

Critical Issues
Imaginative Research in a Changing World

The Metal Void
First Gatherings

Edited by

Niall W. R. Scott

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The Metal Void

Critical Issues

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The Ethos Hub

'Heavy Fundamentalisms: Music, Metal and Politics'



**The Metal Void:
First Gatherings**

Edited by

Niall W. R. Scott

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Preface

Niall W. R. Scott and Imke von Helden

This past year has seen an explosion of interest in Metal Scholarship, building on a well-laid foundation of material being written over the past few years. This collection of studies has come forth from *Heavy Fundametalisms - Music, Metal and Politics*, the first global conference on heavy metal music held in Salzburg, Austria in November 2008. With a growing critical interest in the music and culture of heavy metal, the need for a deeper discussion has erupted in which to explore and critique what this long standing movement is about, where it is going and what it has to offer, politically, socially and philosophically. Characterised by extremes, it is a music movement that has a range of lifestyles attached to it, comprising of quite disparate and radically different views amongst both fans and its progenitors. Recent publications such as Bill Irwin's edited *Metallica and Philosophy: A Crash Course in Brain Surgery* (2007) have brought the subject to a popular critical readership. Documentary films and earlier innovative texts such as Deena Weinstein's 1991 sociological study *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* and Robert Walser's 1993 study *Running with the Devil: Power and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* have provided a foundation for this subject's development. In more recent years Keith Kahn Harris' Metal Studies website indicate a continuous, serious interest in Heavy Metal. And these are only the tip of the growing archive of articles devoted to the subject from fields of sociology, cultural studies, musicology, politics and philosophy. Even as this is being written a new text edited by Gerd Bayer has come out focussing more specifically on British Heavy metal. *Heavy Fundametalisms* at Salzburg was thus a serendipitous coming together of some of the key names in metal scholarship, whilst recognising the many important contributions being made by those who were not able to make it to the conference. Writers and researchers met for the first time having read each others material or exchanged emails; information and criticism was shared regarding scholarship beyond those at the conference; there was a genuine atmosphere of consolidating what had gone before yet anticipating the many exciting new avenues that could be explored.

Looking back, the conference attracted a great deal of attention. Although 'metal studies' is still in its fledgling stage, an overwhelming amount of people answered the call for papers, making the selection of delegates rather difficult. The conference also attracted interest of the media: several articles appeared in *The Guardian*, the January edition of *Metal Hammer* (UK), on BBC world service, BBC Latin world service, and in

various German papers and radio reports. ‘Metallelectuals’ and ‘metallurgists’ from all over the world showed that - in spite of sceptical side glances from both the academic world and the metal scene - there is indeed a *raison d’être* for academic debate within the field of metal music. Having said that, the meeting also showed that there is more to a conference on metal than a bunch of serious academics discussing various aspects of heavy metal. Everyone who caught a glimpse of the delegates sitting in the conference room (or posing balefully in front of Mozart’s birthplace in the middle of the night) could have noticed easily that this music is part of their culture and their lives, not just any scholarly subject.

It is the aim of this first volume of a series to give a first impression of the *Music, Metal and Politics*-project and to provide a fully-fledged overview of the subjects presented at the conference. Presentations dealt with such diverse topics as the origins and history of metal music, fans, religion, politics, racism, nationalism, philosophy, gender, phenomenology and many more. As a result there are common themes that run through this collection and the chapter groupings do not by any means limit the content of the chapters. Exciting developments in the world of metal were traced, from the metal underground in Turkey to the metal scene in Brazil. Further studies (among many others) covered the part religion plays in a supposedly Satanic and evil music scene and another presentation analysed the role of ubiquitous elements like booze, suicide and a certain amount of noise in connection with aesthetics. The chapters presented in this volume are raw and thinly edited to maintain the feel of immediacy of the conference- some chapters are more polished; others are germinating seeds of ideas still being developed. This mix, this playing with ideas moulded the three days into something more akin to an intellectual jam session, avoiding formality and giving way to creativity and experimentation in discussion. The present volume consists of 5 parts: *Metal phenomenology and Metal existentialism* (part 1), *Race, Identity and Gender* (part 2), *Metal politics and Metaethics* (part 3), *Metal Culture and the Music* (part 4) and *Filling the Metal Void* (part 5).

The first section delves straight in to the heavy stuff: *Metal Phenomenology and Metal Existentialism*. This lays out the defining features of metal and opens the conceptual space under discussion. Joseph Russo’s ‘Nile’s Primal Ritual - Induction of the Devotee’ provides the reader with an induction into the subject takes us through what metal is, what it can be and anticipates the progression of the chapters that follow, including issues concerning gender identity and politics. Two horned salutes point further, where Nicola Masciandaro in ‘What is this that Stands before Me? Metal as Deixis’ gives a phenomenology of metal like no other. He describes it as a deictic art, rooted in the dramatisation of Black Sabbath’s self titled song. His phrases such as ‘metal pointing to the presence of its own pointing’ will make any readers head rotate through 360 degrees. Jamerson Maurer brings

to the fore musings based on underground black metal through the band Wold. 'Fire walk with me; or Dwelling in the Lodge of Differentiation' has elements of punk's edginess expressed in a phenomenology describing the onto-poietic space that metal is capable of putting on display. The more existential themes mixed with a dose of ethics and politics in the final two chapters round up this opening part, but introduce what is to come. Michael Nagenborg and Christian Hoffstadt in 'You're too Fuckin' Metal for Your Own Good' Controlled Anger and the Expression of Intensity and Authenticity in Post-modern Heavy Metal' deals with the aspect of aggression in both lyrics and behaviour. Last-mentioned claim that staying respectively becoming angry and living out anger are important elements of heavy metal that serve to maintain the identity of a community and its members. Carmen Deanna in his essay 'Tragic Metal' tracks an infusion of the Dionysian in modern culture, namely in heavy metal. This is the metal that many of us experience, and Deanna, remaining true to the live event brings us back to *that* concert experience- the one that captures all that is metal.

Part 2 of this collection questions heavy and, particularly, extreme metal; involving aspects of *Race, Identity and Gender*. Dealing with metal music means dealing with extremes, be it in terms of music, lyrics, imagery or appearance. This constant transgression of boundaries, especially in terms of imagery and lyrics, often confronts fans and musicians with the suspicion of being racist, sociopathic or just silly - an experience every metal fan, most notably every extreme metal fan, has made. Mikael Sarelin in his analysis 'Masculinities within Black Metal: Heteronormativity, Protest Masculinity or Queer?' observes three types of masculinity within the Finnish black metal scene. He does so within the scope of his field research in that he examines stage performances as well as the audiences' reaction. Florian Heesch examines the reception of Norse topics connected to constructions of gender in 'Metal for Nordic Men? Amon Amarth's Representation of Vikings', referring both to the mythological narratives and representations of masculinity through to later romantic imaging of the Viking. Karl Spracklen's 'True Aryan Black Metal: The Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music', explores the tension between the black metal scene as a neo-tribe and Black metal as a site of construction of whiteness and white identity. The possibility of pursuing black metal and Satanism in the relative safety of online chat rooms as a leisure activity may lead to the odd dark giggle, but Spracklen finds fascinating insights into an under investigated world. Keith Kahn-Harris examines Jewish metal in 'How Diverse Should Metal Be? The Case of Jewish Metal' under the aspect of diversity within metal regarding to metal's increasing interest in location and national origin. Youth identification with metal has always been a strong feature of the scene and Andy Brown's

research in 'The Importance of Being 'Metal': The Metal Music Tabloid and Youth Identity Construction' argues that the media are very important to heavy metal culture and that metal magazines in particular offer a range of ways of accessing metal culture. Finally, Rebecca Forrest discusses the rarely seriously considered part groupies play(ed) in the construction of myth as well as persona of the metal or rock god in 'Mud Shark: Groupies and the Construction of the Heavy Metal Rock God'.

As with race, gender and identity, *Metal Politics and Metaethics* presents frequently discussed issues in heavy metal. Are all people who listen to heavy metal music extreme in their political attitude? Does the apparent immoral material in the metal scene enhance or damage the quality of the music? Scott Wilson provides a pan-European perspective of metal in 'From Forests Unknown: Eurometal and the Audio Political Unconscious'. Taking his starting point from Lordi's Eurovision victory, he claims that metal acts as a bearer of both a political and audio unconscious in which there could be located a political alternative to globalatinization. Laura Wiebe Taylor takes us back to the problems of race an identity covering the special case of Norway's black metal scene and claims that the racism inherent in the local scene cannot be understood independently and that it is an unfortunate amplification of mainstream racist views. It is striking that, although the number of female musicians and fans is growing, heavy metal still seems to be a place of displaying masculinity. Therefore, gender construction is an important field in metal research. Justin Davisson metal director of KZSU-FM radio in California, in his epic essay 'Extreme Politics and Extreme Metal: Strange Bedfellows or Fellow Travellers?' provides an overview on both aesthetic and ideological extremes in metal, featuring examples from the days of Slayer's 'Angel of Death' in the 1980's to the Norwegian Black Metal scene in the 1990's to the current strain of National Socialist Black Metal. But is metal interested in politics at all? Some would see it is typified by the a-political, yet Niall Scott in 'Politics? Nah.. Fuck Politics man! (What can we expect from metal Gods?) insists that even this is a voice worth paying attention to. He sees the metal scene as a continual argument, challenging and transforming, notably evident in performance, offering a philosophy and a politic of its own. Daniel Frandsen in 'Suicide, Booze and Loud Guitars: The Ethical Problem of Heavy Metal' examines the connection between heavy metal and unethical behaviour by means of comparing theories from Berys Gaunt, Matthew Kieran and Theodore Gracyk with the lyrics of the Finnish band Sentenced. Richard Floeckher argues in 'Fuck Euphemisms: How Heavy Metal Lyrics Speak the Truth about War and Oppression' and within the scene, that there seems to be a social control of anger. Floeckher states that heavy metal lends an angry and clearly critical voice to those whose voice goes unheard in the mainstream media quoting examples from bands like Black Sabbath, Slayer ad Marilyn Manson.

In *Metal: The Culture and the Music* Kathleen McAuley and Elizabeth Clendinning follow the myth of Cthulu and find many references to and quotes of Lovecraftian works ('The Call of Cthulu: Narrativity of the Cult in Metal'). Contemporary cries to war in battle metal and viking metal mythologies lead Imke von Helden on a voyage pillaging and ransacking the treasures found in this growing genre. The reception of Old Norse Mythology in terms of both lyrics and imagery in viking metal is dealt with in her chapter 'Barbarians and Literature: Viking Metal and its Links to Old Norse Mythology'. Sarah Chaker aims to answer questions like these in her qualitative field research 'Extreme Music for Extreme People (!?!): Black and Death Metal put to Test in a Comparative Empirical Study'. Dietmar Elflein provides an analysis of the musical language of heavy metal, with the main focus on rhythmic organisation and interplay in his chapter 'Slaying the Pulse: Rhythmic Organisation and Rhythmic Interplay within Heavy Metal'. His writing generates an informed moment of realisation into what makes metal *metal* rather than rock.

Ilgin Ayik, a violinist with the band Knight Errant and a music scholar, in 'Pentagram (Mezarkabul): Founders of Turkish Heavy Metal' present recent developments within the Turkish metal underground which grows steadily stronger. Her work provides a living musical analysis of the scene that Pierre Hecker describes in the following section. Finally, Joseph Blessin finds surprising parallels between 19th century operatic and modern rock performances in 'Parallax of Alexander Scriabin's Opera, *Mysterium* and Heavy Metal Performance: An Art Historical Perspective' on the basis of a lopsided relationship between performer and audience among others.

Filling the Global Metal Void is a tour through the phenomenon of metal across a range of cultures and in global context. It brings together elements of insight and critique in the preceding sections of this volume, but also gives us histories and documentation of metal in the far-flung corners of the scene. This is not just metal on the geographical edge, but also cultural edge. Cláudia Azevedo recapitulates the Brazilian history of heavy metal music on its way to mainstream culture and its fall back into the underground during the 1990s in 'Metal in Rio de Janeiro 1980s-2008: An Overview'. In 'Heavy Metal in a Muslim Context: The Rise of the Turkish Metal Underground', Pierre Hecker focuses on the emergence of rock and metal culture in Turkey in general and the problems musicians and fans experience in society fleshing out the context from which Ilgin Ayik's analysis of Mezarkabul's blend of traditional literature and music with heavy, thrash and progressive metal emerged in Turkey. Jeremy Wallach, writing in his area of metal expertise, investigates indigenous music scenes in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore in 'Distortion-drenched Utopias: Metal and Modernity in Southeast Asia'. He is interested in the relationship between music-based subcultures and politics, sources of social differences and constructions of

masculinity. Marcus Moberg takes us into the Christian, perhaps more utopian alternative subculture of Christian or white metal in 'Turn or Burn? The Peculiar Case of Christian Metal Music'. Perhaps not so peculiar at all, considering some of the well known bands and names featured in his work. The edition concludes on an important chapter 'Filling the Void: The Heavy Metal and Hard Core Punk Archiving Project' by Brian Hickam and Thomas Atwood opens up this section by examining the current state of source material availability and by reflecting strategies for the establishment of multi-lingual archives of heavy metal. The importance of a project such as this cannot be underestimated, considering the amount of narrative experience and eclectic material that is vital to the story of metal that could be lost to the abyss of time.

This conference was part of the *Critical Issues* conference series by Inter-Disciplinary.Net. *Critical Issues* is a forum to discuss key contemporary issues on an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary basis in order to encourage open and honest dialogue. One of the great strengths of this project is its connecting the work of senior scholars and new researchers from all over the world. There will be a hard cover edition focussing on a collection of extended chapters from the conference forthcoming.

PART 1

Metal Phenomenology and Metal Existentialism

Induction of the Devotee: Nile's Primal Ritual

Joseph C. Russo

Abstract

One of the primary expressions within metal involves the indulgence in ritual, not merely as a theme, but as a model for what the form itself is, or might become. The American group Nile's invocational and incantatory songs are striking examples of this potentiality, and this chapter will attempt to read these gestures via the phenomenology of ritual. Nile's primary mythopoetics tend towards invocations of ancient Egyptian gods. However, the content takes precedence over the thematic, for it structures the very execution of the performance. Within Nile's performance stands the latent unattainability of the ancient ritual, this incantatory/invocational vocal which Nile interchanges with the 'death metal vocal': this incantatory vocal conveys the unnamable through its obscuring of the clear meaning of language and by brutalizing language. On a limited level, we have statements, or more accurately, gateways, into the realization of various primal rituals. To delve further, however, we see that what is being conveyed *is* a kind of ritual of ritual itself: the strategies undertaken by Nile stand as an experiencing of the phenomenon that is not necessarily attached to the lyric/thematic. While the lyric details, for instance, the steps by which the sun god Ra exterminates the demon Apep, the experience of the sound itself is an assault that disrupts the normative auditory field and brutalizes the listener into a simultaneous active-submissive state, a flinging of oneself into the ritual.

Key Words: Ritual, induction, sound, performativity, phenomenology, mythopoetics, violence, queerness, negativity, language.

The phenomenon of metal stands as a gateway, for its many participants, into those realms of perception, which are otherwise veiled, thus, inaccessible. The cults that arise from the practice of metal are varied, although certain shared *performative* qualities and a specificity of tropes within the form can be said to exist. Primarily, the devotees, as it were, of these cultic groups, participate in similarly manifesting actions, which are both highly stylized and regulated. They ostensibly benefit from, and gain a specificity of knowledge through, these actions. The nature of the knowledge itself is certainly physiologically rooted, and can be said to emerge through the possibility of both physical, perception-shifting experience and the regulated stylizations and behaviours mentioned above. The actions themselves can certainly be read as *rituals*, and a discussion of

phenomenology & metal is most readily served by participating in that ritualized action which connects them. The pertinence of a possible phenomenological reading, or *phenomenological experiencing of sound* via specifically death metal, may find its origin in the endeavours of those who wish to explore the possibility of phenomenology creating a universal, dialectical method of 'unveiling' the phenomenon. That is, the action of connecting what is seen as the overarching function of phenomenology with a multitude of possibilities, through an engaging with the *multitude of possibility* itself. The phenomenological exploration of metal necessitates a *ritualistic approach*: the entire focus resides in its participating in the phenomenon, rather than primarily transcribing it. The specificity of this type of an exploration of the American group Nile requires the establishing of an experiential mode of critique. What must be reconciled are the apparent incongruities between Nile and their ostensible embodying of aspects of ancient Egypt. There stands the implication of possibly validating the performativity of a modern, western death metal band as more than only an empty performativity, and inherently false. Nile's dedication to the Egyptian Book Of The Dead stands as the virtual basis of their emergent expressions, as well as a significant portion of Nile's latest record, *Ithyphallic*, which equally dedicates its content to Lovecraftian mythos in the form of quotations from Donald Tyson's *Necronomicon: The Wanderings Of Alhazred*. An allowance for a commonality between possible modes of experience opens up a conceptual space; within this space, seemingly disparate ways of ritual-making draw from each other in a fruitful manner, as in the assertion of Tymieniecka that: 'The ontopoiesis of life indeed informs the complete edifice of the phenomenological endeavour underlying and founding all its spheres, laying down its primogenital field.' (Tymieniecka xvi)

Being that such an attempt is always challenged by the impossibility of the 'authentic' experience of the Egyptian ritual, what could be proposed is the re-conceptualization of an historical indeterminacy via a modern religious experience, namely, through the cultic ritual of Nile. What Nile conveys via ritual is not merely a restating or re-experiencing of the ancient ritual: the ritual, which is Nile's performance, involves an indulging in the dialogue in order to participate in this ritualized ritual. The Nile-ritual is realized alongside of, and within, this conveyance. The repetitive-gesture model of this ritual, and also the model which structures the genre, never authentically constitutes repetition. This concept of a completely de-stabilized repetition holds forth regardless of the mathematical, or rhythmic, model of repetition. That is not to say that the concept of measured, numerically articulated models of reading music-rituals, and numerical occurrences within the structuring of these rituals, becomes obsolete; it means that a repetition as such is never truly experienced by the 'perceiving' subject.

As Gilles Deleuze articulates in *Difference and Repetition*, the very act of the subject is itself de-stabilizing as a result of the perceptive qualities of the subject, which occur as conceptually placed within 'time', and are a result of perceptions that occur within that ostensible time-space. As Hegarty discusses in a Deleuzian exploration of noise/music, even if a kind of identity can be ascertained/expressed on the level of a musical articulation of singularity, it is always via some nuance of an established form, as with Nile's representation via the strategies of metal. That is to say, the so-called repetition is always temporally constituted, which implies a systemic ordering of reception that can never truly repeat. Therefore, the repetition is always a replica of itself: '...repetition displays identical elements which necessarily refer back to a latent subject which repeats itself through these elements, forming an 'other' repetition at the heart of the first.' (Deleuze 25) This 'rendering-other', or replication, is a result of repetition being formed only via the ostensible difference it manifests within the mind which observes it. So, each musical figure that connotes repetition is perceived within a dialogue where meaning is absent. Deleuze posits the possibility of a reversal from this process, in which the capacity for a meaningful loss of sensory perception can take place: 'the role of the imagination, or the mind which contemplates in this multiple and fragmented state, is to draw something new from repetition, to draw difference from it.' (76)

Nile's primary *mythopoeitics*, or the poetic content and figurations of the mythical narratives they use, tend towards invocations of ancient Egyptian gods and lesser figures of the Ogdoad/Ennead pantheons. However, the thematic content of the work cannot be the basis for our understanding of it. In the centre of much of the performance lies a kind of linguistic and aural '*pressing-forth*', the factors which characterize the method of ritual. Firstly, as with the genre of death metal (and, to an extent, all metal), there is a repetition, within the compositions, of aggressive tactics, which can convey a trance-inducing wall of aural violence. Furthermore, there stands the latently unattainable nature of the ancient ritual, which could be validated by the 'death metal vocal': the blast of deep, 'diaphragmic' growl, which characterizes the genre. That is to say, the incantatory vocal conveys the unnameable through its obscuring of the clear expressions of language, and by brutalizing language. This vocal method may be read as a poetic lamenting of the inadequacy of language, the futility of conveyance. This quality manifests as the avatar of Nile's ritualised voice. Often, the deep, brutalized vocal style manifests as the lyric enters into the explicitly '*performative*'. More specifically, within much of Nile's work, the vocalist deepens the resonance of his voice and more clearly enunciates as the song apprehends the thematic locus of the lyric. On a fundamental level, these incantations function as *gateways* into the realization of various primal rituals. However, what is being conveyed *is* a kind of ritual of ritual itself:

the strategies undertaken by Nile stand as an experiencing of the phenomenon that is not necessarily attached to the lyric/thematic. Alongside and above the lyric, an auditory brutalizing holds forth, which both *replicates* and *overwhelms* the lyric. While the lyric of 'Laying Fire Upon Apep' details, for instance, the steps by which the falcon-headed sun god Ra repeatedly exterminates the snake-demon Apep, the experience of the sound itself is an assault which disrupts the normative auditory field and brutalizes the listener into a simultaneous *active/submissive state*: both an active flinging of oneself into the ritual, and the being-rendered-passive at the hands of a subjugating aural force. Thus, the active-submissive experience of the listener of Nile can be conceptualized as a sort of inverse '*letting-be*', in a Heideggerian sense.

In addition to the aural components of blast and incantation, the locus of the lyric's 'pressing forth' emerges with the establishing of Aker, deification of the horizon, banishing and 'condemning' the demon Apep to the flames. As the god of the horizon, traditionally represented by a thin border book-ended by two outward-facing lions, Aker is designating an ordered space, and limiting Apep's inhabitable space to the night/underworld, as this is the time of Apep's nightly, cyclic battle with Ra. As guardian of passage to the Egyptian underworld, Aker determines the hierarchical systems between gods and demons via his control over liminality. Apep must remain in the space; where Ra is free to pass through. The 'pressing forth' then, is conceptualized as an isolating force, which is followed by a cataloguing of the methods of execution upon Apep: 'Ra maketh thee to burn...Ra pierceth thy head...he cutteth through thy face...Ra melteth thine countenance...the god Aker hath condemned thee to the flames...' (From *Ithyphallic*, Nuclear Blast). The manner in which the sound is conveyed ritualizes this listening: rendering it simultaneously invocation, instruction, and death rite. In another song: 'Papyrus Containing The Spell To Preserve Its Possessor Against Attacks From He Who Is In The Water', the aural components are again the foundation by which the lyric presses forth. That is not to say that the sound somehow 'compliments' the lyric; rather, the sound is the literal weapon, that in which the lyric is enmeshed. In this instance, what is occurring can be read as a kind of preventative measure: the blast of metal supports and overwhelms the lyric's malediction of the crocodile-beasts, servants of Set. As the vocal states: 'Be driven back, Crocodile, thou spawn of Set...Move not by means of thy tail...Work not thy feet and legs...Open not thy mouth...Let the water which is before thee...Turn into a consuming fire...' (*Ithyphallic*). As the language curses the beasts, the blast of sound physically drives them, and the listener, back, thus illustrating the 'active' component of this active-submissive state through the incarnation of an aural weapon. The sound operates on the behalf of its conveyor: it constitutes the avatar of the linguistic spell-ritual. The Cthulhu mythos, as

with many death metal bands, stands as another primary source of poetic expression for Nile. The image of the primary deity Cthulhu, buried in the sunken city of R'lyeh, stands as an avatar of potentiality within these expressions, the potential and inevitability for an unleashing of disruptive, chaotic power. In the Nile song 'What Can Be Safely Written', a hierarchy of *liminality* is again used. In this instance, it is the being Yog-Sothoth, the Lurker at the Threshold, represented by a multitude of spheres or orbs of light, who stands as the mediator of passage between this world and R'lyeh. It is via Yog-Sothoth that the ritual opens up and through its power that Cthulhu can be accessed. Nile's apprehending of this expression again manifests through and alongside of the ritualized sound, described above. Perhaps the question that remains, quite simply, is why? How can the original components of these metal-rituals be understood? How are we to read the conveyance of these metal-rituals: through what lens? It would be relevant to attempt a pinpointing of what impetuses launch these rituals into action, what conceptually enables a phenomenological discussion of metal through its rituals.

Ronald Bogue, in his article 'Becoming Metal, Becoming Death', maintains that death metal is the result of hyper-masculinised expression, resulting in a form created by men to embody and to satisfy what Bogue describes as a hetero-normative maleness. In the section of his article in which the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of '*becoming-woman*' is discussed, Bogue posits that no such process is undertaken by death metal primarily because those who create the work, as well as those who listen to it, are predominantly male. This conceptualization does not acknowledge the implication inherent within Deleuze and Guattari, in that women, as such, are not what is referenced in the term. Socially constructed notions of femininity do not figure explicitly into this reading. The becoming-woman described in their work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, is a conceptual moment which embraces *unstable, multiple* femininity, as contrastive to the *static, singular* representations of masculinity. This can be read as a similar, although variant manifestation of the *arborescent/rhizomatic* opposition, in which those conceptual manifestations that are inherently unstable (becoming-woman, rhizomes) can be read as productive, even vital to existence. So, a becoming-woman in metal would imply a necessary component, a *threshold*, in reaching towards a becoming; it would be constituted by acts which allow for multiple engagements, enacted by beings whose selves are perpetually operating within states of flux. That is, the act of becoming never ends with a final transformation: rather, the '*becoming*' discussed here is the nature of this ever-shifting, dynamic force. A subject, as such, never reaches itself in the traditional definition of a becoming which ends with the transformed, fixed subject. The result is the opening of possibility, not the end of possibility. Therefore, the condition of death metal as a predominantly male

form would not, in this reading, automatically nullify the conceptual possibility within those actions.

The aforementioned concept of the active-submissive state created by the ritual-phenomenon of metal, I would argue, actually constitutes and reproduces a moment by which a becoming-woman is certainly possible, in the sense that the combination of results from this experience reveals and nurtures a dynamic, fluxed perception. However, the term may be more properly understood as a *'becoming-queer'*, for the purposes within this exploration. What is important to understand primarily, in this reading, is that the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of an identification as 'queer' is also not meant as an explicit, normative gesture, although it includes this possibility. What is implied, rather, is that a *'de-territorialization'* of the *static, hierarchized* system known as 'sexuality' is given the possibility to take place through strategic *'lines of flight'*, re-conceptualisations of desire. Within the metal-ritual, what Bogue sees as hyper-masculinised expression cannot be functionally read as therefore hyper-normative, or hetero-normative. Indeed, the metal-ritual, within virtually all of its manifestations (i.e. the aesthetic physical appearances of its participants, the erotically overwrought and resonant physiological results of aural assault, the overarching aesthetic of a proposed alternative to normative maleness, the focus of the lyric upon the radical re-configuring of the body) seeks to establish what should be read as a specifically *'other'* bond between its male subjects: the actuality of a form ostensibly, according to Bogue, created 'by men, for men', has an exclusivity that both 'queers' it within normative expressions of maleness and male-bonding, and opens up possibilities of conceptualization. Although metal is arguably not an exclusively male form, as such, males certainly utilize its constructions in a heavily regulated, stylized manner, with regard to the aesthetics of metal that frames its behavioural modes. The female's participation is often, but not always, read within a reductive mode; she is either regulated to the role of the 'groupie' or, if her participation extends into the creative aspect of the form, is treated as a fluke. What constantly re-surfaces is what is often pejoratively referred to as a 'boy's club', in which the metal-rituals we are discussing are silently assumed as the property and the construction of its male constituents. The irony within these actions stems from the concept that within metal, a basic template of appearance exists that is distinctly female. The archetypal metal-head, as it were, inscribes images upon his body that re-appropriate and disrupt normative images of maleness, ostensibly hearkening back to pre-Christian representations, to the romanticized aesthetic image of the longhaired heathen raider, for instance. This aspect, while perhaps appearing incidental, is actually one of the main sites of protest within the form and is certainly a means by which the participants of the metal-ritual gain access to its dialogue. Furthermore, we can even read the elaborately made-up visage of 'corpse-paint' as an

ostensibly non-normative representation of maleness. That is, these images of make-up on the male body are, in a sense, hijacking what is distinctly female (in the Western tradition) and re-appropriating it for a totally different aim, wherein sexual appeal transforms, or perhaps, is augmented, to the level of a paranormal, ghostly, and threatening appeal. Overall, the physical aesthetic of metal creates a male image born of what is largely considered uncomfortably non-male. Within this reading, the aural assault that emerges through the form of metal can be said to create a ritual that bonds its participants in a manner that is distinctly aberrant from normative forms. That is, the assault itself is the source of this aberrance, it is a sound that is markedly different from the explorations of a music that is meant to soothe, for instance. The assault is welcomed: it is the aim of the form, and as discussed, is beneficial with regard to the discussion of metal-as-ritual. The ‘*active-submissive state*’ which has been mentioned, can be said to exist primarily for the *benefit of the body*, and can certainly be understood as a kind of male-to-male acting-upon the body; an acting-upon which simultaneously physiologically oppresses and empowers its subject, subjugating and arousing it. What must be accentuated is that the reading of these concepts as queer is different than a reading of its subjects as homosexuals. Although there are certainly homosexuals within the tradition, whose presences arguably allow for the specific basis of this argument, what is being pinpointed here is an overarching function that seeks to actively distance itself from the normative, at all costs. The effect, with regard to maleness, inherently *problematizes normativity*. This is where queerness can be apprehended, within what constitutes the metal-ritual as a distinctive action. The manifestations that occur within the metal-ritual, in their creation of exclusivity, and as a result of the specificities of this exclusivity, can be said to mirror the function of Aker or Yog-Sothoth, controllers of the liminal. These manifestations are the thresholds through which our phenomenological exploration of metal passes.

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What is This That Stands Before Me? Metal as Deixis

Nicola Masciandaro

Abstract

Metal holds an essential relation to the phenomenology of deixis, a relation modeled in the opening scene of metal's originary song, Black Sabbath's 'Black Sabbath,' in which indication is dramatized as pointing back on itself towards the one who indicates in such a way that the negativity of the question is restored to the negativity of the subject—the mystery, finitude, and acontextuality of their being—as its first and final ground. Neither a refusal of signification nor an attempt to signify, metal is a deictic art or indication production that points to the presence of its own pointing. Metal utilizes significant forms (music, words) and digests whole discourses expressly for this purpose, neither to express nor not to express things with them, but to make and indicate the making of the sonic fact of their expression into a significance preceding and exceeding all they could express.

Key Words: Deixis, indication, signification, presence, facticity, negation, questioning, ecstasy, negativity, sound, apophasis.

Suppose someone hears an unknown sign, like the sound of some word which he does not know the meaning of; he wants to know what it is . . . [this] is not love for the thing he does not know but for something he knows, on account of which he wants to know what he does not know.¹

[T]he significance of the *This* is, in reality, a *Not-this* that it contains; that is, an essential negativity. . . . The problem of being—the supreme metaphysical problem—emerges from the very beginning as inseparable from the problem of the significance of the demonstrative pronoun, and for this reason it is always already connected with the field of indication . . . *Deixis*, or indication . . . is the category within which language refers to its own taking place.²

[T]he work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there. We could say that the work of art signifies an increase in being.³

Were I medieval rather than a medievalist, my chapter would perform a heretical allegorical exegesis of the opening of Black Sabbath's 'Black Sabbath' as the appearance of Heavy Metal itself, personified by the mysterious figure who, escaping identification, points to the one who sees it, to *me*: 'What is this that stands before me? / Figure in black which points at me.'⁴ Here metal, its authenticity or self-authorization emblemized by the tautological terms of artist, song, and album, would signify an event unveiling the negativity of the mystery of oneself, the unbelievable brutality of the fact that one is, as the original evil of the world. So metal's very advent, an unpredictable/anticipated revelation of a more profound origin, would constitute a messianic opening—think Sabbath's mystical fifth member—toward a world beyond this negativity, the experiential space for its seizure and sublimation. The lovely heresy of this reading is its flirting with refusal of the divine 'gift' of individuated being and its undermining of the impotent Judeo-Christian explanation for what is wrong with everything in terms of a collision between demonic and human agency, in short, Eve. This move, moreover, my medieval alter-ego would discover, is proportionally traced in the fate of Black Sabbath's 'Evil Woman,' a too-pop cover-song reluctantly recorded and released as their debut single with Sabbath's own 'Wicked World' on side B, included in the UK release of the first album, replaced with 'Wicked World' in the US release by Warner Bros., and since forgotten by a metal tradition which generally understands that the *problem* is not something in particular but world itself, the whole ungraspable fact of our being in what stands before us.⁵ Or, as expressed in the following *catena* (a medieval exegetical device) from Bolt Thrower's *The IVth Crusade*: 'Insignificance is our existence . . . No escape, there is no way out . . . Existing in the present which surely cannot last . . . Lost on a voyage with no destiny . . . Our futile lives shall be no more . . . Just isn't how you planned . . . To survive we must comply . . . Faced by this total stranger . . . Take me far away—deep within the dream . . . Open our mind before it's too late.'⁶

Instead, I will pursue a similar argument in a different idiom, namely, that metal holds an essential relation to the phenomenology of deixis, a relation modeled in the opening scene of metal's originary song wherein indication is dramatized as pointing back on itself towards the one who indicates in such a way that the negativity of the question is restored to the negativity of the subject—the mystery, finitude, and acontextuality of their being—as its first and final ground.⁷ As an expression of the experiential structure of metal, of what metal first feels like, this scene shows metal as founded on an ecstatic experience of deixis's essential negativity and so suggests that metal finds itself, becomes and stays metal, as an insistent performance of the fact that we encounter things, the real presence of the *this*, only through negation. At the level of language, the negativity of deixis,

following Hegel and his commentators, is structured by the unutterability of the singular, by the fact that when we say *this*, a sign whose significance is wholly constituted by the contextual instance of its own event, what is said is in fact a *not-this*, a universal which annuls the singularity of what is meant.⁸ What makes deixis work, then, what enables its function in discourse, is that it says by not saying, and more precisely, that it negates its own inability to signify by speaking language, that is, by referring to the actual event of our being in language, in the same manner that ‘I’ means ‘the one who is saying “I”’.⁹ The negativity of deixis thus resolves to a deeper auto-deixis, its pointing to itself. And it is on this principle that the aesthetic empire of metal is built. This means that metal, being like all music something between language and art, discourse and making, is located at the intersection between the phenomena described in my last two epigraphs, that it takes place at the point where language’s referring to its own taking place joins with art’s presencing of what it refers to. Neither a refusal of signification nor an attempt to signify, metal is a deictic art or indication production that *points to the presence of its own pointing*. The ecstatic potential of such deictic self-presencing, literalized in the metalhead’s tensionally vibrating devil horns, is explicable via George Bataille’s definition of ecstasy as ‘the opposite of a response of a desire to know’, which traces a dialectical movement parallel to the opening of Black Sabbath’s ‘Black Sabbath’:

*The object of ecstasy is the absence of an outside answer.
The inexplicable presence of man is the answer the will
gives itself, suspended in the void of unknowable night.*¹⁰

In tune with this pattern, the exuberance of metallic deixis is a bearing forth of the abundance of its own presence, via qualitative and quantitative sonic plenitudes, into the absence of what it would indicate, an aesthetic production or actual making of precisely what can never be pointed to but which deixis, prior to and as the basis of all signification, always does: its own facticity, the fact *that* it is.¹¹

What makes metal deictic in this deeper way? How does it produce the presence of its own *that*? The simple and essential answer is noise, which metal fashions, not as such, but in and out of the significative structures of instrumental and vocal forms. So metal traces its circle of aural experience with a compass constructed from the two points of the unknown or unintelligible sonic sign: sound as the sign of an unknown *event* (something happening, capable of being shown and witnessed—*what was that?*) and sound as the sign of an unknown *meaning* (something being said, capable of being understood and interpreted—*what did he say?*), with the fluid boundary between them being marked by the scream. These two forms of significative noise are the magnetic poles of a being-with-music that, in keeping with

Augustine's analysis of our experience of unknown signs cited above, instantaneously and continuously draws forth the *will* to know, our *what is this?*, while feeding the will solely and purely with its own inexorable dense presence, where *it* now means the phenomenon or event happening in the 'third area' of reality between subject and object, here nameable as the metalhead's willing of metal, the becoming-metal of his own head.¹² Wrestling with and against its own indication, in love with the sign as its fiercest enemy, metallic deixis is a noisy semiotic struggle to make itself what it points to. Before all signification or making of points, before all themes and purposes, metal indicates via the negativity of the unknown sign *that it is* indicating, that it is happening as indication. Indeed, metal utilizes significative forms (music, words) and digests whole discourses expressly for this purpose, neither to express nor not to express things with them, but to make and indicate the making of the sonic fact of their expression into a *significance preceding and exceeding all they could express*. From this perspective, metal's conceptual commitment to negative themes (death, apocalypse, void, etc.) is an absolute aesthetic necessity, ensuring that insofar as metal does signify beyond itself, that this beyond only expose metal's own inexplicability as significative event. Facticity emerges, is made present through metallic deixis the way it usually does, through suspension of the *what*, a suspension which belongs more generally to the experience of wonder, where not knowing *what* a thing is leaves us caught, fixed before the fact *that* it is. In this, metal bears an important relation to the avant-garde sublime, as explicated by Lyotard in relation to painting: 'The paint, the picture as occurrence or event, is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to witness. . . . The avant-gardist attempt inscribes the occurrence of a sensory now as what cannot be presented and which remains to be presented in the decline of 'great' representational painting.'¹³ But what distinguishes metal within this relation is that metal achieves its sensory self-inscription not by standing apart from representational tradition (a move more proper to the avant-garde as such) but by wholly investing in it, by locating itself as a beyond *within* representation, within musical and linguistic form. Metal achieves itself as such a beyond not simply by simultaneously signifying and not signifying (a domain more proper to conceptual and ironic art), but more 'naïvely' and desperately by *signifying through the very refusal to signify*. Noisiness constitutes this refusal as sound's return from significance back towards itself.

For instrumental sound, the noisiness of metallic deixis means sound's becoming substantial, dense, elemental, a thing and hence 'no longer' possibly the sound *of* something happening, nor the sound *of* music, but a happening in and of itself. As captured in its own weighty generic term, heavy metal takes sonic substantiality to its aesthetic limit: the reality of sound so loud it can hurt, the fantasy of sound so solid it can kill. Whence

Doom, or, drowning under quaking mountains of sound: ‘Shockwaves rattle the Earth below with hymn of doom’ (Sleep, ‘From Beyond,’ *Sleep’s Holy Mountain*). Thrash, or, hacking and being hacked to bits with finely ground axes of sound: ‘The only way to exit / Is going piece by piece’ (Slayer, ‘Piece by Piece,’ *Reign in Blood*). Death, or, being disembowled from within by chthonic rumblings of sound: ‘We’re turned inside out / Beyond the piercing cries’ (Obituary, ‘Turned Inside Out,’ *Cause of Death*). Black, or, freezing to death in infernal ice wastes of sound: ‘We are fucking ice’ (Imperial Crystalline Entombment, ‘Astral Frost Invocation,’ *Apocalyptic End in White*).

For vocal sound, the noisiness of metallic deixis means sound’s becoming self, the embodied being of the one to whom voice belongs and hence ‘no longer’ the sound *of* being, nor the sound *of* language, but a being in and of itself. This may be understood as an inversion of the usual experiential relation between voice and language, whereby voice *disappears* via articulation into language and thus stands *behind* the word, informing it. In the metal lyric, voice *appears* via disarticulation from language and thus stands *between* us and the word, interfering with it.¹⁴ Accordingly, metal vocals, especially of the black and death variety, are capable of producing the experience of hearing the word detached from vocal intentionality, the word as unsaid by the one who speaks, as exemplified by the self-indicating word of the demonically possessed: ‘Jesus then asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him’(Luke 8:30).¹⁵ Opening a space between sound and meaning where voice *teems* (cf. *legion* [*legio*, *λεγιών*] as simultaneously noun and name, both and neither), metal vocals similarly produce voice as a singular multiplicity, so that rather than hearing words spoken by voice (the one in the many), we hear voice spoken by words (the many in the one).¹⁶ Vocal metallic deixis is the inside-out voice of a linguistic self-possession indicating the presence of what it says in the being who speaks. Thinking the metal vocal auto-deictically in these terms, as intensifying the presence of its producer such that (following Gadamer) the vocal does not merely speak something because what it speaks is actually there, in other words, as voice as *possessed* by what it says, coordinates with Agamben’s ontological understanding of the negativity of deixis as grounded in the removal or dispossession of the voice: ‘that which is removed each time in speaking, *this*, is the voice. . . . ‘Taking-the-*This*’ and ‘Being-the-*there*’ are possible only through the experience of the Voice, that is, the experience of the taking place of language in the removal of the voice.’¹⁷ What the metal vocal enacts, then, is something like the return of the voice in vengeance against the event of language as what negates it and thus a repossession of the voice as ontic exponent, a pure will to signify.¹⁸

This reading of metal as deixis indicates, moreover, an important relation between metal and apophatic mysticism as a discourse-praxis

radically invested in the experiential possibilities of actuality or the *that*. As captured by the Vedantic formula *neti neti* (not this, not this), the apophatic mystic deictically negates all presences in affirmation and realization of a divine Beyond. In the fourteenth-century *Cloud of Unknowing*, for instance, the contemplative ‘treads all things down full far under the cloud of forgetting’ and through a most intense psychic suffering of sorrow ‘that he is’ arrives at a divine ravishment defined as ‘that joy which robs one of all knowing and feeling of one’s being.’¹⁹ Metal practices a different but symmetrical and thus potentially complementary craft with the same tool, held by the other end, as it were: metal deictically *negates all absences* in affirmation and realization of itself as a Beyond.²⁰ This does not mean affirming the presence of what is absent or denying the absence of what is present. It means, quite simply, denying the absent, negating what is not present. But how does one *deictically* negate an absence, something that is not *there* to be indicated in the first place? How can deixis instrumentalise denial of what is not evident? Metallic deixis accomplishes this the only way it can be accomplished, by pointing to something absent in a manner that denies that there is anything to be pointed *to*, that is, by simultaneously pointing and denying that one is *pointing*, by pointing in denial of pointing’s *significance*. In these terms, deixis is the essential mechanism of metal’s frequently appreciated Nietzschean spirit, as a self-liberating movement away from all possibility of an outside towards which the world is ordered yet therefore also a movement which both remains in contact with the outside as impossible—‘God is dead’—and loves to forget that contact in the midst of its own presence. Metal’s universal symbol, the sign of the horns, perfectly embodies this movement, pointing to what it negates and refuses, devilishly asserting itself as the divinity it denies, all the while signifying little more than *metal* per se. Or as Behemoth sing it: ‘Rise thy horns / For I’m at one with the dark / Divine presence ascends / Touching the forehead ov god’ (Behemoth, ‘Horns Ov Baphomet,’ *Zos Kia Cultus (Here and Beyond)*, Avantgarde Music, 2002). Metal-as-deixis is this touch, the rebellious appropriation of all significance for the irreducible event of its indication, as if the sign, forced to point back upon its own primal presence, would disclose a transcendent anti-ontotheological tautology, a heretically divine human tetragrammaton (I am who I am). So Nietzsche’s Zarathustra says: ‘For me—how could there be something outside me? There is no outside! But we forget this with all sounds; how lovely it is that we forget!’ And the animals reply: ‘In every Instant being begins; round every Here rolls the ball. There. The middle is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity.’²¹ Forgetting that there is no outside, a special virtue of sonic experience, is not an enchanting illusion that there is an outside, but more simply and purely a suspension of the burden of consciousness that there is *no outside*, a putting down of the labour of negation, and hence an opening towards real experience of the

principle, understood by Agamben, that ‘the root of all pure joy and sadness is *that* the world is as it is.’²²

Notes

¹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, J E Rotelle (trans), New City Press, New York, 1997, X.1.2.

² G Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, K E Pinkhaus and M Hardt (trans), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991, pp. 14-25.

³ H Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, R Bernasconi (ed), N Walker (trans), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 35.

⁴ Black Sabbath, ‘Black Sabbath,’ *Black Sabbath*, Warner Bros, 1970.

⁵ On ‘Evil Woman,’ see P Wilkinson, *Rat Salad: Black Sabbath, The Classic Years, 1969-1975*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2006, pp. 37, 48-9, 52.

⁶ Bolt Thrower, *The IVth Crusade*, Earache Records, 1992.

⁷ Cf. ‘From a logical point of view, the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being either this or that. It has the structure of a question. And just as the dialectical negativity of experience culminates in the idea of being perfectly experienced—i.e., being aware of our finitude and limitedness—so also the logical form of the question and the negativity that is part of it culminate in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing’ (H Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, J Weinsheimer and D G Marshall (trans), 2nd ed, Continuum, New York, 1994, p. 362).

⁸ As Hegel explains, ‘the sensuous This that is meant *cannot be reached* by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal. In the actual attempt to say it, it would therefore crumble away; those who started to describe it would not be able to complete the description, but would be compelled to leave it to others, who would themselves finally have to admit to speaking about something which *is not*’ (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶110, cited from *The Hegel Reader*, S Houlgate (ed), Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p.85). Ferrarin comments: ‘By saying ‘this,’ ‘now,’ consciousness experiences the universality of language. The singular is only opined or meant [*gemeint*] because all singulars can be indicated as a ‘this’ or a ‘now.’ The ‘this’ is ‘neither this nor that, a *not-this*.’ In other words, the ‘this’ cannot be identified positively with a singular spatiotemporal given; it abides as a constant in the vanishing of its being referred to. In sum, it is not an immediacy but a negation; the this is the negative proxy (demonstrative pronoun) for each singular given’ (A Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 182-3). Cf. ‘The force and truth of language negate and pass beyond the singularity of the meant, a

sheer sensuous Being, and thus raise it to the conceptual universality of the uttered or expressed. Language will thus annul the singularity that meaning intends to express with it' (T A Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999, p.108).

⁹As D Heller-Roazen, commenting on Agamben, explains: 'Agamben argues that an analysis of the potentiality of language . . . leads to a solution, or more precisely, dissolution of the aporia of self-reference. 'The name can be named and language can be brought to speech,' we read in 'Pardes,' Agamben's essay on Derrida . . . 'because self-reference is displaced onto the level of potentiality; what is intended is neither word as object nor the word insofar as it *actually* denotes a thing but, rather, a pure potential to signify (and not to signify) . . . But this is not longer meaning's self-reference, a sign's signification of itself; instead it is the materialization of a potentiality, the materialization of its own possibility.' Hence the significance, for Agamben, of those parts of language whose connotative value can be determined only on the basis of their relation to an event of language . . . At issue in each case are parts of speech that, in themselves, bear no meaning; they are capable of functioning in discourse only because they suspend their own incapacity to signify and, in this way, refer to an actual event of language. . . . We have seen that Agamben's analysis of potentiality leads to the recognition that actuality is nothing other than the self-suspension of potentiality, the mode in which Being can *not* not be. The same suspension must be said of the potentiality constitutive of language: like all potentiality, it is not effaced but rather fulfilled and completed in the passage to actuality' (G Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, D Heller-Roazen (ed & trans), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 20).

¹⁰ G Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, F Botting and S Wilson (eds), Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, p. 45. Cf. 'Being is dying by loving' (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, 6th ed., 3 vols, Sufism Reoriented, San Francisco, 1973, I.29).

¹¹ Amy Hollywood explains the relationship between facticity, its specific form in the arbitrariness of identity, and Bataille's understanding of ecstasy: 'Bataille not only questions the meaning of his own existence and that of human existence (why live in the face of death?) but also continually brings himself face to face with the sheer contingency of his own existence *as the individual he himself is*. Chance is the hook on which existence falls. It is without meaning and offers no answer other than its own sheer facticity. The abruptness and impudence of this facticity, the absence of response in the response, is/engenders ecstasy' ('Bataille and Mysticism: A 'Dazzling Dissolution', *Diacritics*, vol. 26, 1996, pp. 74-85). Cf. 'The burning corpse of god shall keep us warm in the doom of howling winds / For we are a race from beyond the wanderers of night' (Xasthur, 'Doomed by Howling Winds,'

Xasthur, Moribund Records, 2006), i.e. facticity as heat transfer from absence to presence.

¹² '[This] topology . . . has always been known to children, fetishists, 'savages,' and poets. It is in this 'third area' that a science of man truly freed of every eighteenth-century prejudice should focus its study. Things are not outside us, in measurable external space, like neutral objects (*ob-jecta*) of use and exchange; rather, they open to us the original place solely from which the experience of measurable external space becomes possible. They are therefore held and comprehended from the outset in the *topos outopos* (placeless place, no-place place) in which our experience of being-in-the-world is situated. The question 'where is the thing?' is inseparable from the question 'where is the human?'" (G Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, R L Martinez (trans), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 59).

¹³ J Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant Garde,' Lisa Liebmann (trans), in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, A Benjamin (ed), Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 93, 103.

¹⁴ Cf. 'what is common to most death, doom, and black metal is the anti-melodic, non-natural treatment of the voice If, as Deleuze and Guattari assert, 'the first musical operation' is 'to machine the voice' [*Thousand Plateaus*, B Massumi (trans), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, p. 303], that is, to deterritorialize the voice from its ordinary, 'natural' speaking function, then death, doom, and black vocalists are fundamentally—indeed, primarily—musical in their anti-lyrical non-singing, in that their growls, screams and grunts simply push music's de-naturalization of the speaking voice to extremes' (R Bogue, 'Violence in Three Shades of Metal: Death, Doom, and Black,' chapter 3 of *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics*, Ashgate, Burlington, VT, 2007, pp. 45-6).

¹⁵ Eugene Thacker has explored the shared phenomenology of the Gerasene demoniac's plural name and black metal vocals in his analysis of sonic swarms, 'Pulse Demons,' *Culture Machine*, vol. 9, 2007, <<http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk>>.

¹⁶ Cf. 'the demons blaspheme the theological relation between the One and the Many. What is noteworthy here is that the demons first announce their presence through voice. We are not told whether the infamous answer 'Legion' (more commonly translated as 'I am legion') is uttered in chorus or as a single voice. The word 'legion' itself denotes some sort of an organized quasi-military unit, and thus a more rigid, disciplined mode of organization. But it is spoken – or rather, 'resounded.' We might even imagine that Jesus hears this demonic swarm before it is seen. But in fact, *it is never seen as such*. For, during the exorcism, the demonic swarm is immediately and

invisibly transferred to a herd of swine. The iconography of the passage is striking—the true nature of the demons, we presume, is revealed by the choice of their receptacle in a herd of ‘dumb,’ lowly animals. But, throughout the parable, the only real indication we have of a swarm of demons is this enigmatic resounding of the word ‘Legion’ (Eugene Thacker, ‘Pulse Demons’). So metal is symbolically invested/infested with swaromic self-images, e.g. ‘Howling our metal we light up the world, / And the banner of Ungol is proudly unfurled. / Raising our legion, and now you belong, / And the point of the blade will be screaming our song’ (Cirith Ungol, ‘Join the Legion,’ *Paradise Lost*, Restless Records, 1991). On the horde-concept in Black Metal, via Darwin, Freud, and Deleuze, see Valter, ‘Horde,’ *Documents* <<http://surrealdocuments.blogspot.com/2008/05/horde.html>>.

¹⁷ G Agamben, *Language and Death*, pp. 32-3.

¹⁸ Cf. Agamben reading of Augustine’s analysis of the experience of the dead and/or unknown word: ‘[Augustine] isolates an experience of the word in which it is no longer mere sound (*istas tres syllabus*) and it is not yet meaning, but the *pure intention to signify*. This experience of an unknown word (*verbum incognitum*) in the no-man’s-land between sound and signification, is, for Augustine, the amorous experience as a will to knowledge: the *intention to signify without a signified* corresponds, in fact, not to logical understanding, but to the desire for knowledge’ (*Language and Death*, pp. 33-4, my emphasis). Agamben’s ‘intention to signify without a signified’ intersects with the structure of metallic deixis.

¹⁹ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, P J Gallacher (ed), Western Michigan University Press, Kalamazoo, MI, 1997, 43.1520, 44.1557, 44.1560-1, my translation.

²⁰ Wormed’s explanation of the their first album literalizes this movement vis-à-vis space: ‘WORMED is a mental state in which the human being dwells inside this immense universe, like a small ‘worm’ inside an ‘intestine,’ (the Universe). And how he feels when realizes that he cannot get outside of it. The necessity of crossing to beyond, something as being caught in a pre-dimension. It isn’t anything material, it is simply a way of naming a deep human emotion, we call this feeling WORMED. All lyrics concept [*sic*] in ‘Floating Cadaver in the Monochrome’ explain the ‘chapters’ of this confused space and what [*sic*] this space can compress all dimensions in one to create a hole in the universe. The Geodesic Dome is the ‘ne plus ultra’ point in space that is able to make that dimension portal. . . . This is only the concept of the MCD ‘Floating Cadaver in the Monochrome.’ WORMED’s brand new full-length will be the threshold to this dimension’ (<<http://www.wormed.net/concept.htm>>).

²¹ F Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, A Del Caro (trans), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, ‘The Convalescent,’ p. 175. Nietzsche’s

characterization of Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo* is most relevant with regard to apophasis: 'The psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra is how he that says No and *does* No to an unheard-of degree, to everything to which one has so far said Yes, can nevertheless be the opposite of 'No-saying spirit' (*Ecce Homo*, 'Thus Spake Zarathustra,' ch.6, cited from *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, W Kaufman (trans & ed), Vintage, New York, 1967, p. 306).

²² G Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Michael Hardt (trans), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 90, my emphasis.

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Fire Walk with Me: Dwelling in the Lodge of Differentiation

Jamerson Maurer

Abstract

'Wold embraces the Mytho Poetic; the communication is expressed through our music, and theoretical as well as practical work done through our Woldclan brotherhood and our lodge, the L.O.T.M.P. [Lodge of the Mytho Poetic]' (Wold, album booklet, 'L.O.T.M.P.) Despite the structural 'order' within (perhaps) any musical expression, there are always moments of rupture, of evasion & invisibility lurking in the soundspace, *ontoastral* shadows painting the caverns of our corporeality. This is particularly true of metal, whose aesthetic as well as narrative expressions often embrace the 'dark' and philosophically 'negative' & conceptually *-negating* space(s) of the lived-experience. This concept of an underlying 'Order' of space & reality - of an 'Order-ing' of space, time & object - is a central notion to many explorations within Phenomenology, from Merleau-Ponty's 'pre-reflective cogito' to Tymieniecka's conceptualization of an 'ontopoiesis' within consciousness or 'Logos of Life.' As such, the central kernel ruminating in these trajectories of phenomenological (& ontological) thought is fertile terrain for metal, particularly black-metal, to conceptually germinate through their poetic expressions. It is my contention that these dynamic, perpetually shifting shadows of sound & perception, existing as they do *in* momentary possibilities manifesting in space & time as *illusions of objective form*, represent significant phenomenological & ontological problems with the very notion of 'Order' itself.

The music of Wold is inexorably woven into a *ontopoietic* space; not in the sense theorized by Tymieniecka, but rather as the conceptual space born-from the zone of differentiation between the ontological datum informing the poetic expression & that expression itself. This space effectively functions as a 'lodge' within-whose walls differentiation manifests in perpetuity. The human, in that now-mediated space of the 'lodge,' again reacts to & impacts/imprints its surroundings, all-the-while those surroundings themselves are mediating the body(s) marking it. Such is the conceptual structure in this particular notion of *ontopoiesis*, in which the ontological component exists & evolves through the poetic expression, while that expression itself is the creative/constructive mediation of the ontological kernel(s) themselves. This specific conceptualization of *ontopoiesis*, then, identifies the human not as a static body, but rather as a conceptual structure in a consistent flux of differentiation, as *ontocorporeal* shadows traversing the space of the 'lodge.'

I propose exploring the band Wold & the way in which Language in the 'lodge' is effectively hijacked; the signs, & thus signification, function not as

interiorised kernels of datum, transmitted for either linguistic or phenomenological preservation - the effective transmission of 'information' - but rather as an Artaudian Language, the Language of a Theater of Cruelty, in which signification exists on the Physiological/Corporeal (rather than 'Logical') level. This hijacking-of-Language (in which 'Language' is a primordial physio-encounter) & thus of signification as such within the Phenomenological field, in effect perpetually transforms 'words' into linguistic bodies-without-organs, static-objects find themselves now ruptured, now burning & burnt, (re) born into so-many Phoenix, the shadows of signs haunting a soundspace, only pausing to configure themselves into illusions of clarity.

I believe that the ontophysiological condition exists within Wold (and, perhaps generally, 'death metal' itself) through a poiesis of *ontoaural* possibilities - in the summoning & establishment of a soundspace that fundamentally impacts & indeed modifies & alters the physiological subject. The implications germinating within such poietic projects have significant import in Phenomenology, particularly to the various strands of thought regarding the/a 'Order' underlying 'Perception' itself & the objects constituting 'reality,' for if those static-objects, interiorised in a striated space, are in fact hijacked-vehicles, machines flying 'off the grid' (in a signficatory sense), into the 'lodge' & its smooth spaces of possibilities, the very illusion or concept of Order (of Order-ing) is itself fundamentally problematised.

Key Words: Wold, Twin Peaks, Lynch, Deleuze, Artaud, Merleau-Ponty, ontology, becoming, differentiation, order

If we are to explore the Phenomenology of Metal, we may have to begin with a brief contemplation of the concept of 'Order' - aesthetically, poetically & indeed ontologically. Despite the structural 'order' within (perhaps) any musical expression there are always moments of rupture, of evasion & invisibility lurking in the soundspace, *ontoaural* shadows painting the caverns of our corporeality. I will return in a moment to this term & idea of *ontoaurality*, but for now let us dwell within the contention that these ruptural-moments are particularly indicative of (though certainly not confined to) metal, whose aesthetic as well as narrative expressions often embrace the 'dark' and philosophically 'negative' & conceptually-*negating* space(s) of the lived-experience. This aforementioned concept of an underlying 'Order' of space & reality - of an 'Order-ing' of space, time & object - is a central notion to many explorations within Phenomenology, from Merleau-Ponty's

'pre-reflective cogito'¹ to Tymieniecka's conceptualization of an 'ontopoiesis' within consciousness or 'Logos of Life.' For the former, pre-linguistic consciousness or 'thought' essentially traverses the *conceptuo-terra firma* of perception & visibility, of mutual, symbiotic perceptibility within-&amongst the terrain of so-many phenomena - phenomenon understood-through its etymological ancestry, as 'that which has been shown'/'is showing' - and the consequent 'Ordering' of this vast constellation of *perceptible-perceptions*, such that some-*thing*, some-*lens* before 'Language'-proper serves to transform a truly sublime-nebula into a series of always-already 'known' objects, into *objectdefinable* datum. On the other hand, Tymieniecka's 'phenomenology of life' attempts to 'uncover' a philosophical construct through-which to read & examine 'Life,' & is contingent upon her conceptualization of 'ontopoiesis' - the relative, respective & particular rationalities underlying the consequent Order & Order-ing of self-individualizing living-forms - each object's 'ontopoietic nucleus' serving as the 'ground of beingness of the living individual' that in-turn 'reposes' internally-&-within 'while it spreads and maintains tentacles involving the circuits of all.'² Despite their distinct phenomenological objectives & the disparate conceptual spaces their trajectorial-examinations lead them, both are nevertheless predicated-upon & presuppose an Order, some-arrangement inherent & underlying the existential & ontological modes of Being &/or Becoming. We find ourselves for a moment, then, dwelling amongst Order, pressed against its linguistic shell, prepared & in fact required to pierce its hull & thrust ourselves within the emerging conceptual-fire.

The word & thus concept 'order' has a fascinating etymological ancestry; at its ontological base one finds the spectral trace of *ordinem*, 'row, rank, series, arrangement' originally 'a row of threads in a loom' from the Italic root *ored* meaning 'to arrange, arrangement.' If we follow this ghostly linguistic trail, we see that 'row' is born from the Old English *ræw* - 'a row, line' from Old High German *rihan* 'to thread;' 'arrange' emerges from the body of the Old French *arrangier* - 'to set in a row' from *rang* - 'rank;' & then ultimately 'thread,' the signifiatory progeny of 'thrædus,' the suffixed form of the base 'thræ' meaning 'twist.' In this moment, unconcealed to us, is a *hauntological-incision* into the primordial husk of the very notion of order. 'Twist,' the verb, evolved from its noun counter-point, itself a derivation, perhaps-paradoxically, from the Proto-Germanic *twis* - the root of 'two' - & has cognates in Old Norse, *tvistra* 'to divide, separate,' Gothic *twis* 'in two, asunder,' the German *zwist* 'quarrel, discord,' among others - & yet, in English at least, only until later is there the connotation of the more common notion, combining two into one. We find, then, the curious dynamism dwelling-in the signifiatory-ghost of 'Order,' such that always-already & necessarily within this attempt at arrangement - at some notion of stasis - there remains the trace of internal-differentiation, of the multiplicity

inherently-underlying any consequently-conceived unity, of shadows haunting their form.

This is particularly significant in context to a second conceptualization of 'ontopoiesis' - my own possibility emerging-from the word-object, an-other noological ontology within those signficatory walls - a notion predicated fundamentally on Difference (in the Deleuzean sense) &, more specifically, on what I would call *the Differentiation-of-Difference*, or, the inherent onto-structure of Difference itself. As I conceptualize it, 'ontopoietics' can be understood conceptually as a binary structure - the ontological & the poietic - both informing/affecting the other, even as each is always-already 'reacting' to/informed by the other. Specifically, this would involve exploring the conceptual space(s) created in that zone of differentiation between the ontological datum informing the poietic expression, and that expression itself. Of course, that 'expression itself' in-turn informs/affects the ontology from which it (both consciously & unconsciously) germinates through; in a sense, the poietic expression exists *as* the ontology-manifest. The two exist through their differentiation with-&-from the other. This is indicative of the nature of not only 'Difference,' but indeed *Differentiation itself*, such that it becomes-always-already necessary to view any object, subject, thing of any kind, as not at all some *statico-transcendent interiorising-agent*, but rather as the zone(s) whose very presence is the progeny of what-some-thing-'is' i.e. a possibility, & its symbiote-other, the infinite-totality of *other-possibilities*, in other words, that-which-some-thing-is-not. Thus we see that whereas Tymieniecka's 'ontopoietic nucleus' refers to the creative expression of self-individualization of some-'Life'-object, it is in actuality merely the datum constituting this notion of 'what-some-thing-is' & in-turn fails in effectively accounting for the ontological significance of the contextual field from which any-thing-whatsoever inherently emerges from. In short, Tymieniecka - while significantly illuminating the ontological primacy of 'Life' & the enormity of creative-expressions there within - ultimately neglects exploring that each-expression of self-individualization can *only-ever-become-anything* in symbiotic mutual-reflectivity with-&-within the infinite-possibilities-&-actualities of *all-that-it-is-not*, & more importantly that *either & both* only-ever exist with(in) these spaces, lodges of differentiation all of them.

Here is where we return to the previously discussed conceptuon of *ontoaurality* & the particular significance of the previous philosophical introspection into this idea of 'ontopoiesis.' If we are to rhizomatically branch-off from my specific contention of ontopoiesis & the onto-phenomenological import of precisely such zone(s) of possibilities, we must begin by attempting to hold this symbiotic-entity, to grasp-at (as we bask-in) shadows cast-from the bosom of its symbiote-unity, emanating from

this space-of-Difference & in these plane(s) of differentiating-immanence, of immanent-differentiation. It is with(in) this act of grasping-at that we find ourselves dwelling, so to speak, in the darkness of an illuminating light, whose glare, while actualizing as possible self-individualization of any-kind, simultaneously *conceals* the shadows rushing-forth from these *objectdefinable*-possibilities. As we reside in this space of differentiation, amongst the dark-matter of self-individualized 'Life' & indeed signification itself, we find ourselves helplessly lost in the aforementioned 'lodge of differentiation' - etymologically so, in the sense of being in the state-of-loss, whose signifiatory-ghosts haunt notions of destruction & division, deprivation, separation & dissolution - or rather, self-individualizing-*ed* in an inherently-perpetual state of self-*differentiating*. This space of lost-dwelling created from with(in) the structure of differentiation likewise accompanies so-many symbiotic possibilities; from more normatively discussed concepts such as, say, 'sociopolitical' or 'psychosexual,' to the more ontologically-derived notions of 'ontoaurality' & 'ontophysiology' that I am today proposing. While 'ontopoietics' involves the binary of 'ontology' & 'poietics' - & the zone(s) of differentiating-possibilities emanating from such a structure in bursts of expressions & perceptions - so too are 'ontoaurality' & 'ontophysiology' made-possible only from this symbiotic-figure & the consequent space opened-&-opening from precisely such a union, a space in which the ontological & the aural/physiological differentiate, perpetually, within-&-against their respective 'other(s).'

Wold - an experimental death-metal 'brotherhood,' whose music ceaselessly explodes from a steady ambient white-noise, before crashing back with(in) its sound-base - is inexorably woven into a *ontopoietic* space born-from the zone of differentiation between the ontological datum informing the poietic expression & that expression itself. This space effectively functions as a 'Lodge' within-whose walls differentiation manifests in perpetuity. If one recalls the title of this chapter - 'Fire Walk With Me; or, Dwelling in the Lodge of Differentiation' - David Lynch &/or *Twin Peaks* fans would perhaps be aware of the mythopoietic allusions contained there within. For those whose interests lay elsewhere than Lynch's television series (&, later, film),³ suffice it to say that I believe it is exploring the transformative possibilities of differentiation, with this particular conceptualization of the 'Lodge' figuring prominently in the construction of the show's philosophical & narrative space. It is this ontopoietic trope I wish to utilize in my own particular reading of Wold's musical creations, in particular the affective construction of a soundspace whose ontoaural matter effectively manifests into a 'Lodge' of differentiation whose halls are haunted by ontophysiological specters. It is significant to note that in *Twin Peaks*, while the characters are fixated on 'finding' & physiologically dwelling specifically within either the 'White' (i.e. the 'Good') or the 'Black' (the 'Evil') Lodge,

the show's own presentation of these 'places' are virtually identical-inversions, such that distinction between the two (either by character, or spectator) is essentially impossible. Indeed, one could certainly conceptualize a reading in which these 'Lodges' in fact occupy the same fields of *onto-energy*; in other words, the White Lodge & Black Lodge are not transcendent, static 'areas,' but rather the space of differentiation & thus possibilities unconcealed & made-present by their symbiotic-unity. It is here, in fact, where the nebulously explicated third 'place' - the 'Red Room' or 'Waiting Room' in *Twin Peaks* - becomes particularly pertinent & significant. Entrance into either 'Lodge,' the show's narrative makes it appear, necessitates a literal dwelling-with(in) the Red Room; perhaps one could think of that space of dwelling as precisely this notion of an onto-poietic zone, created not from individual, interiorized *objectdefinable* 'things' but rather from the symbiote-appendages grasping one-another. There is no 'White Lodge' or 'Black Lodge' in absentia of the other; instead, perhaps, there is merely the symbiotic-mediation of both within-&-against their-'Other,' whose resulting rhizomatic union gives birth to the onto-poietic zone of the 'Red Room' - that space of dwelling existing as progeny of the possibilities of both 'Lodges,' but whose conceptual-corporeality is nevertheless required in order for either to differentiate at all, is necessitated for any existentiel-Becoming of any kind. In short, the 'White' & 'Black' Lodge only exist as possibilities because of their rhizomatic-mediations through-&-with(in) the 'Red Room,' i.e. their-particular onto-poietic space, or 'Lodge of Differentiation.'

This brings us to the first portion of my title which has not heretofore been explicated. While the specific reference of 'Fire Walk With Me' resides within *Twin Peaks*, the significant allusion intended is one of transformation, of the transformative, transmutative power & energy of 'fire' itself. From Heraclitus (& indeed one could ethnographically or anthropologically find earlier reliance, reverence & fear in-&-of the element) to astrological creation myths to Lynchian poietic-narrative, 'fire' has served as a major (if not primordial) force of transformation - or more specifically, of differentiation, of radical differentiate-*ing*. It is no surprise, then, that Wold's album 'L.O.T.M.P.' (Lodge of the Mytho-Poetic) begins with the track 'Invocation of Fire' - their opening moment, the first step into their 'Lodge' itself serving as an explicit summoning of Fire, a conjuring of the elemental-energy of differentiation. The lyrics (included in the liner-notes, but otherwise virtually indistinguishable to the spectator as objects of static-signification) unconceal Wold's specific act of invocation: 'Grand purifier, / Southerly king, / I beckon thee. / Mysterious arsenal, / Aeternus sentinel, / En garde with fury / Ready to strike. / Hail Fire King Ruler. / Bright overlord / Inside of me.'⁴ These lyrics are a fascinating entrance into this Lodge of

Differentiation, a powerful invocation towards (one could say) an ontoaural 'Red Room,' within-whose walls Wold not only walks, but indeed dwells. From the opening identification of the 'grand' 'purifying' potentiality (or in fact actuality) of fire, we find this tense inner-energy; this element - which destroys, lays waste, in many ways devours the *objectdefinable* to degrees of devastation, until there are literally new entities - simultaneously, for Wold at least, *purifies*. Unconcealed in this rhizomatic-symbiote is Fire's ontological-power, as a substance of truly radical Differentiation, whose presence inherently marks & makes-visible the *dark-matter* of signification, the possibilities dwelling with(in) any-'thing.' Wold continuing this invocation in the utterance 'mysterious arsenal / Aeternus sentinel' beckons for a moment of etymological dwelling; 'mystery' derives from the Greek *mysterion* (a secret rite) & *mystes* (one who has been initiated), whereas 'arsenal' is, through Italian, from the Arabic for a 'house of manufacture' of, specifically, *sina'ah*, or, 'art, craft, skill.' In a sense, then, Wold identifies the 'weaponry' of Fire to be, literally, *ontopoiesis* itself - in Fire's opening-up & making-possible a Lodge of Differentiation. The next line refers to the identity of Fire as 'Aeternus sentinel' - sentinel, or sentry originally linking to *sentire* meaning 'to hear & perceive' & thus sentinel's birth as a word-concept signified 'one who hears & perceives' - therefore 'Aeternus sentinel' refers to the Eternal nature, i.e. the inherent infinite-perpetuity, of perception & perceptibility & thus of Differentiation itself. Of course, the closing stanza - 'Hail Fire King Ruler. / Bright overlord / Inside of me' - merely confirms what we have already discovered. Wold's ontopoietic expression of Fire-as-Differentiation, & located, inherently & in perpetuity, internally & from-with(in), effectively identifies each ontological-entity - each Being or Becoming-Body - as a possible Lodge of Differentiation.

It is my contention that Wold specifically (& perhaps 'metal' generally, in particular 'death metal') ontopoietically summons & establishes an auditory-zone of ontoaural possibilities, in-turn opening-up zone(s) within-which the body is differentiating ontophysiologicaly. This ontophysiological condition is created through-&-with(in) the perpetual grasping-at the ontoaural shadow-body(s) haunting Wold's soundspace - a space that is in perpetual-Becoming, in radical dynamic flux & whose Invocation is not a declaration in 'signs' & thus a 'signification' that functions according to principles valorizing & yearning-for interiorized-kernels of datum, transmitted for either linguistic or phenomenological preservation (i.e. the effective transmission of 'information'), but rather incantatory-utterances in Artaudian Language(s), the Language(s) of the Theater of Cruelty, in which signification exists on Physio-Corporeal rather than 'Logical' level(s) & whose primordial goal is radical, perpetual differentiation. The music of Wold (& to a less-intense & consumptive degree, 'metal') is predicated (in part) upon precisely such an Artaudian-

assault whose ontopoietic manifest-progeny dwells upon a distinctly *avant-garde* expressive-terrain.

It is important to think of this term in relation to its noological ancestry, in other words through an examination of its conceptual signficatory-DNA, so to speak. Etymologically, it is not merely to be the 'vanguard,' but particularly the notion of that-which-is-ahead-of-the-'Guard.' Guard derives from the notion of not only 'guarding' as in 'protecting,' but in essence (one could say ontologically) 'guard' meant to guard and protect *expectantly*. It is to guard, yes, but to guard while expecting, looking for, waiting for whatever threat is to come. The vanguard, then - that which is *ahead-of* that expectant-guard - exists not in the statico-space of the 'Guard' proper, but rather indeed in the dynamic possibilities *out-there*, ahead of the Guard, where there is only unknown, where there is (by definition) that which is unexpected, *unexpected-able*, & therefore dynamic-possibilities (as opposed to the statico-'inevabilities'). Thus, the *avant-garde* - ontopoietically - can be thought of, thought-through & conceptualized-as the expressions existing in the space of the vanguard, outside of the domain of expectations, outside of the Guard's watch, & thus clearly & inherently (I would argue) in conflict with stasis, constancy, permanence, & interiorized, striated ideas of form & space. In this sense, one can think of the manner(s) in which some-expression exists as-&-with(in) this vanguard-space, in conflict with illusory statico-conceptualizations of form, content & ontological-matter; it is with(in) this notion that Wold (particularly) & 'metal' (generally) invades & occupies - while engulfing in transmutative flames - any possibility of stasis-as-such through the pronounced cacophonous incantations & sonic-incisions repetitively-differentiating in(to) the 'metal'-matter of soundspace(s). The vocals (as is relatively common in 'metal') are discordant diaphragmic slashings & gashes upon the auditory-epidermis of the spectator's Becoming-Body, the quasi hallucinatory-revelry contained with(in) the tearing-tissue of the shrieking-utterance - each incantatory-Invocation slicing-apart & slashing-asunder the progeny-of-Stasis known as 'Order.' In addition, 'metal' normatively employs heavy guitar distortion - obscuring, concealing & fundamentally altering perceived implicit-signification - while simultaneously utilizing percussive (notably drum) as a thunderous explosion from-with(in) physio-temporal tranquility & rest, violently disrupting & transgressing this *perceptory*-illusion with a ritualistic assassination of stasis, stagnation & ontophysiological inertia. The heavy layering of instrumental-incisions upon soundspace that particularly & especially epitomizes Wold's music is notable here; implementing (through both voice & non-human instrumentation) variant-&-varying intonation, inflection, relative-volume, speed & 'clarity'-of-repetition, the resultant ontopoietic expression(s) exhibit prodigally potlatch dissonance - shadows

dwelling with (in) a 'Lodge' of spectral aural-signification.

This spectrality-of-Language & thus of signification as such within the 'Onto-Phenomenological' field - in which 'Language' is nothing if not a primordial physio-encounter - in effect perpetually transforms 'words' & 'sounds' into linguistic bodies-without-organs, once-static-objects find themselves now ruptured, now burning & burnt, (re) born into so-many Phoenix, the shadows of signs haunting a soundspace, only pausing to configure themselves into illusions of clarity. Dwelling amongst these sonic-specters that shimmer across our auditory-walls thus fundamentally transforms & transmutes the ontophenomenological-spectator itself into a Lodge of Differentiation. The human, in-&-as that now-mediated space of the 'Lodge,' reacts to & impacts/imprints its surroundings, all-the-while those surroundings - so many Becoming-soundspace(s) - themselves mediate the body(s) marking it. The body is thus ontophysiologically-differentiating, it is in perpetual-*Becoming* - not as static body(s), but rather existing as conceptual structure(s) dwelling with (in) a consistent flux of differentiation, of-&-as precisely these *ontocorporeal* wraiths that traverse & exist in-&-as so-many Lodge(s). The implications germinating within such ontopoietic conceptualizations of 'metal' projects have significant import in Phenomenology, clearly, particularly to the various strands of thought regarding the/a 'Order' underlying 'Perception' itself & the objects constituting 'reality.' For when these static, interiorized *objectdefinable(s)* of striated space are in-fact haunted by ontocorporeal shadows - those wraithlike-vehicles & 'machinic'-apparations - when they are summoned in a revelrous-incantation to walk amongst-&-with (in) the conceptual-matter of Order & Order-ing itself, to Walk with Fire & dwell with (in) the Lodge of Differentiation, Becoming-Consumed in a brilliant ontological effigy.

Notes

¹ M Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Trans. F Williams, Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 2002.

² A.T. Tymieniecka, *Life: Phenomenology of Life as the Starting Point of Philosophy; 25th Anniversary Publication, Book III*. Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research, Volume L, Ed. A.T. Tymieniecka, Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht, 1997, p. xiii.

³ D Lynch, et. al, *Twin Peaks*, The Definitive Gold Box Edition (The Complete Series)(1990), Paramount Home Video: Paramount, 2007.

⁴ Wold, *L.O.T.M.P.* (CD Booklet), Recorded Nov. 2003-Aug. 2004, Profound Lore Records: Saskatchewan, 2004.

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You're too Fuckin' Metal for Your Own Good! Controlled Anger and the Expression of Intensity and Authenticity in Post-Modern Heavy Metal

Christian Hoffstadt & Michael Nagenborg

Abstract

One critique on Heavy Metal is its fixation on anger and hatred, while being primitive and anti-intellectual. What a critic in the 70's has said with regards to Black Sabbath about the 'sophistication of four Cro-Magnon hunters who've stumbled upon a rock band's equipment' might be well accepted by many critics of this particular style today. Taking a look at the aesthetics, the artistic expression and imagery of post-modern Heavy Metal, we will focus on the expression of intensity and authenticity as an attitude to life. However, we will not only take a look at the modes of expression, but also at the limitations and restrictions on the expression of anger. We will correlate music, lyrics, video, gestures, facial expressions as well as band and fan communication to understand why intensity emerges from 'controlled anger'. As Elster explains, since the time of Aristotle 'the most frequent antonym of passion was reason'. In this tradition anger is the passion we have to worry about the most in case we want to act reasonable. However, passions might also be seen as an instrument of self-binding by being instrumental to overcome time-inconsistency of personal identity. In our chapter we will work within a framework, which assumes that Heavy Metal has to strive for creating a resource to refuel anger enabling the community members to 'stay true'.

Key Words: Anger, hatred, control, reason, passion, identity.

1. Introduction

Heavy Metal is often criticized for its fixation on anger and hatred, while being primitive and anti-intellectual. What a critic in the 1970's has said with regards to Black Sabbath about the 'sophistication of four Cro-Magnon hunters who've stumbled upon a rock band's equipment'¹ might still be well accepted by many critics of this music style today.

In the first part of the chapter we will argue that 'anger' is one of the elements in Heavy Metal that adds to the impression that Heavy Metal is irrational and primitive, in other words: stupid. As has been noted by Jon Elster, since the time of Aristotle 'the most frequent antonym of passion was reason'.² In this tradition anger is the passion we have to worry about the

most in case we want to act reasonable: 'Anger is perhaps the most important of these blind-and-deaf passions. It may be unique among the emotions in its capacity to make us forget even our most vital interests'.³ But anger might also be seen as an instrument of self-binding by being instrumental to overcome time-inconsistency.⁴ Hence, we will argue that staying and becoming angry as well as expressing and living out anger are important elements of Heavy Metal, which serve to maintain the identity of the community and its members (which includes musicians as well as fans).

Since anger is a 'deaf-and-blind emotion', the experience of anger adds to the intensity that members of the Heavy Metal community strive to experience. Again, this is true for fans as well as for the musicians and does add another anti-intellectual element to Heavy Metal. What has been said on Hardcore by Katharina Inhetveen might also be valid for Heavy Metal: The community members are not to be described as 'experts' in the sense of Adorno.⁵ Being part of a Heavy Metal concert is not about the rational processing of an audio signal. As Robert Fudge notes: 'You don't just listen to Metallica's music – you experience it, and the music's sheer power can simultaneously stimulate and drain you.'⁶ In short, we will argue that Heavy Metal is about providing a distinctive bodily experience to the ones participating, which includes building up and releasing the emotion of anger.

In the second part of the chapter we will focus on what we call 'controlled anger', which refers to the fact that Heavy Metal since the 1990's has turned towards an elaborated form of 'anger management' for musicians and fans alike. Hence, we will focus on the form of social control to be observed at Heavy Metal concerts, which at times seems to contradict the fundamental experience of freedom and even chaos one would expect.

2. Emotions and Morality

Although Jack Harrell mentioned 'freedom' in his list of 'subjects typical to most rock music [that] are absent in death metal [as well as in other extreme forms of Metal]',⁷ we hold the 'freedom to express anger' to be fundamental to Heavy Metal. 'Extreme metal's vitality 'stirs up' the body', Keith Kahn-Harris writes in his book on *Extreme Metal*:

This process allows the expression of what are seen to be negative emotions. Aggression, anger, violence and brutality are seen as the essential elements of extreme metal and the source of its vitality [...].⁸

Writing on 'Metallica, Emotion, and Morality', Robert Fudge points to the tradition already mentioned in the introduction: Philosophers

have long worried about the potentially corrosive effects of certain styles of music on the listener's moral character. If listening to, say, angry Metallica songs makes us angry, and if feeling angry makes us act in less than desirable ways, then it follows that angry Metallica songs have a negative effect on our morals.⁹

What made Philosophers worried is the fact that anger makes us ignore even our most vital interests, as has been already pointed out by referring to Jon Elster's book on self-binding.

In *Ulysses unbound* he deals with the question why individuals may want to restrict their freedom of choice: 'Prima facie it would seem that nobody could have a motivation for discarding options, delaying rewards, or imposing cost on themselves'.¹⁰ As he points out early in his book, one reason to discard future options is to protect oneself against passions, which 'may cause us to deviate from plans laid in a cooler moment'.¹¹ Thus, a 'person who fears that anger might cause him to act in ways contrary to his self-interest would do well to avoid occasions on which this emotion might be triggered'.¹² Taking the writing of Seneca, Hume and Montaigne as a starting point, Elster argues in favour of a concept of rationality that avoids being ruled by one's own passions.¹³

However, Elster also discusses findings that in contrast to Seneca and Montaigne, to which he refers himself, view passions as 'precommitment devices that enable agents to overcome time-inconsistency problems'.¹⁴ Although, he disagrees, because he views persons know to become angry to be less attractive as partners for interaction, he has to admit that 'anger and envy affect the credibility of threats'.¹⁵

We would also like to add that becoming, being and staying angry may also help to remember who we are. When we are still angry about something, it is reasonable that we still identify ourselves as the same persons in the future as we are now. Thus, passions may be instrumental to overcome a certain kind of time-inconsistency problem, which arises from regretting our precommitment of the past, since we have become another person.

It's interesting to note that Elster refers to Seneca, since the Stoic position which rejects anger as a self-destructive emotion is in stark contrast to the Aristotelian view 'that anger can be appropriate and useful in certain circumstances and to certain degrees'.¹⁶ And it is worth mentioning the Aristotelian position here, because Robert Fudge's reflections on 'Metallica, Emotion, and Morality' are build on Aristotle's view, that 'too little anger is ... unhealthy'¹⁷ and '[by] arousing our anger, our anguish, or our resentment, music helps us deal with our emotions and get over them sooner'.¹⁸ Thus, he regards Metallica's music as morally beneficial 'insofar as it helps purge us of destructive emotions'.¹⁹

Hence, others suggested the sharp contrast between passions – especially ‘anger’ – and rationality is part of a specific stoic tradition, which might still be dominated today, however, not all philosophers did and do reject anger as purely self-destructive notion. Thus, there is no need to judge Heavy Metal being ‘stupid’ or being morally destructive because of its fixation of anger and other negative emotions.

Now, let us return to ‘anger’ as an instrument of self-binding to overcome time-inconsistencies. As being stated above anger adds to the credibility of threats, but the fact that someone is still angry about something might also prove that the feelings of the person have been authentic in the first time and the person is still the same. However, as Fudge also points out following Aristotle, Heavy Metal music might also be morally damaging since ‘it has the potential to arouse negative emotions that lead to destructive behaviour’.²⁰ By doing so, Fudge argues that moral virtue ‘is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency’.²¹ Hence, even when anger is to be viewed as being appropriate and useful at times from an Aristotelian position, excess is to be avoided. In the second part of our chapter we will study the way that Heavy Metal tries to define the ‘mean between the two vices.’

3. **Controlled Anger**

When at a live gig in the early 1990’s Metallica’s former bass player Jason Newsted was seemingly ‘acting like a maniac’ and getting caught up with the energy of a song, James Hetfield told him: ‘Jason, you’re too fuckin’ metal for your own good!’

Here we can see two different views of expressing anger in one band. While James Hetfield had changed in the first 10 years of Metallica from the young, angry and uncontrolled thrash metal guitarist and singer to a more controlled, charismatic and ‘cool’ band leader, Jason Newsted entered the band 1986 as a thrash metal bassist, who lived music very intensively, and left Metallica 2001 as the same person. Besides the roles of the other two band members, we can see that these two persons portray different views of Metal, of living the anger of the music and controlling this anger. Watching the 1992 San Diego Show of Metallica, we can see Jason singing (shouting?) a lot of the ‘old Metallica stuff’ in a very rough, unpurified manner, putting all his energy and anger into the songs. On the other hand, if we watch James singing and playing guitar, we hear a trained voice and we see a lot of cool and controlled behaviour, reducing emotion to well-formed mimics and gestures, e. g. snarling or using archaic, threatening gestures.

At first sight the later James Hetfield strives for a balanced expression of anger in an Aristotelian sense of finding a mean between two extremes (of having no anger or having too much anger). In contrast Jason

Newsted's behaviour on stage shows his striving for the excess, for acting out the feelings and sharing it with the fans.

At this point we are able to define James' behaviour as contained, holding back emotions. Fudge refers to Hetfield's song writing for the Album 'St. Anger' (2003), which is documented in the film 'Some kind of monster' (2004), to show that James' retentiveness in acting out may be more civilised, but also has a dark side: James, as he explains himself, was hiding from his real feelings for a long time, not revealing them neither to his band colleagues nor to the audience/environment and finally taking refuge in drugs to cope with his bad feelings. He experienced the clear expression of anger (and connected feelings like fear) in the songs of 'St. Anger' as a relief, as a clearing and balancing of his emotional state.

This story about Metallica illustrates the fact that Heavy Metal since the 1990's has turned towards a more elaborated form of 'anger management' for musicians and fans alike, although precisely then more bands playing very extreme styles of metal appear.

