

**PUBLICATION
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Kahn-Harris, K (2006) *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Oxford: Berg

As the first book-length academic study of extreme metal music and culture, Kahn-Harris's *Extreme Metal* is an important – and overdue – contribution to scholarship in this field. As a collection of heavy metal's most obscure and inaccessible subgenres, extreme metal has been subjected to only limited scholarly attention since its emergence in the 1980s. Most of the extant literature tends to view the music as a response to and expression of a specific set of local circumstances. For example, in his book *Metal, Rock and Jazz* (1999), Harris Berger describes death metal as a soundtrack to deindustrialisation, and in particular, to the disenfranchisement of blue collar workers in North America's industrial mid-west.

In a radical departure from this dominant approach, however, Kahn-Harris adopts a global perspective on extreme metal. Based on fieldwork in the UK, Sweden and Israel, he argues that extreme metal fans across the globe share much in common: they share similar musical values, ideologies of listening and habitus, exercise subcultural capital in similar ways, and share much of the same infrastructure and many of the same institutional practices. Hence, he argues, musicians and fans not only see themselves as belonging to tightly bounded local subcultures, but also understand their musical and subcultural practices to be part of a global extreme metal scene that, in many ways, seeks to transcend the specificity of local context. By analysing extreme metal via the concept of scene, Kahn-Harris adopts a holistic approach to extreme metal musical and social practice that allows him to theorise extreme metal scene members' high degree of commitment to a genre and to a cultural space characterised by fluid and globally diffuse boundaries.

Kahn-Harris's most valuable contribution to extreme metal scholarship can perhaps be found in his discussion of transgression. In three key chapters – 'The Scene and Transgression', 'Experiencing the Scene' and 'Reflexivity, Music and Politics' – he demonstrates how transgressive practices, discourses and musical texts enjoy a high level of prestige within the extreme metal scene, but suggests that while the scene may appear to be highly transgressive, its texts and discourses are not necessarily experienced in an unequivocally transgressive manner.

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He describes the extreme metal scene as a space in which highly transgressive texts and discourses are produced and consumed, but in which scene members seek to make their experience of the scene 'ordinary', mundane, and suited to the demands of everyday life. Extreme metal music and practice is governed by what he refers to as a logic of "reflexive anti-reflexivity" (144), a term that is used to describe scene members' deliberate refusal to address, or even reflect upon, the ethico-political implications of the discourses they produce and consume. For many extreme metal musicians and fans, one of the key pleasures of the scene is the opportunity to disengage text and practice; to play with a range of highly transgressive themes without viewing them as a necessary precursor to any 'real' acts of transgression.

Although Kahn-Harris ultimately views "reflexive anti-reflexivity" as something that should be changed in the interests of a more politically progressive musical and social practice, in emphasising the disjuncture between the literal content of extreme metal texts and discourses and scene members' experience of them, he highlights an important dimension of what this music 'means' that has, until now, received only limited scholarly attention.

However, perhaps because Extreme Metal attempts to cover such a large range of musical, social and institutional practices in fewer than 170 pages, much of the discussion remains relatively brief. For example, Kahn-Harris assumes that the reader possesses a fairly detailed working knowledge of extreme metal and its various subgenres, which is somewhat problematic given the dearth of scholarly material currently available on the subject. His work would have benefited from a more detailed musical history of extreme metal, including a greater discussion of the (occasionally combative) relationships between the different subgenres and between the different local scenes. Some of these differences and conflicts are discussed in a short chapter on 'Comparing Extreme Metal Scenes' and brief remarks are scattered elsewhere throughout the book, but a more thoroughgoing analysis of extreme metal's various aesthetic and ideological permutations would have added greater detail and specificity to what is already an important step forward in extreme metal scholarship.

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Danielsen, A (2006) *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press

With Mr Brown sadly no longer around, all ongoing ontological enquiries concerning 'states of being induced within funk grooves' will require appropriate redirection. Volunteering her expertise on the subject is Norwegian funkateer Anne Danielsen, who pursues an experientially focused analysis of the funk groove and its ensuing impact on white Western musical/cultural predispositions.