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„You can't say it's a style. It's who you are.“

The Significance of Merchandise in the Metal Music Scene

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## Abstracts

English:

Within the global music business, merchandise articles (like T-shirts and further clothing, but also other items of everyday life as well as music records) are commodities that are widely appreciated and bought by the fans. It seems that especially in music scenes that revolve around rock and metal music, a lot of people regularly consume such merchandise items, and band merchandise clothing has become a distinctive feature of most metal scene members' style of visual appearance. In this thesis I attempt to give an answer to the question of why this is the case. Based on my research in Slovenia's capital city of Ljubljana, I have examined how members of the local metal scene act upon metal merchandise items and other scene members in different situations. By presenting both viewpoints of merchandise retailers as well as their customers, I will give an outline of the local market for metal music merchandise, the actors that operate within it and their motivations to do so. Moreover, I use the notion of cultural capital, which is ultimately based on the works of Bourdieu and was further developed by Thornton and Kahn-Harris, to analyse how scene members react not only to merchandise items themselves, but also to the people that use them. I will show that through either appropriate or improper use and display of merchandise items and in relation to other factors such as age and experience in the scene, the people within are permitted or denied an accumulation of cultural capital by other scene members.

German:

Im globalen Musikgeschäft stellen Merchandise-Artikel (wie T-shirts und weitere Kleidungsstücke, aber auch andere Objekte des täglichen Lebens sowie Tonträger) Konsumgüter dar, die von den Fans weitestgehend geschätzt und gekauft werden. Besonders in Szenen, deren zentrales Element Rock- oder Metal-Musik ist, konsumieren viele Personen regelmäßig derartige Merchandise-Artikel, und Band-Merchandise-Kleidung hat sich zu einem Erkennungsmerkmal der visuellen Erscheinung vieler Angehöriger der Metal-Szene entwickelt. In dieser Masterarbeit gehe ich der Antwort auf die Frage nach, warum dies der Fall ist. Basierend auf meiner Feldforschung in Sloweniens Hauptstadt Ljubljana habe ich untersucht, wie sich Mitglieder der lokalen Metal-Szene in verschiedenen Situationen gegenüber Merchandise-Artikeln und anderen Szenenangehörigen verhalten. Ich präsentiere einen

Überblick über den lokalen Markt für Metal-Musik-Merchandise, die AkteurInnen, die in diesem tätig sind und deren Motivationen dafür, indem ich sowohl Verkäufer als auch KonsumentInnen zu Wort kommen lasse. Weiters nutze ich den Begriff des kulturellen Kapitals, der auf den Werken Bourdieus basiert und von Thornton und Kahn-Harris weiterentwickelt wurde, um zu analysieren, wie Szenenangehörige nicht nur auf Merchandise-Artikel selbst, sondern auch auf andere Personen, welche diese benutzen, reagieren. Ich lege dar, dass Mitglieder der Szene durch den entweder angebrachten oder aber unangemessenen Einsatz von Merchandise-Artikeln und in Verbindung mit anderen Faktoren wie Alter und Erfahrung in der Szene die Anhäufung von kulturellem Kapital von anderen Szenenangehörigen gestattet oder verweigert wird.

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*For my Parents*

## Introduction

The kids who liked metal looked like they liked metal. Now it's a little different, but there was a time when everyone had long hair, everyone was in black, everyone had tattoos. I mean, it was just funny. It was like an army of kids.

[Rob Zombie in Dunn's "*Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*" (2005)]

Take a moment and think about heavy metal. What are the first things that come to your mind? Probably something like this: loud, fast and aggressive music, played on distorted guitars by people with long hair dressed in black clothes. Metal culture, however obscure it might be to some, has provoked the same kinds of associations for almost half a century now within sight of a broad public. Thus, metal is a household term laden with meaning even to those who only tangentially come into contact with it.

An important part of these widely shared associations with metal music is its accompanying visual aesthetic. If we look closer at my brief description of metal above, we can see that the latter part has nothing to do with music any more, but with how the musicians *look*. But not only the musicians, also the most ordinary of metal fans support a certain appearance which differs from that of the general mainstream of society. Some of the main visual associations that the term "metal" may provoke in people are black clothes and leather, studs and spikes, men wearing their hair long, women with dark eyeliner on their pale faces and, of course, images of Satan, occultism, destruction, death and doom. These associations are certainly quite stereotypical, for there is a large variety of metal styles, each of them with their own visual counterpart, but they are most definitely not wrong. If you would go to any metal concert today, I am sure that you would find a fair number of persons onto whom these stereotypical descriptions fit perfectly. The images I mentioned above are often found on the T-shirts these metal fans all over the world proudly wear in public to show allegiance to *their* music and *their* culture. In other words, metal culture comes with its own visual aesthetic that makes its members easily distinguishable from those of other youth cultures. It was when I looked at my own pile of metal shirts when I first asked myself: "Why is this so important for all those metal fans whose closets look roughly the same?"

Band merchandising, in short, means the printing of band logos, album covers and other music-related graphics onto T-shirts, hoodies, jackets, trousers, underpants, wristbands, hats, scarves, carpets, shoes, beer glasses... You get the idea. When I started to look at matters of buying and wearing merchandise in the metal scene as an anthropologist, I wondered about the deeper structures that are lying behind these issues. After all, hip-hop music also has a large, worldwide audience and a distinguishable visual aesthetic. But the fans of hip-hop music, just as the fans of many other music styles for that matter, do not seem to care as much for merchandise goods as rock and metal music fans do. At least, that's what it seems to me, since when I am walking down a busy street in any city, I will probably see more *Slayer* T-shirts than *N.W.A.* T-shirts, and research evidence confirms that this is not just due to my selective perception (Korn 2009:162). I wanted to find out why this is the case. This curiosity, which is partly motivated by my previous experience in the metal scene as a fan of the music, led me to the question of why merchandise is so important for metal fans.

## **Research**

To answer this question, I conducted four months of field research. Taking part in an international student exchange program allowed me to undertake this research in an area I was completely unfamiliar with before – the metal scene of Ljubljana. After doing some research, I discovered that there is a very active metal scene in Slovenia, with its centre being the capital city. However, I realized that I had little to no knowledge about Slovene metal music, and despite the immediate vicinity, I was unable to name a single metal band from my neighbouring country. Given that I could think of metal bands from almost all other states that share a border with Austria, my complete lack of knowledge concerning Slovene metal just further stirred up my curiosity.

When I arrived in Ljubljana in October 2017, I did not know what to expect. I found myself in a city that I had only visited once before for a couple of hours, I did not speak more than a few words in Slovene, and I had absolutely no idea where to start my studies. The only plan I had was to attend as many concerts as possible, since I figured that this would be the easiest way to get in touch with the local metal scene. And visit concerts I did. During the four months of my research, I attended nine concerts in and around Ljubljana. Those concerts (most of them

organized by the collective “Dirty Skunks<sup>1</sup>”) ranged in size from small club concerts of relatively underground bands, sometimes with an estimate of not more than 30 visitors (e.g. in Channel Zero Klub, Orto Bar, Klub Jedro) to larger shows of long-established metal veterans with more than 1000 attendants (in Kino Šiška). Stylistically, I was able to see performances of almost all of metal’s most prominent subgenres, including thrash metal (e.g. *Kreator*), death metal (e.g. *Dying Fetus*), black metal (e.g. *Gorgoroth*), doom metal (e.g. *Monolithe*) and folk metal (e.g. *Zaria*). But not only the musical styles supported in the Ljubljana metal scene were quite diversified. The concerts also provided a good mixture of local, often young and lesser known bands sharing a stage with both better and lesser known bands from countries all over the world, including Poland, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Norway, Greece, USA, Canada and Australia, indicating how well the Ljubljana scene is interconnected with the global metal scene.

At those concerts, my main method of research was the participant observation. I attended the shows and behaved in the same manner as I would do when I go to a concert in my leisure time, but instead of devoting my energy to headbanging as hard as I can<sup>2</sup> I focussed on observing the way the other fans dress themselves for the concerts, how they interact with each other and especially how they interact at the merchandise booths, the small tables at (almost) every concert where merchandise articles of the evening’s bands are being sold. I also engaged in conversations with various fans that I met at those concerts, which was essential not only for my research but also for my social needs, since I attended the majority of shows on my own.

Between the stage, the bar area and the merchandise booth (which in smaller clubs can be all in the same room), I often found myself sitting somewhere and taking field notes, a practice that occasionally provoked curiosity among other fans, in turn often resulting in a conversation. Therefore, taking fieldnotes proved to be both a method of documentation as well as of establishing contact with people. Those who approached me showed interest in my research and were all very helpful by answering some questions and telling me about their habits in relation to merchandise consumption. I also engaged in conversations with the merchandise retailers at the concerts, observing their work and asking them about it. One of them, Matija, a man in his 30s, whom I have encountered at several concerts, is also the head of Slovenia’s largest record label exclusively dedicated to metal music, “On Parole Records<sup>3</sup>”.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see [dirtyskunks.org](http://dirtyskunks.org).

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth analysis of metal dance styles see Riches 2011.

<sup>3</sup> For more information visit [on-parole.com](http://on-parole.com).

Apart from research at concerts, I tried to get access to the local metal scene through other channels. It was by accident that I found the location where I would spend most of my time over the course of the following months: a small metal bar and cafe called “Alter Bar” just outside the centre of Ljubljana, around the corner of my faculty building. I stumbled upon it just a few days after I arrived in Slovenia when I was looking for a place to get a coffee with two colleagues from university. After we had our coffee, I went up to two men, metal fans as I could see from the way they looked (they had long hair, beards and wore black clothes and band merchandise) and asked if I could join them for a drink. I introduced myself to them, told them that I was new in town and that I was doing research on the metal scene with a focus on merchandise. They immediately showed great interest in my work, encouraged me to sit with them and told me that I will always be welcome among them.

From this first encounter on, I visited Alter bar at least three times a week, mostly in the afternoon and evening hours, to chat with the regular customers as well as the owners Karmen and Ico. I realized that for some of the regular customers, including the two men I first encountered, Alter Bar was something like a second living room, a place where they would gather almost every day to meet, drink a few beers, chat and play Tarok (a card game popular in the area). Within a few weeks, I became friends with the owners and most of the regular customers, as I came to be somewhat of a regular myself. Alter Bar thus became one of the central locations for my studies and the people I met there were the ones I focussed my research on. Through this peer group it became much easier for me to gain first- as well as second hand information about the processes and dynamics within the local scene of Slovenia and Ljubljana in particular. Unfortunately, the bar went out of business by the end of 2017.

After I had established myself as a part of the group, I also started to meet with some people in other places, especially at concerts. Most of the time, however, I limited my visits at Alter Bar to between three and five hours, since I made the experience that after this amount of time my attention rapidly faded, and I had problems distancing myself from the field and maintaining my position as a researcher. Generally, maintaining the emotional distance necessary for my work was not always easy, since I consider some of the people I met in this bar as my friends by now, and thus had to find a way to deal with these ambivalent positions, both as a friend and as a researcher in the field. Therefore, it was important to continually talk with my interlocutors about the process of my research, not only to remind them of it but also to show them that it is not in my interest to exploit them for the information they were giving me in any way. Apart from talking about it, occasionally taking fieldnotes also aided me in this task.

Another place that I have regularly visited, apart from concert venues and Alter Bar, was “Truga Shop<sup>4</sup>”, Ljubljana’s only store for merchandise (with a focus not only on metal music merchandise, but also movies, TV series and comics). Opened in 2016, Truga was recommended to me by several persons as the go-to store for metal merchandise in the city. The fact that Truga also sold concert tickets provided me with a good reason to visit the store regularly and have a chat with the owner, Tomi, a 40-year-old guy who was always very kind and helpful to me.

As I may already have become evident, my main research method besides the participant observation was that of the informal conversation. I spent most of my research time just talking to different people more or less involved in the Ljubljana metal scene. Some of those conversations were about merchandise, but many were about all sorts of things, as my aim was to engage in the lived reality of the local scene and its members without forcing any issue, especially regarding the group that revolved around Alter Bar. While the conversations with my regular interlocutors, especially at Alter Bar, provided me not only with an in-depth insight into the local metal scene but also with very personal information about the persons I had talked to, conversations with random people, which I had met mainly at concerts, helped me to gain a more comprehensive knowledge about the Slovene metal scene and the individual motifs of its members to buy and use merchandise items.

Nevertheless, I decided to also record a handful of conversations in an attempt to get more tangible data. The aim of these conversations was to focus specifically on matters regarding merchandise. To keep this focus, I made a question sheet that I could have recourse to in order to redirect the discussion back to the topic, should it run off the track too far. The first of these conversations I had with Samo, a man in his mid-20s who by the time was working as a waiter in Alter Bar. Another recorded discussion in Alter Bar also included Samo, alongside with Ico, the bar owner (in his late 30s), Celin and Timotej (both regular guests, the former in his late and the latter in his early 20s). To get some insight into the perspective of the people who work in the merchandise business, I scheduled appointments with both Matija from on Parole and Tomi from Truga Shop. To talk to Matija, I visited him in his hometown, Trbovlje, where we talked in a local cultural centre, Tomi I visited in his store in the centre of Ljubljana. I will use passages of all these conversations throughout this text to support my arguments. These statements of course only reflect the opinions of individual persons. However, many of them

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<sup>4</sup> For more information visit [facebook.com/trugashop/](https://facebook.com/trugashop/).

are valid for larger parts of the metal scene as well and are therefore used as examples of shared values within the scene.

Near the end of my research period, at a time when I had already gathered a lot of information, I made an attempt to see if the accounts of mostly single persons that I had documented so far were true for a wider part of the local metal scene. Therefore, I handed out a questionnaire at the last concert I visited. Subject of this questionnaire were the motifs of the attendants to buy merchandise articles and to wear merchandise clothing. Since it was a concert of two well established bands (*Kreator* and *Vader*, as well as one support band) taking place at a big venue (Kino Šiška), I was able to reach a large amount of people. Specifically, I focussed on those concert attendants who just came from the merchandise booth after buying something or were waiting in line to do so. While I cannot claim that the data gathered through this questionnaire is of statistical relevance, it surely shows that some merchandise-related issues are the result of widely shared opinions and values within the metal scene, and many of the numbers are quite similar to those of Kati Korn's analysis of music merchandise from consumers' perspectives (Korn 2009).

My research was limited to one specific place, the city of Ljubljana, as well as a certain, relatively short time period of four months (October 2017 to January 2018). Therefore, I can only give an account of the issues that were true of this specific field in this specific time. However, based on my long-lasting experience in other local and trans-local metal scenes over the course of more than ten years, I would argue that most of the results which I am going to present in this work are in large parts true for the majority of metal scenes, at least in many parts of Europe.

During all my research, I had a quite ambivalent status within the field. On the one hand, I was a part of it in terms of my membership to the trans-local metal scene. On the other hand, I was a foreigner to the country, the city and the local scene. Of course, being a part of the group I studied had its advantages. Probably, the main advantage consisted of the fact that I was familiar with the implicit rules and codes within the metal scene, at least when it came to certain aspects of appearance, behaviour and opinions on certain matters. I had the impression that because of my physical appearance that labelled me as a fan of metal music and because of the knowledge of the scene I displayed in various conversations I was perceived as genuine and thus regarded with a certain amount of respect. I am sure that this contributed to my fast acceptance into the group that revolved around Alter Bar as well. However, it would be wrong to assume that I was alike with all of my interlocutors regarding our social and philosophical values. I have made



this experience while talking to persons with sometimes very radical political views that do not conform with my own mindset and values at all. Still, I decided not to argue about it, since this was neither my research focus nor did I want to break with otherwise entirely friendly and helpful people just because of political discordances. Instead I just took those statements as they came and tried to change the subject as soon as possible.

Of course, being part of the field also poses some obstacles. Since I was already familiar with many trans-local aspects of the metal scene, I had to be particularly careful not to take things for granted that could be of importance for my research, even if I was already familiar with and would otherwise pay no mind to them. Hence, I had to carry out my research with a high level of self-reflexivity. Distancing myself from the field enough to see and recognize these otherwise familiar things was a balancing act, since I did not want to lose my status as a scene member. Moreover, I feared that my interlocutors would be easily annoyed if I asked too many questions to which I was already expected to know the answer based on my experience and position.

This is where my status as a foreigner came in handy. I was coming from another country with a social history other than the Slovene, spoke a different language and had absolutely no knowledge about Slovene metal music and the local scene. Therefore, I could present a certain level of naivety and curiosity about some issues that would otherwise have been misplaced. In other words, my ambiguous position in the field allowed me to oscillate between the roles of the researcher and the metalhead quite frequently and whenever needed.

## **Metal Studies**

Metal music and culture has for a long time been neglected by the social sciences (Walser 1993:x), which is interesting since other youth culture phenomena, like for example punk, have been the subject of analysis through social scientists for a long time (see for example Hebdige 1979). This is quite interesting because metal culture was not only established as an own genre of rock music before punk, but also because metal had evolved into a global phenomenon and was one of the dominant musical genres in the 1980s, at least in the USA (Walser 1993:x). The starting point for a serious engagement with metal music and culture is undoubtedly the publication of Deena Weinstein's sociological examination in 1990, followed up by Robert Walser's musicological take on the matter published in 1993. "It is these core studies, adopting

a sociological, ethnological and musicological approach, that provide the ‘foundation stones’ for the mature development of metal studies” (Brown 2011:216). From then on, metal culture has gained more and more attention from scholars, and the field of metal music studies has evolved into a versatile and interdisciplinary area of academic research. With the foundation of an “International Society for Metal Music Studies”<sup>5</sup> (ISMMS) that also publishes a periodic, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to metal music and culture, metal studies have certainly earned their place in academia.

However, aspects of material culture, and merchandise in particular, have fallen under the radar of most researchers concerned with metal culture so far (apart from a handful of recent exceptions like for example Tom Cardwell, who published an article about battle jackets in 2017). The main topics of interest for researchers of metal culture have for a long time been the music itself (e.g. Walser 1993), metal as subculture<sup>6</sup> or scene, alongside with its local and global dimensions (e.g. Weinstein 2000, Harris 2000, Kahn-Harris 2007, Wallach et al. 2011) and issues of power- and gender relations (e.g. Weinstein 2000, Kahn-Harris 2007, Hickam and Wallach 2011, Hill 2016). However, material culture plays a significant role within metal culture, and the appearances of metal scene members are quite unique. Therefore, I consider it of utter importance to take a close look on the styles of metal culture, for “[t]he components of style serve social, social-psychological, and symbolic functions. Style differentiates insiders from outsiders, allowing individuals to create identities. By providing forms for expressing attitudes, values, and norms, style takes on the character of a readable text” (Weinstein 2000:127). Hence, this work is an attempt to explain the importance of merchandise items as both objects of material culture as well as crucial parts of the metal style.

## **Structure**

The first chapter of this thesis deals with the notion of scene and how it is applied to metal culture in everyday life. It starts with a brief history of metal music, beginning with an analysis of the term “heavy metal” and how it first came to usage. Thereafter follows a chronological

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<sup>5</sup> For more information visit [ucmo.edu/metalstudies/metal\\_studies\\_home.html](http://ucmo.edu/metalstudies/metal_studies_home.html) (Metal Studies Bibliography) and [facebook.com/International-Society-for-Metal-Music-Studies-155690037851820/](https://facebook.com/International-Society-for-Metal-Music-Studies-155690037851820/) (ISMMS).

<sup>6</sup> Many scholars have analysed metal music culture according to the notion of subculture, while I prefer to perceive it as a scene. Therefore, when I reference the works of others who talk about subculture, I apply their ideas to the framework of scene used throughout this thesis.

breakdown of metal's history, starting from its development out of the psychedelic blues-rock in the late 1960s during the decline of the hippie-era, covers in short the genre's crystallization period during the 1970s, the first big stylistic split in the early 1980s that was followed by metal's most commercially successful period, the development of more underground extreme metal styles in the early 1990s and how the scene has evolved ever since up until the present day.

After that, I will discuss the sociological and anthropological concepts that are most relevant in relation to the everyday notion of scene. I will argue that scenes can be both seen as social fields in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1993), but also as art worlds following the definition of Howard Becker (Becker 2008). Then I will examine how the notion of scene is used in relation to music-centred youth cultures, drawing heavily from the works of Miha Kozorog and Dragan Stanojević (Kozorog/Stanojević 2011) as well as Keith Kahn-Harris, who very convincingly applied it onto the field of extreme metal (Kahn-Harris 2007). Within this discussion I will illustrate how I use the notion of scene in this thesis to properly grasp the relatively open, but still clearly delimited nature of the metal community and its simultaneously global and local manifestations.

After the main theories are discussed, I will apply them onto the field of my research. Therefore, I will give another historical chronology, this time of the metal scene in Slovenia, following closely the article on the same topic by Rajko Muršič (Muršič 2011), where I will especially go into details about those issues that differ from metal's overall history, which in the case of Slovenia are often due to the country's socialist history as a part of former Yugoslavia. Another focus is set onto the current trends in Slovene metal music as well as the institutions that exist to support the Slovene scene. Ultimately, I will take a close look at the metal scene of Ljubljana, which was the actual site of my research. Here I will present an overview about some of the local institutions, musicians and other actors that play important roles within the scene and therefore ensure its continuity.

In the second chapter, I turn my attention away from the metal scene towards the other element of this thesis, which is merchandise. Starting with a definition of the term, however, I will not only rely on Kati Korn's analysis of merchandise from consumers' perspectives (Korn 2009), but also draw heavily from the views of metal scene members to analyse what a merchandise article is and what not. After that, I will devote some space to the close relation between merchandise and clothing, and the predominant status of T-shirts and hoodies in opposition to other merchandise items within the metal scene. In the end of this chapter, I will elaborate on

the question if records are to be considered as merchandise goods or as a separate kind of commodities, an issue where the views of most scene members I have talked to differ significantly.

The third chapter is devoted to once and for all bring together the topics of merchandise and the metal scene, for I will discuss the economic impacts of the merchandise market. Starting with a discussion of the music business in general, I will soon turn my attention towards issues that are specifically related to the metal scene. A particular focus hereby is set onto the fact that merchandise sales make up the main source of income for most metal bands, especially those who are lesser known and don't earn much from ticket sales. The most important place for such bands to promote both their artistic work and their merchandise, as well as to sell the latter, are concerts. Therefore, a section of this chapter is devoted to concerts as a main locus where merchandise articles are displayed, bought and sold. After that, I will also take a look on other distribution channels for merchandise that exist within the scene, such as online shops and metal stores, the latter of which can be found in almost every bigger city.

Having discussed matters of merchandise at length, the following chapter is concerned with the metal style. Here I will take a close look at what makes the appearances of metal scene members so distinguishable and unique in comparison to those of other music scenes and youth cultures. I will analyse the different elements that together form what Sam Dunn refers to as the "metal uniform" in his documentary *"Metal: A Headbanger's Journey"* (2005). Further, particular attention is placed on the role which the colour black plays in the visual aesthetic of metal culture. Following this breakdown of the metal style, I see it necessary to address some rather problematic issues concerned with the reproduction and enforcement of gender stereotypes within the scene. These stereotypical representations that often lead to the devaluation and oppression of women on certain levels do in many cases stand in close connection with matters of clothing style and visual appearance. After this unpleasant but indispensable discussion, attention is paid to the use of merchandise as common, everyday clothing, a practice that is prevalent within the scene.

In the subsequent chapter, I will examine in detail the various reasons and motivations for people within the metal scene to buy, use and display merchandise articles. The first section is concerned with merchandise articles, particularly clothing, as a visual statement of belonging to the scene. I will argue that metal fans are often perceived as outsiders by – and thus alienated from – the mainstream society, and therefore seek to establish a more intimate connection with other members of their peer group, which is the metal scene. Wearing merchandise clothing

can act as a strategy to strengthen these bonds of affiliation to other scene members by publicly displaying the musical preferences, but also the values and morals they share among themselves. While this may be true especially for teenagers, many fans of metal music have attained old age by now and still keep up with these practices. In the light of this fact, I will also discuss the factor of seniority within a scene that is often described as a youth culture.

In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at what seems to be the main motivation for most scene members to buy merchandise goods, which is the desire to support the musicians. Based on the fact that merchandise sales account for the main source of income for many metal bands and that most scene members are well aware of this situation, I will analyse the underlying mechanisms that have resulted in the prevalent scenic practice of buying merchandise articles as a major form of supporting the scene's institutions alongside with attending concerts (though these two practices often go hand in hand). Following up, I will delve deeper into the issue of merchandise collections and the status of merchandise items as collectibles, for such a use of merchandise goods differs significantly from other practices regarding merchandise usage and frequently bear upon matters of personal value and intimate connections between certain merchandise items and their owners. This leads to the final section of this chapter, where such intimate collections are further investigated in association with merchandise as memorabilia that establish a link between a certain moment of time, allowing the owners to relive the (ideally positive) emotions of that moment whenever they engage with these specific merchandise articles.

