identity; for example, between the intense activism, physical prowess, love of machines and taboo on introspection of motorbike boys and their preference for 1950s' rock 'n' roll. For Hebdige, the punks best illustrated the principle:

> The subculture was nothing if not consistent. There was a homological relation between the trashy cut-up clothes and spiky hair, the pogo and the amphetamines, the spitting, the vomiting, the format of the fanzines, the insurrectionary poses and the 'soulless', frantically driven music.
>
> (Hebdige, 1979: 114–15)

The BCCCS writers' sociocultural analyses represented an original and imaginative contribution to the sociology of youth cultures, but were critiqued for their overemphasis on the symbolic 'resistance' of subcultures, which was imbued with an unwarranted political significance; the romanticizing of working-class subcultures; the neglect of ordinary or conformist youth; and a masculine emphasis, with little attention paid to the subcultural experiences of girls. And while music was regarded as a central aspect of subcultural style, its homological relation to other dimensions of style was not always easy to pin down. For example, the skinheads' preferred music changed over time, making problematic any argument for its homological role in skinhead culture. As Hebdige observed, the 'early'

skinheads preference for elements of black style, including reggae and ska music, is contradictory considering their racial stance. At times, stylistic attributes were too quickly attributed to a specifically subcultural affiliation, rather than recognizing their wider adoption.

Post subcultures

A convergence between music and cultural group values continued to be evident in some contemporary youth subcultures through the 1990s, most notable in goth (see the discussion that follows), heavy metal, hip-hop and various strains of punk. However, subsequent theoretical discussions and case studies suggested that the degree of homology between subcultures and music had been overstated. Reviewing the earlier literature, Middleton concluded that subcultural analysis had drawn the connection between music and subculture much too tightly, 'flawed above all by the uncompromising drive to homology' (Middleton, 1990: 161).

Indeed the very value of the concept 'subcultures', and particularly its conflation with oppositional cultural politics, became seriously questioned (Hebdige, 1988: 8; Huq, 2006: Chapter 1; Redhead, 1990: 41–2). For many youthful consumers during the 1980s and 1990s, the old ideological divides applied to popular music had little relevance, with their tastes determined by a more complex pattern of considerations than any 'politically correct' dichotomizing of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' music or subcultural associations. This was most evident in the constituencies for indie and dance music (see Fonarow, 2006; Thornton, 1995). Newer studies began using the term 'post-subcultural' to indicate this theoretical shift (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003), with greater attention now paid to more flexible concepts such as 'tribes' and 'scene'.

Interest also turned more to the majority of youth, those who do not join or identify with subcultures, the nature of fandom and the study of local musical scenes. While the commercial orientation of the musical tastes of 'mainstream' youth are still, as with Riesman 50 years earlier, often taken as given, this consumption is seen in more active and creative terms. Further, it is by no means a homogeneous situation, as, like the earlier subcultures, the 'mainstream' is revealed as a varied audience with different tastes and allegiances informed by factors such as class, ethnicity, gender and age.

Northern soul

The cultural studies preoccupation with youth subcultures obscured the significance of subcultural affiliations held by older music fans. A case in point is the academically relatively neglected example of northern soul, a regional cult in the UK Midlands, based around ballroom/club culture and all-night dancing to 1960s' Motown and independent label (e.g. Cameo, Parkway, Verve) soul records chosen for their 'danceability' (e.g. the Exciters).

Northern soul became prominent in the early 1970s, with the Wigan Casino, a World War I dance hall, being declared by American *Billboard* to be the world's

best discotheque. The subculture has maintained itself, with fanzines, continued all-nighters and record compilations; it is celebrated in feature films, musicals and compilations of recordings. Studies of northern soul challenged the preoccupation of earlier subcultural theory with music as symbol and the perceived homology between musical style and subcultural values. Northern soul produces a sense of identity and belonging based on the consumption of 'music as music', organized around a club scene and dance (Wall, 2006). Here the records have value both as commodities and as bearers of musical meaning; the exchange, buying and selling of records is an important part of the northern soul scene. Indeed, the use of 'white labels' represents a unique form of fetishization of black musical culture by white consumers (Hollows and Milestone, 1998).

Northern soul illustrates how 'contemporary youth cultures are characterized by far more complex stratifications than that suggested by the simple dichotomy of "monolithic mainstream-resistant subculture"' (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003: 7). Recent research in popular music has retained elements of the subculturalist approach, but moved towards a more sophisticated understanding of the activities of music audiences, drawing heavily on the concepts of sounds and scenes.

