

Université de Montréal

**Extreme metal:
Subculture, Genre, and Structure**

par Samaël Pelletier

Université de Montréal

Faculté de Musique

Mémoire présenté
en vue de l'obtention du grade de Maîtrise

en musique

option musicologie

avril 2018

© Samaël Pelletier. 2018

Abstract

Extreme metal is a conglomeration of numerous subgenres with shared musical and discursive tendencies. For the sake of concision, the focus throughout this thesis will mainly be on death metal and black metal – two of the most popular subgenres categorized under the umbrella of extreme metal. Each chapter is a comparative analysis of death metal and black metal from different perspectives. Thus, Chapter One is historical account of extreme metal but also includes discussions pertaining to iconography and pitch syntax. Subsequently, Chapter Two concerns itself with the conception of timbre in death metal and black metal. More specifically, timbre will be discussed in the context of sound production as well as timbre derived from performance, in particular, vocal distortion. The conception of rhythm/meter will be discussed in Chapter Three which will simultaneously allow for a discussion of the fluidity of genre boundaries between death metal and progressive metal – largely because of the importance placed on rhythm by the latter subgenre. Instead of a focus on musical practices, Chapter Four will instead take a sociological approach with the aim of answering certain issues raised in the first three chapters. Ultimately, this thesis aims to elucidate two questions: What are the different aesthetic intentions between practitioners of death metal and black metal? And, how do fans conceptualize these aesthetic differences? Sarah Thornton's notion of subcultural capital – which is derived from Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital – will help to answer such questions.

Keywords: extreme metal, death metal, black metal, timbre, sound production, rhythm and meter, metrical dissonance, subcultural capital

Résumé

Le métal extrême est un amalgame de plusieurs sous-genres qui partagent des caractéristiques musicales et discursives. Pour des raisons de concision, une attention particulière sera donnée au *black* métal et au *death* métal – deux sous-genres très populaires qui font partie de l'amalgame de l'extrême métal. Chaque chapitre entreprend une perspective différente afin d'offrir une analyse comparative entre le *death* métal et le *black* métal. Le premier chapitre débutera avec l'histoire de l'extrême métal, en plus d'inclure une comparaison des deux sous-genres en matière d'iconographie et de syntaxe mélodique/harmonique. Le deuxième chapitre, poursuivra avec une analyse sur la conception du timbre entre le *death* métal et le *black* métal. Plus précisément, je ferai une distinction entre les timbres qui sont engendrés par la production audio, comparativement aux timbres qui résultent de performances musicales, comme par exemple, la distorsion de la voix. Par la suite suivra une analyse sur la conception rythmique et métrique du *death* métal en particulier, car cette approche va simultanément me permettre d'entreprendre une discussion sur la fluidité qui distingue les sous-genres *death* métal et le métal progressif – ce dernier étant largement conçu par sa complexité rythmique et métrique. Le quatrième chapitre, quant à lui, entreprendra une approche sociologique afin de répondre à certaines questions engendrées dans les trois premiers chapitres. Ultimement, ce mémoire vise à élucider deux questions en particulier: Quelles sont les intentions esthétiques qui distinguent les praticiens de *death* métal de ceux qui pratiquent le *black* métal? De plus, comment les amateurs des deux sous-genres conceptualisent ces différentes intentions esthétiques? Afin de répondre à ces questions, l'approche sociologique du quatrième chapitre fera lumière sur la notion de capital de sous-culture – introduit par Sarah Thornton, mais dérivée du concept de capital culturel de Pierre Bourdieu.

Mots-clés : métal extrême, '*death* métal', '*black* métal', timbre, production de son, rythme & pulsation, dissonance métrique, capital sous-culturel

Table of Content

INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 1. EXPLORING THE EXTREME METAL UMBRELLA: THRASH, DEATH, BLACK.....	17
I. History, Genealogy, and Iconography	19
Death Metal In The Sunshine State	22
Norwegian Black Metal.....	27
II. Pitch Syntax: Death Metal Melodic Sequences.....	31
Pitch Syntax: Death Metal and Horror Films.....	35
CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTION OF TIMBRE IN DEATH METAL AND BLACK METAL: SONIC SIGNATURE, SOUND PRODUCTION, AND AESTHETIC INTENTIONS	40
I. Volume, Distortion, and Heaviness.....	41
The Affect Of Distortion (Rhetorical Properties).....	43
II. Sonic Characteristics And Studio Production: Death Metal And Black Metal.....	44
Death Metal Studio Production: Hyperrealism And Heaviness.....	46
Black Metal’s Rebellion Of Sound Production	48
III. The Voice – Performance Timbre.....	49
Vocal Distortion	50
Aesthetic Goals: Death or Black.....	52
Rhythmic Function Of Vocal.....	53
CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTION OF RHYTHM&METER: THE NEXUS OF DEATH METAL & PROGRESSIVE METAL	56
I. Temporal Organization.....	58
Juxtaposing The Additive And Divisive Process.....	59
Metrical Dissonance.....	61

ABAC Metric & Hypermetric Organization	66
Metric & Hypermetric Superimposition	69
II. Analysis of Meshuggah.....	71
CHAPTER 4. THE PARADOXES OF ACQUIRING SUBCULTURAL CAPITAL: DEATH METAL, BLACK METAL, AND PROGRESSIVE METAL.....	
77	
I. Mundane Subcultural Capital And Transgressive Subcultural Capital	77
The Desire To Shock	83
Elitism & Solipsism in Black Metal.....	85
Elitism Against Mainstream Culture.....	88
II. Subcultural Capital, Virtuosity, And Rhythmic Complexity	91
Individual Virtuosity.....	92
Rhythmic Complexity.....	93
Conclusion.....	95
Appendix I.....	98
Bibliography.....	99
Discography.....	105

List Of Figures

Figure 1.1. Sam Dunn's "The Definitive Metal History Family Tree"	19
Figure 1.2. Iconography of thrash metal bands.....	21
Figure 1.3. Iconography of death metal bands.....	25
Figure 1.4. Iconography of black metal bands.....	30
Figure 1.5. Transcription of the introduction section in "Leprosy" – Death.....	34
Figure 1.6. Transcription highlighting melodic sequence in "Leprosy"	35
Figure 1.7. Transcription of <i>Halloween</i> theme – John Carpenter (1978)	36
Figure 1.8. Other examples of the melodic sequence (root-p5-m6) in death metal.....	35
Figure 1.9. Transcription of bridge section in "Leprosy" – Death.....	37
Figure 2.1. A rapper's set of tools	55
Figure 3.1. Metric grid.....	59
Figure 3.2. Displacement dissonance and grouping dissonance.....	61
Figure 3.3. Transcription of guitar in "Deliverance" - Opeth.....	61
Figure 3.4. Temporal organization of pop-rock music	63
Figure 3.5. Formal functions of metric dissonance	64
Figure 3.6. Transcription of "43% Burnt" – Dillinger Escape Plan.....	65
Figure 3.7. Transcription of "Constant Motion" - Dream Theater	67
Figure 3.8. Transcription of "Esoteric Surgery" – Gojira	68
Figure 3.9. Walter's two kind of grouping dissonance	70
Figure 3.10. "Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave It Motion" – Meshuggah.....	72
Figure 3.11. "Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave it Motion" – Meshuggah	72
Figure 3.12. "Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave it Motion" – Meshuggah	73
Figure 3.12. "Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave it Motion" – Meshuggah	75
Figure 3.13. Transcription of guitar and drum in "Deliverance" - Opeth.....	74
Figure 4.1. Words which reoccur most often in death metal and black metal lyrics	83

INTRODUCTION

Extreme metal is a conglomeration of numerous subgenres with shared musical and discursive tendencies and includes, amongst others, the subgenres of death metal, black metal, doom metal, and grindcore. The focus of this thesis is mainly on death metal, and black metal – two of the most popular subgenres categorized under the umbrella of extreme metal. Although other subgenres are also discussed – such as thrash metal and progressive metal – the reasoning for introducing other subgenres is nonetheless to underpin the overall comparison between death metal and black metal. However, I make no claims that the genre theory proposed in this thesis is monolithic because, as David Brackett notes, “genres function as ephemeral utterances that provide a clue to the role played by music in the intersubjective social imagination.”¹ A piece of popular music can be interpreted in a number of ways by insiders of a subculture and thus each chapter takes one or more different perspectives in hopes that it offers readers a continuous comparison between the two subgenres of death metal and black metal. These different perspectives are characterized by different methodologies used throughout this thesis. For instance, the first chapter begins with a historical context of death metal and black metal whereas the fourth – and concluding – chapter takes a sociological approach. Other comparisons between the two subgenres highlight their disparate conception of timbre which confers on each distinctive sonic signature – partly the result of distinctive studio production techniques employed in each subgenre.

The exclusive focus on death metal during certain sections reveals implicit discrepancies between it and black metal. For example, although the chapter on the conception of rhythm and meter (Chapter Three) makes very little mention of black metal, such a chapter nonetheless implies that while this approach to rhythm is characteristic of death metal, it is less so of black metal. Therefore, excluding such a chapter would undermine the value for relatively complex rhythms in death metal – a musical practice rarely heard in black metal.

Objective

The approach of this thesis involves an analysis on the field of semiotic possibilities that both subgenres affords to fans. The scope of such a field of semiotic possibility must not solely take into consideration the sonic dimension (sonic signature, musical practices, timbre, rhythm & meter), but also to incorporate the visual dimension (iconography), and also, albeit to a lesser extent, the

¹ David Brackett, ‘Questions of Genre in Black Popular Music’, *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 25 No. 1/2 (2005), 89.

linguistic dimension (lyrics). My hope is that such an approach leads readers to a wider understanding of what characterizes the subgenres under discussion, in addition to partly elucidating what is afforded to fans in each subgenre. Certain sections will nonetheless place a greater emphasis on discussions relating to the sonic dimension because such an approach has the potential to answer certain questions, such as: What are the required sets of musical practices that characterize certain metal subgenres? Do such musical practices help to distinguish certain subgenres from others? Or rather, are such practices common – at least to some degree – to a variety of other subgenres?

Methodologies

Each chapter is approached from a slightly different perspective and therefore requires an adjustment to the system of methods used. Music analysis is useful to certain sections of the first chapter – in which the focus is on pitch syntax – as well as the third chapter which will use music analysis more extensively due to the focus of the whole chapter being on the conception of rhythm and meter.² However, the second chapter deals with timbre and therefore requires a more appropriate methodology in order to tackle questions relating to timbre: spectral graphs, spectral analysis, and various terminologies relating to sound production. The focus in the fourth chapter is mainly sociological and therefore requires a different set of methodologies than all preceding ones. The tools for Chapter Four are largely derived from sociology – more precisely from Sarah Thornton’s notion of subcultural capital – in the hopes that it provides clarity to the questions posed in Chapter Four – but also to the questions posed throughout this thesis that perhaps may be elucidated with a sociological approach.

Hypothesis

The relationship between metal and power, evil, anger, as well as brutality, still remains elusive in certain regards. Questions about whether metal’s relationship with evil, anger, and brutality lead to any negative or positive impact – on an individual and collective level – are legitimate questions that need to be addressed. Does this music instill negative feelings in an individual that weren’t there before? Or does that individual listen to metal in order to have a safe and controlled vehicle to express negative emotions that were already present? Are those negative feelings ephemeral and only last while the music plays? Or do they stay with the individual long after he stops listening to this music?

² I will expand on the analytical methods of Chapter Three in later sections.

This thesis does not necessarily seek to answer every question above, but rather, to elucidate the hypothesis that the aesthetic intentions in death metal mostly revolve around ‘power’ whereas the aesthetic intentions in black metal are more aligned with ‘evil’ rather than ‘power’. In order to support this hypothesis, each chapter contains sections in which the dichotomy of power and evil is made rather explicit. However, the hypothesis above is sometimes underpinned implicitly – as in the case of those sections in Chapter One that discuss the historical context in which black metal is marked by certain controversies that could easily be considered as ‘evil’: murder, church burning, assault etc....

Chapter outlines

The first half of Chapter One adopts a historical narrative in order to help readers understand, in part, the genealogy of the two main subgenres under discussion (death metal and black metal). However, a discussion of the genealogy of death metal and black metal gains tremendous insight by incorporating thrash metal in the discussion even though the latter is only considered to be a nascent form of extreme metal. The subgenres will be introduced in a chronological order and the scope of the discussion will be widened to include a broad comparison between the iconographies of each subgenre. Additionally, in the discussion pertaining to the history of death metal, I will introduce two different scenes recognized as most influential – one from the U.S. and another from Sweden – as well as two bands in each scene that are considered as outliers. Although a vast description of outlier bands is not necessary in Chapter One, readers can keep in mind one of the outlier bands discussed in greater depths in Chapter Three: Meshuggah.³

As a general rule, death metal album cover artwork tends to depict different shades of horror and thus a discussion of death metal’s relationship with horror movies seems pertinent to begin our understanding of the semiotic codes in death metal. Thus, the second half of Chapter One is more concerned with pitch syntax in death metal which shares many resemblances to horror film music. As for black metal album cover artwork, it is commonplace to use the nomenclature ‘raw’ to describe one of the main approaches to both iconography and studio production. Thus, it is only in Chapter Two that I expand discussion relating to ‘raw’ black metal iconography because it is more pertinent to discuss the meaning of ‘raw’ black metal in the context of timbre and studio production.

³ The reason I describe Meshuggah as an outlier death metal band is because they have numerous similarities with progressive metal. Thus, Chapter Three presents Meshuggah at the nexus between death metal and progressive metal.

By comparison, sound production in death metal is more commonly described as ‘heavy’ – a terminology that is almost non-existent in black metal.

Why is death metal described as ‘heavy’ but not black metal? How exactly is the music heavier? What elements are needed for music to sound heavy? Or, should a better question be: what elements are needed for music to *feel* heavy? Does each listener’s experience heavy music in the same manner? Ultimately, the answers to such questions may clarify our understanding on the role of sound production as a stylistic marker which influences how listeners perceive the subgenre boundaries separating death metal from black metal. Additionally, the aesthetic intentions of both subgenres will be discussed by analyzing the function as well as the sonic characteristics of the voice in death metal and black metal. My hope is that this approach provides a first partial answer on a hypothesis proposed earlier: ‘power’ is the general aesthetic intention of death metal whereas black metal’s aesthetic intentions are generally best described as connoting ‘evil’.

Black metal will barely be discussed in the third chapter. Instead, the focus is on certain musical practices at the nexus of death metal and progressive metal: rhythmic & metric complexities. Thus, the focus in Chapter Three is on the conception of rhythm/meter which will simultaneously allow for a discussion on the fluidity of genre boundaries between death metal and progressive metal. Although the musical examples in Chapter Three draw from typical death metal bands, the opening and closing sections are almost entirely devoted to Meshuggah – largely because rhythmic & metric complexities are paramount to Meshuggah’s music. As a general distinction, Meshuggah’s approach to rhythm and meter is drastically more complex than other death metal bands – hence why they are described by some as progressive metal. However, as readers will discover more in depth in Chapter Three, Meshuggah’s music is not quite representative of traditional progressive metal. Thus, instead of seeking a resolution between both subgenres, the approach for Chapter Three is to consider Meshuggah to be at the nexus between progressive metal and death metal.

Chapter Four eschews the focus on musical practices and instead takes a sociological approach with the aim of answering certain dilemmas posed in the first three chapters: Why do extreme metal bands consistently make use of shock tactics in their iconographies? Why is the general evolution of extreme metal characterized by a desire to push towards everything ‘extreme’? What triggers polemics concerning virtuosity and complexity? Why do fans equate their personal taste in music – especially if they consider it to be complex – with a position of elitism in regards to those who don’t share the same musical tastes?

