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Coprolalia and Shibboleths: musical and textual interaction in the Breakcore room

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Summary

This thesis is an ethnographic account of a musically oriented online *milieu*. It draws primarily on discourse analysis, ethnomethodology, semantic anthropology, and sociolinguistics to critically explore the interaction of 'amateur' electronic musicians within this environment. Following a preliminary discussion of the dominant theoretical terms in which the relationship between music and technology is conceptualised ('rationalisation' and 'democratisation'), with specific reference to the agent construed as subject to these forces, the peer-to-peer environment is described.

Textual interaction is then introduced and subject to close analysis. The interaction is found to be 'gendered' and to take ritualised confrontational forms, involving '*coprolalia*'. The reading that follows is structured by considering key units of meaning (*shibboleths*) across varying contexts of use. These shibboleths are the (linguistic-discursive) honorific/epithets *nigga* and *ghey*, and the (musical) 'amen' breakbeat. Through discussion of these units, the cultural politics and problematics of identity and authenticity as instantiated locally are discussed. Data are brought into dialogue with a spectrum of interpretive and critical theory so as to explore the discursively violent, homosocial features of the subcultural 'space'. The analysis is then related back to the rationalisation/democratisation binary in such a way as to advocate a pragmatic, critical approach to social theory.

The grounded orientation taken to data generates its own interpretive priorities. Where conventional accounts of new music technologies (specifically peer-to-peer, sampling, and digital composition software) are *normative*, imputing rationalising or democratising effects, consideration of these technologies in *use* shows such frameworks to be misguided. Close empirical analysis indicates that the principal issues involved in considering these technologies are not their potentials as enabling 'subversion' or standardising musical culture, but the extraordinary articulations of subcultural identity and aesthetics they facilitate, and the 'inert' or 'structural' abjection underlying these articulations.

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1 – Introduction

1.1 Overview

In recent years it has become a sociological commonplace to posit a disjuncture between 'how we live now' and 'how we lived before'. Whether we choose to characterise 'how we live now' as late capitalism, postmodernity, globalisation, or risk or information society (*etc.*), a commonly emphasised source of difference is the impact of a global telecommunications infrastructure, impacting upon all aspects of social interaction, from instantaneous global capital flows to the constitution of subjectivity itself.[1]

Lash, for instance, argues that the form of life of contemporary society has become technological: "I operate as a man-machine interface – as a technological form of natural life – because I must necessarily navigate through technological forms of social life … I cannot achieve sociality in the absence of technological systems, apart from my interface with communication and transportation machines" (2002: 15-16). This is culture and sociality 'at-a-distance', as with Anderson's imagined community (1983), but so diffuse and attenuated as to be disjunctive. The dominant form of sociality becomes "networked individualism" (Castells 2001: 131). Identification is to despatialised, elective-affinity social networks or 'disorganisations'. The imagined community, constituted by 'virtually proximate' individuals (Bauman 2003: 61), is not a national one but an international one (be it of musicians within a specific genre, academics, or what have you). Concurrently, there is a *dis*identification with the local. Place becomes generic as social relations are spatially "disembedded" (Giddens 1990: 21). Localities become homogenous "non-places" (Augé 1995: 78-79): suburbs, malls, fast food chains, transport systems; and these socio-technical networks are enacted in generic, 'abstract' spaces: the internet, cable news, mobile telephony. Power relations are reconfigured, such that the elite become an 'exterritorial' class; conversely, immobility becomes the mark of the excluded (Bauman 1998).

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[1] For example, Beck 1992, Castells 1998, Giddens 1991, Harvey 1989, Jameson 1991, Lyotard 1984, and Poster 1995.

This is not to suggest that such accounts imply that 'how we live now' is a *consequence* of technology. They do imply, however, that recent technological developments (specifically in telecommunications) play a fundamental role in these changing modes of sociality. Moreover, they often do so in broad and speculative terms. Whilst such theorising can be compelling, it is often, to say the least, under-operationalised empirically. It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that by examining interaction at the 'interface', we could explore these broad claims about 'how we live now'.

For instance, we might ask: how might 'networked individualism' operate socially? What kind of 'individuals' are these? How radical is the disjuncture between computer-mediated interaction (CMC) and its face-to-face (f2f) counterpart? How might mediated interaction inform our conceptions of sociality, culture and the self? How are sociality, subjectivity, and signifying practice managed and constituted by those who have significant personal investment in 'virtual' environments? What symbolic, discursive, and material resources do despatialised social groups draw on in the collective production of meaning, and how might that meaning be identified and described? How *do* 'we' live now, and what are the appropriate means of finding out? Through a microinteractional focus on a number of interlinked 'despatialised networks' and their efforts to 'disorganise', as fans of particular genres, as musicians working within them, and as agents constructing, representing and 'making sense' of the world, I hope to be able to engage empirically with some of these questions, and some others besides.

What follows is an ethnographic account of 'bedroom producer' interaction as instantiated in peer-to-peer ('p2p') chatrooms. It takes as its principal data set approximately 2100 pages of conversational text logged nightly from these chatrooms, spanning a six-month time period from July 2003 to February 2004, alongside material generated through frequent visits to the locale in the intervening period. It is also informed by email interviews with a number of successful musicians working within the genre/musical subculture at the centre of the research, but absent from the 'field' (barring the circulation of their music therein); interstitial consideration of websites and online fora associated with the 'scene'; over 80 gigabytes of downloaded music and, of course, what Garfinkel refers to as "bibliographies" (2002a: 67).

Music, obviously, is important, and not just to active practitioners. Frith argues that "Patterns of music use provide a better map of social life than viewing or reading habits" (2003: 100). Merely in terms of media exposure, nothing is as ubiquitous as music: "The average citizen of the Western world hears music for just under one quarter of his/her waking life" (Tagg 2001). Music, however, is widely perceived to be *changing*, in terms of

its sound, its constituent elements, the manner of its production, and its distribution: Taylor asserts that digitisation is "the most fundamental change in the history of Western music since the invention of music notation in the ninth century" (2001: 3). There is obviously a world of music now available for consumption by download, a world otherwise inaccessible. To consider music solely as a commodity has become an absurdity. A core theme of this text is the 'technologisation' of musical culture; specifically, the question as to whether the relationship between music and technology could best be characterised as *rationalising* or *democratising*. As DeNora suggests: "Such 'high level' questions are perhaps best answered through specific reference to real actors" (DeNora 1999: 37).

The approach taken here to analysis is somewhat unconventional, but well suited to the multiform nature of the environment. Effectively, data are furnished which demonstrate orientations to fundamental units of shared but contested meaning, and subject to close analysis. The approach to these 'units' runs as follows. A brief definition of the bedroom producer is sketched (1.3). An account is then given of the rationalisation/democratisation debate (1.4-1.6), with specific attention paid to the agent conceptualised as 'subject to' these forces (1.7). The p2p environment is described, firstly in terms of an overview of the development of the technology (2.1), and then in terms of the 'file-sharing imperative', the reciprocity norm 'governing' p2p (2.2-2.4). Following this the mp3, the digital artefact at the centre of p2p exchange, is discussed, in terms of the information revealed in its 'properties', and through consideration of the 'tags' provided by 'rippers' – those who 'produce' mp3s from commercial releases (3.1). At this point, the text turns to the 'presentation of self' within the p2p environment, through discussion of the concept of *persona* (3.2-3.3). These introductory sections 'set the scene' for the interaction analysed in following chapters, through providing descriptions of (a) the social, legal and technological 'ground' to interaction, (b) the local norms of exchange, (c) the resources so exchanged, and (d) the 'mediated' subjects engaging in exchange.

With the 'scene' so 'set', in-depth analysis begins, with the emphasis throughout on elaborating local, intersubjective meaning as this is manifest in dialogue. This analysis is so structured as to achieve several tasks at once, through treating individual data as *simultaneities* (Ardener 1982: 11). The analysis opens by addressing the seemingly confrontational nature of CMC, through discussing specific instances of 'trollery', where the reading is informed by and engages critically with ethnomethodology, semantic anthropology, ethnographic sociolinguistics, and Bakhtinian accounts of language. The immanent interactional order is indicated with reference to interactants' orientation to network-induced 'lag' (4.2, 4.4). A critical discussion of ethnomethodology is interjected,

suggesting that semantic 'density' belies the possibility of focussing solely on *how* communication is achieved (4.3). 'Confrontational' interaction is shown to utilise ritual insult exchange, where these insults demonstrably take specific forms (4.5-4.6). This speech genre is contextualised with reference to Herring's (1996b) account of "adversarial" interactional style (4.5). It is then argued that instances within the data are isolable as *coprolalia*, that is, as a particularly adversarial, dysphemistic speech play, iterated through the use of expletives and obscenity, and 'structured' so as to transgress the politeness norms of conventional bourgeois discourse (4.6). Throughout, close attention is paid to the potentials for interactional innovation inherent to the medium (specifically through 'quotation'), and the *distributional* nuances of meaning deployed by personæ and inhering within specific interactional forms and terms.

To this end, the first *shibboleth* to be considered is introduced, the honorific/ epithet *nigga*, firstly in terms of an etymological account of verbicide (5.1).[2] As simultaneity, careful consideration of this term and the variable contexts of its deployment across a trajectory of use and meaning (as element in greeting sequences, requests, and 'jokes') provides the preliminary means of accessing the other core theme of this text, the social identity of the subject at the music-technology interface as instantiated in the form of the bedroom producer, through considering the role of *embodied* identity in the constitution of subcultural authenticity (5.2). An allotropic investigation of meaning is presented, suggesting that levels of meaning 'density' are variable, contestable and contextual (5.3).

This is then further demonstrated in relation to the politics of identity articulated and policed by the terms *gay* and *ghey*. Herring's conception of interactional adversariality is inflected through the introduction of the *adversative* (Ong 1981); which furnishes a perspective highlighting homosocial aspects of interaction (6.1-6.2). The adversative is described as an 'insider' form of social cohesion, and is then enriched through a reflexive ethnomethodological evaluation of its own sociological manifestation and interpretation, and through an account situating it in terms of the concept of *fratriarchy* (6.3). The fratriarchal reading is elaborated through analysis of the remarkable semantic and interactional properties of *gay/ghey*, as often obscene 'literalisations' of adversative contest which demonstrate the relationship between subcultural authenticity and normative,

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[2] The term 'shibboleth' (derived from the Hebrew, meaning 'ear of corn') was used as a 'watchword' to differentiate the Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the 'sh', from the Gileadites (Judges 12: 6). In contemporary usage it refers to terms indicative of social location or origin, the use of which therefore serves to distinguish between groups.

heterosexist masculinity (7.1-7.2). The ambivalent character of fratriarchal transgression is then contextualised in relation to the category of the *abject*, such that coprolalia is shown to have a double role in the production of subcultural masculinity and the critique of bourgeois respectability, where these are operationalised simultaneously (7.3). This masculinity, performed by the bedroom producer, is situated in terms of its relationship to computer culture, particularly as evinced through the relations between computer games, identity, and the subcultural musical formations of 'chip tune' and 'gabber' (7.4). Following this, the bedroom producer's constitutive relationship with 'nerddom' is discussed, before fratriarchal space is underlined in its peculiarly 'familial' aspect (7.5).

At this stage the third and final unit of meaning to be considered is introduced, the 'amen' breakbeat. This ubiquitous break plays a fundamental role in 'breakcore', the genre at the centre of the research, and can be considered a "museme", a minimal unit of musical form and meaning (Tagg 2000: 83; Middleton 1990: 189). The discussion begins with a description of accounts of music which emphasise its 'extradiscursive' aspect. Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic is described and related to a recurrent theoretical-interpretive concern, the ethnomethodological conceptions of *how* and *what*, as a means of critiquing this perceived 'extradiscursivity' (8.1). The break itself is then described in terms of its temporal properties and the practices it is subject to in its repetition and resequencing, and contrasted with the 'basic disco rhythm' as a means of 'marking' time. These practices are summarised under the aesthetic ideal of 'keeping the edits tight' (8.2).

The sampling of the amen as a cultural practice is then discussed in terms of competing notions of 'communal' and 'individual' creativity, where these notions are shown to complicated by ideas of (racial) political identity and 'cultural appropriation' (8.3). These issues are explored across a stylistic continuum from 'jungle' to breakcore, oriented throughout towards contrasting approaches to the deployment of the amen and its contextual relation to the sample base. The dancehall sample base, and the 'soundclash' performative model, are discussed in terms of their role in jungle, which is shown to have an adversative homosocial aspect, related to the issue of homophobia in dancehall lyrics (8.4). The politics of sampling are thus discussed in terms of both racial appropriation and the recontextualisation of material perceived as problematic by some practitioners. Subcultural authenticity is shown to be articulated through a differentiation *between* genres, and between the 'underground' and the 'mainstream', where 'dancefloor compatibility' is associated with 'incorporation' (9.1). The debate within breakcore circles concerning the use of the amen is related to ideas of both creativity and musical structure

(9.2). It is then argued that ensuring the maintenance of the 'underground' entails an ongoing increase in the 'tightness of edits' (virtuoso temporal control on the producer's part), alongside an engagement with the counter-aesthetics of *noise* (both the non-musical sound, and the genre). Both of these phenomena are characterised as adversative displays of sonic dominance (9.3).

The various approaches to musical composition outlined thus far are then summarised and situated through a discussion of 'plunderphonic' sampling. *Bricolage* 'pop mashing' is contextualised in relation to broader cultural practices of intertextual citation (10.1). This leads in to a problematisation of accounts of plunderphonic practice which seek to highlight its political 'resistance', and thereby a critical assessment of sampling, p2p and 'bedroom producerness' (10.2-10.3). This assessment is then related back to rationalisation and democratisation so as to critique these frameworks. It is argued that metatheoretical impositions are misguided in terms of their logical circularity, their tendency to reify complex social phenomena, and their normative assumptions (10.4). The role of CMC in the constitution of the breakcore 'scene' is explored through a discussion of the Goffmanian dramaturgical metaphor and the distinction between 'frontstage' and 'backstage' (10.5). A pragmatic approach to field and theory is advocated, such that theory becomes a narrative resource, whilst subcultural 'resistance' becomes both context-bound and multi-directional (10.6). The discussion concludes with some reflections on the mode of academic writing and the form of reflexive ethnographic representation (10.7).

1.2 Doing internet research

What follows takes the 'decentralised scenic institution' of a particular virtual 'space' as primary (Kahn-Harris 2004: 99). This space can be delineated so as to indicate the features it possesses rendering it pertinent to a discussion of the role of technology in musical culture. The first such feature is the bedroom producer, the 'amateur' musician 'residing' there. The second is the space itself, p2p, as a contested site of music distribution. The third is the 'scene' in question: 'underground' or 'independent' electronic music, specifically, the genre known as breakcore (a contraction of 'breakbeat hardcore'). Breakcore is a post-rave, hybrid musical style privileging percussive intensity and complexity, which draws, among other things, on 8-bit or chip tune music, drum and bass, gabber techno, heavy metal, hip-hop, IDM ('intelligent dance music'), industrial and jungle. A punk, 'DiY' aesthetic, significantly informs the genre. Whilst best thought of as

an umbrella term, breakcore demonstrably engages in *plunderphonic* sampling practices, which is to say, breakcore practitioners frequently *expropriate* other musics. The *site* of the research thus intersects with this *style* of musical production in a particularly *facilitative* way, one which producers 'make capital of'.

Over the following chapters, the online environment is taken seriously as an ethnographic research site. As Titon indicates (2003: 179-180):

> The computer revolution has already occurred. Most research already takes place in front of the computer screen. Linked, hypertextual multimedia representations of music not only further thicken the descriptive stew but also, at their best, they offer the computer user the opportunity to enter the virtual world of the ethnographer.

CMC, Jones argues, "is at once technology, medium, and engine of social relations. It not only structures social relations, it is the space within which the relations occur and the tool that individuals use to enter that space" (1995: 16). As Hakken asserts: "on-line activities constitute a sufficient social analogy to the field site, that this is a 'where' which, while 'nowhere' in the geographic sense, can safely be presumed to be sufficiently 'where-like' in some relevant cultural sense" (1999: 58). While there is, as Gertrude Stein famously said of Oakland, "no there there", this 'where-likeness' and its import will be demonstrated in detail. The placeless space that 'there' is online, is a set of shared symbolic practices, it is a "socially produced space" (Jones 1995: 17). Featherstone and Burrows point out that "contemporary social life still tends to operate with an implicit physiognomic notion that the face and the body are the only 'true' sources which can reveal the character of a person" (2000: 5). *Foregrounding* computer-mediated space highlights the role of discourse in the social construction of space conventionally thought of as 'real', and the mediated personæ participating in CMC shed dramatic light on the presentation of 'real' selves.

The contemporary ethnographer, Marcus suggests, "must make method out of a rhetoric of circumstance" (2002: 4). What we find as a general problem in ethnography has a specific instantiation within the study of music-technology interaction. In reference to ethnomusicological fieldwork, Slobin writes: "I thought my mission was to locate, identify, and describe … local musics, and whenever I encountered musics of wider visibility, I was annoyed" (1993: 17-18). Such 'visibility' is, of course, rendered possible by technologies of recording, storage and transmission, alongside the existence of a globalised oligopolistic entertainment industry. Only recently has technology itself come to appear a relevant feature of ethnographic method with reference to *music*, warranting

reflexive scrutiny. At one time, recording technologies were taken as a simple good for ethnomusicological fieldworkers, "as a method of preservation, as a check on the fieldworker's objectivity, and as a source of material for comparative studies" (Shelemay 1991: 280). The increasing role of technology in the production and dissemination of music, though, implies that isolating and 'locating local musics' becomes increasingly problematic.

As with music, so with language: Sacks indicates that the discipline of conversation analysis is an artefact of recording technology: "conversation is something that we can get the actual happenings of on tape … at least what was on the tape had happened" (1984a: 25-26). This empiricism enables Herring's claim that "CMC is arguably the greatest boon to the study of language use since the invention of the portable tape recorder in the 1950s" (1996b: 155). The argument propounded in this text is that CMC is not only crucial to the *study* of social interaction, but to the development of *signifying practice itself.* CMC demonstrates and facilitates the global distribution of a youth-cultural idiom and related interactional forms; yet the *multi-modal* character of these forms is often elided by accounts of both CMC and youth culture. Although Hall (1996), Herring (1996b), Kendall (2002) and Mabry (1997), for instance, all discuss the often vituperative style of online interaction and its relation to masculinity, they do not, on the whole, explicitly engage with or analyse examples of this style. Similarly, whilst Gilroy (1997), Keller (2003), Rose (1994), and Walser (1993) all seek to address 'aggressive' performative modes and content in popular-musical cultures, they largely gloss over the constitutive roles of misogyny and homophobia within these cultures. Katz (2004), for example, presents an account of hip-hop DJ battles in which the central role of symbolic sexual and racial denigration is only obliquely (and rather coyly) addressed. This research differs, in its direct attempt to critically address these forms, and in the structure of this attempt, addressing them as both features of interaction and of musical style and structure.

Whilst this research originated in a theoretical interest in the rationalisation debate, ethnographic research design is emergent; methodology and focus develop simultaneously. I did not set out to analyse the computer-mediated discourse of bedroom producers; nor did I set out with an explicit methodological agenda. This strategic contingency is a consequence of what Strathern calls the "open-ended procedures" of ethnography, which "refer *both* to the manner in which observations are made *and* to the process of compiling a description. Far from truncating description," Strathern suggests, ethnography "has its own search engine in the form of a question: what connections are going to be useful? That is simply because one cannot always tell in advance; more strongly, it puts one in to the

situation of not necessarily wanting to tell in advance" (2000).[3] The initial approach is 'open'; it is through the course of the research that such 'connections' are established.

The core foci of this research: the amen breakbeat, *nigga*, and *gay/ghey*, are means of ordering the material or charting a path through it; they provide the 'connections' through which the field can be described, and emerged as such through the course of the analysis. Tracking them furnishes a structure through which the data, and thus the milieu, can be engaged with. This could no doubt have been done otherwise, but it so happened that these three constituents of meaning most obviously required explication when it came to analysing the data, and proved through this analysis to be fundamentally informative elements in exchange and interaction.

The orientation to interactional form taken here follows ethnomethodological precepts in its commitment to the study of "materials collected from *naturally occurring* occasions of everyday interaction" (Atkinson and Heritage 1984: 2). The analysis and interpretation which follows draws on methodological 'naturalism': "every effort is made to maintain a direct focus on the specifics of interaction which is naturally occurring and uncontaminated by interventions from the researcher" (Heritage 1987: 258). Once I had 'arrived', the approach taken to the field was, in Schwartz and Jacobs' term, "nonreactive" (1979: 75). As well as being grounded in commonly held epistemological assumptions about the 'independence' of the social world and the dangers of researcher 'contamination', a further benefit of nonreactivity is that it yields data warranting explanation in its own right. Rather than data being used to answer (and thereby close) questions, it is used to frame and inform them. A nonreactive approach is unobtrusive; the priority is interaction and exchange in the social environment, rather than the researcher's role in it. Although I came across some discourse I found objectionable, I do not see the researcher's role being, as Bell puts it, "to intervene in the lives of participants to enhance their well-being" (2001: 199).

'Virtual ethnography' is an emergent and expanding field (Bell 2001, Giesler 2006, Hine 2000, Strathern 2000), in which there is recurrent debate concerning how CMC relates to 'real life' ('RL'). One still contested aspect of this relation is the ethics of appropriate research, about which it is possible to formulate two contradictory positions: one asserting that interactions are public and *published*, and hence sources must be cited, the other suggesting they are *private*, and hence should be anonymised if they are to be quoted at all. Both of these perspectives assume that research is concerned with

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[3] All emphasis is in original unless otherwise stated.

communicative content (rather than style or form), and that it is consensual (that the interaction is presented in a manner those cited would support). The possibility of what Herring calls "legitimate critical research" is thereby occluded (1996a: 155).

The 'field site' of this research is 'public', and open to anyone with access to an internet connection (the platform which yielded the data is downloadable at http://www.slsknet.org/download.html). I have obscured neither the location of the interaction, nor the usernames of the participants to that interaction.[4] The reasons for these decisions are simple. Firstly, the platform plays a constitutive role in contemporary music production, coming up repeatedly in musicians' interaction online and off (this is how it came to my attention in the first place).

For example, in the most viewed article on the Ragga-Jungle.com website, jungle producer Tester suggests that "people need to realize that you simply can't cut a few

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[4] Soulseek, and breakcore online in general, can be characterised as *immersive environments*, in which one gradually attains degrees of 'competence'. Only through close attention over an extended period of time does it become evident which interactants and producers are considered locally significant, and this is of course an ongoing, dynamic process. The analysis that follows is *ex post facto*, and imposes an interpretive structure on interactional data from which, for the most part, I was not an active, 'real-time' participant, but a 'lurker'. In many cases, the significance of cited data only emerged quite some time after that interaction took place. This is partly a consequence of my capitalising on the off-peak, dial-up access available to me when the fieldwork was carried out (6pm-9am weekdays, and full weekends). This access served also to constrain or channel participation in certain ways. Most notably, it was difficult for me to upload music to those with broadband access, with the implication that I could not participate equally as an amateur producer (it simply took too long for others to conveniently download my own productions from me. On more than one occasion, a novice producer was startled to discover I had a download *queue*, and could not simply download and listen to their productions immediately). Presumably, given that this access was temporally constrained, it also impacted upon who would be present in interaction (those in certain time-zones could expect to be more active during those times). Universal informed consent in a chatroom environment is a difficult ideal to operationalise, particularly where (1) there is a relatively high turnover of interactants, (2) data is logged while the researcher is absent, and (3) relevant data only come to appear so after a significant lapse of time. All participants with whom I came into personal contact were informed of the research and the logging of interaction, which participants themselves routinely do. There is a 'back story' to this preliminary research, here omitted, which included interaction with semi-amateur and bedroom producers and DJs in Dublin, and collaborative attempts to come to grips with music production software. Email dialogue was initiated with a number of exponents of the genre, including Bong-Ra, DJ /rupture (both of whom I first heard on the John Peel show on BBC Radio 1), and Donna Summer/Jason Forrest. A commercial or 'pirate' acapella distributor, Loopfish, was also contacted. My initial approach, then, was to foster dialogue with individual participants and users, but over time I became more interested in 'independent' chatroom dialogue. Insights generated through email dialogue, in response to a self-identified researcher, revealed little of the contest and collaboration evident in chatroom dialogue.

acetates with an amen overtop an acapella you stole off Soulseek and be ready to 'clash' the next night" (Pepperell 2004). This is an argument about professionalism in music, denigrating as 'amateur' a certain type of production. According to Tester's argument, jungle has moved 'beyond' this; those who 'steal off Soulseek' can no longer legitimately *compete*. The argument is notable, as the site of this research is rendered synonymous with a type of production Tester wishes to distance jungle 'clashing' from. The importance of Soulseek precludes the possibility of obscuring it; it is probably *the* dominant file-sharing application in use amongst contemporary electronic music producers. The 'where-likeness' of the locale is such as to render it a place which intersects with 'real' places in a highly dramatic and contested way, which I do not wish to downplay.

Secondly, following Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, and Rosenbaum-Tamari, I have retained the usernames of participants (1997):

> On many grounds there is no apparent need for researchers to disguise the identity of participants any more than participants have done so themselves ... we are actually in the same position as the players themselves, who must develop their own interpretations of the textual mask presented by any given player.

Usernames *refer* to personæ in such a rich manner that further masking these 'masks' would obscure their role in the subcultural landscape in a manner both untenable and unnecessary. Usernames are also often the names of musicians, where these are in circulation 'beyond' the platform (on commercial and netlabel releases, in live performance and so on). To alter usernames would therefore be to 'interfere' with the data in its public referentiality.

To treat this data as public is to advocate and practice free and open information exchange, and to demonstrate how CMC explodes conventional distinctions between public and private, political and personal, and so on. The position propounded here is not one where 'legitimate critical research' is 'above' the dialogue so researched, such that this 'legitimacy' immunises the research from the problematics of the interaction itself, but rather one which acknowledges that diverse publics and contexts for dialogue exist. The existence of a public domain for the sorts of interaction analysed here effectively guarantees the existence of a further domain where this interaction can itself be discussed. The often confrontational nature of the dialogue serves to render unreasonable 'strong' ethical positions which foreclose the possibility of critical analysis: given that the dialogue so often involves ritual contest, whilst simultaneously being public and free from censorship, censoring the analysis of that dialogue appears disingenuous. To make this

argument is to acknowledge that there is no monistic, unitary public space, instead there are many discrete contexts for dialogue, often marked not so much by civility and sensitivity but by conflict, dissensus and dispute.

1.3 'Bedroom producers'

The designator 'bedroom producer', in common parlance, refers to an ideal-typical individual, making music in (it is usually taken to be) *his* bedroom: "IDM is a community heavily composed to [sic] young guys who have internet connections in their bedrooms--totally scary in other words" ('DJ /rupture', via email, February 20, 2003). The bedroom producer "has the know-how, the technology, and the will to create music via computer programs and sampling within the confines of his or her own room" (Ayers 2006: 133). The term has a number of immediate descriptive consequences: as Grajeda points out, "the bedroom – our trusted guarantee for reproduction – has become instead (or perhaps once again) a site of cultural production, inverting as well the gendered coding of consumption and mass culture as 'merely' feminine" (2002: 365).

The term conjures up the bedroom of the teenage boy in the family home, a 'backstage' place, loaded with meaning as a specific masculine domain. This bedroom is the *networked* version of that space nostalgically evoked by Frith: "not a place of sexual activity but a site of consumption, the place for listening to records and the John Peel show, for filing back numbers of *The Face* and the *New Musical Express*, for dressing up and posing, for practicing the guitar and messing around with a tape-deck" (1992a: 181). As we shall see, these activities are, for the bedroom producer, supplanted by computer-mediated equivalents. The internet is "integral to teenage boys' bedroom culture" (Lincoln 2005: 410).

It will be noted, also, that 'producer' has rather distant and anonymous qualities: one does not generally speak of 'bedroom musicians' or 'bedroom composers' (though there is an antecedent musical form in another part of the house: the *garage* band). This is perhaps a consequence of the idiosyncrasies of electronic composition; a piece of music 'made' in the software 'virtual' studio is generally said to be 'produced', not 'arranged' and certainly not 'composed'. 'Producer', however, also refers in the discourse of professional musicianship, where a record is 'produced', perhaps by such an *auteur* as Phil Spector. Toynbee suggests that the use of the term demonstrates that, with electronic music, "the distinction between musicianship and technicianship has almost disappeared

... the bedroom has become a metonym for a new cultural politics of access and empowerment" (2000: 94-95).

The bedroom producer is not to be confused with a related ideal (stereo)type: the 'bedroom DJ'. The latter, of course, is first and foremost interested in mixing music 'produced' by others. However, there are overlaps worth emphasising; consider the following Mixmeister Studio advertisement (2004):

> DJ Ed Hornsey is a dance music enthusiast who spends most evenings creating DJ mixes at home. But the popular term "bedroom DJ" doesn't apply to him, he says.
> "Bedroom DJ implies that I'm a wannabe, that I'm somehow less than competent. But the mixes I create are as good or better than what you can buy in the shops," says Ed.
> Hornsey is one of a growing class of music buffs who take their music mixing very seriously. Known as 'mix producers', they have a passion for creating commercial-quality music mixes, in a wide range of genres. But while bedroom DJs are typically practicing in the hope of landing a live performance gig one day, mix producers prefer the delight of completing a studio project to the thrill of being in front of an audience.

This contrast class of bedroom DJs furnishes the following insight about 'bedroom' and 'producer': combining the two terms generates a contradiction. 'Bedroom' is amateurish, incompetent, gauche, homemade; 'producer' is masterful, accomplished, objective. An association is 'implied' between 'bedroom' and 'less than competent wannabe', and drawn in commodified terms (Buy the appropriate software and become "commercial-quality"). There is also an ambiguity about getting 'out' of the bedroom: the "wannabe" bedroom DJ "typically" does; his otherwise indistinguishable counterpart the 'mix *producer*' does *not*. This is what we might call the 'privatism' both the bedroom DJ and the bedroom producer are understood to participate in: "the delight of completing a studio project" is preferred to "the thrill of being in front of an audience". That is, the "delight" of staying in, alone, in front of one's computer, is superior to the potential awkwardness of "being in front of an audience", thrilling though that might be. The seemingly innocuous phrase, 'bedroom producer', is thus a contested site in a struggle for musical legitimacy and credibility. The term indicates the disparaged status of 'amateur' musical practice (particularly in computer production, which is not yet respectably 'naturalised' as, for instance, guitar or piano playing for pleasure is), associated with the influence of ideas of music as a profession and an industry.

It is telling that bedroom producers continue to be referred to as such, rather than, for instance, 'online musicians' or some other appellation. The 'loadedness' of the term is not the only thing which makes it *wrong*: the bedroom is not, strictly speaking, the site of

the bedroom producer's musical and social activity (it is, rather, an imagined location where the 'wetware' body sits, functioning discursively to diminish production and that which is so produced). Bedroom producers themselves tend to shorten the appellation to 'producer'. Similarly, guitar enthusiasts do not denigrate what they do with 'amateur' or some other qualifier. Neither are they uniformly referred to with such a qualifier (everyone has to start somewhere). The 'virtual' studio need not be in the bedroom, but until 'bedroom' is dropped, the producer is condemned to 'wannabe' status.

Thus, 'bedroom producers in p2p chatrooms' refers to those navigating a trajectory through these tensions. Music serves as a "pathway out of the private sphere of the bedroom and into the public sphere" (Lincoln 2005: 409). According to this line, given that the bedroom producer is already at the computer, the most immediate way of getting 'out' and finding likeminded individuals is by going online, to where others are discussing, exchanging and 'producing' music: p2p. Although the appellation has significant purchase, in its privatist and negatively-valued connotations of 'wannabe' amateurishness and 'nerddom', it is a misnomer where it is taken as referring to actual bedrooms (it is *here* that there is 'no there there'): the trajectory is bi-directional, and it is equally valid to assert that 'producerness' enters the bedroom from the network as that the producer enters the network from the bedroom. The 'bedroom' is predicated on and materialised by the network, it is only through CMC that the 'bedroom' exists.

1.4 The rationalisation/democratisation debate 1: rationalisation

Simply stated, the rationalisation hypothesis suggests that technology serves to 'rationalise' music – and that this is, or has become, 'a bad thing'. 'Technology' is here defined in the broadest anthropological sense: a drum, for instance, is an audio technology. In producer Trevor Horn's example: "technology has affected the music since people built cathedrals" (Warner 2003: p. 143). Music has always been dependent on technology, and the latter has always informed concepts of what constitutes the former, in terms of what music 'should' sound like, and of what sounds it is pragmatically possible to produce. This history, though, is generally 'invisiblised' and the musical status quo naturalised (Durant 1990: 178-9). Technological development is contingent: the sense of inevitability is retroactively installed (for instance, the history of the gramophone, or indeed that of the internal combustion engine).

The rationalisation hypothesis finds classical expression in Weber's *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (1958), which presents an historical account of such processes as the formation of the artisanal guilds which ultimately standardised musical instrumentation.[5] Weber's principal focus was the rationalisation of the 'irrational' seventh chord: the problem of the 'Pythagorean comma', a consequence of the tension between harmony (logic) and melody (emotion), between the rational and expressive in music. This tension is the basis of Western 'art' music. Weber hypothesised that the Pythagorean comma signified the limits of rationality: further rationalisation of the harmonic scale, Weber suggested, would be at the cost of aesthetic, affective flexibility. Thus, in Weber's work, the technology of notation (necessitated by the medieval trend towards polyvocality) is part of a rationalisation cascade for music.[6] Rationalisation implies that "a universal notational system and precise measurement of tonal and rhythmic differences comes to define what music *is*" (Goodwin 1992: 76). Technology instantiates, but also limits, what constitutes 'music' itself. Weber's implicit interest, of course, given the subtext of the rationalisation master narrative, is the point at which this constitution becomes an 'irrational' imposition: "In his study of music Weber showed how increasing harmonic rationalisation in western art music had tended to rigidify tonal intervals (by eliminating microtones, melodic inflection of pitches, etc.)" (Théberge 1989: 107). Rationalising technologies are simultaneously enabling and constraining, the suggestion, however, is that as they sediment or become 'naturalised', their impact serves to limit human expression. Weber himself fears that the rationalisation of social organisation at large leads us into the notorious 'iron cage': "a polar night of icy darkness and hardness" (Weber 1991: 128).

Contemporary advocates of the rationalisation hypothesis still find much cause for concern in music technology. Théberge, for instance, continues: "The rationalisation of temporal relations between musicians through technology and technological practices such as overdubbing can have a similar rigidifying effect: not so much on the musical materials themselves as on the dynamics of musical performance, that is, on music-making in its temporal domain" (1989: 107). Théberge argues here that such taken-for-granted aspects of the commercial music-making process as multitrack recording have profound 'dehumanising' effects: "by breaking the essentially time-bound character of group performance, overdubbing tends to emphasize the individual contribution over that of the

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[5] Attali likewise furnishes a description of musical professionalisation from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, as the 'jongleur' became the 'minstrel' (1985: 14-18).

[6] Analogous to that of writing (alphabetical supplanting pictographic) for literature, or symbolisation (Arabic supplanting Roman numerals) for mathematics.

collective. It creates a 'simulation' of collective activity and thus interrupts what Habermas might refer to as 'communicative action' by substituting in its place a 'work' discipline. Group performance itself undergoes a process of rationalisation and this process is encouraged by the commercial context of production" (*ibid.*: 105). Such arguments contain moral, aesthetic and economic elements, though these are often fused (technology as taking the 'soul' out of music, but also leading to the underemployment of musicians, with a subsequent deterioration in musical quality).

Such arguments are 'homological', implying that the structure of music production (and with varying degrees of explicitness, the structure of music) *reflects* the structure of society: "the concept of *rationalisation* is deployed to demonstrate a correspondence between capitalist societies and Western 'classical' music" (Goodwin 1992: 76). The homology is a structural connection between material and cultural form (Frith 1996: 269-270). As Tagg puts it, "musical structuring can also be read as social structuring" (1994: 217). We are encouraged "to view music as a manifestation of the social, and the social, likewise, a manifestation of music" (DeNora 2003: 151). Music, as social practice, "*embodies assumptions*" about social power and structure (Rose 1994: 70). To paraphrase Marx: people make their own music, but not under circumstances of their own choosing. The Weberian anxiety is that rationalisation renders these circumstances increasingly cramped. In its stronger forms, the homological argument suggests that "music is illustrative of the evolution of our entire society: deritualize a social form, repress an activity of the body, specialize its practice, sell it as a spectacle, generalize its consumption, then see to it that it is stockpiled until it loses its meaning" (Attali 1985: 5).

For Goodwin, the rationalisation consequent on the "new machines" is threefold: "harmonic rationalisation, temporal rationalisation, and timbral conformity" (1992: 83). By harmonic rationalisation, Goodwin means the tonal standardisation of modern synthesisers, which, he argues, restricts tonal scope. Music is temporally rationalised by the drum machine, which programs an exact and specific number of beats per minute (bpm). An example of how this concern is actually built into music software is furnished by the 'randomise' (sometimes even labelled 'humanise') feature on drum machines, which introduces fractional irregularity in an attempt to replicate the idiosyncratic timing of a human drummer. Finally, Goodwin suggests that the presetting of synthesisers and samplers leads to timbral conformity: "Influences are thus no longer digested, they are merely appropriated" (1992: 84).

These perspectives suggest that technology functions to restrict musical expressivity. The market is usually inferentially culpable for this, with varying degrees of

guilt according to the account offered. Through technology, the music-making process is insidiously standardised, and the music produced homogenised into lowest-common-denominator banality. There is a direct echo here of Adorno's suggestion that 'jazz' and 'light music' function ideologically to restrict the possibility of radical expression; as music is increasingly rendered mere commodity and the market interjects itself ever more completely, we become alienated from the position of producers into that of passive consumers (in music, but not only in music): "Music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption like everything else, recuperators of subversion, or meaningless noise … The monologue of standardized, stereotyped music accompanies and hems in a daily life in which in reality no one has the right to speak any more" (Attali 1985: 8).

It is a cultural-pessimist commonplace that music is deteriorating as a result of market pressure and the consequent impact of technology, leading to Adorno's 'pseudo-individualisation' of product and the contemporary "hyper-real inauthenticity" of content (Grossberg 1998). Any possibility that music could enrich life or foster critical thought is depicted as being eradicated: music becomes literally inhuman: a "flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus … The performance sounds like its own phonograph record" (Adorno 1991: 39). This is the emotive centre of the rationalisation hypothesis: music as an ominous, vacuous, brain-numbing, formulaic Muzak, instilling conformist conservatism, and technology as directly implicated in this. Technology is thus a 'handmaiden' to rationalisation, and (according to a 'strong' reading), what is happening to music foreshadows what is happening to social life itself: a process of universal rationalisation, evacuating meaning and humanity from the world.

1.5 The rationalisation/democratisation debate 2: democratisation

The rather more optimistic perspective is that of democratisation, where technological development both opens up forms of expression to social groups normally excluded from musical participation, and generates stylistic innovation and diversity in those forms. The utopian strain of this argument depicts the technological production of music as subversion from within, using and problematising "the very instruments of domination necessary for the creation of the new global economy – its consumer goods, technologies and images", and this as "a model for contemporary global politics" (Lipsitz

1994: 34). Durant productively disambiguates this use of 'democracy' as follows (1990: 193):

> (i) Democracy as consequent on the (by some standards) inexpensive nature of the technology.
>
> (ii) Democracy as consequent on artistic input into the design process of the technology.
>
> (iii) Democracy as consequent on the accessibility and ease with which the technology can be mastered.

If the argument rested on (i), Durant suggests, it would not be a very broad democracy; musicians are consumers of technology and hence dependent on the (profit-driven) manufacturers.[7] The response to this counter-argument is (ii), which elides the fact that "the value of any technology relies on opportunities for its use as well as on its own specifications, and that in the case of music such use requires an infrastructure both of performance conditions and of necessary operating skills" (Durant 1990: 194). Much music production software is not immediately accessible to the novice. This brings us to (iii), suggesting that the simplicity of the technology will 'horizontalise' the relationship between professional and amateur. This too, though, is perspectival: a bedroom producer's democratisation might, conceivably, threaten a well-trained but poorly paid musician's employment. Durant's point is that no 'pure' ethical import can be granted to technological innovation (*ibid.*: 194). Furthermore, according to Durant, the democratisation argument has unspoken ideological underpinnings: the model of 'democracy' employed is "about stimulating a high-volume, low unit-cost domestic instrument market, based on youth cultural aspirations to pop stardom" (*ibid.*: 194-195); one could also argue that it effectively outsources musical production (and risk) away from the industry.

Rationalisation and democratisation, as set forth in the arguments of Durant, Goodwin and Théberge, are implicit in everyday thinking about technology and music. Any position on music technology or its innovative use is also a position on whether that technology is, or could be, rationalising or democratising. These analytical frameworks are constitutive of how we conceptualise musical development: the history of musical aesthetics and technique can be written as a process of democratisation or rationalisation. In Attali's argument (let alone Weber's or Adorno's), music is "at the heart of the

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[7] 'Cracked' or 'pirated' music software can be downloaded for nothing (and generally is by the bedroom producer). Dave Smith, inventor of the MIDI protocol, estimates that 80-90% of all music software in use is so pirated (Mackintosh 2003). However, this is a distinct issue.

progressive rationalisation of aesthetics, and it is a refuge for residual irrationality" (1985: 6). The debate is vital, given that it inflects our conceptions of what is happening to music and what we *want* to happen to music.

The following example illustrates this: the premier issue of an American hip-hop magazine called *Scratch* (2004) contains a diagrammatic notation for 'turntablist' vinyl scratching (Carluccio, Imboden and Pirtle 2004: 121-126). It is called the 'turntablist transcription methodology', or TTM. The companion website, www.ttmethod.com, informs us that:

> TTM is an organization dedicated to the advancement of the turntable as a musical instrument, and of the turntablist as a musician. The primary focus of TTM's efforts is the creation and evolution of a system of written notation to accurately document a turntablist composition in all of its subtlety and nuance.

The TTM (and the development of turntablism as a cultural form) demonstrates the *naturalisation* of a specific musical technology: "by using a mechanical contrivance, a violinist or an organist can express something poignantly human that cannot be expressed without the mechanical contrivance. To achieve such expression of course the violinist or organist has to have interiorized the technology, made the tool or machine a second nature, a psychological part of himself or herself" (Ong 2002: 82). Such a notation has profound implications: its existence can be used to lobby for the educational institutionalisation of the turntable as a musical instrument, as those who have devised the TTM are no doubt well aware. As Thornton argues (1995: 29):

> The ultimate end of a technology's enculturation is authentication. In other words, a musical form is authentic when it is rendered essential to subculture or integral to community. Equally, technologies are naturalized by enculturation. At first, new technologies seem foreign, artificial, inauthentic. Once absorbed into culture, they seem indigenous and organic.

The existence of the TTM could be taken as direct evidence of the accelerated evolution of the turntable as an instrument entitled, so to speak, to all the 'rights' of a traditional instrument. In one way, the TTM indicates rationalisation in action (the ad-hoc 'science' of turntablism is formalised in a notated form, in a mass-circulation hip-hop magazine). However, we could conceptualise the TTM as a profoundly democratic development for budding turntablists, enabling a mediated apprenticeship (the 'masters' of the form teach 'Scratch' readers new techniques in each edition).

1.6 Cryptonormative subtexts to the debate

Rationalisation and democratisation are *constructs*. Nevertheless, "knowing that a phenomenon is a cultural construct does not diminish the reality of its existence. This is a basic sociological truth" (Regev: 2002: 253). We might reasonably suspect, though, that one or the other refers to reality with a greater degree of *fit*. However, it might be that neither perspective has sufficient purchase, or indeed that *both* do, depending on how the terms are defined. We might, for instance, conflate both perspectives by saying that rationalisation contains elements of the 'democracy' Tocqueville predicted: a banal, mediocre 'tyranny of the majority', in which everyone can have a radio station (Podcast), and nobody listens to any of them because they are all the same. As Jameson puts it: "the music of today stands both as a promise of a new, liberating mode of production, and as the menace of a dystopian possibility which is that mode of production's baleful mirror image" (1985: xi). Democratisation would appear then to have finite limits (though it is possible to define the term more expansively). There are problems also with the rationalisation hypothesis: whilst connoisseurs might follow Adorno in extrapolating it from 'pop', there is something problematic in describing the sheer eclecticism of the musical activity we find around us as rationalised. If anything, music is presumably getting more, rather than less, diverse, and this is hard to square with what Middleton calls the "Ur-pop song in Adorno's mind" (1990: 54).

Frith suggests that arguments decrying the rationalisation of music depict this process as analogous to alienation: "Something human is taken from us and returned in the form of a commodity" (1992b: 50). The problem with such arguments is that they posit rationalisation as something 'done' to music, when music is itself always-already embedded in complex technological processes: "it was technological developments that made our present understanding of musical 'authenticity' possible" (*ibid.*: 69). This is not to be technologically determinist: "technological developments take on their particular character only in specific instantiations within prevailing, but also changing, social relations and contexts" (Durant 1990: 180). Technology is interactional: one cannot predict how an emergent technology will evolve. Moreover, technological developments have *unintended consequences*: the story is not simply one of capitalist rationalisation and consolidation, but of cycles of disruption and stability.

Rationalisation, then, could be said to be both a 'push' and a 'pull' process; technology is not anterior to society, it is an aspect of it. Consumers can disrupt industry power through such practices as 'home taping' and p2p, effectively (though perhaps momentarily) supplanting established distribution networks, but this 'bottom-up' disruption could have the unforeseen long-term effect of consolidating technological rationalisation. When considering the impact of technology on music, one is obliged to take a position (for instance on copyright), reflecting *one's own* cultural perspective, weighing up, as Durant says, the relative merits "between the new and expanding fields of activity stimulated by the technology (including new and possibly unforeseen capabilities), and the challenge to economic, legal and labour rights which exist in current ways of doing things" (1990: 180). It is not just the ongoing interaction between music and technology which requires assessment; attention must also be paid to the theoretical and methodological terms through which that assessment is made. The latest round of technological compression is unlikely to result exclusively in a non-differentiable musical wasteland; neither does it necessarily herald a democratising revolution of 'new' sounds. An inflexible position within either camp is unlikely to account effectively for the complexity of the situation.

Aside from these concerns, there are a number of other means through which the binary might be constructively problematised specific to a foregrounding of what occurs in the following chapters. Goodwin, Durant and Théberge all restrict their arguments to the field of music *production*. Obviously, though, technology also impacts upon distribution and consumption. Indeed, it is more common to find democratisation arguments endorsing the disruption of established distribution channels by consumers. An implication is that democratisation is defined as expansion of the right to *consume*, with a corresponding definition of the citizen (only) as consumer - this is what makes p2p a civil liberties issue: we are used to thinking of our rights as consumer rights. Frith and Savage contextualise this in bald political terms: "Margaret Thatcher translated social relations into market relations, and John Major redefined the citizen as the consumer" (1998: 12). The right to download is (or isn't) a consumer right, but curtailing it involves an invasion of individual privacy, by the state or corporate powers, on a scale many commentators find discomfiting.

In practice, though, the categories of production, distribution and consumption tend to collapse into each other: "Consumption is part of a process that includes production and exchange, all three being distinct only as phases of the cyclical process of social reproduction, in which consumption is never terminal" (Gell 1986: 112-3). This is especially true in contemporary music, where there is often 'slide' between consumption

and production (the obvious example is the transformation of vinyl from end-product to raw material). As Gilbert and Pearson indicate, "Popular music forms and practices often make it difficult to maintain strict categories of production and consumption, with their connotations of activity and passivity" (1999: 111). Attributions of democratising or rationalising consequences are therefore informed by how practices (of consumption *etc.*) are defined, where the application of stringent economic criteria can have rigidifying effects, which are, moreover, further inflected by pre-conceptions of what is to constitute, for instance, democracy.

To be a producer of music increasingly involves consumption, searching for the sound that 'feels' right – the right drum sample and so on. 'Playing' a drum machine or sequencer is replaying it; the sound produced is being reproduced (Théberge 1993: 162). Much contemporary music making involves manipulation of sounds already familiar to the listener. This is obviously the case in 'sample-based' genres, but is also true of 'instrumental' music, in which any work is reliant, at least in part, on its generic likeness to previous works for its recognisability.

This difficulty of rendering rigid distinctions between the production and consumption of sound highlights a fundamental subtext of the debate: the status ascribed to the 'author'. As DeNora points out, the critique of contemporary musical practice inherent in the rationalisation hypothesis privileges a Romantic, individualistic conception of authorship: "What is missed by such a value system is an emphasis on socially shared and facilitated co-ordination, on collectively shared ways of doing – the value of conventions as enabling – not only as constraining" (2003: 135). The rationalisation/democratisation binary reproduces pre-existent ideas around elitism/populism, and, beyond this, structure/agency.[8] Hence, rationalisation can be conceived of as determinist: the consumer is a sort of 'cultural dope', and yet (from some perspectives, undue) respect is paid to the creativity of the individuals responsible for 'the canon'. Democratisation, in contrast, emphasises both the active agency of producers and consumers and the social (structural) features of cultural production. These points highlight the technophile utopianism associated with the democratisation hypothesis on one hand, and the association between rationalisation and cultural pessimism on the other. For a persuasive undertow to cultural pessimism is technological determinism, which parallels the 'vulgar' Marxist suggestion

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[8] The dichotomy also reproduces Cartesian mind/body dualism. In a telling metaphor, those who dance to the 'jazz' so abhorred by Adorno "call themselves jitterbugs, as if they simultaneously wanted to affirm and mock their loss of individuality, their transformation into beetles whirring around in fascination" (1991: 46). Social dancing is rendered an activity engaged in by mindless insects.

that consumption is determined by production. Determination, however, is invariably overdetermination, for in itself, technology is 'inert' (Hine 2000: 4).

1.7 White (male) 'bedroom'; black (male) 'street'

There are further senses in which the subject or individual agent can be 'fleshed out' so as to illuminate the underpinnings of the debate. When we seek out the assumptions that subject is predicated upon, we find that 'he' is open to definition only within a delimited and well-defined set of historical stereotypes.

Thus Adorno provides us with the extraordinary figure of the 'radio ham'. This brilliant character "is shy and inhibited, perhaps has no luck with girls, and wants in any case to preserve his own special sphere" (1991: 47). Obsessed with the technology of music whilst utterly ignorant of music itself, the hapless radio ham has been duped into pseudo-activity: "It is irrelevant to him what he hears or even how he hears; he is only interested in the fact that he hears and succeeds in inserting himself, with his private equipment, into the public mechanism, without exerting even the slightest influence on it" (*ibid.*: 47). "To make oneself a jazz expert or hang over the radio all day," Adorno suggests, "one must have much free time and little freedom" (*ibid.*: 48). Adorno thus bluntly asserts that 'jazz expertise', whatever that might be, is (unlike Adorno's own expertise in the work of Webern or Schoenberg), an utterly 'regressive' trap. Radio hams, upon whom capitalist rationalisation wreaks its havoc, are in their pseudo-activity like flies in a spider web: they "want to extricate themselves from the mechanism of music reification to which they have been handed over," yet the only means available for them to do so are articulated precisely through the terms they cannot get beyond. Hence "their revolts against fetishism only entangle them more deeply in it" (*ibid.*: 46).

Interestingly, the knowledge cultivated by the radio ham, be it pop-cultural or technical, is equated with that of another subset of masculinity. The radio ham is "nearest to the sportsman: if not to the football player himself, then to the swaggering fellow who dominates the stands" (*ibid.*: 47). This description of the musically engaged subject is surprisingly stable. Writing nearly 60 years after Adorno, Straw describes record collections as, like sports results, "the raw materials around which the rituals of homosocial interaction take place" (1997: 5). An interest in music, and especially an interest in music technology, is taken to instantiate not only a certain personality type, but a mode of masculine being, historically *facilitated* by the technology itself, which enabled

the incursion into the traditionally feminine domain of music through masterful interaction with that 'male' device, the phonograph (Katz 2004: 58-61).

This personality-type through which concerns about music technology are elaborated is also implicitly inscribed within a marked body. According to Waksman (1998), technology is coded within a race/gender matrix as follows: a) black 'nature'/white technology, b) female 'nature'/male technology. The black male is constructed as primitive, earthy, potent, close to nature, pure, in short, body. Woman is coded as body too, but the connotations are somewhat different: woman is passive, quiet, submissive; black male is virile, primal, 'the noble savage'. Technology is a symbol of white rationality, 'mind' and alienation. With reference to the black male it is *emasculated*, an amplified sign of white physical weakness. But with reference to femininity technology is a symbol of the ascendance of masculine power over nature. This ambivalent coding of music technology is subtle, yet crucial, and informs general and specialist thinking about music. Indeed, it is a foundation upon which the 'racing' of musical genres is operationalised:

> Another example of the attempts to differentiate into existence 'street music' & 'bedroom music': both breakcore and grime are weird, oftentimes abrasive peripheral dance musics being made by a handful of in-the-know producers and released through tight DIY distribution networks. But critical consensus is quick to praise grime as raw/street/populist and breakcore as individualist/bedroom even when, in absolute terms, breakcore records are selling better, the genre is more widespread and grassroots and internationally-catchy than grime.

The two genres described here (DJ /rupture 2005a), grime and breakcore, are, as the passage suggests, constituted in binary terms, where grime – an offshoot of 'UK garage' – is 'street' and breakcore is 'bedroom'. 'Street', though, like 'urban', signifies 'black', whilst 'bedroom' is 'white'. Both genres are 'dance' musics, both are produced 'technologically', yet the imputed sites of production 'colour' the music. Pirate radio is said to be the distributive 'origin' of grime in the same way that the internet is construed as the 'home' of breakcore. As grime is authenticated by a geographical grounding in metropolitan Britain, the 'natural' medium for grime consumption is taken to be the cassette (specifically, cassette recordings of pirate radio), whilst for breakcore, effectively relegated to the 'bedroom' (though numerous geographical locations are available within

the genre's 'myths of origin'[9]) it is the mp3. This is not to posit some bizarre correlation between ethnicity and audio format, but to highlight the 'identitarian' sense in which preconceived imaginings of the subject feed into conceptions of what music is and how it should be understood. The technology of music, and aesthetic ideals concerning its use, are inextricably, though often covertly, bound up with class- (as with the imputed relationship between musical and sports knowledges as 'trivia'), racial- and gender-identity ideas. Thus, accounts describing the technologisation of music evoke a cardboard cutout figure, such as the radio ham, to press home ideological assumptions about whom this rationalisation or democratisation is done *to* or *for*.

[9] Notably, Bristol (UK), Ghent (Belgium), Hamburg (Germany), Milwaukee (Wisconsin, USA), Newcastle (New South Wales, Australia), Osaka (Japan), Rennes (France), Rotterdam (Holland), and Winnipeg (Manitoba, Canada).

2 – Points of Departure: bringing p2p activity into focus

> In dealing with conventional topics, it is usually practical to develop concepts and themes in some sort of logical sequence: nothing coming earlier depends on something coming later, and, hopefully, terms developed at any one point are actually used in what comes thereafter. Often the complaint of the writer is that linear presentation constrains what is actually a circular affair, ideally requiring simultaneous introduction of terms, and the complaint of the reader is that concepts elaborately defined are not much used beyond the point at which the fuss is made about their meaning ... The problem, in fact, is that once a term is introduced (this occurring at the point at which it is first needed), it begins to have too much bearing, not merely applying to what comes later, but reapplying in each chapter to what it has already applied to. Thus, each succeeding section of the study becomes more entangled, until a step can hardly be made because of what must be carried along with it.
>
> (Goffman 1974: 11)

2.1 'Darknet': the unfinished history of p2p.[1]

This chapter is divided into four segments, through which the approach to the 'field' continues. Following a description of the development of p2p, the file-sharing imperative is described, and then contextualised in terms of comparative anthropological economics. Systems of exchange have long been of interest to sociologists and anthropologists, and the fundamental norms of p2p interaction can be evaluated within a nonmonetary exchange system framework. The final section of this chapter emphasises the wide degree of cross-platform interactional variation within the larger p2p 'community'.

Erving Goffman is cited on linear presentation above to draw attention to the following point: this initial analysis constitutes the 'ground' over which the following chapters are 'figure'. The approach is 'rhizomic' – having described p2p in these terms, I will move to consider it from other angles. To develop a military analogy Goffman uses elsewhere, this is theoretical 'sniping' rather than 'suppressive fire'; the intention is to

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[1] The 'darknet' is a term coined by Microsoft researchers to describe networks devoted to illegal exchange of copyright material. From Microsoft's perspective, the paradox of the darknet is that increasing copyright security (which implies decreasing anonymity) actually disincentivises legal exchange (Boutin 2004). Shirky points out that the "membrane" required for real darknets – a firewall, limiting entry and rendering intranet activity invisible from outside – is actually a convention of corporate rather than p2p networks (2003).

keep 'refocusing the kaleidoscope', and thereby present a fluid description of dynamic social processes.[2]

To include a summary of the explosive and controversial spread of p2p, involving as it does the 'macro' machinations of such organisations as the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) and the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America), is to gesture at the outset towards the implications of the actions of the 'end users' of the technology, and to situate their activity within a legal and cultural framework beyond their control and often at odds with the form of sociality they practice. The story of p2p also serves as a powerful example of the unintended consequences of technological innovation, highlighting the speed at which conflict can emerge out of competing ideas concerning the 'fair use' not only of technology, but of 'culture' itself.

P2p is a form of decentralised, distributed networking, as opposed to hierarchical, 'client/server' networking, allowing computer users who have the appropriate software installed to download and upload files directly from and to other computers on the network, to perform searches, to 'instant message' each other, and to 'socialise' in chatrooms.[3] The software allows registered computers to establish connections, to 'talk' to each other and identify the files stored on those computers. As the designator 'peer-to-peer' suggests, the nodes in this model of exchange are 'equal'; relations are any/many rather than one/many. Users of p2p may request and transmit files and folders to each other, reproducing those files and folders across the network. In Vaidhyanathan's elegant formulation, p2p 'resolves' the "request from an anonymous seeker with a supply from an anonymous donor" (2004: 16), it provides the ground for the exchange of the *gift*. The

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[2] Goffman claims to be 'sniping' from a different position in each chapter of *Relations in Public* (1971: 1), rather than laying down a 'barrage'. A less militaristic analogy could be drawn from photography or photomontage.

[3] It is worth making a few preliminary comments about the distributive aspects of p2p chatrooms at this early stage: room occupancy is *not* solely for the purposes of discursive interaction. When it is suggested that chatrooms are entered in the search for 'likeminded individuals', this does not mean that said individuals necessarily intend to verbally *communicate*. It so happens that general searches for 'specialist' material often yield disappointing results: this is known as the "search horizon" (Shirky 2003). In searching for (say) a certain breakcore release, a search within the occupant list of the Breakcore room is liable to produce results where a general search might produce none. Fans of niche genres therefore cluster in rooms specific to those genres; each room is a genre-specific distributional archive, collectively and 'voluntarily' maintained. Some of these users may interact online for 6 or more hours a day, others simply leave the computer running, returning periodically to check their download queue. The latter 'inactivity' is referred to as "idling" (Marvin 1995).

'pure' p2p ideal is a wholly devolved system, independent of any central server, where all functions are performed by nodes on the network, that is, by individual users.

Such a decentralised architecture furnishes protection against hostile attacks (technological or legal) unavailable to centralised systems, because only individual nodes can be targeted. Thus p2p represents a neat instantiation of the original grand network-computing idea formulated by ARPANET: of a nodal system which does not break down when individual nodes crash (where that crash was originally envisioned as consequent on nuclear attack); a chain that is *not* only as strong as its weakest link. This is one of the reasons why the RIAA had to legally pursue individual users rather than simply shutting down p2p servers – it is the individual users, rather the servers, who are now in violation of copyright. Where Napster search facilities went through a central index, the following generation of p2p platforms merely facilitate sourcing the location of and exchanging information, in much the same way as a search engine. Searches are decentralised and conducted through the nodes of the network, such that there is no centrally maintained 'list' of the files available (Shirky 2003). Those files are, of course, music, generally (but not exclusively) in mp3 format.

Mp3 is an abbreviation of 'Motion Picture Experts Group 1 or 2, Audio Layer 3': the mp3 was originally devised as a 'layer' in a digital video file. The mp3 highlights the uneasy relations between "audio formats, entrepreneurial capital and consumer interests, on the one hand, and the marketing and distribution structures of the record industry, on the other" (Théberge 2001: 20). The mp3's predecessor for the digital storage and transmission of audio was the prohibitively large, CD-standard AIFF format. Mp3 compresses AIFF audio data by a factor of ~ 12. It became the "de facto music distribution standard during 1997, reaching 1 billion internet downloads per month in 2000" (Kretschmer, Klimis and Wallis 2001: 419). However, the compactness, availability and user-friendliness of mp3 were by themselves insufficient to render ubiquitous music downloads viable. As Woodworth points out, it took "a confluence of economic, technological, political, and social factors" to render widespread exchange and distribution of music online a reality; this confluence resulted in p2p, initially in the archetypal shape of Napster (2004: 162). Over the last 7 years, the Napster idea has evolved into the current constellation of p2p platforms: approximately 137 applications, utilising 17 distinct protocols.

The first, and still best known p2p application, Napster was released in 1999 and ran as a free service until 2001, when it was shut by court injunction. Within seven months of launching, the RIAA had filed suit against Napster (Garofalo 2004: 95). At its height, it

was reputed to have "as many as one billion music files" available for download (Rojek 2005: 358). When Napster was ordered offline a host of other services immediately stepped forward to vie for its support base. As Kahn and Kellner put it: "despite Napster's fall, many continued to believe that the idea of the P2P network signalled a form of cultural revolution and a number of new P2P communities arose within the Internet space previously dominated by Napster" (2003: 302). Thus, in the first week of January 2002, the Morpheus application was downloaded 1.5 million times, whilst KaZaA was downloaded a million times (Garofalo 2004: 100). By May of 2003, KaZaA was being downloaded an average 12 million times a month (Rojek 2005: 359).

Effectively, p2p devolves responsibility and control onto the users themselves, bypassing both the technological and legal limits of centralised distribution. Firstly, one-to-one connections between users and file duplication across the network eliminate 'server fatigue', the tendency for central servers to crash when subject to multiple requests for the same file. Secondly, with regard to the law, "the time-consuming process of seeking permission from copyright holders on a song-by-song basis was avoided by having users post songs themselves and, more importantly, holding users responsible for adhering to copyright law" (Woodworth 2004: 163). A significant factor in the success of the free services is that content is unrestricted: subscription services are bound by the catalogues of their copyright proprietors.

The combination of these two features (alongside the increasing availability of broadband) makes it clear why p2p became such a source of concern for the recording industry oligopoly, who account for some 80% of music sales globally. This, combined with their evident disinterest in the distribution potential of what Bill Gates calls "frictionless capitalism" (Kretschmer et al. 2001: 420), and the negative publicity attending to their lawsuits (which in one instance targeted a 12 year old) contributes to the ease with which the recording industry has been characterised as the 'bad guys'.[4]

In turn, p2p can be simplistically depicted as radically democratising: consumers may now exchange products with each other directly and for free, cutting out the industry providers – and copyright holders – altogether. For this reason Kahn and Kellner call p2p a "movement … that publicized the utopian potential of the Internet as subcultural community and bearer of a gift economy" (2003: 302). Users themselves constantly update an unrestricted catalogue of content, which is easily accessible because decentralised. The implication, as Garofalo suggests, is that "music-as-content" has effectively come to

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[4] In another famous case, a *dead* 83-year-old grandmother was prosecuted (Farrell 2006).

replace "music-as-product" (2004: 89). Some commentators even speculated that online music delivery would 'dis-intermediate' the established music market altogether by *dematerialising* its product (Jones 2000, 2002; Janson and Mansell 1998; Hawkins, Mansell and Steinmueller 1998). As Moore suggests: "Simply put, digital distribution removes inventory altogether" (2000: 105).

The recording industry was, notoriously, defensive of its monopoly; as one industry insider put it: "we are going to strangle this baby at birth" (Kretschmer et al. 2001: 426). Having never been proactive about online distribution, the recording industry mobilised against p2p with a fourfold strategy:

1. Successfully lobbying for an extension of intellectual property rights, and a corresponding restriction of the definition of 'fair use', such that the copyright holder's control is extended into after-sale, noncommercial use.
2. Litigating against p2p platforms and users in a strategy dubbed "fear and awe" (Parker 2003).[5]
3. Developing technological restrictions to digital reproduction (digital rights management or 'DRM').
4. Mounting a PR campaign against the 'epidemic' of 'piracy' which, as Seagram (Universal's parent company) CEO Edgar Bronfman put it, is threatening our "principles of law, justice and civilization" (Kretschmer et al. 2001: 434).

This latter, somewhat counterintuitive course of action was guaranteed to alienate the industry's core constituency; the consequence of this moralistic crusade was the loss of "the good will of the most dedicated segment of the record-buying public" (Garofalo 2004: 97). The demonising rhetoric of the campaign conflated the language of moral degeneracy ('thieving' and 'piracy') with that of (sexual) hygiene; p2p was depicted as a 'viral' disease, leading to rampant, uncontrolled reproduction of illegitimate files, which are, moreover, rife with contagious computer viruses (Woodworth 2004: 179-80).

Worst of all, from the perspective of fans, was "the Annihilation Hypothesis", the threat that p2p would 'kill' music – rather, that it would 'kill' the *music industry* (Katz 2004: 180). The RIAA argued that p2p use was directly implicated in falling CD sales (Caney 2002). However, even by the RIAA's own figures, whether this was, in fact, the case, remained unclear. During the post 9/11 period, sales of leisure goods fell, and the price of CDs increased. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the turn to p2p took place at a time of profound industry consolidation, with a corresponding downsizing

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[5] The coinage describing the automated mass issuing of cease-and-desists is 'spamigation'.

that significantly diminished mass-market variety of content. According to Garofalo, "In the merger that created Universal, for example, the artist roster at affiliated label A&M was cut from 90 to eight. The net effect for fans was fewer artists, fewer new releases, and a narrower range of musical offerings" (2004: 89).

Research suggests that the effect of file-sharing on CD sales is "statistically indistinguishable from zero" (Oberholzer and Strumpf 2004: 4). As Negus says of the agendas of the 'mainstream' music industry: "Despite often being presented as a fairly 'liberal' business, populated by personnel who are 'in touch with the street', these agendas were in no way a 'reflection' of the diversity of music being played and listened to" (2002: 512). The music being listened to and produced, and the music being mass-marketed, are not necessarily the same: although the logic is counterfactual, there is *not* "a simple relationship between song-by-song downloading and album sales" (Vaidhyanathan 2004: 49). According to Mann, in 2004 "eighty-eight recordings – only .03 percent of the compact discs on the market – accounted for a quarter of all record sales" (2005: 179). For this reason copyright loss hits the industry much harder than it hits individual music producers. Jupiter Media Metrix reported in 2002 that, contrary to the claims of the RIAA, "P2P file-swappers were 41 percent more likely than average online music fans to have increased their spending [on CDs] in 2001" (BizReport 2002). These factors all contribute to the argument that the campaign mounted by the RIAA "was not a response to falling profitability due to piracy, but instead a successful counter-strategy to relieve anti-trust pressures while legally securing the Internet as an alternative distribution channel" (Denegri-Knott 2004).

The debate, and the 'moral panic' response to the technology, was a replay of previous clashes between consumers and elements of the global entertainment industry, most notably, the 'home-taping' controversy over audiocassettes in the 1970s, and the MPAA anxiety about home video. In the former instance, the RIAA succeeded in getting a levy implemented on sales of blank cassettes to make up for 'lost sales'. The implication was that even if the cassette is used to record one's own composition on the kazoo, the 'Big 4' are still entitled to recompense for lost revenue (Jones 1995a). Yet, in 1989, the U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment found that "tapers buy more records than nontapers" – consumer practice was the reverse of that assumed by the industry (Garofalo 2004: 97). It is a commonplace today that audiocassettes served to expand the music market, and revenue from video sales and rentals has come to be indispensable to the motion picture industry (Kretschmer et al. 2001: 435).

Despite the widely publicised legal clampdown, the number of p2p services available rose 535% in 2002; to a total of 38,000 web pages offering p2p software downloads (Patrick 2002.). It is estimated that for every legally downloaded (i.e., paid for) song, 250 'pirated' files are exchanged (MacDonald 2004). Over a billion music files are downloaded every week from p2p networks (Oberholzer and Strumpf 2004: 2). According to the RIAA, the equivalent of 4,000 million CDs is exchanged on p2p every year (Buquet 2003). Usage figures vary widely, but p2p is estimated to account for up to 70% of all internet traffic (Glasner 2006). The Electronic Frontier Foundation estimates that over 60 million Americans use p2p programs (Sherman 2003). The former RIAA Chair and CEO, Hilary Rosen, has pointed out that the most widely used p2p software, KaZaA, has been downloaded 120 million times (2002). A later estimate put the global number of KaZaA users at 250 million (Anderiesz 2003). KaZaA is now a subscription service; it settled for $100 million in 2006 (Williams 2006a), but the point still holds.

As global legal pressure increases, with the British Phonographic Industry demanding on average £2,000 in compensation from the individual users it is prosecuting (Phillips and Redmond 2005), p2p technology grows ever more sophisticated as it seeks to attain the 'pure' networking goal. The latest generation of decentralised p2p applications, such as BitTorrent, uses sophisticated 'swarming' and encryption technology to ensure the privacy and anonymity of end users (Mennecke 2004).

A 2004 poll found that 83% of American teens consider free music downloads "morally acceptable" (Denegri-Knott 2004). As Rojek puts it, "fee evasion remains eminently viable" (2005: 360). File-sharing has effectively become 'normalised' or 'naturalised'. With the majority of users seemingly unwilling to pay to download or stream music – many of them embittered survivors of the online 'music wars' – the onus of proof as to why they *should* do so still lies with the industry (Buquet 2003). One evident consequence of the negative publicity of the campaign against file-sharing is that "what may have once been simply a way of getting free music has become for many a form of protest, largely in response to the actions of the record industry" (Katz 2004: 177). From the perspective of *fans*, p2p provides an invaluable resource for the exchange of music and information about music. P2p users "do not simply trade music files; the communicate with each other. They share ideas and feelings, argue passionately about music, and turn each other on to new sounds. In short, they self-select into communities of taste, which, without spending a dime, constitute a better promotional vehicle than anything the music industry currently has at its disposal" (Garofalo 2004: 99). Socially, these "communities may address needs that no off-line group could meet", particularly in relation to niche

genres (Katz 2004: 172). For the recording industry, artists, and fans alike, p2p has become a fact of the "audioscape" (Lovering 1998: 46).

2.2 "share your files": The file-sharing imperative

Within four days of downloading Soulseek, a 'local' approached me in the following way (on May 14, 2003):

> [glOOm] share your files

At this stage, I did not even know myself that I had no files shared; I had only explored the search and download functions. Our conversation therefore occurred simultaneously with my hurried initial explorations within the 'File Sharing Configuration' window, as I attempted to allow access to my files:

> [AW] why aren;t they shared? it says it's set so they are?
> [glOOm] i'm sorry, but they're not, or maybe you share only for your users list?[6]
> [AW] nope: 'My shared files should be available to: everyone.' it says
> [AW] am i missing sumthin
> [glOOm] so i dont know, i have "no files shared" that's all
> [AW] r u supposed to have a 'shared files folder'? no, right?
> [glOOm] yes
> [glOOm] you select folders you want to share
> [glOOm] do people download from you?
> [AW] see now
> [AW] i just got slsk
> [AW] can u get it now?
> [glOOm] yes, it works now
> [AW] i'm on a modem, it's slow. but i thought i had it enabled...
> [glOOm] now it's okay
> [AW] kewl
> [AW] see anything interesting?
> [AW] does this mean i could browse your stuff?
> [AW] i see i'm getting venetian snares from u

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[6] Soulseek has a 'user list' feature where one can add the names of friends, people with similar musical interests and so on. The program can be configured so that some or all of one's shared files are accessible only to those on the user list.

It was only here that I realised how I had come to glOOm's attention, seeing glOOm's name in my 'Transfers' download window. Upon moving to see what I had available in exchange, glOOm found that I had no files shared. However, as my questions indicate, I was as yet unsure how this 'browsing' is achieved.

[glOOm] it's not really very usefull sharing program files folder you know
[AW] hang on
[AW] how bout now?
[AW] and how can u tell?
[glOOm] that's better
[AW] i just read your user info. how long r u on slsk?
[glOOm] a long time
[AW] yes
[glOOm] why?
[AW] cuz've what you say there
[AW] i've bin on like 4 days or something
[glOOm] ok
[glOOm] rules are only here to scare bad users, it's not a way of life
[AW] yeah. ana abad user is someone who canes your tunes/bandwidth w/out sharing?
[glOOm] lol[7]
[glOOm] yes, but most of the time, people dont share because they dont know how to do, or they think they already share files
[AW] like me
[glOOm] people who dont share because they dont want, are fortunatelly a few
[glOOm] yes
[AW] but if you think u r sharing you can see nobody's getting anything in your transfers
[AW] u couldn't think that indefiniately if nothing was ever uploaded
[glOOm] yes

One crucial aspect of the platform raised in this conversation is 'user info'. Upon right-clicking the cursor over a user's name on Soulseek, one of the options which presents itself (along with 'Browse User's Files', 'Add To List', 'Send Message', 'Ignore User' and a number of others) is 'Get User Info'. This opens a window detailing how many upload slots that user has allowed (which is to say, how many people can download music from that user at any one time) and how long their upload 'queue' is (that is, how many files are awaiting upload from that user's computer). Users can also display text, and if they wish,

[7] "Lol" truncates 'laugh out loud'.

an image, in user info, and many users choose to display their interpretation of the Soulseek 'rules' there (these rules are not articulated anywhere in Soulseek's own 'official' information about itself).[8] Thus glOOm's user info read as follows:

> -- You don't share your files,
> -- You think I could waste my time searching in your Program Files folder,
> -- You think sharing incomplete mp3 or jpg files is enough,
> -- You think putting all files in only one folder, whitout any subfolders, is the best way to organize your files,
> -- You think setting 0 slot allow you to share your files,
> -- You think you can DL my whole drive in once,
> -- You think you can ask me to start your files,
> -- You think I'm unfair,
> If you think that way, you won't download from me. I spend a long time organizing and tagging mp3 files, be understanding.
> IF YOU ARE NOT IN MY USER LIST, DON'T TAKE MORE THAN ONE ALBUM WITHOUT ASKING ME (A double albums is 2 albums)
> For all other fair people, enjoy!

glOOm's interpretation is relatively specific. One often finds, in browsing someone's files, a number of empty folders, the names of which explain their interpretation of the Soulseek rules. Thus one might see folders with the following names (a plus sign next to a folder indicates that it has further subfolders. Clicking on a folder reveals its contents):

> -normal slsk rules apply-
> +electronica
> +metal
> +pop

I have seen a user with folders titled:

> -archive your files
> +breakcore
> +dnb

---

[8] A recently added function is 'Things I Like', which allows users to present their likes (and dislikes) within user info, providing valuable tips for those exploring unfamiliar genres. 'Things I Like' also incorporates such search functions as 'Get Similar Users' and 'Get Recommendations'.