The final chapter of this thesis is about the affiliation between merchandise and the accumulation and use of cultural capital by metal scene members, and many arguments that were presented beforehand are taken up again to explain this issue. Initially, I will discuss how the habitus in the metal scene shapes the ways scene members act and present themselves in the face of their peers and how this relates to obtaining cultural capital, again drawing heavily from the works of Bourdieu. Thereafter, I will present how the notion of subcultural capital was introduced as a framework to study music-centred cultures by Sarah Thornton in her work on dance music scenes in the early 1990s (Thornton 1995). This framework was later used to analyse the extreme metal scene by Kahn-Harris, who has developed a more elaborate notion of the term. He discusses two forms of subcultural capital – mundane and transgressive – which have different qualities and are both necessary for the reproduction as well as the further development of the scene. These ideas about flows of cultural capital in the scene lie at the foundation of my analysis of merchandise.

After these initial theoretical explanations, I will analyse in detail how merchandise acts in relation to capital in the metal scene. I have defined three distinct ways in which such a connection is particularly relevant. The first one is merchandise as economic capital. I argue that merchandise articles can be perceived as a form of economic capital that is restricted in its usability exclusively to the metal scene. This is particularly important in the face of collectors' items which possess not only personal, but also significant economic value that can easily be converted into real money within the boundaries of the scene. Closely connected to this is the perception of merchandise articles as cultural capital themselves. An accumulation of merchandise goods (e.g. in form of a collection) usually means a proportional gain in scenic cultural capital, and the loss of the collection may provoke the opposite. The merchandise items are the physical evidence of their owners' commitment to the scene and the resources they have invested in its institutions. Cultural capital in the scene, in this case, is inextricably linked to merchandise goods, which hence become an embodied form of cultural capital themselves. Finally, I will analyse how scene members use merchandise, especially clothing, to accumulate scenic cultural capital. By wearing merchandise clothing of certain bands, one demonstrates his or her commitment to the scene and their knowledge of the music. However, there is a wide range of factors (e.g. age, appearance, status in the scene) that influence if these persons are perceived as genuine or as fake by other scene members, and this section seeks to unravel the complex systems of merchandise use and perception in relation to cultural capital that exist within the metal scene.

## Metal Scenes

### A History of Metal Music

Metal music first emerged in the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. There is no consensus on when the term “heavy metal” was first used. Some claim it originates in the lyrics from the *Steppenwolf* song “*Born to be wild*”, which was released in 1968 and gained popularity because it was featured on the soundtrack of the movie “*Easy Rider*”. The song, as well as the movie, refers to the American biker culture and in this regard to the loud motorcycles as “*Heavy Metal Thunder*” (Steppenwolf 1968). Others claim that the term originates in William S. Burroughs’s 1962 novel “*Naked Lunch*”, even though Burroughs never uses the phrase in this novel but introduces some characters in his 1964 novel *Nova Express* as “*The Heavy Metal Kid*” and “*Heavy Metal People of Uranus*”. Whether it comes from *Steppenwolf*, from William S. Burroughs or from somewhere else, however, it is a fact that in the late 1960s music journalists started to use the term to describe the music of bands like *Led Zeppelin*, *Deep Purple* and *Black Sabbath* (Walser 1993:8; Weinstein 2000:18f.).

What all these bands have in common is that they are from the United Kingdom. However, the roots of metal music lie in the American Blues. Along with the infamous *Jimi Hendrix* from the USA (who actually lived in the UK for quite some time), it was mostly British bands like *Cream* and *The Yardbirds* who appropriated the American blues style, electrified it and thus generated blues rock (Walser 1993:9; Weinstein 2000:16f.).

Just like there is no consensus on where the term “heavy metal” comes from, there is also no consensus on which the first heavy metal band was. However, two bands are mainly mentioned in this regard: *Led Zeppelin* and *Black Sabbath*. It seems to me that the views on this have shifted since the 1970s, because even though Walser, Weinstein and many others have classified *Led Zeppelin* as a heavy metal band, I have the feeling that nowadays it would be rather considered as hard rock. Nevertheless, most people have high opinions on their music, and their influence on heavy metal is definitely dignified. From my personal point of view, I agree with anthropologist and filmmaker Sam Dunn when he says: “For my money, *Black Sabbath* reigns as the first heavy metal band” in his documentary *Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey* (2005).

Even though journalists occasionally described early *Black Sabbath*, *Led Zeppelin*, *Deep Purple* and their likes as heavy metal to emphasize their harder, louder, darker more obscure and sound, lyrics and visual styles, we cannot speak of heavy metal as a genre at that point, since “[a] genre of music includes at its minimum a code of sonic requirements that music must meet to be included in it. That is, a genre requires a certain sound, which is produced according to conventions of composition, instrumentation, and performance” (Weinstein 2000:6). While these requirements have not been given in what Weinstein in reference to Ronald Byrnside calls the “period of formation”, “[t]he core of Heavy Metal – its sonic, visual, and verbal code – [was] defined in terms of the genre’s period of crystallization in the mid- to late 1970s” (Weinstein 2000:8). The reason why during that time heavy metal had established itself as a genre of its own within the musical landscape was the uprising of a new style of metal music from the UK, commonly referred to as the new wave of British heavy metal (NWOBHM), led by bands like *Judas Priest*, *Iron Maiden*, *Saxon* and *Motörhead* (even though *Motörhead* never considered themselves to be a metal band (Ear Candy Mag 09.03.2018) and their style differs somewhat from the other NWOBHM bands because of their closer relation to punk) (Kahn-Harris 2007:2; Walser 1993:12). Since that time, the term “heavy metal” is not only used to talk about metal music in general. Primarily within the metal scene, it is used to refer to bands that were either part of the new wave of British heavy metal or stand in its tradition, as opposed to other subgenres like thrash-, death- or black metal. Therefore, when I talk about metal music in general, I will not use the term “heavy metal” to avoid confusion but will simply speak of it as “metal”.

In the early 1980s, metal music for the first time started to split up into two main camps, the more mainstream oriented lite metal (also called glam rock, glam metal or hair metal) and the more fundamentalist and underground thrash metal (Kahn-Harris 2007:2; Walser 1993:13f.; Weinstein 2000:45). While lite metal laid a stronger emphasis on melodies, feminine or androgyne appearances in male performers (Weinstein 2000:45ff.) and spawned a wide range of bands that I claim would not be considered metal by today’s standards, like *Bon Jovi*, thrash metal combined the sonic features of the new wave of British heavy metal with those of punk rock and hardcore and laid down the foundation for all the metal styles that are now subsumed under the term “extreme metal”, including some of metal’s largest and most productive subgenres like death- and black metal (Harris 2000:14, Kahn-Harris 2007:8; for a detailed analysis of and comparison between lite metal and thrash metal see Weinstein 2000). The emergence of thrash metal also gave birth to some of the most influential metal bands of all time which are highly regarded up until the present day within the metal scene, including the



US-American “Big Four” (*Metallica*, *Slayer*, *Megadeth*, *Anthrax*) as well as *Exodus* and *Overkill*, and some German bands like *Kreator*, *Sodom*, and *Destruction*. All of these bands are still active today.

From this point on, metal music and culture has fragmented into many different playstyles and subgenres, most of them accommodated by certain cultural and social elements revolving around them.

“By spawning subgenres heavy metal became part of a wider cultural complex, just as it had earlier erupted from a wider complex. The new formation [...] includes both heavy metal and subgenres within itself, each of its members being defined by distinctive codes that contain some or all of the elements of heavy metal’s code. Heavy metal persists, after the subgenres have crystallized, as classic metal, carrying on the core of the musical culture. It is also ever present in the recordings of its classics, which are replayed and reissued, a library at hand to provide inspiration to new artists and a sense of tradition to fans. Finally, heavy metal is present in the traces that it leaves on the music produced within the subgenres that erupted within it” (Weinstein 2000:55f.).

After extreme metal, with all its subgenres, was at the head of metal culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s, around the beginning of the new millennium there came

“a time of major change in Metal. There has been an increasing cleavage between the (mostly American) ‘New Metal’ bands, such as Korn that are introducing new elements into Metal and have achieved considerable mass market success, and an increasingly ‘fundamentalist’ Extreme Metal scene” (Harris 2000:24).

New metal (also called nu metal or nü metal), with its sonic mixture of metal, hip hop and pop elements, was hugely successful at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but vanished rather quickly after a few years. The more fundamentalist extreme metal scene on the other hand has persisted until the present day, and there is no end in sight, as new subgenres are spawning continually, while long-established musicians continue to produce high-quality music on a regular basis (for an overview of metal’s different subgenres see the table in Seppi and Stoycheva (2015:17) or in Dunn’s (2005) movie<sup>7</sup>).

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<sup>7</sup> You can find the table online at [upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b7/Metal\\_Genealogy.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b7/Metal_Genealogy.jpg).

It is not my intention to present a detailed description of all these different subgenres in this thesis, because even in the eye of certain, sometimes major differences and sometimes discrepancies between them, opposed to other musical styles or scenes and their fans, and especially in opposition to the musical mainstream, it is still valid to speak of one, global metal scene (Harris 2000:14f.).

## **A Concept of Scene**

To fully grasp what is meant when I talk about the global and local metal scenes, it is necessary to look at what is meant when talking about “scene”. Music-centred scenes, like the metal scene, can be perceived as “social fields”, using Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993) notion of the term. Further, since at the core of this field lies an art form, which is metal music, we can speak of an artistic field, or a field of artistic production. Hence, metal music is the crucial component for this field to exist. However, it is not only the producers of the music, the artists, who are to ensure the field’s continuance. The fans of the music are equally important since it is them who consume the works of art, distribute and propagate them and thereby guarantee that the musicians can carry on producing music. To analyse metal culture therefore means to not just focus on the art itself and its producers, but to also take into account all those who first off elevate musical works to be perceived as art.

“Given that works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized, that is, socially instituted as works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such, the sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work. It therefore has to consider as contributing to production not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.) but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work - critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such” (Bourdieu 1993:37).

The field of metal music production thus includes producers, fans and all institutions that deal with those works of art. Further, it takes into account the social conditions under which those works of art are produced, circulated and consumed. The works of art themselves are thus to be analysed as “a *manifestation* of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated” (Bourdieu 1993:37). Within this field, different agents occupy positions that wield more or less power. The constant struggle over power in which all the agents are enmeshed in is fought out through the accumulation and deployment of capital within the field.

“[T]he structure of the field [...] is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external and specific profits [...] which are at stake in the field” (Bourdieu 1993:30).

To analyse the field of metal music production therefore means to analyse the distribution of power and the flows of capital within it. Thus, the edges of the field are where these movements of capital and power come to a halt. However, these flows are constantly changing, and so too are the edges of the field.

“The *boundary* of the field is a stake of struggles, and the social scientist’s task is not to draw a dividing line between the agents involved in it by imposing a so-called operational definition [...] but to describe a state (long-lasting or temporary) of these struggles and therefore of the frontier delimiting the territory held by the competing agents” (Bourdieu 1993:42f.).

Another concept of art-centred social systems is Howard Becker’s notion of “art worlds”. In opposition to Bourdieu, Becker perceives the artist to be merely one of many people that are needed to produce a work of art. In his notion, the production of an art work involves not only fabricating, but also disseminating, consuming and appreciating it. Thus, “we are interested in the event of a work being made *and* appreciated” (Becker 2008:4). Further, it includes all those who are directly or indirectly involved in providing the necessary resources for the production of an art work, be it the materials for its fabrication or the time to appreciate it.

“All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation. The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often

become more or less routine, producing patterns of collective activity we can call an art world” (Becker 2008:1).

Becker’s notion of art worlds thus differs significantly from Bourdieu’s understanding of the field of artistic production. Becker refers to all participants and institutions who work together in an art world to produce a work of art, whereas Bourdieu emphasizes the structure of the field, the struggle for power and capital, as well as the conflicting discourses among the various agents.

Art worlds can appear in many different sizes and qualities. Typically, though, “situations of art making lie somewhere between the extremes of one person doing everything and every smallest activity being done by a separate person” (Becker 2008:9). The artist’s job in an artwork is merely to exercise the core activities of an art work’s production. To do so, however, he is dependent on all of the people who constitute the specific art world. “The artist thus works in the center of a network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome” (Becker 2008:25).

The borders of art worlds are equally diffuse than those of the artistic fields, but have a different quality.

“[W]e look for groups of people who cooperate to produce things that they, at least, call art; having found them, we look for other people who are also necessary to that production, gradually building up as complete a picture as we can of the entire cooperating network that radiates out from the work in question. The world exists in the cooperative activity of those people, not as a structure or organization, and we use words like those only as shorthand for the notion of networks of people cooperating” (Becker 2008:35).

The notion of scene that I use throughout this thesis is less of an academic concept than it originates in the everyday use of the term within the scene itself. By today, most scholars in the field of metal music studies use a notion of scene that was strongly influenced and shaped by the works of Keith Kahn-Harris, particularly his book on “Extreme Metal” from 2007. Harris’s notion of scene is especially useful since it “draws on everyday uses of the concept. [...] The most common use of it is to refer to local, face-to-face contexts of music-making and consumption” (Harris 2000:14). Up to this point, since metal first gained scholarly attention about 20 years ago, many academic concepts, ranging from “subculture” (Larsson 2013:96) and

“bricolage” (Weinstein 2000:5f.) to the more music-orientated “genre” (Walser 1993:3f.) had been used to analyse metal music culture. However, since in the last decades “youth identities – and indeed social identities per se – had become more reflexive, fluid and fragmented due to an increasing flow of cultural commodities, images and texts through which more individualised identity projects and notions of self could be fashioned” (Bennett 2011:493), the relatively fluid and open notion of scene occurs to me as the best fitting for the examination of metal culture. Kahn-Harris proposes the use of a concept of scene that relates both to the non-academic, everyday use of the term that may be apparent within the scenes under examination themselves, as it is the case with the extreme metal scene, and a scholarly defined framework, allowing researchers to “define a unit of analysis that is emergent both from everyday reflexivity and from a more systematically theorised, academic space” (Harris 2000:14).

Such a notion of scene contains elements of both the concept of the artistic field as well as of art worlds. Depending on whether the focus is more on the everyday use of the term that originates in the scene itself or on the more academic notion, one of these concepts prevails. The everyday understanding of scene is usually closer to Becker’s understanding of art worlds, including all the persons that in any way have something to do with the art work itself, and laying a strong emphasis on the scene’s collective nature and the widespread networks of cooperation and mutual support within. A more academic take on scene, on the other hand, may be more concerned with the power relations and flows of capital. I try to combine both these approaches to achieve a well-balanced representation of the metal scene and its members.

The notion of scene always indicates a relatively fluid web of interconnected persons and institutions that is not necessarily bound to a certain locality, which makes it ideal to study social phenomena centred around specific musical styles (Kozorog/Stanojević 2011:361). These music scenes can be described as “spaces for the coming together of individuals bound not by class or community but by musical taste and related aesthetic sensibilities, their constant evolution and often transient nature” (Bennett 2011:496). Such music scenes exist both on local as well as on trans-local and global levels, and while some of them may only function on one of those levels, most of them stand in constant interaction with each other thus functioning both autonomously and in connection to their counterparts (Kozorog/Stanojević 2011:362).

The individuals that are involved in the scene are not just musicians and/or fans but cover a vast field of functions and positions within it. Therefore, musical scenes, such as the extreme metal scene examined by Kahn-Harris, need to be viewed as “the locus for a huge range of interconnected practices, texts, institutions and social phenomena” (Kahn-Harris 2007:11). The

individual agents involved in those practices are viewed as members of the scene, since “[i]n the case of metal music, which entails a high degree of affiliation among its consumers, membership is usually present” (Kozorog/Stanojević 2011:366). However, “[t]he use of scene to describe a variety of musical spaces shows that the concept need not be based on predetermined ideas of what scenic involvement consists of” (Kahn-Harris 2007:21), meaning that even the slightest action within the scene leads to the flow of capital and therefore to a certain degree of scenic involvement, although a person would not consider itself or would not be considered by others as a scene member, for “[t]here is no other criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effects within it” (Bourdieu 1993:42). Considering this,

“[i]t is but a short step to arguing that *all* music and music-related activity takes place within a scene or scenes. This assertion allows us to avoid the endless task of drawing boundaries between what is a scene and what is not. It recognizes that no musical practice can take place entirely separately from social processes. The implication is that scenes include everything, from tight-knit local musical communities to isolated musicians and occasional fans, since they all contribute to and feed off a larger space(s) of musical practice. Even the simple action of buying a CD means to become ‘involved’ in a scene, in however slight a way, by virtue of causing some sort of effect within it. One cannot make a rigid distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ membership. It also follows that everything within a scene, and indeed scenes themselves, may exist within a number of other scenes” (Harris 2000:25).

I will examine in detail how cultural capital within the metal scene can be attained through the consumption and use of merchandise in the last chapter of this thesis. First, however, it is time to take a closer look at the metal scene of Slovenia, and in particular on the local scene of Ljubljana where my research was based.

## Metal in Slovenia

As mentioned before, I have conducted my research in Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia, mainly within the period between October 2017 and January 2018. Being a complete stranger in town and without knowing anyone when I arrived in the beginning of October, I quickly gained access to the local metal scene, onto which I want to shed some light over the course of this chapter. However, before I delve into the particularities of the metal scene in Ljubljana, I think it is necessary to give a brief overview over Slovene metal as a whole, for I consider it important to look at the bigger picture into which the smaller scene is embedded.

I do not want to go too deep into the history of metal in Slovenia (for a more detailed history of the Slovene metal scene see Muršič 2011), therefore I will just highlight a few points both where the history of Slovene metal goes along with its counterparts in other regions, but also where they differ from each other. To begin with, it is to note that just as in many other European and North American countries, rock music became popular during the 1950s and diversified over the course of the next decades, with some of its strains putting their focus more and more on a “harder” sound, emphasizing loud, heavily amplified, distorted electric guitars and bass, pounding drums, and powerful vocal styles (Muršič 2011:295f.; Walser 1993:9; Weinstein 2000:16ff.). Slovenia of course was a part of Yugoslavia back then, a country where records were both available and cheap, especially during the 1970s, but where musical instruments were hard to get because they had to be imported, which is why mainly young people from better situated families were actually playing in bands and making music themselves (Muršič 2011:296f.).

Due to the easy access to cheap records that were also released (under license) with little delay, an initial metal scene formed during the 1970s mainly in Ljubljana and other urban centres of Slovenia and all of Yugoslavia, and more and more people started to make metal music themselves. This trend changed dramatically when punk flooded over Yugoslavia, rapidly advancing to be the main form of rock music and culture in the late 1970s and early 80s. However, while most of the bands now played punk rock and with just a handful of active metal bands left in Slovenia, metal still had the larger audience and popular bands from other countries still played concerts in much larger venues than punk bands did (Muršič 2011:298).

After punk almost eradicated metal music production in Slovenia, thrash bands from abroad like *Metallica* and *Slayer*, which mixed the sounds of the new wave of British heavy metal (NWOBHM) of bands like *Iron Maiden* and *Judas Priest* with the newer sound as well as the

speed and aggression of punk- and particularly hardcore bands (Walser 1993:14; Weinstein 2000:49) became popular, and many new bands formed in Yugoslavia who incorporated this new playstyle of metal in the late 1980s. From that time until now, metal and punk used to (and still do) continually influence each other, and it seems to me that these two musical and cultural styles are more closely connected in Slovenia than I have experienced it in Austria or Germany. One example of this close connection between metal and punk is Tomi, one of my interlocutors, who told me that he played in a hardcore punk band before he started playing metal, and that there was a big shift from punk towards metal in the 1990s (personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018).

Opposed to the initial wave of metal in the region, the centres of music production shifted from the larger, urban areas to the smaller towns all over the country, resulting in many small-scale instead of one unified Slovene metal scene. This development further progressed with the ongoing shift towards extreme metal since the early 1990s. Up to this point, the metal scene and music production was mainly influenced by the large output of music from the United Kingdom and the United States of America, but with the emergence of thrash-, and later death- and black metal, attention shifted towards other parts of the world, first and foremost Scandinavia and Germany (Muršič 2011:302ff.). However, small local scenes have always had a significant influence on the development of extreme metal (Harris 2000:16).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, metal in Slovenia, now an independent state, reached an unprecedented level of popularity, partly due to the success of the black/death metal band *Noctiferia* from Ljubljana, whose music video for the song “*Fond of Lies*”, as a result of a nationwide effort within the scene to promote band and video, was at the top of the national television video charts in 2002 (Muršič 2011:305). From this point on, the metal scene rapidly developed into what I have encountered during my research in Ljubljana.

Nowadays, Slovenia is best known in the international metal scene for the MetalDays festival, which has taken place every year since 2004 (back then under the name Metalcamp) in July or August in the alpine town of Tolmin (Festivallica 06.03.2018). Located at the merging point of the two stunningly beautiful mountain rivers Soča and Tolminka, the festival has earned a very positive reputation within both the Slovene as well as the international scene for its marvellous location, laid back atmosphere, consistently good line-up composed of big names (2018 will feature *Judas Priest* as headliner (Metaldays (1) 07.03.2018)) and local underground bands, and not least the low prices for alcohol. The number of tickets has been limited to 12.000 since 2010 (Metaltalk 06.03.2018), allowing the festival to retain its familiar feeling while still



playing a significant role in the European festival landscape, especially for metal fans from the neighbouring countries (I have been told by some people that they as Slovenes feel as a minority there, with the main audience being from Germany and Austria). Whenever I have encountered Slovene metalheads whom I have not met before, most of the time and not without pride, one of the first questions I was asked was if I have ever been to MetalDays. Gladly, I could answer this question with “yes”, since I had attended the festival in 2016, and I am planning to visit it again in 2018. Apart from this one big event, there are several small-scale local metal scenes in various towns like Postojna, Maribor or Nova Gorica, with the largest one undoubtedly being in Ljubljana. Other notable regular events apart from MetalDays festival include its winter edition called Winter Days of Metal, which is located in Bohinjska Bistrica, as well as Svarunova Noc, a mainly folk metal orientated one-day event named after a Slavic god that takes place every year in November in Medvode, just outside Ljubljana which I have attended during my time there. Opposed to MetalDays festival and its winter event, the much smaller Svarunova Noc almost exclusively hosts local underground bands. In 2017, the only band from outside of Slovenia was the headlining *Valkenrag* from Poland, all other bands were from in or around Ljubljana. Hence, Svarunova Noc is first and foremost an important event for people from in and around Ljubljana.

Before I will focus on the Ljubljana scene in more detail, I want to emphasize that the whole metal scene in Slovenia is decidedly interconnected through several forms of (mass-) communication, which I too have found extremely helpful during my research. The MetalDays festival, but also smaller events in various towns offer bands from all over Slovenia a place to perform (Muršič 2011:307) and the Slovene record label On Parole Records has signed several of them, including the still active *Noctiferia*, to ensure that metal music has a future in Slovenia. The level of interconnectedness within the country seems to have increased significantly since Rajko Muršič wrote his article about Slovene metal scenes roughly ten years ago, and it seems as though social media, particularly Facebook, have had a significant and ongoing impact, helping bands from all over the country to promote themselves and their shows, spread their music via platforms like Bandcamp, and generally for members of the scene to stay in close contact with each other. “Industrialisation and globalisation have made available an increasingly large range of musical resources that have enabled a growing range of groups and individuals to use them in the construction of identity and location” (Harris 2000:26). Svarunova Noc with its reference to Slavic mythology and its focus on folk- and pagan metal is a prime example for that. Further, it positions itself at the intersection between the local metal scene of Ljubljana and a more global metal scene. The several local scenes Muršič mentioned

(Muršič 2011:303) are linked together to what Kahn-Harris (in reference to Holly Kruse) calls a trans-local scene, with its members operating both on the narrow local as well as the wider trans-local level simultaneously (Kahn Harris 2007:20).

## **The Ljubljana Scene**

The metal scene in Ljubljana does mirror the scene of Slovenia in most regards, although there are some slight peculiarities. First of all, I want to emphasize that Ljubljana has the largest metal scene in the country. Therefore, the scene's infrastructure is developed quite well relying on several kinds of scene institutions. Metal fans in Ljubljana can visit a vast number of concerts, both from local and international bands and in a variety of styles, that cover the majority of metal's subgenres. Given the size of the city, with approximately 278.000 inhabitants (Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office 07.03.2018), the number of metal concerts seems proportionally high. In the month of November alone I have attended five metal shows, with the possibility to visit even more had my budget not been limited. Compared to my hometown of Salzburg, which is a little more than half the size of Ljubljana (Statistik Austria 2018) and where larger metal concerts have become rarer and rarer during the last decade, this strikes me as a high number. Kahn-Harris also notes that "[e]ven in locations with strong local scenes, there are not necessarily many gigs", and it seems that the people appreciate and take advantage of these opportunities, as most concerts I have visited were well-attended, even if they took place during the week.