Heavy Metal bands like 'Slipknot' seem to have learned the lessons of the crossover years and by now have started to allow the audience to perform rituals of building up and releasing tension. Thus, although Heavy Metal relies on anger as a fundamental expression enabling a distinctive bodily experience, post-modern Metal does not aim to stir up emotions to the excess, beyond the point of control anymore in a way earlier examples of Extreme Metal did. Instead of bands outdoing one another by becoming even louder or faster, post-modern Metal incorporates different kind of expressions within one song.

Besides a more sophisticated mood management in post-modern metal song writing, the fan culture developed several forms of 'controlled anger'-interaction. While in the 1980's, a concert's progress could be endangered by individual outbursts of fury which mostly ended in fights and brawls, post-modern fan culture stages – with help from the bands – a controlled and rule-based turmoil, we could even say: turmoil of battle. Especially in big concerts and open-air we can observe different forms of interaction for the purpose of acting out anger in a controlled way. Instead of beating each other and wreck the place etc. the fans play different 'games' like moshing (which has its own place since the 90's: the Moshpit), stage-diving, Wall of death, pogo, bouncing and barging, some of these being adopted from other subcultures.

While anger in metal has different reasons and forms, one important is anger as an 'essential political emotion'.²² Harrell states that he was astonished watching a Megadeth-concert, at which the band played a cover of the Sex Pistols song 'Anarchy in the UK' (as Anarchy in the USA').

Death metal rockers say that the appeal of their music is its anger. Rather than naively calling for a utopian peace, it speaks to the frustrations felt by young people as they struggle against the inherent weaknesses of institutional, highly managed societies.²³

Now, imagine an audience of angry individualistic young men, singing with clenched fist 'Cause I won't obey! Anarchy!' The socio-critical and anarchic message becomes paradoxical, because the audience finally obeys the 'rule' to sing along with the band and to act together peacefully. The revolutionary anger expressed in the song is tamed and controlled by the conventional forms of interaction.

We can observe the same collective expression of socio-critical and deviant anger at Metallica-concerts, when James Hetfield sings 'Am I Evil?' and the crowd responds 'Yes I Am!' – Finally the deviant anger becomes the norm, regulated by rules of the (metal) game, forming rituals of 'anger management'. Thus, we can observe social control at Heavy Metal concerts, which at times seems to contradict the fundamental experience of freedom and even chaos one would expect.

A fine example of controlled anger is the video clip 'Duality' by the extreme metal band Slipknot. The band, as usual wearing their horror-clown-masks, is playing the song in a house surrounded by a horde of fans. The fans try to enter the house and wreck the furniture, obviously their blood is stirred up by the aggressive music and they try to live the anger and self-hatred expressed by the song. At the end, when the band performs a more easeful break, the lead singer brings the fan community to being calm and motionless by lifting his hand like a priest – but also then the anger finds a loophole in the facial expressions of the fans (the band has no facial expression since they wear masks).

The impact of the music and the social interaction of band and fans lead to a state of barely bearing the intensity, which is expressed in the behaviour of the fans. Nevertheless, the anger and despair ('All I've got...all I've got is insane...') depicted in music, video and interaction with the fans does not lead to real (self-) destruction: The power excited by the music flows back into the interaction and gives strength to the band and the fans, and finally prevents the anger becoming (self) destructive, the individual in the crowd becoming 'insane'.

Here, the power of anger remains, but is transformed to an intensity and authentic feeling of being angry together, which is much more beneficial for the individual than being angry on his/her own. So the effect of metal – at best – is an equilibrium of feelings or a transformation of destructive anger into beneficial feelings of social cohesion. Shouting out that you are 'fucking hostile' is not hostility in itself or instigation for it, but one option in a

controlled social field that generates norms and rules for itself. As Harrell puts it, Metal and its expression of anger is an important cultural field that deserves scientific observation.

4. Concluding Remark

In this chapter we have argued that Heavy Metal is not to be judged as irrational and irresponsible just because it stresses the freedom to express anger and be angry. The stoic rejection of anger might be a dominant thought today, however by following Fudge we pointed to the Aristotelian tradition of accepting anger as being useful and appropriate in some cases. In the second part of the chapter we have explored the elaborated form of ‘anger management’ to be found in Heavy Metal.

We would like to conclude with the remark that we were not able to address the specific form of anger expressed in Heavy Metal and the specific devices used within Heavy Metal to arouse and release anger. Hence, we suggest looking for differences between different ‘angry subcultures’ like Hardcore, Punk, or Hip Hop to figure out, if there is anything like a specific form of ‘Heavy Metal anger’ or ‘Punk anger’.

Notes

¹ D Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*. Macmillan, New York 1991, p. 2.

² J Elster, *Ulysses Unbound*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 7.

³ *ibid.*, p. 12

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 45ff.

⁵ K Inhetveen, ‘Gewalt, Körper und Vergemeinschaftung in Subkulturen’. In: *Kultivierung von Gewalt. Beiträge zur Soziologie von Gewalt und Ordnung*. C. Liell and A. Pettenkofer (eds), Ergon, Würzburg, 2004, p. 51.

⁶ R Fudge, ‘Whisper Things Into My Brain. Metallica, Emotion, and Morality’. In *Metallica and Philosophy. A Crash Course in Brain Surgery*, W. Irwin (ed), Blackwell Publishing, Malden (MA)/Oxford/Carlton, 2007, p. 5.

⁷ J Harrell, ‘The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock’. *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 18/1, 1994, p. 93.

⁸ K Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal. Music and Culture on the edge*, Berg, Oxford/New York, 2007, p. 52.

⁹ R Fudge, ‘Whisper Things Into My Brain. Metallica, Emotion, and Morality’. In *Metallica and Philosophy. A Crash Course in Brain Surgery*, W. Irwin (ed), Blackwell Publishing, Malden /Oxford/Carlton, 2007, p. 5.

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- ¹⁰ J Elster, *Ulysses Unbound*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 1.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 7.
- ¹² *ibid.*, p. 8.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, p. 12.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 45.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 47.
- ¹⁶ S Braund and G Gilbert, 'An ABC of epic ira: anger, beasts, and cannibalism'. In *Ancient Anger*. S. Braund and G. Most (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York, 2003, p. 285.
- ¹⁷ R Fudge, 'Whisper Things Into My Brain. Metallica, Emotion, and Morality'. In *Metallica and Philosophy. A Crash Course in Brain Surgery*, W. Irwin (ed), Blackwell Publishing, Malden /Oxford/Carlton, 2007, p. 9.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 10.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 15.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15.
- ²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated and edited by Roger Crisp. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge , 2006, 1107a.
- ²² N Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism. Anger Is an Energy*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks/London/New Dehli ,1997, p. 107.
- ²³ J Harrell, 'The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock'. *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 18/1, 1994, p. 97.

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Tragic Metal

Carmen Deanna

Abstract

This chapter will examine the relationship between Greek tragedies, the Dionysian and the genre of Heavy Metal music. Nietzsche praised the tragic poets for finding the perfect balance between the Dionysian and Apollonian. Apollo is god of the Sun, lightness, poetry and reason, Dionysius, the god of wine, intoxication and ecstasy. Nietzsche argued the suppression or loss of the Dionysian dimension of being as a symptom of modernity. So where might one find infusion of the Dionysian in modern culture? Possibly in film or in video games, but these lack the attributes of lyrical recitation, live performance and large audiences, which are all important to the way Greek tragedy was expressed and experienced. Metal brings these attributes to popular culture in a way other artistic mediums and genres do not and with a strange resemblance to Greek tragedy. Further, when we consider the cathartic effects of art, Metal concerts arguably offer the audience a venue for the catharsis of erotic and violent drives suppressed by the norms of mainstream culture. They provide the space for the release and expression of the Dionysian as well as an opportunity for self-affirmation in a seemingly chaotic and unjust set of circumstances. One of the teachings of the Greek tragic poets is to accept one's fate, to lack freedom and still be responsible. Similarly, many metal artists lyrically portray strength and dignity in the face of suffering and despair. Metal pits the spirit of Prometheus and Antigone against the nihilism of late modernity and provides the working class the physical and psychological space to experience the Dionysian.

Key Words: Nietzsche, Heavy Metal, Greek Tragedy, Dionysius

1. Nietzsche and the Dionysian Worldview

We waited impatiently for Slayer to take the stage of the fifty-year-old theatre that was worn and dilapidated while a member of the stage crew shifted a spotlight to focus our voyeurism on those exposing themselves among the audience. Eventually the lights dimmed and our suspense expanded. Then with a pyrotechnic explosion of primordial fire, Slayer opened their set with 'Killing Fields,' a blistering recollection and expression of the tragedies of mass murder.

We stood in awe of the swirling attack of a discordant mix of instruments. Slowly the crowd began to shift from side to side with increasing intensity until ultimately we were no longer in control of ourselves and were given over to the demands of something greater than ourselves. Bodies hot and absorbed into collective motion, the boundary of self began to disintegrate and the truth of being the oneness with nature engulfed our consciousness. We had begun the process of forgetting, of surrender to the primal drive toward an erotic and intoxicating melding of flesh and consciousness.

This is a recollection of an aesthetic experience Nietzsche would call Dionysian and bears at least some qualities with Freud's discovery of a Death Drive under the Nirvana Principle. For both thinkers, these were politically salient concepts that helped to explain the irrational or unconscious motivations beneath the rational and theoretical justifications for the violence, war, and suffering, inherent in the human condition. Beginning with Plato, there is the attempt to dispel from civilization the irrational and mad knowledge conveyed by the aesthetic experience. In Plato's *Republic*, art and specifically lyrical poetry are identified as imitations of truth removed from the theoretical or intellectual realm of 'true' reality. The distinction between the sensible and the intelligible is established and for Nietzsche this has significant cultural, psychological and political consequences. Most importantly the establishment of what Nietzsche calls the *principium individuationis*, essentially the notion that we are all autonomous individuals permanently separate from one another. Contemporary political theory typically cites the invention or discovery of the autonomous subject as a consequence of modernity be it either material or ideological. For Nietzsche this is a lie and illusion. Nietzsche finds the roots of the modern condition in the demise of a tragic worldview and the rise of otherworldly paradigms of being. Human beings now needed to find a reason to live; a way to give meaning to being and this was achieved by looking away from the suffering of existence to either some theological promise or some abstract theoretical truth. The consequence of this for modernity is that now the combination of the liberal and capitalist global ideology, along side the technocratic regime of surveillance and rationalised bureaucratic states, produces a system where human beings exist under extreme conditions of social and psychological alienation. The self becomes a prisoner and we are increasingly asked to sublimate or repress fundamental psychological and biological drives. By the dawning of the Twentieth Century, Western culture was ripe for the reawakening of the tragic worldview. Nietzsche believed emancipation and, one could say, the overcoming of alienation was only achieved in the aesthetic experience. As Nietzsche eloquently states it in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man...Now the slave is a free man; now all the ridged barriers which necessity, caprice, or 'impudent convention' have fixed between man and man are broken.¹

But who was the mythological Dionysius? Dionysius is the god of violence, ecstasy and intoxication. The cult of Dionysius has its roots in differing myths and interpretations of those myths regarding the god. Many compare the myth of Dionysius with the Christ story. In one version of the myth Dionysius is the progeny of an incestuous relationship between Zeus and Persephone queen of the underworld. Hera attempts to destroy the child by sending him to the Titans who would dismember and devour him. Zeus fends off the Titans with lightning bolts and saves the heart of the child. The heart is then fed to Semele the mortal princess of Thebes as a means to impregnate her. In another version Zeus impregnates Semele and again Hera out of jealousy attempts to destroy the child by rising doubt in Semele's mind as to who is the true father. Semele demands Zeus to come to her and show himself. He does, however no mortal can look on the god and survive. Again Zeus saves his son, this time by sewing foetus into his thigh till he is born.

Contemporary conceptions of the god focus either on the violent bloodlust and cannibalism or the life giving forces symbolized by wine and the phallus.² Nietzsche is one of the few modern thinkers to give Dionysius a fair shake. Though for sure he is more attracted to the suffering and overcoming of Dionysius than to the violence and ecstasy of the group; he still places great significance on the primal experience of the loss of subjectivity in the aesthetic experience of Greek Tragedy.

For Nietzsche Greek Tragedy was the zenith of civilization. He argued rightly that the Greek experience was one of life on the edge. There was an intense awareness of the finitude of the individual life and the ever-present reality of suffering and death. Tragic poetry provided an aesthetic experience and world-view allowing the individual to lose their identity briefly and experience the eternal oneness and power of life. Let there be no mistake Nietzsche recognized the danger in the Dionysian experience to lead to revolution and loss of political stability.³ But he believed tragic music to balance the Dionysian force with the Apollonian force of image and illusion. In fact, he believed in tragedy, Dionysius speaks the language of Apollo and Apollo the language of Dionysius. While some scholars argue it is the Apollonian Nietzsche intends to elevate⁴ in the following passage he ultimately seems to suggest in tragic music it is Dionysius who triumphs over Apollo.

In the total effect of tragedy, the Dionysian predominates once again. Tragedy closes with a sound, which could never come from the realm of Apollinian art. And thus the Apollinian illusion reveals itself as what it really is – the veiling during the performance of the tragedy of the real Dionysian effect; but the latter is so powerful that it ends by forcing the Apollinian dream itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom and even denies itself and its Apollinian visibility. Thus the intricate relation of the Apollinian and Dionysian in tragedy may really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and all art is attained.⁵

What Nietzsche calls Dionysian wisdom is lost or at least reduced to unrecognisable form by the Socratic or Plutonic invention of theory, which is ultimately the germ seed of Christianity and the Enlightenment faith in science. All of these worldviews Nietzsche suggests have reduced life to some otherworldly possibility. This is to say, that in modernity humans are unable to look into the abyss and go on living. Life becomes meaningless and painful and the individual settles for mediocrity and turns away from life rather than embrace it.

Nietzsche sets out as a sort of cultural and political psychologist determined to cure the deepening alienation of modern experience. One reading of Nietzsche's cure is the recreation of a tragic culture or of aesthetic experience where the extreme subjectivating forces of modernity can be tempered. Heavy Metal is one example of such a force though surely on a subaltern level. In the next section we will examine some of the common themes among this reading of Nietzsche, the tragic worldview and the genre of Heavy Metal music.

2. Metal as Tragic Art

Nietzsche's praise of Wagner's music as the modern rebirth of the tragic paradigm hints at the tragic character of Heavy Metal, though this is a praise he ultimately revokes. Most popular genres of music are founded on African American blues; largely constructed in a 4/4 time signature and following a 1-3-5 or 1-4-5 pattern. Metal, however, and particularly the sub-genres of progressive and thrash metal were willing to explore more complex time signatures and rhythmic progressions. Yet, the central restatement of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century concert giants like Wagner, Holst and Stravinsky is the awesome darkness and loudness of the music. In no way is the intent here to suggest Heavy Metal is the heir of classical or concert music rather the claim is heavy Metal shares some of the aesthetic qualities of this era of classical music and that quality is plausibly that of the Dionysian experience. Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* is perhaps the best

example of Classical music's influence on Heavy Metal. Not only the huge aura of chest pounding sound but the political and social psychological effects of the piece. There was much anxiety among the establishment powers that the performance of Stravinsky's piece would lead to certain riot. The passion and ecstasy of spring evoked by the thunderous cacophony of the orchestra as the horror and rapture of a tale of human sacrifice is portrayed, produces the primal Dionysian truth birthed out of a culturally decadent consciousness. Certainly the establishment was not incorrect in the belief that the circumstance would be ripe for the disintegration of civility and the rise of violence. And, in deed, fights broke out in the audience minuets into the performance.

Nietzsche cites spring as one of the two principle forces that bring 'natural man to the self-oblivion of intense intoxication,'⁶ the other being narcotic drink. But for Nietzsche the aesthetic experience of tragic art is not the actual performance of the Dionysian desires and pleasures but their symbolization. It is in this way that Dionysius comes to speak the language of Apollo.

For sure the event does contain the Aristotelian notion of a cathartic effect in the experience of tragic art but it is more. Not only are potentially antisocial emotions exhausted but, the edges of the self dissolved and the hierarchy of the socio-political system shattered. 'The dithyrambic chorus is a chorus of transformed beings who have completely forgotten their civic place and their social position; they have become timeless servants of their god, living outside every social sphere.'⁷ Charles Taylor argues such experience is similar to that of Carnival and calls these, 'forms of 'horizontal' social imaginary.'⁸ But for Taylor these experiences produce a collective conscious in a way that seems incompatible with the Dionysian experience of Heavy Metal. Taylor and Nietzsche as well are concerned with the potentially violent, nationalist or revolutionary effects of such experience. But Taylor's identification of such events and experience as inversions of social and political hierarchy misses the greater political and psychological import of the tragic character of Heavy Metal. Beyond the levelling of social hierarchy experienced by the audience in a live performance an identification with the lyrical narratives and representations as a universal state of the human condition provides the psychological space for a sort of group pity and acceptance of the unjust and horrifying state of being. 'Dionysiac excitement is able to transmit to an entire mass of people this artistic gift of seeing themselves surrounded by ... a crowd of spirits with which they know themselves to be inwardly at one.'⁹ This is a striking description of the transfiguration of the individual in aesthetic experience of Heavy Metal. The audience shares in the suffering of Dionysius as and expression of the primal and fundamental drives of nature or Nietzsche would say the Will to Power. This is why the working class is so well fitted to Heavy Metal and the

Dionysian experience -they are nearest to the Dionysian 'a copy of nature and its strongest impulses, indeed a symbol of them, and at the same time the proclaimer of her wisdom and art; musician, poet, dancer, seer of spirits, all in one person.'¹⁰ Modernity finds little or no space in civil society for such impulsive primal truths about the dark underbelly of being as it is absorbed in its life denying mass of automatons blind to suffering that abounds.

Many Metal compositions take as subject matter this suffering, war and atrocity. Yet a performance of Black Sabbath's *War Pigs* or Iron Maiden's *The Trooper* does not evoke a depressed affect. Quite the opposite, one is enthralled and enraptured in the sublime aesthetic experience and is able to momentarily leave their temporal individuated subject position and become part of the sublime quality of life. What Nietzsche might call the great yes saying to life. More, the working class may identify and recognize the effects of greed and hubris in ambitious political leadership. Though contested most critics and metal heads agree Black Sabbath was the first Heavy Metal band and in the context of tragic Metal they surely are its first great voice. *War Pigs* is now thirty-eight years old and there must be but few metal bands that have not made the effort to cover the piece. The claim in this piece is, of course, in reflecting on the experience of the US in Vietnam and the seemingly endless revolutions of war and peace that the 'Politicians hide themselves away / They only started the war / Why should they go out to fight? / They leave that all to the poor.' We, the audience, may all identify with the soldiers plight not unlike the ancient Greeks would identify the politically salient lyrics of the chorus in Aeschylus's Agamemnon considering the suffering of their soldiers and enemies as well 'for one woman's promiscuous sake / the struggling masses, legs tired, / knees grinding in dust, / spears broken in the onset. / Danaans and Trojans / they have it alike.'¹¹ The citizens in their experience of Attic Tragedy must have understood and felt the meaningless of war and suffering; the war in their eyes being fought for the honour of a whore. How could one go on living in a world of such senseless violence and carnage? Well, one way is to turn away from life. On an individual level this may be achieved through drug and alcohol abuse or other sense numbing ascetic practices like yoga or meditation.¹² Or the liberal model might suggest retreating into our personal private spheres and immersing ourselves in fetishist practices of various forms of consumption. On the social and cultural level groups may turn to other worldly promises or religion or similarly to faith in the power of abstract scientific and theoretical knowledge. However, by the late Nineteenth early Twentieth Century thinkers like Nietzsche and Freud recognize the weakening of both the theological and rational worldviews to make life worth living. Theological claims and comforts are being continually disproved by science and the utopian of vision of Enlightenment thought is far from being established. The tragic worldview is, unlike

theological and Enlightenment models, one that is in and of this world full of the contingency and awfulness of being.

Modernity finds itself in a condition like that of the Ancient Greeks when the gods of Olympia become reified and static. Modernity has no source of inspiration or enchantment the theoretical rational cultural consciousness has made the promise of truth an historical and theoretical project. The modern subject has no venue through which it might glimpse at Dionysian wisdom. Tragic music saves the mythical status of being from grounding itself in historical foundations as Aeschylus does with Prometheus by bringing the Titans back into the narrative. 'What power was this, that could free Prometheus from his vultures and transform myth into a vehicle of Dionysiac wisdom?'¹³ Nietzsche argues only the '...Herculean strength of music.'¹⁴

The chorus of Greek tragedy is echoed in the voice of modernity's working class. The chorus in Aeschylus's Agamemnon rings an ancient bell Heavy Metal brings back to human consciousness, 'Zeus, who guided meant to think, / who has laid it down that wisdom / comes alone through suffering. / Still there drips in sleep against the heart / grief of memory; against / our pleasure we are temperate / From the gods who sit in grandeur / grace comes somehow violent.'¹⁵ There are few voices, few aesthetic projects that posit the human imperial hubris against the backdrop of the abyss, as does Greek tragedy and yes, Heavy Metal. For sure film and video games both bring violence and ecstasy to the subject as an aesthetic experience but fail to have the Dionysian effect argued above. These mediums do serve as an escape from the pain of living and often do thematically deal with the darker side of the human condition, however they are ultimately mostly illusion and image. These mediums fail to evoke the primal violent ecstasy of the Dionysian experience. Few persons sitting in the movie theatre are moved to dance or chanting; they will not delight in vile narratives of horror or suffering like the members in the audience of a King Diamond or Pantera performance. Nor are many able to stare into the abyss of being and return to the secular world of everyday life without being severely repulsed. Most of us would prefer to retreat into the utopian vision of some theological or ideological promise of liberty and equality rather than face the reality that 'I've been pissed on, spit on, shit on, fucked with and pointed at by lesser man.'¹⁶ Or recognize and relive the fact the 'The world today is such a wicked thing / Fighting going on between the human race / People give good wishes to all their friends / While people just across the sea are counting the dead.'¹⁷ When one returns from the Dionysian ecstasy the real world seems unbearable and the wisdom of the wood-god Silenus weighs heavy on one's conscious mind; that knowledge that 'The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon.'¹⁸

3. Metal and Political Life

Nietzsche writes:

Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion – this is the lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection; it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action...¹⁹

Heavy Metal provides that thin veil of illusion from the political truth -the truth that our utopian religions and political ideologies deny the primordial suffering and self-contradiction of becoming. There is no need for nihilism for Nietzsche or for those who have experienced the sublime knowledge felt in the ecstasy of sound and motion in the centre of a mosh pit at a Slayer concert. Metal Heads are not nihilists nor are they utopians like the liberal and socialist secular cultures of the imperial West. In fact they may be more fully aware and capable of dealing with the death and destruction for which their states are responsible. They know the familiar scene and experience it in mythological beauty; as in this stanza from Megadeth's *Architecture of Aggression* 'Ensuing power vacuum / A toppled leader dies / His body fuels the power fire / And the flames rise to the sky / One side of his face a kiss / The other genocide / Time to pay with your ass / A worldwide suicide.'²⁰ Metal, as the Megadeth example suggests, holds little hope that the violent hubris of human kind will be resolved when all states are liberal democracies at the end of history. As such the subject of the Dionysian experience is much closer to a Hamlet or Oedipus than a Jack the Dreamer. For sure the majority of the Metal community unlike the audience of Attic Tragedy are slaves not masters with little or no political power. But this genre is growing older and its Dionysian wisdom is spreading across the globe. For now economic models and utopian faiths still cling to the tentacles of power but the increasing number of crises in the distribution of resources, from food to energy to the recent financial debacle, make this time in history increasingly ripe for the return of a tragic worldview.

The return of a tragic worldview is by no means a utopian vision. Staying true to Nietzsche's thought it is a philosophy of pessimism. True enough, but a tragic culture though build on pessimism is not necessarily a cruel or authoritarian one. The liberal and socialist models built on the foundations of an optimistic faith in science and knowledge construct a culture of decadent rational actors whose rights to liberty and equality are supposedly protected by the sovereign. The egoist ethical principles

combined with liberal optimism might well make populations and political leadership insensitive to violent origins of the stability they enjoy as well as the ongoing acts of violence needed to sustain the system. Further, it may well make them blind to the suffering of the human condition in general. The tragic worldview and the Dionysian aesthetic experience produce not only wisdom founded on pessimism but a subject capable of great measures of pity and empathy. It is in the loss of subjectivity, or the temporal suspension of alienation, that subjects are transfigured into the collective spirit and reconciled with the dark sadness of the human condition. This is why the chorus of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* could lament the death and suffering of the Trojan people as well as their own. Further Metal's lyrical narratives of suffering and violence may well allow the subject the same capacity for pity or at the least the knowledge one does not suffer alone. Metal opens up the political space for the catharsis of aggressive and vengeful drives as well as a possibility for reparation.

Let us imagine a rising generation with this fearless gaze, with this heroic attraction to what is monstrous (*ungeheuer*), let us imagine the bold stride of these dragon-killers, the proud recklessness with which they turn their backs on all the enfeebled doctrines of scientific optimism so that they may 'live resolutely', wholly and fully; would not the tragic man of this culture, given that he has trained himself for what is grave and terrifying, be bound to desire a new form of art, the art of metaphysical solace, in fact to desire tragedy as his very own Helen...²¹

Notes

¹ F W Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, and the Case of Wagner*, Vintage Books, New York,, 1967. p. 37

² A Henrichs, *Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard*, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 88, 205-240.

³ See Ch 3. in K Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1994.

⁴ For an example of this argument see Ch. 4 in W A Kaufmann, *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1974. For an example of the opposing argument see Ch. 7 in G Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006.

⁵ F W Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, and the Case of Wagner*, Vintage Books, New York,, 1967. p. 130

⁶ F W Nietzsche, *The Dionysiac Word View*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1999, 117-138.

⁷ F W Nietzsche, R Geuss and R Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, 1999. p. 43-44

⁸ C Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2007., p. 715

⁹ F W Nietzsche, R Geuss and R Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, 1999. p. 43

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 45

¹¹ Aeschylus, *Aeschylus*, Chicago U.P., Chicago, 1953. (lines 62-67).

¹² On this see S Freud and J Strachey, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Norton ;, New York, 1989.

¹³ F W Nietzsche, R Geuss and R Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, 1999. p. 53

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 53

¹⁵ Aeschylus, *Aeschylus*, Chicago U.P., Chicago, 1953.(lines 176 -183).

¹⁶ Pantera, *Vulgar Display of Power*, Atlantic / Wea, 1992.

¹⁷ Black-Sabbath, *Black Sabbath*, Warner Brothers, 1970.

¹⁸ F W Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, and the Case of Wagner*, Vintage Books, New York., 1967. p. 42 According to Walter Kaufman Nietzsche is here quoting Sophocles Oedipus at Colonus (line 1224) but according to Speirs and Geuss (F W Nietzsche, R Geuss and R Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, 1999.) Nietzsche is quoting a passage from Aristotle's Eudemos of which fragments survive.

¹⁹ F W Nietzsche, R Geuss and R Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, 1999. p. 40.

²⁰ Megadeth, *Architecture of Aggression*, Capitol / Combat, 1992.

²¹ F W Nietzsche, R Geuss and R Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, 1999.p. 88.

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PART 2

Race, Identity and Gender

Masculinities within Black Metal: Heteronormativity, Protest Masculinity or Queer?

Mikael Sarelin

Abstract

This chapter discusses how gender is performed during black metal-concerts in Finland. The focus lies within three different types of masculinities, which are called heteronormative masculinities, protest masculinities and queer masculinities. I have gathered my material during black metal-concerts and therefore I emphasize on bands during their stage performances. I want to describe how different masculinities are performed and shaped during the black metal-concert, and which sorts of signals the acts of performance send out to the crowd. Finally I am also going to describe how the crowd responds to these signals. To cut it short, my chapter will focus on describing the gender performance that takes place during the stage performance, and the reactions of the crowd. Performance within the performance, that is.

Key Words: Black metal, Finland, gender, heteronormativity, heterosexual matrix, queer, protest masculinity, masculinities, performativity.

1. Introduction

My chapter focuses on different alternative masculinities that are to be found within the Finnish black metal-scene. With the help of examples, which I have gained through participating in concerts, I am going to describe divergent masculine practice within the scene. Since I have limited my material to the Finnish black metal-scene and some of its more active participants, my conclusions and theories are applied on the Finnish black metal-scene only. My field-material consists of interviews that I have made with some of the core-members of the Finnish black metal scene, as well as of documentation that I have done during participant observation.

Research in masculinity has come to concentrate more and more on issues concerning the social construction of masculinities in time and space. This means, that masculinities are constructed and expressed in a specific room.¹ This is the case in my research concerning black metal as well, since I concentrate on how masculinities are expressed within a specific group, (the active core of the black metal underground in Finland) often in a specific room (the club where a concert is held). My research is concentrated within a contemporary frame.

2. Masculinities

R.W. Connell stresses that there is no universal structure of masculinity. Differences in the patterns of masculinity are to be found in both time and space.(not) This is successfully displayed by David D. Gilmore when he looks for manhood within different societies just to conclude that 'I do not think that there is a conclusive answer to that question', the question being whether there is a 'deep structure of manhood or a global archetype of manliness'.² He therefore suggests the term *masculinities* instead of masculinity. Different masculinities can, and also do coexist within the same frames of culture and time. This coexistence is not a static one but there are power relations between different types of masculinities in form of hierarchies where some types of masculinities are dominating whereas others are subordinated. Usually there is one type of masculinity within a society that is hegemonic, that dominates the other types and that is therefore desired.³ Hegemonic masculinity needs not necessary be the most visual or common form of masculinity and it is often quite hard to maintain. Male sports-heroes, who are often used as an example of hegemonic and desirable form of masculinity, have to fight hard in order to maintain their masculinities, sometimes with physical injury as a result. Since masculinities are not constant, they change. Masculinities are constantly challenged, reconstructed and modified, Connell stresses.⁴

Connell uses a four-piece model in order to analyze gender relations. These four pieces consist of power relations, production relations, cathexis or emotional relations and symbolism. Power relations are all about men's subordination of women. This position of subordination of women is what the women's movement has chosen to call patriarchy.⁵ Patriarchy consists of the structures in society that assures men's authority over women.⁶ By emotional relations Connell refers to sexual needs and the premises that coordinate these needs. Heterosexual, as well as homosexual needs are included in the structure of gender. Symbolism includes various verbal and visual means to uphold the subordinations of gender. These means might stretch from how men address women to include wearing of clothes, make-up and body-culture.⁷ In the analysis of my interviews with Finnish black metal-enthusiasts I use mainly three of the above-mentioned pieces, namely power relations, emotional relations and symbolism, in order to grasp the gender-relations within the Finnish black metal-scene. I will not present my analysis in detail in this chapter.

According to Connell masculinity is a social construction. Even though masculinity refers to men's bodies, it is not determined by biological qualities. Women as well as men can have masculine qualities and masculine bodies, reasons Connell. There are usually numerous different masculinities present at the same time within a society. The ideal masculine pattern within society, the dominant pattern, is referred to as the hegemonic masculinity.

Other, subordinated and marginalized masculinities, such as homosexual masculinities, coexist with the hegemonic pattern. Marginalized masculinities often develop within oppressed groups of society, such as ethnical minorities. These marginalized masculinities often share the same agendas with the hegemonic masculinity, even though they seldom 'fit in' or enjoy the social benefits of hegemonic masculinity.⁸

3. Heteronormativity

According to Judith Butler, normative sexuality strengthens the normative gender-pattern. The dominant heterosexuality of society sets the standards and expectations for both men and women. To question this norm involves a risk of losing the sense of belonging to a specific, accepted gender.⁹ Heteronormativity is, as Keith Harris shows, very much present within the metal community. The scene is predominantly heteronormative.¹⁰ This said, there are expectations on gender within black metal as well and I would argue that these expectations are pretty much the same as in the society that surrounds the Finnish black metal-scene. I assume that if a person does not fit into the sexual norm in the Finnish society, the same person will not fit into the norm within the Finnish black metal-scene either.

4. The Heterosexual Matrix

The heterosexual matrix is an understanding according to which only a heterosexual identity is possible. This heterosexual identity is divided into two separate sexes, within which masculinity is separated from femininity only to be rejoined again through heterosexual desire and the actions that this desire causes. The norms of society have different demands on the individual depending on whether the individual is considered a man or a woman. For example, to be considered a man, a person must have a body that is considered to be a man's body. Plus, his behaviour must relate to a pattern that society expects of a man. On top of all, his desire has to be a heterosexual one, he is expected to desire a woman, who is in her turn also expected to fulfil norms, namely those of femininity.¹¹ According to Butler, gender is a construction created to serve political and social interests.¹² These interests that Butler points out are, as far as I can see it, masculine hegemony and ultimately the patriarchy. By using the heterosexual matrix and its demands as a set of tools, I am now going to analyze two Finnish black metal-acts that put heteronormativity to the test.

5. Bisexual Skinhead Black Metal

During my ongoing process of fieldwork I have repeatedly come across two bands that differ from the rest of the Finnish black metal-scene in quite an interesting way. Both bands refer to themselves as black metal, though, and they both sound like black metal and look like it as well, at the

first glimpse, that is. They both also play on shows with more 'typical' black metal bands. So I suppose that both Enochian Crescent and Black Dawn are in fact black metal-acts, but the way they do their thing is quite norm-breaking, and here I refer to both the surrounding society and the Finnish black metal-scene. Not only do Enochian Crescent and Black Dawn question the normative religious views in the typical black metal-manner, but they also play around with the heterosexual matrix.

I will, by using examples, try to clarify in which ways heteronormativity and the heterosexual matrix are questioned, especially in the live acts of these two bands. What I would like to say is that their highly provocative stage performances are queer in a Butlerian manner.

The following quotation is from my field-diary from a show from the year 2004, where Enochian Crescent performed amongst other established Finnish black metal-bands.

The lead singer was dressed in a long army-style grey cape and a cap that reminded me of the Russian army. On his feet he was wearing knee-high platform-boots. He was wearing green and black make-up and his nails were painted green. The rest of the band looked more like an alternative setup than a black metal band on stage.¹³

The above-mentioned look does not exactly match what could be referred to as the typical *dress code* of black metal. Especially the green make-up and the green nails are norm-breaking, as far as there is a norm to break within black metal, which I would argue that there is.

After the first couple of songs were dealt with, the singer stripped his cape and revealed a white corset. Yet a few songs later, a man holding a whip entered the stage and started whipping the singer while the band continued to play. During the last two or three songs soap-bubbles started raining down on the stage from a machine meanwhile the singer coated his face with red lipstick, and proclaimed that Enochian Crescent are *transvestial black metal*. Some of the fans in the crowd cheered while I heard others refer to Enochian Crescent 'as a bunch of fags'.¹⁴

If green nails and make-up were not normative within black metal, then the corset, the soap bubbles and the lipstick were definitely off limits. Enochian Crescent questioned the heterosexual matrix through making the masculine body feminine, through erasing the borders between the masculine and the feminine. The lead singer performed a transsexual identity in order to shock

his fellow black metalers, I assume, and I would like to claim that he succeeded. He challenged the heterosexual matrix, crossing boundaries set by the heterosexual norm through his transsexual performance, becoming neither man nor woman.

According to Butler change is achieved through questioning of the sexual norms with the help of provocative and prohibited behaviour.¹⁵ I'm not sure whether the guys in Enochian Crescent wanted to achieve change in society's sexual patterns through their strange stage-show, but I'm sure they wanted to provoke the crowd and the Finnish black metal-scene. According to one of my informants black metal lives in a constant fear of stagnation, of losing shock-value.¹⁶ I think that the above-mentioned performance was very much about shocking the crowd, taking black metal to the next level of provocation, the provocation of sexual identity.

Shock value is stated as very important within black metal. Through adding new and shocking elements into the music and the scenery, the artists want to avoid stagnation of the scene. Stagnation is dangerous to the scene since it stops its development but also since stagnation might alter the underground-status of black metal. Questioning of the heterosexual matrix in the way that Enochian Crescent did it, could be seen as a means of shocking a crowd that has already seen almost everything there is to be seen when it comes to shock value. And according to the comments about Enochian Crescent being homosexuals that I overheard, the concept worked.

The next norm-breaking example is from a concert from 2003 where Black Dawn warmed up the crowd before the Australian/Dutch band *Deströyer 666*.

The lead singer and front man of Black Dawn, who is also the lead singer of Enochian Crescent, wore a tight latex-dress. His head was shaved and his nails were painted red. He looked kind of sick, a little bit Marilyn Mansonish, probably because of the white facial make-up with black marks around his eyes, that he was wearing.¹⁷

Within black metal, according to Thomas Bossius, gender is usually not stressed. Rather, the usual gender setup of the black metal-environment is more or less androgynous.¹⁸ Still, when sex and sexuality do enter the scene seems to me that Deena Weinstein's description of the macho ideology within metal where men are depicted as tough, strong and active whereas women are seen as weak and passive is correct.¹⁹ Indeed, it seems as if Robert Walser's idea of a male-bonding metal scene that excludes women is to be found within black metal as well.²⁰ But not in the case of Black Dawn. Black Dawn certainly did stress gender and they were definitely not embracing the image of the alpha male warrior. As mentioned in the previous

example, the front man of Black Dawn, Wrath, was wearing what could be called non-traditional corpse paint. A transsexual corpse paint, if you wish. The questioning of sexual norms was visual already at this stage but there was more to come.

In the middle of Black Dawns set a man entered the stage. This time he brought no whip with him, but instead he was pushing a perambulator in front of him and was dressed in a red skirt with white dots on it. From within the perambulator he picked out marshmallows and a bottle of pigs' blood. He soaked the marshmallows and himself in the blood and then proceeded to throwing out the marshmallows into the crowd.²¹

When the adult man dressed out as a little girl entered the stage, the character of the event changed at once. It changed from being a conventional black metal-show (with slightly adjusted norms compared to the everyday black metal-show) into a cascade of sexual norm breaking. Not only did the performance question the heterosexual matrix and its boundaries between the masculine and the feminine. It also broke the rules between the adult and the child as well as between the pure and the impure.

The performance during Black Dawns' show allows itself to be analyzed with the help of Butler's theory about performativity. According to this theory, gender is not fixed. When a baby is born, its environment starts building its gender through social, performative acts. This process of performative reshaping goes on for the rest of the persons' life. According to Butler our gender-identity is the result of a repetitive process. Gender and sex are shaped, they are performative.²² The man who was dressed out as a little girl was, as I see it, reshaping gender, sex and sexuality during his performance. Through his act of performativity he was questioning the social settings that determine the masculine and the feminine, and doing this he questioned the normative sexuality, the heterosexual matrix.

I suppose that the primary thought of the performance was to wake the crowd up through questioning the heterosexual matrix and its set of rules, which are to be found as much within black metal as anywhere else. Even though shock value is an important element within black metal, I would argue that there are norms within black metal. It seems to me that Black Dawn wanted to stretch one of these norms beyond recognition by letting an adult man turn into a little girl that was playing around with blood. The innocent got mixed up with the impure, not least through the blood that could, with a little imagination, be seen as the symbol of menstruation, whereas the little, innocent girl does not menstruate. In a time when the heterosexual desire is no longer the only alternative and society is becoming more or less tolerant towards different sexualities, Black Dawn blew the roof off through sexualizing the only being in society that is not yet combined with sexuality, one of the last taboos: the child.

6. The Search for Queer

Queer is an element that raises questions concerning stability, the use of force, opposition and change within performativity.²³ Queer can be understood as questioning or critique of heteronormative sexuality, as an alternative to the norm. Sexuality and normality are questions usually combined with queer theory. Queer theory discusses questions concerning sexual normality, what the view of normality is based on and how sexuality is regulated in society.²⁴

Queer hence concerns the twisted, the different and the *Other*. These are all elements that I have run into during my fieldwork within black metal. Since queer theory is a theory about norm-breaking sexualities and sexual Otherness, I have chosen to use it in order to explain how the heterosexual norm is both neglected and verified within black metal. What I am saying is, that I am looking for the Queer within black metal.

According to Queer theory sexual identity is constructed, which also means that it is not constant, but open to changes and variation. Sexual identity is used by the patriarchy to create a heterosexual norm that sustains patriarchal power.²⁵ To be queer is thus to question the (hetero)sexual norm, something I have described in the examples above.

7. Conclusions

Individuality is highly praised among my informants and also elsewhere within the black metal-scene.²⁶ It would seem that individuality might be the key to explaining how masculinities that are quite different from each other can coexist within the same scene. According to Connell, the term identity is commonly used by the individual in order to define belonging to a certain context, such as a scene. Connell points out that several sexual identities can co-exist within the same cultural frame. The term identity might thus become a way of proving that one is different, unique, an individual.²⁷ This, I would argue, is the case in black metal as well. Within a homogenous scene it might be difficult to stand out as an individual, and since individuality has become an important issue within black metal, the performance of different masculine identities might become a way to prove that one is an individual.

Along with performing various masculinities as a proof of individuality comes the constant fear of stagnation within black metal. Some of my informants have stated stagnation as a threat against black metal, something that must be avoided 'by all means'. Could fear of stagnation cause masculinities to reshape and coexist, to the extent of becoming queer?

Notes

- ¹ R.W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 2000, p. 8-9.
- ² D Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p. 220.
- ³ *ibid*, p. 10.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, p. 14.
- ⁵ *ibid*, p. 24.
- ⁶ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, 1996, p. 74.
- ⁷ R. W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 2000, p. 24-26.
- ⁸ *ibid*, p. 29-31.
- ⁹ J Butler, *Genustrubbel*, Bokförlaget Daidalos AB, Göteborg, 1990, 2007, p. 25.
- ¹⁰ K Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2007, p. 72-73.
- ¹¹ J Butler, *Genustrubbel*, Bokförlaget Daidalos AB, Göteborg, 1990, 2007, p. 13.
- ¹² *ibid*, p. 56.
- ¹³ IF 2004/2:3
- ¹⁴ IF 2004/2:3
- ¹⁵ F Ambjörnsson, *Vad är queer*, Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur, Stockholm, 2006, p. 139.
- ¹⁶ IF mgt 2001/75
- ¹⁷ IF 2004/2:1
- ¹⁸ T Bossius, *Med framtiden i backspegeln: Black metal- och transkulturen: Ungdomar, musik och religion i en senmodern värld*, Bokförlaget Daidalos AB, Göteborg, 2003, p. 81-82.
- ¹⁹ D Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, Da Capo Press, 1991, 2000, p. 67.
- ²⁰ R Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1982, p. 115.
- ²¹ IF 2004/2:1
- ²² J Butler, *Könet Brinner!*, Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur, 2005, p. 100, 126.
- ²³ *ibid*, p. 101-102.
- ²⁴ F Ambjörnsson, *Vad är queer*, Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur, Stockholm, 2006, p. 8.
- ²⁵ L Gemzöe, *Feminism*, Bilda förlag, Stockholm, 2003, p. 99.
- ²⁶ K Kahn-Harris, *Extreme metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2007, p. 42.

²⁷ R.W. Connell, *Om genus*, Bokförlaget Daidalos AB, Göteborg, 2002, 2003, p. 118-119.

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Metal for Nordic Men: Amon Amarth's Representations of Vikings

Florian Heesch

Abstract

The huge interest in Norse topics in heavy metal today is examined by analysing an exemplary Viking metal song, *The Pursuit of Vikings* by Amon Amarth. It can be shown that the representations of Vikings in this song refer to the picture of heroic heathen sailors and raiders, which is based on medieval sources as well as on literature and other sources from Romanticism to the 20th century. It is stated that the band's death metal style, especially the growling vocals confirm the masculinity of the represented Vikings.

Key Words: Viking metal, Norse myths, growls, gender, masculinity

Since around the early 1990s the heavy metal scene shows a growing interest in Norse topics. Old Norse myths and Viking topics play an important role in extreme metal genres as pagan metal and even in black metal where they have taken the place of satanism and occultism to a certain extent. This can especially be observed in the Nordic countries but to a lesser extent also in other European countries and in the USA. Although the phenomenon is generally well known, references to Norse topics have rarely been analysed in detail.

This chapter attempts to fill the gap of knowledge by providing a precise analysis of an exemplary Viking metal song, namely the Swedish death metal band Amon Amarth's *The Pursuit of Vikings* from the album *Fate of Norns* (2004).

My research is part of an ongoing interdisciplinary project on receptions of the Eddas, located at the department for Scandinavian studies at the Goethe-University, Frankfurt. The aim of the project is not only to reveal the sources that are used in heavy metal when it is referring to Norse myths, but also to identify typical and idiosyncratic strategies of transforming subjects like these into heavy metal. It can be observed that constructions of identities and ideological implications play an important role. One crucial question is to what extent receptions of Norse topics are connected to constructions of gender. This will be the main focus of this chapter, whereby I will concentrate on Amon Amarth as a suitable example. Of course there are further important questions concerning identity and ideology as for instance how receptions of Norse myths are related to religious attitudes,

practices and networks or how they are related to racist ideologies. But these cannot be discussed within the frame of this chapter.

Amon Amarth can be considered to play a significant role in the receptions of old Norse in heavy metal today. Of course they have predecessors and it is also important to note that heavy metal is not the first and only musical culture, which transforms Norse myths into music. One of the most influential compositions on Norse myths is Richard Wagner's operatic tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which even inspired heavy metal bands as Grave Digger (who released an album *Rheingold* in 2003) and Manowar. The latter released their album *Sign of the hammer* which includes a tribute to the Norse God Thor as early as 1984, and today they appear again as popular metallic supporters of Vikings and Norse mythology as it can be studied in their album *Gods of war* (2007). The Swedish band Bathory had a large impact on the spread of interest in Norse topics, starting with the album *Blood Fire Death* (1988). Bathory also used the appropriate Viking imagery. Musically, Bathory were influential on black metal as well as on death metal bands. While receptions of Norse myths were mostly important in black metal, especially the Norwegian black metal of the early 1990s, and the younger pagan metal, bands as the Swedish Unleashed made the topic fit into death metal before Amon Amarth appeared.

Since a couple of years Amon Amarth ranks as one of the most successful extreme metal bands worldwide. Their song *The Pursuit of Vikings* has become a scream a long hymn in live performances and can be considered exemplary for Amon Amarth's representation of Vikings.¹ The band focuses almost entirely on Norse topics. In September 2008, they released their latest Album *Twilight of the Thunder God*,² which was discussed and highly praised by many different metal magazines, thus confirming the still ongoing interest (or, at least, openness) for Norse topics in heavy metal. The release of *Twilight of the Thunder God* was well prepared by the record company Metal Blade Records publishing a comic strip by Lucio Parrillo on the story of the main title in many metal magazines over the whole of Europe.³ Even if the content of Norse metal songs is not always discussed in detail in the magazines, here it is represented in another medium, which seems to be adequate to how metal fans dedicate themselves to the Topic, at least in the perspective of Metal Blade Records.

1. The Song and its Sources

The Pursuit of Vikings tells about the depart of a group of Vikings from their home country. Narrated from the perspective of the Vikings, the story starts with the observation of nature, the sea being freed from ice at the end of winter. The step from nature to fate is not far, the latter being the most important motivation to travel. When the longships sail out onto the sea, the Vikings tell us about the glorious aims and fateful expectations of the

journey. In the chorus, the god Odin - in the Swedish spelling 'Oden' - is called: He shall guide the Vikings' ships and weapons, which will be used in future fights.

Oden! Guide our ships
 Our axes, spears and swords
 Guide us through storms that whip
 And in brutal war⁴

The lyrical form is a typical Amon Amarth song including a subjective narrator perspective and the present tense, which suggests that the outlined events are directly experienced, even if they are obviously located in a historical or mythical time far away. Inclined listeners could easily connect to the narrator's 'we' and dive into the described situation that is constructed out of history, myth and fantasy. When concertgoers unite to scream the chorus together as it usually happens in live performances, the identification with these Vikings is perfect for that particular moment.

The rhythmic and strophic structure of the lyrics corresponds to that of the music. This seems self-evident, but we also find certain close connections. When counting the stresses we notice that there is an irregularity in the first line of the chorus, which has only three stresses instead of the expected four. This irregularity is based on the musical structure, which includes a certain accent on the important call 'Oden' which is followed by a pause. Thus the text is marked as a text to be sung.

The representation of Vikings in the song corresponds well to that image which dominates the romantic literature since around the 18th century and the popular culture of today: the Scandinavian, male, heathen, heroic warrior who travels by ship in search for adventures.⁵ He is a fatalist who would give up freedom only for the price of death. The last verse summarizes this image:

It [the longship] carries us out to sea
 With hope of fame and pride
 And glorious all will be
 That with sword in hand will die⁶

The last two rows evoke the widespread reception of the poem *Hávamál* (*Sayings of the High One*), verses 76 and 77 from the Poetic Edda.⁷ There it is said that somebody's reputation will last even after the person's death. This has often been interpreted in a rather martial way, pointing to the heroic death of warriors, as it is also the case here.⁸

Amon Amarth's rather popular representation of Vikings appears to be based on widely shared images of the cultural memory. It seems that Amon Amarth refer to a range of sources which can be literary but also taken from other media. It is obvious that Amon Amarth are not interested to represent the Vikings as they are seen in a strict historical sense. As historical research has shown, the Vikings were not - or at least not only - those heroic warriors looking for adventures, but also traders and settlers who left their home for economic interests and better conditions for living.⁹ But it would not be a very interesting result to simply criticize Amon Amarth's representation of Vikings as historically inaccurate. Rather, we should have a look at which kinds of images they refer to and, in a second step, in which way their Viking image is connected to gender constructions.

The image of the Vikings as brutal warriors was initially shaped by Christian chroniclers and clergymen who had experienced the Viking raids as victims. As Régis Boyer has pointed out, this picture is summarized in a prayer that was common in French churches in the Middle ages: 'A furore Normannorum, libera nos Domine'.¹⁰ Amon Amarth quote this prayer in translation in their song *Thousand years of oppression* on the album *Versus the world* (2002): 'Save us, oh Lord, from the wrath of the Norsemen',¹¹ and they used the second half of the phrasing as the title of their DVD *Wrath of the Norsemen* (2006), clearly showing which kind of Viking picture they refer to.

In romanticism this picture was modified into a positive, heroic one, and this is the image, which became so popular. Among others the Swedish poets Erik Gustav Geijer and Esaias Tegnér contributed to this picture.¹² Geijer wrote several romantic poems on the topic including the famous poem *Vikingen (The Viking)*.¹³ This text also tells from the perspective of a young man how he left his home for the uneven adventurous life as a Viking. Here we also find the fatalistic belief that one's fate is predestined by the mythical weaving women, the Norns, as in *The Pursuit of Vikings*. Furthermore Geijer refers to the idea that the deeds of the death will not be forgotten but receive their glory. So, if Amon Amarth refer to this idea, which could be traced back to the Eddic *Hávamál*, as mentioned earlier, it is much possible, that this is mediated by Geijer and his impact on the romantic picture of Vikings.

The modern Viking warrior image can also be found elsewhere in literature. A further Swedish example from the twentieth century is Frans Bengtssons novel *Röde Orm*, which tells an adventurous story about a young man and his career as a Viking.¹⁴ Furthermore, not to forget, the popular image of the Viking warriors has been shaped by other media, too, for instance the Hollywood movie *The 13th warrior*.

In one aspect it seems obvious Amon Amarth receive their inspiration not only from literary source. Since August 2007 they are members of honour in the re-enactment group Jomswikinger, the German

part of the Jomsvikings.¹⁵ These modern Viking warriors spend their free time by reconstructing and training Viking fighting styles and methods. They appear not only on festivals, middle age-markets and so on but also perform fights in stage shows of heavy metals acts as Amon Amarth or Manowar.¹⁶ They are part of a network of people with similar interests, sharing their certainly thorough knowledge about Vikings. Anyway, being a Viking means most of all being a heroic warrior to these people.

The lyrics include some details, which can only be understood on the basis of certain information. In the second verse we learn about the goal of the Vikings' journey that it is 'riches in the east'. This confirms that Amon Amarth sing from the perspective of Swedish Vikings. While Vikings from Norway and Denmark mainly travelled to western regions as the British Islands, Iceland, Friesland and Northern France, it were mainly, if not exclusive, Swedish Vikings, who travelled to the eastern Baltic regions, including Russia, and some even far to Constantinople,¹⁷ a topic that has also been transformed to metal by Amon Amarth.¹⁸

2. Viking Masculinity

The representation of the Vikings as warriors and raiders corresponds to a male centred perspective. Obviously we do not need to explain, why there are no women in Amon Amarth's Viking world, which is about fighters and sailors. Indeed among historic Vikings on their trips to plunder there were hardly any women. The women came first into view, when modern scholars started to demystify the romantic Viking and reveal the historic Viking's importance as tradesmen and settlers.¹⁹ In the real world of Vikings women did exist. Robert Walser has shown that one strategy of confirming the patriarchal structure in heavy metal is exscription of women.²⁰ Amon Amarth do not have to try hard to exscribe women from their Viking world: They connect to an image, which already works in this way. However, they confirm this with their music.

Concerning the relationship between music and content it is most important to look at the genre typical style. The death metal style is obviously connoted to the most central themes of the genre, i.e. death, aggression, violence, and war. Music that sounds like death metal will evoke these themes in the ears of anybody involved in that culture, even if he or she does not understand any word of the text.

The genre typical style of *The Pursuit of Vikings* is not neutral in terms of gender. It is a distinctly gendered style, especially concerning the growling vocals as they are practiced here by Johan Hegg. The sound of a death growl can be seen as a twofold masquerade: it seems to be very loud and masculine. The first aspect is a result of vocal technique in combination with electronic amplification; the second one is construed by discourse.

The aggressiveness of screaming is certainly one reason, why screaming and especially growling is mostly regarded as masculine. In this aspect screaming is as much a part of the aggressive image of heavy metal as its other typical musical parameters as distorted sounds, fast and hard guitar and drum playing style and the sheer volume of the music. But growls are even more masculine, not the least because of their low pitch. The sheer dominance of growling men confirms that impression.

It is not difficult to find examples for how this male character of growl is construed and confirmed in heavy metal discourse, namely in discussions in web forums, magazine articles and reviews. That works not merely in the way that the masculinity is stated openly, but rather in discriminating any growl practice by women. Angela Gossow, to mention only the most prominent example, is described as ‘the woman who can growl like a man’, which leaves nothing to add.

Not the least Amon Amarth themselves connect to this tendency: In interviews they state that they will always keep absent from two things: keyboards and female vocals²¹ implying that female vocals are clear vocals and surely no growls as practiced by Johan Hegg.

As a conclusion we see that Hegg’s growls are an important stylistic means to confirm the Vikings’ masculinity and they are intended to function in this way. Amon Amarth’s death metal style confirms the represented Viking image as male aggressive warriors.

3. Masculinity and the Scream-a-Long Effect

It is interesting to observe what happens to this representation when performed live as a scream a long hymn as the band used to practice in their concerts in recent years.²² When Hegg asks the audience to ‘sing’ the chorus the people do not growl, of course. This is not only because most people cannot growl but also because this would be rather soft, not much louder than talking. In the traditional interaction between stage and crowd Hegg asks the audience to shout as loud as possible, giving them a second chance to shout even louder than before. Against the ongoing playing of bass and reduced drum set, the people have to scream – loudly. The result is a usual shouting of an exited crowd on non-defined pitch. It does not sound as masculine as a growl and one can even hear some female fans who naturally shout on a higher pitch. The originally growled chorus can obviously easily be transformed into a non-masculinist shouting.

This relativates the masculinist image to a certain extent. Having said this it is not meant to state that Amon Amarth contradict their artificial Viking image when making it a scream a long hymn. This practice in live performances fits into Amon Amarth’s self-image of good entertainers. Anybody could join the Vikings’ call to Odin – even women. Nevertheless,

even if it is ‘only’ entertainment, the patriarchal attitude in their representation of Vikings remains obvious.

Notes

¹ For some reason, even Sung-Hyung Cho’s documentary film on the Wacken open air festival *Full Metal Village* ends with *The Pursuit of Vikings*.

² Amon Amarth, *Twilight of the Thunder God*, sound recording, deluxe collector’s edition, Metal Blade Records, Eislingen, 2008.

³ While the song *Twilight of the Thunder God* deals with Thor’s fight with the midgard serpent which is part of the Ragnarök (the Norse myth about the end of the world), the comic strip combines this with the myth about Thors earlier attempt to kill the midgard serpent from the boat of the giant Hymir. According to Metal Blade Records the comic strip was published in the following magazines: Metal Hammer (Germany), Rock Tribune (Belgium), Hard Rock (France), Terrorizer (UK), Inferno (Finland), Metal Hammer (Greece), Norway Rock Magazine (Norway), Hard Rocker (Poland), Loud (Portuga), Sweden Rock (Sweden), Rock Planet (Slovakia), Rock Hard (Spain), Spark (Czech Republic), Metal Hammer (Hungary), Metal Blade Records, <<http://www.metalblade.de/amonamarth/>>, viewed on 7 November 2008. Besides the website, I refer to Terrorizer, issue 171, June 2008, pp. 48-49, and Metal Hammer (Germany), October 2008, pp. 70-71.

⁴ Amon Amarth, *Fate Of Norns*, sound recording, Metal Blade Records, Eislingen, 2004.

⁵ R. Boyer, ‘Vikings, Sagas and Wasa Bread’, in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, A. Wawn (ed), Hisarlik Press, Middlesex, 1994, pp. 69-81.

⁶ Amon Amarth, *Fate Of Norns*.

⁷ *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, G. Neckel (ed), vol. 1: Text, 4th, revised edition by H. Kuhn, Winter, Heidelberg, 1962, p. 29. For an English translation see *The Poetic Edda*, trans. with an introduction and notes by C. Larrington, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999 (Oxford World’s Classics), p. 24.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of these two verses see K. v. See, *Die Gestalt der Hávamál. Eine Studie zur eddischen Spruchdichtung*, Athenäum, Frankfurt/Main, 1972, pp. 46-50.

⁹ R. Boyer, *Die Wikinger*, trans. L. Gränz, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1994.

¹⁰ R. Boyer, ‘Vikings, Sagas and Wasa Bread’, p. 70.

¹¹ Amon Amarth, *Versus the world*, sound recording, Metal Blade Records, Eislingen, 2002.

¹² R. Boyer, ‘Vikings, Sagas and Wasa Bread’, p. 73.

¹³ E. G. Geijer, 'Vikingen', in *Samlade Skrifter*, new extended edition, J. Landquist (ed), vol. 2: Skaldestycken, Tal och avhandlingar 1817-1819, Norstedt & Söners, Stockholm, 1924, pp. 29-33.

¹⁴ F. G. Bengtsson, *Röde Orm: En berättelse från okristen tid*, Norstedts, Stockholm, 2005 (first published 1941).

¹⁵ Die Jomsvikinger. Bloðvítir, viewed on 10 November 2008, <<http://www.jomsvikinger.de/>>, The Jomsvikings, viewed on 10 November 2008, <<http://www.jomsvikings.com/>>.

¹⁶ *ibid.* The appearance of the Jomsvikings is documented on 'The Pursuit of Vikings', video recording in Amon Amarth, *Twilight of the Thunder God*, deluxe collector's edition, bonus-DVD, and Manowar, *Gods of War*, sound recording, limited edition, Magic Circle Music, 2007, bonus-DVD.

¹⁷ H. R. E. Davidson, *The Viking Road to Byzantium*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1976.

¹⁸ Amon Amarth, 'Varyags of Miklagard', in *Twilight of the Thunder God*. In the Viking age, the Scandinavians called Constantinople by the name Miklagarð, the Great Town. Consequently, Amon Amarth use this name, too.

¹⁹ J. Jesch, *Women in the Viking age*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 1991.

²⁰ R. Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, reprint, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, [1999] (Music / Culture), pp. 108-117.

²¹ S. Schilling, 'Ragnarök aktuell – Asgards Wächter melden Vollzug', interview with Amon Amarth. *Legacy*, nr 56, August/September 2008, pp. 17-18, F. Krapp, 'Götterdämmerung', interview with Amon Amarth. *Metal Hammer* (Germany), October 2008, p. 32.

²² The performance at Summer Breeze open air festival, Dinkelsbühl, 2007, is documented on Amon Amarth *Twilight of the Thunder God*, deluxe collector's edition, bonus-DVD.

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True Aryan Black Metal: The Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the Construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music

Karl Spracklen

Abstract

Debates in leisure studies over the meaning of leisure, couched in terms of freedom and constraint, have hinged on the postmodern turn (Bramham, 2006; Henderson, 2006; Spracklen, 2006). At the same time, researchers of popular music have theorised the development of neo-tribes as the effect of postmodernity on practices of consumption and identity formation (Hodkinson, 2002; Bennett, 2006). Black metal is a form of heavy metal music taken to extremes of image, content and ideology, exemplified by the church burnings and murders in Norway at the start of black metal's recent history (Kahn-Harris, 2007). Previous work on black metal (Spracklen, 2006) has linked the discourses of identity in the scene to a Habermasian framework of communicative and instrumental rationalities at the end of modernity (Habermas, 1981:1984). In this paper, previous and new research into the discourses about black metal on an internet forum will be examined alongside scene literature to explore the tensions between black metal as a neo-tribe and black metal as a site of the construction of whiteness (Garner, 2006) and white (racist, Aryan, heathen) identity. As an insider in the black metal scene, I use my knowledge of that scene to observe discussions on a black metal on-line forum about what it means to be a black metal fan (being "kult"). In addition, six adult black metal fans were interviewed about their involvement and understanding of the music and its extreme ideologies. In identifying the tensions between playful belonging and elitist ideology, it will be suggested that an imagined, white community is being created that resists notions of postmodernity, globalisation and consumption and casts doubt on the completeness of the postmodern turn. In turn, this doubt about the postmodern turn will raise issues for our understanding of leisure.

Key Words: Black Metal, Leisure, Racism, Aryanism, Nationalism, Whiteness, Online forum discussions , postmodernism, Habermas

1. Introduction

Debates in leisure studies over the meaning of leisure, couched in terms of freedom and constraint, have hinged on the postmodern turn. At the same time, researchers of popular music have theorised the development of

neo-tribes as the effect of postmodernity on practices of consumption and identity formation. Black metal is a form of heavy metal music taken to extremes of image, content and ideology, exemplified by the church burnings and murders in Norway at the start of black metal's recent history. Previous work on black metal has linked the discourses of identity in the scene to a Habermasian framework of communicative and instrumental rationalities at the end of modernity. In this chapter, previous and new research into the discourses about black metal on an internet forum will be examined alongside scene literature to explore the tensions between black metal as a neo-tribe and black metal as a site of the construction of whiteness and white (racist, Aryan, heathen) identity. As an insider in the black metal scene, I use my knowledge of that scene to observe discussions on a black metal on-line forum about what it means to be a black metal fan (being 'kult'). In addition, six adult black metal fans were interviewed about their involvement and understanding of the music and its extreme ideologies. In identifying the tensions between playful belonging and elitist ideology, it will be suggested that an imagined, white community is being created that resists notions of postmodernity, globalisation and consumption and casts doubt on the completeness of the postmodern turn. In turn, this doubt about the postmodern turn will raise issues for our understanding of leisure.

2. Methodology

In addition to insider, ethnographic reflections on the scene, the material used in the critical analysis of discourses in black metal was gathered over two ten week periods observing and recording comments made on a black metal website forum, as well as ethnographic work complemented with six informal, semi-structured interviews with black metal fans. This approach to on-line data collection followed the work of Hodkinson, Hine and Kanayama in using publicly available discourses on-line to establish how understandings and identities are represented and constructed. The forum, at www.blackmetal.co.uk, is a publicly accessible one. Knowledge of the scene established this forum as a key on-line space for black metal fans, both British and International, to discuss the music and its surrounding culture in English. The forum has private spaces accessible to members who sign-up; on reflection, the decision was made not to use material from these private spaces, as this research project was about understanding the public discourse of black metal and whether the rationality was communicative or instrumental in debating the 'essence' of the scene and the music. Also, by limiting the research to public postings and discussions, ethical issues of consent were avoided.

3. Black Metal as Elite Resistance

On the blackmetal.co.uk open forum, it is clear that the majority of people posting comments see black metal as something beyond the bounds of normal, respectable society. In a discussion about the possibility of Varg Vikernes visiting the United Kingdom on his release from prison, the posters were largely dismissive of mainstream white working-class culture and contrasted the conformity of belonging and passive acceptance with the elite individualism of black metal. As one poster claimed: 'Black Metal is for the 'intellectual elite' therefore chavs will never listen to it' (Diabolics, posted 21 November 2005). The poster who instigated the discussion started by saying:

I think he's gonna be shocked if her ever visits the UK, as to the fucked up social class of people we like to call chavs... maybe one of them will go shout something at a 'fuckin skater', not knowing that the 'fuckin skater' is Varg, and end up in a world of pain (Valtam, posted 20 November 2005)

Immediately, then, Valtam was making a distinction between himself and the black metal scene, and the white, working-class 'chav' subcultures. But there are two other themes in his posting. The first is one of elitism: what offended Valtam was potentially being misidentified as a skater, a member of a teenage subculture who might dress in black but who wouldn't be a member of the black metal elite. The second theme is that of the fantasy of revenge: Varg Vikernes killing a chav on behalf of all the black metal fans who had faced abuse for the clothes they wore, the hair they grew long and the music they listened to. This theme was picked up by another poster, who criticised the violent nature of white and black working-class youth then asked, seemingly without being aware of the irony: 'Why aren't there more groups of BM warriors setting clubber's (sic) cars on fire, instead, and attacking people, in a more meaningful way?' (Lesh, posted 23 November 2005)

The forum is governed by tacit rules about what one posts, and what one says about black metal or particular bands. For instance, when someone asked the question – what is black metal to you? – a member called jonesmark, who was one of the most prolific commentators on the forum, was the fourth person to reply to the initial posting and tried to fix the definition as follows:

First and foremost for myself is the music, period. Second comes the ideology and philosophical standpoints (jonesmark, posted 9 December 2005)

Although this thread continued to be discussed through 148 posts over a period of two months, in essence the debate was about the relationship and balance between the music as an aesthetic style (coldness, anger) and as a vehicle for elitist ideology (Satanic, pagan, misanthropic, nationalist). In other words, jonesmark's intervention at the beginning, had limited the focus to a debate along those lines, which stressed the elitist nature of the music and the nature of the music itself. The tacit rules of the forum encourage posters to conform to a view of black metal that is elitist, that resists a mainstream defined by inferior people and inferior attitudes: 'Black metal is a musical and ideological (sic) form of seperating (sic) myself from the flock of sheep that is modern life' (Nelly75, posted 14 December 2005).

4. Black Metal as Neo-Tribe?

Heavy metal is white man's music (Weinstein, 1991), and despite high-profile black rock stars such as Jimi Hendrix and Phil Lynott, the music has always been associated, in the West, with white, male, working-class communities. The adherence to norms and values associated with hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity is evident in the language of the forum: bands not liked are called gay, and sexist and homophobic jokes and pictures are often posted. The homoerotic, hypermasculine nature of black metal is not so evident, but comes across in the sense of male-separateness and bonding in the following comment:

I remember reading an interview with rob darken (Graveland) where he stated that black metal should not be used to impress chicks, but rather scare them away... if I play a show and some chick comes onto me saying that she loved my music and would like to get to know me better, then that is just the surest way NOT to get me to know her better (Nattestad, posted 2 January 2006)

At the gigs I've attended, there have been barely a handful of black and Asian metal fans. On the forum, this whiteness is largely tacit, but comes through when extreme nationalists make postings and others react to the racism. For the nationalists, black metal is a music solely by and for various permutations of white/Nordic/European elites, and there are tediously regular and frequent statements along those lines. When other black metallers attack this racism, they still couch their attacks in terms of a white, Eurocentric world view that conflates ethnicity with exotic, foreign Others:

I couldn't care less what people do in their spare time... (whether they) worship Hitler or are Asian (if anything, being a black metallers in a country like Malaysia where you

risk prison and even the death penalty deserves more credit than being a BM fan in social-democratic tolerant Norway) (Arkeos, posted 14 December 2005)

5. Black Metal Fans

This section of the chapter summaries the findings of a small-scale research project talking to and interviewing six black metal fans in the north of England – three of whom were personal contacts. The other three were identified through talking to the first three and finding out the contact details of people I had seen at gigs or in the Hellraiser metal/punk shops in Leeds and York. All six of the black metals fans were white, male, and all were aged over twenty. Half of them had partners of some kind – and one of them attended gigs with his long-term girlfriend. All six were serious consumers of black metal music: they went to gigs across the north and in London, two were regular customers at the Hellraiser shops, one of them infuriatingly being the person who beat me to the Leeds shop on a Saturday to buy rare imports. One of the fans was a collector of black metal vinyl, and had built up an obsessively huge horde, which he then burnt to CD to play during the working day. Everyone used the internet to buy records: Supernal Music was an on-line retailer (and underground record label) they all recognized and used, and two of the fans had built up a close friendship with Alex Kurtagic, its owner. The fact that Kurtagic has been one of the standard-bearers of elitist ideology in black metal - through his column in *Zero Tolerance* magazine, the use of his catalogue to support revolutionary conservative views associated with nationalism and purity and European identity, and through his record label releasing albums by National Socialist BM bands like Hate Forest – did not worry the fans I interviewed. Melkor, who in his day job worked in the public sector in a traditionally left-wing profession, admitted that ‘there’s a lot of edgy stuff put out [written] by Alex, for sure, but it’s all provocation’.

In my research with black metal fans, a common theme that quickly emerged was a sense of (some) ironic distance from the seriousness of the genre’s elitist ideologies. That is not to say that the fans I spoke to were actively against those ideologies. Far from it: all were sympathetic towards the anti-Christianity and anti-conformity of the ideologies, and all wore Thor’s Hammers at gigs, signifying an empathy with the scene’s (Scandinavian, Nordic, Aryan?) heathen turn. They all agreed with the view that black metal was more than just music, and that there was a distinctive depth to the genre’s ideologies which went far beyond the cartoonish Satanism of 1980s metal bands like Venom. One of the fans, Gothmog, even went so far as to claim that black metal was ‘against everything in the modern world, and back to the old gods’. But they all saw black metal as being something visceral, to be enjoyed as a feeling or a sound, rather than an

exposition of political beliefs. In this sense, the fans were similar to those interviewed by Kahn-Harris (2007) in his ethnographic work with people involved in the black metal scene in England and Israel. Bauglir, for example, told me that black metal was about 'aggression, darkness, hatred', but also that 'you can't tell what they're saying anyway, so it doesn't matter what they're singing about'. Another black metallor, Glorund, was more precise, when he told me that it was always 'about the MET-AHL!' and nothing else. For him, a heavy metal fan who first got into the music in the mid-eighties thrash era, and who still listened to and played (as a drummer) all kinds of extreme metal, black metal was just the most metal – the most evil, the most Satanic, the most hard – of heavy metal's many genres and scenes. Like the other older (post-30) black metal fans, he had progressed from the thrash of Anthrax and Megadeth to the first 'true' extreme metal genre, death metal, before that scene was in turn overshadowed by Norwegian black metal. As such, the older fans had been on the fringes of the death metal 'tape-trading' scene in the late eighties and had expressed support for bands like Obituary and Death (Kahn-Harris, 2007). But of course, as I have already mentioned, it was this death metal scene that the Norwegian Black Metal Circle condemned for not being serious about Satanism. The arrival of demo tapes of black metal bands like Mayhem and Emperor, the conversion of Darkthrone from a death metal band in baggy shorts and trainers into corpse-paint-wearing monsters, and the fall-out from the church-burnings and murders, ensured that these extreme metal fans knew the difference between their Gummy thrash, poser death and the true music of the dark side.

What these fans got from black metal was a feeling that the scene, but especially its music, expressed something authentically (primevally) evil. The Devil has always had the best tunes: heavy metal, right from its roots in the Crowley-worshipping Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin and the Hammer Horror theatrics of Black Sabbath, has always flirted with darkness and Christian ideas of Evil. Black metal is just another iteration of that relationship with evil, darkness and anti-conformity. Melkor described it as 'playing around with the things that we were told were scary, just to get a reaction from normal people... and you don't get more scarier than Satan'. The contrast with normal people typifies the tension in black metal between the explicit elitism and individualism (physically retreating into the snow-bound woods and mountains of northern Europe) and the need to have the transgression recognised. All of the fans expressed a need to have their anti-Establishment, anti-modern, anti-Christian music vindicated by the reaction of people outside the scene: on discussing Nocturno Culto's self-produced and directed film about his home in the Norwegian wilderness, Thu, one of the younger fans interviewed, contrasted Culto with his bandmate Fenriz: 'Black metal is about opposition, not hiding away. Fenriz lives in Oslo

surrounded by shit. That's what makes him angry. That's what makes Darkthrone a proper metal band. Anger, and watching the faces of the people who look at you when you walk past them. Fenriz walks the streets.'

For these fans, then, black metal resembled a neo-tribe, in the way in which they were able to be 'true' and yet be aware of black metal's playfulness and relationship to other forms of extreme metal. None of the fans wore corpse-paint and spikes round town, and only two of them had gone to gigs in the full black metal costume. But they did wear Thor's Hammers, black metal tee shirts and other items of extreme metal jewellery to perform black metal in public. And for all the fans, black metal marked a space in which masculinity; individuality and freedom of thought were privileged over conformity and commodification.

6. National Socialist Black Metal

I returned to the blackmetal.co.uk forum in 2007 to further examine the extreme ideologies of the scene. I was particularly interested to explore the tensions between black metal as a neo-tribe and black metal as a site of the construction of whiteness (Garner, 2006) and white (racist, Aryan, heathen) identity. During my time observing the comments made by the fans on the forum, two threads came to my attention. The first was a discussion about the band Drudkh; the second was about NSBM itself. This last thread proved to be very timely and useful for this research, as the discussion was connected to an anonymous on-line poll of forum users. On 10 July 2007, after just under a month of discussions, and after the heated arguments had faded away, the poll showed a majority of the black metal fans agreeing with the statement that National Socialist ideology in black metal was stupid: 54% of respondents (31 where n=57). Only 16% believed that the ideology was 'great', seemingly approving of the music and its ideology; 14% believed NSBM was 'entertaining', a more ambivalent position to take; and 11% said that black metal was 'supposed to be bad', apparently supporting NSBM as an extension of the provocative nature of the scene. In addition, a further 5% believed that NSBM was 'just a bit of fun'. This on-line poll, while clearly not representative of all black metal fans, was reflective of the ambiguity of NSBM in the wider scene, and perhaps the majority-held opinion of NSBM as something that is a provocation too far. It is also instructive to see that the people who did see a place for NSBM in black metal were not automatically in accord with its white (racist, Aryan, heathen) supremacist, romantic nationalist politics: the 11% who saw in it an extension of provocation and anti-conformity; and the 5% who saw NSBM as a big joke on the anti-NSBM fans who took it all too seriously.

The thread on black metal ('What do we all feel about NSBM?') resulted from an original posting on 15 June 2007 by someone called diseasedmind. It is worth quoting from this original post at length, as

diseasedmind made a number of articulate arguments against the legitimacy of National Socialism and its ideological influence in black metal:

I have a massive axe to grind with NSBM... the problems I see are these: 1) Most importantly, it's an invasion of the scene by people with political agendas who have no actual regard for the broader BM scene itself... 2) Politics has no place in a musical form focussed on the destruction of everyone... I'm not including bands who simply write about their cultural heritage in this, though there's quite a degree of crossover which is of course exploited by... NSBM activists... 3) The assertion that the demise of our culture is the fault of one section of society is again incompatible with a musical form which recognizes (and often celebrates) the inherent self destructiveness of the human species. National Socialism is an idiot's philosophy in which history is romanticized... stupid people exist in all races and cultures and a mass global cull would in purely logical terms be no bad thing. NS subscribers are the most intellectually stunted of the lot so logically we should start with them. NS activism in BM is a cancer, which threatens the long-term health of the BM scene as a whole and needs to be checked. That's my position anyway. I expect there'll be some neo- fascist sympathizers lurking in the wings to have a rant... anyway, figured it'd be interesting to see how many sympathizers vs. passive acceptors and objectors.

This initial posting is interesting in the way diseasedmind asserts that black metal is purely misanthropic in its ideology. For diseasedmind, black metal's pure misanthropic message is in danger of being subsumed by elitism based around (white) racial supremacy – though he/she does allow room for heathen romanticism (bands that write songs about their pagan/heathen cultural heritage), as long as that romanticism does not spill over into nationalism. This racial supremacy is critiqued by diseasedmind as being the antithesis of black metal's misanthropic elitism: there is no culture or race or nation that is any better than any other, because the whole of humanity is rubbish. Note that diseasedmind is quite happy to criticise National Socialism for its irrational logic of supremacy, while at the same time writing about global 'culls' of the stupid (ironically, starting with the neo-Nazis as prime examples of stupid people). Also note that diseasedmind ends the post by suggesting this is just his/her opinion: an explicit declaration

of black metal's commitment to individuality and freedom of speech and thought.

By 28 June 2007, 133 postings had been made on this thread, making it one of the liveliest discussions on the web site that year. The first response to diseasedmind's argument came at 8.58pm on 16 June 2007, a mere three minutes after the original post. The poster, Invocation, added to his position at 9.03pm. He/she agreed with 'everything' but suggested 'nazi's will never, EVER change their opinions'. Invocation's second post added the point that 'one of the goals of the Pagan Front is to remove all Satanism from black metal'. The Pagan Front are a key organisation promoting extreme right-wing propaganda in black metal: Invocation's comment demonstrates the way in which the neo-Nazis are seen to be trying to dissociate black metal from Satanism (something he/she presumably thinks has a place in black metal, given his/her name and their comment).

More ambivalent comments followed soon after Invocation's. One poster, a heathen romantic based in the United States, said

I find European history and paganism really interesting, and I like it when bands incorporate that stuff into their music. I only think it becomes stupid when it just turns into Hitler Worship, but most of the worthwhile NSBM bands don't do that (jeffnogo, posted 16 June 2007)

Some other postings made similar points that legitimised some NSBM as being about paganism and local (white) identities, against NSBM that supported Germany and the Holocaust.

The first challenge to diseasedmind from a supporter of National Socialism appeared at 10.43pm on 16 June 2007. Carpathianhell may have adopted a cod-horror name, but their comments justified and supported the aims and objectives of National Socialism and its black metal sub-genre. 'NSBM supports the destruction of the judeo-christian regime does it not?' they argued, 'NSBM supports the elimination of all who are 'impure'... anything that supports the destruction of something, at least human-wise, is welcomed in black metal as far as I'm concerned'. Here, Carpathianhell was linking black metal's anti-Christianity to a wider resistance against something they called 'judeo-christian' religion, an extrapolation that allows anti-Semitism to be justified as being part of a wider defence against religion. Carpathianhell continued

BM needs allies to achieve it's (sic) ultimate goal, the destruction of all humanity, the destruction of all judeo-christian like filth. If NSBM supports any part of that ultimate goal (which they do) then BM must accept these

allies. And from what I've seen, NSBM groups such as the Pagan Front have a much more real chance... of making actual changes in society... what is better the destruction of some people (whose who NSBM wants destroyed), or of no people at all?

Carpathianhell's comments were immediately criticised by other posters. Some postings argued that ultimately black metal was about the music: 'I'll start by stating I don't agree with any NS ideology but half the time I haven't got a fuckin' clue what the hell their on about anyhow... don't give a toss if they goose-step round their bedrooms all night so long as they don't bother me... give me a good toon [tune]' (posted by no-necro-name.com, 16 June 2007). But one poster, Nemesis, provided a critical demolition of National Socialism and NSBM, which led to Carpathianhell retreating from overt support of neo-Nazi genocide to a position that attempted to establish National Socialism as a genuine political philosophy. But by 17 June 2007, at the twentieth post in the thread, others were picking up the defence of NSBM in more crude terms: 'it's the fucking bestest, haha cunt fuck off' (posted by Wehrwolf). After others continued to try to justify NSBM by equating it with freedom of speech and freedom to provoke, diseasedmind and another anti-NSBM poster, centurion, ended up caught in a number of debates with ambivalent or pro-NSBM black metal fans. On the latter side, for example, someone argued that 'you can hate everyone, but hate certain groups less... some people may endorse NS movements (not necessarily white power movements), due to the fact that they bring death' (posted by schadel_reich, 18 June 2007). The thread continued to grow over the next few days as more defenders of NSBM appeared, but diseasedmind continued to answer their comments. In the end, by the time the thread tailed off at the end of the month, the NSBM defenders had stopped posting, and more anti-NSBM posters had appeared, as well as a number of people who had been sidetracked into a discussion about the lack of non-white musicians in black metal (and the existence of black, black metal musicians such as Mystifier, and the Pashtun Muslim black metallor Taarma).

The second thread involved Drudkh. Drudkh are a Ukrainian pagan BM band, whose key members were also musicians in Hate Forest, a NSBM band. When the initial posting advertised the availability of Drudkh's new album, it drew two responses from those critical of NSBM. The originator of the NSBM thread, diseasedmind, was quick to point out Drudkh's link to the Pagan Front and Hate Forest. Another poster, Tantalus, mocked Alex Kurtagic of Supernal Music by claiming that the high price of the deluxe edition was due to a surcharge on 'all those dedicated to the downfall of ZOG [the codeword used by neo-Nazis for the secret Jewish conspiracy]' (posted 21 June 2007). Again, many black metal fans said they would buy the record,

even though there was a question mark about the band's ideology (especially since the lyrics, translated from the Ukrainian original, do not seem to be explicitly pro-NS). The situation wasn't made any clearer when a fan of Drudkh claimed that the band was 'not involved with the PF... the Pagan Front is completely irrelevant to Drudkh... I've been to the site before... none of the money from this deluxe edition is going to some NS organization' (posted by Kveldulf, 24 June 2007). When diseasedmind tried to make people realise that the Pagan Front was actively supporting neo-Nazi activism, one fan, Valgrinder, asked 'black metal is about hate and death... but how come hating for example Jews is a bad thing then?' (posted 23 June 2007). So, even if Drudkh are not National Socialist, they have fans who are.

7. Conclusions

Black metal can be understood as a self-referencing community, or neo-tribe, in which action is communicative. Following Habermas' definition of communicative rationality and action as democratic, communal and non-hierarchical (Habermas, 1981:1984), we can begin to analyse actions and words within the black metal community as being representative of communicative rationality. Black metal is against the instrumental rationalities that dominate Western society: it is anti-Christianity, anti-State, anti-commercialisation. In talking about black metal, the posters on the form were keen to distinguish the communal, democratic nature of black metal from the mainstream, commodified world of corporate rock. Black metal exists outside of traditional or modern social structures; its meaning and purpose are the subject of discourse and debate (Habermas, 1981:1984). Even the streak of nationalism and extremism associated with black metal can be seen as an example of the liberal nature of the meaning-setting discourse and action: there is no bureaucratic, hierarchical structure to remove or impose such extremism, which ironically allows such extremism to prosper without censure. Black metal's essential nature is individualist. So individuals choose to consume black metal as a way of expressing their individuality and their ability to rise above instrumental rationalities and make informed, civilised choices about consumption and leisure.

However, in many ways black metal can be also understood as a place that reaffirms instrumental rationalities and promotes instrumental action in leisure and consumption. Whatever individuals in black metal might think about the nature of the music, the community, the genre, it is still a business operating in a market in a commodified, globalised industry. Black metal is not a communal music played live in a free setting. Black metal is part of the Westernised, commercial pop and rock music industry that has imposed itself on the rest of the world, and as such black metal reproduces the instrumental actions that govern that industry. Music is recorded and sold. The symbolic boundaries of the neo-tribe are shaped by

the consumption of commodities such as records, tee-shirts and fanzines. Small labels and specialised shops and websites cater and foster demand for commercial products. People make a living from black metal. The most successful black metal bands are booked by professional agencies to undertake tours in venues owned by multi-national corporations. More obscure black metal bands send out press releases, establish web-sites, upload music files. Rather than being truly democratic, communal and liberal, black metal is governed by instrumental rationalities associated with the music business, and by ideologies of elitism that owe their origin to nationalist debates in European nation-states going through the phase of late capitalism (Habermas, 1981:1984).

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How Diverse Should Metal Be? The Case of Jewish Metal, Overt and Covert Jewishness

Keith Kahn-Harris

Abstract

Many critiques of metal mention its 'whiteness' as a problematic feature of it. Such critiques are to a certain extent refuted by the increasing number of studies that have demonstrated the national and ethnic diversity in metal scenes across the world. Metal is increasingly invested in notions of location and national origin, resulting in forms of 'folk metal' developing in metal scenes around the world. At the same time, there are some striking limitations as to the diversity of global metal. Metal scenes are much less developed in some conspicuously 'non-white' places including much of sub-Saharan Africa and many 'non-white' ethnic and national groups, such as those of Chinese origin, are under-represented in metal worldwide. It is also true that most of the metal scenes that are dominant in global terms, such as the Swedish scene, are overwhelmingly 'white'.

This chapter examines how far the aesthetic and political validity of metal is dependant on its diversity. To what extent is pushing for ethnic and national diversity within metal an important political, social and aesthetic goal? This chapter examines the case study of Jewish metal to illuminate these questions.

Key Words: Jewish Metal, Jewishness, Popular Music, diversity, difference, music and social policy, aesthetics, politics.

Since 2005 I have written a blog called 'Metal Jew'¹. The blog stems from my deep interest and involvement in both the Jewish and metal communities. The blog was never intended to be a serious platform for the lengthy expressions of either my personal life or my intellectual ruminations. Rather, it is a fairly light-hearted place for me to draw attention to and discuss things that interest me in the Jewish and metal worlds. In particular, I am interested in the intersection between the Jews and metal, Jewishness and metalness, Jewish culture and metal culture.