+jungle

and so on. *Many* users display a folder labelled:

!!!share or be banned!!!

or something similar. Others have folders reading:

share your files
no more than two albums at once
if i think you're only sharing your save folder
or i can't see your files=banned

Some people have a folder entitled something like:

plz read my user info before downloading from me!

Naming folders in this way is more convenient than relying on user info; people are much more likely to browse files than check info. It can take time for Soulseek to retrieve user info. Hence there are two explicitly textual means of 'sign-posting' one's orientation to exchange (folder names and user info). At times of high publicity for the RIAA's campaign, interestingly, sharing norms became somewhat unstable (for fear of prosecution, some people would not allow one download an entire album, as they were under the impression that the copyright resided in the entire work itself and that, therefore, uploading only half of the material was legal). This concern was and continues to be expressed in user info, as evinced by the following ('evil_nikki', accessed September 10, 2004):

-Gabber Bitch 4-Life-

1. 1 Album/ 1 Full Mix / 25 Tracks @ a Time!
2. If You Want To View My Files .... Message Me ...I Will Add You To My User List
3. If I D/L From You ...You Are Automatically Added To My User List. D/L Anything.[9]
4. Slow D/L Rate - Ask Before D/Ling.
5. Files Not Shared = BANNED
6. Ignore My Rules = BANNED

[9] 'D/L' is a contraction of 'download'.

========== DISCLAIMER==========

These MP3s are for backup and educational purposes only. You should only have this software/music to serve as a backup.
You have an evaluation period of 24 hours but after that you must delete the mp3's from your computer. I will not be held responsible for anything you do with the MP3's. For controversial reasons, if you are affiliated with any government, Software manufacterer, Legal Firm, Legal Service, Public Service, F.B.I., Private Investigation Service, OR any ANTI-Piracy group or any other related group, or were formally a worker of one you CANNOT access any of my files. If you look at my files you are not agreeing to these terms and you are violating code 431.322.12 of the Internet Privacy Act signed by Bill Clinton in 1995 and that means that you CANNOT threaten my ISP(s) or any person(s) storing these files, and cannot prosecute any person(s) affiliated with this page which includes family, friends or individuals who download my files. By continuing to downloading my files, you are expressly and impliedly agreeing to all terms as stated above, and affirm that you are in compliance with all federal, state and local laws concerning the files I share.

This 'disclaimer' was then duplicated in Dutch. Such disclaimers are often found in user info. A similar defensive disclaimer is sometimes found in a folder in the 'share' variously labelled "### please note ###" or "[RIAA warning]" (retrieved January 30, 2006), containing a number of text documents, where these text documents are named as follows:

## a	warning - if you represent or are affiliated with any government,	##.txt
## b	police, law enforcement, investigative, anti-piracy organization,	##.txt
## c	riaa, mpaa, or any television or movie production production	##.txt
## d	company, video game company, console manufacturer, distribution	##.txt
## e	company or group, or any other related company or group, or were	##.txt
## f	formerly an employee or contractor of such entity, you cannot	##.txt
## g	enter, search or download data from this computer, and you must	##.txt
## h	leave and disconnect immediately.	##.txt
## i		##.txt
## j	if you enter, search or download data from this computer, you are	##.txt
## k	not agreeing to these terms and are violating code 431.322.12 of	##.txt
## l	the internet privacy act of 1995, which in turn, means that you cannot	##.txt
## m	threaten the owner and user of this computer, the isp(s) used in	##.txt
## n	connecting this computer to the internet, or any related person or	##.txt
## o	entity, including family, friends, employees and employers.	##.txt
## p		##.txt
## q	by continuing to enter, search or download data from this computer	##.txt
## r	you are expressly and implicitly agreeing with the terms stated	##.txt

## s	above and affirm that you are in compliance with all federal, state	##.txt
## t	and local laws concerning the use of this computer.	##.txt
## u		##.txt
## v	if you do not agree to all of the above, you must not go any further	##.txt
## x	with the use of this computer and you must leave and disconnect	##.txt
## y	from this computer immediately.	##.txt
## z	thank you.	##.txt

Such disclaimers are an unremarkable commonplace of 'slsk'.[10]
On only *one* occasion have I seen this:

> no rules – take what you want !!!

This folder name was in the 'share' of 'mzk2005', which contained a large quantity of 'speedcore' and gabber techno (retrieved December 15, 2005). This is an extraordinary reversal of the conventional 'slsk rules'. However, mzk2005 is still uploading: the material simply remains available to those who don't share, and the gifter expresses indifference to this fact. Interpretations of the norms of exchange also vary according to the boundedness of the 'regime of taste' in question. Consider the following user info ('(jmr) chuuzetsu', accessed January 1, 2004):

> 1. If you want to download files off of me, you must be in the 'japanese music' room. If you are not in the 'japanese music' room, I will ban you.
> 2. You can only download One (1) album at a time or Three (3) maxis at a time or One (1) PV at a time. If you don't follow this rule, I will ban you.
> 3. Share your files. If I see you are downloading off of me and you are not sharing your files with anyone, I will ban you.
> 4. Sending me a message saying "Why did you ban me?" does not mean I will unban you. So you are pretty much wasting your time. I banned you for a reason.
> 5. Do not send me a message saying, "Can I download this?" Of course you can, as long as you follow the rules. Don't waste my time and your time by sending me a message and asking that. If you do, you are banned.
> 6. If you try to downloading the following: Garnet, Kuroyume, Hitoki, Kiyoharu, SUS4, or SADS without being in the room 'Kiyoharu' you will be banned big time.

Rules 2 and 3 above are standard versions of the Soulseek rules, concerning reasonable downloading and reciprocity respectively. It is considered ill mannered to

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[10] 'Slsk' is the local shorthand for Soulseek.

queue more than two albums from one user at a time; this takes up bandwidth and slows traffic, and also to have nothing available to those from whom one is downloading (regardless of whether or not it is something they want). The principle sanction referred to in the case of violation of these norms is, as should now be clear, 'banning'. Once again, upon right-clicking a username, one of the options is 'Ban User'. If user *A* 'bans' user *B* and user *B* attempts to download files from user *A*, the status of these files will come up for user *B* in the 'Transfers' window (which details outgoing and incoming files) as 'Remote: Banned'. Whatever user *B* has tried to download, they won't be able to get it from user *A*, unless *B* can successfully petition *A* for 'unbanned' status. Over the course of the next section these findings will be discussed with reference to the anthropology of exchange.

2.3 The 'gift' and the 'leech': reciprocity in the embedded economy

There are two reasons for explaining p2p in these terms. One is to situate the file-sharing phenomenon within a broader historical context. In Karl Polanyi's term, this is an argument against 'catallactic' logic. Polanyi uses this term to refer to the artificially restricted view of social exchange (and the 'rational' actor) associated with neoclassical economism: "Catallactically, trade, money and market form an indivisible whole" (1971b: 257). According to such logic, forms of social exchange that occur outside of this 'whole' are either invisible, archaic or 'irrational'. Yet, as Polanyi makes clear, it is actually the perspective propounded by economism which is an anachronistic imposition, an effect of the market mechanism on the conceptualisation of social exchange. The commodification of land and labour, Polanyi argues, generated an autonomous economic sphere which "became determinative for the body social" (1968: 63). He goes on to assert: "*Man's economy is, as a rule, submerged in his social relations*" (*ibid.*: 65).

This perspective therefore has the strategic benefit of positioning p2p users as being engaged in a comprehensible activity with precedent forms, situated within a long social history, for which numerous attempts at theoretical explication have been made, rather than representing p2p users simply as deviant thieves or anticapitalist libertarians. Thus, we are able to get a perspective on file-sharing away from the normative terms in which it is usually discussed, which places the activity diachronically rather than exaggerating its 'newness', and which is distinct from, and yet fruitfully accounts for, the normative system which structures file-sharing.

We are used to thinking about technology, and about music, in certain pre-given ways. Such inherently social and communicative aspects of human experience are always, as it were, preconfigured discursively and ideologically. Thus the attempt to account for them within contrasting frameworks partakes of the stylistic technique of juxtaposition. As Marcus explains, juxtaposition has "been a key technique of Western avant-gardes (and of postmodernist styles derived from it) in terms of collage, montage, and assemblage, in the creation of 'making strange' effects or defamiliarisation, which to some degree critical anthropology has shared in a much more prosaic way" (2002: 3). Such juxtaposition is a useful strategy insofar as it generates "perspective by incongruity": "by looking at the familiar through a new set of concepts the taken for granted becomes problematic" (Lofland 1980: 27).

From the examples cited of folder names and user info on Soulseek, and from my first interaction there with glOOm, it should be clear that the file-sharing imperative and the reciprocity it advocates is the social 'adhesive' which resolves the Hobbesian problem of social order within p2p distribution. The file-sharing imperative is the foundation for p2p sociality. It instantiates, in Giesler's term, a 'polyadic' form of exchange, "in which multiple anonymous gifting agents share multiple gifts at the same time" (2006: 21). The standard contrast class for reciprocal exchange is that which occurs in the market: "Market exchange transactions differ because they are not expressions of social obligation, which makes them seem especially 'economic'" (Dalton 1968: xiv-xv). Market exchange, in Polanyi's terms, is 'disembedded', whilst 'embedded' economies are characterised by reciprocity and redistribution. The 'disembedded' economy is a formal market as we understand it, with its own rules. It can be further situated within the historical binaries common to sociological analysis as follows:

Embedded/disembedded
Gemeinschaft/gessellshcaft ['community'/'society'] (Toennies)
Mechanical/organic solidarity (Durkheim)
Reciprocity-redistribution/'economy' (Polanyi)

In *gemeinschaft* social organisation, "the economy is embedded in noneconomic institutions" (Polanyi 1971a: 70). These terms are normative – 'community' is idealised, 'society' (the cash nexus) is depersonalising (*ibid.*: 68-69). The first term in each binary is privileged and projected onto an idealised past. Embedded, *gemeinschaft* exchange is thought to possess specific social functions lost to disembedded monetary purchase: reciprocal exchange is not engaged in 'for profit', but rather to bind people together into a

web of reciprocal giving: "to thicken the social ties from which arise the obligations" (Malinowski 2002: 182). Moreover, goods transferred reciprocally in embedded exchange are not abstracted or 'alienated' in the Marxist sense, the social and use-value which they possess is not rendered as a commodity- or exchange-value, and is not readily expressible in terms of interchangeable 'cash' worth.

According to Polanyi, in embedded *gemeinschaft* systems "two forms of integration – reciprocity and redistribution - occur in effect usually together" (1971b: 253). Exchange assumes a market mechanism, reciprocity assumes symmetry, and redistribution assumes an allocative centre capable of orchestrating the centripetal flow of goods/services. "Reciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetrical groupings; redistribution designates appropriational movements toward a center and out of it again; exchange refers here to vice-versa movements taking place as between 'hands' under a market system" (*ibid.*: 250). With reference to p2p, we may say that relations between end users are characterised by reciprocal exchange, and that the platform itself provides the redistributive centre enabling this reciprocity (this redistributive function has in other historical instances been provided variously by the state or some other socially binding institution, often a normative exchange structure like the *Kula* described by Malinowski). Whilst it has little 'administrative' control, as it were, over its own use, by providing the search facility which enables users to connect to each other, the p2p software furnishes the institutional architecture facilitating reciprocal exchange.

These terms – reciprocity, redistribution and exchange – are not, Polanyi stresses, merely aggregates of the behaviour of the individuals concerned. Rather, they require a pre-existent institutional matrix: "Only in a symmetrically organized environment will reciprocative behavior result in economic institutions of any importance; only where allocative centers have been set up can individual acts of sharing produce a redistributive economy" (*ibid.*: 252). Reciprocity therefore "presupposes the presence of an allocative center in the community, yet the organization and validation of such a center does not come about merely as a consequence of frequent acts of sharing as between individuals" (*ibid.*: 251). This is a basic point about the relationship between micro interaction and macro structure: without some institutional redistributive mechanism, individual acts of reciprocal sharing, however widespread they are, will not lead to the development of a redistributive economy.

What is noteworthy about p2p, as compared to 'classical' reciprocal systems, is the sheer scale of generalised reciprocity p2p enables, or, as Giesler calls it, 'metareciprocity': "A technological consequence of cybernetic gift giving, metareciprocity is a formerly

unprecedented postmodern reciprocity species that prevails in cybernetic gifting networks" (2006: 33). P2p differs significantly from 'traditional' reciprocity systems because the mp3 is a "*nonrivalrous* resource": its consumption by any individual does not preclude the possibility of further consumption (Katz 2004: 163). Scarcity, therefore, is not a feature of p2p distribution, although *rarity* is: some users have large amounts of obscure material, with correspondingly long upload queues. Digital reciprocity systems are exponential given the reproducible form of the gift exchanged, and the fact that exchange relationships are wholly symmetrical and start from a state of near total anonymity and generalisability. Also remarkable is the inbuilt 'solution' to free-riding: the possibility of 'banning' users, and the underlying normative structure. For reciprocity is the default position, the *norm*, and departures from it must be justified (as when glOOm enquired: "maybe you share only for your users list?"). The 'user list only' downloader, however, is still a *leech* when downloading from someone not added to his or her user list.

'Leeching' is the term used to designate free-riders, those who benefit without contributing in kind: "Leeches are the bottom of the social heap" (Cooper and Harrison 2001: 80). Online gamers also use the term, to refer to those who join groups only to gain 'power-ups'. Implicit within this term in both its file-sharing and gaming manifestations is the simple charge that the 'leech' is benefiting from 'public goods', as it were, without any reciprocal effort, though the basis of this charge can be formulated in broadly social (gains in status or material – often the two are convertible) or narrowly technical terms (consuming another user's bandwidth without any corresponding bandwidth sacrifice, whether for the uploader or for anyone else). One might also say that the norm, like many other social norms, has both a 'rational' or 'self-interested' aspect and a 'community'-oriented aspect.

Soulseek users are self-policing, and those who take without giving, the 'leeches', are invariably reprimanded, and sometimes banned outright. If they persist they will be challenged, and perhaps banned, repeatedly:

'hwarrang' 11/09/03

[hwarrang] some guy was downloading a load of stuff off me yesterday, in fact he had taken what he wanted, maybe 40 files, and when i browsed him: no files shared

[AW] did you talk to him?

[hwarrang] so i messaged him, and said: dont you share files?

[hwarrang] and he said no

[hwarrang] and i said, you know you'll get banned for carrying on like that

[AW] and he said

[hwarrang] and he said, well what are they going to do (referring to slsk) ban me?

[hwarrang] and i said, no the users will ban you

[AW] and what did he say? why didn't he share?

[hwarrang] and he said, well i got what i wanted so HAHAHAHAHA

[hwarrang] and i said funny guy

[hwarrang] you're lucky i didn't catch you earlier, you'd have got nothing. you won't get anymore

[hwarrang] and i banned him

[hwarrang] he also said, they should be paying for the music[11]

In another instance:

Soulseek Artists room 25/10/03[12]

[augias] woah someone is leeching my entire nobukazu takemura collection

...

[augias] brb /me has to regulate

A could download two albums from *B* without having anything *B* wants: the *principle* is that *B* should be able to see what *A* has available *in case* they want it. As Polanyi suggests, reciprocity "demands adequacy of response, not mathematical equality" (1971a: 73). One of the great pleasures of the p2p experience is the serendipitous musical discovery made through reciprocal exchange: one browses those in the upload queue, and may find a rarity, an oddity, or even a whole new 'lead' in others' shares. Of course, there is also a certain amount of leeway here: Soulseek users tend to be patient with 'newbies' or 'noobs' (as glOOm was with me) once they have been able to successfully articulate this status. Some people do not have large shares because they just came to p2p and haven't gotten much yet *to* share. There are ways for the determined 'leech' to pre-empt or short-circuit the file-sharing imperative, but they are for the most part ineffective. For instance, one may simply change one's username (indeed, one may do so as often as one likes). However, where something specific is being downloaded, this ruse will be obvious:

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[11] Note the peculiar free-riding logic of the argument presented by the user hwarrang describes: "he also said, they should be paying for the music", a 'should' the user evidently does not apply reflexively.

[12] Henceforth the 'Soulseek Artists room' will be referred to as the 'SSA room'. 'Brb' is 'be right back' abbreviated.

BC room 27/09/03

[/dev/null] hehehe man, someone has been trying to leech from me all night (dl w/o sharing)
[/dev/null] I banned him, he got all pissed off and was like "fuck you, I don't need your files!!"
...
[/dev/null] 20 minutes later.... someone else w/ a new name not sharing is dling the same stuff
[/dev/null] so apparently he does

2.4 Contingency and cross-platform variation

In concluding these comments, I want to emphasise the contingent nature of the p2p experience, consequent on the scale of the activity and the spectrum of networks, with their respective technological, normative and social structures. There is an extraordinarily wide variety between p2p platforms concerning searching and browsing functions, content orientation, levels of social interaction and so on. Amongst the bigger networks, some applications have reputations for their blandness of content, their elitism, their social inertia, or any number of other 'social', rather than technical, aspects. Different applications also have different ways of handling the uneven distribution of bandwidth: for example, if one wanted *high speed* downloads one could go to LimeWire, which allows searches within users of a certain bandwidth – hence those with fast connections can effectively ignore those without such access. Soulseek does not have this restrictive capacity. Note that this uneven access has a geographical distribution – some countries have ubiquitous high-speed access, and some don't. I was acutely aware throughout the course of the initial research that dial-up access effectively precluded certain types of interaction, simply because my uploads and downloads took so long.[13]

In addition, Soulseek, unlike LimeWire, or the BitTorrent protocol, does *not* allow multiple-source downloads: it does *not* assemble a file simultaneously from several other nodes on the network; rather, it copies the file from one location only. The consequences are that one can wait longer to get a file (depending on that user's speed, the size of their

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[13] Levels of access structure levels of engagement. The frustrations of dial-up's high "transaction latency" (Odlyzko 2003) present a form of what Marcus, citing Ulrike Meinhof, describes as *Konsumterror*: "a sort of consumer-fan panic...that suspends one's very identity in the fear of missing out on what's happening, or what is said to be happening" (1990: 476).

queue and when they are online), but also that for the duration of the download a one-to-one relationship is established, with each party able to browse the other. The *form* of the technology has serious bearing on the interaction, and hence the 'community'.

For Soulseek users, that multiple-source downloads are not possible is often viewed as a source of frustration, but it is a quite deliberate policy. The following is taken from an interview with Nir Arbel (Menecke 2003), who runs the Soulseek server (and who, incidentally, used to be a programmer for Napster):

> Slyck.com: Let's look into the future of Soulseek. What features can we expect? Any chance in multi-source downloading?
>
> Nir Arbel: Nope. To reiterate on something I've said many times before. We like being an old-school network where users not only know who they're downloading from, but also depend on each others' good will. That's how a community works. Any network that does a good job of anonymizing the uploaders through decentralization and multisource transfers can be a great tool, but it's not a community.
> New features? The only thing we're concerned with right now is reliability. Make the server stop crashing, make searches return more results and faster, make the client more stable for more people. The network isn't so small that radical new changes can be easily introduced without major disruption. If I am going to start working on new features, it's very likely that they'll be on the side of the community aspect rather than the file-sharing aspect, like the recommendations module.

There is also complex interplay *between* p2p networks. For instance, when Audiogalaxy was shut down, large numbers of its users (perhaps twenty thousand) migrated to Soulseek. In the other direction, the Japanese music rooms of Soulseek have produced a BitTorrent group. It is not uncommon for users to run multiple p2p applications simultaneously; one often sees shared folders on Soulseek named for other file-sharing applications. Content and individuals circulate freely across networks. Finally, even within Soulseek, there is an extraordinary amount of variation concerning behavioural and interactional norms within subcommunities as instantiated in rooms: interaction in the 'UK Grime' room, or the 'japanese music' room, or the 'Classical' room, or the '+BlackMetal+' room, operates in radically different ways. Even within a specific room, interactional norms are also likely to change over time as individuals come and go (and styles become more or less popular), accruing to dramatic differences over a 2 or 3 year time span.

These distinctions are raised to make the following points: firstly, p2p is a mass phenomenon, and secondly, as a consequence of this, any given individual's experiences of it are likely to be personal, idiosyncratic, and partial. The scale of p2p exchange and engagement implies that there is no 'Archimedean point' from which to survey the entirety of the phenomenon. Similarly, one individual could not become acquainted with the output of *every* radio station or *every* fanzine; in some respects p2p operates *like* radio stations or fanzines, but also in synchronous, bi-directional relational modes not instantiated in these media. Clearly, my own experiences on p2p are specific and *contingent* in this way; there are too many platforms to have an in-depth understanding of *all* of them as social phenomena. This is not to say that the findings emergent from the fieldwork are *random*; I would argue this given Soulseek's reputation for electronic music specifically, and the association, made by Soulseek itself and others, between Soulseek and electronic musicianship. My findings are specific, but they are also specific to the set of orienting concerns discussed in the previous chapter.

3 – Populating the Frame

3.1 The inscribed mp3: 'properties' and 'tagging'

The previous chapter included several brief examples of dialogue for illustrative purposes, the chapters to come focus in detail on more extended exchanges. This section, however, diverts from interaction altogether. The reasoning behind approaching and analysing this text-based interaction is to elaborate a 'thick' description of a key site at which technology and music interact. It is therefore crucial to recall the "*multi-modal*" nature of online sociality (Kress, Leite-García and van Leeuwen 1997: 257). Although we will be subjecting text to analysis, as text is the primary *residue* of social interaction on p2p, we would be stumbling into logocentric bias were we to forget why we are 'here' in the first place. This immersive environment is one in which interaction occurs in a text form, but it is also an 'audioscape' or 'soundscape'.

Music, whether commodity or not, has associated modes of non-aural signification. When we think of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, we think of the Beatles, the *sound*, but we recall also the *epoch*, the mythology, *the album cover* and so on. The flood of sound characterising p2p is entangled, like the flood of dialogue occurring there, in a web of social exchange, meaning and signification. Digitally stored sound may not have the haptic qualities of CD or vinyl, and may move differently, but it still moves socially and along discernible trajectories. The distributed material, aside from the riches of its *musical* properties, is (literally) encoded, loaded with meanings, which provide clues as to how this material circulates. The following pages, in short, present a *look* at mp3s and their *properties*, so as to situate the mp3 as sociocultural fetish: "a sign that evokes devotion to itself" (Danesi 1999: 13).

The features of the mp3 first encountered on p2p are name, duration, bit-rate and size. The latter two are noteworthy, as an equivalence is posited between bit-rate and 'quality' (audio 'fidelity'). The higher the bit-rate (the theory goes), the better the audio 'capture' (the theory does not always hold: a high-quality rip may be of a poor-quality

audio source).[1] Bit-rate is expressed as 'kbps' (kilobytes per second) and is related therefore to the size of the mp3 in disk space. The higher the bit-rate, the larger the file, and the longer it takes to transmit. As broadband access (and affordability of computer memory) increases, there is a steady 'inflation' in bit-rate. In 2002, the almost universal standard was 128 kbps. Some purists claimed to detect a difference in quality between 128 and CD, however, it was usually suggested that 192 kbps was satisfactory. Now 256 is commonplace and 192 could be said to be standard. There is also a proliferation of competing formats, such as ogg, m4a, flac (the much-hyped 'lossless' format) and so on, also indicating increasingly sophisticated media players.

The 'properties' of a downloaded mp3 though are somewhat different – the *name* of the mp3 as displayed online is distinct from its *title* entered in 'Properties' (a window displaying file information, accessible on a PC by right-clicking an mp3), where pregiven 'fields' document artist name, album name, year of release, track number, genre, and *comments*. The following is a comment embedded in the mp3's of a 'noise' release, a split LP by Prurient and Nicole 12:

> whoever ripped this ripped it as entire sides, i thought that was gay so i fixed it. not sure about the exact track breaks on prurient's side as they all pretty much ran together. nicole 12's side is fine though --avant gardening

Here, 'avant gardening' (a Soulseek noise room occupant) indicates to those who download the release that it is not as it was when *he* downloaded it, and presents an account of why he segmented the release into its component tracks. Anyone may alter the 'properties' of the mp3s that come into their possession – properties are identifying features by which media players catalogue, order and present mp3s; hence it may be convenient to rank mp3s in any number of preferred ways. This is the process glOOm referred to as *tagging*: "I spend a long time organizing and tagging mp3 files, be understanding". Notably, media players are increasingly associated with user-updated

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[1] The mp3 compression codec was designed with psychoacoustics in mind. VBR (variable bit-rate), for instance, allocates hard drive memory to sound according to its complexity as grasped by the human ear, 'dropping out' aspects of the sound which will be inaudible. Sounds that continue through a piece of music but become swamped by other sounds will thus be 'dropped' (this is what is meant by applying the term 'lossy' to the mp3 format), and minimal memory space is allocated to segments that are 'quiet' or uneventful, through a compression process known as "perceptual coding" (Katz 2004: 160).

online databases, which will recognise any CD for which information has already been inputted, and label the resulting mp3s appropriately – automatically tagging them.[2]

Upon *playing* a downloaded mp3, scrolling text rolls across one's media player – including the text inputted as 'comments'. The following comments are presented in order of the 'officialness' of the mp3 release:

> Not a perfect conversion of course,
> but the patterns are there.
>
> It should be enough for a remix!
>
> Notes:
> - many params are not converted
> - the slides are handled differently & might not always be translated correctly
> - the 2 TB303, TR808 & TR909 are send to FX tracks 1,2,3 & 4 to apply effects easily
> - press F11 to get the credits for this song
>
> get ReBirth RB-338 at:

Whilst these 'comments' seem to be technical 'talk' from the originator of the mp3, they are produced automatically by ReBirth. It is not possible to edit the mp3 in the form where 'params' – parameters, 'slides' and 'FX tracks' could be altered: the mp3 is not equivalent to the ReBirth music file. Such comments indicate the ease and speed with which material circulates: exported out of the program with which it was 'mastered' as mp3, and immediately uploadable (software manufacturers evidently grasp the potential of p2p as a product placement avenue). Other producers distributing their work on p2p sometimes include some descriptive comment, in one instance: "granulated; almost ambient", in others reference may be made to the program their music was produced with, for example "made with FL Studio 4 (98-02)" (these three examples come from the work of Producer Snafu, quahogs and blaerg respectively). As with the generic ReBirth

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[2] For example, iTunes uses the Gracenote CDDB (compact disc database), whilst jetAudio uses a series of mirrored 'freedbs'. The freedb at http://uk.freedb.org/ was, in 2003, averaging "around 200,000 connections per day" (200,000 CDs ripped and correctly tagged). Gracenote indicates that it hopes to expand "the potential for more interesting and revenue-generating applications": where CD manufacturers endorse Gracenote's specification, which includes significantly expanded 'properties' fields, the information in the database will be written on the CD at the point of production, rather than inputted into mp3s after the fact by end-users (Gracenote 2003, Freedb.org 2005).

comment, naming the software has the implication of rendering the site of production visible, accessible, and within reach. Beyond cases where music is distributed direct from the location of its production, other types of authorship and detail as to origin may be inscribed.

For example, on an mp3 recording of DJ sets by Paul Blackout and Mark N, the 'properties' title is "Live at Triple J Radio, Mix Up Programme, Newcastle, Australia - 29.05.2004". When the mp3 plays this information scrolls past on the media player, immediately preceding the following 'comment': "Ripped & Encoded by |Sup|pa| - Exclusive for MPIII.com - http://www.mpiii.com/". The person who recorded this broadcast and rendered it as mp3, '|Sup|pa|', provides a name and a link. It is common for a link to be included in comments, and for the encoder to announce their name (sometimes uploaders even include a review of the release). Another recording (this time by Epsilon), with a vinyl release (on Killing Sheep Records, as indicated), contains the following comment: "built in newcastle, australia by brndnbrks on ft2&audiosim for sean @ killing sheep 2001 nothing subject to copy right".

However, there is a whole other level of elaboration for such 'tagging', for the transfer of a name associated with the origin of the mp3. This comes in the form of an 'nfo' file. A peculiarity of this format is that the .nfo extension opens in more than one application (Ronkko n.d.). On both the Windows and Mac operating systems, therefore, one is obliged to right-click and specify a text program, such as Notepad or TextEdit, with which to view the nfo. Otherwise, the system attempts (and fails) to run the nfo, either with System Information (Windows) or Script Editor (Mac). The nfo under consideration here, then, is a text document, in the definition furnished by AfterDawn (2005):

> a file packed with a release by a piracy group when they release things on the Internet. The files are designed by ASCII artists and can be read with notepad. They contain release information. For example, the runtime or a movie or how to install if it's software. It's like an identification file, there is always an nfo file packed with a release.

These piracy groups or *rip crews* "are extremely sophisticated and often very well organized. Their purpose is to encode new music into the mp3 format and to distribute it to their member sites for eventual dissemination into the larger community of traders and leeches outside the group" (Cooper and Harrison 2001: 84). The internal rip crew division of labour is usually as follows: "Rippers obtain new music and convert it to MP3 format and provide it to packagers, who add group information and place it on a 'drop site' for the

couriers to disseminate" (*ibid.*: 85). The arrival of such releases on p2p is generally facilitated through IRC ('Internet Relay Chat').

The following pages present a few typical nfo files accompanying music releases; it should be evident that the nfo is intended to be presented on a screen rather than spread across pages. So as to reproduce each nfo on a single page, font size has been reduced.

00-hellfish-speed_drinking-(dc33)-vinyl-2001-doc.nfo

Hellfish - Speed Drinking
Ripper.: Team DOC
Source.: Vinyl
Style..: Hardcore
Catnr..: n/a
Date...: 06/02/2003
Grabber: Cool Edit 2
Encoder: LAME v3.91
Quality: 192kbps/44,1KHz
Label...: n/a
Size...: 19,10 MB
a1 hellfish - speed drinking 04:55
b1 hellfish - control freak 07:36
Total Playtime 14:31 min
DOC
RELEASE NOTES
GROUP INFO
DOC Is In Need Of The Following:
* Dedicated & Hard Working Rippers,DJ's & Promo Suppliers For The Genres: Hardcore,Trance,House & All Subgenres
* Siteops That Are Interested In DOC HQ And Have A Rev1 150Mbit & +200GB Site For Us Guys :)
"History"
Da Oldskool Crew Was Formed By Some Rippers That Are Already In Other Groups, But For The Love Of This Specific Music Genre Called "Hardcore" And Its Subgenres We Started This New Group. These Days DOC Exists Of Dedicated Ppl That Love All Kinds Of House Music
"Contacts"
People Know Where To Find Us....
GREETS
Greets To The Groups That Keep The Scene Alive, Groups Like SQ TCS MIX SND
Greets To TEAM DOC and all Other Hardcore Fans :)
ascii: ©©©

the year of release (2001), and the *crew* who *ripped* it: DOC – 'Da Oldskool Crew'. This is the standard order for stating this information, nfos display a high degree of uniformity in the information they contain and the order thereof; it is in the manner of presentation that variety occurs. In nfos, the stylised 'ornamentation' or 'illumination' *around* the information is 'ASCII art'. ASCII is an acronym for 'American Standard Code for Information Interchange' – a source code in which data files (for instance, programs) can be written.

ASCII art is pictographic representation in the set of standard typographic characters utilised by ASCII. It is a mosaic, *gestalt* form, based on the 'drawing'/typing of composite images. Such representation can be, and is, incorporated in code, such that when programmers examine each others' work, jokes, illustrations and so on can be embedded within that code. As the DOC nfo, and the nfo examples below also demonstrate, ASCII art involves a playful re-orientation to the 'grapholect', where the latter is "a transdialectal language formed by deep commitment to writing" (Ong 2002: 8). 'Taking in' ASCII representation involves 'stepping back', seeing, instead of 'transparent' discursive text, the pictographic *shape*, 'writ large' and rendered in a linguistically 'meaningless' order, where these two levels of representation are often juxtaposed: "whereas the print text invites us to look through it to the meaning, the digital text is bi-stable: we are invited both to look through it and AT it" (Danet 2001: 362). 'Emoticons' ('emotion icons'), such as ';)', a smile and wink read with the head tilted to the left, or '<3', a heart when read with the head tilted to the right ('<Z3' is a 'broken heart') are the simplest forms of ASCII art; these "graphic accents" are mundane features of CMC, adding "expressiveness, emotion, and aesthetics to written discourse" (Witner and Katzman 1997). The 'heavy metal' emoticon is '\m/', representing the fist with index and little fingers extended. Below are two Soulseek usernames which render words in ASCII (retrieved August 2, 2006):

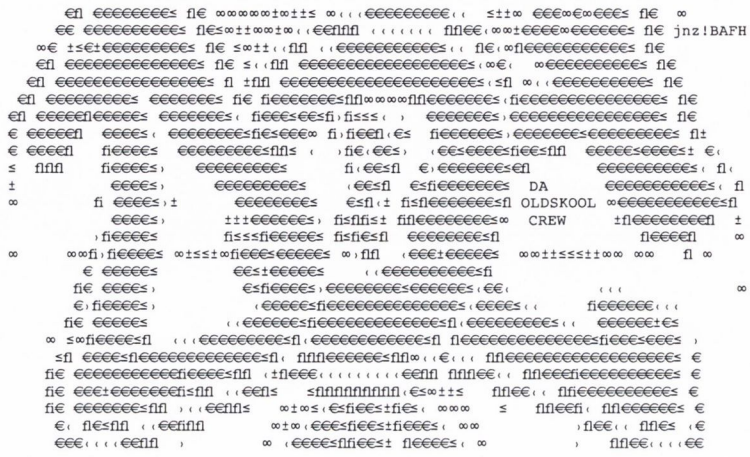
[]D [] []\/[] []D

[]DOo []DOo

In the DOC example above, the name of the ASCII 'writer' is given (twice) as 'jnz!BAFH', a tag within a tag. Thus at the bottom right of the nfo:

```
ascii:
jnz!BAFH
```

As one scrolls down one is presented, firstly, with a stylised ASCII representation of the crew's acronym: DOC.



Nfos demonstrate a remarkable combination of stylistic-representational forms – ASCII (computer culture) and graffiti of a specific style: hip-hop tagging. Tags, such as that presenting the name of DOC above, are sometimes considered "unintelligible and unpronounceable monosyllables, written in stylised capitals either swollen to deformity or bizarrely angular" (Harvey 2006: 68). Tagging (notably, on the New York subway) is one of the 'four elements' of (what is now 'old school') hip-hop, alongside breakdancing, DJing and rapping (Ards 2004: 312, Katz 2004: 117).[3] These four elements, as Rose has demonstrated, share "stylistic continuities", namely "*flow*, *layering*, and *ruptures in line*" (1994: 38). Banes similarly indicates that the "obscure gestural ciphers of breaking [breakdancing] find their parallels in the (deliberately) nearly unreadable alphabets of wild-style graffiti, the (deliberately) nearly unintelligible thicket of rap lyrics, and the (deliberately) barely recognizable music that is cut up and recombined in scratching" (2004: 18). The DOC ASCII tag, and the other tags presented below, demonstrate this stylistic 'near unreadability'.

The gestalt form of ASCII as a 'medium' for the tag heightens this deconstructive textual 'noisiness'. Atlanta and Alexander suggest that hip-hop graffiti seeks "through stylistic abstraction, to encode its words in the look of a foreign alphabet" (1989: 157). Tags retain decipherability, though, they can be 'made out', and their 'noisiness' takes a recognisable form. Tags are "each unique but entirely within a formal tradition" (Harvey 2006: 77). Characteristically, the hip-hop tag is exemplified where "long-winding,

[3] In both its hip-hop and rip crew form, tagging is a territorial inscription: mobile, communal resources (trains, mp3s) are marked and claimed; this communality is contested in both instances.

sweeping, and curving letters are broken and camouflaged by sudden breaks in line. Sharp, angular, broken letters are written in extreme italics, suggesting forward or backward motion" (Rose 1994: 38). Thus, in the DOC tag above, the 'D' overlaps the 'O', itself overlapping the 'C'. Letters are sharp, edges and corners accentuated, and the three-dimensionality of the script makes it appears to 'float', rather than being imprinted on a surface. The stylised representation of the rip crew's name, and often some other ASCII 'drawing', are standard features of the rip crew nfo; this regularity is what justifies the characterisation of ASCII tags in nfos as "digital folk art" (Danet 2001: 350).

The nfo then furnishes, firstly, some technical information about the software utilised in producing the mp3:

```
Ripper.: Team DOC       Grabber: Cool Edit 2
Source.: Vinyl          Encoder: LAME v3.91
Style..: Hardcore       Quality: 192kbps/44,1kHz
Catnr..: n/a            Label..: n/a
Date...: 06/02/2003     Size...: 19,10 MB
```

Next are the 'release notes', details concerning the content of the mp3s in question:

```
a1 hellfish - speed drinking              06:55
b1 hellfish - control freak               07:36
Total Playtime                            14:31 min
```

A revealing aspect of this particular nfo is that the dates do not tally. The single was released in 2001, apparently ripped on 06/02/03, but in the last few lines jnz!BAFH signs off specifying the year as 2002. The reason for this is that the graphic around information is a standard template in which all DOC rips present their info (the template is updated every few years, more recent DOC nfos contain different ASCII and 'group info'). DOC's group info indicates the following:

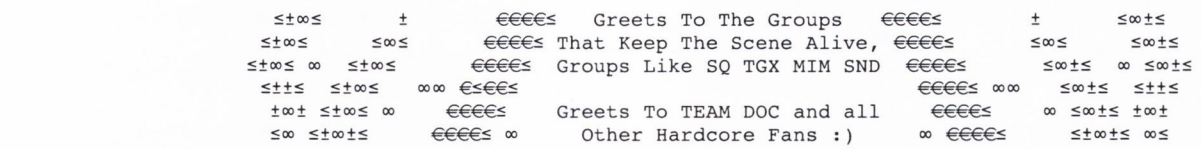
```
                                GROUP INFO

DOC Is In Need Of The Following:

* Dedicated & Hard Working Rippers,DJ's
  & Promo Suppliers For The Genres:
  Hardcore,Trance,House & All Subgenres

* Siteops That Are Interested In DOC HQ
  And Have A Kewl 100Mbit & +200GB Site
  For Us Guys :)

"History"

Da Oldskool Crew Was Formed By Some Rippers
That Are Already In Other Groups, But For
The Love Of This Specific Music Genre
Called "Hardcore" And Its Subgenres We Started
This New Group. These Days DOC Exists Of De-
dicated Ppl That Love All Kinds Of House Music
```

DOC make a claim to a certain status: they "keep the scene alive". In effect, they are inserting themselves into the supply chain, redirecting the trajectory of this content, and prolonging and expanding its 'life' by circulating it in an alternative medium. They "strive to be the first group to transmit a given musical release onto the Internet after its release, preferably even before it is released in music shops" (Cooper and Harrison 2001: 85). Their success is measured by how widespread this distribution is and the extent to which those exchanging the material continue to circulate their tag, their nfo, with that material.

The 'needs' specified by DOC are a sufficient convention of nfos that they are open to parody, as in the following 'translation' of technical into drug-subcultural argot, produced by TrT ('Tek Relizer's Team'). This text was extracted from 00-aphasic-we_are_junk-(junk03)-vinyl-2004-trt.nfo, but it is also present in other nfos TrT have released. TrT also indicate here that they can be reached on EFnet, a major IRC network:

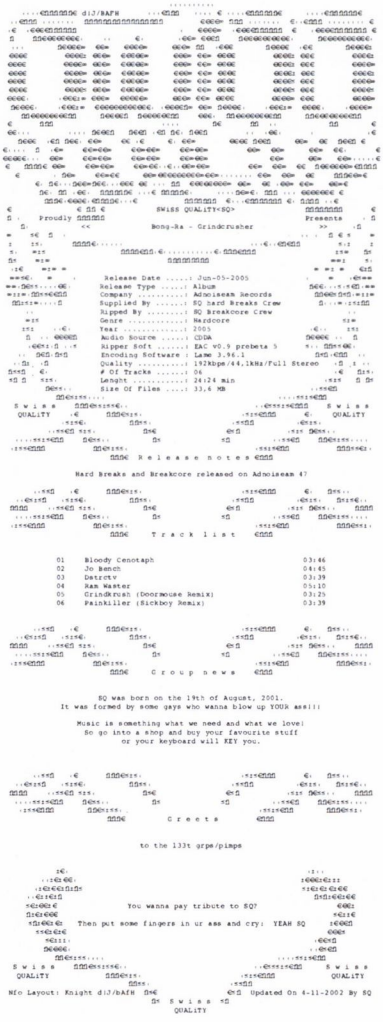
```
Tek Relizer's Team is looking for experienced and devoted HomeGrowers.
If You think you have some good HomeGrown Weed,
and like to share it with the world.
Contact TrT at #TrT  on Efnet.

We are also looking for:
- EU/US Affils provider (100 bags+)
- Suppliers of legit SmokeWare and Unrelized Weed Species
- Coffeeshop Owners (10bags+) of Weed for Exclusive TrT usage.
- Bot Roller Suppliers (better stoned then sorry)
- Stone BNC to keep head alright
- Anything else that makes feel real nice
```

In their concluding comments, DOC hail a number of other rip crews; first among them, SQ crew (Swiss Quality):



Both SQ and DOC specialise in releasing hardcore techno, gabber and breakcore rips. SQ, who are extraordinarily prolific 'rippers', produced the following nfo:

00_bong-ra_-_grindcrusher-(adn47)-vinyl-2005-sq.nfo



Again we see the same information, ranked in the same way. In this instance the ASCII is accredited to "d!J/BAFH" or "Knight d!J/bAfH". Note that this nfo contains the following 'anal-erotic' proclamation:

≤€±€€±€ You wanna pay tribute to SQ? €€€±
fl±€±€€€ ≤€±±€
≤fl±€€±€± Then put some fingers in ur ass and cry: YEAH SQ ±€€€fl

What is particularly interesting about rip crews is their position in relation to the p2p market. Whilst some p2p users delete nfos (indicated where the folder name retains the rip crew acronym), dedicated file-sharers tend to retain them, as a glance at the nfo can indicate whether one is in possession of an 'incomplete': a folder missing tracks. The crews who produce nfos are effectively at a completely different location in the distributive nexus to the consumers of p2p, often looking 'down' on them. For example, in an FWYH ('Fuck What You Heard') nfo (00_enduser-calling_the_vultures-2005-fwyh.nfo), FWYH ostensibly address other crews as follows:

≤€≤∞ Now a Message to those lamerz that are growing in ∞≤€≤
≤€≤∞ numbers everyday, DONT be BITCHES,and focus on the ∞≤€≤
≤€≤∞ things that matter,QUALITY & SECURITY,dont support ∞≤€≤
≤€≤∞ the FAKE Scene,dont share on p2p and xdcc channels ∞≤€≤
≤€≤∞ dont recruit there,and especially dont be ASSHOLES ∞≤€≤
≤€≤∞ Keep up on this track & you¥re all gonna regret it ∞≤€≤
≤€≤∞ DO IT THE RIGHT WAY,or just BURNinHELL, Fuckheads! ∞≤€≤

Lest it seem that this discussion is somehow restricted to the genre of 'hard breaks' or 'hardcore', consider the following, accompanying a hip-hop release:

00-madvillain-four_tet_remixes-2005-soup.nfo

```
                                - S O U P -

////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////
*                          s o u p  p r o u d l y  p r e s e n t s                          *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////
*
* madvillain-four tet remixes
*
* artist ........  madvillain
* title .........  four tet remixes
* release date ..  2005
* label .........  Stones Throw
* cat. no .......  STH2102
* url ...........  n/a
*
* rip date ......  05-04-2005
* genre .........  hip-hop
* quality .......  VBRkbps / 44.1Hz
* time ..........  27:46 min
* size ..........  47,5 MB
* source ........  vinyl
*
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////[ S O U P ]/*
* release info                                                              *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////
*                                                                           *
* Produced by Four Tet (Kieran Hebden) except track 5 produced by          *
* Four Tet and MF Doom                                                      *
*                                                                           *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////[ S O U P ]/*
* track list                                                                *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////
*                                                                           *
* 01 meat grinder                                              02:07        *
* 02 accordion                                                 02:55        *
* 03 money folder                                              02:46        *
* 04 great day                                                 02:54        *
* 05 rhinestone cowboy                                         03:12        *
* 06 meat grinder (instrumental)                               02:07        *
* 07 accordion (instrumental)                                  02:50        *
* 08 money folder (instrumental)                               02:47        *
* 09 great day (instrumental)                                  03:02        *
* 10 rhinestone cowboy (instrumental)                          03:04        *
*                                                                           *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////[ S O U P ]/*
* EAC logfile                                                               *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////
*                                                                           *
*                                                                           *
*                                                                           *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////[ S O U P ]/*
*                                                                           *
////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////
```

The approach SOUP (who specialise in producing hip-hop rips) make has none of the 'bluster' of the previous examples. They do not produce 'greets', they do not offer information about themselves, they don't suggest the reader get involved or stay away. The 'product', as it were, rather than the crew, is foregrounded. Nonetheless, the album folder title, and the name and title of every mp3, ends in the name of the rip crew in all instances cited thus far. Thus, whilst nfos share similarities, they are also differentiable in terms of the *genre* (and associated subcultural mannerisms) to which the rip crew is dedicated. This is evident in both ASCII and 'group info'.

The nfo below is from another genre, in this case, 'dubstep'. The ASCII represents bassbin speakers, referring to the sonic properties of the genre ('BASS' specialise in ripping dubstep and grime).

00_tectonic-loefah_and_skream-tec003-vinyl-2005-bass.nfo

This nfo contains a *review* of the release. Similarly, the nfo below, following what is presumably an image of one of the 'HiGH iNTELLiGeNCE tRoLLS' for which the rip crew are named ('HIT' specialise in ripping 'noise', of which this release is an example), furnishes some personal information about the band featured in the release, along with a description or evocation of the music featured:

00-dead_machines--futures-2005-hit2000.nfo

```
artist : Dead Machines
title : Futures
date : 2005
label : Troubleman Unlimited TMU151
genre : Noise
rls. date : May/2005
tracks : 05
bitrate : VBRkbps
size : 90,8 MB

Dead Machines is John Olsen from Wolf Eyes and his wife Tova
O'Rourke from Wooden Wand And The Vanishing Voice. They're
known for their handmade electronics and tape manipulation
played at blistering volumes, and as one of the first
'couples' noise projects. This release contains four squirming
heaps of drone and moan that capture sounds from the ocean
floor to the molten core of the earth to the unexplored
corners of the galaxy. Trademark cover art by Olsen. Limited
to 500 copies.

01-Futures, Pt.1                                    [11:39]
02-Futures, Pt.2                                    [12:23]
03-Futures, Pt.3                                    [18:49]
04-Futures, Pt.4                                    [03:03]
05-Futures, Pt.5                                    [13:40]
                                                    -------
                                                    59:44 min
```

The final example to be considered here, text extracted from a 'No Name' nfo, is highly instructive in terms of the relationships it demonstrates *between* rip crews:

00-va--phthalo-infinitecomplexity_businesscard_cdr_01-2003-no.nfo

```
No one cares who we are or why we do what we do. No one cares who you are
or why you do what you do. No one likes your gay ass ASCII. No one likes
those mp3s you just released which you downloaded from Slsk that have been
reencoded 16 times. No one is impressed with your 30 2003 pre's a week of
shit music. No one needs a -PROMO-, -ADVANCE- and -RETAIL- of the same
fucking CD. No one wants to watch your childish .nfo wars (yes, we are
aware of the irony). No more "Another HOT release from..." please.


Shouts to all crews *ripping* quality music and thanks to those who have
made this possible
```

Rip crews thus share another feature with graffiti crews: "Crew members, among other things, compete with other crews" (Rose 1994: 43). The adversarial stance assumed here, and by FWYH above, neatly summarised in the phrase "childish .nfo wars" is something to which we shall return.

This type of 'authorship' and naming is a feature not just of p2p *music* distribution, but of p2p distribution *in general*. The following are names of ripping crews involved in the distribution of *movies* online: HbCt, Beefstew, Romcity, Digital Misconduct, Demonoid.com and NoTXoR. Some of these movie rippers specialise in distributing Hollywood movies, at the latest, as soon as they are released in the cinema. The ECHiZEN and Team Apex crews are said to specialise in ripping Hong Kong movies exclusively. Again, information is distributed in nfo files, in a folder with the movie (ripped usually as

an 'avi' file). Again, information is ordered in a certain way. And again, any financial exchange occurs prior to p2p distribution, an investment on the part of those who rip the content.[4]

Rip crews are notable for the act of *naming*, the work of 'injecting' identity into the (re)distributive system. A precursor to this phenomenon has been documented in India's cassette industry, where bootlegged cassettes bear palimpsestic residual names: the beginning of the cassette may feature the name of the most recent cassette (re)producer, further into the cassette, the names of more 'original' producers (further back in the distributive chain) can be heard at appropriate pauses in the music (Heston 1991, Manuel 1993).

On p2p this *piggyback branding* (where distributors inscribe and thereby 'make' their name) is made possible in part through the increasingly specialised vinyl market: desirable releases are pressed and released in limited-run vinyl form 'for' DJs, though DJs are not, of course, the only people who want to hear these releases. P2p distribution implies an understanding of the artificial rarity and restriction of vinyl as medium, as indicated by the following (Gasteier 2004):

> This is the 21st century and, whether the Recording Industry Association of America agrees or not, these are exciting, lucrative times for emerging artists. Instead of twenty people playing M.I.A.'s 'Galang' at dance clubs, a thousand people have downloaded it and eagerly anticipate more from the new female emcee starlet. And now *Piracy Funds Terrorism* (which stupid people actually think) gives the Internet another reason to congratulate itself.

The "twenty people" who would be playing the release are of course DJs; the "thousand people" downloading were, presumably, at the mercy of these DJs before they were able to download (although the downloading indicates that listening is not bound to the club). Implicit within such accounts is the suggestion that online distribution allows consumers to bypass those (such as, presumably, the journalist who produced the account) who would establish themselves as arbiters of taste, horizontalising stylistic development and demand, such that the processual formulation of 'cool' is articulated by active consumers rather than by privileged media 'gatekeepers'. Democratisation of demand is

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[4] This information about film rips was supplied by a BitTorrent user (July 6, 2005). A similar, but more technologically sophisticated social formation to that discussed here under the 'rip crew' name, is that of software 'crackers', who reverse-engineer copyright code, usually so as to disable authentication restrictions, thereby enabling the software to be distributed and installed by users at no cost. Noted cracker crews include CORE, DrinkOrDie, the Phrozen Crew, SnD, TNO, and UCF.

imputed, as the 'thousand' become able to access the resources of the 'twenty' without having to invest in the esoteric practices of the DJ. Such arguments also seek to 'coolify' the process of downloading, in this instance it is implied that downloading actually *outcools* clubbing. The vinyl artefact though, because, rather than in spite of the difficulties involved in engaging with it, remains talismanic; to claim in p2p environments to possess releases as vinyl is to produce a claim to a high level of involvement, with (hopefully) an ensuing allocation of status.

Of course, 'illuminated' rip credits presented in nfo files are not the only means through which visual representation occurs within the domain of the mp3. It is possible to embed imagery *within* an mp3. Hence iTunes associates images with mp3s that can then be displayed on the iPod. Intriguingly, vinyl rips often feature images of the actual record itself; the vinyl 'aura' survives.

The visual is one of the 'concrete' means through which culture represents itself, including the auditory culture of the mp3. Just as different subcultures have different conceptual and aesthetic preoccupations, so they draw on different symbolic *codes* to express these. This is obvious in the representations of heavy metal, which has a long preoccupation with 'darkness' and the occult and so on (for instance, Black Sabbath). In the extreme metal subgenres of 'death' and 'grind', we find a stylised symbolism of mortality and morbidity: corpses, blood, shrouds, organs in jars, autopsies, and so on – in short, corporeal *horror* (Walser 1993: 160-163).[5] This is of particular pertinence with regards to the Breakcore room, where many participants were 'gravers' – they had come to electronic music from a prior involvement with metal, and had an understanding of how the mechanics and preoccupations of breakcore parallel those in metal. And where metal draws on themes of death, violence and decay, breakcore too often explores the 'dark side': madness, violence and the grotesque, in terms of both its speech samples and its visual representation (leaving its sonic dimensions aside for the time being). Such subcultural imagery serves to identify works, producers and fans as being 'of' that particular genre; signifiers are deployed to differentiate genres from the 'mainstream', but also to differentiate genres from *each other*.

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[5] Florida, often considered 'ground zero' for 1990s death metal, was concurrently notable as the retirement capital of the US. As examples of the morbid preoccupations of death metal consider the names of the following Florida bands: Cannibal Corpse, Death, Deicide, Monstrosity, Morbid Angel, Mortician, and Obituary.

3.2 Stylistic signification and the body

Stylistic markers (visual, verbal, *etc.*) are mobilised interactively and at various levels of immediacy; they are present linguistically (*built in* to the text and the language), and come up for discussion themselves. Whilst we generally become familiar with interactants through their usernames and textual performance, the 'real', embodied self is often mobilised as a resource guaranteeing the authenticity of its online instantiation. As a preliminary introduction, then, to the 'bedroom' selves in their "meat space" (Clark 2000: 124), consider the following extract, which moves from a discussion of remixes of 90s jungle producer Congo Natty to the phenomenon of 'natty' dreadlocks themselves.

Ragga jungle room 27/10/03[6]

1. [Babylon_Demolitionist] alot of heads hate on that whole style
2. [Babylon_Demolitionist] and rebel mc is supposedly a pranoid schitzo
3. [illacrew] so
4. [illacrew] what does it all mean
5. [lllude] to much coke in da brain
6. [Babylon_Demolitionist] he hasn't made any decent choons in years
7. [tribalaction] ya yay ya ya yau
8. [Babylon_Demolitionist] nah rebel nah touch coke'
9. [Babylon_Demolitionist] he is a devout rata actually
10. [Babylon_Demolitionist] *rasta
11. [lllude] my bad
12. [illacrew] so people that riped the saj track hate on congo

In line 2, 'Babylon_Demolitionist' recounts a rumour concerning the mental health of Rebel MC.[7] 'lllude' suggests a possible explanation for this (line 5): cocaine. Babylon_Demolitionist rejects this suggestion as implausible (9-10); Rebel MC is 'a devout rasta' (the star '*' is used to indicate the correction of a typo in a previous turn, as at line 10). From here lllude introduces the topic of his own 'locks'.

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[6] Henceforth the 'ragga jungle room' will be abbreviated to the 'RJ room'.

[7] Rebel MC is credited with originating, through sampling, the *name* of jungle in 1991. According to Reynolds, an area of Kingston called Tivoli Gardens is known as the Jungle. Consequently dancehall soundsystems would 'big-up' *junglists*. The "all junglists" hail originally entered the sample base via cassette recordings of soundsystem performances distributed in the UK (1998: 245).

13. [lllude] been growin me locks for 10 years now
14. [Babylon_Demolitionist] nah I think Odie named it that
15. [illacrew] word
16. [lllude] true
17. [illacrew] i like congo natty
18. [Babylon_Demolitionist] word 10 years here as well
19. [illacrew] <4

The subcultural investment lllude claims is assented to by both Babylon_Demolitionist and 'illacrew', in the same way: "word" (15 and 18). illacrew uses '<' to indicate himself in line 19, to say that he has been growing his own dreads for four years (14, 16 and 17 refer to the "saj track" mentioned in line 12; Congo Natty is one of Rebel MC's pseudonyms).

20. [lllude] i would die if they wern't there
21. [illacrew] they is quit long
22. [lllude] down to my arss
23. [illacrew] i have 247
24. [illacrew] haha
25. [illacrew] stienski has 8
26. [Babylon_Demolitionist] I've never thought to count
27. [lllude] you rasta??
28. [illacrew] he has 1 right on the back of his head that is like 5 inches around
29. [Babylon_Demolitionist] probably round 50 er so
30. [Babylon_Demolitionist] agnostic
31. [illacrew] ^
32. [lllude] k
33. [illacrew] he can only sleep on his right side
34. [illacrew] hahaha
35. [lllude] i got a tree startin to form in da back of me head
36. [illacrew] bet
37. [lllude] shiots like 10 in thick
38. [illacrew] my girls got about 150
39. [illacrew] hers are way long though
40. [lllude] true
41. [oloccangitrots] do you speak italian?
42. [illacrew] i twisted craveones back in the day
43. [illacrew] now his are bangin
44. [lllude] gurls wit locks.....OH LORD
45. [illacrew] i know many
46. [illacrew] erik you gonna shit

47. [illacrew] so many tings a gwan Denver

Junglists and their New Age Traveller/raver precursors adopt or appropriate dreadlocks from Rastafarianism, where the wearer's 'dread' appearance signifies humble 'naturalness' and a nonconformist disregard for conventional appearance.[8] Hence lllude's question as to whether he is interacting with Rastas (line 27).[9] Babylon_Demolitionist's responds that he is "agnostic" (30; in the following line illacrew again uses an arrow, this time to indicate that he too is agnostic). lllude's following line, "k" (32 – 'ok') confirms his understanding. The interest in dreadlocks is sufficiently finely graded that the *number* and *size* of the dreads in question are explored: thus illacrew qualifies the statement that his "girl" has "about 150" dreadlocks by saying "hers are way long though" (38-39). The ideal is seemingly a sort of 'monolock' – the bigger, fewer and longer the locks, the better. Note that a request from an Italian speaker (41) is ignored. Similarly, the comment of an otherwise silent user, 'tribalaction' (7), is not classed as warranting attention, The conversation is 'steered'; participants are able to filter those statements which 'deviate' or are otherwise to be discounted, and thereby maintain a certain interpretation of what is happening.

lllude's capitalised "OH LORD" at the thought of "gurls wit locks" (44) most likely indicates the desirability of such "gurls", this seems to be the reading which illacrew subscribes to, given his assertion that there are "many" such "gurls" in Denver (45 and 47). Babylon_Demolitionist is "gonna shit", illacrew suggests (46), and not just because of the "gurls" either (47). The body (like the *name* and the 'speech' itself) appears here as a carrier of subcultural *code*, where this code exhibits ideological connotations. Identities – such as masculinities – are *embodied* – in bodies, and in material and discursive practices and processes. Moreover, these are interdependent (Connell 2005: 54).

BC room 24/10/03

48. [presstheresset] my pants smell funky

49. [presstheresset] i havent washed them in about 2 months and i wear them every day

---

[8] Dreadlocks have a biblical reference (Numbers 6: 5). Hebdige, though, suggests that this justification (alongside Samson and Delilah) was discovered latterly, and that Rasta dreadlocks originally emulated the hairstyles of "some East African tribes" (1979: 143n5).

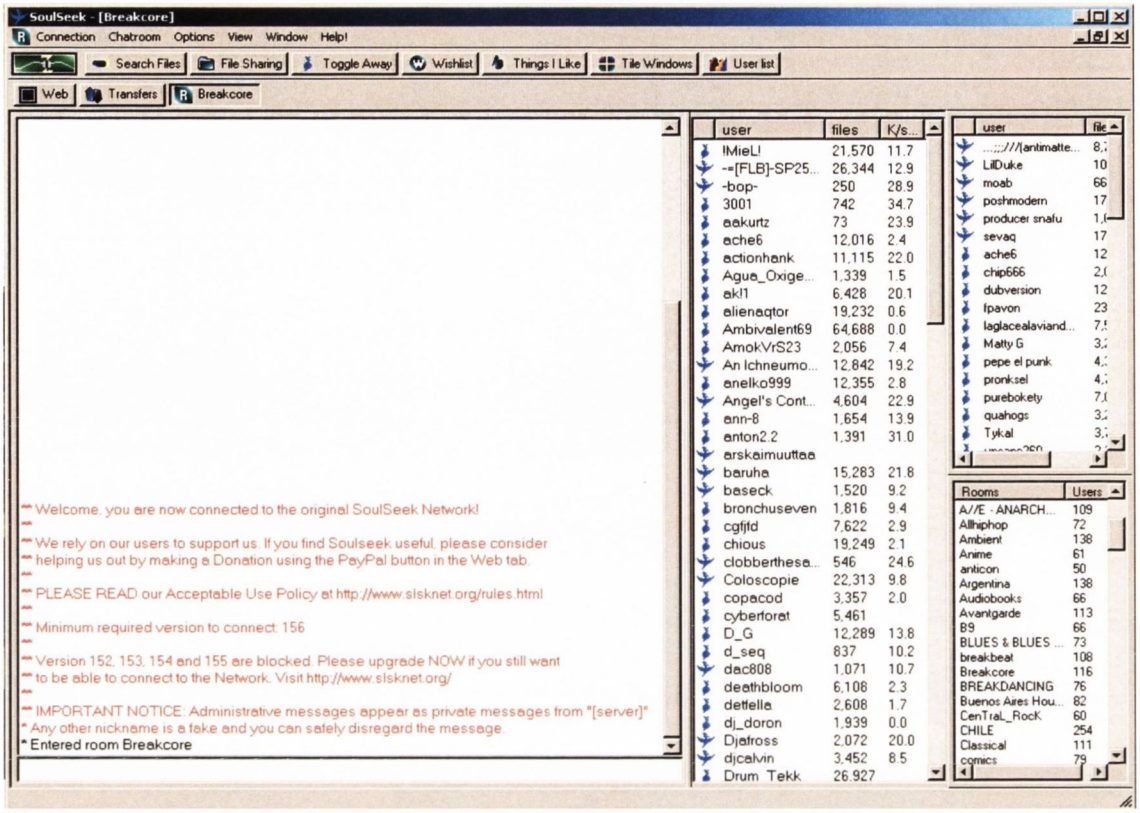
[9] Though lllude is 'passing through' the room, elsewhere in this conversation he exhibits familiarity with external sites used by room occupants.

50. [hidgekill] and in an unrealted story>>>
51. [redcode_] you seem to really like your pants ;)
52. [hidgekill] I have a thing about my pants too
53. [presstheresset] yeah i had to duct tape these bad boys together
54. [hidgekill] breakdown jeans
55. [presstheresset] theyre pimp
56. [hidgekill] soft wash
57. [Fboy] pants are a necessity in our modern day society

Again, a disregard for conventional norms of self-presentation is espoused. In the two examples considered above the topic of conversation is *style*: hair and clothes can be changed. The descriptive terms used warrant scrutiny: presstheresset describes his jeans as "funky", as "bad boys", as "pimp", whilst illacrew calls his friend craveone's dreadlocks "bangin". Style is spoken of, or read and 'written', in terms articulating anterior social and embodied relations; the terms in which subcultural praise and condemnation are expressed are likewise inflected. CMC users ostensibly appear to each other as 'disembodied', but they often assume this disembodiment *a priori* to be 'male' and 'white'. Despite the anonymising potential of the medium, the 'wetware' (sexualised and racialised) returns like the repressed: "The bodies with which we type do not evaporate, but are carried though, discursively inscribed, as internet users re-establish race (and other forms of) identity online" (Campbell 2006: 271).

3.3 Personæ

Immediately upon entering a Soulseek chatroom one is presented with the following view:



The main window here is the 'dialogue' window: "where the action is"; where time gets killed (Goffman 1967: 149, 162-163). The list of users to the immediate right of this window contains every user in that room. This is the Breakcore room; by perusing the 'room list' window at the lower right, we can see that there are 116 users currently in the room. All rooms look the same, except for the list of room occupants, the dialogue therein, and a recent addition (not shown above): scrolling 'ticker' across the top of the room dialogue window, inputted by users, usually consisting of links to websites, witticisms, requests for particularly rare material, notices of upcoming releases, calls for collaborations or material for forthcoming compilations and so on. Barring their *names*, all users also look the same: the logo or brand of the blue Soulseek bird immediately to the left of the name. If the wings are spread and it is 'flying':

the user is online and using Soulseek, if the wings are folded:

the user is online but 'away'. However, there is a 'Toggle away' button on the main menu, allowing one to appear 'away' even when one is not – this is indicated to the user who wishes to appear away by an 'A' over the connection icon on the main menu bar:

The understanding is that those who are 'away' have – or wish it to seem that they have – left Soulseek running while doing something else. No offence is taken at nonresponsiveness from the away. However, users often assume the mantle of 'awayness' to evade unwanted interaction; it is not uncommon to have private conversations with the ostensibly 'away', or even for the 'away' to forget they are 'not there' and interact publicly. A red icon:

indicates that the user is offline.

There are two numbers to the right of each username in the room occupant list above: these numbers indicate the number of shared files on that user's hard drive, and the speed of their connection. This is how users 'look': their name, status, number of files shared, and connection speed. Before the moment of dialogue, or before further examination of a user's 'properties' (by browsing their files or checking their user info), this is the entirety of the information available to users about each other.

Barring the offline, anywhere that a name is visible, one can browse that user's files. The files shared and their organisation gives a good idea of the location of that individual within the sign economy. The activities of searching, downloading, archiving and sharing are all evidence of "a process that involves clear symbolic work: complex and careful exercises of choice" (Willis 1990: 61). Files shared are cultural products in their own right, but in terms of the performance of identity online we may think of them as *insignia*; they are like 'badges' informing us of that user's orientation to the aesthetic regimes in play.

Thus far, the following terms have been used: 'participant', 'interactant', 'occupant', and 'user', where each has a slightly different scope. A 'user' is a hypothetical person working through the functions presented by the software. An 'occupant' is a name in a room list, and likewise has certain options available specifically in terms of the relations to other occupants of that room. The notion of 'participant' implies a social

dynamic. 'Interactant' operates at the level of the text itself; a participant may be involved without being active in a specific interaction event. We may say that the interactants are those active 'voices' in the text: they are the *players*.

So as to sketch out in greater detail the form of the individual online, I want to introduce another term: the 'persona' (Gill and Whedbee 1997: 166-167). The dramaturgical metaphor, so successfully deployed by Goffman, is sometimes thought of as a somewhat hackneyed rhetorical form: social life is taken as drama. However, in etymological terms the derivation is the *other way around*: the idea of the 'person' originates in the Latin *persona*, referring to an actor's *mask*, to a character in a play. The dramaturgical metaphor is not an 'add-on' to the understanding of social life, the idea of the person is derived from the dramaturgical. As Turkle suggests, "The derivation implies that one is identified by means of a public face distinct from some deeper essence or essences" (1997: 182). A persona is also generally thought of as referring to those 'public' aspects of an individual presented to others. When Goffman distinguishes between the *performer* (roughly equivalent to persona) and the *character* (the 'self' which the performance is to evoke), his point is that the latter is attributed as a consequence of the former (1990: 244-245). As the online instantiation of a 'self', then, a persona is peculiarly distinct from its offline, 'real life' manifestation. The "situational self", Collins writes, is "staged to give a particular impression; it certainly does not convey a full picture of what the individual's self might be if one took all the moments of his/her life together" (2004: 21).

In online interaction there is, as White argues, "a cinematic-like segregation of space between user and character" (2001: 131). This *space*, between the 'self' and the persona, is generated by the 'distance' between the embodied user and the despatialised online environment. It can be traversed in a 'direct' fashion: personæ may represent themselves in a manner corresponding closely to (their understanding of) their offline identity. Usernames and the identities they represent may be "connected to a certain element in the real self which they wish to exhibit" (Bechar-Israeli 1995). However, there is also a 'nonrealist', stylised aspect, where fantastic or surreal elements are deployed. A persona can therefore allow for a more 'real' presentation of a self's internal lifeworld than is available offline – personæ may be more *sincere* in terms of the conformity between a persona and the self-conception of that individual. Online environments can thus facilitate the articulation of what Amichai-Hamburger refers to as the 'real me' (2005: 34-35). Through an online persona, one may, in short, 'play one's ideal self' (Turkle 1997: 196).

For example, the images with which personæ present themselves tend not to be pictures *of* them, but rather images which represent how they *feel* or wish to be perceived. Particularly indicative in this regard is the username. As Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, and Rosenbaum-Tamari suggest: "Masks are meant not only to hide a player's real identity but also to call attention to the person and to the mask, its expressive power, imaginativeness, capacity to instil fear, evoke humor, and so on. Similarly, textual masks – online nicknames – are not only means to disguise RL identities but a form of online 'plumage'" (1997). As well as being a means of asserting identity and thus bearing personal emotional investment, names and their respective personæ are often weighted in terms of subcultural forms and orientations to them: hence 'batty bwoy' and 'Babylon_Demolitionist' exploit the Jamaican English (JE) code commonly drawn on in the ragga jungle room. In contrast, '/dev/null' or 'someone stole my user name' make reference to and indicate those users' orientation to the technology through which the message is expressed.[10] As Tonkin suggests: "When masks are used to make actors collectively anonymous, they reverse contemporary individualist expectations, in which masks are assumed to hide the real personality, not to contribute a revealing transformation" (1992: 231).

Williams (2003, 2006b) has demonstrated the importance of usernames in the articulation of subcultural identities, specifically in relation to straightedge and the symbology of 'sXe' and 'X' within that subculture. Remy suggests that the taking of a name reflects the 'oath of loyalty' to the 'brotherhood' (1990: 49). It is therefore unsurprising that usernames in the 'Underground Hiphop' room should so often feature the '$' sign, as with the following (retrieved July 17, 2006):

$$$ BaKeR 3 BiTcH $$$	$$JahArmy$$	$mokyDoGGie
$$$Bialy$$$	$%	$onlydopeshit
$$Cash Money$$||	$&$ NiGGA~$LAYA $&$	$Redrum781 – Falco is Back$
$$FYD$$	$&$ Underground Queen $&$	$umu

With greater specificity, 'japanese music' room occupants for a time took on the prefix '(jmr)'. The following are some of the names derived from the 'corporate persona', as it were, of the japanese music room (retrieved January 1, 2004):

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[10] '/dev/null' is an MS DOS deletion command: technical literacy is here transvalued – nothingness and the void are perennial 'dark' subcultural concerns. 'someone stole my user name' makes a humorous claim to online longevity: IRC, upon which p2p is based, does not allow two or more identical logged-on nicknames (Bechar-Israeli 1995).

(jmr) breuildu	(jmr) Lupinpunch	(jmr) Sko
(jmr) Fly Me To The Moon	(jmr) mirai	(jmr) StapleFood
(jmr) garlicboy	(jmr) Mista T	(jmr) stardustlust
(jmr) jinhong	(jmr) roo	(jmr) Susano-[MACH]
(jmr) kaedemouse	(jmr) sixpercent	(jmr) taco

Personæ are not quite like persons, we cannot 'read' the former the way we do the latter. A persona is mediated, 'ideal' rather than 'real'. As Williams argues, "individuals develop, through online personæ, new understandings of their personal identities" (2006b: 179). Personæ behave differently from persons. Another way of describing this, again drawn from Goffman's dramaturgical framework, is to interrogate the distinction between 'front' and 'back' regions – between frontstage and backstage (1990: 109-121). Online interaction has a looking-glass aspect in this regard, insofar as it can be considered a backstage or a frontstage (evident in the continued use of 'bedroom producer'). As Goffman puts it, regions vary "in the degree to which they are bounded and according to the media of communication in which the barriers to perception occur" (*ibid.*: 109). For current purposes, it is sufficient to note that online personæ may be taken as 'backstage' performances, although this is an issue to which we shall return.

Some users have more than one name, or change their name, sometimes two individuals are 'behind' a specific persona, sharing the terminal, and in one notable instance a recurrent 'interactant' was a 'spam-bot'. A persona could be said to be like an *attenuated* person in some respects, and yet also like a public 'front' - even where, paradoxically, that front may display behaviour or disclose details considered intimate, private, or inappropriate 'in real life' (IRL). Personæ can be thought of variously as reflections of, as cultural effects of, or projections of selves. They lack *tangibility*. Whilst co-present selves may usually interact with access to all the instantaneous nonverbal feedback of 'face-time', personæ are reliant solely on the cues of interactive text. There is, then, a peculiarly 'clear' manifestation of certain types of social *signal*. Whether or not we understand this as being 'frontstage' or 'backstage' will depend on what motives we attribute to personæ. Personæ may determine their levels of anonymity and interaction in ways which persons may not. A persona is, after all, literally, a *mask*, and masks have traditionally been understood to be worn where conventional 'public' reality has been suspended.

Whilst some personæ can, and do, meet IRL, most cannot. Users may know each other for a long time and yet know their interaction will always and only be CMC; and that

it therefore depends on exogenous contingencies in ways offline co-locational interaction generally does not. For these reasons there is a *suspension* of certain types of IRL familiarity/distance and an *extension* of CMC norms and orientations. At this stage, this should be evident from a cursory glance at the *idioms* or codes utilised in subculture-specific chatrooms: "Members of online groups rather quickly develop their own special paralangue" (McKenna and Seidman. 2005: 195). Personæ establish relations through overtly stylised linguistic repertoires which are generally not as exhaustively applied between co-present persons: they are, to a certain extent, *saturated* versions of signals which would, co-locationally, most likely be *diffuse*.

I do not mean to suggest that there is a failure of correspondence between 'self' and 'persona'. I do not doubt that there is some end point, usually an individual person, behind any given persona, but the orientations of these individuals to the environment and to other users are so diverse that it would be inappropriate to impose phenomenological assumptions from less mediated milieux. The strongest case for such caution comes from the observation that appropriate norms of interaction are not standardised but *distributional*: this holds particularly for conceptions of appropriate decorum and civility. These latter norms remain radically contingent, iterative, and open to contestation.

Goffman writes (1967: 95):

> Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance. He walks with some dignity and is the recipient of many little offerings. He is jealous of the worship due him, yet, approached in the right spirit, he is ready to forgive those who may have offended him. Because of their status relative to his, some persons will find him contaminating while others will find they contaminate him, in either case finding that they must treat him with ritual care. Perhaps the individual is so viable a god because he can actually understand the ceremonial significance of the way he is treated, and quite on his own can respond dramatically to what is proffered him. In contacts between such deities there is no need for middlemen; each of these gods is able to serve as his own priest.

In this remarkable passage, it is evident, as Collins points out, that "Goffman spent much time following up Durkheim's remark that the individual had become the principal 'sacred object' in modem secular society", where this 'sacred object' is both 'worshipped' and constituted through interaction rituals (Collins 1986: 107). My intention is to elaborate on how a persona may be construed as a "priest" in the manner delineated by Goffman. Over the course of the next chapter, I hope to illustrate some of the rituals common to the

personæ under consideration with reference to their mode of *talk*, the normative structure of interaction, and the location or *milieu* in which that interaction occurs.