I did some research before I arrived in Ljubljana in order to find out where the main meeting points of the local metal scene are. The one that struck me as the most obvious was Orto Bar, located just a little bit northeast of the city centre. It is a dedicated metal bar, hosting scene events (concerts, parties) several times a week, and most of the concerts that I have visited had taken place there. Another location that initially seemed important was Metelkova, an autonomous social centre close to the main train station. Although Metelkova occurred to me to be more of a hub for punk culture, many metal fans in Ljubljana told me that they regularly hang out there and that there are frequent concerts featuring artists playing all kinds of alternative music, one of them being extreme metal in all its varieties. However, apart from one death metal concert in Channel Zero, one of Metelkova's several clubs, I did not get access to the particular scene revolving around this area. I assume that Metelkova just provides a meeting point for different alternative local scenes, including metal and punk among others, and that as

such it is much more important during the summer months than it was at the time of my research in autumn and winter since a lot of its hangout spaces are located outside. However, the place where I spent most of my research as well as leisure time was Alter Bar, a small metal- and rock bar and café located at the southwestern edge of the city centre. Since it was just around the corner of my faculty building, I discovered this bar by accident, and was warmly welcomed by its regular customers, and soon integrated into their inner circle. Unfortunately, it closed in the end of 2017, and its core group of customers partly dissolved.

So far, not much scholarly attention has been paid to such scene bars, particularly not to those ones that do not host concerts. However, I would argue that they are major hangout places for members of the scene, where they can come together, get to know each other, form friendships and discuss all matters of life, not at least music, which Kahn-Harris considers as an “essential part of life” (Kahn-Harris 2007:51) for scene members. Sinclair states that metal bars act as “the meeting point for musicians and fans to maintain the sense of community in the scene and share their passion with like-minded people” (Sinclair 2013:183). While those bars usually do not have significant relevance for trans-local and global levels of the scene, they may be of great importance for local scenes. Every larger city that I have lived in so far had at least one metal bar. The main distinctive features of such premises opposed to other bars are that the music played there is almost exclusively metal and rock and that the audience is in large parts composed of fans of those musical styles. Additionally, those places are most commonly decorated with symbols that are typical for the scene, be it on concert posters, records or the like, making such bars even more appealing to fans of metal music. “The heavy metal fans communicate in their own standardised language that differentiates themselves from other groups whilst at the same time reinforcing their sense of group comradeship. It is, however, the non-verbal communication of symbols such as heavy metal posters on the wall, small darkly lit basements and even the smells that heavy metal fans can interpret, share and understand as common symbols” (Sinclair 2013:183). However, metal bars are open for all sorts of people regardless of their musical preference, and many of them attract customers from outside the scene on a regular basis, like it was the case in Alter Bar. Therefore, those bars are spaces where the particularities of the scene are most visible to the outside in dress codes, ways of behaviour and discourse, since “[t]he experience of scene is not necessarily an exceptional experience and, therefore, cannot always be considered as separate from the experience of everyday life” (Kahn Harris 2007:55). Places like Alter Bar, where regular customers come nearly every day, drink coffee or beer and chat for a few hours, definitely have to be considered as both places of everyday life and scenic institutions.

Concerts, on the other hand, are not as publicly visible since they almost exclusively attract members of the scene, even though they are undoubtedly “the event[s] that epitomize[s] the cultural form [of metal] and bring[s] it to fulfilment” (Weinstein 2000:199). For festivals, this is equally true, even though they are more visible to the general public particularly in the areas where they take place, since it is hard to oversee when 12.000 metal fans settle down in a rural mountain town with less than 4.000 inhabitants for a week (like it is the case with MetalDays). Still, those are extraordinary events, not everyday occurrences, and most of the scene members carefully choose which concerts they attend and treat those occasions as something special (Weinstein 2000:205ff.), so that we cannot speak of everyday life in that regard.

Among the institutions that both Keith Kahn-Harris and especially Deena Weinstein consider crucial for a flourishing (extreme) metal scene are concert promoters (Kahn-Harris 2007:86). “[A]rtist and audience do not find one another: they must be brought together by an apparatus of promoters, venue owners, and technicians, who condition their direct encounter” (Weinstein 2000:180). Probably the most active concert promoter in Ljubljana is the team of Dirty Skunks, which is supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia as well as the Municipality of Ljubljana (Dirty Skunks 08.03.2018). They have organized six out of nine concerts that I have attended during my research, are active in many subgenres and organize events featuring local newcomer bands as well as international genre staples. Hence, they can be considered an important pillar of the local scenic infrastructure. Another major promoter, operating not only in Ljubljana, but in all of Slovenia (and partly also in the neighbouring countries) and organizing mainly larger events, is MH Concerts. The manager of the company is very active in the national metal scene. He not only plays guitar in the previously mentioned band *Noctiferia* since 2005 (Encyclopaedia Metallum (1) 08.03.2018) but was also involved in the organization of MetalDays for some time (MetalDays (2) 08.03.2018) and owned Master of Metal shop, which was Ljubljana’s only physical metal store for records and merchandise articles for several years.

After Master of Metal shop closed down in 2016, one of its employees, Tomi, decided to continue the metal merchandise business in the same building, just a few meters from the previous location and opened “Truga” shop (Slovene for “Coffin”) on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. Unlike Master of Metal, Truga only sells merchandise but not records, since the owner considers the price of records too high and cannot compete with large department stores, like Müller, which also offer a fair selection of more mainstream metal records. However, besides band merchandise, Truga also specializes in merchandise from other fields of popular culture, mainly film, TV, comics and gaming. Truga is much smaller than its predecessor, consisting

only of one room with a handful of merchandise items on display, as the major part of Tomi's business is made up of backorders. The previous store had a larger offer of in-stock articles and customers would regularly visit the store, while Tomi mainly communicates with his customers via internet. Also, the owner of Master of Metal is well interconnected within the scene, and therefore many bands that were playing in Ljubljana or passing through while on tour took the time to have signing sessions at the store, which is not the case with Truga (personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018).

In general, it can be said that Truga is still an important place for metal fans in Ljubljana who want to buy merchandise. However, Master of Metal was much more a focal point for the scene where people used to meet, buy and listen to music and exchange ideas, thus contributing to the further development of the scene. This and the fact that the owner was a central figure both in the national and international metal scene makes Master of Metal comparable to other metal (record) stores that had a significant impact on the development of local and global metal scenes and genres, like the famous "Helvete" store in Oslo, birthplace of the second wave of black metal, and "Dolores" shop in Gothenburg, at the centre of the Swedish death metal scene in the 1990s (Kahn-Harris 2007:98). Still, there is no doubt that Truga shop, albeit lacking this level of interconnectedness, is part of the key infrastructure in the Ljubljana metal scene, promoting local bands for free by distributing their music (e.g. in the form of demo CDs) or selling their merchandise. Also, the owner Tomi is guitarist, vocalist and founding member of the death metal/grindcore band *Dickless Tracy* that was formed more than 20 years ago in his hometown Brežice (Encyclopaedia Metallum (2) 08.03.2018).

Now, after I have presented the site of my research, the following chapter will clarify what goods can be considered to be merchandise from the point of view of most metal scene members.

## **What is Merchandise?**

### **Merchandise in Popular Culture**

Let us take a look at what is meant when talking about merchandise and merchandising in the context of the metal scene. In particular, I want to highlight two very important things in the beginning: First, merchandise items are consumption goods that are exchanged at a market. Therefore, they have monetary value and are subject to all market-related rules and developments. Also, there are different kinds of people involved in the markets for merchandise, ranging from producers over merchants (notice the linguistic relation) to consumers. Second, merchandise items are branded products. They are intended to refer to and promote certain aspects of mostly popular culture. In the case of metal music and the metal scene, merchandise articles mainly relate to either certain bands or to specific events, mostly festivals. Thus, merchandise products are not the main product of the underlying industry, but license-based spin-off products dedicated at promoting and capitalizing already existing brands (Korn 2009:15).

In the case of the music industry this means that the term “merchandise” designates “the commercial secondary-utilization of music brands, that means of music acts, music events and other music products” (Korn 2009:32; my translation). Usually, this is achieved by applying certain visual design elements, like logos (of bands or events), album cover artworks or other textual or symbolic elements that stand in connection with the institution that is to promote, onto commodities. Those goods exist in a wide range of forms, from very common clothing items like T-shirts and hoodies over hats, patches, stickers, posters, keychains etc. etc.<sup>8</sup> (Korn 2009:32f.).

Kati Korn, in her economic analysis of music merchandising from a consumer perspective, does not count music records themselves as merchandise since records commercialize the main product a music act is known for, which is of course the music itself, and are thus not a secondary product (Korn 2009:33). However, if we put this scholarly position aside, the opinions within the metal scene on whether to view musical records as merchandise or not differ

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<sup>8</sup> To explore the huge variety of merchandise goods that exist in the metal scene, visit [nuclearblast.de](http://nuclearblast.de) or [emp.de](http://emp.de), two of the largest online merchandise retailers in Europe.

quite significantly. When I asked Samo and Timotej if they consider records as merchandise, the answer came quick like a shot:

Florian: “Do you consider records as merchandise?”

Timotej: “Yes!”

Samo: “Yes!”

Timotej: “Records are part of merchandise because they give us the same feeling as buying a shirt or a hoodie. It’s something you now own. It’s something that reminds you of this band. If you just... You know you have it. For every single CD, I know I have it, I know where it is.”

[...]

Samo: “I mean, it’s almost the same.”

(personal communication, Samo and Timotej 05.12.2017)

However, when I asked Matija, who is himself involved in the record and merchandise business, the same question, the response was totally different:

Florian: “Do you consider records like CDs and vinyls part of merchandise or is it something separate for you?”

Matija: “Separate.”

Florian: “Why separate?”

Matija: “Because they are produced and used for a different purpose.”

Then, when I confronted him with the opposing views that I had heard before, he continued:

Matija: “It’s one of the aspects how you look at everything. This is mostly as from a listener who wants to support the band. In this case, yes, I totally agree.

He or she wants to give some money to the band and get himself or herself a souvenir. This is the same, but I see different reason why produce CDs and vinyl, and why produce merchandise. And the intention, the product, is totally different. You listen to CD or to vinyl, and the shirt, hoodie, everything else, I don't know, underwear, you wear this. And it also covers different human needs. One is like, for the soul, and one is for not getting cold. If you look at the T-shirt for something you wear, so you wouldn't be standing on the street naked. But yeah, definitely. You can just look at everything as a souvenir, as something you bought from the band you like.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

Contrary to the viewpoint of Samo and Timotej, who both treat records as merchandise because of their symbolic value, Matija, while acknowledging that either categorization is valid, focuses on the intended use of records as music media and thus sees them as a category of their own due to their different function. Therefore, he takes a position that is closer to the one proposed by Korn, while Timotej and Samo have a more open concept of what is merchandise and what is not. Another person who speaks on behalf of a wider concept of merchandise is Tomi, who generally opposes a detailed categorization:

Florian: “Do you consider CDs or vinyls or other records as merchandise or do you think that's something different?”

Tomi: “I know in catalogues it's kind of categorized like, you know, music, and then merchandise with T-shirts, hoodies and stuff like that, and music and accessories, but, I don't know, you know. It's like talking about these different genres. Ok, we play grindcore, and nowadays we play more grindcore slash crustcore slash, slash, et cetera, et cetera. I think, yeah... It's all, you know... Ok, let's call it merchandise, you know. Because, you know, when you buy a T-Shirt, you know, you support the band, when you buy a CD, you support the band. Maybe from this point of view, you know, let's call it, you know, band stuff you have to have, you know. This is my category of, you know, it's good to have, or, you know, it's great to have or to buy. You know, it's like... I don't know this, you know, categorizing, you know, this is it, and this is this, and this



is this, this was before that, it was this, you know. It's like, you know, mass confusion.”

(personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018)

Given that there is no consensus within the metal scene about this matter, I decided to include records into the definition of merchandise that is used in this work. The reason to do this is that the way people in the metal scene relate to records and act upon them is in many cases the same or at least very similar to the way they do in relation to other merchandise goods like clothing items. Further, besides T-shirts and hoodies, records are the main merchandise items bought by fans, at least at concerts (personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017). That being said, I now have to take a closer look at clothing as merchandise items, since this is of particular concern in the context of metal scenes.

### **Clothing as Merchandise – Merchandise as Clothing**

When I have talked with several members of the metal scene about merchandising and merchandise items, more often than not the conversation was immediately about clothing, particularly about T-shirts. The reason for this is probably the fact that T-shirts are undoubtedly the most purchased and used merchandise articles within the metal scene (personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017). Korn, on the basis of a survey she conducted, came to the conclusion that 89,9% of all people who bought merchandise purchased a T-shirt, with the gap to the second most frequently mentioned category of items (poster, calendar, photo) that come in at 54,9% being quite large. Out of the fans of metal music, which she categorized as medium- or intensive-users of merchandise (Korn 2009:165), 87,9% of the medium-users and 94,6% of the intensive-users bought T-shirts. Hoodies, sweatshirts, jackets and long sleeves were the fourth most purchased items (34,8%) just after pins and buttons (35,7%) (Korn 2009:168). Out of the 56 persons that filled in the questionnaire I had distributed at a concert and who had bought merchandise on that evening, 46 (82%) had bought a T-shirt, and 7 had bought a hoodie (questionnaire, 18.01.2018). Together, they come at 94,6%, and thus perfectly correspond with the numbers provided by Korn. Also, when I had asked people in conversations what merchandise items they buy, “T-shirts” was the most prominent answer:

Florian: “What stuff do you usually buy?”

Timotej: “Shirts.”

Ico: “Shirts.”

Timotej: “If I have the money, hoodies. One hoodie so far. Yeah, shirts and hoodies.”

Florian: “So, no fancy stuff. No coffee mugs, no...”

Celin: “No. Maybe Patches. Patches.”

Timotej: “Patches. But I don’t buy patches really, ‘cause I don’t have anywhere to put them. So, no use for them.”

Samo: “Just make a pillow out of them.”

Timotej: “I would like to buy a mug, but no good mugs, with merchandise.”

(personal communication, Timotej, Ico and Celin 05.12.2017)

Due to the dominance of clothing as the prime manifestation of merchandise goods, it seems that the term “merchandise” is immediately and primarily associated with T-shirts and, to a lesser extent, other clothing items. At least, it occurred to me that this is the case with members of the metal scene, who on occasion even use terms such as “merchandise”, “merch”, “band-shirt”, “T-shirt” and the like interchangeably. Sometimes, conversations about merchandising implicitly entirely turned into conversations about clothing.

The appearances of fans of metal music are as manifold as the different styles of metal music themselves, but there is undoubtedly a tendency to dress and look in a particular way that is conforming to the scenic code – jeans or army pants, leather, and a strong emphasis on the colour black (I will take a closer look at the distinctive features of metal fashion later). Phillips and Cogan write in their *Encyclopedia of Heavy Metal Music* about fashion in the metal scene: “[F]or years, the metal subculture has defined itself by various uses of clothing and other accessories to show either allegiance to metal in general or to a particular subgenre of metal” (Phillips/Cogan 2009:90).

That merchandise clothing is a central fashion element in the metal scene becomes clear when we look at the different accounts of metal fans that various authors have presented since the beginning of metal music studies as an academic discipline. Although seldom the main focus of attention, clothing, particularly T-shirts, are mentioned in many works about metal culture. In the beginning of the 1990s, Deena Weinstein wrote about the visual dimensions of metal music, stating that the graphic logos of metal bands are “significant features of T-shirts, pins, hats, and patches – the merchandise bought and proudly worn by fans” (Weinstein 2000:28), and Jeffrey Arnett claimed in 1996: “If you were to visit a typical American high school, you would be likely to see some students wearing black t-shirts with the logo of a heavy metal band” (Arnett 1996:28).

While most of the older publications are almost entirely focussed on male participants in the metal scene, Gabrielle Riches talked about her interlocutors as “[w]omen [...] [who] engaged in liminal performances that subvert mainstream performances of femininity by dressing in grotesque metal shirts” (Riches 2011:322), showing that this is not an exclusively male phenomenon, while Emma Baulch proves that it is not limited to the historic centres of metal music and culture, Europe and North America, by giving an example of the Balinese extreme metal scene where “[t]he embodiment of death metal began [...] with the making of tee shirts [sic] which eventually covered the death/thrash mob in a uniform blackness. These tee shirts [sic] were emblazoned with the names of death metal and thrash bands” (Baulch 2003:197).

We can thus see that merchandise and fashion go hand in hand in the context of the metal scene. Therefore, most of this work is concerned with clothing, because apart from records, other merchandise items were rarely mentioned in conversations and neither have I observed many of them being used in public (apart from a few stickers, mainly at club- and bar toilets). However, I do not consider this as much of a limit or a constraint in the examination of the practices revolving around merchandise within the metal scene because of the prevailing status of clothing in this context. The simple function of merchandise as clothing does not seem to be the principal reason why metal fans buy such large amounts of merchandise. For only nine of the people who responded to my questionnaire, the reason for buying merchandise was that they “needed something to wear” (questionnaire, 18.01.2018). What causes people within the metal scene to partake in this substantial merchandise business will be the topic of a later chapter. Right now, I want to take a closer look at the second large category of merchandise items, which are music records.

## Records

There is no clear consensus about whether to count records as merchandise items or not. Because of this, I want to look at some of the particularities of records that separate them from other categories of merchandising goods. As was mentioned by Matija in his statement above, records are first and foremost sound storage media designed to contain the main product of musicians: music. One can argue that this is the main function of a record and thus the only aspect of them that matters. However, this would be a short-sighted view on the matter, since records have many more qualities than just being a storage medium for music, and it is precisely those additional qualities that bring them closer to other merchandise items.

Probably the most outstanding quality-beyond-the-music is a record's graphic design, which consists of two main elements: text and image. The texts on records are usually limited to the artist's name and the name of the record on the front cover. In the metal scene, it is common that bands have a unique logo, which has a high value of brand recognition, making it easy for the consumers to identify band and musical style. This logo is combined with the image, which changes from record to record and is often linked to the musical or lyrical content of the album. Additional information, like a track list, publication notes and copyright notice are usually provided on the back cover of the record.

There are several reasons why, at least in some musical genres, physical records are still produced and sold in quite large numbers, despite the fact that most of the music is also available online. In fact, especially vinyl sales are constantly rising, with LP sales reaching numbers as high as in the early 1990s ([theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) 26.05.2018) One of the reasons why physical records are so appealing are their cover artworks.

“The album cover remains the most visible form of music packaging. In addition, LP album covers have not yet lost their cultural status for designers and consumers alike. Visually, the 12-inch square of the album cover has proven a fertile forum for the development of a rich sense of cultural, artistic, and social history” (Jones/Sorger 1999:70).

By many music fans, an album is not viewed simply as a collection of songs on a storage medium. Instead it is seen as a piece of art, consisting of several components.

“Album art has been, and always will be, a key part of the experience. Even if we come to live in a fully digitalized world, album art in some form will always

remain. But in its physical form, album art isn't restricted to just the front cover – it's the back, the inside, the disc, the booklet, gatefold, poster, inserts, and more" (Jones 2014:62)

Or, as Matija has put it:

Matija: "[...] a CD or Vinyl is complete project consisting of music, of lyrics, of cover and other elements. So, I believe that to make a good one, you have to fulfil all those aspects of that album. [...] Albums without covers would be half products, you know."

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

In most cases, music is the central of these elements, but cover artwork, inlays, booklets, the cover itself or additional giveaways may be of equal importance when it comes to the decision of buying a physical record or not and which one. Hence, the record packaging is not just there to protect the record. Instead, it occupies a somewhat ambivalent position where it is both a form of marketing as well as a part of the whole artwork itself that it advertises.

"[P]opular music has increasingly relied on visual style to present and sell itself. The visuals of music have been most permanently stored and most widely displayed on the packaging of prerecorded musical products-album covers. While the basic role of music packaging remains the protection of the prerecorded medium, it also functions as a visual mnemonic to the music enclosed and as a marketing tool" (Jones/Sorger 1999:68).

Just as the answers to the question if records are considered to be merchandise differ quite significantly, so do the answers to the question whether record cover designs are important and why. Interestingly, those people who would include records into the category of merchandise items are the ones who do not seem to care all too much about their graphic design, but mainly focus on their function as sound storage media.

Samo: "I'm not the kind of guy that would be like '*Oh, I really like that cover*' I'm more like the guy that... I don't care if it's wrapped in toilet paper and has

shit on it. If it has good music on it, I don't really care. [...] I think that covers are meant for, like, only the first impression. People mostly just look at a cover once, make an opinion about it, but they don't dive into it over the years or something like that."

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

However, Samo does not regularly buy records, and neither do some others who consider records as a part of merchandising. Moreover, some of them do actually value records as an art form that trespasses the music alone, especially when there is additional value added, for example if the record is a special edition or limited in number. This again comes closer to the view of Matija. Even though he sees records as something separate than merchandise items, for they have a different purpose, he considers the additional value added to the storage medium itself as an important decision factor for people who buy physical records:

Matija: "I [...] believe that graphical elements and the whole packaging of phonographs has helped a lot that digital music did not destroy phonographs, especially in alternative music. At the time when you can buy or get mp3s, at the beginning, soon metal- and other alternative music labels started releasing special releases, limited editions, boxsets, you know. Because they tried to convince people that they still buy a physical copy. Because if you just get a disc in a white bag, it's the same if you buy mp3s. But if you get beautiful artwork, you know, or a digipack, boxset, whatever. Something that opens, that you, like... Or a poster inside, something like that. Ok, this is the additional value of the product, and of course people easily decide to give the money for this. I do the same, you know. And yes, of course, if you get lyric sheets, you know, you can read them, you don't need to go at your computer and search for them, if you don't understand the lyrics, and stuff like that."

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

As Matija already implied in this statement, the music fans do not necessarily buy records any more in order to listen to the music, and metal is no exception in that. Many fans get their music

for free on the internet. This may be a problem for record labels, since they do not sell as many records as they might have one or two decades ago. However, tape trading had already been widely practiced in the metal scene back in the 1980s, often with international reach. In fact, most underground metal music was spread through tape trading, with own columns in many fanzines<sup>9</sup> featuring large lists of tape requests and offers (Kahn-Harris 2007:78ff.). Some of the more successful metal bands from that time gained initial attention this way and may not have become famous otherwise. Matija as a label owner has similar reasons why he is not opposed to the wide availability of music on the internet. On the contrary, he supports it by making some of the music released on his label accessible for free or allowing the bands to do so.

Florian: “What’s your personal opinion on the whole digital availability of music? It doesn’t matter if legal or illegal. That you can go on Youtube and listen to it.

Matija: “We put our albums on the [internet] in digital, people can buy them, listen them for free, I don’t care, and also bands don’t. Digital music and illegal downloading, that is the problem of pop fuckers, so fuck them. You know, in alternative music, it goes that the digital music helped promoting bands, labels and music, you know. It was used that you would give this to people, they would... More and more people can hear this, and you can find potential listeners of the music you are releasing or play. [...] Most metalheads have large CD or Vinyl collections at home, so. But they probably wouldn’t buy some albums, [if a] friend wouldn’t recommend and send their link *‘Listen to this on the Youtube’*, or *‘Download it’*, or *‘I don’t know how to get it, find it on the computer in a digital form’*. But if people are stealing music from pop stars, I really don’t care.

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

Since music is widely available on the internet, and moreover a lot of it for free, there is less need for the fans to actually visit record stores to browse through the new releases and search for music they want or discover new things by trial and error as it was the case a few decades ago. Thus, the people who do not regularly buy records, like Samo, do not care too much about

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<sup>9</sup> *Fanzines* are magazines published by scene members, with often very limited reach and dealing with specific matters of metal music and the scene, e.g. providing album reviews and interviews with band members.

their graphic artworks. However, those who do buy them, like Tomi and Matija, do care a lot how a record is packaged and how the album artwork is designed as they see the records as pieces of art that cannot be reduced to the music alone. In Matija's case, he also thinks that record artworks are still very important for advertising the music, since it gives the potential listeners a first impression of what they can expect when they buy it. Further, the cover is the first thing they see if they browse through records at a (physical or online) store, and a good design might stick in the viewer's head and leave a permanent impression or raise interest and curiosity (personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017).

It has become evident that merchandise articles comprise a vast variety of goods, including clothing and records, which are quite visible in scene-related marketplaces. Therefore, I will take a closer look at the economic issues linked to merchandise in the subsequent chapter.