I'm not the only one interested in this intersection. The internet has facilitated the linking up of Jewish metallers –for example there is a Facebook group called 'Jewish Metalheads'. Although I am the only dedicated Jewish metal blog, other Jewish bloggers have discussed metal and their connection to it². More broadly, a key part of contemporary Jewish culture in the last few decades has involved tracking the Jewish involvement

in popular music. So, books like Scott Benarde's *Stars of David: Rock n Roll's Jewish Stories*³ and Guy Oseary's *Jews Who Rock*⁴ and websites like *JewsRock.org* have revealed the Jewish backgrounds of popular musicians. Thanks to such projects I now know that the Jewish involvement in metal is not restricted to such well-known Jewish figures as Gene Simmons of Kiss and Dave Lee Roth of Van Halen; it extends to members and former members of metal bands like Cannibal Corpse, Anthrax, Dream Theatre and Manowar.

Most of these projects are little more than contributions to the Jewish parlour game of 'Spot the Jew'. The very existence of this parlour game is testament to the lack of overtness in the Jewish contribution to popular music. Whereas for example Hispanic or African-Americans have been highly visible and audible in their dissections of their backgrounds and identities in their work, the same has historically not been true with regard to Jewish popular musicians. In recent years however, there have been a number of studies that have dissected the Jewish contribution to popular music by scholars such as Steven Lee Beeber, Michael Billig, Jeffrey Melnik and Michael Rogin⁵. Such studies have demonstrated a specifically Jewish contribution to the development of twentieth century popular music, and have shown that the coyness of this contribution – often as songwriters, producers and impresarios rather than performers – is revealing of the ambivalences of contemporary Jewish identity.

Much of this work has focused on first and second generation Jewish immigrants to the United States and UK, Jews who grew up in an ambivalent and marginal place. With later generations of Jews, who grew up in highly assimilated families, it is often hard to see how their Jewish upbringings made much of a difference to their work. In the case of metal, in most cases, the specifically Jewish contribution to metal bands appears non-existent or obscure.

There is of course no obligation on Jews or anyone else to speak of their backgrounds and identities in metal or any other music. Nor is a 'subterranean' Jewish influence on one's music unworthy of interest. However, in my ongoing work on contemporary Jewish culture I am principally interested in attempts to make particular cultural forms 'explicitly' Jewish. How can an artistic work 'speak' Jewishly in ways that do not require complex processes of decoding? How can an artist be a 'Jewish artist' in ways that indelibly stamp their productions as Jewish in open and visible/audible ways? Again: I am not suggesting that other, less overt forms of Jewish expression are secondary or unworthy of interest. I *am* suggesting that overt forms of Jewish expression are curiously under-explored in some artistic forms – such as metal – and that they pose certain challenges to artists.

Furthermore, while ‘subterranean’ forms of Jewish expression may be no less intrinsically valuable than other forms, it is problematic when the Jewish contribution to an artistic field is dominated by covert rather than overt Jewishness. In such situations, there is a danger of the erasure of Jews themselves as the subjects and objects of artistic expression. If Jews are simply a ‘ghost in the machine’ in an artistic field, then what becomes of living, breathing Jews?

This question becomes particularly problematic with regard to the influence of the holocaust on metal. Following my presentation of an early version of this chapter the 2008 ‘Heavy Fundamentalisms’ conference, Jeremy Wallach argued in response that the holocaust has been an important source of fascination in the development of the vocabulary of metal. A similar argument has been made with regard to the early development of punk in the US by John Stratton⁶. Certainly one can point to the ubiquity of the term ‘holocaust’ as a descriptive term in metal lyrics and in descriptions of metal music and the foundational importance of Slayer’s song ‘Angel Of Death’ in the development of extreme metal cannot be understated. However, even if the holocaust is of such central importance, it is as a trope of extreme evil rather than anything that has to do with ‘real’ Jews.

1. Jewish Metal

Overtly Jewish metal is rare but not entirely absent in the global metal scene. Examples include:

- The Israeli bands Orphaned Land, Amasefer, Desert and Arallu who combine metal and Middle Eastern music sources, drawing on Jewish texts, legends and symbolism⁷.
- Jewish metal by orthodox Jews, including the Hassidic-influenced extreme metal of Teihu and the outreach-focused metal of David Lazzar (known as ‘The Rocking Rabbi’)
- The Ultra-orthodox Jewish black metal of Schneerson and Golgolot.
- The Makkabees and Metalish who play metal covers of Jewish standards.
- The Yiddish language metal of the Israeli band Gevolt.

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- The avant-garde experimentation of Jamie Saft's 'Black Shabbis' project.

Many of these bands are short-lived, one-off or unsigned, existing only as a couple of songs on a myspace profile. Only Orphaned Land and Arallu have made much impact on the global metal scene. There are also traces of Jewish themes found in the wider metal world, drawn on by both Jewish and non-Jewish artists. The holocaust is a recurring theme but, as I have argued that the holocaust is usually denuded of Jews to serve as an exemplar of evil (the exception being the rare cases of anti-semitic metal found in National Socialist black metal). Kabbalistic themes occur on occasions in black metal, although again it is generally a kabbalah subsumed into a Satanic rather than Jewish mythos.

My search for Jewish metal has been comprehensive but its findings have been few, far-between and generally very obscure. Until fairly recently, I saw my search for Jewish metal as a fun and innocent form of play. However, I have come to think that my project and the 'field' (such as it is) of Jewish metal, raises some more serious issues regarding music and diversity. In particular, the Jewish presence or its lack in metal and in other popular music genres has helped me in questioning and complexifying assumptions about the aesthetics of difference.

2. Metal and Difference

A criticism that has often made about metal is that it is 'white', that it reflects a deliberate flight away from metal's African-American blues roots and the racial melting pot of contemporary popular music⁸. In fact, as section two of this collection demonstrates, metal is one of the most globally diverse forms of music, with well-populated metal scenes everywhere from Indonesia to Morocco to Peru. While it is true that much of black Africa (with the puzzling exception of Botswana⁹) is more or less metal-free, global metal is highly diverse and far from 'white'. While it has historically been the case that the iconography of metal has drawn on signifiers of whiteness, such as Vikings¹⁰, the increasing popularity of 'folk' metal and of local metal syncretisms has considerably widened the musical and symbolic diversity of metal.

However, if metal were exclusively 'white' – white in the most unambiguous, northern European dominated, blond haired sense of the word – would it actually matter? Does metal need to be diverse to be socially or aesthetically 'valid'? Does metal music need to represent musical differences? And if so, how much difference is 'sufficient'? Is the current situation – in which almost any difference is represented apart from black

African difference – ‘good enough’? And finally – do we need more Jewish metal for metal to be worthwhile?

In part, such questions can be answered easily: if metal’s hypothetical homogeneity, or its actual limited heterogeneity, is dependent on racist or oppressive practices of exclusion then that is of course highly problematic. There is indeed a racist strain within certain quarters of the black metal scene, some of which, as I have recorded elsewhere, has been directed against Jews. Yet this racist strain is not a dominant strain and it has not prevented the explosion of folk metal themes and metal’s globalisation in recent years. As I have argued elsewhere, the limitations to metal’s diversity, the exclusion of certain groups, is largely down to complex processes of self-exclusion¹¹. The barriers to the development of Jewish metal and to black African metal are self-imposed ones, rooted in the perceived incompatibility with what is constructed as the metal habitus.

3. Music, Difference and Social Policy

If we look at other musical and cultural practices though, it does seem that diversity is in some quarters a key touchstone of political and aesthetic validity. In 2001, Greg Dyke the then director-general of the BBC described the organisation as ‘hideously white’. In 2008, the UK culture minister Margaret Hodge was widely interpreted as having argued that the proms were ‘too white’, arguing:

This isn't about making every audience completely representative but if we claim great things for (cultural) sectors in terms of their power to bring people together, then we have the right to expect they will do that wherever they can¹².

Addressing this argument of course takes us into the realms of social policy, in which a common goal is to ensure that publicly funded cultural institutions reach the broadest possible cross-section of the population. The concern here is less aesthetic than ensuring that institutions funded by a cross-section of tax-payers will be accessible to that cross-section of tax-payers, and further that cultural institutions can play a role in facilitating ‘social cohesion’ by creating connections between different kinds of people.

State social policy is also used to help to nurture the participation of particular countries, regions, localities and ethnic groups in global and national musical practices. As the various essays in Martin Cloonan and Simon Frith’s 2008 special issue of *Popular Music* on popular music policy show¹³, there is a strong desire from governments and local authorities to preserve the voices of their constituents against the perceived homogenising effects of globalisation.

Policies to preserve and nurture diverse musical voices are generally directed at certain kinds of institutions and forms of music. Popular music policy aims – in broad terms – to increase the visibility of particular constituencies in global or national music making and/or to develop the export potential of their music scenes. Policy generally proceeds from the assumption that a particular music scene is not diverse enough, but this judgement tends not to be made in aesthetic terms. Further, only certain types of music tend to be the subject of such judgements – that is, those that are globalised or exported to the extent that the involvement of diverse populations is a valid and important project. So, to take a hypothetical example, the government of Austria might develop policy to ensure the visibility and export of Austrian rock musicians on a global stage. However, the Austrian government would not promote the involvement of Austrian musicians in Trinidadian calypso, nor would the Trinidadian government promote the involvement of Trinidadian musicians in Austrian schlager. Of course the Austrian government might sponsor tours of schlager groups to Trinidad or the Trinidadian government of calypso groups to Austria; this is a matter of ensuring global cultural visibility but not of creating a globalised schlager or calypso. It is a given that such musics are the preserve of national, local or regional groups and their global exportation does not carry with it the obligation to ensure diverse global involvement in them.

There is thus a vast swathe of musics that are understood as emerging from more or less homogeneous communities and whose aesthetic and political validity is in no way seen as being compromised by this homogeneity. Why then might this argument not be seen to be applicable to other musics? Why might diversity be an issue in metal and not an issue in schlager or calypso? The reason of course is that for much of its over 40 years of existence, metal has been a highly globalised music that has spread to most parts of the world. Metal emerged from Britain and America, two powerhouses of global musical production, and consequentially the export of metal worldwide raises real issues about power and the homogenisation of global culture.

The question is less about whether it is appropriate for metal to be exported globally – such things are inevitable in a globalised capitalist system – but how and whether metal can be exported globally without concomitant imbalances of power. In my research on metal I have argued that the global metal scene is relatively egalitarian in that global participation and exposure is possible from most locations¹⁴. Particularly in the more underground forms of metal, bands from a wide range of countries can and do tour and have their music circulated throughout the global metal scene.

But how far does metal *music* reflect the global diversity of the metal scene? Here the situation is much more uneven, with some bands and

local scenes producing highly distinctive forms of metal with others being more concerned to produce a ‘place-less’ form of metal. Interestingly, it tends to be the more globally prominent and powerful scenes such as those in Scandinavia that have been more concerned with creating distinctive local forms of metal. The most homogeneous sounding forms of metal are over-represented in its more marginal and far-flung locales. In countries that have traditionally been marginal to global cultural flows and where playing metal is difficult due to state control or simple lack of resources, being able to replicate a ‘place-less’ form of music without local traits is often seen as an escape from the constraints of locality. The ability and desire to articulate difference in metal is in many cases a function of a privileged position with global networks of power and capital. In this way then we should not assume that instances of local aesthetic difference within global metal are necessarily signs of aesthetic and political ‘health’.

If the aesthetics of difference are not necessarily a sign of a healthy politics of difference – at least in metal – then how far is difference *per se* necessarily necessary in metal? While the global metal community is more diverse and facilitates more egalitarian interaction than many other global musics do, it nonetheless has limitations to its diversity. As I mentioned before, with a few exceptions black sub-Saharan African and the black Caribbean are largely absent in metal. China and India have also traditionally been underrepresented. Further, throughout the metal world women are a minority, at least as musicians. Then of course there are the myriad differences in representation of all manner of ethic, religious and national sub-groups.

4. Expectation, Absurdity and Difference

It is at this point that one becomes aware of the *reductio ad absurdum* in tracking the diversity of metal: that of comparing rates of participation in metal across every conceivable demographic category. Extended quantitative enquiry might be able to demonstrate that there are proportionally twice as many metallers in Staffordshire than Somerset. But what would this tell us and would it matter anyway?

My search for Jewish metal is perhaps part of this *reductio ad absurdum* – a delight in obscurity, a search for novelty, a desire to see metal everywhere – but there are still serious issues here. While globalised homogeneity is problematic, even abhorrent, it is not clear what kinds of heterogeneity, difference and diversity should be counterposed to it. My *reductio ad absurdum* of yearning for parity between the proportion of metallers in every conceivable sub-group is just that – absurd – but it does raise the question of where the search for diversity should stop and what kind of diversity is ‘sufficient’ to forestall the danger of a dystopian, homogeneous and monolithic globalised musical future.

One possible answer might be that certain kinds of diversity are particularly important in particular kinds of music and particular modes of globalisation. So, one could make the argument for example that the absence of black Africans, black Caribbeans and African-Americans from metal is problematic as it represents a musical and social erasure of the African-originated blues roots from metal. Similarly, one could also argue that a greater Jewish presence in metal is necessary to problematise the simplistic dichotomisation of Christ-Satan often found in metal imagery. The presence of some sub-groups in metal can create productive tensions and interrogations of comfortable certainties that are productive of aesthetic and political dialogue and contestation. If the presence or otherwise of Luxembourgers in metal may be all but irrelevant in this regard, the presence of Jews and sub-Saharan Africans is certainly relevant.

I raise these questions as I think that within critical studies of popular music and indeed within cultural studies and related disciplines more generally, such issues tend not to be explicitly spelled out. Beyond a clear valorisation of difference, the tendency of cultural studies and related disciplines to eschew proscription and policy-making means that it is never clear how difference should be lived as a value. Further, this distancing from the realm of policy-making also makes the function of criticism unclear – who is being persuaded to do what and by whom? A key issue here is *expectation*. What is it reasonable to expect to see in terms of diversity within a popular music scene? And what is the relation of *hope* to expectation? What should we hope for and what expectations do we have that our hopes should be realised?

Within bureaucracies and state funded institutions it is possible and reasonable to set clear standards as to what kinds of diversity are expected within popular music production and consumption. Within chaotic and fluid global music scenes, any set standard of diversity, or indeed of other kind of behaviour is both absurd and unrealisable. Music scenes such as the global metal scene are not amenable to this kind of bureaucratisation and to centralised policy-making (although their constituent institutions and local scenes might be). Members of music scenes are not accountable to policy-makers, intellectuals and critics outside those scenes.

If scene members have an obligation that is open to external judgement and enforcement, it is perhaps to more abstract and less parochial ideals. The answer to the question ‘what should be expect from scene members?’ is ‘the same as any other human being’. How human beings should conduct themselves and the ideals that should structure and institute this behaviour is of course a question far beyond the scope of this chapter! With regard to diversity and difference within music scenes, the question becomes what kinds of practices and ideals can institute a kind of diversity

within music scenes that is politically, aesthetically and ethically appropriate? And how what kinds of practices and ideals can be instituted 'outside' a music scene to ensure their replication inside a scene?

Jewish metal is – like my blog - largely an irrelevance; one more obscure curiosity in a world laden with trivia. This near-total absence is not proof of the political or aesthetic invalidity of metal, nor would its presence be proof of its validity. What *is* relevant are the nature of the practices that produce and restrict difference within the global metal scene. The presence or absence of any one grouping within global metal is not necessarily evidence for an inappropriate attitude to difference within metal – provided that that absence is not due to overt and racist practices of exclusion. Jewish metal might of course provide new and interesting perspectives on metal, but that does not mean that the absence of these perspectives undermines metal's aesthetic or political vibrancy or heterogeneity.

I will conclude this discussion by suggesting that popular music studies can benefit from a fuller consideration of diversity and its value. Indeed popular music, like cultural studies and related disciplines, can benefit from a fuller discussion of *value* per se. This chapter has perhaps shown how a consideration of difference, heterogeneity and diversity can take one to some perplexing questions and bizarre *reductio ad absurdum*. Further, this consideration also raises difficult issues about policy, change and the possibilities of external criticism of music scenes. If nothing else, Jewish metal has taken *me* to some interesting places, if few easy conclusions.

Notes

¹ <http://www.metaljew.org>

² See for example <http://heebnvegan.blogspot.com/2007/01/struggles-of-jewish-air-guitarist.html> <http://asimplejew.blogspot.com/2006/08/trapped-in-lower-levels-jewish-heavy.html> - <http://www.thedeciblog.com/index.php/2008/04/18/dont-bogart-the-charoet/> (All accessed 1 October 2008)

³ Scott R. Benarde, *Stars of David: Rock 'n' Roll's Jewish Stories* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2003)

⁴ Guy Oseary, *Jews Who Rock* (New York: St Martins Griffin, 2001)

⁵ Steven Lee Beeber, *The Heebie-Jeebies at CBGBs: A Secret History of Jewish Punk* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006), <http://www.jewpunk.com/>; Michael Billig, *Rock n Roll Jews* (London: Five Leaves Publications, 2000); Jeffrey Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews and American Popular Song* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise:*

Jewish Immigrants in the Melting Pot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996)

⁶ Jon Stratton, 'Jews, Punks and the Holocaust: From the Velvet Underground to the Ramones - the Jewish-American Story,' *Popular Music* 24, no. 1 (2005): 79-106

⁷ For more on Israeli metal see: Keith Kahn-Harris, 'I hate this fucking country': Dealing with the Global and the Local in the Israeli Extreme Metal Scene,' *Critical Studies* 19: Music, Popular Culture, Identities (2002): 133-151.

⁸ See for example: Jeremy Wells, 'Blackness 'Scuzed: Jimi Hendrix (In)Visible Legacy in Heavy Metal,' in *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 50-63

⁹ See my September 4 2007 blog post 'Metal Africa': <http://kkahnarris.typepad.com/weblog/2007/09/metal-in-africa.html>

¹⁰ See Imke von Helden and Florian Heesch's chapters in this volume.

¹¹ Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2006)

¹² Quoted in 'Hodge attacks Proms: they're narrow and lack the common British values' *The Guardian* 4 March 2008. Available online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/mar/04/classicalmusicandopera.politicsandthearts>

¹³ Martin Cloonan and Simon Frith, eds., 'Special Issue on Popular Music Policy' 27, no. 2: 189-316

¹⁴ Keith Harris, "'Roots'?: The Relationship Between the Global and the Local Within the Global Extreme Metal Scene,' *Popular Music* 19, no. 1 (2000): 13-30

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The Importance of Being Metal: The Metal Music Tabloid and Youth Identity Construction

Andy R. Brown

Abstract

There has been very little work done on the popular music magazine and even less on the metal music magazine.¹ Existing authoritative accounts of heavy metal as a cultural formation view media as a secondary and confirmatory source of youth identity.² This chapter argues that media is much more important to metal culture than such classic studies allow, particularly in offering 'clues' as to how to 'live' metal as a youth identity. Given the almost complete lack of engagement with metal as a youth culture offered by most forms of youth communications (TV, Radio and the press) the role of branded media - such as Kerrang!, Metal Hammer and Terrorizer in the UK and Decibel, Revolver and Metal Maniacs in the US - are essential in offering a mediated arena where a range of ways of 'being metal' are communicated within the 'circuit of culture' of the contemporary magazine format. Based on research into how youth adopt metal as an identity choice in the face of a range of conflicting and dominant narratives of 'inclusion', this chapter argues that forms of metal media offer a mediating link to the 'imagined communities' of metal fandom, essential to those wishing to anticipate acceptance within a group that they have little or no prior knowledge of. Examining a representative sample of metal magazines that are successful within the UK and US markets, the chapter argues that the metal music magazine *does not* offer an essentialist identity to readers but rather a range of ways of accessing metal culture that are variously: commodified, narrativized and deliberative.

Key Words: heavy metal, metal media, commodification, narrativisation, deliberation, 'circuit of culture', packaging, symbolic violence, rockism, subculture, reader-engagement, sell-out.

1. Introduction

Existing authoritative accounts of heavy metal as a cultural formation view media as a secondary and confirmatory source of youth identity.³ This chapter argues that media is much more important to metal culture than such classic studies allow, particularly in offering 'clues' as to how to 'live' metal as a youth identity. Adopting an inductivist approach to metal magazine culture, I hypothesise that imagining and achieving *inclusion* within metal youth cultural worlds involves a range of mediations that can be

described as *commodification*, *narrativisation* and *deliberation*. Commodification, the process by which cultural meanings can be imbued within and embodied in things that can be consumed:⁴ that is, purchased, used, worn and exchanged, is the essential basis of any youth mediated cultural practice.⁵ What this means is that, despite a long tradition of critical opinion to the contrary, the minimum basis for participation in metal youth culture requires the purchase of commodities and an understanding of their symbolic significance and uses. Tabloid metal magazine culture, available in news retail outlets and by mail order, provides the teen metal consumer entrée into a commodified world of products whose purchase promises engagement with the meanings and understandings of metal subcultural worlds. Opening the pages of a metal magazine opens up a veritable cornucopia of mediated commodities – from new bands, albums and downloads, to live concerts, tours and reviews, to clothes, contacts, pictures, posters, ads and letters – which describe a world that references itself: so that the meaning and significance of one thing is always measured and made meaningful by its relationship to other things *within* the world of metal. The tabloid metal magazine format offers a means of arrangement, order and display of the collage-like properties of this commodified-culture that continually offers excess that cannot be absorbed in one viewing.

It is the generic properties of narrativisation that offer means of navigation of this experience. The narrativisation of metal media culture takes a number of forms that offer both value hierarchies and order to the reading/viewing experience. Band news and interviews narrate significant dates, events and career milestones, achievements, plans and biographies of musicians, their influences, experiences, personalities, likes and dislikes. New album releases and live concert reviews, festival and tour reports, narrate a constantly renewed cycle of music performance and production that is about to happen, has happened or will happen. Finally, this mediated metal print and picture culture is cross-cut and quilted by layers of critical, polemical and satirical forms of deliberation which offer various vantage points from which opinion, argument and judgment can be formed, expressed and received. Key and capsule reviews and ratings of newly released product and live performances are presented. Judgments are offered in the form of value hierarchies, rating scores and by reference to previous releases, genre and sub-genre classification and recommended comparisons. Columns, regular features, genre and sub-genre histories, classic bands and albums, commentary and inquisitions, reader's letters, reader's polls, opinions and e-mails are presented and debated. Therefore, I will show how commodification, narrativisation and the architecture of deliberation describe and constitute the metal music magazine as a self-referencing world that invites forms of participation, identity construction and self-reflection.

2. Research Sample and Methodology

This chapter draws on aspects of my current research into the metal magazine press in the UK and the US. The research sample includes the three main UK publications: *Kerrang!*, *Metal Hammer* and *Terrorizer* and three selected titles from the more diverse US publishing roster, the long run *Metal Maniacs*, and the more recent, *Revolver* and *Decibel*. These titles were selected on the basis of popularity or that is to say, readership and circulation data.⁶ The research material consists of an 18-24 month continuous sample (which slightly favours the UK magazines, because I have been collecting them longer and also because I am UK based. In addition, *Kerrang!* is a weekly publication, so there are more of these).⁷ The research involves a combination of historical and theoretical discussion of metal music culture, critical rock journalism and the treatment/definitional creation of heavy metal and its problematic relationship to rock criticism and rock ideology, the rise of the metal press, in the context of the decline of rock criticism and the tabloidisation of the music magazine; as well as arguments about niche consumerism within the contemporary magazine publishing and multi-media market environment. The methods of analysis I have pursued have involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, combining content and textual analysis, reader focus groups and interviews. In this chapter I am going to draw on aspects of the historical and theoretical analysis and apply this to ways that we can understand the metal music magazine, thematically as a textual resource, that offers 'tips' and 'clues' to readers about how to construct and explore a range of mediated metal identities or ways of being 'metal'. I am therefore arguing that metal media, specifically the magazine, as part of a circuit of metal media culture, offers a range of resources for constructing, maintaining and sustaining a metal lifestyle or more specifically a *metal* 'attitude' to life. Hence the importance of *being* metal.

But I am also going to argue that the historical and discursive conditions of metal's emergence and interpretation have had a decisive impact on how it has been critical understood, how metal musicians have understood themselves and how audiences have understood the music. That is the developmental conditions of metal's formation have had an impact on its mode of address to its audience and its self-presentation and musical ethos and the significance of this to what I am presenting is that the tabloid-form of the heavy metal music magazine and its critical appreciation have been profoundly influenced by this.

3. The Metal Magazine: A Brief Sound Check

Although there has been a steady stream of work on the origins and development of the rock press and critical rock journalism⁸ there has been comparatively little work done on the popular music magazine⁹, even less on the metal music magazine.¹⁰ Feminist media scholars have conducted extensive research into the form and content of the magazine, which has drawn a distinction between girl's and women's magazines.¹¹ More recently research attention has been directed towards the lad's or men's magazine, particularly in the UK.¹² This work has also signalled a shift way from the analysis of textual ideologies to the examination of the 'interpretive repertoires' of actual readers and their consumption practices. Notable recent work has attempted to develop a more integrated account of how the production and consumption of the magazine can be understood as part of a 'circuit of magazine culture', which attempts to link 'production issues and editorial decisions with the actual content of the magazines, following this through to issues of readership and interpretation'.¹³ Adopting this kind of framework for the analysis of the magazine allows the researcher to explore the form of the magazine and how this is shaped and modified by the interplay of producers and consumers within the context of the increased commoditisation of social identities and social practices.¹⁴ In the context of metal culture, it can help to show how the metal magazine provides a conceptual mapping of the commodified practices that constitute metal fandom and their mediation within the address of metal magazine culture.¹⁵

Shuker argues that metal magazines are a variation on the teen glossies in that they emphasise bands as performers and their pictorial representation. However 'their base in a specific genre and its associated audience give them a special quality'.¹⁶ This is because the genre was either ignored or heavily criticised by the music press, prompting the rise of the specialist metal magazine. Like Weinstein, Shuker argues such magazines, despite their glossy formats, have a subcultural function in that they 'promote the images and values of metal'¹⁷ while their transnational production acts as a means of global communication of such a community. However, Shuker's description of the content and layout of *Hot Metal* ('Australia's loudest magazine') suggests the teen glossy format – short articles, colour pictures, poster-sized pull outs, free stickers, capsule size reviews of records, videos and concerts, gossip features, letters and competitions – is employed to cohere heavy metal's public image of rebellion and deviance. But ultimately it is 'affordable, attractively packaged 'rebellion', allowing its consumers to [...] vicariously identify with the heavy metal genre'.¹⁸

This argument is somewhat incoherent since specialist press arise when there is small demographic to cater for, for example, musician's magazines¹⁹ whereas the demographic for metal is very large, comparatively speaking. Atton has convincingly argued that the ratio of music fanzines to

professional magazines is determined by the amount of critical acclaim and market share for particular music genres.²⁰ Shuker's point about the critical marginalisation of heavy metal and the relationship of this to the kind of metal magazine that does eventually emerge is more important than he realises. What is suggested but not fully articulated here is that metal is like pop but unlike it. It is like it because it is like the teen glossies and it is unlike it because unlike teeny pop it is subcultural. But ultimately the subcultural credentials of metal are about attractive packaging rather than *practice*, of offering lifestyle deviance as something that is admired and explored within the confines of the pages, hence the idea of 'vicarious' identification.

Although the formation of the metal magazine as a recognisable tabloid form is partly to be explained by the economics of the publishing field and the related decline of critical rock journalism and its age demographic, the style of the typical metal magazine, its mode of address to its readership and its 'packaging' (as Shuker would have it) are tied up with the cultural politics of metal's history: specifically metal's definitional origins and critical marginalisation within rock culture, its characterisation as populist rather than popular, as suburban, mainstream and masculinist, rather than urban, edgy and subcultural; its music as crude and derivative; its musicianship as 'empty virtuosity', and so on. It is the discursive conditions of this classificatory system of exclusion from legitimate rock culture and the response of metal's musicians and audiences to this 'symbolic violence' (and symbolic silence) which shape metal's mode of being, its signifiatory systems, types of discourse and styles of representation, all of which can be found in the metal magazine form, in various combinations, from niche to more mainstream titles.

4. Bourdieu, The Rock Field and the Exercise of Symbolic Violence Explaining the Naming of Heavy Metal

As Straw has perceptively argued, in a seminal piece, which is otherwise negatively inclined, 'heavy metal is at once the most consistently successful of forms within rock music and the most marginalized within the discourse of institutional rock culture'.²¹ This 'institutional discourse' is what Gudmundsson et al, define as the 'semi-autonomous field of rock journalism populated by publishers, magazines, editors, writers, readers, artists, record companies, and so on'.²² The field of critical rock journalism is therefore what Bourdieu in *Distinction* would identify as the outcome of a successful legitimation strategy, undertaken by 'new intellectuals, largely autodidacts specializing in 'legitimable' cultural capital'.²³ Cultural legitimacy in Bourdieu's field theory 'depends upon the ability of a cultural form to achieve' a degree of autonomy within a field that is structured around an aesthetic and economic polarity, where at the 'autonomous' or 'pure' pole, producers seek recognition from peers that pave the way for artist-critic alliances, whereas at

the 'commercial' pole, producers compete for public acclaim.²⁴ A field is constituted when it becomes specialized enough to generate its own rules, has a clergy that possess symbolic capital and admission criteria.²⁵ As Gudmundsson et al argue 'In the case of rock, one might talk of a rather successful legitimation process'. However, the field is also 'characterised by low admission thresholds, a weak consecratory power [...] and a dominant commercial pole'.²⁶ This leads them to argue that the maintenance and consolidation of legitimacy within rock culture criticism required the mobilisation of criteria organised around a quest for authenticity in musical performance: 'authenticity was needed to explain why rock mattered more than other forms of popular music' rather than sales figures.²⁷ Drawing a parallel with jazz criticism, they argue that 'an autonomous pole emerged that opposed what was considered commercial, and the quest for authenticity became the central' issue within this discursive strategy.²⁸

I wish to depart from this framework in two crucial respects. First, in asserting that the ideology of rock or *rockism* that emerged out of this process of field constitution was one that envisioned and sought to canonise the best of rock as that which was *both* popular and artistic, that is, it was the fusing of these two contrary elements within a popular aesthetic which was believed to mark rock music as unique. Critical rock journalism was suspicious of popularity *per se* and of artistry without a popular address. So one finds a consistent criticism of acts that were popular but had *nothing to say* and acts that were too obscure or esoteric to be considered rock. If one looks at cannon formation or critics' polls, again the classic albums and artists are almost invariably those that combine these two qualities. Examples would be artists like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, The Who, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and Van Morrison.²⁹

The rise of heavy metal represented a decisive challenge to this criteria of the popular aesthetic, which was resolved by dismissing metal's artistic pretensions as 'empty' and its audience as a 'mass' of non-discerning consumers who were the proletarian male equivalent of the *feminised* audiences for pop music. Returning to the quote from Straw, we can see this tension clearly articulated: 'That literary criticism is not regularly unsettled by the popularity of Harlequin romances while [...] rock culture regards heavy metal as a 'problem' is symptomatic of [a tension] between the ascension of critical discourse on rock music to respectability and the importance to it of a rock populist reading'.³⁰ Or consider the remarks of Simon Frith, academic *and* music critic:

The huge popularity of Grand Funk Railroad, in 1970-71, symbolized the arrival of a rock culture of working-class fans who didn't even read *Rolling Stone*; and the rise of Kiss later in the decade was an even clearer indication of

how rock could be integrated into the traditional marketing modes of teenage *pop*. The result was a music which had no significance for 'the intelligent' rock fan at all.³¹

Here, the problem of heavy metal is that it transforms rock music into a 'loud populism', sold to working class males. The 'reactionary' significance of this commercial development is signalled in McRobbie and Frith's (1990/1978) seminal account of the gendered division of popular music into 'cock-rock' and 'teeny-bop'. McRobbie and Frith's clear point of reference for cock-rock is Led Zeppelin.³² For McRobbie and Frith, the masculine expressiveness of 'cock rock' allowed the construction of a public community 'reminiscent of football matches and other occasions of male camaraderie'³³ whereas romantic 'teeny-bop' addressed itself to the 'solitary female', offering a discourse of monogamous sincerity, which reinforced sexual conformity. But, in effect, within the contours of the ideology of rockism, both these modes of engagement are employed to define that which authentic rock is *not*.³⁴

Second, while Lindberg et al and Gudmundsson et al show how *exoticised* others and musical lineages (delta blues, folk music) are employed to define authenticity in rock style, they fail to note how such classification and cannon formation require the *demonisation* of inferior and illegitimate forms, a role usually assigned to pop because of its obvious commercial criteria. But it is heavy metal (and to certain extent progressive rock),³⁵ that are the *inauthentic* other that allow authenticity to be claimed for rock music. As they themselves note, Charles Shar Murray, a key scribe in the transatlantic rock clergy, declares heavy metal to be 'the most dishonest form of rock music extant'³⁶ yet they fail to follow this quote back to its source, where we find this extraordinary piece of symbolic violence:

The blues had a grandson, too, a malformed idiot thing that stays chained up in the cellar most of the time. When visitors call or when it is taken out for an airing, it gibbers and hoots, flexing its muscles and masturbating frantically. It brags incessantly of its strength and its masculinity, its great and noble heritage and its direct line of descent from both black and white geniuses, but it takes good care to avoid all but the most superficial trappings of its ancestry. It fuels itself on fantasies of adventure and power and sexual conquest; it sees itself as Conan or Mad Max. It says it will never die. This thing's name is heavy metal. It is the result of excessive inbreeding reinforced by cultivated ignorance.³⁷

This symbolic struggle to constitute rock as legitimate culture, at the expense of inferior kinds, is important not least because it means that, almost uniquely among popular music forms, metal was negatively constituted from the outset. The very naming of the genre was an act of *journalistic violence*, which implicated both the form and its audience.³⁸ And as Walser, Brown and Weinstein have shown,³⁹ the terms of this symbolic violence have continually been renewed in both critical review and academic writing since. The significance of this for the themes of this chapter are that metal youth identity, in its formative or foundational phase, was constituted in and through negativity and marginalisation and yet the voluntary embrace of this stigmata paradoxically offered a 'rites of passage' and a type of subcultural identity that was uniquely tied to a mass cultural form. Weinstein, it will be recalled, characterised metal fans of the 70s and 80s as 'proud pariahs'.⁴⁰

It is this conjunction of elements that provides some of the reasons for why heavy metal is characterised as proletarian in its manners and mores, that is blue-collar and *masculinist* but also, despite its mass appeal, rebellious and disturbing: that is Other to bourgeois criticism (which it is almost completely *indifferent* to) and to key aspects of the cultural habitus of working and lower middle class occupational groups, where its majority members are recruited.⁴¹ Second, this does not significantly change until the rise of the metal press itself which, in theory, should have allowed the wholesale re-signification of what it means to be metal but which did not reject these foundational *epistemes* entirely but rather re-negotiated their ontological reality: how they were engaged with as an identity practice. It is this identity practice – one that defines itself in distinction to rock but not completely outside the terms of rock criticism – that is to be found in the emergence and consolidation of the tabloid-style metal press. So the form and discourse of the metal tabloid both challenges and confirms the negative characterization of heavy metal culture. There is of course variation within the range of magazines, where this assertion is more or less true (for example in the UK market, *Terrorizer* is closer to a mode of rock criticism and *Kerrang!* the market leader, closer to a pop mode, although they are both clearly branded as metal, not rock and certainly not pop)!

There are other complicating factors at play here which have some bearing on this but are not ones that completely alter its logic. The rise of the metal press emerges out of a significant period of reinterpretation of metal (the NWOBHM), whose catalyst was punk. This encounter involves complex syncretisms⁴² but ultimately I think it is fair to say that metal was re-claimed for youth, after punk. Or to put it another way, each new genre and sub-genre that emerged after punk renegotiated its relationship to (what we might term) *classic* metal but never entirely rejected that heritage.⁴³ The other factor is that the rise of the metal press coincided with and perhaps helped to precipitate the decline of the rock music press itself with the move within

publishing to the magazine format as a tabloidised form, of which Kerrang! is a significant exemplar. Kerrang! is significant in other ways too, not least because over the last decade it has, at various moments, outsold the NME⁴⁴ the last remnant of the rock press in the UK (itself forced into a re-launch as a tabloid). But also because this success, particularly as a weekly tabloid, has influenced the values of other metal publications, more widely, bringing a greater homogeneity to the form, although again this dynamic is itself characteristic of the wider magazine publishing field. Here, the market logic of its initial appearance, launched as a colour magazine-style freebie by Sounds (a print based weekly broadsheet), is significant because this marketing strategy eventually leads to its launch as a stand-alone magazine, in the face of the declining sales of its parent paper (Sounds eventually folds in 1984). This launch decision is based on a calculated assessment of the size of the potential readership segment of the existing paper and also can be seen to signal a seismic shift within the overall music journalism market itself, towards niche titles or segmented markets, rewarding those that do so and punishing those that resist. For Gudmundsson et al, the current situation is to be explained as emanating from a 'turning point' occurring in the 1980s, characterised by market diversification and the consequent polarization of music journalism between 'consumer guidance and advanced criticism'.⁴⁵ In one sense then the metal tabloid magazine can be viewed as a precursor of the consumer guide and branded media model of the music paper that now characterises the market as a whole.⁴⁶

5. Opening Up the Tabloid Metal Magazine: How Loud is Loud?

In this section I offer an inevitably selective analysis of the content of my six metal magazines, one that attempts to show how the discursive conditions of metal's identity formation and its subsequent negotiation within the metal magazine tabloid, can be mapped onto the categories of textual address of the magazines in question *and* the process of reader engagement and interaction with the magazine, evidence of which can be found in the channels of feedback that such tabloid's feature and clearly encourage: letter and email comments and band Q & A features. I earlier claimed that imagining and achieving *inclusion* within metal youth cultural worlds involves a range of mediations that can be described as *commodification*, *narrativisation* and *deliberation*. In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to describe elements of this textual organisation and mode of address to readers but also to indicate how these elements of *structuration* of the tabloid metal magazine organise this experience, as commodified, as narrativized and as deliberative.

I also want to suggest that these regions are arranged in a concentric pattern, whose most immediate and *reader-facing* element is that of commodification. As I have already claimed, the tabloid-metal magazine is

extensively commodified and this essential quality is represented in its 'loudness' and 'excess' of form. I would argue that it is almost impossible to overemphasise the 'loudness' of the visual style and organisation of the metal tabloid (although it is also clear that the UK magazines are by far the more 'hyped', as American's would put it). Within the sample, the clear winner in the loudness quotient, as far as 'packaging' goes, was Metal Hammer, who along with its Future publishing stablemate, *Classic Rock*⁴⁷ consistently attempt to offer eye-catching ways that the magazine itself can be re-packaged within an additional outer-sleeve or box, along with goodies, such as 'free' stickers, DVD, CD samplers and the like. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this has got to be the 'Collector's edition Bloodpack!', which featured a magnified shot of Kerry King's bullet-like head, mounted on a slip-over cardboard sleeve, which featured a plastic rectangular 'window' containing a blood-like liquid which was able to run, within the confines of the packet, over the Slayer guitarist's screaming, animated features. The strap line to this issue, was 'slayer: 20 Years of 'Reign in Blood'. The cover claimed Slayer as 'the most metal band ever!' and this was a tie into the main feature, the top twenty best albums of all time, which Slayer topped. The band also featured in a seven-page interview/retrospective, in the same issue.⁴⁸

This example perhaps also highlights the point that it is within the mediated arena of the Metal tabloid, that the values of 'loudness' as overtly *masculinised* display, are most clearly signalled as intrinsic to the underlying value systems of metal culture itself, one understood as a public culture of performance and display. This performance is heavily coded as 'masculine' but not in a way that necessarily excludes female performers, for example. It is about having the 'balls' to stand up and shout and be loud and then be able to back this up with a musical performance that 'kicks ass', 'owns', 'rules' is 'crushing' or which 'annihilates' the opposition. Female performers can therefore have 'balls' and can 'kick ass', too. But if they do choose to compete in this arena then they can also be criticised in these same terms (as for example, Angela Gossow of Arch Enemy, who is one of the few top rated female death-growl or grunt singers but who is also criticised for a lack of continuity in metal-attitude, when it comes to the treatment of fans and her 'star' status).⁴⁹ There are of course other ways to be metal within metal culture, including metal ways to be feminine. My point is that it is within this arena of public display that the *difference* of metal culture from rockism is most obvious: in metal culture there is nothing intrinsically wrong with an aggressive, arrogant display of one's musical abilities and message, since the aim of musical creation is to *connect* with an audience and an essential and valued aspect of this is the *strategy* of achieving this. Here we can see how metal culture does not reject but fully embraces the charge of populism levelled at it by rock criticism.

Although there are variations within the range of magazines sampled, the textual strategy of invitation in almost all instances is to offer an 'excess' of content, in terms of features, images and adds-ons or freebies. This promise of textual excess is hardly unique to the metal magazine but can be found on the covers of almost any lifestyle or celebrity-gossip magazine. The difference is that the metal magazine offers a way of constructing a commodified identity practice that is, in some sense, in opposition to or an alternative to a mainstream practice. But given the sense that all lifestyle tabloid's offer a way of constructing an identity practice *within* an idea of the mainstream, it is the quality of credibility - of offering a tangible sense of difference that is at the same time attainable - that marks the distinctive address of the metal magazine cover style and display of content.

Narrativisation offers a range of ways of understanding how metal culture and metal music can be understood as relatively coherent and unified. Here the metal tabloid magazine offers various narratives that suggest coherence to the metal project and its core or organising values. Narratives which work to shape the 'noise' or loudness of its overall mode of address towards frameworks that make sense of metal in terms of the rationale of the magazine and which seek validation in terms of readership engagement and response. Narrativisation tends to occur within the band interview, the album review and the live concert review, but it perhaps appears in its most obvious form within the historical overview, classic band, album guide or 'think piece'. It is here, adopting the mode of address of critical rock journalism, that the metal magazine reveals its desire for canonisation and hierarchy, which is less *open* to contestation by readership. Despite this, I will argue that one of the most consistent thematic modes of narrativisation, across all the sampled titles, is that of the *proletarian success story*. It is this narrativisation strategy, above all others, with which readers find their deepest confirmation of engagement with metal culture. It is also an area where there is evidence, on occasion, of deliberative disputation between metal journalists and readership.

I do not want to suggest that the level of deliberation is the highest or unifying level of the tabloid metal magazine. Often this arena is one of controversy, not least because metal culture offers an even more restrictive evaluative discourse than that of rock. What this means is that writing about metal is even more conscious of the problem of the loss or estrangement of musical meaning through its intellectual cognition. The way that this is expressed in terms of the 'core values' of metal culture is that the authenticity to be found in metal modes of musical expression are not translatable into cognitive schemas and that to render them so is to misunderstand what they actually are.

This presents a considerable problem to metal music journalism, which is textually resolved in terms of the development of terms and

expressions that are seen to reflect and perfect the sentiments and discourses of the metal subcultural audience, rather than to contradict them. This mode of popular *ventriloquism* is rendered at its most problematic when there is evidence that the audience contradicts or contest this judgement. It is this aspect that I want to focus on, specifically, in order to demonstrate how the deliberative level offers a degree of criticism and critique of metal culture but not one that invalidates the metal magazine 'project'. Rather this element serves to integrate possible areas of conflict within the narrative integration of the magazine as a whole, while also acting as a means of adjustment and realignment of features of the magazine that have failed to win favour with readers.

6. Commodification: Buying into the World of Metal

Despite the similarity of the metal music magazine to a range of other consumer and lifestyle-based tabloids, it cannot be categorised successfully in this way.⁵⁰ This is because the 'lifestyle address' of the metal magazine offers a range of identities and dispositions which invite a critical attitude to consumption, understood as an 'attitude to life' which is 'metal'. Although involvement in metal culture can certainly be described as a 'lifestyle choice', the range of publications sampled address their readership via a discourse of subculture, alternative-mainstream or of fandom.

Sometimes these modes of address can occur within a single publication, such as Metal Hammer, whose strap-line is 'Defenders of the faith' (subcultural) but which gives major coverage to the big names in metal that contest the mainstream, while also offering a supplement, *Subterannia* - which covers a range of sub-genre 'underground' bands and styles. *Metal Maniacs*, very much presents itself as concerned with metal culture as a subcultural underground, but it also entertains the idea of an alternative-mainstream, when covering big named bands. *Terrorizer* and *Decibel*, are very much concerned with addressing fandom and subcultural affiliation within Extreme Metal styles (death/black, industrial and hardcore variants), whereas *Kerrang!* and *Revolver* offer a sense of metal as alternative mainstream and sometimes a type of rock (*Kerrang!* mentions the term 'rock' frequently, *Revolver* 'hard rock').

While it was also clear that there are a number of ways in which the metal magazine 'borrows' from the repertoire of the celebrity gossip/lifestyle tabloid, overall these inputs could be explained as being as much to do with the changed multi-media environment in which the magazine now operates, particularly that of the 'celebrity' personality or 'icon'. Thus, well-known metal musicians and performers are referred to as 'icons' (in *Kerrang!* particularly) and as 'gods' (*Metal Hammer* calls its annual award ceremony 'The Golden Gods'). But even here the discourse of the guitar hero or god is one that is seminal to metal culture (despite the hugely successful computer

game franchise), although now it is not necessary to be a ‘shredder’ to achieve heroic status. But in the case of the ‘Hottest Chicks in Metal’ series, run by Revolver (now up to its third edition),⁵¹ the criterion for inclusion appears not to be musical ability or performance but ‘looking as sexy as possible’.⁵² It is perhaps notable that the majority of female metal fan letter writers, responding to this feature, do not contest this mode of inclusion, as sexy ‘pin-ups’ but emphasise instead the issue of growing inclusion/success in the metal world: ‘All the chicks you mentioned rock fuckin’ harder than any of those shitty emo-wannabes!!! It’s awesome to see us women progressing and kicking more ass than half the guys out there. I’m all for more chicks in metal’ – *Rosalie Black, via email*.⁵³ Or they criticise the narrow range of female performers included, suggesting it should be wider and cover more ‘breaking’ women. One reader wanted to know whether other female metal artists were asked but said ‘no because the article seemed to be less about musical talent and more about the women’s appearance’ – *Patricia Burton, via email*.⁵⁴ Another noticeable aspect was to suggest a means of equalization:

since you guys has a ‘Hottest Chicks in Metal’ issue (July), why not have a ‘Hottest Dudes in Metal’ issue? Yeah, *Revolver* is a guy magazine. But girls like it, too! Here are some recommendations to get you started: Synyster Gates, Zacky Vengeance and M. Shadows of Avenged Sevenfold; Alex Varkatzas of Atreyu; and Jacoby Shaddix of Papa Roach. Think about it! – *India Hodges, via email*.⁵⁵

This argument for equivalence rather than opposition also characterised female reader responses to the Xmas give-away calendar, offered to readers of Metal Hammer. But there was also a degree of critical edge to the responses:

And boobies for all

Last month I was delighted that there was a 2008 calendar but I wasn’t happy it was all women. I’m not into having girls on my wall. Can you make one with hot male metallists? – Gal Wanting Hot Guys, email

Moan sour

I need to moan about the calendar. Do you assume all your readers are male? Wrong! I have no wish to see half-naked women. Why can’t we have half-naked men, like the gorgeous Corey Taylor? –Mary, Email.

That time of the month

Who the fuck came up with the idea of an all-female calendar? C'mon boys, you do have at least one female reader. How about a calendar for the girls? We need fantasies too! If I want to look at a sexy, half-naked woman I'll look in the mirror. – Helen, Scotland.⁵⁶

A male reader, in the same issue, anticipating the complaints to the 'hot metal chicks' calendar, reasoned: 'anyone interested in men gets to look at a load of them semi-naked and sweaty in your live section every month, so give it a rest and leave us be' – Ross, Cumbria.⁵⁷

A similar line of defence was offered by the letter's editor, when the issue surfaced again in a later issue:

Girl on Girl

Your free calendar at the start of the year was all women, so you should make it a bit fairer on us girls, by next year getting all the Golden Gods winners to strip of like the girls at the Golden Gods. I would definitely come see Alex Laiho and Shagrath from Dimmu in all their glory. Anyone with me? - *The Devil's Beatch, email.*

Are you kidding? Whether you like beardy mountain men or tattooed whippet boys, MH already is soft porn for you ladies.⁵⁸

More surprising, perhaps, is Revolver's regular one page 'hard hitting' metal celebrity advice feature, shared between Vinnie Paul and Cristina Scabbia. Although it is noticeable that the more controversial 'issues' relating to sexuality, fidelity and balancing motherhood with a metal 'lifestyle' tend to be addressed to Scabbia and those to do with the business, being in band and band relationships, musical composition and the like, to Paul. Having said this, the choice of agony adviser was clearly the letter writer's own but did tend to self-select by gender but not always, as for example this potentially 'difficult' one sent to Scabbia:

I listen to metal and play in a metal band, the whole nine yards. I'm also a cross-dresser. I wear skirts, heels, you name it. I'm not as open about it as I want to be (my girlfriend and few close friends know, but that's about it). I was wondering if you had any advice about how I can let others know. – *John, via email.*

Do other people *need* to know? There are certain things in a man (or woman)'s life that should stay private. Maybe this is one of them.⁵⁹

This theme and its treatment could obviously be contrasted with this one, taken from the same issue:

I'm a headbanger who's in love with three girls. I don't know which one to choose. All three of them are goth, but two live out of state. What should I do??? - *Andrew S., Chinle, Arizona*

Do I really need to tell you what to do here??? Screw all three of 'em. Hellyeah!!! You will be the tri-state stud!!! This is an excellent situation that I have been involved in several times!!!⁶⁰

But it would be wholly misleading to suggest that the rule of masculine identity in metal operated absolutely in terms of this selection since overall the letter's relating to love, sexual relationships and 'moral dilemmas' was fairly evenly balanced, which meant Vinne Paul also had to offer advice about 'dating' and 'parents'.

There are no direct equivalents to this feature to be found elsewhere in my six magazine sample, although Metal Hammer did run a metal celebrity column, featuring Dani Filth for about 12 issues (but this falls outside my sample range). Metal Hammer currently runs a spoof advice column, featuring the persona of Jurgentoksvig ('Ask Jurgen') that operates via MySpace, which satirises the hyper-masculinity to be found in Black metal styles and its incipient homo-eroticism. Jurgen specialises in the reader-insulting, profane, obscenity-laden put down and hilarious anecdotes involving *double-entendres* about his relationship with the mighty-horned one, Nils and his 'broadsword'.

Another obvious import from the tabloid lifestyle magazine is Revolver's 'Dressed to Kill' regular one page feature, where 'stars' of metal and hardcore share their 'fashion secrets'. This item is very similar to the 'steal their style' feature to be found in the UK celebrity/gossip magazine, *Heat* (which incidentally also ran a special on the metal t-shirt as fashion accessory.⁶¹ The difference is that the metal personalities are not 'snapped' out walking and then have their wardrobe analysed, sourced and replicated by fashion advisers. Rather they are able to comment on what they wear (why, how and when they bought an item or why they did) but then the feature informs readers where such clothing can be sourced ('Not that you care about this stuff, but if you wanted to get [this] look, here's how you would do it').

The ‘stars’ featured in my sample, cover a wide range (from Melanie Coats of *Burning Brides* to Ben Falgoust of *Goatwhore*) but overall tend to feature more female musicians and performers (than are featured elsewhere in the magazine) and younger more style conscious bands.

This feature has, perhaps surprisingly, not raised much controversy and continues to appear. In my sample there were only two adverse comments on it, only one of which addressed the rationale of the piece:

enough with the ‘Dressed to Kill’ section. Any real metalhead does not care where some celebrity gets his or her clothes. I mean, if you need a magazine to tell you how to dress, go fuck yourself. I dress how I want to, I act how I want to, I speak how I want to, I do what I want to. *That’s* metal. Some fucking full-page crap about where to buy myself a studded belt is not - *Adam Carson, Edmonton, Alberta.*⁶²

Although the overarching theme of this criticism is ‘what is and what is *not* metal’ (which is a dominant rationale of the deliberative aspect of all reader interactions with the sampled magazines), perhaps one of the reasons why this feature has not been as controversial as would be supposed is that metal readers recognise that assembling a metal look and knowing where to get items of clothing is an important, though often unspoken issue, publicly. It is also worth recalling that metal culture was a pioneer of branded merchandise and marketing, particularly the commercial development of the t-shirt as a vehicle for band and album advertising⁶³ and that this revenue stream is often a means of survival for many bands.

7. Narrativisation Strategies in the Metal Tabloid: The Proletarian Success Story

I suggested earlier that one of the most prominent thematic modes of narrativisation to be found in the metal-tabloid is that of the *proletarian* ‘success’ story or the ‘rags to riches’ narrative. In the days of the instant celebrity, Reality TV or the mediated personality, who is ‘famous for being famous’ or just famous for ‘five minutes’, this narrative may seem like an out of date cliché, but it is one that remains central to the self-mythology of metal culture as a whole: *it is a hard road to the top and it is the journey there that makes you what you are.* This narrativisation strategy is to be found operating as the dominant framework in the band interview, key album review and live concert review. Concentrating on this aspect is justified I would argue because this element of narrativisation offers a way of seeing how the discursive construction of the origins, career trajectory and self-management of the successful metal band both draws on rock ideology (the album as a

statement of musical distinction, artistry and as an index of career development and progression) but also departs from it in significant respects. This is because the success of the metal band is always seen to be a proletarian success story. That is, success is always achieved very much 'from the bottom' and very much against the odds. The 'bottom' can be coded as class, ethnicity or of being a social misfit, failure or 'fuck-up'. But whether inequality and disadvantage are explicitly identified in the rise to stardom or big band status, such an achievement is always presented as a journey of achievement against the odds, against expectations, against the *normal* run of things. It therefore always involves a sense of transformation: of becoming something that is meaningful, authentic and 'truthful'. It is always about the strength of self-belief and the need to fight self-doubt (and the sense that self-doubt is more likely to be stronger, a greater obstacle the lower down you begin to climb from).

But, above all, it is about being in a band that are able to work together and support each other through 'thick and thin'. Here the band is coded as a sort of surrogate family that offers acceptance of a person on their own terms however dark or bad or difficult they have been in their life before the band. What the band ask for in return is total loyalty to the group and to each of its members: it is bond of blood, of brotherhood and belief in what each contributes to the whole. The band *is* a gang; most often - a gang of lads.

Metal Hammer's 2006 cover story on up and coming Welsh metal band, Bullet For My Valentine, has all these ingredients, including the clichés: 'Today Bridgend, tomorrow the world. It seems that Bullet For My Valentine's days of struggle are over. They've made the US chart – played to thousands of people in the UK and they're even wowing the beautiful people of Amsterdam. Smoking'.⁶⁴

It is this framing of humble origins (South Wales is one of the most socio-economic deprived areas in Northern Europe) and the struggle to get noticed by audiences *and* earning the right to the success that comes from gaining an audience, that is clearly highlighted in the discursive structure of the interview; itself a product of the interplay of interviewer and band respondents:

I think we deserve every bit of our success,' says Matt Tuck [of Bullet For My Valentine]. 'I think we deserve it for our perseverance, for the time we spent not being successful, for all the hours we put in when it wasn't working out, for all the money we spent, and for all the time we played to fucking 20 people on a Tuesday night in a freezing cold club. It's cost us blood, sweat and tears to get to this point'

‘We’ve worked fucking hard to get where we are today,’ says Moose.

‘However long it lasts, we’ve earned it,’ says Tuck.⁶⁵

And later on in the interview the theme is returned to:

Comaraderie, that’s one of the things that Matt Tuck names when he’s asked just what it is that separates the bands who succeed from the bands who fold like three metres of kitchen foil. It’s togetherness, he says, a willingness to go through bad times and to persevere, to emerge from the other end bloodied but unbowed. That ‘what doesn’t kill you will only make you stronger thing’ that people in bands are always banging on about.⁶⁶

The theme of the humble social origins of the band is clearly central to the six page feature, Kerrang! run in January, 2008:

It was here, in Bridgend, that Bullet For My Valentine were born and raised. Just down the road is the pub in which Pudge joined the band, round the corner are the town centre benches on which they’d hang out every Saturday afternoon, killing time, plotting their future.

It’s the sort of town in which rock’n’roll dreams are born. Where the normal course of life takes you from school to the assembly line, from the assembly line to retirement and then into a grave shortly after 60. It’s the sort of place where you better dream to be different or face succumbing the slow death of the mapped out for you.⁶⁷

As is the achievement of ‘breaking out’, through forming a band and being totally dedicated to the pursuit of success:

Maybe if you’re a kid in Bridgend, it’s good to see people like us walking around town. With any luck they look at us and think, yes, they can make it if they want to. It would be nice to think we’ve given someone hope. We grew up struggling in the same area they have, we had the same ideas, the same dreams, and we’ve shown that it can happen if you’re persistent.⁶⁸

These themes were also very prominent in the cover feature run on the band in Hammer’s US stable mate, Revolver. The piece was called ‘Back to the

Future of Metal' and highlighted the traumatic period when their vocalist, Matt Tuck lost his ability to sing during the recording session of the anticipated new album, *Scream Aim Fire*.

There was a time in the last six months when I thought that Matt's would never come back and that we were gonna be a one-album band,' Moose admits. 'We even briefly thought about getting another singer. It was not a very nice time.' 'I almost think they had to get to the lowest point in order to rise above it,' Richardson [the producer] says. Once they did the band knuckled down. 'Definitely with *Bullet*, the guys realize it's a career thing,' continues Richardson. 'They all held boring jobs working in factories and stores before the band blew up, so they're conscious that they wanna savour the moment and make it last as long as it possibly can.'⁶⁹

The singers vocal problems and its impact on the band are characterised as a personal and career 'low point' for the band and the following question and answers with the singer explore these themes:

Q. Did the voice problems ever cause tension between you and the rest of the guys in the band?

Tuck: No, the boys were great. I was the reason everything was getting fucked up, and I was taking the full brunt of it and dealing with it in my own way, which is just to lock it up inside myself. But there was never arguments or fights or them saying 'For fucks sake, Matt!'. They were like 'Do your own thing, and if there is anything we can do, let us know' I know that deep down the boys were just as worried as I was.

Q. Did having them by your side make dealing with it easier?

Tuck: In a way, yeah, I mean, we've been together for too long to just give up over a voice problem, even though it's been as severe as it has and lots of things have gone wrong because of it. There's nothing else we want to do in our lives, and if takes another 12 months to work at it and get it better, that's what we will do. But having them there in my corner, not getting pissed off or wanting to jump ship, was totally cool. That's just the way me and the rest of the guys are with each other. It's more of a brother thing than anything else'.⁷⁰

Surprisingly perhaps, the narrativisation strategy of the band success story to be found in the metal tabloid-magazine, corresponds more closely to the 'success myth' identified by Dyer⁷¹ to explain the legitimating function of movie stardom, than it does to the idea of the artist 'career' in rock ideology.

As developed in the star system, the success myth seeks to orchestrate and reconcile contradictory elements that include (1) ordinariness as the hallmark of the star, (2) an insistence that the system rewards talent and specialness, (3) that lucky breaks may happen to anyone, and (4) that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom.⁷²

The difference is that the 'star system' that operates to select the top bands in metal culture is one internal to metal culture itself and therefore the process of selection is one negotiated between the industry and the wider subculture and this is also true of the role of the metal tabloid itself, which is similarly positioned. Exploring the discursive construction of the metal career within the narratives of the metal tabloid and the varieties of ways that readers engage with, assent to and dissent from this framing, tells us something about how the notion of subculture operates within metal culture, not simply as a means of distinction and difference from a despised 'mainstream' but also as a set of aspirational desires and modes of self-identity projection or identification, which are infested in the success of the bands in question.

Following and engaging in the ups and downs of the musical career of a band is where readers find their strongest sense of personal and emotional investment in metal culture. But which bands are identified as worthy of support and that are the *most metal* is always a negotiation between the fan base and the semi-institutionalised judgments of journalists. It is also an arena where there is evidence, on occasion, of deliberative disputation between metal journalists and readership. This is because the narrativisation strategy of the metal-tabloid is to anticipate and encourage the success of bands it covers but at the same time it also attempts to frame the musical output of such bands in terms of a value system that is seen to be derived from the accumulative history of the genre *and* critical standards which it believes readers will share.

The other area of conflict is the economic dimension of success. Metal tabloid-culture and metal culture more widely celebrates the economic success of bands who have managed to be successful. But such success projects the band into a 'liminal' or crossover space, where their music and identity become visible to those audiences 'outside' it, those whose primary taste is not necessarily metal. It may also involve a move to a major label and so on. It is at this point that phrases like 'sell out', 'gone commercial' and 'betrayal' begin to circulate in the forums where deliberation is possible,

when such success is seen to be at the expense of metal fans whose support got the band to the brink of crossover into the mainstream (e.g. Metallica).

8. Exploring Deliberation in the Metal Magazine Form

Examining the critical response to Bullet For My Valentine's second album, the long-awaited follow up to their hugely successful debut, *The Poison*, offers an instructive case study of the magazine-reader dynamics of the deliberative level of metal magazine culture in these terms. In the run up to the release of *Scream Aim Fire*, Kerrang! ran a number of anticipatory features, interviewing the band about the release of the album and what it was likely to sound like and how the band judged it as a follow up to their previous release of 2006.⁷³ This was followed by a six-page interview feature, two weeks before the album was released and reviewed.

The review, a feature length one-page spread, rates the album three KKK's (good, as opposed to excellent (KKKK) or classic (KKKKK)). This rating is in stark contrast to the KKKKK rating, given the band in a live review of their performance at Rock City, Nottingham, the preceding December⁷⁴ where the band's performance on two new tracks, was deemed comparable to 'classic Metallica – everything from the focused, escalating riffage to Tuck's needle sharp vocal nuances' which 'if truly representative of the new album, the start of an amazing year for the band'. But the review, weighing the metallic against 'a brush with emo or pure pop-punk', concludes that the album overall is 'not entirely the juggernaut we might have hoped for'.⁷⁵

This is followed, in February 2008, by a two-page key note review in rival UK metal magazine, Metal Hammer, which scores the band only 5/10. The review begins by framing the release in terms of the expectation levels heaped on the first British metal band to emerge for years that is a contender for 'international' success along the lines of Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Black Sabbath and Motorhead: the very bands that Hammer's front page, December 2006 cover story of the bands experiences as openers for Iron Maiden in the States, invokes, along with Metallica.⁷⁶ The review even uses the same headline: 'shot Through the Heart'. But the inference of this phrase is very different, when it comes to the judgement of the musical fare on offer:

These songs are dressed up in all the trappings of 21st Century thrash and metalcore – the furious riffs, the blurred finger fretwork, the Dragonforce-esque bursts of speed – but, deep down, this is a pointedly commercial and unthreatening mainstream rock album aimed squarely at young kids who will be just as happy jumping up and down to My Chemical Romance and Linkin Park. Once each

obligatory heads-down intro subsides – and this happens in virtually every song – Matt Tuck’s plain, somewhat anaemic voice appears with a melody that could have been borrowed from any big-selling pop-punk or radio-friendly post-hardcore album from the last decade.⁷⁷

The review concludes in damning fashion by arguing that, ‘‘scream Aim Fire’ sounds like metal designed by a committee of record company executives who have never been to a metal gig in their lives’.⁷⁸

It could be argued that the framing language of this review bisects the epistemic constitution of the core values of metal culture and how they are negotiated within the print culture of the metal magazine-tabloid. Here metal culture differentiates itself from *rockism* through a consistent emphasis on metal music as a popular generic vernacular of the underclass: hence the anticipatory coverage of Bullet For My Valentine, as potential inheritors of the metal success story, able to translate the values of the metal subculture into thematic and musical statement. Here there is no antagonism between success and the core values of the metal subculture and indeed the coverage of the band - what the band are seen to be, what they ‘stand for’ - perfectly fits the critical paradigm of this anticipation. The problem is that this anticipation also has to be reconciled with a journalistic critical framework that seeks evidence that the release offers evidence of ‘innovation’ and ‘progression’ within the genre; terms of assessment and evaluation which speak the language of classification and judgement: of how the album ‘sits’ in relation to the existing standards of the field. It is here that the language and procedures of rockism are translated into those of the language of the ‘sellout’ but also the language of distinction, which is foundational to rockism: discerning that which is pop and that which is *not*.

Notes

¹ But see Brown, ‘Everything Louder than Everything Else’ 2008.

² Weinstein *Heavy Metal*, 2000, p. 193-7.

³ Weinstein, *ibid*.

⁴ See Appadurai, *Introduction* and Kopytoff ‘The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process’ in A. Appadurai (ed) *The Social Life of Things*, 1986.

⁵ Brown, ‘Everything Louder than Everything Else’, 2007.

⁶ For example, Kerrang! has an average circulation of 60, 290, Metal Hammer 48, 540, Terrorizer, 14, 952, in the period Jan-June 2008 (MediaTel. Co.UK, accessed November 2008). Circulation figures relate to individual copy sales, whereas readership is the number of actual readers of the

magazine. Thus, Kerrang!'s readership during the aforementioned period is calculated to be 450, 000! See Brown 2007, p. 650.

⁷ I had also originally planned to include Canada's *Brave Words and Bloody Knuckles*, which also rated in the top ten, but the cost on import was prohibitive. There is also clearly a gap in terms of European titles, the absence of which is purely down to the limitations of my research budget. I would like to acknowledge the financial support of Professor Fiona Montgomery and the School of Historical and Cultural Studies at Bath Spa University, for allowing me to maintain a subscription to these titles.

⁸ Flippo, 'The History of Rolling Stone' parts I-III, 1974; Frith, *The Sociology of Rock*, 1978, p. 139-156; Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*, 1981, p. 165-177; Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music* 1994, p. 72-98; Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, 2001, p. 83-98; Gudmundsson et al, 'Brit Crit: Turning points in British rock criticism, 1960-1990', 2002; Lindberg et al, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers & Cool-headed Cruisers*, 2005; Laing, 'Anglo-American Music Journalism: Texts and contexts', 2006.

⁹ Toynbee, 'Policing Bohemia, pinning up grunge: the music press and generic change in British pop and rock', 1993; Thornton, 1993; Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, 1995; Forde, 'From polyglottism to branding: On the decline of personality journalism in the British music press', 2001; see also Jones (ed), *Pop Music and the Press*, 2002.

¹⁰ But see Weinstein *Heavy Metal*, 2000, p. 174-180; Brown 'Everything Louder than Everything Else', 2007; 2008.

¹¹ McRobbie on *Jackie and More!* 1978; 1991; 1996; Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* 1987; Hermes *Reading Women's Magazines* 1995; Gough-Yates *Understanding Women's Magazines*, 2002.

¹² Jackson et al, *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* 2001; Benwell *Masculinity and Men's Magazines*, 2003 and Crewe, *Representing Men*, 2003.

¹³ Jackson, op cit, p. 3.

¹⁴ See Miles, 'Towards an understanding of the relationship between youth identities and consumer culture', 1995, 'Researching Young People as Consumers', 2003 and Miles et al, 'Fitting In and Sticking Out', 1998.

¹⁵ Brown, op cit, 2007 and 2008.

¹⁶ Shuker, 'On the Cover of the Rolling Stone': The music press' in *Understanding Popular Music* 1994, p. 84.

¹⁷ Op cit, p.85.

¹⁸ Ibid..

¹⁹ Theberge, 'Musicians' Magazines in the 1980s', 1991.

- ²⁰ Atton, 'Living in the Past'?: Value discourses in progressive rock fanzines' 2001.
- ²¹ Straw, 'Characterizing Rock Music Culture: the Case of Heavy Metal' 1990, p.109.
- ²² Gudmundsson et al, 'Brit Crit: Turning points in British rock criticism, 1960-1990', 2002, p. 42.
- ²³ Gudmundsson et al, op cit, p.43; Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 1991, p.93.
- ²⁴ Gudmundsson et al, op cit, p. 44.
- ²⁵ Op cit, p. 45.
- ²⁶ ibid.
- ²⁷ Op cit., p. 44.
- ²⁸ Op cit, p. 48.
- ²⁹ Regev, 'Producing artistic value: the case of rock music', 1994, p. 93.
- ³⁰ Straw, op cit, p. 109.
- ³¹ Quoted in Brown, 'Heavy Metal and Subcultural Theory: A paradigmatic case of neglect?', 2003, pp. 219-220.
- ³² See Frith, *The Sociology of Rock*, 1978, p. 227; see also Fast, 'Rethinking Issues of Gender and Sexuality in Led Zeppelin: A Woman's View of Pleasure and Power in Hard Rock', 1999.
- ³³ Frith and McRobbie, 'Rock and Sexuality', 1990, p. 375.
- ³⁴ See also Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Urban Culture*, 1985, p. 123.
- ³⁵ Straw identifies progressive rock as the other significant strand of 70s rock that is pilloried by rock journalism. For an account of this critical dismissal see Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counter Culture*, 1997; Stump, *The Music's All that Matters: A history of progressive rock*, 1998 and Martin, *Listening to the Future: The time of progressive rock 1968-1978*, 1998.
- ³⁶ Quoted in Lindberg et al, op cit, p. 203.
- ³⁷ Murray, 'What Have They Done to my Blues, Ma?' in C. Heylin ed. 1992, p. 604.
- ³⁸ Weinstein, op cit, p. 18-20.
- ³⁹ Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, 1993, p. 20-25; Brown op cit, 2003 and Weinstein, Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, 1993, p. 20-25; Brown op cit, 2003 and Weinstein, 'Rock Critics Need Bad Music', in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, C. J. Washburne and M. Derno (eds), 2004, pp. 294-310.
- ⁴⁰ Weinstein, op cit, ch. 4. *passim*.

⁴¹ Weinstein, op cit, 2004 , p.301; 2000, op cit, p. 99-113; Brown, op cit, 2003, p. 214.

⁴² See Brown, 'Punk and Metal: Antithesis, Synthesis or Prosthetic?', Paper presented at *No Future?: Punk 2001*, 2001.

⁴³ cf. Harris, 'Roots?: the relationship between the global and the local within the Extreme Metal Scene', 2000, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Brown, 'Everything Louder than Everything Else': The Contemporary Metal Music Magazine and its Cultural Appeal', 2007, p.647.

⁴⁵ Gudmundsson, G., Lindberg, U., Michelsen, M. and Weisethaunet, H., op cit, p. 41.

⁴⁶ Forde, op cit, 2001; Brown, op cit, 2007; 2008.

⁴⁷ Classic Rock is not part of my sample, although metal does feature quite heavily in it, especially through the contributions of Geoff Barton and Tommy Udo. *Revolver* is also published by Future.

⁴⁸ *Metal Hammer*, July 2006.

⁴⁹ For example, see the coverage of Gossow in 'I am not a bitch': Confessions of a metal goddess', *Kerrang*, Sept 29th 2007, p. 22-26.

⁵⁰ Brown, op cit, 2007, pp. 649-653.

⁵¹ *Revolver* also ran an Xmas 'Hot chicks in corpse paint', which was a feature involving two female models displaying various metal oriented gift ideas. This style of feature is very similar to those run in the *Lad's* mag.

⁵² Editorial, *Revolver* June 2008, p. 018. Although, even here, the accompanying text to the series of pics, does attempt to address issues that relate to being a female musician/performer in a male dominated genre. *Revolver*, July 2007, p. 056-078 and June 2008.

⁵³ *Revolver*, September 2007, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Op cit, p. 023.

⁵⁵ Hellbent for Letters, *Revolver*, January 2008, p. 023.

⁵⁶ Chainmail, *Metal Hammer*, January 2008, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Scabbia, *Revolver*, February 2008, p. 036.

⁶⁰ Paul, *Revolver*, February 2008, p. 036.

⁶¹ Brown, op cit, 2007, p. 70.

⁶² Hellbent for Letters, *Revolver*, January 2008, p. 022

⁶³ Brown, op cit, 2007, p. 72.

⁶⁴ *Metal Hammer*, May 2006, p. 5.

⁶⁵ *Metal Hammer*, May 2006, p. 36.

⁶⁶ *Metal Hammer*, May 2006, p. 39.

⁶⁷ *Kerrang!*, January 12, 2008, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Matt Tuck, of Bullet For My Valentine, quoted in *Kerrang!* January 12, 2008, p. 24.

⁶⁹ *Revolver*, March 2008, p. 070.

⁷⁰ Op cit, p. 074.

⁷¹ Dyer, *Stars*, 1998, p. 42.

⁷² Dyer cited in Holmes, 'Reality Goes Pop!' Reality TV, Popular Music, and Narratives of Stardom in Pop Idol', 2004, p. 156.

⁷³ *Kerrang!* January 05, 2008, p. 24.

⁷⁴ *Kerrang!* January 12, 2008, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Metal Hammer*, Dec 2006, p. 32-38.

⁷⁷ *Metal Hammer*, February 2008, p. 85.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

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Mud Shark: Groupies and the Construction of the Heavy Metal Rock God

Rebecca Forrest

Abstract

The experiences and influence of groupies have rarely been seriously considered in studies of heavy metal music and the caricature of groupies drawn by the popular media has been privileged. This chapter seeks to discuss the role groupies played in the construction of the myth and persona of the metal rock god, while acknowledging the preconceived notions perpetuated by popular media. According to Deena Weinstein in 'Heavy Metal: The Music And Its Culture' groupies are not appreciated by the rest of the [metal] audience and frequently male fans 'think that [groupies'] access to the performers is 'unfair.' (pg. 228)' Books about metal bands and their exploits on and off the road, like 'Hammer of the Gods' and 'The Dirt: Confessions of the World's Most Notorious Rock Band,' treat groupies like a punch line to a never ending joke that only the boys are in on. The popular media tends to present groupies as sexually indiscriminate, submissive, mentally ill, and taken advantage of. However, groupies and their sexual exploits, like the myth involving Led Zeppelin, the groupie and the mud shark, played an integral part in the construction of and mythology and the persona connected to metal rock gods in the early days of heavy metal. Groupies directly participated in and even instigated wild backstage parties, outrageous hotel antics, and drug use that have been the basis for the construction of the persona of the male metal rock musician as wild, sexually potent, powerful, and poignant. At the center is the groupie. Review and analysis of newspaper and magazine articles, documentaries, lyrics, and movies will be used to discuss media views of groupies. Autobiographies by groupies, female music fans, and books about metal bands form the basis of the discussion of groupies and their role in identity construction.

Key Words: Heavy Metal God, groupie, Led Zeppelin, media

1. Groupies and the Construction of the Heavy Metal Rock God

The experiences and influence of groupies have rarely been seriously considered in studies of music and the caricature of groupies drawn by the popular media has been privileged. This chapter seeks to discuss the role groupies played in the construction of the myth and persona of the metal rock god, while acknowledging the preconceived notions perpetuated by

popular media. Groupies and their sexual exploits, like the myth involving Led Zeppelin, the groupie and the mud shark, played an integral part in the construction of and the mythology and the persona connected to metal rock gods in the early days of heavy metal.

Groupies directly participated in and even instigated wild backstage parties, outrageous hotel antics, and drug use that have been the basis for the construction of the persona of the male metal rock musician as wild, sexually potent, powerful, and poignant. At the center of it all is the groupie.

2. What is a Groupie?

What is a groupie? Commonly a female music fan that engages in sexual acts or relationships with male musicians, sometimes concurrently. There is no consensus on who is a groupie or what a groupie does, but for the purposes of this project a groupie is defined as a woman who pursues musicians and enters into sexual, sometimes prolonged, affairs with them. For example, Lori Maddox [aka: Lori Lightning], a well-known L.A. in the 1970s groupie gave 'herself exclusively to Jimmy [Page from Led Zeppelin] from age fourteen to sixteen.'¹

While there are documented cases of male groupies in relation to both male and female rock stars, for the purposes of this project when I refer to groupies I am referring to females and, more specifically, female music fans that identify themselves as groupies. Because the meaning of the word 'groupie' has changed over time, for the purposes of this project I will focus on the meanings of the word 'groupie' in the popular music scenes in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

One difference between a groupie and a fan, which both popular media and groupies agree on, is the access the groupie, has to the musician or band when not on stage. While the fan's physical domain consists of airport arrival areas, hotel lobbies, and concerts where she is physically kept away from the band, the groupie extends her realm to the backstage area at the same concerts, sharing tables at restaurants with the band, private parties, and band member's hotel rooms. A groupie gets past the security measures set up to keep fans away, either through cunning or because she knows the band on a personal level from previous trips to her town.

Generally this access strictly remains on the road and does not transfer over to the musician's life at home. While a groupie may long to be a more constant presence in the rock star's life, she is not expected to cross over to the rock star's actual life off the road. She is the road wife, a temporary girlfriend, a comfort in a strange town, and a diversion from the hardships of the road and his reality at home. The rock star's world is divided between his time at home and time spent on the road. The groupie's world is divided between the times when he is in town and when he is gone and she is left longing for his presence.

3. The Popular Media's Presentation of the Groupie

According to an article called 'The New Morality: Is It New or Just in the Open?,' published on November 24, 1968 in the *Los Angeles Times*, journalist Dial Torgerson discussed the changes in morality and acceptable behavior in the 1960s with a focus on acceptable behavior for female young adults. According to Torgerson, morality was on the decline. 'Illegitimacy is up, venereal disease rates are up, college dorms are now coeducational, young unmarrieds casually set up housekeeping, orgies are advertised, nice girls go into bars alone, yesterday's smut slips unchallenged through today's mail, a play simulates oral copulation, movies from a volunteer firemen's smoker play on Sunset Blvd.'² According to this article nice girls are not supposed to go into bars alone or possibly at all. This dialectic between the behavior of nice girls, acceptable social behavior, and bad girls, unacceptable social behavior, set the stage for media negotiation of the meaning of the word groupie and the discussion of their behavior.

In 1969 'The Groupies' LP was produced by Alan Lorber in an attempt to record and possibly off of groupies' exploits. The LP and the women on it pulled no punches when it came to openly discussing their thoughts about rock stars, sexual desires, and sexual adventures and misadventures. One of the groupies says she had recently been beaten by a famous English guitarist (identified only as Jimmy). Another discussed suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, doing drugs, and nearly overdosing 'because of a group.' 'The Groupies' LP presented a one-dimensional view of groupies as merely sexual beings, or beings that spoke about sex, whose only goal in life was to sleep with as many musicians as possible.

Rolling Stone Magazine also turned a spotlight on groupies in 1970 with *Groupies & Other Girls: A Frank and Freaky Speak-in with the Daughters of the Rock Revolution*. The lengthily article, which originally appeared in the magazine, was made into a book shortly thereafter and features stories and excerpts of interviews with women and girls in the music scene at the time, including the groupie 'musical' group, the GTO's, Cynthia Plaster Caster, who made plaster casts of band members' members, and lesser known groupies like the late Geni the tailor.

Unlike 'The Groupies' LP that allowed groupies to talk about their own experiences in small groups in a stream of consciousness style, *Groupies & Other Girls*, is mediated by the authors, John Burks and Jerry Hopkins, but has the same effect on the way the groupies are presented. According to Burks and Hopkins, 'groupies may tend to think of themselves as unselfish vessels of love, but those who've studied the groupie ethos see them otherwise.'³ Using the term 'vessel' when talking about groupies suggested that groupies, and by extension their bodies, only serve a pseudo-sexual

utilitarian purpose. With statements like this, the authors took agency out of the hands of the interview subjects.

In 1970 a documentary about groupies also played in several cities and made headlines across the United States. Ron Dorfman and Peter Nebard's glimpse into the world of groupies and rock 'n roll was met with controversy. To begin with, censors toyed with giving the film an X-rating based on the drug content and sexually explicit conversations caught by the filmmakers. Attempting to calm these concerns and suggesting possible neurosis, Los Angeles Times writer, Kevin Thomas said, 'No girl seeing this picture would come away wanting to be a groupie unless she were already sick.'⁴

Robert Weiner, the documentary's producer, claimed that after two months on the road he was 'depressed and horrified. The musicians are lonely and depressed when they're on the road, that's why they are so susceptible. The girls [groupies] got them started on drugs and spread VD.' To add insult to injury, when asked if any groupies tried to bed him while making the film, Weiner said some had, but that he had not given in, simply stating, 'I'm allergic to penicillin.'⁵ In response to the documentary Jerry Parker of *The Washington Post* presented the following definition of groupies:

Groupies can be smut mouth angels or delicate waifs struggling beneath the weight of their own eye shadow. Exotic creatures fantastically gotten up in feathers and furs, and at the same time pathetic little wretches with pimples and baby fat. Little girls lost and hip chickies who know exactly where they are headed. Red-hot, hard-bitten mamas or frightened, fluttery Little Nells who are sitting ducks for the first long-haired cat who comes along. All he's gotta have is rhythm. Rock 'n roll rhythm. And to have made some kind of a name for himself displaying it.⁶

While Parker's definition offers a more nuanced look at groupies than had been offered by the documentary or the documentary's producer, describing groupies of various types from smut mouth angels to little girls lost, from hardbitten mamas to sitting ducks, still suggests that groupies are not nice girls, young, lost, lonely, naive, predator, prey, and sexually indiscriminate, provided that the man is a musician.

'All he's gotta have is rhythm' and a name. According to Parker, the musicians' name is vital and, at the same time, makes the individual irrelevant. In the same article Eric Clapton admitted that he used to sleep with groupies. Though he claimed to have had an epiphany. 'It isn't your body or your face they wanted to make love to, but your name.'⁷

Not all media about groupies was as critical, in 1973 *Star Magazine* was published in Los Angeles and touted itself as the magazine for and about groupies, replete with a monthly groupie cartoon based on some of the antics that took place on LA's Sunset Strip, interviews with musicians, and sit downs with some of the groupies who worked with the magazine. Groupies Coral Starr, Sable Starr, and Lori Lightning, who was 13 years old at the time, all modeled for this magazine. In the photo shoots young groupies were dressed up and made up to look older and more outlandish than their years and regular lives in high school portrayed.

Articles and interviews in the magazine gave pointers on how to be a groupie, how to 'bag' a rock star, and how to leave him begging for more. A veritable how-to guide for aspiring groupies, *Star Magazine* venerated young groupies on the Sunset Strip, contributed to their larger than life personas, and displayed the outlandish and revealing clothing they wore to clubs and concerts. However, sustaining a magazine dedicated to the topic of groupies proved difficult and the publication folded after five issues.

The views of groupies presented and perpetuated by the media have had a lingering effect on the negotiation of what a groupie is and what a groupie does. The media construction of groupies as sexually indiscriminate, submissive, naïve, childlike, and in need of protection from themselves started in the late-1960s and continues today as evidenced by recent fictional films like Cameron Crowe's 2001 *Almost Famous*.

Books about metal bands and their exploits on and off the road, like *Hammer of the Gods* and *The Dirt: Confessions of the World's Most Notorious Rock Band*, present groupies in a similar way and treat them like the punch line to a never ending joke that only the boys are in on, as sexually indiscriminate, submissive creatures. While reminiscing about Motley Crue's time on the Monsters of Rock Tour, Mick Mars discussed a particular evening in the hotel bar in Sweden. 'One of the guys from AC/DC brought a girl back to the hotel bar. He was really drunk and puked all over her...After drinking enough to make himself sick again, he asked the girl to come up to his room with him. She was still stained with his puke, but she said yes anyway. How gross is that?'⁸ Mars' clear disdain for the groupie in this story echoes some of the media portrayal of groupies previously discussed.

According to Deena Weinstein in '*Heavy Metal: The Music And Its Culture*' groupies are not appreciated by the rest of the [metal] audience and frequently male fans 'think that [groupies'] access to the performers is 'unfair.'⁹ However, the mere presence of beautiful sexually available women made the bands' out of control, non-stop partying lifestyle the envy of many male fans. In addition, groupies, even puke stained groupies, have played an important part in the construction of the band's identity and solidified the recognition of band members as wild, sexually potent, powerful, and

poignant through the creation and circulation of stories. At times, though, stories about wild metal gods and insane on the road antics have taken on a life of their own.

4. Led Zeppelin and the Mud Shark

The mud shark incident, be it true or false, has been told and retold in many different ways. It was spawned in 1969 when Led Zeppelin was on tour in the American Northwest. The most popular version of the story involves Jimmy Page fishing out of the window of a hotel room in Seattle, catching a mud shark, and forcibly fucking a young groupie who had been tied to the bed with the live fish. The incident has been attributed to everyone from Jimmy Page, to John Bohnam, and Led Zeppelin's manager Richard Cole, to the whole of Led Zeppelin, with their opening band at the time, Vanilla Fudge, looking on in approval and recording the proceedings for posterity. The facts of the story and debates of its truth are of little consequence. What is important is how the story, in its many incarnations, portrays heavy metal musicians as rabid, out of control, sex crazed, heathens and showed direct physical power and influence over a sexually potent woman and how the outlandish story and its many versions would only be remotely believable in the context of heavy metal.

The mud shark incident highlighted the imagined debauchery of life on the road and took it to a level never before suspected. It was almost inconceivable to think of bands like The Beatles or Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young having participated in an episode involving a groupie and a live mud shark. After all, the Beatles just wanted to 'Hold Your Hand.' But heavy metal in its infancy allowed for the debauchery supposedly exhibited and groupies facilitated the creation of the notion of the dangerous, dark, and degenerate metal rock god through their presence at out of control gatherings and the circulation of stories.

According to famed LA groupie, former Jimmy Page paramour, and author, Pamela Des Barres, groupies in the 1970s had a speedy and reliable communication system and they used it to talk about their main love in life, musicians, and heavy metal musicians were a favorite topic of conversation. Before Led Zeppelin had arrived in LA, 'we'd heard about [them], how crazy they were. They'd been back East first. We heard all the rumors and everything because communication among the groupies...was on an up-to-the-minute level. We knew some girls back East... We heard how wild Led Zeppelin were, that they fucked a different girl every night. They already had a reputation a month into their first tour.¹⁰ Groupies used telephone, mail, and even telegraph to keep information flowing.

The media presentation of groupies also had an effect on the bands and the identities constructed for the heavy metal musicians and this media reached a wider audience than groupie word of mouth may have been able.