Literature Review of Metal

Theoretical context for a musicology of metal

In 1993, Robert Walser released *Running with the Devil* which is considered by many as the first serious musicological work on heavy metal. For Walser, heavy metal should be approached as a discourse: to analyze discourse means to take everything in considerations, not merely relying on the music alone or the culture alone.⁴ For example, in Walser's 1993 survey, "fans overwhelmingly rejected the categories of the pissed-off", rather they gave much more importance to the "power of the music and its impressive guitar solos."⁵ Subsequently, Walser developed his notion of the "dialect of freedom and control" which states that fans identify with guitar solos because of the guitarist who frees himself from the temporal constraint and sheer physical power imposed by the rest of the band. As Walser says:

The feeling of freedom created by of motion of the guitar solos and fills can be at various times supported, defended, threatened by the physical power of the bass and violence of the drums. The latter rigidly organize and control time; the guitar escapes with flashy runs and other arrhythmic gestures. The solos positions the listener: he or she can identify with the controlling power without feeling threatened because the solo can transcend anything.⁶

Although Philip Tagg's work does not exclusively deal with metal, he did nonetheless elaborate on Walser's idea in an interesting manner. For Tagg, instances in which soloists (guitarist or vocalist) overcome and overpower the loudness of the entire band which surrounds them are signifier of an archetypal hero "emerging victorious [against] highly connotative sonic pins into the caricatured bogeymen of normality."⁷ On the esthetic level of analysis, the public at concerts who witness the soloists' victory temporally "feel what it might be like to win the battle against all those sounds and rhythms that seem to represent control over the rest of your life."⁸ Could this affect be linked with what is describe as the confidence inducing powers of metal?

Could there be a link between the virtuosic soloist as the archetypal hero emerging victorious and the technical death metal rhythm guitarist playing virtuosic compound riff structure with only

⁴ Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 26.

⁵ Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, 19.

⁶ Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 54.

⁷ Philip Tagg, "Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music", (Ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynebee. *The Popular Music Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 11.

⁸ Tagg, "Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music", p.11.

glimpse of the archetypal hero can be heard via the stylistic orienting devices of motivic pair's in the higher register of the riff? Such signification, if present at all, is more akin to a partial and fragmented victory against the sonic chaos. This heighten musical connotation of despair and death: the harsh realities of life in which we can't identify with the archetypal hero.

Demographics and theoretical context of studies of metal's subculture

Over the last three decades, various studies on metal's audience were conducted in an attempt to learn – amongst other things – the average age, sex, gender, and social class of fans.⁹ The question of whether metal could have a negative effect on the youth was another topic of interest for public and non-public alike. The Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) was among those who criticized metal for what they perceived as a danger to the youth.¹⁰ However, regardless of whether a study intended to be a detractor or defender of metal, as Eric Smialek noted, most studies had a common interest regarding “their investment in a heavy metal taste public conceived rather narrowly as a working-class male youth subculture.”¹¹

Although it is true that a majority of metal fans are young men – from teenagers to 25-year olds – several nuances need to be considered in order to give us a more realistic portrait of this culture. Smialek offers two factors that were not taken into consideration in certain studies on the demographics of metal. First, in some cases the timespan between those studies is over twenty years which mean that it does not provide a sufficiently nuanced approach that takes into account metal's musical and social (public) evolution. Second, the portrait of a metalhead¹² as a young working class male stems from studies that were conducted in the United States. However, in recent years other studies from France and Indonesia have painted a more nuanced profile of metalheads. On the Indonesian island of Bali, Emma Baulch concluded that metalheads “were distinctly bourgeois... [their] future seemed relatively bright [and] most of them were university students.”¹³ Although the

⁹ See Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991), 98-9; Harris M. Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* (Hanover: University Press of London, 1999), 61.

¹⁰ Established in 1985, the PMRC was an American committee whose intention was to increase parental control on music via Parental Advisory stickers.

¹¹ Eric Smialek, “Rethinking Metal Aesthetics: Complexity, Authenticity, and Audience in Meshuggah's I and Catch Thirtythr33” (Master's Thesis, McGill University, 2008), 22.

¹² Common label attributed to fans of metal music.

¹³ Emma Baulch, “Gesturing Elsewhere: The Identity Politics of the Balinese Death/Trash Metal Scene”, *Popular Music* Vol 22 No.2 (2003), 199.

majority of fans are 25 years and younger, the studies from Fabien Hein and Natalie Purcell's introduce interesting nuances to this research. In France, Hein found that 32% of metal fans were over the age of 25 while Purcell found that 42% of fans of death metal in the United States were "25 years of age or older."¹⁴

Deena Weinstein's work is mostly sociological and she was one of the first scholars to publish a work on the culture of heavy metal. A line of thought present throughout her book is the dualistic aspect of heavy metal which for Weinstein, stems back to the genesis of metal's subculture at the end of the 1960. For Weinstein, the genesis was a synthesis between three fractions of youth culture: hippies, blue-collar youth, and outlaw biker gangs. The result was a culture that blended "the long hairstyle, casual dress, and drugs" characteristic of the hippie culture along with the "traditional machismo and romance with physical power...epitomized by images of outlaw biker gangs."¹⁵ Although the polarity between hippies and biker gangs might not seem reconcilable, according to Weinstein, it is precisely this contradiction that heavy metal embraced. "Woodstock, the utopia of peaceful hedonism and community, and Altamont, the dystopia of macho violence, exemplify the polarity of the 1960's youth culture."¹⁶ The juxtaposition of both culture resulted in both utopian and dystopian elements being blended in the culture. For Weinstein, heavy metal culture embraced the juxtaposition described above with no intention of ever "effecting a genuine reconciliation of the utopian and dystopian oppositions, but creating, instead, a shifting bricolage of fashion, rituals, and behaviors, which includes elements of each partner in the binary opposition."¹⁷

Sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris was the first scholar to write an entire book dedicated to the subculture of extreme metal. Building on Weinstein work's, amongst other scholars, Kahn-Harris's was less concerned with the demographics of metal fans in the United States, instead opting for a study of metal fans around the globe. For Kahn-Harris, extreme metal is "produced and consumed across the world through a wide variety of institutions in a wide variety of contexts."¹⁸ His work compares extreme metal scenes across the globe. Although each scene share a certain degree of similarity with one another, there nonetheless exists difference in what is valued and meaningful for

¹⁴ See Fabien Hein, *Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Metal: Histoire, Culture et Pratiques* (Paris: IRMA, 2003); Natalie Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 99.

¹⁵ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 100.

¹⁶ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 101.

¹⁷ Weinstein, 101.

¹⁸ Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (New York: Berg, 2007), 7.

fans. Additionally, Kahn-Harris' borrows from both the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Sarah Thornton in order to subsequently present readers with two different kinds of subcultural capital that exists in the extreme metal subculture: mundane subcultural capital and transgressive subcultural capital.¹⁹

In contrast with Weinstein, who believes that metal is about power and aggression, Harris Berger's position is that there is "little doubt that much of the rage in metal has its roots in class frustrations."²⁰ For the most part, Berger's work is slightly more politicized compared to other scholars and his approach dovetails sociology and politics. Additionally, in interviews with musicians of the death metal scene in Akron Ohio, Berger attempts to understand metal's function as conceptualized by fans. For example, in interview with Dann Saladin, a death metal musician from Akron Ohio, Berger resumes Saladin's interpretation of metal's function as that of "using the energy of the music to overcome apathy and spark personal motivation."²¹ Dann slightly corrects him by instead describing metal as "a way of discarding anything that would oppress you [...] not necessarily jump-starting, but just breaking away from the things that would oppress you from doing what you consider your life to be."²² Berger seems to disagree and believes that endorsing the idea of personal responsibility takes attention away from the inequalities and deindustrialization of capitalism. Dann emphasizes that "metal's anger is focused on personal change, not political or structural [*sic*] change [...] the metal scene kind of dwells on changing yourself."²³ Berger's explanation for the origin of this philosophy in metal is traced back to a collective reaction from the death metal scene against the more politically preachy approach of the hardcore scene.

Theoretical framework for a formalist approach to metal

In 2007, Jonathan Pieslak was the first musicologist to address the growing trend of rhythmic complexity in the subgenre of progressive metal, more specifically in the music of the Swedish band Meshuggah. Pieslak was the first to elucidate the manner in which Meshuggah's music functioned rhythmically – or at the very least, how certain songs functioned rhythmically by combining three different musical practices: odd-time signature, mixed meters, and superimposed

¹⁹ Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, 121-31.

²⁰ Harris Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jaz̄z: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 290.

²¹ Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jaz̄z: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience*, 287.

²² Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jaz̄z*, 287.

²³ *Ibid.* p.287.

rhythms.²⁴ Pieslak's follow-up came one year later in 2008 and instead of focusing exclusively on Meshuggah, Pieslak's analysis of the music was complemented with discussions pertaining to the difference between what fans find meaningful in different metal subgenres. For Pieslak, fans of progressive metal identify with the rhythmic/metric complexity they perceive in the music whereas fans of nü-metal (a subgenre that emerged in the 1990s which blended elements of rap, metal, and industrial music) identify with timbre.²⁵

Nicole Biamonte has published various articles on rock as well as heavy metal and what distinguishes her from other scholars mentioned so far is the fact that Biamonte's approach is almost exclusively formalist. Her work on metrical dissonance in rock and heavy metal elucidated how certain temporal dissonance functions in the context of a piece.²⁶ Biamonte's insight on the small-scale and large-scale function of metrical dissonance are paramount to Chapter Three of this thesis – which deals with the conception of rhythm and meter. Following the formalist approach of Biamonte, I offer my contribution to certain of her theoretical concepts in Chapter Three.

Biamonte also published works on the functions of modes in heavy metal, which for the most part revolves around Phrygian and Locrian. Additionally, her analysis on certain unconventional harmonic structures in rock and heavy metal provides great insight for the first chapter of this thesis. In her study, Biamonte explores the “harmonic and phrase functions of selected pitch structures unique to rock that comprise the basic material of a significant body of songs, and that do not fit comfortably into the conventional paradigm of major-minor tonality.”²⁷

Theoretical framework for a phenomenology of metal

Although Eric Smialek's work is much more recent than other scholars mentioned so far, his insights on extreme metal were nonetheless quite valuable for this thesis. Smialek's focus is, for the most part, on how musical and cultural expressions vary significantly from one extreme metal subgenre to another. Additionally, a great deal of Smialek's research concerns how fans “may

²⁴ Jonathan Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah”, *Music Theory Spectrum* Volume 29 Issue 2 (2007), 220.

²⁵ Jonathan Pieslak, “Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's ‘Hey Daddy’”, *Popular Music* Volume 27/1 (2008), 46.

²⁶ See Nicole Biamonte, “Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music”, *Society for Music Theory* Volume 20 Number 2 (2014), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.2/mto.14.20.2.biamonte.html>>.

²⁷ Nicole Biamonte, “Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music”, *Music Theory Spectrum* Vol. 32 Issue 2 (2010), 95.

experience different genres phenomenologically.”²⁸ More specifically, Smialek is “interested in the ease or difficulty with which fans are able to follow along with a track in their minds from one moment to another.”²⁹ Harris Berger also explores the phenomenology of musical performance in the context of two different music scenes in Akron Ohio, one of which is the death metal scene. For Berger, the phenomenology of the musical performance of a drummer can be described as a juxtaposition of two temporal process: the additive and the divisive process.

Additionally, Smialek noted a trend amongst different metal scholars: the tendency to represent some facet of metal in a dualistic manner – whether it is the music, culture, or politics. He provides the following examples, some of which I mentioned already: Walser’s notion of the dialectic of freedom and control; Kahn-Harris’s idea of transgressive and mundane subcultural capital; Berger’s notion of the additive and divisive process; Weinstein’s categorization of metal lyrics as either themes of chaos or Dionysian themes, as well as her notion of metal culture as a binary opposition that juxtaposes utopian and dystopian elements; Tagg made similar comments on industrial music – which shares various elements with metal, including distortion. Tagg put forth a list of sonic characteristics that either represent utopian or dystopian elements.

²⁸ Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015”, 164.

²⁹ Smialek, 165.

CHAPTER 1. EXPLORING THE EXTREME METAL UMBRELLA: THRASH, DEATH, BLACK

Even though thrash metal is not usually categorized under the extreme metal umbrella – but instead is considered to be a nascent form of ‘extreme metal’ – the discussions below will nonetheless include thrash metal because doing otherwise would undermine thrash metal’s subsequent musical influence on death metal and black metal. Nevertheless, thrash metal’s treatment of the voice shares more similarities with hard rock than with extreme metal, especially in the way the voice of thrash metal employs a certain amount of distortion but not at the expense of the comprehensibility of the lyrics. Consequently, thrash metal is not considered a fully fleshed-out form of extreme metal. For all the reasons just mentioned, the discussion on thrash metal in this chapter will be limited to its history – which began in the early 1980s. This approach will allow me to focus on the two main subgenres discussed throughout this thesis: death metal – which surged at the end of the 1980s – and black metal – which began in the early 1990s as a reaction against death metal.

Before enumerating some of the characteristic bands of thrash metal, death metal and black metal, the paragraph below offers readers a broad introduction as well as a broad definition of the extreme metal umbrella which encompasses, amongst others, all three of the aforementioned subgenres. The following point needs to be born in mind: extreme metal is not a single subgenre, rather, it is an umbrella term which vaguely connotes all styles of metal characterized by substantial vocal distortion. The umbrella of extreme metal includes various subgenres which borrowed from heavy metal’s musical characteristics but takes those characteristics to their sonic extremes. In other words, extreme metal relates to the metal genre by presenting an ‘extreme’ version of the style.

The evolution of extreme metal is one that generally aims towards greater speed, intensity, brutality, heaviness, i.e. a quasi-teleological process in which each parameter is intensified to an extreme degree. Of course, what is considered extreme today can become mundane tomorrow: the most extreme gesture becomes quickly domesticated. One could make a strong case that extreme metal has reached such a limit in contemporary times, signaling the exhaustion of the genre as a whole. Furthermore, although the label ‘extreme’ might seem a little prurient, it does nonetheless effectively describe the general musical aesthetic as well as the iconography evoked in both the lyrics and the graphic art of metal albums. Lyrics, music videos, and album art often revolve around dark, grim, macabre, and even repulsive topics. Album cover art will be a particular focus of this chapter because, as Pieslak has noted, hitherto, “scholars have primarily focused on musical characteristics

and thematic content as a way to distinguish subgenres.”³⁰ Scholars interested in such questions could gain tremendously by better taking into account the visual and verbal dimensions in addition to the sonic ones.³¹ All three can change or influence the semiotic possibilities afforded to listeners. Additionally, album cover artwork reveals important aesthetic differences on the visual plane between different subgenres. As Erik Smialek points out, “to create the most convincing artwork possible, artists and the bands that hire them must synchronize the subtlest of genre distinctions between the band’s music and the visual imagery if the design is to succeed.”³²

As a first approximation of the generic landscape of metal, readers can refer to Figure 1.1, and are asked to give special attention to subgenres under discussion throughout this chapter, indicated in the figure with a yellow star for the three main subgenres under discussion and a smaller blue star for subgenres discussed more occasionally. Although not in any way exhaustive or a perfect representation, the evolutionary tree provides readers with a window into the intermingled relationship between subgenres.

Stylistic markers of subgenres can only be defined as such if they are recognized as meaningful by competent listeners who over time, have acquired certain stylistic expectations. For Leonard B. Meyer, “this means that granted listeners who have developed reaction patterns appropriate to the work in question, the structure of the affective response to a piece can be studied by examining the music itself.”³³ Therefore, fans’ testimony on the meaningful distinctions between subgenres will be drawn from various sources, including: fan reviews, online forums, and various interviews.

³⁰ Jonathan Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah”, *Music Theory Spectrum* Volume 29 Issue 2 (2007), 243-4.

³¹ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991), 7.

³² Eric Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015” (PhD Diss., McGill University, 2015), 159.

³³ Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 31-2.