Scenes and sounds: the music of place

The intersection of music and its physical location has been a developing field of inquiry, with a number of distinct and original contribution to the critical examination of space and scale as significant aspects in the production and consumption of sound recordings. Cultural geographers have been doing research on music since the late 1960s, investigating the relationship between the social, cultural, economic and political factors in musical analysis. Traditionally, the geographical analysis of music emphasized the dynamics and consequences of the geographical distribution of recorded music around the world and how particular musical sounds have become associated with particular places. This work was largely characterized by the use of a narrow range of methods and theories and focused on only a few musical styles, notably blues, folk and country. Studies of rock and pop music, and their various genres, were notably absent from the majority of this work. In the 1990s these musical forms, and their locales, became seen as worthy of serious study and accorded greater attention by cultural geographers and popular music scholars (see Carnoy, 2003; Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 1998; Stokes, 1994).

Several areas of research into popular music and geography can be identified: (i) a concern with the spatial distribution of musical forms, activities and performers; (ii) exploration of musical home locales and their extension, using concepts such as contagion, relocation and hierarchical diffusion and the examination of the agents of and barriers to diffusion; (iii) the delimitation of areas that share certain musical traits or on the identification of the character and personality of places as gleaned from lyrics, melody, instrumentation and the general 'feel' or sensory impact of the music; (iv) pertinent themes in music, such as the image of

the city. A necessary addition to these emphases is the global processes of cultural homogenization and commodification and the intersection of these with the local.

While the cohesion of their 'common' musical signatures is frequently exaggerated, such localized developments offer marketing possibilities by providing a 'brand name' with which consumers can identify. Interest in particular sounds has concentrated on the significance of locality and how music may serve as a marker of identity. Many histories of popular music refer to particular geographic locales, usually cities or regions, as being identified at a specific historical juncture with a sound. Examples include the Liverpool 'Merseybeat' sound associated with the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Searchers in the early 1960s; San Francisco and the psychedelic rock of the Jefferson Airplane, Moby Grape and the Grateful Dead in the later 1960s; various punk scenes since the 1970s, such as Straightedge and Washington DC. The following brief examples illustrate the interaction of history, physical location, musical style and the music industry.

Sounds: Dunedin and Manchester

A New Zealand example of this process is the emergence of the 'Dunedin sound' associated with the now internationally recognized Flying Nun label. In the late 1970s a number of bands in Dunedin, a university city of then only just over 100,000 people, established a local cult following their appearances at various pubs and university venues. National exposure and critical and commercial success followed and several bands (the Chills, the Bats, the JPS) went on to establish international reputations, largely on the 'indie' college circuit in the UK and North America. The 'Dunedin sound' and 'the Flying Nun sound' became shorthand for these bands, despite the clear differentiation among the Flying Nun label's recorded output. The sound itself, at least in its original evocation, was largely equated with a jangly guitar-driven sound, a distinctive New Zealand accent on the vocals and 'low-tech' recording and production, all serving to produce a specifically identifiable local product.

Manchester also provides an instructive example of the role of geography in forging a distinctive orientation to localized alternative music. The notion of a Manchester sound and scene was a loose label, popularized by the British music press in the early 1990s. Since the late 1970s, Manchester has been associated with several styles of indie and alternative music: in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the post-punk sound of Joy Division, which mutated into New Order; 'bedsit blues' in the mid-1980s with the Smiths and James; and the tempo and mood was revived around 1988, in the wake of 'acid house', with the arrival of the club-and-ecstasy sounds of 'Madchester', led by the Happy Mondays, the Stone Roses and Oldham's Inspiral Carpets. All three periods and styles fed off the association with Manchester: the songs often had included clear geographical references and reflected localized feelings and experiences; record covers and other promotional imagery incorporated place-related references; and a network of alternative record labels (especially Factory Records), venues and an active local press created a supportive network for the bands and their followers.

Scenes

There has been considerable exploration of the role and effectiveness of music as a means of defining community/local identity, although, as Adam Krims (2012) argues, the conflation of the two has, at times, been overstated. Situated within this work, the concept of scene has become a central trope in popular music studies, a key part of the 'spatial turn' evident in urban and cultural studies generally. To a certain extent, scene, as analytical concept of greater explanatory power, is regarded by some commentators as having displaced subcultures.