In the 1970 film *Groupie*, mentioned previously, one scene showed an unidentified groupie describing 'Jimmy Page's skills with whips. When the film, *Groupie*, was released the following year Led Zeppelin's [already] tattered reputation sank even lower. Now it was – 'Jimmy Page – scourge of the groupies.'¹¹ Despite the fact that the movie was not widely released, the rumors about Jimmy Page, his penchant for rough sex and his interest in Satanism were perpetuated through word of mouth by groupies and fans alike. In another example of stories taking on ever more unbelievable themes, and in a way going back to mythical roots in the blues, it has been suggested that Jimmy page sold his soul to the devil in return for his musical success.

These rumors persist to this day through storytelling, media, and books written by bands and groupies. Pamela Des Barres has made a veritable cottage industry out of writing about groupies and their exploits. While some of her stories attempt to set the record straight they continue to perpetuate the rumors they attempt to dispel. For example, Des Barres maintains that Jimmy Page is a thoughtful and gentle lover, but admits that he did have whips and said that she was certain that he used them on someone, just never her. The continued publication of these stories reinforces and perpetuates these stories and the notions of debauched heavy metal rock gods' behavior. It must be remembered that these stories and stories generated about modern heavy metal and rock bands continue to be negotiated and renegotiated.

In conclusion, groupies, their actions, their presence, and their communication played an integral role in the construction of the wild, crazy, debauched persona that has been attached to some heavy metal musicians. However, it must be remembered, the presence of groupies has also indirectly influenced the music itself. When standing backstage in full groupie garb, metal groupie Patti Johnsen was asked by a woman standing next to her, 'What are you supposed to be?' Without missing a beat, Patti turned to the woman and calmly summed up the groupie's most valuable contribution to music, 'I'm the reason they picked up a guitar in the first place.'¹²

Notes

¹ Buell (2001), pp. 82

² *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1968

³ Burks & Hopkins (1970), pp.38

⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1970

⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, February 14, 1971

⁶ *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1971

⁷ *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1971

⁸ Lee, et al (2001), pg. 124

⁹ Weinstein (2000), pg. 288

¹⁰ Davis (2008), pg. 92

¹¹ Davis (2008), pg. 94

¹² Des Barres (2007), pg. 272

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PART 3

Metal Politics and Metal Ethics

From Forests Unknown: Eurometal and the Political / Audio Unconscious

Scott Wilson

Abstract

The idea of an audio political unconscious is suggested by Jacques Attali when he argues that music, as a particular organization of noise, heralds the coming of a future social order.¹ The extremes of metal, however, push at the intensely pleasurable threshold of dis/organization in which music becomes noise as well as vice versa. Any notion of a future social order promised by metal therefore can only be seen as highly equivocal and as precluded as much as pre-empted. But that does not mean that immanent to metal there isn't the possibility of some future thinking of the political. Certainly, as this chapter argues, the extremes of metal exist in the absence of any political thought adequate to the current state of affairs. Across Europe, old and new, national and regional varieties of DM, BM, Viking, battle, folk, doom and ambient have tracked the expansion of the EU and its borderlands. At the same time, the expansion of the homogenizing force of the techno-bureaucratic EU, that is itself a symptom of the failure of the nation-state in the face of global capital, has left a trail of discontents, some of which have found a voice in metal. This chapter looks at metal as the bearer of both a political and audio unconscious in which can be located, along different tracks, the positive reverse of the absence of any European popular culture in which could be located a political alternative to the 'globalatinization' represented by institutions like the EU.²

Key Words: Lordi, black metal, political unconscious, globalatinization, racism, Satanism, Freud, Laclau, Derrida, Bataille.

The name of the land we come from, Transylvania, literally means 'the land behind the forest', which is not a geographical meaning but an esoteric one. The sense that we give to this metaphor is that of 'transcending the forest', where the forest separates the limits between the known and the unknown, between the conscious and the unconscious part of existence, between the concrete density of existence and the melted abstraction of collective memory.

Negură Bunget³

So Pure ... Evil. Cold
 Transilvanian hunger
 Darkthrone, 'Transilvanian Hunger'⁴

1. Eurovision

The term 'Eurometal' is deliberately coined to cause unease, as if there were or could be any such genre in metal. The prefix 'Euro-' always seems to herald something bland, trashy, kitsch. And if there were to be named such a genre, defined in relation to North American or South East Asian metal, say, where would be its limits? Would Turkish bands be included? Or bands from the UK, a country with a semi-detached relation to its continental neighbours? What about Israel? Why not? Israel has after all in the shape of Dana International provided a winner of Eurovision. So if there is no Eurometal – no Eurosounds worth speaking of – there is at least a Eurovision that has been momentarily disturbed by metal, or at least hard rock. And Europe cried 'Hallelujah!'

For much of Europe, particularly Western Europe, Lordi's extraordinary hard-rock victory in Eurovision 2006 failed to disturb the contest's general function, which is to continue, through its vapidty, to inoculate Europeans from any desire for a popular forum for cultural or political expression. In Finland, however, the victory constituted something of a national event. The particular staging of national culture in the Eurovision song contest is apparently taken more seriously by some nations than others, and in Finland the contest has 'evoked patriotic emotions throughout Finnish television history, even though Finland has often ranked among the lower positions'.⁵ What is seen in some nations of Europe, particularly Britain when it gets *nul points*, as the insipient nationalism of Eurovision is evident of course in the vote-rigging that has plagued the contest ever since General Franco in 1968 condemned Cliff Richard to the runners-up spot. It continues today with the spectacle of the Baltic and Balkan countries voting for each other.

When Lordi were selected to represent Finland in a local competition, their monster masks and unconventional (for Eurovision) hard rock/soft metal form caused a degree of consternation in the nationalist press. The selection was considered a 'sacrilege and the band were accused of satanism'.⁶ To circumvent these attacks, Lordi adopted a dual strategy. On the one hand, they publicly supported sub- and minority cultures against nationalist intolerance, and on the other, co-opted nationalist symbols in their performance. Waving the Finnish flag, they sported nationalist symbols like traditional top hats and Sami 'Four Wind hats'.⁷ Their overwhelming victory in the contest was thereby cemented as a specifically Finnish victory.

Indeed, in an essay called 'Hard Rock Hallelujah! Empowering Reflexive Political Action on the Internet' (2007) sociologists Tapio Häyhtio

and Jarmo Rinne argue that the significance of this victory as a Finnish national event had political repercussions. While Finnish political leaders sought to associate themselves with the victory – even to the point of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen making the ‘devil’s horn’ gesture while posing for pictures with the band – it was not until a number of Finnish papers and magazines broke the taboo on publishing the unmasked face of Mr. Lordi himself that the band became the centre of a popular revolt, stirring national outrage against the media and various boycotts, ‘buycotts’, website jamming and other internet campaigns.

Two suggestions can be made on the basis of this well-known example. First, the exceptional difference that was acknowledged in the record haul of points for ‘Hard Rock Hallelujah’, coupled with the band’s subsequent status as national heroes, hints at the desire for some kind of popular forum for cultural or political expression that Eurovision generally displaces. The specific nature of Lordi’s success suggests perhaps that this desire pulsates, unacknowledged and in darker forms no doubt, throughout the various metal subgenres, scenes and festivals that have proliferated throughout Europe, new and old, since the early 1990s. And, moreover, that these desires expressed in the form of hard rock or metal can have genuine popular appeal. Second, that it is perhaps this question of the mask and unmasking that lays down the terms and limits of this cultural and political desire, terms and limits, moreover, that need to be circumvented.

In their essay, Häyhtiö and Rinne are interested in what the public outrage surrounding Tomi Putaansuu’s unmasking has to say about the use of the internet in ‘empowering reflexive political action’, they are less interested in speculating on what caused the excessive response or why the papers and magazines misjudged the public so badly. Yet it is not obvious that there should have been such an excessive reaction. The cartoon mask is clearly a gimmick. Images of Alice Cooper or Gene Simmons without their make-up have never caused national outrage or anxiety in the US. Häyhtiö and Rinne acknowledge that there was a ‘deep source’ to the moral indignation surrounding the unmasking:

Lordi’s victory was regarded as a national heroic deed and an expression of Finnish *sisu* (toughness or ‘guts’, considered to be a mental characteristic of Finns), entirely comparable with the miracle of the Winter War, achievements of the greatest Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, and other cultural success stories.⁸

Lordi became a focus of nationalist desire because Finnish *sisu* was perceived in the relative hardness of the music that is correlated to the ferocity of Finland’s refusal to be subordinated to pan-European powers such as the

Soviet Union or National Socialist Germany, all of which is visually figured in the ‘satanic’ monstrosity of the mask. It is the audio and visual manifestation of Finnish *sisu* then that is at stake when sections of the Finnish press tear away the ferocious mask of Mr. Lordi to reveal the studious, bespectacled, faintly geeky, naked face of Tomi Putaansuu.

There is the mask, then, and there is the music. They are not the same thing. The controversy over the mask points to a fairly straightforward repetition that suggests the work of a political unconscious, which I will briefly rehearse. Music, however, lays down the tracks of an audio unconscious that, while it connects at certain points with the unconscious supposed to be structured like a language, operates differently.

2. Globalatinization

What is the ‘deep source’ that Häyhtiö and Rinne hint is at the basis of the public expression of moral outrage that erupted from the unmasking of Mr. Lordi? Morality is desire in its pure state, something evident in the very familiar ‘phallic’ logic of the mask that it is the function of the enlightened press, in its role as the representatives of the third estate, to unveil. It is psychoanalysis, of course, that has pointed out the libidinal force of this desire to reveal truth in all its nakedness. Its structure is the effect of symbolic castration, the point being that the revelation of nakedness provides the occasion for the erection of the ‘phallus’ (in contradistinction to the penis) in the form of truth, logos, paternal law, moral authority in its universal form and so on. That is, precisely, the power to distinguish between truth and falsity, appearance and reality, presence and absence – the power to dispel the fear of monsters and unmask them as just ordinary men. To disavow this truth, which is what the outraged Finns did, to want the mask rather than the man, is to fall prey to fetishism.

Of course there is nothing new or unique about this kind of nationalist fetishism. Every nation has to find a way of giving content to the empty form of the nation, filling it out with some myth of ethnicity usually bound up with fetish objects. For Ernesto Laclau, this is indeed the populist means through which hegemonies are established. ‘Hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical’.⁹ Prime Minister Vanhanen, with his devil’s horn gesture, has clearly read some Laclau. What is odd is the recognition – or perhaps it is not recognized consciously – that there is something precisely *monstrous* or satanic about the ethnic content, the pagan symbols and objects that are supposed to fill the void hollowed out by this modern Northern European nation-state. But this is not at all limited to Finland.

There is clear continuity between the Lordi controversy and expressions of political desire, anxiety and discontent in other Northern

European nations, continuity that has been articulated over the past 20 years or so by various forms of metal. Metal has become the name under which multiple styles, scenes and festivals have articulated the pleasures, desires and discontents of numerous people across Europe, old and new in the face of the expansion of the EU and its borderlands. This expansion of the proto-superstate, itself a symptom of the failure of the nation-state in the face of global capitalism, has provoked, enabled and exacerbated a desire for the nation that seeks support in phantasmatic objects of ethnicity. Everyone knows the ‘monstrous’ forms this discontent can take from the burning of churches in Norway to racism and neo-Nazism in NSBM and elsewhere. So while it might be suggested, following Laclau, that the pagan ‘*objets a*’ are the positive reverse of the absence of any European popular culture in which could be located a political alternative to ‘globalatinization’, it is important to recognize the dangers inherent to the forces – conscious and unconscious – that connect Northern European racism with nationalisms that seek to ground themselves in such objects.

This is even more imperative since the connection between racism and paganism is an effect of the history of globalatinization itself. This term, coined by Jacques Derrida, he defines as ‘this strange alliance of Christianity, as the experience of the death of God, and teletechnoscientific capitalism is at the same time hegemonic and finite, ultra-powerful and in the process of exhausting itself’.¹⁰ The sub-clause ‘Christianity, as the experience of the death of God’ perhaps needs some commentary particularly given its pertinence to the politics of metal in Europe. Simply, Derrida is referring to the Kantian distinction, upon which secular law and political morality is based, between ‘the religion of cult’ that is marked by dogmatism and ‘moral religion’ that is marked by critical reflection geared towards self-improvement that must act as if God had abandoned us or were dead. For Derrida, this distinction or even opposition between practical reason and ‘dogmatic faith’ defines ‘even for us today, the place of conflict, if not of war’ in a Kantian sense, but also in an ideological sense in the way that it informs and justifies the *real politik* of international relations. In its ‘hyper-imperialist’ Anglo-American modality, globalatinization ‘imposes itself in a particularly palpable manner within the conceptual apparatus of international law and of global political rhetoric’.¹¹

In a small but highly symptomatic way, it seems to me, this conflict is played out in some Northern European genres of metal that appeal to non-Christian or pre-Christian myths, objects and symbols. For Freud, the conflict, based on the Christian experience of the death of God, has relatively long roots or goes back beyond Kant at least. In 1939, having fled the Nazi persecution of Jews in Austria and throughout Europe, Freud reflected on the roots of Northern European anti-semitism. The key problem, or ‘final motive’, for Freud was the problem not of Judaism as such, but rather the

problem of Christianity. The conversion of the Northern European peoples to Christianity is historically too recent; it was too coercive and has remained incomplete. At best, it is disavowed in fetishistic returns to pagan polytheism, at worst resentment is displaced on to the Jews, from whence Christianity came, with all the death-driven hatred that springs from self-disgust. Freud cites the Jewish practice of circumcision, which is both a sign that the Jews successfully resisted Christian conversion and a reminder of the more powerful symbolic castration to which the Northerners became subject.

We must not forget that all those peoples who excel today in their hatred of Jews became Christian only in late historic times, often driven to it by bloody coercion. It might be said that they are all 'misbaptized'. They have been left, under a thin veneer of Christianity, what their ancestors were, who worshipped a barbarous polytheism. They have not got over a grudge against the new religion, which was imposed on them; but they have displaced the grudge on to the source from which Christianity reached them. The fact that the Gospels tell a story that is set among Jews has made this displacement easy for them. Their hatred of Jews is at bottom a hatred of Christians, and we need not be surprised that in the German National Socialist revolution this intimate relation between the two monotheist religions finds such a clear expression in the hostile treatment of both of them.¹²

In its own very small way, then, the moral-political revolt surrounding the symbolic castration of Mr. Lordi effected through the removal of his mask is a repetition, which finds echoes throughout Europe, produced by the repression of this previous, more profound cultural trauma: the violent latinization of Northern European peoples that has become globally transnational, via a detour through the Anglo-American world, in an alliance with teletechnoscientific capitalism. While the Lordi example is no doubt trivial, a minor populist event, the globalatinization that provides its context sustains in the repetition the traces of an unconscious death drive that it is essential to monitor.

Eurovision has always, in its multicultural inclusivity, been slightly in advance of the EU itself; as such it has always provided Europeans with a safe and progressive image of the project of European union. In Eurovision, national-cultural differences are subsumed within the familiar gestures of pop music and rendered exchangeable within the same signifying economy. It is impossible, however, to ground the specificity of national culture in pop songs and image-commodities precisely because one can simply be

exchanged for another. For psychoanalysis, the alterity of the Other cannot be grounded in another signifier, but only in 'jouissance', essentially pain or suffering (something like Finnish *sisu*, perhaps). The jouissance that is supposed to ground the nation in a specific experience or scene of suffering is unrepresentable, always lost as an effect of symbolic castration, and displaced down the signifying chain until it becomes figured by something apparently unexchangeable, something excessive or 'monstrous'. Briefly and within the context of Eurovision, Lordi managed to evoke genuine difference through apparently breaking the chain of banal equivalence.

Within the context of the universalism of the EU, however, the desire for genuine ethnic difference takes a more sinister path towards 'monstrosity', drawn to the inevitable glamorous limit of dark jouissance that founded, negatively, the EU project itself at the end of world war two.

3. Dissonance and Repetition

It is appropriate in the context of a *Eurovision* that the object of popular Finnish revolt should be the unveiling of the mask – the simulacrum of national guts and virtue – that discloses nothing behind it. What is 'behind' the mask belongs not to the visual register nor to language, but to sound. And the sound does not unify the nation in relation to an image of ethnic jouissance, but turns a nation of Finns momentarily into hard-rock metalheads. Difference is realized not through reference to a mythical past but through reference to elsewhere, by acceding to a different register of affect altogether. The affective power of metal arises as an effect of the joy of dissonance that is understood here not as just another term in musical vocabulary in contradistinction to harmony, but as constitutive of the experience of metal that opens the individual in intimate communication with a larger community. Dissonance is relative, of course, contextual and also the effect of a repetition of a purely audio unconscious that repeats the shock of a constitutive audio event in a frisson of horror-pleasure productive of desire.

In metal images and words are subordinate to sound. The nonspecific monstrosity of Lordi's masks is consistent in this respect with the lyrical content of 'Hard Rock Hallelujah' that equivocates between good and evil in deference to the sovereign value of rock. Simultaneously both demon and angel and consequently neither, 'Not quite an angel / Or the one that fell', music is located as the force that exceeds both in an experience that broaches the divine, 'Hallelujah!' This is why it makes little difference what ostensible moral or political lyrical reference metal may have, or why it is possible for there to be Christian metal or Jewish metal or for musicians to switch spiritual allegiance without noticeable effect. In this respect, however, metal remains closer to evil than to good since it goes beyond measure. Evil exceeds the good-and-evil that in their mirror relation remain equivalent, self-defining and exchangeable for one another.

This is an experience, of course, that goes to the heart of metal, an experience that, since its inception, has been evoked through images of evil and through 'satanic' provocations of Christianity. While this runs through the history of rock 'n' roll (Jerry Lee Lewis), the Blues (Robert Johnson) and so on, from Black Sabbath the evocation of evil becomes a musical principle. There is no space here to go into all the paradoxes of Satanism, but three brief points can be made. First, the Satanism associated with metal establishes, albeit ironically, a relation to the divine in a secular age marked by the death of God and globalatinization. This is especially the case when the Satanism is primarily concerned with a spirit of demonic, rebellious play. Second, as can be seen most clearly with Bathory, having been established, the initial Satanic anti-Christian position gives way to the procession of pagan simulacra that announces Viking metal, battle metal, folk metal and so on. Third, Satanism and all the other evocations of evil, darkness, death, doom, apocalypse of various varieties has no function other than to evoke in language, discursively, that is in a wholly inadequate way, the limit-experiences produced by the music.

It is Georges Bataille, perhaps, and his notion of the limit experience and of joy before death that comes closest to conceptualizing the passion of the music that is also, always, even if you are listening to it alone, a shared passion and an experience of being-with others. So Satan is important purely as a figure, an emblem of what is essential to the music in its political dimension that is precisely that it exceeds and remains exterior to all forms of political determination. To paraphrase Bataille, our metal credo would be: 'First of all it is impossible to define just what propels the phenomenon of metal that cannot be made to serve a master. NON SERVIAM is said to be the Devil's motto. If this is so, then metal is diabolical'.¹³ The diabolical negativity of metal's satanic momentum, therefore, prevents it from coalescing into any reactionary ethnic or nationalist project.

If metal is *a*political in the sense that it is not reducible to any politics even as it provides the (non) basis of an open community, the ecstatic limit of a community without formal limits, this is because it is also a kind of *a*music. Metal at its most affective occupies the border between music and noise that is constitutive of the formation of any subject of music at any time. The formation of any subject of music necessarily involves a repression (or expulsion) of 'noise' the return of which in metal is precisely if indefinably (precisely indefinably) what propels it as a rebellious form. To put it abstractly: if there is a subject of metal, it is an *a*musical subject without formal limits that is produced by the force of dissonance, that is an effect of repetition, that is repressed but returns as repetition in the form of a dissonance. That is: a 'new' dissonance that marks the point of innovation, movement and change.

Notwithstanding the virtuosity of many heavy metal musicians, metal is a music in which experience is privileged over knowledge or know-how as the path to joy that broaches, in headbanging heaven, the divine. This is especially the case in a form like black metal, which generally favours low cost and low fidelity production values and a raw, cold sound. In black metal the ecstatic experience is reached in evacuating God, or indeed any other comforting name, from the space of the divine. In the pagan winter of black metal ‘the million hands of joy have something holy to burn’ as all the names of the divine go up in flames fanned by ‘an infernal cyclone of blasphemy’.¹⁴ God is nothing other than a category for symbolizing and delimiting an unnameable experience of intimate communication in a paternal metaphor. In black metal Satan or death are names that are more frequently conjured up to evoke the shared experience of intimacy, but they are simply figures for the unnameable and the unknown. In contrast to the paternal embrace of God, the unknown ‘leaves one cold, does not elicit our love until it overturns everything within us like a violent wind’.¹⁵ ‘So Pure ... Evil. Cold / Transylvanian hunger’.¹⁶

In black metal and indeed in much pagan and folk metal, the forest is the figure for the unknown, for unconscious desire. ‘Transylvania, which literally means ‘the land behind the forest’ is not a geographical place but an ‘esoteric’ one. For folk metal band Negură Bunget ‘the forest separates the limits between the known and the unknown, between the conscious and the unconscious part of existence, between the concrete density of existence and the melted abstraction of collective memory’. Music, since it is not a category of understanding but a vehicle of experience, provides the means of taking the unknown as a (non)object and of ‘transcending the forest’.¹⁷

The productivity of metal’s audio unconscious as it broaches the limits of the unknown in experiences of nonknowledge marks out and traverses territory both psychic and real, individual and collective, and the proliferation of forms and styles (and modes of non-productive expenditure associated with pre-modern European cultures) is an effect of its *amusical* force that traces a locus of dissonance and repetition that takes it beyond modern social and political formations.

Notes

¹ J. Attali, *Noise*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977, p.4.

² On ‘globalatinization’ see J. Derrida, *Acts of Religion*. London: Routledge, 2002.

³ Negură Bunget quoted in *Terrorizer*, 176, November 2008, p. 51.

⁴ Darkthrone, *Transylvanian Hunger*, Peaceville Records, CDVILED 43, 1994.

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- ⁵ Häyhtiö, T and Jarmo Rinne, 'Hard Rock Hallelujah! Empowering Reflexive Political Action on the Internet' in *Journal for Cultural Research*, 2007, 11.4, pp. 337-358, p. 340.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 341.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 348.
- ⁹ E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2007, p. 116.
- ¹⁰ J. Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, p. 52.
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp. 66-7.
- ¹² S. Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism' in *The Origins of Religion*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, pp. 237-386, p. 336.
- ¹³ G. Bataille, 'Letter to René Char on the incompatibilities of the writer' *Yale French Studies* 78, 1990, pp. 31-43, p. 34.
- ¹⁴ Darkthrone, 'The Pagan Winter' from *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*. Peaceville, 1992.
- ¹⁵ G. Bataille, *Inner Experience*. New York: State University of New York, 1988, p. 5.
- ¹⁶ Darkthrone, 'Transilvanian Hunger'.
- ¹⁷ Negură Bunget, *Terrorizer*, p. 51.

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Nordic Nationalisms: Black Metal takes Norway's Everyday Racisms to the Extreme

Laura Wiebe Taylor

Abstract

Contradictory to claims from some of metal's detractors, metal music and culture are rarely sites of extraordinary racism. However, during the early 1990s, a small group of musicians from Norway's emerging black metal underground demonstrated how easily the valorisation of national identity and cultural heritage can transform into declarations of racial purity and Nordic superiority. Despite mainstream Norway's denials of complicity, black metal musicians' espousals of racism and ultranationalism cannot be understood independently of a larger geopolitical environment - which includes not only historical Norwegian Nazism and contemporary national socialist extremism but also the recent successes of far-right politics as well as anti-immigrant sentiments circulating in the Norwegian, and European, public sphere. Situated within this context, black metal's nationalistic racism can be seen as an 'extreme' reflection of the xenophobia and cultural nationalism proliferating throughout Norwegian society and of the 'everyday' racisms these attitudes engender. While the black metal scene has been the subject of scholarly (Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, 2007) and popular (Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 1998, 2003) attention, and Marianne Gullestad's recent anthropological research has brought racism in Norway under the analytic lens, as yet the connection between these areas has received little notice. This essay looks at the racism manifested in the early Norwegian black metal scene where it intersects with discourses of nationalism and xenophobia in Norwegian society and argues that the racism of black metallers was not an inexplicable aberration but an unfortunate intensification and amplification of mainstream racist views.

Key Words: Black metal, Norway, racism, nationalism, xenophobia, heavy metal music.

1. Black Metal: Extreme Music

Norwegian black metal represents an intersection between locality and genre: its locality figures the scene as a national expression within a global metal underground, its genre as a particular set of stylistic and ideological practices within the broader category of metal music.¹ As one of the 'extreme' subgenres of metal, black metal is characterised by 'sonic,'

‘discursive,’ and ‘bodily’ transgression, including its screamed vocals, intense tempos, heavily distorted riffs, and abject or socially unacceptable lyrics, imagery and rhetoric.²

In *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Kahn-Harris notes that extreme metal is a predominantly white genre, attracting few artists of sub-Saharan African, Chinese, or South Asian descent even when it makes no deliberate attempts to exclude them.³ This demographic tendency is even more pronounced in Norway’s black metal underground, partly explainable in terms of the country’s white majority population, but the genre’s exclusionary constructions of Norwegian black metal whiteness may also play a role. Black metal also emphasises a kind of whiteness in musical terms, avoiding elements, such as blue notes and syncopated rhythms, that are associated with African American influences.⁴ The white face paint, or corpse paint, worn by many black metal musicians, including many of the early Norwegian artists, might be read as a further marker of whiteness - the horror of whiteness associated with whites’ historical power to bring about others’ deaths.⁵

During the early nineties, Norwegian black metal coalesced around a raw, primitive aesthetic - low production values, piercing drone, stripped-down song structures and arrangements, and harsh imagery - much of it pillaged from Norse mythology, paganism, satanism and/or fascism. The resulting sonic and visual noise could then serve to evoke, even enact, a particular vision of Norway, an atavistic and ruthless national imaginary where social interaction is based on perpetual strife and mutual hate. Individual songs and albums, at least those written in English, were rarely explicit about how this vision of Norway might be brought about, but several artists’ public actions and statements indicated their ideologies of ethnic and racial nationalism, glorifying a myth of pre-modern, pre-Christian and pre-immigration Norwegian identity.⁶

The Norwegian black metal underground developed within a particular temporal, cultural, and geopolitical context that included an increasingly heterogeneous Norwegian population, pressure for Norway to join the European Union, a history of Nazi occupation, and a tradition of cultural nationalism relying on the construction of a homogenised Nordic heritage. It is within this environment that the Norwegian black metal scene emerged as the social and musical production of a small number of young white men expressing their disdain for what they perceived as modern weakness and liberalism while attempting to reclaim Norway’s Viking, or at least pre-Christian, history and to re-establish an imagined white, warrior past.

2. The Norwegian Context

According to Iver Neumann, national identity has been important in Norway since at least the 1770s, when aspirations for Norwegian political independence inspired a nationalistic campaign of self-definition. Historians such as Gerhard Schønning associated Norwegians' 'common and proud history' with the 'age of the Sagas' - what later became known as 'the Viking age' - when brave and fiery Norwegian peasants represented a 'Terror' for the rest of Europe.⁷ Norwegian language and nature (mountains and cold climate, for example) became celebrated markers of a 'nationalised' people, defined against the ruling Danes, the allegedly 'less pure-blooded Swedes' and Germans,⁸ as well as Finnish migrants and the indigenous Sami living in the north.⁹ Norway's contemporary 'national self-image,' as described by Marianne Gullestad, still sees Norwegians as 'close to and fond of nature,' but also as 'white'¹⁰ - a colour specification that was only implicit in early national identities.

After Norway emerged as a 'fully sovereign state' in 1905, self-definition began to work in opposition to, first, a generalised 'European Other,' then to Nazi occupation and, eventually, to the political amalgamations of the European Community and European Union.¹¹ Yet, as part of Europe, Norway has also been engaged in a larger European project of maintaining a distinct identity from the United States, and from the non-European East and South.¹² Gullestad suggests that Norwegian national identity has been revitalised in recent decades as a 'response' to factors such as increasing 'individualization, immigration, Europeanization and globalisation.'¹³ This revitalised identity is racialized as well as nationalised, constructing a vision of Nordic racial homogeneity that never actually existed.¹⁴ It relies on a sense of Norway's colonial innocence, even victimisation, and excludes both historical and contemporary immigrants from attaining the status of 'Norwegian.' Even now, writes Gullestad, 'nine out of ten majority Norwegians reserve the use of the word 'immigrant' for people with what is perceived to be a 'dark skin colour'.¹⁵

Far-right political parties that espouse an anti-immigrant rhetoric have also become more popular in Norway since the 1980s: for example, the far-right wing Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) became the third largest in Norwegian parliament in 1989 while advocating 'tax reform and stronger immigration controls.'¹⁶ Xenophobic discourses invoked by the Progress Party and others who pose immigration as a national, cultural or ethnic problem or threat engage in a form of 'raceless racism,' which attempts a denial of race in order to indulge in 'fantasies' of homogeneity and a 'bleached' Europe.¹⁷ Such popular, if marginally acceptable, discourses of cultural and ethnic nationalism exist in Norway alongside the similar but more easily demonised ideologies espoused by an extreme nationalist political underground.¹⁸

Despite this larger socio- and geopolitical context, black metal racism is more likely to come up in a discussion of extreme underground politics, satanism or paganism than in an analysis of mainstream racist discourses circulating in the public sphere.¹⁹ Certainly a nation that associates racism primarily with Nazism, and which rarely refers to racism except in denials,²⁰ could not have found it difficult to distance itself from the satanic and fascistic imagery of the black metal scene or the violent acts of scene members.²¹ Yet such transgressions do not express clear radical or underground political allegiances, nor do they usually expose overt or explicit racism. It was a small step from the celebration of Norwegian history to a nationalistic glorification of Norse heritage, from the shock value of Nazi references to the shocking values associated with Nazism and fascism. But for early Norwegian black metal, racism was often implicit and incoherent, embedded in a bricolage of violent, anti-religious, and racist ideas drawn from any available inspiration, including mainstream constructions of white Norwegian national identity.²²

3. Nazi Imagery and Ideology in Black Metal

The connection between racist nationalism and black metal's appropriations of Nazism can be read in the Aryanism and anti-Semitism that some scene members have expressed. One prominent example involving the band Darkthrone is discussed in both Kahn-Harris's *Extreme Metal* and Moynihan and Söderlind's *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Darkthrone featured the phrase 'Norsk Arisk Black Metal' ('Norwegian Aryan Black Metal') prominently on the back cover of their 1994 album *Transilvanian Hunger*.²³ As Kahn-Harris explains, the band also initially demanded that the record packaging include a written statement calling any attempt to criticise the music a demonstration of 'Jewish behaviour'; in response to the resulting backlash, Darkthrone's members quickly offered a public apology, but their claims to have offended people 'unintentionally' were disingenuous, and while their record company (Peaceville) did not distribute the letter, the 'Aryan' slogan was not removed.²⁴

Black metal's appropriations of Nazism, along with satanism and Norse paganism, are also related to the scene's propensity for misanthropy - its celebrations of violence and war, and discourses about survival of the fittest or purging the weak. The connection is illustrated by numerous album and song titles, including *Panzerfaust* - a Darkthrone release from 1995 that takes its name from a Nazi anti-tank weapon, or simply, 'War,' a 1991 song by Burzum (*Burzum*).²⁵ But in the black metal context, even images of nature often take on an especially harsh or threatening guise, inflecting the image of Norway's national natural wonders and forbidding weather with visions of 'wild' forests and mountains and the dangers that lurk there.²⁶ Again, song

and album titles offer indications of this perspective - such as Burzum's 'Feeble Screams From Forests Unknown' (*Burzum*, 1991), or Darkthrone's 'Where Cold Winds Blow' off *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (1991).

Such imagery - Nazism, war, and harsh nature - carries over into Norwegian metal's constructions of white masculinity and male power. These not only favour the image of the ferocious Viking warrior but also resonate with Nazi ideals of Aryan masculinity defined against an extreme backdrop of dark forests, imposing mountains or bitter ice and snow.²⁷ Black metal band photos and promotional shots of musicians in absurd re-creations of Viking armour often provide visible manifestations of this violent masculine archetype.²⁸ Such 'extreme' whiteness also serves to reinforce the normalisation and invisibility of ordinary whiteness, while excluding colour (and gendered) difference from black metal and Nordic identity. Black metal tends to claim indiscriminate misanthropy, and espouse an ideology of generalised warfare.²⁹ Yet it is clear that racialized difference is particularly despised. The genre's exclusionary nationalistic discourses, as well as individual artists' more explicit commentaries, indicate that black metal hates some types of people more than others.

4. Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Black Metal

Because of black metal's tendency to marginalise politics, artists' racist views are far more often revealed through interviews with individual musicians than in songs.³⁰ It is in such interviews that the ultranationalism of early Norwegian black metal most clearly takes mainstream forms of racism and xenophobia to an extreme; some artists used such opportunities to publicly express feelings of distaste or disgust toward 'non-Norwegians' - immigrants and, particularly, Muslims.³¹ Scene member Jan Axel Blomberg (Hellhammer), made several particularly virulent racist statements in interviews in the 1990s. In one of his milder comments Blomberg suggested that immigration is a problem in Norway.³² He offered a more inflammatory suggestion while discussing the church fires set by black metallers: '[. . .] why not burn up a mosque, the foreign churches from the Hindu and Islamic jerks [. . .] instead of setting fires to some very old Norwegian artworks? They could have taken mosques instead, with plenty of people in them!'³³ In one sense, Blomberg is revealing a willingness to oppose any organised religion,³⁴ but his desire to protect Norwegian culture and his disturbing characterization of Muslims and Hindus and their culture as disposable is an extreme and, I would suggest, deliberately transgressive appropriation of widely prevalent anti-immigrant and nationalistic views.

Other black metal musicians, without making explicitly racist statements, have expressed a strong desire to celebrate their culture and heritage, and regret that this may be interpreted as 'racist or Neo-Nazi.'³⁵ Even when such comments do not involve an explicit call to rid Norway of

'non-Norwegians', they reinforce constructions of Norway as a white Nordic space. This kind of thinking is not far removed from the more mainstream or 'new' racisms analysed by critical race theorists since the 1980s. Even when such discourses encode race as culture, they often cast racial and ethnic differences as insurmountable, suggesting, for example, that people 'naturally prefer [their] own kind.'³⁶ Cultural mixing is seen not just as 'unnatural' (although some argue that it is) but as the fuel for violent conflict.³⁷ Thus popular culturally-framed arguments calling for the exclusion of immigrants from Norway, or an end to immigration from Africa, the Middle East, or Asia, provide a thin veil for racism, eschewing claims to biological difference only to get caught up in the pseudo-biology of 'basic human instincts.'³⁸ This 'cultural fundamentalism,' as Verena Stolcke calls it, contends that '*relations* between different cultures are by nature hostile and mutually destructive because it is human nature to be ethnocentric.'³⁹ Such views of hostile human nature are not far removed from Norwegian black metal's misanthropic vision of perpetual human strife.

5. **Everyday Racisms in Norway**

'Raceless' racist discourses, focusing on culture or ethnicity, circulate Norway and other nations that conceive of themselves as homogeneously white, and their whiteness as threatened by multiculturalism and an influx of black and brown immigrants.⁴⁰ Scenarios that position immigration as a threat to the natural cultural (read 'racial') homogeneity of Norway particularly focus on Muslims as the source of disorder and a drain on social welfare.⁴¹ Providing social aid is viewed as distasteful by many black metallers,⁴² but social aid for 'non-whites' also comes to be seen as a 'problem' by ordinary citizens who imagine refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular, as (state-made) 'social welfare clients' and a burden on local communities and the nation.⁴³

On these grounds - the construction of a white Nordic national identity, hostility toward non-Nordic and especially non-white immigrants - Norway's mainstream nationalism and xenophobia may be understood as directly related to black metal's ultranationalism: extreme and everyday racisms intersect, the latter informing and enabling the former. Despite such ideological similarities, it is not surprising that this relationship has received little attention. It is only recently that researchers such as Gullestad have begun to demonstrate that mainstream racism actually exists in Norway and that it is similar to the xenophobia and ultranationalism of the radical underground.⁴⁴ In fact, despite the resurgence of right-wing extremism in the country and the proliferation of anti-immigration rhetoric, most of Norway, and Europe in general, has been in 'raceless' denial.⁴⁵

Attempts to blame xenophobia and racism [and other forms of discrimination] on the 'dregs' of society provide those in denial with a

scapegoat, individualizing the problem while normalising racist views.⁴⁶ Scapegoating also supports the naturalisation of 'ordinary' whiteness as an 'invisible' ideal. As Richard Dyer asserts in *White*, the 'extreme' whiteness identified with white supremacy serves as a 'distraction' - a symptom of 'derangement' in which 'ordinary' white society fails to recognise its own reflection and can thus continue to imagine itself the non-raced universal human norm.⁴⁷ Doing away with scapegoats and distractions does not mean ignoring the harm caused by extreme racism (nor should it lead to wallowing in unproductive guilt), but it does demand the recognition of everyday racisms wherever they may circulate and a commitment to dismantling them.

Recognition is thus only the first step, but an important one.

The comparisons I have outlined here are exploratory rather than explanatory, but they do indicate that Norwegian black metal did not invent new forms of racism or appropriate them strictly from National Socialism or neo-fascism. Rather, the scene's inherent transgressiveness has produced an intensification of pre-existing mainstream discourses - 'extreme' versions of the everyday racisms and discrimination already present in ordinary Norwegian society.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ On 'The Significance of Locality' in popular music in an era of accelerating globalization, cf. A. Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2000, chap. 4. For a foundational discussion of popular music's 'Genre Rules,' or stylistic and ideological conventions, cf. S. Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Harvard UP, Cambridge MA, 1996, chap. 4. For a scholarly analysis of the black metal subgenre and culture, cf. Kahn-Harris.

² Kahn-Harris, pp. 27-49; cf. R. Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, UP of New England, Hanover & London, pp. 41-56.

³ Kahn-Harris, pp. 73-74.

⁴ Kahn-Harris, pp. 137. Mostly implicit within the sound of the music, this erasure was taken to an extreme by atypical black metal musician Varg Vikernes, who eventually tried to expunge all black-associated elements from his music and publicly disparaged African American musical contributions; cf. Moynihan & Söderlind, p. 175. Mayhem drummer Jan Axel Blomberg (Hellhammer) expressed a similar sentiment when he stated, 'Black Metal is for white people', *ibid.*, p. 351; cf. K. Beckwith, 'Black Metal is for White People'. *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture*, vol. 5, iss. 3 2002, viewed on 22 April 2005, <<http://www.media-culture.org.au/0207/blackmetal.php>>.

⁵ Cf. Beckwith; R. Dyer, *White*, Routledge, London & New York, 1997. Drawing on Richard Dyer's analysis of whiteness, Karl Beckwith suggests that black metal corpse paint evokes whiteness as an ideal through the symbolic association of whiteness with 'moral and aesthetic superiority', Dyer, p.70, cited in Beckwith, para. 9. Superiority, probably, but I would argue that Dyer's analysis of whiteness as a signifier of death offers a more compelling explanation here, where corpse paint might be read as a transgressive celebration of whites' horrific capacity for bringing death to others, Dyer, p. 208.

⁶ Many black metal artists sing in their native languages rather than English and incorporate various elements of 'folk' music, Kahn-Harris, pp. 99-100, 133.

⁷ I. B. Neumann, 'This Little Piggy Stayed at Home: Why Norway is Not a Member of the EU', in *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States*, L. Hansen & O. Wæver (eds). Routledge, New York, 2002, pp. 92-93.

⁸ Neumann, pp. 93-97.

⁹ K. Salimi, 'Norway's National Racism'. *Race and Class*, vol. 32, 1991, pp. 111.

¹⁰ M. Gullestad, 'Blind Slaves of our Prejudices: Debating 'Culture' and 'Race' in Norway', *Ethnos*, vol. 69, iss.2 2004, p. 184.

¹¹ Neumann pp. 101, 111-126.

¹² V. Stolcke, 'New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe'. *International Social Science Journal*, vol 51, 1999, pp. 25.

¹³ Gullestad, 'Blind', p. 191.

¹⁴ M. Gullestad, 'Normalising Racial Boundaries: The Norwegian Dispute about the Term *Neger*'. *Social Anthropology*, vol. 13, iss.1 2005, p. 30.

¹⁵ Hernes and Knudsen (1990) quoted in Gullestad, 'Blind', p.189; cf.

Gullestad, 'Normalising Racial Boundaries'.

¹⁶ Institute of Race Relations, 'The Far Right in Europe: A Guide'. *Race & Class* vol. 32, 1991, 138; cf. Gullestad, 'Invisible', p. 48. In 2005 the Progress Party gained an additional 12 seats to become the second-largest party in Norwegian parliament; D. Sauders, 'Fighting Back Against Rising Neo-Nazi Violence'. *The Globe and Mail*, 29 October 2007, p. A18. On June 5, 2008, Aftenposten.no reported that the Progress Party had moved to first place in public opinion polls; an October 17, 2008, report indicates that after recent financial crises the Labour Party has returned to first place in public opinion.

¹⁷ D.T. Goldberg, 'Racial Evaporation', advance manuscript, 2007, forthcoming as 'Precipitating Evaporation (On Racial Europeanization)' in *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*, Wiley-Blackwell,

2008, p. 2; P. Gilroy, Foreword, in *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence*, Heike Raphael-Hernandez (ed), Routledge, New York, 2004, p. xii.

¹⁸ Cf. H. Lööw, 'White-Power Rock 'n' Roll: A Growing Industry', *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture*, J. Kaplan & T. Bjørge (eds), Northeast UP, Boston, 1998, pp. 126-147.

¹⁹ Cf., for example, K. Beckwith; K. Fangen, 'Living Out Our Ethnic Instincts: Ideological Beliefs Among Right-Wing Activists in Norway', in *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture*, J. Kaplan & T. Bjørge (eds), Northeast UP, Boston, 1998, pp. 202-231; J. Kaplan, 'Religiosity and the Radical Right', in *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture*, J. Kaplan & T. Bjørge (eds), Northeast UP, Boston, 1998, pp. 102-125; also Lööw, op. cit.

²⁰ Both Gullestad and Goldberg, among others, repeatedly discuss the tendencies of European nations, including Norway, to deny their internal racisms. Norway's denial of racism is often tied to the nation's sense of its own history as a colonised, not colonising nation, which neglects the state's colonisation of the Sami people. Cf. Gullestad, 'Blind' p. 182; Salimi, p. 111.

²¹ It is at the racist intersection of extremity and extremism, nationalism and neo-Nazism, satanism and Nordic paganism that the early Norwegian black metal scene connects with the ultranationalistic political underground and white power musics. However, black metal bands with clear national socialist commitments tend to be 'confined to their own largely autonomous scenes', as Kahn-Harris observes, and National Socialist bands exist in tension with both black metal and white power musics, pp. 41, 155-56. This tension is illustrated by a statement posted on the National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) website claiming that NSBM originated independently of the White Power and White Noise Community, and is viewed as an 'outsider' to both black metal and white power music, viewed on 14 December 2007 <<http://www.nsbm.org>>.

²² Cf. R. Walser on metal's appropriation of history and mysticism as a form of postmodern bricolage in the case of Iron Maiden, pp. 151-160.

²³ Kahn-Harris, pp. 152-53; Moynihan & Søderlind, pp. 350-52.

²⁴ Kahn-Harris, 152-53.

²⁵ Cf. Kahn-Harris, pp. 38-41, for a discussion of war ideology in extreme metal.

²⁶ V. Vestel, 'Breakdance, Red Eyed Penguins, Vikings, Grunge and Straight Rock'n'Roll: The Construction of Place in Musical Discourse in Rudenga, East Side Oslo'. *Young*, vol. 7, iss. 2 1999, pp. 11-15; cf. also Kahn-Harris, pp. 40-41, and D. Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, Da Capo, 2000, p. 289.

²⁷ This imagery is in line with the Nazi masculine ideal; for example, cf. P. Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, Routledge, New York, 2004, pp. 166, 171.

²⁸ Cf. Kahn-Harris, pp. 40, 46; Moynihan & Söderlind, pp. 17-21, 39; Vestel, p. 11.

²⁹ Kahn-Harris, p. 40; Moynihan & Söderlind, p. 252.

³⁰ Kahn-Harris, pp. 48, 156.

³¹ Moynihan & Söderlind, pp. 71, 105, 156, 352; Vestel, p. 11.

³² Moynihan & Söderlind, p. 352. Blomberg expressed this sentiment in an interview with the authors, conducted between 1995 and 1997.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 105.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 71. Bård Eithun (Faust) of Emperor, for example, has commented on the opposition to Christianity and Islam in black metal ideology.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 354; see comments from Eithun, and Emperor's Tomas Haugen (Samoth). Moynihan & Söderlind also quote M. W. Daoloth, a black metal musician from Greece, on racism in the black metal scene, where black metal's 'yearning to return to the past (in a spiritual sense) suggests a Europe for Europeans, as it was in ancient times, before multi-culturalism [. . .]', p. 354.

³⁶ Goldberg, *State*, p. 235.

³⁷ Stolcke, pp. 26-27.

³⁸ Stolcke, p. 27.

³⁹ Stolcke, pp. 27, 29; cf. Gilroy, Foreword, pp. xii-xiii, xvii.

⁴⁰ Cf. Gilroy, Foreword; Stolcke.

⁴¹ Gullestad, 'Invisible', pp. 52-57.

⁴² Musicians such as Ihsahn (Emperor) and Garm (Ulver) have expressed strong feelings of distaste for people(s) they see as weak, Moynihan & Söderlind, pp. 219, 225. Members of the nationalist racist underground express similar views, often more strongly, cf. Fangen, pp. 215, 221.

⁴³ Salimi, p. 114.

⁴⁴ Goldberg, *State*, p. 219. One example of these efforts can be seen in commentators' responses to the 'racially motivated murder' of a 15-year-old boy in Norway by neo-Nazis. Gullestad, among others, points to the connection between this violence and Norway's struggles with everyday racism and injustices, L. Bevanger, 'Norway coming to terms with racism' 9 Feb. 2001, and 'Norway 'rife with racism'', 17 Jan 2002, BBC News, viewed on 30 Nov 2007, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk>>.

⁴⁵ On the resurgence of right-wing extremism, cf. L. Weinberg, 'An Overview of Right-Wing Extremism', in *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture*, J. Kaplan & T. Bjørge (eds), Northeast UP, Boston, 1998, pp. 9-11; also IRR, and Saunders. The extreme-right

politics of Norway's Progress Party have been a source of race-related controversy, cf. 'Progress Party Brochure Sparks Racism Charges'. *Aftenposten English Web Desk* 16 August 2005, viewed on 5 Nov 2007, <<http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1097512.ece>>.

⁴⁶ Gullestad, 'Invisible', pp. 56-57.

⁴⁷ Dyer, pp. 220-223.

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Extreme Politics and Extreme Metal: Strange Bedfellows or Fellow Travellers?

Justin Davisson

Abstract

Extreme metal's relation extreme politics provides for a variety of examples. From Slayer's *Angel of Death* in the 1980's to the Norwegian black metal scene in the 1990's to the current strain of national socialist black metal extreme politics have played a role in extreme metal either aesthetically or ideologically. Such combinations are nothing new in the music world. Richard Wagner's denouncement of Jews is widely known. Performances of his works are still very controversial in Israel. Furthermore, one can look at the 1970's punk movement in England and its use of using Nazi imagery for shock value. Additionally, racist lyrics have in the past cropped up in hip-hop artists such as Public Enemy and Ice Cube. Heavy Metal's own relation with such extreme attitudes has a history that has been around almost as long the genre itself. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the growth of both extreme metal and its relation to extreme politics. Extreme metal can be defined as thrash metal (i.e. early Metallica, Kreator), grindcore (Napalm Death, Pig Destroyer), death metal (Morbid Angel, Nile), and black metal (Darkthrone, Burzum). Extreme politics can be defined as both ultraright (i.e. fascist and Nazi) and on some instances ultra-left wing (communist, anarchist). This will also look into whether or not certain artists are using extreme politics for mere shock or to actually endorse dangerous ideas. Furthermore, this will explore how these ideas have spread worldwide throughout the metal scene. This will also focus on the marketing of each phenomenon across the Internet. While generally considered 'outsider' music, there have been numerous media stories, books, documentaries and even art exhibits on extreme metal. Such a sensation could explain why Varg Vikernes' image appearing in a window of a t-shirt shop in such unexpected places such as Berkeley, California. In summary, this will touch on how and why music from the margins of society can be affected by politics from margins of society.

Key Words: extreme metal, black metal, death metal, punk rock, music history, racism, fascism, anarchism, ultra-nationalism, Nazism, marketing, controversies, media, sub cultural phenomena.

1. Introduction: Wagner & the Cajun Rebel

Extreme metal's relation to extreme politics provides a variety of examples. From Slayer's *Angel of Death* in the 1980's to the Norwegian black metal scene in the 1990's to the current strain of National Socialist Black Metal & extreme politics have played a role in extreme metal either aesthetically or ideologically. Heavy Metal's own relation with such extreme attitudes has a history that has been around almost as long the genre itself. These attitudes range from the ultra-right (racist and neo-Nazi) and some instances ultra-left wing (communist and anarchist). Such combinations are nothing new in the music world. Richard Wagner's denouncement of Jews is widely known. Furthermore, the strange but true phenomena of racist country and punk will be also be touched on. Additionally, racist lyrics have in the past been used by big name hip-hop acts. This chapter will look at how far and how often Heavy Metal has pushed the limits of not only sound but of ideas.

Long before the controversies surrounding Metal and even before rock and roll there was Richard Wagner. Wagner is considered the catalyst for the ultimate 'art over politics' debate in music. While Wagnerian clichés such as 'it ain't over 'til the fat lady sings' are still prevalent, Wagner's work remains attached to much controversy. Adolf Hitler said: 'Whoever wants to understand National Socialist Germany must know Wagner'.¹ Wagner's music was often used at Nazi party rallies and followed Hitler's radio speeches. There are many who still associate his music specifically with Nazi Germany.

In July 2001, Jewish composer Daniel Barenboim conducted the piece 'Tristan und Isolde' at the prestigious Berlin Staatskapelle's Israel Festival. When he asked the audience if they wanted to hear Wagner as an encore to the regular program it sparked a half-hour debate before the performance and in turn causing many Israelis to protest and walk out of the theatre.

C.J. Trahan, a late 1960's New Orleans area musician recorded many 45 rpm singles under the name Johnny Rebel. Trahan recorded songs with titles such as 'Kajun Klu [sic] Klux Klan', 'Nigger Hatin' Me', and 'Some Niggers Never Die (They Just Smell That Way)'.² The songs were done up in the contemporary country style featuring a backing band. Stylistically, it's been described as the regional take on rockabilly called 'swampabilly'. While the Johnny Rebel 45s mostly were used in juke joints throughout Louisiana & decades later they were bootlegged in Europe and found their way into other regions of the U.S. One of the main bootleggers was the American label Resistance Records whose involvement in 'hate music' we'll touch on later.

2. Early US & UK Punk: Swastikas & Sickles

Moving into the 1970's, the early American punk scene adopted the swastika as a shock tactic to rebel against the 'safe' music era of E.L.P. and David Cassidy. One of the first bands to use the swastika was Cleveland-based, proto-punkers, The Electric Eels. Guitarist John Morton called their approach 'art terrorism'. Their fashion sense pre-dated the tattered and torn look of the UK's 'Class of '77'. As Cleveland punk historian Mike Weldon said:

In 1974, they (The Electric Eels) were wearing safety pins and ripped-up shirts, T-shirts with insulting things...White Power logos and swastikas: it was offensive and they meant to be offensive. They meant to distract people, but I don't think they were exceptionally racist: they were being obnoxious and outrageous.³

In 1974, the New York Dolls flirted with communist hammer and sickles and one photo even shows the later line up with guitarist Johnny Thunders wearing a swastika. The band's manager, Malcolm McLaren would later gain infamy in by working with the Sex Pistols in Britain. The British punk scene of the late 70's quickly picked up on the swastika as shock-tactic from the Sex Pistols and their affiliated groups like Siouxi and the Banshees. During the time of 1977-78 many punk fans gravitated towards this look while others felt it was just helping the neo-fascist National Front gain popularity.⁴

Additionally, the punk's use of the swastika came following the time when Eric Clapton's praised the National Front. In August 1976 he told an audience to 'vote for Enoch Powell...(and) stop Britain from becoming a black colony...get the foreigners out'. To turn the tide, an organization called 'Rock Against Racism' put together a major campaign within the punk scene. Rock Against Racism was formed in 1977 as part of the umbrella group, The Anti-Nazi League. Several punk and reggae bands played benefits for Rock Against Racism including X-Ray Spex, the Buzzcocks and Steel Pulse.

3. Skrewdriver, Blood and Honour

To counteract anti-racist activism, 'Rock Against Communism', was created as a reaction to the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party-connected Rock Against Racism. Rock Against Communism was first led by the National Front then reconvened in 1982 under the leadership of Ian Stewart, from the Nazi skinhead Oi! Punk band, Skrewdriver.⁵ Through Rock Against Communism, Stewart created a label called White Noise Records who released albums by other Nazi skinhead bands such as Brutal Attack, No Remorse and Skullhead. Skrewdriver's Hail the New Dawn was released in

1984 and continues to be a huge inspiration to the white nationalist movement worldwide. Even though the album seemed like it was from a very marginal fanbase, it's currently selling on Amazon.com.

Germany's Rock-O-Rama Records released Skrewdriver's *The Voice of Britain* and *Boots and Braces* albums in 1987 (Coincidentally they also released left wing Finnish hardcore punk bands like Riistetyt and Appendix). The same year, Donaldson formed a new organization called 'Blood and Honour' whose goals were to unite white youth and promote white power 'through positive ideals and a positive message'. Other aims included: 'to create units in every city, every town in every country. To promote our culture and our traditions.'⁶ This is especially true considering Blood and Honour has chapters in several European countries including Czech Republic, Finland, Switzerland, Serbia, Hungary and Sweden. Plus, they have documented supporters in Argentina, Australia and South Africa. Additionally, Blood and Honour also has chapters in the U.S. in Texas, Georgia, Ohio and California.

Blood and Honour was also, 'a magazine promoting (National Socialist) NS ideals, NS music, be it rock. Oi!, metal, etc.'⁷ Much to their aim, the Australian metal band Death's Head has played benefit shows for Blood and Honour and can be seen on Metal-Archives.com in front of their banner. The band features Ryan Marauder, guitarist of the black and death metal bands Gospel of the Horns and Destroyer 666, both of whom are more based in the general metal tradition of blunt lyrics about war, Satan and sex.

4. First the Headbangers, Now the Hip-Hoppers

During the early 90's, 'gangsta rap', an offshoot of hip-hop received a wealth of sensational media coverage not seen since the early days of rock and roll. Due to the fact that it was a predominately African-American based style; it sounded the alarm in suburban white America. White teens bought the major of records by articles like N.W.A. and Ice-T. In turn, this replaced the Tipper Gore fronted Parents Music Resource Centre's focus on 'explicit lyrics' from heavy metal to hip-hop. The time period of 1988-1991 hip-hop was filled with racially charged lyrics. In 1991, Ice Cube's song 'Black Korea', on his second solo album *Death Certificate*, spewed venom towards Koreans in South Central L.A., '...your little chop suey ass will be a target/So pay your respects to the black fist/or we'll burn your store right down to a crisp.'

Ice Cube's lyrics were a dead-on foreshadowing of what was to come in the barren neighborhoods of L.A.'s South Central. During the 1992 riots, many black youths attacked Korean shops. While a more direct correlation may be made from growing tensions between the two communities as opposed to lyrics in a popular rap song, there still is a lot to be taken from Ice Cube's lyrics.⁸ In a 2006 interview with the magazine,

FHM, Ice Cube said, 'if they (Koreans) still have a problem, it's their problem (not mine)'. Additional controversies arose in the early 90's with statements made by Public Enemy's 'Minister of Information', Professor Griff. In a 1988 Washington Times interview, Professor Griff said that 'Jews are responsible for the majority of the wickedness that goes on across the globe.'

Getting into the crux of our focus, Heavy Metal has been dismissed by the political right wing as 'amoral', 'decadent' and 'anti-Christian'. Whereas the left wing has often deemed it to be 'sexist', 'fascistic', and 'close minded'.⁹ Regardless of these critiques it has become something more than music in relation to the way it uses provocation - both symbolically and politically. What is represented by these symbols and are they used for just shock value or an actual political motive?

The first band in heavy metal considered 'extreme' was Motörhead a British band so loud and heavy 'if they moved in next door they'd kill your lawn'. When they debuted in 1977, they made even Judas Priest seem normal. Lemmy Kilmister of Motörhead has for many years collected Nazi memorabilia. Although, he collects SS banners, flags and daggers for strictly non-political reasons: 'I like having this all this stuff around because it's a reminder of what happened, and that it's in the past (for the most part ð Nazism still exists, but at the margin).' Lemmy also said that he's against any left wing or right-wing extreme and defines himself as 'an atheist and an anarchist'.¹⁰

5. Genre-riff-ication: The Birth of New Styles

Some general definitions before we get further into metal. 'Thrash metal' grew from both the speed of hardcore punk bands like Discharge, The Misfits and Black Flag and merged the aggression of heavy metal bands Judas Priest, Iron Maiden and Motörhead. A few notable examples of thrash metal are the American 'Big Four': Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer and Anthrax. Other noteworthy thrash bands include Exodus, Kreator, Sodom and Destruction. The style often employs crunchy guitar riffs and shouted 'gang' choruses.

Death metal began in the mid-80s with the releases of American bands as Possessed with their 1985 album Seven Churches. The Florida band Death followed in 1987 with their debut *Scream Bloody Gore*. The style is known for going even faster than thrash metal taking in the blast beat which can run anywhere between the standard 180 to the hyper blasting 300 beats per minute. Vocals are often growled into a low pitch. The pitch and tone of the pitch will depend on the vocalist. These range from utterly incomprehensible in early Cannibal Corpse to the melodic style of Dark Tranquility. Other significant death metal bands include, Entombed, Carcass, Morbid Angel, Obituary and Amon Amarth. Death metal is the most

common sub genre in the world. The largest database of metal music, Metal-Archives.com, lists 11,756 active death metal bands.

Death metal has occasionally flirted with extreme right-wing politics. Florida-based band, Malevolent Creation got themselves in trouble with their lyrics to the song 'They Breed' which includes the line: 'Someday you will feel the hate/You fucking niggers'. The band claimed these lyrics were merely speaking through the voice of an extremely enraged person and not endorsing racism. Although, if that wasn't enough the antics of their bassist Jason Blachowicz got them in more trouble when he wore a KKK t-shirt onstage in Germany. Guitarist Phil Facinia, promptly kicked him out of the band: 'When I got onto the bus and he was fuckin' laughing about it, I fuckin' beat the living shit out of him...it worked and I haven't talked to him since.'¹¹

Black metal began with the raw and dirty near-punk styling of Newcastle, England's Venom. While Black Sabbath's flirted with Satan and the occult then Venom rented out a space in hell. Instead of Sabbath singing, 'Please god help me', Venom requested to 'leave me in hell', and proclaimed to be 'possessed by all that is evil'. Venom later recanted any support of Satanism in a 1985 interview with Kerrang! Magazine vocalist/bassist Cronos said, 'Look, I don't preach Satanism, occultism, witchcraft, or anything. Rock and Roll is basically entertainment and that's as far as it goes'. Another significant band in the first wave of Black Metal include Mercyful Fate (Denmark). They created a more classic yet theatrical metal sounds forged around bits of Judas Priest and Deep Purple. Mercyful Fate's vocalist, King Diamond is a member of Anton LaVey's Church of Satan. Although, it's important to keep in mind that King Diamond sees himself more as an entertainer first and a Satanist second.

Equally important was Hellhammer and the refined epics of Celtic Frost (both related bands from Switzerland). Hellhammer wrote about Satanism and took on a raw, primal sound. Afterwards, Celtic Frost focused on the otherworldly works of H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard and sonically an epic, bombastic style. Other notable contributions to the first era of black metal came from Sweden's Bathory. Bathory's early albums Bathory, ...The Return, and Under the Sign of the Black Mark released between 1984-87 featured raw production, very fast tempos and raspy vocals. This also helped Swedish metal find a more extreme musical identity. Previous to Bathory, their scene was represented by the pomp rock of Europe and the guitar shredding excess of Yngwie Malmsteen.

Black metal's second wave came mostly through Scandinavia, significantly from Norway. What separates the second wave from the first is not only the image of black and white, corpse-painted faces and but also the level of the music's speed and intensity. The make up differed from KISS or Alice Cooper in that it attempts to portray something more sinister. A direct

influence came from the cover of I.N.R.I., the 1987 album from the Brazilian band Sarcófago. In the photo all 4 members faces are covered in black and white make up, menacingly standing in a graveyard. Plus, Sarcófago's chaotic mix of hyper-thrash metal infused with embryonic death and black metal elements were held in high esteem by the Norwegian scene. Instead of making corpse paint an added dimension of a stage show, it was in the words of Abbath (of the band Immortal), '...to celebrate our inner demons æ it's not a theatre thing.'

Similar to death metal, black metal also employed blast beats but took on the Bathory-ish raspy vocals. It often featured long passages of lighting quick, treble-based riffs. These riffs repeat in intervals between 5 to 7 notes, often causing a 'trance-like' effect. A great example of this is featured throughout Darkthrone's Transilvanian Hunger album. Other significant black metal bands from this time include, Mayhem, Emperor, Enslaved, Immortal, Ulver and Gorgoroth. Also of note are several Swedish bands such as Marduk and Dissection, along with the Finnish groups Beherit and Impaled Nazarene.

The current or third wave of wave of black metal is a mish-mash of styles ranging from the thrash infected sound of Aura Noir to the avant-weirdness of Lugubrum to the slow doom of Nortt. In recent years commercial-oriented groups such as Dimmu Borgir and Cradle of Filth have played in front of over 10,000 fans as part of Ozzfest. Also, Immortal's 2007 reunion shows in L.A. and New York commanded ticket prices of \$100. Additionally, black metal's aesthetic influence has been featured in art galleries, multiple documentaries and news reports worldwide, comic books and even fashion runways. Whether this is promoting the 'true' face of black metal is still up for debate.

6. S.O.D., M.O.D. and Carnivore æ Parody or Reality?

Stormtroopers of Death, a side project of Anthrax's Scott Ian and Nuclear Assault's Dan Liker. The band's debut Speak English Or Die, while filled with harsh humour and silly lyrics about milk was considered by most as a joke. Ian came up with the idea as when he first thought of the band's mascot, Sergeant D., an ultra right wing comic book character set to the tone of crossover 'mosh metal'. It seems that S.O.D. was merely the product of their times, an age where offensive humour wasn't considered necessarily offensive. Musically, it was considered important by fusing the velocity and speed of hardcore with the crunch riffing of thrash metal:

...To start you must understand that we (M.O.D.) believe that to truly stir up negative emotions about racism, hatred, facism [sic], etc. you cannot write a song from the third party situation. What would be stronger than taking on the

identity, in the first person of a fascist, racist bigot and writing lyrics as he sees the world? I created 'Corporal Punishment' as this character. [...] Again, please realize these are not my opinions...¹²

It's also important to note that S.O.D. was around in the era of hardcore/punk bands such as the Meatmen who released the anti-Arab song 'Ragheads Suck' and The Mentors whose self-described 'Rape Rock' was as more musically and lyrically awful than it was literally threatening. The title track to *Speak English or Die*, begat several 'response songs' from hardcore bands - namely, 'Speak Siberian or Die' from England's Concrete Sox and 'Speak Japanese or Die' Japan's by Yellowmachinegun. Ironically, S.O.D. played and recorded 'Speak English or Die' live in Japan and later released the anti-racist song, 'Skool Bus' on their 1999 album *Bigger than the Devil*.

However, if S.O.D. was taken as a joke then what could be said of vocalist's Billy Milano next band M.O.D. (Method of Destruction)? M.O.D.'s first album *U.S.A.* for M.O.D. was a parody of the mid-80's humanitarian pop phenomenon of 'We Are The World' and Live Aid. Instead of offering an 'uplifting message', M.O.D. offered these words: 'America has it's own problems/That's what should come first/So fuck those nigger's charity/And let them die of thirst.' Milano defended his lyrics as a satire on reactionary attitudes in an open letter to *Aardshok* magazine:

Another New York-era thrash metal band in the mid 80's know for controversial lyrics was the Peter Steele-led Carnivore. Carnivore dressed like a heavy metal version of extras from *The Road Warrior*. They connected the brute force of metal along with a post-apocalyptic warrior mentality in songs named 'Male Supremacy' and 'Race War'. The first is written as an interpretation of an ultra-macho character 'ala Conan. The lyrics are so overtly over the top, it's clear that there's at least a little exaggeration and sarcasm at play. Particularly, with lyrics such as 'when on the fur/I make love to her.' The latter song 'Race War', on the surface seems to led a call for what the title states, particularly in the second verse: 'Don't call me your brother/Cause I ain't your fuckin' brother/We fell from different cunts/And your skins an ugly colour'. The last line of the song 'everybody loses' only adds to the 'are they' or 'aren't they' confusion. Drummer Steve Tobin when interviewed by the German ezine, *Lechmetal.de* said: 'I personally see Carnivore songs as some tongue-in-cheek humour as well as some sarcasm happening. I say what's on my mind and so does everybody else in this band, especially Pete.'¹³

Carnivore altogether may have been 'tongue in cheek', however, the Carnivore's tribute album, *If You Can't Eat It Or Fuck It... Then Kill It* was released by Fetch the Rope, a label that solely promotes white power bands. The album was also distributed by Vinland Winds, a label key in promoting

National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) in the U.S. Additionally, the compilation features the French NSBM band Hakenkreuzzug and U.S. racist death metallers, Arghoslent. The album is also carried by such non-political metal mail order sites as Hell's Headbangers, Black-Metal.com in the U.S. and Iron Tyrant in Italy.¹⁴

7. Infamous Butcher...

The same year Carnivore released their debut, Slayer's *Reign In Blood* came out with much adulation and controversy. The opening track 'Angel of Death' which deals with Nazi doctor, Josef Mengele and his twisted experiments in the concentration camps. The song starts with a pained scream and jolts forth with an extreme level of sonic intensity. Such intensity that people often reacted in feeling the words 'Auschwitz, the meaning of pain/The way that I want you to die' was literal instead of descriptive. The rest of the lyrics also mention, 'destroying without mercy to benefit the Aryan race'. Although, this is the band describing the deeds of a madman not commanding anyone to 'kill 'der untermench' in the name of Slayer'. —Angel of Death' is just as provocative as the rest of the songs on the album that go into extreme detail regarding methods of killing and torture. Such vivid details aren't much different than a graphic mystery or horror novel. Guitarist Jeff Hanneman's spoke to KNAC.com of his obsession with war, particularly with World War II:

Well, my father was in WWII. ...And then one day my dad was just cleaning out his closet, and he dumped all these (Nazi) medals on me and goes, 'You want these? I'm gonna throw 'em out if you don't'. I was like, 'Whoa! Yeah!'There was nothing really to do while on tour), so I would just buy books about WWII and just read and read and read...Right before I wrote —Angel Of Death, I read a bunch of books about [Nazi Doctor Josef] Mengele because he was pretty sick. That was how how —Angel Of Death' came about...I know why people misinterpret it it's because they get this knee-jerk reaction to it. When they read the lyrics, there's nothing I put in the lyrics that says necessarily he was a bad [...] because to me æ well, isn't that obvious?!?!?!¹⁵

Additionally, the band ran into trouble on their first European tour in 1985. They were banned from selling their then-popular 'Slaytanic Wehrmacht' (Satanic War machine) fan club t-shirts in the Netherlands. The band sold this t-shirt during the *Hell Awaits* tour as well as through many worldwide

record stores and rock merchandisers. Again, this is Slayer going the beyond the before as if KISS' fan club is 'the army' then Slayer's will be a wehrmacht. This non-political, mythical version of 'a wehrmacht' not 'the Wehrmacht' can be seen in the context of similar minded fan clubs of other metal bands - Mercyful Fate's 'Coven', Venom's 'Legions', and Celtic Frost's 'Necromaniac Union'.

Despite this, Slayer still has a following among some 'white power' types. Bay Area heavy metal photographer and blogger, Brian Lew witnessing Nazis at Slayer shows: 'it seems like these Nazis think the singer's name is Tom Aryan and not Tom Araya.' Lew has known the members of Slayer since they played their first show in San Francisco in 1983. On his blog, Haggis Buffet, Lew describes the events around a Slayer concert in Sacramento, California in 2007:

Every time I've been to a Metal show in the Central Valley in recent years, the 'White Power Thang' has been in full effect and this night was no exception. It's not often that I'm in a public place where White Boyz (sic) are comfortable enough to go sans shirts to show off their Aryan Ink. I think the White Boyz are simply confused and their limited reading comprehension...Of course, I'd like to hear their rationalization [...] why Tom's skin is brown.¹⁶

8. Teenage Thrashers Shock for the Sake of Shock

Far down into the underground of metal during the 80's was a collection of bands using Nazi imagery. Much of this while questionable was on the same naivety of the 70's punk movement. The bands included were later-era thrash and early death metal bands Holocausto (Brazil), Mein Kampf and Rommel (both from Japan), Angel Reaper (Hungary) and Separator (Poland). All of these bands had used swastikas or images of SS soldiers and flirted with the themes in their lyrics but all had no connections to any actual political movements, made racist statements in interviews or neo-Nazi affiliated label. There are also early photos of Max Cavalera of Sepultura wearing a swastika t-shirt. Although, Cavalera's action could also be attributed to a teenage-level shock value, similar to the early British punks.

9. Death Metal Becomes Safe: Black Metal Blazes in the North

Between 1992-94 death metal reigned at the top of the metal underground. Bands like Carcass, Entombed and Morbid Angel all received MTV play and were also featured in hundreds of metal magazines and fanzines worldwide. While their music was certainly extreme others felt that

it didn't go far enough. In the late period of this era, many death metal bands were doing 'normal' things like going on stage with sweatpants and t-shirts, whereas the burgeoning 2nd wave of black metal would demand much more. 1994 marked the year when Cannibal Corpse could perform the song 'Meat Hook Sodomy' in a mainstream comedy like 'Ace Ventura: Pet Detective'.

Bubbling under the overgrowth of death metal and its alleged '(love of) life metal' were several bands like Mayhem, Darkthrone and Burzum. Even though they began as a death metal band, Darkthrone changed styles because they felt death metal wasn't going anywhere. Drummer Gylve 'Fenriz' Nagell said of its regression, 'it was all (turning into) this P.C. shit...about voting'. Also, Regarding Darkthrone's massively influential 1991 release, 'A Blaze in The Northern Sky', Fenriz, says: 'we went for a grimmer approach to say the least.' Guitarist and vocalist Ted 'Nocturnal Culto' Skjellum said, 'the metal scene in Norway was very small, very limited'.¹⁷

Before Darkthrone, Norway's only black metal band was Mayhem. While still teenagers they released the Deathcrush LP in 1987. The album made an impact on a small but significant level in the fanzine/tape trading underground even receiving a review in the influential UK magazine Metal Forces. However, the early 90's line up of Mayhem was known more for the strange but true events surrounding the group. Namely, the 1991 suicide of their 2nd vocalist Dead (Per Yngve Ohlin), the eating of pieces of Dead's brain by guitarist Euronymous, church burnings and grave desecrations.

When asked about this level of lawlessness Euronymous countered with:

We are for fuck's sake not a humanitarian joke band! When we say that we are into death-metal then it means we worship the dead. There is nothing that is too raw, disgusting or sick (morbid). People who don't understand this can GO TO HELL!¹⁸

10. Euronymous and Varg: Internationalist vs. Nationalist

The eventual inner-band rivalry between Euronymous and Varg Vikernes set the stage for even more controversy. This rivalry between them eventually led to the brutal murder of Euronymous. The story has been widely documented in the media inside and outside of Norway. Tabloid headlines at the time also surrounded the rash of church burnings in Norway. Several members in the black metal scene committed a large number of the church burnings. Namely, Tomas 'Samoth' Haugen and Bård 'Faust' Eithun both of Emperor, Jørn Tonsborg of Hades Almighty and Vikernes committed these arsons. Vikernes' own church burnings numbered up to 8   ranging from the Oslo area in the Southeastern region to the West coast near Bergen.

Church burnings and graveyard desecrations were eventually done by teens who claimed to be part of the black metal scene and yet didn't play in bands, run labels or create zines. Regardless of —authenticity' these acts also took place in Sweden, England and Germany.

The night of August 10, 1993 Varg killed Euronymous by stabbing him 27 times and leaving the knife in his victim's eye socket. Vikernes claims self-defence and says that Euronymous attacked him first. However, considering that there was no witness to the murder itself, Vikernes' account seems unreliable. Vikernes is now serving the maximum sentence of 21 years for the murder and multiple church arsons.

In the months leading up the murder Vikernes and Euronymous had a very intense relationship. The two would have debates about music, specifically about bands they wanted to promote on Euronymous' label, Deathlike Silence. Euronymous was international in his thinking signing bands from Sweden, Japan and Israel. The latter of which got him into much trouble with Varg. Vikernes' ideology was extremely racist and didn't want Mayhem much less the Black Metal scene supporting the band Salem who he disdained as —a bunch of Jews'. In turn, Vikernes sent a mail bomb to Salem vocalist Ze'eb Tanboim that was intercepted by Israeli police. Additionally, Vikernes had plans to blow up the Oslo based anarchist squat, Blitz House.

During his time in prison, Vikernes made 3 albums æ *Filosifem* (his last metal album), 2 ambient, nearly 'new age' sounding works with Old Norse titles: *Dauði Baldrs* (—The Death of Baldr') and *Hliðskjálf* (—Secret Ritual Site'). Additionally, Vikernes has written many philosophic works incorporating racist version of Norse paganism and —Aryan philosophy'. One article, explains Burzum's change from metal to ambient music which states:

...to be a true Aryan, one has to think like an Aryan as well, and people will never do that as long as they keep polluting their minds with alien (read: metal) music, or even worse; alien music and alien lyrics! ¹⁹

11. **Varg Vikernes: The World's Favourite Black Metal Criminal**

Vikernes has published 5 books and booklets which are posted as PDF files on his website. These books discuss the paganism mentioned earlier, his version of the murder of Euronymous and Varg's own rocky relations with the media. Burzum's music was also featured on the soundtrack of the Harmony Korine's pseudo-documentary, *Gummo* in 1998. Due to coverage in American and British media, in a wide array of publications ranging from the metal scene (*Kerrang!*, *Pit*, and *Sounds of Death*) to a number of unexpected places (*New Music Express*, *New York Press*, and *The Guardian UK*), Burzum's records and merchandise became widely distributed on the Internet and in independent record stores. Additionally, Burzum has garnered 8 tribute album compilations. It's important to note that *Unholy Records*, a sub-label of the white-power label *Resistance*, put out the first tribute.²⁰

Possibly due to the extensive sensationalistic media coverage Vikernes has become like a contemporary, heavy metal Charles Manson. T-shirts adorned with his visage of holding a spiked club can be found on dozens rock n' roll t-shirt sellers online and in stores. Once such store I found in Berkeley, California while having dinner on Telegraph Ave. I looked out the window at the t-shirt shop to find Varg's image staring back me with a spiked club in hand! Obviously this could be attributed to 'dangerous celebrity' = 'easy to market product'. In a way, the Burzum t-shirt was akin to the early 90's sensation of serial killer memorabilia like Jeffery Dahmer t-shirts and Albert Fish trading cards. However, some fans such as the one named Rainer who runs the *Burzum.com* fansite says:

If you walk down a street wearing an (offensive grindcore band) Anal Cunt shirt, you might get the message across to certain people that you hate them, hate society and hate its values. If you wear a Burzum shirt, you get the message across that you hate society and its values and you are working to create a new society with new values.²¹

In recent years, with his failed escape attempt shown all over the world via YouTube; Vikernes has largely become fodder for Internet mocking. However, some metal sites such as the *Hessian.org* have called him a political prisoner and his music æ specifically on *Hvis Lytt Tarr Oss*, as 'beyond brilliant'. A recent eBay seller was asking for \$1,125.00 (814 EUR) for a first pressing of Burzum's *Aske* LP. The marketing of the story of *Mayhem* and specifically Vikernes' own story is quite remarkable. His visage and album covers on t-shirts is have turned up all over the world. Metal bands from Australia to Chile have worn his t-shirts or have been influenced by his music.

Vikernes' racism goes back to the Wagner argument in that his music has been hugely influential in black metal and even other sub genres like doom metal. His lyrics are mostly about Norse mythos and dream

without actual mention of race or fascist ideas. His influence unlike that of the racist punk of Skrewdriver went far beyond the parameters of a marginal scene.

12. Darkthrone & Phil Anselmo's Obviously Dodgy Behaviour

In 1994, Darkthrone stirred up controversy with their album *Transilvanian Hunger* the back cover of which originally said 'Norsk Arisk Black Metal' (Norwegian for 'Norwegian Aryan Black Metal'). Added fuel to the fire was their initial response to distributors who wouldn't carry the album:

We would like to state that *Transilvanian Hunger* stands beyond any criticism. If any man should attempt to criticize this LP, he should be thoroughly patronized for his obviously Jewish behavior.²²

However, Darkthrone later explained that 'Jew' was synonymous with Norwegian slang for 'jerk' or 'stupid'. Regardless of the clumsy misinterpretation, Darkthrone's press release made it very clear that they were not racist or political:

'Jew' was ABSOLUTELY NOT intended to hurt or provoke anyone, and we apologize to anyone who has suffered. Also, it must be said the NONE of our albums have ever contained any racism/fascism or Nazi slant at all. Everyone can check this out by reading our lyrics.²³

Additional evidence over the years has shown Darkthrone to be completely centred on creating and promoting music: black metal and otherwise. In recent years, Darkthrone, specifically through drummer Fenriz, has been featured in some of the most entertaining metal interviews on YouTube. His —music geek' styled humour has even inspired a fansite called *Take Me To Your Fenriz.com*. On Darkthrone's official Myspace page he proclaims 'the Fenriz attitude' as: '20% john mcenroe, 20% jello biafra, 20% lemmy, 20% king diamond, 20% larry david - 100% maniac!!!' hardly the words of a neo-Nazi.

In March 1995, Phil Anselmo of Pantera gave a 'white pride' speech onstage on Montreal. Anselmo ranted against hip-hop artists who are 'basically saying it's okay to kill white people...this is our world, and tonight is a white thing'. One black female fan told the *Montreal Gazette*, 'I'm not saying he's a white supremacist, but I think he isn't able to articulate himself properly and that he harbours racist views.'²⁴

13. Deeds More than Words: Neo-Nazis in American Underground Music

The post-World War II fascist movement didn't get its foothold into the metal scene until around the early 90's. In 1994, the Wisconsin band Centurion released their album *14 Words*. Centurion's music ranges from standard thrash metal to melodic traditional metal like Manowar. *14 Words* was based on David Lane's infamous slogan of: 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children.' He also wrote the '88 Precepts', which were guidelines for 'establishing and securing a white nation'. Although, Lane has become better known for his deeds.

David Lane was a member of the racist terrorist organization, The Order. The Order was also known as *die Bruder Schweigen* (German for 'The Silent Brotherhood'). Lane along with Order member Bruce Pierce was complicit in the murder of Denver radio talk show host, Alan Berg. A month after the murder of Berg, 12 members of the Order committed an armed robbery of a Brinks truck in Ukiah, California taking \$3.6 million. The Order was eventually caught with Lane receiving a 150-year prison sentence. Within white nationalist movements the numbers 14/88 refer to his '14 Words' and the 88 to both his 'Precepts' as well as 'HH' or 'Heil Hitler' since 'h' is the 8th letter of the alphabet.

The advent of websites in the mid-late 1990s paved the way for independent record labels to sell and distribute their music more easily. With more contacts and e-mail campaigns, a label could get the word out by simply posting their URL in a CD. The American ultra-right took notice of this. Tom Metzger became the mouthpiece of Nazi skinheads on West Coast with the notorious skinhead group White Aryan Resistance ('W.A.R.'). The West Virginia-based William Luther Pierce, a former physics professor at Oregon State had a long resume with American racist movements. Specifically, he worked with American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell in the 1960's. Pierce founded the National Alliance, an American fascist organization and publisher of the racist fantasy book, *The Turner Diaries* written by Pierce under the pseudonym, Andrew MacDonald in 1980. *The Turner Diaries* has been called 'the bible of the racist right' and details an 'Aryan world takeover', bombings of federal buildings. The book received a bevy of mainstream media attention when it was found in Oklahoma City federal building bomber, Timothy McVeigh's car in 1995. It also appeared in the belongings of the two men convicted of the dragging death of African-American, James Byrd. Byrd's killer said 'We're starting the *Turner Diaries* early'.

Tom Metzger and W.A.R. did the talk show circuit in the late 80s and early 90s, most infamously on the 1989 *Geraldo* episode where one of the W.A.R. skinhead's broke host Geraldo Rivera's nose. Despite this instant media recognition, Metzger's only attempt in promoting ultra-right music

was a failure. Typically this involved W.A.R. and other Nazi skinheads attempting to infiltrate punk venues like Berkeley's 924 Gilman Street and being completely outnumbered. In 1989, they secured a permit to hold an 'Aryan Woodstock' concert in Napa, California. Although the permit allowed they weren't able to play music. The attendance figures for the event numbered around 300 but television footage showed the Nazi skinheads to be vastly outnumbered by protesters. Throughout most of the 1990's Metzger was bogged down in the courts after his connection to the 1988 murder of an Ethiopian immigrant in Portland, OR. The latter part of the 90's into the 2000s Pierce proved to be more media savvy and more influential.

14. Fourth Reich and Roll: Resistance Records Infiltrates the Scene

Resistance Records based in Detroit started in 1993 by George Eric Hawthorne (aka: George Brudi) of the National Socialist metal band, Rahowa, short for 'Racial Holy War'. Hawthorne was, also a member and aided by the racist U.S.-based World Church of the Creator.²⁵ He helped promote other racist and Nazi bands such as Bound For Glory, Berserkr and the Angry Aryans. Rahowa themselves were known for running the gamut from metal epics to silly, albeit racist parodies of 50's rock n' roll songs ('Third Reich' done to the beat of Jerry Lee Lewis' 'Great Balls of Fire') with lyrics reading:

One, two, three, four/You kill all the niggers and you gas
all the Jews/Kill a gypsy and a commie too/You just killed
a kike/Don't it feel right?/Goodness gracious, Third Reich!

During the period of 1994-1997, Resistance had sold between 60,000 to 100,000 tapes and CDs. More than 40 record labels in Europe had licensing agreements with Resistance. Another factor was the blossoming of white power music in Sweden that went from having only one concert in 1992 to 20 in 1995. During Hawthorne's leadership the label also was in contact with labels in Czech Republic, Poland, Yugoslavia, England, France, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Lithuania, Russia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Plus, Hawthorne made contacts with the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Resistance Movement, Australia and even Japan. However, Resistance slowed down in 1997 when Hawthorne was jailed on assault charges after beating up a female anti-racist in Ottawa, Canada.²⁶

In 1999, shortly after federal authorities in Michigan raided their headquarters on tax fraud, Pierce bought Resistance Records for \$250,000. He followed this purchase with the acquisition of the Swedish Nordland label and eventually began to seek out National Socialist Black Metal releases to add to their growing distribution. Along with Rahowa and the previously mentioned Centurion, Resistance also released a series of other 'white

nationalist music' (featuring mostly folk and punk) compilations, which they handed to potentially sympathetic passers by in Tampa, Florida. Adhering to their 'David Lane-ian' methodology, Resistance sells CDs at the 'aryan friendly' price of \$14.88.

The label also attempted to send music to college radio stations, including where I am a volunteer DJ. Resistance sent music to Stanford University's KZSU, in 1998, Music director, Mike Howes, rejected adding the music not entirely based on its noxious ideas but more because 'it sound just like bad punk æ we've received plenty of that.' Howes also told me that during this time there was a big debate around the station regarding whether or not they would add and play racist music on the air if the music itself was good. The station only received the one package from Resistance but in 2000 also randomly received a copy of Resistance Magazine. Interestingly, no representative from Resistance had followed up with us regarding it. In the Fall 1999 issue of Resistance magazine, William Pierce discussed the label's significance:

Music speaks to us at a deeper level than books or political rhetoric: music speaks directly to the soul. Resistance Records ... will be the music of our people's renewal and rebirth. It will be music of strength and joy for our people. It will be music of defiance and rage against the enemies of our people.... It will be the music of the great, cleansing revolution, which is coming. Enjoy it!²⁷

Resistance was able to get a foothold into the metal scene by also using more traditional promotional tactics. They were able to set up a merchandise table at both the 1998 and 1999 Milwaukee Metalifests. Napalm Death who was on the bill for the 1999 Metalifest was surprised that the promoters gave an open forum to Resistance. As vocalist Barney Greenway said:

We were at Milwaukee Metalifest a few years ago and they had a store there. And it was like, what the hell was this? There were white power kids blatantly walking around and giving me the evils, you know, obviously, trying to provoke me. This goes to promoters too. Hell, you make enough money. Show some integrity. Stop these people from coming in and infesting the scene.²⁸

The Milwaukee Metalifest wasn't the only place where the National Alliance and Resistance Records worked at getting new recruits during major metal shows. They worked on the biggest tours: Ozzfest, the 'Unholy Alliance' tour (featuring Slayer, Children of Bodom and Mastadon), and even

Metallica. The latter of which sounds strange considering half the band is Mexican and Filipino. Other neo-Nazi groups like Pennsylvania-based Keystone State Skinheads have also used this tactic:

Members have been busy distributing promo materials, such as leaflets, CD's and stickers at local concerts. This has been an area of interest for some time and now it is starting to get some support and positive response. With help from suppliers like Label 56, Final Stand Records and Aryan Wear a number of us have been able to hand out stuff at large events with great success. Large numbers of patrons of events such as Sounds of the Underground Tour, Warped Tour, Ozzfest and many others have welcomed receiving the promotional material.²⁹

Also, the Keystone State Skinheads also promoted a live show in central Pennsylvania featuring racist death metal and black metal bands like Arghoslent and Wotanordern. Resistance and the white nationalist movement scored a media coup with the Bakersfield, California-based 'child-folk' duo of Prussian Blue, have also been promoted by Resistance Records. The 14-year old twins, Lamb and Lynx Gaede are the daughters of National Vanguard affiliated writer April Gaede. The National Vanguard is a splinter group of the National Alliance. Prussian Blue was named after the residue left in gas chambers used in the Holocaust, which has been brought up as 'proof' of an alleged lack of evidence.³⁰

The duo sings songs like 'Victory Day' an ode to Nazi Party Deputy, Rudolf Hess. Additionally, they have songs praising Robert Jay Matthews of the Order. Resistance Records released their debut album *Fragment of the Future*. The twins received press worldwide ranging from hip publications like *vice* to an interview on ABC-TV's *Good Morning America* & viewed by millions.