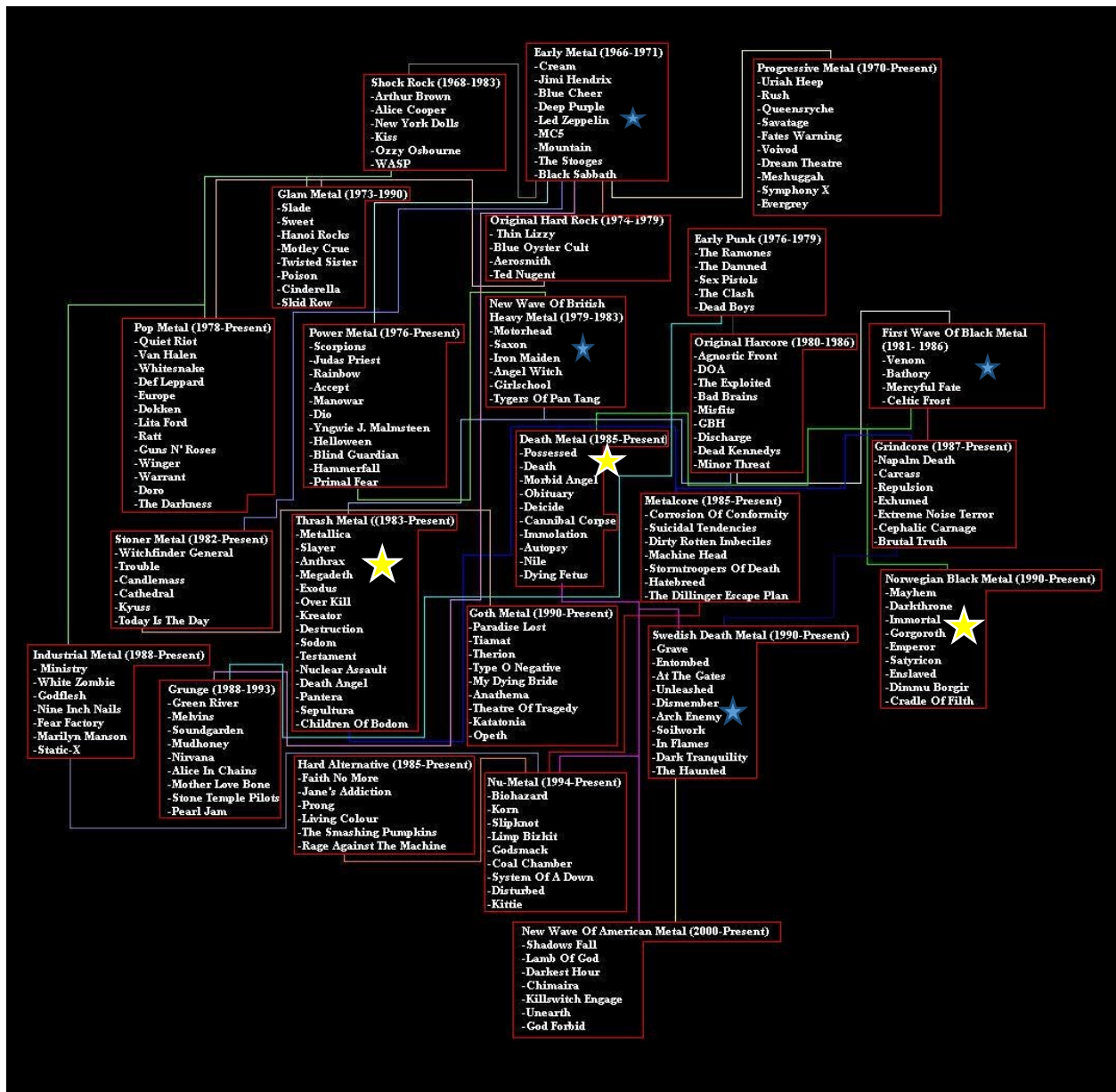


Figure 1.1. Sam Dunn's "The Definitive Metal History Family Tree" as it appears in the Special Features of Metal: A Headbanger's Journey (2005). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Metal_Genealogy.jpg (accessed March 19 2018)

I. History, Genealogy, and Iconography

The bands Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax – often grouped together and dubbed ‘the big four of thrash metal’ – are considered as nascent forms of extreme metal. The big four of thrash metal all came to prominence in the early 1980s. It is during this time period that fast tempi and relentless rhythmic streams of notes were crystallized into the sonic signature by thrash metal

bands. Thrash metal's newly adopted aesthetic of relentless rhythmic ruthlessness was a departure from earlier traditional heavy metal bands of the 1970s such as Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, and Deep Purple, who preferred to play "slow, even ponderous music."³⁴ Thrash metal's departure was especially meaningful for fans who had acquired "stylistic experience" and thus had expectations regarding tempo due to heavy metal bands of the 1970s preference for slow tempi.³⁵ I suspect the contrast between slow and fast tempi resulted in fans perceiving the aesthetic of thrash metal's sonic signature as more extreme than their predecessors.

Thrash metal's penchant for fast tempi comes from the musical aesthetic of NWOBHM (New Wave of British Heavy Metal) which includes bands such as Iron Maiden, Saxon, and Motörhead. The latter are often referred to as the first band to bridge the gap between two subcultures previously at odds with one another: punk and heavy metal subculture.³⁶ Additionally, Motörhead's drummer, Phil Taylor, is credited by some as the initiator of the double-kick bass drum – which later became a required technique for drummers in the thrash metal or death metal subgenre.³⁷ The double-kick bass drum was first performed on Motörhead's song "Overkill" released in 1979. In essence, the new addition to the drum kit allowed drummers to play with both feet which consequently facilitated playing rapid succession of notes. For Jack Harrell, the sonic result of the double-kick bass drum can sometimes be akin to a "machine gun rhythm that corresponds to the overall tone of the music."³⁸

Slayer's influence on the subsequent development of extreme metal was more significant than that of Metallica, Megadeth, and Anthrax. Slayer's third album, *Reign in Blood* (1986), was the catalyst for death metal³⁹ – "if not the archetypal album of the death metal subgenre" says Pieslak.⁴⁰ There are at least four reasons why Slayer was considered more extreme than its thrash metal counterparts: First, Slayer popularized the thrash beat which is characterized by the snare-drum hit

³⁴ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 24.

³⁵ Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 35.

³⁶ Ian Christe, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 30.

³⁷ Interview with Lars Ulrich of Metallica (at 8:30) in *Metal Evolution: Extreme Metal*. Dirs. Sam Dunn and Scott McFadyen, 2011.

³⁸ Jack Harrell, "The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock", *Popular Music & Society* 18/1 (1994), 93.

³⁹ Smialek, "Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015", 73-4.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 148.

which occurs on every eighth-note upbeat as opposed to traditional practices which favor quarter-notes beats two and four. Slayer's drummer, Dave Lombardo, is usually recognized as the originator of the thrash beat – which became the paramount drum beat of the thrash metal subgenre. Slayer's creation was a nascent form of sonic disorientation which would later come to characterize death metal.

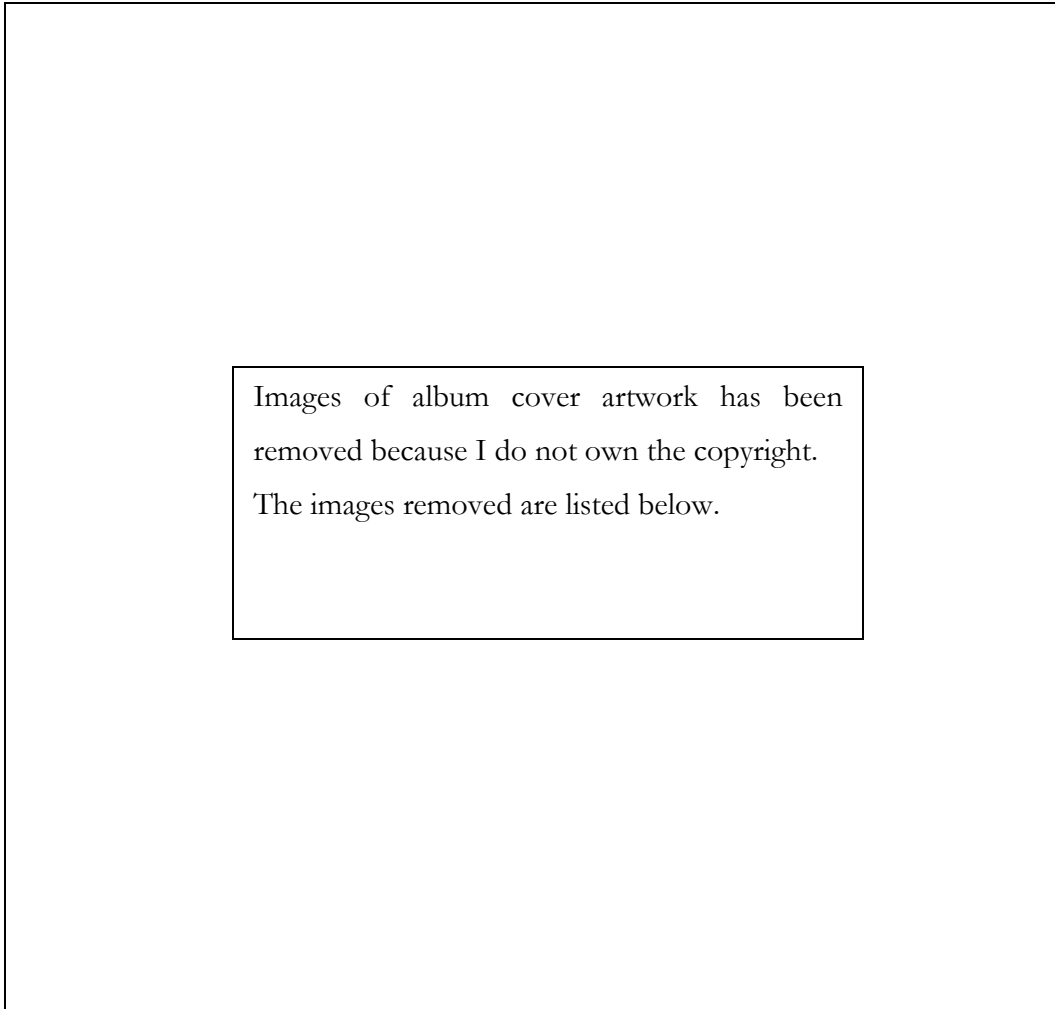


Figure 1.2. (Top left) Metallica's 1986 *Master of Puppets* / (Top right) Megadeth's 1986 *Peace Sells But Who's Buying?*
(Bottom left) Slayer's 1985 *Hell Awaits* / (Bottom right) Slayer's 1986 *Reign in Blood*

Second, Slayer normalized playing over 200 beats per minute which intensified the sense of disorientation elicited by the up-beat snare-drum hit of the thrash beat. Playing at tempi over 200 beats per minute can create a sense of intensity in some listeners. Such a sense of intensity could also be increased by the double-pedal bass drum which would mimic the guitar tremolo, consequently

creating what Pieslak describes as “a sonic barrage of unyielding rhythm.”⁴¹ Third, Slayer’s guitar riffs were significantly more chromatic than their thrash metal counterparts, who, for the most part, remained modal.⁴² Lastly, compared with other thrash metal bands, Slayer’s iconography was much more shocking due to their use of satanic images and symbols (see figure 1.2).

As mentioned before, thrash metal’s sonic signature was the first to be characterized by relentless streams of notes played at fast tempi. Once speed became part of the sonic signature of thrash metal, the generation of bands that followed, those associated with the ‘death metal’ moniker, attempted to outbid their predecessors by playing at even faster tempi, using lower tunings for their instruments, increased vocal distortion (thus greater incomprehensibility of lyrics), and well as favoring chromaticism over the modal approach of thrash metal.

Death Metal In The Sunshine State

In the late 1980s, thrash metal gave way to death metal, most prominently to the Florida death metal scene that burgeoned in the early 1990s and included classic acts of the time such as Death (USA), Obituary (USA), and Suffocation (USA).⁴³ A major difference between death metal bands and their thrash metal predecessors was the new approach by the former in regards to production. The innovations in metal production were largely pioneered by Scott Burns, an engineer and producer who is accredited as the creator of the Florida death metal sound.⁴⁴

The biggest difficulty of death metal production was to properly record the double-kick bass-drum – something that no one before Burns had succeeded in doing. Burns immediately attracted various death metal bands across the United States to relocate to Florida in order to work with him. According to Ian Christie, “life in Florida did not revolve around any significant social

⁴¹ Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*, 150.

⁴² However, Slayer’s first album released in 1983 was much more melodic mainly due to the dual guitars harmonized in intervallic thirds à la Iron Maiden and also much more modal in general. The increase in chromaticism in Slayer’s subsequent releases seems for some as the meaningful crystallization of extreme metal. For example, Fenriz, member of seminal black metal band Darkthrone, says that the first Slayer album was a primitive form of extreme metal which wasn’t crystallized, in part, because there weren’t many “half notes” (at 3:30).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1iXsF8787M&t=186s>

⁴³ Ian Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25 (2013), 16, 10.1111/jpms.12026.

⁴⁴ Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, p.16.

scene, but dozens of bands had their albums produced or engineered by Scott Burns and the staff at Tampa's Morrisound Studios."⁴⁵

On the musical characteristics of death metal, Jack Harrell lists speed as "one of the most important musical features to the genre."⁴⁶ Consequently, speed is underpinned by certain musical practices that typify the genre of death metal, such as, tremolo picking on the guitars, the double-kick bass drum, and 'blast beats' – both played by the drummer.⁴⁷ The blast beat can be conceptualized as the progenitor of a particular musical practice which Alan Moore previously identified as the tendency for hard rock drummer's to play a snare-drum hit on every quarter-note.⁴⁸ Subsequently, the blast beat is characterized by a snare-drum hit on every eighth note or even every sixteenth note.

A type of 'melodic sequence typical of metal' is another distinctive musical practice in death metal and will be discussed in detail in the last section of this chapter. For now, readers can conceptualize 'metal's approach to melodic sequences' as a group consisting of a minimum of two notes which guitarists transpose up and down the fretboard often in a chromatic manner. To put it another way, melodic sequence in metal largely evolved from Slayer's use of chromaticism and thereafter death metal bands pushed the technique further. An overview of bands from the Florida death metal scene would most likely align with Walser's claim that heavy metal bands rejected the importance of melody.⁴⁹ However, a closer inspection reveals certain scenes of death metal in which the style places great importance on melody – or at the very least, more so than the death metal bands mentioned in the first paragraph of this section. Therein lies the significance of the next death metal scene – discussed in the paragraph below – which emerged only a few years after the Floridian bands: Swedish death metal.

⁴⁵ Christie, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*, 242.

⁴⁶ Harrell, "The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock", 93.

⁴⁷ Daniel Frandsen, "Two Steps Past Insanity: The Expression of Aggression in Death Metal Music" in *Can I Play With Madness? Metal, Dissonance, Madness, and Alienation*, ed. Colin A. McKinnon, Niall Scott and Kristen Sollee (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011), 39.

⁴⁸ Alan F. Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock. Second edition* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 38.

⁴⁹ Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 50.

The death metal scene in Sweden was largely popularized by bands such as At the Gates (Gothenburg), Dark Tranquility, and In Flames. A major difference between Swedes and their American counterpart – who largely favored a chromatic approach to guitar – was that Swedes opted for a more melodic approach by incorporating, amongst other things, dual-lead guitar in harmonized diatonic thirds as well as chord progressions which favor melodic choruses. Such musical practices were characteristic of Iron Maiden and hitherto hadn't been incorporated in death metal. However, as opposed to Iron Maiden, the melodic character of most Swedish death metal bands is the responsibility of the guitar – as opposed to vocals.

The bands discussed so far are good overall representations of their respective scenes. However, both scenes have bands who are stylistic outliers, i.e. bands who share certain musical characteristics with the scene in general but who also differ drastically in some other ways. For example, Cynic and Atheist are two bands from the Florida death metal scene who also came to prominence in the early 1990s but whose music differs drastically in some way or another with the rest of the scene. Atheist are often credited as one of the first bands to twist the musical code of death metal. Their album *Unquestionable Presence*, release in 1991, is a good example of their sonic signature style, which, according to Jeff Wagner, “gained a stature as a tech metal cornerstone.”⁵⁰

As for the Swedish death metal scene, Meshuggah and Opeth are two good examples of bands who are stylistic outliers. Meshuggah's music will be a major focus of Chapter Three which deals with rhythm and meter and thus understanding the historical and geographical context is important for any discussion relating to Meshuggah because it helps to see exactly *how* their music differs from their Swedish counterparts. For now, however, I will focus on the band most often accredited as the original death metal band, and who, unsurprisingly enough, is called Death.⁵¹ Chuck Schuldiner, guitarist, vocalist, and composer, is often referred to as the Godfather of death metal.