## **Economic Perspectives on Merchandise**

Merchandise items like T-shirts and posters were initially given away by record labels as advertising material, often for free. In the 1970s, bands like *The Rolling Stones* and *The Who* started to sell these items at their concerts, and the merchandising business was born. Shortly after, companies specialized in merchandising were founded, and up to the present day there exists an ongoing trend towards a more professional and international market for music merchandise. That the merchandise business today is not a corner phenomenon and a mere by-product of the record industry becomes evident when we take a look at the economic figures regarding merchandise sales. Back in 1996, the global trading turnover for music merchandise added up to a total of about 800 million Euro worldwide. In 2009, attendants of music events in Germany spent an estimate of over 290 million Euro on merchandise articles (including records) (Korn 2009:31). These figures do not only indicate that music merchandising is a business branch to be taken seriously, but also that the relative market is continually expanding, which still seems to be the case today. According to Billboard.com, the global music merchandising industry grew 9,4% within one year, from 2015 to 2016, reaching a global turnover of 3,1 billion Dollars (~2,5 billion Euro) (Billboard 23.03.2018). If those figures are correct, it means that the global merchandise market has tripled its monetary volume of sales within the last 20 years, and it steadily continues to grow at a rapid pace.

## **Merchandise as Main Source of Income**

The growth of the market for licensed products is going hand in hand with the decline of record sales. This is due to the transformations within the music industry that started to occur with the rise of digital music storage media, the internet and online filesharing platforms. It has become increasingly simpler for consumers to obtain music through different channels outside the reach of record labels. Thus, the labels lose control over the distribution of their products, and subsequently record sale numbers drop. As a reaction to this ongoing trend, record companies try to gain more and more control over the merchandise business that often was not in their hands initially (Korn 2009:34ff.). However, it is not only the labels that profit from increasing merchandise sales, but first and foremost the artists themselves.

According to Korn, fans of metal music in Germany spend an average of more than ten Euro per music event on merchandise, which is much higher than the average of 3,90 Euro per person and event of all music styles considered together. This means that the people in the metal scene are among those who spend the most money on merchandise goods within the whole music industry (Korn 2009:37). Those concert attendants who responded to my questionnaire and claimed that they had bought merchandise on that night spent an average of 27,64 Euro on such goods. If we look at those figures, we can reason that within the metal scene either more people buy merchandise when at concerts, or those who do so spend more money than people in many other popular music scenes. As the main reason to do so, most of my respondents (54) claimed that they buy merchandise to support the bands that play at the concerts (questionnaire, 18.01.2018).

I have talked to members of several metal bands (*Ambra*, *Amken*, *Disentomb*, *Incarceration*), playing different styles of metal music (progressive/doom, thrash, brutal death, death) and coming from different parts of the world (Slovenia, Greece, Australia, Brazil/Germany). At first glance, those four bands are as divergent as it can get under the unifying banner of metal music. What they all have in common, however, is the fact that they are operating almost entirely in the underground. They do not release their albums on major labels (if they have releases at all), have a marginally institutionalized distribution network at best, and are no big players in the metal scene. They stay in their respective sub-stylistic niches, and even there they are not particularly well known. The members of bands like these are not rock stars. They don't become rich and famous with their music, don't travel the world in private jets and don't party every day with champagne, cocaine and groupies like the common clichés of the rock music industry would suggest. Rather, they have to go take vacations from their regular jobs to be able to go on tour, open up the stage for other, more famous bands, and hardly get any money out of it if they get paid at all (Weinstein 2000:74, 76).

Vanias, the vocalist and guitarist from *Amken*, told me that since they are the first band to play every evening, they do not get any money from ticket sales at all on the tour they did in November 2017 together with major black metal bands *Gorgoroth* and *Gehenna*, despite of playing 18 shows in 19 days (personal communication, Vanias 07.11.2017). For all bands to whose members I have talked (except for *Ambra*, who were just founded and have no merchandise/records for sale yet), selling merchandise (including records) at concerts is the main source of income, not only on tour but generally within the whole music business. One band member told me that on a good concert night they get 400 to 500 Euro out of merchandise sales. Since the popularity of the band is slowly rising, not only their sales numbers increase,

but they can also afford higher prices for their merchandising (personal communications, Daniel & Michael 03.10.2017, Jord 30.10.2017, Vanias 07.11.2017, Robi & Žiga 10.11.2017). It is hence not uncommon for the artists to point out during the show that they have merchandise available for sale, especially when they just released a new record that can be purchased. Matija, who owns a record label and thus is familiar with the payment practices in the industry largely confirmed those aspects:

Florian: “Why do you think merchandise is something important?”

Matija: “It’s important for bands. Because merchandise is definitely one of the aspects that the bands get money. The bands earn mostly from merchandise and shows. Of payments from playing. They don’t get that big share of record sales.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

It is important to note that not only merchandise of the main headliners of the evening is sought after by the fans. Even the lesser known bands sell a good deal of goods. Jord, vocalist of Australian brutal death band *Disentomb*, to whom I have briefly talked at a show, told me that even though they are the first of four bands to play each night at the ongoing tour, merchandise business is going well (personal communication, Jord 30.10.2017). However, this seems to strongly depend on the unique qualities of the different concerts, such as subgenre, size, prominence of the bands playing, and not least of the attending audience. When I did my questionnaire survey at a show of German long-time thrash metal legends *Kreator*, 47 out of 56 persons who claimed to have bought merchandise that night bought something from *Kreator*. From the co-headlining death metal outfit *Vader*, 23 people claimed to have purchased something, but only one concert visitor bought merchandise from the supporting band *Dagoba* (questionnaire, 18.01.2018). In this context it is also important to mention that the range of items offered was largest for *Kreator* and just slightly smaller for *Vader*, while *Dagoba* had a relatively limited choice of products.

As merchandise booths are virtually omnipresent at concerts, I was surprised when I did not see any merchandise for sale at one of the shows I attended. After asking a few people, I found out that this is probably due to the fiscal law in Slovenia. Bands are not allowed to sell merchandise unless they have a registered company with a Slovene tax number and pay a sales tax (VAT) for the goods they sell. Since the VAT is quite high, I have been told that some bands decide

not to sell merchandise when they play in Slovenia, even if they do at the other stops of the tour (personal communications, Vanias, Č. and M. 07.11.2017). A few days later at another concert, I met Matija for the first time, who was selling merchandise for the bands that played that night. He told me that the VAT is 22%, like for most other goods. However, the bands have to find a company that will sell their products for them, and Matija's company On Parole often does so. Therefore, the bands do not only have to pay taxes, but also the company that sells their merchandise. This is the reason why some bands decide to demand a higher price for their merchandise items. According to Matija, this is EU-law, but it is enforced more consequently than in other European states, a fact that is probably going to change within the next few years as tax law enforcement becomes stricter in the whole European Union. (personal communication, Matija 10.11.2017).

Because of the additional expenses, some bands decide to sell their merchandise underhandedly, if this is possible under the relative circumstances. Especially in smaller venues, such practices are still possible, and I have attended a few concerts where merchandise was sold directly by the bands or their crew. In these cases, it is not uncommon that every band has their own section in the merchandise booth area with their own salesperson. One guy I met at a concert said that he mostly visits grindcore shows, and that the merch is cheaper there, which is a good thing since he considers himself "addicted to merch" (personal communication, P. 30.10.2017). Since grindcore is a musical style at the intersection of death metal and hardcore punk and thus is historically rooted in a more left-wing political environment with a strong emphasis on Do-It-Yourself culture, I strongly assume that merchandise sales in this scene take place beyond fiscal law enforcement. However, I never visited a grindcore show in Ljubljana, so this is mere speculation.

## **Merchandise at Concerts**

Merchandise booths, where band merchandise is sold, are a central element of most metal concerts. Located either in the lobby, the bar area or the concert hall itself (depending on the venue), they are usually not more than a simple table where items like records or patches are placed and a wall or pin board on which clothing items like T-shirts or hoodies are hung for display. As the following account of a metal concert from Jeffrey Arnett indicates, they have

been inseparably connected to the concert experience for at least more than 20 years. After waiting in the cold outside the venue, and upon entering the lobby, he noticed that “[t]he action is centred around the concession stands, where t-shirts (\$18-20), programs (\$10), and other items bearing the logos of Iron Maiden or Anthrax are being sold. The young ‘metalheads’ [...] press forward eagerly, awaiting their chance to purchase one or more of the tokens displayed there” (Arnett 1996:7f.).

I have made similar observations myself where as soon as the concert venue had opened, people rushed to the merchandise booths and often immediately bought some goods, even if they had not seen a glimpse of the band or heard a single note yet. While the bands play, there normally is not much going on at the booths, but especially at larger concerts, the steady stream of customers never totally comes to a halt. During the changeover breaks as well as after the concert, the run for merchandising is equally high as in the beginning, if not even higher, as not only I but also Arnett have observed: “During the intermission you walk around the lobby where people are streaming toward the food/beer lines, the restrooms, the concession stands. If anything, the press of people at the concession stands is even greater than before” (Arnett 1996:11).



Fig. 1; Various merchandise items on display at concerts in and around Ljubljana. Top: T-shirts; Centre: CDs; Bottom: Patches and Buttons. (Top: Annegg 30.10.2017, Orto Bar, Ljubljana. Centre and Bottom: Annegg 17.11.2017, Klub Jedro, Medvode)

Based on my observations I would say that many concert attendants buy merchandise after they have seen a band. This circumstance explains why there is a rush for merchandising during changeover breaks and after the concerts.

The amount of money spent at these events is highly dependent on factors such as age and popularity of the band, age of the audience, range of products and of course their prices. However, as I found out with my questionnaire, many concert attendants do plan to buy merchandise in advance (47 people) and thus bring extra money to the show to do so (45 people). The average amount of money spent by the people who bought merchandise that night was 27,64 Euro, which is more than the cost of one T-shirt was, indicating that many of them either bought something more expensive, like a hoodie, or purchased more than one merchandise item (questionnaire, 18.01.2018). Given the fact that most of my respondents claimed to have bought T-shirts, the latter is more likely. Celin described the process of buying merchandise at concert to me as follows:

Celin: “Basically, you take out your wallet and you go ‘Hmm.’ And you go ‘Ah, That one, that one, that one, That. Ooh, Jesus, I don't have that much money.’”

(personal communication, Celin 05.12.2014)

Among the items sold at these booths, T-shirts, as mentioned before, are the most prominent and can thus be seen as the classics when it comes to merchandise items. Apart from T-shirts, records were available at almost all concerts I had attended. While hoodies and patches are also fairly common, other merchandise items are rather rare and hence are just sold occasionally. At one concert, for example, the headlining band sold women's underpants with their logo printed on them, and those were sold out some time halfway through the event. When I asked Matija, who was working at the merchandise booth that night, how many people buy those kind of things, he answered that such items usually don't sell well and that the only reason why the underwear was sold out was that they just had six pieces of them (personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017).

Most bands or event promoters do sell differently designed T-shirts of the same band or event simultaneously, so that they have something visually appealing for every customer (Korn 2009:168). These other items usually feature the same designs as the T-shirts but the variance is much smaller, as Timotej had noted in a conversation:

Timotej: “If we compare hoodies and shirts, the designs are usually the same. So if you want the design on the hoodie, they definitely have it on the shirt. So usually, when we don’t have enough money for a hoodie, we buy the shirt with the same design we wanted on the hoodie. [...] Because they usually have only one design for the hoodie, because [...] not many people buy hoodies.”

(personal communication, Timotej 05.12.2018)

Often, a special tour shirt is available at concerts. Normally, those feature the dates and locations of all tour stops, which are commonly printed on the backside, and either the graphics of the most recent album or an artwork specifically created for this tour’s merchandise. Tour shirts have always had a high popularity within the scene. “T-shirts that are tour shirts, ordinarily sold at concerts, are more highly valued than those bought in stores, and shirts from long ago tours are the most highly respected of all” (Weinstein 2000:127). Not only do I have a fair share of them myself, but my interlocutors also frequently mentioned them when talking about merchandising at concerts:

Florian: “[...] if you have like, let’s say, three or four different shirts with different designs.”

Celin: “From the same band or...?”

Florian: “From the same band, yeah. Like, how do you decide which one you take. Do you buy the one with the design that you like most, or do you buy the tour shirt from the tour?”

Celin: “That pretty much depends on the album. If there is a shirt that linked to the album they made...”

Timotej: “That and what’s the occasion. [...] if you were at that concert, you buy the concert shirt or the tour shirt. You don’t buy the previous tour’s shirt.”

(personal communication, Celin and Timotej 05.12.2017)

Apart from those tour shirts, items that feature the artwork of the latest album are usually a staple, as Samo has noted:

Samo: “[...] basically every band that brings out a new album produces a T-shirt with the... Most of the times with the album cover on it. So you still have this kind of, you know, the cover and the music kind of going together.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

Since there is a significant amount of money involved in the merchandise business and bands often depend on this money, merchants are very cautious about the ways they interact with the customers and present their goods. Items are not just thrown at the tables at random, but often strategically placed to attract customers, as Matija has told me:

Matija: “Sometimes, when I receive merchandise, and I have limited space to work, I thought to myself ‘*What shirt do you think you would sell the most?*’, and then I put these easily accessible than some of the others. And a lot of times I was predicting correct.”

Florian: “So you developed kind of an eye for the good and the less good.”

Matija: “Yes, probably. But it’s maybe... It’s not an eye, but experience, you know. Because when I... Sometimes I think, ok, if I would buy one of those shirts, I would usually choose the less selling ones, you know. And it’s also a difference of what kind of genre the band is, you know. All the power metal shirts have to be colourful, with big prints front and back, you know. Black metal shirts.. Nobody will buy colourful black metal shirts. It has to be black, with white or grey print, very minimalistic.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

Matija already indicates in this statement that different playstyles of metal music and distinctive visual styles usually go hand in hand. Especially black metal aesthetics occupy a special position in this regard, since graphic designs in this subgenre are often radically different from those of other metal styles. Black metal’s main colours are black and white. This may also be true for the rest of all metal aesthetics, but in contrast to them, there are seldom other colours used in black metal. While the styles of graphic design are to a large part conforming to a certain



subgenre-code, there are also differences in the customer preferences within those particular genres, mostly depending on the age of the customers, as Matija goes on to say:

Matija: “I have noticed that T-shirt designs are conforming to the age of the listeners. You know, bands like *Sabaton*, *Korpiklaani*, *Wintersun*, have young listeners. And young people, especially kids, high school kids, you know, or even younger, they like those colours, those big pictures, you know. And as I see older people, they prefer more minimalistic shirts, you know. [...] Look, as I remember, when I was a kid, we all were wearing very colourful full print shirts. And the more colours, the bigger picture, the better, you know. And after the years, not just me but also people I know from that time, then we all just wear shirts with logos, with some details, you know. Minimalistic ones.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

This aspect is also mentioned by Korn, who not only states that older music fans buy less merchandise and favour different product categories, but also want to have simpler and more subtle designs so they do not make a fool of themselves in public (Korn 2009:166ff.).

Concerts and festivals are still the main sites where 45% of music fans of all genres inform themselves about and buy merchandising (Korn 2009:165). Hence, these events are the main locations where merchandise is bought and sold, and the metal scene is no exception, as the following two excerpts from conversations with Samo and Celin indicate:

Samo: “[...] mostly you buy merchandise at festivals or concerts. And at those events it’s mostly like... If you go to a concert, you’ll most probably find the latest T-shirt and the latest album cover. So you just buy that.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.1.2017)

Celin: “I’m the kind of a guy who goes to the concert and then buys merch. I don’t really buy stuff I didn’t hear in person. Because there’s a whole new level of going to a concert and buying the merchandise or just buying it online.”

(personal communication, Celin 05.12.2017)

However, the range of items offered at concerts is often limited, and especially bands that come from overseas and lack a distribution company in Europe often have a quite small range of goods available (personal communication, Celin et al. 05.12.2017). Especially for women, dedicated clothing items are scarce and often only available at concerts of better known bands. If dedicated women’s clothing is for sale, the design variance is by far not as wide as it is with unisex T-shirts. This may be the reason why, according to Korn, men do not only buy more merchandise than women in general, but they also buy more clothing, while women tend to purchase other items in higher proportions (Korn 2009:166ff.). Even though my interlocutors in the field were predominantly male, one of the few women I have talked to about merchandising has confirmed that she often does not like the design of merchandise clothing or that it does not fit her properly, which is a main reason why she rarely buys merchandise items at all (personal communication, An. 03.11.2017).

When people go shopping for merchandise at concerts, they seem to do this in a very conscious manner. Merchandise shopping for many is an enjoyment inseparably linked to the concert experience as a whole. I have observed that even at larger concerts, where the run for merchandise is quite high and there are long queues in front of the booths, there is hardly any pushing or shoving visible, and if persons do engage in such a way, they are in most cases prompted to behave properly. The customers take their time to look at the choice of products, confer with their friends or partners about which articles they like and what to buy, and then approach the salespersons and place their orders. Since many people in the scene regularly buy merchandising, many of them are accustomed to the process and know quite precisely what they want or need, as Matija has indicated in the statement below. Others who do not buy merchandise regularly seem to often need more time to decide and also frequently have to try on clothing items before they buy them to see if they fit.

Matija: “As I have noticed, people that are going often to the concerts and often buying stuff, they know which size fits them and just say *‘Give me this shirt in*

*large, extra-large, whatever*’, but there are some people who are rarely buying, and they want to try it on, and they have to decide. Depends.”

Florian: “So it’s a little bit a thing of experience. You see who’s experienced in this.”

Matija: “Yes.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

### Other Distribution Channels for Merchandise

Apart from concerts, there are basically three other ways to purchase music merchandise: online shops, physical stores and through informal, personal contacts. The latter is probably the least important of those distribution channels, but I do not have sufficient data to support this claim. Therefore, I will focus on the two official institutions that sell merchandise items. About one quarter of music fans of all genres buy merchandising and inform themselves via online shops, and 11% of them do so at retail (Korn 2009:165). While some companies do operate both an online shop as well as one or more physical



Fig. 2; Tomi in his merchandise store “Truga Shop” in Ljubljana. (Annegg, 23.01.2018, Truga Shop, Ljubljana)

stores (in different cities), it appears to me that this is not the case in Slovenia, at least not in Ljubljana. Here, the only merchandise store in the city is Truga Shop, which seems to be known by everyone within the local scene, even though not all of them actually use its services. After its predecessor had shut down, Truga was established by Tomi in 2016 with a stronger focus on backorders than on actual in-store shopping. The reason for this is the fact that a larger store with more in-stock items would require a significantly higher budget and is not necessary since most customers want to comfortably order goods from their homes anyways. When I asked Tomi why his customers do not order the goods they want from other online stores themselves, he answered to me that some of them do not have credit cards or do not trust online payment

methods. Also, some of the items are not available for private customers but only for companies, which is the reason why Tomi has access to a much larger assortment of merchandise goods than a private customer would have (personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018). Some of these aspects came out in conversations I had with other scene members, like Samo:

Florian: “Where do you normally buy stuff when you buy some?”

Samo: “Truga Shop. Previously I bought them at Master of Metal, and the guy... The business went down, so one of his employees started a shop that mostly deals with online ordering. So I just come there and tell him what I want and he orders it, then I get it.”

Florian: “Why don’t you order it yourself online?”

Samo: “First, I don’t like internet payment options. I’m one of those guys that just doesn’t trust that kind of shit. I don’t know, I like it simple. I just come there, tell the guy what I want. I don’t really care if it comes like five Euros more expensive or ten.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

Tomi claimed that within the last decade, since he started working at a Master of Metal store in 2006, the whole scene has changed, and in accordance the merchandise business also did. Back then, more people actually came to the store to buy records and merchandise or just to browse the choice of products and connect with other like-minded people. Nowadays, most customers rather order via internet and have the items delivered to them, since this feels more comfortable to them.

Tomi: “Back then, when I started, I remember, every morning when I came to open the shop, there were almost every morning, you know, five to eight metalheads waiting, you know, like zombies. ‘*Oooh, I need a CD*’ ‘*Yeah, of course you need a CD. Did you eat something this morning?*’ ‘*No, fuck food! I need a CD. I need a T-Shirt.*’ So, that’s why back then we had a lot of T-Shirts, a lot of stuff in stock, and today I don’t have it. Because, you know, I also have

some customers from Ljubljana, who live like maybe 500 meters from the shop, and they rather see to not to come, you know, because they are lazy, and they will rather pay three Euro for post expenses than come here.

(personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018)

Despite the fact that most of Tomi's business and customer contacts are done via communication over the internet, I would not qualify Truga as an online shop since it has no dedicated webstore per se. A large Slovene online shop that sells merchandise items was launched in 2009 by the record label On Parole, followed up two years later by the company's own ticket presale system (personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017). Being probably the largest and best-known record label for metal music in Slovenia, their webstore, selling records, merchandising and concert tickets under a single roof, seems to be equally well acquainted. Opposed to buying merchandise in physical stores, online shopping is just like shopping through catalogues which Clarke describes as "alternative, non-formal modes of acquisition" (Clarke 1998:97). It offers the benefit of shopping comfortably from home and having the purchased items delivered by mail. Moreover, online search masks allow to precisely look for the wanted items or more generally filtering the articles on offer along various categories. While this is desirable for some people, as Tomi has indicated in the statement above, others like himself still favour going to an actual, physical store when they want to buy merchandise or records. Tomi referred to shopping for CDs or Vinyls as kind of a ritual, where he wants to touch them and feel them while browsing. Further, he dislikes scrolling through hundreds of pages in online catalogues (personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018).

Generally, it can be said that with the digital availability of music, online stores, social media and a continually changing economic environment, the metal scene has altered significantly within the last decade, and so too has the merchandise business both within the scene as also in regard to the whole music industry. However, there are still people who stick to the old-fashioned practices of buying physical records, browsing through items at the nearest metal store and, of course, buying lots of merchandise at concerts. What most of these scene members have in common is a distinctive visual appearance. One could speak of a style that is unique to the metal scene, which I will examine in the following chapter.

## **Metal Appearances**

### **The Metal Uniform**

Merchandise is often related to fashion within the scene, as the major part of merchandising goods bought and used by metal fans are T-shirts and other clothing items. Therefore, I now want to take a closer look at the fashion styles connected with metal music and the messages they entail. “While many outside the metal scene have long mocked metal bands for their dedication to fashion, all subcultures use fashion as signifiers of membership. In metal, different meanings are encoded in different metal costumes” (Phillips/Cogan 2009:91). This statement is certainly true, even though boundaries between subgenres and their particular dress codes are fluid, and while in the literature it is often mentioned that different subgenres have entirely different clothing styles, I cannot support this claim based on my observations. Although there certainly are minor variations that can be ascribed to subgenre preferences, I would consider the everyday clothing styles within the metal scene as quite uniform.

Up to the 1990s, denim and leather dominated the appearances of the metal fans as it is described in Dunn’s metal documentary (2005). One major exception to this was the subgenre of hair metal (or glam metal) where “the gamut from risqué styles, fabrics and colours generally associated with female sex workers and exotic dancers (spandex, leather, lace, animal prints, and neon) to long hair and makeup matched with more masculine rocker attire” (Sollee 2011:54). Since hair metal was the most visible form of metal music in the 1980s, being labelled by the Rolling Stone magazine as the “mainstream of rock and roll” (Walser 1993:3), its visual aesthetics “largely replaced the faded denim and long-limp-haired look associated with heavy metal fans during the 1970s” (Bennett 2001:45). However, glam metal has almost entirely vanished as an everyday aesthetic, and during the last two decades, there has evolved a certain, mundane fashion style within the whole metal scene that is widely adapted nowadays.

Most metal fans today wear either jeans (mostly blue or black) or army pants (mostly black or camouflage) along with sneakers or army boots. Added to that are band or festival T-shirts as well as hoodies or sweaters. For jackets, black leather and black or blue denim are the usual choices (Weinstein 2000:127). This emphasis on rather casual clothing derives from the aesthetics of death metal, where a less stylized, trivial appearance was favoured (Phillips/Cogan

2009:91) in opposition to glam metal's highly sexualized and gendered looks and thrash metal's almost exclusive focus on denim-and-leather, albeit the latter had a strong impact that is still noticeable today. Denim jackets are often converted into so called battle jackets by cutting off the sleeves and decorating them with patches of one's favourite bands. Those patches are either bought or hand-painted, and sometimes the motifs are also painted or embroidered directly onto the jackets. Studs, buttons, pins or other embellishments are also common (Cardwell 2017:1; Weinstein 2000:128). Studs in particular are frequently seen not only on jackets, but also on wristbands, belts and other accessories. Made popular to a large extent by the band *Judas Priest*, many metal fans did not (or still do not) know that the focus on studs and leather has its origins in the gay community, until Rob Halford, vocalist of the band "famously came out as both gay and a member of the gay leather community" (Phillips/Cogan 2009:225) in 1998, shaking up the foundations of the heterosexually connotated perception of masculinity in the scene. I will discuss such issues of gender representations through clothing in the scene presently after looking at what strikes me as the common ground of almost all metal appearance.