Russian thrash metal band Korrozia Metalla (Russian for 'corrosion of metal') one of the biggest bands in the Russian metal scene. With albums selling 600,000 copies they've had a strong fan base inside and outside Russia. The group has been around since 1984, and is mostly known for their wild stage shows featuring topless dancers, mental patients, flying coffins and dwarves. If that wasn't odd enough, around 1993 they went the extreme-right route and wrote songs supporting Russian ultranationalist movements. One of their most provocative songs is 'Kill the Sunarefa' which translates to 'Kill the Arabs' or kill the 'non-whites'. The song was introduced by vocalist Sergei 'Spider' Troitsky as a dedication 'to all patriots who wage war against the southern Asiatic animals who poison our lives with their rotten fruits and vegetables and rape our women. Death to the Sunarefa is our anthem.'³¹The

anti-Asian attitude is peculiar, as their website shows an Asian woman singing then stripping on stage with the band during a December 2007 concert.

The song is also featured on the newly released American CD & DVD version of the album *Russian Vodka*. The album is distributed by the National Alliance-affiliated label *Vinland Winds*, run by *Grimnir Wotansvolk* (aka: *Richard Mills*) also distributed the album. *Wotansvolk* is best known as the vocalist for the racist Black Metal band, *Grand Belial's Key*. Although there is a mystery around the American version, considering that *Wotansvolk* died in late 2006 yet versions of it turned up first in distributors and stores in early 2008.

15. **'More Evil than Satan': National Socialist Black Metal**

The advent of National Socialist Black Metal started around the mid-1990's prompted the idea of making things 'more extreme than thou'. Some felt that this was consistent with the aims of black metal. If it's anti-Christian why shouldn't it be against all other religions? As *Ymir G. Winter* of the band *Grom* describes this ideology:

In Black Metal you had most bands following the formula of anti-Christ(ian), kill the Christians ...well what about the Jews? On a religious level Christianity's based on Judaism. On a different level which NSBM takes it to, Jews are a race...I think that they're responsible for most of the wrongs in the world.³²

One of the biggest bands in NSBM is the Polish based *Graveland*. Founded in 1992 with a few demos then several albums released through the German label *No Colours*. *Graveland's* early work is pretty standard Black Metal with harsh vocals and fairly plain tremolo picking. The group's inspirations mostly from *Bathory's* later 'Viking-era' albums: *Hammerheart* and *Twilight of the Gods* along with the soundtrack to the movie *Conan*. While the group initially wrote about Satanism their founder *Rob 'Darken' Fudali*, says otherwise:

...as a part of Judeo- Christianity, Satanism is alien to the indigenous culture of our forefathers. Satanism should be rejected as a part of enemy propaganda. We have never been slaves of Judeo-Christianity and we will never be!³³

Additionally, *Graveland's* *Blood of Heroes* EP from 2002 was released in the limited number of —Aryan pressings' of 1488 copies. The

original copies were said to have included a dedication to Timothy McVeigh. Although, Fudali backed out when he believed it could get them unneeded attention for themselves and their label, Vinland Winds.³⁴ The Pagan Front, the largest hosting site on the Internet for NSBM bands and labels, has also supported Graveland. Graveland has additionally done split releases with the Polish Nazi skinhead band Honour as well as the German NSBM group Absurd.

The case of the band Absurd and their former leader and drummer, Hendrik Möbus is connected too much of the American and international white nationalist movement. In 1993, the 16-year-old Möbus along with two other members of Absurd strangled and killed 14-year-old Sandro Beyer. Möbus spent 8 years in prison then was paroled in 1999, although his parole was revoked for giving a 'sieg heil' salute in Germany. To make matters worse he dismissed the seriousness of his murder conviction while being interviewed in the book *Lords of Chaos*:

(Beyer is) an utterly irritating guy who became a pain in the ass... He has [sic] spread rumour and bullshit about ourselves, something we couldn't stand any longer. [...] it simply was a beneficial act for mankind.³⁵

Absurd also used Beyer's gravestone on the cover their 1995 Thuringian Pagan Madness tape. The tape was released by Capricornus Productions, run by Graveland's drummer Capricornus. After serving an additional 18-month sentence he ventured off into America. While in the U.S., Möbus, stayed in Seattle and Ohio, joining up with Nathan Pett (aka: Nate Zorn) of the esoteric fascist group, White Order of Thule. Along the way, Möbus ended up at the compound of the National Alliance in West Virginia. In August 2000 the Immigration Naturalization Service (INS) arrested Möbus for parole violation. During the proceedings, National Alliance and other white nationalist groups protested at the German embassy in Washington D.C. to stop the government from treating Möbus like a common prisoner. As Möbus claims: 'The FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) promises basic freedoms, but persecutes everyone who doesn't think and speak in a Politically Correct manner.'³⁶

Regarding National Socialism, Möbus called it: 'the most perfect synthesis of the Luciferian will-to power, and neo-heathen principles and symbolism.' National Alliance founder, William Pierce provided legal aid for Möbus, raising over \$6000, it was to no avail. Regardless, the 'Free Henrik Möbus campaign still appears on several white nationalist and NSBM affiliated websites such as *Mourning The Ancient*. Even with Möbus back in prison, a version of Absurd is still recording and playing shows. The group

played a show in Queens, NY along with another NSBM band, Grand Belial's Key. Due to many boycotts, most of these shows are promoted via invite only.

Nokturnal Mortum from the Ukraine is one of the other biggest NSBM bands. They formed in 1994 and have released songs such as 'Taste of Victory' that they invoke David Lane's ideas: 'we do remember our forefather's oaths/we do believe in power of 14 words'. Later in the same song they make a pointed reference to Holocaust denial and hatred of Jews: 'If they weren't burnt those 60 years ago/they should be burnt today'. In 2007, Nokturnal Mortum teamed up for a 4-way split release called Eastern Hammer, invoking the Slavic version of the hammer toting Norse god Thor, called Perun. The release features Russia's Temnozor (Russian for 'spirit of the sunrise'), Graveland and a Polish group called North.

16. Racism and NSBM in Contemporary Russian and the Ukraine

Ultra-nationalism was the 'elephant in the room' during the Soviet era. Many of these movements were barred from the public in this time. When they did make an appearance they often were blamed on a 'western capitalist conspiracy'. Many of the Eastern European and Russian NSBM bands link racism and ultra-nationalism with pagan Slavic identity. Similar to the Norse pantheon, the pre-Christian Slavic gods have been shunned from most accounts of history. However, unlike the Norse gods the official record of written sources is dubious. Also, early Russian Christians invented Cyrillic, the region's first alphabet. However, Nordic runes are often mixed in with Cyrillic and German on many Russian and Ukrainian NSBM releases. Part of the usage of runes is due to the early Russian history of Swedish Vikings role in the cities of Kiev and Novgorod together with their explorations along the Dnieper and Volga rivers. After the Ukraine broke from the USSR, they issued several bank notes with Viking illustrations. One possible explanation into Nokturnal Mortum's attitude is the acceptance of anti-Semitism in the general population. This can be traced to recent headlines showing desecrations of synagogues in the city of L'viv. In August 2005, a major Kiev university presented former KKK leader and white nationalist David Duke a doctorate degree. MAUP (Ukrainian acronym for Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management) has 57,000 students and is considered one of the best colleges in Eastern Europe.³⁷ Duke's dissertation was called '—Zionism as a Form of Ethnic Supremacism'. Duke has also taught classes in at MAUP in history and international relations. Could Nokturnal Mortum's anti-Semitism in the Ukraine also be a reflection of the anti-Semitism in the society in general?

Russia has also been at the forefront of NSBM. Many of these are under the banner of the label, Blazebirth Hall. Blazebirth affiliated bands include Forest, Raven Dark and Brainkald. Forest has release Within these

bands are dozens of offshoots and side projects ranging from blunt force of Aryan Terrorism to the very 80's sounding 'power metal (i.e. Helloween) with an aryan face' of Finist.

The large number of NSBM and NS affiliated metal bands in Russia could also be reflective of general population's attitude around race. In the two decades following end of the Soviet Union, Russia's racism became public. The Moscow based Sova Centre for Human Rights reported: In the spring of 2007, radical violence continued to grow. Over the three spring months, xenophobic and neo-Nazi attacks affected at least 137 people, killing 18...there are no reasons yet to report improvement.³⁸

17. In the Least Likely Place: NSBM Music in the San Francisco Bay Area

Music from bands like Graveland, Absurd, Nokturnal Mortum and many other like-minded bands can easily be found in record stores in the traditionally liberal cities of San Francisco and Berkeley, California. Aquarius Records in San Francisco's Mission District and Amoeba Records in the city's Haight-Ashbury district æ known as the focal point of the hippie-era 'Summer of Love'.

In my discussion with Aquarius Records owner Andee Connors, he said:

The whole NSBM is always a touchy subject. We actually try not to sell stuff that is obviously in your face racist, like records with swastikas all over 'em, or photos of the concentration camps ovens or any of that. We now usually put a big disclaimer in the review, so people who aren't super informed know what they're getting into.³⁹

Regarding customer reactions, Connors told me:

Reactions are mixed. We have this one young guy who won't buy anything with a whiff of NSBM about it. He's very careful and super conscientious. Then we have a couple older Jewish guys, who both wrestled over Burzum to begin with but both eventually decided they love the music and have chosen to just ignore the politics. I think that stuff is abhorrent, but a lot of the music is amazing. I'd say most of the Graveland(s) (albums) we sell 20-30 copies of. We've probably sold 50 of the (Nokturnal Mortum connected) Mistigo (Varragoroth Darkestra) over the years.⁴⁰

One of the Aquarius disclaimers reads:

Fair warning: (San Francisco Black Metal band) Lasoviec are on Dark Hidden Productions, a label with dubious political leanings, and with definite ties to the Pagan Front, the hub for all things NSBM aka: National Socialist Black Metal. Although the band seem to be more concerned with themes cosmic, and spiritual nature and mythology, there are definite racist implications, the link is undeniable, so regardless of the band's stance, the label's is clear thus, another instance where the listener has to decide if the music trumps the possible unpleasant politics.

One of the other more obvious points about NSBM not being a 'true' sub genre of metal is that is purely aesthetic and ideological version. That is, it's merely black metal under the guise of being even more obnoxious and more 'evil'. It has no tempos, tuning, vocal styles or guitar tone that would separate it from say, Marxist black metal. Although, a band like Gorgoroth while very controversial for their blasphemous stage shows does not support NSBM. Guitarist Infernus said: 'Nazism to me is a flock mentality...and at least Gorgoroth is individual (minded) and creating our own world out of chaos.'

However, the phenomenon is spread out even more through downloading. Metal-Archives.com, lists 154 active NSBM bands. The topic is a hotly debated issue on Internet forums. Oddly enough, the majority of blogs focused on NSBM MP3 downloads are based in Chile and Mexico. These blogs are littered with Third Reich and esoteric fascist symbols.

18. Has the Authoritarian Left been Left Out?

Much less influential but certainly still extreme is the left side of the politics. Within punk and hardcore it's very easy to find. However, in metal, bands that identify themselves with communist and anarchist ideology or at least emphasize with those sentiments are sometimes harder to find.

Revisiting Mayhem's Euronymous, we find that he came from the opposite yet equally totalitarian end of Vikernes - i.e. Stalinism. Euronymous was a member of Norway's Rød Ungdom (Red Youth) an self-described 'revolutionary communist' youth organization that up until the late 1990s supported the dictatorship of Enver Hoxa of Albania and the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia. Some members of Rød Ungdom even had dinner with Hoxa.

In metal music this fusion of right and left extremes (even in the same band) was something new. However, this had been going on within the fringes of politics for a long time. American fascist and author of the manifesto Imperium, Frances Parker Yockey attempted to pursue a goal of uniting the Soviet Union with Germany during the 1950s and 1960s. Kevin

Coogan's 1999 biography of Yockey, explains his philosophy as a —Red-Brown alliance':

Yet periods of ideological decay often breed strange new variants, such as the 'Red -Brown alliance' in the former Soviet Union, which do not easily fit into conventional political-science categories of 'left' and 'right.'

Another example of this fusion is the Chicago black metal group Blood of Martyrs, whose claim to be occultic 'Black Ram Anarchists': 'Drawing on a lifetime of metal and occult experience as well as an interest in altered and trance states, and aligning itself with pagan, environmentalist, and alternative political (Black Ram Anarchists)'. The Black Ram Anarchism is based around a concept called 'Anarcho-Nationalism' which they describe as 'the nationalism of the people (Volk) which in its more consistent expressions is a legitimate rejection of both foreign domination and internal authoritarianism, i.e. the State.'⁴¹

19. Anti-Authoritarian Death Metal and Grindcore

While death metal often features gory lyrics about murder, dismemberment and death, it does have a political component. The band Misery Index writes songs about class struggle, political and societal hypocrisy. Their 2008 album features titles like 'Ruling Class Cancelled' and the title track 'Traitors' æ which questions American hyper-patriotism via Fox News. Bassist/vocalist Jason Netherton and guitarist Sparky Voyles - came from the band Dying Fetus. Dying Fetus began playing basic blasting, fast death metal with typical song titles like 'Raped on the Altar'. However, since 2000 they have been decisively critical about American policies in the Middle East and about religion.

The UK's Napalm Death is considered the pinnacle of grindcore. Grindcore is an extremely fast style that grew from the hardcore/punk scene. In the late 80's there were numerous bands in the UK and Japan who were essentially playing 'fast-core' which was a tempo of Black Flag's fastest song accelerated to 20 times as fast. At times people would call it 'blurr-core' but the Brits deemed it 'grindcore' due to its near-mechanical grinding sound. Napalm Death arose first from the anarcho-punk scene appearing on the Crass Records compilation *Bullshit Detector* in 1982. This early version of the band was mostly raw and loose hardcore sound with an occasional use of tribal drumming.

After several line up changes they decided to go much faster and in 1987 released 'Scum' which featured the 1.3 second 'You Suffer'. In later years the band went through more line up changes but continued to forge the path of grindcore and never gave up their political ideas. The band is well

known worldwide and continues to be a huge influence on grindcore to this day. Their activism has included appearing on benefit compilations for AK Press, Anti-Racism Action, and Southeast Asian Tsunami Relief. Plus, the group has appeared in ad campaigns for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Former Dead Kennedy's vocalist and activist, Jello Biafra did guest vocals on their 2005 song 'The Great And The Good'.

The band Carcass while not overtly political, originated through Napalm Death and via the anarcho punk scene. One of the members mentioned the reasoning behind their gory album art on the album *Symphonies of Sickness* was to show that 'the human meat is no different than the animal meat.' Their vegan/vegetarian and anti-meat concepts were less political and much more graphic with titles like 'Exhume to Consume'. Their influence was also much less political and for better or worse gave rise to the death metal/grindcore offshoot called 'goregrind'.

Brutal Truth is equivalent to the American version of Napalm Death. The band formed by ex-Anthrax and S.O.D. bassist Dan Lilker plays with insanely fast songs, screamed out vocals and plenty of blast beats. The group is credited for creating the world's shortest ever music video for the song 'Collateral Damage' which is a scant 2.18 seconds. Their 1992 song 'The Birth of Ignorance' from their debut *Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses* has the lyrics: 'Ignorance and prejudice/Raping peoples minds/Moulded by environment/Hatred of all kinds'. The group has also done experiments with techno/industrial sounds and even covered avant-garde jazz artist Sun Ra. When asked about his activism, vocalist Rich Hoak said:

Brutal Truth is the main focus of our lives and our political activism. We try to spread our message and hopefully shake up a few people and maybe in the end it will do the globe some good.⁴²

Another important left-leaning grindcore band is the Orange, County, CA based, Phobia. Formed in 1990, they have played shows with everything from death metal to crust punk to sludge rock bands. Their t-shirts bare the slogan —Total Anarchist Grindcore'. When asked about the Bush administration's foreign policy, vocalist Shane McLachlan said:

This is going to be the worst year, it's the last term of Bush. So he has to make it all happen, that means a lot of dead people. This is what we have to wait for. He has an objective for all the rich bastards and his family ideas, so this is the year we need an assassination!!!⁴³

One of their songs 'Never' takes an anti-patriotic stance: 'I'm a flag burner from the USA/I don't give a fuck what you say!!! /No cloth gives you freedom/No cloth gives you pride.'

20. 'Being Ignorant is Cool': Racist Grindcore

While many grindcore bands veer to the left, it is also important to note that's not always the case. In 2001, the Australian band Rupture released a 7" called Soap Farm with photos of holocaust victims. The title and cover were obvious references to Nazism and the Holocaust. However, the band seemed to want to do the old traditional punk thing and 'piss off everyone at once.' Despite having the flipside called 'Das Waffen SS' the band still tried to clear the air:

It has come to our attention that since all the P.C. close minds out there seem to love spreading bullshit about us, calling us 'nazis' I guess we may as well act like Nazis so fuck you, make of this release as you will. At least we can still take the piss and laugh at all you insecure retarded yuppie peacenik bible thumping diatribal wank. Anyway we all know who the REAL Nazis are!!!

The group previous released split 7-inch singles with Brutal Truth and the anarchist Drop Dead. Also, aside from the Soap Farm single the crux of the band's lyrics had to do with pornographic sex and drugs. They were more comfortable in promoting filthy 'scum rockers' like G.G. Allin than fascist leaders like Adolf Hitler.⁴⁴

If Rupture wasn't enough extreme obnoxiousness then there's always Anal Cunt whose name alone sets them apart from a million other bands. Musically they create ultra-blurs of noise and grindcore. Their early releases had no titles and went so far as to having a 5643 song EP pressed on 7-inch vinyl. The release is unofficial world record for sheer number of songs. Essentially, 16 different songs can be heard at once with each song timed at less than 2 seconds. Regardless of the studio trickery, Anal Cunt became much more offensive than their high school parking lot name. Almost every one of the band's releases is filled with endless screaming and raging against things they deem 'gay' or 'retarded'. When they're not taking that angle, they're making fun of rape and promoting sexism. In 1999, the group released the aptly titled It Just Gets Worse with song titles like 'Body By Auschwitz' and 'I Sent Concentration Camp Footage to America's Funniest Home Videos'. When asked about the controversy over Mel Gibson's 'Passion of the Christ' movie, vocalist Seth Putnam said:

(Jews) all deserved to be fuckin' killed...he shoulda got an award for sayin' that shit...they never shut the fuck up about the Holocaust they always whine about it ...we have a song called 'Hoggin' up the Holocaust' æ how they get all the credit for the holocaust.⁴⁵

21. **Against Authority and Full of Grimness: Anarchist-Black Metal**

While much of Black metal has been influenced or supported by the ultra-right, there is a number of leftist and anarchist leaning bands. Wolves In The Throne Room from Olympia, Washington is one of the most significant ones. The band's philosophy is more akin to eco-anarchist notions of living close to the earth and radical primitivism. Although this has brought the group much criticism:

We hear about how we live from other people all the time and it's usually an exaggeration coming from people who either kind of idealize their conception of what we're doing, think we're 'unkvlt' (i.e. 'not true black metallers') hippie posers.⁴⁶

Additionally, the one-man band SorgSvart (Norwegian for 'Black Sorrow' or 'Black Grief') is the flipside of Burzum. SorgSvart is a Norwegian band that supports Anarchy and stands against 'authoritarian and despotic ideologies'. SortSvart also had help on their 2008 album Vikingtid og Anarki ('Viking Time and Anarchy') from Darkthrone's Nocturno Culto. Culto's appearance on the album maybe seems odd considering Darkthrone's Transilvanian Hunger-era alluded to earlier.

Other bands of the anarchist black metal ilk include Order of the Vulture, Fall of the Bastards both from Portland, Oregon with anti-Christian lyrics from a more anti-state, anti-authoritarian perspective. Also, a number of the anarcho-punk collective, CrimeThinc's bands were often metal leaning. A notable band was Timebomb, who were described as: 'Italian, vegan straight edge, anarcho-communist black metal'.

22. **Historical Imagery and Mistaken Identities**

There are numerous bands that believe in and support extreme political ideologies. Although, there are those like the early punks that have courted controversy simply by the way they look or by certain images they use. Sometimes a band just writing about World War II can be controversial. Specifically, Hail of Bullets 2008 debut, Frost and War came out with a promo photo showing 3 out of 5 band members with shaved heads and bomber jackets. This along with the fact that the band employed an angular font used on nearly every paperback 'political thriller' (see Clive Cussler)

provoked strong reactions. Drummer Ed Warby tried to clarify matters in an interview with Nocturnal Cult e-zine:

We've already been called communists as well as fascists by some less than intelligent individuals, but in general people are smart enough to see there's nothing in our lyrics to justify either accusation. I realize a band made up of bald guys wearing combat clothing releasing a war album may seem dubious to some, but anyone who takes the time to actually read the lyrics will find appearances to be most deceiving in this case. Martin is a raving pacifist, and he definitely did not set out to glorify war in any way, quite the opposite.⁴⁷

The Swedish black metal band Marduk also caught flak for creating albums named Panzer Division Marduk, which can be seen as nebulous as the —Slaytanic Wehrmacht' of Slayer. Marduk also used a Swedish World War II era tank on the cover. Morgan Håkansson in an interview with Terrorizer said his band wants to give the listener —feel like they're being overrun, like they're under a Blitzkrieg of sound'. It's important that Håkansson says, —blitzkrieg of sound' versus —we should launch a Blitzkrieg against Israel and New York City'. Again, he only speaks of creating an extreme sound environment. On their 2005 album Plague Angel they have a track —The Hangman of Prague'. The song deals with Richard Heydrich, the Nazi henchman in the Czech capitol in World War II. Håkansson takes a similar view of Slayer in defending his interest in the subject:

I write music according to what interests and fascinates me. I can't control it; if I read about something or watch a documentary, that creates interest in my head...we're not singing about trolls, we're singing about things that actually happened and events that actually took place.⁴⁸

Regarding the band's totalitarian symbolism of eagles and stoic buildings, Håkansson says:

It's strange, because over the years we've sung about so many historical happenings. We did the whole Vlad (the Impaler) thing ['Nightwing' 1999], we had song titles in French, we had songs in Romanian and no one said a word. But as soon as we do something in German the whole world explodes.

Also, the German band Endstille has gotten into trouble simply for using WWII imagery as well as for the more obvious troubling title of Endstille's Reich. You may see a tank or a plane or a machine gun, but that's just history, and it's history that inspires us. We use that imagery to provoke thought and discussion. We're against anything remotely related to Nazism. When we're playing, we want to create the atmosphere of war. Our new album, 'Endstilles Reich', has a photo of a church taken in 1946...it has nothing to do with the Third Reich. What 'reich' means in this context is 'home' or 'place'.⁴⁹

In addition, the band played Vienna's 'Metal For Fairness' benefit, the proceeds of which went to building schools in Cambodia, not a cause that your average 'aryan warrior' would support. Also, the imagery of Endstille's album covers are similar to that in virtually any Time-Life series on World War II æ war torn cities, anti-aircraft guns, the sinking of the Bismarck - mere images telling a story minus any ideology.

23. Conclusion

In summary, the history of metal along with several other types of music is connected to a lot of political controversy. Whether that is something we choose to support, disdain or debate is entirely up to us. As fans, musicians, radio DJs and writers we have the ability to make these choices. These topics have been a hot button issue inside and out of the Metal scene and will likely to be that way for many years to come.

Notes

¹Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler Peter Viereck, Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, New Jersey, 2004, p. 137

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Politics? Nah, Fuck Politics Man: What Can We Expect from Metal Gods?

Niall W. R. Scott

Abstract

In this chapter I wish to explore the question of what we might be able to expect from Metal with regard to an ethics, politics or philosophy of Metal. I suggest that in line with Paul Feyerabend's piece 'Let's make more movies'; Heavy metal provides the opportunity for a philosophical approach that is special to it, in taking metal to be involved in the generation of ARGUMENT. I consider Hatebreed to provide a good starting point for such an expectation where a philosophy is *performed*, and this does much more than the mere verbal expression of the band's lyrics. Plato's criticism of poetry and poets as imitators provides an interesting challenge here, where without the relevant distance and critical reflection one might start to become more like the persona of the performance; that we are controlled by the desires expressed in the performance rather than us having control over them. However he asks that the poet be assisted in defense- people who are not poets, but love poetry to show that poetry does more and as a result we would gain much from it. Unfortunately Plato finds no such defense. In Heavy Metal such a defense and dialogue in attempting to develop a philosophy of metal or a politics of metal can be made with the result that we can expect more from the metal scene by way of intellectual and philosophical reflection.

Key Words: Politics, Philosophy, Plato, Argument, Hatebreed

This conference has gathered together a considerable critical mass of metal academics and practitioners. Many of us will have experienced negative criticisms of our interests to write and engage with the metal scene in such a manner. For academia it is perhaps too populist, for the metal scene academic and critical interest is an unwelcome intrusion, pointing to a wary skepticism that such interaction might destroy the very visceral nature of the scene. But most of us here (not all) are fans and members of the scene alike- it is something that is part of our culture and something that many of us have grown up with. What is apparent is in this conference and in previous work there is room for a dialogue to open up between the two in a manner that I think can only enhance and provide new insights into various academic disciplines and complement the metal scene itself. For example from my perspective the question that intrigues me is at the possibility of articulating a

philosophy or politics of Metal. In enquiring into such a theme, and using metal as the source of such an enquiry, what can be expected from the scene and its protagonists? So what might the nature of expectation be when we engage in an academic and/or reflective critique of the Metal scene and its progenitors? In this presentation I wish to look back at some of the issues that emerged at this conference and open up discussion on the question of expectation from a philosophical, moral and political point of view; even asking whether there can be a philosophy of metal at all. Some of this has been substantially dealt with in chapters that, for example introduced a phenomenology of metal or regarding ethical problems, such as the question of whether immoral content can enhance or is necessary for the improving the quality heavy metal music and the metal scene. In many ways this chapter presents a series of (unanswered) questions and directions that the interaction between metal and philosophy could explore; think of it as a presenting of possibilities that we could get to work on...

The quotation in the title is rephrased from an eloquent expression by James Hetfield, in his response in an interview on Greek television. Hetfield's response is rather cutting. The interviewer asked, regarding their willingness to play some songs for the alliance for climate protection (Live earth) concert at Wembley, in July 2007:

'That's something that I believe politicians should care of; do you think metal, rock 'n roll can fill the gap of politicians?'

Hetfield replied: 'No, fuck politics. I mean I can't stand it. It drives me crazy, and there's even you know politics with music, you know and the business side really bothers me. I like playing music. We were asked to play and I said ok I want to play. There's a lot of people going to be watching that show... I don't like talking politics. Metallica is about music music from us for the ears of our fans, really that's what it's about. I don't like playing for any cause. I want to play because I like to play'¹

When listening to this interview I moved from expectation to disappointment, but of course should I have been disappointed- what else ought I to expect from a petrol head metal God? Hetfield's interpretation limits the understanding of politics to party politics, and in denying playing for a cause, opens himself to an accusation of inauthentic contradiction, as the band often plays events for charity. However this is perhaps to bring a demand for consistency to the table too early on, prior to researching the nature and understanding of politics and the political in the metal scene and the context in which such a comment might emerge. Homing in on just one expressions such as this further ignores what metal as a whole might have to offer to the realm of philosophy and politics.

In addition to this premature disappointment, the metal scene in all its complexity is likely to contain parts that deserve to be treated as they are, not as one might want them to be. Such a warning is given by Scott Wilson

in his recent book *Great Satan's Rage American negativity and Rap /Metal in the Age of Supercapitalism*. Wilson provides a word of caution regarding the extent to which we should be wary of reading things into songs. This caution is mindful of not only what we take lyrics to deliver, but also the utterances of performers in interviews. He writes: 'It is of course an error to overnarrativise or make too much sense of pop lyrics. The power of pop lyrics lies precisely in their economy or even their poverty, which leads to an excess of possible meanings and effects. Effect is more important than meaning'

We might want to say: well... to expect philosophy, be it moral, political or aesthetic philosophy to emerge from metal, then we had better be clear about what philosophy is. This is of course the question that aspects philosophy itself spends much time preoccupied with, and not a road I wish to follow here. We may also perhaps be tempted to say that this entire pursuit is a mistake. Metal is perhaps devoid of anything remotely philosophically interesting, and that one may argue is its strength. After all, as reported in the Guardian following AC/DC's release of *Black Ice* and the start of their 2008/09 world tour in an interview with Angus Young: 'Alas, what he can't be relied on to do is support those who delve into the sociological implications of AC/DC's appeal. 'What we do, you're not going to look into it with depth, y'know,' he [Young] suggested recently. 'Because if you look into it with depth, you're not going to get it.'² Here however immediately a challenge is opened up that is worthy of serious consideration- what kind of thing then is it that has no depth or deeper meaning? The denial of theory and the expression of superficiality as a stance could be the beginning of a philosophical expression, or a philosophical position itself, much like the way that Hetfield's exclamation above can be arguably treated as a political expression.

There is no doubt in my mind that the metal scene *is* philosophically and politically interesting. To start with, it provides much that can act as an example or a springboard into philosophical discussion. But then if it only acts as an example, as can any other aspect of popular culture act as an example in the pursuit of various branches of philosophy then all we are doing is plundering a scene for its use in the promotion of an academic discipline, and not engaging in the scene itself, for its own philosophical and political value, on its terms. This is a possible exploitation that does both metal and philosophy a disservice. I contend that metal *can* generate a philosophy and a politics in its own right. The material presented at this conference is in part evidence of such a possibility. For example, if we take the final point of Scott Wilson above, that effect is more important than meaning, then this is perhaps where to target our expectation and look at the content of this effect.

What is then the challenge here? I am interested in the relationship between what is presented through metal performance, the lifestyle and the dialogical interaction between what comes out from the 'stage' as it were and the metal scene, and philosophy, particularly moral and political philosophy. This would not just be limited to the metal scene, but also include the influence that metal and thinking about metal philosophically and politically can have on philosophy in general. In asking what we can expect from metal in general, not just its progenitors, the fundamental question will be articulate of whether a philosophy of metal would have to be, even could be free from merely a verbal exposition and critique of the phenomenon. After all to say the word METAL does not convey the sound of a distorted guitar; it does not convey the scene; it does not bring with it volume. However to *perform* the word in addition to its utterance with the clichéd devil's horn symbol opens up new territory- it's effect carries new and different meaning to its mere utterance. From a simple gesture to the experience of a metal event there are effects that point to and possibly articulate a worldview, a weltanschauung. It is this world view which is now being explored, in part, at this conference. Even though often it is impossible to articulate the awe that can be experienced at a metal event, or the sense of belonging to the community or scene, that awe remains part of the wonder from which philosophy begins. Heavy metal opens up a contemporary space where one can 'explore the non-verbal world' using the terminology from Alan Watts³, but not just any space- it cannot be occupied by another movement, scene or sound. Even verbal utterances like that given by Hetfield have more in their non-verbal content- 'fuck politics' than the mere words expressed- it is *because* they are said by a metal God that a response is elicited in a way that is bound up with the scene. Exploring such a question can both give insights into what we might take the metal movement in all its guises to be as well as insights into philosophy. In a sense then a space is opened up for a dialogue between the two. This dialogue is already exemplified in the material that has been presented at this conference.

Metal aids us like many art forms, I think, in moving away from a logocentric obsession in philosophy and politics to the exploration of meaning and argument in a different realm, one yet to be explored in Metal. For example, the agitation expressed in the music and performance can for some act as a kind of therapy, a diagnostic tool that exposes current social and political malaise; a dark window opening out to expose what may be wrong or sick in society. Philosophy and interpretive critical analysis can use language to assist in mediating that diagnosis back to the scene and beyond. What can be expected from Heavy Metal is ARGUMENT!, a stance a position on the world expressed in a range of ways from utterances to distorted lifestyles, performances gestures and a diabolic gaze at the world. Borrowing from Paul Feyerabend, what to expect from Metal is for our

senses to be irritated and to not be restricted to the 'use of rational criteria only'. We can use a metal gathering, an event, a gig and album cover to judge a range of interplaying agencies that bring that thing and the scene about and to use it to judge reason rather than 'using reason to judge everything else'⁴

This opens for us here a possibility of reflection and reflexive engagement, something that is already present in the metal scene in various guises. An important component of philosophical thought is that of reflexivity and critical reflection. Keith Kahn Harris has commented on the issue of reflexivity in the extreme metal scene stating that as fitting the definition of a reflexive community, it is 'continually active and self aware' At length he identifies this reflexivity: Scene members throw themselves into the scene, the scene is stretched over time and space, scene members constantly debate what sort of space the scene should be; the scene's products are purely cultural; scene members seem to practice intensive reflexivity. However having identified this he goes on to identify examples of unreflexivity as well, perhaps reminiscent of the Hetfield quotation above.

In addition to that, Kahn Harris identifies 'reflexive anti-reflexivity' with regard to the paradox that the metal scene provides us both with the reflective intelligentia and the stereotype moronic spectrum, the 'reflexively anti reflexive' he identifies as those who know better, but decide not to know, or rather avoid or do not wish to express what they do in fact know. This is for him, a distinct way in which the scene can be experienced.

In response to this though, do we in our work have an obligation to try and draw out more reflexive tendencies? A possible response may be then to remain silent, in the deep sense that not only involves no longer being able to say anything about metal in response to the scene, but also to not think about it and only *experience* metal. However, the gathering at this conference and other work shows that this will not do. Maybe we are showing up our philosophical and critical bias, but I think this demand comes at us as an invitation from the scene itself. It is a scene that elicits expectation engagement and dialogue. When the metal God and the metal scene 'speaks' I have an expectation- when asked about political or moral issues, my ears prick up; when challenged to think and reflect critically about what the scene delivers we would do it a disservice to remain silent.

Hatebreed for example in their lyrical content offer some challenging insights into how one might wrestle with such issues. The frustration expressed in the language is matched by the theatrical aggression of metalcore. It could be argued that on experiencing Hatebreed live in the pit, the combination of the music and lyrics, there is nothing quite like it, in the sense that the sound would not be the same without the content of the lyrics. The content leans more to the existential and amoral than immoral, but nonetheless they present in the totality of their performance a

philosophical position. The reflection in the words combined with the aggression of metalcore and the crowd's behaviour are part of what I see as an argument. The fight club-like consensual theatre of violence performed by the audience and the way it complements the content and onslaught of the music make demands on the sole employment of reason alone. In the lyrics we encounter highly reasonable and measured advice; yet in the music and the posturing we encounter something altogether different. It emerges thus too from the title of their first album in 1997: *Satisfaction is the Death of Desire* and clearly so in the *Rise of Brutality*. Because of the combined lyrical and performative content of a Hatebreed experience, I expect more from it than the mere moment of the gig- the experience challenges, brings about catharsis, reflection and contemplation. Exemplified in the song *A Lesson Lived is a Learned*, part of the lyric reads:

' Do it/ Some scars are meant to be worn with pride/ Everyday is knowledge to use in life/A lesson lived is a lesson learned/ Setbacks used to propel me forward/ Misjudgment taken as a force to do right/ A better outlook, a mindset of power/ Each day resolve and reform/ A lesson lived is a Lesson learned/ Everyday is a lesson...It's how you use the knowledge you've been given.'⁵

Plato's criticism of poetry on ethical grounds is highly relevant here. In book three of *The Republic*, Plato holds that the content and engaging with the content of poetry is likely to affect the participant such that he becomes more like the content (misery) expressed in the poem. He asks whether it is right to admire someone on the stage who is performing something that we would be ashamed to resemble. He holds that 'or better nature being without adequate intellectual or moral training relaxes its control over these feelings' when it involves someone else's articulation. He considers the same to be true anger and all the 'other feelings and desires of pleasure and pain that accompany our actions'; that we are controlled by these desires rather than us having control over them. However he asks that the poet be assisted in defense- people who are not poets but love poetry to show that poetry does more and as a result we would gain much from it. Unfortunately Plato finds no such defense. He condemns those artists and poets who are imitators and do not give primacy to the role of reason. To me, engagement with Hatebreed's urge to 'use the knowledge you have been given' diagnoses a different, positive role for the lyricist that can lead us into a more thorough questioning of the nature of this knowledge- not forgetting that the words are delivered, performed and received in the context of the metal scene rather than being mere text on a page. There are some, but few imitators in the metal scene and imitatory features tend to be performed in the interest of self-satire. The combination of excess and extreme in emotion and extreme reason allows Metal rise above this criticism.

In Hatebreed we find both an emotional overload of aggression and frustration combined with articulate content that raises my philosophical ethical and moral expectations from Metal. There is an opportunity here, as has been explored at this conference to provide a defense of the kind that Plato is after, but with the result that Feyerabend's view of philosophy is complemented. That is metal can help us to judge reason rather than to be judged by it. Metal in its entirety and in the microcosms of movements within it can be treated as a philosophy in the deeper sense of it *being* philosophy. It presents a way of looking at the world and being in the world; it is a philosophy that is shown, not just argued in language. It generates an expectation of examination, a common factor that has brought us together here. Metal politics, Metal ethics, Metal morality, Metal philosophy, Metal culture - permit the recognition of a way of being- one that is not restricted to the mere verbal expression of an argument. What can we expect from metal? We can begin by exploring the possibility that Metal *is* Argument.

Notes

¹ Hetfield, J. youtube interview, Greek television
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF7ofDZYJd0>.

² The Guardian 27th Oct 2008.

³ Watts, Alan, *Philosophy Beyond Words* in: The Owl of Minerva: Philosophers on Philosophy 1975, p. 198.

⁴Feyerabend, Paul, *Let's Make More Movies*, in: The Owl of Minerva: Philosophers on Philosophy 1975 p. 202.

⁵Beattie, C., Byrne, M., Martin, S. and Jasta, J. *A Lesson Lived is a Lesson Learned*, 2003.

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Suicide, Booze and Loud Guitars

Daniel Frandsen

Abstract

It is widely known that there has been a lot of controversy about the content of (especially the lyrics in) heavy metal. Themes like murder, suicide and abuse are commonly found in this genre, and it has been claimed to be inappropriate for people, children in particular, to be hearing and supporting. One way of approaching this discussion is to focus on the relation between the content of a work of art, and the aesthetic value of the work. It has been claimed that a work portraying unethical behaviour, that is being ethically flawed, will always be aesthetically flawed as well. According to this moralist view, most heavy metal should be considered aesthetically bad due to the norms of our society. In the present time, with the growing interest in heavy metal, it seems reasonable to suggest that the moralist view might be problematic, and that an alternative theory may get us closer to the truth about the relation between aesthetics and ethics. My claim is that it can be an aesthetic merit for a work of art, especially heavy metal, that its content is morally flawed, due to the nature of the specific type of music. This is called the immoralist view. I will attempt to show this by reference to songs about suicide and alcohol-abuse from the Finnish heavy metal band Sentenced, and theories from Berys Gaut, Matthew Kieran and Theodore Gracyk among others.

Key Words: Heavy metal, aesthetics, suicide, immoralism, noise.

1. Introduction

There have been many controversies about the heavy metal culture ever since the first Heavy Metal songs hit their audience in the 1970's. Mainly, these controversies have been about ethical and aesthetical issues. In one of the most well-known controversies on heavy metal culture, two young heavy metal fans at Columbine High school killed 13 people, wounded several more, and subsequently committed suicide. In the aftermath of the Columbine massacre the artist Marilyn Manson suddenly got into the cross fire kindled by the media, since he supposedly seemed to have had noticeable influence on the two metal fans at some point. For a number of reasons he certainly was not to blame for the (insane) incident at Columbine High, but one thing still remains unsettled: Is there a connection between Heavy Metal and unethical behaviour? In the following I will focus on the question stated above, also exploring the important role of the aesthetics associated with

Heavy Metal culture/music and the possible influence on its audience. One might ask whether there is any connection between ethics and aesthetics at all. One is about the *good* and the *bad* in some sense, and the other is about what constitutes beauty and ugliness. At first sight the two seem to be unrelated. This view is called autonomism. As there are a number of reasons to regard autonomism as doubtful, the first part of this chapter will focus on exactly this complex of problems concerning autonomism. Thereafter I will look at the moralist view as it is put forward by Berys Gaut, who claims that an unethical content will always result in an aesthetic flaw, and discuss why this theory cannot be true concerning Heavy Metal. In the last part of the chapter I will show why the position called immoralism (or contextualism) is the preferable theory.

2. The Rejection of Autonomism

Philosophers, such as Monroe Beardsley have claimed that there is no reason to propose any real connection between the good and the beautiful, or generally speaking: there is no connection between ethics and aesthetics¹. The claim is that it literally makes no sense to attempt the establishment of a relation between the two concepts, because the two are fundamentally different². This claim is called autonomism, and indicates that no content of any artwork can make any difference to any artworks' aesthetic value. However, this view is, at best, irrelevant as I will show, but since autonomism has been popular to defend, it is necessary to show why the theory does not hold.

Autonomism holds that the ethical content of an artwork is irrelevant to the aesthetic value of the work, but what we are concerned with here, is works of art (music to be specific), where the ethical content is highly relevant. To reject autonomism, it has to be made clear how ethical content can be relevant for the value of this type of artwork. It is quite often the case that we evaluate works of art partly according to its ethical proposals. We praise some works of art for their ability to illustrate the goodness in humans for instance³. Therefore the notion that the ethical content in such works of art is always irrelevant will be wrong in such cases. Certainly there will be other cases in which the ethical content is highly irrelevant for the aesthetic evaluation of an artwork. But for this chapter's purpose it is indeed important to notice that there actually *are* cases in which the ethical content is pertinent/relevant for the aesthetic value of certain works of art – such as for music.

One way to do this is to imagine a piece of music, where the ethical content would normally considered to be relevant, like the song Noose by the band Sentenced for example, without any ethical content. Obviously, it is a song about committing suicide, which is - for obvious reasons – socially considered a bad and irreversibly desperate act, and therefore often stays a

concealed topic within society. Imagine if Noose kept its sound but changed the content – the lyrics of the song - and the song changed into something absolutely irrelevant to any ethical evaluation, would this simultaneously change the aesthetic value of the work? Claiming that the aesthetic value actually changes, I will, in the following, elaborate on the important role of musical composition and thereby show why autonomism needs to be rejected in regard to the instant case.

3. The Case of Moralism

During the last decades there has been quite a lot of controversy surrounding the Heavy Metal culture. The prevalent concern has been the suicidal acts committed by some young Heavy Metal fans. Some people claimed that the music, as well as musicians are to blame for such tragedies. What is claimed here is that there is a direct connection between such tragedies and the content of the music. Some would perhaps propose that specific content (unethical in this case) can in some way corrupt the audience. Whether this is true or not, it may seem irrelevant for the discussion presented above. However, there is a connection between the debate about the controversies and the value-relation that should be given attention at this point. The claim that musicians can be the ones to blame for another persons suicide, can be formulated in terms of the reverse relation between the ethical content and the aesthetic value. If a work of art proposes immoral behaviour, its content is ethically flawed, thus (in the moralist view) aesthetically flawed, and in its effect can convince people to behave in a certain manner. But claiming this is to suggest even more than moralism. Holders of this position will have to claim at least the possibility of some works of art, being able to cause a change in a person's beliefs, specifically about ethical matters.

Berys Gaut, who is one of the well known experts in the debate about the relation between ethics and the aesthetics, put forward a model for analysing, and in the end reconstructing the theme in his work *Art, Emotions and Ethics* from 2007. The first thing to consider is whether the relation between ethics and aesthetics is invariant or complex⁴. If it is invariant, it means that the relation cannot change, no matter which artwork is evaluated. That is, if one is convinced that an ethical flaw necessarily results in an aesthetic flaw, then the relation is invariant⁵. To argue that the relation is complex, is to claim that the relation can vary, meaning that an ethical flaw in a work of art can in some cases result in an aesthetic merit, but not necessarily in all cases⁶.

The next thing to consider is whether the value-relation of ethics and aesthetics is symmetric or inverted. An invariant symmetric relation means that, in all cases, an ethical flaw will result in an aesthetic flaw. If the relation is inverted, however, it means that an ethical flaw will always result in an

aesthetic merit. For obvious reasons, such a position has never been noticeably promoted. All theories that suggest a complex relation between ethics and aesthetics will propose that the relation is symmetric in some cases, while inverted in others⁷. In order to have a plausible theory that proposes an inverted relation, it has to be complex rather than invariant. This position is often called immoralism (or contextualism in Gaut's terminology). If one holds that the relation is invariant and symmetric, it will be a variant of what is normally called moralism (or ethicism in Gaut's terminology).

	Invariant	Complex
Symmetric	Moralism / ethicism	Immoralism / contextualism
Inverted	Extreme immoralism	Immoralism / contextualism

This certainly raises the question why anyone should be a moralist? A moralist is committed to say that any ethical flaw within any work of art, will necessarily result in that work being also aesthetically flawed. This does not mean that a work is really bad, just because it contains an ethical flaw in its content. It is aesthetically flawed, in so far as it is ethically flawed⁸. So a song about suicide can still be considered good, but, it could never qualify to appear as "aesthetically perfect". Gaut however proposes that the use of what he calls "pro tanto principles" can justify the moralist view⁹. This means that thinking in terms of a work of art which is aesthetically flawed - in so far as it contains an ethical demerit - will allow the moralist to acknowledge that the aesthetic value of a piece of music, can depend on an ethical flaw in its content¹⁰. This seems to make moralism an attractive position to hold, but there remains one problem, which appears unsolved. The theory still implicates that any work of art which contains an ethical demerit is aesthetically flawed. This generates the result that artworks, and in this case lyrics praising suicide will consequently be valued lower than lyrics on the pleasant sides of life – at least as long as we will solely consider the aesthetic value to the extent of ethical content. The following section will focus on the (more) preferable alternative theory, especially in regard of Heavy Metal culture, namely immoralism.

4. Noise and the Aesthetics of Heavy Metal

Before focusing on immoralism (contextualism) it will be reasonable to examine some important points about the aesthetics of Heavy Metal music and its aesthetic perception. Since it is impossible to make a throughout analysis of the aesthetics of Heavy Metal, I will settle with the most important point, namely the use of noise in the composition. One of the most significant theories on the use of noise in music has been put forward by Theodore Gracyk, in *Rythm and Noise* (1996). Although he wrote his work on the aesthetics of Rock music, most of it can easily be transferred to the aesthetics of Heavy Metal, without any significant difficulties.

What we call noise can be divided into three categories:

1. Any sound that interacts with human communication
2. Any sound that disturbs humans
3. Any sound at a volume that can damage the listener physiologically

Noise in the first category will not be dealt with at this time, since it allows every sound any human might ever hear, to be noise, and if all sounds are considered noise we cannot distinguish noise from other types of sound, and therefore, the discourse would change into a general discourse on sound rather than noise¹¹.

The second category is more interesting for the chapter's purpose. What is often referred to as noise, are sounds that disturb us, and this is also what some people think of Heavy Metal, for exactly that very reason. In fact, most Heavy Metal music is composed with the intention to disturb the listener. What some people, who do not like to listen to the rough sound of Heavy Metal music, point at, is the feeling that it is hard to focus on other things, while listening to an 'infernal racket', such as referred to Heavy Metal music, playing in the background. Recognizing that the intention of Heavy Metal music is to disturb the listener, it becomes obvious at this point that this intention is overall fulfilled.

Concerning the third category of noise it is a well known fact that most Heavy Metal fans listen to music at a high volume, that could supposedly be loud enough to damage their hearing. It is quite often the case that the music is recorded at a rather high volume, which makes a difference in most cases¹². The reason for this can be found in exploring how the electric guitar works. What we hear, when we hear the sound of an electric guitar, is not the sound of the strings vibrating. Magnets are placed underneath the strings (these are called pick-ups) through which an electrical current is flowing. The vibration of the strings then is causing the above mentioned disturbance through this electrical current, which is also what the audience listens to through the speakers, along with harmonic overtones¹³. In order to get the desired sound out of this process, it will in some cases be necessary to

amplify the sound, because some sounds will not be audible at a lower volume. The reasons for the high-volume recording process are obvious at this point, but what does this have to do with the Heavy Metal audience listening to the music on a rather high volume in their own living-rooms too? In order to notice single parts of the music, it can be necessary to play the music rather loud. Often, Heavy Metal-bands are composed of four instruments (some even more), all playing fast in some cases, and when they are recorded at such a high volume, it might be hard to notice all elements of the music at the same time. At a low volume it is mostly the bass that drops into the background. Of course there are exceptions like the band Mötörhead, where the bass is constantly the most noticeable instrument. This is partly due to the special role the bass plays in a band like Mötörhead, where it takes over the role that would normally be performed by the lead guitar. It is of course possible to find more examples where the bass is noticeable, while not filling the role of the lead guitar. However, this shows that the listeners could miss out on a lot of details and good sounds if they do not pump up the volume on their stereos.

What does this say now about Heavy Metal music and the audience's culture/way of listening to it? Obviously, there are good reasons for applying the word noise to Heavy Metal, but it does not necessarily mean a bad thing. In fact it can help enhancing the meaning of the music, which will be explored on the example of the analyses of a song by the Finnish Metal band Sentenced.

5. Shouting Out in Misery

One thing that has not been mentioned yet is the important role of vocals in Heavy Metal music. It is true that not all vocals you will find in Heavy Metal are special in some way; instead there are various types of vocals used in different songs. Some remind the listener of screaming, some offer a very rough sound, and even others sing in a way that is far from what people normally call singing. The reason for this variety of vocal-types has to do with the variety of sound played by different Metal bands. Certain vocal-types are more soothing for certain music-styles. If a song is slow and melancholic it would seem inauthentic if the vocals were like Madonna's in Material Girl for example. It would at least be hard taking it seriously, as in the case of watching the film *Spaceballs* (which actually does not have the intention to be taken seriously) since it is supposed to be a parody on the cult film *Star Wars*. Even though *Star Wars* is fiction, and most of it impossible in reality, it is still more trustworthy as a story than *Spaceballs*. This important point will be reconsidered in the remaining chapter.

As it has been shown, it is an aesthetic merit if the vocals match with the overall sound of the music. An aggressive song about mass murder for example, will be more trustworthy if the vocals are as aggressive as the theme of the song, and perhaps sounding 'evil'. Thence the vocals, the music as well as the lyrical content should be connected in a trustworthy way, in order to receive, the best result regarding the aesthetic value of the work. Any disharmony between these three elements will be problematic for any piece of music, unless the point is to make something that corresponds to what *Spaceballs* is to *Star Wars*, namely a parody. Parodies are not necessarily aesthetically unfortunate, or even aesthetically worse than the work it is supposed to be a parody of. The aesthetic value in many cases depends on the ability to make the audience 'believe' in its concern. This does not mean that the audience should believe it to be the actual reality, but believe in it solely for the purpose of the aesthetic experience. The best films are often those who make the audience believe to see reality. A horror film that actually makes people scared is better crafted than one that does not.

6. Defending Immoralism

A big part of what can be called the ethical content of a piece of music is the lyrics. At least it is easier to deal with the meaning of the lyrical words, than merely dealing with sound, even though it can be claimed that the music in itself (without the lyrics) has a meaning that can, to a certain extent, be formulated in words. I agree with this view, but it is nearly impossible to say what a specific piece of music is about, without having any lyrics, since almost everyone could have their own individual beliefs about the meaning of the music.

To not dwell in this debate, it is necessary to strictly focus on the ethical content of music in reference to its lyrics. One of the examples I will focus on is the song *Noose* from the Finnish Metal band *Sentenced*. The song was released in 1996 on the album called *Down*. As the title of the song might reveal, *Noose* is about committing suicide by hanging oneself. The story in the song is quite similar to the poem by Novalis: *Hymnen an die Nacht*. The protagonist in *Noose* is depressed because his loved-one has taken her own life, by hanging herself. Up until her suicide her life had been depressing, and she decided to end it all by taking the rope. The grief ends up being too overwhelming and, he starts excessive drinking and in the end decides to take his own life: 'I'll take the rope just like you, and where ever you are I'll be too'. In this song it seems like suicide is presented as a preferable solution to the narrator's grief, which is – without major controversies – unethical in the way that suicide should not be promoted as a way of solving personal problems. Obviously, it is very common to condemn persons who are telling others to end their own lives just because it seems to them that they are not able to overcome their sadness otherwise. But what

makes the case of Noose different is the fact that firstly it is a fictional story, and secondly the writers of the song do not consider suicide a good ethical action. However, this does not show that it is a piece of music, in which the (un)ethical content is actually an aesthetic merit. As mentioned above, the discussion on the matter has mainly been focusing on the composition – this is not enough though to defend immoralism (contextualism). One of the best defences for immoralism can be found in Matthew Kieran's article 'Forbidden Knowledge: the challenge of immoralism' in *Art and Morality* from 2002. He calls his position cognitive immoralism, which proposes that unethical art, or art portraying unethical behaviour, will make people understand certain things about the world, which would otherwise remain invisible¹⁴. One of the examples he uses is bullying. He says that the only way to know what it is like to be a bully is to either *be* the bully or understand the bully¹⁵. But how can we come to understand a bully, without being one? A possible method might be a film that portrays the behaviour from the bully's perspective – assuming the film is made in a good manner in order to make the audience understand the bully's motivation for the unethical behaviour.

What those works of art do, is to award the audience with something cognitive. When we are confronted with this type of art, we achieve, what Kieran calls imaginative experience. It is a sort of indirect information about a certain aspect of the world. Looking at the information through another perspective than one's own, it will contribute to a greater understanding of the whole. This is, of course not a necessary condition to understand the world, but it is a sufficient condition. This means that when a person listens to a song like Noose, it might be possible for that person to learn what it is like, to be in such a mental-state where suicide seems like a good solution. If a work of art can teach us something about the world, it will, on this point have an aesthetic merit above a work from which we cannot learn anything.

This position has been criticized by Gaut, namely in the point which says that what will be learned from such imaginative experiences does not correspond to the content of the work. Noose is a song about killing yourself, because of a lost loved one, but we also learn how it feels to be in that mental-state. There is, in Gaut's view, no direct connection between the apparent content of the song, and what is learned, because we are not actually learning that hanging ourselves is a good idea. Gaut is right about this, but he seems to miss an important point. It is not important that what we learn is exactly the same as what is proposed in the lyrics of a song, but that we learn something about what it is like to be in the mental-state that has been described.

7. Enjoying the Misery

An often-stated question is how and why one can enjoy listening to songs about suicide, murder, alcohol- and drug-abuse etc. The answer is not as straightforward as one might think. The easy way out of this discussion is to make a statement about the difference in peoples taste in music, but that would disqualify any attempt to continue this debate, and in the end, when analysed sufficiently, people tend to be absolutists about this issue. Most music-lovers would agree on the fact that 'good music' is to be used about certain pieces of music that live up to some criteria. But these criteria obviously may differ from person to person.

It would not surprise anyone, if people claimed that they like music about the bad and difficult things in life, without any further explanation. It is exactly the explanation we are looking for. So how do we explain the enjoyment of hearing about the darker sides of life? This is where the issue becomes tough to deal with, but I will give an explanation in two ways. Firstly, one may argue that it is purely the aesthetic excellence that makes one listen to a song about suicide, if it lives up to the criteria about a certain connection between the music, vocals and lyrics as described above. But this alone will not give a sufficient reason why anyone would want to listen to the misery of another person's life. What it shows, is that anyone who claims this, will only say that they like to listen to music that lives up to their criteria for good music. This means we would have to assume that persons who like music would like to listen to the music they like personally, whatever kind of music it might be, and that the music happens to be about the miseries of life, is a coincidence.

Another quite different approach has been offered in the article 'Fade to Black: Absurdity, Suicide and the Downward Spiral' by Justin Donhauser and Kimberly A. Blessing in *Metallica and Philosophy* from 2007. As it is stated in the article, James Hetfield said in an interview in 1991 that in the process of writing the song *Fade to Black*, he was quite depressed and he used the artistic process as a sort of therapy¹⁶. In the end it would make him feel better. Therefore I claim that this is true, not just for the composer and performer, but also for the audience. That obviously shows that music is not only used to enjoy the good sound, but is also used as a way of dealing with one's emotional problems. Many Heavy Metal fans therefore tend to argue that they do not increase their aggressiveness, but rather calm down by channelling their bad vibes and moods out of their minds through the aggressiveness of the rough sound of Heavy Metal music. The music functions as a kind of catharsis then. If one feels depressed, it can be soothing to listen to songs about life being nothing but misery. But this is a claim that is difficult to proof and justify sufficiently and will therefore not be relevant in this analysis.

Likewise there exists the opinion that listening to depressive music actually makes people depressed or even more depressed as they already are. This is incorrect: for one thing there are certainly listeners who are not depressed when they listen to melancholic sounds. Further more it is noticeable that those people who are depressed already listen to the music for exactly this reason - it has a soothing effect on them and their mood, they just feel less alone with their emotions. This still leaves the possibility for other reasons to like music about suicide, without having the intention to end one's own life. This is important since – as has been shown - there can be several reasons why some people like aggressive music, other than being aggressive themselves. In the end, it is possible to enjoy the misery of others, even if the person feeling depressed or angry within the song may be a fictional character just like it is possible for people to like films in which fictional characters are killed.

8. Closing Remarks

It may at first seem like the issues addressed in this chapter, are not directly dealing with the problem of the suicides committed by Heavy Metal fans, and the artists being blamed for it as a consequence. However, there *is* a clear connection here. To claim that an artist carries the responsibility for another person's suicide, because that person may have liked the works of exactly that artist, also carries the accusation that the artist actually made the fan commit suicide. This is false. Firstly, to say that unethical behaviour is the consequence of listening to certain songs is to say that it can work in such a way, that it changes persons' ethical beliefs, or has the ability to make a person more depressed, and eventually depressed enough to want their own death. This is rather unlikely. The majority of musicians certainly compose music without the intention to make people commit murder or suicide. If a Sentenced fan for example feels the urge to hang him- or herself after listening to Noose, there is no proof that the music was actually causing this deadly urge, but rather the listener's own mind and psyche. Such an accusation would appear highly irrational, furthermore even wrong, since that would mean that there should be far more suicides committed. Therefore it is plausible to notice that it takes more than imaginative experience – as described by Kieran – to completely change a person's beliefs.

As I have argued above, there are good reasons to regard a version of immoralism (contextualism) as the correct theory. This consequently means that unethical content in a piece of art does not make art as such less valuable. Of course there is a difference between what 'good' art is, and what is good for, especially young people to be exposed to. There is a reason why certain films are rated as inappropriate for children to watch, but can the same be said to apply to music? In most cases, it will take a lot of time to get to know what a song is really about, and not just what the lyrics tell. Music is

never as direct as a film, also due to the lack of visuals in the music. Another difference is that parents do not forbid young children to watch horror films because they are afraid of them committing suicide. They do it because they want to prevent them from having nightmares, or behaving like the people they *see in the film*. It is hard to *see* what people do by hearing a song. Music is not telling people how to behave, but a story about life.

The opinions and theories that have been expressed and described throughout this chapter have disproved the view that Heavy Metal music was aesthetically unattractive or even bad. Furthermore it has been shown that the notion of Heavy Metal being ethically suspicious – in the way that the music leads people, either through lyrics or sound, to behave unethically – is false. How can anything, that is aesthetically good, be ethically bad, in the sense that the work of art should never have been made, or even that it ‘brings evil to the world’? As far as I am concerned and as the described theories have proofed it does not lead to more evil in the world, than by listening to Madonna’s Material Girl.

If anyone by default regards Heavy Metal as worthless or even bad for the world or our society, the suspicion lies close to assume that they never took the time to find out what the music really is about: Heavy Metal is not just music which breaks the silence. It is also music that demands attention; it openly disturbs people by opening new horizons in regard to life’s misfortunes. Nonetheless, the music’s aesthetics as well as its transmitted ethics are not able to push the audience into bad or even deadly behaviour.

Notes

¹ B Gaut, ‘Art and Ethics’ in B Gaut and D M Lopes (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Routledge, New York, 2001, p. 342

² Ibid. p. 343

³ Ibid. p. 344

⁴ B Gaut, *Art, Emotions and Ethics*, Oxford, 2007, p. 52

⁵ Ibid. p. 52

⁶ Ibid. p. 53

⁷ Ibid. p. 53

⁸ Ibid. p. 58

⁹ Ibid. p. 58

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 64

¹¹ T Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: an aesthetics of rock*. Duke University Press, London 1996, p. 103

¹² Ibid. p. 109

¹³ Ibid. p. 112

¹⁴ M Kieran, 'Forbidden Knowledge'. S. Gardner and J. Bermudez: *Art and Morality* Routledge 2002 p. 66

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 67

¹⁶ J Donhauser and K A Blessing, 'Fade to Black: Absurdity, Suicide and the Downward Spiral' in W Irwin (ed), *Metallica and Philosophy: A crash course in brain surgery*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2007, p. 149

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Fuck Euphemisms: How Heavy Metal Lyrics Speak the Truth About War

Richard J. Floeckher

Abstract

Heavy Metal music is in equal parts loved and reviled for the searing candor of its lyrics. On the one hand, its lyrics have faced obscenity charges and have been scapegoated for everything from teen suicide to school shootings. On the other, they have created meaning in the lives of millions of fans whose loyalty to the music is unshakeable. There are several aspects of heavy metal lyrics that are attractive to metal fans. This chapter will explore one important, and often overlooked aspect: The almost complete absence of euphemistic language one finds in their description of important social issues. The focus here will be on heavy metal's treatment of the theme of war. Borrowing part of its title from a brilliant, and often hilarious, essay, *Fuck Euphemisms* by author and translator Élise Hendrick, this chapter will develop Hendrick's position that euphemistic language disempowers oppressed groups by turning the crimes committed against them and the suffering these crimes produce into mere abstractions. Hendrick points out that euphemistic language is more obscene than the 'language of anger' it replaces. Heavy metal lyrics, by contrast are defined by their anger, and it is the rawness of its expression that attracts fans to its message. Where euphemisms hide reality, heavy metal lyrics expose it. Empowerment involves speaking and writing clearly about the reality of one's situation. Thus, while Heavy Metal lyrics are often nonpolitical in content (in terms of describing a particular political situation), they can still serve a concrete and, ultimately, positive political purpose. By providing uncompromising, in-your-face commentary on war that contradicts the doublespeak of politicians and pundits, Heavy Metal lyrics lend an angry voice to those whose voice goes unheard in the mainstream media. Drawing from Hendrick's essay, in addition to the work of Deena Weinstein, Keith Kahn Harris, I will examine this anti-euphemistic language of heavy metal lyrics from Black Sabbath and Metallica to Nine Inch Nails and Slayer.

Key Words: Hendrick, Nine Inch Nails, euphemisms, Metallica, Black Sabbath

The first verse of Nine Inch Nails' anti-war anthem 'The Good Soldier' describes in unambiguous terms the brutality of combat: 'Gunfire in the street/Where we used to meet/Echoes that are beat/When the bass goes

bomb/right over my head/step over the dead/Remember what you said/You know a part of my old life.’¹ Though written in response to the cruelty of the current Iraq war, from the perspective of an individual soldier, Trent Reznor’s uncompromising lyrics level a broader indictment against all wars, plainly exposing the suffering that politician and media doublespeak so often conceals. For this reason, his lyrics belong to a category of heavy metal lyrics that I would like to call anti-euphemistic lyrics. These lyrics convey such raw urgency about their subject that they can inspire political action despite their general apoliticalness. Considering the example of Reznor’s lyrics and others like his within a broader history of heavy metal, this essay will examine how these anti-euphemistic lyrics tell a crucial, and wholly different, story about war than the one fed to the public by politicians and the media who coddle them.

1. The Danger of Euphemisms

Not all euphemisms are harmful. Some like those used to describe certain sexual acts or unsavory bodily functions can actually serve the positive purpose of saving someone from embarrassment or inspiring a good joke. Euphemisms of this kind are typically benign and seldom result in injury or death. Their function is a matter of social grace and nothing else. Other euphemisms, however, are not so harmless. For example, those used in the context of war reporting and general discourse about war are downright dangerous. Euphemisms of this sort are designed to minimize human suffering and unite the public around a cause most reasonable people instinctively know to be wrong. In her essay *Fuck Euphemisms*, writer and translator Elise Hendrick offers this concise and unforgiving definition of euphemisms.

[Euphemisms] are bloodless, heartless evasions that destroy the truth whilst leaving the underlying facts mostly intact (though they are occasionally outright lies).²

Hendrick goes on to give examples of some of the more common euphemisms one hears during wartime.

Commentators speak of the war *in* Iraq. The United States intervened in Iraq, they will say, because of faulty intelligence. Regrettably, there has been the odd bit of collateral damage in the midst of what military experts call low-intensity conflict or counterinsurgency operations, which often involve depopulating large areas, include village closures, in order to neutralize insurgents. This policy of shock and awe counterinsurgency sometimes

involves civilian contractors, who help in the defense of Iraq.³

These are just a few of countless examples of euphemisms that disguise the brutality of war and render its victims, soldiers and civilians alike, alone with the reality of what has happened to them. When the news media abandon their responsibility to use language that accurately describes the brutality of war, what is left is a chasmal physical, psychological and emotional divide between the victims of war and those of us who only read about them. Indeed, euphemistic language turns war crimes into mere abstractions and, contributing to the already impersonal nature of modern warfare, cleverly transfers culpability away from the aggressor and onto the victims themselves. In the introduction to *What Every Person Should Know About War*, former New York Times correspondent and anti-war activist Christopher Hedges writes about how this affects the lives of veterans and civilian survivors.

Modern industrial warfare is largely impersonal. The effects of these powerful weapons and explosives on human bodies are usually not disclosed to the public. The physical and psychological wounds are lifelong crucibles carried by veterans and civilian survivors...Those who suffer from war's touch are often left to struggle with the awful scars alone or with their families.⁴

While it is wholly within the power of the media to generate empathy for the victims of war, this power so often goes untapped. Instead of describing with concrete, visceral language war's effect on human bodies and minds, the media betray war's victims by prettying up their experiences. One might wonder, however, how long the major newspapers and television networks would stay in business if they started reporting on the murder of innocent children instead of on that odd bit of collateral damage.

The primary danger of euphemistic language is not that it will inspire active violence in a public who is repeatedly exposed to it, but rather that it engenders passivity in that public. This, of course, is the path to a kind of violence, itself: the violence of apathy. For example, a person who reads the major mainstream newspapers and magazines and watches the mainstream television news may know at some level when he's being fed a pack of lies, but at another, deeper level he's quite content to accept them as a way to ease his conscience and stave off his feelings of helplessness. Better to accept the fictitious world the euphemism creates than go crazy with images of dead bodies and decimated cities. However, allowing oneself the refuge of this fantasy world is extremely dangerous. As Deans has noted,

‘people who speak with bland detachment of the random violence that is war have taken a dangerous first step toward accepting that violence.’⁵

2. Not Afraid to Bleed: Heavy Metal’s Anti-Euphemistic Lyrics

Euphemisms used to describe the violence of war tell us that suffering is not *really* suffering and that death is not *really* death. They tell us to deny instinct and common sense so that our conscience may remain intact.

The story heavy metal lyrics tell about war, however, is wholly different. Blunt, confrontational, visceral and often as obscene as the suffering they describe, heavy metal lyrics look war in the face. They are the camera rolling in the middle of combat—an honest, fearless witness.

If euphemistic language can be called the language of passivity, anti-euphemistic heavy metal lyrics should be called the language of anger. Far from describing war with bland detachment, heavy metal lyrics drop the listener in the middle of it, an experience that is intensified by the music itself. In this way, heavy metal lyrics (as a whole) function less as an explicit protest against war in the way that much folk rock (of both the past and present) does, and more as an exposing of war’s cruelties. The conscious goal is not to promote political reform, though heavy metal lyrics do hold the power to inspire political action. As Deena Weinstein has noted, Heavy Metal’s tendency is to hold that the deepest conflicts and frustrations in life cannot be resolved by political reform or revolution.⁶ Still, one detects in heavy metal lyrics a deep concern and respect for the victims of war that is expressed through the blunt-honest descriptions of the physical and psychological wounds inflicted upon them.

There are several examples of such anti-euphemistic lyrics that long-standing metal fans could cite off the top of their heads, but for the purposes of this presentation, I have decided to limit myself to five examples that I think best illustrate my point. Being concerned more with lyrical content than stylistic unity, I have chosen examples from several genres of metal spanning almost four decades, from 1970 to the present. These I have divided into two groups. The first group includes two songs: Black Sabbath’s ‘War Pigs,’ from 1970, and Guns N’ Roses’ ‘Civil War,’ from 1990 that address with broad strokes the phenomenon of war itself. The second group includes songs that tell the story of combat from a soldier’s perspective. Included here are Metallica’s ‘One’ from 1989, ‘Rooster,’ from 1992, by Alice In Chains, and ‘The Good Soldier,’ from 2007, by Nine Inch Nails.

‘War Pigs,’ doubtless the most famous song from Black Sabbath’s 1970 album *Paranoid* was originally titled Walpurgis, and was intended to describe the witches sabbath. The recorded version retains the original concept’s sense of place and progression of time—events seem to unfold over the course of a single night. But what we witness here is not a pagan celebration but an apocalyptic battle. Black Sabbath’s bleak, graphic lyrics

place us immediately into the middle of the fighting, where we are introduced to the generals of death and destruction.

Generals gathered in their masses/ Just like witches at black masses/
 Evil minds that plot destruction/ Sorcerers of deaths construction/
 In the fields the bodies burning/As the war machine keeps turning/
 Death and hatred to mankind/
 Poisoning their brainwashed minds, oh lord yeah!⁷

The opening lines of 'Civil war' by Guns N Roses have the similar effect of placing the listener in the middle of war's destruction. The song begins with the spoken lines

What we've got here is failure to communicate./Some men you just can't reach.../So, you get what we had here last week,/which is the way he wants it!/Well, he gets it!/N' I don't like it any more than you men⁸

Listening to the opening of 'Civil War,' we have the feeling of being guided across a body strewn battlefield, shortly after the fighting has ended. Though we are left to imagine what the scene actually looks like, we can't help but reflect with the speaker on its brutal meaninglessness. We are denied the comfortable illusions euphemisms provide, which, as Hendrick points out, 'seek to anaesthetize mind and conscience alike.'⁹ Instead, these 'anti-euphemistic' lyrics bring us face to face with the concrete physical reality of death and destruction, a reality seldom revealed in sanitized media reports of war.

The class dimension of war, so often concealed or trivialized by the media, is also exposed in these two songs. While most intelligent, well-informed people understand that it is typically the children of the lower classes who are dispatched to their death at the front lines of a war, it's frightening to ponder how little outrage this inspires in the public at large—outrage, for example, at the despicable, exploitive practice of stop-lossing by the United States Military of typically lower middle class and poor soldiers. How often do we hear, either from the mouths of politicians themselves or in the filtered sound bites of the dominant media, the class dimension of war presented in such unequivocal terms as those of Black Sabbath?

Politicians hide themselves away/They only started the war/Why should they go out to fight?
 They leave that role to the poor¹⁰

Or as it's portrayed in the scathingly simple rhyme of the chorus to 'Civil War'?

And/ I don't need your civil war/ It feeds the rich while it
buries the poor/ Your power hungry sellin' soldiers/ In a
human grocery store/Ain't that fresh/ I don't need your
civil war¹¹

One can easily imagine Ozzy Osbourne and Axl Rose standing before the United States Congress, echoing in song 2004 Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry's no-bullshit stance on stop-lossing, calling it precisely what it is: a back-door draft.

While the above pair of anti-euphemistic lyrics level damning critiques at the phenomenon of war, the next group reveals personal accounts of combat and its aftermath. Deeply personal and chillingly graphic, they map the psychological and physical wounds of the individual soldier. Indeed they put the shellshock back into posttraumatic stress disorder.

'One' by Metallica describes the tortured inner world of a World War I veteran (a world surely inhabited by countless other veterans from all wars everywhere). Confined to a hospital bed, the soldier is blind, mute and immobile. His body destroyed, his mind is nevertheless lucid, indeed terribly so. The song's lyrics emphasize, in no uncertain terms, the reality of war's effect on the human body. The body is not transformed into an abstraction here—something that can be neutralized or offered as collateral—but is described as the very vulnerable organism it is, one that can be wounded, burned and dismembered.

At the song's close, we learn that the soldier is the victim of a land mine. Its effect is clear enough:

Landmine has taken my sight/ Taken my speech/Taken my
hearing/Taken my arms/ Taken my legs/ Taken my
soul/Left me with life in hell¹²

The agony of Metallica's bed-ridden soldier is matched by the suffering experienced by combat weary soldiers in 'Rooster' by Alice in Chains and Nine Inch Nails' 'The Good Soldier.' The genius of these two songs lies in their ability to generate understanding of, if not empathy for the dreadfulness of the individual soldier's experience through visceral, penetrating imagery.

'Rooster' was inspired by the Vietnam War experiences of guitarist Jerry Cantrell's father, Jerry Cantrell Sr. Cantrell Sr. was nicknamed 'Rooster' as a young boy and the nickname stuck throughout his time in Vietnam. Indeed, the fact of the nickname's origin adds poignancy to its use

in the song. 'Rooster's' 'anti-euphemistic' lyrics capture the paranoia, distress, homesickness, regret, terror, exhaustion and physical pain of war. All of this is conveyed in the first verse.

Aint found a way to kill me yet/ Eyes burn with stinging
sweat/ Seems every path leads me to nowhere/ Wife and
kids household pet/ Army green was no safe bet/ The
bullets scream to me from somewhere¹³

And then, in the chorus, we hear the determination to survive laced with paralyzing fear.

Here they come to snuff the rooster/ Yeah here come the
rooster, yeah/ You know he aint gonna die/ No, no, no, ya
know he aint gonna die¹⁴

The same kind of lonely anguish is echoed in 'The Good Soldier' by Nine Inch Nails. Fifteen years after 'Rooster' made the devastation of the Vietnam War clear to a generation of young people once removed from it, Trent Reznor released the uncharacteristically political album Year Zero, whose song lyrics read like a litany of the sins of the Bush administration and their warmongering, religious zealot supporters. 'Good Soldier' tells the story of one soldier caught in the middle of the Iraq disaster. Indeed, what is most disturbing about the following lyrics is how, in an effort to console himself, the soldier adopts the very rhetoric that got him there in the first place.

Blood hardens in the sand/ Cold metal in my hand/ Hope
you understand the way that things are gonna be/There's
nowhere left to hide/'Cause God is on our side/ I keep
telling myself¹⁵

No doubt, Reznor's lyrics unapologetically expose the fusion of American military power and right wing religious fundamentalism. But, more importantly and generally, they underscore the power political doublespeak carries in times of war.

3. Can Anti-Euphemistic Heavy Metal Lyrics Inspire Anti-War Activism?

A good response to this seldom posed, though manifestly important, question might begin with the following quote about the nature of art in general. The quote comes from Pablo Picasso: 'Art is the lie that tells the truth.' This powerful statement is easy enough to understand. Art is the lie

because it is not the world that it depicts. But it tells the truth by depicting that world in terms plain, visceral and honest. Such an honest depiction of the world constitutes nothing less than the very foundation of empowerment and growth.

The aforementioned examples of lyrics from Black Sabbath, Guns 'N Roses, Metallica, Alice in Chains and Nine Inch Nails do indeed describe war in terms plain, visceral and honest. They may not provide a clarion call for political reform, but they do provide all who listen to them an alternative to media and politician doublespeak. We find in these lyrics a very real emphasis on how combat affects the body, mind and soul. The victims whose stories are told in these lyrics are not abstractions or statistics, but real, vulnerable human beings who have families, friends and histories.

It goes without saying that no matter how much euphemistic language and propaganda is used, war can never really be made agreeable. But it is clear to this writer, a citizen of a country whose public has been consistently coerced into passivity over the last eight years, that euphemistic language is a powerful, omnipresent and dangerous force. Of course, it would be naïve, unrealistic and perhaps a bit cruel to believe that if more people would just listen to heavy metal, the truth about war would be revealed to them and that from that point forward, they would consider the support of a war an unconscionable act. But, for those who do listen and do want to hear art speak truth to power, heavy metal's anti-euphemistic lyrics provide enough evidence for them to say fuck war and fuck euphemisms.

Notes

¹ Nine Inch Nails. Lyrics. 'The Good Soldier' *Year Zero*. CD Interscope Records. 2007

² Hendrick, Élise. 'Fuck Euphemisms.' *Life After Gonzales*. Posted Saturday, 17 November 2007. Accessed July 10, 2008. <http://lifeaftergonzales.blogspot.com>. Search under 2007.

³ Ibid

⁴ Hedges, Christopher. *What Every Person Should Know About War*. Free Press. 2003

⁵ Gladney, George Albert 'Euphemistic Text Affects Attitudes, Behavior'. *Newspaper Research Journal*. . FindArticles.com. 15 Sep. 2008. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3677/is_200501/ai_n13634103

⁶ Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: the Music and its Culture*. Da Capo Press. 1991, 2000.

⁷ Black Sabbath. Lyrics. 'War Pigs' *Paranoid*. CD. Vertigo Records. 1970

⁸ Guns N Roses. Lyrics. 'Civil War' *Use Your Illusion II*. CD. Geffen. 1991

⁹ Hendrick

¹⁰ Black Sabbath

¹¹ Guns N Roses

¹² Metallica. Lyrics. 'One' ...And Justice For All. CD. Elektra. 1989

¹³ Alice in Chains. Lyrics. 'Rooster' Dirt. CD. Columbia Records. 1992.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Nine Inch Nails

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PART 4

Cultural and Music Theory

The Call of Cthulhu: Narrativity of the Cult in Metal

Elizabeth A. Clendinning and Kathleen McAuley

Abstract

The works of H. P. Lovecraft are a common trope in many genres of metal. References to his work often focus on the dark deity Cthulhu, typically represented as summoned by priests of the Old Ones. Although references to Cthulhu and his priests take on many forms in these songs, one common format is for the song to narrate or directly represent the summons, often quoting specific chant passages from Lovecraft's works themselves. However, given the nature of vocal timbre and instrumental accompaniment used, it is often difficult to understand the incantations or the passages describing them. This performed conflict introduces a question: for whom are these chants executed? Are they intended for the singer, the audience, or as a means to communicate with some sort of dark power internal or external to the listeners? This chapter explores the interplay between voice and symbolic musical representation in works about Cthulhu such as 'Shackled To The Trilithon Of Kutulu' by Bal-Sagoth and 'Thy Cosmic Horror' by Black Dahlia Murder. We focus on the mediation and creation of the insider/outsider perspectives through levels of accessibility of sung text and musical representation of text, drawing comparisons between this and other 'cult chant' music. Ultimately, we will suggest that many works on Cthulhu echo patterns found in world religious traditions, where the aural representation of 'sacred' events is used to communicate with an uninitiated audience while the language of performance itself is reserved for the 'priests,' or stage performers and 'initiates,' those audience members who have learned the words before the performance.

Key Words: Cthulhu, horror fiction, H.P. Lovecraft, religion, performance, metal, ritual

1. Introduction

Morbid priest calling forth
Abominations of the sky!
Kutulu meets in the void
Ancient ones rule once more.

Morbid Angel, *Abominations of Desolation*, 1991

Eighty years after the first publication of 'The Call of Cthulhu' in the American science-fiction magazine *Weird Tales*, references to H. P. Lovecraft's fictional monster Cthulhu are common in black, death, power, and thrash metal released worldwide. A relatively minor figure in Lovecraft's collected works, the literary Cthulhu haunts victims in dreams, beguiles them through contact with 'diseased' books and artifacts, and repulses them with 'bestial,' 'mongrel celebrants.'¹ In his accounts, Lovecraft's 'scientific' male narrators dwell on the incurable insanity and alienation that plagues those who have fleeting, fragmentary encounters with Cthulhu's 'black seas of infinity,' rarely elaborating on the nature or origins of the beast.

In metal, however, variations on this Cthulhu mythos have been a consistent and vibrant motif since the early 1980s. Appearing regularly in a diversity of metal genres between 1984 and 2008, songs inspired by Lovecraft typically narrate a Cthonic apocalypse, recall Cthulhu's nightmarish home R'lyeh, or directly summon the dream-god and its spawn.² Often, direct invocations are made using specific chant passages taken directly from Lovecraft. In some cases, these passages are further combined with chant content from other mythological traditions. The timbre and instrumental accompaniment common to most genres of metal, however, can make the incantations and the passages describing them difficult to understand. Consequentially open to interpretation, a great deal of metal that makes reference to Cthulhu does so outside or in explicit contradiction to Lovecraft's descriptions of Great Cthulhu. Alternately casting bands and their audiences in the roles of worshipper, priest and deity, contemporary odes to Cthulhu have elaborated and popularized understandings of the 'Cthulhu cult' totally alien to their creator.

This tradition of homage and 'summoning' poses several key questions about the nature and purpose of Cthonic invocation in song. For whom are the chants and summons of Lovecraft-inspired metal executed? Are they intended for the artist, the audience, or as a means to communicate with some sort of dark power internal or external to the listeners? Variations in the genre suggest that most performers are not attempting to call forth Cthulhu in the same way that Christian metal calls upon the Holy Spirit or Satanist metal calls upon Lucifer. Contextualising the tension between accessibility of sung text and musical representation in Lovecraft-inspired metal over time, however, one can juxtapose Cthulhu-inspired 'cult chant' and the sacred music of many world religious traditions. Outlining the similarities between this kind of metal and holy music of the Roman Catholic Church and various shamanistic societies, we will ultimately suggest that metal's invocations of Cthulhu mirror performances in world religious traditions where successful aural representation of a 'sacred' event is equally or more important to audience understanding than direct access to the language of performance.

2. H. P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos

Understanding the historical context of H.P. Lovecraft's mythos gives perspective on Cthulhu's transition from literary dream-threat to metal messiah. Born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1890, Howard Phillips Lovecraft had a short but accomplished life. Survived after his death in 1937 by a small body of work that dwells extensively on the class and racial tensions, his works on 'the Mythos' are generally regarded as some of his most significant contributions to gothic horror and science fiction. First appearing in the 1920's prose poem 'Nyarlathotep,' fragments of this Cthulhu mythos can be found in nearly all of Lovecraft's subsequent work.³

Despite the current popularity of the Cthulhu in metal, however, only a fraction of the roughly 60 stories published or ghostwritten by Lovecraft during his lifetime deal specifically with the octopus-like marine god.⁴ Debatably first, the story 'The Call of Cthulhu' was published in 1926. A narrative piece based on the recollections of the great-nephew of 'George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages in Brown University,' it details one man's search for the origins and meaning of an idol of the 'nameless sky-spawn,' Cthulhu.⁵ Short works featuring Cthulhu and its worshippers such as 'The Mound' and 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' followed the 'The Call of Cthulhu,' as did novellas such as 'At the Mountains of Madness.'

In light of metal's later treatment of Lovecraft's mythos, several common features of these stories are unexpected. Their most prominent surprise is a shifting, nebulous treatment of Cthulhu itself: only slightly demystified in tales of 'the Mad Arab' and 'deathless Chinamen,' Cthulhu's trademarks are vague, hypnagogic premonitions of evil that drive those who encounter them insane with their promises of a 'holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.'⁶ Though great attention is paid to the internal state of the elites forced to search out the tentacle-headed creature, most of the stories' literal or factual knowledge of Cthulhu is ascribed to third party sources such as 'degenerate Esquimaux' and 'Louisiana swamp-priests,' testimony that is subsequently derided as 'evil,' 'incomplete' and untrustworthy.⁷ When a narrator comes into personal contact with a Cthonic ruin or Cthulhu's presence, the encounter is characterized as indefinite in nature, 'purely dream fragments involving no memory of volition, details, or physical exertion.'⁸ Thus, while Cthulhu's 'non-Euclidean' palace, 'flabby claws,' 'squid head,' 'membranous wings' and vast stench are direct textual references, Lovecraft constantly reminds the reader that Cthulhu 'cannot be described.'⁹ Cthulhu's return is also the subject of vague inference and repugnant avoidance, as noted by the narrator who concludes that '[Cthulhu] must have been trapped by the sinking whilst within his black abyss, or else the world would by now be screaming with fright and frenzy...but I must not and cannot think!'¹⁰

For Lovecraft, these encounters with Cthulhu are necessarily and desirably indeterminate. Constructed as the inappropriate knowledge of racially ‘degenerate’ or mentally weak men, Lovecraftian heroes cultivate a ‘placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity’ or face the true terror of the Cthonic beings: insanity, alienation, inexplicable death, and ‘babbling for eight years about horrors and then dying in an epileptic fit.’¹¹

3. The Cthulhu Cult: Transition from Text to Performance

Though Lovecraft’s explicitly Cthonic works were never lost to committed horror and science fiction fans, their emergence as a frequent trope in black, death, thrash and fantasy metal can be traced to inclusion in influential albums like Metallica’s *Ride the Lightning* and Celtic Frost’s *Morbid Tales*, both released in 1984. As noted previously, Lovecraft’s vision of Cthulhu is one of ineffable terror of the illicit. This literary Cthulhu is infinite and incomplete, interacting with the material plane through inference, dreams, and mutable impressions. Early Lovecraft references in metal are often similarly insignificant or indirect, approximating a literary vision of Cthulhu. In Celtic Frost’s ‘Morbid Tales,’ for example, a Yog Sothoth is connected with the tradition of Cthulhu-induced nightmares:

Agony and nightmare
To Yog sothoth they moan
Nightfalls, morbid affair.
Beard the faceless one

By the 1990s, however, songs and albums themed around Cthonic subjects began to emerge. Though technically true to Lovecraft’s literary form, many of these songs ignore or outright contradict the more subtle premises of Lovecraft’s Cthulhu. Bands such as Necromantia, Nile, and Holy Martyr, for example, describe Lovecraft’s supposedly inscrutable deity in minute detail. Taking on the role of priest, bands began to offer communal ‘prayers’ to a god that Lovecraft envisioned as shattering connections with communal social life. Liberal mixes of Cthonic mythology and Judeo-Christian or other mythological imagery have also appeared, as in Morbid Angel’s 1991 album *Abominations of Desolation*, where common representations of Satan and Cthulhu are invoked in turn:

Praise the beast, the chanting grew
Praise the beast with virgin blood
Praise the beast with soul and mind
Praise the beast and show the sign...