Album artwork for the first two releases of the Florida-based band Death largely revolved around zombie imagery and post-death situational fantasies (See top row of Figure 3). However, Death abandoned such imagery by the time of their third release in February 1990, which interestingly enough, happens to coincide with the end of the fall of the Berlin wall that occurred only three months prior to Death's third release – appropriately entitled *Spiritual Healing*. Prior to the

⁵⁰ Jeff Wagner, *Mean Deviation: Four Decades of Progressive Heavy Metal* (New York: Bazillion Points Publishing, 2010), 170.

⁵¹ Christe, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*, 241.

end of the Cold War, the ominous nuclear threat had previously been a real possibility and I find it interesting that images of zombies were abandoned almost immediately after the end of the Cold War. I do not claim to have proof that there is a correlation but zombies do seem like an appropriate choice of horror imagery to represent the potential threat of a nuclear attack which was a real possibility during the releases of Death's earlier albums (1987-1988).

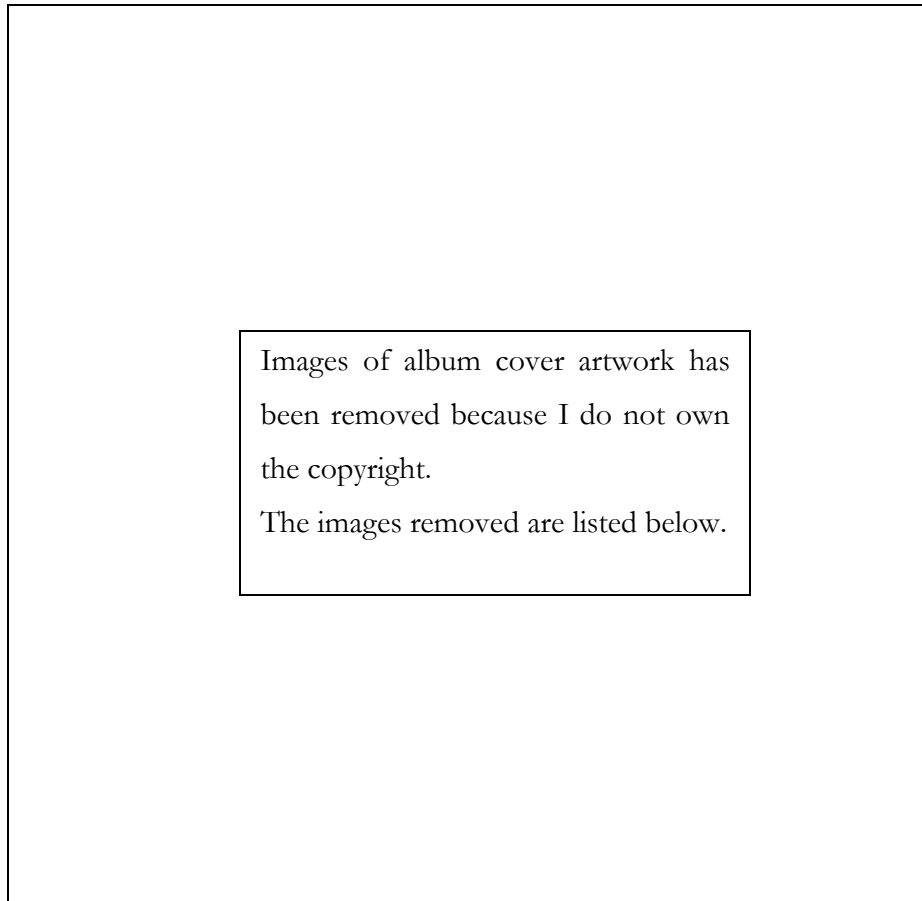


Figure 1.3. (Top left) Death's 1987 *Scream Bloody Gore* / (Top right) Death's 1988 *Leprosy*
(Bottom left) Cannibal Corpse's 1992 *Butchered at Birth* / (Bottom right) Obituary's 1989 *Slowly we Rot*.

The band Cannibal Corpse – also from the Florida death metal scene – has been at the center of several controversies in the past specifically due to their album artwork which pushed the limits of shock even further with their exaggerated depiction of physical agony (see bottom left of figure 1.3). In interviews, Cannibal Corpse bassist, Alex Webster, has stated that the band's appeal for shocking album cover artwork stems from the two interests shared by each member: horror

movies and death metal. “We’re taking two of our favorite things and putting them together” says Webster, and “we were certainly not the first band to do that.”⁵²

Ironically enough, Cannibal Corpse’s notoriety for obscene album cover gained nationwide attention because of the public denunciation made by then-U.S. Senator and vice-presidential candidate Bob Dole. On this topic, Webster says the “negative attention has definitely helped” the bands career and he jokingly thanks Senator Dole for the “free advertisement.”⁵³ The band has stated in various interviews that Senator Dole’s public outcry turned Cannibal Corpse from a relatively unknown band to one of the most popular death metal bands in the U.S. The last chapter will introduce various motives for why metal culture equates controversy with publicity. Before even attempting to philosophize on the motives behind metal’s desire to shock, however, I will focus on the semiotic codes which connote different shades of horror and thus influence what is afforded to listeners.

Metal’s association with horror movies didn’t begin with death metal and in fact, Alice Cooper is usually the one, as noted by Weinstein, who is “credited for donating a horror-film visual aesthetic to heavy metal’s bag of tricks.”⁵⁴ However, the shock effect of Alice Cooper pales in comparison to the bands discussed in this chapter so far. For example, Kerry King, guitarist of the thrash metal band Slayer, describes his songs “as horror movies on music, it’s a fantasy world.”⁵⁵ However, Slayer’s iconography largely revolves around depictions of hell and various satanic imagery and in a way shares similarities with horror movies related with the devil or evil spirits, e.g. *The Omen* (1976), or *The Exorcist* (1973). Death metal iconographies seems to connote slightly different shades of horror. One that has to do with exaggerated depiction of physical agony which seems appropriate to slasher horror movies due to their mutual fascination with anything morbid. I will return to discuss death metal’s link with horror movies in the last section of this chapter. For now, however, I will focus on the historical context of black metal’s emergence in the 1990s (more specifically Norwegian black metal) which will lead to a discussion on black metal album cover artworks.

⁵² Taken from Sam Dunn’s interview with Alex Webster in *Metal Evolution: Extreme Metal* (Dirs. Sam Dunn and Scott McFadyen. 2011) (2:40-3:20).

⁵³ Sam Dunn’s interview with Alex Webster in *Metal Evolution: Extreme Metal* (2011) (4:50-5:30).

⁵⁴ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 21.

⁵⁵ Harrell, “The Poetics of Destruction”, 95.

Norwegian Black Metal

As Ian Reyes has noted, “the first to directly appropriate the black metal label was Venom (England), releasing *Black Metal* in 1982.”⁵⁶ The first wave of black metal subsequently followed in the early to mid-1980s with bands such as Switzerland’s Celtic Frost and Sweden’s Bathory. These bands influenced the second wave of black metal at the start of the 1990s, with bands like Mayhem, Burzum and Darkthrone, who were all centered in Norway – and for that reason it is often dubbed Norwegian black metal. However, in comparison to Venom’s playful theatrics, members of the Norwegian scene have stated in interview with Michelle Phillipov, “that their music and personae were genuinely evil, rather than something contrived only for the purpose of performance.”⁵⁷ As an example, Euronymous, guitarist of the band Mayhem expressed his desire to only compose and release “truly evil music.”⁵⁸ Varg Vikernes, a controversial figure (discussed further below) and sole member of Burzum, “has claimed that the purpose of black metal is to spread fear and evil.”⁵⁹ Thus, it is for these reasons that I will focus on the second wave of black metal as opposed to the first wave. Also, the sonic signature of the first wave of black metal is very similar to the thrash metal bands discussed earlier in the chapter and therefore, the sonic signature of the second wave of black metal makes for a more pertinent discussion – albeit a more controversial one.

In *Lords of Chaos*, Michael Söderlind & Didrick Moynihan discuss how the second wave of black metal provided the archetype of general violence associated with the black metal scene. This second wave is infamous for a series of church burnings, assaults, and even a couple of cases of murder in Scandinavia, the most infamous of which led to Varg Vikernes’s 1994 conviction for murdering Euronymous. Both musicians had a prominent status in the Norwegian black metal scene. The accused is the one man band behind Burzum, who also briefly played alongside the victim, Euronymous, in the seminal black metal band, Mayhem. The story has been recounted countless times in several books and documentaries and has become a lynchpin in the mythology and meaning of the genre.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, 8.

⁵⁷ Michelle Phillipov, *Extreme Music for Extreme People?: Norwegian Black Metal and Transcendent Violence* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 155.

⁵⁸ Michael Soderlind and Moynihan Didrick, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 1998), 66.

⁵⁹ Soderlind and Didrick, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 93.

⁶⁰ Phillipov, *Extreme Music for Extreme People?: Norwegian Black Metal and Transcendent Violence*, 157.

While these cases should not be justified or excused, the reality remains that the majority of black metal bands have no intention of acting out the transgressive content of their lyrics. Keith Kahn-Harris points out that almost every metal bands with violent, evil, and disturbing lyrics, rarely, if ever, act out on the fantasies described in their lyrics – something Kahn-Harris refers to as the “logic of mundanity.”⁶¹ “While it is precisely the anomalousness of this violence that has contributed to its ongoing interest” says Phillipov, “this interest has bestowed the Norwegian black metal scene with a level of importance that would have been unlikely had this scene been governed by the ‘logic of mundanity’ characteristic of most other extreme metal scenes.”⁶²

For Reyes, however, black metal’s appeal in the 1990s “can neither be reduced to a fascination with the spectacle of the Norwegian crimes nor with its diabolical or anti-social resonances.”⁶³ The black turn, as Reyes calls it, was a rebellion against the signature death metal sound production developed by Scott Burns a few years prior to black metal’s emergence. Readers may recall that Scott Burns was discussed earlier in the death metal section because of his crucial role forging the death metal sound production.

A direct rebellion against the sound production of Burns was made explicit by certain black metal bands such as Norway’s Mayhem. “In 1993, Mayhem repackaged and rereleased their 1987 album, *Deathcrush*, with a new graphic on the back, a crossed-out picture of Scott Burns surrounded by the words ‘no fun,’ ‘no core,’ ‘no mosh,’ ‘no trends.’”⁶⁴ Reyes is thus correct to point out that the appeal generated by black metal in the 1990s was not solely due to the numerable controversies surrounding the Norwegian black metal scene. In other words, black metal’s emergence, as described by Reyes, “was a criticism of and an alternative to the hegemony of heaviness at a moment of crisis in the history of extreme metal.”⁶⁵

For José Filipe Silva, however, the black metal rebellion described above was partly a result of “the basic transversal philosophical lines” that is at the core of the subgenre.⁶⁶ More specifically, Silva conceptualizes black metal’s philosophy as mainly being a “rebellion against those who don’t

⁶¹ Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (New York: Berg, 2007), 59.

⁶² Phillipov, *Extreme Music for Extreme People?*, 157.

⁶³ Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, 20.

⁶⁴ Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, 16.

⁶⁵ Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, 20.

⁶⁶ José Filipe P.M. Silva, “Black Metal: History, Trace of Character and Archetype” in *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast! An Approach to Underground Music Scenes* (Porto: University of Porto. Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 2016), 217.

respect one's own heritage and culture" which can result in "a strong sense of parenthood, personhood and sometimes loneliness that turn Black Metal into non-mainstream or even anti-mainstream."⁶⁷ Jesse McWilliams, in his epistemological work on black metal, came to a slightly different conclusion which "does not indicate that black metal must necessarily aligned with some musical quality or philosophical theme, but that black metal is a revelation of the failure of such imperatives."⁶⁸

It is no wonder, then, that black metal rebelled against the sound production of death metal. The former perceived the sound production of death metal as overproduced, overly-technical, which lacks the 'raw' quality of sound production that black metal is so found of – a topic explored in greater detail in the chapter relating to timbre and sound production. The important thing for readers to retain at the moment is that black metal's emergence was largely reactionary in nature.

However, 'raw' black metal, is not representative of the overall black metal scene. In fact, in addition to the dichotomy between sound production in death metal and black metal, there also exists a dichotomy between raw black metal bands and symphonic black metal bands. The former, Smialek notes, "tends to eschew the atmospheric keyboards of symphonic black metal, preferring instead to derive a more chaotic ambiance by layering tremolo-picked guitars."⁶⁹ Thus, the intentional use of lo-fi production by raw black metal bands is in marked contrast to the exorbitant, film-music like productions of bands such as Cradle of Filth and Dimmu Borgir who, sometimes hire full orchestras for both recordings and concert performances.⁷⁰

I will now say a brief word on black metal album cover artwork and the reasons for doing so are twofold: first, album cover artwork is a visual stylistic marker that distinguishes black metal from death metal; second, black metal's general aesthetic preferences are often apparent in album cover artworks. For example, as Smialek has noted, "Black metal musicians and fans tend to share with Romantic artists a reverence for the imagined qualities of purity symbolized by nature's beauty, harshness, and magnitude."⁷¹ On the other hand, black metal album covers may also "conjure a

⁶⁷ Silva, *Black Metal: history, trace of character and archetype*, 217.

⁶⁸ Jesse McWilliams, "Dark epistemology: An Assessment of Philosophical Trends in the Black Metal Music of Mayhem", *Metal Music Studies* Volume 1 Number 1 (2015), 36.

⁶⁹ Smialek, "Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015", 139.

⁷⁰ Smialek, 139.

⁷¹ Smialek, 136-7.

mysterious, evil cult atmosphere that skewers common Christian tropes.”⁷² Thus, black metal, for Smialek, is largely predicated on “related interest with that which is harsh and grim yet thoroughly opposed to [...] Romantic grandiosity.”⁷³ (see figure 1.4)

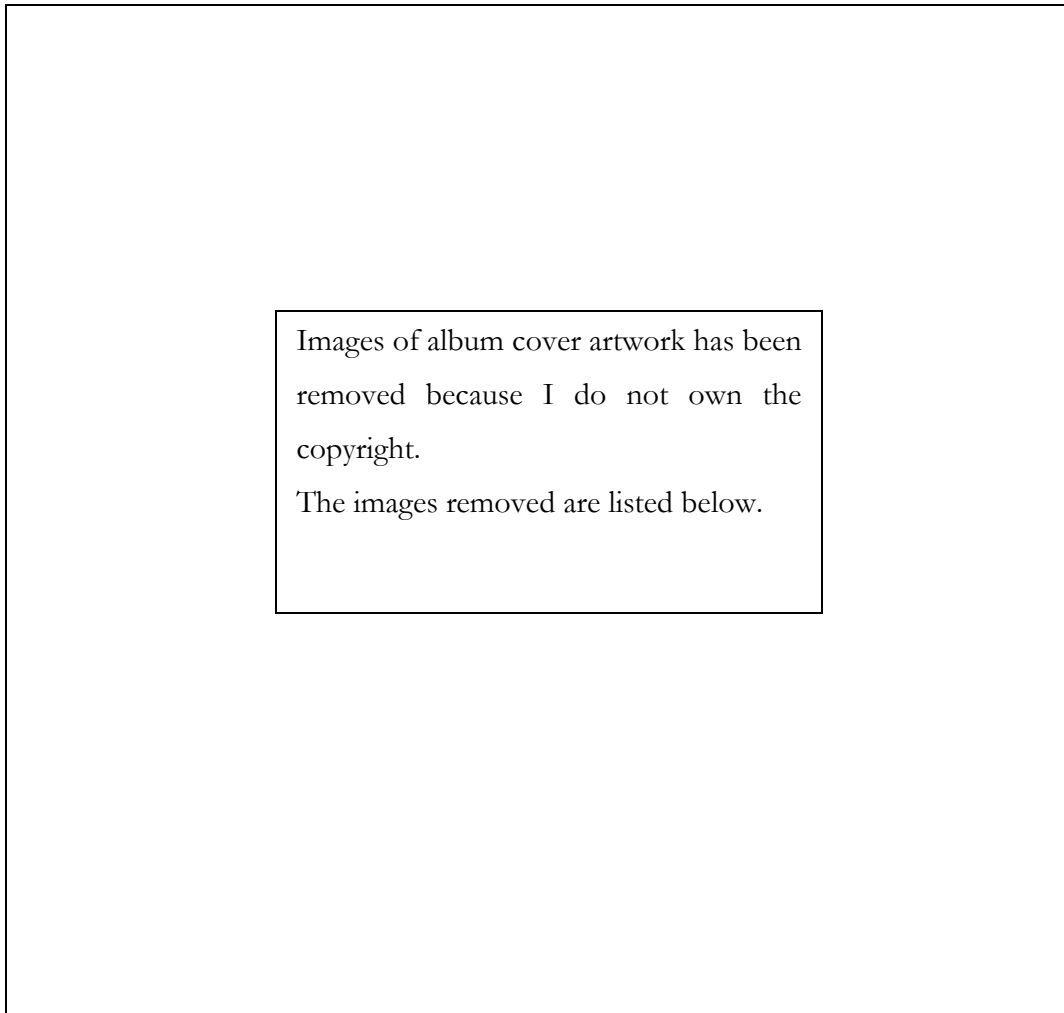


Figure 1.4. (Top left) Darkthrone’s 1991 *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* / (Top right) Burzum’s 1992 Eponymous album (Bottom left) Cradle of Filth’s 2000 *Midian* released / (Bottom right) Dimmu Borgir’s 1996 *Enthroned Darkness Triumphant*

So far, this chapter explored and discussed three different metal subgenres (thrash, death, and black) and I attempted to provide readers with certain peculiarity of each subgenre – whether musical, visual, or historical. Additionally, album cover artwork, beyond merely distinguishing between thrash metal, death metal, and black metal, also indicate what fields of semiotic possibilities are afforded to listeners.