4 – 'Speech'/Play and Interaction Ritual

> The accumulating flow of words buries rather than strikes the target. It is this verbosity which is most easily taught and most easily learned, so that words take the place of thought, and nothing can be found behind them.
>
> (Labov 1972b: 202)

4.1 'Inert' violence and desensitisation: the myth of normless cyberspace

Some perspectives invite us to situate certain types of interaction at the margins of society, in a twilit, anomic and amoral world of (real and representational) obscenity and violence. Technologically mediated signals, and other forms of mediated mass signification (television, music, mobile telephony, certain types of clothing), are, in this debate, labelled as channelling or transmitting socially disruptive and chaotic signals, just 'under the surface' of everyday reality, and leading to a moral degradation of that reality (Beck 1992, Kinney 1996, McNair 2002, Mulgan 1996). Some communication flows, their existence and circulation, reveal breaches in the conventional conception of the public sphere – the liberal-democratic, 'shitless' ideals we thought we were saying to each other are negated by this tide of discursive sewage.[1] The online world is described as a lurid, liminal mirror zone, an ungovernable 'Other' to RL ('real life'), where the repressed returns to subvert and pollute the bourgeois ideals of free speech. Hence Sardar writes: "The Net, in fact, provides us with a grotesque soup of information: statistics, data and chatter from the military, academia, research institutions, purveyors of pornography, addicts of Western pop music and culture, right-wing extremists, lunatics who go on about aliens, pedophiles and all those contemplating sex with a donkey. A great deal of this stuff is obscene; much of it is local; most of it is deafening noise" (1996: 24).

In what follows, the objective is to illustrate how chatroom interaction is structured and 'normed'. This process begins with a description of the organisation of text-based interaction. The argument is presented in the form of antistrophe, which is to say; it draws on material which seems to confirm the suspicion that online interaction tends towards

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[1] In a discussion of Bakhtin's 'carnival', Eagleton (2001) refers to certain totalising discourses as 'shitless'; parallel to the 'official' voice(s) mockingly undermined by carnivalesque laughter and excess.

lowest-common-denominator crassness and obscenity.[2] The line of debate is data-driven throughout, and the material presented in such a way that individual samples serve as springboards for the discussion of a number of pertinent features of the interaction occurring therein.

4.2 'Making sense' of textual interaction

It is generally argued that in CMC, "perception and expression are *both* amplified *and* reduced" (Sobchack 1996: 81). There is simultaneously 'more' and 'less' in terms of what might be characterised as social signal: "Because IRC is text-based, yet interaction is synchronous, a new genre of communication has developed" (Bechar-Israeli 1995). Turkle similarly suggests that "this new writing is a kind of hybrid: speech momentarily frozen into artifact, but curiously ephemeral artifact" (1997: 183). For Danet, text-based interaction is "doubly attenuated and doubly enhanced", by which she means the following: "Digital writing is attenuated because the text is no longer a tangible physical object" (2001: 12). We cannot *touch* the text of CMC, and as digital information it has a certain inherent *disposability*. It is also 'attenuated' compared to speech, given the absence of kinesic or paralinguistic signals such as gesture, intonation, comportment and so on. The force of the Word is magnified where typographic text becomes the principal medium for the transmission of affect.

However, online communication is also paradoxically *enhanced* compared to f2f speech: as utterances can be re-examined at a later time, text-based interaction possesses a temporal extension beyond the instantaneity of the spoken word. It may also be considered enhanced compared to conventional writing: as the interlocutor is present, it is dialogic. Textual representation in print generates the distanciation of 'autonomous' discourse: "which cannot be directly questioned or contested as oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its author" (Ong 2002: 77). The author cannot be queried via the Book, which just says what it says in the author's absence; the author can, however, be asked for clarification in textual interaction: "This curious condition of being both doubly attenuated and doubly enhanced means that typed online communication lies between speech and writing, yet is neither: in short, it is something new" (Danet 2001: 12).

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[2] 'Antistrophe' refers to "the turning of an opponent's argument against itself" (Babcock 1978: 15).

Chatroom interaction is, then, evidently different from co-present interaction. It is *not* speech, though it preserves interactional features of speech. Nonetheless, it is customary to consider it to be more 'like' speech than it is 'like' writing. However, the temporal aspect of the interaction must be emphasised, for the 'speech-like' qualities of CMC solidify or sediment over time (the 'speech' gradually 'freezes' or 'hardens' into decontextualised text). Text-based interaction, Hutchby asserts, "affords a version of conversational interaction, but only within technologically circumscribed constraints" (2001: 183). Specifically, Hutchby suggests that the following four constraints, emergent from the medium itself, distinguish CMC from the normative order of everyday f2f spoken interaction (2001: 183-184):

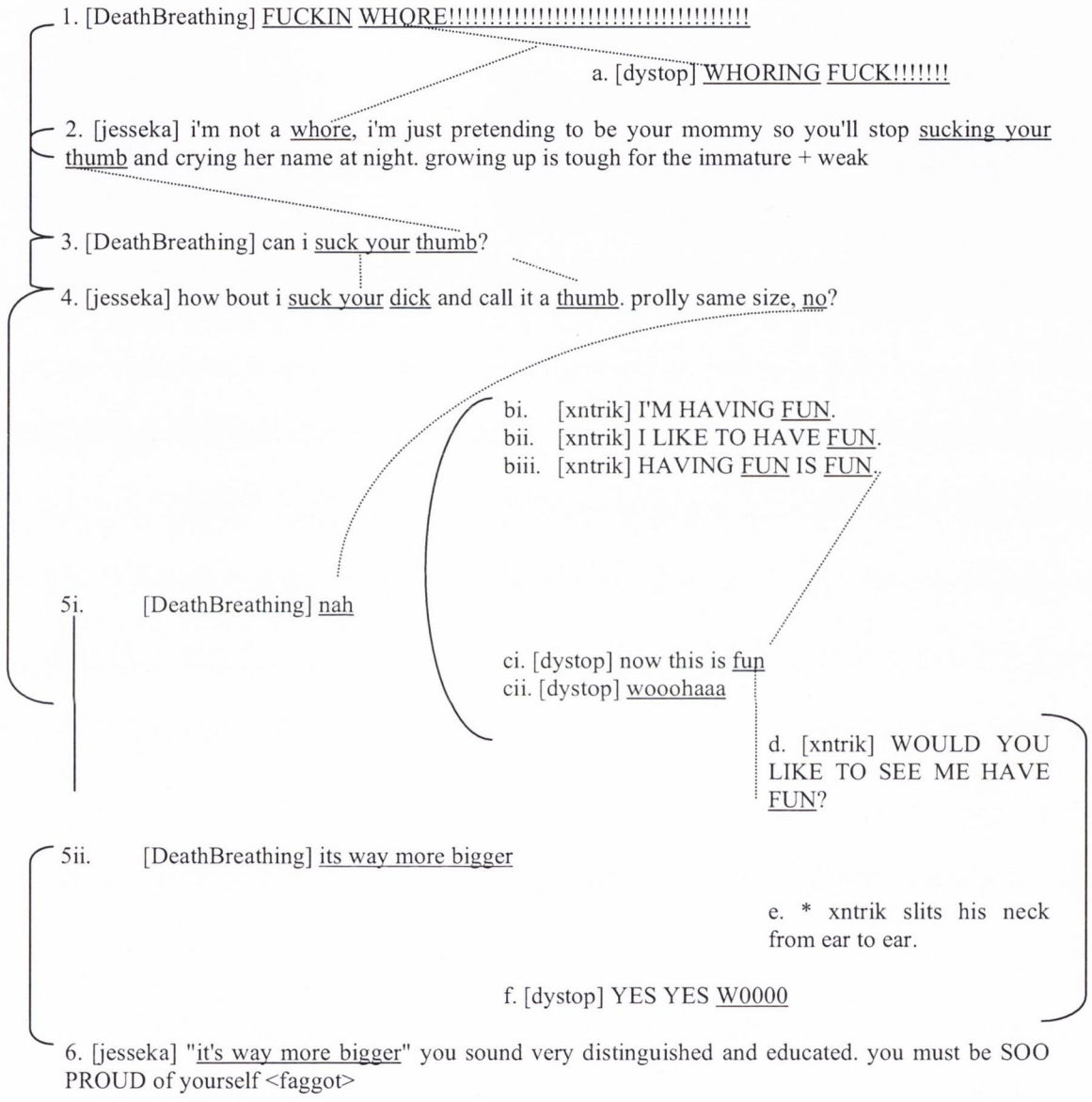
a. a turn can only be taken by typing one's statement and pressing the 'Enter' key;
b. that conversational turn is only 'uttered' once it has been distributed by the server (it is here that the temporal 'lag' occurs);
c. the distinction between the formulation of a statement and its being sent or 'said' (its appearance on screen) means that other statements may appear in the interim, altering the intended conversational sequence; and finally
d. as all this goes on, the conversation scrolls up within the chatroom window, such that where conversational volume is high, a response may be issued to a previous turn which is no longer visible on screen.

The principal issue in ordering multi-party text-based interaction, therefore, becomes that of establishing and interpreting sequential structure. As Werry indicates, "Successive, independent speech acts are simply juxtaposed, and different topics interwoven … this leads to rapid shifts in topic, and also to a greater chance of separate conversations intertwining" (1996: 51). The nature of the medium is such that the basic rule of conversational turn-taking: what Schegloff calls "the *abab* specification", is significantly less straightforward than in f2f interaction (1972b: 350). In this rather parsimonious communicative environment, participants must orient their turns (for instance, through 'addressing' their statements specifically), and interpret the turns of others, where those turns may *lag* in sequence behind the statements to which they were responses. Consider the following:

BC room 28/07/03: 1

1. [DeathBreathing] FUCKIN WHORE!!!

Figure 4.1: BC room 28/07/03



We cannot know from this vantage point whether this lag was due to the network or to exigencies at the terminals of the participants. However, it is evident that adjacency pairs need not be *temporally* adjacent: what Schegloff calls an "insertion sequence" can defer the return/response to the first of the pair-part (1972a: 78). As Hutchby puts it, the adjacency pair framework possesses "temporally extendable relevance" (2001: 67).

In Figure 4.1, repeated words and phrases in the exchange are underscored for emphasis, with dotted lines indicating the 'movement' of these terms across participants. In this segment, dystop's input is for the most part *reverberative* or echoic: at line a, he

echoes DeathBreathing's insult at 1 (including the capitalisation and exclamation), at c, he elaborates his position in the terms furnished by xntrik at b. Reverberation is employing the same term(s); constituting through repetition an identifiable register or "voice" (Silverman and Torode 1980: 162), where the latter is "the realization in speech of underlying normative orders" (Mishler 1984: 103). Thus 'fun' reverberates across the segment, particularly where xntrik uses it as both noun and adjective (biii) – "HAVING FUN IS FUN", rendering the term banal through repetition, and leading up to his 'suicide' with the rhetorical question at d, which further subverts the usage and meaning of 'fun'.[5] Interestingly, dystop's only 'original' remarks, the "wooohaaa" and "W0000" at cii and f, are expressive rather than referential; their function is continuative.

There is also echoic interplay between DeathBreathing and jesseka. The latter ranges from the enunciative alliteration of 'fuck'-'suck' (1-4), and jesseka's invitation, developing and 'sexualising' her previous accusation of infantilism (moving from 'thumb' at 2 to 'dick' at 4), to her direct quotation of DeathBreathing (6), in which single turn no less than three distinct 'speech' acts occur (respectively, the quotation, the sarcastic retort, and the final insult, "<faggot>", so bracketed as to appear *sotto voce*, but in reality, of course, displayed to the whole room to 'damn' DeathBreathing above and beyond the scorn of the previous statement). The latter half of line 4 is itself notable in terms of its truncated grammatical form: as adverb-adjective-noun-tag question, the turn invites (and gets) a response in line with the tag: the question is so structured as to get the conventional

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[5] The 'action' function in IRC enables users to 'perform actions' by typing '/me' before the action so indicated. This is done in the following way: if a user named 'reader' enters

/me types

instead of appearing on screen as

[reader] /me types

as it would when 'saying something', it appears as

* reader types

Hence users may represent actions to each other 'virtually', in what Danet describes as "verbal puppetry" (1995). Also, whereas general conversational text is black, 'action' text appears in a dark green as follows (where 'np' is an abbreviation for 'now playing'):

BC room 13/12/03

* deformator np VENETIAN SNARES - 7 sevens.med\[b.04]Number_Seven.mp3

[[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] howd in the fuck do you do that

[[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] n/m

[[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] its not important how oyu changed the color of your screename

answer which it *does* get, thus *belying* the ostensibly oppositional nature of the exchange (Kiesling 2005: 712).

The dynamic conversational 'engine' in the fragment is jesseka's presence. Whilst DeathBreathing self-selects as 'sparring partner' to jesseka, xntrik offers a series of 'metacommentaries' which indirectly acknowledge this 'slanging match'; at a further level 'up' this reading is corroborated by dystop's comments, which refer to both the DeathBreathing-jesseka exchange and xntrik's performance of ennui. The DeathBreathing-jesseka colloquy is a certain type of ludic display and is understood as such by xntrik and dystop, whose 'side' comments reinforce this reading of it. Such exchanges are *verbal games*: "a system of playful behaviours" (Hewitt 1997: 32). As such, they "harness speech play to a combative arena, where consensual rules specify the roles, moves and goals of the game" (McDowell 1992: 141). They are also inherently 'spectacular': "The point of the game is for each player to have his superiority in a given area recognized. That is why the practice of *agôn* presupposes sustained attention, appropriate training, assiduous application, and the desire to win" (Caillois 1962: 15). This is jesseka's only appearance in the transcript, and she offers a focus for the previously undirected homosocial *badinage* in the room. Some 90 turns earlier, jesseka introduced herself with: "you retards know of any good vocal break tracks?"

In itself there is not very much which is 'serious' about this text; it is throwaway 'time-killing'. It is ostensibly not *meant* to *mean* anything, but an amazing amount of detail is 'given away' in a highly concise, evocative and efficient manner. And yet, as Hughes puts it in describing a section of *Beowulf* (1998: 50): "What does this exchange mean? Is it a piece of flyting, an exchange of ritual insults between champions, or a piece of fooling, or an elaborate exercise in irony?" Moreover, how are we to arrive at a satisfactory account of such meaning and justify it? In Mabry's rather understated terms: "The apparent acceptance, if not cultivation, of argumentative discourse in computer-mediated discussion groups stands in sharp contrast to the conventions of ordinary social conversation" (1997). It is one thing to suggest that there is an interactional order to dialogue – the dialogue could still be construed as 'obscene'. Dialogue can be scatological, racist, homophobic, misogynist - in short, *abject*, but orderly nonetheless.[6] The seeming casual disposability,

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[6] The 'appearance' of order, abjection, etc., is perspectival. The 'perspective by incongruity' technique of 'making strange' resituates interaction to highlight its significance from alternative viewpoints, to stage an 'intervention' foregrounding the contextually invisible. In emic terms, within the field from which the datum is extracted, such dialogue is routine to the point of banality.

the instant local obsolescence of such exchanges, renders all the more imperative an investigation of how they embody this ritualistic 'casualness'.

4.3 'Making sense', ethnomethodology and interpretation

The antecedent ethnomethodological question here is, therefore, how to justify a given reading, a given assertion of orderliness and meaningfulness – in this case, the reading and assertion here elaborated. There is always the possibility that an 'unpacking' such as this can never be definitively completed. Where we equate the establishment of meaningfulness and orderliness with the exhaustive elaboration of the tacit, the unspoken within the interaction analysed, it may be that the means of accomplishing the task are designated so as to multiply the features of that task interminably (Garfinkel 1972: 317). The reason for this potential 'interminableness' can be found in the 'demonic' theoretical and methodological separation between utterance and meaning, between 'appearance' and 'reality' (Silverman and Torode 1980: 249). The area at which this concern arises is precisely at the opposition between the various distinct binaries represented here:

Table 4.1: Binary interpretive segmentation

vs.

Form	Content
how	*what*
process	product
that which is *said*	that which is talked *about*
message	metamessage
signifier	signified

...

It is generally assumed that an 'explanation' or 'interpretation' will, on the basis of the left hand side sketchily formulated in the data, show the 'truth' of the right hand side. On the basis of the partial ('deficient') detail furnished by the left hand side, the 'real' meaning of the right hand side will be elaborated: "The first and most important step in the formalization of discourse analysis is to distinguish *what is said* from *what is done*" (Labov 1972a: 121). Such interpretation "entails the interpreter reformulating in his own

words the reality of which the interpreted speech is construed to have only formulated the appearance" (Silverman and Torode 1980: 12).

The radical aspect of the ethnomethodological project as Garfinkel sets it out is the argument that these divisions are obfuscatory; that the distinction between what is said and what is done/meant should be dropped. If no definitive, final account of what is 'really' meant can be given, then *how one speaks* and *what one talks about* are not, after all, distinct. Thus Garfinkel suggests (1972: 319):

> An explanation of what the parties were talking about would then consist not of an account of what the parties had intended and not said but entirely of describing how the parties had been speaking; of furnishing a method for saying whatever is to be said, like talking synonymously, talking ironically, talking metaphorically, talking cryptically, talking narratively, talking in a questioning or answering way, lying, glossing, double-talking, and the rest.

To recognise the form *is* in this instance to recognise the content, alternatively, we may say that the meaning is not communicated independently of *how* it is expressed. In short: meaning is a situated, local, indexical achievement. To reiterate: "To recognize *what* is said *means* to recognize *how a person is speaking*" (*ibid.*: 320).

What is intriguing about Garfinkel's account, above and beyond its interrogation of conventional theories of meaning and reference, is that this interrogation merely pushes the demand for justification 'up' to a second-order level: we still need to know how the description or method described for accounting for "how the parties had been speaking" is correct and why it should be taken as such. Interpretation rears its imperfect, subjective, 'ad-hocing' head once again, and with it the distinction between utterance and 'meaning'. The ethnomethodological response to this epistemic (hermeneutic) slippage is to relocate the problem in the research process itself: to argue that methodology is not just the way research is conducted, it is also what is to be researched; that the inevitability of the ad hoc in the methodology of understanding is not just the rarefied preserve of researchers but is, in fact, the fundamental issue in human interaction and sense-making. Thus it comes about that the problem lies not in the supposed elliptical imprecision of the data or faulty assumptions concerning how research is to be conducted, but in the universality of interpretation and the subsequent emergent regress: full reflexivity is achieved; any inquiry into such practices is itself already, a further instance of such practices.

To present these arguments and this data in this form is to privilege a certain *episteme* or way of knowing; it is to say that explaining these things in this way is of value

in itself over and above other activities and other ways of explaining or knowing. This is ultimately a matter of *faith* in what the purposes, goals and results of 'doing' sociology are. Furthermore, the way one makes oneself understood or legitimises a given argument in a formal situation (such as this) is much the same as that contingent practical reasoning described by Garfinkel and utilised by others in more 'civilian' situations: '*ceteris paribus*', '*etc.*', and so on. In discussing these details of the data and the interpretation of it, all *I* am doing is elaborating or detailing in a way similar to that through which a 'native speaker' would do so, though with somewhat different emphasis, explicitness, and 'taken-for-granted-ness'. This reading of Garfinkel, then, suggests that 'logic' and 'methodology' are contingent, processual achievements: accountability is accomplished 'practical reasoning'. Underlying the 'doing' of successful sense-making in sociology are processes not so radically different from those underlying the doing of it in everyday reality. The strict phenomenological severity of the ethnomethodological program underlying these observations tends to be underestimated: "All procedures whereby logical and methodological properties of the practices and results of inquiries are assessed in their general characteristics by rule are of interest as *phenomena* for ethnomethodological study but not otherwise" (*ibid.*: 322). That is, there is no 'objective', universally applicable methodology; there is no guaranteed programmatic method, and therefore any such claim made for such a method is itself of sociological interest, and furthermore, can be deconstructed and shown, effectively, to be in some sense an *ideological* claim.

Garfinkel's intervention offers cautionary counsel: a wholly interpretive approach can lead into a spiral of potentially inexhaustible meaning. As an alternative, he suggests suspending the utterance/meaning distinction and instead attending solely to *how* meaning is expressed. Whilst such a focus is certainly necessary, there is a danger that idiolectal agency may be overemphasised *at the expense of social meaning and intelligibility themselves*. It is difficult to imagine how meaning could be abandoned: an account which renders the *how* of expression the only appropriate topic for analysis reduces meaning to expression, and thereby merely *defers* meaning. After all: if the meaning of the dialogue in question is evident in terms of its expression, why should it be talked about at all? We come full circle back to the simplistic ideal of language as a transparent, neutral window on 'reality'. One way of delineating the distinction being indicated here is to paraphrase the binary contrast in Saussure between *langue* (language/code) and *parole* (speech/message); there is always a danger that emphasis on the order (objective; structure) of the former neglects the creative meaning-production (subjective; agency) inherent to the latter – *but* there is also generally considered to be a converse danger with

excessive focus on a given idiolect – for a person cannot really be said to wholly 'own' the words he or she speaks. Garfinkel's implicit deconstructive critique of meaning and reference is, therefore, itself parasitic on the supposedly abandonable distinction between utterance and meaning, it partakes of the naïve search for the Word that means what it says.

Yet we can't really posit a word that 'means' always and only what it 'says', this is precisely why Garfinkel argues instead that the 'meaning' lies in the 'saying', in its own expression, not in the word itself but rather in the selection and enunciation of that word, however this is achieved. Garfinkel is not wrong to urge attention to the means of expression, but he gives the game away in implying that there is something distasteful about the protean indeterminacy and inexhaustibility of meaning. In practice, strict adherence to Garfinkel's program may appear wilfully myopic, for, as we shall see shortly, words just *do* contain semantic excess beyond the intentions of the speaker. Bakhtin (1981: 293-294) writes:

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts ... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others.

The position assumed here is that there is *not* only an either/or choice with reference to the columns in Table 4.1, and nor is there inevitably a fundamental and irresolvable disjuncture between the two.[7] Any statement has both centrifugal and centripetal aspects. Where there is a semantic 'excess' or remainder over and above what is 'merely' *said*, it is often - but not always - explicable with reference to *how* it is expressed, where this refers to how we 'read out', for instance, the perceived affective content of the exchange cited above. Whilst there is (or is attributed) the 'meaning' inhering within the exchange, which can be said to be grasped to a lesser or greater degree, or shown or explained with more or less insight or depth, part of the sense in which this grasp or insight

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[7] The perceptive reader, though, will note that this chapter is conventionally structured so as to show the reassertion of this binary 'form/content' logic: this discussion itself is a bridge enabling the movement from a description of the 'structure' of interaction (temporal lag and the like) to an account of the 'function' of that interaction (verbal play, ritual insult and so on).

or depth is *communicable* relies on 'audiencing', successfully indicating and mobilising meanings shared *not* by the participants in the exchange, but by the participants in the reconstruction or excavation of meaning taking place here. One way of describing this is to gesture again to the distinction between the interaction as 'speech-like' at the time of its production, and increasingly 'text-like' as that time gradually recedes.

4.4 'Making sense': from interactional lag to verbal games

The purpose of interjecting this discussion is to render explicit the assumptions upon which this reading is based – this reading which claims to present a thoroughgoing account of just what this sort of interaction is. The datum bears all the hallmarks of being an almost pathological example of the sort of 'trolling' or 'flame war' dismissed by the critics of 'cyberspace' cited at the outset of this chapter.[8] A glance at the context, though, shows that it is oriented to by *members* as what *sociolinguists* would call a form of dysphemistic *speech play*.[9] This sort of phatic sparring is an example of a joking relationship – "an obligatory relation of familiarity, expressed usually in ribald, licentious, playfully abusive forms of reference or address. Insults arise as a matter of convention between individuals characterized by their group identification" (Abrahams 1992: 147). Thus the datum continues, leading up to jesseka's departure (note in particular jesseka's statement at line 20):

BC room 28/07/03: 2

16. [jesseka] "it's way more bigger" you sound very distinguished and educated. you must be SOO PROUD of yourself <faggot>
17. [DeathBreathing] what is with you?
18. [DeathBreathing] you got problems

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[8] 'Troll' or 'troller' is the local descriptor for an interactant who appears to have exclusively offensive, disruptive or provocative intent. 'Trollery' is used here to refer to a particular form of adversarial interaction characterised by its reliance, one might say, on content of a Rabelaisian nature. Interactants known to each other sometimes engage in stylised trolling routines, but the term is generally applied to exchanges between strangers.

[9] Dysphemism is the opposite end of the synonymy scale from euphemism: *kicking the bucket* is dysphemistic, *putting one's affairs in order* is euphemistic. *Taking a piss* is dysphemistic, *powdering one's nose* is euphemistic (Allan and Burridge 1991: 80-81).

19. [DeathBreathing] i just wanna love ya baby
20. [jesseka] fighting with you people stimulates you guys better conversation wise
21. [jesseka] ....and you don't love whores, you pay them
22. [DeathBreathing] HAHAHAHA
23. [DeathBreathing] youre sayin youre a whore?
24. [jesseka] not until you pay me
25. [jesseka] ok?
26. [DeathBreathing] ohh allright
27. [jesseka] now do you guys have any good music to recomend or am i wasting more of you and my time? haha
28. [DeathBreathing] what do you want?
29. [jesseka] preferable breaks with vocals in them
30. [DeathBreathing] theres not much of that
31. [dystop] I would have to recomend Primas Annias and Nogra.... probably the meanest shit out right now
32. [DeathBreathing] hahaha thanks
33. [DeathBreathing] rprznt
34. [jesseka] if you guys are representing yourselves that's sad!
35. [DeathBreathing] no vox but we rock
36. [jesseka] where you people from anyways?
37. [dystop] try to get Fewk teh polic3 by primas annias....
38. [DeathBreathing] NJ
39. [dystop] vocals and breaks.
40. [dystop] sweden
41. [DeathBreathing] fewk ROX
42. [dystop] thnx
43. [jesseka] riiiiiight
44. [xntrik] I LOVE YOU GUYS.
45. [dystop] where are you from, whore?
46. [DeathBreathing] youre so mean!
47. [jesseka] montreal
48. [dystop] I LOVE YOU GUYS
49. [DeathBreathing] i <3 you too
50. [DeathBreathing] i <3 jesseka
51. [dystop] okok.
52. [dystop] jesseka: no honestly, try to DL Primas Annias - fewk teh polic3. You'll like it. Either here or from primasannias.tk
53. [jesseka] yeah i found nothing on here. but thanks
54. [dystop] go with primasannias.tk , it should be at decent speed.
55. [jesseka] g'night ladies
56. [dystop] gnight niggah
57. [jesseka] i am your #1 niggah

58. [dystop] no doubt!
59. [xntrik] you guys are awesome.
60. [dystop] yeah we rule

Again the 'lag' of CMC is evident, it is an institutional fact of interaction, "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel 2002b: 37). Whilst it might seem that the *abab* rule is broken or rendered breakable by this lag, this is not the case. Rather, participants 'compensate' for the lag by simply filling it with *another* conversation: "it can be claimed not that the rule has been violated, but that more than one conversation is going on" (Schegloff 1972b: 350). Participants orient to the lag automatically, making sense of the way in which adjacency-pair order is disrupted by, effectively, maintaining two (or more) conversations at once. This is most evident in the 'cycle' spanning lines 36-47, which concerns the conventional topic of geographical location. This topic is initiated by jesseka, but the previous topic continues to run concurrently, and the conversation could be said to split again at xntrik's 'resurrection' (44). This can be shown in the following way:

Figure 4.2: BC room 28/07/03

[DeathBreathing] no vox but we
rock

[jesseka] where you people
from anyways?

[dystop] try to get Fewk teh polic3
by primas annias....

[DeathBreathing] NJ

[dystop] vocals and breaks.

[dystop] sweden

[DeathBreathing] fewk ROX
[dystop] thnx
[jesseka] riiiiight

[xntrik] I LOVE YOU GUYS.

[dystop] where are you from,
whore?
[DeathBreathing] youre so mean!
[jesseka] montreal

[dystop] I LOVE YOU GUYS

The communicative mode of CMC "enables a kind of escape from traditional paradigms of social interaction, which are based on the centrality of presence … users can feel freer than in co-present interaction to breach the social boundaries which humans ordinarily place around interaction with strangers" (Hutchby 2001: 177). To use Nakamura's term, standard f2f distinctions and boundaries are "e-rased" (2002: 117). The boundaries are *different*: this does not mean that there are *no* boundaries. Notably, such interaction must be situated in its subcultural context. In discussing black metal, Kahn-Harris argues that the "scene provides a measure of 'insulation' that allows members to play with a range of highly transgressive themes" (2004: 105). This is certainly the case here (with gratuitously 'profane' speech genres and thematic content), but the computer-mediated milieu in which the performance of subcultural 'undergroundedness' occurs compounds the 'insulation'. Following the extravagant obscenity of the insult-exchange cycle, interaction leading up to jesseka's exit is actually quite *polite*. Also significant in this regard is the repetition or reverberation of "I LOVE YOU GUYS" (44 and 48), a quintessential example of the expression of solidarity through purportedly tongue-in-cheek 'addressee indirectness', where: "Homosocial desire is abstractly expressed only to the group and the institution" (Kiesling 2005: 711). The theme is continued by DeathBreathing (49-50), in lines which also clarify his affections by shifting them from a 'you' which can only refer to xntrik and dystop, to a more properly heterosexual object - jesseka: "i <3 you too/i <3 jesseka".

4.5 "kewl room to learn insults in": Adversariality and ritual insult exchange

To return to the terms of a speech-play or verbal jousting elaboration of the BC room 28/07/03: 2 segment, according to one reading it could be argued that, in lines 17-18, DeathBreathing is 'backing down', having realised that jesseka is perfectly happy to push the combative mode to its limits. DeathBreathing's drawn-out "ohh allright" could be construed as further illustrating his conceding the point (26), and it may read as such by jesseka, for in her next turn she moves to get the interaction 'on topic', asking, "now do you guys have any good music to recomend or am i wasting more of you and my time?" (27).[10] This turning point enables a shift to a more 'collaborative' mode, where dystop

[10] At line 43 there is another instance of expressive spelling, with jesseka's "riiiiiight" indicating sarcasm. *How* the statement is 'said' reveals a discrepancy between what is said and what is *meant* – this is indirection or 'double-talking'. Profitable contrasts may be drawn with the spelling of "thnx" (42) and "ROX" (41).

effectively 'spams' jesseka with a recommendation to download "Primas Annias and Nogra" (31). It is correct to assume that 'Nogra' is a (racially inflected) *nom de plume* of DeathBreathing, and dystop's grateful "thnx" (42) can be taken to indicate that he is 'Primas Annias', whose "fewk the polic3" has just been praised by DeathBreathing.[11] Room occupants are thus able to seize this opportunity to 'close the borders' and display their allegiance to each other (and to the room/aesthetic for which they stand). It is unlikely that DeathBreathing's use of the subculturally weighted shorthand "rprznt" (represent) at line 33 is not intended ironically, for spamming publicly directed at outsiders is generally frowned upon (unlike in-group peer-review). jesseka's response neatly disavows the legitimacy of such a manoeuvre: "if you guys are representing yourselves that's sad!" This one line mobilises the entire 'radio ham' critique in a particularly visceral and contemporary way.[12] Correctly, jesseka understands DeathBreathing and dystop to be advertising ('representing') their own music (and, as is evident from the text, demonstrating their regard through such mutual representation), in a niche chatroom on a peer-to-peer platform, and jesseka therefore asserts that such activity undermines any claim they may be making for subcultural status: it is merely 'sad'.

An alternate (though still zero-sum 'conflict' or 'game') reading could suggest that jesseka went 'too far', and that this is the reason DeathBreathing seemingly concedes: "our sense of the common moral order of everyday life is temporarily jeopardized when infractions arise, and when this happens, we don't simply seek to repair whatever's been damaged or disrupted. What we mainly look for are signs of the culprit's more general respect and regard for social rules and the order we approve" (Harris and Rampton 2000: 13). jesseka's return to the on-topic and approved conversational resource of requesting listening recommendations (thereby positioning those 'native' to the room as insiders) displays such respect and regard (particularly given that the Breakcore room is not an ideal location to search for "vocal break tracks", and that by this stage jesseka is probably aware of this). Moreover, the request at line 27 is undermined somewhat by being immediately followed by "haha": it is as though there were a "gap between self and voice"; jesseka is already signalling her intention to leave (*ibid.*: 14). Interactants, Goffman writes, may "conceal low regard by extra punctiliousness" (1967: 60). Indeed, they may also *reveal*

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[11] "Fewk teh polic3" is a reference to N.W.A.'s "Fuck Tha Police" (1988); the former track also samples the latter.

[12] The comment jesseka makes at line 34 also contains within it the core existential paradox of personæ – the idea of 'representing' oneself, and the implied mediation and possible 'inauthenticity' of all self-presentation.

low regard through the same means, and this is arguably what jesseka does when she returns to this situationally appropriate topic of "vocal break tracks".

Whether or not there is a clear 'winner', the gladiatorial confrontation came to a close. Insofar as DeathBreathing remains a 'vocal' fixture of the room, he may lose battles, but not yet the war; he 'holds his corner' of the arena. Yet we cannot know how many other such 'arenas' jesseka has 'sparred' in or exactly what her orientation is to them. It is certain, however, that she is accomplished at the 'adversarial style'.

Drawing on Gilligan to account for gendered differences in interactional styles online, Herring contrasts what she calls the (predominantly male) "anarchic/agonistic ethic" with the (predominantly female) "positive politeness ethic" (1996b: 130). The former is manifested in what Herring calls "the Adversarial style", whilst the latter is instantiated in the "Supportive/Attenuated style" (*ibid.*: 118-119). There is of course some overlap here - not all adversarial interactants are male, and not all supportive interactants are female.

For illustrative purposes, the two styles may be neatly contrasted with reference to the following exchange. The (male) Breakcore room occupant known as 'vek' (initially '[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]', a name with *two* ASCII faces in it, then 'V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent') maintains a performance that could be characterised as being of the adversarial style, whilst the (female) user referred to in interaction as 'ang' or 'angie' (whose username is just an ASCII face: '||-_-||') could be typecast as furnishing an illustration of the supportive style. The following exchange between the two took place on the "Introduce yourself here!" section of the 'faces place' forum:

> ANGIES A WORTHLESS WHORE THAT SUCKS DICK FOR FAST FOOD AND SHE'S PROLLY GIVIN UP SOME PUSSY FOR POCKET CHANGE ... THE SHITEATING WHORE.... I LAUGH AT HER PSEUDO - INTELLECTUAL APPROACH AT LIFE .... SOMEONE JUST NEEDS TO RAPE AND MURDER THAT WORLTHESS CUNT .. CUZ SHE STINKS LIKE RUSTED FISH AND HER CRADLE ISNT WORTH PUTTING A BABY IN ...

The virtually hebephrenic excess of this text is then repeated in its entirety 13 times (V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent and ||-_-|| 2005).

||-_-||'s response is:

> welcome vek, glad u could join us

The contrast between these statements is stark.[13] vek came to a social space 'owned' by ||-_-||, apparently only to abuse her personally, and with his regular username so that he could be identified 'cross-platform'. The post was vek's first on the site; ||-_-|| had moderator status but did not remove it; and though *vek* edited some of his other posts, those remaining are similar in tone to that cited above.

According to Herring, "these systematic behaviors correspond to two distinctive systems of values each of which can be characterized in positive terms: One considers individual freedom to be the highest good, and the other idealizes harmonious interpersonal interaction" (*ibid.*: 137). Herring formalises the dichotomy for heuristic purposes, nonetheless, some adversarial exchanges appear valued as satisfying and constructive play by the group, whilst particularly adversarial interactants often come to be regarded as *hindering* dialogue: "freedom of speech when combined with adversariality may effectively translate into freedom of speech only for the adversarial"; those who favour a conversational style not wholly given over to gladiatorial insult exchange can be marginalised (*ibid.*: 138-139). In another example involving vek:

BC room 06/01/04

61. [cutups] its always weird when i come into here and theres some discussion already going on.
62. [k5k] vek, I did offer ta tell you where I live
63. [k5k] theres no discussion goin on, its jus vek
64. [/dev/null] yeah
65. [/dev/null] me + k5k are merely his shit encrusted mirrors
66. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] and k5k .. your mothers a 3 $ hooker... and your father is a gay shitpusher from grenwich village you shitbag...
67. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] congrats....
68. [k5k] dude, at least my mum didnt kill herself
69. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] your a COMPLETE FUCKING PIECE OF GARBAGE..
70. [k5k] veks mum is dead everyone, died giving birth cuz veks head was too big
71. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] you stink of foul turds... and you prolly have a 5th grade education
72. [|| | ||| || ||||] kewl room to learn insults in english , thank all

This extract demonstrates, firstly, how unmitigated adversariality comes to seem tiresome even to well-practiced participants. Line 65 is remarkable in this regard, as it places vek in an abject and grotesque narcissistic position, throwing excrement at (what he

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[13] There is more than one way to perform adversariality, and ||-_-||'s response is highly effective in its 'non-adversarial adversariality'.

takes to be) his own reflections, reflections which are, of course, self *and* Other. Secondly, it shows the contrast between 'simple' or 'obscene' insult and a less adversarial alternative which nonetheless accrues status: competitive wit, and finally, it indicates how the adversarial style is understood by participants and observers. The implication of Herring's distinction is that statements will be interpreted differently depending upon which ethic one subscribes to. From one perspective, much of this verbal combat *stops being funny*, and takes up space that would otherwise be given over to something else.

However, close attention to detail precludes the formulation of generalisations. In line 72, '|| | ||| || ||||' jokingly expresses appreciation for the insults exchanged: thus underscoring the ritual aspect of insult exchange, which is, as we shall see, sometimes perilously close to 'real' hostility.[14] Ritualised exchanges are identifiable as such and differentiable from actual conflict, but it is possible for an exchange to move across the nonserious/serious boundary: "in the most successful kinds of play, the most constant message must be the deeply ambivalent one: this is play – this is *not* play. With joking activity ... this paradoxical message is very commonly carried out by the use of the same aggressive, hostile formulaic devices found in use in real arguments – i.e., the same curses, boasts, devices of vilification and degradation, etc." (Abrahams 1989: 245).

4.6 "yr mum": The semantic tension of ritual insult exchange

CMC, according to Hutchby, "involves a distinctive combination of individuality and anonymity which enables participants to 'play' with social identities, along with a relatively unconstrained capacity to breach social norms associated with face-to-face interaction" (2001: 174). This 'breaching', however, is achieved in conventional, routine, and ritualised ways. There is nothing 'new' about swearing and insult exchange as a means of asserting a transgressive, devil-may-care position – the expletive is a 'cool' *styleme* deployed to indicate a seeming refusal of the formalistic voice, expletives are generally used "to break norms, to shock, show disrespect for authority, or be witty or humorous" (de Klerk 1997: 147). Conversely, within the terms of that formalistic voice or register, habitual profanity appears the shockingly coarse, and yet also boring verbal tic of what Hughes calls "characters of limited sensibility" (1998: 274). This is evident in the

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[14] This works both ways: a jesting insult can be (mis)taken as a serious slur, and a seemingly real slur can be undermined through (deliberate mis)interpretation as a routine joke.

following passage (cited in Owst 1966: 414), from John Bromyard's *Summa Predicantium* (circa 1390):

> These inventors of new oaths, who inanely glory in such things, count themselves more noble for swearing thus. This is to be seen among those who consider themselves of high breeding, or are proud. Just as they invent and delight in everything of the nature of outward apparel, so do they also in the case of vows and oaths ... Strange vows and swear-words invented by them are already so common that they may be found daily in the mouth of any ribald or rascal you please.

The self-serving moral hygiene of formalistic 'shitless' discourse has long been manifested in 'lip service' of this kind, as though condemning explicit language served also to disavow the taboo referents of that language (similarly, the language in question has a 'functional' effect in terms of its reinforcement of conservative morality, which underwrites its success). The power of such perspectives, like the power of those discursive forms against which they pit themselves, depends on the distinction between civilised, conservative, respectable, bourgeois discourse, which (claims that it) 'means' what it 'says', and another, jocular, casually obscene, apparently subversive discourse – which (seemingly) doesn't. The latter can be fruitfully described as what de Sousa, in a succinct and nicely inverted (because *shitless*) euphemism, calls *coprolalia* (literally, 'shit-talking') (1987: 281).[15] The latter is deemed threatening to the former precisely because it undermines the weight of the meaning of the Word, demonstrating that some statements may not 'mean' what they 'say', and correspondingly, that it seems possible to refuse meaning, to 'not take seriously' the Master's Voice. The tension between the two plays on the potential for 'double-talking' slide across the serious/nonserious boundary: that an obscene, cutting joke can be figuratively 'true'; that deadpan delivery enables irony and sarcasm. Note also that coprolalia as a speech genre is a means of both elaborating and signalling an informal 'backstage' context, opposed to the *shitless* norms of 'frontstage' presentation (Goffman 1990: 129):

> The backstage language consists of reciprocal first-naming, cooperative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking, rough informal dress, 'sloppy' sitting and standing posture, use of dialect or sub-standard speech, mumbling and shouting,

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[15] The term *coprolalia* apparently originally referred to the verbal output associated with Tourette's syndrome and related speech patterns. It is used here as a contrast to the *shitless* voice of authority discussed by Eagleton (2001). Each is named for the speech genre it repudiates.

> playful aggressivity and 'kidding', inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor physical self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching, and flatulence. The frontstage behaviour language can be taken as the absence (and in some sense the opposite) of this.

'Backstage' coprolalia and 'frontstage' *shitlessness* are thus co-dependent. Speaking of such interactional forms as would here be classified coprolalic, Goffman writes: "these are not random impulsive infractions. Rather, these acts are exactly those calculated to convey complete disrespect and contempt through symbolic means" (1967: 87). Collins builds on Goffman's insights in his elaboration of what he terms 'the street code': "The street code not only negates normal criteria of middle-class achievement and respectability, it is a full-fledged counterculture. Middle-class demeanor standards are taken as signs of timidity … The street code is a set of rituals that generate the most emotional intensity and dominate the focus of attention; the bland politeness and mild accommodativeness of normal Goffmanian social manners pales before it" (2004: 281).

As a preliminary exploration of this distinction, consider in closer detail the fragment cited in the previous section; such exchanges are 'simultaneities'; they "indicate that it is possible to derive a multiplicity of social, epistemological, linguistic and psychological theories from a single case" (Ardener 1982: 11).

BC room 06/01/04

61. [cutups] its always weird when i come into here and theres some discussion already going on.
62. [k5k] vek, I did offer ta tell you where I live
63. [k5k] theres no discussion goin on, its jus vek
64. [/dev/null] yeah
65. [/dev/null] me + k5k are merely his shit encrusted mirrors
66. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] and k5k .. your mothers a 3 $ hooker... and your father is a gay shitpusher from grenwich village you shitbag...
67. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] congrats....
68. [k5k] dude, at least my mum didnt kill herself
69. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] your a COMPLETE FUCKING PIECE OF GARBAGE..
70. [k5k] veks mum is dead everyone, died giving birth cuz veks head was too big
71. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] you stink of foul turds... and you prolly have a 5th grade education
72. [|| | ||| || ||||] kewl room to learn insults in english , thank all

The intention in what follows is to examine a number of turns in this sequence as ritual insults, equivalent to *sounds* as formulated by Labov:

T(B)	is so	*X*	that	*P*

'Sounds', or 'the dozens', are "an oral contest, a joking relationship, a ritual of permitted disrespect in which the winner was recognized on the basis of verbal facility, originality, ingenuity, and humor" (Levine 1977: 347-348). In this ludic speech genre, '*T(B)*' is the target, '*X*' is an attribute of *T*, and '*P*' is the proposition designating the extent to which *T* possesses *X*. Labov's discussion centres on the classic *your mother* – in Labov's example, "*Your mother* [*T(B)*] *so old* [*X*], *she fart dust.* [*P*]". Which is to say, *T(B)* stands for 'the mother of *B*', such that:

Your mother	is so	*old*	that	*she farts dust.*

'Sounds' do not 'mean' what they 'say': they mean something else. Neither *A*, the producer of the sound, nor *C*, the audience (the existence of an audience is assumed), take it that *B*'s mother really does fart dust; neither do any of the parties concerned believe that *A* actually holds it to be the case that *B*'s mother farts dust. Sufficient contextual information must be available for the audience to interpret the actual, implicit meaning. Correct understanding "involves the recognition and attribution of some implicit content or function, which is potentially obscured by the surface content or function" (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 166).

Now, vek refers to k5k's mother *and* father (line 66) in a manner analysable directly in the terms of Labov's scheme (1972a: 154). We could easily 'fill in' this line such that:

(a)	Your mother	is [so	degenerate *etc.*	that	she's] a three dollar hooker

and

(b)	Your father	is [so	gay *etc.*	that	he's] a gay shitpusher from Greenwich Village

where, tacitly or 'as everyone knows', lots of gay people reside in Greenwich Village.

Note the indeterminacy as to what the attribute *X* is. A degree of 'exophoric' ellipsis in formulation is commonplace in stock insults: one may, as vek does, simply state the proposition *P* and let the audience impute their own attribute. The aspersion cast upon k5k's parents renders them as immoral, indecent, poverty-stricken, sexually deviant, *unclean*. It is not so important how this is elaborated; it is sufficient that *X* be offensive in terms of the 'middle class politeness criteria'. This rule of thumb refers to the *shitless* manner of speech one would use "to be polite to a casual acquaintance of the opposite sex in a formal situation in a middle class environment" (Allan and Burridge 1991: 31). The insult is successful precisely to the extent that it violates these norms. Transgression of the middle class politeness criteria is simultaneously a means of expressing and creating homosocial solidarity: young men "use oppositional stances to create stances of solidarity" (Kiesling 2005: 703).

However, k5k's response is not directed at vek in such a way as to show the unfavourable light his *parents'* lowly position casts upon *his* person, but rather emphasises the detrimental impact which an absurd or grotesque feature of *vek's* person (the size of his head) had upon his mother (to wit, causing her death). k5k's return *inverts* the usual implicature of a *your mother*. Also, vek's insult is directed at k5k (the ostensional aspect of *your*), whilst k5k's addresses the room (*veks mum is dead everyone*), not vek, but *does* refer indexically to him. This indirectional form has the added bonus of seemingly *ignoring* the target. Having asserted that vek's mother committed suicide (68) and seen by the response that he has hit upon a profitable seam (69), k5k delivers the *coup de grace* (70). The 'nonserious', idiomatic nature of these insults is evident, for vek's mother can't logically have killed herself *and* died in childbirth.

To paraphrase k5k, then:

vek's head	is so	big	that	vek's mum died when she gave birth to him

The syntactic complexity of the turn is itself of note, for the sentence is structured so that the climactic punchline is delayed to the final clause:

> veks mum is dead everyone, died giving birth cuz veks head was too big

In responding to this (71), vek again chooses a two-part structure, but follows k5k in 'personalising' the content: k5k stinks, and probably only has a fifth grade education:

(a)	You	[are so dirty *etc.*	that	you] stink of foul turds	

and

(b)	You	[are so ignorant *etc.*	that	you] probably [only] have a fifth grade education	

There is one more point about this exchange worth elaborating, implicitly evident from lines 68 and 69. Occurring *between* the two insults thus far discussed, these two turns stand out:

68. [k5k] dude, at least my mum didnt kill herself
69. [[{-_-}]Vek [{-_-}]] your a COMPLETE FUCKING PIECE OF GARBAGE..

The point is this: vek's mother is, seemingly, actually dead. The evidence for this comes from an episode 23 days earlier, where the pertinent information lies in the quotation at line 74 below:

BC room 14/12/03

73. [[{-_-}]vek [{-_-}]] [true_k5k] yr mum? were you saying that to me . . .?
74. [true_k5k] [[{-_-}]vek [{-_-}]] you must be some butt fucking childmolesting piece of half breed . .. you worthless bitch . .. DONT TALK ABOUT MY MOTHER YOU SHITEATER HAVE SOME FUCKIGN RESPECT FOR THE DECEASED.....
75. [true_k5k] he doesnt know it was me that killed her, with my ozone hole of doom
76. [777?] go k5
77. [777?] go k5

In line 74, k5k quotes vek's response to some *previous* insult in *your mother* form that he has deployed against vek, so as use this quote as a foundation for line 75, again directed at vek, but in such a form that it is tangentially in keeping with the ongoing conversation in the room (a debate concerning the relation between ozone layer damage

and industrial pollution).[16] Line 75 only makes sense following the quote immediately previous, which allows k5k to insult vek via his mother without having to laboriously spell out the details; k5k uses the quote to demonstrate, *to the room*, that he has successfully taunted vek on this point previously – he let's vek 'do the talking' for him. This sort of epideictic quotation is specifically intended for an audience of 'ratified overhearers' (Kiesling 2005: 714). The judicious use of the quote successfully pre-empts the possibility of a similar return from vek: it is itself such a return. Rather like the ultimate elliptical parataxis: *your mother*, k5k does not actually say *anything* about vek's mother, he merely demonstrates the prior success he has had with this tack.[17] With this turn, k5k achieves an insult and a rebuttal without even formulating a sentence of his own.

vek's previous line (73) is itself a quotation of k5k, followed by a request for clarification as to the intended recipient of a previous turn. Such quotation is commonplace in multi-party interaction: one may commonly quote a turn of another co-participant when, for instance, it is a question one is answering, one is seeking clarification as to the meaning or intended recipient of the turn quoted, one intends through such quotation to ridicule the statement quoted, one wishes to express agreement with the sentiment of the statement quoted, or one is making an accusation of inconsistency through demonstrating that an opponent has shifted position in an argument. One may also, of course, quote conversations going on elsewhere, or previous conversations of those who are absent (and present). In one instance, a sort of reverberating duel occurred based on reprising or echoing the most grotesque or offensive quotes the participants had in their arsenals (individual quotes, and sometimes whole conversations, are also reproduced in user info and on external sites).

Such heteroglot quotation leads to the possibility of 'putting words into someone's mouth': undermining or making fun of somebody by suggesting that they said something. This ventriloquial tactic is often used for humorous effect, as below:

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[16] Possibly someone else drew this response from vek, but were that the case it is unlikely k5k would use it in this way. The use of the quote implies the boast that k5k elicited it. To use such a quote where another player had gotten it from vek would be a sort of plagiarism potentially diminishing to k5k.

[17] This truncated *your mother* is manifest in a local username: 'YER MAW'. The same user also logs on as 'YER MAW@work'.

SSA room 15/01/04

[Kernel32] i'm good online buds with dubya
[Kernel32] he's not really a cunt
[|--||||] whos dubya?
[Kernel32] bush
[Kernel32] hold on
[|--||||] oh right
[Kernel32] i've got a quote from him i saved the other night
[Kernel32] [Bush Jnr] HAHAHAHHSAFHDHA I'm SO FUKKING FRUNK... I CAN PRESS THIS BUTTTON AND BLOW UP LITHUANIA

It is possible that k5k's quotation of vek is such an instance – that vek did not write the statement reproduced at line 74, but the quote exhibits characteristic traits of vek's personal style (particularly the content of the insults in lower case and the use of connective ellipses). The turn by k5k in question occurred seven lines earlier, and was indeed directed at vek, an expression of doubt concerning vek's claim that industrial impact on the ozone layer is inconsequential:

[true_k5k] according to who
[true_k5k] cocal cola
[true_k5k] yr mum?
[true_k5k] I mean mom

Perhaps k5k brought up vek's mother 'out of habit', but then realised the 'rise' that could be got from vek. Or perhaps k5k was trying to engineer an opportunity to reproduce the quote. Either way, vek inquires as to whether it is indeed *he* being questioned and therefore *his* mother under discussion (had vek responded differently, it would have been difficult for k5k to deploy the quote at this stage). In this instance, vek doesn't take the bait k5k has cast beyond querying whether or not it was cast for him; in fact, after line 73, vek says nothing whatsoever for some time. If 'winning' a verbal duel is equated with successfully reducing one's opponent to silence, then k5k can be said to have 'won' here, for he got vek to 'shut up'. Moreover, the cost of having done so with such material does not seem that high, given the encouragement offered by '777?'.

Collins (2004: 21-22) argues that:

> It is possible for individuals to set out to dominate situations, insult others, have jokes at their expense, even drive them out of the situation and the group. But situational prestige goes to the person who does this by keeping to the normal forms of ritual interaction. A successful insult is one that is done within the expectable flow of conversational moves, inserting double meanings so that on one level it remains appropriate. Put-downs and one-upmanship are successful when the onus for breaking the smooth playing out of the interaction goes to the recipient, who incurs dishonor either by being unable to shoot back a smooth and appropriate reply, or by breaking the frame entirely with an angry outburst.

Such outbursts signal that the offended party has been successfully put "in wrong face or out of face" (Goffman 1967: 8). In Labov's examples, ritual insults are reciprocated with further ritual insults, whilst *personal* insults are met with denials, accounts of mitigating circumstances, excuses, silences and so on. Line 69, which follows k5k's initial mention of vek's mother, is none of these, but is nonetheless different to the ritual insults vek presents in other turns. Yet once line 69, with its abrupt shift to 'shouting' in 'raised caps', is sent, it is evident that the interaction is still perceived as 'play' and not 'real'. The nonserious nature of line 68 is flagged by the "dude, at least" preface – a standard form for a 'parry' in insult exchange. It is the tasteless, *ridiculous*, hypothetical 'possibleness' of line 70 which makes it so successfully offensive. There is a sort of semantic tightrope here, as Goffman indicates in his discussion of 'sounds': "statements made about a player's parent are seen as displaying the wit of the insulter, not the features of the parent, and so can be wondrously obscene. A mild-sounding insult that happened to refer to known features of the particular parent would be given a different relevance and cease to be unserious" (1974: 50). But aside from vek's initial, summary dismissal at line 69 of k5k's first mention of vek's mother ("your a COMPLETE FUCKING PIECE OF GARBAGE"), it is 'back to business': in vek's next turn at line 71, he returns to ritualised insults only slightly different from those which he was using before capital was made of his dead mother, and in what follows it is evident that the insults are understood as 'not serious' (indeed, even lines 71 and 72 indicate this understanding): "An insult is still an insult, and still competitive, but it is *socially* indirect in that it is serving not only competition but solidarity as well" (Kiesling 2005: 710).

Within the *milieu* of the room, one of the primary functions of interaction is *entertainment*, where statements are successfully classed as the latter to the extent that they are perceived as the opposite of the 'serious', bourgeois, formal register. The purpose of ritual insults is, after all, to *get a laugh* (Kelley 2004: 128). Many ritual insults succeed

precisely where "they would arouse disgust and revulsion among those committed to the 'good' standards of middle-class society" (Labov 1972a: 143).

Interactional success or failure in agonic insult exchange demonstrably turns on one's ability to recognise and exploit the opposition between bourgeois *shitlessness* and coprolalia, where the latter two are in a relation of total interdependence, as Goffman points out (1967: 86):

> The idiom through which modes of proper ceremonial conduct are established necessarily creates ideally effective forms of desecration, for it is only in reference to specified proprieties that one can learn to appreciate what will be the worst possible form of behavior. Profanations are to be expected, for every religious ceremony creates the possibility of a black mass.

Transgression gets laughs, where these arise, precisely because "verbal dueling treads a fine line between play and real aggression" (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 176).[18] Clearly, k5k is 'playing' close to this line. As Levine indicates, ritual insult exchange has implicitly understood 'rules': "They could be violated, of course, but the cost of deviating from the normal pattern was anger, loss of control, and confusion" (1977: 348). Such consequences, Anderson points out, are possible in play, because play implies that "the situation is somewhat undefined and subject to varying interpretations, and ... there is a ready audience conferring differences in social rank according to the apparent outcome of competitive play" (2003: 198). The meaning in such statements lies not in what they say, but in what they do: express audacious mockery, claim superiority or prestige, indicate a robust, assertive attitude towards personal criticism and the possibility of emotional upset, dare a response and so on.

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[18] This fine line is underscored where insults are issued 'asynchronously'. A *folder* has circulated within the Breakcore room entitled "shitmat - haha i fucked blaergs girlfriend with my painfree font shaped monster cock, she hated it but i didnt [dont call me names again cunthead mix]" (retrieved May 25, 2006). The folder contains a single '*noisey*' track, featuring a voice repeating "blaerg smells of poo". In 2001 Shitmat material was released on Aural Addiction, a label co-owned by blaerg.

5 – "only if you're a real nigga"

> When users go online, race dwells in the mediating space between the virtual and the real, the visible and the invisible; when the line between the two is crossed, disruptive moments of recognition and misrecognition can ensue.
>
> (Nakamura 2002: 144)

5.1 Verbicide and shibboleth ambiguity

Ritual insult exchange is characterised by a high degree of semantic indirection. Insult exchange sequences and the insults which constitute them are idiomatic. A canonical reading of the terms used in ludic maledicta does not render an appropriate interpretation: "The apparent significance of the message differs from its real significance" (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 173). The implicature of the statement is irreducible to the lexical and semantic properties of the statement's surface formulation: "in verbal duels, it is the nuance which is most important. It is the connotation, not the denotation, which may cause the greatest concern" (Dundes, Leach and Özkök 1972: 149). As an interactional genre, verbal games such as insult exchange do not possess direct or transparent referentiality. As Salmond puts it: "Much of the verbal behaviour in these rituals is not really aimed at communicating semantic information at all, but rather at fulfilling a required set of ritual paces" (1989: 210).

But I want to argue further, now going in the opposite direction to prove the same point. It has been argued thus far that there are cases where the meaning of the words does *not* give us the meaning of their being said in their specific contexts. What the words *say* is not equivalent to what they are being used to *do*. There are also cases, however, where the words *say* more than what they are *doing*, where the intention of the speaker comes close to being *exceeded* by the effect of the words, where the words mean (with varying degrees of intent) more than just what they are used to say, partly because the words in question are so *heavy*, and partly because they are being used (shock-)tactically as a consequence of this. Their interminably reverberating use is again intended to indicate studied *masculine* disregard towards bourgeois discursive conventions. In de Klerk's words: "We find taboo language 'strong' because it implies the violation of a code … the use of expletives has a covert attraction because of its connotations of strength, masculinity and confidence in

defying linguistic or social convention" (1997: 147). Use of expletives is therefore often an articulation of *macho* defiance, in terms of the attitude exhibited towards both the referent of the utterance and the sensibilities of the recipient, and can furthermore be characterised as *verbicidal.*

As is indicated by the use of terms such as *swear*, *oath* and *curse* to describe vernacular 'bad language', our understanding of linguistic obscenity exhibits emphasis on speech as illocutionary *act*, on the word as deed. Such terms demonstrate the vestigial traces of oral culture; illustrating the original conception of malediction as word-magic. *Blasphemy*, *profanity* and *obscenity*, like *damn* and *curse*, originally have religious meanings: the roots of *blasphemy* are in the Greek *blas-* ('evil, profane') and *phemos* ('speaking), whilst *profanity* originates in the Latin *pro* ('before' or 'outside') and *fanus* ('temple') (Allan and Burridge 1991: 124). 'To curse' originally meant 'to damn', and 'to damn' has itself depreciated from its 'fire and brimstone' sense. Such terms are subject to, or rather evidence of, the long process of secularisation and 'disenchantment'. The anachronistic *scarlet woman*, for instance, has long lost its associations with the papacy and become associated with the meaning of *whore* more or less exclusively. As religious belief diminishes, identity-based insults grounded on religious identity (*devil*, *heathen*) lose their power, coming ultimately to be replaced by racial and national insults (such as *nigger, Paki*). Analogously, "terms like *villain*, *rotter*, *bounder* and *cad*, which used to have a strong moral basis, have been displaced by more physically and sexually based terms, such as *bastard*, *bugger*, *shit* and *fucker*" (*ibid.*: 237-238). *Bugger* is a good example of this: "Deriving from the French *Bougre*, 'a Bulgarian', it carries the sense of 'a heretic' from the fourteenth century and 'a sodomite' from the sixteenth" (*ibid.*: 129). The term depreciates from a religious (xenophobically formulated: 'Bulgarian' here referred to a member of the Orthodox Church) to a sexual sense, and then becomes casualised into general use. The taboo moves from the religious, to the sexual, and most recently on to ethnic/political identity. That which is most taboo generates the most effective swearing (the most offensive terms in the taboo lexis currently are probably *cunt* and *nigger*). However, terms tend to depreciate with repetition; this is why such repetition is characterised as 'weakening' or 'verbicidal'. We may characterise 'obscene' discourse as verbicidal to the extent that such constant repetition allows us to discern distinct semantic inflections.

The purpose of this section is to sketch out some examples of contemporary verbicidal usage, where the politically loaded term is ostensibly being used in a 'generic' way. The terms in question may be characterised as *shibboleths*, as our orientation to them

reveals something of our own social location. The goal is to explore the evasiveness or 'slipperiness' of the Word, to demonstrate an immanent critique of what Vološinov calls "the word with its theme intact, the word permeated with confident and categorical social value judgment, the word that really means and takes responsibility for what it says" (1973: 159). In the first example to be considered, the intention is to explore the meaningfulness of a particularly sensitive term, through exploring the boundary conditions between serious and nonserious use and showing how these conditions are contextually signalled. In the second example, which follows in the next chapter, a further purpose is served: there the term examined is the most basic constituent element of ritual insult exchange, and moreover plays a fundamental role in the elaboration of heterosexual masculinity.

The 'casual' offensiveness of a term can be differentiated from its 'objective' offensiveness as these are manifested in interaction. Terms are subject to verbicidal depreciation, but can be reinvested with semantic weight where the *intent* behind them is felt to be forcefully hurtful. Repetition is a key issue: the terms under consideration are used again and again, with nuances elaborated and prioritised in varying ways according to context. Another fundamental issue is therefore one of *milieu*, serving as a determinant of (*how* and) what may and may not be said. The intention is to move through a discussion of obscenity (as stand-alone form in the 'trollery' genre, and as element of ritual insult), to a more general discussion of wit and verbal contest as "reputation-making machine" (MacKinnon 1995: 129).

Over the rest of this chapter, then, discussion is restricted to use of racially offensive terms, specifically, the *nigga/nigger* complex, for, as Wong suggests: "The N-word is perhaps the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in the English language" (2005: 766). The transvalued *nigga* form entered global youth culture "with the emergence of hard-core gangster rap, as a particular expression of hip-hop around 1987" (Judy 2004: 106).[1] As a shibboleth, the term is embedded within a matrix of ethnic and subcultural identity politics, and as such tells us much about the orientations of those who deploy it (to raise it is to perform this act). It therefore allows us to explore the limits of verbicidal use, where pragmatics has ostensibly overcome semantics. Moving along an interpretive continuum, from the 'institutionalised' AAVE ('African-American Vernacular English') semantic inversion or resignification of *nigga*, towards what can only be real and deliberate expressions of racism, it will be recalled that in the first dialogue examined in

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[1] Around the same time, incidentally, the amen breakbeat entered circulation.

the previous chapter, jesseka took her leave from the Breakcore room in the following way:

> [jesseka] g'night ladies
> [dystop] gnight niggah
> [jesseka] i am your #1 niggah
> [dystop] no doubt!

In a literal reading of these four lines we have the following elaborate pantomime: someone (most likely white) of indeterminate gender, but bearing the name of a woman, calling people who aren't women "ladies", and accepting, in turn, the proffered designation "niggah". Such ascription may be profitably contrasted with what Bunzl describes as "inverted appellation", in a discussion of gay men referring in conversation to other gay men as 'she'. Bunzl suggests that through such reference, a critique of heteronormative conventions is being enacted, representing "an effective rejection and dissolution of the mandatory congruence of 'natural' and grammatical gender" (2000: 228). But it does not seem we would wish to make the same argument of this use of 'ladies' to refer to other males (the latter does not undermine the efficacy of linguistic gender marking, rather, it reveals the hierarchical aspects of such marking, and by implication, the derogated status of the 'female' within the symbolic order). In this case it appears that normative gender is reinforced through such appellation, whilst in Bunzl's case that it is undermined. And even in the latter case, as Bunzl admits, ostensibly transgressive, queer use of 'she' to refer to males nonetheless draws on, and in some sense reproduces "the surface effect of binary gender and its normative vectors" (2000: 233n16).

In the instance above, then, both "niggah" and "ladies" are ritual inversions, friendly pieces of jocularity (which also function, notably, as assertions of *white masculinity*, the hegemonic embodiment online and off). This generalised, 'innocuous' or 'neutral' use of *nigga* is commonplace in casual online interaction, amongst American youth generally, and increasingly elsewhere also, in part, perhaps, as a consequence of the globalisation of hip-hop as youth-cultural *lingua franca*; what Rose describes as "the blackening of the popular taste" (1994: 65).[2] Judy more bluntly names this "the 'niggafication' of white suburban youth" (2004: 113).

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[2] The common usage of 'pimp', seen above (chapter 3: BC room 24/10/03), and the 'affectionate' use of 'biotch' (*bitch*) are similarly derived from hip-hop.

As this exchange indicates, use of *nigga* is in most cases restricted to the functional role of a ritual element in greetings and farewells: it is something co-participants use, with a seeming degree of sarcasm or irony, in hailing each other. It is not the universal form for a greeting, but it is unremarkable. Thus, in some other incidents:

RJ room 27/10/03

[scottfro] yo
[suttu77] yo yo mi nigga
[scottfro] how are you doing

BC room 10/12/05

[pbf] WSUP NIQQA
[elementabuse] same old same old homeboy

BC room 11/07/05

[producersnafu] wsup carlosa
[daesfunka] wsup snafu
[producersnafu] how you is nyugga?
[daesfunka] im ok my nigga
[daesfunka] what about you?
[TraumaTizer-] aaaightZ

In all four of these segments there is evidence, as Mitchell-Kernan suggests, that vernacular use of *heavy* words like *nigga* is often "marked" with other differentiating elements of code (be they lexical, AAVE-derived terms, or local and thus 'chirographic'. Where the lexical is represented through spelling, double-marking occurs), so as to signal that the terms in question are being used and understood as components of subcultural, dialectal speech acts (1972: 175).

RJ room 27/10/03, BC room 11/07/05 and SSA room 04/02/04, below, also share a crucial and remarkable feature: the proprietary use of *my* prefacing the designator. Similarly, jesseka assumes this position in stating "i am your #1 niggah". In discussing AAVE use of *my nigga*, Alonso suggests that this is the usual everyday deployment of the term: "The most common use of the word 'nigga' is the 'term of endearment' a shout out, a greeting to a fellow brother … The word 'nigga' in this usage can easily be replaced by

brother, *partner*, *buddy*, *homie*, *dude* and *homeboy* to convey the same point" (2003). There are numerous hip-hop illustrations of this form, such as the 1998 Tupac Shakur album title *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*. The Pharcyde's tale of unrequited love, "Passin' Me By" (which has itself been sampled numerous times), contains the line:

> She could be my broad, and I could be her nigga

In this instance the possessive aspect signifies mutual romantic commitment. However, terms of endearment may be hierarchical where their usage is nonreciprocal or asymmetric, and hierarchical language use has been of longstanding interest to sociologists and sociolinguists. From a Goffmanian perspective, "the entire structure of society is ritually stratified" (Collins 1988: 46), and ascription of *my nigga* or assumption of *your nigga* status may be thought of as a 'status ritual'. As Whyte writes: "Each member of the corner gang has his own position in the gang structure … To have a position means that the individual has a customary way of interacting with other members of the group' (1993: 262-263). Use of appellations such as *my nigga* (and the ritual ascription and contestation of *gay* status, considered in the following chapters) can be taken as a means through which such 'customary ways' are affirmed, explored and contested. Conventionally, such use of *my* signifies a continuum, ranging from affection to patronisation. In elaborating the hierarchical distinction between 'regulars' and 'wineheads' at the corner liquor store that was his field site, Anderson emphasises this proprietary aspect in describing how wineheads "tend to pay for association with regulars by becoming '*their* wineheads'" (2003: 121, emphasis added): "Sides seem to be chosen each time group members talk about other group members as 'yo' people' or 'my people' or 'yo' crowd'" (*ibid.*: 36). This production of hierarchy through *my* is also evident in designations such as *my Lady* or *my Lord*. In greeting rituals, therefore, the possessive *my* in the honorific *my nigga* plays a fundamental role in the elaboration of the local social order, demonstrating reciprocal ties of mutual regard, where such elaboration may be contested both in terms of that signified by the proprietary *my*, and in terms of the 'frame' articulated through *nigga* status ascription.

The other principal use of *nigga* is in making requests for an allocation of status or assistance, where the interactant making the request and using the term may not be able to reciprocate at an 'equal' level (discursive violence in return for the symbolic violence of the gift). Here the term is a hierarchical compliment issued through *self-ascription* of 'abased' *nigga* status, attributing subcultural status to the more powerful party (Savran

1998: 33). In the following segment, '/-\nnias' asks 'Mr.Sensi' for list membership (download access). Goffman argues that "Since social relations are defined partly in terms of voluntary mutual aid, refusal of a request for assistance becomes a delicate matter, potentially destructive of the asker's face" (1967: 28-29n21). Hence the 'account' offered by Mr.Sensi: access to the desired track must be restricted for an upcoming 'soundclash'.

RJ room 29/10/03

[Mr.Sensi] gunshotremix
[Mr.Sensi] .mp3
[Mr.Sensi] brb smoke break
[illacrew] mine is called gunshot
[/-\nnias] hey mr sensi
[Fabian420] that chun rulz
[Mr.Sensi] yes?
[/-\nnias] add a nigga to yo list
[Mr.Sensi] i cant let anyone get the song in the clash besides fabian

In the fragment below, 'jesusaurus', having difficulty installing music software downloaded from KaZaA, is requesting a copy of that software from 'Mofo-', who has indicated that he is in possession of a fully functional version of same (that the defective software originates on KaZaA prompts the contributions of 'BigDickFitzwell'). Note that jesusaurus offers Mofo- whatever he wants from his own share in return, with the caveat that his connection is slow. In both of these instances, the request is to be added to the userlist of someone with a desirable, but exclusive, share – a 'user list only' user. In both of these 'request' uses, then, *nigga* is a subject position assumed by the supplicant. Goodwin points out that "requests [by subordinates] for information display deference towards the addressee and permit options in the way in which recipient[s] should respond" (1988: 61). There is a complex homosocial aspect involved in these usages (to be explored in greater detail in relation to *gay/ghey* in chapters 6 and 7), an aspect of desire for the Other. As Savran indicates: "for a white male subject living in a pervasively racist and misogynist culture, a black positionality can function analogously to a feminine one insofar as both represent positions of abjection" (1998: 33).

Underground Hiphop room 16/09/03

[jesusaurus] can u hook a nigga up
[jesusaurus] PLEASE
[Mofo-] only if you're a real nigga
[Mofo-] =)
[BigDickFitzwell] kazaa is slow as fuck for me
[jesusaurus] my connect is a lil slow but u can take whatever ya want from me
[BigDickFitzwell] sometimes i goes down to 000.1 k n shit
[Mofo-] k ur on my list
[Mofo-] one sec

The situation becomes interesting where co-participants choose *not* to allow such usage to pass as unremarkable. We see an intimation of this where Mofo- says "only if you're a real nigga", as though requesting credentials (a play on the meanings of 'real' as synonym for 'authentic', 'sincere' or 'up-front'), but Mofo-'s statement is immediately followed by a smile ("=)"), indicating that his previous line is not itself 'for real' and ensuring the statement it follows is not misread. Mofo- is playing with the use of the term, but not querying its use. The incident is inconsequential but all the more telling for it.

In the following example, 'AuralCommune' answers two questions in succession: that asked by 'syonic' (AuralCommune recommends the Frank Zappa movie *Baby Snakes*), and the rhetorical greeting offered by 'bhndz'. His response to the latter is sarcastic, using another question as an answer and using "hood" in such a way as to destabilise or 'artificialise' the subcultural stance bhndz is attempting to articulate, partly by (mis)reading bhndz's metaphorical use literally. AuralCommune's response appears to suggest the following: AuralCommune does not respond to the term 'nigga'; those who do are in "the hood"; and the latter place and the Soulseek Artists room are not spatially coterminous.

SSA room 04/02/04

[syonic] what movie should i download?
[bhndz] aight
[bhndz] where my niggas AT?
[AuralCommune] baby snakes
[AuralCommune] at the hood?

Where such ritual use of *nigga* as honorific is not 'let lie', the contextual appropriateness of the term, and the right of the person who used it to do so are both 'denaturalised' and called into question. The implicit idea that hip-hop culture is the archetypal template of 'coolness' (including 'ironic' coolness) is also interrogated. It is asserting a refusal to be bound to a particular, contentious subcultural argot. A complex double inversion is rendered, whereby the introduction of the term (itself considered an inversion, at least in its positively-valued AAVE usage), as an element of insider 'we' code, is recast as being an element of an imposed 'they' code. The questioning draws out the possibility that such usage might be the mark of a *poseur*, a posture indicating inauthentic 'identity tourism' (Nakamura 2002: 55). Crucially, questioning the use of the term can be interpreted as an aspect of status conflict. The game where all players are cool 'cyberpeople' is disrupted and abruptly reframed; the play of personæ is momentarily suspended. Offline reality is mobilised as a limiting critique of online play - it is a sort of a 'reality check'. The use of the term may be seen by those who challenge it to break *co-occurrence expectations*: questioning the use of the term is equivalent to stating that the frame signalled by it is not contextually appropriate to these sorts of interaction.

A further inflection would be that AuralCommune is also contesting the use of *my*: *your* niggas are in the hood; *we*'re not *your* niggas. AuralCommune's response would then be a means of contesting reciprocity, and thereby, producing hierarchy, through refusing to assume the status of being amongst bhndz's *niggas*. I want *my* buddy to feel that I am *his* buddy, in a relation of mutual reciprocity and regard. I may not want to be someone's *nigga*, and I may be reluctant to classify anyone as *my* nigga. But there is an important difference between rejecting the term and rejecting the apparently friendly relations it imputes where its usage is 'naturalised'. The proprietary use of *my* is distinguishable from *nigga* status ascription, though articulated with it in such instances.

One might be tempted to ask: are these rejections or questionings politically 'correct': the voice of 'shitless' bourgeois authority reprimanding the unstable, 'playful', (supposedly) transgressive voice of identity play? Ought such deployments be characterised as linguistic appropriations, racist in effect if not in intent? Might the *refusal* of these deployments be identitarian? To what extent do our answers to these questions depend on 'whose mouth the word is in'?[3] The goal here is not to assess given exchanges and to classify them as racist/not-racist, but rather to indicate the continuum. As Campbell

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[3] For instance, if we know that 'producersnafu' (whose name incorporates the acronym, of American military origin, for 'situation normal: all fucked up') is Mexican–American, or that 'tweak', in the following extract, is a white resident of Trinidad? Context seemingly includes the originating 'mouth'.

insightfully points out, the 'narrow' definition of racism, which identifies racists as (only) "right-wing bigots who hold irrational prejudices", elides the casual discrimination pervading interaction, including the 'structural' discursive violence embedded in our signifying practices (2006: 271).

