

BACK TO COAL!!



Hard Core, self-organization and alternativity

Successfully having established an area for the production and distribution of their music outside of the mainstream corporate music industry, the hardcore scene (or scenes) poses a possible model for, or at least an interesting case study that might provide some pointers towards, the development of a sustainable alternative artproduction/-distribution.

The hardcore scene shares several characteristics with the historical avant-gardes, and its aptness as a partial model for art is in part connected to its sharing some of these characteristics.

The hardcore scene in general is both anti-establishment and specifically political. This is evident both in the sound and intensity of the music, making it less accessible than more commercially controlled forms of music, and in the highly political lyrics of many of the bands. Just as the early workers theatres in Germany strove to find the balance between the social/ political message and the entertainment value of their plays, the hardcore scene mediate their political message through a certain sound /aesthetic that is also seen to have a value in itself. Both in their lyrics and in statements and interviews the different bands and participants in the myriad of scenes connected to hardcore underline the blend of entertainment and political message in their music:

In addition to hopefully bringing people together for a good time we hope to share some of our experiences and beliefs in working class solidarity, friendship, loyalty and self-improvement as a means to bettering society. (1)

Of course, the "good time" and entertainment aspect here is connected to the political message in the same way as the rejection of traditional (bourgeois) aesthetics had a political function in the avant-garde movements, with the hardcore sound itself underlining their content and general energy of the lyrics. However, whereas the strangeness of the avant-garde aesthetics was quickly taken up by the mainstream, the hardcore scene (sound), although it has evolved and has influenced other music styles, has been able to remain alternative and independent of the bigger music scenes (and therefore also of the big corporations).

Contrary to most of the different experiments in alternativity and self sustained systems in the contemporary art scene, the hardcore scene has managed to build up and maintain a functioning alternative scene outside of the more traditionally commercial music business, and has remained in control of their own output for a substantial number of years now. Of course, the distribution and production of hardcore music is slightly simplified as a model for the production/ distribution of contemporary art, because of the simple fact that the music industry has such a convenient product to sell, but even so, I believe that it can function as a model in order to point out certain possible solutions for the establishment and maintenance of sustainable alternative structures within the artworld.

The distribution of hardcore music is handled almost exclusively through smaller record labels and distribution companies, most of whom are run largely on an idealist basis*. Fanzines, record labels of various sizes, concert venues etc. all interconnect and relate to each other forming what Manuel DeLanda describes as a meshwork. The hardcore scene(s) seems to have been able to build up a functioning alternative and self organized market structure exactly because of its belief in group solutions and interaction and because of the synergic effect of this meshwork situation. This situation seems also to have evolved with, and been further strengthened by the advent of the internet and its possibilities for networking and small scale and special interest based distribution.

Addressing an audience consisting of their peers, with very much the same background and frames of reference as themselves, the bands describe the situation of their audience by describing their own. Naturally this gives the audience a strong sense of shared interest and recognition and helps facilitate a large degree of audience-performer interaction.

The Dropkick Murphys ideas (as quoted above) of sharing their beliefs in "working class solidarity", "self-improvement" and "bettering society" of course strongly echo the historical avant-gardes and their hopes of (and belief in)

being able to bring about changes in society by means of their art. The avant-gardes -historical as well as contemporary- always suffered from severe problems of the distribution and reception of their art, though. As Jochen Schulte-Sasse writes:

Individual works may have criticized negative aspects of society, but the anticipation of social harmony as psychic harmony, which is part of the aesthetic enjoyment for the individual, risks degenerating into a mere cerebral compensation for society's shortcomings, and thus of affirming precisely what is criticized by the content of the work. (2)

These problems are to a large part avoided by the hardcore scene exactly because it has remained in control of its own distribution, thereby steering clear of the cultural assimilation and aesthetic repackaging that has created a situation in the artworld where the mode of reception undermines the critical content of the works.

* Many of these are also run by the bands themselves or by people involved in several of the other parts of the production and distribution of the music. One example here is Rick Ta Life of 25 Ta Life, who in addition to several band projects also runs a distribution company and a record label.

NOTES:

(1) The Dropkick Murphys, www.dropkickmurphys.com

(2) Jochen Schulte-Sasse, foreword to *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Burger, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996

[Read an interview with "The Dropkick Murphys"](#)