⁷² Ibid. 159.

⁷³ Ibid. 136-7.

When comparing the iconography of death metal and black metal, one might be tempted to say that the shock effect is more pronounced in death metal than it is in black metal. However, there is an important nuance in the shock effect of death metal iconographies: the shock effect, when exaggerated up to a certain point, results in a reaction of laughter for some – as opposed to truly being shocked. For example, the exaggerated depiction of physical agony on the album cover of Cannibal Corpse (Figure 1.3) is almost too surreal – or unrealistic – for some to perceive it as a serious, frightening, and realistic possibility. On the other hand, the simple and raw album cover artwork of black metal bands seems much less shocking but the simplicity simultaneously connotes a threat more realistic than the exaggerated agony depicted in Cannibal Corpse (see Figure 1.4 for black metal iconography). Thus, the fact that black metal iconographies present a more realistic danger results in the public perceiving the shock effect of black metal as more serious and thus potentially more evil.

The next section will explore how certain musical characteristics might influence what is afforded to listeners. I will begin with a theoretical overview of musical practices characteristic of death metal which will bring me to a conclusion regarding the relationship between such musical practices that are characteristic to death metal but also horror movies. Black metal will be discussed only sporadically in the sections below.

II. Pitch Syntax: Death Metal Melodic Sequences

Berger, Smialek, and Harrel have all proposed certain concepts for the characterization of death metal's surface-level pitch syntax. Therefore, I will briefly discuss contemporary theories about the conception of pitch-organization in death metal in order to subsequently propose my own theoretical contribution of 'parallel motion of melodic fragments'. Beyond merely suggesting the existence of 'parallel motion of melodic fragments' in death metal, a link will be made with similar musical practices in horror film music. Such a link can only be said to be meaningful if horror movies are in the semiotic field afforded to fans hence the discussion of album cover artworks in the first sections of this chapter.

The dissonant riffing of thrash metal characterized by intervals such the tritone, minor second, and major seventh is even more rampant in death metal. In Western culture, the tritone has often been recognized as the interval that represents the devil (*diabolus in musica*). For Jack Harrel,

the tritone is death metal's "most characteristic musical signature."⁷⁴ Harris Berger, who elaborated on Harrel's work, attributed the ubiquity of tritones and "unexpected half-steps" to "an effort to avoid the diatonic or blues based harmony that metalheads see as commercial and light."⁷⁵ Whereas guitars in thrash metal mostly play dissonant intervals (m2, dim5, m7) that naturally occur with respect to a tonic in certain modes – such as Phrygian and Locrian⁷⁶ – death metal makes use of similar intervals outside the confines of a specific mode or scale. This is what Berger refers to as unexpected half-steps. The avoidance of commercialism noted by Berger is an important point that relates to my comparison between extreme metal and heavy metal and will be elaborated in the chapter on subcultural capital (chapter 4).

Smialek's work on the disorientation of symmetrical pitch collection in death metal provides a more theoretical explanation that favors symmetrical pitch collections, i.e. the diminished and augmented scales. "Death metal bands can create a sense of disorientation by building riffs using symmetrical pitch collections."⁷⁷ The disorientation is mainly attributed to a phenomenon widely recognized by music theorists: "the characteristic sense of tension and resolution felt within the diatonic major scale is a product of the asymmetry of its intervallic construction, specifically with respect to what theorists call 'transpositional symmetry.'"⁷⁸ The major scale, for example, does not divide the octave symmetrically and, as noted by Smialek, therefore "it makes a noticeable difference where one stops and starts while playing. With symmetrical divisions of the octave, one loses that sense of orientation. Any starting or stopping point seems comparatively arbitrary."⁷⁹

Nicole Biamonte, in her work on rock music, noted that "while surface-level pitch syntax and behavior in vernacular music may differ from those of the common-practice tradition," they nonetheless share three "underlying organizational principles:" pitch centrality and pitch hierarchy; relative consonance and dissonance; as well as phrase structure and function.⁸⁰ The former provides

⁷⁴ Harrell, "The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock", 94.

⁷⁵ Harris Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1999) 62.

⁷⁶ These modes stem from the larger heavy metal influence, which Biamonte noted the popularity of in heavy metal.

⁷⁷ Smialek, "Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015", 165.

⁷⁸ Smialek, 165.

⁷⁹ Smialek, 166.

⁸⁰ Nicole Biamonte, "Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock", *Music Theory Spectrum* Vol 32 Issue 2 (2010), 95.

saliency to this chapter. Additionally, Biamonte noted that “parallel chord patterns are highly idiomatic to the guitar, because of the ease of sliding barre chords up and down the fretboard.”⁸¹ Her analysis of rock music revealed an abundance of major chords in comparison to minor chords. For Biamonte, “the preference for major over diatonic triads may relate to the use of distorted timbres, which render major triads somewhat dissonant, but minor triads significantly more so.”⁸² Conversely, black metal – but also death metal to a certain extent – takes the opposite approach and favors an abundance of distorted minor chords – something rarely seen in rock music.

Biamonte raises an important point that holds true for various kinds of metal, including the ones discussed here: death metal and black metal. An advantage of playing guitar is the feasibility of moving motivic content of motivic fragments in parallel motion of different kind simply by shifting the hand position along the neck of the instrument down or up a fixed number of frets. This explains why certain riffs are best analyzed as fragmented motivic cells that are displaced in parallel motion on the guitar (moving the shape up or down the neck without changing which strings are played). Broadly speaking, death metal tends to favor melodic fragments in parallel motion over power chords whereas black metal tends to favor parallel motion of melodic fragments as well as parallel motion of minor chords (as briefly mentioned in the above paragraph).⁸³

Melodic fragments often consist of a few notes at close proximity of a power chord shape, e.g. root, perfect fifth, and minor sixth; or root, perfect fifth, and augmented fourth. This was noted by Esa Lilja in her work on heavy metal’s characteristic chord structures: “In most heavy metal there is such a strong emphasis on the bass notes that the analysis should also rise from them. This is especially true with dyads.”⁸⁴ Thus, patterns in parallel motion – whether played with chords or melodic fragments – are best analyzed when regarding the bass note as the root – as opposed to a

⁸¹ Biamonte, *Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock*, 101.

⁸² Biamonte, 104.

⁸³ Such a style of playing guitar can possibly be explained by metal musicians who often lack a formal music education. Thus, the absence of tonality in the music is not necessarily deliberate but rather a result of following the tradition of other metal musicians who preceded death metal.

⁸⁴ Esa Lilja, *Characteristic of Heavy Metal Chord Structures: Their Acoustic and Modal Construction, and Relation to Modal and Tonal Context* (Licentiate Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2004), 23.

chord inversion. In other words, for Lilja, “heavy metal chord constructing seems to be more similar to the intervallic practices of *figured bass*.”⁸⁵

Figure 1.5. (0:12-0:23) Introduction section in “Leprosy” – Death (1988)

Power chords in extreme metal are often arpeggiated in a manner that creates a rhythmic interplay between notes of the power chord. The close proximity between the power chord, minor-sixth interval, and tritone facilitates left-hand movement from one note to another. “Like power chords these sixths are quite rich in sound – due to their distorted quality.”⁸⁶ Added intervals, such as the three aforementioned, that are played in combinations with power chords (as opposed to replacing the fifth with an added interval) will be distinguished from typical dyads for the remainder of this chapter and will be referred to as triadic motifs. For example, the bottom guitar in figure 1.5, a transcription of the song “Leprosy” by the band Death, is built with a single triadic motif of 1-p5-m6 that is moved in parallel motion of half steps and thirds. The added parentheses in figure 1.6, should help readers to see the melodic cells more clearly. The first two notes of each melodic cell is a power chord.

⁸⁵ Lilja, *Characteristic of Heavy Metal Chord Structures, Their Acoustic and Modal Construction, and Relation to Modal and Tonal Context*, 22.

⁸⁶ Lilja, *Characteristic of Heavy Metal Chord Structures*, 23.

The image shows a musical score for the introduction of the song "Leprosy" by the band Death. The score is in 12/8 time and consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is a guitar tablature. The tablature shows a sequence of notes: (1-3-4), (1-3-4), (5-7-8), (5-7-8), (0-2-3), (0-2-3), (4-6-7), (4-6-7).

Figure 1.6. (0:23-0:34) Introduction section in “Leprosy” – Death (1988)

Pitch Syntax: Death Metal and Horror Films

Death’s approach mirrors that of horror film composer John Carpenter. Composers of such films rely heavily on certain musical practices in order to scare their audience appropriately. According to Philip Hayward, music’s capacity to “create tension and shock supplementary to narrative and visual designs is a key element in the horror genre.”⁸⁷ A good example is Carpenter’s theme in the classic horror movie *Halloween* which is built around a 1-p5-b6 motif that moves downward in parallel motion by minor seconds (see figure 1.7).

Even though Carpenter did not compose or perform his works on guitar, his success as a composer – additionally to the sheer success of the *Halloween* franchise alone, “probably the most successful horror film of all time” according to Hayward – resulted in the mass distribution of Carpenter’s musical style directly to the ears of various metal musicians.⁸⁸ The *Halloween* franchise was so successful that it created a new genre of so-called ‘slasher’ films.⁸⁹ Thus, perhaps Carpenter’s name was not necessarily known by everyone in the death metal scene, but the fact that a majority of metal musicians have often made use of iconography from various horror movies makes a strong case for death metal musicians’ general familiarity with horror film music. Readers can refer to figure 1.8 for a list of other pieces and bands with the same approach (r-p5-b6 melodic fragment).

⁸⁷ Philip Hayward, *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound, and Horror Cinema* (Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2009), 1-2.

⁸⁸ Hayward, *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound, and Horror Cinema*, 1.

⁸⁹ Hayward, *Terror Tracks*, 1.

Figure 1.7. *Halloween* theme – John Carpenter (1978)

Film music composed by John Carpenter	Transposition	Melodic sequence of metal	Metal piece
Halloween (1978)	Parallel motion in m2	r-5-b6	Death – Trapped in a corner (0:00-0:20)
The Fog (1980)	Parallel motion in m2	r-5-b6	Cynic – Veil of Maya (0:31-0:46)
	Parallel motion in m3	r-5-b6	Suffocation – Lieges of Inveracity (0:03-0:18)
	Parallel motion in m2	r-2-b3-5-b6	Effigy of the Forgotten (0:12-0:21)

Figure 1.8. Other examples of the r-5-b6 motif in the death metal subgenre

Although the root-p5-m6 melodic sequence is a common practice in various forms of metal (including the ones discussed in this chapter), the pertinence of the above analyses is not to stress the importance of those specific intervals (root-p5-m6), but rather to show how a ‘pattern’ on guitar

is often moved up and down on the guitar neck and thus results in sense of harmonic disjuncture which characterizes both certain death metal bands and horror movies. Having said that, I refer readers to Figure 9 which offers an example of a variation of the guitar ‘shape’, or ‘pattern’ and which consists of slightly different intervals, the first three of which are the root, major second, and minor third. For guitarists, the only difference between playing the earlier examples and the one below is that the latter simply requires guitarists to change their third and fourth finger from the adjacent string above (which was required for the r-p5-m6 pattern) and play the same shape with the third and fourth finger now on the same string as the root – as seen in figure 1.9.

Figure 1.9. Bridge section at (1:51-2:19) “Leprosy” – Death

Based on the analyses discussed so far, one might infer that the monolith of death metal is one of horror, fear, violence, and overall eeriness. However, such descriptions are more specifically appropriate for the examples discussed so far in part because of what is afforded to listeners by the general iconography of bands, including, amongst other things, album cover artwork as discussed in the first section of this chapter. Be that as it may, regardless of what is afforded to listeners, are there certain sounds universally recognized as harsh, horrifying, and frightening? Or, on the other hand, are we simply enculturated (by years of watching movies) to associate certain sounds with certain emotions?

Horror films without music would most likely fail to scare viewers, or at least to the same degree.⁹⁰ The suspense in certain scenes can be created by the music alone, e.g. in the case of a scene in the movie that isn't visually or narratively scary – at least not significantly so. Does this mean one can infer that certain sounds are universally deemed frightening, irritating, or harsh? Or have we culturally learned to interpret certain sounds as 'scary' specifically *because* they appear in horror movies? To what degree would the viewer's interpretation of such sounds be influenced by different imagery?

Research in music cognition seems to indicate that there are indeed certain sounds considered as annoying, irritating, or even scary. The latter are those sounds that, according to Daniel Levitin, "consist of short, abrupt, and loud noises."⁹¹ From an evolutionary biological perspective, it seems normal that such sound frightens us because during our time as hunters and gatherers, short, abrupt, and especially loud sounds, represented a potential threat, ambush, or attack from dangerous animals. However, such a scenario would be more likely with low instead of high pitches due to the former more likely to represent a larger animal. Hence why, for Philip Tagg, (as an example), "low pitch is associated with threat, terror, fear, and doom, whereas high pitches are associated with activity, lightness and, if consonant, happiness."⁹²

As for sounds that irritate or annoy us, David Huron proposes an interesting analogy to the phenomenon of sensory dissonance caused by a "visual glare [that] interferes with our ability to see."⁹³ During our primitive history, such interference could have resulted in severe consequences because, as Huron notes, it "degrades the performance of the visual system (the auditory system in music's case) so that we are less able to gather information from the environment"⁹⁴ From a similar evolutionary biological perspective as the above paragraph, as hunters and gatherers, not being able to gather information from our environment meant a possible risk of not noticing an eminent threat against ourselves personally or against our tribe. According to Huron, a 'sonic glare' that interferes

⁹⁰ See Hayward, *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound, and Horror Cinema*; Nathan Fink, *The Sound of Suspense: an analysis of music in Alfred Hitchcock films*, 9th International Conference of Music Cognition and Perception (2006)

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.610.738&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

⁹¹ Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain On Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Plume, 2006) 92.

⁹² Philip Tagg and Karen Collins, *The Sonic Aesthetics of the Industrial: Re-Constructing Yesterday's Soundscape for Today's Alienation and Tomorrow's Dystopia* (2001), 9.