Fig. 3; Battle jacket with hand-painted patches at a thrash metal concert in Ljubljana. (Annegg, 26.11.2017, Kino Šiška, Ljubljana)

## **“Black” Metal**

There is one main feature that unites most metal fans in their fashion choices, which is the tendency to dress mainly in black (Bilimava 2014:16). Black is *the* colour par excellence that is mostly associated with metal, for it is featured frequently in album cover design, stage decoration and not least in both musicians and fans clothing choices. This may be the case predominantly due to the fact that the colour black in the European and Anglo-American

conception of the world “means of danger, it means evil, [...] also again a freedom, outside of the light of day, where people are not watching you”, as Deena Weinstein argues in Dunn’s movie (2005). Arnett states that while wearing black T-shirts is a common thing amongst metalheads, “to wear black from head to toe, every day, carries the motif one step further” (Arnett 1996:135). He associates the colour with mourning and warrants its extensive use by one of his interlocutresses with her seemingly depressed state of mind, “mourning for her younger hopes of what the world would be like or what her life would be like” (Arnett 1996:135). This rather pessimistic view completely negates the fact that the colour black has always been a staple in all styles of fashion, and that its use is not limited to metal fans but widespread amongst the general public. Timotej told me that he also exclusively wears black, and when I asked him why, he replied:

Timotej: “I like black. It’s kind of my favourite colour. I don’t know.”

[...]

Ico: “When yellow becomes darker than black, then he will wear yellow. [...] He’s wearing yellow, but it’s a really, really, really dark yellow.”

Timotej: “No, actually, black goes with everything. And it’s easy to wear black. You can get everything in black. If I choose any other colour, I might just look dumb.”

(personal communication, Ico and Timotej 05.12.2017)

We can thus see that there are many facets of black clothing, and the reasons to why this colour has such a prevalent status within the metal scene cannot be explained in its entirety. However, it is evident that the connection between metal and the colour black is as old as the music itself, made obvious by the name of one of the first metal bands, *Black Sabbath*. Back then, it was a radical opposition to the colourful hippie culture. When *Judas Priest* showed up on the scene a few years later, they introduced to metal the studs-and-black-leather style favoured by parts of the gay community. After the colourful 1980s that featured the peak of glam metal, flamboyant appearances and ostentatious stage shows, there came a reversion to the more basic clothing styles. Since then black, being the exact opposite of all the colours favoured in the previous decade, became the go-to colour for metal fans in terms of clothing and appearances, and it has



held this position until today. However, because of the fact that black clothing is perceived as the norm, everything that deviates is regarded as interesting or peculiar.

Florian: “You have a favourite? Like a favourite shirt or a favourite sweater or whatever?”

Matija: “Actually no. I like a few shirts I have that are a different colour than black, you know. Because 95 percent of my shirts are black, and then I have a few white ones and one grey one, and... They are like something special, you know, because of the different colour.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

It seems to me that in recent years there has been a shift towards shirts in other colours than black. Especially white and red T-shirts can be seen more and more often at merchandise booths at concerts, but also other colours are featured frequently. By the people who buy and wear those shirts, those are often regarded as something special since they allow the wearer to stand out against the sheer mass of people dressed in black.

## **Gender Stereotypes**

At this point, I think it is important to address some issues concerned with gender relations and stereotypes within the metal scene. However, since this is not the main topic of this thesis, I will limit my discussion to those matters which are related to physical appearances, especially clothing, since a person's clothes are symbolic means of expressing sexuality and gender and thus contribute significantly to the construction of one's gendered identity (Sassatelli 2011:128) (for detailed analyses of gender matters in the metal scene I recommend Hill 2016; Riches 2011 and Weinstein 2009).

Many scene members wear their hair long, but although commonly perceived as such both by insiders and outsiders, this is not necessarily a distinctive feature of metal fans (Larsson 2013:105). For men, facial hair is almost obligatory, and particularly full beards and goatees

are worn by many male scene members. This emphasis on beards as well as the tendency towards army-style clothing, like boots and cargo-pants, is perceived by some scene members as especially masculine, and thus favoured not only by men but also women who want to overcome the highly sexualized image of femininity that is historically prevalent in the scene in favour of a more empowered position (personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017).

Based on my experience, I would argue that women can occupy two distinct positions within the metal scene. It seems that no matter how important their contribution to the scene is, how much the numbers of female fans grow and how much more visible and vocal women become within inter-scenic discourses and practices, they are more often than not reduced to one of the following two stereotypical figures. The reason why these stereotypes are of particular interest to me is that they are for a large part based on visual appearance, notably clothing. The first one is the historically grown and long-established figure of the highly sexualized female role, of which Arnett gives a quite strong example in his description of a metal concert's audience:

“The girls are noticeable as they walk in to find their seats, not only because they are distinctly in the minority, but because many of them are dressed in highly suggestive clothing. The nature of this suggestion is not lost on the boys around them. One girl walks down the aisle wearing a dress better suited for prom night than a heavy metal concert. [...] Other girls wear clothes that are not only suggestive but downright obscene. One girl who walks by you in the lobby is wearing a blue spandex top with no bra. The top button of her faded jeans is open, and the zipper is down about two inches. She has a blank, addled look on her face” (Arnett 1996:9).

It becomes pretty obvious in this description that Arnett does not approve of this way for women to dress and style themselves. He even goes so far as to call it a “neoprostitute style” (Arnett 1996:9) and contributes with this derogatory mode of expression to the devaluating practices towards women that are, in my opinion, one of the metal scene's greatest problems. However, Arnett is not an isolated case, albeit he represents a quite extreme point of view. Most of the early academic works on metal culture failed to fully grasp and value womens' parts in and contribution to the scene. Instead they were either seen as “the potential victims of male metal fans' misogynistic attitudes [...] or treated stereotypically” (Hill 2016:28).

Besides the highly sexualized archetype of woman that I have illustrated above, there is another stereotypical role, pertaining to those women who dress less “feminine” in favour for a more casual, unisex style, “dressed like the boys, in the trademark metalhead style of denim jeans, a

black ‘concert’ t-shirt bearing the logo of a heavy metal band, and a leather or denim jacket” (Arnett 1996:9). In this case, the female role is discarded in favour of a more asexual position, in which the woman is not reduced to her gender and, ultimately, her sexuality (a similar description of female clothing styles is given in Weinstein 2000:134). However, in the stereotypical conception of these roles, there is little place for women to oscillate between the two positions or of incorporating aspects of both, even if in reality, many female metal fans manage to do exactly this very successfully. Nevertheless, they are often sorted into one of these categories through the male-dominated discourses within the scene. When looking at the literature about the metal scene in the 1970s and 1980s, one gets the impression that there has been a significant improvement concerning these matters within the last two decades, but the fact that the same stereotypes that I believe to be reproduced and represented today have been already described by Arnett more than 20 years ago indicates that the metal scene has an urgent need to catch up to current discourses about gender, sexuality and sexual orientation (I believe this is equally true for issues concerning ethnic minorities, for a discussion on that see Kahn-Harris 2007).

However, while what I have described so far may look as a masculinist, if not misogynist tendency within the metal scene, Deena Weinstein argues (with a special focus on British heavy metal) that it is “neither misogynistic nor an expression of machismo; for the most part women are of no concern; there is no binary of male/female, no invidious elevation of one gender over the other – that is, British heavy metal is not masculinist” (Weinstein 2009:18). Weinstein admittedly does characterize British heavy metal as masculine, but not in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, she speaks of a cultural masculinity as “constituted from key features of biological and social masculinity [that] floats free of originating biological and social groups. It is available to others as demonstrated by female British heavy metal fans. They wore the same denim, leather and band t-shirts [...] as their male counterparts” (Weinstein 2009:19). What she means with that is that British heavy metal (and many other playstyles of metal music as well as the scenes concerned with them, as I would argue) is a social construct composed around one main element – power (for an in-depth analysis of power in the context of the metal scene see Walser 1993 and Kahn-Harris 2007). Since power has been historically perceived to be in the hands of men for thousands of years, at least in the European and Anglo-American context, metal incorporates these signifiers of male power and transfers them into something that is accessible for all fans of the music. What was typically male and manly before is now typically metal, and thus detached from its previous connotations with gender (Weinstein 2009:27f.). While this may partly be true, I still hold it problematic that in this conception of a

metal scene, the only way for female fans and scene members to gain access to this power is to discard all attributes of femaleness and enter, at least visually, the realm of male-oriented looks and aesthetics. That this is definitely not the case is demonstrated by countless women who are active participants in all manifestations of the metal scene, be it as musicians or as fans, in the focus of attention or in the background, that manage to wield power and hold respect without the need to deny their femininity or selling out their sexuality.

### **Especially Ordinary**

I now want to set aside this topic and lean my attention towards merchandise again. Just like all the clothing items discussed above, merchandise, particularly band T-shirts, constitute an important part of the metal uniform and fashion style. For most people within the scene, this is reflected in their everyday clothing, which includes merchandise items on a regular basis.

Florian: “When do you wear the stuff [merchandise]?”

Samo: “All the time. It’s all the stuff I have. I have no white T-shirts, nothing else.”

Florian: “So it’s your everyday stuff, just like me?”

Samo: “Yeah.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

Merchandise thus is part of the everyday outfit of many metal fans, and I myself am no exception from this, as I wear band- or festival T-shirts almost every day. However, in the practices of dressing and choosing what to wear are some significant differences between various scene members, especially regarding their use of merchandise. For me personally, deciding which shirt I want to put on for the day is a quite conscious decision. The same is true for another one of my interlocutors, who mentioned that he always chooses “the right shirt for the right day”, which reflects his current moods and emotions (personal communication, Al.

03.11.2017). Other people, however, usually just pick a shirt at random, often the one that is on top of the T-shirt-pile in the closet, as the following statement shows:

Timotej: “I actually don’t look, I just take a shirt from the closet, put it on. The same hoodie every day.”

Florian: “So you don’t specially decide, like, you’re not standing in front of the closet and go ‘*Ok, which shirt do I want to wear today?*’”

Timotej: “No.”

Ico: “Close your eyes and pick a shirt.”

(personal communication, Timotej and Ico 05.12.2017)

Given this randomness that is implied in such statements, one could get the assumption that merchandise is something quite ordinary, something that people do not think about and not feel concerned about. Indeed, this is precisely what Matija told me, referring to merchandising goods as nothing more than mere commodities that are bought and used without much thought, just like many other items of everyday life.

Matija: “Merchandise is a thing that... It’s kind of nothing special. [...] It doesn’t have such depth as we would be discussing music, art, literature.”

Florian: “Why not? I mean, a lot of people buy it, a lot of people wear it, it’s kind of a big business. Why is it nothing special?”

Matija: “Why? Socks are nothing special. A lot of people wear it, a lot of people buy it. They are also, like this, designed as merchandise, you know. I think it’s just some... Even merchandise is some things that we lightly consume in our lives.”

However, following this statement, he immediately highlights that some merchandise has other qualities after all, and hence is not just superficial.

Matija: “I also have to admit that, ok, merchandise, on some fields, it has something in common with art. I wouldn’t say that merchandise is art, but it has some common things that... It can be very well designed, it can be inspiring, it can be provocative, it can have a message, a meaning.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

If we look at both these statements together, it becomes clear that merchandise is considered to be somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand it is just normal clothing, intended for everyday usage and therefore nothing special. On the other hand, it is a medium through which one can express her or his feelings, emotions, views and preferences regarding music, politics, society and so on. “Clothing and body coverings express ideas to the wearer about herself [and himself], to those outside her [and him] looking on, and to the connections or disparities between these” (Botticello 2009:131). It is because of this second aspect of consuming and publicly displaying merchandise that it gains a deeper meaning for many people within the scene, and hence exceeds the matter of pure fashion and visual aesthetic. This becomes evident in the following statement of Celin about the relationship between merchandise and expressing oneself.

Florian: “So you would say that merch is kind of an expression of...?”

Celin: “Expression of yourself and what you are, what you listen to. [...] I wouldn’t say that it’s a style, you know. You can’t say it’s a style. It’s who you are. It’s not meant to be a style.”

(personal communication, Celin 05.12.2017)

The ambivalence of merchandise becomes quite clear here, as Celin refuses to talk about wearing merchandise as a matter of style. If it was a style would imply in this case that it would be something superficial, without any deeper meaning. Hence, merchandise is inevitably perceived to have some meaning or message, both by the people who use it and by the people who look upon it. Tom Cardwell explains this matter by reference to battle jackets, which can be considered to be highly personalized forms of merchandise clothing: “The communication of identity is perhaps the most fundamental symbolic function of the battle jacket to those within the subculture. Whether it is the mapping of a personal set of musical taste preferences, self-

selection as a member of a particular subgenre of metal, or a stand against the perceived mainstream” (Cardwell 2017:7). So even if one takes out the first T-shirt he or she grasps in his or her closet and puts it on, it will always be a medium of communication, thus transcending its form of a pure fashion item, and therefore it will always be something special by being something completely mundane. Plain, mono-coloured T-shirts, as opposed to merchandise clothing, are regarded as totally unexciting and ordinary, but lack the particularities that are ascribed to merchandise.

Florian: “You are wearing merchandise basically every day, right?”

Matija: “Yes. Actually, I don’t think if I have more than five black shirts. [...] All hoodies I have are band merchandise.”

Florian: “So it’s not a special decision, that you say: *‘Today I want to wear merchandise.’* It’s just your everyday clothing.”

Matija: “Yes.”

Florian: “Is that because you have it, or is there another reason why you want to wear merchandise instead of just a plain black sweater or whatever?”

Matija: “Plain black sweater is boring.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

With that being said, there is one social arena where these aspects of wearing and especially displaying merchandise is of particular importance for people within the metal scene: the concerts. Even those of my interlocutors who usually do not put much thought into the matter of which T-shirt they should wear on any given day suddenly feel the urge, if not the necessity, to carefully select their clothes and think about their appearance when they are about to attend a metal show. Weinstein argues that “[a]ttendance at concerts is the central ritual of the metal subculture” (Weinstein 2000:134) and most people in the scene will agree that when going to see a metal concert, one should dress in a certain way. So, let us look at Weinstein’s description of a typical concert audience to see how the people at metal shows dressed a few decades ago:

“On the day of the concert they [the audience] dress in their metal uniform, which is often a special variant of their everyday garb. ‘Dressing up’ for a

concert, the way people dress up for a wedding or some other formal occasion, is not proper here, but there is a special code for choosing concert clothes. Thought must be given to the specific metal T-shirt to be worn. If one of the concert bands is a fan's favourite and he or she happens to own a shirt displaying that band's logo, that T-shirt will be the fan's first choice. If a certain favoured band member had previously performed with another band, that former band's T-shirt would also be appropriate. Any other band's T-shirt or a shirt advertising Harleys or some brand of beer would also be acceptable. The point is to represent the primary symbols of the subculture on one's body" (Weinstein 2000:206).

Now that we got an idea on how the audience of a metal concert looked in the past, let us find out what people today say when they talk about dressing up for concerts.

Florian: "Do you choose which T-shirt or which sweater you want to wear today?"

Samo: "Not really."

Florian: "Just pick the one that's on top [of the pile]?"

Samo: "Yeah."

Florian: "Also if you go to concerts?"

Samo: "I would wear a Shirt that's from a band that plays. If that's an option. But otherwise I just pick whatever's on top."

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

There certainly is some consensus that when attending a concert, the top choice of dress is to wear merchandise clothing from one of the bands that play there, and this obviously has not changed over the last thirty years. As a matter of fact, I have observed that exactly such merchandise items were proportionally overrepresented most of the concerts I have visited. Particularly at shows of better known bands that have been around for a long time, have already played in the area before and have good distribution channels for their merchandise, the people in the audience often seem to wear T-shirts of these bands which they have already possessed, or ones they just bought at the booth. This claim is supported by my questionnaire, where



merchandise from *Kreator* and *Vader*, the bands that played, was most mentioned when asked what the concert attendants are wearing right now (questionnaire, 18.01.2018). If one does not possess merchandise from any band that plays at a concert, they often put on something from the same musical subgenre or to express their knowledge of and membership to a specific sub-scene.

Celin: “If I go to a concert, it has to be in the same genre or the music.”

Timotej: “Yeah, band. Same genre or the band you’re going to see.”

(personal communication, Celin and Timotej 05.12.2017)

We can see in the statements my interlocutors made that the way people within the metal scene dress up for the occasion of a concert are still the same as Weinstein described them quite some time ago, and that there are no major differences between Weinstein’s research area, the USA, and my quite locally restricted examination of the Ljubljana metal scene. Therefore, it is safe to say that these practices are relatively universal for metal scenes around the world and are thus a marker that constitutes of what I have described so far as a somewhat unified, global metal scene. How practices of merchandise use and consumption further affect metal scene members will be the topic of the next chapter.

## **Merchandise in the Metal Scene**

### **A Signifier of Belonging**

As I have already mentioned, clothing is an important aspect in the everyday lives of metal fans, and merchandise in the form of band- or festival T-shirts constitutes a crucial part in this scenic fashion style. To understand why a uniform look that incorporates merchandise is of such major relevance for metal scene members, we need to look at who these people are that make up the metal scene.

As a music-centred scene outside the mainstream society, metal music has always been attractive to people that, in some way or another, do not conform to this mainstream-society's codes and rules, and this status is made visible through visual features like clothing, hairstyles or bodily stance. Thus, "the heavy metal subculture is distinctive and marginalized from the mainstream" (Weinstein 2000:139). Just like metal's predecessor, the counterculture of the 1960s, the metal scene is a place for those who, in some way, do not fit anywhere else. Back in the 1990s, the fans of metal music were described as young people in their teens and early twenties (Weinstein 2000:106f.), and it is indeed young persons who often feel alienated and misunderstood who join the scene, particularly during puberty. Arnett has therefore come to the conclusion that "[h]eavy metal is a reflection of the alienation that many adolescents feel as a result of the lack of instruction provided to them by their culture, including family, school, community and religion" (Arnett 1996:17). While I would argue that this is a generalisation and cannot be said for all members of the scene, there surely is some truth in the assumption that many fans of metal music have experienced such feelings when they were introduced to metal and the scene that revolves around it for the first time. Sinclair, for example, has made the observation that many of the metal fans he had interviewed told of problems within their home environment.

"Many of the fans [...] came from families with divorced or separated parents. Clearly, there is no direct link between heavy metal and divorce; otherwise heavy metal would be the most popular music scene in the western world. Moreover, there are many metal fans that have been brought up in stable family homes. However, there are several instances in the data where the relationship between

the participants and their families can be linked to their developing interest in heavy metal” (Sinclair 2013:200).

It is such factors of alienation from the rest of society that may lead fans of metal music to engage more intensely with their own peer group – the members of the metal scene – as they are most likely to share those feelings as well as other attitudes, beliefs and opinions in the face of the modern world, which is often seen as “a major cause of alienation” (Miller/Woodward 2012:122). Just as their social status, “[t]he appearance of heavy metal fans is quite distinct and draws attention to them [...] These visual signals bring the fans together and reinforce the idea that heavy metal fans are ‘outsiders’ or ‘outcasts’” (Sinclair 2013:206). In other words, the metal uniform is a distinctive feature of metal scene members, used to demarcate them from the rest of society and strengthen the bonds of affiliation that exist within.

That metal has more often than not been categorized as a youth culture (albeit its oldest scene members – musicians as well as fans – have surpassed the age of 70 by now) is probably due to the fact that many fans first come into contact with the music in their teenage years (Bilimava 2014:26). When I visited concerts of such well-known bands like *Testament* or *Kreator*, both of which have been active since the 1980s and have large, international fanbases, I have observed quite a high number of young fans, not older than 15 years old, attending the shows in the company of what seemed to be their parents. Alongside them were the long-time metal fans, many of them past the age of 50, who have probably grown up with the music of these bands back when they released their first records. What united them, besides their passion for the same kind of music, was the uniformity of their looks. Both the 15- and the 50-year-olds waited patiently in line at the merchandise booth until it was their time to buy the most recent tour shirt just to put it on immediately, before the concert had even started. For the older fans, other factors than the identification with the scene may be more relevant in this regard. They probably have already consolidated their position within the metal community and their clothing style has plateaued into “what they regard as a mature sense of who they have [...] become” (Miller/Woodward 2012:23). However, wearing metal merchandise will always be a statement of one’s affiliation to the scene. This aspect seems particularly important for the young fans who may achieve a sense of belonging through wearing these shirts, as they now fit (at least visually) into the scene and are thus part of a larger social group.

Adolescents strive to cut, or at least weaken, the existing ties they have to institutions such as family or the community they grew up in to find their own selves and establish a unique personal identity of their own. “Adolescence is segmented as a particularly important time for

discovering and expressing a sense of self that seems ‘uniquely’ one’s own, an identity which is separate and autonomous from given social relationships, such as families, neighborhoods and communities” (Horst 2009:107). Therefore, it is not surprising that those teenagers search for new peer-groups to identify with where they are able to fulfil themselves. “[I]t can be the lonely who are most obsessed with relationships, just as it can be the impoverished who are most materialistic. It is often absent figures who become the subjects to whom one’s relationship to artifacts is devoted” (Miller 1998b:489). Being part of a community can aid in the task to achieve some sense of belonging.

“One way of enjoying the mundane comforts of modernity without alienation and disempowerment may be to participate in modernity within a community. [...] Community is a concept with positive connotations of an enduring space of solidarity, closeness and mutual support. Community is often represented as a bulwark against the onslaught of an atomizing modernity, if perhaps a fragile one. Communities are potentially less alienating than impersonal social structures and may provide the mutual support and meaningful interaction that is threatened by modernity” (Kahn-Harris 2007:159).

However, membership in a community can bring its own problems, as they may have their own rules of conformity that are sought to be adhered to by its members. In the metal scene, these codes do include a certain way of clothing. Young scene members thus strive to comply with these rules in order to fit in. This presents with certain problems itself, as Kahn-Harris goes on: “[C]ommunities may themselves prove disempowering through the homogenization and erasing of difference. Communities may simply become a microcosm of an alienating modernity” (Kahn-Harris 2007:159). When I asked a few friends in Alter Bar why they think it is important for metal fans to wear merchandise, Ico immediately related the question to teenage fans, as he simply stated in a joking manner:

Ico: “You know, teenage people are so insecure, they have to fit somewhere.”

(personal communication, Ico 05.12.2017)

Ico was not the only one of my interlocutors who referred to teenage alienation when talking about merchandise. Tomi also mentioned that, when he was about 13 years old, it was really

important to him to visibly demonstrate that he is not a part of the societal mainstream, but of the metal scene.

Tomi: “[O]f course, since you are a fan of something, somebody, you know, like, you want to have this on a T-Shirt, you know. And I remember when we were kids, you know, we would like to show that we don’t like this *Caught in the Act* boybands you like, you know. We like to show that, you know, we are *Slayer* fans. [...] For me, it was important that, you know, I have a *Metallica, Master of Puppets* front cover on the shirt, and I was like feeling like god.”

(personal communication, Tomi 21.01.2018)

The statements above show that the discovery of metal music, the steering towards the metal community and the following change in clothing style and visual appearance often coincide with adolescence. This time of change at the threshold between being a child and being an adult, between the safety of the familiar and the danger of the unfamiliar, where a person gradually needs to take responsibility for her or his actions in order to become a fully functional member of a society, is also a time of conflict that is, in most cases as I would presume, accompanied by great difficulties and disturbances. Clothing can act as a manner to not only establish one’s own identity in this time of transition, but also to establish a level of control (if only over one’s own appearance) that is much needed during such periods of uncertainty. “[I]n material culture studies clothing is seen more as an active agent or instrument, as it is a means by which people accomplish various tasks, including that of dealing with a difficult situation; in some cases as a catalyst that provokes further change” (Miller/Woodward 2012:24).

That this sense of belonging to a group is an important aspect of clothing (and of merchandise in particular), not only for teenagers but for most people within the metal scene, became clear to me during numerous conversations I had over the four months of my research. For example, I have been talking to an acquaintance at the Svarunova Noc event. We were standing in the bar area, watching different kinds of people and discussing their particular looks when I asked why, in her opinion, the people in the metal scene look how they do. Her answer was that she believes people do dress in a certain way (referring to army-style clothing, boots and leather as well as to band- and festival T-shirts) to show to other persons that they listen to metal music, that they like metal music and that they are a part of the metal scene (personal communication,

K. 17.11.2017). Another friend told me that he buys and uses merchandise in order to “be part of something” (personal communication, Al. 03.11.2017). Although he did not specify what exactly wearing merchandise makes him a part of, it became clear during the conversation that he referred to the metal scene as a form of community that for him was associated with strong, positive feelings of belonging and affiliation. A similar experience was made by Bilimava, who reports that most of the metal fans she has talked to “speak of metal public using such terms as ‘community’, ‘brotherhood’ or even ‘tribe’” (Bilimava 2014:31). These terms can both refer to either a local metal scene or to the wider, international scene, and I too have heard people mention a “metal community” on several occasions, referring to both the local and the global.