The position argued here is that sometimes seeming racism is 'not really', and sometimes seeming 'right-on' antiracism is not really. The discussion of semantic indeterminacy, meaning and interpretation of which this is a part suggests that interpreted meaning is not final, and meaning in interaction is irreducible to the author's intent, thereby admitting semantic surpluses and deficits.[4] It is nonetheless permissible to describe one's impressions, and at times doing so is justified or even morally necessary. The norms and expectations in operation on Soulseek tend not to negatively sanction the expression of perspectives which would be unacceptable in other settings. The online environment could, perhaps, be characterised as a cathartic safety valve, where repressed/suppressed discourse forbidden by the 'middle class politeness criteria' can be given free rein. However, this "functionalist steam-valve explanation", as Babcock would call it, perpetuates the exclusion from the milieu of those targeted by the discourse (1978: 22). This is why Nakamura argues that "Internet users who adopt other racialized personæ … replicate versions of otherness that confirm its exotic qualities and close off genuine dialogue with the pronounced minority of users who are not white and male" (2002: 55). More sophisticated than the 'functionalist steam-valve' is the account furnished by Kahn-Harris, who terms the seeming moral and political indifference of some youth-culture practitioners "reflexive anti-reflexivity", arguing that it "produces a politics of depoliticization in which the structuration of the scene and the consequences of certain practices are wilfully ignored" (2004: 106).

To make these points is to gesture towards the ambivalent position of *this* textual voice in terms of the distinction between shitless discourse and coprolalia. As it happens, interaction of a sort which I initially found disturbing on Soulseek has come to seem banal, though sustained trolling is still sometimes off-putting. My own sensibilities have at times been offended, and this would seem to align this text along with the formalistic, bourgeois voice and register which I have been arguing opposes itself to the nonserious heteroglossia of chatroom interaction.

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[4] To say that the word has an excess of meaning is to say that its use in some context will be contested; that for the audience in that context some boundary will be crossed where that word is used.

SSA room 29/10/03

1. [tweak] psy, you lied to me
2. [psy_sci] me never
3. [tweak] you said u were black
4. [psy_sci] lol
5. [psy_sci] im sicilian
6. [tweak] i realized
7. [tweak] and there i was worring that i had offended you
8. [tweak] talking bout nignogs
9. [psy_sci] sicilians are black, u did
10. [psy_sci] take it back cracker
11. [tweak] no, i dodnt do anything wrong
12. [psy_sci] im black where it counts
13. [psy_sci] if u know what i mean
14. [tweak] lol
15. [tweak] i just like to say nigger
16. [tweak] nothings wrong with that
17. [psy_sci] but u gotta say nigga
18. [psy_sci] as to not offend the darkies
19. [tweak] ok
20. [tweak] nigga
21. [psy_sci] and if u wanna get silly, u can say nukka
22. [psy_sci] nizzle

Within a flood of racial and ethnic stereotypes, clichés and designators of varying degrees of impropriety (the terms: *black*, *Sicilian*, *nignogs*, *cracker*, *nigger*, *nigga*, *darkies*, *nukka*, *nizzle*, the sarcastically dramatised racial tension of line 10, the stereotype mobilised by lines 12-13 etc.), 'psy_sci', in lines 17 and 18 of this segment, hones in on the essentially complacent and hypocritical aspects of *nigga* – specifically, the idea that the term so spelt and enunciated (by whites) is acceptable. The juxtaposition is one of ironic intent: in the statement "u gotta say nigga/[so] as to not offend the darkies", psy_sci's synonymous use of the second term ('darkies') is calculated to ensure the offensiveness of the statement overall, where the surface intent of the statement is ostensibly concerned with describing how to be *in*offensive, and his continued, accumulating reiteration of alternate synonyms emphasises this: it is a sort of strategic "verbal skidding" which functions to undermine the moral/semantic force of the terminology in question (Sherzer 1978: 139). Hence psy_sci's turn at lines 17-18 can be read as a criticism of the use of *nigga*: if this is why the term has such common currency (in short, so that male white

youth may 'have their cake and not offend the darkies'), might we want to query the use of the term? In a complicated piece of double-talking, psy_sci presents a reading of the naïve use of *nigga* as unwittingly racist, from a position which is profoundly ambiguous.

I am aware that my description of such an exchange can be subject to the same sort of analysis I am subjecting the datum to, and perhaps found insensitive. I am also aware of the general ethnomethodological precept, that describing the situation is also in some sense creating it as a situation of the sort described. I am not *only* using elements of distasteful racist discourse to demonstrate a point about the contextual variability of linguistic meaning, nor should the argument be taken as suggesting that racism may be *reduced* to a semantic issue. This is one reason why, a few paragraphs ago, I rejected the idea that the observer's role was to categorise such encounters as racist, or not. Throughout this discussion, one goal has been to demonstrate that 'simultaneities' may *mean* both 'more' and 'less' than what is apparently intended, and that therefore sometimes what initially appears innocuous can be considered insidious from another vantage point, and vice versa. The prevalence of these markers in subcultural discourses, online and off, necessitates their analysis and discussion. Whilst meaning is context-dependent, its interpretation is also situated: as shibboleths, the terms characteristic of such exchanges shed light on the orientations of the audience to their use.

5.2 "some wandering prick": Trolling, subcultural authenticity, and the limits to 'joking' racism

The following exchange is reproduced so as to highlight the sequence of turns and responses. Lines 24, 26, and 27 constitute the joke cycle initiated by 'PHUCKUP' (the anaphoric meaning of line 32 is not clear), whilst lines 23, 25, 35 and 36 are the joke cycle initiated by 'hyper3000' (the follow-up to line 35 is omitted for the sake of brevity). Lines 28, 29 and 37 are the response tokens to these jokes. The reader's attention is drawn, however, to lines 30, 31, 33, 34 and 38.

This is the only incident in the ragga jungle room corpus where the term *nigger* is used.

RJ room 02/02/04: 1

23. [hyper3000] what do you get
when u stab a baby in the chest?

24. [PHUCKUP] hey
hyper, how do u keep a
nigger from drowning?

25. [hyper3000] erection

26. [hyper3000] tell me
27. [PHUCKUP] take ur
foot off his head

28. [justin_sane] AHAHAHAHAAHAHHAA
29. [justin_sane] LOL

30. [batty bwoy] oi STOP SAYING THE N-WORD
31. [justin_sane] DAMN

32. [PHUCKUP] e samba

33. [justin_sane] RULES
34. [justin_sane] BATTY

35. [hyper3000] what do you get
when u mix a nigga with an
octopus?
36. [hyper3000] i dunno

37. [PHUCKUP] hahahah

38. [justin_sane] THATS NOT LIKE YOU

The focus here is on the intervention produced by 'batty bwoy' at line 30, and the response to this made by 'justin_sane': "DAMN/RULES/BATTY/THATS NOT LIKE

YOU" (31, 33-34, and 38).[5] The disapproval expressed by batty bwoy (through the shitless circumlocution of the 'n-word') has an interesting effect: in the next racist joke hyper3000 produces starting at line 35, the *spelling* is modified – again the lie is seemingly given to the supposed casualness of *nigga*. The limits of this casualness are demonstrated: the joke is obviously not rendered acceptable to those in the room for having been so modified. This is the first of three times when batty bwoy requests restraint from the guests, his final request (shortly before the incomers fall silent) simply states 'justin behave'. The second request runs as follows:

RJ room 02/02/04: 2

[batty bwoy] justin
[jahba] ragga scene iz doing nice in the city huh
[justin_sane] WOO WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
[batty bwoy] please
...
[justin_sane] WHAT
[batty bwoy] drop the N word dude

It is worth furnishing some background to this episode: batty bwoy and 'Tykal' are regulars in the ragga jungle room – Tykal is a notable presence in the online American jungle 'scene'. This is the only appearance 'jahba' makes in the room, but he knows Tykal through other channels (music produced by jahba is circulated in mp3 and vinyl formats – notably on Bong-Ra's Kriss Records imprint). The other participants (justin_sane, hyper3000 and PHUCKUP) are all newcomers: they appear to have 'followed' batty from the more populous 'drum'n'bass' room. Their interactional style is trollery: they have come to 'stir things up' and they are succeeding in transgressing the discursive norms of the locals. The room regulars pursue a number of strategies in dealing with the incomers: ignoring the trolling and carrying on their own conversation (about the relative merits of various cities), expressing disdain and disapproval (as when one participant, named 'WhereMyBrapAt', responds to a joke with "you guys bother to memorize these?"), and admonishing the guests directly – as batty bwoy does.

batty bwoy seemingly feels himself obliged to attempt to 'gag' the incomers, or at least to 'leash' them, given that they are known to him from another room, he views their

[5] In JE, 'batty bwoy' is a derogatory term for a gay man.

jokes as his responsibility. Such jokes are instantiations of what de Sousa calls 'phthonic mirth', humour of a callous and malicious kind: "a phthonic joke requires a butt or victim, and the butt of a joke is someone who typically does not laugh but knows only too well what's funny to those who do" (1987: 291). Phthonic humour is distinguished from *wit*; it exploits negative stereotypes ascribed to the 'butt' of the jokes (*ibid.*: 276). It is unclear what batty makes of this 'low' humour elsewhere, but he clearly doesn't find its flavour as here manifested appropriate to the ragga jungle room. And he is right: such exchanges are *not* appropriate to the ragga jungle room, and the reasons for this inappropriateness are only partially 'politically correct', they are more accurately resultant from issues of *subcultural authenticity* and a consequence of status conflict.

As its name indicates, ragga jungle is characterised by its use of ragga/dancehall samples: the genre is dependent on Jamaican musical culture and its adherents in the ragga jungle room utilise terms derived from the JE vernacular, particularly for emphasis and ritual greetings. For these adherents (overwhelmingly young white American males), JE serves a similar function as borrowings from AAVE such as *nigga*. Junglists therefore have an 'elective affinity' with Jamaican culture, negating the possibility of tolerating this sort of 'humour'. The use of such terms in this context is an affront to the face-wants of the room regulars, a provocative failure to pay proper respect. There is also a territorial issue: incomers can't go unchallenged where they use *this* space for *this* sort of interaction; this is exactly what these incomers are testing. The challenge is not going unnoticed either, as justin_sane emphasises by quoting a user from another room:

> [justin_sane] xAm] justin_sane is in the ragga room!

This other user, whose name justin_sane does not completely copy, is evidently an interactant in the room where the line was produced, but a lurker in the ragga jungle room. The line is effectively an invitation to others in that room to witness what is happening in the ragga jungle room: justin_sane's quotation of the line is therefore a provocative statement that there are witnesses. The incomers' projection of ostensibly casual racism into this space is particularly sensitive, as it renders visible the ambiguous foundation that junglist ideology as expressed in the room is grounded upon. The calculated irreverence of the incomers in this segment is summed up in hyper3000's cutting definition of ragga jungle:

[hyper3000] ragga jungle: amen - amen - amen - homophobic lyrics - amen - amen - amen - 2 step fill

When the 'trollers' eventually depart and 'order is restored', the locals move to define the offensive interruption as symptomatic of youthful exuberance and immaturity:

RJ room 02/02/04: 3

[batty bwoy] ah kids u gotta love dem
[Tykal] they got some good ones fi sure
[batty bwoy] all in 1time
[batty bwoy] thats why i used to be in the d'n'b room all the time!!its bullshit around the clock 24/247/7

In this way, distance is established between the language and discourse of the incoming 'kids', and that of the local core participants: both explicitly as conversational topic, and implicitly through the reasserted usage of JE markers.

In this episode, the 'n-word' becomes a source of struggle, used as a positional, political indicator, with the 'trolls' engaging in a rapid-fire exchange of offensive jokes, and the room occupants attempting to restrict this exchange, specifically, the degree to which it exploits the *nigga/nigger* complex. Once batty specifically draws attention to the use of *nigger*, it is replaced with *nigga*, a spelling not at all usual to this 'joke' genre (between the two warnings issued by batty, PHUCKUP uses *nigger* once in the question part of a joke, whilst justin_sane sticks with *nigga*, telling a further two jokes using the term). With regards to the distinction between words which 'mean what they say' and words which don't (the word in its centripetal and centrifugal aspect, respectively), these two terms are quite distinct: use of *nigger* obviously indicates, and is taken as indicating, calculated and malicious racism.

In these sorts of exchange there is a degree of potential ambiguity: the 'kids' may on the one hand unreflexively use the term precisely for its offensiveness, but this usage may be 'casual', similar to that of *nigga* in greetings and requests (hence the replacement), the justification for this being that the term is not used 'seriously', but 'only' in a game sequence of adversarial 'dirty joke' exchanges (over the course of the entirety of the exchange, however, there are six racist jokes – excluding one 'incomplete' for which the punchline was not issued, apparently because pre-empted by another joke with identical punchline, and only two of the 'dead baby' variety). The joke-tellers could offer

justification in terms of what de Sousa (referring to 'Monty'), calls 'the Python principle': "it can be funny to suppose that something that is not at all funny might be funny, but only if you actually think it isn't actually funny" (1987: 291). This could account for justin_sane's reproach to batty bwoy in lines 108/110/111/115 of RJ room 02/02/04: 1 above: the 'kids' could claim they are just 'kidding', engaging in second-order 'irony' (albeit of a rather dubious kind). This is precisely what PHUCKUP says when he briefly returns later the same evening, without justin_sane or hyper3000, and has his attempt at producing 'traditional' *sounds* rejected:

RJ room 02/02/04: 4

...
[PHUCKUP] ur mommas that fat nigger humper that works at walmart
[Babylon_Demolitionist] hmm
[Babylon_Demolitionist] that's decidedly not funny
[PHUCKUP] ur mommas so fat, i had to roll her fat ass in flour, and look for the wet spot
[PHUCKUP] b4 fucking her
[Babylon_Demolitionist] that one's old
[Babylon_Demolitionist] yer white aren't you
[kee_PTS] beat it, phuckup.
[PHUCKUP] im only kidding guys
[Babylon_Demolitionist] no self respecting black man would tell a yo momma joke like that
[PHUCKUP] lol
[PHUCKUP] im a redneck cracker
[kee_PTS] obviously
[PHUCKUP] i have a swaztika tat, on my cock
[Babylon_Demolitionist] fair enough
[PHUCKUP] i love humping little half nigger girls
[PHUCKUP] hahahhahah
[PHUCKUP] sorry
[kee_PTS] keep it going
[PHUCKUP] whats long and black
[PHUCKUP] ?
[PHUCKUP] the unemployment line
[PHUCKUP] muw hahah ha ha ha
[Babylon_Demolitionist] :|
[Babylon_Demolitionist] sooo....
[Babylon_Demolitionist] ooh shit
[Babylon_Demolitionist] just found some king kong acapellas
...

[WhereMyBrapAt] who is that phuckup guy?

...

[Babylon_Demolitionist] some wandering prick

PHUCKUP is here at a serious disadvantage given that he no longer has 'partners' to 'riff' with. This, his exit sequence, is remarkable for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the nature of the delegitimation strategy Babylon_Demolitionist advances, which states that PHUCKUP belies his RL ethnicity through the ritual insults he has deployed: "no self respecting black man would tell a yo momma joke like that". This statement itself rests on the essentialist stereotype that only a 'self-respecting black man' can produce successful sounds (successful sounds are only produced by 'self-respecting black men'), and the 'old' sounds PHUCKUP is advancing indicate that he is not a person of this class (Babylon_Demolitionist is, incidentally, white too).

Babylon_Demolitionist's argument:

[Babylon_Demolitionist] that one's old

[Babylon_Demolitionist] yer white aren't you

[Babylon_Demolitionist] no self respecting black man would tell a yo momma joke like that

could be formally restated as:

Only persons *P* have attribute *x*

If *x*, then *P*

Not-*x*, therefore not-*P*

Interactional legitimacy and authenticity in relation to the sounds genre as formally defined is here mapped directly onto racial identity, effectively in such a way as to bar PHUCKUP from continuing. PHUCKUP is informed that he is (ethnically?) not capable of rendering successful plays in this speech genre, and that (therefore) nor is he (morally?) entitled to do so. Contextual legitimacy and appropriateness includes originating 'mouth' after all.

Secondly, the strategies of Babylon_Demolitionist and kee_PTS contrast sharply with that of batty bwoy above: in the latter instances, the issue is expressed 'impersonally', trolling *per se* is treated as part of the acceptable rough-and-tumble of everyday discourse, the issue is defined as being (just) that of the use of a sensitive and therefore inappropriate *word*. In this case, however, PHUCKUP is targeted 'personally', his trolling style - his *delivery* – is taken to reveal information about his *real* self (as opposed to his 'playful'

persona), information which demonstrates his trolling style to be *authentically illegitimate.* PHUCKUP is vulnerable to this strategy because operating *alone* (against Babylon_Demolitionist and kee_PTS, acting in concert). Were hyper3000, justin_sane or some other willing 'devil's advocate' or 'jester' player present, they would be able to 'normalise' the interactional style, the very definition of social reality and its ethico-existential postulates, which PHUCKUP here finds himself unsuccessfully attempting to impose.

Thirdly, there is the style in which this targeting is achieved, take, for instance, kee_PTS' line: "beat it, phuckup." An often-observed feature of profanity-heavy interaction is that, given the verbicidal use of expletives, emphasis is inversively expressed through unaffected directness: were kee_PTS to tell PHUCKUP to *fuck off*, he could be (mis)read as agreeing to engage in a session of the sort PHUCKUP is attempting to engender.[6] The same can be said of the turns produced by Babylon_Demolitionist (as when he merely says "fair enough" in response to PHUCKUP's claim to have a swastika tattooed on his penis). The intensity of these statements lies in the severity of their understatement (also noteworthy in this regard is the parallel absence of JE markers). This paratactic style allows for the expression of distaste without giving PHUCKUP the satisfaction of *shitless* indignation: PHUCKUP is invited/dared to continue by kee_PTS: "keep it going"; he is 'given enough rope'. Rather pathetically, PHUCKUP's final joke is one which he has already deployed earlier, when justin_sane and hyper3000 were present; as the interaction goes on, PHUCKUP runs out of 'material', eventually falling silent and exiting. Once he has done so, the only reference subsequently made to him characterises him as a "wandering prick", drawing associations to both (cultural and personal) rootlessness and infidelity, as well as 'dickheadedness'. WhereMyBrapAt asks the question precisely to invite such assessment – the question is so phrased as to express distaste.

This reading of 'humorous' racist coprolalia and the strategies deployed for its neutralisation can be elaborated further with reference to, in RJ room 02/02/04: 3, the brief mention of the trolls' joke repertoire following their departure: "they got some good ones fi sure". Here Tykal indicates that he can 'appreciate' what *would* make such jokes funny (i.e., he is a good sport etc., not prudishly *shitless*), though he does not in fact find them so. The requirement to seem able to manfully 'take a joke' perhaps also informs the manner in

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[6] Both Hughes, and Allan and Burridge, report that in the Second World War, when an officer said: "get your fucking rifles" it was interpreted as routine, whilst "get your rifles" indicated the possibility of mortal danger: omission of the expletive indicates the import of the statement.

which batty bwoy attempts to restrict the trolling, through the metonymic device of taking issue only with the 'N-word'. *During* the exchange, though, batty bwoy, Tykal and WhereMyBrapAt expressed their disapproval, as did kee_PTS and Babylon_Demolitionist in the 'sequel' cited above. Even though those using *nigger* in this instance claim that *they* don't *mean* it (which is to say, those offended have misinterpreted them, are uptight and can't take a joke etc.), it does not seem that the claim holds up; it is not *really* just the use of the term which is contested, but the elaboration of racist ideology throughout the joke sequence (casual sexism and homophobia are another matter, largely permitted in the ragga jungle room). After all, why use such terms at all if not to exploit their 'inert' discursive violence? The history and semantics of the term show its 'joking' use to be disingenuous: the claim to be 'just kidding' is made in bad faith.[7]

As batty bwoy says in (RJ room 02/02/04: 3), such 'bullshit' is seemingly a constant in the drum'n'bass room (among other places); *nigger* is successfully offensive in the ragga jungle room because of the subcultural ideology of that room, the usage is thus doubly transgressive: offending liberal *shitlessness*, and offending the utopian junglist aesthetic. The three 'trolls' mobilise pragmatics and impute meanings which are contested by the local junglists, and deliberately so: that is the role they have assumed. Both sides to the interaction seek strategically to impose their own meanings and their own implicit political perspectives.

5.3 Order, contest and meaning

The previous chapter began with a quote from Labov, who, in arguing against the reading of 'restricted code' as indicative of inarticulacy at best, and intellectual deficiency at worst, presented a countercritique of the syntactic verbosity of prescribed English. Labov suggested that the concise, efficient nature of 'restricted' formulations (such as ritual insults) is obfuscated by those adjudging such formulations to be lacking in *shitless* nuance; he argued further that the roundabout circumlocutions of the bourgeois voice tend to deflate into long-winded, meaningless tedium. The debate has repercussions insofar as in the distinction between how (it is presumed) we *should* speak and how (in fact) we *do* speak, class, ethnicity and *gender* play large - but largely 'unspoken' - roles. By

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[7] This argument follows Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists in reverse-engineering the Humean 'fallacy' – the derivation of an *ought* from an *is*. The *moral* is correlated with, assigned to, or imposed upon the *meaning*; the interactional order of sense-making is shown to be a normative order.

highlighting the idiosyncrasies of particular speech communities (communities unable to repel the incursions of the researcher), the (middle-class) sociolinguist presents these idiosyncrasies, their (interpreted) meanings and their (imputed) functions in a formal setting far removed from their point of origin, reifying them in the process. Using the formal register as interpretive metalanguage can 'neutralise' what it was that made the elliptical or 'restricted' formulation so strategically effective. The formal register has its own indirection: evasive statements in authoritative voice can be issued devoid of substantive content, but 'wearing the clothes' of respectability and sense-making. The Labovian point is that the bourgeois voice presupposes the right to be heard, when in fact it might not 'say' much; we must be wary of how the right to be heard is made, and what other voices are silenced in the process. For this reason, a succinct piece of coprolalia may be preferable to a long-winded piece of *shitlessness*.

The intention is not to praise the supposedly transgressive voice here subsumed under the name of coprolalia, but rather to demonstrate how discursive transgression is contested depending on its content and context. The previous chapter began, and this chapter ended, with adversarial episodes: jesseka in the Breakcore room, and hyper3000 *et al.* in the ragga jungle room. In their own ways both episodes can be considered 'successful' or 'effective', insofar as they allow room occupants to assert their territorial, aesthetic/political and social primacy within the spaces they frequent and collaborate in maintaining. But this effect is achieved through distinct means in each case: in the former there is agreement as to what is going on, how it is being achieved, and why, in the latter the meaning of events and the terms in which events are produced are themselves contested. This is a consequence of the trolling styles of the incomers in each case and the conversational resources thereby deployed. That adversative 'trolling' is a widespread practice often read as genuinely problematic (particularly in its racist xenophobic aspect) is evident from the following two posts (v0rvii 2006; djdceiva 2006), which both describe trolling in two other Soulseek rooms:

> I'm a soulseek user who always online in Thai room, it has lots of user online there and now it has the problems, spamming and someone I think who is foreigner was slag our Country and The King off, due to the Military Coup in Thailand. We are so feel annoyed about these things. I just need permission or something that able to kick or ban someone who do like that from our Thai room … I always online, see many conversations they talked about and know someone who always spamming. Just need some help or some advice.

> I dont know if there has already been a topic about this but I would like to bring to the ateention of the soulseek moderatorsz the ongoing problem in the House Music Lovers Room.
>
> There is a user which comes on around 4pm EST everyday with a different name but usually something like VOICE OF AMERICA, or WHITES RULE and just spams the room with pro-american jiberish and racial spam. I have been a member of soulseek for almost a year now and have noticed this and have been told by other users that it has been going on longer than this. Can something please be done to stop this user as it frustrates hundreds of users daily in the House Music Lovers Room. I tried to take action myself today by flooding the users pm and was quick to be banned for 30 minutes automaticaly by the server but yet this racist person or "bot" whatever it is carries on everyday for 30 sometimes 45 minutes.[8]

Over the course of this chapter and that preceding, we moved from a sketch of how interactional order is produced and read, to a critique of the ethnomethodological claim to bypass interpretation. The argument presented was that, *pace* Garfinkel, meaning resides wholly *neither* in *what* is said nor in *how* it is said. The discussion then situated incidents of trolling and insult exchange as speech-play events of a particularly *adversarial* style, characterised by their *verbicidal* dependence on obscenity. For this reason such exchanges were characterised as instances of *coprolalia*, where the latter is defined ideal-typically as a situated, local, seemingly irreverent discursive genre oppositionally opposed to the formalistic (*shitless*), ostensibly *transparent* voice of authority, the 'voice from nowhere'. This distinction is an evocative mnemonic or shorthand rather than a pair of definitional pigeonholes, helpful insofar as it mobilises familiar ways of 'speaking', which can be 'heard' everywhere. It is a springboard to elaborating interconnected distinctions: between 'us' and 'them', self/Other, and so on.

Individual data have been approached as *simultaneities*. The frame is a recursive aspect of the picture: *context* is itself an indexical 'shifter'.[9] The informational scope of the data varies contextually: one isolated incident, persona, word, etc., can mobilise/speak for an indefinite number of insights. The intention is to show how seemingly mundane events can be shown to resonate in multiple keys. Thus *nigga/nigger*, for example, can be shown – in a single conversational sequence - to be used as a doubly or triply inverted badge of subcultural identity and authenticity. The word is a dynamic, reverberating *shibboleth*, which functions so as to situate those who consume/(re-)produce or reiterate it. An

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[8] 'Pm' is an abbreviation for 'personal message'.

[9] 'Shifters' (*I*, *you*, *she*, *there*, *now* etc.) are words with wholly context-dependent meanings, lexical 'floating signifiers'.

etymological particle in a semantic economy, it is both material and ideological; its implications impinge upon both pragmatics (use) and ethics (exchange). The word on occasion appears almost to *speak for itself.* It is our logophilic residue, our record of history, of the poignant weight of discourse on corporeality. The point is to show how semantic density is given to, and withdrawn from, the word, because through this process meaningfulness may be given to, and taken from, the world. Thus, as racial epithets have a general and particular deployment, a continuum from 'blunt' to 'sharp' we might say, so such terms can be shown to separate or adjoin *socially.*

We tracked the semantic dynamism of this 'curse-word' to the stage at which it becomes inert or *fixed,* stopping short at the point at which there can be little ambiguity concerning meaning. Coprolalia can be shown to utilise double-talking indirection, there is a continuous tension between serious and nonserious statements and interpretations. Ritual insult exchanges are only exceptionally (mis)read *personally* – they are implicitly understood as a gamelike speech genre. Similarly, *nigga* as an element in ritual greetings and respectful requests is generally read as such, and yet remains open to periodic questioning, where the latter can reframe the subcultural-linguistic register functioning in the *locale.* Likewise with racist 'joke' sequences: there is a constant possibility of contestation as meanings are collaboratively created and recreated, depending on social *context.*

Online interaction is demonstrably orderly, in terms of the sequence through which that interaction is expressed, achieved and interpreted, and in terms of the conversational repertoires available to co-participants and the anterior terms of their selection. Even where such repertoires are, 'properly speaking', abject or obscene, they derive their impact wholly from, as ritualised trolling or insult-exchange sequences, their success in manipulating meaning through indirection, and as coprolalia, from their transgression of the middle class politeness criteria. We have also seen the roles played by context and interpretation in establishing how 'text acts' are understood *in situ* as 'serious' or not, and therefore how a linguistic-aesthetic, ethico-political order can be collaboratively produced, maintained and challenged in text.

6 – "we all suck equally much": 'doing' masculinity[1]

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.
>
> (Butler 1999: 179)

6.1 "who wants to fight me?": Adversative interactional style[2]

In what follows, the analysis is *gendered*, which is to say, elaborated in terms of the presentation of an account of a form of masculinity, through consideration of the terms *gay* and *ghey*. This further situates the discursive violence so characteristic of chatroom discourse (particularly, misogyny, racism and homophobia). In previous chapters, the idea that the extracts presented contained sexism and homophobia as well as racism was only peripherally addressed; in what follows this focus shifts. The use of racial epithets is not random: as Back suggests, "there is a clear relationship between the ritual expression of masculine identities and popular racism: the former provides the platform for the latter" (1994:179). The terms under consideration mobilise and normalise a particular conception of micropolitical relations, a topology of normative masculinity. Through continuing the strategy of exploring ritualised exchanges and the shibboleths which mark them as such, it will become possible to highlight aspects of the accomplishment of a cohesive identity in the locale under consideration.

As we proceed, reference will also be made, where appropriate, to common pieces of music within the local soundscape, where these furnish 'multi-modal' demonstration of the ubiquity of the concepts being indicated in the text. In keeping with the simultaneities approach, as this movement is traced towards music, we will move away from instances of adversarial coprolalia, and towards examples of an alternative interactional style oriented more towards collaborative competition: the latter will be characterised, following Ong (1981), as the adversative. Adversative interaction demonstrates how, as Seidler puts it,

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[1] dystop, BC room 28/07/03.

[2] producer snafu, BC room 08/07/05.

"men often learn an instrumental relationship to language as a form of self-defense" (2006: 16).

The adversative is arguably distinguishable from pure adversarial coprolalia (such as trollery) as a matter of degree rather than kind, nonetheless, the adversative is more common to co-participants familiar to each other and with the local conversational priorities and routines, and is associated with more complex forms of word-play than those found in adversarial coprolalia. As Hall points out: "Complex textual jokes serve to distinguish insiders from outsiders" (1999: 45). The primary element in coprolalia is shock-tactic obscenity, whilst in adversative exchange, sophisticated confrontational wit (broadly defined) dominates. This distinction, however, is subsidiary to the overall argument being propounded. The intention is to underscore the notion that, *pace* Herring (1996b), distinctive, gendered interactional styles can be discerned beyond an adversarial/supportive binary. The adversative gives us a more nuanced and sympathetic account of interaction, through highlighting the fact that 'the fraternal bond' is performed largely through competition and – literally – one-upmanship (Curry 2004: 204, Lyman 2004: 174). As an interactional style, the adversative ceremonial has long been the dominant mode in (formerly all-male) academic interaction, rhetoric and oratory, as evinced in agonic Socratic dialogue (Ong 1981: 125, Tannen 2002: 1654). Whilst the adversative is historically a competitive interactional style coded as masculine, coprolalia is properly speaking a confrontationally offensive genre of transgressive speech play, of the sort Bakhtin referred to as 'Billingsgate': "curses, oaths, slang, humour, popular tricks and jokes, scatological forms, in fact all the 'low' and 'dirty' sorts of folk humour" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 8). As Hughes says of *flyting*: "the language is often gross, even grotesque and astonishingly scatological … It is the verbal equivalent of virtuoso sword-play" (1998: 47).[3]

Elaborating the adversative also demonstrates how interaction (on- and offline) is coloured by dissent, dispute and disagreement: there is a tendency in the literature around 'virtual community' to overemphasise consensus and downplay the extent to which discourse is coloured by vituperation. For both the 'real' world and its online manifestation, "difference, asymmetry and conflict are constitutive features" (Robins 2000: 152). As Adorno suggests, the social world's "unifying principle is division" (1978: 113).

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[3] An interesting adversative-coprolalic 'institution' worth mentioning in this regard, originating in vaudeville, is 'The Aristocrats' in-joke, through which stand-up comedians compete in elaborating transgressive excess. The joke is the topic of a 2005 documentary of the same name.

This is not to de-emphasise that aspect of the adversative Quinn insightfully names "culled empathy" (2004: 315), but to stress the homosocial aspect of the adversative, which works to generate "connection and common ground while also creating status. Both work to create homosocial desire" (Kiesling 2005: 714). Masculinity is a discursive process in which individual young men find themselves, to which they must orient, and within/through which they work to create a solidary 'we'. As Ong points out: "in a contest, "against" and "with" come to the same thing" (1981: 33). This is an uncontroversial insight: "many forms of male bonding play are rule-governed aggression, as in sports and games" (Lyman 2004: 175). Much online verbal play is 'rule-governed aggression', in part, one may speculate, because of the particular variant of masculinity involved (about which more later), and in part because masculinity is of course *embodied.* Consequently: "gender is vulnerable when the [bodily] performance cannot be sustained" (Connell 2005: 54). This is precisely the case in text-based environments, where interactants must "perform their bodies as text" (Nakamura 2002: 35). These two aspects – the type of masculinity, and the location of its enactment – interact in a particular way, producing a 'low' discourse of corporeal excess. As Hall puts it, the medium functions as "an electronic 'carnival' … a kind of institutionalized outlet for violence and vulgarity" (1996: 156). As an autochthonous consequence of these two features, gender is performed and re-produced in particular, 'naturalised' ways.

The following analysis of 'bedroom producer' masculinity is ordered as follows: the remainder of this section continues the discussion of interactional form, outlining the adversative in use. The adversative is then considered in use against incomers, and its relation to other 'voices' further explored. Following this, in section 6.3, the adversative is contextualised through 'interrupting' it with a (re)reading, situating it in relation to its own sociological interpretation, and to the concept of *fratriarchy*. In chapter 7, the specifically masculinist properties of the adversative as a fratriarchal idiom are explored, through a discussion of the use of the term *gay*. The distinct homosocial properties of the alternate *ghey* formulation are then outlined and related to local conceptions of normative heterosexual identity and authenticity. These forms of masculine identity are then described in terms of their 'abject' character and their ritually transgressive relation to respectability, such that the nerd/cool, 'double nature' of bedroom producer masculinity can ultimately be elaborated.

Perhaps the best way to elaborate the distinction between coprolalia and adversative style is to return to cohorts we have previously considered. The following extract is, chronologically, the next time in the transcript in which k5k and vek interact.

BC room 16/12/03

* Entered room Breakcore

1. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] bumped!
2. [k5k] any one code a serial fr musicmatch 8?
3. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] anoying! although no d/l or u/l ceased!
4. [k5k] stupid slsk
5. [/dev/null] yeah, fuck it I want a refund!
6. [/dev/null] oh, wait.... ;)
7. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] refund ?
8. [k5k] it means to return something and get your money back
9. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] yes
10. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] i know that
11. [k5k] yay!
12. * blaerg taps jabs k5k with elbow
13. [blaerg] watch this
14. [blaerg] damn you vek!!!
15. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] hwy damn me ?
16. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] what did i do
17. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] ijust said the word refund .. .
18. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] and its like ... as if people wanna come out the woodwork and irritate me for some reason . ?
19. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] lmao[4]
20. [k5k] damn you to hell!
21. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] damn me to hell ?
22. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] lmao
23. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] thats funny
24. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] hilarious even !
25. [k5k] yay
26. [k5k] learnt anything today?
27. [blaerg] vek is impervious to irony
28. [k5k] yeeeep
29. [k5k] not me, I have it on toast!
30. [blaerg] its one of the more nutritious literary devices ....
31. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] i'm afraid if i supposedly did go to hell . . amusing as that would be I think satan would prolly send me back to destroy the world ... .
32. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] LMAO
33. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] no w that would be hysterical

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[4] 'LMAO' is an abbreviation for 'laughing my ass off'.

34. [k5k] yeah, but first you'd have ta let satan and sadam butt fuck you

35. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] jovially laughing ... as i would launch nuclear warheads to china „. .britain,.... europe . .. .. and hell . .. even asia .... .and causing massssive anxiety across the board .. .

36. [k5k] then they'd send you back to virginia and laugh

...

The reader's attention is drawn to the latter half of the sequence, particularly from lines 12 to 30. In the beginning of the extract (1 and 3), 'd_sc_mb_b_l_t_r' describes being 'bumped', the common experience whereby Soulseek appears to go momentarily 'down', whilst nonetheless continuing uploads and downloads.[5] Although file exchange continues (for the connections which were established before Soulseek went 'down'), 'bumped' users cannot access rooms or private conversations with others, who 'read' the 'bumped' as offline. The responses of k5k and /dev/null (4-6) indicate the pragmatic orientation to Soulseek: when /dev/null ironically says "yeah, fuck it I want a refund!/oh, wait.... ;)", closing with a wink (5 and 6), he is indicating that, given that the platform is *free*, one must 'grin and bear it' when the system is overloaded.[6]

A cursory glance at this exchange highlights the complexity of member's orientations, for along the indexical 'pivots' of key terms, multiple, distinct frames of reference (and with them, imposed semantic restrictions and hierarchically competitive versions of 'reality') are being propounded and contested (Hanks 1997: 51). 'Refund', for example, has the following connotations:

1: (line 5: /dev/null) an 'ironic' usage, implicitly indicating that, in this context, conventional consumer rights are not applicable.

2: (line 7: vek 1) a contextually indeterminate token, a referential failure requiring clarification.

3: (line 8: k5k 1): 'refund' as artificially restricted to a contextually catachrestic, formulaic definition, where

4: (line 8: k5k 2): the conative aspect of rendering this utterance is such as to elide the meanings associated with 1 above; to manoeuvre, through double-talk, the status of 2, above, into misapprehension.

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[5] k5k's unanswered request at line 2 is for an authenticating serial number for music software.

[6] Soulseek 'caps' the maximum number of simultaneous users; when this number is exceeded, some users get 'bumped'.

5: (line 17: vek 2) 'refund' as an innocuous marker (bearing none of the associations at 1, 3 or 4), the use of which in form 2, does not warrant adversative disputation, or rather serves as a means of mocking/engaging in such disputation.

In both of vek's uses, it is not (contrary to k5k's misrepresentative turn) the definition or denotation of the term which is at issue, but the local reference. One may say that vek is 'at one remove' from the term, attempting to locate or 'fix', not its referent, but the situated reasons subtending its deployment and relevance, whilst k5k, operating at a different 'semantic' location, is using 'refund' as an adversative lever, allowing us to see how the lifting out of aspects of motivated relevance "while disattending or discarding other aspects" works, and indeed has a moral character (Heritage 1984: 150). The issue here is "not the referent itself, but the relation between the utterance framework and the referent" (Hanks 1997: 50).

This exchange sets the scene for what follows. vek's request for clarification, his 'disambiguator', at line 7 opens up the possibility of k5k's pedantic, adversative definition (8), and through all that follows blaerg's entry (12) it is evident that blaerg and k5k are casting themselves as insiders, exploiting the impression that vek is not 'getting' the interaction correctly. This is highlighted by the action-utterance form of blaerg's "conversation restart" (Jefferson 1984: 193), publicly 'nudging' k5k to indicate his intention. An adversative 'joke' is set up, with vek as the butt. Through this, status leverage is generated for, and by, blaerg and k5k. vek is seemingly (mis)reading the interaction 'literally', and thereby misinterpreting what is happening. For this reason blaerg can assert that 'vek is impervious to irony': k5k and blaerg are speaking to each other (and to the audience) through (double-talking to) vek, demonstrating that they 'get it' at a level 'beyond' that at which vek is operating. This is shown by the anachronistic form of the insult issued to vek (14 and 20); in this instance a coprolalic insult (a *your mother*, for example), would be inappropriate: it would not do the 'work' of adversative one-upmanship.

By line 30 this formally adversative sequence has timed-out, because vek continues to focus on what are, from k5k and blaerg's perspective, ancillary matters arising from the anachronistic insult. vek refuses or fails to see himself as bearing the brunt of the adversative joke; he does not acknowledge that k5k and blaerg are attempting to put him in "a slightly wrong face" (Goffman 1967: 26n18). He successfully maintains an 'impervious', realist approach to language and interaction, restricting the scope of the adversative double-talking, thereby obliging a similar return to form on the part of k5k

(hence line 34).[7] blaerg and k5k are able to briefly get 'one up' on vek by 'outsmarting', rather than out-insulting him. They *demonstrate*, rather than *say*, that they are on the 'inside', making fun of the fact that vek does not see that they are making fun of him.

This is the essence of adversative exchange: to create consensus or solidarity within or across a group of speakers so as to oppose it to others: ostensibly conflictual speech acts serve to engender homosocial bonding (Kiesling 2005). As Harris and Rampton suggest: "there are points of indeterminacy in interaction which provide showcase moments, both for the symbolic display of social allegiance and for the affirmation, contestation or redefinition of dominant orders" (2000: 15). The 'gap' across which vek, and blaerg and k5k, interact is just such a point. The contestation of 'the real' as evinced in dialogue here is 'interminable': insofar as contrasting styles reference contrasting ontologies and inscriptions into this textual reality, simply out-insulting (as in ritual coprolalia sequences), or literally outwitting (as in adversative disputation and play) co-participants grants only fleeting victory; 'winning' is equivalent only with successfully (but temporarily) aligning the discourse in accordance with one's own interpretive/definitional imposition.

It is worth considering one more fragment involving vek, not, as Herring suggests, because vek himself (or, indeed, k5k, or justin_sane, or the other co-participants we have been considering) is of primary concern, but because his performative persona exemplifies and draws out distinct attributes of the 'speech' modes circulating in the milieu: "what is important are patterns across groups of speakers, rather than individual linguistic variation … the identity of the person who posted the message is secondary to the person's membership in a larger social grouping that uses language in characteristic ways" (1996a: 159). In the simultaneity below, the interactions of 'elementabuse' and 'pbf' with vek provide a further insight into the adversative and the degrees of discursive complexity it brings into play. Subsidiary topics are (unsuccessfully) initiated by 'MISSING' (lines 38, 62, 63 and 66), bringing up his enthusiasm for 'grind' and a DVD about this subculture, and 'TraumaTizer-', who enters conversation (46) and brings up his amphetamine use, evidently with some ambivalence (49, 53, 58). What is key here is the masculine form of the interaction (with virtually every utterance read, more or less, as a challenge to heterosexist masculinity, and thereby a confirmation of it), and the different levels of reflexive sophistication with which the various 'players' are orienting to the co-produced text.

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[7] Independently of its masculinist properties, line 34 is also an oblique pop-cultural reference to the *South Park* movie, in which Satan and Saddam Hussein are depicted as having a romantic relationship.

vek has several turns previously said that he is going to leave 'in 20', and a 'playful' adversative question has arisen as to whether or not this is '20 seconds' or '20 minutes' (vek's account of this is stretched across lines 42 and 47: "when i said 20 seconds/i was being funny"). elementabuse in particular is here 'playing' with vek.

BC room 10/12/05

37. * elementabuse shakes vek's hand
38. [MISSING] im gettin more n more into grindcore more than anything
39. [elementabuse] let's hear it for vek guys, he's alright!
40. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] i'm not gay element .... back you dick rider
41. [elementabuse] i only shook your hand man
42. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] when i said 20 seconds
43. [elementabuse] and i was only joking around with you
44. [elementabuse] there's not need to insult me
45. [elementabuse] which you've done at least twice
46. [TraumaTizer-] hi ghey boys
47. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] i was being funny
48. * pbf gives it up for vek
49. [TraumaTizer-] no amphetamines for me this evening
50. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] applause ?
51. [elementabuse] you called me a phool and a dick rider
52. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] better be
53. [TraumaTizer-] ahum this weekend :(
54. [pbf] yes applause
55. [elementabuse] haha very droll pbf ;)
56. [elementabuse] like it
57. [elementabuse] it was a double entendre
58. * TraumaTizer- cries
59. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] people dont seem to get thru to humor
60. [pbf] you were thinking maybe an ass ramming
61. [pbf] fucking queerbop
62. [MISSING] anyone ever seen this dvd
63. [MISSING] bleeding through
64. [elementabuse] it's because you have no tone in the way you type vek
65. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] i guess
66. [MISSING] sheep amonst wolves or whatveer
67. [[V3ktr0n Audio Reprazent]] dunno
68. [elementabuse] you need to type so that people can 'see' the tone in your 'voice'

This sequence demonstrates the manner in which normative masculinity is reinforced; it is through the discursive excess of such elaborations that 'normality' is constructed, whilst the interaction simultaneously becomes more polysemic – indeed, these two processes are arguably the same. The polysemicism becomes reflexive at the point that elementabuse describes pbf's "giving it up" for vek (line 48) as a *double entendre* (55-57). This *double entendre* concerns the ascription of the role: *the recipient of the phallus*, what Jackson refers to as the "insertee role" (1978). We shall return to this libidinal-economy reading shortly. Another remarkable feature here is elementabuse's advice to vek (64 and 68), and the "retrospective-prospective" spin this puts on vek's interactional style (Garfinkel 2002b: 89), which, from elementabuse's perspective, is evidently deadpan and flattened of affect. Line 68 is striking for its diglossic quotation (the quote marks around 'see' and 'voice') and the complexity of the synaesthetic analogy: seeing 'tone of voice' in text. The interpretive lacuna between vek, on the one hand, and, this time, pbf and elementabuse, on the other, is also evident: there is a strong sense in which vek serves as a scapegoat to the group. Simultaneously, vek is stating his own perception that others are not 'getting' or 'reading' *his* sense of humour and play correctly (59), presumably on the basis of elementabuse's response to vek's adversarial turn at line 40.

6.2 "i dont get it": Repelling incomers, abortive sequences, and the limits of the adversative

For the most part adversative interaction is in-group 'banter'; through which co-participants entertain each other. Verbal and intellectual ability – in the service of humour – is highly esteemed. However, there is a rather more sour aspect to the adversative mode which it would be disingenuous to omit. We can differentiate between in-group adversative contest (mutual needling and critique across shifting cliques, where status competition is oriented around entertainment), and another class of interactions: the adversative directed towards incomers, as a means, indeed, of *repelling* them. In rendering this distinction, the characterisation of exchanges as such becomes somewhat 'formal'; real interaction, obviously, tends to supersede imposed categorisations, as there is usually 'more than one thing going on at once' (hence the idea of treating data as simultaneities). Challenging incomers has the function not only of maintaining the cohesiveness of the group (through policing membership), but also boosting the status of the challenger within the group. The important feature of such exchanges is not only the orientation to the 'outsider' they reveal,

but also the role the incomer (particularly the incomer's opening gambit) serves for the group. Innocuous, polite incomers, often with innocent queries, can end up serving as grist to an adversative status mill they had little cause to anticipate.

The adversative can thus be characterised as a confrontational interactional mode which, once initiated, asserts the initiator's claim to supremacy, demanding some return on the part of co-participants, who may be obliged to align themselves hierarchically with the adversative stance and engage in contest: a 'chorus' of one or more other players known to the initiator may back their claim up; whilst the 'challengee' must either compete, or appear to not 'get it'.

This feature of the adversative is something which is shared with the coprolalia exchanges considered previously. The difference is of direction and orientation. 'Trollery', such as that engaged in by jesseka and justin_sane, involves an appropriate, locally literate challenge from outside the group, obliging locals to defend their 'space', whilst these adversative challenges are issued from inside the group to outsiders, and characterised not by their obscenity, but by their vituperative character and their claim to specialised knowledge (about both interactional orientation and the content of discussion). This is evident when we consider failed sequences, where the challengee – unlike, say, jesseka, *later on the same day* – does not successfully engage.

BC room 28/07/03

69. [blackcalx] anyone here like any artist from hands production/ant-zen
70. [dystop] yeah me
71. [blackcalx] you like winterkalte
72. [dystop] ant-zen has imminent right?
73. [blackcalx] or needle sharing
74. [nazipig] noisex
75. [nazipig] noize creator
76. [dystop] no i think winterkälte sucks ass
77. [blackcalx] i like them
78. [dystop] well then you suck too.
79. [blackcalx] i guess
80. [dystop] yup
81. [DeathBreathing] hahahahha
82. [DeathBreathing] and hes gone
83. [dystop] hwy, i have to insult the newbies right?
84. [Synthe.Labo] why are you so bastird?
85. [Synthe.Labo] ahaha :)

Exchanges such as this show that it is not only possible to be rude without being obscene, but also that obscenity can actually *obscure* rudeness. In coprolalia sequences, we often find obscenity without hostile intent, such that hostility is expressed 'directly' through truncated, 'polite' forms (as when kee_PTS wrote: "beat it, phuckup"). This underscores the point about 'indirection': that coprolalia is generally not read as personally offensive. Disagreement with an other serves to enact the shared priorities and boundedness of the room. Insofar as dystop's comments on the output of the Ant-Zen record label are offensive, this happens at an 'inert' level: the band "sucks ass", and thus anyone who listens to them "sucks" too. This sort of denigration does not constitute ludic insult exchange of the sort considered previously. blackcalx could have disregarded dystop's assertion that 'Winterkälte suck ass' at line 76, but once he has stated his differing opinion on this matter dystop can extend dismissal to him (the question with which blackcalx entered dialogue was presumably intended to preface a further question or request). As dystop asserts once blackcalx has left the room: "i have to insult the newbies right?" It is indeed a routine matter to dismiss 'noobs' in this way; such dismissals serve as 'initiations' in a sense.

blackcalx's abrupt exit highlights the fact that knowledge concerning the 'routineness' of these interactional norms is 'distributional' in the sense elaborated by Sacks: differently positioned actors have different perceptions of 'what is really going on' (1984b: 421).[8] This is why dystop is able to 'read' blackcalx as a 'newbie', why it is so easy to offend him, and why he does not grasp that he is, as DeathBreathing indicates (82), the target of adversative contest being evaluated by 'ratified overhearers'.

The following extract again features a number of personæ previously encountered. The user named 'AntiCorporate Manifeso' has entered the room to 'spam' a musical project.

BC room 31/07/03: 1

86. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] yo
87. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] what up
88. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] i got a great really fast break core/punk track if anyone's interested....

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[8] Soulseek marks exits: as soon as an interactant has left the room, their name in the dialogue window turns red. This would have occurred at some stage between lines 79 and 82 being entered.

89. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] STATIC QUO
90. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] its on my HD[9]
91. [xntrik] that name is gay, dude.
92. [xntrik] you might as well call the track GAY BUTT FEST BONANZA QUEER QUEER.
93. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] im bi
94. [xntrik] me too.
95. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] so that WOULD be appropriate
96. [xntrik] and even i think that name is gay.
97. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] y
98. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] ?
99. [xntrik] come on, dude.
100. [xntrik] it's so gay.
101. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] y?
102. [xntrik] you might as well dress it up in sequins.
103. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] k
104. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] k
105. [xntrik] k took my baby away.
106. [dystop] lalala
107. [DeathBreathing] hahahahahahaha
108. [dystop] ramones is teh shit

The form of the refusal xntrik offers here is particularly 'gendered', above and beyond dystop's routine usage of 'sucks' in the previous datum. It is also more 'playful'; consider in this regard lines 103-105, where xntrik completes AntiCorporate Manifeso's repeated 'k' so as to turn the conversation into the title of a Ramones song.

The sequence goes on:

BC room 31/07/03: 2

109. [xntrik] www.clownpenis.fart
110. [DeathBreathing] you should try being nice to people
111. [DeathBreathing] haha
112. [DeathBreathing] assholes
113. [mcvicar] ?
114. [dystop] being nice is gay
115. [mcvicar] gay happy
116. [DeathBreathing] but you guys ARE gay
117. [xntrik] we're so gay.

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[9] 'HD' is an abbreviation for 'hard drive'.

118. [pressthereset] bi curious
119. [xntrik] bunch of fucking fags.
120. [mcvicar] but where u from
121. [xntrik] gaytown.
122. [mcvicar] death
123. [DeathBreathing] NJ
124. [xntrik] by way of queersville.
125. [mcvicar] batty boy
126. [dystop] i have nothing against homosexuals, it's the gays i can't stand.
127. [DeathBreathing] AHAHHAHAHAHAHA
128. [mcvicar] im not gay he suked my dik
129. [AntiCorporate Manifeso] i dont get it
130. [dystop] well duh
131. [xntrik] fucking homos.
132. [dystop] fucking homofuckers
133. [mcvicar] hahah y
134. [dystop] being homo is so gay
135. [mcvicar] blackpool
136. [xntrik] fucking shitfuckers.
137. [mcvicar] shit stabbers
138. [mcvicar] any one got any doormouse shit
139. [dystop] fuckfuckers
140. [mcvicar] like addict and distort
141. [mcvicar] or fuck hadcore
142. [pressthereset] EAT A MOTHERFUCKER BURGER MOTHERFUCKER
143. [DeathBreathing] FUCK!
144. [pressthereset] fuck FUCK
145. [DeathBreathing] FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK
146. [DeathBreathing] eat my fuck
147. [pressthereset] fuck fuck, fucking fucker
148. [DeathBreathing] fuckin fuck fuckty fuck fucker

* Disconnected

After his final turn at line 129, AntiCorporate Manifeso does not appear in the room again: he does not, as he says, "get it". As Lyman asserts: "It is when jokes fail that the social conflicts that the joke was to reconstruct or "negotiate" are uncovered, and the tensions and emotions that underlie the conventional order of everyday social relations are revealed … the success or failure of a joke marks the boundary within which power and aggression may be used within a relationship" (2004: 170). Consider the subject positions assumed within the dialogue. "Being homo is so gay" (134), an alternative approach is

simply to state "FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK" (145). This is rather different from coprolalia as ludic maledicta, but it is not all that uncommon. It serves as a particular instantiation of the performance of masculinity in text, where, as Hall points out, "bodyless communication … is characterized not by a genderless exchange, but rather by an exaggeration of cultural conceptions of masculinity – one realized through the textual construction of conversational dominance, sexual harassment, heterosexism, and physical hierarchies" (1996: 158).

The presence and orientation of 'mcvicar' is notable, for he participates in two ways of speaking within the text. While he is participating in the 'riffing' on sexual orientation (137), he is simultaneously initiating 'normal' sequences, himself participating in the ambiguous and playful results:

> [mcvicar] but where u from
> [xntrik] gaytown.
> [mcvicar] death
> [DeathBreathing] NJ
> [xntrik] by way of queersville.
> [mcvicar] batty boy

mcvicar is, like AntiCorporate Manifeso, an incomer. Unlike AntiCorporate Manifeso, however, mcvicar is not adjudged to be a newbie who must be adversatively 'put in his place'. mcvicar enters dialogue with "?" at line 113, and leaves with "or fuck hadcore" at line 141. Though new to the room, it is unlikely that mcvicar is new to this interactional style (in contrast with AntiCorporate Manifeso). The reason for mcvicar's arrival is iterated at lines 138, 140 and 141: to look for music by Doormouse: he goes on to mention three labels which have released Doormouse material: Addict, Distort and Fuck Hardcore. 'Fuck Hardcore' is of course not incongruous here, this is a popular idiom (it is also encountered musically, with the repetition and manipulation of audio samples of expletives); this sociolinguistic transgression is multi-modal.[10] mcvicar's request, though,

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[10] Newcastle's Nasenbluten are notable in this regard, repeatedly recycling edits from the often-sampled 'drill instructor speech' in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, particularly the word 'cocksucker' and the phrase 'fuck my sister' (they appear in 3 Nasenbluten tracks to my knowledge). Hellfish has similarly explored a single sample of the word 'motherfucker'. This 'institutional' obscenity is what makes it possible to speak of coprolalia as an "anti-adult counterculture" (Collins 2004: 277). We have already touched on jungle's reliance on dancehall lyricists; some breakcore producers seek to disrupt the homophobic elements of dancehall as they circulate in jungle and post-junglist breakcore: Istari Lasterfahrer, for example, has edited a

goes without an answer, no-one elects to offer him their "doormouse shit", the obviousness of the request fails to warrant it an answer. Given that mcvicar is sufficiently familiar with the material to mention the names of record labels (where this 'secondary involvement' is demonstrated alongside his familiarity with the local interactional style), there is not enough to be gained from challenging him; he is already 'speaking the language' and therefore offers insufficient opportunities for adversative leverage.

Lines 142-148, with which the datum closes, give us an insight into the primacy of the text, of the inscribed word, and of the capacity to dominate signal. It is not just that mcvicar does not get an answer, it is the entire tone of the sequence taken overall (including the 'arrest' of the dialogue initiated by AntiCorporate Manifeso), and the closeness of the interaction to something approaching refusal to interact, or rather, to interact only within formalistic, strictly delineated limits. These closing lines are also place-markers, to mark the space/time until a new topic begins: an important aspect of the discourse is pre-emptive foreclosure, the use of key words and topics to neutralise or render untenable certain sorts of discussion or interaction. If the only point that can be raised about 'STATIC QUO' is that the name is 'gay', the 'line' or 'script' AntiCorporate Manifeso would otherwise have pursued cannot be operationalised (Goffman 1967: 5-11). Similarly, (non)responses of repeated 'fucks' condense the terms of the interaction.

The idiom is remarkable, and bears comparison with the use of other key words generally taken to indicate social position. In this regard, the French phrase *faux pas* as used in English is exemplary: the assertion of inappropriateness is issued via code-switching. We also have *bon mots* in this regard, and numerous other terms derived from French. For example, one speaks of the *denouement*: can one say 'the denouement sucked ass' without a certain degree of incongruity? These are *socially differentiated* ways of speaking – it is not (just) that French is another language, *faux pas*, *bon mots* and *denouement* are aspects of English vernacular within distinguishable language

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male JE voice sample to render 'me a de faggot dem a shot'. He has also released an album, *Battyboy Soundclash*, featuring complex, politically oriented sequencing of hip-hop, dancehall, jungle and metal. As 'Fuck Hardcore' suggests, the names of artists, releases and labels can also be explicit (unsurprisingly, there is a label called 'Cunt Records'; distributing the gabber hybrid known as 'speedcore'). The breakcore artist Enduser has titled a track "He Literally Rearranged her Internal Organs with his Giant Pussykilling Meatstick" (on *The Gutter Techno Experience*). Similar explorations of transgressive material are worked through in 'grind' (the genre mentioned by MISSING in line 38 of BC room 10/12/05), but through a more morbid idiom (one which often appropriates terms from forensic pathology): the band Devourment has an album entitled *Molesting the Decapitated*, featuring track titles such as "Postmortal Coprophagia". This perhaps is coprolalia as 'serious play'.

communities: shibboleths, albeit marking a different social formation. *Bon mots* and 'sucks ass' are semantic operators which *refract* as elements in social deixis, they are what Bakhtin calls 'social ideologemes' (1981: 357). We can see these ways of speaking as 'structural' when they are parodied, as when someone says, in double-talking jest: 'pretentious, *moi*?' It is the same with 'lol', 'pwned', 'pr0n' or 'teh win'.[11] The usage of such terms (and their orthographic specificity) is 'specialised'; associated with a culture or subculture, and demonstrably used by members of these cultures both online and 'IRL'. For instance, there is the language code of junglists, an organised communicative mode (both dialectal and musicological), subjectable to critique from those local to its community of use.

Hutchby states that: "Aspects of IRC encourage users to play with the conventional limits of expression, breaking the boundaries of social etiquette. At the same time the participants appear to be attempting to form themselves into 'communities' with differently structured behavioural norms, forms of expression, and the rest" (2001: 181). The argument presented here emphasises Hutchby's connective "At the same time": these processes are comprehensible as unitary. This is why we can conceive of coprolalia as being refined to a 'formal' code (as in lines 142-148 above): "speech play carried out systematically over an entire discourse segment to produce distinctive ways of speaking for special social purposes" (McDowell 1992: 141).

The 'institutional' nature of the cultural/linguistic forms here explicated is demonstrable through reference to its parodic inversion, as in the following:

BC room 22/11/03

149. [Torasaburo_Kobayashi] what is breakcore??
150. [Torasaburo_Kobayashi] anyone please sharing Moby
151. [CR420] moby not breakcore
152. [Torasaburo_Kobayashi] what moby not breakcore??? your are a homosexual gay
153. [hernesto] true!!
154. [true_k5k] moby is glitchcore is he not?
155. [seedy] no pisscore.

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[11] 'The' spelt as 'teh' has specific local properties, and is often used in conjunction with other markers. 'Porn' is often spelt 'pr0n'. 'Pwns' and 'pwned' for 'owns' and 'owned' apparently originate in the online *Quake*-playing community, typos institutionalised in cultural orthography (to 'own' is to psychologically dominate, to master). These spellings of 'teh' and 'pwn' are in part subculturally emergent consequences of keyboard 'interference'.

156. [Torasaburo_Kobayashi] moby is cute
157. [true_k5k] no
158. [Torasaburo_Kobayashi] your a fag
159. [true_k5k] no you
160. [Torasaburo_Kobayashi] cheers
161. [true_k5k] no worries

This extract obeys 'forms' as though legible through a 'direct' schema: (ostensible) 'incomer' demonstrates ignorance of local aesthetic and interactional priorities through 'giveaway' (contextually inappropriate) questions revealing ideological-cultural position at odds with that of insiders; in consequence has adversative challenge issued in terms of heterosexist masculinity etc., but it is in fact largely phatic – speech play, a parody of the forms it instantiates. When 'Torasaburo_Kobayashi' asks 'what is breakcore?' (line 149), he already knows 'the answer' to this, he is initiating a well-established routine, imitating and mocking, for adversative effect, the ignorance of those who lack the resources to answer the question (the question is further problematised by being 'postluded' with a request for the popular dance musician Moby, thus enacting the distinction between the 'mainstream' and the 'underground').

Among insiders, asking this question in this way is tantamount to demonstrating one's familiarity not only with the answer(s), but the constitutive local knowledge rendering the question ridiculable; establishing and subverting the question as an introversive, reflexively commentable element of the interactional environment. It is thus doubly adversative insofar as it establishes a hierarchy of competent readers. The same can be said of the close of the sequence (158-161), where the exchange of homophobic insult is resignified more as a joking 'handshake' than an offensive challenge. This is also legible as a Goffmanian 'ritual profanation' (Goffman 1990: 170): "when standard ceremonial forms … are employed in what is felt to be a facetious way, apparently as a means of poking fun at social circles where the ritual is seriously employed" (Goffman 1967: 86). As Vološinov points out, "Any current curse word can become a word of praise" (1973: 23).

6.3 'Garfinkeling' Garfinkel

In *Ethnomethodology's Program*, Garfinkel speaks of "bibliographies" (2002a: 67) and "literatures", arguing that the absence of accountability (seeming or imputed,

accountability either absent or 'unexplicatable', such as we ostensibly find in the end of BC room 31/07/03: 2 above), and "the escape from accountability", considered as the obligation on the part of the researcher to demonstrate (a qualifying 'only' is suggested) a 'classical' order in line with the bibliographies of the disciplinary corpus, combine to "reveal and exhibit as curious absurdities the corpus claims of the literatures of the analytic arts and sciences of practical action and practical reason" (2002a: 261).[12]

This critique can be rephrased in terms of homology: the researcher interprets the social through a set of metalinguistic analytical tools, supposed to uncover socially significant aspects of social interaction, where these aspects are predefined in terms of 'the literature'. The phenomena in question are to be understood as instantiating some 'deeper reality'. This is, in fact, in line with what Garfinkel elsewhere calls the 'documentary method of interpretation', where the latter "consists of treating an actual appearance as 'the document of', as 'pointing to', as 'standing on behalf of' a presupposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of 'what is known' about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other" (2002b: 78). Ethnomethodological bootstrapping itself, therefore, is a socially regulated form of dialogical knowledge production of the sort it seeks itself to explicate. Smith puts this issue succinctly when she asserts that "Sociological procedures legislate a reality rather than discover one" (1990: 53). This is particularly the case where the focus is on language use, which does not just refer or point to norms, actions etc., but reflexively instantiates such. For instance, statements made about the file-sharing imperative serve as manifestations of that imperative, they demonstrate it at the same time that they *are* it. Likewise, adversative aspersions cast upon sexuality are simultaneously reinforcements of 'compulsory' heterosexuality. Language both describes and generates social reality: "the terms themselves are included in what is being negotiated" (Ong 1981: 47).[13]

As can be argued, this is indeed the method through which the discussion of the data presented here has proceeded, where, in Wieder's terms: "Each newly encountered 'piece' of talk was simultaneously rendered sensible by interpreting it in terms of the developing relevancies of the code and was, at the same time, more evidence of the existence of that code. Furthermore, the interpreted 'piece' then functioned as part of the

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[12] By "the analytic arts and sciences of practical action and practical reason", Garfinkel means formal analytic "professional sociology" (Garfinkel 2002a: 143n12).

[13] The same insight is applicable to the claims made by the disciplinary corpus and the terms in which they are expressed, disputed and reformulated.

elaboration of still further 'pieces' of talk" (1974: 161). In this instance, the element of 'code' under discussion can be characterised as that of a *männerhaus* or fratriarchy: the 'rule of the brothers'.

Fratriarchy is the transitional, relatively autonomous intermediary domain indicated by Kristeva: "in which the sons, out of 'maternal love', and/or supported by 'homosexual feelings and activities', would renounce mothers and sisters and set up an organization based at first on matriarchal law, and ultimately on patriarchal law" (1982: 59-60). In the fratriarchal order the feminine (mother) is symbolically rejected, yet the law of the father is not (yet) fully (re-)established. This is, of course, legible solely in terms of the relatively marginal position of bedroom producers in relation to the labour market and the family: young people, Collins writes, are "the only contemporary group that is officially subjected to petty humiliations because of their categorical status, in this respect resembling black people who are unofficially subjected to similar tests; both groups are assumed dishonourable until proven otherwise" (2004: 277).[14] Kristeva describes how "the archaic father and master of the primeval horde is killed by the conspiring sons who, later seized with a sense of guilt for an act that was upon the whole inspired by ambivalent feelings, end up restoring paternal authority, no longer as an arbitrary power but as a right; thus renouncing the possession of all women in their turn, they establish at one stroke the sacred, exogamy, and society" (1982: 56). Crucially, as Marcus points out: "the incest taboo (which generates exogamy, hence exchange) presupposes a prior, unspoken taboo on homosexuality" (2005: 197).

This 'mythic' patricidal revolution is evocatively effective in exploring how it comes to be that youth-cultural discourses which take themselves to be radical, avant-garde, subversive *etc.* (such as the discursive violence of some types of hip-hop, metal and electronic music) come to instantiate (some) patriarchal norms in particularly virulent form.[15] In this allegory, the fratriarchal order is oriented around the fantastic moment when the Father's *shitless* Word is ritually 'killed' by fratriarchal coprolalia. The "central principle" of Freud's political theory, according to Schorske, is "that all politics is reducible to the primal conflict between father and son" (1973: 342). Yet the brothers, the sons, inherit the Word of the Father; coprolalia itself is their 'father tongue', the underside of patriarchal privilege (this is most obvious in considering actual institutional fraternities).

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[14] This fact, Collins goes on to suggest, explains why youth culture at large emulates black culture.

[15] The same is true of radical politics. Recall, for example, Stokely Carmichael's famous 'joke' that "the position of women in the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] is prone".

The fratriarchal männerhaus ('men's hut'), Remy argues, has an "extra-familial, extra-patriarchal" aspect; it is not oriented solely towards the reproduction of patriarchal order (1990: 48). Fratriarchy is thus a sort of adolescent male 'moratorium', "not on significant experiences but on their consequences" (Turkle 1997). The father bears responsibilities which the brothers do not; the brothers are "preoccupied with matters other than paternity and parenting, raising children, providing for a wife and family, and acting as guardian for a moral code" (*ibid.*: 45). What this 'fraternal horde' is preoccupied with is, among other things, the performance, instantiation and working through of certain forms of subcultural masculine identity (itself constituting an 'inverted' moral code), via ribald but routinised interactional forms, and the locale of the 'field' provides us with an extraordinary site within which to witness such adversative performances, where: "each assures himself that everybody is a friend though at the same time everybody is on his own and keeping everybody else at arm's length – an admiring arm's length, in a kind of diffuse communal narcissism" (Ong 1981: 81). The issue here is not strictly about sex and sexuality, but about hierarchy, dominance, contest and control. Sexuality merely provides the ritual language through which these issues are articulated.

Analogously, the issue is not merely or primarily about the typologisation of abstract, formalised interactional modes, for "What is there for the sociologist exists in and only in particular people's activities in definite places and times. What is there for us is produced or accomplished in people's ongoing and co-ordered practices" (Smith 1990: 200). The role of the 'bibliography' in recursively generating itself is not, therefore, in some way polluting or compromising (we depend on the bibliography to adjudicate upon itself), the 'bibliography' successfully refers to a social world beyond itself, as indeed does the data: the bibliography is a similarly ongoing and dynamic process to the material it is used to elaborate, both are mutually constitutive.

In a similar regard to Garfinkel's discussion of 'bibliographies', we speak of palimpsests: 'underneath' or 'beyond' that which is written, is found that which was written before; at the level of both the sememe, and what Barthes called the 'myth' (Sheperd and Wicke 1997: 43), as shown above in relation to shibboleths or social ideologemes and interactional styles respectively. Garfinkel's writing is itself an element of a literature and a bibliography, and can be discerned in a similar 'metatextual' perspective in this writing (Lacasse 2000: 37). Thus we can conceive of reading Garfinkel, as we have been doing, both 'against' and 'with', and in so doing bring into consideration the following points: Garfinkel's thinking can (should) *be applied to itself*, such that the (in)famous phrase "To recognize *what* is said *means* to recognize *how a person is*

speaking" must be read in terms of its own location and what it says about itself (1972: 320). It is possible to read both Garfinkel and the data as simultaneities – Garfinkel's meaning, too, is unfixed, processually variant, an indexical expression in dialogue, and to be understood in terms of its own context. The idea is that of applying Garfinkel to himself: *what* he is saying; *how* he is saying it. Thus what Garfinkel (or anyone else) is saying varies according to how he is (taken as) saying it, and can be pressed into ostensibly contradictory services – as it actually has been.

Indeed, the account previously presented, read 'against' Garfinkel, is not in keeping with other discussions of his work. Whilst it was argued ('against') in chapter 4 that indexicality was a problem for Garfinkel, to be solved by jettisoning conventional theories of meaning and signification, it is also possible to argue ('with') that indexicality is a resource rather than a limitation, such that the context-bounded nature of language use is something members can be seen to exploit (Heritage 1987: 250). A rigid and reifying depiction of meaning, from this perspective, depends upon a formalistic or 'legislative' anterior account of linguistics and semantics at odds with lived linguistic practice. With this acknowledged, it becomes possible to focus on how participants and analysts "create, assemble, produce and reproduce the social structures to which they orient" (*ibid.*: 231).

According to Heritage, ethnomethodology is based on the following three assumptions: social interaction has structural organisation; it is oriented towards context; and "these two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed, a priori, as disorderly, accidental or irrelevant" (1984: 240). Varying the orientation towards these three points demonstrably alters the material implication of social interaction and the reading thereof, such that (in relation to both the data and the 'bibliography') if we disregard structural organisation (including the social and disciplinary organisation of the corpus) disattend to context, or suggest that meaning is fixed rather than contextually constituted, we find we are left with a static, impoverished picture, where our own social knowledge is reified and abstracted (Smith 1990: 23).

In this way, the generative context of the bibliography sediments itself as an 'objective' body of knowledge The 'objective reality' so distinguished is given in part by pre-constituted sociological categories which are obtruded into and made to cohere with 'reality', such that agency, moral responsibility and the actor tend to disappear. The political implication of the status of the literature is such as to elide the role of the observer/interpreter, and this is indicative of a long-term process of subjectification: "At the fair the subordinate classes became the object of a gaze constituting itself as respectable and superior by substituting observation for participation" (Stallybrass and

White 1986: 42). From the privileged perspective of a depersonalised gaze constituting itself as an objective observer of an objective social reality, "to qualify a statement with the modifier 'I know' is to deprive it of factual status" (Smith 1990: 66). Thus, in paying homage to the literature (in an act of adversative bolstering), the researcher commits a disservice to the social foundation of knowledge and inadvertently reinforces the ideologically constructed 'objectivity' of the sociological canon.

We can, therefore, conceive of Garfinkel as grist to an academic adversative mill within this text, and thereby consider the contrast class of how the adversative operates in the domain of respectable academic discourse, where, as Mulkay points out, the "expression of disagreement is accomplished through a direct assertion of agreement with some third party" (1986: 310). In parallel with the discussion of the adversative interactional mode thus far presented, Mulkay, in analysing the correspondence of academic chemists, found that disagreement was often framed indirectly through agreement with a third-party 'co-disagreer'.[16] As Tannen indicates, it is through such ritualistic agonic disputation that academic 'competence' is performed, contested and assessed, and disciplinary 'camps' thereby established and maintained (2002: 1662-1663). Analogously, xntrik *et al.* bond against AntiCorporate Manifeso, as blaerg and k5k align themselves in opposition to vek.

Hence, an ethnomethodological approach to one discourse and the means through which 'order' is established therein can be shown to shed light on another, generating further refractions. The structure of the 'truth' or 'falsity' of academic claims thus becomes inherently contumacious, a 'Kuhnian' product, not of rigorous impartiality and objectivity, but of complex social processes in disciplinary production and authentication. The orientation to the disciplinary corpus becomes strategic rather than 'absolutist'; for the academic mode of scholarly disputation can be shown to be similarly adversative to that in use at the field setting. From this perspective, it does not matter 'objectively' whether Garfinkel is 'right' or whether the reader is in agreement with him, just as it does not matter 'objectively' whether Winterkälte are good or who thinks so: what matters is what is made of these reference points praxeologically, how they are used adversatively in the agonic construction and contestation of canonical hierarchies (whether these are taken as aesthetic, intellectual, or both).

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[16] Addressee indirection has longstanding historical antecedents, as Levine indicates in his discussion of the Ashanti custom of *bo akutia*, through which grievances towards high-status persons could be aired by addressing them towards another in the presence of the offending party. Levine describes this indirection as "vituperation by proxy" (1977: 8-9).

7 – 'Ghey'

> The glorification of the loser is the revenge of the nerds.
>
> (Duncombe 2002: 230)

7.1 *Gay/ghey* and the performance of masculinity

The adversative mode is a means of engendering alliances through opposition against others, deployed inside and outside the group – *intra* and *inter alios*, but particularly striking in the latter case where the outsider so challenged is unfamiliar with the form. In what follows the adversative is situated as a critical extension of the Herring's adversarial style through consideration of the *gay/ghey* complex. As Herring herself points out: "By challenging and criticizing others, men attract attention to themselves and engage in "contests" as a result of which they gain or lose in status" (1996c: 104).