⁹³ David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge: First MIT Press, 2006) 324-5.

⁹⁴ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 324-5.

with our ability to hear will most likely stem from intervals such as the tritone and minor second as well as any “dense and loud sonorities containing many close pitches.”⁹⁵

The physiological descriptions of music listening in the above paragraph, although accurate, should nonetheless take into account the two following considerations: context and competence/experience. Some listeners enjoy dissonance and thus won't react as negatively as one who might encounter harsh dissonance for the first time. Additionally, certain harsh sounds or intervals have come to represent very specific emotions largely because of the public's enculturation to emotions evoked from the sound/image relationship across the span of a film. Listeners, according to Simon Frith, “have learned what emotions and stories sound like” because of film scores.⁹⁶

Conclusion

This chapter served as an introduction to two subgenres under the umbrella of extreme metal: death metal and black metal. I presented readers to the genealogy which begins in a nascent form with thrash metal, followed by death metal, and finally, black metal. Additionally to the historical account, each subgenre was discussed in relation to its most distinctive musical practice and iconography. The purpose of such analysis was to introduce readers to certain musical and visual distinctions between death metal and black metal. The former was subsequently discussed further in the second half of this chapter which focused on pitch syntax as well as a musical practice characteristic of both death metal and horror film music: ‘melodic sequences’.

The next chapter will expand on the difference between the two aforementioned subgenres but the focus will shift to timbre (studio production and performance). Chapter Two's focus on timbre will ease discussions on different strains of both death metal and black metal – some of which were briefly hinted at in the present chapter, raw black metal being but one example. Descriptive terms such as ‘raw’ and ‘heavy’ will be explored further in the next chapter because both terms, as readers will see, serve to distinguish the aesthetic intentions between both death metal and black metal. However, before elaborating on the aesthetic distinctions, a discussion is required in order for readers to understand exactly *what* timbres constitute metal's sonic signature.

⁹⁵ Huron, 324-5.

⁹⁶ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 122.

CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTION OF TIMBRE IN DEATH METAL AND BLACK METAL: SONIC SIGNATURE, SOUND PRODUCTION, AND AESTHETIC INTENTIONS

This chapter will focus on some of metal's most distinctive timbres: instrument distortion (guitar and bass), vocal distortion (screaming), and triggered double-kick bass-drum. The latter two are – for the most part – exclusive to metal whereas instrumental distortion is a staple of other musical styles, e.g., rock music. Scholars nonetheless generally agree distortion is metal's most distinctive timbral characteristic and therefore it will be discussed in greater details than other timbres.⁹⁷ Additionally, this thesis proposes a distinction between timbres resulting from the technological development of audio production as oppose to timbres related to musical performance e.g., instrumental distortion (by means of amplification) as opposed to vocal distortion.⁹⁸ For example, the contribution of the bass in creating a 'heavy' sound was not possible before the 1960's because there was no electric bass amplifier.⁹⁹ The first half of this chapter will mostly deal with timbres related to production and technology whereas timbres related to performance will mainly be discussed in the second half.

The previous chapter dealt with the genealogy of the subgenres, their respective album cover artwork, as well as certain musical practices such as pitch syntax. Its purpose was to provide clarity to readers about the disparity between death metal and black metal. Subsequently, we can now elaborate further on discrepancies between strains of death metal and strains of black metal. Additionally, and of particular interest to scholars of popular music, this chapter follows Ian Reyes' work and seeks answers to “the connection between the rhetoric of subcultural aesthetics, like ‘extreme,’ ‘heavy,’ ‘black,’ or ‘raw’ in this case, and the material artifacts to which these terms become dis/articulated.”¹⁰⁰ For Reyes, such terms as the ones above “are more than subcultural argot they point to real, audible phenomena and, more importantly, to the ways listeners understand

⁹⁷ Duncan Williams, “Tracking timbral changes in metal productions from 1990-2013”, *Metal Music Studies* Volume 1 Number 1 (2015), 48.

⁹⁸ By this, I don't mean to imply that vocal distortion can't be achieved solely with studio production. The opening distorted voice in King Crimson's *21st Century Schizoid Man* provides us with such an example.

⁹⁹ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991), 24.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25 (2013), 18.

their meaning and value.”¹⁰¹ However, Reyes rightly reminds us that although we may theorize sonic signifiers “as a sort of language, the grammar and vocabulary of that language are volatile, subject to changes in the means of production and distribution as well as to changes in audience demographics and tastes.”¹⁰²

Albin Zak distinguished two categories of scholarly research on timbre: those that examine “physical properties” and those that study “rhetorical properties.”¹⁰³ The former examines the “precise characteristics of a sound, and entail[s] a sound’s dynamic envelope, spectrum, and spectral envelope” whereas the latter studies “how a piece is received by a listener and how specific sounds can draw references to specific works, genres, or even meanings.”¹⁰⁴ Discussions of the physical properties of timbre mostly concern audio production. On the other hand, discussions of the rhetorical properties are in the same category as what Walser refers to as “the discursive significance of timbre as a means of articulating power and affect.”¹⁰⁵ My approach for this chapter is to examine both categories in the hope of elucidating what defines the relationship between the physical and the rhetorical properties of timbre. Is it a symbiotic relationship? Or is it a dichotomy?

I. Volume, Distortion, and Heaviness

Walser was one of the first to note that timbre – more specifically, volume combined with distortion – is paramount to the heaviness of heavy metal.¹⁰⁶ However, a musical aesthetic based on ‘high volume’ is not exclusive to metal and originated in certain bands of the 1960s, such as Blue Cheer, MC5, and The Who.¹⁰⁷ Such an aesthetic was not possible before these bands because the technological improvements in amplification only occurred during the 1960s. This quest for loudness was a catalyst for the subsequent development of guitar distortion. Music cognition expert

¹⁰¹ Reyes, “Blacker than Death: Recollecting the ‘Black Turn’”, 18.

¹⁰² Reyes, “Blacker than Death”, 19.

¹⁰³ Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ryan Blakeley, *Genre and Influences: Tracing the Lineage of Timbre and Form in Steven Wilson's Progressive Rock* (Master Thesis, University of Ottawa, 2017), 34.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 44.

¹⁰⁶ Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, 41-5.

¹⁰⁷ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 18.

David Huron says that “loudness is known to increase physiological arousal and there are good reasons for organisms to be highly aroused by sounds.”¹⁰⁸

Distortion is defined as a “truncation of the part of an input signal that exceeds certain voltage limits” thus resulting in “additional high-frequency harmonics or *combination tones* at the various sums and differences of the frequency components of the input signal.”¹⁰⁹ The audible distinction between overdrive and distortion is mainly attributed to the way the sound wave is clipped. For example, clipping occurs when an amplifier attempts to deliver a higher output voltage than it can handle. Higher voltage excess results in a harder clipping compared to a soft clipping which doesn’t exceed the voltage capabilities of the amplifier to the same degree. Overdrive is produced by soft clipping while distortion occurs when there is hard clipping. The latter results in a wider spectrum of overtones (higher and lower frequencies) and more audibly pronounced amount of overtones.¹¹⁰ Distortion, compared with overdrive, sounds blurrier – thus more ‘chaotic’ – and sonically conveys more aggression.

Although distortion exists in other styles of music - including pop music – its use is usually restricted to high frequencies at the limit of the threshold of human hearing (15,000-20,000Hz) whereas metal applies distortion to the lower range of the frequency spectrum. The result is an extremely dense low range, one that is denser than what can be found in most any other music. Metal’s dense low range can be partly be attributed to two tendencies among guitarist. First, metal guitarist tend to remain in the lower range of their instrument, the two lowest guitar strings, the E and A string predominating. Second, there is a tendency for death metal bands to gravitate towards lower guitar tunings, or ‘scordatura.’ The combination of the acoustic properties of distortion played in low registers creates an acoustic phenomenon referred to as ‘spectral masking’. For Mark Mynett, spectral masking is created by “the increased spectral energy and density resulting from the guitar signal’s harmonic distortion which casts a sonically dense blanket over the majority of the other instruments and sounds involved.”¹¹¹ The sonically dense blanket of spectral masking over other

¹⁰⁸ David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge: First MIT Press, 2006), 34.

¹⁰⁹ Chen-Gia Tsai, Li-Ching Wang, Shwu-Fen Wang, Yio-Wha Shau, Tzu-Yu Hsiao, & Wolfgang Auhagen, “Aggressiveness of the Growl-like Timbre: Acoustic Characteristics, Musical Implications, and Biomechanical Mechanisms”, *Music Perception* Volume 27 Issue 3 (2010), 211-2.

¹¹⁰ Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 43.

¹¹¹ Mark Mynett, “The Distortion Paradox: Analyzing Contemporary Metal Production”, in *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 68.

instruments tends to hinder the individual clarity of other instruments. From the point of view of music cognition, Huron notes that acoustic properties characterized by “the presence of intense, rich spectra” are often associated with anger and fear.¹¹² Perhaps such associations may explain the two tendencies amongst metal guitarists described in the paragraph’s beginning.

The Affect of Distortion (Rhetorical Properties)

“The timbres, performance, and musical structure of metal communicates feelings of power and aggression.”¹¹³ Various scholars have “identified power as the most important concept that unifies otherwise opposed metal subgenres.”¹¹⁴ According to Walser, metal’s extreme amount of volume and distortion, coupled with its dense low end leads to the common idea that metal is synonymous with power.¹¹⁵ Power is sonically represented as unrestrained “sheer volume...meant to overwhelm, to sweep the listener into the sound, and then to lend the listener the sense of power that the sound provides.”¹¹⁶ However, Jonathan Pieslak describes such music with loud volume as acting like an “empowering agent” as opposed to simply being a “dominating force over the fan.”¹¹⁷

The pain-pleasure dichotomy refers to the way different individuals appreciate certain styles of music over other styles. Music rarely has the same meaning for everyone, let alone appreciated positively by everyone. The same is true for the concept of power in metal which “operates in a context-dependent, multi-faceted, but diametrically opposed way.”¹¹⁸ In his study of American soldiers fighting in the Second Gulf War, Pieslak provides a good example of the pain-pleasure dichotomy of metal. “On one hand, soldiers find the music empowering as they prepare for missions and patrols; on the other, the power element within metal sound frustrates and irritates insurgents.”¹¹⁹ The latter example refers in part to insurgents – detained by the American army during the Iraq War – who were exposed to metal played at high volumes for long periods of time. This form of mild torture was not meant to “sonically antagonize a person” but rather, “to sonically

¹¹² Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 324.

¹¹³ Jonathan Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 150.

¹¹⁴ Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*, 137.

¹¹⁵ Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 43-5.

¹¹⁶ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 23.

¹¹⁷ Pieslak, *Sound Targets*, 137.

¹¹⁸ Pieslak, 169.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 169.

overstimulate them such that they would agree to answer questions in order to make the sound stop.”¹²⁰

In the case of soldiers during wartime, the reasons for distortion as psychologically empowering – or indeed, overpowering – are twofold: loudness and a wide range of overtones. However, as mentioned before, loudness may increase physiological arousal but it does not necessarily connote aggression by itself. Sheila Whiteley attributes the “aggressiveness” and “painfully piercing effect” of metal to instrument and vocal distortion, rather than volume. Distorted guitar “produces an aggressive quality through the introduction of many high frequency harmonics.”¹²¹ Thus, when the physiological arousal of loudness is combined with the aggressive inducing acoustic properties of distortion, it “psychologically empowers soldiers by communicating an energized aggressor’s mindset.”¹²²

II. Sonic Characteristics and Studio Production: Death Metal and Black Metal

Duncan Williams’ work concerns the evolution of timbral change in metal production. According to Williams, “the metal scene has undergone an evolution in sonic characteristics that is partially rooted in music technology developments and associated production techniques that have given rise to a set of identifiably distinct ‘metal’ timbres”, some of which are: “the sound of triggered drum samples, sound replacement, ‘re-amping’ guitar and bass signals, and the restricted dynamic range of the loudness war.”¹²³ The latter is “a production trend accompanying the digital era” in which contemporary albums often sound louder than those released in previous decades. This idea is “well-grounded in a controversy within professional audio circles concerned with the so-called ‘loudness wars.’”¹²⁴ Although the digital loudness war is by no means restricted to metal, “the issue of manipulating dynamic range compression in order to increase perceptual loudness in modern

¹²⁰ Pieslak, *Sound Targets*, 87.

¹²¹ Sheila Whiteley, “Progressive Rock and Psychedelic Coding in the Work of Jimi Hendrix” in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 260.

¹²² Pieslak, *Sound Targets*, 152.

¹²³ Williams, “Tracking timbral changes in metal productions from 1990-2013”, 39.

¹²⁴ Ryan Moore, “Sound, Technology, and Interpretation in Subcultures of Heavy Music Production” (PhD diss. University of Pittsburg, 2008), 128.

music production is perhaps even more pertinent to the metal genre than in other popular music forms.”¹²⁵

Sound replacement and re-amping are two other contemporary techniques of sound production. The former refers to the practice of producers who replace, modify, or add pre-recorded kick-drum samples to a live drummer’s recorded performance.¹²⁶ For example, musical passages of relentless streams of notes can be recorded in its entirety without the need for the musician to start over after every mistake – except in the case of a catastrophic mistake!

On the other hand, re-amping can be thought of as a way to facilitate the deliberate manipulation of an instrument’s tone. As an example, it was previously common practice to record guitars with the distorted guitar signal originating from the amplifier and going directly in a recording console. However, modern technology of amplifier modeling – defined as a digital software that offer guitarists a device with hundreds of digitally-produced guitar tones – is often used in combination with another established practice in contemporary metal production: “re-amping, whereby clean guitar sounds are recorded, and then at the mix stage, sent out to real amplifiers to be recorded back into the DAW” (digital audio workstation).¹²⁷

Triggers are “devices that produce an electronically sampled sound whenever a kick drum is struck.”¹²⁸ Consequently, triggers tend to result in a ‘punchier’ tone for bass-drum which is something sought after by most metal drummers. However, in the case of death metal and black metal, the use of triggers is used in a contrasting manner: it is almost obligatory for death metal drummers whereas triggers are eschewed in black metal. In terms of audio mixing, triggers add definition and clarity to double-kick bass-drum. “For recording engineers, this allows for greater ease in avoiding masking problems between the overlapping frequencies of the kick drums, bass, and guitar.”¹²⁹ However, certain fans consider triggers to be controversial because they allow “drummers to produce rapid double-kick rhythms with a consistent spectral envelope and dynamic level (i.e. precisely controlled articulation and volume) between attacks, regardless of how inconsistently the two drums are actually struck.”¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Williams, “Tracking timbral changes in metal productions from 1990-2013”, 39.

¹²⁶ Williams, 63.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 51.

¹²⁸ Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015”, 147.

¹²⁹ Smialek, 147.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Taking the kick drum as an example, we have here an instance of timbre engendered from technological advancement. On the other hand, a constant double-bass kick-drum at lightning speed is an example of a timbre engendered from musical performance. Discussion relating to the former will expand on advancing technologies such as drum triggers. Subsequently, an examination of the rhetorical properties will follow specifically in regards to the double-bass kick-drum being akin to a machine gun relentlessly firing rounds of bullets. The combination of the double bass-drum's sonority along with music videos containing scenes of war, death, chaos, and violence, resulted in a music that unabashedly embraced the semiotic connotation of anger, violence, and death in their music

Harrell was the first to point to the analogy between the sound of bullets fired from a machine gun and the engendered sound of playing relentless and unsyncopated rhythms on the double bass drum.¹³¹ The constant attack of unsyncopated notes mimics the sound of a machine gun. "The violent expression of power associated with firing a gun becomes sonically replicated in the rhythm of the music."¹³² Speaking about soldiers during the context of war, Pieslak speculates that "soldiers may feel empowered by the music, which, for them, evokes the sound of combat."¹³³

Death Metal Studio Production: Hyperrealism and Heaviness

As mentioned in the first chapter, Scott Burns' role as an engineer and producer played a crucial role in creating the Florida death metal sound which "boomed in the early 1990s."¹³⁴ Additionally, black metal's genesis and subsequently its approach to production was largely a reaction against Burns' production style. Thus, studio production functions as an important stylistic marker between death metal and black metal. However, more importantly than simply noticing the disparity in production between both subgenres, it is also important to know *what* constituted Burn's production style. As Reyes says, "Burns' interpretation of heaviness defined the genre at the time, specifically the combination of exaggerated, muddy bass; tightly focused drums; prominent vocals; and inhumanly precise performances."¹³⁵

¹³¹ Jack Harrell, "The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock", *Popular Music & Society* 18/1 (1994), 93.