Scene can be understood as 'a specific kind of urban cultural context and practice of spatial coding' (Stahl, 2004: 76), 'describing both the geographical sites of local music practice and the economic and social networks in which participants are involved' (Kruse, 2010: 625). A basic reference point for later discussion was an essay by Straw (1992), which argued for greater attention to scene in popular music studies, defined as the formal and informal arrangement of industries, institutions, audiences and infrastructures. Also influential were Cohen's study of 'rock culture' in Liverpool (Cohen, 1991) and Shank's study of the rock 'n' roll scene in Austin, Texas (Shank, 1994). Researchers subsequently engaged with, refined and applied the concept of scene to a wide range of settings and locales. Much of this work, along with theoretical discussion of the concept of scene(s) can be found in several edited collections (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004; Whiteley *et al.*, 2004). As Kruse concludes: 'Subjectivities and identities were formed, changed, and maintained within localities that were constituted by geographical boundaries, by networks of social relationships, by a sense of local history, and in opposition to other localities' (Kruse, 2010: 628).

To provide just one example from among many, locality, scene and youth culture were fruitfully brought together by Bennett in a series of ethnographic case studies. Among these, his study of urban dance music (including house, techno and jungle) in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, shows how, through their participation in club events and house parties, 'the members of this scene celebrate a shared underground sensibility that is designed to challenge the perceived oppression and anarchism of Newcastle's official night-time economy and the coercive practices of the local police force' (Bennett, 2000: 68).

In part arising from the earlier fascination with subcultures, a particular focus, especially in the US, has been on alternative music scenes. (The term 'underground' is also used for non-commercialized alternative scenes, since the performers in them are hidden from and inaccessible to people who are not 'hooked into' the scene.) Alternative music scenes fall into two basic categories: college (US tertiary institutions) or university towns or large cities that are somehow 'alternative', usually to even larger urban centres nearby (e.g. Minneapolis and Chicago). Most important American college towns had local music scenes self-consciously perceived as such in the 1980s and through the 1990s, with these linked as part of

an American indie underground (see Azerrad, 2001; Kruse, 2003). The most prominent were Athens, Georgia (source of the B-52s, Love Tractor, Pylon and REM); Minneapolis (the Replacements, Husker Du, Soul Asylum, Prince), and Seattle. Sometimes a small college town and nearby large city contributed to a shared scene; as with Boston and Amherst, Massachusetts (sources of Dinosaur Jr., the Pixies, Throwing Muses and The Lemonheads), with bands moving back and forth between the two centres. Alternative scenes worldwide appear to continue to conform to this basic pattern (see Fonarow, 2006, on British indie).

While alternative music is often linked to particular local scenes, the question is why then and there? Such scenes have generally developed out of a combination of airplay on the local college radio stations, access to local live venues, advertisements and reviews in local fanzines and free papers and, especially, the existence of local independent record companies. Bertsch (1993) argues that there are fundamental links between alternative music scenes and high-tech areas, with both sharing a decentralized, do-it-yourself approach to production and with indie isolationism not far removed from the entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism, with 'every one out for himself'. Music making, equipment design and programming are undertakings one person or a small group can succeed at without much start-up capital. Seattle in the early 1990s provides an example.

Seattle

In 1992 the Seattle music scene came to international prominence, closely linked with the mainstream breakthrough of alternative music promoted by American college radio. Nirvana's second album and major-label debut *Nevermind* (Geffin, 1991) topped the *Billboard* charts; Pearl Jam and Soundgarden were major draw cards at the second Lollapalooza touring music festival in 1992 and enjoyed huge record sales. The music made by these and other bands, with many initially recording with Seattle's Sub Pop independent record label, became collectively labelled as 'grunge', although the label obscured a variety of styles (Anderson, 2007).

The Seattle scene and the grunge music with which it was associated became the most written-about phenomenon in contemporary popular music since the birth of punk. Major labels scoured Seattle for unsigned bands or internationally sought out grunge-oriented performers (for instance Australia's Silverchair). The film *Singles* (Cameron Crowe, 1992), set in the Seattle scene, was widely publicized and commercially successful. The popularization of grunge-related fashion saw spreads in *Elle* and *Vogue* touting $1000 flannel shirts from the world's most famous designers. The 'Seattle sound' became a marketing ploy for the music industry, as well as an ideological touchstone for generation X:

> Seattle defines the source of the phenomenon and organizes its often disparate expression. In writing about the Seattle scene, critics are not just chronicling a random success story. They are grappling with the notion of a geographically specific scene itself.
>
> (Bertsch, 1993)

A combination of factors explained why Seattle became prominent at that time and place: the ability of Sub Pop to feed into the majors; many good bands of similar style; the strong local alternative scene, linked to the universities of Washington and Evergreen State, (the latter a progressive, no-grades school with an alternative-oriented radio station); and the city's geographical separation from Los Angeles. Critics emphasized the perceived purity and authenticity of the Seattle scene as a point of origin, defining bands like Nirvana in opposition to the mainstream music industry. The foundations for the success of bands such as Nirvana and Soundgarden were laid throughout the 1980s by earlier alternative music scenes. What had changed was that by the early 1990s it had become easier and quicker for new alternative or indie bands to attract the attention of major labels or commercial radio, and to move to major labels and achieve some mainstream success (Azerrad, 2001).