As an interactional style, the adversative can demonstrably be deployed with reference to any topic or resource. A remarkable feature of the adversative, though, is its iterative role in re-producing normative masculinity. One may take issue with someone's impression of Winterkälte, as one may take issue with a reading of, say, Garfinkel, but the adversative circuit is underscored when one frames the adversativeness by elliptically asserting that, for instance, the name STATIC QUO is *gay*. In such instances the adversative is both deployed as a style and 'literalised' in form and content. Consequently, an examination of the use of *gay* in adversative disputation can simultaneously highlight the 'maleness' of the interaction and the performative constitution of that 'maleness' through the interaction. By considering the use of *gay* we get at the empirically witnessable gendering of interaction.[1]

The discussion of this shibboleth proceeds slightly differently to that concerning the *nigga* complex, and the reasoning for this should become clear. In the former case, the discussion proceeded from *nigga* as ostensibly 'neutral' element in greeting sequences, to *nigger* as constituent in racist 'jokes', stopping short at the point where *nigger* becomes an

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[1] This 'maleness' is a variable but constant resource, not a topic but a performative mode: "Masculinity (like femininity) is not a fixed quality, but a set of gender-specific behaviours, which adapt over time to changing material realities" (McNair 2002: 151).

element of 'pure' racist discourse. The discussion stopped here not because such discourse is not available for analysis in the field (the +BlackMetal+ room is – correctly – notorious on Soulseek as a site for racist hate speech, and the Breakcore room itself is occasionally witness to vitriolic displays of racism, including outbursts against whites), but rather because one of the features of interaction foregrounded was the local negotiation of contingent meaning.

Whilst the distinction between *gay* and *ghey* is highly informative, to explore and order gradations between them in similar fashion would underplay the inbuilt expansiveness of *gay*. *Gay* is not to *ghey* as *nigger* is to *nigga*: however 'slippery' *nigga* is in seemingly 'innocuous' use, *gay* is semantically 'excessive' in a way which precludes the possibility of charting a similar path. There is not a 'direct', specifiable meaning for *gay* in the sense in which (a wholly racist) one is specifiable for *nigger*. *Gay/ghey* is profoundly ambiguous, and is operationalised so as to relate to the identity of individuals in a manner quite distinct from the casual racism of fratriarchal discourse. Neither is *nigga* a derivative from *nigger* in a form analogous to that in which *ghey* is a derivative from *gay*. Whilst *nigga* is used in a form which appears to 'neutralise' or transvalue the connotations of *nigger*, the existence of *ghey* indicates the excess already inherent to *gay*, excess entailing the newfound specificity of *ghey*.

We may start by attempting to locate exactly what it is that 'gayness' refers to and where its parameters lie. According to Connell: "Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure" (2005: 78). Bunzl thus argues that "an abject conception of 'the homosexual' is not only continuously enacted and reproduced in the mundane politics of everyday life, but surfaces in the politically and socially sanctioned, mass-mediated deployment of normalcy" (2000: 214). 'Hegemonic masculinity', as we shall see, is constituted by its homosexual Other: "heterosexuality at its most normative is organized around homosexuality … men define women as their binary opposites because so little distinguishes male homosociality from male homosexuality" (Marcus 2005: 198). As Back observes, "Homophobic assertions and name calling … are used to challenge the status of a young man vis-à-vis his peer group. Additionally, participation in these rituals constitutes a kind of communion with these heterosexual versions of masculinity" (1994:175). The shifting 'whatever' Connell describes tends towards explosiveness in fratriarchal discourse: once one thing is defined as *gay*, almost everything becomes so. *Gay* is remarkable in that it tends to subsume everything; it is a core feature of the "constitutive outside" (Campbell 2006: 272). Kimmel

suggests that "Probably the most common putdown in America's high schools and middle schools today is 'that's so gay' … [This] has less to do with sexual orientation than it does with gender. We are the gender police, making sure that other boys stay in line" (2004: 571). An accusation of homosexuality is the most likely insult to be directed at a male by another male (Preston and Stanley 1987: 217). In the corpus, *gay* appears almost exclusively as a wholly negative signifier. *Gay* is everything (the collective masculinist) 'we' are not. If 'we' don't like something, it's *gay*. *Gay* signifies total disgust and exhaustion. Ultimately, it's all *gay*:

BC room 4/11/03: 1

1. [RamonesGrl17] im lookin for new shit to download..any suggestions
2. [kokainum] death sitcom
3. [kokainum] and dr. combat
4. [kokainum] worldstars
5. [RamonesGrl17] ok
6. [kokainum] they are
7. [deathsitcom] actually kokanium is gay and wants to fuck me that's why he says that
8. [kokainum] sure. i love such tight assholes full of ville vallos cum

This datum begins with an information request: 'RamonesGrl17' asks the room for recommendations. 'kokainum' recommends someone who is present, 'deathsitcom' (2). deathsitcom takes joking, adversative issue with this 'representing', suggesting the only reason kokainum has recommended him is because he is 'gay' (7). The "actually" and "and wants to fuck me" are important here: they restrict the possible readings *gay* is open to, specifying the roles, framing the charge of gayness, and initiating the topic in an appropriately off-hand, adversatively humorous way. Through suggesting that kokainum is gay, deathsitcom downplays the possibility that (he believes that) kokainum recommends him because his music is *good*, thereby ensuring he does not appear vain or big-headed. kokainum's next move is crucial, for, under the guise of the adversative homosocial *badinage* (itself demonstrating and testing how 'close' kokainum and deathsitcom are), careful policing is going on concerning who is entitled to legitimately offer information to whom, and about whom.

Clearly, RamonesGrl17 is a (possibly female) incomer, who does not enter dialogue again beyond line 5, thereby demonstrating how occupation of some discursive positions forecloses the possibility of speaking from other positions. In the face of the in-

group adversative banter of the room regulars, there is little scope for outsiders to engage. Ong (1981: 107) is instructive in this regard, when he suggests that:

> Women can be present at the competition, for in a sense women are what it is all about: the male must prove his masculinity in the presence of women, though also, and indeed even more, in the presence of fellow males, to show by contest with them in their masculinity that he is freed from woman to the maximum.

The fratriarchal adversative is significantly *display*, and one of the crucial features of the interaction is who does *not* speak, what discursive positions are *not* articulated, for such exscripted positions (such as the elided feminine, alongside the uninterrogated locus of male heterosexuality) are constructed 'silently', gesturally configured through their absence. The 'normal' is constructed through the elaboration of the 'deviant'. 'Normal' (normative heterosexuality) is the spectre in whose honour the feast is celebrated, governing, shaping and continuously shaped through exhaustive interest in the Other and projected anal eroticism onto that Other. As Stallybrass and White indicate, "disgust always bears the imprint of desire" (1986: 191).

At line 8, kokainum responds to deathsitcom's challenge, opening with the flattened "sure" (emphasised by the addition of the period stop) and then offering the dysphemistic image of "tight assholes full of ville vallos cum" (Ville Valo is the reputedly bisexual lead singer in the 'love metal' band HIM – an acronym for 'His Infernal Majesty'). This line serves to 'brutalise', in coprolalic fashion, any suggestion that kokainum's appreciation for deathsitcom's musical output is homoerotically untoward, while adversatively extending the veiled possibility that the asshole of deathsitcom himself is amenable to such a description (in line with deathsitcom's "and wants to fuck me", which ascribes the 'insertee' function to kokainum). This is an interesting variation on what Dundes, Leach and Özkök call the "my-penis-up-your-anus strategy" of boys' verbal gaming practices (1972: 153): deathsitcom *invites* the homosocial, adversative/phallic advance of kokainum (to return the compliment of kokainum's recommendation of him to RamonesGrl17), and is rewarded with line 8, which *performs* an adversative demonstration of fratriarchal aggression.[2] The perspective articulated in the extract positions the reader as

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[2] Again, Nasenbluten's Mark N (under the *nom de guerre* of Pack Rape) furnishes an excellent musicological illustration of adversative coprolalia of this kind. In 1996 a limited-edition flexidisc was released, the B-side of which is entitled "Rotterdam Takes it up the Arse", featuring that line shouted to the tune of "Camptown Races". This is one of several releases from Newcastle's Bloody Fist Records addressing other cities'

possessor-of-phallus, *gayness* is thereby 'projected' onto the recipient-of-phallus: "Anal sexuality is a focus of disgust, and receptive anal sex is a mark of feminization…Hegemonic masculinity forbids the receptive pleasures of the anus" (Connell 2005: 219). This is legible within the anthropological terms of social topography: "the margins of the human body [are] thought to be specially invested with power and danger … We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points" (Douglas 1984: 121). This specific mobilisation of *gay* predicates local personæ as such, but the designator and its semantic content rapidly proliferate. The episode continues:

BC room 4/11/03: 2

9. [kokainum] but in the end we are all gay
10. [kokainum] like madonna
11. [kokainum] or sean connery
12. [kokainum] or michael jackson
13. [kokainum] or bernie & ert
14. [hushchild] i think you got lost on your way to the IDM room
15. [deathsitcom] Or Mimaku
16. [kokainum] or saber rider
17. [deathsitcom] haha
18. [kokainum] or prince
19. [Mimaku Spldat] saber rider rules!
20. [kokainum] but is gay
21. [deathmetalhell] saber rider?
22. [Mimaku Spldat] schmarrn
23. [kokainum] sure. he fucks fireball for money
24. [Mimaku Spldat] no way
25. [deathmetalhell] fireball
26. [kokainum] die leute im idm room sind ja alle ziemlich fertig
27. [deathmetalhell] everyone that listens to breakcore is gay
28. [Mimaku Spldat] brave star is gay, thats for sure

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imputed pretensions to 'hardcore' status, with Sydney also coming under fire, in a ritual form elementabuse describes as "we from this city-core" (BC room 10/07/05). Reynolds furnishes an account of similar attacks on Amsterdam from Rotterdam (1998: 257). The musicians on Bloody Fist are known informally as 'Fisters'. As Dundes, Leach and Özkök indicate, each competitor in this sort of exchange "defends and asserts his virile standing in his peer group by seeing to it that his phallus threatens the anus of any rival who may challenge him" (1972: 135).

29. [deathmetalhell] because breackcore is GAY
30. [kokainum] labbern irgend ne scheisse von wegen intelligenter musik auf mtv
31. [kokainum] thats why we love it
32. [kokainum] bilbo is gay
33. [deathsitcom] brave star fucks his horse
34. [Mimaku Spldat] but thats a male horse, so hes gay, like i say
35. [deathmetalhell] does he fuck or get fucked
36. [deathmetalhell] ?
37. [Mimaku Spldat] propably, the horse fucks him, thats possible too ... ???
38. [deathsitcom] the horse fucks him with the gun
39. [Mimaku Spldat] waaahahahaha
40. [deathsitcom] but the gun has got a female name

...

As Glazener suggests, "the use of repeated epithets ... calls attention to the formulaic quality underlying any representation of stable identity" (2001: 169). What we are witness to are "performances of forms of masculinity that depend upon homosexuality for their definition" (Talbot 1998: 200). The 'local', intra-interactional *gay*, an attribute deathsitcom jokingly suggested accounted for kokainum's recommendation of him, develops here through a medium of popular-cultural references into the generic, total, negative gay (*ghey*); a property imputed to Madonna, Sean Connery, Michael Jackson, Bert and Ernie from *Sesame Street*, Prince, the breakcore producer and interactant Mimaku Spldat (hailed at line 15 by being lumped together with these figures), the cartoon characters Saber Rider and Fireball from the 1980s 'space Western' cartoon *Saber Rider and the Star Sheriffs* (10-20), Bilbo Baggins from *The Lord of the Rings* (32) and all breakcore listeners and all breakcore (27 and 29). The sophistication of this cultural referencing is itself notable: "A salient property of IRC discourse involves what one might call the written equivalent of speaking in tongues. Participants produce a bricolage of discursive fragments drawn from songs, tv characters, and a variety of different social speech types" (Werry 1996: 58).[3] *Gay* moves from signifying such things as arousal through (explicit description of) the *visual image* of post-coital bodies (those of the hypothetical lovers of Ville Valo), to becoming an attribute containing far more than anal eroticism (as, in fact, *ghey* does). kokainum comes up with 7 of these popular-cultural references, but deathmetalhell, Mimaku Spldat and deathsitcom also volunteer candidates

[3] 'hushchild' suggests (line 14) that kokainum's conversation is more appropriate to the IDM room (which, moreover, kokainum couldn't even find his way to). kokainum responds to this in German (26 and 30), saying that the people in the IDM room are 'all rather finished', and relating this to IDM featuring on MTV.

(27, 28 and 33). The *ghey* elements of the complex – gay as something 'we all are' – can be fruitfully elaborated through comparison with lines 114-116 of BC room 31/07/03: 2 in the previous chapter, which read:

114. [dystop] being nice is gay
115. [mcvicar] gay happy
116. [DeathBreathing] but you guys ARE gay

Here, paradoxically, DeathBreathing can be understood as obliquely *complimenting* room occupants as *nice* guys, through asserting that they are *gay*. Considerations such as these demonstrate the 'explosive' properties of the complex.

Through the end of the sequence – particularly lines 33-40, we again see the issue of anal receptiveness elaborated. As Kristeva argues in her discussion of ritual defilement: "filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a *boundary* and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin" (Kristeva 1982: 69). In this instance, what lies on the 'other side' is the receptive pleasure of anal eroticism, forbidden to (constitutive of) compulsory male heterosexuality. The continuous enactment and iteration of the boundary is related to "the frailty of the symbolic order itself" (Kristeva 1982: 69). This boundary does *not* exclude general homoeroticism: "there is nothing insulting about being the active homosexual. In a homosexual relationship, the active phallic aggressor gains status; the passive victim of such aggression loses status … it is only the passive, female role which brings discredit" (Dundes, Leach and Özkök 1972: 147). The 'passive' homosexual role has "historically been represented with a kind of fantastic intensity as feminine, impotent, grotesque, unnatural, pathological, even sinful … A penetrated man is looked upon as powerless, sullied, unmanly, and immoral … the only 'honorable' male sexual behavior (and I would add fantasy) is active penetration. Activity, and the assumed underlying fantasy of domination, is held to be equivalent to authority" (Corbett 2001: 24). The fundamental question is thus that of who is the *fucker* and who the *fuckee*,[4] with the 'passive' role 'definitionally' gay: "*men fuck* … this is a masculine and *dominant* thing to do …

[4] The *fuckee* form is used here (rather than the more conventional *fucked*) in part as an element in rhetorical strategy: as outside of regular usage, *fuckee* serves to highlight the distinction between coprolalic speech and *shitless* academic writing. Moreover, *fuckee* has greater specificity in this context, for *fucked*, as subject to verbicide, has numerous nonsexual connotations (for instance, of being conned, intoxicated, inoperable *etc.*).

whomsoever or whatever is so used is the subordinated and therefore inferior party" (Loizos 1994: 72).[5]

The semantics of gayness *expands* through this sequence: *gay* – even as restricted to recipient-of-the-phallus – keeps proliferating beyond binary categorisation. The character BraveStarr (from the television cartoon of the same name) serves as a medium through which male/female, straight/gay, human/animal, human/machine, discursive/material, passive/active *etc.* recursively recombine to destabilise and untether any fixed meaning for 'gayness', even within the seemingly straightforward terms of attempting to 'tie it down' to its sexual element.[6] Universal gayness entails that no matter how complex BraveStarr's sexual interaction is, it will still be (comically, grotesquely) gay, but this imposition is ultimately in keeping with the larger sense of *gay*; however it is tested in terms of anal receptivity, the sense of general gayness (as predicated of, say, Sean Connery or Bilbo Baggins) ensures that anal eroticism, no matter how carnivalesque, will be *gay*, but still only the tip of the *gay* iceberg. *Gay* is totalising in its elasticity, as is indicated by its developing movement from being something which 'in the end we all are' (line 9), which all breakcore and breakcore fans are (27 and 29), to its absurd, burlesque totality in relation to the convoluted sexual permutations constructed around BraveStarr (being anally penetrated by a 'female' gun wielded by a cyborg horse is *still* gay). *Gay*, then, moves from the adversative homosocial characteristic imputed to kokainum, through anal receptivity via Ville Valos, into generalised negative dismissal via numerous pop-culture icons (including the local subcultural priority and its practitioners), and finally into the coprolalic exploration of sexual mechanics around a cartoon character.

This 'joking' exploration of the semantics of *gay* is a popular trope among young men. Such 'jokes' as Rodgers remarks, are also "the method by which a dominant category defends itself against a disadvantaged but threatening category" (1997: 58). Consider the following extract, in which 'oldman', 'maladroit', DeathBreathing and 'd34df411' discuss continuing musical production.[7] The sequence is notable for a number of reasons pertinent

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[5] *Gay* thus points to the derogated status of *women* in fratriarchal discourse.

[6] BraveStarr was a sheriff on a mining planet called New Texas. This space Western cartoon first aired on American TV during the late 80s and early 90s. BraveStarr's cyborg horse, Thirty/Thirty, carried a gun called Sarah Jane.

[7] The name 'd34df411' is pronounceable as 'Deadfall' in '1337speak' ('elite-speak' – the code of heavy internet users; pronounced as 'leetspeak'), where numerals replace letters of similar appearance (thus '4' is 'A', '3' is a reversed 'E', and so on). This character substitution originated in hacker culture. As 'psy_sci' puts it: "where is my certificate of 1337f\|355"; that is, *eliteness* (SSA room 20/10/03).

to the overarching line of argument: firstly, we see the 'negative value' of music production – DeathBreathing suggests the reason oldman is (still) making music is because he has *nothing better to do* (58), and d34df411 then indicates, in a reflexive move (61), that precisely the same holds for DeathBreathing – a suggestion DeathBreathing sarcastically endorses (62-68). Involvement in the state of 'bedroom producerness' is correlated with *lack* of involvement in other spheres: specifically, the social (64) and employment (68-71). This marginalised status is acknowledged as shared: music production and participation therein (including participation in the room) helps to "kill the dull hours" (60). This rather understated way of formulating involvement is combined with offhand but evocative descriptors referring to the (creatively satisfying) processes of involvement: keeping it "satany" and "crunk up" (56-57).[8]

Secondly, there is the sudden emergence of *gay* and anal eroticism, *in this context*, at the end of the extract:

BC room 09/09/03

41. [oldman] hey mal i should have that man club jungalist remix done within a week or two
42. [maladroit] hey excellent
43. [oldman] im going into remix mode as soon as i finish this one album
44. [oldman] :)
45. [maladroit] im looking forward to it
46. [DeathBreathing] youre still makin stuff lucas?
47. [d34df411] i told 7U? that he should sign me
48. [d34df411] we'll see. haha.
49. [maladroit] ive been trying to do a remix of the nasenbluten professor of death track
50. [maladroit] ha yeah pressure him
51. [oldman] yeah im still making stuff, what world are you living in?
52. [DeathBreathing] i dunno
53. [DeathBreathing] i didnt think you were for some reason

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[8] 'Crunk', of AAVE origin, is a 'portmanteau word' telescoping the beginning of 'crazy' or 'chronic' ('chronic' referring to high-grade hydroponic cannabis and its effect) into the end of 'drunk', economically evoking the exponential effect of simultaneous ingestion. Crunk also refers to a genre of 'Dirty South' hip-hop. To 'keep' is to volitionally perpetuate and participate in the longevity of a cultural/ontologic form, as when we 'keep it real'. In JE dancehall lyrics, the listener is frequently encouraged to 'big up'; this has both a bodily referent ('big up your chest', like 'owning', exhorts the confident occupation of space), and a more socially extensive sense where 'big ups' are honorific acknowledgements. In this sense 'bigging up' is analogous to 'representing'. "Keep it crunk up" is therefore a complex formulation: a high degree of subcultural *literacy* is clearly a valued interactional priority.

54. [oldman] thats odd
55. [oldman] im always trying to keep busy
56. [d34df411] keep satany
57. [oldman] keep it crunk up
58. [DeathBreathing] you have nothing better to do i guess HAHA
59. [d34df411] burn.
60. [maladroit] it helps kill the dull hours
61. [d34df411] and you do john
62. [DeathBreathing] i know
63. [DeathBreathing] im real busy
64. [DeathBreathing] espescially with ALL my friends and stuff
65. [d34df411] friends?
66. [DeathBreathing] exactly
67. [DeathBreathing] haha
68. [DeathBreathing] and my job
69. [d34df411] hahah
70. [d34df411] that too
71. [DeathBreathing] that i dont have
72. [d34df411] yea.
73. [maladroit] do imaginary friends count?
74. [d34df411] black ones
75. [d34df411] that's it tho.
76. [DeathBreathing] nope
77. [oldman] yeah john is really busy being "grossed out" by anal sex
78. [maladroit] its a beautiful thing
79. [DeathBreathing] im not grossed out by it
80. [DeathBreathing] its just not my thing
81. [oldman] HE MUST BE GAY IF HE DOESNT LIKE ANAL SEX

Line 81 here *works* so effectively in this sequence because, firstly, it so abruptly raises the spectre of anal eroticism incongruously and paradoxically. The humour of this intervention in otherwise mundane, laconic dialogue is predicated on paradox and contradiction: 'anal sex' (to wit: *recipient*-of-the-phallus status) is the primary marker of gayness, but if DeathBreathing doesn't like anal sex (roles as yet unspecified), he must be *gay*. The disjunctive lacuna of nonspecification of role in the anal-erotic transaction is drawn on for comic effect. If DeathBreathing does not like the anaphoric 'it' ('active' male/female), he must therefore like the cataphoric 'it' (male/male 'passive'), where 'it' is so formulated as to *not* rule out either possible permutation: the permutations must be inferred. Again *fucker* and *fuckee* status are underscored: where DeathBreathing does not want to anally penetrate (a woman), this is reductively rendered so as to logically entail

gayness (anal-erotic receptivity). Implicit also is the general negative status of *gay*; that DeathBreathing's distaste indicates also that he is in some sense therefore not 'man enough', and hence, by implication, is conceivably the recipient of the phallus.

Secondly, there is the anterior set-up to this introjection (77), which demonstrates the relation between 'bedroom producerness', the previously indicated marginal socio-economic position of co-participants, and normative heterosexist, fratriarchal masculinity itself. The inverted formulation jokingly suggests that DeathBreathing's distaste (itself undermined by the quotation marks around "grossed out") is so preoccupying as to preclude participation in a social and working life. The problematics of masculinity, gayness and anal eroticism are here *directly* related to the social situations of participants, and to their creative involvement in cultural production. These linkages, emergent in the dialogue, render an account of fratriarchal masculinity and its discursive elaboration imperative.

In both the 'BraveStarr' section of BC room 4/11/03: 2, and the concluding lines of BC room 09/09/03 just discussed, the coherence and stability of the straight/gay binary is tested to its limits. It is precisely the absurd cultural *overdetermination* of sexual orientation which is glimpsed through the convolutions and contortions sexuality is subjected to in the data.

7.2 *Ghey* and the supersession/sublation of *gay*

These articulations of *gay* can be constructively contrasted with the process Thornton describes as 'the feminisation of the mainstream', as instantiated in the genre castigated as 'handbag house', and personified in the image of 'techno Tracy', dancing around her handbag (1995: 100-105).[9] As Thornton asserts, ostensibly 'subversive' subcultural capital, like the priorities and preoccupations of fratriarchal discourse, is expressed through, legitimates, and reinforces existing social disparities, with the 'uncool' rendered as the preserve of the feminine, whilst authenticity is produced and normalised as gender-neutral: "the feminine tends to signal the inauthentic, and the authentic is rendered in genderless or generically masculine (rather than macho) terms" (*ibid.*: 72).

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[9] The ubiquity of the '(ef)feminising' dismissal is demonstrated by Governor Schwarzenegger's famous piece of performative autoglossia (at the 2004 Republican National Convention): "And to those critics who are so pessimistic about our economy, I say: 'Don't be economic girlie men!'"

The difference with *gay* is that it articulates a logic 'beyond' standard male/female dichotomies. Conventionally, anal receptivity transgresses the classification systems through which male heterosexual identity is established – the latter identity requires the former practice as constitutive contrast class. This is why gayness-as-anal-eroticism returns, cast out, but necessitated for the maintenance and coherence of normative heterosexuality. Yet labelling something as *gay* is not reducible to rendering it even as effeminate, it does not, strictly speaking, even imply castigating the object so named as homosexual. *Gay* in masculinist discourse, like the generic use of *faggot*, proliferates beyond sexual prohibition. This curious, 'explosive' disjuncture of *gay* may be profitably inflected with reference to the queer theoretical deployment of 'loss'. Corbett points out that "Historically, the subjectivity of male homosexuals has been theorized around the trope of loss: the losses both of masculinity and of power" (2001: 24). This can, however, be read 'backwards', such that *heterosexuality* is conceptualised as "the melancholic mimicry of a lost but unmourned homosexuality: a heterosexual woman becomes the woman she cannot have, a heterosexual man seeks to embody the man he is barred from desiring" (Marcus 2005: 197).

From the queer theoretical perspective, therefore, the constitution of heterosexuality is directionally refigured, and this provides a crucial insight into the status of *gay* and similar terms. As Eminem explains, usage of *faggot* does not "necessarily mean gay person," but means "pussy" or "cissy" (cited in Keller 2003).[10] Although, formally speaking, attribution of *gay* or *faggot* status has "become unhinged from its customary meaning" of active homosexual practice, *gay* appellations continue "to carry the anxiety of loss that is attached to the homosexual" (Corbett 2001: 8). These castigations ostensibly challenge the heterosexual masculinity of their targets, but also extend into sexually non-specific dismissal. Corbett articulates this semantic nuance persuasively in arguing that "faggot = loser": the Columbine killers, for example, were frequently taunted with such terms, yet they "were not homosexuals; they were alienated losers. Their alienation was perceived, at least in part, as a consequence of their manifest rejection of popular codes/ideals and the manner in which they repeatedly failed to adopt cultural standards of distinction and value" (*ibid.*: 5).

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[10] This recalls Butler's account of the role marginalised subject positions play in hegemonic masculinity: "an identification that is, as it were, *already* made between faggots and women, the feminization of the faggot, the feminization of the black faggot, which is the black feminization of the faggot" (1993: 132, also Savran 1998: 33).

This excess of *gay* is evinced in the data by its elaboration as *ghey*, 'uncoupling' the disparaged attributes of gayness from homosexual practice. It is possible to be actually *gay*, but nonetheless not *ghey*: some noted breakcore producers, for instance, are widely reputed to be gay (that is, practicing homosexuals), but are unlikely to be castigated as *gay/ghey* – or at any rate, not for that reason. The sociosexual practices of gayness, therefore, are dissociated from the qualities of *gay/ghey* as an 'unfocused' marker of contempt. The *ghey* aspects of the complex are socially deictic and indeterminate (though this remains 'rooted in' *verboten* recipient-of-the-phallus status), the term becomes a floating signifier for the uncool (that which 'sucks'), and thereby indicates the unspoken 'straight' (which is also all that which is sincerely and unaffectedly enthused upon, and acceptably, heterosexually masculine) as always-already at risk of contamination. *Ghey*, then, is simultaneously an affront to masculinist authenticity, and curiously dislocated from homosexual practice (as indicated by the explosive totality of *gay* in line 9 of BC room 4/11/03: 2: "in the end we are all gay"). There is also a crucial sense in which *ghey* is liberatory – in which it is easier to be affably, homosocially *ghey* than it is to be *gay*:

SSA room 19/10/03

82. [Kernel32] look and me and superbo... put us together and we could battle the world with our penises
83. [Kernel32] *at
84. [Threetwosevensixseven] see how close together bush's eyes are?
85. [DrSuperbo] dude
86. * coconono threatens you with stick fighting
87. [nfotxn] And those ears.
88. [nfotxn] He's likea chimp.
89. [DrSuperbo] you and me putting our penises together to battle the world
90. [coconono] dude bush has several recessive genes
91. [DrSuperbo] 1) that is so ghey
92. [Kernel32] lol

...

93. [DrSuperbo] 2) it would be like Master and Blaster from mad max
94. [Kernel32] well i'm ghey i cant help it
95. [coconono] 3) but fun
96. [Kernel32] lol

In the above extract, 'Kernel32' expresses his affection for 'DrSuperbo', through the homoerotic suggestion that they could 'battle the world with their penises' (line 82).

This, of course, is *ghey*, as DrSuperbo suggests (91) and Kernel32 assents (94) – in fact, it is *almost* beyond the pale of acceptable homoeroticism.[11] Interestingly, DrSuperbo's reformulation of Kernel32's original statement (89) renders the suggestion even *gheyer*: moving from 'battling the world with their penises' to 'putting their penises *together* to battle the world'.

Note that being ghey is something Kernel32 'can't help' (94): Kernel32's sexual orientation, whatever it might be, is not at issue here; what Kernel32 'can't help' is expressing his fondness for DrSuperbo in these fantastic, homoerotic terms – terms which can be revealingly contrasted to those in which deathsitcom accounted for kokainum's appreciation of *his* musical output in line 7 of BC room 4/11/03: 1, above. In the latter instance, deathsitcom jokingly imputed ('active') homosexual desire to kokainum, an imputation accepted *only* at the level of adversative jocularity. In both instances, male friendship is expressed through a puerile, homoerotic idiom. However, in BC room 4/11/03: 1, the terms are conventionally masculinist and heterosexist (gayness is used to maintain safe, sociable, adversative *distance* - including distance from *itself* – whilst simultaneously, indirectly expressing friendship), whereas in SSA room 19/10/03, no reference is made to anal receptivity: it is as fratriarchal possessors-of-phalluses that the world-battling will be engaged in. Paradoxically, it is precisely this departure from the conventional allocation of sexual roles that renders Kernel32's claim at line 82 out of the (adversative) ordinary and therefore profoundly *ghey*, where such status is something Kernel32 can assent to. Here, then, ghey *supersedes* gay, and not only that, but *gay/ghey* itself becomes homosocially *and* homoerotically *cool*; that is, *ghey* supersedes *straight*. However, this is only at an abstract discursive level: it is precisely the forbidden desirability of the ghey which makes it *cool*.

The first time *ghey* is 'marked' in the transcript follows, in a conversation describing parodies of the MasterCard advertising campaign:

SSA room 27/10/03

97. [paraxod] my favorite mastercard ripoff was something my friends did, they bought one of those rollercoaster pictures of themselves

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[11] Master-Blaster, in the film *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, consists of a highly intelligent dwarf (Master) strapped to the back of an inarticulate giant (Blaster). Master-Blaster are mutually reliant, each cannot function without the other.

98. [paraxod] made it up into an ad, showed "4 tickets to magic mountain, $160, 4 hotdogs, $25, 4 hits of E, $80, peaking at the top of the riddler, priceless!"
99. [Numbr] thats gay, dude
100. [paraxod] i think ghey is the proper spelling
101. [Numbr] indeed
102. [Numbr] gheigh
103. [ronnohk] how come the search function isnt fucking working?!?!?!/

At line 99, 'Numbr' indicates the generic negative 'gayness' of the parody 'paroxod' has just described as a personal favourite. The response paroxod returns to this (100) is to proffer the innovative spelling, transvaluing the implicit challenge of Numbr's negative assessment. Numbr approves the alternate formulation, offering an even more elaborate alternative (101-102): the potential challenge of *gay* is neutralised by its reformulation as *ghey*. In such deployments, *ghey* has greater purchase – more *nuance* – as a descriptor than *gay*. It is also more socially facilitative:

SSA room 11/11/03

104. [psy-sci] plz check out 1:13 to 1:14
105. [Kernel32] and 1.47 to 1.59
106. [humbleice] why?
107. [psy-sci] its simply genius
108. [psy-sci] :)
109. * gR4g3TRoL eats
110. [Kernel32] superbos "the soul seekers" sample is genius
111. [psy-sci] but superbo is ghey
112. [gR4g3TRoL] is number 3 being worked?
113. [KiloWatts] what's 1:47-1:59 ?
114. [Kernel32] so are you
115. [psy-sci] yea true
116. [KiloWatts] is it just you and another person or sth?
117. [Kernel32] 1.47-1.59 is the kernel32 vs auan amen battle
118. [KiloWatts] ahh
119. [psy-sci] were one big ghey family

The numbers referred to in lines 104, 105, 113 and 117 are *seconds* in a collaborative musical project the room is engaging in (specifically, as 'gR4g3TRoL' correctly guesses at line 112, *One Minute Massacre Volume 3*, for which a total of 59 users ultimately submitted material). Again Kernel32 is 'bigging up' DrSuperbo – more

precisely, a sample originating with him (110). Again, *ghey* is reflexively applicable and acceptable, as evinced by lines 111, 114 and 115. And again, therefore, the *gay/ghey* complex is something 'we' all are: "one big ghey family" (119).

"[S]ign-vehicles or tokens which carry ceremonial messages", Goffman states, "may be linguistic, as when an individual makes a statement of praise or depreciation regarding self or other, and does so in a particular language and intonation" (1967: 55). As Brown and Gilman point out, "During the medieval period, and for varying times beyond, equals of the upper classes exchanged the mutual *V* and equals of the lower classes exchanged *T*" (1960: 256). Needless to say, dominants ascribe *T* to their subordinates and receive *V* in return. We have similarly differentiated in-group reciprocal *my nigga* status ascription and supplicant *nigga* self-ascription by subordinates (such as in requests for user list status), and in so doing, considered the production of hierarchy within groups. We may tentatively say that self-ascription of *ghey* status is a type of ritual deference enacted by subordinates. Moreover, reciprocal ascription and assumption of *ghey* status among insiders is acceptable, while outsiders may be challenged with *gay*. Through such attribution, and indeed the contest around and 'testing' of such attribution, status and group membership are negotiated and displayed. As Anderson notes, "attributes of status are not perfectly fixed. They are precarious and are situationally influenced, if not determined" (2003: 117). In these aspects of their usage, then, these shibboleths are similarly 'status rituals', despite their quite distinct semantic content: "these marks of devotion represent ways in which an actor celebrates and confirms his relation to a recipient" (Goffman 1967: 56-57).

The following sequence, the final illustration of *gay/ghey* to be analysed, is a highly sophisticated investigation of the unique transgressive elements of the complex. The extract begins with 'carn1fex' requesting an explanation of the process required to enable Soulseek to recognise his updated 'share' (120); carn1fex must therefore be a relative newcomer. Although new, carn1fex has already been 'welcomed', as evinced by the complement 'timeheater' proffers (123); that of adding carn1fex to his userlist on account of the collection he is sharing out. 'NR420' explains how to 'refresh' Soulseek's list of shared files at line 122:

BC room 08/01/06: 1

120. [carn1fex] wait how do i get soulseek to refresh the database it holds for my files

121. [NR420] = exstacy of zero g sex

122. [NR420] disconnect, reconnect or change folder options in file sharing
123. [timeheater] i was gunna add you anyway since you've got stuff i like :)
124. [carn1fex] aw fuck
125. [NR420] i am 22
126. [timeheater] i am 14
127. [carn1fex] alright
128. [carn1fex] brb
129. [psi36] OK, goes to figure
130. [timeheater] heaheah
131. [timeheater] no
132. [timeheater] 16
133. [psi36] and most of you don't have gf's I guess
134. [timeheater] 19 really
135. [NR420] time, i was celibate 12-19
136. [psi36] this seems more like a brag about sex room then a breakcore room
137. [timeheater] i almost got felt up last week does that count?
138. [NR420] i have two gfs right now sorta .. ;)
139. [timeheater] psi you should know that they're the same thing

As carn1fex disconnects to 'refresh' (127-128) the interactants elect personal information about themselves. timeheater misrepresents his own age *twice* (126 and 131-132), furnishing an oblique insight into both his sense of self and the possibilities of misrepresentation inherent in the medium (including, the suggestion is, misrepresentation for sexual purposes). 'psi36' serves as 'realist' foil here; he takes timeheater's underestimation at face value (129), and goes on, at line 133, to hypothesise that (presumably on the basis of their presence) other room occupants do not have girlfriends ("gf's"). His ongoing 'downgrading' continues at line 136, where he suggests that the dialogue of the room is 'off-topic'. Naturally, timeheater and NR420 immediately take the opportunity this provides to 'fix' dialogue at precisely the level psi36 is ostensibly critiquing (137-138).

More pertinent, though, is timeheater's next turn (139), addressed directly to psi36: "psi you should know that they're the same thing" – that is, *bragging about sex* and *breakcore* are the *same thing*. When this assertion is considered alongside the qualifiers of the previous two turns (lines 137, where timeheater says he *almost* got felt up, and 138, where NR420 says he *sorta* has two girlfriends), it is clear that this territory is similar to that explored in BC room 09/09/03, above ('he must be gay if he doesn't like anal sex'). In that datum a link was made between 'bedroom producerness', marginal social status, and normative heterosexuality. In *this* extract, the link indicated is even more explicit: bragging

about sex and breakcore are equivalent. As should be evident (and as is indirectly supported by psi36's further comments below), bragging about sex is *ghey*, therefore, again, *so is breakcore*, and so is involvement in breakcore production and consumption. At another level, of course, the technological mastery required for, and demonstrated by, bedroom producerness stands as a (substitutional) representation of *sexual* mastery, and of the social engagement and skill bedroom producers do not (feel they) have (paraphrasing Corbett: '*ghey* = nerd').

The ingenuity of line 139 is acknowledged in the following way:

BC room 08/01/06: 2

140. [psi36] whatever
141. [NR420] HAHAHAA
142. [NR420] break sex core
143. [timeheater] sex break room
144. [psi36] guess so
145. [carn1fex] mkay
146. [carn1fex] that should do it
147. [timeheater] i am the soulseek breakcore sex room moderator
148. [psi36] not my thing realy
149. [timeheater] that's ok
150. [psi36] bragin about sex and stuff that is
151. [diab0lik] sex isnt your thing
152. [diab0lik] ?
153. [psi36] breakcore is my thing though
154. [timeheater] pff who cares about breakcore
155. [timeheater] when u got titties
156. [psi36] i like to do it, not talk about it
157. [NR420] you have tits time?
158. [diab0lik] u must have a steady gf eh?
159. [timeheater] :\
160. [diab0lik] who u respect
161. [NR420] haha
162. [psi36] jep
163. [diab0lik] thas cool
164. [timeheater] you are ruining my reputation as the breakcore gay
165. [psi36] soo this al is a bit shalow to me
166. [psi36] but no offence to you guys
167. [carn1fex] hehe

In this part of the sequence psi36 maintains the 'mature' role he has adopted in the face of a series of adversative challenges. As carn1fex re-enters the room (145-146), 'diab0lik' is drawn into the interaction, seemingly by psi36's professed disdain for the flavour of the conversation, entering at lines 151-152 with "sex isnt your thing/?" This move, addressed to psi36, elides the distinction between 'sex' and 'bragging about sex', and leads psi36 to produce one turn professing that breakcore is 'his thing' (153), and a further turn asserting the conventional (non-*ghey*) masculinist orientation to sex (156). In the intervening lines (154-155), though, timeheater elaborates an alternative view: "pff who cares about breakcore/when u got titties". This leads to NR420's question (157), which timeheater responds to in lines 159 and 164, where the latter line shows the extent of the possibility for confusion: NR420 jokingly asks if timeheater has 'tits' (that is, evidently, asks timeheater if he is female), but presumably it is timeheater's *own* admission of total indifference to breakcore when presented with "titties" which is 'ruining his reputation as the breakcore gay'. The reader can be certain that timeheater is male; he is almost certainly not actually *gay* 'IRL'. More important for the present analysis is his expression of the relationship between 'underground' authenticity and 'subaltern' sexual identity. It will be recalled that, similarly, in BC room 31/07/03: 1 (lines 94 and 96) in the previous chapter, xntrik claimed to be (like AntiCorporate Manifeso) bisexual, and utilised this claim as part of his 'playful' dismissal of the name STATIC QUO as 'gay'. Thus the sexual orientation of members is secondary to the work sexual orientation (professed, assumed and imputed rather than 'actual') achieves in interaction.

Simultaneous with this exchange, diab0lik continues his sarcastic questioning of psi36, with the linked turns at lines 158 and 160: "u must have a steady gf eh?/who u respect". The addendum is informative, as it offers the following twofold inference: were psi36 *not* to respect his girlfriend, he would somehow be more amenable to the dialogue; implicit in this suggestion is a vague acknowledgement that the dialogue is 'disrespectful'. psi36 responds in the affirmative (162), and goes on to assert that the existence of his "steady gf" is what renders the interaction "shallow" from his perspective (165).

BC room 08/01/06: 3

168. [NR420] what if you are going to do it yesterday but then they have their period and you want the first time to be special and then you are stuck an hour away housesitting all firday in Franger town. What then..WHAT THEN!??!?! YOu think about it!!!!!!

169. [diab0lik] i dont give a shit

170. [timeheater] what
171. [timeheater] just jerk off then
172. [NR420] i am breakcore bi.. does that make me less brokeN?
173. [diab0lik] yes
174. [timeheater] that makes you pretty boring
175. [NR420] no way that would stop me thinking about it
176. [timeheater] you are only cool if you're gay and doing breakcore
177. [NR420] hahahaha
178. [carn1fex] heheh

Line 168 is either pasted in from another source, or phrased in such a way as to appear to come 'out of the mouth' of a sexually frustrated teen, concerned about losing his virginity, or, at least, sleeping with his 'gf' for the first time. This heteroglossic turn presents a comic take on having a "steady gf", demonstrating that being in a relationship is no guarantee of sensible, 'non-shallow' output of the sort psi36 professes to prefer (a contrasting reading could suggest it is in accord with psi36's perspective: that sexual contact reduces the volume of ridiculous, sophomoric, coprolalic discourse; the latter is – an inferior – substitute for the former, perhaps emergent from the *lack* of the former), and simultaneously expresses a certain frustrated *disdain* for sexual relationships (under fratriarchy, heterosexuality is *ghey*). This is clear from the responses the turn elicits: diab0lik simply doesn't "give a shit" about the conundrum NR420 has outlined (169), whilst timeheater suggests: "just jerk off then" (171). Lines 172, 174 and 176 represent a turn in the conversation out of this topic and into the relationship between sexual orientation and coolness, with timeheater suggesting, crucially, that bisexuality is *not* sufficiently cool in breakcore production: "you are only cool if you're gay and doing breakcore" (176). He goes on:

BC room 08/01/06: 4

179. * timeheater is the only gay breakcore artist
180. [psi36] what about Duran Duran Duran
181. [timeheater] no
182. [timeheater] jeez i have to explain it every time
183. [carn1fex] you and doormouse should have a naked tag team marathon
184. [psi36] he acts prety gay
185. [NR420] so whats this ghey anyway
186. [timeheater] ghey
187. [diab0lik] is he gay?

188. [timeheater] and gay
189. [timeheater] isn't the same
190. [NR420] well what is it,
191. [NR420] some metrocore shit?
192. [NR420] i am northcore
193. [timeheater] gay is ghey but ghey isn't always gay... it's like being christian. catholics are christian but not all christians are catholic
194. [psi36] and Jason Forest, I was told he likes to kiss guys
195. [timeheater] see that doesn't mean he'd want to fuck one
196. [diab0lik] lol
197. [psi36] guess not
198. [psi36] probly just an act
199. [NR420] hey wait - new genre: dumpcore
200. [timeheater] i'd love to have cum all over my face right now and it would be for real, not any poser gay shit

The above segment is the 'core' of the sequence, and of this analysis.[12] At line 200, 'gay' *appears* to finally reach self-negation, through the juxtaposition of its sexual and devalued social (*ghey*) aspects (with the latter indicated by the modifier "poser"). The paradox demonstrated in the discussion arises from forcing a confrontation between norms of masculine 'hardness'-as-authenticity and homosexuality. Thus, it is suggested in lines 194-198 that the gayness of WFMU DJ Jason Forrest (who also records under the name Donna Summer) is not 'real', or not 'real' enough (and when this suggestion is connected with the posture timeheater is assuming, there is a concurrent, absurdist devaluation of subcultural capital for those so denigrated). The most important feature of the episode is the elaboration of the relationship between *gay* and *ghey* which timeheater provides. NR420 brings this issue up (185); eliciting the response from timeheater laid out over lines 186, 188 and 189. NR420 then asks if *ghey* is "metrocore" (191), referring to 'metrosexuality', the coinage used to describe heterosexual men who spend time and

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[12] Applying the suffix 'core' to new terms (as NR420 does at lines 191, 192 and 199) is a popular local pastime; it will be recalled that Moby was referred to as both 'glitchcore' and 'pisscore' in BC room 22/11/03 (6.2). The popularity of the 'game' is demonstrated by this comment from 'rejwer88': "*insertword*core rulez" (BC room 07/08/05). The practice is also instantiated in the titles of breakcore and breakcore-related tracks and releases, of which the following are examples: 38core, A-Core, Bland Core, Beijing Operacore, Bowelcore, Brokecore, Catcore, Cheapcore, Childcore, Ciastcore, Crunkcore, Dadcore, Deathcore, Dubcore, Fakecore. Frenchcore, Gangstacore, Gay Core, Illcore, Jamaicore, KFC Core, Kremlincore, Lardcore, Makasu Hath Core, Methcore, Numbcore, Oxycore, Slime Core, Trachcore, Trendycore13, Vendettacore, Waltz Core, Warcore, Xtremecore.

money on their appearance. At line 193, timeheater offers a remarkable elaboration by analogy of the *gay/ghey* complex.

There are two relations here: the posited analogy between gheyness/sexual orientation and religion (allowing the former to be understood by reference to the latter), and the relation between Catholicism and Christianity. Catholicism is a subset of Christianity such that the two are non-equivalent (a Christian may instead be, for instance, a Protestant). It would therefore be incorrect to assert, for example, 'all Christians are Catholic' (analogously, 'all ghey things/people are gay'). In the analogy, then, Christianity 'stands for' gheyness whilst Catholicism 'stands for' gayness. Gay is then a subset of ghey, and it would be incorrect to assert that all predicated as ghey (Christian) are (equivalent to all and only that which is) predicable as gay (Catholic). Thus, the *ghey* is not necessarily *gay*, for there is an unspecified inference class of analogues to (for example) Protestantism, things or people that are *ghey* but *not gay*. Note that one may safely infer that gayness is axiomatically *ghey* (a Catholic cannot not be a Christian). Yet line 200 *appears* to contradict this, where "poser gay shit" is interpreted as *ghey*, a certain form of "for real", 'macho' gayness which is *not ghey* is suggested.

However, the bizarre, inverted coprolalia of the line itself, and, indeed, timeheater's choice of the original *gay* spelling, serves to demonstrate the limits of coherence in the fratriarchal 'law' of normative heterosexual masculinity and its relation to ('authentic') identity: this is what makes the statement work as an extraordinary, carnivalesque piece of masculinist *non*sense. The sequence runs on to carn1fex's departure:

BC room 08/01/06: 5

201. [psi36] look at me i'm so gay
202. [psi36] or ghey or whatever
203. [timeheater] yeah
204. [timeheater] like look at snafu
205. [NR420] asexual is the new black huh
206. [timeheater] i wish i was black
207. [diab0lik] do u wear pink hello kitty shirts?
208. [NR420] "it's not pink, it's salmon!!"
209. [NR420] "that's what the store clerk told me anyway..."
210. [psi36] lol
211. [diab0lik] no... neon pink
212. [carn1fex] anyways im going to go see whos hanging out at the 24 hour fallafel at 6am.. you guys have fun with your.. mm.. whatever.

213. [diab0lik] not sleeping

214. [timeheater] it's not even six you fag

At the close, tellingly, timeheater reverts to the conventional masculinist use of language (214). Like line 200, one may say that this is *both* contradictory and *not*, or rather, that it is not *only* 'either/or', but *also* 'both/and'. As Corbett points out, terms such as *fag* "can be employed with either defiance or affectionate good humor to celebrate the very losses and failures that are supposed to provoke shame and disgrace" (2001: 4n1). There is no reason to demand that the 'beliefs' held in the Breakcore room about the acceptability or otherwise of sexual orientation be any more coherent than the beliefs held by the Azande about witchcraft.[13] The exchange demonstrates an implicit homophobic critique, which peculiarly denies the 'possibility' or 'legitimacy' of gayness, or holds gayness not only as-difference but as-*fake*-exhibitionist-difference, a difference juxtaposed with *racial* difference. Line 205 can be productively contrasted with lines 73-74 above, in BC room 09/09/03, which suggested the possibility of friends who are both 'imaginary', and 'black'. Here racial desire serves as a 'mirror', in which the image of (homo)sexual desire is found wanting. It is revealing that 'snafu' is brought up as an example (204), for, as previously indicated, producer snafu – who titled an album *Sighcore* – is Mexican-American; his ethnic 'authenticity' is suggested by timeheater's following turn (206), but it is actually snafu's *gheyness* which is being held up as typical or exemplary, where that gheyness refers to snafu's use of music to express emotion. There is therefore an inferred 'slide' from fake, exhibitionist gayness, to fake, exhibitionist gheyness, where the latter is used to police emotional expression and to ridicule the expression of emotional pain – such expression is, of course, *ghey*.

7.3 Fratriarchy and abjection

The dialogue discussed above can be contextualised in terms of the social identity it reveals. It is evidently 'hard to read', difficult to pin down to a final, univalent interpretation. As Braidotti puts it, "the simultaneity of opposite effects is the trademark of the monstrous body" (1996: 136). The exploration of the 'rules' of sexual identity being

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[13] Such occlusions are not uncommon in the contradictory discourses of identity produced in youth cultures. Kahn-Harris found, in his analysis of racism in black metal, statements "so extraordinarily schizophrenic that existing analytical tools barely seem to cope" (2004: 100).

engaged in *can* be read as subverting identitarian heterosexuality. Yet such a reading would not be 'definitive'; for this is a form of speech *play*, and the continuous sexualisation of dialogue (even or especially where the terms are 'debased') has a profoundly abject character. In demonstrating the norms, transgression reinforces them; this is so whether the dialogue refers to or instantiates conceptions of gender, sexual or ethnic identity. Authenticity is performatively rendered in embodied terms, where the inauthentic is associated with that which is not 'correctly' situated in those terms. Conversely, appropriate displays of heteronormative masculinity are the primary means of displaying authenticity (where authenticity has connotations of 'hardness' – to be authentic is to be 'hardcore'). As Connell indicates, homophobia is mobilised "to draw social boundaries, defining 'real' masculinity by its distance from the rejected" (2005: 40).

The paradox of discursive transgression (as with, for instance, the position taken by timeheater above) is its fundamentally ambiguous form as both 'subversive' and not simultaneously, in this sense the dialogue under consideration is analogous to Bakhtin's carnivalesque. For in carnival, not just the 'official' unitary voice but *all* speech positions were subject to ridicule: carnival was the liminal zone in which "there was no language-center at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the 'languages' of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where all 'languages' were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face" (Bakhtin 1981: 273). The carnivalesque is a 'place' at which official *shitless* discourse comes under ridicule – where conventional bourgeois masculinity is oddly 'hystericised'; performed as an outrageous and offensive caricature; but it is also a 'place' in which all positions in language can be seen as unstable, contingent postures. This is the reasoning behind considering individuals and their discursive positions as personæ in the first instance, for we come to see names and the identity positions they enact as 'masks', where it is no longer appropriate to speak of 'genuine', 'authentic', '*true* faces'.

The question is *not* whether coprolalia of this sort is 'in the final analysis' subversive, as the question is not whether carnival subverts or reinforces the status quo: it may serve both purposes ambivalently, or oscillate between the two: "a repetition which works at once to legitimate and delegitimate the realness norms by which it is produced" (Butler 1993: 131). 'Subversion' is something of a misnomer in this context and 'transgression' is therefore preferable, because the implications of 'subversion' are that it is always rebellious, emancipatory *etc.*. Subversion requires antecedent political commitments to be recognised as such. In contrast, 'transgression' is merely the crossing/enactment of moral, social or cultural boundaries; transgression can go in the

'wrong' direction, or in no obviously legible political 'direction' at all. Ferguson argues that "In a disturbing tautology, transgressive behavior is that which constitutes masculinity" (2004: 154). In the fratriarchal domain, these transgressive enactments are generally *not* subversive. The most generous interpretation would perhaps be that whilst they *seem to* subvert the patriarchal voice of authority, they do so through the simultaneous enforcement of a normative (subcultural) fratriarchal law. Even where it is possible to argue that the extreme *ridiculousness* of *gay/ghey* in homosocial discourse highlights the absurd and arbitrary identitarian logic of heteronormativity, this is still dependent on and reproductive of that logic. While such transgressive play "has the potential to destabilize and temporarily suspend the heteronormative regime, it does so through the socially-scripted adherence to the imperative of heterosexualized genders" (Bunzl 2000: 233n16). Fratriarchal coprolalia can be uproarious, transgressive, disorderly, unruly, etc., and yet nonetheless nonsubversive, for white masculinity is an identity position "with the well-nigh irresistible attraction of being almost exactly as transgressive as it is normative" (Pfeil 1995: 75).

Fratriarchal coprolalia is not, then, the subversive *opposite* of the official *shitless* voice, but rather the *obversion*, the grotesque mirror enactment, as Glazener suggests (2001: 159):

> Carnival laughter is not an abstract negation, a bracketing 'not-x'. It undermines official language by mocking it, em-bawdying it ... Carnival laughter challenges traditional concepts of logic and identity. It is ambivalent in that it affirms and denies at once ... its principal manifestation is the masquerade, in which masks destabilise identities in general and masked surrogates for high figures are ritually degraded and deprived of their official identities.

This ambivalent destabilisation is neither definitively subversive nor a 'functionalist steam valve', it is, rather, a potentiality which reveals (and conceals), which enacts and performs, the absurd totalitarianism of identity grounded in the body. Even the most 'vulgar', asinine presentations of heteronormative masculinity have this potentiality, and it is even clearer in cases of ironic *parody* and implicit critique. A few one-line examples will demonstrate the point, from a variety of subcultural positions:

BC room 16/09/03

[Torasaburo_Kobayashi] I'm going to take a nap because I'm hardcore to the extreme.

Instances such as these are amongst the rare occasions when we see the rigidity of the norms of fratriarchal masculinity parodied. The humour of this statement is generated by the incongruity of 'napping' as a demonstration of being 'hardcore to the extreme'. The attribute of 'hardcoreness' is gesturally rendered absurd through its juxtaposition with the mundanity of 'taking a nap'. This transgressive transcendence of 'hardcoreness' *can* be read as reproducing 'hardcoreness' at a 'higher' level: from this 'closed' perspective, to critique the hardcore is only ever to adversatively demonstrate an infinite regress of further hardcoreness. Alternately, Torasaburo_Kobayashi can be read as speaking from a 'neutral' (perhaps critically *shitless*) position, which exposes 'hardcore to the extreme' as 'merely' another position in the language game. The predicate 'hardcore to the extreme' is here similar to the ineffable property of being 'true' in black metal or being 'real' in hip hop.[14]

+BlackMetal+ room 10/11/05

> [sa7an1c] I'm so black metal that I go to Wal Mart wearing sweatpants with no underwear with an erection.

This *braggadocio* instantiation of the 'talking penis' (Hall 1996: 156-157) – the visible-erection-in-tracksuit motif – is not that original in terms of this manifestation of subcultural masculinity; there is a grind metal track called "Getting a Woodie in Your Sweats and Setting it on Fire".[15] Subject to parody here are *both* the rigid norms of 'hard' subcultural masculinity *and* the 'official', respectable, *shitless* bourgeois voice. Frequenting Wal-Mart, especially in sweatpants, is considered absolutely an *abased* activity. The line can also be read as a travesty of 'being black metal', and a dialectical reproduction of higher-level 'black metalness'. It is a performative allusion to the absurdity of transposing 'black metalness' into the 'real world' (like Torasaburo_Kobayashi's 'hardcore napping'), at the same time that it is a homage to the fratriarchal phallus – there

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[14] The parodic '101 Rules of Black Metal' have been widely circulated in email and are viewable at numerous metal sites. The first two rules are "1. Don't be gay", and "2. Be 'true'".

[15] The track is on Artery Eruption's *Reduced to a Limbless Sex Slave*. Artery Eruption follow grindcore convention in providing ultraviolent transgressive song titles (a typical example is "Rage-Induced Infant Assfuck", on the same album). Grindcore, like the slasher movie genre to which it owes so much (not least its speech samples), is a "transparent source for (sub)cultural attitudes towards sex and gender" (Clover 1987: 188). The visible-erection-in-tracksuit also features in the opening credits to MTV's *Jackass*. In a neat confluence of (thematic and orthographic) subcultural codes, the username 'sa7an1c' is simultaneously 'black metal' *and* '1337'.

is not, in this sense, any 'escape'; there is no 'true face'. Considering masculinity from this perspective, as contingent, unstable, a fluctuating and undecidable element in the continuous iteration of its own backdrop, we can map *back*, to consider the different masculinist 'voices' performed in the text. From different perspectives the absurdity of embodied identity is revealed, and crucial here is the relationship between subcultural authenticity, 'wit', and normative masculinity, where the latter can be read as prismatic and conflictual (as the fratriarchal adversatively aligns *both* with/against subcultural authenticity, *and* with/against patriarchal conformity).

I have suggested that the sorts of interaction under consideration have an *abject* character, and that this is associated with their ritual transgression of the middle class politeness criteria. When, for example, sa7an1c demonstrates the extent of his virile, subcultural militancy, of how black metal he is, through the definitional illustration of parading a visible erection around Wal-Mart, one of the processes occurring in such a statement is 'transcoding', where "bodily grossness operates as a critique of dominant ideology" (Kipnis 1994: 376). The social degradation, humiliation and poverty implied by the sweatpants-in-Wal-Mart experience are ritually transvalued through their imbrication with the visible-erection-in-tracksuit motif, where this motif is rendered as especially 'black metal'. The masculine properties of subcultural authenticity ritually recuperate and transcend the ignominious 'loserdom' predicated over the Wal-Mart experience.[16]

'Bodily grossness' and the transgression of the middle class politeness criteria is closely associated with abject bodies and the double-disciplining thereof (the antecedent disciplining of bodies into bourgeois respectability, which generates the abject and thereby identity, and the fratriarchal countermovement which seeks to claim/deploy the phallus for adversative transgression of the *shitless*). The constitutive rejection of the Other, the "condemnation of hybrids and migrant beings" (Kristeva 1982: 103), is part of a continuous process which defines identity against both that which it excludes, and the *shitless* voice always threatening to incorporate it and dissolve the fratriarchal, legislating, ultimately, patriarchal conformity.

The grotesque, violent, and physically gross enacts and polices the border between self and Other, but serves also as a medium for ridiculing the norms of patriarchal respectability. This respectability is grounded in the historical constitution of the embodied bourgeois subject, that is, "the structural change in people towards an increased

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[16] Wal-Mart as a sign of abject horror is also exploited by PHUCKUP's hideous turn (5.2, RJ room 02/02/04: 4): "ur mommas that fat nigger humper that works at walmart".

consolidation and differentiation of their affect controls, and therefore both of their experience (e.g., in the form of an advance in the threshold of shame and revulsion) and of their behavior (e.g., in the differentiation of the implements used at table)" (Elias 1978: 224). Bourdieu sketches the same trajectory in observing that: "If all societies ... set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress*, *bearing*, physical and verbal *manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture" (1977: 94). Young (1990: 137-140) formulates bourgeois respectability thusly:

> Respectable behavior is preoccupied with cleanliness and propriety, meticulous rules of decency. Rules govern minute aspects of everyday behavior concerning bodily function and the arrangement of the environment. The body should be clean in all respects, and cleaned of its aspects that betoken its fleshiness – fluids, dirt, smells. The environment in which respectable people dwell must also be clean, purified: no dirt, no dust, no garbage, and all signs of bodily function – eating, excreting, sex, birthing – should be hidden behind closed doors. Bourgeois morality created a sphere of individual privacy, where the respectable individual would be alone with his or her body, taking care, bringing it under control and making it ready for public view. Respectable behavior involves keeping the body covered and not exhibiting its functions: so strict norms govern how to eat, silently, with no belching, burping or farting. Speech is also governed by rules of decency: some words are clean and respectable, others dirty, and many, especially those relating to the body or sexuality, should not be mentioned in respectable company ... In speaking one should keep one's voice steady, certainly not giggling or expressing sadness, anger, disappointment, or uncertainty. One should speak firmly, without hesitation or ambiguity, and slang, dialect and accent should be absent from one's speech.

It should be evident that a systematic aspect of personæ presentation has been the ritual transgression of this respectability, from sa7an1c back to BC room 24/10/03 (3.2):

> [pressthereset] my pants smell funky
> [pressthereset] i havent washed them in about 2 months and i wear them every day
> ...
> [pressthereset] yeah i had to duct tape these bad boys together
> [hidgekill] breakdown jeans
> [pressthereset] theyre pimp

Under fratriarchy, a transgressive alternative to bourgeois respectability is presented, a negating mirror-discipline: "Manners, regulations of the body, thus become the site of a profound interconnection of ideology and subjectivity, a zone of transcoding at

once astonishingly trivial and microscopically important" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 90). That cast out for the constitution of the respectable (including, but not limited to, the 'lower bodily stratum') is celebrated as subculturally authentic, as all the while the abject serves the dual purpose: policing the borders of fratriarchal masculinity; and transgressing the perceived norms of the *shitless* patriarchal alternative.

7.4 Bedroom producer masculinity

The social identity of the bedroom producer has, in addition, a subterranean 'loser' or 'nerd' aspect, which further enriches our account of bedroom producer identity. This is evident when we recall some of the extracts above alluding to the relation between sexuality and 'bedroom producerness'. 'Nerd', Collins suggests, connotes "a socially inept person who is wrapped up in technical details and prefers machines to peoples" (2004: 351). Stereotypically, as Lupton indicates, losers or nerds are *represented* as (2000: 102):

> invariably male, usually in their late adolescence or early adulthood ... social misfits and spectacularly physically unattractive ... Lack of social contact has exacerbated their inability to communicate face-to-face with others, and a poor diet and lack of fresh air and exercise does little to improve their complexions or physique.

Under pursuit here, however, is not the body of the ideal-typical nerd (who bears striking similarity to Adorno's radio ham), but rather his 'misfitting', his rejection of and/or failure to pursue supposed 'RL' priorities, and the relationship between this and subcultural involvement:

BC room 5/10/03

> [rsmith3d] No, I think I'd rather hang around here and discuss music that hot girls find totally uninteresting.

The above quote alludes to the gheyness of Soulseek interaction in terms of the 'real world'. The line is both a 'joke' and not, a statement of both the conflicting imperatives of fratriarchal masculinity (participation in a 'safe' homosocial sphere of specialised knowledge, and masterful integration in the challenging domain of 'hot girls'), and the problematics of subcultural authenticity and 'belonging': the specialised

knowledge flow 'rsmith3d' enjoys participating in is uninteresting to 'hot girls' (a socially *non-transferable* form of cultural capital), but he nonetheless 'would rather' the former to the latter. Bedroom producers, as 'nerds', are often "heterosexual dropouts" (Kendall 2000: 272), thus we see here a repudiation of or 'resistance' to the demands of heterosexist conformity. However, 'hot girls' remain the ideologically 'correct' object of desire, even where they are beyond reach and (perhaps in consequence) repudiated.

The following extract begins with a protracted greeting sequence, which further highlights the relationship between fratriarchal involvement online and the rejection of what is generally considered 'real life'. Conventionally, issuing of 'real' first names signals a lead-in to insider solidarity – first name usage amongst those so informed has the social-deictic benefit of excluding those thereby rendered ignorant of whom turns are addressed to – the difference here is that repeated iteration of multiple, distinct first names for several personæ has the effect of undermining the 'reality' of 'real' names: "Alteregos are more real because you choose them. Ordinary names are unreal because you didn't" (Eshun 1998: 106). The reader's attention is also drawn to the ritualistic nerd self-abasement produced by 'brokecore' at lines 227-228, which indicates that, as Goffman points out, "in terms of the ritual code, the person seems to have a special license to accept mistreatment at his own hands that he does not have the right to accept from others" (1967: 32):

BC room 08/07/05: 1

215. [dj_pacific] hey brendan
216. [ObsoleteSystems] my name is Fil
217. [dj_pacific] hello fil.
218. [KNAR] im brennan
219. [dj_pacific] I know u know
220. [ObsoleteSystems] or Justin...whichever you prefer
221. [KNAR] hi fil
222. [dj_pacific] now
223. [ObsoleteSystems] lol
224. [dj_pacific] hey brennan
225. [dj_pacific] hi justin uh
226. [KNAR] hi reggie
227. [brokecore] im John
228. [brokecore] i suck at life
229. [KNAR] hahah
230. [ObsoleteSystems] i know you john...lol

231. [dj_pacific] I'm terry.
232. [dj_pacific] and wendy
233. [dj_pacific] and tomas
234. [ObsoleteSystems] no you're kevin
235. [ObsoleteSystems] nick?
236. [dj_pacific] oh ye
237. [ObsoleteSystems] i forget
238. [ObsoleteSystems] lol
239. [dj_pacific] sorry
240. [dj_pacific] ....
241. [dj_pacific] lol
242. [dj_pacific] fil? or should I just call you f'
243. [ObsoleteSystems] whatever
244. [ObsoleteSystems] doesn't matter
245. [ObsoleteSystems] lol
246. [dj_pacific] ye
247. [ObsoleteSystems] most people in america think my name's Justin Bailey
248. [dj_pacific] My name's Nick yes.
249. [dj_pacific] Why?
250. [ObsoleteSystems] cause that's what i tell them it is
251. [ObsoleteSystems] lol
252. [dj_pacific] After that cheat code on Metroid
253. [dj_pacific] Why am I such a geek!
254. [ObsoleteSystems] lol dude..i use it as my name
255. [ObsoleteSystems] lol
256. [dj_pacific] lol
257. [ObsoleteSystems] and yes it's after the cheat code for metroid

Once the 'niceties' are out of the way, what occurs is highly revealing, particularly the exchange of 'nerd' insider knowledge between 'ObsoleteSystems' and 'dj_pacific' (247-257). Here long-term (sub)cultural fratriarchal involvement 'erupts' into the 'real' world. At line 247, ObsoleteSystems indicates that he gives his 'real' name as "Justin Bailey". dj_pacific correctly cites the origin of this name (252), as a cheat code for the 'old-school' 8-bit Nintendo game *Metroid* (originally released in 1986), immediately following this with the exclamation: "Why am I such a geek!" (253). However, ObsoleteSystems has obviously 'out-geeked' (emically, he has '*pwned*') dj_pacific: he not only knows that Justin Bailey is a *Metroid* cheat, *he uses it as his name in 'real life'* (254). The status of 'Justin Bailey' as 'cultural' or 'subcultural' is perspectival, and the ubiquity of Nintendo must be borne in mind: Mario is reputed to be more recognisable to American children than Mickey Mouse (Collins 2003: 1).

What makes a grasp of this vital is that gaming experience and music production (alongside p2p activity) involve protracted periods of time in front of a computer. This is an example of the constitutive connections between what are generally conceived of as 'mass' and 'sub' cultures, and between individual personæ and the symbolic environment they inhabit. Video game music and music produced on similar *sounding* technology has significant local aesthetic status (extending beyond its 'nostalgia value'): the musics referred to as 'chip tune' or '8-bit' are produced on either the original technology or on 'emulators'; there is also a breakcore variant referred to as 'drillbit' (combining 'drill and bass', one of the names, predating 'breakcore', given to frenetically sequenced drum and bass/jungle, and '8-bit').[17] Epsilon produces 'drillbit' under the (fratriarchally notable) name of Patricider, combining elements of chip tune, noise, gabber, metal and breakcore. There can be no doubt that the 'vintage' game consoles produced by Commodore, Sega and Nintendo were hugely influential for a generation of electronic music producers (and consumers). The connection between video games and rave culture was perhaps first made explicit in the 'Pac-Man' tune (remixing the theme to the original game) produced by Power-Pill (Aphex Twin) in 1992, and this connection remains evident: Venetian Snares' *Cavalcade of Glee and Dadaist Happy Hardcore* (2006) features a track entitled "Pwntendo".

In describing gabber's air of "proto-fascistic brotherhood", Reynolds suggests that the rave aesthetic is "designed to make the gabba kid feel like he's actually *inside* a video-game" (1998: 258-259). The intersections between fratriarchy, identity, technology, politics, and the rigidly masculine musical form of gabber are well described by Gilbert and Pearson (1999: 95), who argue that gabber

> is characterized by jackhammer beats occasionally exceeding 200 beats per minute and rarely possesses anything discernible in the way of melody or rhythmic variation. Angry, adrenaline-testosterone textures are pressed into the service of pure linearity, speed without content, direction without aim ... to a large extent it's difficult not to understand this type of music as a pure expression of phallomorphism, its sonic emptiness deriving from the fact that there is simply nothing here *but* phallomorphism; shape without content ... [but] The difference between a hardcore mix and a Beethoven symphony is that in the former climax is

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[17] Emulators are software programs through which operating systems replicate the sounds produced by earlier hardware – for instance, one could run an emulator on the Mac OS X replicating the sounds of the Commodore 64. Sabrepulse and Bit Shifter are notable exponents of 'chip tune'.

> never really reached. The mountain remains unclimbed, the woman un-fucked; it is phallomorphism, but phallomorphism without the aim of mastery over woman.[18]

These inter-articulations between gaming culture, technology (particularly, the already-obsolete, *naturalised* 'old school' 8-64 bit variety), masculine identity, and the *form* and timbre of electronic musics are absolutely crucial to an understanding of 'bedroom producerness'.

For ObsoleteSystems to refer to himself IRL with the name of a Nintendo cheat code furnishes an extraordinary example of interstitial 'brand' appropriation, where an element of gaming culture is transposed into (thereby relativising the ontological integrity of) 'reality'. This highlights the sense in which sharp distinctions between 'worlds', with RL prioritised as, as its name suggests, more 'real', are increasingly untenable.

The sequence continues:

BC room 08/07/05: 2

258. [brokecore] what cheat code?
259. [ObsoleteSystems] i own an original Atari Member's Only Cheat code
260. [KNAR] the nudity one?
261. [dj_pacific] for the bikini clad samus aran.
262. [ObsoleteSystems] yep
263. [ObsoleteSystems] not cheat code...coat
264. [ObsoleteSystems] i have hte atari coat
265. [ObsoleteSystems] ll
266. [KNAR] if you beat it in three hours you get that too
267. [dj_pacific] And to think little boys got excited over those shitty visuals.
268. [ObsoleteSystems] damn right pacific
269. [ObsoleteSystems] actually no...
270. [KNAR] i didnt care
271. [KNAR] my buddy did
272. [ObsoleteSystems] i used to play Leisure Suit Larry games for that shit
273. [dj_pacific] lol
274. [ObsoleteSystems] staring at the shitty VGA graphic tits
275. [ObsoleteSystems] all boxy and shit
276. [ObsoleteSystems] but hey..when you're 10..that's the shit
277. [dj_pacific] seeen.

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[18] The libidinal economy of gabber is adversatively ridiculed locally, as evinced by the track title "Gabbers are Sexually Repressed Homosexuals" by 3 Random Wordz, on *Gabbers are Gay*.

This exchange effectively indicates the relationship between long-term computer use and bedroom producer masculinity. Prior to the discovery of 'pr0n', it was, as dj_pacific observes, the 'shitty' graphics of computer games (and their female characters) that got 'little boys excited' (267). The *intimate*, constitutive relation between desire and digital representation is evident – the recollection of this desire intersects with (is a grounding element of) collective and individual 'bedroom producerness'. This is arguably an instance of what Bull describes as occurring when the social "undergoes a transformation through the colonization of representational space by forms of communication technology ... the technologically produced products of the culture industry, in all its forms, becomes a substitute for the subject's sense of the social, community or sense of place" (2003: 363). This colonisation, indicative of the constructed nature of *any* 'sense of the social', is perceptible at the ambiguous point at which technologically mediated interactions and representations become both *preferable* and *cool* as compared to the 'real'.

7.5 "Ghey family"

The social spaces under consideration, then, are used for the exploration and elaboration of the cultural and libidinal economy of fratriarchal, 'bedroom producer' masculinity: instantiated in interaction and aesthetics, embodied in the end-users at their terminals, and worked through in the musical material and surrounding resources distributed therein. A ubiquitous and recurrent feature of this exploration and elaboration is the dialectical transvaluation of 'nerdness' or 'loserdom'. For example, Misanthrope has produced a piece featuring a vocal sample which runs:

> You think I don't appreciate art. You think I don't understand fashion. You think I'm not hip. You think I'm pathetic, a nerd, lardass, fatso. You think I'm shit.[19]

This is 'sucking at life' as an aesthetic of authenticity and a political statement about identity, combining a sense of rejection *from* social esteem and 'belongingness' (loss

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[19] The track, "Incision", features on *Eye of the Void*. The title possibly evokes self-harm, a practice referred to in breakcore and gabber release titles (such as Stormtrooper's *Self Mutilation*), and imagery (such as the artwork for Epsilon's *Win Oedipus Cancer Game*).

of face and social *failure*), and a simultaneous, 'underground' rejection *of* conventional social involvement. The sample (originating in Todd Solondz's 1998 movie *Happiness*) implies that its own transplanted context (breakcore) is itself a form of (misunderstood, undervalued) 'art', 'fashion' and 'hip' – that the anger of the nerd is a critical, creative-destructive cultural force. This is the bedroom producer instantiated in sound (sound which 'hot girls find totally uninteresting', where this perception is double-edged). The abject character of this form of masculinity is evident in the pre-emptive self-dismissal which specialised musical and technical knowledge is subject to, both in dialogue (as shown above), and in the themes, samples and titles of musical works. Another example of this is a track title from the Soulseek Breakcore room's own compilation, *The Teenage Mutant Breakcore Pirates in What the Fuck is Breakcore*, Skeeter's "Clichéd Breakcore with Ninja Turtle Samples".[20] In the chapters to follow we will consider the debate about 'clichéd breakcore' in relation to the amen breakbeat; for current purposes what is notable about this track title is the disavowal it signifies, the 'negative' properties of bedroom producerness.

Duncombe, from whom the epigraph for this chapter is drawn, suggests that zine producers are "self-conscious losers; they wear their loserdom like a badge of honor" (2002: 228). The discourse around *this* form of 'loserdom', though, transvalues loser status *at the same time* that it reproduces (self-inflicts) it: the disjunctive loser is positioned between rejection *from* and rejection *of*. Both of these 'rejections' are replayed, filtered, surrounded with ritual forms – the 'badge' is worn in many ways, and the 'brand' it implies has a dual status.

The fratriarchal spaces of Soulseek dialogue, and the adversative exchanges articulating it, are predicated on the exscription of the Other (most fundamentally, the feminine Other). The elaboration of bedroom producer masculinity involves an element of *spatial* exclusion, where room occupation is rendered a *male* privilege, requiring familiarity with traditionally male forms of knowledge and interactional expertise, and where these relations and exclusions are mutually reinforcing. The discussion has, in consequence, focused on the relationships *between* men, and *between* forms of masculinity, thereby repeating the gendered bias of 'traditional' ethnographic accounts,

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[20] The title and rather bizarre artwork for this compilation appropriate the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* 'brand', transtextually situating the featured producers in relation to the cartoon (and the 'return to innocence' implied by its memory, as with *Metroid*). The second part of the album title – *What the Fuck is Breakcore* – refers to the extraordinary conversational routine local to the room and initiated with that question.

and articulating also the discourse of "cyberspace as boystown" (Silver 2006: 69). There is a growing *minority* of active women within the rooms under consideration, but the women present tend to have *special* status and are often only *temporary* participants. This space is thus supposedly 'free' from the critical gaze of the female, thereby allowing the full exercise of fratriarchal privilege.