¹³² Pieslak, *Sound Targets*, 150.

¹³³ Pieslak, 150.

¹³⁴ Reyes, *Blacker than Death: Recollecting the 'Black Turn'*, 16.

¹³⁵ Reyes, *Blacker than Death*, 16.

The foundation of a musically tight band rests on the rhythmic skills and sensibilities of the drummer. “Because the drummer’s role is so crucial to a band’s ability to communicate ensemble virtuosity, recording engineers must ensure that drummers’ performances sound both intricate and discernable regardless of whether or not they can play consistently at a virtuosic level.”¹³⁶ For Weinstein, such an approach to production gives an ambiguous “appearance of virtuosity.”¹³⁷ In the case of Williams, production of “modern metal drums are doctored, unauthentic and over-processed, yet this style of engineering is the standard.”¹³⁸ However, the purpose of production as described in this section is not to portray virtuosity per se, but rather, to increase the listener’s sense of heaviness in the music.

The timbral characteristics discussed in this section so far all share one thing in common: they all add power (via volume or non-human performance precision) to not only every instrument in a band, but also to the final mix as a whole. The loudness war creates a sense of high volume in listeners and thus of intensity. Re-amping allows for more precise performance execution during the recording process and triggers do the same for live performances or studio recordings. Additionally, “in order to precisely control the dynamic and equalization levels of all parts of a drum kit, sound engineers often place microphones on every drum so that they may record each part to its own track.”¹³⁹ This is what both Smialek and Reyes refer to when they speak of hyper-virtuosity in metal. For Reyes, “the hyper-realistic result it produces, comparable to the up-close sound effects of an action film, is often avoided by recordists in other genres who opt for more holistic, room-based microphoning.”¹⁴⁰

Thus, *what* constitutes a heavy sound should start to become less vague at this point. As I mentioned in the above paragraph, the timbres introduced in this section all add ‘power’, but also heaviness to metal’s sonic signature. Before concluding this section, the citation below is from an excerpt of Reyes’ interview with studio engineer Alan Miller. The latter describes “how the three-dimensions of a mix are organized for aesthetic impact” by which in the case of metal, conveys “a heavy sound.”¹⁴¹ In other words, Miller describes the relationship between sound production and

¹³⁶ Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015”, 147.

¹³⁷ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 83.

¹³⁸ Williams, “Tracking timbral changes in metal productions from 1990-2013”, 44.

¹³⁹ Moore, “Sound, Technology, and Interpretation in Subcultures of Heavy Music Production”, 226.

¹⁴⁰ Moore, 226.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 68.

'heaviness'. Additionally, the text below encapsulates some of the ideas that were discussed in this section.

Spatially—I should say, depth-wise—heavy music tends to live mostly close. That is, heavier sounds seem to be closer to the listener than not, and then things that are further away from the listener tend to stand out as special effects. At least in my experience of heavy music, typically there are very, very few ambience cues. The ambience cues that are there tend to be tight and small, so it seems like you're in a small space, which again conveys being close to the performers. The term “in-your-face” gets used a lot. Where, if everything was sort of bathed in reverb, it's not going to be in your face because it's over there, it's far away, non-threatening. Heavy is up here [puts hand in face] and in-your-face and threatening. And width cues, if something appears to be very wide coming out a stereo image that can add to aggression. So you tend to find guitars that occupy the full stereo width and the drums tend to be right up the middle to be sort of central and focused and pinpointed in-your-face, and the vocals tend to live there as well, but the guitars kind of envelope everything, and that's a common thing.¹⁴²

Black Metal's Rebellion of Sound Production

There are various reasons for why practitioners of black metal opt for a lo-fi sound production. For example, it functions as support for the bleakness in the music itself but also to complement the grim and dark lyrics. Themes can revolve around depression much more often in black metal than in death metal – so much so that there is even subgenre called 'depressive black metal' and I will discuss this in Chapter Four. However, black metal production is largely meant as a rebellion against death metal, but also against what black metal musicians see as the pop music industry – with their overproduced, almost fake, mass-marketed music – telling the world how music is supposed to sound. As Gylve “Fenriz” Nagell, drummer of Darkthrone says, black metal is meant as a response to a society where “everything is made to be shiny.”¹⁴³ Drawing on the work of Scott Wilson, Jesse McWilliams says that “black metal denies the validity of artificial production as attributions of meaning because it rings out in the impenetrable darkness of [...] intellectual emptiness.”¹⁴⁴

Black metal musicians take pride in recording their songs in one take, even if it contains many mistakes. They make no effort at taking the time to get a good guitar sound. As Varg Vikernes

¹⁴² Alan Miller in interview by Ian Reyes on 5/21/2006; Moore, “Sound, Technology, and Interpretation in Subcultures of Heavy Music Production”, 68-9.

¹⁴³ Cited from *Until the Light Takes Us*. Dir. Aaron Aites & Audrey Ewell. 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Scott Wilson, *Basileus philosophorum metaloricum*, (Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium, 1. 2012) p.45; taken from Jesse McWilliams, “Dark epistemology: An assessment of philosophical trends in the black metal music of Mayhem”, *Metal Music Studies* Volume 1 Number 1 (2015), 36.

attests in *Until The Light Takes Us*, when he records a guitar, he finds the cheapest guitar amplifier possible then he randomly places the mic on the speaker without bothering to do any sound tests.¹⁴⁵ The result is a dense sonic chaos of piercing distortion condensed to high frequencies and a haunting screeching voice uttering unrecognizable words.

The poor audio quality of black metal can be construed negatively as an indolent approach to studio production, i.e., being too lazy to bother with a decent audio production quality. However, fans of black metal are more likely to construe the lo-fi audio quality as authentic in comparison to all other forms of metal. The lo-fi production in black metal, as Smialek points out, “became a floating signifier for authenticity built on the seriousness of purpose that the transgressive criminal activities (i.e. church burnings and murders) of Norwegian black metal musicians came to represent.”¹⁴⁶

Although not related to black metal, Alan Moore’s discussion of stylistic development (in progressive rock acts Gentle Giant and Genesis) is in line with the above paragraph. “The greater accessibility gained by Genesis and Gentle Giant could be construed as maturing...but could equally be seen as a loss of vitality and settling for the easy way out.”¹⁴⁷ A similar dichotomy of meaning exists in regards to the lo-fi quality of black metal’s audio production (as opposed to a dichotomy of meaning on stylistic development as in Moore’s example).

III. The Voice – Performance Timbre

A general distinction can be made about the voice’s timbral properties across different subgenres of extreme metal. For reasons of concision, however, I will limit my analytic comparison of the voice to the two extreme metal subgenres discussed so far: death metal and black metal. Beyond merely pointing out the existence of these differences, this section will focus on the voice’s timbral and acoustic difference that “serve to separate aesthetic goals” between the death metal growl and black metal screech.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Cited from *Until the Light Takes Us*, Ewell.

¹⁴⁶ Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015”, 142.

¹⁴⁷ Alan Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock. Second edition* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 215.

¹⁴⁸ Smialek, 256.

Alan Moore proposed four factors that characterized individual vocal styles: register and range, degree of resonance, and a singer's attitude towards both pitch and rhythm.¹⁴⁹ Factors two and four (register and range; a singer's attitude towards rhythm) are of particular interest because, as we shall see below, timbral and rhythmic analyses are more salient for metal – more so than traditional melodic analyses – and thus both factors (a singer's degree of resonance and attitude toward rhythm) will be of primary concern for the analysis on voice in this chapter. A voice's degree of resonance refers to richness and quality of overtones that distinguishes one voice from another, i.e., timbre. The timbral function of the voice in metal will be discussed first which will lead to an analysis of the voice's attitude towards rhythm.

Vocal Distortion

For some musicians, causing a reaction, whether good or bad, is a bigger indicator of artistic success than any other commercial endeavor could be. Pushing the limits of the human voice in a way that actually blurs our perception of what a human sounds like is not surprising considering metal's passion for shock. The resulting vocals can sometimes sound so alien due to the fact that “growling is neither part of the symbolic order of speech, nor is it the affective *jouissance* of screaming...like screaming, it is un-gendered and disembodied.”¹⁵⁰

The range from a lighter distortion à la Metallica – where comprehension of words is mostly intact – to an extreme distortion à la Napalm Death – where “the audible but utterly indiscernible lyrics carried on the wall of sound express a deliberate disruption in language and comprehensibility, presenting and distorting the very tools of speech and audible clarity that make political communication possible.”¹⁵¹ Napalm Death's seminal first album was released in 1987 and was the catalyst for the grindcore subgenre. Grindcore is another subgenre under the umbrella of extreme metal for whom the vocals pushed “the genre from music into noise.”¹⁵²

Vocalists who distort their voice to their maximum capabilities prevents listeners from comprehending the lyrics in a clear manner. Why would a vocalist want to render it difficult to understand his/her lyrics? A partial explication is provided by Nicola Allet's discussion with metalheads on the affective response of music listening. Allett learned that fans evaluated whether a

¹⁴⁹ Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*, 45-7.

¹⁵⁰ Rosemary Overell, *I hate girls and emotions: Negotiating masculinity in grindcore music* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 210.

¹⁵¹ Niall Scott, *Heavy metal and the deafening threat of the apolitical* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 240.

¹⁵² Overell, *I hate girls and emotions: Negotiating masculinity in grindcore music*, 208.

piece of music was good based on the technique and talent of musicians, rather than the feelings or words of the piece.¹⁵³ This means that “a song’s inherent meaning of vital power is more important than any delineated meaning presented in the lyrics.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the justification for indiscernible lyrics seems to be that ‘vocal power’ is typically given greater importance than ‘clear enunciation’ of the words.

Thus, in line with the above paragraph, one must alter his/her perception of the voice as a ‘melodic instrument’ because “melody is relatively less important in metal than many other kinds of music.”¹⁵⁵ Michelle Phillipov describes the vocals in death metal as “aggressive, relentless” and playing “an almost exclusively percussive role.”¹⁵⁶ However, metal’s “avoidance of melody...can also easily lead one to believe that the extreme metal voice relies solely on rhythm for musical interest.”¹⁵⁷ Although, rhythm is undoubtedly important, timbre is also much more significant in metal – more so than in other styles of music.¹⁵⁸

The lack of melody in extreme metal vocals creates a greater “importance for timbre and articulation, placing a particular emphasis on the acoustical differences found in consonants and [...] place an even greater importance on the timbral variation of vowels” to express different shades of emotions.¹⁵⁹ Thus, extreme metal vocal “prompt us to think differently about how musical parameters that are often considered in isolation from one another—pitch and timbre in particular—exist interdependently.”¹⁶⁰

The first distinctions between death metal and black metal vocalist is the different techniques used in both subgenres and which subsequently results in different voice registers. Death metal growls are a performance technique by which vocalists “use the membranous folds above the vocal cords to exert pressure on the larynx to produce a deep, guttural growl that is virtually unused outside extreme metal music.”¹⁶¹ By contrast, the term ‘brightness’ is “perceptually associated with a

¹⁵³ Nicola Allett, *The extreme metal 'connoisseur'* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 173.

¹⁵⁴ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 34.

¹⁵⁵ Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 50.

¹⁵⁶ Michelle Phillipov, *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 78, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015”, 239.

¹⁵⁸ Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 50.

¹⁵⁹ Smialek, 239-40.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 239.

¹⁶¹ Phillipov, *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits*, 74-5.

high concentration of upper-register spectral energy [and] generally distinguishes black metal vocals from the lower frequency voices in death metal.”¹⁶²

Aesthetic Goals: Death or Black

A generalization on the ‘aesthetic goal’ of both subgenres (death metal and black metal) can be made in regards to “the different amount of emphasis that black metal places on evil and death metal places on power.”¹⁶³ “Black metal screams that follow an arch-like path through vowel space express an ominous, even majestic, presence in contrast to the startling effect with which death metal screams often begin.”¹⁶⁴ “While death metal screams usually occupy a fixed position in vowel space appropriate to the depiction of a stabilized source of power, a prolonged meandering movement can better depict the presence of a festering evil.”¹⁶⁵

Additionally to the distinctive techniques of vocalists in both subgenres, there are other factors – some of which have been discussed already – which reinforce the aesthetic goals respective to each style (‘power’ in the case of death metal as opposed to ‘evil’ in black metal). The semiotic field afforded to fans in death metal is quite different from what is afforded to black metal and this thesis has so far explored some of these differences with respect to album cover artwork, studio production, and the respective history of each subgenre. Although all three factors are important, the latter is particularly significant because of black metal’s infamous history which includes acts of murder, assault, and numerous church burnings. Thus, even if death metal plays with horror fantasies, the history of the subgenre is not marked by the same controversies as black metal. I suspect that black metal’s history influences the semiotic field afforded to fans, i.e. it reinforces the idea that black metal connotes evil.

The dichotomy of the aesthetic goals of death metal and black metal is underpinned by another distinction between the voices in both subgenres: death metal favors a rhythmic approach much more often than black metal. As readers will see in the section below, a rhythmic voice that accents upbeats can be construed as connoting aggression or power – an approach barely used in black metal which thus is in line with the aesthetic differences presented in the above section. Therefore, although black metal won’t be discussed in the remaining portion of this chapter, the fact

¹⁶² Smialek, “Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music”, 237.

¹⁶³ Smialek, 256.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 264-5.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 265.

that a rhythmic analysis is more pertinent to death metal is additional proof of the aesthetic differences between the subgenres.

Rhythmic Function of Vocal

According to Simon Frith, the “basic rhythmic devices” of rap and rock are “dependent on language, on the ways words rhyme and syllables count.”¹⁶⁶ As we shall see below, the ‘basic rhythmic devices’ of metal vocalists are also dependent on language – especially syllable counts – but have a greater dependence on the metric placement of accented words and syllables, i.e., accented syllables on strong beats as opposed to weak beats. The rhythmic devices of vocalists in metal parallel what Moore defines as a singer’s attitude towards rhythm: “the rhythmic tension between a (wayward) voice and a (strict) rhythm section” characterized by both “syncopation (anticipation of and delaying behind the beat) and the ways the beat is subdivided.”¹⁶⁷ Metal’s reduced dependence on language – in comparison to rap music – can partly be attributed to the increase in vocal distortion which in turn reduces the listener’s ability to comprehend the lyrics.

As mentioned earlier, fans of metal value the music more than the lyrics – even more so for fans of extreme metal due to the lyrics not necessarily being comprehensible. David Geliebter, Ari J. Ziegler & Evan Mandery concluded in their study – on fans of rap and metal – that fans of rap had a better memory recollection of the lyrics than fans of metal, i.e., fans of metal pay less attention to the lyrics, or at the very least, they have a weaker ability to memorize and recall the words.¹⁶⁸ Be that as it may, Kyle Adams, in his analysis of the voice in rap music, argues that “the best approach [to rap] is first to disregard the semantic meaning of the lyrics, and to treat the syllables of text simply as consonant/vowel combinations that occupy specific metrical locations.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, if an analysis of rap is best approached by disregarding the semantic meaning of the lyrics, the same is likely true regarding an analysis of metal (because fans place even less importance of the lyrics in metal).

Adams’ work consist of two different analytical approaches: first, analyzing rhythmic features of lyrics with surface features of the accompaniment. Second: analyzing the musical layer

¹⁶⁶ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 175.

¹⁶⁷ Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*, 46.

¹⁶⁸ See David Geliebter, Ari J. Ziegler & Evan Mandery, “Lyrical Stresses of Heavy Metal and Rap”, *Metal Music Studies* Volume 1 Issue 1 (2015), 143-53.