Morbid priest calling forth
 Abominations of the sky
 Kutulu meets in the void
 Ancient Ones rule once more

As Cthonic allusions in metal have become even more frequent towards the end of the 20th century, a new and largely self-generated understanding of Cthulhu as annihilator has become standard. In Internal Suffering's 2000 *Supreme Knowledge Domain*, for example, Cthulhu is described in the act of destroying the world, a threat Lovecraft notes only in passing. In 'Evil Sorcerers,' Internal Suffering sing as priests of Cthulhu rather than as the victims of Lovecraftian psychological malaise, describing

'Great destruction of everything... fire rains from the spheres
 Seas of blood spilled on the ground... powerful uprising of the Old Ones!
 IA! IA! ZI AZAG!
 IA! IA! ZI AZKAK!
 IA! IA! KUTULU ZI KUR!
 IA!'

Given Lovecraft's disgust with the worshippers of Cthulhu and their 'howls and squawking ecstasies' [sic], songs that describe and summon Cthonic subjects could be described as Lovecraft-inspired but not Lovecraftian. Why has Cthulhu come to represent the object of priestly petition rather than Lovecraft's alienating tormentor? Who or what is being invoked in these works? Exploring several examples of Cthonic text from a musical perspective, we will explore how and why Cthulhu has been used in a selection of contemporary metal songs, ultimately arguing that literary and textual understandings of Cthulhu in metal are secondary to the ambience created by the musical form of chant itself.

4. Metal, Ritual, and the Cthulhu Mythos

'From the Deeps' by the Norwegian black metal band 1349 is one example of a work with both mixed mythological references and a Cthonic summons. The song begins with homophonic chanting of 'Ia, ia,' the word commonly associated with the priests summoning Cthulhu. This is accompanied only by the slow crescendo of electric guitar. As the chanting fades into the background, the drum set and guitar parts enter at full force, launching into an instrumental section before the vocals re-enter. The first stanza of the song is all that can be understood clearly from simply listening

to the song, as most of the rest of the lyrics are obscured by the machine gun-like drumming. However, there are several references to Cthulhu in this stanza:

‘The stars are right!
For eons they have slumbered
Dead but dreaming
Waiting beneath the waves
Awaken!’

This stanza is drawn from phrases scattered throughout ‘The Call of Cthulhu,’ but instead has transferred the time and location of the ritual to the present. The rest of the lyrics are not clearly heard, and although they could apply to the appearance of Cthulhu, they could also apply to two other monsters referenced in the text: Kraken and Leviathan. The song ends with the chant of ‘Ia!’ again, fading to only vocals and then out completely.

This provides an interesting contrast with two songs by the English extreme metal band Cradle of Filth. For example, their song ‘Mother of Abominations’ from their 2004 album *Nymphetamine* begins with the unison chanting of ‘Ia, ia, Cthulhu fhtagn’ a common paraphrase of the chant of Cthulhu’s priests, ‘*Ph’nglui mglw’nafh Cthulhu R’lyeh wgah’nagl fhtagn,*’ drawn from ‘The Call of Cthulhu.’ Although this opening is extremely similar to that of 1349’s ‘From the Deeps,’ the remainder of ‘Mother of Abominations,’ sung in nearly unintelligible registers of ‘metal growl,’ has absolutely nothing to do with Cthulhu, instead describing a figure ‘Our Lady Overkill’ and making comparisons to other mythological beings, specifically Vulcan and the gorgons. The song ‘Cthulhu Dawn’ from their 2000 album, in fact, contains no other direct references to Lovecraft’s works besides using these words as a refrain in ‘death growl,’ which contrasts greatly with the rest of the song, sung in a higher-register growl that could be construed as a description of what would happen on a day when Cthulhu did return.

The lyrics from these songs are not necessarily directly linked with Lovecraft’s works, but are either loose descriptions of what the coming of Cthulhu would entail, or are devoted equally to other dark deities. However, in each song the references to Cthulhu are prominently placed, due both to their contrasting timbres and the overall song structures. This suggests that in the case of these songs, the singers both ‘summon’ Cthulhu through traditional sonic means of invoking a god, but more so to use him as a thematic element than to worship him. The fact that these summons are intelligible while the rest of the song is not suggests that in ‘calling Cthulhu,’ these bands are giving the audience members a ‘shortcut’ to communing with this idea of ultimate evil, then using the remainder of the music (and the lyrics, for those who understand them) to elaborate upon this essence of

darkness.

Instrumental works whose titles mention Cthulhu support this idea. The earliest instrumental metal song to feature Lovecraftian themes, and debatably the first metal song ever to make direct reference to Cthulhu, is Metallica's song 'Call of Ktulu' from their 1984 album *Ride the Lightning*.¹² The track opens with an eerie wind sound and gentle guitar arpeggios before increasing in pace with the bass below playing a series of edgy three-note figures. After the drum set enters, these rhythmic and melodic figures repeat, unfolding over time gradually like a thrash minimalist work. The lyrical mood returns, and the song ends with a progression of power chords. In this case, the title seems only used to evoke a mood symbolized by Cthulhu, with further exploration of this theme reserved for 'The Thing that Should Not Be' from their 1988 album *Master of Puppets*.

Another example of a Cthulhu-themed instrumental is the song 'Cthulhu Fhtagn!' by the Swedish death metal band Death Breath. The song primarily consists of four chords repeated in different keys, overlaid by heavy drumming and repeated scales and arpeggiated figures in the electric guitar part. As the song progresses, it also features sections of heavily distorted guitar. There are two lines of lyrics in the song that are sung in a growl, and the only words that are clearly legible are 'Cthulhu fhtagn.' In an interview with 'Voices from the Dark Side,' when asked about their references, Death Breath drummer Nicke Anderson replied: 'We write lyrics that seem to fit the music and so far they've been dealing with overwhelmingly bad breath, zombies, psychopaths, Armageddon, capital punishment, Satan, you name it. Anything Lovecraftian seem to work as well.'¹³ In so far as 'Cthulhu Fhtagn!' has lyrics, this supports the idea that lyrics are primarily selected to give form to the atmosphere invoked by the song.

Of the entire songs and albums devoted to Cthulhu, one of particular interest is 'Thy Horror Cosmic' by Black Dahlia Murder on their 2003 album *Unhallowed*. Although it does not quote directly, the song paraphrases aspects of the story 'The Call of Cthulhu,' referring to one who 'for vast aeons has slept, lurking 'neath the haunted deep, sea soaked perversion,' which mirrors the various accounts of those who encountered the cults of Cthulhu in the story. Repeatedly throughout the song, the singer calls for this lord to 'arise,' thus apparently invoking the dark god. However, the piece itself is a fairly consistent stream of metal growl and repeated drum and guitar patterns—if this song is meant to evoke Cthulhu in the minds of the audience or be intelligible to the band, it would only be through study of the lyrics as written, not as sung.

A good contrast to this is the song 'Shackled To The Trilithon Of Kutulu' from Bal-Sagoth's 2006 album *Cthonic Chronicles*. Bal-Sagoth is well-known for drawing inspiration from the stories of H.P. Lovecraft and other horror writers contemporary to Lovecraft. Once again, most of the

lyrics of this song do not draw directly from the stories, but use the imagery from Lovecraft's works to create the story of the song. In this song, there are two voices present: one lower in range that serves primarily as narrator, while one in a higher range (and is harder to hear) that sings lyrics invoking Cthulhu directly. For example, the 'priestly' voice calls: 'Rise o' spawn of Chaos and elder night/With these words (and by the sign of Kish), I summon Thee,' and "'Hear me, Lord of Dreams,' 'Hear, Thy servant calleth Thee.' / In Thy tower they have sealed ye, dead yet ever dreaming./O' great Lord of the Deep, awaken from Thy deathly sleep.' Although one can tell that this voice is summoning directly, the narrator is much easier to understand, and quotes the passages from Lovecraft more directly: 'In His house at R'lyeh, dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.'/'Yet He shall rise, and His kingdom shall cover the earth!' Behind all of this is a continuous, up-tempo pounding and crashing of drums and guitars. The one mostly incomprehensible voice is 'communicating' with Cthulhu while the other is more explaining what is happening to the audience, suggesting multiple levels of mediation from a god to the average listener.

In all of these cases—whether in brief textual references, titles of instrumental works, or the use of comprehensible versus incomprehensible voices in full songs—Cthulhu is being invoked either musically or textually; however, aside from brief significations that the songs are about Cthulhu, direct communication with Cthulhu (such as passages addressing him directly) are rarely comprehensible to the casual listener. In a sense, the function of the singers within this context resembles that of religious leaders in a variety of traditions, including shamanism and the Roman Catholic Church, in the role of 'bridging the natural and supernatural worlds.'¹⁴

In the case of shamanic traditions worldwide, incantations may be sung in the native tongue, but their accompaniment (whether it be rattles in the case of the shamans of the Warao in South America or hourglass drums and bell trees in Korea, or anything in between) and the song formats and timbres contribute to this communication with the spirits. For example, in the case the shamans among the Warao group of Venezuela, shamans possess certain skills enabling them to know the proper songs for harnessing power of spirits; although in this case their actual words can be understood by the listener, the precise combinations and inflections of words and specific types of song ending-phrases and formal structures (whose powers are unknown to all except the shamans) are what are able to complete this communication with the world beyond. Further, in contacting these spirits, the shamans are 'sing[ing] for power' - using their musical abilities to communicate with the supernatural world for gain.¹⁵ Since those who are observing the shaman or have called upon his help do not fully understand the powerful workings of his song, they must allow the shaman to communicate through music on their behalf, and trust that the music communicates the correct messages.

In the Catholic catechism, priests are often either portrayed as manifestations of Christ or as being imbued with some of the powers of Christ (for example, being able to perform transubstantiation and to be able to hear confession.) Musical worship has historically and currently been important in this tradition as well. During medieval times, vocalists or instrumentalists were often only drawn from the clergy, and all services and music were in Latin, primarily Gregorian chant.¹⁶ In this case, this meant that the majority of worshippers, illiterate in Latin, could not understand most of the service or the words to its music, instead had to rely on their basic knowledge of the meaning of the text rather than specific words. In this case, then, only the initiated (generally the clergy and those educated in both reading, writing and religion) could fully understand the meaning of the songs - the rest, not able to understand the language, would only be able to follow along with the suggestion of the music and theme.

The type of communication taking place with Cthulhu in these songs is similar - while the band members have the capability to replicate this sonic communication, they do so in a medium where sound is more important than words to comprehension, even though the words themselves often contain the true appeals to this 'divinity.' Of course, the bands are not trying in all earnestness to communicate with Cthulhu; as one fan of Lovecraft and metal pointed out, this is a 'way of doing dark creepy spirituality...[invoking] monster gods without resorting to...cheesy reverse Christianity.' In light of this and the fact that Cthulhu is only one of many dark gods commonly invoked in metal, it seems that the most important aspect is the power and dark imagery of Cthulhu invokes by being a part of the song. Nor are the lyrics, the exact verbal means of summoning, truly important; as another fan noted, 'The thing with death metal lyrics... [is to] just enjoy the vibe of the music...know that the lyrics are bound up with the cover art, what you assume the lyrics are going to be about...general vibe and content... the title of the song and the sound of the music is enough to guess what the lyrics are about.' Thus it seems that it is the knowledge of this communication with Cthulhu as evoked by the title, audible refrains, and music itself, that creates an atmosphere that can channel the dark imagery and energy of Cthulhu into an enjoyable and transcendent metal experience for the fans.

5. Conclusion

Although 'the call of Cthulhu' as it is presented in metal cannot be said to serve the same religio-spiritual functions as found in the music and rites of world religions, or even Christian and Satanist metal, it has adopted many similar aural and textual features as these religious musics that are used to communicate the arcane knowledge of mystical ritual with congregants. Thus it seems appropriate, when the language cannot be understood, for the musical ethos of these metal pieces to carry the bulk of communicatory

power - and it is equally appropriate for Cthulhu to be manifest thus in these metal paeans, as it was Lovecraft who wrote in an autobiographical essay that 'atmosphere, not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction.'¹⁷ And what better home for Cthulhu than in the metal genre, where skilled performance can elevate the horrific and the hideous to the sublime? For final consideration, we end with a description of the priests in 'The Call of Cthulhu,' which seems just as apt for the pieces explored in this chapter.

There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other. Animal fury and orgiastic license here whipped themselves to daemoniac heights by howls and squawking ecstasies that tore and reverberated through those nighted woods like pestilential tempests from the gulfs of hell. Now and then the less organized ululation would cease, and from what seemed a well-drilled chorus of hoarse voices would rise in sing-song chant that hideous phrase or ritual: 'Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.'¹⁸

Notes

¹ H. P. Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', in *Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Joyce Carol Oates (ed), The Ecco Press, Hopewell, New Jersey, 1997, pp. 53-62.

² Though Cthulhu's name was no doubt coined to recall the term 'chthonic,' an adjective meaning 'of or relating to the underworld,' we capitalize it to suggest its use as a pronoun, 'of or relating to Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos.'

³ Some, like 1917's 'Dagon,' reference an unnamed creature with traits that would later be ascribed to Cthulhu.

⁴ S. T. Joshi, 'Introduction', in *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honor of H. P. Lovecraft*, David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (eds), Associated University Presses, London, 1991, pp. 30-31.

⁵ H. P. Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', in *Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Joyce Carol Oates (ed), The Ecco Press, Hopewell, New Jersey, 1997, pp. 75-76.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 58-67.

⁸ H.P. Lovecraft, 'At the Mountains of Madness,' in *Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Joyce Carol Oates (ed), The Ecco Press, Hopewell, New Jersey, 1997, pp. 217.

⁹ Since Cthulhu's 'horrors' are often barely concealed terror at racial taboo violation, this frequent conceit seems to serve the reliability of the Lovecraftian narrator. In Lovecraft's earlier works, any white man that comes

into contact with Cthulhu is ‘polluted’ or driven insane; rather than transmit knowledge through such a treacherous source, Lovecraft presents ‘scientific’ third-person accounts of encounters with the beast. In later works, Lovecraft turns to first-person, explicit invocation of the racial horror of Cthulhu. Describing a Cthonic sentry in *The Mound*, for example, the narrator notes, ‘I saw the same thing that poor Heaton saw... it had been a very human being once; and what is more, it was *white*’ [italics original].

¹⁰ H. P. Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, in *Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Joyce Carol Oates (ed), The Ecco Press, Hopewell, New Jersey, 1997, pg. 76.

¹¹ H. P. Lovecraft, ‘The Mound’, in *Black Seas of Infinity: The Best of H. P. Lovecraft*, Andrew Wheeler (ed), SFBC Science Fiction, New York, 2001, pg. 392.

¹² Gary Hill, *The Strange Sound of Cthulhu: Music Inspired by the Writings of H. P. Lovecraft*, Lulu.com Press, 2006. Hill suggests that Black Sabbath’s song ‘Behind the Wall of Sleep’ (1970) contains the first metal reference to Lovecraft’s works; however, considering he quotes band members as denying this direct influence, it seems that the Metallica song has this honor.

¹³ Frank Stöver, ‘Death Breath,’ interview from ‘Voices from the Dark Side,’ <http://www.voicesfromthedarkside.de/interviews/deathbreath.htm>, accessed 10 October 2008.

¹⁴ Dale A. Olsen, *Music of the Warao of Venezuela: Song People of the Rain Forest*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1996.

¹⁵ Olsen, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁶ This only officially ended with the Second Vatican Council in 1962, and Gregorian chant is still considered to have a privileged place in the Catholic liturgy.

¹⁷ H. P. Lovecraft, ‘Notes on Writing Weird Fiction,’ in Wheeler, op. cit., p. 526.

¹⁸ H. P. Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, in *Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Joyce Carol Oates (ed), The Ecco Press, Hopewell, New Jersey, 1997, pg. 62.

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Barbarians and Literature: Viking Metal and its Links to Old Norse Mythology

Imke von Helden

Abstract

Viking metal emanated in the late 1980s in Scandinavian countries, pioneered by the Swedish band *Bathory*. It was further developed and coined by Norway's Enslaved who combine Viking topics with a special 'Northern' sound. In terms of contents, viking metal is focused on the Viking Age, Old Norse mythology, pre-Christian religions and nature. Bands like *Amon Amarth* and *Enslaved* are increasingly popular among metal fans all over the world and will render the basis for my analysis. The following chapter will examine the reception of Old Norse mythology in viking metal music in terms of both lyrics and cover artworks. Viking metal bands adopt and reinterpret saga themes, stories and characters, mainly taken from the Eddas. Heroic or romantic imagery plays an important role among metal bands in general. Strong Viking warriors in chain mail and leather as well as scenes of assumedly everyday Viking life in Northern landscapes can be found in numerous cover booklets.

Key Words: Viking metal, Old Norse mythology, Enslaved, Amon Amarth, Norway, Sweden, Viking imagery.

1. Viking Metal

Viking metal is a comparatively young subgenre of heavy metal music. There are difficulties in defining it, because the definition - apart from certain elements like anthem-like choruses - is not based entirely on musical features and overlaps with other metal genres. The music derives from the also Scandinavian-coined genres of black and death metal. It is furthermore closely linked to another subgenre called pagan metal, which deals mainly with Pagan religions and lies in a broader context where not only Old Norse mythology is dealt with, but also Celtic myths and history, fairy tales and other elements of folklore. Traditional instruments like the violin or flute are used more often in pagan than in Viking metal music.

Hyper-masculinity, excess and images of heroic warriors can already be found in the early lyrics of classic heavy metal bands like *Yngwie Malmsteen* and *Manowar*. In Viking metal lyrics and imagery, there is a focus on strength and barbarism: both are deeply concerned with displaying heroic warriors, fight and - in addition - untamed and barren nature. There are

also motifs of freedom, masculinity, adventure and fantasy imagery and stories.¹

Nationality and a deep interest in the own country's history are deeply embedded in Viking metal.² Music journals identify *Bathory*'s 'Blood Fire Death' as the first viking metal piece, because of the cover artwork and the strong identification of mastermind Quorthon with his Viking ancestors.³ The link between Scandinavian musicians and their Viking roots is often stressed in promotion material and in interviews. Five years after 'Blood Fire Death', Norwegian Enslaved took up the subject of their supposedly barbarian ancestors and the Old Norse literature in both lyrics and imagery (cover artwork, band photos). There were several other, mostly black metal-oriented bands that followed this idea. During the 1990s, Swedish *Amon Amarth* added a new dimension to the definition of viking metal by means of their death metal style of music.

Two kinds of approaches to the Viking motif and Old Norse literature are dominant in viking metal: One is concerned mainly with cultivating an image of strength and barbarism and with quoting stanzas from the poems and sagas which, as a result, romanticise the subject and indicate escapist ideas. Like Trafford and Pluskowski in their essay on 'Antichrist Superstars' state, 'what matters is what they [the Vikings] stand for in popular cultural terms'.⁴ The second approach puts much more emphasis on being historically correct and on dealing with Old Norse mythology as the sole focus of lyrics and identity. Both approaches stress personal links to the Vikings as their ancestors.⁵ Moreover, the lyrics are often written in Nordic languages like Norwegian, Old Norse and Swedish. There are also examples in Finnish and Faroese. There are, of course, also many texts written in English, in order to ensure and enhance the comprehension of the lyrics.

Many viking metal musicians turned away from the black metal-linked Satanism of the early 1990s - when young Norwegian musicians burned down medieval stave churches - to Viking motifs and more indistinct allusions to 'old gods' and the subject of the Christian oppression of their heathen ancestors.⁶ With the exception of few examples in the metal scene, there is no close link between Nordic religions and black and viking metal respectively. Heathen religions like Odinism have never constituted a vital part of the viking metal scene. The ideology of viking metal is not at all homogeneous. There are many ideas about what constitutes viking metal: descent or music, image, ideology in any shape or historical correctness.

2. The Reception of Old Norse Mythology and the Viking Age

Heather O'Donoghue in her 'Remarkable History of The Norse Myths' *From Asgard to Valhalla* observes that:

Norse Myths functioned both as marker of cultural familiarity - the beliefs of 'our' ancestors - and also as a source of arcane allusion, available to those who pride themselves on their ability to deal in difficulty and strangeness.⁷

The same is true for the reception of Old Norse literature in heavy metal music. As I have already noted with regard to *Bathory*'s lyrics, Viking ancestors, their ability to fight and to live in an inhospitable environment as well as pre-Christian Scandinavian cultural heritage and literature were a great inspiration for making this kind of music. This can also be seen in the imagery which will be analysed below. Taken together, these aspects of content and imagery cultivate a romantic, often escapist image.

Considering the contents of the lyrics, allusions to Old Norse mythology are frequently employed by viking metal bands. As the following examples will demonstrate, hardly any other subjects and motifs can be found in the lyrics. Saga material is being retold and reinterpreted, sometimes even quoted literally in the songs. Fascination for native folklore and tradition as well as primal energies within man is displayed.⁸ Christian oppression is a recurring motif, too. Some musicians also involve racist ideology in their lyrics, as seen in the case of *Burzum*. Today though, most bands dissociate themselves resolutely from right-wing ideologies. Another omnipresent aspect in terms of lyrics is the portrayal of Northern landscape in order to create an atmosphere of bleakness and untamed nature, which is underlined by the raw and untamed style of music. Both underline the Viking motifs. In contrast to musicians who have studied mythology and linguistics, there are various bands that promote stereotypical views on the Viking Age and Norse mythology. Within the metal scene, diffuse ideas about Vikings who fight against Christian oppression and who are in an unreflected manner associated with virtues like heroism, bravery and masculinity have established themselves and continue to fascinate a considerable number of metal fans. Like in Old Norse mythology, alcohol plays an important role in both lyrics and promotion which also affects the bands' image.⁹ Apart from beer and other drinks mentioned in Norse sagas, it was mead that made its way into the texts and, what is more, into the metal concert halls of Europe.¹⁰

Nearly all lyrics of the Swedish band *Amon Amarth* cover mythology and the Viking Age. Founded in Stockholm in 1992, the band has currently established itself as one of the leading death metal bands in Europe.¹¹ The band members lay much emphasis on a Viking image rather than a correct historical context. They state that they - as opposed to right wing enthusiasts - are merely interested in mythology and the Viking Age because of their personal interest in their own ancestral roots. Recurring motifs on every single one of *Amon Amarth*'s seven albums are momentary

pictures of supposedly Viking life. A quantity of songs deals with Viking warfare against Christian oppression, like the song 'The Sound of Eight Hooves': 'He's running through the woods so black/ A loyal servant of Christ/ Dogs are barking down his back/ He's running for his life'¹² Revenge and heroism as well as details of killing acts and warriors going berserk are other means of referring to the Viking Age, as in the lyrics of 'For the Stabwounds in Our Backs'.¹³ Allusions to Old Norse mythology are frequently applied and quoted, too. The names of Óðinn, Loki and other mythological characters are recurring examples in various songs like 'Where Silent Gods stand Guard'¹⁴ or 'Annihilation of Hammerfest'¹⁵, an example of saga rewriting. Religion plays a peripheral role in the lyrics only. Furthermore, there are very few allusions to actual historical events, like the war of King Olaf against the Irish.

Enslaved from Western Norway, on the other hand, deal with mythology and Vikings in a different way. Their early albums, like 'Vikingligr Veldi', concentrate entirely on Old Norse mythology and coined the Scandinavian Viking metal scene like no other band. Several lyrics include descriptions of Old Norse gods and attributes and stories connected with them, for example the song 'Heimdallr', in which the reader is informed about the most important characteristics of the Æsir god. Other means of applying mythology involve references to heathen deities in idiomatic expressions ('Kingdom of the Hammer' meaning Norway in the song 'Living beneath the Hammer'). There are also extensive descriptions of nature, the characteristic shore and the rough climate. Because of the newly upcoming trend of uncritically applying mythology in viking and pagan metal lyrics, the band dissociate themselves from the term and accuses other bands of using slogans in a stereotypical way. *Enslaved's* Ivar Bjørnson states that his interest in his ancestral roots was aroused by his seeing himself in the wider context of the world as a whole and helps to understand other cultures instead of fearing or rejecting them.¹⁶ Consequently, the new albums since 'Monumension' - after 2001 - seem philosophical rather than mythology-oriented.

Imagery has always played a vital role in heavy metal. Visual media like CD cover designs, band photographs, merchandise and web site designs are all used to cultivate image. Many black and death metal bands favour martial images of violence, weapons and battlefields.

The cover artwork of the majority of bands, for example, is not exclusively based on the material culture of the Viking age. Martial imagery is also favoured on a broad basis, but not always used in a historically correct manner.¹⁷ This combines with the fascination for ancestral roots (cf. pagan metal) and pre-Christian heritage, expressed visually through mythology (symbols, runes and saga characters) and aesthetics of Northern landscapes.

Barbaric image in appearance and demeanour, like in black metal is another important means of self-representation.¹⁸ The image of strong male warriors who defend their homes and families and fight bravely is promoted widely. Most bands try to convey their vision of a glorious past which in most cases does not have much in common with historical facts. Images like this can be found on several cover artworks of *Amon Amarth*. Their album covers are dominated by fire on a dark background. The albums 'Versus the World' and 'The Crusher' show a warrior in loincloth, fighting unknown dangers. *Enslaved's* cover of 'Eld' shows the singer of the band in Viking clothing and chain mail, with a drinking horn and a sword in his hands. Around his neck is a pendant of *Mjølfnir*, more commonly known as Thor's hammer.¹⁹

In interviews with Scandinavian bands, there is always much talk of a very strong attachment to nature (which plays a very important role within the viking metal scene). *Unleashed's* singer Johnny Hedlund says in an interview, that

[...] the influences that I have are actually from my ancestors and from sitting in the countryside and feeling the power of nature – just by sitting there knowing that my grandfather's, father's father was standing here with his sword...by knowing that you are influenced from it.²⁰

This corresponds with *Enslaved's* cover artwork of 'Blodhemn', which shows the band members standing on the shore, surrounded by rocks, dressed in Viking clothing and armed with swords. The background is made up of the sea and a drifting Viking longship underneath the outlines of a gigantic human skull that appears to be hovering in a darkening sky. The combination of atmosphere, landscape and band members' appearance form an image that shows the essence of viking metal in a single picture.

3. Barbarians and Literature

What do barbarians have to do with literature? The main focus of most Scandinavian viking and pagan metal bands is the history of their own cultural roots. The bands can be distinguished by their different approaches to Norse mythology. There are bands like *Enslaved*, who adopt a critical and well-informed perspective at their own history and even study the subject at university. On the other hand, there are bands like *Amon Amarth*, who claim they have not even really read the sagas, and who utilise Old Norse mythology as an overall image carrier that is as famous among metal fans all over the globe as it is popular.²¹ What both bands and their supporters have in common is the enthusiasm for wild, raw, energetic music and corresponding contents as well as imagery.

In the Scandinavian countries themselves, bands like Enslaved are well known even among ‘normal’ people and their international success is being reported in newspapers and on TV. Norwegian media channel NRK proudly writes about the band’s success and labels the members ‘keepers of the cultural heritage’.²² Considering that a few years earlier some of the band’s members were active in Norway’s black metal scene, which was commonly associated with church burnings and periodic outbursts of violence, this positive media reaction may appear rather odd. However, it also serves to illustrate that the people’s passion for their cultural identity is not limited to the viking metal scene. Influenced by their Scandinavian idols, ancestral imagery nowadays functions without boundaries: The members of Swiss pagan-folk metal band *Eluveitie* successfully stress their Celtic roots in music, image and lyrics. The extent of the Scandinavian influence as a force of its own becomes clear when reading about German bands like *Drautan* who write songs in Norwegian. Metal from Norway even enhanced the number of students of Norwegian in Italy: NRK broadcasted the TV show ‘Typisk Norsk’ that shows a report about black metal-enthusiastic students in Rome who learn Norwegian in order to really understand the lyrics as well as its origin.

Notes

- ¹ S Trafford & A Pluskowski, ‘Antichrist Superstars. The Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal’ in D W Marshall (ed), *Mass Market Medieval. Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture*, McFarland, London, 2007, p.61.
- ² This fact nourished the already existing racism within the scene in various cases.
- ³ B T Jaschinski, ‘Laenderspecial Schweden’, *The Legacy Chronicles: Pagan Fire*, special issue of Devil Inc. Presseverlag, Saarbrücken, 2007, p.66.
- ⁴ Trafford & Pluskowski, op.cit.,p. 61.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, p. 63.
- ⁶ M Moynihan & D Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos. The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (new edition), Feral House, Los Angeles, 2003, p.207.
- ⁷ H O’Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla. The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths*, Tauris, London/ New York, 2007, p.202.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, p. 199.
- ⁹ For more on alcohol in Old Norse literature, see G Kreutzer, ‘Bier, Met und Wein- Aspekte des Alkoholismus im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien’, in K Brynhildsvoll (ed), *ÜberBrücken. Festschrift für Ulrich Groenke zum 65. Geburtstag*, Buske, Hamburg, 1989.

- ¹⁰ Result of my own field research on the *Pagan Fest 2008* and *Summerbreeze Open Air 2008*.
- ¹¹ Biography on band homepage, viewed on 9 September 2008, <http://www.amonamarth.com>.
- ¹² From the album *The Crusher*, 2001.
- ¹³ From the album *Versus the World*, 2002.
- ¹⁴ *ibid*.
- ¹⁵ From the album *The Crusher*, *op.cit.*
- ¹⁶ C Wachter, 'Enslaved. Jenseits von Vergangenheit und Zukunft', *The Legacy Chronicles*, *op.cit.*, pp.58-59.
- ¹⁷ Trafford & Pluskowski, *op.cit.*, p. 67.
- ¹⁸ Moynihan & Søderlind, *op.cit.*, p. 201.
- ¹⁹ Trafford & Pluskowski, *op.cit.*, p.67.
- ²⁰ Moynihan & Søderlind, *op.cit.*, 203.
- ²¹ 'Ragnarök aktuell - Asgards Wächter melden Vollzug.' Interview with Amon Amarth in *Legacy* 4/2008.
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Extreme Music for Extreme People: Black and Death Metal Put to the Test in a Comparative Empirical Study

Sarah Chaker

Abstract

To many people, black and death metal music comes across as loud, aggressive, ugly and destructive – almost indistinguishable from noise. For that reason, they cannot understand the huge attraction black and death metal music has for the fans. In my opinion, the sound phenomena black metal and death metal cannot only be explained by analysing the musical structure of black and death metal music. Participant observation studies I carried out at German black and death metal scenes indicate that for many fans, black and death metal is much more than ‘just’ music: A specific lifestyle, a community of like-minded people, a special living environment. Consequently, I suggest regarding black and death metal as two particular kinds of cultural practice, where the sound-phenomena are intimately connected with the scenes and economic contexts. This realisation requires a multi-disciplinary research strategy including a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Some selected results of my empirical PhD thesis¹ about black and death metal I am working on since 2006 are summarised in this chapter.

Key Words: Black metal, death metal, extreme metal, scene, empirical research, political view, demographic data.

1. Introduction

As you have probably already noticed, the title of my chapter comprises of the quotation ‘Extreme music for extreme people’ which can be traced back to the US-death metal band *Morbid Angel*. The band uses it as an advertising slogan and it can be found, for example, as a backprint on *Morbid Angel*-T-shirts or -sweat shirts.

The advertising consultants of the band did quite a good job by inventing this slogan for several reasons:

- a. It is short and memorable.
- b. The slogan could draw the attention of people who aim to be regarded as individual but have not yet been part of the black or death metal scene. According to the motto: Special people need a special kind of music, the slogan offers one potential means of enclosing yourself with a spectacular aura: Listen to the ‘extreme’ music of *Morbid Angel* and

- you will have a pretty good chance to be identified by others as somebody out of the ordinary, or also as somebody 'extreme'.
- c. The slogan is also attractive for death metal scene-members themselves, because it serves the positive self-perception of the scene. What the slogan indicates to the death metal fans is: The music created by *Morbid Angel* is not mean but extreme. The fact that you have chosen to listen to the music of *Morbid Angel* demonstrates that you are somebody extraordinary and individual. Or vice versa: Your music-preference shows that you are not 'normal', not average and boring like the other hundreds of thousands of people. That is exactly what the death metal scene-members (and to be honest: all of us) want to hear. In this perspective, an exclusive and elitist character both of death metal music and the scene is underlined.
 - d. Moreover, the advertising slogan suggests that the music created by *Morbid Angel* is only composed for 'insiders'. The band accents the importance of their fans by assuming that only these like-minded, 'extreme' people would have the ability to comprehend and interpret the band's music in an adequate way. Or it is perceived the other way round: 'Normal' people would not be able to understand *Morbid Angel*'s music in a 'correct' manner, because they are 'normal'. Thus, a kind of *gatekeeper-function* is presumed for 'extreme' music that would keep 'normal' people out of the scenes.
 - e. The advertising slogan is uncontroversial, meaning it is effective all over the death metal scene and beyond. Both people inside and outside the scene accept the advertising message as most likely or even true. The scene-members fancy themselves as somebody special due to their unusual taste of music. Scene-outsiders are of the same opinion: Somebody who is freely listening to such 'music' is most likely a freak - not to mention the fact that black or death metal music is often not acknowledged as a musical genre. That is, the extreme music of *Morbid Angel* allows distinction sought by both parties.

The above arguments are perhaps suitable to explain the sales message's efficiency. But whether the slogan is also grounded in reality, is another matter. So what I have in mind is to present you some selected results of my PhD thesis preliminarily titled *Black and Death Metal. The Sound - The*

Market - The Scene, which was developed and conducted at the Department of Music at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg/ Germany since 2006. In this manner, we can scrutinise whether the advertising slogan's promise becomes the empirical truth or not.

2. Scientific Methods

My initial contact to black and death metal dates back to the year 1999. I was visiting a German summer festival with some friends where several black and death metal bands gave a concert amongst other bands. From the onset, I was fascinated by the artistic skills of the musicians and by the vibrant sound impression. At this stage, I studied musicology and German literature at the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg. To finance my studies, I worked as a DJ for alternative rock music in a small local club. After my first concert experience with black and death metal, I noticed that in the North-western region of Germany, a lively black and death metal scene seems to exist but there were not enough public gathering places for people preferring this extraordinary type of music. Thus, I came upon the idea to create the *neckfracture-party*, an official black and death metal party-event, which became a complete success in the region of Oldenburg. Behind my DJ's desk, I had the opportunity to study the behaviour of black and death metal fans carefully for several years. In this manner, I had an interior perspective of the scenes, which has been consolidating my research endeavours until present:

Firstly, my longstanding personal part-time-involvement in the black and death metal scenes has enabled me to describe black and death metal music in connection with the scene's socio-economic and cultural contexts. In my opinion, the great appeal black and death metal has for the scene-members can not only be explained by analysing the musical structure of black and death metal music. Despite the fact that the special black and death metal sound also accounts for the attractiveness of black and death metal music and thus has to be studied, the participant observation indicates that admittedly black and death metal music is ideologically of paramount importance for most of the fans but is often much more than 'just' music: A specific lifestyle, a community of like-minded people, a special living environment. Consequently, my PhD thesis suggests regarding black and death metal as two particular kinds of cultural practice, where the sound-phenomena are intimately connected with the scenes and economic contexts.

Secondly, my closeness to the scenes provided to be quite advantageous for the qualitative and quantitative interview procedures. Most of the interviewed black and death metal fans answered the questions posed quite openly, when they noticed that I was familiar with the scenes. The rate of return of a half-standardised questionnaire, which was given to 550 black and death metal fans at two German black and death metal festivals during

Summer 2007, reflects the advantage of having the in-depth knowledge of the scenes: 521 questionnaires were returned (rate of return: 94.7%), and 507 of them contained valid data. During the data-interpretation, my in-depth knowledge regarding black and death metal proved to be quite helpful due to my ability to interpret symbols, rites and activities in the same manner that scene members do. For this reason, I can illustrate what scene-internal activities, rituals and forms of communication really mean to the fans. In this manner, it is hoped that a description of the scenes can be made precisely out of the scenes-perspectives, ideally 'through the eyes of the fans.'²

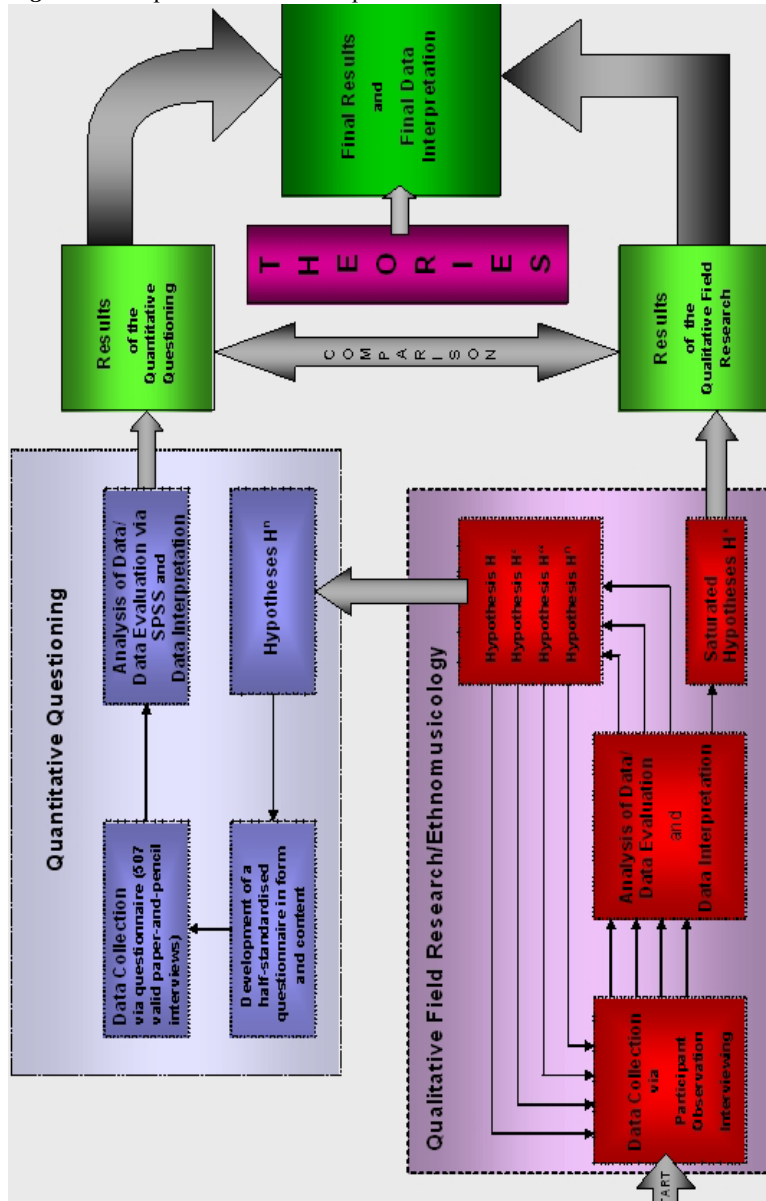
Of course, I am aware of the danger of slanting the data-interpretation due to my personal association to the scenes. All connections to scene-members were cut when analysis and interpretation of the collected data commenced. Additionally, a research diary, which was written during my field-research-activities in the scenes, currently assists me in reflecting back on the grade of my prior involvement.

This leads us to the methods adopted in order to scrutinise black and death metal music and the corresponding scenes.

As the sketch below demonstrates, a multi-disciplinary research strategy including a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was utilised. Although my PhD thesis has its origins in musicology, other methods and theories were integrated in the research project which are not located in musicology, such as methods from empirical social research, theories of gender studies, media aesthetics, sociology, ethnography or social psychology.

My studies are based on qualitative field research ensuring that the scenes could be explored in this manner and that enough information could be collected at each time in small amounts, in order to create some meaningful hypotheses. From 2005 to 2007, I was able to attend numerous black and death metal events, entered a recording studio event with the German death metal band *Suffocate Bastard* and made qualitative interviews with black and death metal musicians, journalists, concert promoters and fans. The data collection via participant observation and qualitative interviewing led to the first hypotheses, whose accuracy was continuously proven in the field. The field research was completed by paper-and-pencil-interviews given to 550 fans at two German black and death metal festivals during summer 2007. The valid data of 507 questionnaires was evaluated via the statistical computer programme SPSS, open categories were counted by hand. The results of the quantitative questioning were compared with the results of the qualitative field research and led on to the final data interpretation. At present, my research-project is near completion.

Figure 1. Adopted methods of empirical social research.



3. Results

(abbreviations: dm=death metal, bm=black metal)

The following results are expected to help in answering the question whether and to what extent 'extreme' music preferences, such as black or death metal, influence the behaviour of their listeners. Are or do fans of extreme music act more extreme than other people who prefer more common/ popular music genres?

A. Sex

Both the German black and death metal scenes are clearly male-dominated. 86.2% of the interviewed death metal fans were male, with only 13.8% female. An similar picture was observed for the black metal scene: 83.4% of the queried black metal fans were male, 16.6% were female.

B. Scene-access, Scene-membership and Age

Death and black metal fans first commenced listening to death/black metal at the average age of 15.6 years (standard deviation: dm: 3.0 years, bm: 2.9 years). The majority first came in contact with death/ black metal via friends (dm: 82.8%, bm 74.0%). An important role was also played by special scene-magazines or fanzines (dm: 23.8%, bm: 28.0 %) and events of the scenes (dm: 16.8%, bm: 15.2%).

The average term of scene-membership is 10.1 years for death metal fans (standard deviation: 5.6 years) and 7.4 years for black metal fans (standard deviation: 4.8 years). The extremely long-term-scene-affinity in both cases illustrates that for many fans black and death metal have become more than 'just' music – it also stands for a special attitude towards life. The long-term-scene-loyalty is rather untypical for scenes in general – perhaps it would make sense to discuss the black and death metal scenes as *subcultural scenes*, because they still contain some typical elements of subculture in them.

The average term of scene-membership depends on the average age of the interviewed black and death metal fans: The average age of a death metal fans is 25.8 years old (standard deviation: 5.5 years), whereas black metal fans are on average 23.2 years old (standard deviation: 5.6 years). This shows that both scenes are scenes of young adults, and *no pure youth cultures*.

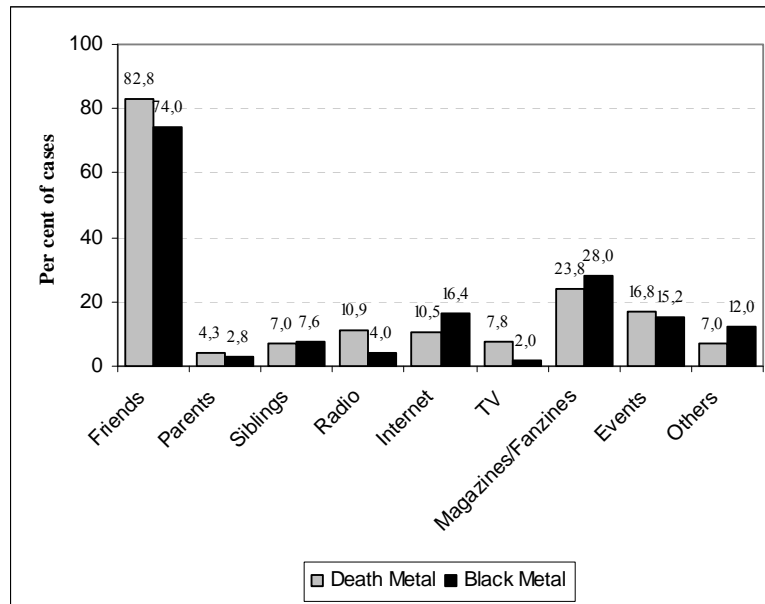


Figure 2. How did you first get in contact with death/ black metal?

The bar diagram demonstrates in valid per cent of cases, who or what enabled the first contact to death or black metal. In total 506 valid cases. Of that dm=256 valid cases, bm=250 valid cases. Multiple answers possible: m=843. Of that m(dm)=438, m(bm)=405.

C. Scene-network and Status of Music

With the aid of Ronald Hitzler's scene-concept,³ it is possible to describe the black and death metal scenes as *two different scenes*, each with its own music, history, media, symbols, rituals, habitus, events and meeting places. Although the black and death metal fans sometimes have to share rented premises pragmatically, they try hard to distance themselves from each other via music, styling, habitus, personal engagements etc.

Both death and black metal fans are particularly interested in death/black metal music (dm: 94.5%, bm: 94.4%, multiple answers possible). The music itself remains the centre of attention and binds the entire scene-network together. All other aspects of the scenes such as contents (lyrics, pictures, images), behaviour, symbols, rituals and (life-)style are bowed to the music and fragmentally reflect what the sound expresses as a whole. Both scenes demonstrate a *propensity towards wholeness*. Undoubtedly, there is a coherency to what the subculture theoreticians Dick Hebdige and John Clarke

have called 'homology.'⁴ Perhaps, they would even argue that black and death metal fans could appropriate this way as a 'contradictory reality.'

D. School-leaving Qualification and Current Employment Situation

The thesis of an advancing *bourgeoisisation* of the whole heavy metal scene, as already formulated by Bettina Roccor in 1996,⁵ also finds facts as being true for the black and death metal scenes. One broad hint for the correctness of this thesis is the school-leaving qualification of the queried black and death metal fans: 53.8% of the interviewed death metal fans and 38.1% of the black metal fans have graduated from high school (in Germany: termed 'Abitur').

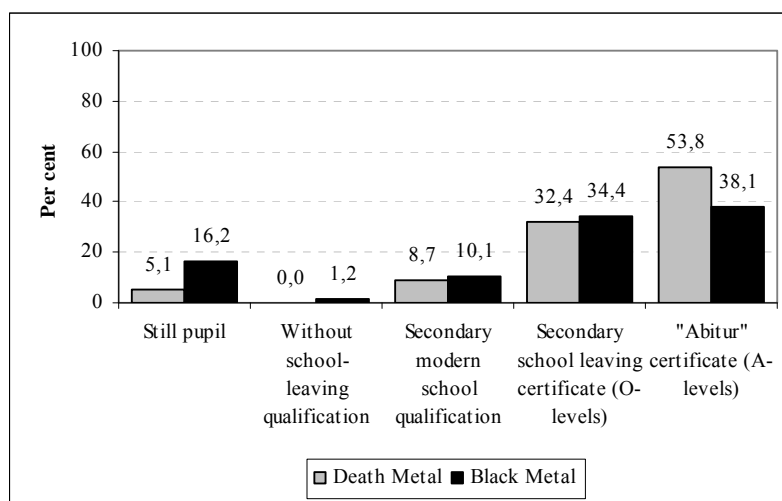


Figure 3. School education.

The bar diagram demonstrates by comparison in per cent the school education of the interviewed death metal and black metal fans. In total 500 valid cases. Of that dm=253 valid cases, bm=247 valid cases. $p=0,000 \rightarrow$ id est very highly significant.

It must be pointed out that this result does not demonstrate that death metal fans are more intelligent than black metal fans. As previously mentioned, the interviewed black metal fans are on average more than two years younger than the queried death metal fans, thus there are more black metal fans who are presently pupils (dm: 5.1%, bm: 16.2%). About one third of the interviewed persons have a secondary school leaving certificate (O-levels), and approximately only one-tenth obtained a secondary modern school qualification. School dropouts were an absolute exception.

The current employment situation of the interviewed death and black metal fans reassert the thesis of *bourgeoisisation*: 29.0% of the death metal fans are employees, 18.8% are students, 17.3% are labourers and 10.2% receive career training. Student comprise 20.2% of the black metal fans, 15.4% are employees, 14.2% are labourers and 17.8% receive career training. Because of the lower average in age, more black metal fans are pupils (see above). It was observed that 7.5% of the death metal fans and 7.3% of the black metal fans were unemployed. The average unemployment rate in Germany in October 2007 was 8.2%. Only very few death or black metal fans were working freelance or self-employed (under 3.0%). Therewith, the popular opinion that black and death metal is especially attractive for people from the lower social class has proven false. In fact, most black and death metal fans are *members of the middle class*. Furthermore, the scene-membership is *independent from social class-affiliation*, which is a typical characteristic of scenes in general.

E. Hobbies

88.6% of the interviewed black metal fans and 85.8% of the death metal fans have music-related hobbies, for example playing musical instruments, listening to music or visiting concerts and festivals. 32.4% of the queried death metal fans and 43.4% of the black metal fans are musicians in a metal/ rock band - most of them are self-taught artists (dm: 73.1%, bm: 75.2%). Beside musical activities, sports (especially riding motorbikes and bicycles), reading, computer-gaming and internet-surfing, meeting friends, sex and drinking beer are mentioned as a favourite hobby.

F. Childhood and Current Life Situation

Also the *idée fixe* that many black and death metal fans listen to such music because they are permanently frustrated or constantly unhappy turned out to be untrue. Of the interviewed death metal fans, 68.7% described their childhood as nice or very nice and 26.7% found it quite okay/ normal. Only 4.7% of the death metal fans had in their own view a bad or very bad childhood. A similar result is ascertainable for the black metal fans: 58.6% described their childhood as nice or even very nice and 32.9% found it quite okay/ normal. Only 8.5% of the black metal fans found their childhood to be bad or very bad.

That a happy childhood is often an important precondition for being entirely satisfied later in life also becomes apparent in this study: 64.7 % of the death metal fans and 61.1% of the black metal fans are satisfied or even very satisfied with their current life situation. Barely one third of the interviewed death and black metal fans are sometimes more or less satisfied (dm: 30.6%, bm: 29.7%). Only 4.7% of the death metal fans and 9.2% of the

black metal fans described their current life situation as being dissatisfied or even very dissatisfied.

G. Political Attitude

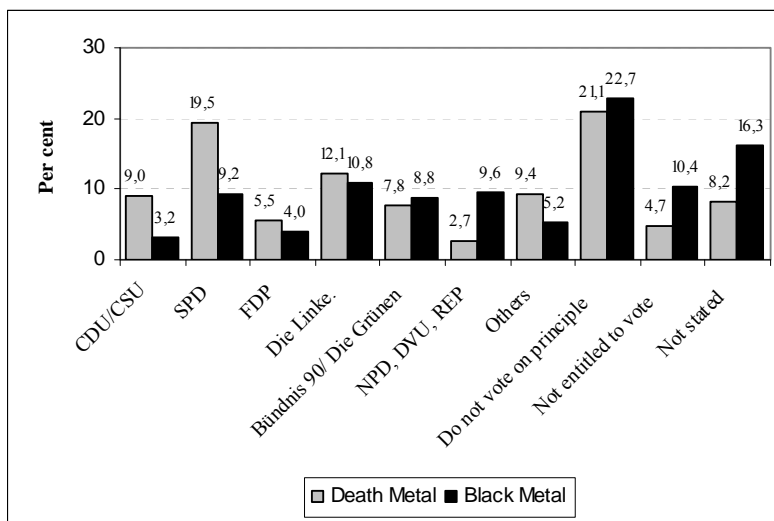


Figure 4. Which party would you vote for if there were parliamentary elections on the following Sunday?

The bar diagram demonstrates by comparison in per cent, which party the queried black and death metal fans would vote for if there were parliamentary elections on the following Sunday. 445 valid cases, 62 persons did not provide information—'Not stated.' $p=0,000$ —is very highly significant.

The political attitude of *death metal fans is not extremely right-wing* – on the contrary: they tend to vote for centre or left parties in the majority. When asked which party they would vote for if there were parliamentary elections on the following Sunday, only 2.7% of the interviewed death metal fans would elect an extremely right-wing party such as the German NPD, DVU or REP.⁶ Approximately 12.1% of the death metal fans would elect the left-wing party DIE LINKE. Centre parties such as SPD⁷ and CDU/ CSU⁸ would obtain 19.5% and 9.0% of the votes of the death metal fans. The green party BÜNDNIS90/ DIE GRÜNEN and the Free Democratic Party FDP would be voted for by 7.8% and 5.5% of the death metal fans. Additionally, the minute fun-party APPD⁹ would have a good chance in obtaining some parliamentary seats, if only death metal fans were allowed to vote (3.5%).

The black metal fans had a more extreme political view than the death metal fans: Small parties such as BÜNDNIS90/DIE GRÜNEN (8.8%), the FDP (4.0%), the left-wing-party DIE LINKE. (10.8%) and extremely right-wing parties like NPD, DVU or REP (9.6%) would have equally good chances to be elected as the traditional larger parties CDU/ CSU (3.2%) and SPD (9.2%).

Admittedly, many death and black metal fans stated that they would not go to the elections on principle (dm: 21.1%, bm: 22.7%). Furthermore, 16.3% of the black metal fans and 8.2% of the death metal fans refused to provide any evidence or information. Explanation: 'No politics in metal!' Approximately 4.7% of the death metal fans and 10.4% of the black metal fans were not yet entitled to vote.

The data clearly demonstrates that *the black metal scene has in fact an extremely-right-wing-problem* - one tenth of the black metal fans declared they would vote radical right-wing. Nevertheless, the entire black metal scene *should not be labelled as extreme right-wing*. Another question posed in this study was whether the fans were in the opinion of whether any bands exist in their own scene which damages the scene. Only 30.5% of the death metal fans were in the opinion in comparison to 76.3% of the black metal fans. Many black metal fans complained of NSBM¹⁰ bands and fans in an open category. This demonstrates that most of the black metal fans at least recognize NSBM as a problem and to numerous fans, NSBM bands and fans are not welcome on the scene. But there is also *uncertainty and helplessness* ascertainable in regards to how to tackle this problem.

H. Social Engagement

30.8% of the queried death metal fans and 28.6% of the black metal fans were or are working in an honorary capacity. The fans of both scenes particularly apply themselves for social and socio-political activities. They work in youth centres and retirement homes, care for disabled people, are committed to fire services, parties, unions and environmental protection organisations. Surprisingly, 10 black metal fans and 13 death metal fans declared that they have been voluntarily involved in a Christian church. Apparently, many black and death metal fans are able to switch ad libitum between scene-life and everyday-life and to do what is expected and appropriate in the respective context.

I. Satanism

In my thesis of 2004, I demonstrated that in black and death metal, many of the interviewed death and black metal fans were observed to have little interest in Satanism. Barely half of the fans have ever occupied themselves with Satanism.¹¹ This is quite surprising, because the scenes surround generously themselves with satanic signs. It is possible that black

and death metal fans interpret satanic symbols completely differently than people outside the scenes. The use of satanic symbols does not stand for an adoration of Satan but can be interpreted as a sign of *rigorous rejection and drastic criticism of Christianity*, more precisely: *Of Christian institutions* such as the church. Many fans use satanic symbols in order to shock and provoke others.

K. 'Aggressive' Music

The grade of aggressiveness in the sound turned out to be a *yardstick and a quality factor* of black and death metal music for the fans. They like black and death metal, *because* it sounds aggressive. This does not also indicate that the fans automatically act aggressively. The majority of the fans are able to separate fiction from reality and are thus not interested in realising any means of violence such as that expressed in the music and the corresponding contents. Moreover, black and death metal fans often interpret rituals and symbols of black and death metal in a completely different manner than 'scene-outsiders'. At its heart, existing misunderstandings between scene-members and scene-outsiders are the *result of problems with the construction and exegesis of meaning*.

4. Conclusion

As the above selection of results of my PhD thesis demonstrate, the queried German black and death metal fans are in many regards just 'normal'. Their extraordinary taste of music and their scene-involvement does not hinder the black and death metal fans to go into society and participate successfully in social activities (→hobbies, social engagement, political attitude, education and employment-situation). In some respects, the scene-members of both scenes can even be described as conservative, as the submission to artistic achievement principles or the emphasis of moral standards such as common honesty demonstrates.

In my opinion, the black and death metal scenes function for many fans as a *kind of niche, playground or retreat area* where they hope or believe to meet like-minded people, and where different attitudes to life, for example different concepts of masculinity, can be tested.

Music is one and perhaps the most important conjunction between the fans because it animates communication. Concurrently, the fans hope, black and death metal music would keep out 'mainstream' people – at this point the above mentioned advertising slogan grabs. Incidentally, a quite fundamental fear from this behaviour from black and death metal fans becomes evident: That somebody would try to take away the possibility to act self-dependently from the scene-members. In this manner, the creation of maximum extreme music can be understood as an *efficient strategy to fight social and economical appropriation*. That this concept works quite well in

everyday life can be seen from the emphatic refusal black and death metal music still often receives in public. Furthermore, black and death metal remains less interesting for the music industry. In this aspect, a radical distinction via music seems to be an appropriate survival strategy for the black and death metal scenes.

Notes

¹ My PhD thesis and this chapter were funded by the *German National Academic Foundation*. Some results of the PhD thesis were already presented at the IASPM-ANZ Conference *Music on the Edge* in 2007 at the University of Otago, Dunedin/ New Zealand.

² R Hitzler, T Bucher, A Niederbacher, *Leben in Szenen. Formen jugendlicher Vergemeinschaftung heute*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2005.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ D Hebdige, *Subculture. Die Bedeutung von Stil*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1983. J Clarke, *Stilschöpfung*, in P Kemper, T Langhoff, U Sonnenschein (eds), *But i like it. Jugendkultur und Popmusik*, Philipp Reclam, Stuttgart, 1998.

⁵ B Roccor, *Heavy Metal. Kunst. Kommerz. Ketzerei.*, Iron Pages, Berlin, 2002.

⁶ NPD: National Democratic Party. DVU: German People's Union. REP: Republicans. Extreme right-wing parties in Germany.

⁷ SPD: Social Democratic Party.

⁸ CDU: Christian Democratic Union, CSU: Christian Social Union.

⁹ APPD: Anarchist Pogo Party of Gemany.

¹⁰ NSBM: National Socialist Black Metal.

¹¹ S Chaker, *Black und Death Metal. Eine empirische Untersuchung zu Gewalt, Religion und politischer Orientierung*, Thesis previously undisclosed, Oldenburg, 2004.

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Slaying the Pulse: Rhythmic Organisation and Rhythmic Interplay within Heavy Metal

Dietmar Elflein

Abstract

The chapter presents a musicological attempt to analyse the musical language of heavy metal. My main analytical focus in this chapter will be on rhythmic organisation and rhythmic interplay since the importance of rhythm as an analytical parameter in popular music studies has been posited very often but has rarely been put into practice.

The main musical unit of any heavy metal song is a riff, that is a short rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic figure played by at least one instrument, mostly the electric guitar. Riffs are repeated and form the structural framework of the song, or the modular structure as Glenn T. Pillsbury called it. But, like Robert Walser wrote back in 1993, heavy metal's rhythmical framework is organised more basically around a pulse than a meter. Therefore, the riff and the pulse relate to each other in different ways.

Riffs can be seen as a special way to organise the pulse. The simplest riff just copies the pulse on one note. Other riffs produce groups of pulses by changing the pitch or the accent of pulses, respectively by combing or silencing pulses in order to create longer notes or pauses. One common feature of heavy metal is to deal with a tension produced by groupings of three and four pulses, which are either played simultaneously by different instruments or in succession by at least one instrument. This relates to one common method of rhythmic interplay within heavy metal, which tends to double the rhythmic (and melodic) structure of the riff and therefore also doubles this tension. Some selected and typical ways of rhythmic interplay will be analysed and presented - also as a possible expression of ensemble virtuosity within heavy metal.

Key Words: Heavy, metal, thrash, musicology, analysis, popular, music, rhythm, pulse

A musicological attempt to analyse the musical language of heavy metal should focus on the riff, the main musical unit of any heavy metal song. A riff is a short rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic figure played by at least one instrument, mostly the electric guitar. Riffs are repeated and form the structural framework of the song, or the modular structure as Glenn T. Pillsbury called it.¹ But, like Robert Walser wrote back in 1993, heavy metal's rhythmical framework is organised more basically around a pulse

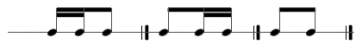
than a meter.² Therefore, the methodological starting point is the notion of an extensive regular pulse. That means I want to concentrate on the parameter rhythm and its concretion in rhythmic interplay. According to Herbert Bruhn rhythm is defined as a structured cognitive representation of a sequence of auditory objects within defined spaces of time.³ Also according to Bruhn the temporal organisation within a piece of music is subdivided into pulse, metre and rhythm – all considered as invariants. Pulse is referred to as a regular repetition of an acoustic event. Metre restructures a pulse in heavy (stressed) and light (unstressed) acoustic events, while rhythm is regarded as a specific organisation of the pulse within a given metric framework.⁴

A steady pulse has to be regarded as an impact of the blues on heavy metal. In many blues-rock styles the bass provides the pulse, but the widening of the boundaries of the blues in Great Britain in the second half of the 1960s altered the role of the instruments. Especially bass and drums changed roles from pure accompaniment to virtuosic play – something embodied by the ‘supergroup’ Cream for example.

While the bass left the pulse behind, guitar and drums took over. The extension of the roles of the drums leads – amongst other things - to the adoption of the double bass technique from jazz drummers like Ray McKinley or Louie Bellson. But in heavy metal this technique developed from a sign of virtuosity to one of the basic principles of drumming. As a consequence double bass drumming became closely related to heavy metal as a whole.

Regarding the role of the guitar, to play a steady pulse on one pitch is the simplest riff one can think of. This repetition of the pulse gets ‘metallised’ by a combination of the palm mute playing technique and an increasing amount of distortion of the sound. Muting the strings with the palm of the right hand while playing produces a sound, that features the attack while sustain and release are shortened. Harris Berger and Cornelia Fales analyse that heavy metal guitar sound minimises the audible attack of the plectrum by increasing the amount of distortion over the years.⁵ In general distortion means a flattening of the dynamic envelope of the sound. As a consequence the muting of the strings can become harder, while still staying tonally defined. The emerging playing aesthetics longs for an exact pulse with a minimum difference between the single impulses. The difference in the sound of the pulse between the original ‘The Green Manalishi (With The Two-Pronged Crown)’ version released by Fleetwood Mac in 1970 and Judas Priest’s 1978 cover version is striking.⁶ A similar difference can be heard when comparing the palm muted playing in Led Zeppelin’s ‘Communication Breakdown’ with Judas Priest’s style of playing.⁷ Heavy metal tries to tame distortion by palm muting and to play a defined regular pulse means to really succeed in taming the guitar.

To make such a riff more complex, one can either change rhythm, pitch or both. To continue with rhythmic variation first, there are two easy ways to modify a pulse: one could double or halve the tempo. Therefore there are three basic groups of two respectively four pulses, with two of them being irregular.



Basic groups of four pulses

The first of these three variations is also known as the ‘Iron Maiden gallop’. The two variations of the regular pulse have an inherent tension between three and four, respectively odd and even. To work with this tension is one basic principle of heavy metal playing.

Megadeth, ‘She-Wolf’ opening riff,

Megadeth’s opening riff of ‘She-Wolf’ is such a one-pitch-riff.⁸ In the second half of the riff we see the ‘gallop’-variation, while the first half works with groups of six pulses. The drum accompaniment is responsible for the transcription of the first quaver as a single note and not as extending the last group of pulses to a number of six during repetition. Also the drum accompaniment supports the ignorance of common time by not stressing the first pulse of the second half. The basic principle of the riff is the mentioned tension between three, respectively six and four. This tension is supported by the fact, that within the even numbered group of pulses an odd number of notes gets played and vice versa. This tension can also consist between binary and ternary structures like in the following example, which could be the fourth riff of ‘The Four Horsemen’ by Metallica or the first riff of ‘Children Of the Grave’ by Black Sabbath.⁹

Metallica ‘The Four Horsemen’ fourth riff, Black Sabbath, ‘Children Of The Grave’ opening Riff

Up to now to slay the pulse meant to increase the amount of distortion to strengthen palm muting and opt for a regular pulse with minimum differences between the single impulses. Now one can add a desire to stay rhythmically unique and avoid being in-between. Heavy metal playing is either binary or ternary but not shuffling. The smallest invariant rhythmic unit is not a riff like Pillsbury suggests but a group of two pulses.¹⁰ Therefore, of the several possibilities to construe the pulse between the angles of exact binary and ternary playing only a selection is used in metal.



Groups of pulses between the angles of binary and ternary playing styles

Within heavy metal the rhythmic structure of the first, the second and the last example are commonly used, but rarely the third and almost never the rhythmic structure of the fourth and fifth example. The difference between the blues influenced rhythm of rock and roll and the rhythmic idea of metal can be exemplified by a comparison of Motörhead's cover version of Metallica's 'Whiplash' with the original.¹¹

The image shows three staves of musical notation for the 'Whiplash' riff:

- Metallica:** A continuous stream of eighth notes with a 'P.M.' (palm muting) instruction above the staff.
- Motörhead:** A similar stream of eighth notes, but with a more relaxed feel and a 'P.M.' instruction above the staff.
- Amon Amarth:** A triplet-based riff with a 'P.M.' instruction above the staff. The notation shows a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note, repeated.

Metallica 'Whiplash' third riff, Mötörhead, 'Whiplash' third riff, Amon Amarth, 'Fate Of Norns' opening riff

If again we think of a continuum with binary and ternary playing as antipodes the exact binary pulse of Metallica gets weakened by Motörhead's way of playing. It is becoming more rock than metal. The ternary end of the continuum is exemplified by the Amon Amarth example with its unique ternary playing style including the pause on the second quaver of the triplet, which leads not to shuffling.¹² Similar constant ternary playing can often be heard in Viking or pagan metal including folk or medieval influenced styles.

One-pitch-riffs can easily be transposed to add another layer of variation. Slayer use the transposition of even numbered groups of pulses with or without rhythmic variation very often¹³ and influenced a lot of

extreme metal bands, like for example Emperor in 'I Am The Black Wizards'.¹⁴

Emperor, 'I Am The Black Wizards', second riff

Regular groups of four pulses are transposed to create the riff. Because of the high density of pulses more elaborate rhythmic variations and the use of palm muting are hard to play and also very hard to hear. It's more like play as fast as you can..

Breaks or pauses form another possibility of rhythmic variation. Such riffs are often contrasted with a backbeat to promote a syncopated feel. The bass doubles either the riff of the guitar or lays a steady pulse like in the following example, 'Primal Concrete Sledge' by Pantera.¹⁵

Pantera, 'Primal Concrete Sledge', opening riff

Pantera promote groups of three pulses in the guitar, with every third pulse paused. Bass guitar and bass drum lay a regular pulse, the toms are grouped in 3+3+3+3+4 pulses, a succession of pulses that has its roots in either the son clave of Afro-Cuban-music, the R&B hambone or the Bo Diddley rhythm of early rock and roll. This grouping of 3+3+3+3+4 or 6+6+4 or 3+3+2 pulses is used in many heavy metal riffs throughout the subgenres, prominent representatives being Judas Priest with 'Grinder', the title track of *Painkiller* or Accept with 'Fast As A Shark'.¹⁶

Hence, the 3+3+2 succession of pulses can be thought of as a major impact of Afro-American music or short the blues on heavy metal.

The image shows three musical staves. The top staff, labeled 'Grinder', features a series of chords in a descending sequence. The middle staff, labeled 'Painkiller', shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with palm mutes (P.M.) indicated above the notes. The bottom staff, labeled 'Fast As A Shark', displays a dense, fast-paced eighth-note riff with palm mutes (P.M.) indicated above the notes.

Judas Priest, 'Grinder', 'Painkiller', Accept, 'Fast As A Shark', opening Riffs

Besides the already mentioned possibility of transposing groups of pulses there are two ways of changing the pitch of the pulse. One can either change the pitch within groups of pulses like in the 'Painkiller' example or change pitches in special parts of the riff, hence contrasting groups of pulses with one pitch with groups of pulses with changing pitches like in the 'Fast As A Shark' example.

In classic metal like Judas Priest or Accept both sections often have the same length, while in thrash metal the section with changing pitches often gets shortened like in 'Whiplash'. In the following example from the title track of Metallica's *Master Of Puppets* the riff is divided in four sections with a steady pulse on the palm muted low E-string in sections one and three and the sequence of 3+3+2 pulses in section two, which changes to 3+2 pulses in section four.¹⁷

The image shows a single musical staff for an electric guitar. It starts with a palm muted (P.M.) eighth-note pulse. This is followed by a section of four eighth notes, with the first three grouped together. The first two of these are slurs (sl.) and the third is a single eighth note. This is followed by a second section of four eighth notes, with the first three grouped together. The first two of these are slurs (sl.) and the third is a single eighth note. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Metallica, 'Master Of Puppets', third riff

The 3+3+2 grouping recalls the blues influence, which is subsequently denied by the following 3+2 sequence. While styles like the blues work with stable sequences of groups of pulses, which normally add up to the desired length of the metre, heavy metal seems to treat smaller units as independent. A defined group of pulses can be subtracted like in *Master Of Puppets* or added like in the second riff of Judas Priest's 'The Sentinel', which lasts nineteen pulses composed out of combinations of groups of two and three pulses.¹⁸



Judas Priest, 'The Sentinel', second Riff

Here the familiar progression of 3+3+2 pulses in the first part of the riff is in the second part not only repeated but supplemented by a group of three pulses, therefore adding up to the whole of nineteen pulses. Adding or subtracting groups of pulses can easily go beyond the scope of the rhythmic boundaries of entities divisible by four. More complex musical structures like irregular metres evolving out of gluing groups of pulses to riffs are usually labelled as an impact of progressive rock on heavy metal. But, like the avoidance of shuffling and the insistence on a strict separation of binary and ternary rhythmic concepts are a 'metallisation' of blues influences, the complex structures of progressive rock become 'metallised'.

One good example is the opening riff of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal classic 'Blitzkrieg' by Blitzkrieg, covered by Metallica for their *Garage Inc* album. Blitzkrieg cite explicitly the opening riff of 'Hocus Pocus' by the Dutch progressive rock outfit Focus.¹⁹ The following transcription compares both riffs.

Blitzkrieg

Hocus Pocus

Blitzkrieg, 'Blitzkrieg', Focus, 'Hocus Pocus', opening riffs

Blitzkrieg shorten both parts of the 'Hocus Pocus' riff and simplify the harmonic structure in the second part by reducing the chords to power chords, but both riffs share the basic form and the already familiar two part structure. The difference is that Focus shift within the boundaries of regular time, while Blitzkrieg arrange groups of pulses and don't care about a regular metre and common time. They subtract the two last pulses from the opening sequence of the Focus riff, repeat the resulting group of six pulses a third time, while simultaneously shortening the group to four pulses. Thus Blitzkrieg ignore their implied transformation of the binary pulse of Focus in to a ternary structure and create a part of the riff with a length of fourteen pulses. The simplification of the 'Hocus Pocus' riff mutates into an increase of rhythmic complexity, while at the same time simplifying harmony.

Therefore, the basic principle in the construction of heavy metal riffs seems to be the more or less free arrangement of groups of two and three pulses. The metre is the result of this combination and not the condition.

Within rhythmic interplay the parallel existence of different subdivisions of the pulse can imply rhythmic structures that resemble polyrhythmic elements within the musical language of heavy metal. Such an example is the opening riff of the title track of Iron Maiden's *The Number Of The Beast*, which adds up to twenty pulses and emphasizes once again the importance of the combination of groups of two or three pulses.²⁰

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Voice, with lyrics: "I'm co - ming back" and "I will re - turn". The second staff is for Electric Guitars, showing a complex, polyrhythmic riff. The third staff is for Bass Guitar, showing a similar complex, polyrhythmic riff. The bottom staff is for the Drum Kit, showing a complex, polyrhythmic pattern with 'x' marks indicating specific drum hits.

Iron Maiden, 'The Number Of The Beast', opening riff

The vocal part divides the twenty pulses into two units of six and fourteen pulses. This arrangement is translated into the whole transcription despite the guitar and bass parts add seven and thirteen pulses and start one pulse before the vocals. The difference is clarified in the transcription by an anacrusis. The drums add a third level to the rhythmic interplay by simply arranging five groups of four pulses, while starting two pulses later than the vocals. Therefore the transcription of the drums reads 2+4+4+4+4+2 pulses. Because of the implied polyrhythmic elements of this riff published transcriptions of the song tend to be unsure, how to display the metre or time of the track. For example in two editions of the German Guitar magazine the riff is notated in 5/4 time in the first transcription and as a combination of 4/4 and 6/4 time in the second.²¹

The underlying organising principle of arranging groups of pulses is therefore not exclusive to the guitar parts, but dominates the rhythmic interplay as a whole in a more or less elaborate way. A comparison of the drum parts accompanying the first and the third guitar riff of 'The Number Of The Beast' shows that drum parts are also glued together from small groups of pulses.

Iron Maiden, 'The Number Of The Beast', first and third riff

During the first riff a group of four pulses is repeated four times before a different group of four pulses adds up to the total of twenty pulses. The accompaniment to the third riff repeats the same group of four pulses as in the first riff only three times and ends at a length of sixteen pulses by adding another different group of four pulses. 'The Number Of The Beast' shows how different structures of arranging the pulse can coexist in rhythmic interplay and create uncommon resemblances to polyrhythmic feel, while it is more common in heavy metal playing to layer different subdivisions of a pulse by constantly doubling and halving it.

Within 'Raining Blood' by Slayer the development of layering different subdivisions of a pulse beginning with a slow mosh part and ending with a fast blast beat can be shown archetypically.²²

Slayer, 'Raining Blood', fifth and sixth riff

The transcription shows the rhythmic interplay of guitar and drums starting with the sixth riff of the track ('f'), moving on to two variations of

the riff ('f-2', 'f-3') and one interlude before introducing the next riff ('g'). The bass is playing parallel to the guitars, vocals are only heard during variation 'f-3' starting with a long scream on the words 'raining bloooooood'. Starting with the basic pulse in riff 'f', which is interrupted by breaks, first the guitars ('f-2'), then the drums ('f-3') double the density of the pulse ('f-2'). This quadruple variant of the basic pulse is taken over again by the guitar in the interlude and answered with a blast beat of the drums during riff 'g'. This way of layering the pulse showcases a basic element of the musical language of heavy metal on the border to extreme metal.

Therefore, slaying the pulse means to glue groups of (multiples of) two and three pulses to riffs. To emphasize the inherent tension between odd and even means to constantly work with the blues influence on the genre. But unlike in blues-based playing styles this rhythmic tension is not resolved. Heavy metal playing is either binary or ternary but not shuffling. The basic principle is a regular pulse with minimum differences between the single impulses, which are achieved sound-wise by palm muting and an increasing amount of distortion. Metre is the product and not the condition of this way of playing. On the contrary to emphasize even numbered groups of pulses means to lower the blues influence. Within rhythmic interplay different subdivisions of the basic pulse are layered.

Notes

¹ G T Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity*, Routledge, New York London, 2006, pp. 20-29.

² R Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover London, 1993, p. 49.

³ H Bruhn, 'Zur Definition von Rhythmus', in *Rhythmus: ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, K Müller and G Aschersleben (eds.), Huber, Bern, 2000, p. 41.

⁴ H Bruhn, 'Kognitive Aspekte der Entwicklung von Rhythmus', in *Rhythmus: ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, K Müller and G Aschersleben (eds.), Huber, Bern, 2000, pp. 235-241.

⁵ H Berger and C Fales, "'Heaviness' in the Perception of Heavy Metal Guitar Timbres: The Match of Perceptual and Acoustic Features over Time", in *Wired For Sound*, P Greene and T Porcello (eds.), Wesleyan University Press, Hanover London, 2005, pp. 184 and 190-191.

⁶ Fleetwood Mac, *The Best Of Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac* Columbia 510155 2, 2002. Judas Priest, *Hell Bent For Leather*, Columbia 35706, 1978.

⁷ Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin*, Atlantic 7208, 1968.

⁸ Megadeth, *Cryptic Writings*, Capitol Records 7243 8 38262, 1997.

- ⁹ Metallica, *Kill'Em All*, Music For Nations MFN7, 1983. Black Sabbath, *Master Of Reality*, Vertigo 6360 050, 1972.
- ¹⁰ Pillsbury, pp. 20-22.
- ¹¹ Metallica, *Kill'Em All*, Music For Nations MFN7, 1983. Motörhead in Various Artists, *Metallic Attack: Metallica: The Ultimate Tribute Album*, Big Deal 1700, 2005.
- ¹² Amon Amarth, *Fate Of Norns*. Metal Blade 14498, 2004.
- ¹³ E.g. Slayer, 'Piece By Piece', 'Necrophobic', 'Criminally Insane', 'Raining Blood', in *Reign in Blood*, DefJam Recordings GHS 24131, 1986.
- ¹⁴ Emperor, *In the Nightside Eclipse*, Candlelight Records Candle008CD, 1994.
- ¹⁵ Pantera, *Cowboys From Hell*, ATCO Records 7567-91372-1, 1990.
- ¹⁶ Judas Priest, *British Steel*, CBS 84160, 1980. Judas Priest, *Painkiller*, CBS 4672901, 1990. Accept, *Restless And Wild*, Portrait 39213, 1982.
- ¹⁷ Metallica, *Master Of Puppets*, Music For Nations MFN 060, 1986.
- ¹⁸ Judas Priest, *Defenders Of The Faith*, CBS 25713, 1984.
- ¹⁹ Blitzkrieg, *Buried Alive / Blitzkrieg (7')*, Neat Records 10, 1980. Focus, *Moving Waves*, Sire Records 7401, 1971.
- ²⁰ Iron Maiden, *The Number Of The Beast*, 1C 064-07608, 1982.
- ²¹ *Guitar Special Sonderheft Nr.1: 50 Jahre Fender Startocaster*, ppv Medien, Bergkirchen, 2004, pp.121-130. M Rensen, 'Iron Maiden', *Guitar* vol. 80, January 2007, p.64.
- ²² Slayer, *Reign In Blood*, DefJam Recordings GHS 24131, 1986.

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Pentagram (a.k.a. Mezarkabul): Founders of Turkish Heavy Metal

Ilgin Ayik

Abstract

Pentagram (a.k.a. Mezarkabul) released the first heavy metal album in Turkey. They founded in 1984 and have released six albums which received great interest both inside and outside of the country. The band performed live firstly in a wedding hall in one of the suburbs of İstanbul. The most significant aspect of the band is their interpretation of Turkish maqams and usuls within the heavy metal form and sound by reinforcing it with the Turkish wind instrument ney. They became a pioneer band by blending aşık (Anatolian minstrel) literature, mystic philosophy and janissary music with heavy, trash and progressive metal; and they influenced the next generation Turkish heavy metal bands. This study's aim is the comparative analysis of the band's music and its influences. As a result, one will be able to understand the mechanism of blending different kinds of musical genres in the band's songs. It will be also possible to observe the diverse aesthetical criteria of composition according to Turkish and European ears. The band's unique position will be stressed by highlighting their way of using specific musical components like phrygian mode with kürdi maqam characteristics, or rhythmic patterns like 7/8 and 10/8 with usul (rhythmic pattern) and velvele (rhythmic embellishment) characteristics. These specialities will show their distinction among other heavy metal bands, although they are mentioned with heavy, trash, progressive, oriental and folk metal.

Key Words: Pentagram, Mezarkabul, Turkey, phrygian mode, music theory, Turkish music terminology

I heard Pentagram for the first time in my teenage years as a successful Turkish trash metal band. But, years later, when I first listened to their album Anatolia, I totally met something different. They were like 'Turkish Metallica' and at the same time they were including traditional Turkish motifs in it. I impressed by this music very much at that time, so I decided to go one of their shows. It was in Cemil Topuzlu Openair Theater. When I see huge amount of fans, I realized that it was a bigger thing than I imagined. They were the first and best heavy metal band in Turkey who could gather such a big audience for the first time. And later, I would be

going to understand that they would get the same interest out of the country, too.

The band is important for their unique music style. They successfully combine heavy metal music with Turkish music elements such as Aşık literature, mystical music, and janissary music. They used some specific modal and rhythmical patterns of Turkish music such as scales like -harmonic minor with a tonic on fourth or fifth degree- that are basically Hicaz and Nikriz maqams and 3+2+2+3 rhythmic pattern which is basically Aksak Semai usul in Turkish music. They used also Turkish instruments like ney, darbuka, zurna, bağlama and a playing technique which resembles bağlama playing technique 'şelpe' in some of their guitar solos.

They have mainly two major musical periods. First is 'trash metal sound' which is similar to American or European trash metal bands, which can be heard in their first two albums. It is still possible to find some Turkish music elements like Hicaz maqam or janissary tunes but general atmosphere in western trash metal sound. Second is can be defined as 'Turkish heavy metal sound' which appears with Anatolia album. Turkish melodies, rhythms, instruments, and lyrics can be heard all over their last albums.

In this study, I will use musical analysis in order to understand the relation between the band's music and their influences. I will transcribe excerpts of their songs and related influences and compare them. For example Anatolia album and Metallica's 1991 album has similar characteristics in song structure, guitar and bass sounds, riffs, some rhythmical patterns and so on. Also we can speak about similarities to other bands like Sepultura, Dream Theater etc. There is also strong influence of 'Aşık' and 'tasavvuf' (mystic) music. The way they use ney and bağlama worth to compare to the original performances. Also in guitar solos, it is interesting to stress the bağlama playing technique 'şelpe' and guitar playing technique 'tapping' which have common characteristics. Lyrics are also highly influenced by mystic philosophy. The band interprets and adds new meanings on the ideas of mystic philosophy.

Analysing the band's music according to their periods helps to understand their works better.. The first two albums Pentagram and Trail Blazer, can be evaluated as trash metal style. The last three albums; Anatolia, Unspoken and Bir can be seen as a mixture of heavy, trash, progressive metal and aşık music and music and mystic music. Other criteria is big and small gestures. In big gestures, the music is purer, the music can be closer to Turkish or western side; in small gestures Turkish and western styles are blending as fragments. Another aspect is playing the instruments in the style of another Turkish instrument. For example, playing the guitar in the style of 'bağlama', or playing the drums sometimes in the style of 'ramadan drum', sometimes 'kudüm'. Song forms are usually in common pop song forms, but the instrumental ones have variation.

Definitions:

Usul: Usul literally means style. Usul is the name given to the specific rhythmic patterns in Turkish music. Some usuls may be also the name of a form. (ex. yürük semai) There are various usuls from 2 to 120 beats which are formed of composite rhythmic patterns.


Velvele: Velvele is the embellished –usually with syncopations–versions of usuls, played by a kind of bounded two drums with two sticks ‘kudüm’. Kudüm is one of the primary instruments of Mevlevi Ritual.

Seyir: Seyir is the name of the motion manner of the improvisation and the melodic structure which represents the characteristics of a makam scale. There are three kinds of seyirs: ascending, descending, and ascending-descending. Seyir is also the name of oral improvisation in the makam scale. When this improvisation is played by an instrument, it is called ‘taksim’.

Aranağme: Aranağme is the tune played by the instruments in order to fill the rests of the vocal parts. It can be short between the verse lines, or longer between the two verses.

Dem: Dem is long drone note –tonic, dominant or other note, according to the solo– played by the instruments in order to support of the vocal or the other instrument’s free solo.

1. The First Period: From Trash Metal To Janissary Music

When we look at the first album, we see a very classical trash metal sound. All riffs, rhythmic patterns of the songs are in popular style of 1980’s metal bands like Slayer and Metallica. Fast tremolos, rhythmical dynamism – usually in very fast 2/4-, natural minor or phrygian mode with augmented 4, sudden modulations to 2nd, 4th, and 5th degrees, chromatism, very fast guitar solos –sometimes at the very beginning of the song-, scream or brutal vocal styles, playing unison of guitar and bass are the common features of the trash metal. So in the first album we see all these features in the songs. Also there is a rhythmic pattern..... in Pentagram song, we’ll hear the slower version of the same pattern in the middle section of 1000 in the Eastland song in Anatolia album.

In second album Trail Blazer, we hear from the first song a fast guitar solo in harmonic minor scale which resembles Y.Malmsteen’s style. Again, for the first time we hear hicaz scale in the album. In No One Wins The Fight, we hear a part of a janissary tune Neslin Deden. The section is prepared with a trashy rhythmic pattern.....

2. The Second Period

With Anatolia album, we hear 10/8 aksak semai rhythmic pattern, nikriz scale for the first time with new vocalist Murat İlkan’s Bruce Dickinson-like voice with its big vibrato. Also the powerful guitar sound resembles the general sound of Metallica’s Black album. The short duo of

bağlama and soprano, gives the clue about Pentagram's new style. Also the symbolic instrument of mystic music 'ney' brings to the band a new colour. Hicaz and kurdi scales are alternating, sometimes with their pentatonic forms. There are also small gestures like using rhythmic patterns of trash metal, with Turkish maqam scales like hüseyini. And also dynamic and asymmetrical rhythm patterns calls the term 'progressive'. There is also one Aşık Veysel cover in the album.

Unspoken album consolidates the new attitude of the band. Again we hear hicaz, nikriz, hüseyini, kürdi scales with flattened 2nd and augmented 4th. Drop d tuning reinforces the solid guitar sound. Songs are in d for darker mood, in e for lighter mood. We also hear rhythmical patterns like 6/4 (yürük semai usul), guitars and drums strengthen by playing a rhythmic pattern which is very similar to 'usul's 'velve'. In verses, filling the vocal rests with the guitars keeps alive the 'aranağme' tradition. There are also 10/8 (aksak semai), 9/8 (aksak), 7/8, and 12/8 beats. Besides ney, we hear other instruments like keyboard, mey, and zurna.