This space is also constructed as *familial*, where, of course, the 'family' consists only of 'brothers'. Adversative balance is maintained between distance and closeness, independence and reliance. This balance for appropriate homosociality is managed through policing the pleasures of interaction via continual reminders of its possible gheyness. Yet the pleasures of participation and the support offered by fratriarchal involvement remain of primary appeal. The conversation in which I was invited into the Breakcore room (initiated by 'blaerg' after I had downloaded his own demo from him), contained the following encouragement:

blaerg 17/07/03

[blaerg] come join our happy little family :)

...

[blaerg] we're a big happy family

One of the things this 'family' does for the individual accessing it is provide an *education*, involving the sociocultural elements elaborated here, but also fostering and facilitating musical creativity, through providing access to software, samples, and the specialised aesthetic and technical knowledge required to use them. In interactional terms, music and its production are examples of 'topic indirectness'; as discussed by Kiesling (2005: 714-715):

> The indirect use of a topic about a domain not overtly focused on personal relationships is a result of the competing cultural discourses of male solidarity and heterosexuality; it is one way out of the male homosocial double bind ... these topics often allow men to perform their expertise in a given topic, thus displaying status through their knowledge at the same time as they make connections with their interlocutors.

Alongside the social effects and purposes of the discussion of musical culture and production, such discussion also provides invaluable pragmatic information, and this highlights another paradox of the fratriarchal "association of loners" (Ong 1981: 81). The

bedroom producer is 'supposed' to be and work alone, to be decently, adversatively independent (to refrain from gheyness), yet the culture and technology of bedroom producerness means that a pool of sociality and all its technical, musical and informational resources are continuously on tap. It is to these resources that we now turn.

8 – Junglist

> "Every work of art is an uncommitted crime".
>
> (Adorno 1978: 111)

> "My name is RLSpencer . I am one of the original members of The Winstons that recorded "Amen Brother". GCColeman was the drummer on the recording.I own the Copyright to "Amen Brother" the recording and neither I nor any member of the group has ever received a dime for the theft of our product! Shame!But then we understand the history of theft of Black ideas!"Civilization","bipedestal motion," "God," "Rock and Roll"(simply poorly played R&B),you get the picture. Richard L. Spencer"[1]
>
> (Spencer 2006)

8.1 'Dancing about Architecture'[2]

Musical practices, Walser points out, do not occur "in a social vacuum" (1993: 112). The preceding chapters furnished an account of a specific *milieu* in which such practices are embedded, and developed a set of analytic concepts to refer to these practices. We are now in a position to demonstrate the *transmedial* application of these concepts to music within bedroom producer culture. In approximate reverse order of original presentation, the following conceptual applications are the most immediately evident:

a) The Garfinkelian relation between *what* is said and *how* it is said (6.3 and 4.3), which can also be expressed as the relation between the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*, will be used in this section to critique the 'extradiscursivity' of music.

b) Masculinist adversative exchange (6.1-6.2, 4.5-5.6) will be shown to be instantiated in sound, in section 9.2, as well as in the vocal samples and performance model elaborated by junglists, in section 8.4.

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[1] The Winstons have not been remunerated for the countless occasions upon which the break has been sampled. The quote summarises the cultural appropriation thesis in succinct and droll fashion.

[2] The phrase is usually attributed to Elvis Costello.

c) Cultural 'appropriation'/'commodification' in terms of race, language and identity (4.6, 5.1), will be explored in terms of musical code, the sample base and the plunderphonic aesthetic in sections 8.4 and 9.1.

d) The Goffmanian idea of *killing* time (3.3), and the phenomenological role of time in music consumption and production, will be explored in section 8.2. This will be further investigated in relation to the amen breakbeat as fundamental (and fundamentally *repeated*) sample. The amen will be treated as a musematic *shibboleth* or ideologeme (6.4-6.5, 5.7-5.8), just as revealing in terms of its context and deployment as *gay* and *nigga*, albeit circulating in a musical rather than a discursive economy.

The evident complexity of these interconnections highlights the point made by Goffman about the artificiality of reductivist linear presentation (cited in chapter 2). How these applications function will become evident as we proceed, beginning with a prefatory discussion about the problematics of music interpretation, and the relation of music to its surrounding discourse.

Up until this point, music has been *relatively* peripheral, relegated to footnotes, occasionally surfacing in the main body of the text: it is often suggested that to attempt to address music directly involves us in an "exponential surge in complexity and indeterminacy" (Pfeil 1995: 73). Barthes declaims: "How then does language manage, when it must interpret music? Alas, badly – very badly, it seems" (1985: 267). There is an air of pessimistic hesitancy in the literature concerning the possibility of getting mired in "the explosion of language when language cannot contain" (Radano 2003: 20). Music is considered to have some essence 'beyond' language and irreducible to linguistic description. According to this perspective, music's communicative immediacy and intensity exceeds representation.

Consider the Misanthrope piece mentioned at the end of the previous chapter: the argument would be that: no matter how exhaustive an account of the split-second sequencing, the counterpoint between bass and synth lines (with accompanying diagrammatic, notational and wave-form analyses); no matter how *evocative* the description of the relationship between musical and linguistic 'meaning/s' in the piece; and no matter how thorough the account of the *history* of the samples, the technology used in the production, and its *situation* in terms of a subcultural canon (*etc.*), we would still be no closer to understanding how it 'works' – how it generates and relates to affect in the listener. Description would be *redundant*, missing the point of why it *is* music and *not* a linguistic account: the only way it could be understood would be if it was heard (or better, *felt*), and even then, the listener might just not 'get it'. In short: "while music occurs in a

world of language that it cannot escape, musical experience is not constituted linguistically and cannot, as a consequence, be reduced to the condition of language" (Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 143).

The argument suggests that the musical-affective features of music *cannot* be described (but can be experienced or *known* prior to their reductive assault by language). This is primarily associated with the distinction between the experience of *sonic* meaning-affect and the experience of *linguistic* meaning-affect, where the former is thought of as having a material impact on the *body* and the latter a discursive effect on the *mind*.[3] As Gilbert and Pearson indicate, "as well as having *meanings*, music can be thought of as producing affects, which cannot be explained in terms of meaning. In other words, music can affect us in ways that are not dependent on us understanding something, or manipulating verbal concepts, or being able to represent accurately those experiences through language" (1999: 39). The disjuncture is such that the 'sound-image' always-already supersedes its description: music is, from this perspective, *extradiscursive*.

Clearly, there *is* a distinction between the experience of music and the description thereof, but there is a distinction between *any* experience and its description. This does not render description impossible or experience impossible to describe: social reality and the subjective experience of it is ultimately mediated by language: "The world is continually emergent in words; reality is the world we bespeak" (Heim 1999: 30). The 'strong' reading of the impossibility of 'capturing' some musical 'essence' in words, can itself be considered a type of conceptual *legerdemain*, misrepresenting the role of language in conveying understanding. The 'cultural musicology' counterargument highlights the *benefits* of linguistic description in illuminating the musical experience: "Words situate music in a multiplicity of cultural contexts, both those to which the music 'belongs' and those to which it stands adjacent in ways that often become apparent only once the words are in play" (Kramer 2003: 124-125). No account of *anything* is equivalent to the experience thereof, but this experience is nonetheless 'inexplicable' without language, and people continue, rather uncontroversially, to communicate. When the 'failure' of language is indicated in this way, two things are happening: firstly, an 'idealist' conception of 'formal' language is propounded which does not correspond to language-in-use; secondly, the manner in which language *is* routinely used for such description by 'competent members' is summarily dismissed, as when Gracyk suggests that "Because most fans are

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[3] For the sake of brevity, 'meaning-affect' refers here to the cumulative impact of a musical piece, its emotive-*and*-informational content (or *how* and *what*).

not articulate about how their favorite music works to generate meaning, those features of the listening experience simply drop out of the ethnographic explanation" (2001: 223).

Exaggerated emphasis on the linguistic elements of the communicative experience misrepresents the process of signification in language *and* music: "any firm distinction between 'linguistic' and 'supralinguistic' spheres cannot hold" (Middleton 1990: 267). As has been demonstrated, meaning and affect are not only generated by *what* is said, the latter cannot be understood without reference to *how* it is said, and more fundamentally: "language is but one manifestation of the signifying process" (Payne 1993: 165). To emphasise the extradiscursivity of music and privilege the linguistic as primary is to present an unnecessarily restricted account of signification and the generation and transmission of meaning-affect itself, 'freezing' the comprehension of music as beyond description: "music's extradiscursivity may be itself a discursive formation" (Radano 2003: 18).

In a precise analogue, the musicality of *speech* often drops out of analysis. Hence Goffman distinguishes between impressions 'given' (*what*) and those 'given off' (*how*): "The key to this distinction is the intentions of the individual: impressions that are given are used 'admittedly', those that are given off convey information inadvertently" (Manning 1992: 45). Goffman writes (1990: 2):

> The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*. The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he and the others are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way.

That given off is ostensibly "ungovernable", and may be used by witnesses "as a check upon the validity of what is conveyed by the governable aspects" (Goffman 1990: 18). The 'given' is, in dramaturgical terms, (contained in) the 'script', whereas when it comes to the 'given off': "the details of the expressions and movements used do not come from a script but from command of an idiom, a command that is exercised from moment to moment with little calculation or forethought" (*ibid.*: 80). This may be profitably contrasted with the Kristevan distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic, where, as Young (1990: 143) formulates it:

> The symbolic is the capacity to signify, to make one element stand for an absent other, the possibility of representation, sense, logic. Symbolic capacity depends on certain repressions, on the opposition between conscious and unconscious association. The semiotic, on the other hand, is the heterogenous, bodily, material, nonsensical aspect of speech always present with, but not integrated into, its signification: gesture, tone of voice, the musicality of speech, arrangement of words, the material aspects of all language that are expressive, affective without having definable significance. The speaking self always carries along this shadow, its spilled-over body expressed in comportment and excitation.

The difference between the symbolic/semiotic and 'given'/'given off' distinctions lies in the fact that the semiotic is corporeal and largely 'unconscious', whereas Goffman allows that the 'given off' may be manipulated, thereby generating a "potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery" (Goffman 1990: 20). Moreover, there is a sense in which the manipulation of expression 'given off' is subject to moral sanction: "'expressive' behavior ... ought never to have been practiced, is rather always to be a by-product of action, never its end" (Goffman 1974: 63).[4] One may, for instance, 'pretend to be' excited, American, or paralysed, this is not the same as actually *being* excited, American, or paralysed. Thus the witness is likely to retain the advantage over the performer calculatedly manipulating the impression 'given off', as it is easier to 'see through' a calculated performance than to maintain one.

The affective success of music as a communicative medium lies in the interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic, just as the adequate comprehension of speech depends on grasping both the *what* 'given' and the *how* 'given off' by that which is said.

Thus the prosodic: the rhythm, metre, and musicality of speech, crucial elements of form which privilege semiotic expressivity (over some transparent, discursive 'content delivery') and are irreducible to canonical readings (in the same way that music is not reducible to its notation). These paralinguistic *hows* indicate the blinkered paralysis of supposedly direct, 'authoritarian' approaches to communication, of the Word meaning always and only just what it says. As Barthes suggests: "Sometimes an interlocutor's voice strikes us more than the content of his discourse, and we catch ourselves listening to the modulations and harmonics of that voice without hearing what it is saying to us" (1985:

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[4] Goffman's example here is young people practicing smoking in the mirror, with an eye to making their smoking appear unselfconscious. That such practicing is considered in some way disingenuous demonstrates this moral aspect to conscious manipulation of the 'given off'.

255). There is no way to deliver 'only' some 'pure' meaning, purged of corporeality; the disavowal of communicative affect is itself a *shitless* affective statement.

It is not, then, that music is *extra*discursive, but rather that *all* 'utterances' possess this symbolic/semiotic double aspect, whereby the materiality of *sound* (as opposed to the 'discursivity' of *words*) operates upon the body; a body habituated or 'disciplined' to grasp and decode the 'meaning' or resonance of that sound. The subject is in part *constituted* by sound: Althusser's interpellating 'hail', for instance, was imagined as aural. The listener's competence in grasping signification is therefore both understood and *felt*. Moreover, *like* language and discourse, music possesses its own codes, themes, tropes and structures, which any given piece participates in to be recognisable as such. Every genre has its own conventions, and what Martin refers to as a "specific technology of stylisation" (1995: 172).

Thus, when reference is made to, for instance, grind metal, or gabber, and to the thematic preoccupations rendering such genres identifiable, these preoccupations are not *only* expressed discursively, but possess sonic manifestations, where a grasp of these connections is *learnt* and intersects with the discursive and the sociality of participation therein. Lacasse refers to this relationship between a sonic 'text' and its accompanying features (titles, covers, liner notes etc.) as *paratextual* (2000: 36-37). For example, grind, in its visual representation (album covers *etc.*), and the titles of releases and bands, re-iterates a stylised representation of violence and death, but also has a highly developed *musical* idiom for dealing with and presenting this material (where the specificity of this musical form belies the possibility of its being an 'organic' expression), including 'spewage'-style vocal delivery, 'blast-beat' drumming, low-pitched, distorted guitar and so on. These features are amongst the *how* of that which grind 'says'.

Moreover, these features possess a certain degree of *autonomy* from grindcore's *what*: given that spewage delivery is largely (though not universally) incomprehensible (one might say that spewage vocals are wholly 'given off', without any discernible 'given'), appreciation for a grind track presumably rests on other grounds than whether the track title (in the absence of discernible lyrics) is about (say) cannibalism or disembowelment.[5] The aesthetic code manifested sonically, therefore, is an element in a coherent cultural *product*. These various codes, with their symbolic and semiotic aspects,

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[5] Although these linguistic features serve an important mnemonic function – I find it easier to recall the title of Splattered Cadaver's "Gushing Gastric Chunks", for instance, than that of The County Medical Examiner's "Algor Mortis (The Linear Rate of Cadaveric Cooling)". Though this does not apparently bear on which of these 'sounds better', it might bear on which is more likely to get played.

develop simultaneously as cultural resources. As a communicative medium, grind (like other genres) draws on and works on a set of *conventional* materials in a set of *conventional* ways. Once this thematic-sonic connection has developed it becomes self-reinforcing: it is easier to identify a band as grind if it is called Putrefied Corpse (or what have you) rather than some non-specific name *not* thematically grind.

To provide another illustration: the Soulseek noise room has produced a compilation; prosaically titled *The Slsk Noise Room Comp*, on which the first track, by DJ RedSkeÿe, is called "This is what Timeheater's mom sounds like".[6] It is a *noise* track, but all the more intriguing for this given that it's title references *timeheater* (7.2), and does so in a 'classically' ritualistic way (4.6). It is, therefore, a remarkable confluence of form across significatory mode, a complex statement about signification, embedded in and referencing the site of its own production and distribution. The title of the piece transposes timeheater's 'tone of voice' as rendered *in text* into the sonic, through the ritual malediction of insulting timeheater's mother. The inference is: 'if you think timeheater sounds *bad*, this is what his *mother* sounds like', where this is understood as being even 'worse'. DJ RedSkeÿe has thus made the ritually insulting leap from timeheater to his mother, and transposed timeheater's discursive output into a sonic interpretation constructing his mother's output as *noise*.

At first 'sight', the 'meaning' of the piece seemingly threatens to be utterly *overdetermined* by its paratextual accompaniment, rendering the sound *only* a vehicle for the transmission of this insider joke (particularly as this is a noise track). But even on this reading (conservatively presupposing that 'non-musical' noise is a 'bad thing', otherwise the title would not be an effective adversative joke), to know what timeheater's mom sounds like (according to DJ RedSkeÿe), we still need to *hear* it. This interpretation also suggests that DJ RedSkeÿe and his cohorts self-identify as sonically 'rebellious', making 'bad' noise/music and transvaluing it in the process. As Nattiez suggests, "composers who have adopted sounds that others consider 'noise' would either like to be considered revolutionaries, or have come to be regarded as such by others" (1990: 47). Sonic transgression thus depends on its own Other of sonic 'conformity'.

Whilst it is precisely the sparseness and excess of 'noise' which would make this a successful adversative statement about timeheater, the *context* must be borne in mind: the noise room and the genre of noise, about which the piece is also an intervention in and

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[6] DJ RedSkeÿe also solicited and assembled the 28 track compilation (one of three such noise room releases) for his netlabel. It is downloadable at http://www.nonqualityaudio.tk (retrieved July 10, 2006).

statement about. To reduce the track and its 'meaning' *only* to its paratextual features is to ignore the fact that even *noise*, in critiquing the conventional musical mechanisms for conveying 'meaning' and in critiquing the idea of 'meaning' itself, nonetheless communicates, and often does so highly effectively given that it is ostensibly no longer bound by the necessity of 'making sense'. As Savage and Bennett assert: "culture classifies and, in doing so, classifies the classifier", which is to say, it serves to locate the agent attributing cultural value within a social system of stratification (2005: 4). To hear DJ RedSkeÿe as having produced a wilfully 'meaningless' noise (*only*) to distribute a ritualistic joke is to misapprehend the cultural politics and (anti-)aesthetics of the genre of noise, which value sonic excess and intensity. Noise, then, also re-iterates a stylised *how* over a relatively conventional *what*.[7]

The reductive textual metaphor of communication is misleading insofar as it stresses the *what*, searching for a 'pure' meaning where the significatory *how* can be disregarded. Likewise, conventional musicological analysis, in its formalistic emphasis on musical *mechanics*, artificially isolates music from its socio-cultural *context*. This is compounded with the genres considered here (noise, grind, breakcore) to the extent that they are '*postnotational*', privileging aspects of sound and methods of production not readily amenable to musicological description (Potter 1998). The implication of "notational centricity" is that the analyst is "forced to look for elements in the music that fit the priorities of the notation (pitch and metered rhythm), priorities that may have little to do with the aesthetic values of the music in question" (Brackett 2000: 28). In this specific sense, to *hear* a piece certainly surpasses analysing a transcription thereof.

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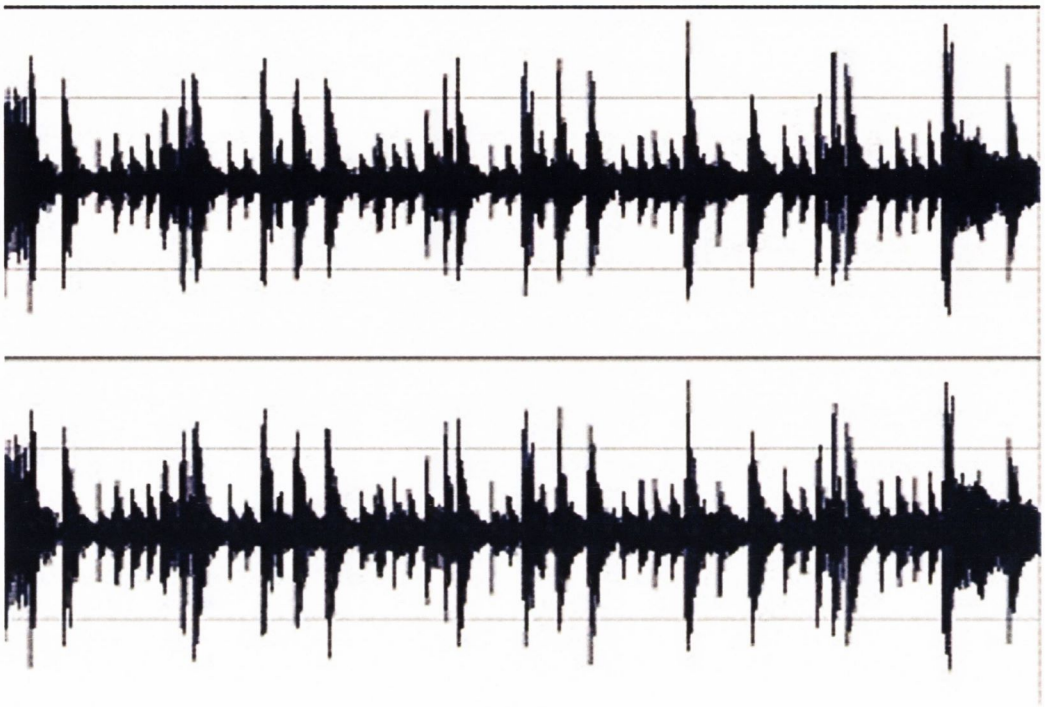
[7] 'Noise' is an expansive, 'undecidable' marker. However, the thematic *what* of the *genre* of noise (in lyrics, titles and artwork) conventionally refers (as in the work of Grunt, Nicole 12, Painslut, Slogun, Sutcliffe Jugend, Prurient, Wolf Eyes, and – most famously – Whitehouse), to such topics as addiction, child sexual abuse, psychological breakdown, sadomasochism and serial murder, within positions ranging from morally ambiguous to nihilistic. The 'mainstream' of noise thus derives its fascination from the suggestion that it transgresses the limits of musicality *and* the limits of human experience as discursively explicable. However, as the example of DJ RedSkeÿe illustrates, this *what* is *not* a necessary and sufficient generic condition; other contemporary 'noisicians' (such as Dead Machines, Double Leopards, Kites – who articulate a pacifist ideology, Masonna, Nautical Almanac or Merzbow) can not be said to engage these themes (which originate in the British industrial 'scene'). Both grind and noise enact taboo topics in ritually (orderly) transgressive ways (including *sonic* ways). Both genres are also traceable back to punk, although through different lineages. The reasons for raising these genres are that both (their thematic concerns and their sonic properties) 'feed in' to breakcore, and listeners are often *competent* in all three.

The issue, then, is not *only* that of how to conceptualise music as 'meaningfully' communicative but distinct from 'direct' representation as conventionally understood, but also how to contextualise it, for musical idioms, styles, genres *etc.* are affective-expressive, but also inherently *social*. As Prior puts it, "Because artworks are coded, meaning is dependent on socially-acquired mechanisms of comprehension possessed by perceivers at varying levels. Successful reception only occurs if there is a fit between the work's codes and those possessed by the beholder" (2005: 126). This *competence* of the 'perceiver' is what makes an understanding of the collective cultural resources manifested in the sonic so imperative: "No music is meaningful or valuable except in light of appropriate cultural capital … Music's significance and value are functions of its use by appropriately knowledgeable listeners" (Gracyk 2001: 34).

These issues can be further explored through returning to the bedroom producer and the sonic material through which he is constituted as such: the *sample*, and in particular, arguably *the* key sample in jungle and breakcore – the *amen* breakbeat, where breakbeats are "points of rupture in their former contexts, points at which the thematic elements of a musical piece are suspended and the underlying rhythms brought center stage" (Rose 1994: 73-74). The amen is at the centre of a debate about musical 'progress' vs. the continuation of 'tradition'. It is also a flashpoint case of 'appropriation' and racially inflected 'authenticity'. Most importantly, as a sonic shibboleth, it always *says* the same thing, and it is therefore in the *how* of its *repetition* that its 'changing same' is articulated, and a generic soundscape thereby constituted. As Toynbee puts it: "It is the pursuit of this generic imago which, paradoxically, yields difference through a cumulative process of selection and intensification of aesthetic zones" (2000: 141).

8.2 "Amen, Brother"



"The most famous break in all of jungle is 'Amen', a hard driving snare-and-cymbal sequence from 'Amen, My Brother' by the soul group the Winstons" (Reynolds 1998: 240). "Amen, Brother" was recorded in 1969. It is a reworking of a traditional gospel track. The drummer on the recording was Gregory C. Coleman.[8] The break is four bars long, and is not a solo: Coleman simply continues his rhythm as the other instruments fall silent. It is 'dropped' approximately 1 minute and 26 seconds in to the track (which is only 2 minutes and 32 seconds long), and is almost 7 seconds long in its entirety. In its original form it runs around 137 beats per minute.

Bong-Ra had this to say about the role of the amen in his own musical development (via email, February 18, 2003):

> If you're referring to Breakcore/Jungle, it started in the early 90's when I heard General Levy's "Incredible!". I think that the first time I heard an Amen beat I got hooked, I got hooked on the dynamics.

[8] Coleman was formerly a member of the Otis Redding band, and "Amen, Brother" reworks Curtis Mayfield's 1964 "Amen", itself based on Jester Hairston's 1963 "Amen" (Kalamu ya Salaam 2006).

These 'dynamics' are fruitfully introduced in the following passage by Mtume ya Salaam (2006):

> it's the missing beat that is responsible for "Amen's" eventual immortality. (If you don't 'hear' it, try counting the beats. The "Amen" break is four bars long—or sixteen counts. The missing beat is—or should be—at the end of the third bar. Count out loud. When you reach 11, you'll feel a fleeting, weightless effect as your brain tries to 'hear' the drumbeat that isn't there.) ... When the band drops out, the drum (and sometimes the electric bass) 'free' the rhythm from its primary role as the underpinning of the groove, as the time-keeper. The rhythm becomes 'the thing' itself. For the duration of the break, it feels as if time, along with the text of the record, has been temporarily suspended.

The first concern with the break is this Schützian, phenomenological property: the compelling dynamic of 'the missing beat'. It is not, strictly speaking, this missing beat alone which gives the amen its 'compellingness', the loop is characterised by its polyrhythmic *hesitancy*, with double-time cymbals marking sixteenths whilst snares sketch an idiosyncratic, irregular pattern, and each bar (save the last) begins with two kick drum hits. The complexity of the break, and the interaction *between* snares, cymbals and kick drums, make it possible to describe Coleman as shifting "the focus of attention among temporal levels in musical perception" (Berger 1997: 464). This 'shifting' (between different temporal 'markings'), and the perceptual practices involved in grasping it, is reproduced by those who 're-interpret' the break, such that there is a *culture* of exploring the amen as though it were an instrument in its own right; it is one of the fundamental constituents of the electronic dance music sample base. Grasping and enjoying the complex temporal interplay between percussive elements is also one of the features of breakcore subcultural literacy as manifested in practice. It is possible to describe and represent the amen (for instance, in the waveform, above, which is how the sample appears visually to a producer about to edit it), the problem with doing so is effectively one of *redundancy* (although not quite for the reasons suggested in the previous section).[9]

The amen is and has been looped, but it is also *resequenced*, processed, broken into its constituent hits: breakcore and jungle are "Composed literally out of fracture" (Reynolds 1998: 239). As the individual elements of the break are 'de-composed' and re-ordered, the polyrhythmic irregularity of the break proliferates. The original *syntax* of the break has thus been partially superseded by its *timbre*; the amen is completely reorganised in terms of its original temporal sequence (and generally significantly sped up), but

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[9] In short, the waveform *reifies* the break, losing sight of its role as an element in cultural *practice*.

remains instantly recognisable. Among American junglists, an amen resequenced bar by bar is positively appraised as *mashed up*; in Britain the same laborious sequencing used to be known as *rinsin'*, seemingly due to its impact on the dancefloor. The continual use of the amen in jungle and breakcore is repetition writ large, genre-constitutive repetition, concurrent with the continual variation of 'mashing up' and 'edit-tightening'. This constant, ongoing resequencing results in "a rupture that affirms the rhythmic pattern while it interrupts it" (Rose 1994: 70).

The syntax of the break is only *partially* superseded though: ignoring the beginnings of individual hits would result in samples which would be difficult to sequence without losing the 'punch' of the original hits (there is, therefore, a sort of 'realist' aesthetic in resequencing the amen, which stands even in particularly severe interpretations). The consistency of temporal duration for individual hits is thus loosely adhered to, but further unpredictability is introduced through digital manipulation, most commonly time-stretching (digitally extending or compressing temporal duration) and pitch-shifting (raising or lowering pitch, with the option of thereby also altering temporal duration). As Rose argues: "Advances in technology have facilitated an increase in the scope of break beat deconstruction and reconstruction and have made complex uses of repetition more accessible" (1994: 70). The process of 'breaking' is ongoing and increasing in intensity, the loop (first appearing in hip-hop in 1986, the year it was re-released on a bootleg *Ultimate Beats and Breaks* compilation) has been subject to this sort of deconstruction in dance music for over ten years, as Madden indicates (2004):

> producers were looking to see just how far they could twist, dice and bend the break before it became nonsensical. For many, the king of the super-technical Amen mash-up sound of the mid 90s was Remarc (whose finest moments from the era can be found collated on 'Sound Murderer', a compilation released last year on Planet Mu). On tracks like 'Ricky', 'Thunderclap' and 'R.I.P.' he shattered Amen into a thousand pieces and then put it back together in utterly alien but weirdly instinctive new shapes. "There was definitely an element of 'top that!' to my Amen programming at the time," says Remarc now, "not to other producers, but to myself. If you listen to all of my tunes in chronological order that progression becomes obvious. I used to like it when people listened to 'em and went, 'What the fuck happened there?' That's when I knew the track was twisted enough!" ... So what does the future hold for the seemingly evergreen Amen? Will there ever come a day when it loses its impact and has to be put out to pasture? "No," says Remarc, firmly. "I've heard so many producers say 'I ain't using Amen no more', but it remains as strong and as important as ever."

Another way to describe the melismatic potential of the amen is through reference to the other primary breakcore sample or 'sound-image': the 808 kick drum and its variants and derivatives. The pre-eminence of the (from some perspectives, *monotonous*) kick drum in techno and gabber is tautologous; whilst these latter genres overlap with breakcore (often in the same piece of music), there is a dramatic difference: the repetition of the kick drum is 'four to the floor', but the breakbeat *destabilises* this techno-esque repetitive purity.[10] This contrast is audible through the ethnomusicological distinction between the 'additive' and the 'divisive'. In short, music experienced as divisive 'breaks time up' into even segments (for example, dividing a bar into four quarters marked by beats), whilst music experienced as additive 'adjoins time' in a series of ordered moments (for instance, conjoining smaller units of two or three beats into patterns).

However, the "balance is such that a listener can hear either rhythm as primary" (Laing 1989: 87). Berger suggests that "Addition and division are two of many ways in which a listener may organize protensions and retensions of musical experience in the thickness of the living present" (1997: 472). The distinction relates to the perceptual experience of music and the listener may, as it were, 'flip' between 'readings' of temporal organisation; different musical structures nonetheless foreground or 'invite' additive or divisive 'listenings'. The interplay between (additive) breakbeat irregularity and (divisive) 4/4 kick drum predictability, the *interruption* of one form of temporal ordering by the other, is the propulsive 'engine' of breakcore.

Whilst the 'break' of breakcore refers originally to the breakbeat itself, there is also an element of 'breaking' or 'cutting up', evinced in the aesthetic ideal of 'keeping the edits tight' (Boomkat Records 2005).[11] Temporal "tightening" has a long history in recorded music, partially attributable to the absence of visual cues: dramatic pauses in 'live' performance are 'dead air' in recordings (Katz 2004: 22-23). Popular breakcore artists, such as Ely Muff, I:gor, Krumble, Rotator and Xian, produce music (de)composed out of percussive fragments and other samples from the recent history of various dance musics (particularly, but not exclusively, hip-hop, gabber, ragga jungle and rave). Sampling of this

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[10] Toynbee refers to this "temporal structuration" as the BDR or "basic disco rhythm" (2000: 145). Contemporary speedcore (for example, DJ Freak, Frazzbass, Komprex, Noisekick) accelerates the bass drum rolls of gabber to the point at which the individual beats become nondifferentiable. At the limits of this style (for example, Nihil Fist), speedcore meets noise.

[11] In breakcore there is some linguistic play around the 'break' and the 'breakdown', with producers recontextualising speech samples of these terms so as to render them 'about' *nervous* breakdown and emotional intensity. Epsilon's "Pills" is a good example of this (on *Christ as Bath Toy*).

sort is what Lacasse calls "the production of a new text (hypertext) from a previous one (hypotext)" (2000: 40). The hypertextual output of these plunderphonic practices, where temporally minute fractions ('tight edits') of occasionally familiar sounds pass by at high speed (and where some of these samples are only familiar *as previously sampled*, the 'original' text is, as it were, nonrecuperable), makes it possible to characterise breakcore as "metamusic – music about music" (Chanan 1994: 277).[12]

These cultural practices are also evident in hip-hop, as Bartlett suggests: "With digital sampling, expropriated material is (often minutely and momentarily) recognizable, yet placed so that it often sounds radically anomalous, especially when the sampled material is overlapped or layered" (1994: 649-650).[13] Music constructed out of samples of *previously sampled* material, though, can be considered to result in "double schizophonia, sounds split from their sources picked up and split again from the original recordings" (Keil 1994: 255).

To 'keep the edits tight' is to exercise virtuoso *mastery* over the sonic material: '*loose* edits' are temporally long and thus 'lazy' (as when a break is simply looped). Compositional competence is demonstrated through the editing and sequencing of *short* samples (this is why, from the perspective of some jungle and breakcore practitioners, drum and bass is 'boring': it does not work hard enough at maintaining the listener's attention through variation). There is a twofold relation to time here, in terms of both the *labour* invested in editing and sequencing on the part of the producer, and in terms of the listener's experience of the ensuing product. Both of these 'times' are themselves predicated on time *previously* invested in listening by both parties, through which the learned perceptual capacity of reading this arresting rhythmic *how* is constituted.

As Chanan indicates, "all music gives structure to time and creates its own sense of space and volume" (1994: 48). Music, Schütz suggests, binds the "composer" and the "beholder" in the "vivid present", in a relationship *such as that which holds between two members of a conversation*. The 'meaning' of music is grasped polythetically (step-by-step), "coperformed" in subjective time by the listener (1971: 175). Music allows the listener to 're-orient' the subjective experience of time, where this is generally described in

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[12] The temporal 'tightening of edits' may reflect concern among producers about copyright enforcement (Mitchell 2005: 232-234). This argument is open to dispute, though, given the regular 'identifiability' of samples.

[13] Bartlett goes on to argue that such 'contrafactual' practices were common in bebop, defining the contrafactual as "an expropriated piece of another tune, brought in as the basis for the composition/performance at hand" (1994: 648).

terms of 'escaping' from time (getting 'lost in music') or entering the vivid present (particularly evident in the embodied experience of dance). According to Schütz, the phenomenological effect of music is to 'synchronise', as it were, the listener's sense of 'inner time', where the latter is "the very form of existence of music", and where, moreover, inner and outer time need not *fit* (1971: 171). This variability in subjective temporal experience is evident – time 'expands' and 'contracts', and attention to the sonic environment (as when this attention is summoned by a ringing phone or some other hail) foregrounds temporal immediacy (Berger 1997: 470-471).[14] The *retrospective-prospective* manner in which the amen operates *through* and *in* time, the 'chronotopic' synchronisation of musical and subjective time (where the former 'orders' or *draws out* the latter in a compelling way), is demonstrated by the following:

BC room 30/07/03

1. [dystop] you heard ne john. me and my two pals listened to the amenloop (you know the one in no remorse) for 12 hours straight.
2. [dystop] and now it's fucking 0900. gnight.
3. [DeathBreathing] HAHAHA

Here, dystop's description of a specific amen's 'compellingness' is framed so as to highlight how *annoying* it is: dystop and his friends have 'lost time' through this specific eruption of 'musical' into 'real' time.[15] The amen is not just sufficiently compelling that one may listen to an *individual* version of it for 12 hours, it is sufficiently compelling as to have become ubiquitous, the basis of jungle and breakcore, and therefore a source of artistic and cultural tension and dynamism.

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[14] The multi-level relations between temporal and musical experience are also elaborated culturally, through such concepts as 'golden oldies', which demonstrate the role musical repetition plays in the constitution of subjectivity: "music has become crucial to the ways in which people organize memory, identity, their autonomy" (Frith 2003: 98).

[15] The amen dystop is referring to is in Atari Teenage Riot's "No Remorse (I Wanna Die)", on *60 Second Wipe Out*.

8.3 "Amen Babylon": music in 'speech'[16]

There is, then, a debate about the use of the amen. Some practitioners (who we might call 'progressives') feel that the amen is exhausted, and its deployment therefore indicative of laziness or adherence to outdated (uncool) aesthetic principles (or possibly both). Others, including conventional 'purist' or 'hardcore' junglists and their breakcore compatriots (who remain convinced of the break's aesthetic power), breakcore 'ironists', and those 'post-junglists' who continue to utilise the break to demonstrate 'virtuoso' sequencing ability, feel that the amen is inexhaustible and too valuable to abandon. There is a spectrum of positions within the debate, with some seemingly continuing to use the break somewhat ruefully, and some producers professing to be finished with the amen who, in fact, continue to use it. This spectrum is mirrored in the continuum from jungle to breakcore, evinced by the plethora of combinatory hybrid terms, such as 'yardcore' (replacing 'hard' with 'yard', referring in JE to the tenement yards of Kingston), or 'speedhall' (replacing 'dance' with 'speed' to indicate the accelerated nature of the form) used in the attempt to pinpoint sections of the spectrum. This debate is *not* relegated to the more obscure ranges of 'bedroom producerness': the amen features in breakcore and jungle, but also in contemporary drum and bass and happy hardcore (which both have massive audiences on account of their 'clubland' popularity), gabber and speedcore, and in advertisements, in Top 40 pop, and even the theme to the cartoon *Futurama*).[17] The ubiquity of the amen arguably guarantees its continuing use, for "To make music which contains specific references to other pieces or compositions is to intervene in a surrounding musical culture, exercising a right of reply to musical discourses which make up our social environment, by re-making, re-ordering, or re-contextualising them, and so commenting on their meanings by changing them" (Durant 1990: 191). This 'right of reply' is undoubtedly one of the reasons that the amen remains in circulation.

The amen also 'stands for' the larger debate about the cultural role of sampling and looping in electronic music production: at stake beyond this is the status and definition of originality in electronic production, and, more significantly, the competing perspectives on

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[16] "Amen Babylon" is the title of a Shitmat track on *KillaBabylonKutz*.

[17] The amen 'crossed over' into early 1990's British 'hardcore' from hip-hop, where it featured, perhaps most famously, in N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton" and Mantronix's "King of the Beats", but also in productions by, among others, 2 Live Crew, Eric B and Rakim, Heavy D, Scarface and Schoolly D. The role of the amen and similar breakbeats in advertising can be thought of as an attempt to 'trade on' the underground authenticity of such sounds.

music as a *collective* cultural resource or a medium for individual, *auteur* self-expression. The latter perspective re-instates the ideology of the producer as masterful, Romantic hero-author; the former prioritises music as a social resource. There is a significant *racial* aspect to this debate (alongside gender- and class-based inflections,); the plunderphonic sampling aesthetic which originally *re*-introduced the amen is regarded by some as following Afrodiasporic cultural practice: thus Levine describes spirituals (of which genre "Amen, Brother" is itself a reworking) as being "forged out of many pre-existing bits of old songs" (1977: 29). Referring to this form of cultural creativity as "social authorship" or "the transformative mode", Toynbee writes: "the transformative represents the utopian imperative of pop in its most developed form. Those features which mark it – versioning, bifurcation, repetition/variation – testify to solidarity and the redemption of human agency, but also to a notion of the past which teaches change. For these reasons the transformative can (and should) be borrowed by all sorts of music cultures" (2000: 64).

The transformative mode works anew upon materials conceptualised as communal resources, these materials-in-process, according to this perspective, are and always have been "*simultaneously* the result of individual and mass creativity. They were products of that folk process which has been called 'communal re-creation', through which older songs are constantly re-created into essentially new entities" (Levine 1977: 29). This reading, which, firstly, privileges 'communal re-creation' as an emancipatory, historically grounded, 'organic' (*authentic*) cultural form (opposed to elitist, Western art-music), and secondly, asserts that this cultural practice can/should be 'borrowed' by other socio-musical formations, is quite distinct from the reading presented by Spencer in the epigraph to this chapter, which describes such 'borrowing' as plagiaristic "cultural cannibalism" (Hosokawa 2002: 235). This latter position asserts that the practice is inequitable when that so borrowed is not in some way returned or recompensed and the borrowing goes unacknowledged.

To be opposed (as Spencer is) to heterophagic cultural 'poaching' is not necessarily to play into individualistic notions of *auteur* creativity (that is, we are not stuck on a pendulum oscillating between author-liquefying, communal *jouissance* and totalitarian creative atomism). One way of approaching the debate is through evaluating contrasting perspectives on the amen, with particular reference to its musical *context*. In some genre-environments, in deployment alongside some sample bases (from the perspective of situated listeners), the amen has come to appear problematic. However, it can also be argued that the persistence of use operates almost as a sort of *disavowal of sign depreciation*, and therefore an element in cultural critique. As Attali suggests: "*In music,*

as in the rest of the economy, the logic of the succession of musical codes parallels the logic of the creation of value" (1985: 35). The amen is a 'heavy' musematic analogue of shibboleths such as *nigga* or *gay*. It 'frames' that which is 'said' around it, and can be considered both *figure* and *ground*, "both *context-shaped* and *context-renewing*" (Heritage 1984: 240). The amen is a 'code', it is also a sonic *imago* which refuses to 'go away' or 'lose value'. The issue is not just the *how* of the resequenced amen, but the manner in which this relates to the context of its iteration. We shall trace this in what follows, beginning with the role of the amen in junglist aesthetics, and moving towards a consideration of how the amen is considered by producers beyond the jungle form.

RJ room 27/09/03: 1

4. * illacrew the winstons amen brother
5. [illacrew] what year is this tune?
6. [Babylon_Demolitionist] /queues Jeopardy theme music
7. [Babylon_Demolitionist] wonder if those winston fools know the ruckus they started
8. [Babylon_Demolitionist] '69
9. [Babylon_Demolitionist] dude
10. [Babylon_Demolitionist] http://www.allthingsdeep.com/dge/winstons.htm
11. [bumbaclot selektah] heh
12. [bumbaclot selektah] gc coleman
13. [bumbaclot selektah] THE MAN
14. [Babylon_Demolitionist] we should make the winstons be judges @ the Ragg Jungle World Clash in 2005
15. [Babylon_Demolitionist] hehe
16. [Babylon_Demolitionist] long wit remarc n bizzy n alla dem
17. [bumbaclot selektah] werd
18. [bumbaclot selektah] we should make a complete amen brother remix
19. [bumbaclot selektah] with alot of samples from the song
20. [bumbaclot selektah] and dedicate a sick honor to gc coleman
21. * Babylon_Demolitionist nods
22. [bumbaclot selektah] i hate hearin that amen is played out and over used
23. [bumbaclot selektah] most dnb tunes need an amen for me to even listen to it
24. [Babylon_Demolitionist] oh no not that again
25. [Babylon_Demolitionist] more amens than the vatican
26. [bumbaclot selektah] jungle lives off the amen, and i love it

In the sequence above homage is paid to the amen from a staunchly 'traditionalist' (more accurately, *revivalist*) junglist orientation. Babylon_Demolitionist suggests

crowning the Winstons as judges at the 'Ragga Jungle World Clash' (14), and goes on to suggest such status also be bequeathed upon Remarc, Bizzy B, and the host of original 'darkside' producers who first popularised the break as a *junglist* element (16).[18] The desire expressed here is for a certain *validation* for the junglist reworking of the amen, analogous to that which occurs in DJ battles: "The newer DJs basically try to gain approval from the 'tribal elders' (as judges) and the elders in turn … give their blessings (bestowing championship status) to those who they feel best represent the artform" (Christie Z-Pabon, cited in Katz 2004: 122).

At lines 18-19, 'bumbaclot selektah' suggests remixing the entirety of "Amen, Brother" (something which, incidentally, breakcore producer FFF has already done). At line 23, bumbaclot selektah baldly states that he won't even *listen* to a drum and bass tune unless it has an amen (most contemporary drum and bass subgenres, such as 'techstep' and 'neurofunk', eschew the break in favour of 'cleaner' sounding, two-step patterns). Babylon_Demolitionist's first response to this is an assent so severe it is almost a refusal to engage: "oh no not that again" (24), by which he means that it is the debate about its use, rather than the amen itself, which is 'played out'. He follows this with the figurative word-play at line 25, indicating how many amens there are in question.

The preceding discussion of the amen (and perhaps the transposition at line 25 in particular) *immediately* triggers the following extraordinary sequence (which continues in a similar vein beyond the material cited), where bumbaclot selektah and Babylon_Demolitionist produce a series of MC-style rhymes, thereby demonstrating how the musical *evokes* the poetical in speech and language; equivalently, how intensely the amen generates ebullient enthusiasm amongst its adherents:

RJ room 27/09/03: 2

27. [bumbaclot selektah] my toons destructive delivering your to hell, praise my breaks just like the one in the liberty bell
28. [Babylon_Demolitionist] you didn't hear? babylon fell, yeah lastnight yuh cyan tell? so kick back and light a splif as the bassline swells
29. [Jungle_Bastard] im off
30. [Jungle_Bastard] sleep time
31. [Babylon_Demolitionist] ez
32. [Jungle_Bastard] Ez

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[18] Generally included here are such names as DJ Hype, Johnny Jungle, Ray Keith, Shy FX and DJ SS.

33. [bumbaclot selektah] and let the amens break, red bloodier than steak mix set perfected with no mistake, guh guh guh god damn that dj's so great, when the bass hits it makes ya levitate from early morn stayin way up late always reprazentin junlge in the united states
34. [Babylon_Demolitionist] wit poison tipped dub plates, we peepin outa grates smobbin in tanks, wit da amen breaks makin yuh screw up yuh face
35. [Babylon_Demolitionist] by the grace
36. [Babylon_Demolitionist] of jah
37. [Babylon_Demolitionist] we come to conquer
38. [bumbaclot selektah] come to wreck ya, any selekta, we'll dead ya, ya know we love breaks, its what keeps ya in the club late, but none of these crews can fuck with my dubplates, you crazy or just smokin way more than chron, the only thing that touches my plates is named ortofon!!
39. [bumbaclot selektah] your sounds dyin, crew commin in last, im the sound of the future the rest your time has just passed, lissen up you soundboys dont just sit on your ass, me dub burn fire none can touch in sound clash
40. [Babylon_Demolitionist] suffering succotash
41. [bumbaclot selektah] haha
42. [bumbaclot selektah] i dibbidie i bedi bedi bedi i tink i taw a putty tat
43. [Babylon_Demolitionist] haha
44. [bumbaclot selektah] heh

...

As is evident from lines 29-32, not even the departure of 'Jungle_Bastard' disrupts this 'flow' of junglist battle rhymes (exchanges of rhymes and lyrics of varying degrees of preparedness are not uncommon in other Soulseek rooms, notably the Underground Hiphop room). The linguistic, prosodic and associative complexity of the exchange warrants scrutiny, and a number of the references are somewhat obscure: the iconic Liberty Bell (27) in Philadelphia is historically associated with the Declaration of Independence and with the Abolitionist movement; it is also famously cracked and therefore 'unringable' – there is a 'break' in it. Ortofon (38) is a company which produces styluses and cartridges for DJs. The ritual boasts themselves are characterised by analogy and hyperbole: the amens are "bloodier than steak" (33); the dubplates (the JE-derived term used to describe exclusively-pressed or advance-release records) are "poison tipped" (34); and the dubs (tracks) are so hot they "burn fire" (39). Linguistically, the play incorporates features one would expect: JE phrasing and markers from dancehall culture and Rastafarianism ("babylon", "dubplates", "jah", "selekta", "soundboy" – the latter two are synonyms for DJ), alongside AAVE terms derived from hip-hop vernacular ("reprazentin", "smobbin" –

a term, presumably abbreviating 'steady mobbin', referring to cruising in a car, "chron" – 'chronic' cannabis).[19]

Then there is the rhythmic *stuttering* in lines 33 and 42: the "guh guh guh god damn that dj's so great" (33) reproduces the 'metronomic' use of language by MCs as they extemporise *in time* (where this is itself an onomatopoeic replication of the turntablist's deconstruction of speech via scratching), whilst bumbaclot selektah's turn at line 42 follows Babylon_Demolitionist's previous exclamatory turn (40) in quoting a Looney Tunes character (that line, of course, is Sylvester J. Pussycat's). However, the *apparently* nonsensical "i dibbidie i bedi bedi bedi" (possibly echoing Porky Pig's stutter before pronouncing "That's all folks!") is followed by Tweety Bird's signature line, thereby *answering* Babylon_Demolitionist.[20] Cartoons, though, are not the only cultural references evoked by the glossolalic consonance of "i dibbidie i bedi bedi bedi"; such utterances are characteristic of both 'old school' jungle MCs (for whom "Biddi biddi bad boy!" was a popular exclamation), and the JE speech samples characteristic of ragga jungle. The specific 'baddaboom' euphony of combining *b* and *d* in this way would therefore be both familiar to Babylon_Demolitionist and bumbaclot selektah, and contextually appropriate to the immediately anterior turns. For example, Soundmurder's *Wired for Sound* mix includes a section of DJ Hype's "Bad Man", which features a looped speech sample from an unidentified dancehall MC which runs:

> Mad madda mad mad madda madda mad mad
> Mad madda mad mad madda madda mad
> Badda badda badda badda bad badda bad bad
> Badda badda bad bad bad bad bad bad!

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[19] The names of both of these interactants are also derived from JE, where 'bumbaclot', roughly coterminous with 'arsewipe', bears similar weight to that of 'motherfucker' or 'cunt' in the US (similar JE expletives are 'rasclot' and 'bloodclot', which draw on the menses taboo).

[20] The "bedi bedi bedi" of this statement is also similar to the catchphrase of Buck Rogers' robot sidekick Twiki: "Biddi biddi biddi" (in the TV series *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*). The characters of Twiki, Sylvester the cat, Porky Pig *and* Tweety were *all* voiced by Mel Blanc.

Furthermore, Cutty Ranks, arguably the most sampled vocalist in jungle, is the source of the following rhyme, delivered with laconic menace to the tune of "Frere Jacques":[21]

> Dibbi-dibbi DJ, dibbi-dibbi DJ
> know me a det, know me a det
> nuff a dem a worry, nuff a dem a worry
> some a dem a fret, some a dem a fret

Anything 'dibbi-dibbi' is, in JE, small, insignificant or pathetic; lyrical reference is often made to 'dibbi-dibbi sounds' (soundsystems) and 'dibbi-dibbi DJs'. The 'function' of such 'non-sense' statements as "i dibbidie i bedi bedi bedi", then, is not formally 'decorative': in this case there are multiple associations and referents, and in the context of the exchange the phrase operates as a thetic *break* or break*down*, a caesura in the rhythmic flow, a 'pause for breath', as well as being a complex signifying element. The line has, at first sight, only superficial 'meaning', but it *resonates* in terms of all that it evokes and its own contextual location. The reason for raising this datum, is, of course, that it is the amen which gives rise to the exchange of rhymes, the amen to which the rhymes are devoted, and the amen to which the rhymes are 'set'. The amen evokes the dialogue, and is evoked by it; the entire exchange re-enacts and is predicated in a material sense upon immersion in the junglist 'project'.

To return, then, to the amen and the form of its instantiation: even in the 'heartland' of the ragga jungle room, the 'natives' are restless: the issue of *looping* is highly sensitive. Jungle_Bastard also features in the following extract, from 11 days before the extract cited above:

RJ room 16/09/03

45. [FrankieD] got my ring tone to some sick fucking amens mash up from tester
46. [Babylon_Demolitionist] noyce
47. [FrankieD] sounds sort of shite but I'll get it right soon enouph
48. [Jungle_Bastard] uhg@tester
49. [FrankieD] so I go into chemical recs a f...what is this uhg @ tester deal?????

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[21] The lyric forms the introduction to Ranks' "The Stopper". Later on in "The Stopper", Ranks asserts that when he comes into the dancehall, it is to "kill yuh wi de lingua". Ranks' better-known "Limb by Limb" is a staple of the junglist sample base.

50. [Babylon_Demolitionist] he's in nyc tonight apparently
51. [FrankieD] yup
52. [FrankieD] totaly
53. [Jungle_Bastard] not a fan of tester lol dont like his songs
54. [FrankieD] with clint and tao
55. [FrankieD] but he's playing out
56. [FrankieD] kj I think no?
57. [FrankieD] O<G
58. [FrankieD] get out of this room
59. [Jungle_Bastard] riiiight
60. [FrankieD] how could you even say that? are you jelouse?
61. [FrankieD] I need and valide explanation
62. [Jungle_Bastard] jealous?
63. [Jungle_Bastard] ahahaha
64. [FrankieD] it's like saying milk isn<t white
65. [Jungle_Bastard] ok
66. [Jungle_Bastard] hes shit is all the same
67. [Jungle_Bastard] low bass
68. [Jungle_Bastard] some amens kind of mashed up
69. [FrankieD] what are you listening it on?
70. [Jungle_Bastard] same mashed up amen over and over
71. [FrankieD] hummmm
72. [Jungle_Bastard] sometimes it sounds like he just throws vocals over it
73. [Jungle_Bastard] without having any idea
74. [Babylon_Demolitionist] I hafta say I'd like him more if he smoked herb :|
75. [FrankieD] I have to disagree..I'll have to say that you haven<t heard much of his stuff then
76. [FrankieD] lol
77. [FrankieD] well lets agree to disagree
78. [Jungle_Bastard] ive heard over 20 tracks of his
79. [FrankieD] I disagree with you to no end...but I'll respect that you have an opinion about it and that you can explaine them
80. [FrankieD] it
81. [Babylon_Demolitionist] jake's a top lad
82. [Jungle_Bastard] haha
83. [Babylon_Demolitionist] militant young warrior

'FrankieD' here says, at line 45, that she has set her ring-tone to play a Tester track or section thereof (elsewhere in the transcript, when she specifies her gender, illacrew responds: "are you a spy?"). Tester (for whom FrankieD does promotional work) is one of the relatively successful 'new school' North American jungle producers, amongst whom other noteworthy figures are 0=0, 16 Armed Jack, DJ C, Debaser, General Malice (referred

to here as 'clint' in line 54), Krinjah, and most famously, Soundmurderer. However, Jungle_Bastard's response (48) is seemingly one of disgust, and this leads to FrankieD's series of incredulous returns, suggesting first that Jungle_Bastard must be joking (56, where "kj" is 'jk' – that is, 'just kidding'. Line 57 likewise intends "OMG" – that is, 'oh my god'), then that his dislike is simply illogically contrary (64), and eventually that the stereo Jungle_Bastard has heard Tester on must be inferior (69) and that this perhaps explains his impression that the bass was "low" (67). Jungle_Bastard's account of *why* Tester's output is inferior is telling: Tester is *monotonous* (66); Tester's amens are only *kind of* mashed up (68); Tester uses the *same* mashed up amen (70); it sounds as though Tester simply "throws vocals over it/without having any idea" (72-73). The latter criticism is, from a producer's perspective, particularly cutting; the inference is that Tester is not just unsuccessfully performing the tricky operation of synchronising speech samples (which tend to 'move around' the beat) with the rest of his material: "without having any idea", the vocal samples sound *inappropriate* in their new context. Were this the case, the entire structure of Tester's tracks, the relationship between the musical *how* and the discursive *what*, would fail.

In terms of viewing this datum as a *simultaneity*, FrankieD's eventual conciliatory response to the position taken by Jungle_Bastard is informative (77 and 79). The ellipsis in the latter line recalls the Kristevan distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic, where phrasing and rhythm in the communicative *how* inform the understanding of *what* is said (Kristeva 1982: 198-200):

> Very frequently the three dots come at the end of complete clauses where no ellipsis is involved. It seems then that their function is to signal that, while the *syntactical structure* is normally complete, the *enunciation*, on the other hand, is not; it continues, becomes displaced, concatenates other clauses. Far from being the mark of a lacuna in the clause, the three dots rather point to the *overflowing of the clause* ... a deeper *meaning* that is not lexicalized; they reveal an intense, passionate attitude, through which the speaking subject displays his desire and calls upon the reader to embrace it, beyond words, through the archaic configuration of melody – the original mark of syntax and subjective position.

It is, therefore, in what is *not* said that points of stress or tension are made manifest, meanings 'beyond' those rendered explicit or 'sensible' can be gestured towards. From this perspective, again it does not matter whether or not Tester *really* 'sucks', rather, what matters is what is made of his output in interaction and what this, in turn, tells us about the collective elaboration of the local regime of taste and how it is negotiated. In line 79

FrankieD offers to "agree to disagree", and though Jungle_Bastard does not directly take up the offer, the topic of Tester's value or otherwise does *not* serve as a vehicle for the sorts of escalation previously encountered. Whilst one may hypothesise that this is due to the position FrankieD takes – the fact that she does not *insist* on Tester's value (with concurrent speculation about the role *her* gender may play in this), such an account would omit the subtleties of how FrankieD's presence interplays with the interactive behaviour of others.

The 'tone' of the dialogue in the ragga jungle room is generally less confrontational than that in the Breakcore room (perhaps, in part, because there is greater consensus), but the room remains a relatively 'closed' fratriarchal space; this is demonstrated by the turns produced by Babylon_Demolitionist at lines 74, 81 and 83. The reservation expressed at line 74 appears to be sympathetic to Jungle_Bastard's critique: Babylon_Demolitionist would like Tester more "if he smoked herb :|". This might mean that he would like Tester more 'as a person' were that the case, but presumably also that 'smoking herb' would improve Tester's musical ability. The latter lines (81 and 83), however, refer not to Tester, but to *Jungle_Bastard* - Jungle_Bastard is 'jake', these turns are thus only *ostensibly* directed at FrankieD. Babylon_Demolitionist thus attempts to minimise the nascent conflict about Tester's amens in a specifically homosocial way: he offers Jungle_Bastard a sympathetic turn which does *not* directly refer to the musical output in question, but rather to that other economy of homosocial togetherness: 'herb' (and thus cannot be said to have sided directly *with* Jungle_Bastard and *against* FrankieD on the issue of Tester's music, but rather, to have diplomatically elided this issue). He does *not*, for instance, gently admonish Jungle_Bastard by suggesting that *FrankieD* is a 'top lass' or some such (for he does address her as a 'lass' elsewhere) and that therefore *her* opinion warrants respect. Given that Babylon_Demolitionist and Jungle_Bastard spend significantly more time in the room – together – than FrankieD does, Babylon_Demolitionist 'allies' himself with Jungle_Bastard rather than FrankieD. Thus, while lines 81 and 83 ("jake's a top lad/militant young warrior") *appear* to explain or excuse Jungle_Bastard's critical stance to FrankieD, they are as such indirect compliments to Jungle_Bastard.[22] Rodgers suggests that "to achieve success within a male domain women must learn to manipulate the male

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[22] As the exchange goes on, FrankieD challenges Jungle_Bastard to upload his own music to her. Whilst the discussion proceeds equitably, with Jungle_Bastard moderating his critique and Babylon_Demolitionist and FrankieD furnishing warrant for appreciating Tester's work, it nonetheless proceeds in conventionally gendered terms, with Jungle_Bastard being invited to justify *his* opinion and prove *his* competence, *against* Tester, *through* FrankieD.

symbols" (1997: 60). In this instance, FrankieD appropriately rates "sick fucking amens mash up" (45), but these 'male symbols' remain ultimately in fratriarchal hands.

8.4 "Fuck Toronto Jungle": the problematics of the ragga jungle revival[23]

As it happens, the entire new school junglist *context* for the amen is legible in fratriarchal terms. In jungle, the amen is sped up to around 180 bpm and set against *ragga* vocals; the vocals of usually male JE MCs or lyricists. Consequently, those critical of ragga jungle are able, as we have seen (5.2, RJ room 02/02/04), to reduce it to the following cliché:

> [hyper3000] ragga jungle: amen - amen - amen - homophobic lyrics - amen - amen - amen - 2 step fill

Many of the most popular contemporary ragga and dancehall artists (including Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Buju Banton, Capleton, Elephant Man, Sizzla, T.O.K., and Vybz Kartel) have produced lyrics which, in elaborating a rude boy, gangsta hypermasculinity, appear to endorse or advocate acts of homophobic violence. Famously, the chorus to Buju Banton's "Boom Bye Bye" (1993), runs:

> Boom bye bye in a batty boy head
> Ca we no promote no batty man dem ha fi dead

The homophobia of Jamaican lyrics periodically surfaces as an issue in British cultural politics (as happened with Banton in 1993). More recently, the 2004 MOBO Awards ('Music Of Black Origin') withdrew nominations for Elephant Man and Vybz Kartel because of their homophobic lyrics (oddly citing the absence of an *apology* for these lyrics), following protests from the advocacy group Outrage. Such lyrics, extracted from their original context and reproduced in jungle, are commonplace: ragga jungle *definitionally* relies on combining the amen with dancehall samples. References to 'batty boys' are, therefore, unexceptional, and although there is a popular image of the culturally 'illiterate' white appropriator, it is hard to imagine that jungle and breakcore producers are

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[23] "Fuck Toronto Jungle", another example of "we from this city-core", is the title of a track on Venetian Snares' *237 0894*.

unaware of what the lyrics are 'about'. Rather, they either *do not care* (in the new context the discursive or informational content becomes subsidiary to its ornamentative or performative *how*), or they in some complicit sense endorse the content (it is appropriately 'hard', shocking, specialised, exclusionary, and exotically Other). It is therefore possible to make a case suggesting that homophobic dancehall lyrics in jungle (and perhaps particularly in breakcore) are peculiar sonic analogues to the punk deployment of the swastika as described by Hebdige: relocated "within an alternative subcultural context, its primary value and appeal derived precisely from its lack of meaning: from its potential for deceit. It was exploited as an empty effect" (1979: 117).

There are a number of crucial features of the recontextualisation of dancehall in jungle worth indicating. The homoerotic Other, as has already been described, is a constitutive feature of fratriarchal masculinity, and in their new context homophobic lyrics become oddly 'dissociated' through the following means: firstly, as 'inert' elements of the junglist sound palette, sampled references to 'batty boys' become 'neutralised' as roughly approximate to ('mere') references to 'faggots' in hip-hop (another sample base). Another way to put this is to gesture towards the *hypocrisy* of condemning dancehall homophobia, whilst Eminem, for instance, is 'taken seriously'. Secondly, the ragga jungle revival itself is predicated upon the fratriarchal adversative (under which the recontextualised homophobia is subsumed). The following is posted on Tester's Trilogy Sound website (2005):

> Tester's sound, with heavy sound-clash style influence, pounds the crowd with hard hitting deep bass, mashed up amen breaks and drum n bass styles along with strong culture and soundboy killin' vocals. Tester is sure to showcase enough dubplates to kill any soundboy who test the champion sound, TRILOGY SOUND.

The revivalist junglists' wholesale emulation of Jamaican musical culture is reproduced in terms of the social organisation of public performance and the manner in which this performance is conducted, as evinced above by Babylon_Demolitionist's reference (more hopeful than actual) to the 'Ragga Jungle World Clash' (RJ room 27/09/03: 1, 14). The circuit of musical performance in dancehall culture has for over 30 years been structured around the 'soundclash', where soundsystems compete for the affections of the audience to be crowned the 'champion sound'.[24] Pertinent features of the

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[24] There are anthropological precedents for adversative musical ritual of this kind. Nattiez, for example, furnishes an account of the Inuit practice of *katajjaq*: "it is played by two women; they repeat a brief motif at

clash include the selector's deployment of exclusive dubplates or 'specials' – also duplicated in jungle, and the MCs' adversative invective and ridicule directed at the opposing sound (as with the rhymes delivered by Babylon_Demolitionist and bumbaclot selektah). The clash also takes a ritual form, beginning with an 'early warm-up' or 'mix n blend' round, followed by a dubplate round, and climaxing with a 'dub fi dub' round.

Although the clash model is no longer as popular in Jamaican dancehall as it was (superseded by noncompetitive 'juggling' events, where soundsystems alternate in entertaining the crowd), it has been exported globally (Niaah 2004). The soundsystem itself was, and remains, a crucial site for the articulation of political (and economic) autonomy, as Hebdige suggests: "The 'sound-system', perhaps more than any other institution within working-class West Indian life, was the site at which blackness could be most thoroughly explored, most clearly and uncompromisingly expressed" (1979: 38). And sections of the North American ragga jungle revival (such systems as Chopstick Dubplates, Junglistic Pressure, Mad Dem Crew, Rewind Sound, Ten Pound Sound, and Trilogy) have come to see the soundclash format as *authentically* junglist. Whilst samples of soundclash vocals are ubiquitous in jungle, there is a great distinction between their use *qua* samples and the enactment of the formal structure of the clash. In contradistinction to jungle's origins in rave, the clash model of competitive exchange between soundsystems formally *foregrounds* the DJs and the *performance* of their competition (the winning selector is the 'star'), over and above the pleasure of the dance. Although the dance itself contains elements of competitive display, in soundclash the priorities of rave are reversed: the music is for adversative display first and dancing second, the primary relation is the hierarchical one between systems rather than between the system and its 'crew' of followers.[25] The clash model may, therefore, be 'true' to (a certain model) of *dancehall*, but it is arguably not 'true' to 'old school' *jungle*, where there was no formal competition of this form. The construction of authenticity is beside the point (ragga jungle is a hybrid form), but this critique does bear on the problematics of the ragga jungle revival.

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staggered intervals, until one of the women is forced to stop, having either run out of breath or tripped over her own tongue. There is a winner and a loser" (1990: 56). More immediately pertinent are the parallels drawn by Katz between the adversative early jazz practice of "cutting contests", hip-hop DJ battles, and ritual insult exchange (2004: 133). Another obvious example is the 'Hit Parade', where the 'winner' sells the most.

[25] The adoption of the soundclash model has further political implications, insofar as the production of dubplates involves 'voicing specials': sourcing (and paying) an actual vocalist, rather than merely editing found or procured acapellas. The clash involves the junglist producer in an actual engagement with the idealised Other. Needless to say, pressing vinyl also involves a significant financial outlay.

For the symbolic violence of the language of the clash is very close to the symbolic violence in homophobic lyrics. The objective in the clash is to 'kill' the opposing soundboy with 'counteraction' dubplates, the competition is 'murderation', to 'play out' the other sound (that is, to musically 'overpower' the other selector to the extent that he has no dubplates left in his arsenal) is 'soundboy burial'. In jungle this idiom is symbolically *militarised*, as when Babylon_Demolitionist describes "smobbin in tanks" (RJ room 27/09/03: 2, line 34); this is further evinced by the popularity of combat fatigues among junglists. The soundsystem is a symbolic 'war machine' for the display of sonic dominance, where the dubplate is a gun (phallus) and the beats of the amen are bullets, as in Tester's "Empty the Clip".[26] The homophobia of dancehall becomes, in jungle, *subsumed* under the soundboy killing (another way of putting this is to suggest that the dibbi-dibbi sound is *ghey*), merely another aspect in a signifying practice permeated by symbolic violence and ritualised contest, presented in a sonic environment characterised by its 'militant' percussive intensity and bass-heaviness. As vocal samples are 'cut out' and inserted into the junglist context, their literal 'meaning' is rendered oddly 'inert'. As Gracyk puts it: "meaning-bearing entities circulate with no reference back to the authorial activity and intentions of whoever created them" (2001: 53). The issue is not that of the retention and transposition of this problematic element of dancehall culture, but what is *made* of this polysemic element in its new environment (not the 'meaning' of the static *what*, but the politics and aesthetics of the dynamic *how*).

From the perspective of most breakcore practitioners, excluding perhaps the explicitly 'political' post-junglists who 'subvert' the idiom by re-ordering ragga samples, the 'problem' with jungle is seemingly not the symbolic (homophobic) violence of the adopted ragga idiom (such violence is also reproduced within other genres, and within breakcore itself), but that the *sound* of jungle is 'not hard enough', that it is formulaic, repetitive, that the style is ossified, the sample base a cliché. Jungle has thus become *overcoded*: "so tightly bound to socialized conventions as to be 'about' its code" (Middleton 1990: 173). When this occurs, "Not only do members acquire an understanding of the rules of the genre, they then lose interest as the texts which conform to them become predictable" (Toynbee 2000: 135). Effectively, the edits of jungle are *not tight enough*, and the adopted cultural elements 'smother' the musical possibilities.

The jungle revival is from this perspective self-restricting. These cultural elements, particularly as instantiated verbally and discursively, meet criticism from breakcore

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[26] The track features on *Dibi Dibi Di/Murder Dem*.

quarters, where they are seen as *inauthentic*. The systemic aspect of junglism as a subcultural form (including such features as references to Babylon, ganja, and Jah) is read as a naïve, juvenile, escapist fantasy.[27] The cultural politics of the junglist project are perceived as being outdated and *inappropriate*. The critique is approximately analogous to that directed towards white hip-hop fans (from other *whites*).

It is for this reason that, to the extent that breakcore continues (disdainfully or otherwise) to use this sample base, it will itself be subject to the critique that it is "a local white youth culture which collectively appropriates black cultural resources while simultaneously stigmatising individual experimentations with black style as in some way going 'too far'" (Bennett 1999: 18). That is, as samples, the music can be *used*, at a safe distance, but engaging in the associated cultural practices (particularly, expressing adherence to the belief system or deploying the idiom in which that belief system is framed), is being a *poseur*. Breakcore practitioners run the risk of painting themselves into a duplicitous corner where they continue to combine dancehall elements with the amen as features of their sample base, and yet reject the ostensibly unitary embrace of the junglist political project. And in consequence, the junglist use of the amen, and the amen itself, are flashpoints of this subcultural tension.

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[27] Another way of putting this is to bring bedroom producerness and 'nerddom' back into the frame: within breakcore there is a cynical grasp of the limits of 'liberation'. Breakcore, though, prides itself on its 'underground' status and seeks to enact an oppositional performative mode – indeed, breakcore, in its rejection of junglism, asserts its own subcultural superiority (the imagery of the skull and crossed floppy disks challenges that of the Lion of Judah).

9 - "a antique style some nerds did"[1]

9.1 "War is in the Dance": breakcore aesthetics and subcultural legitimacy[2]

The preceding chapter considered the musical, discursive, and cultural context of jungle, in which the amen 'originally' came to prominence. The problematics of the ragga jungle revival were described in terms of the *rigidity of form* in adherence to the 'classical' junglist sample repertoire, that is, the reliance upon ragga vocal samples, alongside the appropriation or emulation of elements of Jamaican idiom and cultural organisation. In this section, a number of 'journalistic' pieces by breakcore and IDM 'celebrities' of a sort will be discussed, so as to further situate the amen culturally and politically prior to considering it as an issue amongst breakcore bedroom producers. In the following section, we will see how the debate about the amen and looping, and about the 'underground' and the 'mainstream', is played out in interaction.

Whilst there is a continuum from jungle to breakcore, it would be possible to identify an isogloss, as it were, between the two, the point at which "transgressions of the norm occur that restore interest by contradicting expectations about generic form" (Toynbee 2000: 135). A number of features would constitute such identification, through reference to the sample base (the extent to which elements beyond the junglist palette are incorporated) and the 'tightness' of the edits (the intensity of the manipulation to which the samples were subjected). Somewhat similar features would allow us to differentiate between new and old school jungle, where the new is *like* the old, but intensified and also 'formalised'; it was some time before hardcore/early jungle became identifiable as *ragga* jungle. This restrictive 'formalisation' is what allows ragga jungle to be identified as a relatively 'closed' formation. Revival junglism is in this respect *nostalgic* or conservative. As Toynbee suggests, "Jungle represents an extraordinary leap forward in popular music form and sonority. Its rich polymetre and textural syntax, together with the low salience of melody and harmony, mark a radical departure from earlier styles … The sheer *speed* of the successive moves from house, to rave, to jungle in the period 1988-94 is also

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[1] LFO Demon 2004b.

[2] "War is in the Dance" is the title of an FFF track on the Wood Records compilation, *Breakcore Gives Me Wood*.

unprecedented" (2000: 140). However, where jungle was once at the forefront of dance music, it is now superseded by other genres, both in terms of its popularity, and its technical sophistication.

The isogloss between new school jungle and breakcore, however, also involves an attitude to the musical materials expressed *in* the tightness of the edits, and through juxtaposition with other sample bases. Much breakcore deploys ragga vocal samples, but decontextualises them further by 'chopping them up' more, and placing them alongside incongruous musical material. Breakcore practitioners thereby exhibit that they do not take junglist ideology 'seriously', dancehall vocals become 'deprivileged'; merely one sample base among many (though a favoured one nonetheless). This aesthetic therefore permits dialogue across sample bases – an increase in intertextual heteroglossia. Across the continuum, though, it is possible to identify music that is very much *like* jungle, but basically so frantic and excessive that it is breakcore. A good example here would be FRX, a Japanese producer ostensibly working in the junglist idiom, but at such a pace that the music so produced can no longer tenably be characterised as jungle (one might say that it is breakcore, *as method*, restricted to the jungle sample base). In such cases, it is the amen which reveals the failure of the breakcore authenticity test:

> the ragga revival movement and breakcore are pretty much the same thing these days. Sunday nite in Osaka we hung out in Ove-Naxx's zero-profit anarchy pub DOxCORE, basically a T.A.Z. house party. The other DJs played *nonstop* amen driven ragga breakcore jungle. **So boring**, I hadn't heard that many amens in years, it's just the easiest laziest sample to use. I'm often bummed out by the fact that amen breaks and what Szl calls "decontextualized Jamaican soundclash shouting" and all the other cliches of ragga jungle / breakcore still hold such underground party-rocking validity in certain pockets of the world. Spice, sure. Main dish, no more.
>
> The post-jungle underground is almost as conservative as 'proper' d&b.

In this passage, DJ /rupture presents the conventional critique of the amen and its association with dancehall vocals: *boring* (2005b). A connective establishes the problematic link between ragga jungle and breakcore, the link to be severed if progress is to occur: "ragga jungle / breakcore". Of course, this position simply reproduces elitism of a different sort, in reference to different materials, a new authenticity is constructed around another literacy, sample base or mode of musical production: the amen is uncool, and therefore so are those who persist in considering it some sort of "underground party-rocking" cultural heritage. Implicit in the critique is the dialectical elaboration of a 'superior' position, achieved in part through referencing outside sources (as with Hakim

Bey's 'temporary autonomous zone'). /rupture also quotes the following passage from Sizzle, a telling evaluation of European breakcore, its relation to jungle, and the cultural appropriation model of sampling (2005):

> Settling back into the land of white people, bratwurst and robotic dancing. For whatever reason the disconnect coming from New York is much stronger this time, maybe because I know I'm here to stay for a while.
>
> On my first night I went to a basement party where my shortie Sheen was DJing. Breakcore, Gabber, Ragga Jungle and Distorted Dancehall in a dirty cellar. A good re-introduction to Europe and a reminder of the wierd heavy metalization of black dance music that goes on far from the ears of the people who started it. Young, germans doing incomprehensible dances to music described very aptly by M. Sayyid as 'Really fast.' For those completely unfamiliar, here is stereotypical breakcore recipe: take classic amen breakbeat from black american musicians of 1969, combine with stabs of decontextualized Jamaican soundclash shouting ie:''Stand up inna war!', distort, chop and speed up to heartattack speed, serve to blonde dreadlocked headbangers.
>
> What does it all mean? Is it A) imperialist co-optation? B) The turning of sample culture against it's creators? C) the punk rock of the cracked software generation? The parties have a very punk feeling and many of the people there even look the stereotypical punk rock part, which as an american lapsed junglist who always preferred a dirty basement jam to a smoothed edges one is more welcoming than most of what else goes on here in Deutschland (see above about robot dancing). Nonetheless the feeling of watching the long slow process that turned black rock and roll into nordic heavy metal is inescapable and a bit unpleasant. But for those who tasted that first crack rock of ragga junglist rhythmic insanity and never had enough (like wifey) it is clear that new drum and bass with it's motoric 2 step rhythm and tek house aspirations will never do, and the breakcore scene is basically the only area right now where people have agreed to further explore those ideas (speeded cut breaks, earth shaking bass) outside of the tedious (with few exceptions) ragga jungle revival movement.