Korn presumes that there is some kind of peer-group pressure involved in the decision making concerned with the consumption of merchandise, and that especially within hard rock and metal scenes there is a strong connection between the use of merchandise and what she calls a fan group identity (Korn 2009:180). Thus, the fan group, in this case the fans of metal music, construct their social identity partly through their membership within the scene and their conformity regarding this community’s social rules and practices. “Social identity is that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978:63 quoted in Korn 2009:74).

The metal scene in this regard can be perceived both as a small-scale network of interpersonal relations based on face-to-face contact as well as an international symbolic community revolving around one common core, which is of course metal music. Clothing plays a crucial role in the negotiation of membership to both these social groups. “[T]he cultural semiotics of identity and alterity, as they manifest in clothing codes, are enmeshed not only with symbolic and imaginary (subcultural, ethnic) communities, affinities, and figures, but also with ‘real’ groups, with interpersonal, interaction-based networks” (Ege 2011:166). While the international metal scene sets the rough standards of metal fashion to which one ought to conform in order to express group membership, local scenes can impose certain peculiarities onto the otherwise uniform code. By also taking into account those anomalies, one makes sure to not only reveal his or her affiliation with the local community but also to demarcate oneself from other parts of the larger, international group. “[O]ne of the key struggles of modern life is to retain both a sense of authentic locality, often as narrow as the private sphere, and yet also lay claims to a cosmopolitanism that at some level may evoke rights to global status” (Miller 1998a:19). Group membership is a major cause for the use of merchandise. This was clearly indicated to me by Samo in the following statement:

Samo: “Most metalheads have a feeling of... [...] They have a family, like... They belong somewhere. And, I think that’s the main reason why metal merchandise is sold. Because people go outside, and you instantly recognize a metalhead by the stuff they wear. [...] I think that people usually will relate with people like that, because when you see a metalhead, [...] the image that goes in your head is like: *‘Ok, he’s a cool person, down to earth.’* [...] With metalheads it’s like... We’re cool people, I mean [...] at least we understand each other.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

It becomes evident here that Samo immediately establishes a connection between clothing styles and the values of the wider scene, or at least what he associates with it, and which he also shares himself. Similar with Miller: “What really matters to us is often less the object per se, and rather more the relationship between our opinion and that of others” (Miller 1998b:487). When a set of values is transported through matters of appearance, “dressing is not only of personal importance but also public because [...] the surface of the body has implications for both individual and social identities” (Botticello 2009:131).

Buying and using merchandise items is certainly one of the main aspects that constitutes visual membership to the metal scene. This becomes especially visible in opposition to people outside the scene who thus prefer other fashion styles. As much heterogeneity as there is within the metal scene, in the face of outsiders they can certainly appear as one, coherent group. “Through the use – and the preceding purchase – of merchandising-articles, an individuum can position itself in its social environment and thereby achieve not only integration into the desired group, but also the dissociation from undesirable social groupings” (Korn 2009:80f.; my translation). Just as there are certain opinions and values associated with one’s own peer-group, the same is done about other groups or the general mainstream, and while the own group usually provokes positive associations, others are encountered with indifference or even negativity.

Samo: “Most people you see on the street, you just don’t have an opinion on them as you see them”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

The fans of metal music thus use clothing, and especially merchandise, to communicate their group membership both to other people involved in the scene with whom they want to be associated and to outsiders of whom they want to distance themselves.

“Consumer choices are made on the basis of opportunities for social interaction and participation in community that certain brands can provide. In this way, public icons, be they celebrities or football teams [or merchandise in the case of the metal scene], increasingly function as totems around which consumers can congregate to share passion and emotion and thereby experience feelings of unity, of *communitas*, otherwise absent from their lives” (Richardson 2004:91 quoted in Korn 2009:81).

These shared feelings of community, group membership and the assumptions that go with them, such as the conjecture of a shared passion for the same kind of music, lead to the fact that wearing metal merchandise can establish some sort of connection between otherwise entirely unfamiliar persons. “T-shirts are generally emblazoned with the logos or other visual representations of favourite metal bands. The shirts are worn proudly, and metal fans feel free to direct brief remarks or a thumbs-up gesture to others wearing shirts depicting a group admired by the viewer” (Weinstein 2000:127). I, for example, have made the experience that approaching strangers within the scene by complimenting on the merchandise they wear is a good way to start a conversation. Since I have attended quite a few concerts on my own, this proved to be a highly useful strategy to engage with other people. But also in a non-foreign, non-research setting, merchandise often acts as a catalyst that induces conversation and establishes familiarity. Celin described to me how such an encounter can happen in a concert setting:

Celin: “If you go to a concert of which... It doesn’t matter. If you wear a thrash metal band on you, and you go to a black metal concert, it doesn’t matter. You go there and have it, and people go to you *‘Oh look, nice man! Where did you buy it? What?’* I don’t know. It’s a form of breaking the ice with someone. You know, it’s like an instant connection.”

(personal communication, Celin 05.12.2017)



How important this aspect of merchandise is for the people within the metal scene is made evident by the inner-scenic discourse about such matters, often exemplified on social media through memes like the one in figure 5, which was shared by one of my interlocutors on Facebook shortly before I started writing this chapter. This particular meme plays with the moral panics that have been associated with metal music and the metal scene ever since its inception (for more information about metal and moral panics see Hjelm et al. 2011; Kahn-Harris 2007; Walser 1993; Weinstein 2000). Another story of how merchandise can establish what Celin referred to as “instant connection” was reported to me by

## Wearing Band Shirts In Public

**What I think will happen:**  
Someone will like the band and we'll start talking.

**What actually happens:** Old people and suburban moms look at me like I need Jesus.

Fig. 4; Meme about wearing merchandise clothing (Facebook.com 12.04.2018)

Samo, who at the time of our conversations was employed in Alter Bar. He told me that when he applied for the job, he and Ico (the bar owner) wore the same *Motörhead* sweater, and thus immediately had something that formed a bond between them, resulting in Samo getting the job (personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017). When I addressed this issue during a conversation where both of them were present, Ico confirmed the story:

Florian: “I heard you gave Samo the job because he was wearing the *Motörhead* sweater and you were wearing a *Motörhead* sweater too.”

Ico: “Yeah, I know.”

Samo: “I told you. When I got the job, we were both wearing the same sweater. Actually, all three of us.”

Ico: “Yeah, Karmen [bar owner and Ico’s fiancée] has the same sweater also.”

(personal communication, Ico and Samo 05.12.2017).

What all these narratives have in common is that merchandise clothing acts as a form of visual communication, as a text which those who are familiar with metal music and the metal scene can easily decipher and read while the messages transported through merchandise may remain hidden to outsiders, hence making it a means of communication exclusively for scene members.

Matija: “[T-shirts] became [...] another aspect of visual communication, you know. You are saying something with that, you are giving other people a message. Even if you are wearing a shirt with just a picture of some album, you know. After all, they know what kind of music you like. Probably would be interesting to ask people that don’t wear, that only wear blank T-shirts, what messages do they get when they walk across the street. Do they notice, you know, people, what they have on their T-shirts? Or what kind of messages they get.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

However, the most intimate story about an interpersonal connection through merchandise was told to me by Celin and has nothing to do with communicating through the texts and images printed onto the shirts. Rather, it is about the shirt itself and the relationship between two friends that revolved around it. He once mentioned that a friend of his forgot a T-shirt (an old, worn out T-shirt from the band *Death Angel*) at the campground of MetalDays festival when he left. Celin found the shirt and took it into storage. He called his friend and told him that he found the shirt, to which the friend answered something like: ‘*Thanks man, this is like my favourite Death Angel shirt!*’ Thus, he indicated how much this shirt meant to him and how special it was. However, when they met the next time and Celin wanted to bring the shirt along, he realized that he had somehow lost it. When he confessed this to his friend, he was very upset that Celin had lost his favourite shirt. From now on, every time they met the friend would comment on the loss of this special shirt and how much it spites him. The issue of the lost T-shirt hung above their friendship like the sword of Damocles. After about half a year, Celin decided to take action and try to ease his friend’s grief by gifting him a new shirt. To do that, he went to Truga Shop, and together with the owner routed out the exact same T-shirt and ordered it. Since this particular shirt was not easy to get, Celin waited for approximately half a year until it arrived. Also, he was still worried that his friend wouldn’t like the shirt because it was new and did not have the same personal connection to certain memories that his friend implied about the old one. The next time they met, Celin gave the T-shirt to his friend, hoping that he would be pleased about it. When the friend saw the T-shirt, he was indeed happy but also surprised that Celin went through all this effort to find and acquire this exact shirt. He confessed to Celin that the old shirt, contrary to what he stated many times before, did not hold any special, personal value to him but was in fact just an ordinary, everyday band T-shirt, and

that he had only teased Celin by rubbing in his face that he had lost his *favourite* shirt. However, he really appreciated the fact that Celin took this matter seriously and spared no expense and effort to do something about it, since only a real friend would care about such a thing (personal communication, Celin 03.11.2017).

In this story, the merchandise item, an old, worn out and thus somewhat personalized *Death Angel* T-shirt, became the marker of a connection between two persons. For Celin, it is a symbol of their friendship. Therefore, the story is not first and foremost about an item of clothing, but about the intimate connection this item represents for both of the men, how their friendship was (or at least seemed to be) tested in the face of its loss and how it was reinforced through its return. Thus, Celin reported in a jokingly manner:

Celin: “You know what the worst thing about it is? When me and my friend met the next time at MetalDays, the fucker didn’t even bring the shirt man! I went through all this effort to get it and he just forgot it.”

(personal communication, Celin 03.11.2017).

Even though Celin was upset about the fact that his friend did not value the shirt the way he was supposed to in Celin’s eyes, this anger was more of the teasing kind, just as the grief of his friend over the lost shirt. In truth, he knows how much his friend appreciates the sincerity and intention behind the gift and holds it in high value.

Even though this story revolves around a merchandise item, it could in the same way have been about a pair of pants, a keychain or any other item that has special value to its owner. But the fact that both Celin and his friend knew about the personal connection that some people have to certain merchandise goods, and to the value these items have for them, it became even more believable to make this teasing joke in the first place. But what exactly makes merchandise so valuable for the people they own it? This is a question that I will get to the bottom of later. First, I want to look at another type of connection that is established and upheld partly through merchandise consumption.

## Supporting Metal Music



Fig. 5; Matija (bottom left) selling merchandise to a fan at a concert in Ljubljana. (Annegg, 26.11.2017, Kino Šiška, Ljubljana)

The connection I want to examine now is not one between two fans of metal music, but between a fan and the artist(s) themselves, as Ico has indicated:

Ico: “I buy merch, I guess, to support the band. To have something from the band. To show the whole world that I support that band. Where I stand in this music, and how I stand. Whether I have a tattoo, ‘*Metallica*’, across my forehead, or just a T-shirt.”

(personal communication, Ico 05.12.2017)

Korn argues that this kind of connection is a form of interaction, which is characterized by the one-sided access to resources and the fact that one of the involved actors (in this case the music act) does influence others without experiencing retroactivities. If such a connection is limited to a certain span of time, it is labelled as a parasocial interaction (PSI). However, it can transform into a parasocial relationship (PSB<sup>10</sup>) if it is trans-situational and emotionally charged (Korn 2009:54f.). In other words, if a person visits a metal concert, he or she engages in such a

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<sup>10</sup> From the German term „parasoziale Beziehung” that is used in the respective literature.

PSI. Through buying merchandise from the band and wearing it later, this transforms into a PSB. The person eventually may become a fan and visit another concert, buy another piece of merchandise or a record and use it or listen to it. Thus, the person has made further investments into this relationship to ensure its maintenance.

“Analogous to social relationships, it can also be expected here that investments are not only required to establish a PSB, but are also employed to its preservation and reinforcement. The higher the investments are, the more intensive might the PSB be: Because the more a person cognitively and affectively grapples with an artist brand, meaning through interactions he or she invests in, the more likely it is that out of this PSI results a PSB or that an already existent PSB is reinforced” (Korn 2009:68; my translation).

While the term “investment” in this case refers not only to monetary expenditures, but also to invested time, energy and emotions, the consumption of merchandise can most certainly be seen as such an investment into a PSI. That the fans of metal music are certainly willing to engage in such PSBs is not only indicated by the fact that almost all respondents to my questionnaire who bought merchandise on that night (54 out of 56) stated that they did so to support the band(s), but also came out during several conversations with people from the scene.

Tomi: “You feel good because, you know, you like *Iron Maiden*, you’re a fan, and you have now their T-Shirt. [...] Ok, I know they don’t need any money, they are rich enough. [...] You’re still supporting them, you know. And not just big bands, you know. Smaller bands, you know. When it comes to your, you know, your friends band, you know. If you buy their CD or their T-Shirt, you know, you’re helping them to exist, you know. To have money for, I don’t know, for a studio to record their new album, or for new T-Shirts, or restock the stock of their merchandise, you know.

(personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018)

One of the reasons why I developed an interest in this whole topic was that I perceived merchandise as something of particular importance within the metal scene, and these conversations have once again shown me that it indeed is something that almost all scene

members are involved with, and the main reason for this seems to be the desire to support both the scene in general as well as certain musicians or institutions (like festivals) in particular.

Florian: “Would you say that merchandise is more important in the metal scene than in other musical styles?”

Matija: “Probably. Probably or not. If you just think what T-shirts you see on people around. They are usually wearing shirts from big pop and rock bands. Mostly other shirts are from alternative music, metal, punk, hardcore.”

Florian: “But why do you think is that, that people in these scenes buy more merchandise and wear more merchandise than other ones?”

Matija: “Dedicated fans. I believe that people listening to alternative music are more dedicated to what they listen to than somebody who listens to pop or folk music or whatever.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

What Matija has addressed in this statement is not only the dedication of the metal scene members, which was also mentioned by Tomi before, that leads them to buy a lot of merchandise and display it in public, thus further advertising the musicians and institutions they support. He also draws a line between alternative music scenes, such as metal, punk and hardcore, and their members in opposition to the fans of musical styles that are commonly perceived as more mainstream, such as pop and folk<sup>11</sup> music. This clear distinction between mainstream and alternative culture, and in particular between metal culture and other musical scenes, is a common discursive practice within the metal scene that is enforced not only verbally but also by other means, and wearing merchandise certainly is one of the ways to undertake this task.

Samo: “I think it’s great to share awareness of the culture that apparently isn’t gonna go away. [...] It’s been around for like 50 years. Ok, maybe a bit less,

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<sup>11</sup> The term „folk“ in this case most likely refers to Alpine folk music and probably its intersection with schlager music.

but... It's like the only music genre, besides rock, that really stuck. Pop goes in and out."

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

Samo in this statement goes one step further in drawing a line between mainstream music and metal music by referring to metal's rich musical and cultural history that goes back several decades. "[T]he longevity of metal's appeal in a sphere of popular culture notable for fads and fashions" (Bennett 2001:42) is indeed an aspect of metal culture that many fans seem to be proud of. This is reflected by the respect and sometimes even admiration that is often bestowed on some of the older scene members (Sinclair 2013:210). But it is again the younger fans of metal music that keep the traditions of the scene alive by engaging in the same practices of support and dedication than their elders do, including the consumption of merchandise goods.

Tomi: "I know it's not cheap, of course not, if you're in high school, you know, with no pay check and no job and a big desire to have them all. [...] And they [high school kids] understand that, you know, buying official merchandise is supporting also bands they like and if there are bands [...] you can talk about some scene."

(personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018)

## **Merchandise Collections**

For some people, buying merchandise does not necessarily serve the purpose to make use of it in any way other than for their own delight (Korn 2009:68). They treat merchandise articles as collectibles and often acquire a huge accumulation of specific items, in most cases T-shirts or records. Kahn-Harris notes that "[t]he mundane, solipsistic practice par excellence is collecting. Most scene members have extremely large collections of recordings – I saw a listing of one member's collection that totalled nearly 20,000 items – and members frequently have a staggeringly detailed knowledge of the scene's music" (Kahn-Harris 2007:63).

From the respondents to my questionnaire, 41% of the people who bought merchandise goods that night claimed that they did so because they collect those items (questionnaire, 18.01.2018). Indeed, I have acquired a fairly decent collection of T-shirts and records myself over the course of the last few years, and some of my interlocutors have reported the same about themselves. This practice is viewed by the people in the scene as different to other uses of merchandise articles, as they are not used to transport any meaning or message or to act as an instant enabler of connection between persons.

Samo: “It’s something to buy merch to wear it outside. It’s another thing to collect it and to have it at home.”

(personal communication, Samo 05.12.2017)

Indeed, merchandise goods in this case are “products to collect and become attached to. They represent a physical manifestation of fan identity” (Sinclair 2013:90). To achieve these in some cases huge collections, the fans go through great efforts that often require an in-depth knowledge of the scene’s institutions.

“Collecting involves a sustained commitment to the development and organization of vast and detailed forms of scenic knowledge. Like other forms of scenic practice, it also involves participation in complex networks, the accessing of which, similarly, demands considerable commitment. Members put considerable hard work into their involvement with the scene” (Kahn-Harris 2007:63).

The easiest way to acquire merchandise is to simply buy it. While this is a quite easy task per se, it still requires a substantial amount of resources in the form of money and time to establish a large collection. Therefore, it is no surprise that such collections are regarded as fairly formidable and their owners seen as very committed. The following statement, for example, has made quite an impression on me.



Matija: “One of my friends is counting his shirts in hundreds, and he has bought all of them.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

Matija mentioned to me that he himself owns a very large collection of merchandise clothes too. He was able to acquire it exactly because of the fact that he is so deeply involved in the scene, especially through his work at concerts or festivals and in close collaboration with some bands.

Matija: “The last ten years, I bought, I don't know, five shirts and this sweater [that he was wearing]. But I do wear merchandise, but I usually get them from some bands, from friends. [...] I get a lot of merchandise at festivals where I work. So, I have a [closet] full of shirts, and sometimes I just take some piles and give them away, because I have too many.”

Florian: “You don't often hear that people say: *‘I have too much merchandise!’*.”

Matija: “I know some people. They are mostly people who are working [in the scene], you know. And when we work, you get sometimes merchandise from somebody who, you did him a favour or is satisfied with your work or just instead of saying thank you. Or there are some merchandise left always after the festival, so we can get the rest for free, stuff like that.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

What he already indicates in this statement is that for some fans, the excessive practice of collecting and acquiring merchandise can lead to a considerable lack of storage space, which is the reason why he chooses to get rid of some parts of his collection every once in a while. A similar problem was reported to me by Tomi, who does not only collect T-shirts but also records and other items that not necessarily refer to metal music, since he is also a big movie fan.

Tomi: “I think I quit with band merchandise. [...] But I think the last T-Shirt I ordered for myself was *Exorcist*, the movie. And the poster. [...] If you're into

being a collector of, I don't know, CDs or Vinyls or, I also collect action figures, for example or, you know. Sooner or later you will come to this point that when you'll have to admit, you know, in front of the mirror '*Ok, look. You don't have any physical space for even one seven-inch.*' But I think, next day, you will come across, you know, this seven-inch [...] and of course, never ending story, you know. When it comes to the point when you have only, you know, place to lay down and to sleep and no more to walk normally or to sit behind the desk normally or, you know. For me, it's always like: '*Ok, this is the last one!*'. Not quite. So, I think I'm addicted, you know. But I also know some people, you know, who are more addicted than me, you know, and they have more, lots of more CDs and music on Vinyls or T-Shirts than I have so, you know. I'm just the apprentice here, you know. A rookie. They are like level demigods, you know.

(personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018)

The high level of commitment that is necessary to accumulate such extensive collections as well as the large amount of resources, especially money, that is being spent on them leads to the fact that some of these collections have an immense value, both personally and monetary. Monetary worth is mainly composed of a large number of items that are relatively low in value when considered on their own on the one hand, and certain collector's pieces that may have a high value of their own but are far less in number on the other hand. Especially records are items that are regularly collected and can rise in value when they possess specific characteristics (e.g. limited editions/pressings, special releases, incorrectly produced, signed by the artist).

Samo: "If it's an older thing, the prices can be really high. Especially, like, those Vinyls. If you get, like, I don't know. If you have *The Beatles*, something like, don't know the name. [...] Like really limited editions, because it was then pretty bad because of the graphics on it. [...] It's like really, really expensive."

[...]

Timotej: "The Vinyls are one of the most expensive things you can get."

Samo: “You probably not even gonna listen to it. Because as soon as you open it, the price drops, like, at least fifty percent.”

Timotej: “Eighty percent.”

(personal communication, Samo and Timotej 05.12.2017)

While records are not only collected for personal value but may also prove to be a solid investment if there comes a need to sell them, merchandise clothing, especially T-shirts, is mainly collected for personal delight. However, all of my interlocutors reported that they have a few favourite T-shirts among their collections. Apart from ones in a different colour than black (Matija) or from one’s favourite bands (Tomi), those are in many cases shirts that represent some kind of personal history for their owners.

Timotej: “I have some older shirts that I start, kind of, I’m stopping wearing them because I don’t want to get them hurt any more. They’re on the point of breaking. And I don’t want to...”

Celin: “It’s like they went to Normandy, you know. Like D-Day or something. They have holes in it and all that. But he’s like: *‘Aah, they had enough!’*”

Timotej: “Kind of, yeah. They’ve been to three or four camps [Metalcamp, former name of MetalDays festival], so. It’s time to put them down. I would say my favourite shirt would be the *Amon Amarth*. [...] I am not wearing it anymore because I don’t want it to fall apart.”

Florian: “So what are you doing with it?”

Timotej: “I keep it in the closet and when I’m thinking about taking it out it’s: *‘No, no, no, you stay inside.’*”

(personal communication, Timotej and Celin 05.12.2017).

Indeed, most of my interlocutors remember exactly what the first band merchandise they had bought was. Matija for example, who claimed that he gives away parts of his T-shirt collection

on a regular basis, told me that he still remembers when he bought his first band T-shirt, and that he still keeps it.

Matija: “Wanna know which was my first shirt? My first shirt, *Death*, *Symbolic* shirt. The band, *Death*. Shirt of it with motif of *Symbolic* album. I think I bought this in 1995.”

[...]

Florian: “You still have the first shirt?”

Matija: “Yes.”

Florian: “You still wear it?”

Matija: “Very rarely, very rarely. Because it’s, you know, it’s really old and really... But I’m keeping my first two metal shirts, yes.”

(personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017)

Summing this up, it is clear that merchandise collections, be it records, T-shirts or other items, are often very valuable, especially for their owners, who do not only see them as monetary investments but as items with a history that is intertwined with their own lives. Therefore, some of these collection pieces are not intended for public display even if it may have been their initial function, as it is the case with band T-shirts. Instead, their use is limited to the owners alone, although that means that they just take the items out of the closet or drawer every once in a while, to view them and then put them back in (Korn 2009:68). I will examine the issue of such close linkages between merchandise articles and personal life histories more detailed in the next section.

## **Merchandise as Memorabilia**

As it has become evident by now, concerts and festivals are the main sites to acquire merchandise items for most metal scene members. Those concerts, which are undoubtedly a central part of the scene's infrastructure and a main location for exercising scenic practices, are thus regarded as something extraordinarily positive and delightful by most fans of the music. The merchandise goods bought at certain concerts therefore are memorabilia linked to their owners' memories of the show and the overall concert or festival experience.

Celin: "I'm the kind of a guy who goes to the concert and then buys merch. I don't really buy stuff I didn't hear in person. Because there's a whole new level of going to a concert and buying the merchandise or just buying it online."

Florian: "Why do you only buy at concerts?"

Celin: "Because the T-shirt or the merch, whatever it is, it has a personal note to it. It's like memorabilia, you know. A souvenir of some kind, you know. [...] It has a personal touch."

(personal communication, Celin 05.12.2017)

Celin is by far not the only person in the scene who buys merchandise at concerts for these exact reasons. In my questionnaire, 43% of merchandise buyers claimed that they do so to have a souvenir of the show. While in this case the term "souvenir" might sound a bit more superficial than the term "memorabilia" at first glance, it becomes clear in Celin's statement that it is definitely not, since he uses both words almost synonymously and ascribes a personal touch to the respective goods that exceeds superficiality.

Indeed, the perceived worth of a merchandise item is dependent to a large extent on how much it is able to fulfil emotional and social needs. The emotional aspect is of major significance here. If a T-shirt or other merchandise item reminds its owner of a certain, positively connotated experience (e.g. a concert), it is regarded as especially valuable to this person.

"The perceived value of merchandise is estimated all the higher the more it is capable of eliciting and preserving positive feelings and desirable affective

conditions. This is the case when, for example, a T-shirt with the band's logo and the tour dates does particularly appeal to the music's consumer or reminds him [or her] of the concert experience that is contingent on positive emotions" (Korn 2009:154; my translation).

Therefore, it is no surprise that many bands sell special tour shirts at their shows with the tour dates printed on the backside to provoke such an emotional reaction and attachment, thus making their merchandise especially desirable for the fans as a form of memorabilia linked to a specific, joyful experience.