The specific configuration and dynamics of other indie/alternative scenes have since been examined in numerous ethnographically oriented studies (see Kruse, 2003, 2010 for further discussion and examples). For example, Takasugi (2003) studied the development of underground musicians in a Honolulu (Hawaii) scene in the mid-1990s. His interest was in the values and norms shared by members of the scene and the relationship of these to the socialization and identity formation of the musicians involved: 'the resulting networks serve to sculpt and reinforce the identity of the band members within the scene' (74). This was to conceptual the scene as 'a kind of social movement' (ibid.), one in which the distinction between fans and musicians was not always clear, with both integral to the scene. O'Connor, in a study of contemporary punk scenes in four cities (Washington, DC; Austin, Texas; Toronto; Mexico City), showed that clear differences exist between such scenes, explicable in terms of the social geography of each city. For the punks involved, these scenes were identified with the active creation of infrastructure to support their bands and other forms of creative activity (O'Connor, 2002: 226). Geoff Stahl (2011) documented the manner in which the Wellington (New Zealand) indie scene was: 'Bound together as an infrastructure that supports music making in Wellington, this disparate collection of institutions, industries, venues, media outlets, events and activities cohere in such a way as to the give the Wellington indie scene its distinctive shape' (Stahl, 2011: 148).

The relationship of the local to the global is a key part of the dynamic of local music scenes, alternative or otherwise. For many participants in alternative local scenes, the perceived dualities associated with indie and major record labels are central to their commitment to the local. Here 'the celebration of the local becomes a form of fetishism, disguising the translocal capital, global management, and the transnational relations of production that enables it' (Fenster, 1995). However, the 'local' is increasingly allied with other localities, for both economic and affective reasons. Fenster notes 'the degree to which "independent" non-mainstream musics, while clearly based upon local spaces, performances and experiences, are increasingly tied together by social networks, publications, trade groups and regional and national institutions in ... locally dispersed formations' (ibid.: 83). Today, this is even more evident, with the internationalization of

'local' sounds a process encouraged and fostered economically by the major record companies and governmental cultural policies around the 'creative industries' seeking to brand 'national' music to reach a larger market in the process (see Chapter 14). Local spaces have remained important, however, through their provision of the necessary infrastructure music scenes need to survive: the rehearsal space, live venues and recording opportunities' along with the supportive networks and publicity required to make production and dissemination of the music possible.

Virtual scenes

'Today, with the widespread popularity of the internet, the nature of these local scenes has changed' (Kruse, 2010). The indie sector has flourished, with local sounds/scenes and their followers ideologically linked through internationally distributed fanzines, music press publications and the internet. With music disseminated online, people can connect easily across localities, regions, countries and continents; internet opens up more options and creates more opportunities for sharing of music and associated cultural tastes, most notably subcultural fashion. John Connell and Chris Gibson (2002) argued that the spread of the internet had increased the flow of subcultural music and information across disparate localities, in the process helping to 'de-link the notion of scene from locality' (107), enabling a sense of online 'imagined community' not tied to physical geography. Andy Bennett and Richard Peterson (2004) also noted and celebrated the emergence of such virtual scenes, comprised of mediated one-to-one communication, largely between fans:

> Fan clubs dedicated to specific artists, groups and subgenres have proliferated by using the internet to communicate with each other. Like the participants in trans local scenes, participants in virtual scenes are widely separated geographically, but unlike them … come together in a single scene making conversation via the internet.
>
> (2004: 10)

This cyber facilitation should not be overstated, with internet access not available to all and broadband width acting as a constraint when it is. It is hardly surprising that the subcultural constituencies making extensive use of the internet, notably goth and emo, consist primarily of middle-class/college youth.