Both of these passages (exemplifying the American perspective) describe the musical practice under consideration from 'outside' (or from an 'inside' excluding that practice), as being engaged in by largely undifferentiated 'others' (Japanese in the first case, German in the second). Although we are informed that the site described in the first passage is associated with Ove-Naxx (on whose label FRX is released, and whose own material has been released on DJ /rupture's label), the "other DJs" remain unnamed. Similarly in the second passage, the "blonde dreadlocked headbangers" are collectivised and unnamed. The music-drug analogy is telling (particularly the choice of crack cocaine, with its intense high and severe come-down): this is a description of the genre *imago*, the sought-after 'high' instantiated in sound and the memory of the first hearing, the memory

which drives further listening, investigation and genre development. There is also an element of hierarchical gendering at work in accounting for how one falls prey to this "scene": Sizzle's "shortie", his "wifey", "never had enough" of that "first crack rock of ragga junglist insanity", although Sizzle himself overcame this potent substance, becoming merely "an american lapsed junglist".[3]

The position from which these practices are described is established as culturally and politically literate (again the reference, in this case to the 'reasonableness' of hip-hop producer M. Sayyid, is instructive), and *appropriate* as a position from which to issue critique, where this appropriateness implies that the musical practices of the authors do not implicate them with the taint of cultural appropriation (though a claim to the contrary could be made, not least on the basis of their rather disdainful consumption of 'glocal' scenes). From such a position, however, the long-term continuity of practice and the *internal* glocal logic of authenticity, the cultural dynamics resulting in this "wierd heavy metalization", are obscured from view and rendered alien. As Huq indicates: "Rave's combination of both punk and hippie elements of sartorial and political style/philosophy to a soundtrack of repetitive beats shows that rave did not kill punk, which in turn did not kill hippie. Present-day youth cultures are cumulative rather than successive" (2002: 99). It is not that "nordic heavy metal" is inherently inauthentic whilst "black rock and roll" is not (though that may also be the case). Rather, the distance from the originating 'ears' is politicised as problematic, while the context of the process itself is depoliticised. The final paragraph of the passage (with its 'nonetheless ... but ...") is structured to suggest that, despite this unpleasantness, breakcore remains valuable for junglist 'crackheads' for reasons of *aesthetic development*: breakcore is "the only area" aside from the largely "tedious" junglist revival ('mainstream' drum and bass is summarily dismissed in both passages) where a particular type of virtuoso aesthetics is being explored. The issues raised by the intriguing options sketched at "A" to "C", alongside the issues around which breakcore itself is mobilised, are thereby sidestepped.

We can further situate this material by putting it into dialogue with a contrasting perspective, from Germany, more amenable to the jungle-derived 'clichés' of breakcore, and largely unconcerned about sampling as cultural appropriation. The following is extracted from an article by LFO Demon, which presents a more sympathetic discussion of the continuum of sound from jungle to breakcore, and a modest argument for another

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[3] The proprietary implication of '*my* shortie' is analogous to that exhibited by '*my* nigga' (as discussed in 5.1).

combinatory neologism with which to capture a point on the spectrum: raggacore (2004a).[4] The passage warrants extended quotation:

> **The evolution of hard Ragga-releated music**
>
> Is distorted Jungle with Raggasamples already Raggacore? For example D-Jungle like stuff on Riot Beats? Or Gabber with Ragga like WEDLOCK´s "Ganjaman" (Ruffneck Records) from 1994). Propably part of the origins but not an genre by its own- in fact these examples were Gabber or Jungle with Ragga but not something completely new yet.
>
> How did everything start? Hard to define it specifically but the first time Raggacore became well known was with VENETIAN SNARES – „snares man" 7" (History of the future) and KNIFEHANDCHOP – „bounty killer killer" 7" (irritant/dyhane) in 2001 and BLOODCLAAT GANGSTA YOUTH – "kill or be killed" 7" (full watts). This was the first when it wasn´t Ragga Jungle any more but a step beyond- Breakcore combined with Raggavocals.
>
> Since 2001 there are many records out combining Breakcore with Ragga. Like in Breakcore these records can´t be defined as one, specific style but as many ones. There is not one certain set of elements used to define a style but every artist inventing his or her individual style. So Raggacore is fusion or crossover of many styles getting combined in various ways. In many cases these are elements of Gabber, fast Amenbreakbeats, Ravesounds and Dancehallvocals or –elements.
>
> **Triangle of the sound: Dancehall, Ragga Jungle and Breakcore**
>
> So ***Reggae/ Ragga/ Dancehall*** is the common element sampled from. The reference to it is not clear at all: Most acts out of the Breakcore-scene didn´t have any relations to this scene. They simply sampled the music and didn´t care for the background of the music at all. So for them it didn´t matter first either sampling country&western, Heavy Metal or Dancehall- it was just a resource to get some musical material from.
>
> But in the meantime when more and more Ragga stuff was sampled there seemed to be also more discussion about Dancehall music. This was raised by the discussion about Dancehall and Homophobia.
>
> But people still see themselves as "Breakcore", many of them having roots in Punkrock. So the approach is not to make "Raggacore" or even "Breakcore" but to create an own, individual sound and not caring for some asthetic ideals of a scene.
> In contrast to this many people in ***Ragga Jungle*** refer to Dancehall and the scene and identified themselves with Dancehall music and the releated culture out of Jamaica. Ragga Jungle seems to be a scene quite similar and connected to Dancehall putting out mainly versions with amenbreaks of Dancehall tracks.
>
> Compared with Ragga Jungle Raggacore is harder and wilder. There are many more experimental elements in the music than just Ragga+Breakbeats. Also there is more

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[4] 'LFO' is an abbreviation of 'low frequency oscillation' – that is, bass. Even the persona of LFO Demon stands in contrast to the 'urban' heat of Sizzle and the postmodern literacy of DJ /rupture.

distortion in the music and it´s not based on the same breakbeat all the time. So for many Breakcore fans both Dancehall and Ragga Jungle seemed to be too monotonous and repeating all the time. This changed in the last time with the newschool Ragga Jungle which is quite big in North America. Acts like Twinhooker, Debaser, General Malice, DJ K, Soundmurderer do much harder music than the old Ragga Jungle from the UK in the mid-1990s.

But there are also some differences to ***Breakcore*** in most of the Raggacore records: the experimental approach is constricted in favour to dance compability. The impact of Industrial sounds and pure noise can be kicking and sexy, but it also can be extremly boring after listing to too many poorly produced records. Beat is still more danceable than noise, so in contrast to Breakcore the principles of dancefloor usually top the experimental approach often. So Raggacore seems to be more easily consumable to many people than "normal" breakcore.

It´s not definable where Raggacore starts or end. Boundaries are fluid. There are also similar combinations like Raggacore with music related to Dancehall- especially Dub but also Ska and Reggae. So "Noisedub" would be Tracks of DJ SCUD (Full Watts#3), some tracks of THE BUG or SAOULATERRE "We are da Rasta".

Raggacore-no scene?!

In fact there is no "Raggacore"-Scene. This has various reasons: At the one hand the output of releases is simply too small. At the other hand, most artists can´t be subsumed as "Raggacore" only. So many artists sample Raggarecords in some tracks, but in many other tracks not. Take VENETIAN SNARES for example. He started the hype with the "snares man" 7" but most of his tracks have nothing to do with "Raggacore". Even a artist like BONG RA put out a record with non-Ragga music ("Praying Mantis e.p."). Take all the other artists from DJ SCUD to ENDUSER- least of them fit to the term "Raggacore" only. Also if you would ask them "Are you Raggacore?" most of them would propably deny it. Most of the producers do what they want and not trying to produce Ragga based stuff only.

Same is valid for labels. Most of them also publish "normal" breakcore. Clash, Full Watts, Razor X and Shockout are the only ones specialized in Ragga-related releases only. All the others release different music, too.

Also there is no infrastructure for a scene: no networks, no fanzines for 'Raggacore only" yet. For most of the communication and networking the infrastructre of the Breakcore scene is used.

So it doesn´t make any sense to talk of Raggacore as a "scene" or even a specific "genre"- it's simply a collective term to describe hard, Ragga-related music.

So does it make sense to use the term "Raggacore" at all? I think: yes. Instead of describing it as "certain Breakcore records with Ragga-samples and/or Ragga-related sounds or rhythm structures" we simply call it Raggacore. Other people call it Speedhall, Yardcore or whatever...we call it Raggacore.

LFO Demon begins by delineating the isogloss with which 'raggacore' becomes differentiable, identifying relevant precursors and innovators (with Venetian Snares'

Snares Man singled out in particular, a release, incidentally, featured in DJ /rupture's acclaimed debut, *Gold Teeth Thief*).[5] Contrary to his apparent purpose, LFO Demon repeatedly emphasises individuality and stylistic proliferation, implying the ideological assertion that "do-it-yourself is the prime directive" (Duncombe 2005: 203). He further suggests that this individualism extends to the 'disorganisation' of the non-scene he is naming. The collective consequences of this individuality, however, are identifiable as the hybrid *raggacore*. In contrast with the previous two extracts, the identity politics of sampling are raised only insofar as the homophobia of the sampled material is considered problematic - there is no mention of "the people who started it". This is true both of the practice of cultural borrowing and the material so borrowed: the latter is "just a resource to get some musical material from".

Whilst breakcore *as method*, the edit-tightening, plunderphonic aesthetic, is increasingly extended to other sample bases, this argument for sample base 'indifference' or 'neutrality' does not explain why dancehall has such appeal; why the piece, and the website on which it appeared, is about *raggacore* and not "country&westerncore" or some other '–core'. This elision is compounded by LFO Demon's distancing of breakcore from jungle; describing the "symbolic alliance" junglists profess for Jamaican culture (Bennett 1999: 12). Raggacore is strategically distanced from jungle (raggacore artists evidently feel no such affinity for Jamaica) but also from breakcore. The latter distancing is achieved through the contrast between "experimental", "Industrial sounds and pure noise" (associated with "normal" breakcore), and "dance compatibility" (possessed by jungle and raggacore). As DJ /rupture also argues, this hybrid form remains more accessible than 'experimental' breakcore *without* dancehall elements: it has more *mass appeal*; it is precisely this appeal which renders it at risk of uncoolness – it is, one might say, insufficiently *1337*. The amen approaches terminal uncoolness through its repetition and its longstanding association with dancehall, where these features render it amenable to popular acceptance. The 'underground' must be maintained *as* underground; too unpalatable or 'difficult' for the 'mainstream'. In this instance, dancefloor compatibility stands for co-optation and 'sell-out'. Particularly notable here is not just the construction of the 'underground' in opposition to a hegemonic 'mainstream', but the antecedent discursive construction of the 'mainstream' itself. For, as Gilbert and Pearson point out: there is "no single, overarching dominant discursive formation to which cultural forms can

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[5] Note that this exhaustive interest in origins, delineations, definitions and distinctions, evident also in BC room 9/01/04: 2 (9.3) and elsewhere, has striking parallels with the academic practices of describing and contrasting disciplinary 'camps' and allegiances.

be considered 'oppositional' or not" (1999: 160). What LFO Demon calls raggacore negotiates a difficult trajectory between maintaining 'underground', subcultural authenticity, and 'selling out' (Thornton 1995: 176). Thus LFO Demon goes on (2004b):

> Therein lies the danger: cutting back the experimental elements of Breakcore to make cheesy and totally boring music for the masses just because it works on the dancefloor. This is what nobody wants.
> The tension between dancefloor-compability and experimental music is the interesting thing about breakcore and NOT to make some monotonous loops but sometimes unpredictable changes and swifts in the music. The aesthetics of errors, noises and distortion is still much more attractive than the one based on clean, over-produced sound.
> Also possible that 3 years later everthing won't seem so fresh any more but only like a antique style some nerds did. Time will tell. At the moment it doesn't look like that. The whole thing is growing and there are more and more records coming out. Also the sound is still quite unique: all producers/ DJ's do the sound they believe in and not copying each other. So the huge rush with boring records containg Ragga samples didn't happen yet, luckily. Let's hope it will never occur.

The 'tension' here described, the trajectory of certain sounds through moments of authenticity and illegitimacy, provides an excellent demonstration of the extent to which a particular social group – in this case, that made up of those advocating and contesting a particular musical style, "has competing interests in the production and consumption of culture and in its legitimisation. They are torn between winning a market for cultural goods, which entails popularisation, and preserving the rarity and difference that is the essence of their social position and power" (Wright 2005: 111). Crucially, these competing interests are articulated around the orientation to certain *sounds*. As Bong-Ra puts it: "Cheesy sounds are cool, and great sounds become cheesy" (via email, February 18, 2003). Samples are "multiaccentual", and as such constitute a site of social struggle (Vološinov 1973: 23). The "danger" LFO Demon delineates is that of co-optation: "cheesy and totally boring music for the masses".

The danger is that the 'breakcore aesthetic', described as partly exploration around a set of shared of shared sonic and cultural priorities, and partly self-expression, will be *commercialised* and thereby depreciate in subcultural status, that breakcore or raggacore will become *another* boring ragga jungle. The strategy for maintaining 'underground' status involves alienating the inexperienced, 'newbie' consumer, as evinced by the distinction between "some monotonous loops" and "sometimes unpredictable changes and swifts": the former are easier to *dance to*, but for exactly this reason are to be avoided.

Local authenticity is manifest in the experimental "aesthetics of errors, noises and distortion". In the sound of its own striving for uncompromising radicalism, breakcore reproduces an avant-garde ideal of 'authenticity'.

9.2 "its no proper edicate to use amens in breakcore."

These issues come into sharp focus in the Breakcore room. The following extract demonstrates the relational nature of genre, whilst furnishing a further insight into how breakcore practitioners self-situate. At line 1, /dev/null initiates a new topic with a comment about how "IDM people" receive ragga jungle: IDM, in this instance, is where breakcore goes to 'sell out'. The perennial topic is that of what, exactly, breakcore is, thus both d34df411 and minion offer definitions (2 and 3). DeathBreathing's complaint (4) is about both the Breakcore room and how terms are being 'fixed', from some pernicious, 'mainstreaming' *above*: Venetian Snares is becoming synonymous with breakcore such that alternative styles are being sidelined. This "anxiety about the scene being steered by other actors" (Toynbee 2000: 157), and /dev/null's mocking, heteroglossic turn (6), is what leads 'maladroit' to characterise the IDM 'mainstream' as he does (9). Amen Andrews is a pseudonym of popular IDM artist Luke Vibert; a pseudonym given over to 'amen-driven' output. d34df411 expresses his dismay that Amen Andrews is being placed in the dismissed category of IDM (11), and /dev/null's following turn (12) indicates that, from dev/null's perspective, breakcore production is unfortunately a good deal more intensive than merely sequencing "distorted 4/4 909 beats with a looped funkydrummer over em" – where James Brown's "Funky Drummer" is another legendary breakbeat (played by Clyde Stubblefield). At lines 14 and 16, k5k reformulates his previous turn so as to render d34df411's dismay misplaced (the omitted lines concern two parallel discussions, about geographical location, and about an upcoming release involving the participants):

BC room 11/09/03

1. [/dev/null] it's funny seeing IDM people freak out over ragga jungle now
2. [d34df411] when i think of breakcore i think of like scud
3. [minion] breakcore is like distorted 4/4 909 beats with a looped funkydrummer over em.
4. [DeathBreathing] all i ever hear in here is "snares fuckin rocks" "who got the new snares"
5. [gorhgorh] breakcore is wth we make from it anyway
6. [/dev/null] "Wow!!! this 'ragga braindance' sure is innovative!!"

7. [d34df411] ragga braindance
8. [d34df411] hahahaha
9. [maladroit] IDM fukheds
10. [k5k] amen andrews
11. [d34df411] i like amen andrews :(
12. [/dev/null] minion - I wish
13. [UndaCova] amen is so dead
14. [k5k] me too
15. [d34df411] OH
16. [k5k] but just cuz its got amens

...

17. [dev/null] hehe no comment re: amens
18. [/dev/null] yeah
19. [k5k] never
20. [minion] cool

...

21. [maladroit] amens are good

...

22. [maladroit] fuk you
23. [/dev/null] hahaha
24. [/dev/null] you would say that maladroit : P

...

25. [k5k] I agree wit maladroit
26. [UndaCova] amen was cool in 1993

...

27. [minion] heh

...

28. [maladroit] grrrr
29. [d34df411] undacova quit being a scene fag

...

30. [UndaCova] haha
31. [UndaCova] i'm not

...

32. [maladroit] hah foolio it was cool in amen brother by the winstons its timeless
33. [/dev/null] maladroit - no offense though, I dig yr amen tracks a lot, it's just amens are such a default uncreative excuse these days for producers
34. [/dev/null] ah yeah
35. [/dev/null] I guess it's ok
36. [maladroit] but i REALLY like minimal 2 step

From line 13 the amen is foregrounded. The positions (and indeed the musical output) of the respective participants indicate competing definitions of breakcore

'progress'. As the style develops certain approaches become successful – or not: thus there is a conflict between meticulous sequencing of individual drum samples (/dev/null), the use of distortion, noise and *slowed-down* breaks (DeathBreathing, k5k), and a parodic, accelerated post-jungle (maladroit). Notably, at line 29, d34df411 jokingly admonishes UndaCova for his previous turn dating amen coolness at 1993 (26); being a "scene fag" implies nerdishness of a sort we have become familiar with. Yet at line 32, maladroit asserts that the amen was cool in its 'ur-text' and is, moreover, *timeless* (this may be fruitfully compared with the positions elaborated in the ragga jungle room in chapter 8). The contrasting position laid out by /dev/null is that use of the amen is a "default uncreative excuse" (33). In the following lines /dev/null 'tones down' this criticism (34-35), but maladroit is nonetheless moved to produce a sarcastic turn offering *another* juxtaposition (36).[6] The inference is, maladroit's "amen tracks" *may* be "uncreative" (which is to say, the amen still *works*), but they are still not as uncreative (not as 'mainstream') as "minimal 2 step".

In the extract below, again the relational form of breakcore is elaborated with reference to amens, and again there is a parodic proliferation of genre names:

BC room 08/10/03

37. [maelstrom] does breakcore have amens?:0
38. [Fboy] its funky techstep
39. [Wheelsfalloff] oh dear
40. [blaerg] hehahhehhahaa ' does breakcore have amens '
41. [Fboy] never
42. [Wheelsfalloff] DC Talk do
43. [maelstrom] funky techstep ?
44. [Wheelsfalloff] ARRRRGGH
45. [maelstrom] ewww
46. [blaerg] its not funky dude
47. [echodolo] its no proper edicate to use amens in breakcore.
48. [maelstrom] intelligent techstep ?
49. [Wheelsfalloff] ill fitting genre core
50. [echodolo] bad manners
51. [maelstrom] or pissed off techstep
52. [Wheelsfalloff] It doesnt matter

---

[6] The reading of line 36 as sarcastic or ironic is suggested by the fact that '2 step' is treated with disdain elsewhere in the transcripts. Familiarity with maladroit's musical output corroborates this interpretation.

53. [DeathBreathing] why do people ask so fuckin much?!
54. [maelstrom] hmm
55. [DeathBreathing] it hasta be a joke
56. [Fboy] I was referring to neurofunk not breakcore
57. [echodolo] cause they are curious
58. [echodolo] thats all
59. [Fboy] they are all ignorant fools
60. [Wheelsfalloff] give up....we dont even know
61. [blaerg] just get some /dev/null and you will know what it is
62. [echodolo] haha

Ostensibly, from the perspective of those who engage with the question (39-41), 'maelstrom' has revealed his lack of local subcultural capital with the query issued at line 37.[7] However (and as evinced by the title of the Breakcore room's compilation), the question has *ritual* aspects: it allows participants to reiterate their specialised knowledge (including their knowledge of the interactional routine around the question itself). As such, the interaction is a success as a 'power ritual', achieving an intersubjective focus and facilitating the enactment of solidarity around the local symbols of the amen itself, and the ongoing definition of breakcore (Collins 2004: 49; 348).[8] The essentially dynamic instability of genre is a resource, enabling the proliferation of 'techsteps' (38, 48 and 51), analogous to the practice of generating '-cores' (such as that offered by 'Wheelsfalloff' at line 49). The frustration expressed by DeathBreathing (53 and 55) concerns the continually issued query as to what breakcore is. The exchange indicates the 'common-sense' idea that music cannot be defined, that taste is wholly subjective, that 'pigeonholing' music is a waste of time. However, it also illustrates the critical-analytical difficulty in definition, the almost *constant* multiplication of descriptors in the room demonstrates that "as the number of required traits increases so the number of texts which conform to the resulting composite of genre attributes will decline" (Toynbee 2000: 105).

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[7] maelstrom's question is thus (from the perspective of room regulars) 'naïve' (as implied by the responses the turn yields); however, this interpretation relies on antecedent ethnographic knowledge (this is maelstrom's only appearance in the transcripts). The account of the exchange presented here draws therefore on contextual experience of the local and ongoing tradition of responding to such questions from outsiders in ways which consolidate in-group specialised knowledge, status and membership.

[8] Interactions initiated with the question 'what the fuck is breakcore?' were so commonplace as to lead to fieldnote use of the contraction *wtfibc* - recall the parody of this routine in BC room 22/11/03 (6.2). A number of these routines are discussed in Whelan (2006: 64-65); their significance is also discussed in chapter 10 below.

The reader's attention is also drawn to the ambiguous spelling of line 47, where 'echodolo' suggests that "its no proper edicate to use amens in breakcore". Whether "edicate" here intends 'etiquette' or 'educate' (or both) is unclear, but the turn presents a further take on the amen: echodolo's line suggests that, whether one likes the amen or not, there is a sort of *normative* 'consensus' that one *ought not to*; that it is in poor taste, déclassé, that continuing to use the amen is an inadvertent admission of stylistic illiteracy or ignorance. This indicates the cultural dynamic around the amen, the sonic artefact is imbued with remarkable *social* 'meaning'; again, 'culture classifies'.

One practical implication of taking on board the possibility that it may be poor 'edicate' to use the amen is an investigation on the part of practitioners into what happens when breakbeats are deconstituted into their individual hits and recombined, with the ensuing possibility of a dissolution of musical structure where producers sequence not bar-by-bar within the parameters set by a given loop, but moment to moment, without any adherence to an overarching pattern such as that the amen or some other 'divisive' structure would provide:

BC room 15/09/03

63. [ANTIDOTE->>] Tirriddiliu] " [ANTIDOTE->>] but by his argument anything created by a human with feeling cannot by its nature be random- id disagree with that " yo! i meant that if somebody 'compose' a track, second by second, it might look 'random' but it's 'structured' anyway, and that excludes 'randomness'.
64. [blaerg] still going on with this ?
65. [ANTIDOTE->>] see what your saying but your talking about 'structureness' in the loosest terms possible. You shouldnt have to struggle to mind structure within a tune
66. [ANTIDOTE->>] imo
67. [ANTIDOTE->>] *find
68. [someone stole my user name] hahah
69. [someone stole my user name] thats intense
70. [someone stole my user name] i tried to say that to someone once (in my own words) and they loooked at me like i had just said the sentence "bcxxXCVJD fhfdsoifdsio

Although such issues, according to Shepherd and Wicke (1997: 146-147), tend to 'fall out of the picture', it is evident that they are not beyond the grasp of 'local' practitioners, and are regularly articulated. In this extract, 'ANTIDOTE->>' presents a complex turn at line 63, which quotes a quotation *of him* by 'Tirriddiliu'. This can be disambiguated into the presumable original sequence as follows:

> [ANTIDOTE->>] but by his argument anything created by a human with feeling cannot by its nature be random-
> [Tirriddiliu] id disagree with that
> [ANTIDOTE->>] yo! i meant that if somebody 'compose' a track, second by second, it might look 'random' but it's 'structured' anyway, and that excludes 'randomness'.

ANTIDOTE->> can be read as asserting that, even in the absence of conventional musical structure, the mere fact of human involvement implies that the music so made is not 'random'. ANTIDOTE->>'s turn at line 65 (along with the following two clarificatory turns, where "imo" at line 66 is an abbreviation for "in my opinion") indicates an acknowledgement of Tirriddiliu's argument, alongside an expanded definition of structure. At stake in such discussions is not simply whether or not 'proper edicate' permits the use of the amen, but the definition of musical structure itself: how structure is distinguished from randomness, music from *noise*, 'meaning' from 'meaninglessness'. It is these implications which blaerg responds to by merely gesturing to the longevity of the topic (64).

At the end of BC room 08/10/03, above, blaerg suggested that maelstrom "get some /dev/null". As it happens, /dev/null can stand for a certain *strain* of breakcore, the variant eschewing breakbeat 'mashing' in favour of intensive sequencing at high bpm. This exhaustive musical 'work ethic' results in another variant of what Zappa called "musically uncompromising boy-is-this-hard-to-play" music – where the 'address' is to the competent listener, who can hear how difficult and time-intensive the production was (cited in Gracyk 2001: 220). The following is a Boomkat Records review of /dev/null's debut release, *E Boyz Revenge: 230 BPM Eternal* (2004):

> Having lurked in the break-core maximum-f*ckedbeat underground for years, Boston's dev/null finally releases a debut 12-inch. Extreme rave noise is the rule here, where bits and pieces of classic rave hardcore and old-school jungle (including human resource, the prodigy, joey beltram, sub base records, and 2 bad mice) are yanked from their surroundings and forced to share the frequency spectrum with ultra-jarring, obsessive-compulsive blastbreaks. The result is a noise/beats extravaganza on par with Venetian Snares. This isn't nostalgia or nudge-nudge-wink-wink irony bullsh*t. unlikely as it may seem, this is onehundred- percent dance music. Ace.

It's safe to assume that the online manifestation of the "break-core maximum-f*ckedbeat underground" is, of course, the Breakcore room. The reviewer is at pains to

indicate that the plunderphonic resurrection so achieved is non-ironic, and that the ensuing "extravaganza" is equivalent to the output of Venetian Snares (the evident standard). This compositional mode relies, of course, on percussion samples, including the 'classic' breakbeats, but 'tight' edits are rigorously maintained. The effect is a constant percussive cascade: beats "come so quickly that we hear them as striated belts of sound, rolling across the surface of the music" (Toynbee 2000: 141). This may *sound* 'random' (in its distance from the conventional drum *loop*), but is a consequence of meticulous, diligent – "obsessive-compulsive" – 'structuring' on the part of the producer, a structuring deploying LFO Demon's "unpredictable changes and swifts".

9.3 "the low fidelity question and all that"

In the extract below, vek interjects two 'lead-ins' to questions (at lines 78 and 92). Though d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r eventually acknowledges that vek is 'in line' (98), vek does not issue his question until line 115. The previous turns (here omitted) involved a discussion of collaboration and what factors render it successful (where the 'collaboration' so defined is distinguished from remixing the same samples, or building a collective piece sequentially such as those produced in the Soulseek Artists room).

The current focus, however, is the interaction between 'd_sc_mb_b_l_t_r', /dev/null (referencing, in line 74, the record described in the Boomkat review above), 'GabbaNoize Terrorist', UndaCova and 'sheen', who are discussing the aesthetics and pragmatics of sampling:

BC room 16/12/03: 1

71. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] what styles do you work in dev?
72. [/dev/null] mainly just fast crazy breaks
73. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] ;)
74. [/dev/null] tho the record I just finished is fast crazy breaks with lots of 90's hardcore samples (ukhardcore not bam bam hardcore) mixed in
75. [/dev/null] err early 90's
76. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] but well, it's difficult or unlikely to mix some styles
77. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] but in electronic music i think almost all is possible
78. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] i would like to ask please
79. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] do any of you use breaks from mp3s of the old soul/funk classics

80. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] i always give the example of hardcore, it has been mixed with all kind of styles
81. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] or do you source from cds/sites etc?
82. [/dev/null] I try to use from records as much as possible
83. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] i don't like to sample nothing
84. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] just do it all myself
85. [/dev/null] but, if trapped, WILL resort to an mp3 ripped sample : (
86. [UndaCova] the better you know how to make your own samples, the better your compositions will be... sample sites are a bad habit except maybe if you're looking for a specific recognisable sample
87. [/dev/null] always nice to at least grab breaks from the original context of the tune though, gives you a real different feeling when dl'ing the beats isolated en-masse from phatdrumloops or something
88. [UndaCova] plus if you make your own samples your breaks won't sound the same like all the other cliché breakcore
89. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] i've used mp3 breaks (from the old funk / soul tunes) in the past - i'm not sure on the quality (even high rate VBR ect) i seem to lose 'punchiness'
90. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] yes, i agree with undacova
91. [sheen] yeah, or you can use your editing / modifying capabilites to give it edge
92. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] i have a question .. . .
93. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] all these differing methods!
94. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] own samples = own breaks = original
95. [sheen] i mean the soundmurderer stuff isnt all new but it's still pretty graeat
96. [UndaCova] voila
97. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] it's great!
98. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] vek...
99. [sheen] or old breaks + crazy editing = still madness

In the preceding discussion, one of the issues identified was the contrasting styles of individual producers; with the suggestion mooted that collaboration might be unproductive where the styles of the respective producers are incompatible. In this instance, 'style' is legible as the *sample base* with/in which the individual works. This is what GabbaNoize Terrorist is referring to (76, 77 and 80): the perspective (shared by LFO Demon) that *any* genre can serve as 'raw material'. From here the discussion (following the questions put by d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r at lines 79 and 81) turns to sourcing samples and the varying approaches to their use. GabbaNoize Terrorist and UndaCova (83-84, 86 and 88) present an argument *against* sampling: not using the famous breaks is a means of ensuring that one's "breaks won't sound the same like all the other cliché breakcore" (88). The only situation in which 'unoriginal' sampling is permissible is that in which the intention is to

quote a "specific recognisable sample". This position is summed up by GabbaNoize Terrorist at line 94.

The alternative position is elaborated by /dev/null and sheen. The breaks so sampled can, sheen suggests, be improved by 'editing' or 'modification' (91). sheen summarises the contrasting aesthetic in similar terms to those utilised by GabbaNoize Terrorist, though the formula is not one of transitive equivalence but of addition (99). The exchange continues:

BC room 16/12/03: 2

100. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] yes true too
101. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] for anyone .. .. since some people in here were talking about sending 12" vinyls and the sort. . and performing in shows in europe . ..
102. [/dev/null] undacova - honestly I think it's all about what sounds good
103. [sheen] what i like about samples is you can be funny with them
104. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] but i always prefer doin my own breaks even if it gets a little more work or it's not as good
105. [sheen] it's different with synthetics
106. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] i think eventually i will get more experience
107. [/dev/null] like, some people get really anti-sample, but then make the same lame fm sounds that have been used 100x before
108. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] i heard some things like that mentioned a few times as i was in here in past days....
109. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] im not 100% against samplin, in fact i was demanding samples a few minutes ago!
110. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] is the influence of 8bit/16bit computer/console sounds prevalent in breakcore?
111. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] what i don't like is sampling fully breaks
112. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] not "single" sounds like drums, sanres and all that
113. [UndaCova] it is about what sounds good, but i'm against the overusing of breaks that made older tunes famous
114. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] yes d_sc
115. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] but anyways. .. so collabs are / would be difficult ... ?
116. [/dev/null] hmmm - I don't know how prevalent it is.. there's definitely some tight as hell video gamey breakcore tunes
117. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] SID chip (c64), PAULA (amiga), nes, snes, atari VCS etc
118. [/dev/null] like track 1 on addict 5
119. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] over the ent, IMO I think collabd would eb fdifficult
120. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] yes d_Sc
121. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] it's important

122. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] that's what i guessed from some of laurent ho's stuff
123. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] and a lot of producers are sdistionguished because they use one machines or others
124. [/dev/null] I don't know though... I view video gamey sounds the same as amens and the like
125. [GabbaNoize Terrorist] then is the low fidelity question and all that
126. [[{-_-}]vek[{-_-}]] hmm ...
127. [d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r] I know you can get SID vst instruments
128. [/dev/null] not that it's bad to use them... but they have this kind of "instant gratification" which helps make tracks sound immediately good, but also kind of lowers creative effort sometimes because it takes less to make satisfying results w/ them
129. [sheen] not nessessarily
130. [UndaCova] exactly and i highly worship creative efforts in music
131. [UndaCova] so it may be a personal thing
132. [k5k] still better than using other ppls reaktor mods

A vital point is raised at line 103, the possibility of generating humour through incongruous sample juxtaposition, something which usually depends on the sample being known. As sheen goes on to point out, "it's different with synthetics": with wholly synthesised, non-sampled music (105), there is no possibility of what Lacasse calls "autosonic quotation" (2000: 38-39). The 'autosonic' refers to 'concrete' sounds (identifiable samples from previous pieces), whilst the 'allosonic' refers to 'abstract' musicological features (such as melody or lyrics; a cover version is allosonic). Restrictions inherent in the compositional mode GabbaNoize Terrorist advocates are elaborated by /dev/null in a countercritique (107), pointing out that the other position is equally liable to the charge of homogeneity: 'anti-sample people' may produce "the same lame fm sounds" ("fm" is 'frequency modulation'). GabbaNoize Terrorist goes on to produce a position advocating the sort of ('tight-edited') sequencing /dev/null practices, saying that he doesn't like the use of entire loops (111), but that individual hits extracted from such loops are acceptable: 'drums, snares and all that' (112).

Another question is raised by d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r immediately prior to this at line 110, referring to 'drillbit' or 'chip tune' – in /dev/null's phrase, "video gamey breakcore tunes" (116). The technical terminology here can be clarified: "reactor mods" (132) and "vst instruments" (127) are 'plug-ins' or 'patches' for use with synthesizing software, enabling the production of certain sorts of sound ('VST' is an abbreviation of 'Virtual Studio Technology'). "SID vst instruments" are 'emulators' replicating the sound of the Commodore 64. At line 117, d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r produces a list of 'vintage' game platforms; GabbaNoize Terrorist responds specifically to d_sc_mb_b_l_t_r's question (120),

suggesting a remarkable degree of aural 'literacy': producers may be 'distinguished' by their adherence to the sound of a specific console (123). Noteworthy in relation to this topic is /dev/null's impression that 'chip' sounds are, *like the amen*, clichéd (124, 128).

The overarching position emphasises creativity and the satisfaction derived from self-expression (a sort of 'artisanal' approach): GabbaNoize Terrorist always prefers constructing his own breaks, *even if it doesn't sound as good*, and even though it takes more *work* (104). Wholesale reproduction of identifiable sounds is therefore too 'easy' ('cheating' the producer of pride in his own labour); what 'satisfaction' there is, for the producer, is diminished by using classic breaks (113). There is a continuum of creativity and the acknowledgement thereof; some efforts are more 'creative' than others. This continuum, and the implicit debate about whether musical efforts 'should' be evaluated as *auteur* self-expressions or engagements in cultural dialogue, is also evident in the turns taken by sheen (129) and k5k (132), which indicate, but do not elaborate, alternative perspectives. k5k's interjection contrasts the 'technical' evaluation of the producer with the 'cultural' one of the listener: the 'instant gratification' provided by certain samples is "still better than using other ppls reaktor mods". In other words, plunderphonic sampling (as 'collective authorship') remains acceptable provided it is *technically* accomplished.

In BC room 16/12/03: 1 and 2, composition is framed in terms of originality, creativity and the pragmatics of sourcing (or synthesizing) material. In one exchange, virtually *all* of the preoccupations of production are touched on: music as individual creativity (technical mastery addressed to other *producers*) versus music as intertextual intervention (musical/cultural literacy addressed to other *listeners*); the subsidiary debate about looping and sequencing (with the underlying issue of musical structure); the problematics of the sample base ('originality' in plunderphonic *method* versus cultural continuity in the genre's sound); and the relationship between electronic music ('cool') and the history of computer culture ('nerd'), as instantiated in chip tune and drillbit. Another fundamental issue, identified but not pursued, is raised by GabbaNoize Terrorist (125): "the low fidelity question and all that" – the aesthetics and politics of noise and distortion, which, like the 'tightness of edits', illuminates orientations towards musical structure and the nature of music itself.

Musical structure and the form and 'quality' of sound are (as suggested by LFO Demon) intimately related to the status of breakcore as 'mainstream' or 'underground'. This is evident in the datum below, the final extract to be considered in this chapter, which approaches these issues around bedroom production directly in terms of the market and cultural economy. The topic of discussion is the relation between creative

innovation/expression and commercial viability, some turns previous, the coinage "*mediocore*" has been introduced. The extract begins with a disavowal of the *possibility* of originality, affirmed by k5k and 777?: the collective nature of musical production is acknowledged, and 'iamveryhappy' suggests that originality is irrelevant provided an affective response is generated (138).

BC room 9/01/04: 1

133. [MonkSinSpace] if any of u ever had to hope to be innovative or original, drop the idea, ur a few hundred or thousands year too late heheh
134. [MonkSinSpace] all the rhythms and melodiecombos have been done
135. [k5k] I'm so over being original.
136. [777?] yeah its all so incestuos ,,,im off to do a missy elliot remix
137. [k5k] yay!
138. [iamveryhappy] no matter whether its original if it makes me sick/dance/happy it's ok
139. [k5k] I'm workin on Lena Nystrom remixes, thats as close to original as I'll ever get now[9]
140. [skeeter] monk. you have to admit there is a element of business in the scene. this is not some musical utopia.
141. [k5k] oath, otherwise how would we even know to be here...
142. [MonkSinSpace] skeeter ye i know but for me it is :)
143. [777?] and that element seems to be growing rapidly
144. [MonkSinSpace] im in my utopia still
145. [k5k] til you sign on the dotted line
146. [MonkSinSpace] and if a lable doesnt want my tunes like they are i rather never release anything
147. [777?] which i think is both a good and bad thing for various reasons
148. [777?] thats the spirit
149. [k5k] more attention fr the 'genre' but a faster trip to becoming mainstream
150. [k5k] if yr musical style progresses, it really doesnt matter.

At line 140 'skeeter' (who, it will be recalled, produced "Clichéd Breakcore with Ninja Turtle Samples") contrasts a sort of *realpolitik* concerning the market to MonkSinSpace's anti-'sell-out' idealism. Here the status of breakcore – and Soulseek – as 'proto-markets' is evident: "The imperative in such a field is for the artists and audiences to distinguish themselves from the values associated with the mass market"; where, in addition "the repudiation of success constitutes an insurance policy, a sober recognition of

[9] Lene Nystrøm was the female vocalist in Aqua, who achieved international success with "Barbie Girl" in 1997.

the likelihood of failure" (Toynbee 2000: 27). MonkSinSpace maintains his 'utopian' position (142, 144, and 146), whilst 777? and k5k produce turns concerning the perceived commercial incorporation of the 'scene' (143, 145, 147 and 149).

As the discussion continues, 'cutups' raises the breakcore 'mainstream', "the ragga-gabba--breaks crossover shit" (151 and 156). This is LFO Demon's 'raggacore', Sizzle's 'heavy metalized' "stereotypical breakcore" and DJ /rupture's "amen driven ragga breakcore jungle" all over again. At lines 162-167, there is a brief diversion into historical minutia, similar to LFO Demon's search for origins. The jungle sample base, cutups suggests, is *accessible* (165); a means by which the 'disinterested listener' can 'find a way in' (Gracyk 2001: 219), where, again, this is what renders the genre vulnerable to 'mainstreaming':

BC room 9/01/04: 2

151. [cutups] i think its interesting that at one of the parties in europe that xanopticon played on his last tour, he mentioned that there was a "mainstream breakcore" area...
152. [MonkSinSpace] lol
153. [k5k] weird, who was in it?
154. [777?] i feel like once a genre gets popular it rapidly starts repeating itself
155. [MonkSinSpace] well everything gets commercialised these days
156. [cutups] i think alot of the ragga-gabba--breaks crossover shit sort of fills that nich,
157. [k5k] damn straight
158. [cutups] not sure. i think bongra and some of his boys[10]
159. [k5k] hmmm, not even breakcore then I guess.. just jungle
160. [skeeter] ragga seems like the big thing these days. but calling it the mainstream of breakcore is silly.
161. [MonkSinSpace] ye rubbish
162. [MonkSinSpace] even catani did it on dhr even before breakcore existed
163. [k5k] ragga? when
164. [MonkSinSpace] i got a vinyl from him , an orange one, with a ragga jungle breakcore track on it
165. [cutups] i think it sort of is the more accessable hook by which people might like music labeled as breakcore
166. [MonkSinSpace] was one of my tracks back then from the vinyl
167. [k5k] DHR ltd 12"... hmm... cant remember ragga on it....
168. [MonkSinSpace] ye everything with vocals somehow is more accessible

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[10] cutups means the producers released on Bong-Ra's Clash records, one of the labels mentioned by LFO Demon.

169. [k5k] or sirens!
170. [k5k] hah bumbug.
171. [skeeter] vocals and melodies
172. [cutups] i think though its really the "noisy" aspect that turns people off the most, people who can't deal with it.
173. [k5k] so we gotta keep it noisey to preserve the underground?
174. [MonkSinSpace] personally i mostly think real vocals are disturbing, lot of times they take the mind away too much from the music itself
175. [MonkSinSpace] ye sad but true
176. [k5k] real noise is still underground, it'll never go mainstream...
177. [cutups] depends on how its done. i'd like to see somebody do it well.
178. [777?] personally the stuff i have done with vocals is the stuff pople wanna hear,,,,but i feeled doomed to repeat somthing i did over a year ago for the rest of my life
179. [skeeter] i like how i have to consciously listen to the vocals or the beats in hip hop.
180. [MonkSinSpace] slepcy does it well :)
181. [cutups] hard to say never...but it doesn't seem like we're close to it yet.
182. [MonkSinSpace] slepcy never would be mainstream
183. [k5k] phew
184. [k5k] he could be if you cut a 30 second sample and put it in a car advert
185. [k5k] but still not popular, just known
186. [k5k] I talk poo anyway, ciao!

The relations involved here, between the aesthetic and the political, the 'underground' and the 'mainstream', the agent (producer) and the structure (genre), culture and economy, and the politics of, as Baudrillard would have it, the relation between *symbolic* exchange and the exchange value of the *commodity* (2001: 60), are rendered most manifest in lines 172-185. It is *noise* (the non-musical sound, and the genre, where the ostensible *what* of 'specific senselessness' is belied by the political imperatives of the confrontational *how*) "that turns people off the most" (172), and this gives rise to k5k's question (173): "so we gotta keep it noisey to preserve the underground?" Ensuring the survival of an 'incorruptible' underground entails an inflationary deployment of abrasive sound, always privileging, in LFO Demon's terms, the "experimental approach" over "dance compatibility". Such are the stylistic politics of the subterranean sonic: "sad but true" (175). For 'keeping it noisey' is not immune from critique as an oppositional strategy: "the deliberate self-marginalization of those who aspire to 'underground' status is at once élitist and politically defeatist. The only reason for staying underground is that in relation to dominant structures of power, you are weak" (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 161).

Guaranteeing an exclusive and oppositional (symbolic) *inside*, incapable of (economic) 'rehabilitation' from *outside*, implies transvaluing the 'unlistenable-to', where

sound is appreciably 'underground' to the extent that it transgresses conventional expectations of what music 'is' and 'does': noise-as-genre is, as indicated in 8.1, to some extent dependent on these expectations.[11] This is analogous to what Duncombe calls "the paradox of negative identity: who you are is contingent upon who you are rebelling against" (2002: 245). The suggestion k5k makes (176) – that one may distinguish *real* noise, and that said noise will *never* "go mainstream" – works both ways: people "can't deal with" actual *noise*, the latter remains underground because it is predicated on the rejection of conventional signification. The explanation for the inflationary nature of 'noisiness' (parallel to the ever-increasing tightening of edits) is partly indicated by cutups (181): 'noise' must continually get 'noisier' to evade the risk of commodification (just as the 'undergroundedness' of breakcore is signalled by 'edit-tightening'; a sort of acceleration of 'nowness'). The transvaluation of noise (and the 'training' required to appreciate it) is signalled by k5k's further distinguishing between "popular" and "known" (185), as a means of elaborating a subtle aspect of the process of 'mainstreaming': were a 'noisy' track to feature in a car advert (the ultimate co-optation), it would have been *economically* incorporated but would remain *symbolically* 'outside'. It is not that Slepcy could never 'sell out'; it is that an incorporated Slepcy, could only be *known*, not (as cutups indicates in line 181, *yet*) *popular*.

These sonic constituents – noise and the breakbeat – have a long association: the latter increasingly impacts upon or influences the former, and is recognised as doing so. Thus, in a review of a Whitehouse album (Dean 2006):

> Though they introduced the first hints of rhythm some time ago—all obtuse, upended aggro-industrial splatter—the role of the "beat" seems to play an increasingly large role in Whitehouse's output, figuring in four of the seven tracks here. Taking their cue, perhaps, from the fractured, sadistic beat constructions of the Digital Hardcore acts or newer artists such as Autechre and Venetian Snares, artists who in many ways have redefined an industrial

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[11] *Some* noise reproduces 'conventional' musicological techniques for the generation of affect, although through an unconventional sound palette: feedback, static, distortion and so on, Whitehouse frequently produce a recognisably 'musical' noise (the 'golden rule' of temporal proportionality, for example, is sometimes adhered to). However, there are many noisicians (for instance, Macronympha, Noise/Girl or Japanese Torture Comedy Hour) for whom this is not the case. Even with the latter, though, the paradox of 'structure' remains: "in the last analysis it is still the *composer* who *decided* what he wishes to retain in his work" (Nattiez 1990: 52). The disavowal of conventional musical signification remains an explicable signifying manoeuvre. The choices made by the 'composer' remain motivated and constrained. Toynbee makes a similar argument about free improvisation (2000: 108-110).

noise aesthetic that no longer has to be rooted in the squall and feedback, and can create the same confrontational ruptures using the 'beat' as a weapon.

It is possible to identify particularly 'noisy' breakcore, and breakcore-noise collaborations serve as 'gateways' from one genre into the other (such as the Venetian Snares and Speedranch release *Making Orange Things*). This musical dialogue is not incongruous where a long-term perspective is taken, acknowledging the roles of punk and hip-hop aesthetics in particular.[12]

Grajeda argues that the incorporation of noise in 'lo-fi' implies a "loss of mastery, control and order": "the autonomous artist no longer fully in charge – sharing credit for the source of a sound with an apparatus that makes itself heard, with a technology somewhat out of control" (2002: 366). Sounds conventionally considered extraneous impurities, unintended outputs of the systems of mechanical and digital production of music (most obviously, static, feedback, vinyl crackle and tape hiss), are actively incorporated as elements; often the impression is that machine noise is 'taking over'. LFO Demon's "aesthetics of errors, noises and distortion" serve here as "indexes of 'authenticity'" (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 134).

Commercial audio technology can be regarded as a long search for a sound which is not just an accurate reproduction of the 'real', but a sound which is 'even better than the real', a transparent sonic 'truth', played through a medium which 'inaudiblises' any trace of its own existence. The 'counter-aesthetics' of noise emerge dialectically (and often *nostalgically*, where naturalised technologies are privileged), as an opposition to all that 'hi-fi' discourse signifies: exactitude, efficiency, transparency, purity and perfection of form, the aesthetics of 'high' (*fidelity*) technology (Grajeda 2002: 362). Katz describes the revaluation of analogue noise as a "phonograph effect" (2004: 3-7, 146). This nascent critique, articulated through sound, draws attention to the artifice of its own construction and interrogates the relationship between the human and the nonhuman 'machine'.

One of the remarkable features of the authenticity articulated at the point where breakcore and noise meet is its hypermasculine sonic aggression.[13] Fans and practitioners

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[12] In her discussion of "working in the red" in hip-hop, Rose indicates another precursor to noise: "Decades ago, blues musicians jimmied amplifiers and guitars to get desired sounds" (1994: 199n30). Also noteworthy are the *musique concrète* of Cage, Henry, Schaeffer, Stockhausen and Varèse (Sinker 2002: 181-192). Russolo is also prescient in his construction of 'noise machines', anticipating the noisicians' 'DiY' construction of electroacoustic devices (Nattiez 1990: 51).

[13] This is distinct from, but compounded by, the ultraviolent themes of the genre of noise.

alike refer to noise gigs as 'live actions' or 'live assaults'. Arnett similarly describes metal gigs as "the sensory equivalent of war" (1996: 14). Where jungle engages in ritual displays of adversative symbolic dominance by 'sound-murdering bad boys', noise enacts such dominance at a practically *sadomasochistic* level within sound itself (and 'against' the listener), through a form of what Eshun names "sonic brutalism" (1998: 118). Music functions here as "a defensive as well as an offensive weapon" (Frith 2003: 95). The sonic performance of aggression 'offensively' disrupts the conventions of the 'mainstream'; simultaneously, it 'defensively' constitutes and delimits the 'underground'. It is unsurprising that the domination manifest in the hair-trigger, microsecond-by-microsecond percussive intensity of 'tightening edits' should come to be combined with "the squall and feedback" domination of noise, and vice versa.

10 – "Safeway Brand Breakcore"[1]

> We made an execration as the gate of copyright fell off its hinge and the blood flow of DSP processing began.
> Welcome to Execrate is a reminder that before the DSP explosion, we had already entered the body and gone live, we had already began to process all formats of audio, into the perhaps cack-handed mulch that this album is.[2]
> The world has the ability to process, yet rarely will you find such a cacophony of deformed data in such ineligible order.
> If your a true mangler then in truth you must process everything, here we took the heart body and mind of all that has gone before, we stuck them all back together and created an unrecognisable shape, picture or execration.
> You are the judge, try it for yourself we ate the egg and we fried the chicken!
>
> (Speedranch and Jansky Noise 2004)

> What might I say in my defense? Only what is compelling in the stories I tell. What distinguishes my approach from those who have told their stories before me? I am not surprised to find culture corrupt and its measures mixed.[3]
>
> (Lhamon 1998: 7)

> You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you
> For learning me your language!
>
> (*Tempest* I. II: 363-365)

10.1 The sample base, 'culture jamming' and piggyback branding

Over the course of the previous two chapters, the discussion shifted, from analysis of the cultural preoccupations of bedroom producer identity as instantiated linguistically and discursively, to a transposition of some of the concepts developed in that analysis to the music produced and distributed through this culture. We latterly charted a course, steered by that musematic shibboleth, the amen, from the ragga jungle revival, through to the 'de-coolifying' of that break along the stylistic continuum from its 'mashing-up' in jungle, through 'raggacore', and into breakcore 'proper', and on to the repudiation of the

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[1] The title is the name of a track on Fanny's *Shoebomb Hurricane.*

[2] 'DSP' is an abbreviation of 'digital signal processing'.

[3] Lhamon 1998: 7.

break as looped totality and the advocacy of *noise* as guarantor of an underground immune from commercial 'recuperation'.[4] Another way of describing this trajectory is in terms of (access to, specifically, p2p access to) an ever-expanding sample base (rendering the junglist adherence to ragga samples anachronistic to some practitioners), alongside high literacy concerning the accelerated turnover time of sonic signs (where these aspects are mutually reinforcing). The continual depreciation and transvaluation of sounds and styles entails – one might say *logically* – the 'systematic' application of breakcore *as method* to a proliferating variety of sample bases. Given that the oppositional politics of breakcore involves a rejection of the 'easy' in favour of the 'hard' (in terms of sonic texture, and virtuoso sequencing), an engagement with the stylistic practices of the genre of noise is a logical progression.

The engagement with noise, though, is only one possible move in the 'progression' of breakcore; alternate strategies may be identified, though this would be 'formal' given the fluid continuity of these approaches. They can be elaborated in terms of the sample "resource bank" (Toynbee 2000: 137), and the hybrids so produced; most of these options have already been encountered. One option is the application of 'edit-tightening' to metal (for example, Cuti Sadda, Drumcorps, Bazooka and other gabber producers, or Istari Lasterfahrer, Ove-Naxx and Shitmat): metal is a familiar form to 'gravers', is appropriately 'hard', and 'harder still' when processed and edited with resequenced beats and kick drums.[5] The metal sample base has effectively produced a subgenre of its own.[6]

Another is to expropriate obscure, 'niche' material which has not *yet* been incorporated. This bears similarities with the hip-hop process referred to as 'crate-digging' (Katz 2004: 118). Thus Kaada samples soul, gospel and doo-wop, or S.Duus samples mentos and early ska. As Jitterburg Devil, retrigger (a Breakcore room regular) samples

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[4] Producers of 'hard listening' breakcore, such as Amboss, Eiterherd, I:gor and Zombieflesheater, treat the amen and other well-known breaks with high levels of distortion. Similar processes feature in contemporary speedcore and gabber, where literal noise is a prominent feature.

[5] One of the nfos presented in chapter 3, 00_bong-ra_-_grindcrusher-(adn47)-vinyl-2005-sq, accompanied such a release, as evinced by its title. It is intriguing that: 1) sampling metal apparently bears none of the moral difficulty involved in sampling ragga; and 2) the ethical problematics of sampling on the other hand seem to 'wear out' over time ('decontextualised soundclash shouting' still requires more 'justification' than the amen itself).

[6] This process is also pursued from the other end of the spectrum: the 'digigrind' subgenre utilises digital techniques, in particular drum programming for grind's characteristic 'blast beats'. An example is Tourette Syndrom's *Gabbergrind*. Many grind tracks feature speech samples, perhaps because of the restrictive approach to discursive signification in 'spewage' vocal style.

surf guitar and swing bands. Venetian Snares frequently produces one-off plunderphonic compositions of this sort, with individual tracks based on sources such as the theme from *Coronation Street*, or the audio from the films *Herbie Goes Bananas* and *Kill Bill*. This 'polyglot' sampling produces a *frisson* of dialogic dynamism at an intertextual level in relation to other media (at the other end of the process from crate-digging is the sport of sample-spotting). Where some sample base proves fruitful, it will presumably become an 'institutional' resource.

This approach is distinct from the engagement with noise, given that noise is a method of *treating* (the 'grain' of) sound itself, rather than a sample base.[7] An option 'closer' to noise is the aesthetic furnished by 'the machine': the lo-tech, "video gamey" sounds of 8-bit and 16-bit computers (Bit Shifter, Curtis Chip, Epsilon/Patricider, Hellseeker, DJ Scotch Egg, Sonic Death Rabbit, Producer Snafu, *etc.*). This form of production is not so much a 'direct', autosonic sample *base* as a means of composition within a particular sound *palette*. Generally both plunderphonic 'crate-digging' and chip tune composition are combinatory, involving simultaneous deployment of drum samples (including the amen).

A related approach, involving the deployment of 'specific recognisable samples', is indicated in the title to the following section: the musical form and sample constituents of breakcore as 'lame amens and pop mash'. Some sample bases, and the means of producing some sounds, are *socially* and *legally* more 'powerful' than others. Thus, as Collins indicates, the 'roms' through which 8-bit sounds are produced are *illegal* (2003: 29). 'Underground' sample bases such as grind and ragga are generally 'indifferent' when it comes to ensuring their own immunity from plunderphonic appropriation and redeployment. However, mass-market pop music seemingly *is* in a position to attempt to ensure it is neither appropriated (downloaded) nor redeployed (sampled). Thus one intriguing punk-aesthetic production strategy, duplicating broader cultural practices and exercising 'right of reply' to this power, is the piggyback branding of 'pop mashing'. Before exploring the implications of the preceding analysis for the rationalisation/democratisation binary, we must consider this "militant domestication" (Slobin 1992: 67).

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[7] In the genre known as 'glitch', however, the sample base is raw data. While this 'sounds like' the 'edit-tightening' of noise (the clips and static bursts produced by electronic devices malfunctioning in various ingeniously engineered ways), there is a distinction in terms of origin: glitch is generally considered avant-garde minimalism, rather than a post-rave hybrid. A good example is Ryoji Ikeda's *Dataplex*. An evocative account of glitch is presented in Young (2002).

The different approaches to production outlined above highlight the possibility of transtextual 'mapping': "each listener has his or her own, unique transtextual network; but it should be possible also to look at an entire group's transtextual network" (Lacasse 2000: 57). This is why there is an element of formalisation in characterising sample mining as innovation, or intervention in the popular music economy. Perspective is key: where /dev/null samples '90s hardcore, this may be heard as an informed homage, an innovative rediscovery, or 'clichéd breakcore'. Covach calls the ability to 'decode' the *how* "stylistic competency" (1995: 407). Such competency develops though *enculturation*: "the acquisition of musical skills and knowledge by immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of one's social context" (Green 2001: 22), and varies according to the transtextual map available to the listener. Where, for instance, Doormouse samples polka, this may be a stylistic innovation (to those unfamiliar with polka), but for Doormouse polka almost certainly has specific resonances.

Rose describes sampling as "an invocation of another's voice to help you to say what you want to say. It is also a means of archival research, a process of musical and cultural archaeology" (1994: 79). However, with pop samples the situation is slightly different: given pop's ubiquity, sampling it can hardly be considered 'crate-digging'. Pop as a sample base is distinct from other subcultural sample bases (grind, dancehall, funk breakbeats), in that rearticulation through the constituent elements of these other subcultural sounds has become generically stabilised or institutionalised, this is why we are able to speak of 'raggacore' or 'drillbit'. While the term 'mashcore' is sometimes used to refer to the application of breakcore as method (to other musics in general), one does not speak of 'popcore' as a genre. There are not canonical pop samples in the way in which there are canonical dancehall, hip-hop, or breakbeat samples, in part because, by definition, pop does not have *cool* or underground authenticity. This is also related to the distinct genre status of the sampled material: individual, highly recognisable pop hits (themselves one-offs), as contrasted with non-differentiated, but often pre-sampled dancehall elements or grind riffs. Pop mashes are recognisable because they 'speak' to the mainstream, raggacore is recognisable because it 'speaks' to *itself* first, and dancehall latterly. Recall 777?'s remark in BC room 9/01/04: 1 (9.3):

> yeah its all so incestuos ,,,im off to do a missy elliot remix

Here 777? indicates the vogue for plunderphonic remixes of a popular hip-hop artist, describing this vogue as 'incestuous'. To a certain extent, mass-media visibility

serves as a guarantor of unauthorised remixes: "some labels even 'leak' acapellas with the hope of getting some decent bootlegs/remixes created" (Loopfish, via email, February 27, 2003). This sort of citation is longstanding (the intertextual practice, and the 'incestuous', inter-constitutive relation between 'mainstream' and 'underground'), and analogous to the 'piggyback branding' engaged in by rip crews. *Brands* "are socially constructed texts which mediate meanings between and amongst consumers and producers. A brand is a 'sign for sale'" (O'Reilly 2005: 582). *Bricolage* sampling involves expropriation of these signs. Consider, for example, the Countryside Alliance Crew (2005):

> The crew started out in 2003, bringing their soundsystem to local cattle market auctions and county shows. Formed by rival farmers DJ Psylage and Farmer Giles Peterson in an attempt to settle their bitter land dispute, the crew quickly grew in size and now boasts almost 100 members to date. Brought together by a love for farming and a general concern for lack of rural representation in today's underground music scene, the crew are intent on bringing their unique 'farmcore' style to the forefront and initiating a rural takeover.[8]

This cultural collision (combining Farmer Giles, the Tolkien character, with Gilles Peterson, the BBC DJ; telescoping the 'psy' of 'psy-trance' into silage; taking the name of the conservative pro-hunting 'movement') is also evident in the Alliance's musical output. DJ Psylage's "Keep It Rustic", on *Rural Takeover Volume 1*, alternates (on an amen) an Elephant Man acapella (including the line "sodomite and batty boy don't come near me") with segments of novelty 'Scrumpy and Western' group the Wurzels' "Farmer Bill's Cowman".[9] On the same release, Wool-Pac's "My Dirty Hoe" is built out of the acapella of Tupac Shakur's "Baby Don't Cry", Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia", and the theme tune to the soap opera *Emmerdale* (the pub in *Emmerdale* is called The Woolpack). The remarkable feature about such work (even where the intention is largely comic) is its relation to the broader cultural environment. As Slobin rightly points out, "a large body of subculture musics engage in complex layering, piling code upon code" (1992: 69).

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[8] The Countryside Alliance plays with the relationship between the free party and those who own the land upon which such events occur, combining the raver and the farmer in one carnivalesque persona. Live appearances feature the Alliance dressed in tweed, patch caps and so on.

[9] "Keep it Rustic" illustrates longstanding 'contrafact' or 'social authorship', as well as crate-digging innovation: Farmer Bill's Cowman was itself "based on the 1967 UK instrumental hit "I Was Kaiser Bill's Batman" by Whistling Jack Smith" (Golden Haze Productions 2001).

The intertextual generic connections between the musics discussed here can be highlighted by indicating innovative code-switching 'crossovers' in related 'underground' musics. For example, the Crude track "Lo Bit Quantum Slide", on *Noise Suite*, is a noise piece made, as its title suggests, out of the degraded sound of low bit-rate mp3s. It is thus a sort of 'computer noise' informed by the digitisation of music and the anti-aesthetic possibilities the mp3 presents, and gesturing towards chip tune and the "video gamey" (the process of reducing bit-rate, and thereby audio quality, is referred to as "bit crushing"). On a grind compilation called *Falafel Grind: A Tribute to Cripple Bastards*, there is a track entitled "Blood", credited to Amanda Lear and Giulio the Bastard. It is actually Amanda Lear's 1977 disco hit "Blood and Honey" with Giulio the Bastard's spewage vocals 'on top of it'.[10]

The argument propounded here describes piggyback branding (3.1) as *sonic* branding (Jackson 2003), and the display and appropriation of *sonic* dominance (Henriques 2003: 451). This can be related to the idea of noise as *power* (Attali 1985), and in turn to the rationalisation/democratisation debate (1.4-1.5) as when the 'voice' of music ritually transgresses the *shitless* 'voice' (4.1, 4.6).[11] A final example is Epsilon's "Shatner", which features vocal samples simply saying the name: William Shatner.[12] Epsilon effectively treats William Shatner *just as Kellogg's All-Bran do* – albeit without Shatner's involvement or consent. This 'culture jamming' piggyback branding renders a two-way association between Epsilon and William Shatner, 'triggered' by seeing Shatner or hearing his name. Such sampling is arguably a critical instantiation of Adorno's argument that incessant repetition of "the title trademark of the song or the first words of its lyrics" functions analogously to advertising (2002: 454). In this way, Epsilon is able to intervene in the cultural economy (alternately, the cultural economy intervenes in Epsilon: each 'speaks' ventriloquially through the other), just as rip crews inject their names into the distributive flow of goods on p2p. The effect is to subtly alter the 'meaning' of William

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[10] In 'grinding' disco, Giulio the Bastard also 'discos' grind, demonstrating the existence of the 'BDR' in *grind*.

[11] Mass-cultural examples of intertextual piggyback branding are easy to come by, particularly in advertising (arguably the template for the form), but also in film. The practice is also notable amongst *drug* distributors: in the early 1990s there were LSD blotters called Sonics (bearing the image of Sonic the Hedgehog, the Sega video game character), and Ecstasy tablets bearing the Mercedes logo. Speaking of crack cocaine, George writes: "dealers named their brands after some pop culture artifact such as the movie *Lethal Weapon* or the band P-Funk" (2005: 135). Ritzer's 'McDonaldization' is another example.

[12] "Shatner" features on *Xtreme.core Xtract*.

Shatner; it is one of perspective by incongruity, defamiliarising ('making strange') William Shatner, while boosting the 'visibility' of Epsilon by association.[13]

10.2 "Lame amens and pop mash"[14]

There is something of a danger in assessing the import of sampling practices where these are depicted as subversive or oppositional, as a *critique* of the music industry and the commodity form applied to music, and this danger may be elaborated on two linked counts: the relation of plunderphonic pop mashing to *copyright*; and the *cultural* consequences of the practice. The 'theft' implied by *plunderphonic* is in effect simply a form of cultural dialogue (and a longstanding one at that). For it to be read as 'resistant', other interpretive elements have to be in place – if we are to argue, for instance, that: "the signs no longer signify what was originally intended, as youth subcultures actively engage in symbolic work to challenge the assumptions of powerful ideologies and controlling institutions" (Elliott 1994: 14). Specifically, to read plunderphonic practice as somehow counter-hegemonic, what is needed is an argument suggesting that: "What is morally right, as discovered through an ethical consideration of the impact of copyright on the common good, differs fundamentally from the directions the laws surrounding copyright are moving" (Buchanan 2006: 10).

Only where such a 'difference' has been established is it possible to argue that plunderphonic sampling assumes an oppositional stance. Copyright and cultural creativity are related insofar as the former may appear to constrain the latter, this is what makes wilful copyright infraction appear both culturally and politically 'resistant'. The situation is compounded by the assumptions of practitioners and analysts: "popular music is a solution, a ritualized resistance, not to the problems of being young and poor and proletarian but to the problems of being an intellectual" (Frith 1992a: 179). Here, the supposedly 'resistant'

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[13] Again, the listener's 'competence' plays an important role. Shitmat's coprolalic name is a case in point, bearing a two-fold reference: first to the happy hardcore producer Slipmatt (who often features on compilations advertised on British terrestrial television), and second, to the article for which *that* producer is named, the slip mat on the turntable. Shitmat thus discursively smears excrement over the 'mainstream' with his own abjected persona. Better known cultural references feature in the names of the producers Des and Mel Regime, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Retard Crack Dealer, which 'subvertise' mass media icons within an 'underground' discourse in a style similar to that of "Shatner".

[14] The subsection heading is the title of a track by Xian on *The Riddle of Steel*. 'Lame amens' are of course similar to 'clichéd breakcore'.

aspects of subcultural involvement are not emergent from inchoate, but nonetheless *political*, homologies between practitioners' aesthetics and social position, but are, rather, *read into* subcultural involvement by cultural intermediaries and producers anxious to restate the (*traditional*) 'rebelliousness' of popular music, to find in cultural practices strategies of resistance. Where Parasite samples the *Popstars*-generated band, Hear'Say, or where Istari Laserfahrer samples Tatu, the *how* of this sampling both ritually 'redeems' *and* problematises the original material.[15] The inbuilt obsolescence of the pop artefact is underscored by the 'pop mash', while the recontextualisation restates the sonic norms of 'underground' authenticity (demonstrating the 'popness' of the original by 'hardcorifying' it). The effectiveness of the 'mashing' depends on the extent to which it is audible as instantiating cultural *détournement*: the "use of appropriated materials in ways that alter their original meaning" (Collins 2005: 169).

In a (Foucaultian) sense, though, the oppositional success of such sampling depends on some reactional force from 'the industry'. The subversion is supposed to reside in the practice itself, but is only ever 'actualised' when contested (for the practice to be subversive, there must be something to subvert: the paradox of negative identity again). Where this occurs, the ensuing controversy can be depicted as a David-and-Goliath situation, where the legal power of the 'Goliath' curtails the freedom of expression and creativity of the 'David'. This is precisely what occurred with Danger Mouse, the plunderphonic hip-hop producer who combined Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with the Beatles' *The White Album*. The ensuing product, *The Grey Album*, garnered Danger Mouse and those who uploaded his album cease-and-desist emails from EMI, leading to the involvement of copyright reform advocacy website Downhill Battle (Ayers 2006: 127-136, Duckworth 2005: 147-155). The 'backstage' of downloads came to appear a site of privatised mass resistance on 'Grey Tuesday' (February 24, 2004), when the *Grey Album*

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[15] Parasite samples Hear'Say in "Pure and Simple", on the *Popstar Liberation Front: Steal Our Song*. Even the title of the release signals it as a plunderphonic critique of the demotic pop aesthetic of *Popstars* or *X Factor*: Hear'Say are not a 'real' band, they are 'manufactured'. Discernible in this is, therefore, a parallel of the authenticity found in 'folk' musics (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 118). When Hear'Say's "Pure and Simple" first came out, it was the fastest-selling single in British history. Istari Lasterfahrer samples Tatu's "All the Things She Said" (among other things) on "Side A" of *Acid Explosion/Judge Dread*. The latter piece ends with the following speech sample: "30 years of the same old shit, pop music, money, hit after hit" (interspersed with a rigorous amen). DeathSucker is Parasite's own label, just as Sozialistischer Plattenbau ('more socialistic flat-building') is Istari Lasterfahrer's. The nfo for *Acid Explosion/Judge Dread* states that the commercial release, on vinyl, was limited to 510 copies.

was downloaded an estimated 100,000 times (Ayers 2006: 134). 'Illegal art' highlights the developing institutional relationships between music, copyright, technology and creativity.

Where such responses do *not* occur, has anything subversive happened? Asking such a question highlights the symbiotic codependence between 'mainstream' and 'underground', and the unspoken assumptions upon which any categorisation of such practices as resistant is based: "the notion of a cultural 'underground' which is politically radical simply by virtue of being 'underground' is nonsense" (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 160). To sample Tatu, say, without authorisation, is 'heard' as a rather 'rude' expression of authenticity, intervening in the cultural soundscape. Yet these appropriations combine pop-cultural icons with breaks such as the amen, where the latter is a sign of subcultural authenticity. As we have seen, though, the originators of the amen, that 'legitimate' (authentically masculine, '*black*', and fratriarchal) measure by which (inauthentically feminine) pop is judged and found wanting, may likewise be considered to have had something 'taken' from them.

That something is sampled thousands of times does not make it 'right' (in some moral sense) to continue to do so, just as the ubiquity of Britney Spears does not make it 'subversive' to sample her.[16] Yet in the former case the sample has become *almost* completely divorced from its originators, and in the latter such output continues to be heard as 'resistant', because the *what* said in and by mass market commodities is resituated in terms of a *how* different from that originally intended. One might say that Britney and other 'mainstream' material is frontstage (inauthentic, stage-managed), whilst dancehall and the amen remain backstage (authentic, 'real'). The movement towards sampling pop is thus read as 'subversive' because the frontstage voice so sampled is considered a (*shitless*) official voice of popular culture, subjected to a *détournement* which destabilises the original meaning, where this is doubly transgressive when it is also in violation of copyright. Furthermore, Britney is, of course, much more visible/audible than the amen, dancehall, grind, or other sample bases. Pop mashing is consequently tactical in the sense that it 'speaks' to broader transtextual maps, and this may be construed as 'progressive' to the extent that it facilitates "strategic equivalence-building", – which it does, insofar as, through the familiarity of the sampled material, it may lead to an expanded audience, who may then reconsider the status of the original (Irving 1993: 108). Nonetheless, the amen and the male JE dancehall voice continue to carry all the weight of a symbolically

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[16] Britney Spears' "Outrageous", along with the amen, forms the basis of Killjoy's "Britney Stole My Crack Pipe" on *Kamikaze Club 5*. Society Suckers use her "Toxic" in a piece by the same name on *Drop Name Records Volume 1*.

'outside', underground, subaltern authenticity, in part, no doubt, because of the continuing constitution of black culture as authentic, and the resultant viability of black culture as speaking for youth culture at large (Collins 2004: 277). The redeployment of the amen and the dancehall voice can hardly be thought of as subversive *in copyright terms*, as the originators of the sampled material never had copyright protection or significant earnings in the first place – paradoxically, this is related to precisely what provides these samples with 'underground' status.

One could therefore argue that the authenticity constituted through such sampling was wholly unoriginal, that viewing genres as "just a resource" implies that metamusics such as breakcore (or plunderphonic hip-hop) are wholly parasitic on 'the industry' they ostensibly critique. One may similarly argue that breakcore production, although the 'scene' remains relatively 'underground' (or *because* of its marginality and elitism), is not at all democratising or politically resistant. Rather, it reinscribes domination, mastery and competition, cloaked in an empty rhetoric of plunderphonic 'liberation' and nihilistic post-rave hedonism, where the 'underground' bedroom producer is not a nerd turning the means of capitalist domination against 'the system', but is, rather, Adorno's pseudo-active radio ham, meticulously sequencing amens when he could be actually *doing* some (as yet unspecified) thing about the social world: "all cultural products, even non-conformist ones, have been incorporated into the distribution-mechanisms of large-scale capital … The outsiderishness of the initiates is an illusion" (Adorno 1978: 207). As Jenks asks (2005: 120): "might not these supposed political assemblies (in the form of subcultures) simply divert an impotent political will from a recognition of the real contradictions at work?"

Even the p2p gift can be understood as a form of symbolic violence. Straw argues that music collections "are seen as both public displays of power/knowledge and private refuges from the sexual or social world; as either structures of control or the by-products of irrational and fetishistic obsession; as material evidence of the homosocial information-mongering which is one underpinning of male power and compensatory undertakings by those unable to wield that power" (1997: 4). Hisama similarly critiques the assembly of collections as "an appropriative act … helping only to define the collector's self" (2000: 341n12). Vaidhyanathan, echoing Putnam's "cyberbalkanization" hypothesis (2000: 177), argues that "The users who can scour the hard drives of others and download enough material to become creators and mavens in the community tend to be wealthy, technically savvy residents of developed nations. And even they have few ways of building social capital or deriving cultural capital directly from peer-to-peer" (2004: 61). As with other aspects of CMC, p2p can be negatively characterised as personally and socially

destructive, turning "the merely curious into the obsessive, the fan into the fanatic" (Katz 2004: 175).

Amen fetishism could then exemplify everything *wrong* about the self-absorption of Western, white, masculinist youth culture, where the *apparently* subversive practices of the fratriarchal 'underground' would be "an effect of phallogocentric discourse constructing its own marginal moments" (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 103). The plunderphonic disavowal of sign depreciation would then be not a critique, but an endorsement of the existing sign economy and a political abnegation, operating within and reproducing the exclusionary signifying practices of dominant culture. In order to maintain 'underground' status, to "maintain the image of oppression", as Savran argues about previous 'countercultural' formations, the beats and the hippies: "they needed a conservative, 'straight' culture in relation to which they could obsessively restage their abasement. On the other hand, they simultaneously needed an abjected community of African Americans in which they could see reflected their own 'dark image'" (1998: 122).