In Bir album, we hear guitars in the 'bağlama' playing style. And there is zirgüleli hicaz scale in guitar solos. We also hear the guitarist Hakan Utangaç's half-brutal vocal. There are short trashy parts to awake a retro feeling to their previous albums. Songs are usually in middle tempo. There are one Aşık Veysel and one Aşık Derdli cover in the album.

3. Song Example: 'Lions In The Cage'

The song begins with 4-measure melody in hicaz scale, in 6/4. Drums, bass, guitars, ney, they are all playing in unison, -emphasizing the 2nd and 4th degrees like in hicaz maqam 'seyir' characteristics.-It repeats two times. In the verse, bass and guitars playing a rhythmic riff which resembles syncopated yürük semai velve. The augmented 4th is heard. This rhythmic structure makes room for the vocal melody. Vocal melody is in A-B style. In second repeat, there is back vocal singing in third. Guitars keep the dynamism with rhythmic variations. At the end of the verse, beat changes to 4/4. In bridge, guitars are playing long chords. Vocal's 'ooo' parts with its third, makes call and response with the lyrics. The chorus derives from the bridge. The word 'Lions!' is sung by recitative back vocals. (This part is sung by the audience in live performances). We hear the introduction melody, the second verse, the bridge, and the chorus again. After 8-measure melodic guitar, introduction melody is heard again. The middle section is comprised of the speech of the vocal with effects, long notes of the keyboard, and the ascending short melody of the guitar played for four times. The second guitar solo is again in zirgüleli hicaz scale and 16-measure long. Then the bridge and the chorus are heard two times. At the end, there is a short ney solo in counterpoint style while the band is waiting on the note e-flat as

‘dem’(pedal). The song finishes with an attack-like riff which is played by the whole band.

LIONS IN THE CAGE:

MELODY 4*6/4 D D G C	VERSE 1 4+2*6/4 - 2*4/4 D	BRIDGE 4*4/4 D C	CHORUS 4*4/4 D C
MELODY’ 4*6/4 D D G C	VERSE 2 4+2*6/4 - 2*4/4 D	BRIDGE’ 4*4/4 D C	CHORUS’ 4*4/4 D C
GUITAR SOLO 8*4/4 D	MELODY’’ = 4*6/4 D D G C.....	MIDDLE SECTION 16*6/4 D C D G D	GUITAR SOLO 2 16*4/4 D
BRIDGE’’ 4*4/4 D C	CHORUS’’ 4*4/4 D C	BRIDGE’’’ 4*4/4 D C	CHORUS’’’ 4*4/4 D C
MELODY’’’= 4*6/4 DDGC.....	FREE SOLO C	NEY ATTACK D	FINISH

4. Song Example: ‘Bir’

The song begins with four-measure rhythmic riff in kürdi scale with augmented four played two times. The guitars play in muted long style which resembles bağlama picking from below. (↓↑↑↑) Then the guitar plays the melody in hüseyini scale with its octave two times. With the short drum attack and the harmonics of the guitar, the song moves on the verse. Vocals come in octaves. Bridge is short, in major tone, with long chords. In chorus, we hear first rhythmic –with harmonics-, then long notes on guitars. The same drum attack comes at the end of the chorus. The introduction melody, the second verse, the bridge, and the chorus come again. This time the bridge repeats two times, expressing ‘there is more to say/coda’ feeling with the 6th degree. After the chorus, there is 8-measure guitar solo in zırgüleli hicaz scale. Then the second guitar solo with higher notes with the same length. We hear the bridge, the chorus and the introduction melody for the last time. The song ends with a short attack.

5. Big and Small Gestures

When we look at Pentagram songs, we see two kinds of gestures; big and small gestures. The big gestures are purer whether they are close to Turkish or western side. For example Anatolia song with its nikriz scale and 10/8 aksak semai rhythmic pattern, it’s easy to perceive by the audience. The

only the westerner aspect of the music is almost the sound. For example, The bridge of Stand to Fall is made of very classical trash metal rhythmical riff. But it is also made in huseyni scale, with 6-7-1 cadance along with very characteristic huseyni 4-7-5 leap. This gesture is not very easy to catch by the audience's ear. Still, if we speak of the word 'synthesis' for Pentagram's music, these small gestures constitute the case rather than the big ones.

6. Overall Charactersitics of Pentagram's Music

The most used maqam scales by the band are hicaz –and zirgüleli hicaz-, nikriz, hüseyini, and kürdi scales. The zirgüleli hicaz is used mostly in last two albums and mostly in guitar solos; in order to open a new section by coloring with +7 without changing the tone or chord progression. The songs are either in d or e. D is preferred for darker mood, e is chosen for lighter, more positive feeling.

The guitars are in drop d tuning. The guitar and the bass partitions are very plain, easy to play, and easy to ring. The guitar and the bass are playing the riffs or the melodies in unison or in octaves. These strategies, reinforces the guarantee of the solid and heavy sound of the band.

The most used rhythmic patterns are 10/8 (aksak semai), 9/8 (aksak), 7/8, 12/8, and 4/4. This tempo is very convenient to headbang and accompanying rhythmically along with the band in live shows. The songs are in popular song form. The song starts with the melody, then the verse, bridge, the chorus, again the repetition of these, a middle section or/and solo, and several repetitions of the chorus for the last time.

A Map for the Overall Characteristics of Pentagram's Music

MAQAM SCALES	Form	Tones	USULS/ RHYTHMIC PATTERNS	Temp o	Strategies for the sound
HİCAZ/ZİR GÜLELİ HİCAZ	Song form	D	10/8 AKSAK SEMAİ	100~	Drop D Tuning
NİKRİZ		E	9/8 AKSAK		Plain partitions
HÜSEYNİ			7/8		Playing in unison and octave
KÜRDİ			12/8		
			4/4		

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Modalities of the Avant-Garde: The Aesthetic Role of Light in the Parallax of Alexander Scriabin's Opera, *Mysterium* and Heavy Metal Performance

Joseph R. Blessin

Abstract

It is an inexorable assumption that heavy metal as a rock genre be especially poignant in its aggressive stance towards the hallowed institutions of all forms of Western hegemony, be they cultural, political and religious. This is accepted with such certainty that some would even say that heavy metal as a musical genre offers a legitimate antipodal space to these institutions. It is this characterization of heavy metal that I wish to challenge. The basis of my challenge comes from my own research into surprising parallels between nineteenth century operatic and modern rock performance. The points I will focus on are: a) the continued lopsided relationship between performer and audience resembling something akin to Hegel's 'master-slave' analogy; b) perpetuity of industrial noise - supplanting sublime sounds of storms, waterfalls and tectonic activities of the pre-industrial age (*Luigi Russolo*, 1913) - being articulations of a new class of deities, comprising industrialists whose 'work-based practices' in music (*Georgina Born*, 2005) establish the ubiquitous framework for new eurological ordinances; and c) alchemic formulas amalgamating sounds, digitalized effects, texts, images, gestures, light and colour into new 'heavy metallic' compounds with transcendental glow (*Douglas Kahn*, 1990). The principle performance model of my research will be Alexander Scriabin's Opera, *Mysterium*.

Key Words: Heavy Metal, Scriabin, *Mysterium*, Jazz, Afrological and Eurological Perspectives, Art History, Originality, Brian Eno, Alchemy, Performance, Avant-garde, the Occult, Kant, Evolution, Steven Mithen.

1. Opening Remarks to the 1st Global Conference Heavy Fundamentalism: Music, Metal and Politics

The chapter, *The Light Cast from '... melting the metal of melodies': The Aesthetic Role of Light in the Parallax of Alexander Scriabin's Opera, Mysterium and Modern Rock Performance*, was never intended to be presented at a conference on heavy metal music. For one thing heavy metal as a term is not mentioned once in the essay and there is only fleeting references to groups who could comfortably fit the category. However after having let the essay sit and collect dust for awhile, many of the ideas,

originally set in incipient formation and agitated by impending deadlines, could settle into new sedimentary forms making available new features for analysis and consideration, (which is often the case when essays are revisited months later.) This process of sedimentation reminds me of another process more literal than metaphor and indulge me a little time here to develop it as its significance will become clear by the time this chapter's last sentence is written, although now it may seem at present eons removed from our discussion of heavy metal as a discursive category. Charles Darwin described time has having a way of levelling formations once erect with distinction, bringing to likeness all things regardless of their former complex and solid states. The act of 'sitting and collecting dust' is a hackneyed expression conventionally referring to objects that have exited their prime of usefulness on their way towards entropic disintegration. Steeped in poetic license this expression also connotes objects such as books whose textual content - rather than physicality - have fallen into disuse. What makes textual objects different from their physical counterparts is that their auratic power increases the further back in time they recede.

Walter Benjamin described such objects' auras as both derivative of and dependent on 'ritual, the location of its original use value'¹ in language. For Darwin 'sitting and collecting dust' happened in geological time, or what one may safely call absolute time: a space absent of aura and impervious to language's effort to contain it despite the use of the most complex religious, philosophical and calendaric systems. He sets the exteriority of time to human experience this way:

A man must for years examine for himself great piles of superimposed strata, and watch the sea at work grinding down old rocks and making fresh sediment, before he can hope to comprehend anything of the lapse of time, the monuments of which we see around us.²

All discourse, including ones related to music, fall outside geological time, thus making unusual and contradictory my essay's approach of feigning this time's compressive power to collapse genres, discourses and eras within Western music. The resulting outcome will be a form both potent and dark as it is reductive. It is unavoidable here to mention an analogical form just as potent, black and reductive: source rock, a mineral substance immersed in organic material compressed over millions of years under thousands of pounds of pressure, is also the fountainhead of the Western military-industrial complex. Oil is not too unlike music in this way; they both have particular physical properties drawn into intricate application systems, systems dating as far back as language's emergence from the Paleolithic Age. It was in his book *Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and*

Body that Steve Mithen posited language's first emergence from a music-like mode of communication ('Hmmm communication' in his words)³, language being a new organizational apparatus comprising frozen fragments that had flaked off the song's otherwise whole musical phrase. Mithen described the 40,000-year-old phenomenon of language as snippets of chatter in social world of (music-like) communication expanding into the realm of physical objects⁴ where these snippets were accessible to technical intelligences and fused therein for new all-purpose applications. The consequence: language becomes less communicative and more instrumental, tool-making less instrumental and more communicative, compounding through the ages in discursivity rooted in the ritualistic manipulation of physical objects and phenomena.

This manner of manipulation came in addition to music's own ability at emotional manipulation. To expedite our analysis of heavy metal music, leaving some of the more detailed analysis for later, let me state that in the face of geological time all discursive categories and definitions inevitably collapse with more ease than the frailest of compounds against the force of gravity. All the more dramatic if the category presumes having the hardest of the heaviest of metals. Just as the compressed organic material is the primary source of power in source rock - not the inorganic material itself - it is the organic material compressed in the heaviness of the history of Western music that is a source of power - not the hardened material i.e. 'rock' or 'metal' metaphorically containing it.

2. **Antithesis**

... the artist has moved from viewing art as an object of worship to viewing himself as an object of worship.⁵

If I could make an opening with the grandiose voice of a heavy metal front man it may sound as follows: It follows from this that a few caveats concerning my approach to heavy metal be clearly stated. First of all many of the music practitioners and genres I will discuss have little definitional relation to the conventional notion of heavy metal and I definitely wish not to put myself in a position of being 'a suit and tie' member of the then 1987 Grammy selection committee, who chose Jethro Tull's flute over Kirk Hammet's electric guitar when 'metal heads' worldwide could smell only complicity. Secondly, in many ways what I will say undermines the whole 'heavy metal project' (if such a project can be said to even exist so explicitly). To showcase my art history 'suit' a little here, such a threat could be compared to the devastating effect to avant-garde artists from Jackson Pollack to Frank Stella had Rosalind Krauss' 1980 groundbreaking essay, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodern Repetition* appeared at the apogee of modernist art, reversing its fundamental claim to originality and all

the power and virility invested in such a construct. Heavy metal as a music genre and discursive category deserves critical examination and much is at stake for those of us who have many reasons to take it seriously. For heavy metal purists, who prefer clearly marked labels to ones that bleed into other genres, styles and eras, this essay's considerable broadening of the definition of heavy metal may be discombobulating; for those heavy metal practitioners among us who are interested in the continued refinement of their craft this essay's removal of its mystifying shroud will elicit more a magician's sigh of disappointment on being outed on a favourite magic trick. These differences in audience and performer responses cursively mark a contrastive relationship that will be mostly implicit but never too far from this essay's surface.

To elucidate this point it is worth quickly juxtaposing this relationship. I am quickly reminded of the tepid response to Metallica's 1996 release of *Load*, an album, departing from previous tried and true models that endeavoured to re-define itself within the milieu of an established alternative style among other eclectic styles. The album's country music-influenced song *Mamma Said*⁶ became an anthem of trepidation for all those who had become all too familiar with the band's previous stylistic model. In contrast practitioners themselves are more than happy to assert genealogies of influence and to admit openness to new trends and changes without having the fear of compromising on originality. Much of this essay emphasizes firstly how successful performers achieve such originality despite the use of motleys of diverse and recycled forms and sources and to some extent how and why audience members are persuaded more often than not to accept this problematic claim to originality.

The 'sleight of hands' for this originality - as it has also been throughout the entire history of the avant-garde - lies in the notion of intentionality. The consummation of this strategy in heavy metal is cleverly articulated by Lemmy Kilmister, who has his own hidden '*Ace of Spades*' concerning the longevity of his band Motörhead:

All this happened as an accident. We never had a plan... our whole career... we were a train wreck (a crash coming together)... it usually works though... you know... we were a very good train wreck.⁷

One need only look at the meteoritic decline of an artist like Fred Durst whose neglect of the cardinal rule of intentionality reaches a level *reductio ad absurdum*. Someone as serious about his artistic craft, who wallows in a nü metal designation, becomes its executive, president and CEO par excellent⁸ and promotes a commodity whose greatness he once claimed merited multiple purchases is doomed to fail as a metaphysical rule. One need only mention Lukács' observation that the commodity fetish only works as an

inexorable law of desire cached within the marketplace (reification), not as a dictate for consumption on account of its own inherent value⁹ as Durst would assert. This reification plays an important role in Western music and this chapter will infer how the heavy metal designation could appropriately include genres as diverse as pop, punk, and even early twentieth century opera - for the latter, however, only because it would first primed the mould.

Besides this extreme broadening of the heavy metal label I am also going to cross another red line meriting purgatorial punishment of an even greater degree somewhere between an onstage denunciation and a cameo on a Cannibal Corpse album cover. I will assert that the very entity the heavy metal project aggressively strives to tear down is the very thing it depends on for its continued power - a pact made not with the Devil but with his adversary - God himself!

It is an inexorable assumption that heavy metal as a rock genre be especially poignant in its aggressive stance towards the hallow institutions of all forms of Western hegemony, be they cultural, political and religious. This is accepted with such certainty that some would even say that heavy metal as a musical genre offers a legitimate antipodal space to these institutions - a space where Lucifer has deposed the Christian god-king and has effaced his heirs' 'Enlightenment' constitutions with nihilistic expletives and sacrilegious profanities. It is this characterization of heavy metal that I wish to challenge. As alluded to in my discussion of Durst's failure to possess the 'invisible hand' to reify desire, heavy metal should be looked at within the broader development in the West of 'industrialized' music where technological wizardry in production and performance - as well as performers' own sorcerous stage presence - are all really extensions of occultic practices of early practitioners who learned during the Enlightenment how to both reformulate their craft into techniques of science and veil this technological power behind 'grids' (foreshadowing those of the avant-garde)¹⁰ so as to maintain its continued mystifying power.

And to posit the Christian tradition as the midwife to the Enlightenment without acknowledging the role the Occult played is to fall into the trap that befell thinkers as great as Kant and Hegel. Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* too affirm such a criticism and allude to this 'other' tradition when they assert that 'myth [was] already enlightenment, and enlightenment revert[ed] to mythology'.¹¹ Christianity has always been a Janus-faced tradition rooted partly in the metaphysical tradition of Pauline rationalism but also in the romantic tradition of paganism, this double identity being carried over too into the Enlightenment. Although it is easy to accept the Baconian scientific method as a driving force behind the positivist and rational trajectory of the Enlightenment and its concomitant Industrial Revolution, it is much more difficult to admit that the earliest 'science' experiments of transforming base elements into precious

compounds like gold was also seen as the Eucharistic model for transmuting base aspects of the human soul into a form in unison with the divine.¹² The shamanic character of these first practitioners was never really eclipsed even though Apollonian reason would become the dominate expression of science.

However, just as magic and folk ritual continued to challenge the hegemony of rationalism, the character of the shaman would continue to find other conduits for fusions of magic and technologies and audiences willing to surrender to their enchantment. It is my contention that the shamanic incantational tradition - and its legacy within the Occult - finds continuity in the avant-garde's own mark-making tradition, discursivity becoming the new magic spell. Aside from this the avant-garde artist's typical denial of intentionality can be seen as surreptitiously cordoning off an interstitial space between two worlds: one of pre-existing real forms and one comprising a primordial soup, from which 'original' forms enter into the world. Avant-garde artists' bodies bridge these two worlds in much the same way shaman's bodies bridge their respective worlds, in both cases the spoken and written word (or sign) – the implicit theoretical strategy to a canvas' mark arrangement for the former; a recitation of a spell from some 'book of secrets' for the latter - is the tool to open these interstitial portals.

Borrowing from Ernst Bloch's observations about Joseph Beuys' mentor Rudolf Steiner, Benjamin H.D. Buchloch recognizes in Beuys' own eccentric comportment evidence of the shamanic tradition within the avant-garde art tradition:

[These] special dreamers... are perforated enough to allow unstandardised states to enter into them. That which is deranged has so deranged the limits of the ordinary... Into the ego thus split there enter not only of sin... but a false Jesus among lunatics...¹³

Although Buchloch suggests that the 'highly associative potential and quasi-magical attraction that [Beuys'] works seems to exert on many followers and his public'¹⁴ was tantamount to shamanism, Buchloch does not go far enough in this line of thinking, suggesting Beuys' shift from historically 'specific' (in the Modernist sense of the word) to metaphysical objects, i.e. metaphors, was a misguided movement towards 'opulent nebulosity'.¹⁵ Buchloch does not seem to admit Modernism's 'specific objects' qualify too as nebulous or fundamentally beholden to language. This point is confirmed on the already mentioned evolutionary kinship between language and objects, objects serving instrumental functionality. It is my contention that even ready-mades within the Modernist project are too ensnared in webs of metaphysics - even objects of science and technology, which would seem to offer some possibility of exclusion and separation from language.

Technological ready-mades have always been implicated too in magic's attempt to control the physical world; as Gavin Ashenden points out, pseudo-sciences like 'alchemy would only become a legitimate empirical science, i.e. chemistry, when manipulation of elements was separated from the human quest for personal transformation and change'.¹⁶ Science and technology have too been important tools in art production from Flavin's use of florescent lights to Bruce Naumen's video art and like early alchemists they used their respective media to putatively valuate human subjects from their debased status as commodities or subjects trapped in theatricity¹⁷ - two themes central to the Modernist project. If magic or discursivity ends up not being able to control the physical environment, it can at least control the audiences' perception of it; it is at this point where technology in prestidigitational form becomes indispensable.

The prestidigitation works in this manner because meaning in language is open-ended by nature of its unencapsulated position outside cerebral materiality and inside semiotic immateriality. Language works both to represent the external (and internal as the Cartesian adage goes) environment using shiftable reductionisms where opposites, mutually dependent on one another, give the prestidigitation its ability to deceive the audience. A coin can appear either as present or absent in a magician's hand but only these two extremes of a more complex process register as representation given perception's tendency to exclude information that does not add up to reductive wholes. Within the Western narrative these relationships of opposites can also be seen to make their customary appearance amongst the panoplies of concepts that work within any binary structure of language. God and the Devil's mutual dependence in demarcating one other's parameters of meaning would qualify as one such category. There is no other phenomenon within Western culture where this prestidigitational system is laid bare more than in heavy metal music and performance.

Personal narrative should never interfere with an academic argument but my own experience offers a unique opportunity to add additional illumination. Like many young teens raised in Christian families I was exposed to certain ideas that were meant to protect me and add a hedge of protection around my 'faith' during the tumultuous teen years. One of the greatest concerns for youth pastors at the time was the negative influence of rock music. On one occasion my youth group was shown a significant documentary within evangelical circles called *Hell's Bells: The Dangers of Rock n' Roll*. Produced by Eric Holmberg of the Baptist-sponsored Reel to Real ministries this 1989 documentary expounded on the relationship between rock n' roll and violence, sex, suicide, drugs, rebellion and Satanism. Fast forward fifteen years and what I claim now is that it is within the syncretic tradition of Christianity itself and its involvement in the history

of Western arts and sciences that the ‘mineral’ source of one *interpretative mode* of rock music, one that is eurological, is identifiable. (‘Interpretation’ is significant here as it preserves the possibility of an afrological interpretation.) No lake of fire is necessary when ‘industrialized’ forms of Western music have their own tradition of hellish factories with punctuating bells dating back as early as the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. In an ironic way it is a band like the 80s Christian Heavy Metal band Stryper who takes the rock genre to its logical extreme. In terms of human transmutation Stryper’s infamous ‘alter’ calls far out do the simulated ritual mutilation of audience members’ bodies of the wickedest of death metal bands although both rituals originate from similar motivations. The basis of these motivations emerges from my own research into surprising parallels between nineteenth century operatic and modern rock performance.

It could be said that heavy metal’s ‘heavy’-handed approach to defining the performer-audience relationship is really a *reductio ad absurdum* of the more nuanced strategy described in *‘The light cast from...’* as emerging from the likes of avant-garde musicians like Brian Eno. It can be said that heavy metal performance truly epitomizes what Scriabin meant by the apotheosis of the performer in the second stage of his dialectic progression, ‘antithesis’. However, it is within Scriabin’s first progression, ‘thesis’, where music performance’s power as a prestidigital system is really made manifest. Extending from the process described early on in Mithen’s thesis of language’s evolutionary emergence from musical communication, Scriabin’s ‘thesis’ can be seen as a deeper, more accelerated fragmentational assault on sight and sound of both the musical phrase and gesture. In a nutshell, Scriabin, by means of his own theosophical system, aims to return language to its original musical source, injecting it with new layers of fragmentation - and beyond this - he also seeks to do the same with human perception under the guise of his artificial model of synaesthesia.¹⁸ It is worth quoting a passage from ‘The Light Cast from ...’ (p. 7-12) at length in order to demonstrate just how fecund the opportunities are for deploying prestidigitations on vulnerable audiences in performance spaces.

3. Thesis

... yesterday’s wise men did not dream of... passages and openings into its secrets from the labyrinth of man’s soul.¹⁹

...The verticality of music and color that appears possible in Eno’s music production, at first glance, does not necessarily translate into success in rock performance. This is due in part to concert performance’s inherent horizontality and the difficulty to camouflage intention behind ‘grids’ in concert spaces. Boris Shlester points out how the inevitable horizontality of *Mysterium*’s stage and audience layout undermined its ultimate effectiveness:

To [Scriabin], the dream was a precognition of mysterious, obscure and inchoate cravings of all nature for eventual transformation... The specific number of people experiencing the sensation of ecstasy was, of course, immaterial. What does it matter if two million people or a thousand million people experience the state of ecstasy when a single soul remains excluded from universal light? Such a partial consummation cannot be imagined; either mankind and nature undergo transformation, or none do.²⁰

This process can be extrapolated to modern concertgoers' placements in arenas or concert halls, where differences in economic and epistemological factors such as ticket prices and intensity of fan loyalty, respectively, determine both different qualities of viewing and intensities of engagement. As already mentioned, improvisation was a key aspect to both Scriabin and Eno's artistic goals. For Scriabin, improvisational success was a 'dithyrambic premise with a Dionysian outcome';²¹ for Eno it was 'compositions including unrepeatable sound machine-derived events and irruptions'.²² George E. Lewis exposes such improvisational goals as reproducible 'grid'-like decoys, employed furtively to mask intentionality. In his juxtaposition of eurological and afrological perspectives of improvisation, Lewis used John Fiske's definition of 'exnomination' to explain how appellation and intentionality of 'whiteness' tend to strive for invisibility:

Whiteness constitutes itself as a universal set of norms by which to make sense of the world. Fiske identifies 'exnomination' as a primary characteristic of whiteness as power: 'Exnomination' is the means by which whiteness avoids being named and thus keeps itself out of the field of interrogation and therefore off the agenda for change... One practice of exnomination is the avoidance of self-recognition and self-definition. Defining, for whites, is a process that is always directed outwards upon multiple 'others' but never inward upon the definer.²³

First of all, in Scriabin's *Mysterium*, it is easy to mask appellation behind program's fleeting sound waves and invisible score sheet; for Eno it is also easy to do this because he has the additional advantage of being able to hide his music-producing gestures behind high-quality technologies like filters and mixers. In the case of visual effects in rock performance, however, such exnomination is difficult. For example, lighting schemas in the most elaborate of rock concerts, for example, U2's 1991 Zoo TV tour, resemble visible systems of musical notation i.e. 'note-like' ellipsoidal fixtures on

series of ‘cleft-like’ architectural scaffoldings. Also, the historical proscenium ultimately fails to hide the awkward transition from audience to performance space. Secondly, assemblages within performance spaces like background vocals, audiences, equipment need to be cohesively pulled together into some kind of unity - a synecdochic version of what could be happening at a macro-level within any system patriarchic and/or occidental. The incorporation of extraneous ‘others’ into some universalising project by masculinities²⁴ like Scriabin and Eno is a function of some ‘grid’ system but if all else fails disavowal works too. In her book, *Happening and Other Acts* Marielle R. Sandford sets the terms for all these technical and discursive difficulties. She states:

Happenings are differentiated from dramatic (opera, ballet and mime) theatre by the absence of a coherent diegetic universe. They are differentiated from fairs, pageants, and other non-diegetic spectacle genres by their dramaturgic homogeneity, and from the circus (a genre to which they appear to be aesthetically closest) by their more unified themes and fields.²⁵

Like happenings, music performance’s diegetic apparatus are laid bare, all parts exposed, and turned with Brechtian self-consciousness towards the audience, failing to hide visual and discursive constructs necessary to maintain a self-enclosed imaginary universe including the performer-audience dichotomy. What diegetic parts that do exist like ‘visual elements of colour, line, layout and specific image’²⁶ are only impositions of ‘dramaturgic homogeneity’, attempting to deny spectatorial freedom of movement - physically and discursively. Just as Scriabin’s *Mysterium* did years before, rock performance confronts these ‘loose ends’ within the machinery of its space, which includes, as well, countless spectators possessing individuated wills, who must be persuaded of this ‘dramaturgic homogeneity’ - in no way an easy task given the modern audience’s immunity to the theatrical gimmicks of the past. Gimmicks, conceits denying total, embodied experience by depending on fragmentary, disembodied intrigue, would have been all that Scriabin could have depended on to construct his *Mysterium*’s stage set and visual effects. Pulleys, leavers, trapdoors, manually operated spotlight, workers providing necessary labour would all have been disembodied parts in performance and impossible to hide in a space envisioned by Scriabin as a half-temple with a dome, floor partitioned into terraces extending from the proscenium to a body of water, a retractable roof - all of which would be destroyed during the grand finale.²⁷ The use of light and colour in modern rock performance has come a long way since Scriabin first experimented with the *tastiere per luce*²⁸ in his music

movements, and in many ways has solved many of its lighting and choreography problems. Today's digital and light technologies too strive for music and colour synchronization and, as with Eno's music production, this process too depends on something resembling verticality.

Scriabin's attempt at synchronizing visual effects, in many ways, is a mystical version of how digital technology actually works. Just as 'passages and openings' in Scriabin's *thesis* reveal new sources of knowledge of the 'labyrinth of [the unified] human soul', digital technology too has caches of irreducible element called pixels beyond the representationalism of macrostructures, into which they merge. Jason Gaige, in dialogue with Gerhard Richter's 1966 painting of a colour chart, *192 Colours*, establishes the parameters of comparison this way:

[192 Colours is] arranged in random order on a rigid grid. It is possible to see this painting as a literal working through of Duchamp's observation that once artists began to work with industrially manufactured, 'readymade' tubes of paint, they were effectively producing 'work of assemblages', or 'assisted readymades'. Although sometimes painted on an imposing scale, these canvases resemble nothing so much as manufacturers' catalogues for industrially produced paint. By evaluating colour of any descriptive, symbolic or expressive function, Richter deflates the claim to spiritual significance...²⁹

Rooted compositionally in interacting, individuated colour components, digital pixels like the hues of Richter's colours demonstrate how wholes can emerge from parts uncontaminated by the chiaroscuro (of meaning and intention) of the artist's tampering hand and 'colour circle'.³⁰ In essence, digital technology defers colour's descriptive, symbolic and expressive meaning along vertical recessions until re-configured at a covert distance as representation; representation is therefore indebted to the 'grid's' invisibility and must be seen as sheer illusionism. David Summers affirms representation's general illusionary quality when he described the painted image as 'corresponding not so much to things as to sensations, perceptions and conceptions; or that they are, equally mental terms, fantastic or ideal'.³¹ Digital representation in rock performance too utilizes digital representation to fool audience into seeing physically a totality out of millions of parts and believing, in general, in a cleverly constructed simulacrum of images, feigning reality. Depending only on a limited repertoire of gimmicks - fragmentary, disembodied intrigue - Scriabin too sought to trick audience into belief in and loyalty to his artistic vision. Even though their performance gimmicks appear comparatively more holistic and embodied, rock stars are

no less involved in the same machinations as Scriabin. Technology in performance spaces enables artistic meaning to conflate into its non-art counterpart - the readymade; here artistic intentionality can hide itself, asserting itself more convincingly than even the most charismatic of onstage performer.

Today's light show, with all its fixtures, fog machines, technically savvy assistants etc., is like a trick by a skilful, non-scalpel-wielding magician, a counterpart to Walter Benjamin's own 'surgeon of film':

The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the opposite... in short... the magician is still hidden in the medical practitioner [and encounters the patient face to face].³²

The inability of concert performers to make incisions into spectators' fields of vision through the cutting and stitching of playback/ recording system confirms one of the inherent weakness of concerts' visual production; a weakness unknown to Eno in his sound recording studio. Nonetheless, light technology, depending on the skill of its own magician-practitioners, accomplishes illusions such as the 'sawing-the-woman-in-half' and 'disappearing' trick both dematerialising on-stage substances while maintaining their constitution and horizontality vis-à-vis the audience. What makes these magician's tools magical lies is their status as banal readymades. Minimalist artists like Frank Stella had observed the power of readymades when he recognized how powerful art could be when made with 'paint as good as it was in the can'. For the 'sawing-the-woman-in-half' trick, artists went about avoiding the historical legacy of using oil paints from tubes to make contact with flesh and, rather, painted new skins with industrial paints that were no longer fleshy but would be illusionistically dismembered from the body of 'the entire tradition of easel painting, of painting as representation'.³³

In many ways the effect of these abstract minimalist paintings resemble those of concert lighting where fixtures like the parabolic aluminium reflector medium flood lamps, ellipsoidal/ leko or Fresnel striplights - with their own individuated colour charts - are readymades undoing representation. In his guide to the technical aspects of concert lighting, industry professional, James L. Moody, described the effect of these colour lights on material surfaces during performance when they come from

behind or the side in 'grid' formation, in contrast to their frontality in theatre: 'The formulation of the material to which the colour is bonded makes the colour part of the structure rather than something that lies on the surface'.³⁴ (Coming from the front lights in theatre are designed rather to constitute objects as whole and differentiated object from audience.) This cannibalising influence of colour light on surfaces has long been known and applied throughout art history. In his discussion of the dematerialised surfaces of Yves Klein's *International Klein Blue Monochrome* paintings (which included shiny gold leaf) or Dan Flavin's light works, David Batchelor makes the following observation about coloured light:

The analogical flow of mixed colours decrease the intensity of any particular hue; but the intensity of hue provided by the digital colour also tends to localize that colour. Our awareness of its containment increases. Shiny begins to delocalise colour; it picks up other colours and redistributes its own. Translucent allows one colour to spill onto and overlap another and to glow a little. Fluorescent tubes and incandescent lights project light and colour indiscriminately onto every surface with range. In these ways, the isolation of local colours is countered and put into reverse. Colour begins to regain its excessiveness.³⁵

Along with their well-timed concert black-outs, hard edges of solid objects, bathed in moving lights, seem to disappear and merge into new forms. Such untidy dismemberment and disappearance-reappearance of material objects go against the static principle of the 'grid', contradicting its notion of tight, regulated unity; this is until one recognizes the high level of hidden control, i.e. calibrated logarithms of lighting sequences and predetermined equalizer and lighting settings, involved in audio-visual processes with their own unified grammar and meaning... 'Modern rock performance is comprised of a distribution of conflated phoneme/ morpheme pairings of sound, digitalized effects, text,³⁶ image, gesture, light and colour' all synchronized according to a 'Musico-Color-Logo Scheme'. The meaning produced very much belongs to the realm of Barthes' 'Author-God' as it is invisible (in 'grid' form) yet bears malevolent and dictatorial control over the audio, visual and discursive field of the spectator.

4. **Synthesis**

the artist [being] brought face to face with his true and ultimate goals: the enactment rather than the representation, of transcendence.³⁷

Scriabin's third and final dialectic - 'the enactment not the representation of transcendence' - dialogues in an interesting way with the concluding remarks in Sam Dunn's illuminating heavy metal documentary, *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*:

Is Heavy Metal a sacrament... if it keeps kids alive, if it gives them hopes, if it gives them a place to belong, if it gives them a sense of *transcendence* then I believe it is a spiritual force; maybe it is a pipeline to God.³⁸

The theme of transcendence, central to the thesis of Dunn's heavy metal project, finds several points of contacts with my development of the origins and choregraphical strategies of Scriabin's *Mysterium*. In his documentary it is hard not to see Scriabin and Eno's notion of a verticality of experience in Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson's use to operatic vocal production to shrink the arena to the size of his thumb³⁹ or their virtuoso improvisational strategies being linked to its greater heritage in Western music from Beethoven's 1808 introduction to Choral Fantasy, Op. 80⁴⁰ to Eddie Van Halen's guitar solos;⁴¹ however, the documentary making the ambiguous notion of transcendence its terminus fails to deliver an original and conclusive final word to the meaning of heavy metal. My conclusion will not only posit Scriabin's third and final dialectic as containing clues to the proper definition of this transcendence but also elaborate on how heavy metal has come to be such a 'potent, black and reductive' power. To do this I want to quickly draw the eurological roots of heavy metal in juxtaposition with another vital source interwoven into the history of Western music, that is, jazz and its afrological source.

Dunn's documentary *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey* does acknowledge shared roots between jazz and heavy metal. Much was made in the documentary of Black Sabbath's guitarist, Tony Iammi, and his formative use of the diminished 5th in his guitar riffs as a significant moment ushering in the era of heavy metal; this 'devil's note'⁴² had already been a mainstay in jazz since its adoption from Afro-American blues music years earlier. Heavy metal flirts with the sonic chaos emanating from this diminished 5th but, as with jazz too, quickly retreats from the precipice to find resolution in subsequent notes - although these interstitial spaces for heavy metal seem less yawning and more cauterised. To this extent both genres are conservative, indicative of the evolutionary need for boundaries thus requiring some form of representation to shunt the contingency of non-representation and not wanting to fall into the interstitial precipices unless of course the musician is playing in the atonal realm of an artist like Sun Ra, who as a space alien, remains outside the evolutionary narrative anyways! If the diminished 5th and its flirtation with chaos are shared between heavy metal and jazz, it is Dunn

attaching to heavy metal an analogous spirit of resistance born out of the historical plight of African slaves with which I take issue.

One of the conclusive statements made about heavy metal in Dunn's documentary is how it cathartically allows fans to 'deal with larger issues'.⁴³ Given the extent of this essay's critical development of a 'heavy metal' model, such a conclusion seems now to be a moot point. In this next section jazz performance will be briefly developed for features distinct from its heavy metal counterpart, offering not only ethical respite from an eurological taint but also an acceptable alternative to what Scriabin may just have envisioned for his 'synthesis'.

The jazz model is 'enactment' of the full palette of human boundary formation; the pleasure this creates for performers and spectators depends not on rigid and heavy representational totalities. Jazz musicians face the audience without the cloak of spectacle; they and the audience mutually satisfy themselves with the reciprocating gestural and emotive expression of music. 'Community' was the synthesis Kant discovered in the 'Of Relation' category in his system of transcendental logic and it should also be seen as a possible framing device for understanding Scriabin's own *synthesis*. Kant described 'community' as follows:

... we must note that in all disjunctive judgements the sphere (that is, the plurality of everything that is contained under any one judgement) is represented as a whole divided into parts (the subordinate concepts), and that, as one of them cannot be contained under the other, they are thought as co-ordinated with, not subordinated to, one another, and so as determining one another not in one direction only, as in a series, but reciprocally, as in an aggregate (if one member of the division is posited, all the rest are excluded, conversely).⁴⁴

Kant described 'disjunctive judgements' as belonging to 'communit(ies) of... divisions of knowledge'⁴⁵ that when applied to Scriabin's performance space would mean the audience is taken for all its epistemological particularities without the need to derive an absolute totality. This could include the most multicultural and pluralistic of audiences, epistemological particularities having no bearing on the performance's affect. This contradicts something Boris Shlester said earlier in his explanation on why Scriabin's *Mysterium* actually failed: 'What does it matter if two million people or a thousand million people experience the state of ecstasy when a single soul remains excluded from universal light? Such a partial consummation cannot be imagined; either mankind and nature undergo transformation, or none do.'⁴⁶ The difference lies in the reciprocity of performer and audience, the

impenetrable realm in interstices of ‘cause and effect’ are no longer useful as a source for couching demagoguery and constructing atmospheric ‘mysterium’ in a manner sophistic. Rather much of jazz’ music consists of performing adaptive versions of previously performed songs in an atmosphere luminescent - with little choreography and technological gadgetry. The definition of performative virtuosity is marked by the audacious demonstrations of freedom to embody songs’ nodal heights and depths kinaesthetically and aurally in a manner personal, engaged in interaction with audience – usually without the avant-garde posturing. In heavy metal, as with the entire history of the avant-garde, virtuosity has depended rather on the ability to maintain this originator’s posture, originality linked to these interstitial gateways. If Georgina Born illuminates the ethical problem of such posturing by holding up afrological music as a countervailing model it is really Golan Levin’s description of Thomas Wilfred’s failed attempt to use his clavilux to properly consolidate points of sound and vision, that provides a technological example to Kant’s thesis that parts in temporal and spatial series fail to unite by means of ‘subordination’:

[Wilfred] thinks that the two arts [i.e. the composition and playing of Lumia] are so different that ‘attempts to design Lumia instruments in imitation of musical ones will prove as futile as attempts to write Lumia compositions by following the conventional laid out rules laid down for music. He also argued that the rules governing static composition and colour harmony do not apply to form and colour in motion: If a Lumia composition is stopped at any point, an analysis of the static image may show both form and colour out of balance from the painter’s point of view.⁴⁷

Both these manners of imbalance mentioned by Born and Levin make a model of ‘disjunction’ an ethical imperative for how producers of art media should maintain relations vis-à-vis their audience.

The palette of ‘enactment’ in jazz performance is conspicuously absent in heavy metal performance. If the extent to which represented spaces in heavy metal is not totalising enough, heavy metal welds interstitial gateways together sonically with metallic braces of the strongest alloy. This is evident in heavy metal’s use of heavier and louder musical articulations including streamlined power cords, machine gun drum-beats and an extreme level of electrification and amplification all meant not only to hide the performer’s gesturing body behind mediating technologies but also to declare clean and undeniable transitions between peaks in songs’ grids. It is no surprise why the heavy metal performer’s body never truly engages in dance; they either mimic demon-possessed mediums, drunken bacchanals or ‘head

bang' - a ritual consisting of spasmodic, reductive movements like up and down bobbing of the head in limited gestural and musical expression, i.e. repetitive and limited 'precipice-jumping'. The unnatural aspect of such gestures is elucidated in an article by Declan Pattan and Andrew McIntosh, titled 'Head and Neck Injures in Heavy Metal: Head bangers Stuck between Rock and a Hard Bass', where head banging is described as a health issue:

There are many different styles of head banging such as the up-down, the circular swing, the full body, or the side-to-side. It is thought that head banging to loud music, while making you more 'metal,' has associated risks other than acquired hearing loss. Jason Newsted, known for his circular swinging style head banging, gave 'physical damage' as one of the reasons for his departure from the band Metallica in 2001. In 2005, doctors believed that Terry Balsamo, the guitarist from the band Evanescence, experienced a stroke from head banging. Head banging caused a traumatic aneurysm of the cervical vertebral artery in a 15 year old drummer, and one case of subdural haematoma was reported to be caused by the shearing strain induced by the head and neck motion exhibited during head banging.⁴⁸

In his notion of 'machines of art', William Blake has already described how unnatural lines are, when connected to points geometrically in representational grids. He was of course talking about how to his chagrin the reproducibility of paintings and engravings using systems of points and lozenges, could successfully represent pre-existing great works of art; however, the system he described could also be applied to heavy metal with its dependence on constellations of conflated phoneme/ morpheme units, power chords, electrification and spasmodic dancing, all of which seek to emulate aesthetically the geometrically straight (consistent) lines of machines, to be 'reproduced' in all exactness in every venue in every city during a world tour. Jazz, rather, allows to be reclaimed both the undulating line - naturally formed from contours of limbs and parts in space - and the subtle gesture adding character to such lines, done so with both full chords on instruments, unmediated by technology, and, as well as, movements of dance reaching the full extent of gestural possibility - very much in contrast with headbanging. As well, the jazz performer is never to duplicate any performance that has taken place prior. Mentioning these limiting aspects of heavy metal is not done with the intention of denying its power; reductions are both potent and even desirable especially given the evolutionary need in all organisms to draw clean boundaries in a universe otherwise sublime and infinite. The problem arrives when, in the expression of these

'representations', the performer seeks to embody the power and majesty found in precipices of 'causes and effects' or beyond formal boundaries in language and music. There is good reason why Kant, Blake, Born and Levin all sought to avoid such a performative space, focusing instead on a model, both modest and ethical, that promotes 'community', 'multivocality' and simple pleasure of discovering the full spectra and limits of musical and linguistic boundaries. It could be said that such a space is imaginable only because of jazz, its lessons taught to us from the tragic histories of African slave musicians.

From the legacy of slavery, jazz was born of a tragic human condition of not being able to form world and self representations. The 'cause and effect' of all aspects of the slave's life was, to use Kant's term, categorically serial and one-directional, emanating from a system caching and making the slave owner's intentionality the 'Word'. All the commercial, scientific and ideological justifications for slavery cannot be seen as an anomaly in the history of the West; eurological traces manifest themselves in forms still today, to a much less malignant degree (relative to slavery as the cruellest of human institutions). This essay has explored one of these forms, one aesthetic, using Scriabin's *Mysterium* and heavy metal performance as models. African slave musicians' greatest gift to those in posterity has been their model of representation that finds more joy in the enactment of producing rather than in the representation of production as something final. Their inchoate jazz style would have imposed no totalising schemas and the basis of this enjoyment was playful and collective mischievousness in tinkering with the representational boundaries of both language and music without the heavy handed discursivity declared in any final representation. In contrast, for Scriabin's *Mysterium* and heavy metal performance it is in both of their final representations where joy and euphoria come, the consummating sensation being transcendental; this transcendence has been shown to cut performers and audiences in a manner unidirectional, generating all the ethical questions already elicited in this essay. Unfortunately, jazz, its legacy and roots is not outside the contest for being made into some final representation, evident in the 'tug-of-war' claims by those who want to make it either a 'black' or 'white' representation. This contradicts the genre's avoidance of precipices Kant rightfully claimed should be off limits to human understanding.

In the 'white' corner, jazz was easily adapted to a eurological model for commercial and imperial expansion when it was canonized as a pillar of Western music and weaponised during the Cold War to assert an American vision on the world. Sam Dunn's documentary too demonstrates the ease by which jazz is incorporable into discourses of heavy metal. Geddy Lee of Rush pointed out how: '[their] first influence was American blues processed through the sensibilities of English rock bands'⁴⁹ and a lot of heavy metal

bands such as Black Sabbath claim their origins too to stints as blues/ jazz bands, many of whom too problematically identify with a spirit of resistance they see inherent in afrological music.

However justifiable resistance be for those who seek, past and present, to find representational enclaves outside the dominance and ubiquity of eurological ones, I feel resistance in the context of afrological music is a lesser contribution compared to its performative model. This resistance would constitute the banner of the ‘black’ corner. I would argue that afrological genres such as hip hop or hardcore rap are really resistance models seeking ‘final representations’ to compete with eurological ones. The words of Franz Fanon weigh heavy in this attempt and it is he who develops one of the most powerful of representational models for such resistance. He argued that ‘black eyes’ could ‘face [mysteries of] black magic, orgies, witches’ Sabbaths, heathen rituals and amulets whereas ‘white eyes’ ‘failed to understand magic substitution’ and could only enslave visual/ intellectual incongruencies in hegemonic systems of reason, aesthetics, ethics and social censure.⁵⁰ I feel Fanon’s assessment is wrong for two reasons. Firstly, with this chapter’s avoidance of the dichotomy between mystical occultism and discursive rationalism, taking both as dependent on the prestidigitation, ‘white eyes’ too should be seen as capable of understanding and using magic. Secondly, in Fanon’s construction of his alternative representational model, he used ‘blackness’ as a negation to ‘whiteness’ and, in his own support of revolutionary Marxism in worldwide decolonisation projects, he demonstrates how ‘black eyes’ can too work with totalising systems of reason.

I feel a more productive way to describe the differences between eurological and afrological features rests less in the back and forth of competing discourses of representationalism but more in the ‘enactment of transcendence’ envisioned in Scriabin’s *synthesis* but never achieved. Here African slave musicians discovered in their music a way of communicating that neither assumes interstitial positions outside form nor makes their expression instruments for constructing a final representation. I feel they ‘transcend’ the necessity to form such representations, overcoming problems inherent to language since its emergence in evolution.

In conclusion it is worth tying up one loose end mentioned earlier but not yet fully developed, i.e. the role of colour in Scriabin’s prestidigitational encroachment on human perception in his *Mysterium*. As is the case with all colours the perceptual boundaries of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ is an evolutionary prestidigitation of sorts, two bifurcated perceptions not only betraying an infinite variability in pigment combination and level of light absorption or reflection but also hiding light as the common denominator for both. With these perceptual boundaries come semantic ones and through the whole of human history semantic ‘whiteness’ and

'blackness' have taken on accumulative and bifurcated conceptual meanings. For their role in this essay's analysis of eurological and afrological models of communication (specifically musical), their meaning has a long and problematic history of racial discrimination but only because first there had been perceptual 'discrimination'. This is so even though literal 'white' and 'black' skin pigmentations are impossibilities in nature. This demonstrates how semantic realities often trump their physical counterparts. One type of 'blackness' truly comes in light's absence; this 'blackness' is darkness that has no analogical relation to blackness, a colour seen when light is absorbed into surfaces.

In keeping with this essay's 'approach of feigning geological time's compressive power to collapse genres, discourses and eras within Western music', it is worth recounting one of the earliest accounts of perceptual bifurcations in a myth buried deep in eurological tradition. Ham, known biblically as the mythical ancestor of the 'black' race, demonstrated an illuminating veracity for seeing in his ability to witness the hilarity of his father's nudity and drunken antics. This is in stark contrast to his 'sleeping' father, Noah, and his brothers, Shem and Japheth, who 'wilfully blind' themselves when they walk backwards into their father's tent to 'hide' his indiscretion. In many ways this 'veracity of seeing' demonstrates two bifurcating points of departure for understanding the respective legacies of eurological and afrological modes of communication. While Shem and Japheth gazed into the black precipices of knowledge outside the limits of human understanding, limits both moral and theological, Ham was happy to enjoy the full range of gestures of his drunken father. Noah could very well have been singing - if so it could very well have had a jazzy ring. The consequence within this humorous re-interpretation of the myth of Noah is deadly serious however. According to the myth, Ham's punishment for seeing the 'enactment' of his father's inebriated state was eternal servitude to his brothers, chattel slavery, in its cruellest of manifestations. The blackness of ignorance comes when one stares into precipices that are beyond human knowledge; blackness, of a more sinister quality, emanates when representations are built thereupon.

I hoped to have evoked a new way of beholding musical performance, in its eurological and afrological qualities, testable the next time one attends a jazz and heavy metal performance.

Notes

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Hannah Arendt (ed), *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin: Essays and Reflections*, Schocken, New York, 1968, p. 224.

² Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species (By Means of Natural Selection)*, Dover, New York, 2006, p. 178.

³ Steven Mithen used the acronym Hmmm to describe his notion of musical communication: Holistic, manipulative, multi-modal, musical and mimetic.

⁴ Steven Mithen, *The Prehistory of the Mind: Cognitive Origins of Art, Religion and Science*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996, p. 187-188.

⁵ Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002, p. 187.

⁶ This song was performed by Metallica's James Hetfield (alongside Jessi Colter) on CMT in 1996 along with the Waylon Jennings' cover *Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit Done Got Out of Hand*.

⁷ This quotation comes from an exclusive interview with Lemmy Kilmister in Sam Dunn's 2005 documentary *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*. The interview can be found in the extra footage section on the documentary's menu page.

⁸ In an August 30, 2003 online article titled 'Profile: Fred Durst - Metal Fatigue' from the website, *Times Online*, the author highlights the business credentials of Fred Durst who preferred to be seen as a businessman rather than a rock star: 'The man Marilyn Manson calls an 'illiterate ape' has been clever enough to build a formidable empire. First, he created Limp Bizkit, a band that brought together heavy metal with Durst's whiney excuse for rapping, reproducing the most inane adolescent tantrums in crude musical form. Then he made a commodity out of that brattishness, ending up as senior vice-president at Interscope Records.' (internet publication not credited) http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/music/article1153419.ece

⁹ Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 76.

¹⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition', *October*, vol. 18, Autumn 1981, p. 47-66.

¹¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002, p. xviii.

¹² 'If the connection between alchemy and the Eucharist is not obvious, Waite set out to establish it. He realized that it may appear almost fantastic that he should attempt to use the old and dubious science of metallic transmutation to shed light on the Eucharistic element of the Grail mystery. The thrust of his research would be to establish that the great Eucharistic experiment had its 'analogy' in the rationale that lies behind alchemy.' Gavin Ashenden, *Charles Williams: Alchemy and Integration*, Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio, 2008, p. 78. [Full Quotation]

¹³ Benjamin H.D. Buchloch, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 45. [Paraphrased]

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 53.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 76. [Paraphrased]

¹⁷ Buchloch used Michael Asher's artistic 'dismantling of the Museum/Gallery apparatus' to show how Flavin's lights were really conservative, i.e. commodities in the context of an art gallery. This challenges his claim that they are moveable and contextless (Ibid, p. 16). In his chapter 'James Coleman's Archaeology of Spectacle' Buchloch also posits Coleman's art piece, *Box (ahhareturnabout)*, as going against the notion that an object or body is a 'neutral and naturalized transhistorical given within a universally valid field of potential phenomenological inscriptions'. (Ibid, p. 162). He demonstrates how Nauman's objects and bodies really belong to 'a logic of techno-scientific orthodoxy and morphology of Minimalist literalism' (Ibid) and still serve a theatric function vis-à-vis the audience – despite Nauman's claim otherwise. Asher and Coleman's art pieces confirm how art objects are still caught up in systems of commodification and theatricity despite attempts of artists before to resuscitate them. All these examples demonstrate a continued theme in art history that seeks the transformation of bodies, economically, culturally and metaphysically to their rightful, ideal place in the world. It is in this way that art criticism corresponds with alchemy - discursive 'spells' the new occultic incantations.

¹⁸ 'Charting color-sound relationships to meaning according to hue and pitch intensities, whereby 'the tonality of F major, corresponding with red, would mean 'Diversification of Will' and tonality of G-flat major, corresponding with blue or violet, would mean 'Creativity'...',¹⁸ was a symbolist's 'conceit'¹⁸ created to get beyond conventional language and move towards transcendental meaning.' Joseph Blessin, 'The Light Cast from '... melting the metal of melodies': The Aesthetic Role of Light in the Parallax of Alexander Scriabin's Opera, *Mysterium and Modern Rock Performance*', p. 2.

¹⁹ Simon Morrison, op. cit., p. 187.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 195-96.

²¹ Ibid, p. 16. [Paraphrased] * 'The course was for him no longer an 'ideal viewer,' but in truth the dithyrambic premise and Dionysian basis of drama. Just as a chorus of Titans bore for Aeschylus the action of Prometheus Unbound, so too the multi-voiced yet mute Will, as a wordless chorus of musical instruments, intones for Wagner the primal principles of that which, in the Apollonian vision of the state, as isolated heroes, has a human face and

speaks with a human voice. The gathered crowd joins mystically to the poetic voices in the Symphony; and just as we near Wagner's sanctuary – to 'create', not only to 'contemplate' – we become ideal molecules of the orgiastic life of the orchestra.' [Full Quotation]

²² Douglas Kahn, 'Track Organology', *October*, Vol. 55, Winter, 1990, p. 70. [Paraphrased]

²³ George E. Lewis, 'Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives', *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 22, 2002, p. 224.

²⁴ In many ways masculinity under Scriabin and Eno's regimes expands to the extent of even subsuming femininity. Scriabin sought to seek the union of the two sexes– 'the Masculine Principle, refusing to leave the Physical Plan and the Feminine Principle, refusing to depart the Spiritual (Nirvanic) Plane' – by using the engineered feat of the *tastiere per luce* to capture 'splayed color lights' of the feminine 'colorful world and consolidate them into a synaesthetic 'vision of reality underlying reality.' Simon Morrison, op. cit., p. 208. It is my view that Eno, appareled in 'whirlwind of dyed hair, exaggerated makeup, platform shoes and glittery costumes (Eric Tamm, *Brain Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound*. 1st De Capo Press, New York, 1995, p. 88) applied his 'masculine' 'work-based practices' to 'effeminate' glam rock composition so masculinity was never in question. This observation finds historical precedence in the notion of 'colonization of femininity' (Abigail, Solomon-Godeau, 'Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation', *Art History*, vol 16, no 2, p. 295) achieved through Winkelmannian modalities of masculine beauty. Alex Potts would call this 'psychosexual monism'.

²⁵ Marielle R. Sandford, *Happening and Other Acts*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 295.

²⁶ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Multimedia: Texts and Contexts*. SAGE, 2005, p. 40.

²⁷ Simon Morrison, op. cit., p. 197.

²⁸ 'On the score of Prometheus [Scriabin] inducted, along with the other instruments, separate parts for the *tastiere per luce*, the 'keyboard of light,' or the color organ. There were two movements with parts for the *tastiere per luce*; in one the color organ 'notes' looked consonant with the music and in one it looked dissonant. He intended to structure and intensify the experience of the beholders not by a servile imitation of the musical movement, but by giving the color organ an autonomous role so that color changes pointed and counterpointed at changes in the musical movement.' Cretien van Campen, *The Hidden Sense: Synesthesia in Art and Science*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 53.

²⁹ Gill Perry, Perry, Gill, *Themes in Contemporary Art*. New Haven: Yale Press University, 2004, p. 117-18.

³⁰ 'The colour-chart colours have contributed to a further change in the use and understanding of colour. This might be called the digitalization of colour, whose opposite is analogical colour. The colour circle is analogical; the colour chart is digital. Analogical colour is a continuum, a seamless spectrum, an undivided whole, a merging of one colour into another [like on a painter's palette]. Digital colour is individuated; it comes in discrete units; there is no mergence or modulation; there are only boundaries, steps and edges. Analogical colour is colour; digital colour is colours.' David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, Reaktion, London, 2000, p. 105.

³¹ Nelson, Robert S., Shiff, Richard (editors). *Critical Terms For Art History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 3.

³² Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in Hannah Arendt (ed), op. cit., p. 17.

³³ David Batchelor, op. cit., p. 98-99.

³⁴ James L. Moody, *Concert Lighting: Techniques, Art, and Business*, Focal Press, Boston, 1998, p. 48

³⁵ David Batchelor, op. cit., p. 107-08.

³⁶ In the following quotations Brian Eno demonstrates the conflation of text to non-linguistic meaning in music: 'You see, the problem is that people, particularly people who write, assume that the meaning of a song is vested in the lyrics. To me, that has never been the case. There are very few songs that I can think of where I even remember the words, actually, let alone think that those are the center of the meaning. For me, music in itself carries a whole set of messages which are very, very rich and complex...' Eric Tamm, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sam Dunn, 'Metal: A Headbanger's Journey', 2006.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Robert Levin, 'Improvisation', in *NPR's Performance Today: Milestones of the Millennium*, National Public Radio, Washington D.C., 1999.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sam Dunn, 'Metal: A Headbanger's Journey', 2006.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Penguin Classics, London, 2007, p. 109.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Simon Morrison, op. cit., p. 195-96.

⁴⁷ Golan Levin, 'Painterly Interfaces for Audiovisual Performance' (Master's Thesis), MIT Media Laboratory, Massachusetts, May 1994, p. 25.

⁴⁸ Declan Patton, Andrew McIntosh, 'Head and Neck Injury Risks in Heavy Metal: Headbangers Stuck between Rock and a Hard Bass', *BMJ* Dec 2008, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Sam Dunn, 'Metal: A Headbanger's Journey', 2006.

⁵⁰ Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, New York, 1968, p. 126.

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PART 5

Filling the Metal Void

Metal in Rio de Janeiro 1980's–2008: An Overview

Cláudia Azevedo

Abstract

This chapter aims to offer an overview of metal in Rio de Janeiro since the beginning of the 1980's, considering the effects of economic constraints and the political context acting on the existence and maintenance of the scene in the city. Rio de Janeiro is in the south-east of Brazil and known for its tropical landscapes, beach culture and samba music, with a metropolitan area of about 12 million inhabitants. Apart from the touristic image of the city, metal has existed in Rio de Janeiro since the beginning of the 1980's, when bands frequently sang about political issues and chose names in Portuguese. In 1985 -the year which marked the end of the political dictatorship in Brazil -with the Rock in Rio festival, and following an international trend, metal became more popular within mainstream media. As a result of the popularity of the festival in general and the success of the night dedicated to the metal bands, as well as a sudden and fleeting stability of the national currency, several foreign bands had records released in Brazil, record companies became interested in local bands who were at last able to release records and Brazil entered the route of international bands on tour. Therefore from the mid-1980's onwards, local bands have thought of international careers and started to write in English, following international aesthetic trends both in sound and iconography. In the 1990's, due to political changes in the country, metal bands were back to their previous strong underground condition, that is, not participating in great media events, having had to developed their own alternative net of communication. This situation has remained the same throughout the 2000's, relying heavily on the internet.

Key Words: Heavy metal, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Rock in Rio 1, cultural contextualization, historical constraints.

1. Introduction

The content of this chapter is part of a wider research work regarding how place and time play a role in the process of music signification. In order to understand the poiesis/creation and aesthesis/reception of metal in Rio de Janeiro, it was important to contextualize these instances within history and geography. Here, the focus is on contextualization. The data in this research

has been gathered mainly from primary sources, such as interviews with musicians and fans as well as the analysis of recordings and iconography from printed material, mainly fanzines and magazines. In addition, discussion forums in the internet have proved to be extremely useful, not only in providing access to opinions and information, but also as a means of getting in touch with subjects. Other sources of information have been literature about metal scenes and history of Brazil written by Brazilians, as well as my own memories and experiences as a fan.

Genre and subgenre are treated here as discursive categories which provide some sense of expectation. There seems to be aesthetic and ethical cores to what one could call subgenres of metal, but apart from the core, boundaries seem to be less rigid and permeable. Therefore, in this chapter, the terminology *metal* refers to the set of subgenres according to the most usual classification found among fans and musicians in Rio de Janeiro nowadays: heavy metal, thrash metal, death metal, black metal, power metal, gothic metal, doom metal, prog metal and grind core.

Brazil is a country with plenty of regional diversity regarding climate, ethnicities, economy and traditions in a vast territory therefore it is not possible to make general assumptions about Brazilian metal. I will refer to *place* as the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, which is the second biggest human concentration in the country, and the third in Latin America, with approximately 12 million people. At present, the city of Rio de Janeiro alone is home to more than six million inhabitants. Under the Portuguese colonizers, it became the capital of the colony in 1763. It was home to the Portuguese royal family and court from 1808, when Napoleon invaded Portugal, until the independence of Brazil in 1822. In 1960, the national capital was moved Brasília, but Rio remained probably the main cultural centre in the country, as it had been for more than two hundred years and, during the second half of the twentieth century, concentrated the headquarters of most communication media. People in Rio de Janeiro are the result of five hundred years of interbreeding and descend mainly from Portuguese colonizers, peoples from several areas of Africa and the indigenous populations who had been in the coast of South America for thousands of years. The proximity to the Tropic of Capricorn and the Atlantic Ocean makes Rio de Janeiro the main touristic destiny in the country, often associated stereotypically to football, samba, beaches and girls wearing reduced bikinis. In addition to this, inequalities among social classes are severe. The Southern areas of the city are the niche of the richer and the upper middle classes. Some of these neighbourhoods have an index of human development equal to Scandinavia. The other areas of the city house the middle, lower middle and 'working' classes. Shanty towns, frequently settled on hills, are spread all over the city, due to its topography.

The *average* fan of metal in Rio de Janeiro does not come from the richer Southern part of the city, neither from the shanty towns, but from the middle, lower middle and working classes areas to the North and the metropolitan area. In addition, this fan is probably male, having at least completed high school, even though many do go to university. Field work in concerts shows that metal is not a white phenomenon in the city as approximately half of the people involved – fans and musicians – are Afro-descendants. In addition, it is possible to say that the ages of fans who regularly attend concerts vary from the mid-teens to early thirties. However, this might change according to the time of the day, the subgenre of metal and ticket prices/venues.

2. The Early 1980's

From 1964 onwards, military governments succeeded each other in a dictatorship which lasted until 1985 in Brazil. The State was allied to capitalist development, 'therefore books were censored, but not the cultural industry; theatre plays, but not theatre as a whole; films, but not cinema; songs, not the phonographic industry.¹ The left-wing opponents to the regime were nationalists. Urban popular music was one of the main realms of protest which included appropriation of rural traditional aesthetics, romanticizing of life in shanty-towns and rejection towards anything foreign via cultural industry: Brazilian artists should talk about Brazil and sing in Mother tongue. An example of this is the 1967 demonstration, in the centre of São Paulo, against the presence of the electric guitar in Brazilian music. In the early 1980's, the country went through a gradual process of political opening, with the exiled being able to return, indirect elections in the horizon and the loosening of censorship. In 1985, the first civil president in 21 years was elected *indirectly* -in spite of all public clamour for direct voting – counting on an intense civil interest of young adults and teenagers. However, the country would have to wait until 1989 to elect a president through direct vote.

During the first half of the 1980's, it was very hard for a fan of heavy rock – there was no such term as *heavy metal* in use -to keep up with releases and information from abroad. In addition to Brazil's peripheral cultural and economic status within the world order and the resulting inequality regarding the flux of information, high import taxes affected the consumption of records, good quality electric musical instruments and even magazines. Apart from established names such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Kiss, releases of heavier rock were not regular, did not follow a chronologic order, did not always bring technical information and original art work. Also one could say that, on one hand, opponents to the dictatorship were hostile towards rock and heavy rock considering them foreign alienating music in service of the right; on the other hand, military authorities and the

conservative middle class attributed to it another kind of danger: 'the seduction, involvement and chemical addiction of the youth in order to shape it into new informants and loyal agents for the communism.'²

However, in spite of these difficulties, there were fans of heavy rock in vast numbers who attended massively the few concerts that happened in the country, usually Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In 1981, Queen gathered more than 130,000 people in São Paulo; in 1983, Van Halen and Kiss filled the stadiums where they played. Throughout the 1970's, not more than ten really mainstream acts, such as Alice Cooper, Genesis, Santana, Peter Frampton and Rick Wakeman, played in the country. Brazilian bands who were active during these years were often either closer to progressive rock or hard rock/blues-based.

Heavy bands started to appear at the turn of the decade along with the gradual process of resuming democratic practices and, thus, the loosening of censorship. Band names and lyrics were mainly in Portuguese. *Calibre 38*, *Dorsal Atlântica*, *Azul Limão*, *Taurus*, *Sadom*, *Inquisição*, *Metalmorphose* are some of the bands formed between 1980 and 1983, then active in Rio de Janeiro. There was not an actual intention to get anywhere out of the country with the music – it was a very remote possibility. Also, this was a generation that had grown up during the dictatorship period, immersed in all sorts of mainstream media imports, from *The Monkees* to *Charlie's Angels*, from The Beatles to the Bee Gees and was very familiar with it all. At the same time, Brazilian popular music was massively sung in Portuguese and especially because of the political context, it was not 'nice' to sing in a foreign language. Some bands sang about hedonistic and mythological issues, but the main themes concerned political criticism. Aesthetically, most bands played heavy metal and an incipient thrash metal. Singing in Portuguese was also the case of pop/rock, non-metal bands who started to appear in larger urban centres such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Brasília, Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte.

3. Rock in Rio 1

In January 1985, Rock in Rio 1 Festival would change the popularity of Brazilian pop/rock and metal in general. The festival was organized by the entrepreneur Roberto Medina through Artplan, his publicity enterprise, and supported by several other big enterprises, such as Globo Organizations -the biggest Brazilian communication group -among them. Media space granted to the festival was massive during the months before the event, through radio and television. Rock in Rio 1 became a brand. Artists were glamorised. Media covering reminded the one dedicated to the World Cup. Public opinion had it as megalomaniac, as the place where it was held, *The City of Rock*, occupied an area of 250.000 m², and counted on three stages and two shopping malls, among other facilities. The festival lasted from January 11 to 20, cost an estimate 12 million dollars and gathered an

attendance of 1.380.000 people within ten days.³ Medina, whose brother was Mayor candidate in the following elections, had been successful in bringing Frank Sinatra to Brazil and was aware that the country's reputation was not the most favourable one among foreign entrepreneurs due to lack of technical infra-structure.⁴ The cast consisted in well-established, older artists such as James Taylor and Yes, Gilberto Gil, Pepeu Gomes and Ney Matogrosso, plus young pop, rock, new wave bands: the B 52's, The Go-go's, Nina Hagen, as well as Brazilian new-comers Os Paralamas do Sucesso, Barão Vermelho, Lulu Santos, Blitz. However, among these names, there were bands who were heavy metal or associated to it: Iron Maiden, Ozzy Osbourne, AC/DC, Scorpions, Whitesnake and Queen. Medina said that the choice for the metal-related bands was due to a survey accomplished with the help of Radio Fluminense FM station.⁵ One of the reasons why metal received much attention from mainstream media during the festival was the presence and behaviour of the fans: dozens of thousands dressed in black and spikes who gathered together near the stage, booed, cast pebbles and empty cans towards non-metal artists. On January 19, the 'Black Saturday', it is estimated that up to 250,000 metal fans might have been present. The organization of the festival had to change the programme and opening artists had to change their set because of the headbangers. It was news. One of the Brazilian artists who were harassed by metal fans, pop veteran Erasmo Carlos, said: 'no-one knew what tribes were; the headbangers themselves didn't know that they were so many!'⁶

The festival happened during the peak of a decade, which started in a dictatorship and ended in direct elections to president. Brazilian pop, rock and metal sounded fresh and were associated with this time of political opening and democracy. There was much hope, especially among the youth, displayed in massive demonstrations in the previous year. Would have it been by a chance that the festival was held during the week the congress announced the first civil president in 21 years -something which was appointed much earlier -and supported by so many big enterprises? The advertisement for Rock in Rio I argued that it was more than just a festival: it was history. *The City of Rock* was dismantled by the following governor soon after it was over. There were two other editions of Rock in Rio festivals in the city in 1991 and 2001, but not at the same location.

As a result of the popularity of the festival, rock/pop and metal bands -some existed before, some were formed due to enthusiasm -were able to record their music. Also, Brazilian artists, sound and light technicians became more professional and Brazil entered the route of bands on tour. Metal was exposed to a wider audience and people who otherwise would not have got in touch with it, became fans. Information and releases were updated. More bands were formed, now many of the names and lyrics were in English, such as *Extermínio*, Kripta, Necromancer, *Bíblia Negra*, Explicit

Hate, Metralion, Prophecy, *Necrofilia* and X-Rated. By this time, most bands followed the same sound and visual trends as abroad, including adoption of more extreme subgenres. In spite of the popularity achieved by metal, none of the bands actually left the underground and made a living out of music alone. In addition, 1986 brought an economic plan which controlled inflation during some time, as in 1985 it had reached 233%.⁷ Pop and rock sold more than ever, recording companies felt encouraged to sign and release new bands and this benefited metal, as well. In addition, the market was still mainly dominated by the bigger recording companies and this kind of music cost cheaper to them, as opposed to already established interpreters' recordings which would require composers, arrangers, musicians, sometimes orchestras etc. Rock bands were self-contained.⁸

The following year saw the failure of the economic plan, and a new recession dominated the economy. The end of the decade cut down the previous enthusiasm. It seemed that there was no possibility for and 'intermediate' artist, only for the big sellers.⁹ Bad for metal.

4. The 1990's

The decade started with MTV's debut in Brazil and Sepultura's success abroad. Even though the economic context did not help, bands were still hopeful to become totally professional. It had become a little easier to consume technology, purchase imported instruments, equip studios, and update information. Following an international practice, small labels consolidated an ongoing fragmentation of phonographic production processes in the early 1990's.¹⁰ Many bands assumed they should try an international market because the financial return of the investment on a career was uncertain. One of the reasons for that is the size of the country, which makes touring an expensive endeavour, having to rely on a net of promotion and production instances not always experienced and professional, not to mention the distances which have to be covered by bus or, ideally, airplane.

The size of the country also contributed to keep metal as a romantic hobby for most bands in another way: in 1989, when a new president, Fernando Collor, was elected with 35 million votes of more conservative people from outside big urban centres like Rio and São Paulo, 'there was a significant change in the relationship between music and politics.'¹¹ These people wanted to be given voice and were fond of another kind of music, especially the pop/Brazilian country style called *sertanejo*. Even Brazilian pop rock which had become strong suffered from it and had its room reduced within mainstream media. MTV Brazil was an UHF channel not always available in good quality. Some time later, it became also part of paid cable nets, a fact that, initially, made it difficult to poorer fans to have access to it on a regular basis. By that time, Metallica was receiving much attention due to the success of the 'black album' and grunge indirectly brought some

attention to heavy rock and metal once again. MTV's metal show, *Fúria Metal*, did not show independent bands, even though there was room for the few Brazilian bands who had videoclips. Bands thought about the foreign market. Now they really had to write in English, be updated about technology, move abroad and film video promos. It all required resources so, naturally, very few did. In Rio de Janeiro, bands released records with less difficulty, however, it was not usual to either film promotional videos or tour the country.

Some bands from the 1980's kept their way, such as *Dorsal Atlântica*, while many others were formed along the decade, adopting all subgenres of metal, from the lightest (Sigma 5, Allegro, Thoten, Lost Forever, Heavenfalls, Krystal Tears, Stormfall, Alchemy, among others) to heavy metal and thrash (Dust from Misery, Imago Mortis, Nordheim, Criteria, Farscape, among others) to the most extreme (Mephistopheles, Cold Blood, Nocturnal Worshipper, Songe d'Enfer, Apokalyptic Raids, Agorhy, Grave Desecrator, Mysteriis, Unearthly, Sodomizer, Berkaial, Avec Tristesse, among others). The 1990's closed with decentralization and pulverization concerning subgenres, labels, venues and festivals. Fast broad band internet was still an object of desire and mp3 was unheard of.

5. 21st Century

Metal in Rio is about to celebrate its 30th anniversary. Sound, iconography and discourse have long been transnational. Even though it is still romantic, as there are hundreds of bands and no one makes a living out of it, it has lost its naivety. Younger bands, whose members were born in the 1980's, in a country already in a democratic context and in a world after the fall of the Berlin wall, have been aware that markets have no prejudices. Producer and drummer Armando Pereira, 38, owner of Marquee Records, in Rio de Janeiro, talks about his experience: 'some guys haven't even recorded their first CD and are already thinking about a bonus track for a release in Japan!'¹²

Records and merchandise are available for purchase through the internet and from specialized stores; local bands perform to small (50) to average (300) audiences on a weekly basis in venues or in festivals spread mainly around the metropolitan, Northern and Western areas of the city. There have been accounts of some hostility among fans from the richer 'bourgeois' South and the Northern and Western middle-class and working-class milieu, making apparent the discomfort which is part of city life itself.¹³ Metal festivals are usually held on Sundays, encompassing several bands, and starting by mid-afternoon. On the other hand, bigger bands, such as Slayer, may take thousands of fans to a concert, any day of the week. Something producers have to think of, in Rio, is how violence and crime may influence concert income: crossing the city – distances are long – and getting

home late at night consist in a problem. More radical ones argue that metal fans ought to go everywhere in order to support the scene, no matter what danger is involved. Unlike in other parts of the world, death and violence are not metaphors, they are a possibility. This strengthens the need for the cathartic and empowering function of metal, along economic recession, un-and under-employment and uncertainty. Another function metal might have is to provide the fan from very low-income contexts, whose relations are permeated by working-class habitus, with a feeling of class ascension, while disregarding extremely popular/mainstream music genres Brazilian (*sertanejo*, *pagode*, *axé*, *brega*) and foreign (*funk*, *rap*) -as distasteful and artistically inferior. Interviews and surveys through discussion forums have pointed out that metal fans in general -but particularly prog, power and black metal fans, even though they are not close subgenres – often hold the discourse of 'elite'.

Race does not seem to be a problem for the majority of metal fans in Rio de Janeiro, probably one of the utmost examples of interbreeding on earth. Manifestations of racism are mostly considered illogical due to the fact that a vast number of metal fans are of interracial origin. Even though there are opposite manifestations, they are not frequent.

One could say that metal in Rio de Janeiro counts on a significant following, due more to the size of the population than to its actual popularity in terms of percentage. 'If a well succeeded metal concert can gather 30,000 fans – a considerable number for many countries – very popular artists can gather this audience for days in a row', says Carlos Lopes, ex-leader of *Dorsal Atlântica*, 'and no-one complains about crisis!¹⁴ However, the dynamics of this metal following display the characteristics and hidden (and not so hidden) tensions of the city, in an example of the interaction between local and global, an irreversible process.

Metal in Rio de Janeiro: not forbidden, not persecuted and totally underground.

Notes

¹Vilarino, R.C., *A MPB em movimento – música, festivais e censura*. São Paulo: Olho d'água; 1999, p. 85. Translated by the author.

²Marsiglia, L., '+ velozes + furiosos'. *Bizz – História do Rock – vol.3 – 1972-1979*. São Paulo: Ed. Abril, 2005, p. 45. Translation by the author.

³Biaggio, J. *Os dez dias que abalaram o Brasil* – available at: <http://joacarlosmattos.sites.uol.com.br>, *passim* – consulted: 10.10.08; Batalha, R., 'Matérias Especiais – 15 anos de Rock in Rio'. *Rock Online* – available at: http://territorio.terra.com.br/canais/rockonline/materias/default.asp?materialI_

D=182&codArea=3, 2000, *passim*; consulted: 10.10.08. Bryan, G. (2004). *Quem tem um sonho não dança – Cultura jovem brasileira nos anos 80*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, pp. 260-264.

⁴Biaggio, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁵Estrella, M., *Rádio Fluminense FM – A porta de entrada do rock brasileiro nos anos 80*. Rio de Janeiro: Outras Letras Editora, 2006, pp. 113-114. Fluminense FM was a radio station specialized in rock and pop in any language which started transmitting from Niterói, metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, in the beginning of the 1980's and played an important role in the establishment of these subgenres of metal and pop in the city. From 1982 to 1986, the programme *Guitarras para o povo* [Electric guitars to the people] was among the radio's most listened to, the home of metal and punk in the airwaves of the city. Local bands would take their demos and be played without any kind of payment, or 'payola'. The popularity of the programme was confirmed in interviews when almost all interviewees stated that they did listen to *Guitarras* and got to know many bands and recordings from it.

⁶Biaggio, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁷Dapieve, A., *BRock – O rock brasileiro dos anos 80*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1995, p. 201.

⁸Dias, M.T., *Os donos da voz – Indústria fonográfica brasileira e mundialização da cultura*. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2000, pp. 82-86.

⁹Brandini, V., *Cenários do rock – Mercado, produção e tendências no Brasil*. São Paulo: Olho d'água/FAPESP; 2004, p. 47.

¹⁰Dias, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

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Heavy Metal in a Muslim Context: The Rise of the Turkish Metal Underground

Pierre Hecker

Abstract

Today, local heavy metal scenes can be found throughout the Middle East as in almost any other region of the world. Though still marginal in terms of numbers and public attention, the metal scene in the region, particularly in urban centres in Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel, has developed its own infrastructures consisting of bands, magazines, independent labels, distributors, festivals, and bars. The emergence of local metal scenes has taken place within a wider context of globalization. Particularly, the advent of the internet and the evolution of technological means to convert sounds and images into digital data files that can be easily send along a world wide data highway, significantly facilitated the global availability of metal music and culture. The following pages provide an insight into the emergence of rock and metal culture in Turkey. After a brief introduction into the development of Anatolian rock music in the late 1960s and 1970s, the chapter will shed light on the rise of the Turkish metal underground after the military coup d'état of 1980. Due to economic and political hardship, the dissemination of metal music and culture depended very much on informal networks (tape trading, street sellers, fanzines, distros). The Turkish public, however, perceived the invasion of the public sphere by young rockers and metalheads as a potential threat to prevalent concepts of morality.

Key Words: Turkey, Islam, Anatolian Rock, moral panic

(...) The pull of Islam seems to be strong enough, even outside the Middle East, to preclude metal from getting a foothold among Moslem youth.¹ Or so assumed American sociologist Deena Weinstein in her book of fifteen years ago, *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*, about the relation between metal and Islam. In all fairness to Weinstein, since the time of her research enormous changes by way of technical and communication innovations have aided in the spread of heavy metal music and culture all over the globe. Nevertheless, it must be questioned why particularly Islam is supposed to serve as a force that somehow precludes youth from entering heavy metal. However, Weinstein ignored the fact that as far back as the mid-1960s at least Turkey has had an indigenous rock tradition.

1. Anadolu Rock

The advent of rock music in Turkey dates back to the mid 1960s and coincides with the emergence of rock music and the hippie movement in North America and Western Europe. At the time, internationally-popular bands such as the Rolling Stones, Yes, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, or Deep Purple began to influence the sound of Turkish musicians. Under this influence and based upon the effects of Kemalist music reforms, Turkey saw the development of an indigenous rock tradition that is generally denoted by the term '*Anadolu Rock*' (Anatolian rock).

Turkey attained its independence in 1923, after a long period of war and foreign occupation had caused the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Under the presidency of Mustafa Kemal, who was later bestowed the honorary title '*Atatürk*' (Father of the Turks), the country's new political elite initiated a revolution from above, bringing a radical rupture with the past. The Kemalist model of modernity aimed at eradicating the old Ottoman order and building a new one, free from the traditionalist spirit of the past.

In the course of building a modern, Europe-oriented nation state, the Kemalist government enacted a bundle of wide-ranging reforms. Besides abolishing the Sultanate (1 November 1922), replacing the Arabic alphabet in favour of the Latin alphabet (1 November 1928), removing the constitutional provision which designated Islam as the state religion (9 April 1928), and granting equal civil rights to male and female citizens (17 February 1926) – including the right for women to vote and hold office (5 December 1935) –, the reformers initiated a modernisation of Turkish music.

The idea of incorporating music into the process of modernisation and nation building was based upon the ideological concepts of Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), one of the intellectual fathers of Turkish nationalism. In his most influential work *The Principles of Turkism (Türkçülüğün Esasları)* of 1923, he advocated for inventing a unique form of Turkish national music that would strengthen Turkish national identity and place Turkish music on the same 'civilisational' level with European music traditions.²

Gökalp's idea was driven by the distinction he made between the concepts of culture and civilisation. Accordingly, Anatolian folk music (*halk müziği*) represented the essence of Turkish culture, while European classical music with its elaborate harmonic techniques symbolised the pinnacle of modern civilisation. Consequently, a modernisation of Turkish music could only be achieved by adopting European music standards. With this in mind, he proposed a synthesis of Anatolian and European music traditions.

To realise this aim meant to break with previous music traditions. As a result, the old Ottoman music institutions were either reformed or closed and new music institutions modelled on European music conservatories began to be established. Parallel to the institutional reforms, the Turkish state decided to invite foreign composers to lecture at its newly-established music

academies and to send talented musicians abroad in order to study at European music conservatories. Briefly speaking, the Kemalist ‘music revolution,’ though it did not succeed in eliminating Ottoman music traditions, initiated musical innovation and heterogeneity. The introduction of European classical instruments, the adoption of the European octave system in addition to the Anatolian 24 or 17-tone system, the new possibilities of polyphonic music, and the advent of new forms of musical performance such as opera, orchestra, or different kinds of music ensembles gave creative impetus to the Turkey’s musical landscape and finally paved the way for the emergence of rock music.

Today, we can speak of the four fathers of Anatolian rock music, namely Erkin Koray (b. 1941), Cem Karaca (1945-2004), Barış Manço (1943-1999), and the band Moğollar (f. 1967). All of them started their careers in Istanbul in the mid-1960s. They were the sons of Turkish middle class families and belonged to the first generation of musicians that had been affected by Kemalist musical and educational reforms from their childhood days. Not only did they receive their education from some of the country’s most prestigious international high schools,³ but they grew up in an environment that favoured European classical music over Anatolian music. Within school and family they were socialised into European classical and American rock music. In the case of Erkin Koray and Cem Karaca, both became familiar with Anatolian music not before they had already started their musical careers.

Anadolu Rock embodies the synthesis of modern rock and Anatolian folk music. Electric guitars and bass, drums and rock beats meet Anatolian melodies and instruments such as *bağlama* (a fretless string instrument) or *ney* (reed-pipe). Early after the advent of pop and rock music, Turkish musicians began experimenting - in particular with the new technical possibilities of modern music. Modelled on the technical facilities of the electric guitar, they created the *elektro saz* (or *elektro bağlama*), thus reflecting a general tendency of amplifying musical instruments. The lyrics of the Anatolian rock scene were predominantly in Turkish, although a number of musicians recorded songs in English and French as well. For the inexperienced listener, many of the early tracks of Turkish rock music may sound quite traditional. This might be attributed to an untrained ear, but it is also due to the fact that rock influences remained in the background still.

The Turkish music revolution was not only a musical revolution. That is to say, Turkish musicians did not solely appropriate the sonic, but also the visual representations of rock music. As a result, Turkey saw long-haired men with ‘wild’ beards, jeans, and leather jackets appear on stage for the very first time. Their deviant appearance and behaviour was perceived by many as a provocation and threat to moral values.

2. Turkish Metal

In the streets of Istanbul, young metalheads became visible for the first time in the mid 1980s. Their presence caused manifold controversies among the Turkish public. Due to their deviant appearance and behaviour, they were mostly perceived as an epitome of moral subversiveness: long hair, odd beards, black clothes, and the habit of drinking lots of beer came as a challenge to traditional notions of morality. Countless media reports depicted metal as a threat to Turkey's national and religious identity. Although most of these reports - including accounts on Satanism, suicide pacts, and perverted sexual practices - were highly imaginative, metalheads were indeed violating particularly Islamic traditions: Having extra-martial relationships, considering the drinking of alcohol as an integral part of their life style, and deliberately seeking distance from religious practices in everyday life (e.g. daily prayers, attending religious ceremonies, wearing the headscarf, fasting during Ramadan, etc.) are indicators that Muslimness is not a relevant category for most of them. Indeed, they regard themselves mostly in a secular tradition that needs to be defended in the wake of Islamic revivalism. In that sense, their often anti-religious and anti-traditionalist attitudes fit well into Turkey's Kemalist worldview.

Throughout the 1980s, access to metal music and culture remained highly limited. In the years following the military coup d'état of 1980, neither albums, nor magazines, nor instruments, nor any other kind of metal-related accessories were available on the Turkish market. Import taxes, the devaluation of the Turkish Lira, and a general decrease of purchasing power made western European and American music imports almost unaffordable to Turkish customers. It was not until the mid-1980s that a small number of internationally popular heavy metal albums were licensed to Turkish records companies and sold at more moderate prices. Besides, the national media was still monopolised by the state and rock, let alone metal programmes were extremely rare. This situation did not change until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a series of political and economic transformations started to gain momentum. As a consequence, Turkish metalheads had to rely on informal networks in order to get hold of albums, merchandise, and information on bands and trends.

A. Selling Bootlegs

In a situation where there was virtually nothing, Turkish rockers and metalheads requested friends and relatives, who travelled abroad, to bring them records, cassettes, VHS videos tapes, t-shirts, and patches. As soon as the mid-1980s, some of them started their own informal businesses by selling bootleg cassettes on the streets and in small shops. The places, where bootleg cassettes were sold became important junctions for the local scenes in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, and a few other cities.

Not only did they provide access to music and information on the latest record releases, but they were also places to socialize in terms of meeting other people from the scene. Since the scene was still small and the places where metal music was sold were rare, they attracted metalheads from different parts of the city, thereby strengthening the connectivity and coherence of the scene.