Goth

Goth is an example of the historical development and continued vitality of local scenes based around a subculture. Goth is now an international phenomenon, with well-established performers and scenes, most notably in the US, Japan and Europe, especially Germany. 'Goth', or 'gothic rock', emerged as a part of post-punk alternative and 'indie' rock in the UK in the late 1970s. Its origins in cities such as Manchester in the English Midlands, and in London's suburbia, reflected a broader urban malaise and the indie scene's disenchantment with contemporary politics and culture. As such, goth was also a rejection of the utopian sentiments and commercialism of glam rock, disco and British 'New Pop' which had dominated commercial music and associated street fashion through the 1970s and into the early 1980s. At the same time, however, goth had clear debts to the visual sense and theatricality of both glam and of new romantics performers such as Adam and the Ants. Goth bands commonly adopted names with gothic and general romantic artistic connotations. Singer Siousie Sioux used the term 'gothic' to describe the orientation of her band and may even be the originator of the term.

The goth bands initiated and did much to popularize a goth 'look', especially through the image and style of charismatic and striking-looking band leaders such as Peter Murphy (Bauhaus), Ian Ashbury (Southern Death Cult), Siouxie Sioux (Siouxie and the Banshees) and Nick Cave (The Birthday Party, the Bad Seeds). Along with the music, fashion was at the heart of an emergent subcultural style and continues to be a focus (Brill, 2008; Spooner, 2006). Goths were initially characterized by their wearing of black clothes, with a taste for 'rich' fabrics such as velvet, lace and leather; the extensive use of silver jewellery; long, black-dyed hair; and the heavy use of dark eye/face makeup. To begin with, goth was primarily an English phenomenon, although it quickly developed internationally, particularly in Germany and the US.

The development of goth was underpinned by an interlinked network of clubs and other live venues, record labels and specialist music magazines and fanzines; today, these have a strong internet presence. Both the music and the associated subculture have maintained themselves in various national contexts and urban scenes, although with increasing diversity present. As with other well-established musical genres, goth has mutated into a range of subgenres, most notably dark wave, goth metal and techno goth. The goth subculture has also developed a number of distinct styles, usually linked to its musical variants (see Brill, 2008; Hodkinson, 2002; Reynolds, 2006).

As Brill documents: 'In the early 1990s the second wave of Goth shifted its impetus from Britain to Germany, which has since been the unrivalled epicentre of the scene' (Brill, 2008: 4). A network of independent record labels, magazines, clothing companies and events promoters specializing in goth had developed in Germany through the 1990s. This network included *Orkus* and *Sonic Reducer*, which established themselves as newsstand goth magazines; 'Black' summer festivals such as M'Era Lune, which routinely drew audiences of 15,000 to 20,000 people; and record labels (e.g. Trisol, Out of Line) and numerous professional bands. By the early 2000s Brill estimates that there were 70,000 to 90,000 goths in Germany, compared with roughly 15,000 in the United Kingdom (Brill, 2008: 187. In Germany, members of the goth subculture are often called *Gruftis* – in English: 'tomb creatures'). There are also significant goth music scenes and bands in Scandinavia, especially Finland (the band Nightwish); Italy (Ataraxia); Austria (L'Âme Immortelle); and Switzerland (Lacrimosa). Smaller gothic club

scenes are present in cities such as Paris, Rome and Barcelona and in eastern Europe. Even countries with relatively small goth scenes have produced prominent goth bands, including Portugal (Moonspell) and the Netherlands (the gothic metal band Within Temptation), although it is noticeable that they frequently record on Germany-based record labels. In order to reach a wider audience, most European goth bands sing at least some of their recordings in English. Many of the leading goth bands and their fans congregate at the well-organized music festivals in Germany and Britain.

The continued vitality of goth is evident in these local scenes, which coalesce around the festivals, the specialist record labels and goth-oriented clubs. As part of the increased cyberspace orientation of contemporary popular music, goth bands and goth subcultures can be found on MySpace, YouTube and the internet more generally. In his study of goth scenes in Britain, Paul Hodkinson (2002) found that participants in the goth subculture were able to utilize websites that served as information nodes and clearing houses to learn about events, bands and places. A particular translocal internet effect was the transmission and discussion of style and shared subcultural values.

Conclusion

I have traced a shift from the concepts of youth culture, to subcultures, to sounds and scenes. While this is something of a progression, reflecting changing academic theoretical fashion, I would argue that aspects of each of these remain present in particular locales. Accordingly, it seems most appropriate to view particular physical locations as scenes that include subcultures and specific sounds, with these placed within an international music and leisure market. Goth is an example of the conflation of subculture and scene, historically tied to particular physical sites, with these now extended and consolidated through an online presence.

Further reading

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