10.3 The Master's Tools?

Whilst such a critique is forceful, it is possible to propound an alternative perspective, situating sampling and bedroom production within a broader context. The argument here takes ('bedroom') production practices alongside consideration of the *site* of distribution and interaction (p2p), asserting the independence of those involved. The 'resistance' would then reside in the fact that independent production is prioritised over mass-market commodities, and the latter become fodder for the former, appropriated at no recompense. The principal point would be the existence of an 'alternative' to the commodity-form, a space not dominated by pecuniary interests, where copyright law and norms of private ownership and individualist creativity are contested and problematised.

The p2p proto-market could then be characterised as a "relatively autonomous zone", indicating "the real contradictions of capital in the sphere of musical production" (Toynbee 2000: 29). The existence of such a space undermines the content industries' monopoly on cultural production and distribution. Haupt suggests that "file-sharing … is counter-hegemonic for the following reasons: the integrity of the music text is violated because individual songs from albums can be downloaded, traditional notions of authorship are challenged/violated due to the fact that digital technology makes it easier for individuals to sample music in the production of new music, and brand integrity is

violated" (2006: 116). The 'static' authoriality of the musical brand (the album format, itself a contingent consequence of the vinyl medium) is collapsed by the proliferating mp3 gift.

Audiences are no longer reliant on the cash nexus to secure access to the musics so produced: the product is – to an extent – 'liberated' from the commodity form (independent vinyl releases reach far larger audiences through p2p than they could as tangible goods). P2p certainly appears to have this consequence, at least: it massively increases the diversity of available music, particularly that previously restricted to those able to afford vinyl consumption. The utopian vision of p2p is as the largest publicly accessible, collaboratively maintained, and free archive of recorded sound in human history. Furthermore: "It is not just distribution of music itself which is radically augmented by the internet and home computing technology: the latter also open up the possibility of home production. In this sense the industry can be thought of as doubly assaulted: the monopoly on distribution, and the monopoly on production, are both challenged" (Jones 2002: 217).

There is an obvious connection between plunderphonic practice and p2p as 'hot-wiring the jukebox' (Vaidhyanathan 2004: 54). The music produced and distributed *through* p2p could be considered as a technologisation of Barthes' *musica practica* (Filmer 2003: 102). The musical codes of breakcore, the continual reworking of the amen *imago*, could serve as an illustration of active, democratic involvement. 'Edit-tightening' is a cultural practice applicable to any sample base: amen sequencing effectively serves as an *apprenticeship* (some producers, as we have seen, become canonical amen artists). The means of production are within reach of the amateur listener, and p2p allows this amateur to be *heard*. Chanan argues that: "In driving out the amateur, the whole vast modern commercial apparatus of music conspires to reduce the listener to the condition of compliant consumer, and thus to induce passive reception" (1994: 29). But the combined effects of new music and internet technologies enable "mass customization of musical experience" (Jones 2002: 230). The effect of the commodity form is to *dissuade* musical involvement. Exploring and sharing music on the scale enabled by p2p is otherwise simply impossible for most participants. Laing indicates that both the phonograph and radio originally possessed the capability of "operating as a two-way means of communication" (1991: 5). With p2p, this communicative aspect returns. Downloaders are "listening to more and different kinds of music and are connecting to others with similar interests" (Katz 2004: 174). The social spaces of p2p serve as ground in which not only active listening, but engagement in production, is advocated and practiced. This can be seen as a

manifestation of the hope "that – eventually? – the concert will be exclusively a studio, a workshop, an atelier … where all musical *doing* will be absorbed into a *praxis* with nothing *left over*" (Barthes 1985: 265-266).

The subcultural 'underground' online then becomes a sonic, social space which is (granted, masculinist and bounded, but also nonetheless) *accessible*, communicative and interactive. 'Passive' consumption is eschewed in favour of a participatory, collaborative model of subcultural activity. The music so produced is distributed freely, at little cost, and with little regard for the dangers of copyright infraction: the subculture remains 'below the radar' of those in a position to challenge it, and is rhizomatic insofar as, when servers are shut down, practitioners simply move to another network.[17] Shirky even asserts that "there are now file-sharing networks whose members simply snail mail one another mountable drives of music" (2003).

On the textual level, p2p would be considered a relatively 'safe' homosocial space, within which male youth work out presentations of identity through mediated personæ, in a free discursive play/display unbounded by the normative constraints of conventional discourse, and cohered by ritual bonds which establish a sociality otherwise not iterable in the 'real' world, where literacy in enacting these bonds maintains the 'us' and excludes the 'them'. The space is one in which adversative wit functions as 'reputation-making machine' within an effectively *self-entertaining* medium, in which 'wealth' is measured in terms of the symbolic leisure capital and specialised knowledge displayed by the mp3 share.

This space is also one in which, undoubtedly, the majority of 'participants' are not interactants, but *lurkers*, that contemporary variant of the *flâneur*. The 'minority' status of 'vocal' interactants is something which must be borne in mind: "Readers (and scholars) may be confused as to whether … posters are a clique within the community or constitute the community itself" (McLaughlin, Osborne and Smith 1995: 102). Lurkers are estimated to account for "perhaps over 90% of people visiting online groups" (Nocera 2002). Whilst room dialogue crucially informs the conceptions of both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as to what the genre is and how it is oriented, most room occupants do *not* participate in public dialogue. Room occupancy is an indicator of engagement, but this can be 'read' as distributional rather than textually 'participatory'. The majority of users take this orientation: 'being there', aware of the social drama, but being there *for* exchange rather than 'chat'.

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[17] Soulseek was issued a cease-and-desist by the RIAA in September 2005 (Miller 2006).

Although rooms and the subcultural orientations they manifest cannot be fully understood except through analysis of the dialogue occurring therein, this dialogue is not the ultimate end 'output' of this form of sociality. Within any given room there will be several *silent*, but constantly present, personæ, whose 'role' is not discursive interaction but material exchange: they are the major distributive nodes through which the genre is circulated, those who consistently return search results for genre releases. Cooper and Harrison refer to these committed sharers, on the opposite end of the social spectrum from the leech, as "citizens" (2001: 80). The musical material, samples, and software distributed within rooms are the "compelling content" which coheres the group, where "as more members generate more content, the increased content draws more members" (Nocera 2002). The immersive pleasure of engaging with the text is thus inextricably related to the pleasure of browsing users' files, consequent on the pleasures of searching for and listening to music; multiple frames of reference thereby collide. The peculiarity of p2p as a space is, as I have sought to demonstrate, its multi-modality as a site of discursive interaction, material exchange, *and* aesthetic production, where none of these elements are, strictly speaking, wholly isolable.

The Attalian model suggests *noise as power*, undermining the distinction between music and non-music, such that mobile phones, Muzak, pneumatic drills, commercial radio, birds, cats and dogs, traffic, the whirr of hard drive fans, sirens, karaoke, lawnmowers, air conditioning units, raves, buskers – the total aural field, but also its aspect as *marketised* soundscape, is a *power economy*. This is what justifies interest in sonic units of meaning (such as the amen, or the sonic brand as instantiated in, say, McDonald's "I'm Lovin' It" campaign, or the error alert messages produced by PCs); the constitutive 'meaningfulness' of the soundscape we inhabit. Within this line of thinking, control over the sonic environment (rather than, for example, the constitution of the field so as to privilege certain *gazes* or *textual* positions) is foregrounded as perhaps *the* most important manifestation of the public sphere: "Possessing the means of recording allows one to monitor noises, to maintain them, and to control their repetition within a determined code. In the final analysis, it allows one to impose one's own noise and to silence others" (Attali 1985: 87). Who has the right or the power to be heard? Conversely, how much control or choice do individuals have in what they hear? Such questions enable the invocation of Habermas' 'ideal speech situation'.

The perceived collapse of public space (the *nostalgia* for such space) is always followed by the 'invention' (the 'multiplication' or 'colonisation') of 'new space' (Williams 1973), and the rooms considered in previous chapters would be just such spaces: 'non-

localised' or 'extended' milieux (Dürrschmidt 2000: 83). This account would then situate p2p in relation to what Hetherington calls 'utopics': "a type of spatial play whereby a utopian outlook on society and the moral order that it wishes to project are translated into spatial practice through the attachment of ideas about the good society onto representations of particular places" (1998: 328). For the spaces of p2p serve not only for the distribution of musical material, resources, and subcultural and stylistic discourses, but also as elements in the *coordination* – the '*dis*organisation' – of globally distributed social networks. In short, as Public Enemy's Chuck D argues: "P2P to me means 'power to the people'" (cited in Dean 2003).

This account would have to acknowledge the violence of the musical and textual discourses circulating in the milieu, but this is surely related to the endemic discursive and material violence in 'real life'. Symbolic or representational violence is hardly limited to these spaces, and it is perhaps unreasonable to expect 'fluffiness' here when there is precious little of it anywhere else. As Baym asserts: "participants' communicative styles are oriented around common social practices before they even enter into CMC" (1995: 141). The fact that this citation is a decade old, implying that another generation of users (more familiar with the technology from an earlier age) have continued these practices, suggests not the *development* but the *reproduction* of discursively violent content and interactional styles.

10.4 Parachutes, mushrooms, and theory

The contrasting accounts in the two sections above are versions of *rationalisation* and *democratisation*; they are normative interpretations of the data. However, both perspectives are *naïve*, and the *demonstration* of an immanent critique of both has been a core objective of the preceding analysis. As Attali argues, musical culture "is simultaneously Order and Transgression, a support for Lent and a Carnival substitute" (1985: 120). To reify and *judge* complex social phenomena via an imposition of totalising coherence, such as would occur were the social spaces of p2p to be labelled as rationalised or democratised, would itself be a sort of rationalisation. As Gilbert and Pearson indicate in discussing the technologisation of music: "shouting 'halt, friend or foe?' at the first sight of chrome or an LED will only produce one of two equally facile replies" (1999: 110). A fundamental insight furnished by the analysis is that the terms in which debate is framed literally predicate that debate.

We could, for instance, consider p2p and bedroom producerness *both* rationalised and democratised. One could argue that Soulseek is a temporary reprieve from the iron cage, indicating the existence of that cage and also instantiating it (with the 'total frame' of rationalisation, there is no 'outside'). From this perspective, these interactants are *trapped*: in representational forms and signifying practices, in collectively imposed and reinforced identities, and in technologically mediated communicative systems (and this is the prison of a voluntary 'leisure'). Yet the bedroom producer is a locus of meaning: assuming an anti-establishment stance through consumption and through *creative* practices which re-orient signs and modes of signification. The skills involved in such production are *diverted* from production 'proper', they signal the collapse of conventional production/consumption distinctions (alongside a shift in the 'Attalian' power structure), and this 'time-killing' *uselessness* of subcultural involvement is itself a transgressive practice. This is what Barthes seems to suggest in describing music production with 'nothing left over', no commodifiable residue to be recouped.

I wish to argue that social reality supersedes the binary categorisations of rationalisation/democratisation, and that consequently the primary orientation must be to the data, rather than to some antecedent theoretical framework. This is particularly the case where the research involves analysis of 'sense'-making practices, such as the interactional rituals, exchanges and shibboleths discussed above. As Collins asserts: "micro-situational data has conceptual priority … Micro-situational encounters are the ground zero of all social action and all sociological evidence" (2004: 259). I have sought to demonstrate that interaction in this milieu not only exceeds simplistic categorisation, but also demonstrates the *weakness* of theoretical impositions, particularly those with 'moral' undertones. Whether one conceptualises a p2p chatroom as an elective-affinity virtual tribe, a rhizomic imagined community, a disembedded social network, a postmodern cyberspatial scene or what have you, it certainly possesses a characteristic common to other social groups or networks: it defines itself in opposition to what it ('thinks' it) is not, and excludes those perceived as 'not belonging'.

Sociologists are, as Smith argues, "trained to think in the objectified modes of sociological discourse, to think sociology as it has been and is thought" (1990: 22). Rather than trying to make the data 'fit' the theory, the theory should be illuminated by the data; theoretical preoccupations do not necessarily 'explain' the social world: "to explain is to explain away" (Bernstein 1991: 7). The analysis above shows that, when particular aspects of social reality come to require explication, the role of theory is not to serve as 'judge' to that reality but to attempt elaboration of its coherence, to show how it can be understood.

The implication is that the canon of sociological metatheory should be considered an adaptive strategy. If ethnography is a means of understanding the social world, it is also a means of critically evaluating the theory that 'stands for' that world. Where social life is contingent and 'disorganised', theory tends towards a reifying imposition of orderliness.

The issue outlined here is not due to some category error consequent on what Augé calls "methodological strabismus" (1995: 177), where the metatheoretical wood can no longer be seen for the micro-interactional trees. The goal throughout has been to present an analysis which reflexively 'opens' rather than 'closes', to trace arcs of intersubjective meaning(s) and show the distributional variability of practitioners' orientations to those meanings. This can be elaborated through the vernacular distinction between sociologistic 'parachute jumping' and 'mushroom picking'. Although we began with 'parachutes' (the rationalisation/democratisation binary), as we drew closer to the 'ground' we came to scrutinise certain 'mushrooms' (gifting norms, adversative interactional rituals, the shibboleths *nigga/nigger*, *gay/ghey*, and the amen breakbeat). These particles of social meaning warrant explanation in their own right, and illustrate how the 'parachute jumper's' perspective (despite the interpretive benefits it offers) can be inappropriate, as such constituents of social meaning simply cannot be *seen* from that vantage point. The contradictory, ambivalent forms of discursive transgression discussed above 'call out' metatheory and interrogate its normative priorities.

Conversely, 'structural' features are not invisible to the 'mushroom picker'. As we have seen, remarkable autochthonous features of identity, history and culture can be 'unearthed' simply by careful consideration of a few 'mushrooms'. Totalities are also microscopic, the large is writ and written in the small. As McLaughlin, Osborne and Smith indicate: "discourse processes generate social structures, which in turn affect discourse processes. A study of process yields evidence of the underlying structure" (1995: 94). Effectively, a metatheoretical interpretive scheme contains within itself the tendency to legislate "the procedures used to select, assemble, and attend to the actuality. It appears not as an imposition upon the latter but rather as a revelation of how it is" (Smith 1990: 78-79). The metatheoretical account is open to critique, therefore, as a mediation of the 'real', where this mediative aspect is suppressed. An 'immediatist', pragmatic orientation to data generates its own explicative priorities.

Where rationalisation (or democratisation) is understood as an interpretive scheme, it is not 'really real'; its status is that of a posited framework rather than a materially existent phenomena. It *describes* or *accounts for* such phenomena, rather than being a phenomenal event itself. One indicates some event and describes it as instantiating a larger process,

which must, with at least *some* degree of circularity, be *inferred* on the basis of the evidence indicated. A paradoxical feature of such indication, particularly with a 'totalising' framework such as rationalisation, is that it possesses *inevitability*. As soon as some avenue of seeming 'freedom' opens up (sampling, CMC, p2p), it both *is* commodified/rationalised, and thereby serves as confirmation of this process. This process is unending: this is precisely why, for some of the practitioners cited above, *noise* comes to appear a progression, *an escape*, into a space of (non)meaning 'beyond'. As Hetherington writes: "Finding one's place has sometimes meant going elsewhere into a supposedly free space, a space perceived as more authentic or more one's own, where issues of inclusion and exclusion can be determined by establishing categories of belonging and group identification" (1998: 329). Individuals and collectives are ostensibly 'free' to *go* anywhere they choose (whether this 'anywhere' is understood as a communicative medium, a subcultural aesthetic, a 'lifestyle'), but by going there and thus generating that 'space', this 'anywhere' becomes a place, with identifiable (and marketable) elements. This entails further movement, the generation of a colonisable 'beyond', for "The underground is discovered and cannibalized almost before it exists" (Duncombe 2005: 200). This continual movement can, paradoxically, be characterised as a manifestation of the iron cage (precisely because of its *total* inevitability). Whether some process or event is deemed an instantiation of (bad) rationalisation or (good) democratisation, this characterisation therefore will, in Wittgensteinian fashion, *leave everything just as it is*.

10. 5 Hanging backstage with the boys

There is one further binary to assess, where this assessment will in turn serve to contextualise the interaction considered in previous chapters. It has been suggested that online interaction may, in the Goffmanian sense, be taken as an informal 'backstage'; this claim warrants elaboration and interrogation. The dramaturgical metaphor may be considered in terms of (i) the individual and the persona, and (ii) the group; whether this be considered a 'subculture', a 'community', or a 'network'. Before addressing (i) and (ii) in terms of frontstage and backstage, it is worth providing some background to the distinction.

The frontstage/backstage metaphor suggests that impressions are carefully managed frontstage, and that backstage is informal and relaxed, backstage is where people 'let their hair down': "'frontstage' performance is much more carefully controlled, and much more susceptible to prevailing norms of politeness and decorum" (Coates 1999: 67). Backstage,

one may "plan, brood and complain about frontstage social relationships of past and present, as well as act spontaneously without concern for the proper impression one is making" (Collins 1988: 46). Backstage, Goffman writes, "the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (1990: 115). The suggestion is that backstage is therefore in some sense more 'real' or 'truthful', as there people are not so concerned to behave appropriately; they do not so carefully police their own behaviour. This has consequences for one's sense of sociality: "Interpersonal ties are more intimate to the extent that they take place on backstages rather than frontstages" (Collins 1988: 46). However, the line demarcating frontstage from backstage is somewhat vague: "there is a hierarchy of frontstages and backstages … [but even] the most intimate of situations still has a ritual structure to it" (*ibid.*: 47). The looser or more informal the frame, the further 'backstage', there is "a continuum of increasing informality" (*ibid.*: 56). Nonetheless, Collins follows Goffman in suggesting that even the most intimate or private backstage activities are themselves to some extent staged or performed.

The distinction allows us to question where the 'real' is, and to explore the conceptual apparatus through which privileged 'reality' status is ascribed. Online interaction, Amichai-Hamburger writes, "has been described as a virtual world, the implication being that on some level, cyberspace is a poor second to the 'real world'" (2005: 51). But it seems that, given the fuzziness concerning where each area begins and ends, categorising certain areas as front or back regions will in some cases be an arbitrary imposition. Chatrooms, for instance, appear to be back regions, but there are a number of possible contenders for what they might be 'back' to (the bedroom, the nightclub, the record store, the web page). As Collins asks (1988: 51): "what determines the larger frame, with which the analysis should begin?"

Soulseek rooms may be taken as backstage to, for instance: the commodity market of independent record labels, stores and distributors *etc.*, at which level interactants engage as consumers (sometimes only as downloaders), active participants (as when managing their own record production and distribution) and producers (as when circulating demos to labels, or sourcing samples); or the nightclub, the rave, party or other socially co-present leisure space at which interactants may be present as consumers and/or as 'performers' playing music. More narrowly, rooms could be considered as a backstage for other 'virtual' frontstages: online fora, Myspace pages, and other mediated spaces allowing for a greater degree of forethought in self-presentation and 'impression management'.

On the other hand, room interaction may be taken as a *frontstage*, at which level presentations of high degrees of technical and musical competence are elaborated. Largely

elided from such presentations is any reference to the time and labour that went into the achievement of such competence. The 'naturalisation' of specialised knowledge is here a notable achievement, where technological mastery of the steep learning curves of music-production software, and musical expertise garnered through painstaking, time-consuming listening, are both presented as *fait accompli*, as always-already done, so that the accomplishment and continuous maintenance of these 'backstage' endeavours are obscured from view. Organising and maintaining a substantial music collection takes time and care, but this time and care is only inferentially rendered evident in online dialogue. Successful presentation, online as elsewhere where specialised knowledge is a priority deployed in the establishment of hierarchy, depends on the careful maintenance of an *appearance* of effortless expertise of the sort Goffman refers to as "make-no-work" (1990: 113-114).

Breakcore production and distribution, like skilled chatroom sparring (and academic knowledge production), requires a certain *discipline*. These practices can be fruitfully elaborated with reference to the Japanese conception of *hikikomori* or 'confining oneself indoors' (Caspary and Manzenreiter 2003: 73n11). Caspary and Manzenreiter, in their discussion of the Japanese noise 'scene', point out that *hikikomori* is a significant aspect of becoming accomplished and recognised as a noisician, such accomplishment and recognition depends on having properly 'paid one's dues' in this regard. This is similar to the value ascribed to hours of creative work in isolation within bedroom producer culture.

In addition, the greater leeway for dramatisation and careful self-presentation inherent to text-based environments renders chatrooms in a slightly different sense strongly frontstage. One interpretation of the restriction of interaction to text could be that it allows for much greater impression management than that possible in co-present interaction. It is arguably 'realer', in that interactants' attention is not 'distracted' by physical cues, and the interaction is divested of conventional 'frontstage' politeness restrictions. *Offline* interaction is 'gated' by impressions generated by physical appearance, where these gates may be thought of as opening "to allow the more physically attractive and outgoing into our social or romantic circles and closing when we encounter the less socially skilled or physically attractive" (McKenna and Seidman 2005: 201). These relatively 'superficial' gates do not function in online interaction, where initial impressions are informed by interactional output alone.

Backstage and frontstage, then, are not definitive formal classifications, they are means of assessing types of interaction. There can always be further backstages and frontstages. The issue is not that of where or what the definitive 'primary framework' is, but the different resources interactants bring to bear on 'fixing' social reality in a certain frame,

the degree of engrossment etc. brought to bear. To assess such questions as 'levels of stagedness' in analysis (the relation between interaction and bedroom, between interaction and musical commodity, agency and structure, persona and self and so on), we would need an interstitial account, asserting the 'reality' status of co-presence and materiality much more strongly, and thereby contextualising the interaction as an element in a macro-structure (of the sort described through statistical reference in 2.1, for instance). There are, therefore, 'realist' tendencies towards emphasis on an implicit frontstage *frame*, to use Goffmanian terminology, within the dramaturgical metaphor itself. A live performance is obviously more 'dramatic' than an mp3, but recording technology and 'privatised' consumption are constitutive features of subcultural involvement, and contemporary sociality in general (indeed, there is a sense in which 'live' breakcore can be considered a contradiction in terms, the music is, after all, built out of samples). As Goffman concludes in his own account of the dramaturgical metaphor: "Scaffolds, after all, are to build other things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down" (1990: 246).

The distinction between frontstage and backstage and the continuum across them also tends to foster what Manning refers to as the "*two selves* thesis", the Machiavellian implication that frontstage presentations (*personæ*) are cynical, rehearsed manipulations or versions of more 'real' or authentic backstage *selves* (1992: 46). The problem here, as Manning points out, is that frontstage performances are not wholly voluntaristic and cannot simply be abandoned or dropped – any more than backstage performances can. In both instances, a *self* is performed, the point being that this self and its performance are, to all intents and purposes, identical: the distinction between manipulative and performed self is misleading (1992: 48). However, there remains the tendency to impute ultimate groundedness to the actions of co-present, embodied interactants. Hence Collins offers as a starting point through these issues "a core self in the living organism that is trying to orient through these successive laminations" (1988: 63).

The 'reality status' of online identity presentations, and their relation to offline, physical bodies, are therefore issues of longstanding concern. It is commonly suggested that text-based communication is a unique "protective environment" for the presentation and articulation of identity (Amichai-Hamburger 2005: 27). The sheer scale of chatroom use among some participants allows us to question "whether face-to-face is the standard against which computer mediated communication (CMC) should be compared" (Rafaeli, Raban and Kalman 2005: 58). Online interaction can be shown to contribute to a more flexible conception of self and its relation to embodiment, particularly in terms of the 'real me', the idea, not that personæ are more 'true' than offline presentations, but that interactants may

feel they are better able to express themselves online. What, then, if the online version is the 'real' one, more 'true' and accurate than the constrained and inhibited RL one? It is customary to suggest that the online is a compensation, a supplement. The entire nerd/radio ham critique implies that those who engage in such activities are in some way deficient in (frontstage) 'reality', and that this lack is what drives them to occupy (to retreat to) such (backstage) spaces. But what if the fantasy playground is 'realer' than reality?

McKenna and Seidman indicate that "whether or not close relationships will form online" is directly related to "the extent to which an individual feels better able to express his or her true or inner self online than in traditional interaction settings" (2005: 209). Online interaction and heavy investment in it is thus perhaps an aspect of the "regionalization of the self" (Collins 1988: 46). Our sense of the 'virtuality' of online interaction highlights the 'stagedness' of the 'real'. Turkle refers to this, following Baudrillard, as the "Disneyland effect", where "artificial experiences" have their ontological status boosted when compared to the virtual. She contrasts this with the "artificial crocodile effect", where artificial experiences come to seem *more* real than 'the real'; the latter is devalued by comparison with the virtual (1997: 236-237). Interactants may feel their 'real me' is best expressed in the "identity lab" of online interaction (Amichai-Hamburger 2005: 51).

Collins writes (2004: 275):

> *to convey an effect, the more informal or improvised rituals are, the more that participants need to be ostentatious, to make blatant appeals to emotion and to visible or highly audible action, if they are to make any impression or reputation.* Those starved for institutionalized ritual status (e.g., black lower class; teenagers and young people generally) tend to seek out means of intense situational dramatization.

Where such effects occur online, they will be particularly important for young people who may be relatively disempowered or marginalised IRL, and for whom, therefore, online interaction becomes correspondingly important (Turkle 1997: 238-243).

Nonetheless, as McKenna and Seidman suggest, context is crucial here: "People express different versions of self, both on the Internet and in traditional interaction settings, depending on the context" (2005: 207). The idea of "multiple selves" implies that we are not obliged to make ontological impositions about the 'real' in relation to personal identity, about where frontstage is (Amichai-Hamburger 2005: 40). Instead, the conception is that of individuals 'cycling through' selves over time and according to context (Turkle 1997: 178-179). This brings us from 'self' to 'scene' in relation to the dramaturgical metaphor, and

specifically, the question as to whether the difference between front and back regions could be equated with the difference between, say, dev/null's audio releases, and his online persona. Is one of these to be accredited 'frontstage' status?

It is possible for heavily invested local interactants ('backstage' personæ) to have significant 'frontstage' presence in terms of touring, commercial distribution, radio airplay etc., similarly, breakcore practitioners primarily known for this sort of frontstage work (Baseck, Droon, Enduser, Jahba, Society Suckers) periodically make appearances or 'check in' on Soulseek. Varying degrees of presence may also mark the continuum: increasing frontstage presence – that is, commercial and critical success – often correlates with a gradual removal from backstage Soulseek presence (thus Venetian Snares, occasionally vocal in the Soulseek Artists room, changed his username so as to become 'anonymous', some Breakcore room occupants claim to be in guarded possession of his username). In part, though, this classification depends on whether a persona becomes known first for interaction or for musical work (for instance, blaerg, dev/null, k5k, main$tream, maladroit, Mimaku Spldat, Producer Snafu, toecutter, xanopticon, and xntrik, all of whom I came across as interactants first and musicians latterly). If we come across an artist initially through dialogue, we tend to think of them as 'backstage' operators, and then notice their musical output. Such assessment is revealing of our own residual bias towards the 'real', as those practitioners *absent* from Soulseek interaction (for instance, Bong-Ra, DJ /rupture, Istari Lasterfahrer, or Ove-Naxx) come to appear more 'officially' representative of the genre as an offline, 'real' phenomena, and their work in some sense more creditable (their 'aura' is boosted; 'bedroom' is easier to drop where we can't see 'into' it). This residual bias is also instrumental in hindering our grasp of the sense in which p2p specifically and networked digital distribution in general allows for the relation between producer and consumer to be reconfigured – producers, and production, become 'local' and accessible. Were we not witness to local interaction, we would presumably allocate such 'official' status to the musical work of local practitioners as and when we came across it (and this *would* happen, bedroom producers do get to *leave* the bedroom literally and figuratively). That producers like Venetian Snares can be informally present in the online 'backstage', and yet have significant credibility and success in the offline world, obliges us to think through the connections between online and offline (and how these connections are related to the distinction between 'underground' and 'mainstream').[18]

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[18] This issue is also related to the contingencies of the 'field' setting: the Soulseek Breakcore room draws some practitioners and not others, but this does not mean that those absent are not present in some other

However, a more finely graded approach would also allow us to take on board distinctions between *types* of releases and their relative success (alternately, their relative degrees of 'incorporation'). Enduser's 2003 tour release resulted in a successful offline career. Limited-run vinyl releases may find their most significant audience through p2p circulation. There are artists (Oxygenfad, Lisbent) who are largely distributed online, through free netlabel and peer-to-peer and who, therefore, volitionally or not, have a 'home' there; the online is prioritised (whether or not that counts as a type of 'failure' depends on how narrowly we want to define 'success', and to what extent we retain pre-digital conceptions of how distribution and musical careers 'should' occur). Certain artists have 'made their name' solely through their online personæ and work distributed online; we reveal our own 'frames' when we consider the wholly offline, frontstage career more 'real'. As Sterne suggests, the distinction between the 'virtual' and the 'real' is not "just a conceptual problem but … a cultural and political issue as well" (2006: 91). Furthermore, successful offline careers have, of course, notable online aspects insofar as they are co-ordinated through email, Myspace, and other thoroughly mediated forms not considered here.

A further implication of describing this milieu as a 'backstage' is that the sense in which it may be a backstage *for participants themselves* is downplayed: we do not have access to the parties and clubs played in Bristol, Detroit, Ghent, New York, Newcastle, Osaka, Pittsburgh, Sidney, Vienna, *etc.*. These are ostensible frontstages, which in some sense validate, through co-presence, the cultural, symbolic, and affective success of breakcore practitioners as such (such validation is evident in the circulation of recordings of live performances). Breakcore and musical subcultures generally *do* seem much more 'real' when consumed or enacted in a nightclub or at a party; they become constituted as 'real' precisely through such affirmation on frontstages, which transforms isolated listeners into a collective. And this (the relative primacy of co-presence) does make chatroom interaction appear a 'backstage'. But the point of the analysis conducted here is that technologically mediated communication and music production facilitates a form of sociality distinct from, and not, strictly speaking, reducible to, a 'backstage'.[19]

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online environment. Indeed, the distinctions drawn here between practitioners as 'backstage' personæ, and practitioners as credible 'frontstage' producers, would appear quite different if the primary field site had been Myspace.

[19] It is customary during live laptop performances, for instance, for audience members to lean forward, ascertain and name the software in use. Such namings refer to and perform an antecedent, 'backstage' event of familiarity with that software, a proud proclamation of 'nerd' specialised knowledge.

Participation may be considered an end in itself rather than a means to the articulation of a frontstage, and an interest throughout has been in documenting forms of interaction in terms of their intrinsic Goffmanian 'face value'. CMC is 'speech-like', and in indicating these 'speech-like' properties, the 'field-like' properties of chatrooms emerge. The idea of a 'place' is generated by the interaction, and in much the same way, other types of 'place' are produced. It is not difficult to argue that the *dialogue* is a frontstage, produced by a Goffmanian 'team', for which the lurkers are the 'audience'. Whilst the medium may be taken as a 'back channel' for the facilitation of more 'public' stagings, and may be so 'instrumentally' utilised, it is also clearly used as a 'stage-in-itself', one which significantly impacts on the definitional constitution of the 'real'. Local interaction in the Breakcore room does, for instance, contribute to the definition circulating at large as to what breakcore actually is: there was, for a number of years, a link to a page featuring an extensive collection of *wtfibc* routines on the Wikipedia 'breakcore' page.[20]

We cannot understand breakcore without reference to its online manifestation: breakcore would not exist in its current form without digital technologies of production and distribution. The internet has established breakcore as a 'glocal' cultural phenomenon. It is dependent on the technology for its distribution and organisation, and for its production (samples, music technology). In this regard, it is not alone, and a number of other niche genres have drawn the same benefits from online distribution and sociality. As Katsh and Rifkin suggest: "what happens online inevitably touches what occurs offline" (2001: 7).

Goffman points out that "while there is a tendency for a region to become identified as the front region or back region of a performance with which it is regularly associated, still there are many regions which function at one time and in one sense as a front region and at another time and in another sense as a back region" (1990: 127). This allows us to see that places like the Breakcore room may function as back and front regions simultaneously, depending in part on the frame with which that place is interpreted. Although copyright law, for example, is enacted at some remove from the interaction of the Breakcore room, we clearly gain an insight into the cultural politics of sampling as 'resistant' through immersion in the milieu. How else can we understand the 'real' except through attention to specific local practices in a specific place, and what better sort of place than the environment discussed here? In its very disembeddedness or despatialisation, the Breakcore room is a primary site for the articulation of a vibrant cultural life. The version of the 'real' enacted

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[20] Modulactivator E2-E4, BobArdKor, and nonprophet n.d.. The link has since been removed, presumably because of coprolalic content.

there both draws on, re-articulates and transforms offline 'frontstage' material, and this tension is evident in the interaction itself (as with the negative identity of the nerd, and the discursive mobilisation of the gendered body for the policing of authenticity).

It is commonly suggested, as indicated in the opening paragraphs of this thesis, that in contemporary life we may discern a shift to a looser form of social organisation: 'weaker' (non-co-present) ties replacing traditional ties based on location, family *etc.*. This is the move to a disembedded form of sociality, to 'networked individualism', where identity is organised and expressed through consumption practices. And this is how (the backstage of) chatroom interaction relates to the broader debates about relations between the online and the offline. The form of sociality articulated through Soulseek is different from, but overlaps with, the offline 'real' or 'RL'. There is a distanciation from the 'real' which is also an enactment of a new 'real', one which may in some senses become a 'primary frame'; it has this capacity, and this text (alongside the compilations organised and released through Soulseek, the interaction there, and any number of other features of the *milieu*) is a demonstration of that.

These inter-articulations between the 'virtual' and the 'real' serve to establish each category as stable alter. However, this stability is misleading, as the two categories possess a degree of 'slide' with each other, and with other categories marginalised by the binary itself. Orientations to online material vary, and such material cannot be 'kept in its own place' (as this document indicates). The frontstage/backstage metaphor tends to impute such stability, and this is actually compounded by the 'backstage' interactional styles utilised in chatrooms. But there may be other, and perhaps better, explanatory means of elaborating the linkage between online and offline. For instance, online may be thought of as a subset of the offline, or as 'beneath' the offline, or 'above' it (in that it takes place in a nonlocal space, and yet facilitates and significantly expands the local). Online interaction is obviously related to and grounded in the 'real', but may be taken as 'real in itself', and cannot be merely an adjunct to the real when it generates offline phenomena otherwise impossible. Paradoxically, the very collapse of spatial boundedness may oblige us to look at despatialised places for elaborations of the real, or as sites of the real. The argument would then be that online interaction is effectively a new kind of 'virtual' social space, one warranting investigation in its own right, and one which leaves remarkable traces in the offline in terms of logged interaction, samples and music exchanged and so on.

Online interaction, Sterne argues, "is virtual; the rest of the world is real. But notions of phantasm, absence and unreality have plagued all 'Western' forms of representation, both in technologically mediated and other expressive forms" (2006: 98). Which is to say, face-

to-face interaction is nonetheless *linguistic* and *mediated*, and thus involves the same interpretive dilemmas as to the status of the 'real'. As Turkle asks (1997: 73): "What are we willing to count as real? What do our models allow us to see as real? To what degree are we willing to take simulations for reality? How do we keep a sense that there is a reality distinct from simulation? Would that sense be itself an illusion?"

To allocate definitive 'backstage' status to the interaction, therefore, reveals our own frame: one in which the offline (somewhat abstractly formulated) is the 'real' or 'primary framework'. I see this as problematic insofar as (a) it may be discrepant with the orientations of participants, who are clearly heavily invested and articulate in local online interaction, and (b) in a diffuse and distributed 'scene' such as breakcore, opportunities for co-present ritual affirmation may be rare:

RJ room 19/09/04

[m-loc] none of my friends listen to it, small small dnb scene in my town

Breakcore is not exceptional in this regard, and it has been noted in relation to other niche genres that "online networks have to compensate for the comparative scarcity of real-life meeting points" (Caspary and Manzenreiter 2003: 63).[21] Virtual communities, Stone writes, "are part of a range of innovative solutions to the drive for sociality – a drive that can be frequently thwarted by the geographical and cultural realities of cities increasingly structured according to the needs of powerful economic interests rather than in ways that encourage and facilitate habitation and social interaction in the urban context. In this context, electronic virtual communities are complex and ingenious strategies for *survival*" (2006: 170). Not only may there be no available analogous offline group, but the online group itself may be the primary means of expressing 'group-ness' in relation the 'scene' – it may constitute the 'scene' as such.

This is what makes a grasp of the peculiar socio-spatiality of online interaction imperative, particularly where we have inherited implicitly spatial notions of cultural activity, which then structure our interest in searching for a (geographic) 'real'. In the Birmingham tradition of subcultural theory, Jenks reminds us, subcultures are seen as "sites

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[21] This fact may lead us to speculate that those resident at or near major *geographical* breakcore 'scenes', such as Ghent, or Newcastle, would have less recourse to the online environment for the fulfilment of these needs. However, such geographical proximity may paradoxically bolster online activity for some participants: recall the conceptions of 'representing' and "we from this city-core".

or spaces wrested from the constraints of capitalism and the dominant order. Even though conceptual, these spaces are spoken of through mostly geographical metaphors such as 'turf', 'territory', 'terrain', and 'space' and the boundaries, which enable entry or exclusion, are marked out by language and style" (2005: 119). "The history of youth culture," Hetherington argues, "whether that be spectacular sub-cultures or more ordinary and conformist practices, has always had an element of making space for oneself, of creating a turf and finding one's place" (1998: 328-329). Front and back regions are similarly geographical, although in Goffman's discussion of the 'geography of license', a further term is introduced: "free spaces" (1961: 205-216). Free spaces are those areas where individuals or groups are able to relax, free from the control of authorities, and yet often paradoxically 'under the nose' of those authorities. A free place, Goffman continues, may become a "group territory" when a group is able to exercise a proprietary monopoly over it (1961: 213).

Yet we may imagine a free space which is 'lifted out' of geographical space: "while cyberspace may lack for the most part the physical geography found in, say, a neighbourhood, city or country, it offers users very real opportunities for collective communities and individual identities" (Silver 2006: 64). As Leonard points out in her discussion of zines, "sub-cultures should not be considered unified groups tied to a locality, creed or style, but as dynamic, diverse, geographically mobile networks" (1998: 101). This sort of free space is structured around and through technology (specifically, the p2p2 platform), and around transmission or *flow*, it is a network or "Zeliger circuit" in the sense delineated by Collins: "privatized and fragmented networks may continue to sustain cultural differences, in that distinct cultural capitals circulate within particular sociable networks; but they are invisible to outsiders, not widely recognizable as lifestyle groups" (Collins 2004: 274). Thus the network or community of breakcore practitioners discussed here, with its distinct breakbeat cultural capital, is *largely* invisible as a 'lifestyle group', but not *completely* invisible. One of the few ways it *becomes* visible, though, is online, and where this is the case, the somewhat unwieldy term 'cybersubculture' is sometimes used: "We recognize a cybersubculture when the relationship between technology, on the one side, and the social structures and communicative processes that constitute the community, on the other, are so intimate that without the technology, this subculture would cease to exist" (Caspary and Manzenreiter 2003: 63).

On this definition breakcore (at the time of this research at the very latest) was a cybersubculture – one which seems increasingly to be 'crossing over' or gaining recognition in 'real life' – whilst Soulseek is a cultural content economy which provides a crucial free

space for groups to produce 'group territories' in chatrooms. The (de)spatialisation of 'virtual' commodities becomes crucial when we compare it with other subcultural innovations with regard to conventional flows (for instance, Ruddick 1998, which documents punk endeavours to bypass the cash nexus). One of the issues we glimpse here is the relation between space and commodity, and the manner in which the digital, networked collapse of space disrupts the commodity form. This is, of course, why there are institutional elements involved (such as the RIAA). Many of the commodities which constitute cultural reality and structure temporal process for regular Soulseek users (the next obscure, rare, and difficult to find release) are familiar only as mp3 traces, although 'real' vinyl artefacts persist: "with the Internet there is the possibility that face to face be demoted from its ostensibly classic preordained position/status as ultimate yardstick. The Internet itself is a plurality of media operated by diverse technologies which constitute a culture or a social space in its own right … Computer-mediated contexts, we submit, deserve treatment on their own terms, coming out from under the shadow of what used to be called 'real life' or 'meat space'. CMC is real enough" (Rafaeli, Raban and Kalman 2005: 61).

The difficulty here, however, lies in maintaining a critical stance towards naïve 'realism', "while at the same time speaking to the real" (Sterne 2006: 96). All the means Soulseek provides for 'community' purposes are the ones that help the researcher find/constitute a 'field' as such. As Nonnecke and Preece soberly remind us: "online groups are one of many places for interaction, and although it may not seem like it from a research perspective, life for most members is more than life in the online group" (2003: 126). Caution is required, for "Sites have a tendency to focus our attention on the ways in which things are kept together as part of a cultural unit. We are focused on the local, the contextual, the interrelated and the coherent. The ethnographic description itself has a tendency to make the field seem homogenous … Online ethnographies despatialize notions of community, and focus on cultural process rather than physical place. This can, however, be at the expense of minimizing connections with offline life" (Hine 2000: 61).

Virtual ethnography faces a trade-off, between, on the one hand, exploring the richness of online data, and on the other, *contextualising* this in relation to the offline. This, however, is arguably a problem faced by ethnography in general. As Hine asks (2000: 59): "Where does the local stop and the global begin?" How dense or bounded, how broad or detailed, ought the focus be? Collins suggests that the very fabric of social reality is maintained through "a *single* definition of the situation, one reality at a time. And this definition needs to be upheld by active efforts, and defended against breakdowns and rival definitions" (2004: 24). And this is the focus of this thesis; it concentrates on the

collaboration in producing a textual 'real' through computer-mediated interaction, and in turn, through this concentration or focus, produces a further textual 'real' as ethnography. We may nonetheless want to contextualise these practices, for the human subjects we encounter online "are also subjects of television, telephony, radio, film, and music, as well as elevators, clothing, speech patterns, and food" (Sterne 2006: 96). This can be formulated as a special case of a general scholarly problem, as Tannen suggests: "in order to study any phenomenon, a scholar must isolate the aspect to be studied and focus on it. This gives potential critics an obvious handle to grab onto: 'You ignored this; you left out that'" (2002: 1656). This problem is compounded in studying online phenomena though, which have such a notoriously problematic ontological relation to conventional (and implicitly spatialised) notions of reality. Virtual ethnography, then, is of necessity focused, and in consequence, open to critique in terms of its possible partiality. Yet, Hine continues, "If culture and community are not self-evidently located in place, then neither is ethnography" (2000: 59).

This issue, then, is also related to questions of textual practice and emphasis, to how the adaptive and emergent ethnographic approach taken is articulated and justified. Online 'communities' or 'cybersubcultures' are socially constituted and produced, in this instance, through text and audio primarily, they are not 'real' (or seem not to occur in the 'real'), but in fact, neither, strictly speaking, are *offline* communities; it is perhaps better to frame the discussion in terms of overlapping and intersecting networks, rather than communities, particularly where the latter tend to be conceptualised in strongly spatial terms. Space is both physically real and socially produced and articulated; online space *can* be mapped back on to the geographical 'real', but remains, likewise socially produced and articulated, an extension of the social into fictive space, which in turn significantly reconstitutes real space. The 'real', like 'nature', is "a *strategy* for maintaining boundaries for political and economic ends, and thus a way of making meaning" (Stone 2006: 162). As Stone goes on to point out (and as my findings confirm), interactants themselves conceive of 'their' online space as a place, and mobilise corporeal bodies and references to them as means of legitimating and contesting discursive accounts (*ibid.*: 164-165).

The management of the 'real' is significantly mediated: spectacular events (such as 9/11) receive media coverage in part because they are televisable. Yet these other mass media forms are 'naturalised', they have become part of the 'taken-for-granted'. 'Reality' is constituted much more so through television and print media, which fundamentally inform 'what is happening'. This is what makes it something of an imposition to assume that the definition of a primary framework to reality can be fixed with reference to co-present interaction. The TV is *there*, and dramatically participates in the constitution of reality, but

those who participate in TV viewing are not 'in' the TV. Nonetheless, the audience and the media corroborate and contest the definitions of reality on offer. The difference lies, in part, in the extent to which participants can collaborate in the definition being constructed within the media itself. TV offers relatively sparse opportunities for collaboration, whereas on p2p, the definition is effectively reliant on participants. People participate in numerous communities or networks online and off, with varying degrees of activity or emphasis. Chatroom dialogue, as a sort of frontstage (that is, from the lurker's perspective), is actually oddly similar to reality TV, which in turn makes this document 'like' reality TV, although wearing *shitless* sociological clothes or narration. These distinct mediascapes or media flows intersect and overlap in their constitution of the social – as is evident with sampling. Turkle points out that "Some are tempted to think of life in cyberspace as insignificant, as escape or meaningless diversion. It is not. Our experiences there are serious play" (1997: 269).

10.6 Bedroom producerness beyond rationalisation/democratisation

Theory is *narrative*, metaphor, analogy, diegesis, allegory; populated by characters (the radio ham, the proletariat, the fratriarchal horde). Some narratives have particular evocative purchase – fratriarchy is one such story: it *helps* us to understand otherwise perplexing interactional and discursive forms. This is not to diminish the potential difficulties if that deployment is read as theoretical 'truth': as Schorske argues, where "Patricide replaces regicide, psychoanalysis overcomes history. Politics is neutralized by a counterpolitical psychology" (1973: 342). In contrast, this analysis has sought to explore the political aspects of the 'field' in all their 'both/and' effects.

The rationalisation/democratisation binary, from this perspective, is a narrative resource, with the ambivalent radio ham as principal character. It is a story about the technologisation and privatisation of sociality and 'resistance', and the proliferation of signifying forms. At the risk of referential redundancy, it is possible to argue that the competing frameworks: rationalisation/democratisation, on the one hand; and coprolalia/*shitlessness* on the other, allow us to dramatise an intellectual 'fight' in the text, just along the lines of that previously classed as adversative. Effectively, rationalisation and democratisation are appropriately sober, *shitless*, frontstage preoccupations suitable to

a sociology PhD, whilst coprolalia emerges from the backstage problematics of looking at the milieu itself.[22]

The radio ham *haunts* conceptions of subjectivity at the music-technology nexus, but is not 'there' before we look for him. The cultural location of the bedroom producer, his preoccupations and subcultural history, the problematics of the cultural landscape he inhabits (homosociality, sexuality, race and identity; gaming and computer culture; subcultural language use; nerddom and 'hacktivist' ethics; 'underground' aesthetics and so on), fade from view where he is rendered merely the latest manifestation of a longstanding, negatively valued social stereotype. The radio ham reverberates, 'radio hamness' is a narrative that echoes in bedroom producerness, but also simplifies in fundamental ways.

To advance this argument is not to dismiss the problematic forms of social differentiation and distinction through which bedroom producer culture is articulated – the routine and ritual misogyny, racism and homophobia through which fratriarchal subcultural authenticity is performed, but to contextualise these as instantiations of 'the real' which are, as we have seen, reflexively contested, reinforced, and transgressed within exchange. The exclusionary force of fratriarchal exchange can not be dismissed because of the cultural work achieved through this exchange, but the deterministic rationalisation/democratisation scheme does not, in this case, provide the 'right' critique.

As Gilbert and Pearson suggest, "we need far more precise accounts of the power relationships existing within and between cultural formations, dominant and non-dominant, accounts which recognize that there is no single locus of power in society, but rather a multiplicity of points at which power is condensed and dispersed" (1999: 160). Consider, as a possibly more 'precise account', what Schilt names "c/overt resistance", by which, in their creation of subcultural spaces, individuals "overtly express their anger, confusion, and frustration to like-minded peers but still remain covert and anonymous to authority figures" (2003: 81). Perhaps the practices discussed above could be considered 'c/overt resistance'?

How we conceptualise this depends on what we think it is that is to be 'resisted'. Straightedge, the punk offshoot eschewing intoxicants and promiscuity, is legible as a form of resistance (and 'reads itself' as such), but drug culture can also be construed as resistant (and likewise considers itself so). Resistance is not axiomatically 'progressive'; reactionary and ambivalent 'resistances' are also possible. Kahn-Harris argues that "contemporary

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[22] The binary is also recognisable within the classical divisions which rend sociological theory: macro vs. micro, structure vs. agency, passive vs. active, materialism vs. idealism and so on.

capitalist societies contain a myriad of cultural forms that rework, transgress and provide safe space from oppressive structures of domination" (2004: 96). Some of these 'reworkings' and 'transgressions' move in directions rendering binary interpretive schemes inappropriate, and some of these 'safe spaces' ensure their survival (and their very *spatiality*) through being 'unsafe' to Others. Only close analysis can adequately grasp how gender, ethnicity, sexuality and so on, what McRobbie describes as "'zombie concepts', dead but still alive", are articulated within subcultural discourses and performances (2002: 527). This is tied to the points Gilbert and Pearson raise, about what politics youth cultures can feasibly be said to operationalise. It is also related to Thornton's argument that the hegemony of the 'mainstream' is a discursive construction (by practitioners, and by commentators influenced by the legacy of subcultural studies). Where this is the case, 'resistance' is not only perspectival but centrifugal, and can be considered a form of exclusive subcultural capital accrual. Thus subcultures are re-read as competitive hierarchies: "however 'radical' a group may consider their particular practice to be, in truth they are merely trying to accumulate subcultural capital at the expense of the unhip" (Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 159-160).

This is why 'transgression' as a descriptor is preferable to 'resistance'. Unlike the latter term, transgression is multiform; its 'direction' is not 'fixed'. But transgression (including 'symbolic' or 'representational' transgression) *can* alter the field (Babcock 1978). Where transgression is dependent on norms, the transgression of these norms indicates their construction and thus the possibility of their reformulation.

Where (and only where) a specific model of 'power' is put in place, the practices associated with bedroom producerness can indeed be read as transgressive; if we so choose, bedroom producerness can be read as a 'protest masculinity' (Connell 2005: 114). The preceding analysis has demonstrated this fratriarchal, masculinist aspect of subculture, adversatively 'against' the 'mainstream'. Similarly, where contemporary mass culture is read as 'McDonaldised' or 'Sonyist': "cartelized, transnational systems of production and distribution offering consumers 'a stylized glut of semiotic objects' within each generalized, generic rut of industrialized taste" (Pfeil 1995: 106); bedroom producerness can be thought of as espousing an alternative, open-source or 'Linuxist' critique of cultural production: "youth cultural forms may be celebrated (albeit cautiously and critically) as providing a means for the 'survival' of individual subjects within new forms of symbolically creative community in a complex and difficult world" (Kahn-Harris 2004: 96).

10.7 \m/

Another sociologistic-narrative character is the ethnographic 'I'. As a joke/critique at the expense of the 'salvage' ethnography trope and Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, I propose the latter's account of CMC interaction translated into research as 'drive-by ethnography'.[23] I am not unaware of the ironies of the 'PhD music' label (Thornton 1994: 178). This text is directly predicated on other, collectively generated media; constructed out of the voices of many people. Without them, I couldn't speak at all; there would be nothing for me to say (I said nothing 'new'). The document is a collage, a journey through media. But the patterns accentuated and rendered linear here are diffuse, subtle, dynamic. Instances of meaning, *moving targets* in interaction, have been 'tied down' so as to be explored.

Morley argues in his description of 'textual ventriloquism' that: "the fact that the analyst finally produces an account of his subjects' activities which is not expressed in their own terms, and which may in fact be different from the account they would offer of their own activities, hardly invalidates it, but is perhaps precisely the necessary responsibility of the analyst" (2005: 179). The questions raised by reflexive critiques of ethnography, about how ethnographers can most effectively "integrate the subjectivity of those they observe into their analysis" (Augé 1995: 39), are legitimate, but might not be the most important ones to ask about ethnographic practice. Ethnographers will go on making re-presentations, for the alternative is not some radical anti-representation (for instance, silence – or, a new '[non]noise' non-sense), which wholly abandons the realist epistemology of the representational project, but merely other, better representations.

In describing this world, I have also participated in constructing (a certain version of) it. Texts (such as this) are not merely responses to or reflections of social relations; they also feed back into them (Wolff 1992: 711). The 'materiality of texts' implies that there is no 'neutral' representation; all representation operates upon that which it represents. To foreground the voices of the 'Others' is not a real solution, for the ethnographic *I* still stands behind these voices, 'authorising' them. The 'dialogic' text is still 'authored' – even with 'interrupted' texts with multiple authors (such as the transcripts this thesis is based

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[23] Putnam argues that "Anonymity and fluidity in the virtual world encourage 'easy in, easy out,' 'drive-by' relationships. That very casualness is the appeal of computer-mediated communication for some denizens of cyberspace, but it discourages the creation of social capital" (2000: 177). This is hard to square with the social impact of p2p, even if the latter is assessed only in terms of its role in the intellectual property debate. Perhaps Putnam, too, is looking for the 'wrong' thing.

on). Some voices are 'backgrounded', and others 'amplified', because of the editorial priorities of the story to be told. Personæ have been directly 'sampled', as have musicians and scholars; in treating all of these sources as public, a sort of textual soup or 'plundertext' is produced.

The ethics of public citation – reproduction of public interaction for the purpose of scholarly analysis, run parallel with the ideas mobilised in the discourse around copyright, sampling, p2p and creativity. All of these issues are related to the burst of information proliferation advanced by networked interconnectivity. The data, the rendition of the milieu, and the audioscape of this text, are predicated on the co-existence of this (glocal) interconnectivity and the (glocal) resources available to the researcher. They are these issues 'personalised'; in the same way that p2p can be considered as 'privatised' or 'c/overt resistance'. On the other hand, it can be argued that I have, in scopophilic, auditory and discursive senses, 'spilled beans'. No matter how correct it may be to render certain generalisations, or to interpret data in certain ways, this is nonetheless an imposition. But it is a necessary imposition and in some ways an imposition impossible *not* to make.[24]

The quotation from *The Tempest* in the epigraph to this chapter refers to the 'word-magic' elaborated in previous chapters. It 'cuts' in more than one way, referring to the fratriarchal 'speech' genres analysed and their 'cursing' of His Master's Voice, and the sociological metalanguages for the interpretation of such genres. In making the statement, Caliban "achieves for an instant an absolute if intolerably bitter moral victory"; it is "an assertion of inconsolable human pain and bitterness" (Greenblatt 1990: 25-26). Caliban, Greenblatt asserts, represents the colonial perspective that, prior to colonisation, the 'natives' have no language, they are culturally void and awaiting inscription (*ibid.*: 26). Their speech is gibberish, a *babble*. And, as Sardar argues: "If cyberspace is the newly discovered Other of Western civilisation, then its colonisation would not be complete without the projection of Western man's repressed sexuality and spiritual yearning onto the 'new continent'" (Sardar 1996: 33). In the last colonial moment, this projection rendered the Other "a screen onto which Renaissance Europeans, bound by their institutions, project their darkest and yet most compelling fantasies" (Greenblatt 1990: 22). The 'space' generated by CMC, such as the space of p2p, is being 'colonised', and an implication of this is that social research too will seek to explicate the babble of the unruly natives, including the 'dark' and 'compelling' aspects evident in this 'gibberish'.

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[24] 'Sense' must be made; Garfinkel's 'breaching' experiments demonstrated how sense *is* made and attributed (Garfinkel 2002b, Heritage 1984).

The reader may recall the following statement from section 5.1:

> To make these points is to gesture towards the ambivalent position of *this* textual voice in terms of the distinction between shitless discourse and coprolalia ... My own sensibilities have at times been offended, and this would seem to align this text along with the formalistic, bourgeois voice and register which I have been arguing opposes itself to the nonserious heteroglossia of chatroom interaction.

We are now in a position to assess the authorial position assumed here and its relation to the speech genres discussed in previous chapters, specifically, to ask: is the 'voice' of this thesis *shitless*? Where we read, for instance, ritual insult, as coprolalic, we are reading it through a certain framework, and there is a sense in which doing so may appear to be an instance of those "misunderstandings which arise during interaction between persons who come from groups with different ritual standards" (Goffman 1967: 17n11). Within the *milieu*, such exchanges are routine (and routinely offensive); to label the exchanges coprolalic could appear to be an imposition of an etic, *shitless* perspective.

This text certainly adheres, by and large, to the *shitless* "impersonal sentence constructions" of EAP, or 'English for Academic Purposes' (Scott and Turner 2004: 150). In academic writing, "impersonality is seen as a defining feature of expository writing as it embodies the positivist assumption that academic research is purely empirical and objective" (Hyland 2002: 1095). 'What *really* happened' is a definitional matter, addressed perspectivally; satisfactory accounts vary in length and perspective according to whom they are presented: the accounts presented in this text follow the specific, formal protocol of EAP, a protocol different from that characteristic of chatroom dialogue and other 'backstage' speech modes – not least, about the production of this thesis itself: "different literacies are appropriate in different contexts; and in an academic context, an appropriate literacy will not be achieved merely by having a command of a range of grammatical and lexical features" (Harwood 2004: 80). The 'backstage' accounts I may offer sociably about my work are, of course, absent, as the rhetorical conventions of traditional 'academese' writing oblige an impartial stance as a means of constituting 'objectivity'.[25] As Goffman rather dryly puts it: "the urbane style affected in some scholarly books can be

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[25] I don't, for instance, refer to the work of 'writing up' as 'a pain in the arse' or some such, as perhaps I might to those casually enquiring 'backstage' about my progress.

constructively compared with the feverish drudgery the author may have endured in order to complete the index on time" (1990: 53).[26]

My decision to focus analysis largely on interactions from which I was absent further highlights my distanciating production of an 'objective' text, in which the analytical, impersonal gaze of the observer takes precedence, over the locally produced 'truths' and relevances of interaction. The latter are at times pressed into service as exemplifying elements of a debate constituted in *this* text: this is evident in the rhetorical 'freeze-framing' analysis presented in 9.3, which uses lively interaction to illustrate abstractly formulated ('real' in a sense of referring to antecedent cultural ontologies) arguments. This impersonality is referred to in applied linguistics as *stance* or *evaluation*: "the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (Thompson and Hunston 2001: 5).

The marking or display of stance – for example, the deployment of the ethnographic *I* – conventionally "tends to cluster at various points, notably in the Abstract, at the beginning of the narrative, in the Coda, at the end of the narrative, and just before the narrative's denouement, suspending the action. Essentially, it is evaluation that enables monologic dialogue to be interactive and to fulfil a communicative function" (*ibid.*: 13). It is through evaluation that the reader understands what the writer *thinks*, *feels* or *believes* about what is reported (evaluation is thus 'persuasive'). Furthermore, evaluation is also reflexive or self-evaluative, insofar as "Speakers and hearers evaluate their individual and collective sense of self through the telling and hearing of stories" (Cortazzi and Jin 2001: 120).

In an intriguing parallel to the 'virtual community' debate, the impersonal rhetoricity and general *shitlessness* of EAP is historically related to the idea of textual "*virtual witnessing*" in scientific writing, emerging notably in the debate between Hobbes and Boyle during the 1660s (Shapin and Schaffer 1985: 60). Virtual witnessing is a means of "compelling assent" from the reader, through constituting the latter as a member of an *imagined* or *virtual* scientific community, competent to reproduce or visualise scientific experiments – and thus to assent to the report of such experiments (Stone 2006: 149). As

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[26] Goffman also touches on the *shitless* frame of academic writing in discussing his decision not to quote (famously 'obscene', coprolalic) Lenny Bruce material: "Observe that I have not cited what Mr. Bruce goes on to cite, because restrictions of my frame allow me to do that only if something would be lost in not doing so, which is not the case, although *now*, in the light of this comment on the frame of academic books, I might have warrant for repeating Bruce's illustration" (1974: 71n55).

Shapin and Schaffer indicate in their discussion of this nascent literary style: "The confidence with which one ought to speak about matters of fact extended to stipulations about the proper use of authorities. Citations of other writers should be employed to use them not as 'judges, but as witnesses,' as 'certificates to attest matters of fact' (1985: 68). Citations, then, "are used to increase the rhetoricity of a text" (Harwood 2004: 81). Correct quotation and citation is a central "disciplinary practice" within academic production (Baynham 1999: 486). Boyle, Stone suggests, "correctly surmised that the 'gentlemen' for whom he was writing believed that boring, detailed writing implied painstaking experimental work. Consequently, it came to pass that boring writing was likely to indicate scientific truth" (2006: 149). Crucially, the style constituted in its address an absent, but 'real', agonic community of virtual witnesses; nascently 'objective', but critical adversaries to be persuaded, and in so doing produced a "public space … for collective witnessing" (Shapin and Schaffer 1985: 336). Thus, as Hyland asserts, "we do not simply report findings or express ideas in some neutral, context-free way, we employ the rhetorical resources accepted for the purpose of sharing meanings in a particular genre and social community" (2002: 1093).

In this text, therefore, *I* 'take it seriously', pay attention to the 'Master's Voice', reference and exhibit proper ritual deference to the sacred and canonical (re)sources of the bibliography. As Baynham argues, "Quoting and referring to the words of others to authorize truth statements in this way is a central and constitutive activity in rhetorical genres in general and the academic essay in particular" (1999: 492). The *shitless* ethnographic *I* is thus fundamentally a textual device, and a product of a specific cultural ideology: "The points at which writers choose to make themselves visible in their texts through self-reference have considerable rhetorical importance, indicating the kinds of commitments writers are willing to make and the information they are prepared to give about their beliefs as individuals" (Hyland 2002: 1098). As such, this "ideology that knowledge can (and should) be separated from the knower" remains evident (Tannen 2002: 1666). The *shitlessness* of EAP is a rhetorical and textual strategy, one deployed here in a quite specific style. To reiterate a crucial point previously cited, which bears on the impersonality of EAP and sociologistic knowledge production in general: "to qualify a statement with the modifier 'I know' is to deprive it of factual status" (Smith 1990: 66).

I do not, for instance, reference my own musical endeavours; I have chosen to foreground a certain frame, from which I am *notionally* absent: "writers represent themselves, and find themselves represented, by their rhetorical choices" (Hyland 2002: 1093). There are, in fact, things 'I know' about bedroom producerness, p2p file-sharing,

music production, and music consumption, from 'the inside' as it were, which I do not elaborate here, in part to maintain this 'objective' line, but also out of a genuine belief that experience articulated by others is more germane and persuasive than my own would be (referencing others, and analysing transcripts, is thus in part a strategy for constituting a social reality more 'objective', because 'outside' of or 'autonomous' from the text and the writer).[27] *Shitlessness* is also reflexively evident in the coprolalia/*shitlessness* binary itself, and the careful phrasing and textual demarcation of terms such as *nigga*: I *key* local terms in parenthesis or italics (for instance: '*pwned*'). My 'objectivising' use of a distinctive, sociologistic terminology further distances me from the local 'real' of the analysed interaction.

Scott and Turner point out that "Such an objectivist relationship to knowledge has of course been challenged in many areas of the social sciences and humanities, but its rhetorical effects continue to hold sway in the conventions of academic writing" (2004: 146-147). To indicate this is implicitly to suggest "a criticism of paradigmatic thinking (the traditional logico-scientific mode of knowing) in favour of narrative ways of making meaning which help us to understand human action" (Cortazzi and Jin 2001: 117). The contrast is between 'theorised' and 'experiential' knowledge, and part of what usually occurs in 'correct', successful academic writing is that the latter comes to be articulated as or translated into the former (Baynham 1999: 500). Note also that the legitimating 'objectivity' so assumed is closely linked to the adversative mode of academic knowledge production, and in turn to the sedimentation of the 'bibliography' previously discussed (6.3).

This text, then, is itself a ritual interaction which 'cycles through' a 'correct' sociological narrative. It has received its own 'back talk' critique in a 'frontstage' environment; been subjected to 'vetting' or audiencing which classifies it as exactly the sort of text it is: "the degree of certainty attached to particular knowledge claims is the subject of negotiation, and … the final version must be very precisely modified as a result" (Thompson and Hunston 2001: 10). As such, EAP is virtually inevitably *shitless* (this is part of the guarantee of its 'objectivity', part of what constitutes such writing as a

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[27] Simultaneously, I switch between representational and analytical levels (from local interaction to LFO Demon, for instance) without explicit indication: presumably LFO Demon's definition of "raggacore" is a 'frontstage' presentation (similarly with reviews of Mixmeister, the TTM, Whitehouse, or dev/null). Certainly, textual reification is evident in such accounts insofar as they do not allow for 'back talk' in the same way as 'live' interaction. The analysis gradually moves 'out', from local micro-interactional contest, to broader cultural and sociological debates.

'disciplined' and disciplinary genre, and part of what legitimates this text as an instance of such writing). Although in this particular instance coprolalic content is addressed, addressing it as such reinforces the *shitless* aspect of this text, and paradoxically, reinforces the ontological status of the coprolalia/*shitlessness* binary.

Terms such as piggyback branding, personæ, coprolalia and *shitlessness*, ritual adversative exchange, bedroom producerness, the nerd/cool dialectic, fratriarchy, time-killing and edit-tightening, unlike rationalisation and democratisation, do not predate the engagement with the data, and thus their ontological status, as it were, is more reliable: they emerge consequentially from analysis of interaction as heuristic devices. This is not to deny that they are informed by other terms framing the discussion, including notable local terms (such as leech, *1337*, *ghey*, drillbit, noise). The phenomena referenced in these terms are 'there', and open to analysis. But *this* analysis is also fundamentally informed by the 'bibliography', with all the social differentiation that implies. Anthropology is anthropophagous (Morley 2005: 177), where this refers to both the researcher and the researched. As Ricoeur suggests, "the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better" (1981: 158). It therefore involves the deployment of "connatural knowledge", which "implicates the knower in what he knows" (Payne 1993: 94). Much is said, and I have sought to explore some of the ways of 'sayings'. Soulseek, obviously, is a brand, to which I largely subscribe. Yet Soulseek is also an 'address', an interactional mode, a set of politico-cultural priorities, a social experiment, the sign of a sociotechnical 'lifestyle', a site of fratriarchal privilege, a 'disorganisation', a criminal(ised) activity, a thing to do and a way of doing, a space where many extraordinary aesthetics are articulated, and a multiply transgressive, contradictory moment. In the discussion above, I have tried to show how these strands are interwoven.

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Discography

The following (technically an 'mp3ography') is a list of works featuring artists directly cited and further selected releases exemplifying trends discussed in the text. "Not on label" indicates that the audio was initially distributed on a self-produced CD, whilst "unreleased" designates material distributed solely via p2p. In some instances, it has not been possible to determine catalogue numbers. Where applicable, websites hosting releases are also indicated.

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___. 2006. *Grist*. Ad Noiseam Records (adn70).

___. 2006. *Live and Regret*. Cock Rock Disco (vrock008).

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___. 2005. *In Memory Of/Sans Soleil*. Jungle Therapy (jt007).

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Macronympha. 1995. *Grind*. Old Europa Café (oec064).

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Madvillain. 2005. *Four Tet Remixes*. Stones Throw (sth2102).

Main$tream. 2005. *Main$tream Towers*. Painfree Foundsound Institute (pffscd09).

Maja Ratkje. 2002. *Voice*. Rune Grammofon (rcd 2028).

Maladroit. 2003. *Calcium Labyrinth*. Core-Tex Labs (crtx015).

___. 2005. *Jungl*. Not on label.

___. 2006. *Evil Pink*. Not on Label (maladroit4).

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___. 2005. *Cover the Earth*. Heresee Records (057).

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___. 2006. *Ove-Chan Dancehall*. Adaadat Records (ada0011).

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___. 2006. *666*. D-Trash Records (dtrash86).

___. 2007. *Oxygenfad*. D-Trash Records (dtrash97).

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Rebel MC. 1992. *Word, Sound and Power*. Rough Trade Germany (rtd129.1489.2).

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Retrigger. 2005. *Jamaicore Police Guide*. Digital Enemy (de001).

Robad Pills. 2006. *Sorry for the Ragga Jungle Phase*. SickMode (mode029).

Rotator. 2005. *Dissident Sound Maniak Part 1.0*. Peace Off Records (poffltd06).

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___. 2006. *Help Me Keep Up Destruktion*. Broklyn Beats (bb023).

___. 2007. *Choose Your Poison, Mine is Hardcore !!!*. Peace Off (poff cd mix 03).

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___. 2004. *Vengeance of the Whitehawk Townies*. Death$ucker Records (d$r8.0).

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Slepcy. 2006. *We are the Newest Battle Models*. Cock Rock Disco (crock010).

Slogun. 1999. *Kill to Forget*. Jinx (jinx12-001).

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Strog. 2006. *RaggaTerror Front*. Roff Break (rbzh02).

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___. 2007. *RMXD*. Zero71 Recordings (z71.00).

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___. 1998. *When Pornography is No Longer Enough*. Death Factory (death-982).

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Terminal 11. 2007. *Fractured Sunshine*. Hymen Records (¥755).

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Tourette Syndrom. 2005. *Gabbergrind*. Apathic View Productions (001-2).

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Various Artists. 1995. *Industrial F**king Strength*. Earache Records (mosh150cd).

Various Artists. 1995. *Japanese/American Noise Treaty*. Release Entertainment (rr6930-2).

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Various Artists. 2002 *Bloodclot Ragga Jungle Volume 1*. Killa Records.

Various Artists. 2002. *$kill$ Music*. Sozialistischer Plattenbau Records (spb7005 & spb7006).

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Various Artists. 2003. *Bloodclot Ragga Jungle Volume 2*. Killa Records (brj 002).

Various Artists. 2003. *Drug Skill*. Deathchant Records (dclp003).

Various Artists. 2003. *InfiniteComplexity/Phthalo Businesscard*. Phthalo.

Various Artists. 2004. *Breakcore Gives Me Wood* Wood Records (wood01).

Various Artists. 2004. *Carbon*. Mirex (mirex_c3).

Various Artists. 2004. *Drop Name Records Volume 1*. Painfree Foundsound Institute (pfffs/v:03).

Various Artists. 2004. *Heilige Feuer IV*. Der Angriff (angriff17).

Various Artists. 2004. *Widerstand.org Compilation*. Restroom Records (restroom12003/004).

Various Artists. 2005. *It's Incredibly Retail*. Painfree Foundsound Institute (pffscd006).

Various Artists. 2005. *Kill Your Brain*. Cerebral Destruction (sana008).

Various Artists. 2005. *Teenage Mutant Breakcore Pirates in What the Fuck is Breakcore*. Not on label.

Various Artists. 2005. *The Gutter Techno Experience*. A Klass Records (ak003).

Various Artists. 2005. *Tsunbosajiki*. Renda Records (md-003).

Various Artists. 2005. *Xtreme.core Xtract* Noistorm Records (nois001).

Various Artists. 2006. *Midi_sai Hit Parade*. Midiskee Records (mdsk-0001).

Various Artists. 2006. *The Gooder Slsk Noise Room Comp*. Non Quality Audio (nqa060). http://www.nonqualityaudio.tk.

Various Artists. 2006. *The Kamikaze Club 05*. Peace Off (poffkc05).

Various Artists. 2006. *The Most Goodest Slsk Noise Room Comp*. Non Quality Audio (nqa080). http://www.nonqualityaudio.tk.

Various Artists. 2006. *The Slsk Noise Room Comp*. Non Quality Audio (nqa020). http://www.nonqualityaudio.tk.

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Various Artists. 2007. *Sick Compilation*. Acidsamovar Records (acsa002).

Various Artists. N.d.. *Blotklaatrave Turbo Limited*. Polisz Denskor Forewer (brl001).

Various Artists. N.d.. *Oxycore: Underground Breakzzz of Poland*. Not on label.

Venetian Snares and Speedranch. 2001. *Making Orange Things*. Planet Mu Records (ziq028).

Venetian Snares. 2001. *Snares Man!* History of the Future (hot007).

___. 2002. *237 0894* Planet Mu Records (ziq057).

___. 2005. *Rossz Csillag Allat Született*. Planet Mu Records (ziq111).

___. 2006. *Cavalcade of Glee and Dadaist Happy Hardcore*. Planet Mu Records (ziq150).

___. 2007. *Pink+Green*. Sublight Records (slr204).

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___. 2003. *Bird Seed*. Susan Lawly Records (slcd025).

___. 2006. *Asceticicts*. Susan Lawly Records (slcd028).

Winstons, The. 1969. *Color Him Father/Amen, Brother*. Metromedia Records (mms-117).

Wolf Eyes and Black Dice. 2001. *Chimes in Black Water Volume 1*. American Tapes (am200).

Wolf Eyes. 2004. *Burned Mind*. Sub Pop Records (spcd638).

___. 2006. *Human Animal*. Sub Pop Records (spcd 688).

___. 2006. *River Slaughter*. Hospital Productions (hos-135).

Xanopticon vs. Eiterherd. 2001. *Novus Ordo Seculorum*. Peace Off (poffltd04).

Xian. 2006. *European Tour CD*. Not on label.

Zombieflesheater. 2005. *Powerviolent Dancehall*. Sprengstoff Records (sprengstoff09).

CD Playlist

A CD is provided with the intention of the giving the reader an opportunity to hear the amen and the soundscape of which it is a constituent. The pieces selected are ordered loosely by date. The emphasis is on the development of breakcore from jungle: chip tune, gabber, grind and noise have therefore been omitted, although elements of all of these genres are here discernible. The aesthetic practices and social processes discussed in the text, the different ways of 'saying' the amen, and the diverse 'sayings' *around* it, will also be evident to the listener.

The Winstons: "Amen, Brother" (*Color Him Father/Amen, Brother* 1969).
N.W.A.: "Straight Outta Compton" (*Straight Outta Compton* 1988).
Rebel MC: "Rich are Getting Richer" (*Word, Sound and Power* 1992).
DJ Hype: "Bad Man" (*Ganja Volume Two* 1994).
Bomb20: "Branded" (*Flip Burgers or Die!* 1998).
Aphasic: "Dirty Face" (*Bass & Superstructure* 2000).
Patric Catani: "Hitler 2000" (*Hitler 2000* 2000).
Venetian Snares: "Clearance Bin" (*Snares Man!* 2001).
Parasite: "Pure and Simple" (*Popstar Liberation Front: Steal Our Song* 2002).
Ove-Naxx: "Sex – Drug – Breakcore" (*Bullets from Habikino City* 2003).
Enduser: Untitled (*Tour CD* 2003).
Debaser: "Pitch Black (Total Dark 1 Remix)" (*Pitch Black/Into the Light* 2004).
Doddodo: Untitled (*Tsunbosajiki* 2005).
Epsilon: "Pills" (*Christ as Bath Toy* 2004).
Krumble: "Sans Soleil" (*In Memory Of/Sans Soleil* 2005).
Drumcorps: "Assassin" (*Rmx or Die* 2005).
Lisbeth and Bent: "Kalifornien Liebend" (*The Amenathon* 2005).
DJ Psylage: "Keep it Rustic" (*Rural Takeover Volume 1* 2006).