However, albeit this emotional relationship between music fan and merchandise item is probably the main reason why these items are considered as valuable memorabilia, there are other aspects to it as well, which were addressed by Timotej in the following statement.

Timotej: "If you have a shirt from a band, you have '*I've been there.*' It's gonna be with you for the next twenty years, and you can say to anyone '*I've been there. I have this shirt.*' A reminder. I've been there. I've seen this. I know this. A band. It's saying '*I like them. I like them.*' Mostly it means I have seen them."

(personal communication, Timotej 05.12.2017)

Here, merchandise articles are described as reminder, not of a particular, delightful experience, but of an experience that has been achieved. Thus, the purpose of the merchandise item is not to provoke memories of a specific situation or the positive emotions linked to it. Instead, it acts as a demonstration to others that the owner (and in many cases the wearer) of the particular item has undergone the experience of seeing a particular band play or attending a particular event. While the first cause for buying merchandise at concerts roots in a matter of buying it for oneself, the latter strongly depends on making the item visible for others, so they can link the owner of the item to the experience she or he must have undergone in order to get the respective article.

According to Korn, it is the social needs that merchandise goods are able to fulfil here, since by owning and displaying them a person can puppeteer how he or she is perceived within a larger group (e.g. the metal scene) (Korn 2009:154). This is particularly interesting in the case of metal music festivals, where T-shirts and hoodies are sold with the complete line-up of bands

that play at the respective event printed on the back. Because of this, peers are indirectly invited to guess which of the artists the wearer may have seen, which in turn may again provoke a conversation like I have argued previously.

Practices of merchandise use and consumption are always intertwined with the flows of capital in the field that makes up the metal music scene. Therefore, the subsequent chapter is concerned with several of those capital flows that are directly related to merchandise and the effects they have on the scene.

## **Merchandise and Capital in the Metal Scene**

So far, I have examined several aspects of merchandise which are widely visible within the metal scene and which I thus consider as vitally important for both artists as well as fans of the music. I have looked at the close connection between merchandise articles, clothing and a general sense of fashion that is dominant in the scene. I have discussed the economic significance of selling merchandise for metal music artists and the importance for their fans to be able to support them by buying it. Further, I have argued that acquiring, possessing and (more or less publicly) displaying merchandise articles, for example by collecting or wearing them, serves a variety of purposes, ranging from simply finding delight in them oneself to carefully directing how one is viewed by her or his peers.

At this point, I think it is crucial to stress that none of these matters discussed previously can be viewed or analysed on its own, as they all blend into each other. Just about never is there a single reason why a person acts upon merchandise in a specific way. On the contrary, the practices revolving around merchandise consumption are always based on a variety of reasons, and the emic view on those reasons that people express often differ quite significantly from the etic perspective that others may get. Because of this complexity, in this chapter I will analyse how merchandise acts as a form of cultural capital within the metal scene, using notions of cultural capital that are based on Kahn-Harris' work on "Extreme Metal" (Kahn-Harris 2007), Thornton's work on electronic dance music culture (Thornton 1995) and ultimately on Bourdieu's theory of social fields (Bourdieu 1993).

## **Habitus in the Metal Scene**

To understand how practices of merchandise consumption can be analysed in this regard, it is necessary to understand how habitus works in relation to the metal scene. After its period of crystallization in which "the distinctions between the new style and the styles out of which it [erupted were] still unclear" (Weinstein 2000:7), the scene became autonomous from other fields. In other words, "the style [was] self-consciously acknowledged" (Weinstein 2000:7). This came along with the development of a cultural code which is unique to the metal scene. This code, which is referred to as habitus by Bourdieu, is "preserved by the group memory [and



is itself] the product of a small batch of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations, without those schemes ever being constituted as explicit principles” (Bourdieu 1977:16). It is important to note that this system of codes is not explicit, but inherent in the practices of the scene members, since “everyone is able, not so much to cite and recite them from memory, as to reproduce them (fairly accurately). It is because each agent has the means of acting as a judge of others and of himself that custom has a hold on him [or her]” (Bourdieu 1977:17). In “Outline of a Theory of Practice”, Bourdieu defines the habitus in a particular field as follows:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment [...] produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor” (Bourdieu 1977:72).

If we look at this in the context of the metal scene, we can see that the habitus in the scene is composed of the underlying structures that regulate the practices and behaviour that is typical for the scene and distinguishes it from other, comparable fields. These structures are durable, meaning that once established, they do not fade away quickly and only change extremely slowly through piece-by-piece processes. Also, since they are collective by nature, they cannot be altered by individual agents. However, those who wield power in the field can make use of those structures which, when “skilfully manipulated by the holders of authority [...] ‘awaken’, so to speak, the schemes of perception and appreciation deposited, in their incorporated state, in every member of the group, i.e. the dispositions of the habitus” (Bourdieu 1977:17). Those who obtain powerful positions within the field thus have the ability to shape the habitus to a larger extent than those who have less power, making the habitus the locus of power itself. Since the habitus affects all agents in the field equally and simultaneously, figures of authority can only exist in opposition to the less powerful positions and hence are immediately determined by and depending on them.

“[E]ach position [...] is subjectively defined by the system of distinctive properties by which it can be situated relative to other positions; [...] every

position, even the dominant one, depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field” (Bourdieu 1993:30).

In order to wield power within the metal scene and in turn occupy a position of authority, one has to possess capital. Capital within the field comes in several forms: Economic capital mostly means money, but can also refer to other commodities that are especially valuable within the scene (e.g. rare physical music records that qualify as collectors’ items). Symbolic capital, on the other hand, is to a large extent concerned with how well the different agents have internalized the habitus in the scene and demonstrate this in front of their peers. However, it is not enough to simply spend enough time in the scene to become familiar with its implicit structures and codes. Scene members also need to demonstrate substantial knowledge about the music and the scene’s institutions.

“Knowledge of the historical development of extreme metal canons is extremely important to scene members. [...] Practices of distinction are displayed through demonstrations of appropriately detailed scenic knowledge. A large number of generic and subgeneric [sic] terms assist in this process” (Kahn-Harris 2007:123).

This is true not only for the extreme metal scene, but for the entirety of metal scenes. As an agent enters a certain scene and aspires to become a member of it, he or she has to become familiar with all these matters in order to act successfully and eventually wield enough power to occupy a position of authority. In this context, the habitus in the scene imposes “the sense of how to behave and what to expect in life. The habitus is both a product of capital and convertible into different forms of capital within different sorts of fields in different ways. The habitus that one brings into a field affects one’s chances of ‘success’ and satisfaction within it” (Kahn-Harris 2007:70). This accumulation of capital through an enactment of the habitus in the scene is not consciously undertaken. Rather, the habitus structures the agents’ practices within the scene in a way that allows them to gain capital based on their predispositions. “If agents are possessed by their habitus more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organizing principle of their actions, and because this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action) reveals itself only in the *opus operatum*” (Bourdieu 1977:18). Thus, habitus is not something that is perceived actively by scene members, but instead constitutes the foundation of the scene’s cultural individuality.

The habitus within the field of the metal music scene becomes evident, among other things, in its specific language and the peculiar styles of clothing, fashion and visual appearance that I have already discussed in this thesis. It structures how the agents within scene use their capital in order to occupy powerful positions in the field. By doing so, they constantly reproduce and reinforce the existing habitus and thus ensure its continuance.

“[T]he practices produced by the habitus [...] are only apparently determined by the future. If they seem determined by anticipation of their own consequences, [...] the fact is that, always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, they are determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production [...] which coincides with their own outcome to the extent (*and only to the extent*) that the objective structures of which they are the product are prolonged in the structures within which they function” (Bourdieu 1977:72f.).

I will now discuss merchandise as different forms of capital that circulate in the field of the metal scene. Different forms insofar as merchandise can be analysed as a purely economic resource, as in the case of valuable collectibles. Further, it can be viewed as both a form of cultural capital itself as well as a means for scene members to gain cultural capital by using it in specific ways. The following sections will deal individually with each of these matters. Before I can do so, however, I see it necessary to discuss the different forms of cultural capital within the scene in more detail.

### **Cultural Capital – Mundane and Transgressive**

This section is concerned with two modes of cultural capital within the metal scene that have previously been referred to by researchers as “subcultural capital<sup>12</sup>”. The notion of subcultural capital was first introduced by Sarah Thornton in her study of clubbing and rave culture in the UK in the early 1990s (Thornton 1995). Thornton uses Bourdieu’s notion of capital flows in specific fields to describe how ravers move within their social field, accumulating cultural capital by conforming to its habitus, and in doing so shaping this very habitus themselves. This

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<sup>12</sup> From this point on, I will simply talk of “cultural capital” in this thesis except for when I directly refer to the work of those scholars who use the term “subcultural capital”.

allows them not only to ensure the continuity of the field but also to distinguish between its members and outsiders with relative ease.

“Subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections [...] Just as cultural capital is personified in ‘good’ manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being ‘in the know’ [being familiar with the implicit code, the habitus in the scene], using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles” (Thornton 1995:27).

Thornton’s account of subcultural capital is focussed on a youth culture encompassing different classes. What unites these young clubbers is that they are in a position where they are already able to accumulate economic capital, but do not have the same amount of (monetary) commitments an adult has, which allows them to invest their money in leisure activities and commodities like clothes, parties and drugs (both legal and illegal), all of these gaining them subcultural capital.

“The material conditions of youth’s investment in subcultural capital [...] results from the fact that youth, from many class backgrounds, enjoy a momentary reprieve from necessity. According to Bourdieu, economic power is primarily the power to keep economic necessity at bay. [...] Freedom from necessity, therefore, does not mean that youth have wealth so much as that they are exempt from adult commitments to the accumulation of economic capital. In this way, youth can be seen as momentarily enjoying what Bourdieu argues is reserved for the bourgeoisie, that is the ‘taste of liberty or luxury’” (Thornton 1995:160f.).

Keith Kahn-Harris used Thornton’s notion of subcultural capital in his prominent study of the extreme metal scene, which he describes as a social field in the sense of Bourdieu, with the accumulation of capital as the main goal of all the agents that move within it.

“As in Bourdieu’s model of the field, the scene is a space of conflict, constituted through struggles over capital. The principal such struggle is over the ‘cultural capital’ accumulated through displaying competence in the scene’s cultural practices [...] As in dance-music scenes, subcultural capital is accrued in the

extreme metal scene by constructing and performing various forms of discourse and identity” (Kahn-Harris 2007:121).

However, Kahn-Harris further developed Thornton’s notion of subcultural capital by describing two different forms of it - mundane and transgressive - that exist simultaneously in the extreme metal scene and are both of equal importance for the scene’s sustainability.

Mundane subcultural capital is the far more common and conforms to a large extent to Thornton’s definition of the term. It can be accumulated through ongoing commitment to and investments in the scene and its institutions, as well as by following its habitus.

“Mundane subcultural capital is oriented towards the possibilities of the collective puissance that is produced as a collective result of the mundane efforts of the totality of scene members. It is a form of capital accrued through a sustained investment in the myriad practices through which the scene is reproduced. It is accrued through self-sacrifice, commitment and hard work. [...] [M]undane subcultural capital may in practice be produced solipsistically and even boringly, but it nonetheless implies the possibilities and joys of collective activity” (Kahn-Harris 2007:122).

Transgressive subcultural capital, on the other hand, is gained by transgressing (as the name already indicates) the boundaries, not only of the scene and its habitus but of other fields as well.

“Mundane subcultural capital is accrued through a commitment to the collective. In contrast, transgressive subcultural capital is claimed through a radical individualism, through displaying uniqueness and a lack of attachment to the scene. Indeed, transgressive subcultural capital can be claimed through a critique of the scene itself and, by implication, of mundane subcultural capital” (Kahn-Harris 2007:127).

Because of its highly individual nature, transgressive subcultural capital is a lot harder to acquire than its mundane counterpart. However, the reward for doing so is a fair deal greater, since transgressive capital is not restrictive to one specific scene, but can be transferred to other, mainly artistic fields.

“Transgressive subcultural capital constructs art and individuality as the predominant ways of gaining capital. Potentially, at least, ‘great art’ produces forms of capital that can be transferable into and from other scenes. To a certain

extent, transgressive subcultural capital is not subcultural at all. It is rather a particular version of a form of capital that exists wherever artists and other individuals seek to attack taboos and ‘the mainstream’. While transgressive subcultural capital circulates within the extreme metal scene, its attachment to the scene is contingent and pragmatic – to possess transgressive subcultural capital is to be *part of* the scene but not *of* the scene” (Kahn-Harris 2007:129).

Since the present examination of merchandise in metal culture deals to a large part with issues regarding the scene’s habitus and its internalization, mundane cultural capital will be my main tool for analysis. However, near the end of this chapter, transgressive cultural capital will play a role as well.

### **Merchandise as Economic Capital**

This is probably the most obvious function of merchandise as capital, given its status as commodities that are bought and sold on a regular basis by many scene members and thus circulate within the scene as they are exchanged between different agents. We can break this aspect down to a very simple scheme: one form of economic capital (money) is exchanged for another form of economic capital (merchandise article). The crucial aspect of this simplification is that the two different forms of economic capital differ significantly in quality.

Money is one of the most powerful forms of economic capital in almost all social fields, and therefore allows an agent to transfer this capital from one field to another with relative ease. The quality necessary for capital to be transferrable in this way is its ability to be used by the agents in other fields. “As cultural goods move from one social space to another, they are reconstituted or reinterpreted to suit the requirements and the ‘logic’ of that space: translation from one social space to another is necessarily accompanied by a translation of meaning, form and shape” (Hilgers/Mangez 2015:12). Money can be used to buy almost everything (except for love and happiness as a common saying indicates) and is thus easily transferable. Merchandise, on the other hand, is quite restrictive regarding its utility and therefore has little to no value in other fields outside the metal scene (although the recent trend in mainstream fashion of wearing T-shirts of certain metal bands like *Metallica*, *Black Sabbath* or *Iron Maiden* has led to the fact that such T-shirts have gained significance and value in this particular field).

Hence, it is almost impossible to transfer capital in the form of merchandise from one field to another, at least not without the item losing almost all of its value (a T-shirt can still be worn as simple clothing, but that may not be worth 20 or 30 Euro to someone who can not relate to the band logo printed on it).

Following this logic, merchandise, when viewed as a form of capital, becomes almost entirely restricted to the field of the metal scene. Because of this, even if merchandise cannot quite be regarded as cultural capital in the sense Thornton and Kahn-Harris use the term, merchandise as economic capital has similar qualities as mundane cultural capital in that both do not “have the potential to be translated into cultural capital circulating in other fields and scenes” (Kahn-Harris 2007:129).

Merchandise articles may be collected solely for their monetary value. It is in this case that they must be analysed entirely under the aspect of economic capital. Since they retain their value only inside the scene as the possible buyers of such items are in most cases collectors from within, merchandise as economic capital is restricted to the metal scene for the most part, as it loses its value during the attempt to transfer it elsewhere.

However, if seen from the viewpoint of those agents that sell the merchandise and in return get money for it, it is exactly their involvement in the scenic practice of merchandise trading that allows them to accumulate economic capital that is transferrable to other fields. For persons like Tomi or Matija, who operate important institutions of the scene that require a lot of time, dedication and hard work, this ability to trade inter-scenic for widely usable economic capital is necessary to maintain their businesses and make a living of it. In a scene where commerce is generally perceived as something rather negative (although by far not as rejected as in the punk scene), this form of making money from scene-related practices is tolerated as long as the scene profits from it.

“Profit and commerce are tolerated provided that they are by-products of scenic practice, rather than ends in themselves. As long as the scene ‘comes first’ and an element of altruism is sustained, commercial imperatives are not necessarily problematic. Indeed, some argue that the introduction of the profit motive within the scene guarantees ethical practice. [...] Profit may in fact be seen as a just reward for the accumulation of subcultural capital” (Kahn-Harris 2007:125f.)

Those persons who show a deep commitment to the scene, develop its institutions and put in a lot of time, work and effort are permitted by the rest of the scene to accumulate economic capital

without losing their cultural capital, thus regaining their high status. This is exemplified by the cases of Matija, who started out working for different fanzines<sup>13</sup> and webzines in the middle of the 1990s and ran his own underground distro before he founded the record label On Parole Records (personal communication, Matija 06.12.2017), and Tomi, who was working several years as an employee in another store for records and merchandise until he founded his own business in order to fill the need for such a store after its predecessor closed down (personal communication, Tomi 23.01.2018). For both of them, their initial effort has gained them a reputation as scene members that are important for the scene's continuity and as reliable and trustworthy businessmen, in turn leading them to put more and more effort into their activities.

“Long-standing scene members who have a reputation for ethical dealing and a commitment to the scene gain subcultural capital in the form of respect and fame. Respect translates into sales and increased attention paid to their institutions”  
(Kahn-Harris 2007:126).

For those people who actively participate in the metal scene by running important institutions and thus contributing to its continuance, selling goods like merchandise to other scene members has proven to be a way to make a living entirely from scenic work, while still maintaining and even gaining more cultural capital in the process. For other scene members, however, there are also ways to acquire capital in relation to merchandise.

## **Merchandise as Cultural Capital**

As I have indicated before, merchandise items can be subjects to analysis as a form of cultural capital themselves. In a preceding chapter I have explained how merchandise collectors are viewed as very committed to the scene and thus respected by other scene members. Acquiring a decent merchandise collection requires a substantial monetary investment. As outlined in the previous section, an exchange of capital happens where easily transferrable economic capital in the form of money is exchanged for economic capital with very limited utility. Thus, the

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<sup>13</sup> Webzines are the digital follow-ups to fanzines, their online availability providing a far greater reach. *Distros* are distribution channels for fanzines, demos and records. All of those institutions are usually managed by private persons through informal channels and often with a (close to) non-profit agenda. For more information on fanzines and distros see Kahn-Harris 2007.



merchandise buyer commits her- or himself to the scene by accumulating economical capital that is of hardly any use and value elsewhere. Further, the money spent goes to important institutions within the scene and thus indirectly ensures its continuance. This commitment of resources to the scene and its institutions is perceived as quite important and therefore positively connotated. Therefore, through the conversion of economic capital from almost universal to scene-specific, cultural capital is accumulated as other scene members ascribe it upon merchandise collectors.

However, one does not only need money to build up a substantial merchandise collection. A vast amount of time needs to be spent to accumulate all the items since most collections grow piece by piece over the years. Buying a whole collection can only be done by scene members who already hold enough cultural capital to claim the knowledge about the different items. A new scene member will hardly be familiar with, say, all the different albums in a record collection, neither will he or she have attended all the festivals from which a T-shirt collection contains the respective shirts. To hold a merchandise collection, and in turn to hold cultural capital, scene members need to be familiar with the scene's habitus and possess a knowledge of the different metal music styles as well as the scene's complex history, as I have mentioned before.

“Scene members claim subcultural capital by knowing the complex histories of the scene and by having heard the music of its vast number of bands. [...] [T]he process of developing scenic knowledge is one of the key pleasures of becoming involved within the scene and this knowledge is eagerly displayed” (Kahn-Harris 2007:122).

It is due to this factor that older scene members are in most cases automatically ascribed a substantial amount of cultural capital, especially when they in some way demonstrate that they have been involved in the scene for a long time and know its habitus (e.g. by wearing an old band or festival T-shirt or demonstrating a knowledge about the music). Sinclair states that “older fans have [...] acquired status and respect from the younger fans for their long-term dedication to the scene” (Sinclair 2013:210). Since older fans usually have a greater income than the adolescent fans, they can afford to spend more money within it, be it on concert tickets, merchandise goods or just for a couple of drinks in the local metal bar. Also, they often have already acquired enough capital to successfully run scenic institutions. Therefore, “the older generation plays a key role in maintaining and defining the scene” (Sinclair 2013:211).

Younger scene members, on the other hand, have yet to accumulate their cultural capital, and slowly building up a merchandise collection may aid in this task. Gathering items piece by piece shows that a person actually takes the time to familiarize him- or herself with it. One can only visit a limited number of events every year, and listening to a record several times to get to know it in detail also requires some time. Therefore, by slowly investing the time and money into a collection it is much more likely to gain cultural capital than by buying an entire collection at once, at least for younger scene members. Cardwell reports a similar issue in regard to one of his interlocutors' stance on battle jackets:

“Band patches are not chosen arbitrarily [...] but commemorate attendances at live concerts [...] Pete presents his physical presence at these concerts as the ultimate authentication of his status as a true metal fan. Many other fans would share this view, as concert attendance requires commitment of time, money and long-distance travel. [...] In this way, the battle jacket represents much more than just the wearer's musical taste, testifying to their lived experience as a heavy metal fan, metal being a genre that places great importance on the live concert experience” (Cardwell 2017:16).

The right to own a substantial collection of merchandise items, in this particular cases patches sewn onto a battle jacket, thus has to be earned over a longer period of time.

Further, collecting different items comes with a large difference in both quantity and quality of the cultural capital one may gain in the process. For example, merchandise items like coffee mugs will gain their owners less capital than T-shirts, since mugs are not very visible. Also, the mugs often do not signal a connection to a specific event, which is the case for festival- and tour shirts that can be dated back to a specific time period, indicating how long their owners have been members of the scene. T-shirts are also far more visible since they are often being worn in public, while coffee mugs rarely leave the private sphere (I can hardly imagine someone bringing a different coffee mug to work every day).

The most appreciated merchandise collections, however, are undoubtedly record collections. To own a record collection means that one has not only spent time and money to get the individual items but spent a significant amount of additional time to listen to those records and thus acquire an in-depth knowledge of what lies at the core of the metal scene, which is of course metal music. During the long time this process needs, the habitus of the scene can be internalized, and the knowledge of music and scene can in turn be expressed in much detail in the correct scene-specific language, since “[g]eneric terms are imprecise and subcultural capital

is displayed through precision and knowledge. Subcultural capital is most effectively displayed through knowledge of individual bands and albums” (Kahn-Harris 2007:123). Such a demonstration of cultural capital in the face of other scene members then usually generates respect and the status of a well-established position within the field.

### **Gaining Cultural Capital through Merchandise Use**

In the previous section I have explained how scene members can gain cultural capital through the accumulation of merchandise articles. While in these cases the merchandise articles can be seen and analysed as capital themselves, the following section will deal with matters where merchandise functions solely as means to acquire cultural capital, without having any value ascribed to itself.

I have stated before that some scene members do use merchandise quite consciously, for example in their way of dressing themselves, while others do not particularly care about such things. However, all persons I have talked with were quite aware of the signals they send when displaying certain pieces of merchandise, and they were equally receptive of other people who do so. When they see other scene members wearing merchandise clothing, they will automatically ascribe certain features onto them based on their sole appearance. These ascriptions may then serve as the foundation as to how to communicate and interact with the respective person. Therefore, even though initial assumptions can be discarded after some time of interaction where they may be proven wrong, this first impression functions as an important marker of cultural capital and determines to a large extent if a scene member will be able to gain even more capital or not.

“Subcultural capital is both endowed by other scene members in the form of prestige and power and claimed by scene members for themselves in the ways they perform their identities. To possess subcultural capital, whether by claiming it for oneself or having it endowed by others, is to gain self-esteem and a rewarding experience of the scene” (Kahn-Harris 2007:121).

This again is closely related to the notion that a long-lasting engagement with the scene implies a deep commitment to it that can be translated into cultural capital. “One of the reasons heavy metal has survived as a subculture and maintained many of the same values and aesthetics of

the early bands is the importance placed on new members learning the genre's history" (Sinclair 2013:212). Younger scene members first have to internalize the scene's habitus to be able to gain capital, and displaying merchandise is an important aspect of this process. Think back to the statement of Matija, who claimed that younger metal fans prefer T-shirts with large, colourful prints while older fans tend to buy shirts with a more modest design. Now, if a 15-year old wears a colourfully designed band T-shirt, this perfectly fits her or his status as a young scene member who shows allegiance to the scene and the music, and thus may gain him or her cultural capital because of the commitment demonstrated in this way. However, if a 40-year old fan wears the same shirt, it may provoke associations of inexperience and a lack of scenic knowledge, thus preventing the wearer from gaining capital the way a younger scene member or a fan of the same age wearing a differently designed T-shirt (even of the same band) would.

A similar issue, but of much more consequence, is concerned with the bands or events that are represented on the merchandise articles one displays, since some of them possess more cultural capital than others, which directly translates to the person that displays it.

"As the fans become increasingly involved in the scene, they are introduced at first to popular and commercially successful bands, such as Metallica, Megadeth, Iron Maiden, Slayer, and Judas Priest. [...] There is a certain expectation that members of the scene will know about these bands. These bands also serve as an introduction to heavy metal music which leads to more 'extreme', 'heavier' and increasingly obscure bands. Bands such as Metallica and Iron Maiden are popular because they have more melodic sounds than other heavy metal bands, which has translated into the mainstream and eased many of the participants into the scene" (Sinclair 2013:212).

