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Idiots and Wankers: Grindcore Sociality

In this chapter, I turn to brutal social relations, which occur in brutal spaces and enable, or constrain belonging. In short, I look at how scene members enact, and experience, brutal belonging socially. The experience of being in a grindcore space during a live performance is affective and fosters belonging for scene members. However, with this belonging comes a process of designating those who do not belong in the scene. Here, I will discuss scene members’ experiences of belonging to the grindcore scene and how this works in relation to other scenes and, in Japan’s case, dominant modes of national belonging.

Brutal sociality in grindcore scenes

Massumi suggests that affect suffuses the ‘chaotic co-functioning’ (1998, p. 59) of the political, economic and cultural spheres, which he dubs ‘the social’. Thrift agrees (2008, p. 207). Certainly, representation influences sociality. However, as Thrift points out, sociality also uses a ‘massively extended affective palette’ (ibid.). This manifests in what he dubs ‘interactional intelligence’ (p. 208). Such intelligence depends on affective intuitions of social encounters. It is a shared and mutual expectancy of a situation, or as Thrift puts it ‘[a]ffect… act[s] as the corporeal sense of the communicative act’ (ibid. my emphasis).1 Scene members’ accounts of their interactions with others during gigs indicates the affective nature of such sociality. This is evident in Will’s difficulty in describing his experience as anything other than a sense of ‘something’:

You just like look around you and go ‘hey everyone! Yeeaaaah!’ You know? It’s, it’s – I don’t know, maybe it’s – I don’t know… something, I don’t know…. It’s just – you share the love of the music. And I, I, I,
I always find myself standing at gigs [laughing] with this huge, stupid grin plastered across my face, ’cause I just love it. And, ssssss- yeah – you’ve got, sort of these characters hidden in the crowd who sort of get everyone else feeling relaxed and that kind of thing.

(Will, Melbourne)

Will’s enthusiasm depends on the same sociality fostered through bodily proximity required for a space to become brutal. In fact, for Will, the affective ‘something’ he describes is social – the act of ‘sharing’ the… music’, and experiencing belonging, with other scene members. Will’s experience is more than simply the exclamation of ‘hey everyone!’ His pleasure derives from the inarticulable ‘something’ which connects him with those ‘characters… in the crowd’ generated through affect.

Will’s response to affective sociality is similar to the experience of the ‘soundworld’ offered by Wood and Smith (2004). In their work on music fans and musicians, a similar sort of difficulty in expression is evident. Their participants use nonsense expressions to communicate their experience of affect. They say, ‘you can just go jjjjjjjjjjjjjj’ (p. 537). Instead, Will offers his inarticulable ‘something’ as ‘ssssss’. These noises demonstrate Thrift’s suggestion that the retrospective, (re)cognised description of affective experience is beyond words – that is, beyond the representative structures of language. While the verbal medium of the ethnographic interview remains representational, scene members highlighted the difficulty of linguistically representing affective experiences:

It [going to a gig] is sort of a[n] unspoken thing as well. Like, you can’t really explain the way you feel.

(Hayley, Melbourne)

Mortalised are the best band playing tonight; they are, like, um, I don’t know how to say [pause, punches the air], brutal [burutaru]!

(Bâbon, Osaka)*§

It’s really hard to describe…. It’s an energy rush. It’s nerve racking and highly exciting at the same time.

(Jim, Melbourne)

It’s – fuckin’ oath. It’s just fucking – I don’t know.

(Joel, Melbourne)*

When I’m really pissed [drunk] I do go into a pit and just go [waving arms] ‘wao wao’.

(Nobu, Osaka)