One of the first places to sell bootleg cassettes in Istanbul was a second hand bookstore in the Moda Cinema Arcade. The store was run by Sadi, the vocalist and bass player of thrash metal band Metalium. Sadi started to sell cassettes by placing a few album covers - like Mötley Crüe's *Shout at the Devil* (1983) - in the shop window. From these few albums, he then prepared bootlegs on demand. Close to the Moda Cinema Arcade was another shopping arcade called 'Akmar,' which specialised in selling second-hand books to high school and university students. By the late 1980s, a number of former street sellers began to open record shops in Akmar. Among them were Zihni Müzik, Atlantis Music, Hammer Müzik, the Pentagram Metal Shop, and Saadeth. The Pentagram Metal Shop was opened by the members of eponymous thrash metal band 'Pentagram' (aka Mezar Kabul) while Saadeth was run by Mazhar Şiringöz of Metalium and Çağlan Tekil of Laneth magazine. Zihni Müzik, Atlantis Music, and Hammer Müzik over time evolved into independent record labels, which still exist today. Enis from Hammer Müzik describes the development from selling bootleg cassettes on the streets to becoming an official record store and independent record label:

Actually, there were no original tapes in the market. There were no licenses, no importers. Nothing! So, for example, Haluk [the founder of Hammer Müzik] bought some LPs or CDs of Sepultura or other bands. He made copies and he sold them. (...) Actually, he started by selling tapes on the streets some 12 years ago [in 1991]. And then more original tapes, more CDs here [in the Hammer Müzik shop in Akmar]. At first, he started selling copies. Then he decided to start a shop and travelled outside Turkey to Greece. He had friends going to the USA, Germany. And he ordered CDs through friends and they brought CDs here and he started selling [them]. Afterwards there was big interest for this kind of music. He got licenses for albums and released them here. . The first original, licensed tape was Slayer's *Hell Awaits*. (...) And after that a lot of CD imports, a lot of productions. And the shop was going well.⁴

B. Trading Tapes

The integration of the Turkish scene into the global metal underground took place through the global tape trading network. Before the advent of the Internet, the global metal scene had been relying on postal mail for sending and exchanging demo tapes, flyers, fanzines, and personal information on local bands and scenes around the globe. As Keith Kahn-Harris in *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* has already pointed out, the global metal underground built upon a network with thousands of people participating in it.⁵ One particular mode of transmitting music through this network was 'tape trading.' The term describes an informal practice of exchanging and distributing recordings at a non-monetary level. Among those who participated in the global tape-trading network were individuals, bands, bistros, and independent record labels.

While individuals and bands used to trade only small numbers of demo tapes, record labels usually exchanged higher quantities of their official releases. Since Turkish independent labels mostly had their own mail orders and/or local shops, the trading system gave them the opportunity to avoid costs for international money transfer and to bridge exchange rate disparities. Through tape trading they were able to cheaply purchase records of other companies and, at the same time, spread and promote their own releases in other countries. With regard to Turkey, these aspects were of crucial importance. Apart from record companies, committed individuals set up their own tape trading lists or established their own small distros. Bands also traded among each other, selling their own and other tapes at concerts.

Turkish metalheads began to participate in the global tape-trading network in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Güray, who has been the publisher of several underground fanzines in Istanbul (e.g. *Yer Altı*, *I Feel Like Nick Cave*, *I Feel Like Shit*, *Mafia*), got intensively involved in tape trading in the early 1990s:

Well, I think it was back in 91 or 92. There was *Laneth* magazine you know.⁶ And I think I saw some demo reviews of Turkish bands (...) I wrote them a letter, sent money, and got the demos. I received a couple of flyers of foreign bands then, and I just wondered, if (...) the foreigners would write [back] as well. I just wondered you know. I wondered about more underground acts. So, I just wrote my first letter - I think to *Benediction*. And there was *Gomorrha* and a band from Poland. I can't remember the name right now. And I asked them for demos, prices, and infos. And when I got some response, I was shocked, because I didn't expect it. You know, for the first time I got in touch with foreign bands. And I started to buy their

demos and later... You know when you got a demo back ten years ago you received tons of flyers and lots of addresses. And I started to write to everyone.⁷

The example not only provides a description of how to get involved into the global metal underground back 15 or 20 years ago, but also proves that Turkish metalheads were aware of the latest developments in metal music even without any official marketing. People had started to listen to death metal, although there were no death metal albums officially available in the Turkish market. Güray also provides information on the scope of trans-local connectivity fostered by tape trading:

Well, first of all, it was good to have some stuff from really weird places. You know, in the beginning you just knew that there was metal in Europe and America, but later I received flyers from Panama, from South Africa - Groinchurn.⁸ I've been in touch with them. And then: Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia. So, it was really good! I just wanted to have at least one contact per country. So, I tried to write to everyone, to Israel, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, everywhere.⁹

Tape trading brought Güray into contact with bands from all around the world. The recordings and contacts that he obtained provided him with sufficient resources to start a number of do-it-yourself projects like the above-named fanzines, a number of compilation tapes, and his own distro. All in all, the tape-trading network guaranteed a cheap and easy way of spreading recordings to other parts of the world. Moreover, it helped to create a feeling of community among its participants. Through exchanging tapes, letters, and flyers, people made common experiences, mostly without ever meeting each other personally. Sometimes, however, trading contacts formed the basis for visiting each other or organising concerts. Belgian grind core legend Agathocles as well as Austrian grind core band Mastic Scum both came to Istanbul in 1996 on the basis of contacts that had been established through the global tape trading network.

Meanwhile, worldwide dissemination of the Internet and a number of technical innovations facilitated the recording, compression, and transmission of digital audio and video files. Tape trading, although it did not stop to exist, lost much of its importance to electronic communication facilities.

C. 'A Group of Losers'

Apart from selling bootlegs and trading tapes, the production of fanzines became another crucial means of informally disseminating metal

culture in Turkey. However, metal fanzines did not emerge before the beginning of the 1990s. Up till then, heavy metal was only sporadically featured in some of the country's youth magazines. Professional rock and metal magazines were absent from the Turkish market. It turned out to be a satirical magazine rather than a music magazine, which prompted the rise of metal music and culture in the late 1980s.

Towards the end of the 1980s, young caricaturist Abdül Kadir Elçioğlu started to create the Grup Perişan comic strips, which appeared in Turkey's most prominent satirical magazine *Gırgır*. *Gırgır* (later renamed to *Hıbr*) was one of the world's best-selling satirical magazines with a weekly circulation of 300,000 to 400,000 copies. Its enormous prominence, particularly among young readers, was due to an environment, which did not provide enough space for political and intellectual outlet. Radio and television were still monopolised by a single state-controlled body, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), and the political climate remained affected by the military coup d'état of 1980. In the late 1980s, satirical magazines were one of the few autonomous voices that featured a combination of politics, sex, art, and social criticism. *Gırgır* followed a declared mission to criticize cultural values, politics, and the 'ordinary' way of life.

With the Grup Perişan, Abdül Kadir Elçioğlu invented a comic strip that was dedicated to rock and heavy metal culture. He himself was a passionate rock and heavy metal listener and, in reference to Metallica, used the pseudonym 'Aptülrika.' 'Grup Perişan' means 'group of losers' and tells the story of three young men, who share the same flat in Istanbul while studying at university. The narrative structures of Grup Perişan are based upon the protagonists' discrete, stereotypical characters and their interpersonal encounters in everyday life. Soyut, the confused intellectual, Danyal, the naïve and dumpy but likeable guy from the Anatolian countryside, and Mazhar, the easygoing, rebellious rocker are in search for the joys and comforts of life as represented in girls, music, alcohol, sleep, and - in the case of Danyal - food. Their lives take place in an urban setting, mostly on the streets, in bars, concert venues, university corridors, and their shared flat. By all means, Aptülrika's favourite character is Mazhar. He embodies all the features of a young, rebellious rocker. Uncompromising in his individual way of life and always on collision course with the surrounding society, he goes through, and gets into, a lot of trouble. The author leaves no doubt as to who is supposed to be the undisputable hero of the story. He endows Mazhar with a cheerful, carefree character that enjoys life to the fullest degree. In this way he shows the ultimate success of a lifestyle determined by individual freedom and self-determination.

The relevance of Aptülrika's Grup Perişan lies in a number of aspects. Maybe most striking is how his personal affiliation with Istanbul's

rock and heavy metal scene affected the cartoon's narrative. Together with his friends, Aptülrika witnessed both the rise of the city's metal underground and the controversial reactions from the Turkish public, including verbal and physical insults, consternation, and a lack of understanding. His inspiration often directly derived from these personal experiences, which he then transferred into the Grup Perişan strips. In a humorous and frequently ironic way, which aimed to hold up a mirror to society, he captured the zeitgeist of these early years of Turkish heavy metal in Istanbul. His cartoon's proximity to everyday life is also reflected in the frequent appearance of actual events, settings, and persons: Pentagram's drummer Cenk, one of Aptülrika's close friends, Istanbul's first rock bar, the *Kemancı* under the bridge, or the Harbiye Open Air Theatre, a frequent venue for heavy metal concerts in the late 1980s and early 1990s, are only a few examples of real-life references in Aptülrika's Grup Perişan.

Another aspect of importance is how Aptülrika's Grup Perişan contributed to the dissemination of the visual and verbal representations of rock and heavy metal culture among young readers. Not only did Mazhar with his long hair, leather jacket, torn denim trousers, boots, earrings, and Sodom, D.R.I., or skull print t-shirts match the cliché of the true rocker, but Aptülrika also added some 'hidden' extra information to his drawings. That is, he often filled the background of the cartoon, by way of posters or writings on the wall, with news about bands, up-coming concerts, and record releases. At a certain stage, Aptülrika further decided to go beyond the original scope of the comic strip and use the blank margins of the magazine pages for some further drawings and verbal information. In that way, he presented band biographies (including caricatures of each band member), discographies, lyrics, and the latest news on the metal world. Figure 1 shows a whole page from *Hibir* magazine in order to illustrate samples of Aptülrika's work. In the magazine margins, he depicted American thrash metal legend Slayer with reference to their *South of Heaven* album (1988), while at the top of the page he portrayed the logo of King Diamond. His illustrations further include visual representations, such as several inverted crosses, human skulls, Slayer's pentagram-logo, and the devil horns sign (see the 'bird' at the top of the page). Through Grup Perişan, interested readers became familiar with this kind of metal icons. Over the years, Aptülrika portrayed almost the whole rock and metal world, ranging from classic rock band Jethro Tull to black metal pioneers Venom (figure 2).

3. Satanic Panics

Since the late 1980s, the growing visibility of metal in urban public spaces has been drawing the interest of the Turkish media. Newspaper journalists and television commentators have been depicting metal as a phenomenon of deviant behaviour and consequently as a threat to Turkey's

national and religious identity. The situation exacerbated when a series of teenage suicides and the murder of a young girl on an Istanbul cemetery triggered a panic over metal and Satanism. The Turkish media, emphasising the commonalities of the events, constructed a coherent scenario of interrelated incidents, though they had nothing to do with each other.

The most serious accusations against metal were raised in connection with the so-called 'Ortaköy murder.' Only one month after a devastating earthquake had struck the region of Izmit and Bodrum on August 17th 1999, the naked, half-buried body of a young woman was discovered on a cemetery in the Istanbul neighbourhood of Ortaköy. The girl's head had been reportedly smashed with a stone and her body showed signs of rape. When the newspapers published the story, the police had already arrested two young men and a young woman who unanimously confessed to murdering 21-year-old Şehriban Çoşkunfırat on the night of September 13th. When pictures turned up, showing the perpetrators dressed in black and holding the remains of a dissected cat, rumours of necrophilia and satanic rituals dominated the news. Finally, the media coverage triggered a major crackdown on Turkish rock bars, record labels, fanzines, record stores, and individuals who came to have long hair or wear black clothes.

The media coverage on metal and Satanism - whether in connection with the Ortaköy murder or in connection with alleged suicide pacts of several teenagers - repeated the same narrative over and over again. Regardless of the particular events, the line of argument and accusations remained almost identical. In order to illustrate how the Turkish media cemented the image of rock and metal as an epitome of moral subversiveness, I will refer to an early polemic against metal: The first reference to metal and Satanism, which created public concern in Turkey, was by well-known newspaper journalist Engin Ardiç in an article for Sabah newspaper on 14 October 1990. His outspoken and polemic style of criticism made him an intimate enemy of the Turkish scene.

Metaaal!

As if there were not enough 'species' in the country [already], yet another one has emerged: metalheads. Calling themselves 'children of Satan,' their main features are tattered clothes and iron pieces and shackles [attached] to their backs and heads. Some of them are wearing swastikas and some are cutting themselves with razor blades here and there, ripping themselves left and right and making themselves bleed...

Last Monday, you saw a photo report of our [colleague] Tayyar Işıksaçan on our back page: As much as 2,000 'metalheads' had gathered in the [Harbiye] Open Air

Theatre, enjoying themselves [and drinking alcohol].¹⁰ On their foreheads crosses—yes, painted young ladies with the official ‘sign of the infidels.’ (...)

They have symbols. You stretch the index and the little finger of the right hand into the air and yell, bursting out ‘metaaaaaal’ from deep inside your throat!

(...) I would like to address another and bigger aspect of degeneration to you, a squalor that is [even] more inconceivable: Satan worshippers have been springing up! Yes, in Turkey!

(...) Each Saturday the 15th, they are gathering in order to celebrate a mass with wads of smoke, black cowls, crosses, sharp knives, and a mystic number of magic murmurs. Stark naked chicks. The abbot mixes the blood of the person attending the ritual with his own blood and signs a contract with Satan. After that they copulate like dogs in front of the group!

In any case, there ought to be sexual intercourse between man and woman. They are the servants of Satan: ‘everything is permitted;’ homosexual relationships are fostered. Among them, there are even villains who are molesting small children.

(...) A bloke named A.K. explains their principles in the following way: be antisocial, live only for yourself ... be egoistic, live up to your desires... be strong, evolution proceeds through the perishing of the weak... obliterate all moral values... destroy what is not created by yourself, strike back against everything done to you... spread chaos... do not limit your sexuality to only one gender... live without responsibility... (...) You see, we are unaware of how ‘westernised’ the country is, for heaven’s sake.¹¹

Putting what Ardiç contends in a nutshell, it is metal that spawns multifarious forms of deviant behaviour having a subversive impact on the prevailing concepts of morality in Turkish society. The text is replete with evocative images of deviance that are sought to strengthen this argument. With regard to the variety of images used in the text, it appears necessary to form manageable categories. These categories, which are sought to subsume the different images of deviance, I will call ‘categories of immorality.’

In this sense, I will allot the images present in the text to four analytical categories, each of them covering different aspects of immorality. The lines between these categories are, however, fluent. Some images could be ascribed to more than just one category.

A. Religious Subversiveness

A central argument in Ardiç's polemic against metal is the putative renunciation of Islam. According to what he says, metalheads ascribe themselves to apostasy and Satanism. He depicts them as 'children of Satan,' 'Satan worshippers,' and 'servants of Satan.' The text culminates in a portrayal of a black mass that ends in signing 'a contract with Satan' before engaging in a ritual act of sexual intercourse ('after that, they copulate like dogs in front of the group'). The latter represents another form of illicit behaviour, since Islam limits sexuality explicitly to the realm of marriage.

In order to present more 'evidence' for the apostate nature of metal music, he refers to photographs of his colleague Tayyar Işıksaçan showing young women with crosses painted onto their foreheads. The 'sign of the infidels' upon the skin of young Turkish girls must have come as a shock to the readers, as it implies the girls' conversion to Christianity. This, however, poses a threat not only to Islam, but also to the country's national identity, for Sunni Islam is an important element of Turkish nationalism - despite the Kemalist doctrine of laicism.

Moreover, the example points to the ambivalence of anti-Christian symbols in a Muslim context: A cross is a cross, inverted or not. Wherefore wearing, for instance, a Marduk t-shirt makes you a Christian in the eyes of those who are not familiar with metal iconography.

B. Sexual Subversiveness

The text clearly mentions several forms of sexual subversiveness, namely promiscuity ('they copulate like dogs,' 'there ought to be sexual intercourse between man and woman'), homosexuality ('homosexual relationships are fostered'), and child molestation ('molesting small children'). The concept of morality addressed through these images is mainly religious. Concerning sexuality, Islamic sources do condemn two particular practices: anal intercourse and extramarital intercourse. Both practices are sin- and shameful and, at least according to religious sources taken from the hadith/ahadith,¹² to be punished by law.¹³ This refers equally to heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Neither men nor women are allowed to engage in anal and/or extramarital sex. Accordingly, religious scholars deduced a general prohibition of homosexuality, since (male) homosexuality supposedly involves both before-mentioned practices. From a religious perspective, any violation of these prohibitions represents a disregard for the divine revelation and is therefore considered subversive.

A second, traditional concept of morality addressed here, is the concept of honour and shame. Very briefly speaking, the idea of honour and shame is based upon the principle of separating the masculine from the feminine in order to ensure the sexual integrity of the female body. Any harm to that is equivalent to a complete loss of social prestige for the whole family.

Consequently, metal described by Ardiç as propagating promiscuity must be seen as a threat to traditional social order.

Another aspect implicit to the concept relates to the act of sexual penetration: penetrating is coded male, being penetrated is coded female. While the former is a matter of prestige and virility, the latter is a matter of shame and weakness. The meaning of 'homosexual' in this context is 'the one, who is being penetrated.' Any accusation of homosexuality as done by Ardiç is not only equivalent to a violation of the Divine Will, but also an act of depriving the accused of his manliness. Homosexuality implies weakness, passivity, and a complete loss of social as well as self-respect.

C. Political Subversiveness

From a political perspective, Ardiç blames metalheads of adhering to subversive ideologies such as National Socialism ('some are wearing swastikas') and Communism (mentioned in a second article by Ardiç published only a couple of days later). With regard to Turkish national history, it was open conflict between the Communist Left and the Fascist Right that led the country into political instability culminating in the coup d'état of 1980.

As outlined above, Ardiç assumes an apostate nature of metal that poses a threat to the country's religious identity. Religious identity, in that case, is equivalent to national identity. Another verbal attack along the same line is his final résumé that the emergence of metal and Satanism is a result of westernisation ('You see, we are unaware of how 'westernised' the country is, for heaven's sake!'). The Turkish Republic was born from a war of independence, after European imperialist powers had already agreed on a territorial partitioning of Ottoman Anatolia by the end of World War One. Therefore, Turkish nationalism is highly sensible about any kind of foreign interference in the country's internal affairs. From this perspective, westernisation - seen as a matter of cultural alienation - could breed discord among the population, finally contributing to a weakening and disintegration of the country. Metal, in this sense, is undermining Turkish national identity.

D. Social Subversiveness

The text reveals quite a number of images that can be categorised as socially subversive. It starts with some brief remarks on the metalheads' clothing. What Ardiç describes ('tattered clothes'), contradicts the prevailing dress codes of Turkish society. The question of what is seen as adequate in terms of clothing is based on principles such as decency, tidiness, and cleanliness.

On another occasion, which is not given here, he denounces Turkish metalheads as 'our homemade rich bastards' who are wearing expensive sports shoes. In doing so, he alludes to another sensible issue: the inner-

Turkish discourse on social and cultural disparities. Turkish society – on a regional as well as on a local level - is characterised by major economic inequalities. These inequalities define access to social and cultural resources. Particularly at the time when Ardiç wrote his anti-metal polemic, westernisation in the sense of having access to cultural resources from Western Europe and North America was widely limited to a relatively well-off Turkish middle class. Accordingly, Ardiç implies that metal is an exclusively upper middle class phenomenon. In other words, he draws a line between a allegedly morally-corrupted, westernised elite and a socially-deprived, but morally superior lower class. As a result, the originally social rift obtains the connotation of a moral rift with metal functioning as an indicator for that scenario.

Beyond that, Ardiç claims that metalheads indulge in acts of self-mutilation ('some are cutting themselves with razor blades') and are committed to the principles of egoism and hedonism. Accordingly, they disregard the well-being of others ('be antisocial,' 'evolution proceeds through the perishing of the weak'), seek to maximise their own pleasure ('live up to your desires'), and act solely under the terms of their own interests ('live only for yourself,' 'live without responsibilities'). Finally, he imputes them with a nihilist attitude ('spread chaos,' 'obliterate all moral values'), thereby completing the picture of social subversiveness.

Notes

¹ D Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: the Music and its Culture*, revised edition, Da Capo Press, London, 2000 [1991], p. 120.

² Z Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, Milli Eđt. Bakanlıđı Yay., Ankara, 1996 [1923], p. 88-89.

³ Erkin Koray graduated from the German High School, Cem Karaca from the American Robert College, Barış Manço from the French Galatasaray Lisesi, and Moğollar's Cahit Berkay from the no-less prestigious Kabataş Erkek Lisesi.

⁴ Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 June 2003.

⁵ K Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2007, p. 78-82.

⁶ Laneth was one of Turkey's very first metal fanzines, which was founded and published by Çađlan Tekil between 1991 and 1994.

⁷ Personal interview, Istanbul, 6 August, 2004.

⁸ Groinchurn is a South African grindcore band from Johannesburg, which formed in the early 1990s and later signed with the German independent label Morbid Records.

⁹ Personal interview, Istanbul, 6 August 2004.

¹⁰ Ardiç does not explicitly speak about alcohol here, but using the verb 'dağıtmak' implies wild partying and drinking.

¹¹ Quoted and translated from E Ardiç, 'Metaaal!' in *Sabah*, Istanbul, 14 October 1990.

¹² The *ahadith* (singular: *hadith*) are traditions reporting on the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. Besides of the Koran they represent the major source of Islamic jurisprudence.

¹³ A Schmitt, 'Liwat im Fiqh: Männliche Hmosexualität?,' in J N Bell (ed), *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies 4*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2002, p.49-110.

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Distortion Drenched Dystopias: Metal and Modernity in Southeast Asia

Jeremy Wallach

Abstract

Dedicated fans of heavy metal music can now be found in every corner of the industrialized world. This fandom, rarely mentioned in most studies of ‘cultural globalisation’, is usually associated with the existence of local ‘scenes’ – semiautonomous social networks supporting the production, dissemination, and consumption of recordings, fanzines, and other artifacts that operate to an extent outside the global/national mainstream commercial music industry. This chapter investigates the remarkable development of indigenous metal music scenes in three adjoining Southeast Asian nations—Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore—over the last twenty years. While hard data on this phenomenon are still limited, the little that exist raise tantalizing questions about the relationship between these music-based subcultures and local politics, local constructions of masculinity, pre-existing sources of social difference, and patterns of global dissemination of cultural forms.

Key Words: Ethnonationalism, globalisation, Indonesia, Malaysia, masculinity, music scenes, politics, Singapore, Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction: The Globalisation of Metal in Southeast Asia

In addition to maintaining an enthusiastic fan base in its countries of origin, heavy metal is a global phenomenon with legions of enthusiasts in every corner of the world.¹ In this chapter I offer some preliminary remarks about an explosion of Malay- and English-language heavy metal in the three adjoining Southeast Asian nations of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia based on my ethnographic research in the region in 1997-2000 and subsequent forays into the world of recordings and Internet sites created by the communities that support the music.

When I began my research, many non-metalheads, including fellow ethnomusicologists, had a tough time believing that metal could catch on in Malaysia, Singapore, or Indonesia, even though the popularity of this music previously had been noted by several not-always-sympathetic scholars of Southeast Asian musics.² What had not widely been reported was the enormous scale and vitality of the linked underground extreme metal scenes I encountered in those countries, a testament to the power and scale of metal music’s globalization over the last two and a half decades. While hard data on this phenomenon are still limited, the little that exist raise tantalizing

questions about the relationship between these music-based subcultures and local politics, local constructions of masculinity, pre-existing sources of social difference, and patterns of global dissemination of cultural forms.

Metal fandom, a phenomenon still rarely mentioned in studies of 'cultural globalisation,' depends on the existence of local 'scenes' – semiautonomous social networks supporting the production, dissemination, and consumption of recordings, fanzines, and other artefacts that operate to a great extent outside the formal commercial music industry. This 'outsider' status, combined with the extremity of the music itself, often puts metalheads in a vulnerable position. In the words of metal historian Ian Christe, the music's fans the world over 'live on a volatile cusp, prone to harassment by powers that view them as symbolic of a breakdown in traditional values.'³ The Southeast Asian metalheads described in this essay are no exception, yet their scenes have only gotten stronger in the last twenty years despite concerted government and religious efforts to squelch them.

2. A Brief History of the Scene

The metal movement in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia began in the 1980s with groups of teenaged boys covering songs in English by their favourite Western bands. As these teenagers reached their twenties and thirties, more groups began writing original material, first in English, the same language as that employed by their idols, then increasingly in Malay. By the time a new generation of metal musicians came of age in the late 1990s, 'Malay metal' was a well-established if marginal and disreputable music genre, and shared space with the mainstream pop, Indian film music, and ethnic musics popular in the region.

Many outsiders who learn that the Malaysian and Indonesian national variants of Malay are almost the same language are surprised to discover that the everyday spoken variants of Indonesian and Malay are not mutually intelligible. In fact, participants in the metal scene frequently have to resort to using English as a medium of face-to-face communication. The written languages are more similar, however, and the language used in song lyrics (including metal songs) is nearly identical, which facilitates transnational appreciation of local metal groups, and a number of compilation albums have been produced over the last fifteen years featuring songs by bands from all three countries. In Singapore, metal music is popular among the Malay-speaking minority and has carved out a stable niche in the island nation's music scene with all-day concerts in community centres and ties to the metal scenes in Malaysia and Indonesia.⁴ Both Singaporean and Malaysian bands frequently tour in Indonesia, where the performance environment is far less regulated and their music can draw massive crowds. Indonesian bands tour neighbouring countries less often due to financial considerations and the difficulty of obtaining permission to play.

While the majority of the heavy metal bands from the region do not incorporate elements of traditional ‘ethnic’ music to their sound, bands who have experimented with the creation of ethnic metal ‘alloys’ include the Indonesian groups Gong 2000 and Kremush, the Malaysian groups Purnama and Lefthanded and the Singaporean group UrbanKarma (who also incorporate the sounds of the Australian *didjeridu* and the Brazilian *berimbau* in their music). Javanese gamelan, the region’s best-known musical export, is known worldwide for its (decidedly un-metal) dignified solemnity and refined, stately beauty. In Bali, by contrast, where gamelan is a village-rather than a court-based tradition, a fast, aggressive, and virtuosic variety of gamelan called *gamelan gong kebyar* has existed since the early twentieth century; this style was influential in forging the death metal/ethnic hybrid sound of Denpasar’s Eternal Madness.⁵ These ethnic hybrids constitute one answer to the question of how one can be simultaneously ‘Malay,’ modern, and metal.

3. Metal and ‘Malayness’

By the early 21st century, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore were home to some of the largest metal movements in Asia and the world. This diverse region, comprising the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago, is divided by a sociopolitical distinction between ‘Malays’, the indigenous inhabitants of the region who are predominantly Muslim, and the descendants of immigrants from China and southern India who mostly settled in the region during the colonial era. These latter groups are considered ‘non-native’ and are usually non-Muslim (the Indians are mostly Sikhs and Hindus, the Chinese a combination of Christians, Buddhists, Confucians, and followers of Chinese folk religion). There are also isolated groups of non-Muslim indigenes in rainforest and highland regions called in Malaysia *Orang Asli* (Original People). Indonesia is home to numerous Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, and Buddhist minority groups, as well as isolated peoples who still follow traditional native religions. 96 percent of Indonesia’s population is considered indigenous, 55 percent of Malaysia’s, and about 15 percent of ethnic-Chinese-dominated Singapore.

In *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia*, Craig Lockard writes of Malaysia:

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, heavy metal groups had become the chief focus for expressing youth alienation from mainstream lifestyles and values, although the groups faced sporadic restrictions on their public performances... Whatever the nuances, heavy metal music appealed chiefly to frustrated urban blue-collar workers and unemployed youth, among them the alienated Malay youngsters known

locally and pejoratively as *kutu* ('head lice'), who congregate around malls and affect a punk lifestyle. In some ways this evolving rock subculture provides a distinct challenge to the dominant culture and socioeconomic norms promoted by the state and Islamic purists.⁶

As this passage suggests, urban working-class Malay young men tend to be the most ardent fans of metal. In Malaysia and Singapore metal appears to be *the* music of choice for this group. In Indonesia, *dangdut* (a popular syncretic style whose appeal appears to transcend age and gender) is still the preferred genre for young working-class men but hard rock/heavy metal is a close second. Legendary Western bands, particularly Deep Purple, Metallica, Sepultura, and Cannibal Corpse, are extremely popular among the region's metalheads, but so are Malaysia's XPDC, Suffercation, Infectious Maggots, Sil-Khannaz, FTG, and Indonesia's Betrayer, Grausig, Puppen, Purgatory, Suckerhead, Siksa Kubur, Slowdeath, Tengkorak, and Trauma. Major Singaporean bands include Doxohedron, Impiety, UrbanKarma, and the 'Vedic metal' masters Rudra, a group whose ethnic Indian heritage is a notable exception to the Malay predominance in Island Southeast Asian metal.⁷

Strident Malay ethnonationalism occasionally can be found in the work of Malaysian bands like FTG (which either stands for 'Freedom That's Gone' or, according to some fans, 'Fuck the Government'). In their Malay-language song 'Anak Melayu' (Malay Sons) they assert:

Don't forget your own country/Let the earth be a witness/Ask in your heart/Do not forget your origins/We are Malay sons/Why have you forgotten/Why have you been carried away?/How I long to tell of/From where we came.

While metal in Malaysia and Singapore is commonly associated with working-class Malay ethnonationalism, in Indonesia the national metal movement forges ties across boundaries of religion, ethnicity, and class, a consequence of a markedly different, more inclusive understanding of 'Malayness' that extends back to the colonial era.⁸ In all three countries, however, the intimate association between metal music and 'native' working-class young men, despite the music's indisputably foreign origins, is rarely questioned and appears to be quite 'naturalised'.

4. Politics, Censorship and the Triumph of Metal

The Malaysian metal scene is larger than Indonesia's, despite the country's smaller population, but it has also been much more subject to

government censorship and harassment. In 1985 the Ministry of Culture prohibited a Malaysian tour by the group Scorpions⁹ and Malaysian authorities have maintained an attitude of suspicious hostility to metal ever since (though in 2001 they allowed Scorpions to play while banning Megadeth¹⁰). In 2006 the Malaysian government disappointed thousands of fans when it prohibited the Norwegian black metal band Mayhem from playing in the country.¹¹ In Malaysia, as in Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, and Lebanon, rather than the state viewing crackdowns on metalheads to be the defusing of a genuine threat to the social order, they are generally a tactic to win the allegiance of religious fundamentalists, many of whom regard all music as forbidden by Islam.

Music censorship has been less onerous in Indonesia. In most of the Muslim world western culture is seen as threatening (though, of course, also alluring). In Indonesia, after decades of technocratic, developmentalist leadership, the West is seen less as a hostile territory filled with imperialistic infidels than a valued source of technology, cultural products, and modern ideas. Secular nationalism (with its exhortations of national 'development') is generally more persuasive than the rhetoric of transnational religious fundamentalist movements to the majority of Indonesians. Therefore, Western music, including metal, is often viewed as a neutral or positive force in society.¹² Furthermore, as Krishna Sen and David Hill have pointed out, even during the Soeharto dictatorship (1966-1998) musicians were relatively free from government harassment and censorship (though of course there was some, usually involving popular music superstars like Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals).¹³ Indonesia has also been less conflicted than most Muslim societies about music itself, a result of the relatively moderate variety of Islam that prevails among the majority of Muslims in the country. Therefore, attempts to censor musical expression do not enjoy the same popular support as they do in Malaysia.

In Indonesia, metal bands have made bold political statements as that country transitioned from dictatorship to a cacophonous democracy in 1998, rejecting the authoritarian paternalism that still holds sway for its neighbours. The following is a translation of the lyrics to Puppen's *Hijau* (Green). While the lyrics are relatively indirect and poetic, it remains one of the most politically 'sharp' (*tajam*) underground songs in existence, as the 'green' of the title refers to the Indonesian military police, who frequently commit violent acts against student protestors.

Green oppresses, pressuring repressively/Snatching away
rights that have been trashed, fear is already enough/Green
represses, victims fall/Not aware [they] have grown the
seeds of resistance/Seizing, tearing, green is supposed to
feel cool/Green silences, silences questions why/Spreading

fear, developing colonization/Green oppresses, all is drowned/Snatching rights that have been trashed, we've been oppressed long enough/Seizing, tearing, green is supposed to feel cool/Reject your presence, too great is my pain/Wounds and suffering: green is supposed to feel cool/We have been oppressed long enough!¹⁴

5. Conclusion

According to ethnomusicologist John Blacking,

Music is not a language that describes the way society seems to be, but a metaphorical expression of feelings associated with the way society really is. It is a reflection of and response to social forces, and particularly to the consequences of the division of labour in society.¹⁵

This perhaps provides a clue to why heavy metal has become so popular in Southeast Asia. As a region, the way society 'really is', characterized by wrenching social changes, uneven development, official hypocrisy, and widening inequality is not reflected in the authoritative discourses of government and religious authorities. But this reality *is* expressed in the anger, aggression, and power of metal music.

At the time of this writing, many serious metal enthusiasts in the West are already aware of at least some bands from the region, such as Singapore's Impiety and Rudra, Malaysia's Suffercation and Sil-Khannaz, and Indonesia's Kekal and Armageddon Holocaust. More work needs to be done on the subject of the Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia metal scene. How did the connection between metal music and working-class Malay masculinity first emerge and develop over time? Will the metal scene's increasing visibility in the mainstream give rise to the currency of ever more extreme forms? How do metal artists from the region negotiate the racism and neocolonialism of the global metal scene? Finally, and most importantly, as metal increases in popularity in spite of all attempts to limit it in the Middle East, China, South Asia, and mainland Southeast Asia, will new transnational links be forged that can challenge the hegemony of the Anglo-American metal mainstream? If this happens, arguably metal will have finally arrived as a truly global genre.

Notes

¹ See, for example, I Avelar, 'Defeated Rallies, Mournful Anthems, and the Origins of Brazilian Heavy Metal', in *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*, C. Dunn and C. Perrone (eds.), University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 2001; E Baulch, *Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2007; K Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Berg, New York, 2007; M LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2008; and the essays in J Wallach, H Berger, and P Greene eds., *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, forthcoming.

² Including C Lockard, *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1998; R A Sutton, 'Interpreting Electronic Sound Technology in the Contemporary Javanese Soundscape.' *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1996; Tan Sooi Beng, 'The Performing Arts in Malaysia: State and Society.' *Asian Music*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1989/1990.

³ I Christie, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*, Harper Collins, New York, 2003, p. 364.

⁴ Fu Yu Sin, K. and Liew Kai Khiun, 'From Folk Devils to Folk Music: Tracing the Malay Heavy Metal Scene in Singapore', in *Sonic Synergies Music, Technology and Community, Identity*, G. Bloustien, M. Peters, and S. Luckman (eds), Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, 2008.

⁵ J Wallach, 'Engineering Techno-Hybrid Grooves in Two Indonesian Sound Studios', in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, P. Greene and T. Porcello (eds.), Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 2005, pp. 148-151.

⁶ Lockard, pp. 256-257.

⁷ Vedic metal is a metal subgenre that combines extreme metal with Indian classical music and Hindu sacred chant. While it was pioneered by Rudra from Singapore, Vedic metal began truly to flourish in the small but rapidly expanding Indian metal scene.

⁸ Lian Kwen Fee, 'The Construction of Malay Identity Across Nations: Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* vol 157, no. 4, 2001.

⁹ C Lockard, 'Reflections of Change: Sociopolitical Commentary and Criticism in Malaysian Popular Music since 1950', *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1991, p.38, note 90.

¹⁰ Christe, p. 364.

¹¹ Kahn-Harris, p. 117.

¹² For a further exploration of this thesis, see J Wallach, *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997-2001*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 2008.

¹³ K Sen and D Hill, *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p. 184.

¹⁴ For more about Puppen and the song 'Hijau', see J "'Goodbye My Blind Majesty': Music, Language, and Politics in the Indonesian Underground", in *Global Pop, Local Language*, H. Berger and M. Carroll (eds.), University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, 2003, pp. 75-76.

¹⁵ J Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1973, p. 104.

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Turn or Burn? The Peculiar Case of Christian Metal Music

Marcus Moberg

Abstract

Christian metal music emerged in the late 1970s as a means of evangelism within the wider metal community. In recent years it has grown significantly and developed into a transnational Christian music scene in its own right, including a highly independent infrastructure of record labels, promotion and distribution channels, specialized media, and festivals. However, Christian metal is as much about religion as it is about music. Thus, it remains a peculiar, and often ridiculed, case within a wider metal culture partly characterized by its antagonism and sometimes outright hostility towards Christianity in particular. This chapter aims to provide a general overview of today's transnational Christian metal music scene. In addition, it also aims to highlight what Christian metal is all about from the perspective of its artists and fans through focusing on its discursive construction within various forms of Christian metal media.

Key Words: Religion and popular music, evangelical popular culture.

1. Introduction

Metal, it is often said, is all about the music. And yet, like all major and global popular music genres, it is about much more than that. As Andy Bennett puts it in the introduction to his *Cultures of Popular Music*, 'popular music is a primary, if not *the* primary, leisure resource in late modern society.'¹ To a greater extent than many other forms of popular culture, popular music is characterized by its *collective* quality; 'people forge new friendships and associations based around common tastes in music, fashion and lifestyle.'² Particular ideologies, values and styles are bound up with particular forms of popular music, creating *popular music cultures* that, for many, become important markers of personal and cultural identity. Indeed, metal has often been interpreted as providing its audiences with resources for the shaping of subversive counter cultural identities, thereby constituting a form of rebellion against the hollowness and confines of post-industrial Western society and culture.³ Looking at metal in the Islamic world, Mark LeVine has recently offered a largely similar account of metal as providing growing audiences with tools and resources for carving out their own alternative cultural space within otherwise strongly tradition-bound, oppressive, and potentially explosive societal and cultural climates.⁴

Metal's fascination for the world of religion, particularly the dark and evil forces of the Judeo-Christian tradition, has always been one of its most characteristic lyrical and aesthetic traits. Quite unlike any other contemporary form of popular music, metal is replete with themes, topics, terminology, imagery and symbolism inspired by the world of religion, mythology and legend. As I have argued elsewhere, following Christopher Partridge⁵, viewed in relation to today's increasingly close relationship between religion and popular culture, metal has come to play an important role in the dissemination of a wide range of 'dark' alternative religious/spiritual themes and ideas such as those found in different strands of occultism, esotericism, paganism and Satanism.⁶ However, metal bands have far from always explored religious themes and ideas in a positive light. Instead, metal's dealings with religion, and Christianity in particular, is perhaps best described in terms of a love-hate relationship. Although some bands within extreme sub-genres such as death- and black metal have explored Satanism and anti Christian sentiment in an apparently very serious manner indeed, others have mainly used such themes as a means of investing their music with an aura of mystique and 'otherworldliness' or just dabbled with them in a spirit of playfulness and humour.

Although the 'religious element' in metal is exceptionally pervasive, different metal groups have nevertheless explored various religious themes in a wide range of different ways. This makes it difficult, if not altogether impossible, to determine in which sense, to which extent, or to which degrees, metal can really be said to be 'about' religion. Moreover, as many metal-researchers have pointed out, much of metal culture is permeated by a loosely defined ethos of individualism, which constitutes a barrier against attaching the music to any particular ideology. That said, one can nevertheless find numerous examples of metal scenes which at the very least *seem* bound to particular ideologies, including religious ones: e.g. Satanist, pagan, national-socialist, and Christian. Despite their marginal status these scenes all attest to the malleability of metal music and culture as a vehicle for the expression and articulation of a wide range of disparate worldviews, ideologies, and identities.

The peculiar case of *Christian metal* (also called *white metal*) is perhaps *the* clearest example of this. Christian metal emerged in the U.S. in the late 1970s as a means of evangelism in the secular metal community. During the 1980s it gradually developed into a distinct Christian music culture in its own right and eventually gained a foothold in some European and South American countries such as Sweden, Finland, Norway, Germany, The Netherlands, Brazil and Mexico. Not surprisingly, these are all countries with long-standing 'secular' metal scenes. Recent years have seen the development of a highly independent and largely Internet-based transnational scene with its own infrastructure of record labels, promotion and distribution

channels, specialized media, and festivals.⁷ In addition, the prominent Swedish scene has even produced its own special edition of the New Testament, the *Metalbible*, which at the time of writing is being translated into numerous languages.⁸ In Finland, which also has a vibrant Christian metal scene, metal has also been picked up by the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the former state church of which approximately 80, 7 percent of the Finnish population are members at the time of writing) in the form of *Metal masses* held regularly across the country. In these otherwise traditional Lutheran masses, all liturgical music and hymns are accompanied by a metal band which in itself makes for a very different Church experience.

Whether Christian metal can be said to have gained any real foothold within the ‘secular’ metal communities of these countries is an altogether different matter. By forming its own separate scene, Christian metal has remained confined to the very margins of the broader metal community. However, it has become widely known throughout global metal culture in spite of this. Although they may not approve of it (and many do not), secular metal audiences still tend to know that there is such a thing as Christian metal. Because of its explicitly religious outlook and more or less pronounced evangelistic agenda, Christian metal has often been ridiculed, discriminated against, and at times, vehemently opposed within metal culture as a whole. In many ways, Christian metal may seem totally antithetical to what metal is ‘supposed’ to be about. Be that as it may, Christian metal still deserves to be treated fairly since its very existence warrants serious academic attention – not least from within the ‘field’ of metal studies itself. It might not be possible, or even desirable; to attempt to explain what metal as a whole is ‘really’ about. Focusing on the peculiar case of Christian metal, my aim here is to shed some light on how metal may indeed become ‘about’ some rather specific issues when used by particular groups as a vehicle for the expression of particular identities and world views.

2. Approaching Christian Metal

One could approach Christian metal by asking ‘what is it?’. I would argue that it is possible to provide a relatively straightforward answer to that question: First, Christian metal is metal with a Christian *message*, with lyrics dealing with either explicitly Christian theological topics or other social or cultural issues from a Christian *perspective*. Much like secular metal, Christian metal often explores various biblical eschatological and apocalyptic themes such as the ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil (so called ‘spiritual warfare’), the fall from grace or the last judgment. Many bands also choose to focus more on Christian faith and everyday personal or social struggles. Second, Christian metal is metal produced *by* people who are professed Christians (and it is sometimes principally produced *for* Christians as well). Third, and of lesser importance nowadays, it is metal produced and

distributed through various Christian networks guided by an evangelistic agenda.

Of course, these 'requirements' leave much room for interpretation. Still, even though they are constantly debated, the overwhelming majority of Christian metal musicians and fans hold the view that, in order to be considered *Christian*, a band would have to meet at least the second requirement, and preferably the first as well. This view stems from the notion that, in order to produce music in a truly Christian spirit with a truly Christian content, it needs to be grounded in the personal Christian faith of its creators. It is also worth pointing out that this notion constitutes a central component of the world of evangelical popular culture more generally.⁹ Christian metal has gone further than any other form of Christian rock in fully embracing the defining musical, rhetorical, stylistic and aesthetic characteristics of its secular equivalent. Apart from the content of the lyrics, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between Christian and secular metal. Today's transnational Christian metal scene comprises all metal sub-genres and styles. However, in order to distinguish themselves from their secular counterparts, Christian metalheads have also come up with some, admittedly humorous, labels of their own. For example, Christian black metal is sometimes referred to as 'unblack', Christian metalcore/hardcore as 'Christcore' and Christian death/grind core as 'goreship'. Moreover, Christian metal has also produced its own slogans such as 'Faster for the Master!', 'Turn or burn!' and 'Support the war against Satan!'. As the rhetoric of these slogans illustrate, Christian metalheads have also created their own variant of the uncompromising attitude that metal has been associated with since its early days.

Apart from a handful of academic articles¹⁰, Christian metal has received almost no scholarly attention. Although these articles have all provided accounts of what Christian metal 'is', they have also addressed another question that I view as being of crucial importance for gaining a fuller understanding of Christian metal, namely, 'what is it *about*?'. What do Christian metal musicians and fans get out of their involvement with the Christian scene culturally, religiously, identity-wise etc.? One needs to ask what meanings and functions Christian metal music and culture has for the people who play and listen to it, who administer Internet-sites, produce magazines and fanzines, organize festivals and so on. And if metal, partly in the West at least, is about constructing counter cultural identities and rebelling against the stifling confines of post-industrial late modern society and culture in a spirit of 'Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!', as Rage Against the Machine famously put it, then what is Christian metal about?

Eileen Luhr has argued that the evangelistic efforts of Christian metal bands in the U.S. from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s 'confirmed the fluidity of oppositional cultural themes such as 'rebellion' and 'alienation'',¹¹ These thoughts are echoed by Charles M. Brown who argues that, although in

a much-transformed sense, Christian metal bands also seem to express feelings of alienation and rebellion through their music.¹² But such rebellion and alienation is of a very different kind from that found in secular metal.

In Christian metal, the issue of rebellion has more to do with Christian opposition to the perceived sinfulness and immorality of a late modern society and culture in which traditional 'family values' have been eroded through such things as the legalization and increasing acceptability of abortion and pornography and the rise of gay rights and feminist movements. The issue of alienation, in turn, has more to do with the fundamental Christian struggle of being *in* but not *of* the world. Luhr discusses in detail how influential U.S. evangelical Christian metal bands of the mid 1980s and early 1990s strived to 'redefine 'rebellion' as resistance to sin and obedience to parental, church, and divine authority.'¹³ Turning the 'conventional' understanding of rebellion on its head, Christian bands such as Bloodgood and Barren Cross proclaimed that, in late modern Western society and culture, it was in fact Christian faith and morals that constituted the true and ultimate form of 'rebellion'; 'obedience was the true transgression, and personal morality became the basis for reform.'¹⁴ However, Christian metalheads were also confronted with the difficult task of legitimizing their mode of evangelism within their own churches – an issue that has remained relevant to this day.

However, as Luhr points out, these observations need to be understood in the context of the broader cultural struggles or 'culture wars' that raged throughout U.S. society from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s.¹⁵ Indeed, when looking at the later development of Christian metal in Europe, a more multifaceted picture emerges. For one thing, the American strand of evangelical Protestantism (often referred to simply as 'evangelicalism') has so far remained marginal within the Christian milieu of countries such as Norway, Sweden and Finland whose religious climates are all still dominated by the increasingly liberal Lutheran former state churches (in Norway the Lutheran church retains the status of state church). In such relatively homogeneous and increasingly secularized social and cultural environments Christian metal has become characterized by somewhat different concerns. In contrast to 1980s and 1990s Christian metal in the U.S., today's Nordic scenes seem only marginally concerned with debates on whether the music should be used purely as a means of evangelism or if it can also be adopted wholeheartedly as an alternative Christian lifestyle. Interestingly, almost without exception, the members of the Nordic scenes have chosen the latter.

Of course, Christian metal can still be interpreted as an internal detraditionalising force that, so to speak, rebels *inward* by challenging traditional notions about 'suitable' forms of Christian expression and evangelism. Importantly, when Christian metal is adopted as a lifestyle that combines religion with a particular form of popular music, its rhetoric, style,

and aesthetics, Christian faith becomes expressed in not only a particular popular cultural form but also a in a particular popular cultural way. For many Christian metalheads, this can be seen as having led to the forming of an alternative way of engaging faith and religious life as a whole.

There is thus a sense in which the Christian metal scene may be seen to provide its members with an alternative and non-traditional way of 'being' a Christian and an alternative way of 'doing' religion. Arguably, the view of Christian metal as an alternative Christian lifestyle has been strengthened through the development of a transnational scene that brings together people with a range of different cultural backgrounds and Christian affiliations. That said, the overwhelming majority of Christian metalheads worldwide are *protestant*. This is not surprising considering Christian metal's roots in North American evangelicalism. Particular national scenes do need to be understood in their respective local and national religious and cultural contexts, but as Christian metal has spread on a transnational level it has also become increasingly detached from the cultural struggles characteristic of the U.S. Today's transnational scene is not controlled by any particular Christian group or institution and advocates no particular denominational creed.

One potentially very fruitful way of approaching how particular meanings are attached to particular kinds of popular music by particular groups of people is through focusing on how such meanings are constructed *discursively*. With specific reference to metal, Robert Walser has pointed out that the texts produced within music genres 'are developed, sustained, and reformed by people, who bring a variety of histories and interests to their encounters with generic texts.'¹⁶ Being produced by people in particular historical and cultural contexts, they 'come to reflect the multiplicities of social existence.'¹⁷ Music in itself has no intrinsic meaning, rather, its meaning is informed by the *discourses* that surround it, or as Walser puts it, 'Musical meanings are always grounded socially and historically, and they operate on an ideological field of conflicting interests, institutions, and memories.'¹⁸

Simon Frith makes a similar point arguing that engaging with popular culture entails an act of *discrimination*. For example, in many ways, we use music to express *who we are*. We also often assume that other people's tastes in music will tell us something about *who they are* and what they are like. This, argues Frith, is most clearly evident in the ways in which we *talk* about popular music through making *value judgments*. However, these 'are not about likes and dislikes as such, but about ways of listening, about ways of hearing, about ways of being.'¹⁹ In order to understand the cultural value judgments people make, we need to pay attention to the social and discursive contexts in which they are embedded. Hence, we need to examine the situated discourses that invest music with certain meanings. Disputes about music are not about music in itself but, as Frith puts it, 'about

something *with* music.²⁰ This is particularly important to keep in mind when looking at the presence of such a thing as Christian metal within a broader metal culture partly characterized by a critical, and sometimes openly hostile and antagonistic, stance towards institutional Christianity in particular.

Christian metal may thus be approached by focusing on how its meaning and function is constructed discursively by its musicians, fans and other people involved in maintaining today's transnational scene. To delineate a more specific area, one might focus on Christian metal's discursive construction in various forms of Christian metal *media* such as magazines, fanzines, and Internet-sites such as webzines and forums. Importantly, such forms of media have played, and continue to play, a crucial role in spreading the central discourses that surround Christian metal on a transnational level. Various forms of Christian metal media are also easily accessible to people unfamiliar with Christian metal. Put another way, if a person with only little or no prior knowledge about Christian metal would like to find out more about it, this person would probably start out by looking into various forms of Christian metal media.

3. The Discursive Construction of Christian Metal in Specialised Media

Today's transnational Christian metal media play an important role in circulating a set of key discourses pertaining to the basic meaning and function of Christian metal. Of course, one may find any number of musical, non-musical or otherwise related discourses circulating within the specialized media of any music scene. In the following I will focus on some recurring and overlapping key discourses that play a particularly important role in expressing the basic meaning and function of Christian metal *from the perspective of its musicians and fans*.²¹

First, we have what could be called the 'Christian metal as an *alternative* form of religious expression' discourse. Here, Christian metal is represented as a non-traditional but equally sincere way of expressing Christian faith. Arguably, this discourse constitutes *the* most commonly used general representation of Christian metal today. Second, we also have another closely related key discourse that could be called the 'Christian metal as a *legitimate* form of religious expression' discourse. Both of these discourses are mainly directed *inward* as they confront the criticism still levelled at Christian metal within some conservative Christian circles. The latter also underlies the practice of writing so-called 'Christian metal apologetics' which is a relatively common feature of many Christian metal Internet-sites. Indeed, one can find numerous examples of the simultaneous and overlapping use of these two discourses on large and trans-nationally well known Christian metal Internet-sites. For instance, the following excerpt from the 'Frequently asked questions' section of Sweden-based *The Metal for*

Jesus Page clearly draws on both:

Why the need of Christian metal?

First of all because many Christians love metal music, and since we are Christians it's only natural to combine it with our faith. Just because you are Christian that doesn't mean that you have to listen to gospel or pop music! God is much bigger than the regular church music. Great music also deserves a great message, so why not combine them and take the best from both worlds. The reason that we want to spread the message of Jesus is because we care for people and don't want anyone to burn in hell, but instead find a living relationship with God (cause that's what the real Christian life is all about, it's a living relationship with God and not a boring religion!). Christian metal is also needed to encourage and help believers that love metal to grow in faith and come closer to Christ through the lyrics.²²

In passing, this excerpt also draws on a third key discourse that could be called the 'Christian metal as an effective *means of evangelism*' discourse. Although Christian metalheads nowadays rarely view the music purely as an evangelistic tool, the general notion of a 'metal ministry', of representing a Christian voice in the metal-world, has remained important. This discourse thus continues to be drawn upon by many established and well known Christian metal acts in particular. However, not all Christian metal bands share the same evangelistic fervour. Many would like nothing more than to gain acceptance within the broader metal community and thus choose to consciously downplay or 'cloak' their Christian message in order to better their chances in this regard. Perhaps rather surprisingly then, many contemporary Christian bands appear to seek such acceptance on purely *musical* terms. However, this approach has also been contested within the world of Christian metal itself. For example, when asked about the importance of conveying a clear Christian message in an interview for the fanzine *Heaven's Metal*, Steve Rowe, front man of well known Australian Christian death metal band Mortification, explained:

We have always been accepted in the secular market /.../
We always play with secular bands in Australia. We have sold more than any other metal act from this country. Men who stand for Jesus in their lyrics are the meat of what is going on. Any band that does not have a strong Christian message should not be sold in Christian bookstores or play at Christian Festivals. The world needs Jesus and the

Christian fans need encouragement in their faith and walk with Christ. It is too easy to say you're a Christian and get easy sales in the Christian market /.../ If you don't have the message you should do the honourable thing and take the hard road like all secular acts do. Don't scam Christians who think they are buying Christian music and get no food. What has happened to The US 'Christian' Rock scene is a disease.²³

In this excerpt, Rowe draws on both the 'Christian metal as an *alternative* form of religious expression' and 'Christian metal as an effective *means of evangelism*' discourses. He seems to say that, in order for Christian metal to be 'Christian' in any true sense, it first of all needs to offer Christians 'encouragement in their faith'. He also clearly states that Christian metal should be produced, not only *by* Christians, but principally *for* Christians as well. Moreover, he goes on to argue that Christians have the right to expect Christian bands to deliver spiritual 'food' in the form of a truly Christian content. In addition to this, though, Christian bands also need to cater to the world's 'need for Jesus'. So, even though spreading the word is important, Rowe appears to regard Christian metal's evangelistic element as secondary to its edificational functions. Rowe can thus be interpreted as expressing the commonly held view that Christian metal culture should be regarded as something more than just a means of evangelism.

In a way, Rowe also draws on a fourth key discourse that could be called the 'Christian metal as a positive *alternative* to secular metal' discourse. This discourse is aimed at distinguishing Christian metal's 'positive' message from the perceived potentially destructive messages presented by many secular metal bands. For example, some Christian metal Internet-sites (for example *The Metal for Jesus Page* mentioned above) contain detailed comparison charts designed to aid Christians in finding 'positive' Christian sound-a-likes of popular secular bands. But since the most obvious difference between Christian and secular metal lies in the content of the lyrics anyway, this discourse is basically about distinguishing Christian metal *culture* from secular metal culture more generally. A typical example of this discourse at play can be found in the following excerpt from the Christian metal Internet site *JesusMetal*:

Here at JesusMetal we will introduce you to the Extreme Side of Christianity, or the safe side of Metal, it's both really. Here you'll find all about positive metal, with sometimes-Christian lyrics, sometimes a band just has a Christian background. We try to keep the site 100% Christian, but it might happen that accidentally a secular

band is added, because it was promoted by a Christian company. If you find any band on here that is not Christian, please e-mail. We will dig deeper into a band and decide whether or not we'll delete the band from our archives.²⁴

The administrator of another site, *Christian Xtreme*, provides a very similar description of his main purposes:

Our Mission at Christian Xtreme is to help lead people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through music with positive Christ centred lyrics. I strive to keep this website Christian based so if you find any content on this site objectional please feel free to contact me /.../ Also feel free to give me any suggestions to make this site more Christian based to suit my visitors needs.²⁵

Even though Christian metal is commonly distinguished from secular metal in this way, not all Christian metalheads are as concerned about actually *replacing* their favourite secular bands with Christian alternatives. Many Christian metalheads are avid fans of secular metal as well, but this is not so say that they always approve of its messages. While some Christian metalheads deliberately eschew all secular metal, others avoid only the most overt satanic and anti-Christian lyrics while some just simply ignore the whole issue altogether. This is a much-debated issue at larger online discussion forums such as *Firestream.net* or *Christian Metal Realm*.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on four key discourses on the basic meaning and function of Christian metal that recurrently appear in various forms of Christian metal media. Of course, a wide range of other discourses also circulate within the scene. However, the four closely related and often overlapping discourses explored here play a central role in expressing and encapsulating the essence of what Christian metal is all about *from the perspective of its musicians and fans*. They can thus be seen to constitute the basic building blocks for the discursive construction of Christian metal on a transnational level. Again, approaching today's transnational Christian metal scene through these key internal discourses essentially means approaching it from *within*, that is, from the perspective of scene members themselves. It has been my argument here that, in order to gain an adequate understanding of the phenomenon that is Christian metal, such an approach is necessary. I would also argue that these key internal discourses are highly revealing of the ongoing processes of meaning making that underpin this peculiar combination of Christianity and metal music.

However, we should not lose sight of the various ways in which the Christian scene also is discursively constructed from 'outside' of itself. For example, the discursive construction of Christian metal within the broader secular metal community has so far presented a rather different picture of what Christian metal is all about. From this vantage point, Christian metal is typically represented as being an appropriation of metal music and style for purely evangelistic purposes, as being 'treason' to metal or simply dismissed as a joke. Such external discursive construction also affects the internal discursive construction of the Christian scene to some degree. However, as already noted and further illustrated by the key internal discourses explored here, today's Christian metal scene seems primarily concerned with constructing an understanding of itself as an alternative way of 'doing' religion. As such, its engagement with the broader secular metal community has so far largely remained outweighed by its engagement with itself. Even so, Christian metal can still be viewed as an exceptionally good example of how today's increasingly close relationship between religion and popular culture has bearings on traditional and institutional religion as well.

Notes

¹ A Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2001, p. 1.

² *ibid.*, p. 1.

³ See for example, D Weinstein 1991, *Heavy Metal. A Cultural Sociology*, Lexington Books, New York 1991; R Walser, *Running with the Devil. Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover NE, 1993; K Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal. Music and Culture on the Edge*, Berg, Oxford, 2007.

⁴ M LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam. Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2008.

⁵ C Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West (vol. 2): Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, Continuum, London, 2005, pp. 246-255.

⁶ M Moberg, 'Popular Culture and the 'Darker Side' of Alternative Spirituality: The Case of Metal Music', in *Postmodern Spirituality*, T Ahlbäck (ed), The Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, Åbo, forthcoming.

⁷ M Moberg, 'The Internet and the Construction of a Transnational Christian Metal Music Scene'. *Culture and Religion*, vol. 9, March 2008, pp. 67-82.

⁸ *MetalBibel*, Bible for the Nations, Malmö, 2005.

⁹ See for example J R Howard and J M, Streck, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*, Kentucky University

Press, Lexington, 1999; H Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus. Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004.

¹⁰ P L Glanzer, 'Christ and the Heavy Metal Subculture. Applying Qualitative Analysis to the Contemporary Debate about H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*', Rabbi Myer and Dorothy Kripke Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Creighton University, 4. 1. 2009, <http://purl.org/JRS.>; C M Brown, 'Apocalyptic Unbound. An Interpretation of Christian Speed/Thrash Metal Music', in *Religious Innovation in a Global Age: Essays on the Construction of Spirituality*, G N Lundskow (ed), McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, 2005, pp. 117-137.; Moberg, 'The Internet and the Construction of a Transnational Christian Metal Music Scene', pp. 67-82.

¹¹ Luhr, op. cit., p. 124.

¹² Brown, op. cit., pp. 133-135.

¹³ Luhr, op. cit., p.118.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁶ Walser, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁹ S Frith, *Performing Rites. On the Value of Popular Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 8.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹ Moberg, 'The Internet and the Construction of a Transnational Christian Metal Music Scene', p. 91.

²² J Jonsson, Johannes Jonsson, 1997, 3. 1. 2009,

<http://www.metalforjesus.org/faq.html>

²³ E Hellig, 'Mortification. Dissecting the Goblin', *Heaven's Metal* vol. 62, February/March 2006, p. 10.

²⁴ M Kemman, 5. 1. 2009, <http://home.wanadoo.nl/kemman/homer.htm>.

²⁵ B Wheat, 5. 1. 2009, <http://65.61.12.97/mission.html>.

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Filling the Void: The Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archiving Project

Brian Hickam and Thomas Atwood

Abstract:

There is a crisis in the state of preservation of heavy metal books, magazines/fanzines, and audio & video recordings-primary sources on which today's and future researchers will depend. While the metal and related communities have done excellent jobs over the decades of documenting the music and cultures, no repository exists. If scholars do not act to create a permanent, openly accessible, exhaustive collocation of materials, most items will become lost and there will be gaps in the historical record. One year ago, no library or archive was making an attempt to create and maintain a research-level 'special collection' in the area of heavy metal music and culture. In January 2008, a cooperative effort between The University of Toledo (Ohio) and Bowling Green State University's (Ohio) Sound Recordings Archive and Department of Popular Culture was established to create such a repository. This chapter will present strategies for establishing multi-lingual archives of heavy metal in three to five strategic locations around the world. It will also examine the current state of source material availability and thrash out the reasons why such resources have been neglected. The positive message is that the heavy metal community can remedy the voids in our stored history.

Key Words: Heavy metal (music), hardcore (music), collectors and collecting, periodicals, books, archives, libraries, communities, subcultures

1. History

To a historian libraries are food, shelter, and even muse. They are of two kinds: the library of published material, books, pamphlets, periodicals, and the archive of unpublished papers and documents.

-- Barbara Tuchman¹

Cultural and artistic movements, especially new genres or styles of music, commonly exist for several years before they receive much scholarly attention and become established as areas of valid historical and cultural research. Jazz music, for example, spread globally for over six decades before it was legitimized within academe. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that most textbooks for survey music history courses

acknowledged Duke Ellington and Miles Davis as being worthy of the same serious study as Beethoven and Mozart. In her article 'Jazz Goes to College: Has Academic Status Served the Art,' Alice Goldfarb Marquis assertively concludes:

Yes, jazz deserves all the respect, scholarship, and training that its presence in academe suggests. It deserves to be taken seriously. But, unlike the classical music created for society's stratosphere (elite), jazz erupted from the lowest levels of society, to capture the hearts and bodies of exuberant masses. Despised and persecuted, jazz won a place for itself at the center of American culture. It survived the unrestrained abuse of America's musical establishment. It gave its name to an era. It survived America's worst depression in the arms of swing. It captured the world with its blue notes and fascinating rhythm.²

While neither heavy metal nor hardcore punk has ever truly been at the center of any country's mainstream culture or had an era named after it, Marquis' remarks echo each music's inception and mainstream culture's opinion of these genres and their fans. It is highly unlikely that any music department faculty across the globe would ever rally for the substantiation of metal or hardcore punk. Nonetheless, heavy music and its culture are worthy of study and a collection that is comprehensive is required to support both research and integration into curricula. The line between heavy metal and hardcore has clearly blurred. In March 2009, The University of California Press will publish Steve Waksman's book *This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk*. Since many heavy metal fans follow numerous metal subgenres and also embrace hardcore punk, heavy industrial, heavy psychedelic, and other styles of extreme or heavy music and since tastes and definitions vary, the term 'heavy music' will be used to describe all of these styles.

In the United States, communities such as Nashville, Tennessee, Chicago, Illinois, and Cleveland, Ohio have pushed their constituents to establish country music, jazz, and rock 'n' roll museums and archives. But as for heavy music? It is unlikely that any community will petition for its exclusive recognition or conservation. Nonetheless, the heavy music community proves to be resolutely passionate about supporting, promoting, documenting, and critiquing its musicians and scenes. While the level of heavy music's popularity, presence in the mass media spotlight, and its tours and ticket sales have risen and fallen over the years, the music has continually maintained healthy and loyal followings. Despite popular

opinion, misinformed views, and lack of coverage or unflattering press from mainstream sources, heavy music has survived and continues to flourish.

Complimenting the countless recordings, a substantial amount of literary attention to heavy music has always been present. Unfortunately, no exhaustive bibliography of such items is known to exist. The list of 443 items resulting from an October 2008 keyword search for 'heavy metal and music' in the *Books-In-Print Professional* database is far from comprehensive and includes many irrelevant results. Searching for 'hardcore and music' and 'punk and music' provided 64 and 549 results respectively. It is noteworthy that most punk books do not discuss hardcore, crossover, or metalcore at any length. Through searches of numerous online and print sources, conversations, and interviews the authors have identified nearly 1,000 books directly related to heavy metal and hardcore.³ This number (which includes tablature books, biographies, autobiographies, histories & criticisms, and dissertations) demonstrates the body of extensive literature.

The heavy music community has always shown appreciation for its history. Black Sabbath is still revered four decades after their debut and considered to be essential to a proper understanding of heavy music. Monographic histories of *Creem* magazine and *BOMP! Magazine* appeared in 2008. Lester Bangs, who published music criticism from 1968 until his death in 1982, is often considered America's first great rock critic. His eyewitness accounts and critiques are still studied, as evidenced by 2003's *Lester Bangs reader*⁴ and 2000's biography.⁵ Martin Popoff, arguably the most prolific author in heavy music's history, has contributed more than 25 books and several hundred magazine articles and reviews.⁶ Indeed, the past decade has witnessed an explosion in the number and variety of DVD documentaries covering bands, music scenes, and eras. The number of books focusing on heavy metal, hard rock, or hardcore punk has risen as well. As individuals who grew up on heavy music continue to enter careers as concert promoters, disc jockey's, business owners, researchers, and educators, the number of scholarly publications continues to grow. The popularity of heavy metal magazines, such as Red Flag Media's *Decibel* (which began in 2004 and covers extreme music), and radio programs, such as Ian Christie's weekly-aired *Bloody Roots* (which highlights the international history of heavy metal eras and styles), demonstrates the passion and dedication fans continue to have for this music.

2. The Void

There is, however, a crisis looming regarding the preservation of the growing number of books, magazines, fanzines, audio and video recordings, photographs, manuscripts, memoirs, posters, sheet music, and other sources. While large private collections exist, no single repository is actively collecting the multitude of materials which document this music and culture.

Specifically, prior to December 2007, no previous attempts by any archives, public, academic, or special libraries (including museums, corporate libraries, and private organizations) were being made to create and maintain a permanent, accessible, multi-lingual, research-level collection on heavy music. For various reasons, these institutions have not elected to dedicate the necessary funds, space, or staff to pursue such a project. It is therefore left to the heavy music community to take on the responsibility of preserving its historical and cultural record. A cooperative effort between The University of Toledo (Ohio) and Bowling Green State University's (Ohio) Sound Recordings Archive (S.R.A.) and Department of Popular Culture was established to create such a repository and fill this void. The current mission of the Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archiving Project is to create a 'special collection' of heavy music literature and recordings within the Sound Recordings Archive. The nascent heavy music collection at the S.R.A. includes 109 books on heavy metal or hardcore, 28 issues from 23 different hardcore punk magazines/fanzines, 35 issues from 21 hard rock or heavy metal magazines/fanzines, 120 issues from punk magazines/fanzines, over 2,000 heavy metal sound recordings, over 400 hardcore sound recordings, over 2,000 punk sound recordings, 37 videos on heavy metal, 9 videos on punk or hardcore, and numerous record label press kits. Ultimately, the Archiving Project hopes to see the creation of three to five such collections around the world.

Concern for a preservation crisis exists because there is a window of opportunity for creating such repositories before egregious omissions are unavoidable. While heavy music bands and fans have continually created and handed down oral traditions, histories, and the community's material culture, they must now consider who will assume the perpetual responsibility of preserving this legacy for future generations. Heavy music's history and culture have been preserved largely through grassroots efforts. Most of the materials are privately held by individual fans, which elevates the risk of such sources becoming lost. While this community has maintained an impressive record of documenting and self-preserving items for decades in some cases, there needs to be a secure, coordinated, systematically organized, global effort to protect these valuable resources. Such an archive should be exhaustive, comprehensive, accessible, and representative of the heavy music community as possible. A research-level collection for heavy music researchers would need to cover all formats, mediums, languages, geographic locations, and eras.

It is an inevitable fact that all recordings and items of literature are doomed as they eventually go out of print. Most books, for instance, go from being readily available from retailers to being only available secondhand to being very difficult and costly or even impossible to obtain. During the period that an item is in-print and is in stock with retailers, it may be only

available in certain countries or regions. There are numerous publications from small independent presses or vanity presses which receive limited promotion and distribution. The original pressing of Daniel Ekeroth's 2006 book *Swedish Death Metal* by Tamara Press is one such example. The authors felt it would be valuable to have one copy for our research endeavors and another for the special collection at Bowling Green State University. While searching for this text, it was discovered that Amazon.com and other U.S. retailers did not list the book. The only option for purchasing a copy of the Tamara Press printing was via the author's Myspace page and having it sent from Sweden. When investigating the purchase of the second copy, it was discovered that the book was no longer available as it had sold out. Fortunately, it was republished in the U.S. and Europe a few months later by other presses and is currently available at a more reasonable cost.

Many books, regardless of their publishers, never return in the form of reprints or subsequent editions. It is an unfortunate result that many publications on heavy music will prove difficult to learn about, locate, and to obtain before their availability is limited. *Books-In-Print Professional*, for example, lists only one book on heavy metal music from 1983. If this were the sole source for locating primary sources, there would be no way to cross-reference and discover other publications from that year, such as Tony Jasper's 1983 out-of-print work *The International Encyclopedia of Hard Rock & Heavy Metal*. Martin Popoff's current endeavor is a series of books titled *Ye Olde Metal*, where he combines rare, firsthand accounts from musicians with his own commentaries. The four books published thus far have been limited to 1,000 copies each and can only be purchased directly from the author, thus making accessibility an issue.

3. Getting the Ol' Headbanging Ball Rolling

October 2008 keyword searches of the *Archives U.S.A.* database and the University of Idaho's *Repositories of Primary Sources* site for the phrase 'heavy metal' indicated that no repository has such a mission. Interestingly, the only repository collections that came up with this search were ones pertaining to chemistry. In the article 'Confronting the Dark Side of the Beat: A Guide To Creating A Heavy Metal Music Collection' Robert Freeborn notes that in 2002 a keyword search in the database *Library Literature* 'produced a total of four entries, only one of which was written in English.'⁷ An October 2008 search for the same keyword phrase in *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts* (which includes the content available in *Library Literature*) produced an additional twenty-three entries, discounting book reviews. Freeborn comments on the preservation crisis by referencing a study by Wolfgang Lux:

Lux's 1990 article 'Hier glänzt Metall durch Abwesenheit' illustrates that this dearth of library materials on the subject is the rule rather than the exception. Of the eight libraries that Lux evaluated for their heavy metal content, six of them were at less than one percent in relation to their entire music collections and just over one percent in terms of their popular/rock music collections. In this age of proactive librarianship, these numbers are not acceptable.⁸

The opposite seems true regarding the preservation of many other genres of music in U.S. institutions. In April 2008 Oberlin College (Ohio, U.S.A.) acquired what is regarded as the world's largest privately held jazz collection.⁹ Similarly, the University of California in Santa Cruz became owner of the Grateful Dead Archives. University of California-Santa Cruz music professor Fred Lieberman contends that '[The Grateful Dead Archive] is the first step toward having a library that is a destination for scholars interested in studying an important aspect of America's vernacular music.'¹⁰ In July 2008, a gift to Syracuse University established their libraries as holders of the second largest collection of 78 r.p.m. vinyl records (the Library of Congress being the first).¹¹ Chicago Public Library boasts an extensive blues archive.¹² Florida International University acquired the largest collection of Cuban music in 2006. It contains thousands of items from salsa to Latin jazz. It is noteworthy that:

Each year, research grants [at FIU] are awarded to academics who come to the library to use the collection. And another grant brings local educators, including FIU faculty, to the collection, where they are instructed on how to use it and integrate it into various disciplines. 'You could teach history, international relations, sociology, all through the collection,' says Aragon.¹³

The question arises, would heavy music become part of any college curriculum? Jeremy Wallach, Assistant Professor in the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University, has expressed his intentions of integrating the archive of heavy music into his curriculum.

An important point of discussion is how one goes about defining what is and what is not heavy metal or hardcore punk? Who has the proper training and experience to authoritatively categorize bands into genres and rank their importance? It is not the attempt of the authors of this chapter, nor should it be the endeavor of archivists or librarians or other Archiving Project coordinators, to define 'heavy metal' or related genres or to employ any personal tastes. The scope of the Archiving Project's collection development

policy should be 'anything and everything.' It should be left to historians and other researchers to judge, prioritize, and classify. The goal of such an archival collection should be to maintain items in perpetuity for posterity.

Arnett's book *Metal Heads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation* analyzes socialization, dedication, identity, and community:

Many metalheads find a crucial source of meaning in their involvement with heavy metal, not just from the way they resonate to the lyrics of the songs but from their admiration of the performers, from their participation in the collective ritual of the heavy metal concert, and from becoming part of a youth subculture that shares not merely music but a way of looking at the world.¹⁴

Since heavy music is usually misunderstood and viewed as less valuable or not worthy of purchase by the decision makers in most of the world's repositories, it is left to the music's fans and scholars to see to the acquisition and storage of sources. Freeborn's article on how to create a heavy metal music library collection serves to reinforce the idea that metal as a musical genre and social force is scarcely collected in terms of books, articles, and even recordings among academic and public libraries. When a public or academic library does acquire a handful of heavy music materials, most of them are general in scope and depth. Also, it is unlikely these items will be available years later as many are stolen or withdrawn due to damage, the need for space, or lack of continued patron interest. With an archive most of the materials would be shelved in 'closed stacks' where the items do not leave the premises. Since so many recordings and fanzine/magazine issues will prove difficult to find, how will the Archiving Project obtain copies? The solution is to turn to the fans, musicians, and scholars who have amassed countless personal libraries of literature, recordings, and memorabilia. Regrettably, these thousands of personal collections are at risk of becoming lost to future generations. As music scholar B. Lee Cooper articulates, awareness is an essential element of creating a foundational collection of popular music:

As today's private collectors age and die, librarians and sound recording archivists must convince their family members to donate the cherished collections intact to archival facilities. Emotional attachment and greed will be staunch foes in this resources-accumulation pursuit. So will intransigence. The best bet for accomplishing this task is a firm commitment from the collectors themselves to carefully transfer their most treasured discs directly to a

community of music scholars. Deferred giving via last will and testament bequests may sound outrageous as a means of assembling an academic archive. But it is the best way to insure that the heritage of American popular music won't be frittered away in the fashion that Gordon Stevenson described concerning 'rare records' of the '20s and '30s.¹⁵

From our own networks of friends and associates and searches of online and print literature, we know that some enthusiasts have kept 'every' issue of certain magazines/fanzines. Many fans have amassed libraries with thousands of recordings and dozens of books. A large percentage of heavy music fans exhibit lifelong and passionate commitments to music purchases, concert attendance, and to learning the music's history. The literature, recordings, and concerts are given appreciation and value. In his dissertation *Reading 'Heavy Metal' Music: An Interpretive Communities Approach to Popular Music as Communication*, Thomas F. Gencarelli notes how the musicians themselves are fans. His observations describe beliefs and traits of the heavy music community that bode well for the success of the Archiving Project:

The fourth [point] about sincerity, integrity, and truth has to do with longevity. This is true among both performers and fans. Simply put, longevity is a measure of commitment. For performers, it indicates a willingness to stick to their guns while an audience evolves for their music, no matter what the cost or how long it takes... It also leads to the track record: the legacy of how they stuck to their guns if they did so. For fans, longevity indicates the lengths they are willing to extend themselves over time and time again. It affords them the opportunity to learn about the music to the extent they need to understand and appreciate it. It also lets them demonstrate the extent of their commitment, since metal, more so than any other genre of popular music, is a matter of a lifestyle and not just listening to a set of sounds, diverting one's attention, or following the in-crowd and doing what is 'hip.'¹⁶

4. Delivering The Goods

The success of a global archiving endeavor (where the items being collected are multilingual and of various formats and mediums) is reliant on participation and cooperation. The main participants must be the fans, i.e. the record and CD collectors, magazine and fanzine collectors, memorabilia collectors, musicians, authors, and editors. An advantage, which almost cannot be overstated, is how well-connected the heavy music community has

always been. With the advent and increased ubiquity of the Internet, its network of information and resource sharing and cooperation has only improved.

Why then not call for the heavy music community to raise funds for a freestanding museum and hall of fame dedicated to heavy metal and hardcore? Lessons from popular culture's archival history should be heeded. In May 2008 The Cartoon Research Library at The Ohio State University received over 200,000 works that were formerly housed at The International Museum of Cartoon Art (founded by cartoonist Mort Walker in Greenwich, Connecticut in 1974). The museum, which had relocated to Boca Raton, Florida in an effort to improve finances, had closed for good in 2002 as it was millions of dollars in debt.¹⁷ The Cartoon Research Library at The Ohio State University doubled its 'already-substantial holdings' with this acquisition.¹⁸ The combination will create what is thought to be the world's largest collection of cartoon art. Similarly, The Dick Tracy Museum closed in 2008 due to a lack of visitors and financial woes.¹⁹ While other museums, such as The Cartoon Museum in London, The Cartoon Museum in Athens, The Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco, and The Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art in New York, are successfully preserving comic art, their collections are far smaller and less diverse. It is, therefore, recommended that the heavy metal and hardcore punk community create heavy music 'special collections' within existing academic archives as the expenses are more beneficial, longevity is more likely, and collocation appeals to researchers. Aside from the collections' core foci on heavy music and culture, university libraries (which usually include archives) already contain materials on related topics, such as horror films, war, mythology, folklore, the human condition, violence, social injustice, history, politics, the occult, religion, environmental issues, death, sex, and art.

Financial contributions will allow for the purchasing of items and of library and archival resources and services, such as the binding of magazine issues for conservation purposes. The Archiving Project may even witness large financial contributions from fans. The impressively massive archive of Bob Marley items, for example, exists due to two unique individuals. First, California musicologist Roger Steffens invested thirty-one years, a significant amount of money, and six rooms in his home to build and organize a collection which included '12,000 records and CDs, 10,000 posters and flyers, and 12,000 hours of tapes'.²⁰ Michael Lee-Chin, a Jamaican-born entrepreneur and billionaire, purchased the collection of over 200,000 items in 2004 and gifted them to a soon-to-be-established National Museum of Jamaican Music.²¹ Maxine Henry-Wilson, Jamaica's former culture minister, noted that Bob Marley's iconic status has created an identity for Jamaicans that has '[increased] their perception of themselves and pride in their heritage.'²²

The creation of finding tools (such as bibliographies by genre, indexes, abstracts, and bibliographic databases) for the heavy music archives will depend upon fans who volunteer their time and expertise to describe items. While the libraries can create catalog records for books and periodicals, they will not have funds or staffing for the abstracting and indexing of these heavy music gifts. Such activities, and the creation of archival 'finding aids' (which provide detailed descriptions and provenance), will be necessary to allow researchers the ability to ascertain and evaluate the collections' contents. The majority of fanzines, and some magazines, do not have International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSNs) associated with them. Due to this and their subject matter, none of the existing commercial databases index and abstract these periodicals. Considering the hundreds of magazines and thousands of print fanzines on heavy music, one must appreciate the utility of citations and abstracts:

A well-prepared abstract enables the reader to 1) quickly identify the basic content of the document, 2) determine its relevance to their interests, and 3) decide whether it is worth their time to read the entire document.²³

Additional considerations are that many books are published by small and vanity presses, sometimes without International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs). For these reasons, such items may not be listed in bibliographic tools, such as OCLC's *WorldCat* database of worldwide library holdings or *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory* database. The Archiving Project coordinators will be reliant upon individuals around the world to help identify items. In some situations, due to import and export options, fans will also assist with obtaining items.

Finally, it will be enthusiasts who will help raise awareness of The Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archiving Project and help to promote donations, collaborations, affiliations, and volunteerism. The project might, for example, benefit from affiliations with The World Metal Alliance, Encyclopaedia Metallum: The [online] Metal Archives, similar organizations, record labels, book publishers, and other educational and scholarly associations. Promotion of the Archiving Project and the collections themselves is essential. Fans must assist project volunteers with attaining buy-in. The average fan and the above groups could all assist with promoting the project through word of mouth, blogs, radio programs, reviews, editorials, articles, concerts, documentaries, interviews, conferences, seminars, etc. Ideally, the Archiving Project would be strengthened by perspectives from people who are not librarians or archivists, perspectives from outside of academe, and from those with experience in relevant industries and activities.

It is recommended that the multiple special collections of heavy music be in a consortial model. To ensure success and continuity, it is imperative that each location have a local board of advisors and that the Archiving Project have a worldwide board of directors which oversees all locations. In addition to providing streamlined procedures and the sharing of duplicate copies of items, this will allow the Archiving Project to speak with one consistent voice to the media, potential donors, and others. A consortium approach will allow for the creation of the master lists which will be the very heart of this endeavor: an exhaustive bibliography of known books (with translations of publisher information and descriptions or abstracts into English where necessary); a bibliography of known magazines/fanzines; complete discographies; filmographies; etc.

Ideally, The Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archiving Project would obtain tax exempt status since it is a non-profit organization with an educational mission. In the U.S. this tax law provision is Section 501(c)(3). With locations in different countries, there may be a need to have each location apply for the appropriate status. With a tax exempt organization, financial contributions can be accepted via bank checks and services such as PayPal. The Archiving Project could then purchase resources and services as needed. If the average contribution is \$5.00, it would then be possible to consolidate several such donations and purchase a book or a year's subscription to a magazine. The reward to participants for their contributions will know that they assisted with the preservation of their music and cultural history. Those who choose to donate a book may request a bookplate which lists the donor's name and a dedication, if desired. Other types of recognition for contributions of resources and services may include naming opportunities within the collections and lists of donors on the project website.

The heavy music archives should be located in strategic areas, ideally in three to five university libraries around the globe where popular music or cultural studies programs are viable and likely to endure. Since heavy music exists and is popular all over the world, potential geographic regions could include: London, Berlin, Toronto, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and Sydney. Access to international airports would enhance research opportunities. Creating repositories that are within universities would allow for cross-disciplinary studies. Scholars could more easily initiate programs that encourage the use of metal studies in sociology, religion, fiction, history, art, film, music, and other disciplines.

5. Metal Is Forever (Maybe)

Consequently, the heavy music community must now heed this call, knowing that others have created museums, libraries, and similar archives. Cooper, commenting on the current scholarship of popular and rock music, contends:

Linking librarians and record collectors is the key to sustaining the scholarly study of 20th-century popular music. The Sound Recording Archives at Bowling Green State University in Ohio ought to become a model for the method of assembling, cataloging, and making available to serious music students the broadest range of contemporary music. Certainly, jazz, country, and blues archives, and other specialty collections remain invaluable. So are memorabilia palaces, whether as numerous Hard Rock Cafes or as singular as Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. But the salvaging of private collections, a task lovingly pursued by Bowling Green's William L. Schurk, is a key goal to be achieved over the next five decades.²⁴

The time must be now. This entreaty should not have to be repeated anew. Either the nations of heavy music fans will come together and answer the call to arms or a chapter similar in nature will be presented years from now, at a time when the situation will be grave.

Notes

¹ B Tuchman, *Practicing History: Selected Essays*, Knopf, New York, 1981, p. 76.

² A G Marquis, 'Jazz Goes to College: Has Academic Status Served the Art?'. *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1998, p. 122.

³ The Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archiving Project. <www.myspace.com/heavymusicarchivesproject>.

⁴ B Lester, *Main Lines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, Anchor Books, New York, 2003.

⁵ J DeRogatis, *Let it Blurt: The Life and Times of Lester Bangs, America's Greatest Rock Critic*, Broadway Books, New York, 2000.

⁶ Martin Popoff is co-founder and editor of Brave Words and Bloody Knuckles magazine. A list of his books is available at: <<http://www.martinpopoff.com/html/bookslist.html>>.

⁷ R Freeborn, 'Confronting the Dark Side of the Beat: A Guide to Creating a Heavy Metal Music Collection'. *Music Reference Services Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2002, p. 26.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹ D McDonough, 'From Obsession to Archive - Fan Donates World's Largest Privately Held Jazz Record Collection to Oberlin'. *Downbeat*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2008, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰ D Clark, 'California University gets 'Grateful Dead' Archive'. *Wall Street Journal -Eastern Edition*, April 24 2008, p. A4.

¹¹ B Sisario, 'Syracuse University gets an Oldies Collection'. *New York Times*, July 2 2008, p. E2.

¹² B Dolins, 'Chicago is Loaded with Blues'. *American Libraries*, June/July 2000, p. 98-100.

¹³ E Fernandez, 'The Cuba collection: A New Donation gives FIU the Most Important Cuban Music Library in the Country'. *Miami Herald*, September 17 2006, p. 1M.

¹⁴ JJ Arnett, *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, Westview Press, Boulder Colorado, 1996, p. 25.

¹⁵ BL Cooper, 'It's Still Rock and Roll to Me: Reflections on the Evolution of Popular Music and Rock Scholarship'. *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1997, p. 106.

¹⁶ TF Gencarelli, *Reading Heavy Metal Music: An Interpretive Communities Approach to Popular Music as Communication*, New York University Press, New York, 1993, pp. 357-358.

¹⁷ M Ryzik, 'Do The Superfriends Have Library Cards?'. *New York Times*, May 17 2008, p. B8.

¹⁸ B Eichenberger, 'Cartoon Library Doubles Over'. *Columbus Dispatch*, May 17 2008, p. 1A.

¹⁹ C Starks, 'It's Case Closed for Dick Tracy Museum'. *Chicago Tribune*, February 27 2008, p. 1.

²⁰ A Infantry, 'Expat Buys Marley Trove for Jamaica'. *Toronto Star*, May 26 2004, p. F1.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. F1.

²² *ibid.*, p. F1.

²³ JM Reitz, *ODLIS - Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, updated November 19 2007, retrieved October 1 2008, <<http://lu.com/odlis/index.cfm>>.

²⁴ Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

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