Younger scene members thus can display merchandise from bands like the ones mentioned above with relative low risk of losing cultural capital since it is expected of them to be familiar with the basics of metal music history and express this knowledge through their merchandise use. However, after a few years in the scene, in order to gain more capital, they should have familiarized themselves with more underground bands and show this engagement with the scene by buying those bands' merchandise and displaying it to other scene members. Otherwise, they may be considered as not committed enough to the scene and the music, as the following statement by Celin indicates:

Celin: “If you have a person that goes ‘*Ah, what the fuck, why are you wearing that?*’ [...] It’s being, I don’t know, maybe too mainstream of metal, you know. I heard of a guy who said ‘*Look, another one of those Metallica fans who knows only Metallica and nothing else.*’ And then, you have, I don’t know. You have a large percentage of people that are this way, you know. They know, I don’t know, *Iron Maiden, Metallica, Slayer, Pantera*, and then it goes ‘*What else?*’ If you’re a true fan, you should, I don’t know, say fifteen names in an instant, you know. There are too many people that go in the direction that other people tell them, you know. ‘*Listen to Metallica, listen to that, listen to all that shit.*’ I don’t say that it’s bad music or whatever, [...] nothing like that. That are probably, I don’t know, the basics that we all went through before we came to the personalization of who we are and what we want to listen to, you know. Like you grow as a person, metal grows with you.”

(personal communication, Celin 05.12.2017)

In this example, for the first time we see transgressive cultural capital becoming important in regard to merchandise, alongside mundane cultural capital. While demonstrating one’s knowledge of the underground music scene by displaying it on one’s clothing can lead to the accumulation of mundane capital, expressing one’s personal taste and your personality through this display of merchandise certainly gains scene members transgressive capital, for they demonstrate an emotional connection with the music and the scene.

“[S]cenic discourse produces mundane subcultural capital through critical languages that are primarily concerned with placing bands within systems of distinction. In contrast, transgressive subcultural capital is claimed through scenic discourses that involve a far more ‘personal’ engagement with music” (Kahn-Harris 2007:128).

This does not mean that scene members cannot display merchandise of certain bands without losing capital (although with some bands that are regarded as too mainstream this is almost always the case). Again, how one is perceived wearing a *Metallica* T-shirt, for example, depends strongly on the interplay between different factors such as age, conformity to the scene’s fashion style, time spent in engagement with the scene, already established status and so on. In short, if a person already wields a sufficient amount of capital, he or she is less likely

to lose this capital in the face of merchandise choices that other scene members might find questionable. Also, as I have explained before, different merchandise designs from the same band may be perceived quite differently by other scene members, as Samo has indicated with an example regarding *Metallica* T-shirts:

Samo: “[T]he best example is like, *Metallica*, changed over the years so much that if you see a “*Ride the Lightning*” album it’s totally different than “*Death Magnetic*”. [S]ome people will make an impression of you when they see you.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

What he meant by this is that a person wearing a T-shirt with the design of *Metallica*’s “*Ride the Lightning*” album, which was released in 1984 and is commonly regarded as one of the band’s best albums and a classic of early thrash metal, is perceived completely different than a person wearing a shirt with the design of the “*Death Magnetic*” album, which was released in 2008, at a point in time where *Metallica* already had the image of a once influential thrash band gone soft and aiming for a more mainstream audience and higher record sales. As the perception of *Metallica* within the scene has changed over the years, so too has the perception of scene members wearing the band’s merchandise: “Although popular, heavy metal bands such as *Metallica* and *Iron Maiden* are well respected within the scene and are highly successful as a result; paradoxically, their success has lead [sic] to the diminishment of their subcultural capital within the scene” (Sinclair 2013:221). Thus, while referring to the band’s past may result in an increase of cultural capital, referring to its present likely leads to the opposite outcome. However, this is again largely dependent on the cultural capital a person already has and the factors that determine this capital. A younger scene member wearing a “*Ride the lightning*” T-shirt, for example, is much more likely to be questioned about his or her knowledge about *Metallica*’s music than an older person with the same shirt is. Seniority in this case leads to the assumption that the wearer of the shirt has achieved a funded knowledge about the music over her or his long-time participation in the scene.

One topic that came up many times when I have talked to different scene members about merchandise and which is closely related to what I have just discussed was the question of

authenticity. While I do not see authenticity as a valid tool for analysing ethnographic data<sup>14</sup>, I nevertheless need to examine the stances of the people within the scene on this topic, since it seemed to be of major importance to many of them: “Within many subcultures there is an emphasis on being ‘real’ or authentic that is fundamental to an individual’s sense of identity and standing within the peer community” (Cardwell 2017:14). One example of inauthenticity that was brought up several times by various persons was the issue of large clothing and fashion companies selling band merchandise clothing, and in turn people who wear these products as a fashion statement without having any connection to the bands or their music.

Samo: “Do you know 9gag<sup>15</sup>? I’ve seen a picture [video clip] on it with a girl wearing the *Nirvana* T-shirt. And a guy plays *Come As You Are* [Nirvana song] in the back, so: ‘*What band is this?*’ She’s like ‘*No Idea*’. Great. [...] I think with *Nirvana* that happens a lot. Even when I was back in primary school, people were like ‘*Oh, crap, he [Kurt Cobain, frontman of Nirvana] died, what a shame!*’ You never heard any of his music, come on, seriously.”

(personal communication, Samo 21.11.2017)

Indeed, *Nirvana* T-shirts, along with those of bands like *The Rolling Stones*, *The Sex Pistols* or *The Ramones* have become items that are frequently worn and appreciated by many people outside their respective music scenes as general pop-culture statements and fashion items. By many fans of the music, this ongoing trend is met with rejection against those people who appropriate their cultural symbols without knowing the backgrounds behind them, and the people in the metal scene are no exception in that.

“Arguments about authenticity in metal style (as in any subculture) are hugely complicated by the effects of commodification and the commercial diffusion of the metal ‘look’. John Clarke observed the ways in which subcultural styles are appropriated and assimilated by the fashion system which turns them from ‘lifestyles’ to ‘consumption styles’ (Clarke, 1976:188). The effect of this on subcultural participants might be to increase their concern with being authentic,

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<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the question if and how authenticity can be used as an analytical tool within cultural- and social anthropology see Fillitz and Saris 2013 as well as Muršič 2013 in the same volume.

<sup>15</sup> 9gag.com is an online social media platform popular for sharing memes, short video clips and other user-generated content.

defining themselves in opposition to those from outside the subculture who appropriate elements of the style because it suits current fashion tastes” (Cardwell 2017:15, quotations in original).

It is generally expected that when wearing a T-shirt (or displaying other merchandise) of a particular band, one ought to know that artist’s music. If they do not, those people are precluded from gaining cultural capital and labelled as “posers”.

The concept of “posers” (or “*poseurs*”) within the metal scene can be traced back at least to the 1980s, where there was a big cultural gap between the two dominating musical styles, thrash metal and glam metal (or lite metal in Weinstein’s (2000) terms). The devotees of lite metal were labelled as posers by the thrash fans, mainly because of their preferred fashion aesthetics and the music they favoured, both of which were quite different to the established metal standard.

“A host of pejorative terms for the new melodic style have been coined by metal’s traditional audience and by fans of the major alternative subgenre. [...] Reference to performers of lite metal as ‘poseurs’ indicates that they are judged to lack authenticity. The code of authenticity, which is central to the heavy metal subculture, is demonstrated in many ways. Of all criteria – highly emotional voice, street (not crackerjack) clothes, and ‘serious’ themes – lite metal fails the test of authenticity” (Weinstein 2000:46).

Already back then, authenticity was to a large extent dependent on one’s visual appearance, and I would argue that this has not changed much until the present day (albeit the criteria for being authentic have to some degree). Wearing merchandise from a band that one does not know is certainly a marker for inauthenticity. The same is true for example with extensive use of make-up for men (this has obviously not changed since the 1980s), although I would argue that there is a large crossover-area with the gothic scene where such a style is widely accepted.

So, even though a person demonstrates commitment to the scene by wearing a band T-shirt, this may lead to the opposite of the desired increase of cultural capital, depending on that persons already accumulated capital and knowledge of the scene and the music.

“[D]emonstrating commitment to the scene is not as conducive to status as one may expect. [...] [C]ontributors to the online forums [...] repeatedly deride other fans who dress extravagantly or use make-up as ‘poseurs’ [...] These fans are mocked and derided because they are incorporating stereotypes and essentially



trying too hard. The heavy metal fans are sensitive to such marketplace myths [...] because of how it devalues their own personal subcultural capital to be associated with such stereotypes. Hence, they construct boundaries within the scene to protect their aesthetic interest” (Sinclair 2013:220f.).

While those people outside the scene who wear merchandise of bands they (supposedly) do not know are exactly such a stereotype, it is another group of people that suffers the most from these classifications – those who seek to enter the scene and gain initial cultural capital.

Especially younger fans who have not yet established a stable position within the scene for themselves and are still in the process of internalizing the scene’s habitus properly are often subject to such practices of ridicule and exclusion based on their efforts to conform to the scene’s habitus.

“New members are seen not only as ignorant – precluding them from mundane capital – but also as slaves to ‘trends’ – precluding them from transgressive capital. ‘Trend’ is a word with entirely negative connotations within the scene. [...] ‘Trend-followers’ cannot claim either form of subcultural capital. They are both ignorant and conformist. Scene members try to gain both transgressive and mundane subcultural capital by displaying both knowledge and individuality. The incursion of new members or new spaces onto the scene is something that scene members actively try to prevent. To enter the scene with any kind of capital, new members must work hard to achieve the required scenic knowledge. Moreover, they have to show themselves to be ‘true’ individuals rather than members of a group. Yet they must not, as Sarah Thornton points out, ‘try too hard’. New scene members who try too hard to be transgressive are often ridiculed” (Kahn-Harris 2007:130).

Younger persons are more likely to cause suspicion in already established scene members regarding their sincere commitment to the music and the scene, and therefore often face disapproval until they have proven themselves to be worthy of holding cultural capital. This rejection of relatively new scene members often happens on the basis of appearance evaluation, and the use of merchandise items makes up a large part of that, as Cardwell notes:

“[I]n my conversations with metal fans about their battle jackets, I was often aware of tacit distinctions being drawn between ‘true’ metal fans, veterans of many live concerts and festivals with detailed knowledge of more arcane bands,

and those whose interest and commitment might be more at a surface or stylistic level. This differentiation could be manifested in a fan's jacket – with subtle judgements made about the choice of patches, their deployment, and the general appearance of the garment – whether it looked really lived-in or newly constructed. Amongst older metal fans particularly, there is a sense that one's battle jacket should be a genuine reflection of subcultural experience" (Cardwell 2017:16).

In the same context of all matters I have discussed so far in this section, Cardwell again brings up the example of Pete and his view on battle jackets. I do agree with Cardwell, who considers this stance as exemplary for a large part of metal scene members regarding issues of scenic experience, seniority, authenticity and the opposing principles of fashion and genuine style.

"Like many metalheads, Pete is deeply offended by the tendency of fashion trends to co-opt subcultural style for profit, making it temporarily fashionable and leading to widespread diffusion and adoption of a subcultural look by those outside the scene. But he is also critical of the recent tendency of (often younger) metal fans to quickly produce jackets that they have not 'earned' [...] This fake jacket, according to Pete, fails because the creator has not understood the unwritten rules of metal subculture relating to battle jackets. They have taken a short cut to the appearance of a long-time fan, but their fake jacket has not been earned. The authentic jacket, by contrast, is personally (if imperfectly) created and lived" (Cardwell 2017:17).

However, I have also encountered situations where people in the scene have displayed merchandise items of bands they were not particularly familiar with. While for younger scene members this might in more cases than not provoke ridicule and exclusion as well as preclude capital gain, for those who have already accumulated a fair share of cultural capital and established a stable position in the scene (or at least their peer group within) such a matter may under some circumstances not pose a major problem, as becomes evident in the following discussion between Samo and Florian (another regular customer at Alter Bar who walked in as I was talking to Samo):

Samo: "I have a *Cannibal Corpse* T-shirt, I don't know any song that they made, but as I said, it's more like supporting the culture. [...] I wouldn't say that only

the people that listen to certain music have the right to buy stuff. If you wanna support the thing in general, sure. It's the problem with people that see you that make an impression that *'Oh, you listen to this, you listen to that'* It's not really like that. I mean, maybe you got this T-shirt for a birthday. And you gotta wear something."

Florian: "But People automatically expect that, like, if you have that band's T-shirt, that you listen to the band."

Samo: "Yeah, but as I said, some people, some stuff, you wanna support the culture in general, and some you buy because, ok, you really like that album."

Florian: "Or you really like that T-shirt and you just buy it, even though you don't listen to them."

Samo: "Yeah but then people just laugh at you."

(personal communication, Samo and Florian 21.11.2017)

Samo's statements here seem a bit ambiguous, since he poses that he himself has at least one T-shirt of a band to whose music he does not listen to at all, but that he regularly wears as a statement of supporting metal culture in general. This is possible for him because of the fact that he has already established himself as a scene member among his peer group and thus accumulated enough cultural capital to not be subject to disparagement because of such a matter. However, in the last sentence he declares himself against such a practice as a mere fashion statement. Buying a T-shirt and wearing it just because one likes the design is not enough reason to wear a merchandise shirt. There has to be at least some intention to show commitment and support for the scene and the culture to wear such a shirt and not lose one's face, and this in turn is only possible when one already possesses the necessary cultural capital to do so. Nevertheless, if a scene member is able to challenge the boundaries of the scene's habitus in such a way, this process is likely to gain her or him transgressive cultural capital, which Kahn-Harris defines as "a desire to be different, to challenge and transgress accepted norms within and outside the scene" (Kahn-Harris 2007:128). The transgression in this case, however, is a minor one, hence the scene is still relatively safe of a change of habitus. If anything, such practices enforce rather than weaken the established scenic code and thus can be considered both transgressive as well as mundane in equal shares.

It becomes evident in all these matters that merchandise items, whether they are perceived as a form of capital themselves or as a means to acquire it, play an important role for people within the metal scene to position themselves in relation to other scene members. Of particular significance in this regard is merchandise clothing, as its visibility to others can be used to provoke certain reactions. The main goal of this process is to gain mundane cultural capital, since “[s]tatus and subcultural capital is produced through engaging with the code, collecting mundane capital, [...] through displaying one’s knowledge of heavy metal history, wearing the ‘right’ clothes, attending the ‘right’ gigs and demonstrating an overall commitment to the scene” (Sinclair 2013:274). However, in some cases it is possible for scene members who have already established a stable position within the scene to accumulate transgressive cultural capital as well. Whether a person is able to gain capital or not (and in the worst case lose it) depends on a large variety of factors, including age, status and the performance of the scene’s habitus, thus making this process rather complex, since scene members not only distinguish themselves from people outside the scene, but also “construct boundaries within the scene to protect their aesthetic interest. This emphasises the complex nature of the heavy metal scene. Although individuals can gain cultural capital through demonstrating their knowledge of the heavy metal code and respect through engaging in scenic activities that distinguish themselves, it is also equally possible that they will be mocked or labelled a ‘poseur’” (Sinclair 2013:221).

## Conclusion

Merchandise goods comprise many various things that can be used in several ways. Fans of metal music employ them in a variety of strategies to express their affiliation to and establish a respected position within the complex field of relations and institutions that constitutes both global and local metal scenes. In this thesis, I have attempted to shed light on those eclectic practices in order to achieve a better understanding of a small but significant part of the scene's material culture. With the presumption in mind that merchandise goods are a central element of metal culture, I have aimed at finding out why they are so important for members of the metal scene.

To answer this question, it was necessary to establish an understanding of the field within which I have conducted my research as well as the theoretical frameworks that can be applied to this field. Metal music and culture have a complex history. Established as an own musical style in dissociation of other genres of rock music in the early 1970s, metal has gone through several decades of a constant interplay between reinventing and progressing both music and culture as well as returning to its roots and traditions, which has resulted in a very diverse conglomerate of different musical subgenres and playstyles. Also, metal culture has spread out from its centres in Great Britain, North America and Central Europe and by now spawned local metal scenes all over the world, making it a global phenomenon.

The notion of scene, which I have discussed following the initial theoretical outlines relating to Bourdieu's concept of artistic fields (Bourdieu 1993) and Becker's concept of art worlds (Becker 2008), draws from both of them. Scholars such as Kahn-Harris, Thornton, Kozorog and Stanojević, and others who work with this notion are now specifically concerned with music-centred cultural movements, including metal, and plead for an understanding of scene as a very open and fluid compound of persons and institutions (Kahn-Harris 2007, Kozorog/Stanojević 2011). It is such notions that have shaped my understanding of the metal scene and thus have been prevalent throughout this thesis.

Metal music and culture in Slovenia, which constituted the specific field of my research, has evolved somewhat different from the widely accepted narrative of the global metal scene. This alternative development is to a substantial extent due to the country's history of socialism as a part of Yugoslavia. But even though the institutional and governmental support for metal music was not given for a long time, musical instruments were difficult to get, and the punk movement significantly reduced the production of metal music, Slovenia established a flourishing and

vivid metal scene. During my research in the country's capital city of Ljubljana, I was able to experience first-hand how large and many-faceted the local metal scene is, how present its institutions are and how well they are interconnected with the global metal scene, resulting for example in a large number of concerts from bands of various subgenres that are held all over Slovenia.

In the second chapter I have elaborated on the notion of merchandise and its understanding within the metal scene. Merchandise articles are commodities that are branded with logos, album cover artworks or other graphical designs that directly relate them to a certain band or institution. When talking about merchandise with members of the metal scene, the discussion mainly revolves around merchandise clothing, since particularly T-shirts constitute the absolute majority of merchandise products bought and sold within the scene alongside with records. However, the question if the latter are to be considered as merchandise or not provokes various answers, though in this thesis I have adopted the broader understanding that includes records in the notion of merchandise. This is due to the fact that in a time where music is widely available online through both legal and illegal channels, buying records is no longer necessary to obtain music. Therefore, practices of record consumption more and more assimilate to those of merchandise consumption.

From an economic perspective I was able to ascertain that merchandise sales pose the main source of income for most metal bands. This is mainly due to both the issue that a lot of music is available online for free as well as the fact that the fees they get from playing concerts often barely cover the expenses they have on tour (e.g. for accommodation, food and transport). Especially for smaller bands that operate almost entirely on underground levels, merchandise sales are necessary to fill the band's savings bank and provide the means to produce further records and go on tour, making the merchandise market a crucial institution for the sustainability and further development of metal music.

Concerts are the main distribution channel for band merchandise, as the majority of people within the scene buy it at concerts most of the time. Almost every metal show I have attended so far has had a dedicated merchandise booth where all the bands who played that evening sold records, T-shirts and other goods. Often, specific tour-shirts are available which are highly desirable for many fans because they represent the link between the merchandise product and a particular concert experience. Since the metal fans are willing to spend a lot of money on merchandise at these concerts, much attention is paid to the placement of the items by the retailers to attract customers. However, the availability of certain articles or designs is often

limited. Especially womens' clothing is not represented in many varieties. Therefore, female fans generally buy less merchandise clothing because they often do not particularly like what is on offer. I have also noticed that in Slovenia, many people complain that merchandise is very expensive at concerts and that some bands do not sell anything. This is due to the strict enforcement of the fiscal law that requires the bands to sell their merchandise through a Slovene company and hence pay value added tax. Other important distribution channels of merchandise besides the booths at concerts include online shops and physical stores.

Merchandise clothing, particularly in the form of T-shirts and hoodies, constitutes a main element of the general style of fashion and appearance dominant within the metal scene. Otherwise, this style is characterized by denim or cargo pants, denim or leather jackets (and occasionally battle jackets) and accessories like studded belts and wristbands. Black is by far the predominant colour since it provokes associations of darkness, evil and danger in metal's native societies. However, black clothing is also associated with freedom and a lack of control through authorities and thus has an empowering aspect to it. For most people in the scene, wearing black is the norm and everything that deviates from it is perceived as special and extraordinary. Just like wearing black, wearing merchandise clothing is part of many scene members' everyday clothing style.

One aspect of metal's visual aesthetics that seems to be rather problematic in my opinion is its close relation to gender stereotypes and role models. Especially women are very commonly perceived in accordance to their clothing style, which can be either highly feminized and sexualized or similar to the men's clothing and therefore quite asexual and male-associated. While this can be deliberately used by some women as a strategy to overcome patriarchal structures and gender stereotypes, it still reinforces them continually by making them visible and relevant. Since the metal scene generally has a rather conservative perception of gender roles, I consider this to be an issue where the inner-scenic discourse has a need to catch up.

The widespread use of merchandise clothing in the metal scene is closely related to a sense of belonging to it. Through wearing these clothes, the people make a statement of affiliation not only to their particular peer-group but also to outsiders. Especially for adolescents, who are often confronted with feelings of alienation towards the social structures they have grown up in and mainstream society in general, being part of a large community such as the metal scene is very important. It allows them to share not only musical preferences, but also opinions on all different matters of life as well as their feelings with like-minded people and thus provides them with the emotional support they may need. By wearing merchandise, they not only signal to

others that they are part of a larger group, they further reinforce this feeling for themselves. These issues may be particularly vital for young scene members, but older metal fans likewise relate to other people wearing merchandise in a fashion that is more often than not characterized by immediate sympathy, thus enforcing the bonds between scene members. Further, many fans possess merchandise items that are linked to specific events and memories, hence establishing not only an emotional connection between the thing and its owner, but also between the owner and other persons that may have similar associations with these items.

Merchandise sales, as I have stated above, are the main source of income for many metal bands. The fans are absolutely aware of that and for most of them buying merchandise fulfils the purpose of directly supporting their favourite bands and to a lesser extent also the vital institutions of the scene. Some scene members have acquired vast collections of records, T-shirts or other merchandise items during years of scenic participation in the form of attending concerts, visiting stores and informing themselves through scene-specific media channels like magazines or on the internet. Such extensive merchandise collections indicate that their owners have spent a good deal of resources on different scenic institutions and are thus regarded as respectable supporters of metal music and culture by others.

The last part of this thesis is concerned with the connection between merchandise and cultural capital. Based on Bourdieu's notion that different forms of capital are used by the participants in social fields to occupy certain positions, I argue according to the notions of Thornton and Kahn-Harris that those scene members who act conforming to the habitus in the scene are able to accumulate mainly mundane, but also transgressive cultural capital. They can in turn use this capital to their advantage to establish a stable position within the field and gain the respect of other scene members.

Merchandise plays a crucial role in this process, as its possession and use are effective on several levels. First, merchandise is a direct transformation of money into another form of economic capital that is bound exclusively to the scene, and thus demonstrates commitment to it. Second, even those merchandise items which hold little to no economic value can be seen as direct transformations of economic into cultural capital because of similar reasons. This issue is particularly relevant in the eye of extensive merchandise collections, whose owners are often regarded with huge respect because of their investments in the scene's institutions. However, for younger scene members it can be difficult to acquire cultural capital through merchandise use, since a certain amount of experience in and familiarity with the scene is required beforehand. Ultimately, through displaying metal merchandise, especially in the form of



clothing, fans of metal music demonstrate to their peers not only that they are a part of the scene, but also that they are familiar with its major institutions in the form of bands and events. Scene members are expected to use merchandise items adequate to their age and experience within the scene. If they don't, they are often denied the accumulation of cultural capital and ridiculed by their peers.

As I have demonstrated in this thesis, the use of merchandise items in the metal scene is as many-faceted as the scene itself. Different agents within the field of metal music culture have different approaches to and motivations for engaging with merchandise in various ways. Fans want to support their favourite musicians, support the scene and demonstrate that they are a part of an international, music centred cultural community. Those who work in the scene and run its vital institutions want to ensure its persistence and ultimately make a living for themselves. All of them relate to each other through merchandise items as a form of visual communication, and the information they gather as a result of this are reflected in the ways they approach and interact with each other. It has thus become evident that issues of merchandise possession and use are manifold and complex, mirroring the diversity and complexity of the metal scene itself and the people that hold allegiance to metal music and demonstrate this allegiance by wearing black band T-shirts every day.



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Figure 3, p. 53: Female trash metal fan wearing a battle jacket adorned with hand-painted patches, showing among others patches of *Death Angel* and *Suicidal Tendencies* (Taken by Florian Annegg at a concert of thrash metal bands *Testament*, *Annihilator* and *Death Angel* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 in Kino Šiška, Ljubljana.)

Figure 4, p. 71: Meme about wearing band merchandise clothing in public. (Posted on Facebook by the site “METAL AF” on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2018 and shared by one of my interlocutors on the same day, last accessed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2018 at 10:42.)

Figure 5, p. 74: Matija Prnaver from “On Parole” (bottom left) selling merchandise to fans at a concert. In the background are various T-shirt designs from the band *Testament* on display. (Taken by Florian Annegg on a concert of thrash metal bands *Testament*, *Annihilator* and *Death Angel* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 in Kino Šiška, Ljubljana.)