¹⁶⁹ Kyle Adams, “Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap”, *Journal of the Society for Music Theory* Volume 14 No2 May (2008), 3.

created by the lyrics themselves and how they contribute “to other layers of musical meaning.”¹⁷⁰ Adams’ analytical approach – especially the greater focus on the musical meaning of lyrics that characterizes the second approach – is refreshing in the broader context of scholarly research on rap that was hitherto mostly concerned with the semantic meaning of lyrics. A great deal of Adams’ work concerns what rappers and audiences refers to as “flow” – of which the three main components are the placement of accented syllables, the placement of rhymed syllables, and the correspondence between syntactical and metrical units.¹⁷¹ However, Adams also characterizes ‘flow’ more broadly:

‘Flow’ may be thought of as the rap equivalent to what instrumentalists call ‘technique,’ a set of tools enabling the performer to most accurately convey his/her expressive meaning. In instrumental performance, these comprise the musician’s approach to legato, breath control, pedaling, fingering, and other skills specific to the instrument. The difference with rap, I will argue, is that a rapper’s flow creates its own new rhythmic layers that become an integral part of the musical fabric—as when an instrumentalist uses articulation or accentuation to create large-scale melodic connections not otherwise obvious to the listener.¹⁷²

Such a definition seems suitable for the voice in metal as well. Therefore, my analysis on the function of the voice will borrow from Adams conceptualization of flow: a combination of metrical and articulative techniques that convey expressive meaning (see figure 2.1). However, metal vocalists seem to favor ‘the placement of accented syllables’ technique over the ‘the placement of rhyming syllables’. The hegemony of one technique over the other confirms two important issues mentioned earlier: first, fans value the power of the music – or musicianship – rather than the lyrics – or even a clear pronunciation of the words. Second, when compared with fans of rap, fans of metal have a weaker ability to recall song lyrics.

Besides the two reasons aforementioned, metal vocalists favor the placement of accented syllables because of their greater connotation of anger. Gangsta-rap is often considered to be the most aggressive form of rap music and interestingly enough it is also a subgenre of rap in which with accented syllables are ubiquitous. N-W-A are often considered as the creators of gangsta-rap. Adams describes a typical N-W-A. rhythmic flow which connotes anger as one “punctuated by off-beat

¹⁷⁰ Kyle Adams, “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music”, *Journal of the Society for Music Theory* Volume 15 No.5 (2009), 2.

¹⁷¹ Adams, “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music”, 2.

¹⁷² Adams, 2.

accents and syncopated rhythms.”¹⁷³ For Adams, “the placement of accented syllables, contributes both to the overall organization of the verse and to its general affect.”¹⁷⁴ The affect engendered from a rhythmic flow punctuated with off-beat accented syllables is an important reason for the ubiquity of the technique in metal.

Metrical techniques	Articulative techniques
The placement of rhyming syllables	The amount of legato or staccato used
The placement of accented syllables	The degree of articulation of consonants
The degree of correspondence between syntactic units and measures	The extent to which the onset of any syllable is earlier or later than the beat

Figure 2.1. A rapper’s set of tools (Adams, 2009) (Graph created by author)

Conclusion

Whereas discussions in Chapter One mostly concerned the general boundaries between death metal and black metal, the present chapter was more concerned with the specific timbres that characterize the sonic signature of death metal and black metal. The sound production of death metal plays a crucial role in creating its sonic signature: every single one of the timbres related to technology (triggers, re-amping, sound replacement, and loudness war) contributed in creating the sound as ‘heavy’. Alternatively, black metal musicians for the most part eschews every timbre considered sacred by death metal – hence why black metal is rarely described as ‘heavy’ but instead as ‘raw’. Although the latter terms may have a negative connotation for some, black metal fans construe of the raw sound production as equating authenticity – an idea explored further in Chapter Four.

An important point for readers to remember is that the musical examples in the next chapter (Chapter Three) are mostly culled from death metal and progressive metal repertoires. However, readers may now be in a better position to understand why rhythmic/metric complexities are more commonplace in death metal than in black metal. First, the sound production of ‘raw’ black metal results in a lack of rhythmic precision that characterizes bands in the next chapter; second, black metal’s rebellion was not solely because to death metal’s sound production and in fact the rebellion was also against death metal’s adherence to virtuosity and complexity. Thus, the next chapter familiarizes readers with certain musical practice regarded as rhythmically complex in comparison to

¹⁷³ Adams, “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music”, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Adams, 6.

other forms of metal whereas, the fourth chapter will discuss black metal's rebellion against virtuosity.

CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTION OF RHYTHM&METER: THE NEXUS OF DEATH METAL & PROGRESSIVE METAL

The focus in this chapter will largely revolve around one of the outlier bands from the Swedish death metal scene: Meshuggah. The reasons for the label 'outlier' is simply due to the fact that Meshuggah is one of those bands situated at the boundaries between two subgenres: death metal and progressive metal. The link with death metal is relatively obvious: Meshuggah came to prominence at the same time as the rise of Swedish death metal in the mid-1990s and the vocals in Meshuggah clearly sets them in the death metal category. However, Meshuggah has been discussed in various scholarly publications over the last decade and they are often attributed the subgenre of progressive metal. Meshuggah's music is marked by rhythmic and metric complexities which also happens to be the main criteria of progressive metal.¹⁷⁵ Thus, the reason for this chapter's inclusion of progressive metal is to highlight the degree of rhythmic complexity that is also present in death metal but absent in black metal. The elements of death metal's rhythmic complexities can be found in their purest form in progressive metal. In line with this, my interest in this chapter concerns the effect of metrical superimposition on preserving or disrupting one or various temporal levels, which in order to do so, various theoretical frameworks will need to be discussed beforehand.

Pieslak, who was the first to write on Meshuggah, considered them to be progressive metal specifically because of their approach to rhythm and meter. However, Gregory R. McCandless, whose work is on the progressive metal band Dream Theater, argued that progressive metal was not properly introduced by Pieslak specifically because of Meshuggah's vocals.¹⁷⁶ In other words, Pieslak defines Meshuggah as progressive metal because of their rhythm language whereas McCandless argues that Meshuggah isn't representative due to, amongst other things, the distorted vocals (screaming).

¹⁷⁵ See Jonathan Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah", *Music Theory Spectrum* Volume 29 Issues 2 (2007), 219-246; Eric Smialek, "Rethinking Metal Aesthetics: Complexity, Authenticity, and Audience in Meshuggah's I and Catch Thirtythr33", (Master's Thesis, McGill University, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ Gregory R. McCandless, "Metal as a Gradual Process: Additive Music Structures in the Music of Dream Theater", *Society for Music Theory* Volume 19 Number 2 (2013), 2.

Meshuggah's music is particularly salient for a rhythmic analysis because as Meshuggah's drummer, Thomas Haake says, "all the instruments in this band are percussive instruments, even down to the vocals."¹⁷⁷ Additionally, we shall see below that Meshuggah fans seem to identify specifically with the rhythmic complexity they perceive in the music. Pieslak notes that progressive metal fans equate rhythmic and metric complexities with virtuosity and subsequently such fans often "attempt to distinguish themselves through their ability to appreciate musical complexities."¹⁷⁸ Thus, "formal analysis plays a significant role not only in the composition of the Meshuggah's music, but operates as a key component in the process of fan identification."¹⁷⁹

There appears to be a consensus among metal scholars – such as Jonathan Pieslak and Bettina Roccor – that "the sound and energy of the music are the most fundamental and immediate aspects with which metal listeners identify."¹⁸⁰ Stryper is an evangelical Christian metal band often used as an example that "the musical experience itself is of primal importance, so much so that ideological distinctions between bands can be dismissed through the affect of the music alone."¹⁸¹ This might seem odd for an outsider, but as an interviewee of Friesen and Epstein said says: "What counts is that they can thrash it out."¹⁸²

The above paragraph, although accurate, leaves out the fact that fans can identify with different aspects of the music. In the case of metal subculture, Pieslak noted that fan identification "appears to be shaped at its most rudimentary and 'popular' level around the music," but with two different musical aspects: sound/timbre or musical complexity.¹⁸³ Thus, since the previous chapter dealt with questions relating to timbre, this chapter will focus on musical complexity – more specifically: rhythmic and metrical complexity. Is it common for fans to establish an identification with temporal complexities in the music? If so, are there metal subgenres in which it occurs more frequently?

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Thomas Haake in *Metal Evolution: Progressive Metal*. Dirs. Sam Dunn and Scott McFadyen. 2011.

¹⁷⁸ Jonathan Pieslak, "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", *Popular Music* Volume 27/1 (2008), 47.

¹⁷⁹ Pieslak, "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", 47.

¹⁸⁰ Pieslak, 45.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁸² Bruce Epstein and Jonathan Friesen, "Rock 'n' Roll Ain't Noise Pollution: Artistic Conventions and Tensions in the Major Subgenres of Heavy Metal Music", *Popular Music and Society* Vol.18 No3 (1994), 7.

¹⁸³ Pieslak, "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", 46.

The idea that fans find meaning in the rhythmic complexity they perceive in the music is supported by music cognition research. As Daniel Levitin has noted, “metrical extraction, knowing what the pulse is and when we expect it to occur, is a crucial part of musical emotion. Music communicates to us emotionally through systematic violations of expectations.”¹⁸⁴ The reason for this is twofold and has to do with the most ancient part of the brain: the cerebellum. First, research in music cognition indicates that the cerebellum is the part of the brain that is “involved closely with timing and with coordinating movements of the body.”¹⁸⁵ Second, compelling evidence has been amassed that the “cerebellum contains massive connections to emotional centers of the brain.”¹⁸⁶

Many scholars have attributed rhythmic/metric complexity as progressive metal’s most salient characteristic. As McCandless avers, “the most salient ‘progressive’ aspect of Dream Theater’s sound is its rhythmic and metric complexity, a trait that typifies progressive metal as a subgenre.”¹⁸⁷ For Pieslak, the progressive metal subgenre maintains the loud, distorted guitar timbre characteristic of metal music in general, but progressive metal additionally “emphasizes a sophisticated musical structure, particularly with regard to rhythm and meter.”¹⁸⁸ Pieslak then goes one step further by saying that “the tendency to focus on rhythmic and metric complexity is often the determining factor” of qualification in the progressive metal subgenre.¹⁸⁹

I. Temporal Organization

Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s *Generative Theory of Tonal Music* is an interdisciplinary book in which music analysis dovetails with linguistics and psychology. Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s theories on grouping and meter as well as the relationship between the two are paramount to this chapter. Grouping structures – or groups – are sound signals which listeners “naturally organize...into units such as motives, themes, phrases, periods, theme-groups, sections, and the pieces itself.”¹⁹⁰ Huron’s

¹⁸⁴ Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The science of a human obsession* (New York: Plume, 2006), 172.

¹⁸⁵ Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The science of a human obsession*, 174-5.

¹⁸⁶ Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music*, 174-5.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory R. McCandless, “Metal as a Gradual Process: Additive Music Structures in the Music of Dream Theater”, 1-2.

¹⁸⁸ Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah”, 244.

¹⁸⁹ Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal”, 244.

¹⁹⁰ Fred Lerdahl & Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 12.

research in music cognition supports Lerdahl and Jackendoff's notion of grouping structures: "Rhythmic patterns roughly one or two seconds in length tend to be processed as mental atoms."¹⁹¹

Juxtaposed to this natural organization of groups is the listener inference of "strong and weak beats to which he relates the actual musical sounds."¹⁹² Additionally, in the same manner that meter describes a listener's natural inference of strong and weak beats within a bar, hypermeter refers to the same process at a higher temporal level, i.e., a listener perceives strong and weak bars within larger groupings. The different temporal levels are referred to as the metric grid. (See figure 3.1)



Figure 3.1. Graph of the metric grid

In the sections below, the discussion of meter will be referred to as the 'divisive' process of time because of the pertinent linguistic distinction between additive and divisive time. Divisive time is ubiquitous in Western music, whereas additive time is a temporal organization associated amongst many others with the music from the Indian subcontinent and many African cultures.¹⁹³

Juxtaposing the Additive and Divisive Process

The ubiquity of rhythmic and metric complexities in progressive metal can possibly be explained by the way progressive metal conceptualizes rhythm and meter. This was first noted by Harris Berger in his work on the temporal perception of metal drummers, i.e., a musician's phenomenology of time during a musical performance. Berger concluded that a metal drummer's conception of time was one in which the additive process is juxtaposed with the divisive process. Drawing from Edmund Husserl's terminology,¹⁹⁴ Berger describes the phenomenology of metal drummers as characterized by the experience of protentions – defined as "anticipations of the near

¹⁹¹ David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge: First MIT Press, 2006), 198.

¹⁹² Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, 12.

¹⁹³ See Simha Arom, *African Polyphony and Polyrhythm. Translated by Martin Thom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁹⁴ See Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (Ed. Martin Heidegger. Trans. James S. Churchill. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

future extant in the thickness of the living present – and retentions – defined as “experiences of the recent past continuously experienced in the thickness of the living present.”¹⁹⁵ As Berger defines it:

Thus, for divisive processes, the primary and defining relationship is between the immediate beat and the protentions and retentions on the level of the bar-as-a-whole; for additive processes, the primary and defining relationship is between the immediate beat and the protentions and retentions on the smaller level of the sub-unit, which in turn are secondarily related to protentions and retentions on the level of the pattern as a whole.¹⁹⁶

Implicit in the above paragraph is the notion that during a music performance, a drummer’s temporal perception is a synchronous juxtaposition of the additive and the divisive process. A drum kit’s array of timbre provides the possibility of attributing distinctive timbres between the additive and divisive processes. As an example in 4/4 time signature, bass drums – which plays on beat one and three – are grouped with the snare drum – which plays beat two and four – in order to form the divisive process whereas the additive process will play a flow of 16th notes on the high-hat. Such an example contains two separate but related units of temporal perception.¹⁹⁷ There are countless possibilities of timbre that can be used to create an additive process and a divisive process. A salient example in metal is to combine a divisive process that groups snare drum with high-hat and an additive process in 16th notes played by the bass drum. The approach just describe encompasses the majority of examples in this chapter – additive process played by the bass-drum and the divisive process played by snare and cymbal.

Berger’s additive/divisive model suggests that two layers of temporal perception exists in a metal performance. However, as noted by Harry Stafylakis, the typical metal audience’s perception seems to be divisive time simply because “their gestures and body movements most closely follow the ‘two and four’ articulations of a traditional rock backbeat, an observation that is supported by cognitive research on culturally promulgated rhythmic genres.”¹⁹⁸

Berger arrived at the conclusion that the additive and the divisive process are equally important in metal, and, “in fact the more important question was not which level was more

¹⁹⁵ Harris Berger, “The Practice of Perception: Multi-Functionality and Time in the Musical Experiences of a Heavy Metal Drummer”, *Ethnomusicology* Vol.41 No.3 (1997), 449.

¹⁹⁶ Berger, “The Practice of Perception: Multi-Functionality and Time in the Musical Experiences of a Heavy Metal Drummer”, 474.

¹⁹⁷ Berger, “The Practice of Perception”, 474-5.

¹⁹⁸ Harry Stafylakis, “Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract”, (PhD diss, City University, 2014),

foundational but which level stood in the foreground of the living experience of musical performance, when, and for what reason.”¹⁹⁹ In order to help clarify which level might be in the foreground of the living musical experience, it is important to understand the relationship between metal’s juxtaposed additive/divisive process and the consequent metrical dissonance it engenders. The following section will thus be an analysis of the function of metrical dissonance in progressive metal and death metal.

Metrical Dissonance

Drawing on Maury Yeston’s conception of meter, Krebs developed his work on metrical dissonance by analyzing Schumann’s music.²⁰⁰ “Metrical dissonance, as Krebs defines it, arises when additional layers fail to align with metrical layers in various ways.”²⁰¹ Additionally, Krebs distinguished between displacement dissonance – in which two grouping of units share the same length value but one of them is backward or forward in time and thus a re-alignment of layers might never occur – and grouping dissonance – in which two grouping units have a different length value and re-alignment between the two groupings *does* occur after a certain number of repetition.²⁰² (See figure 3.2)

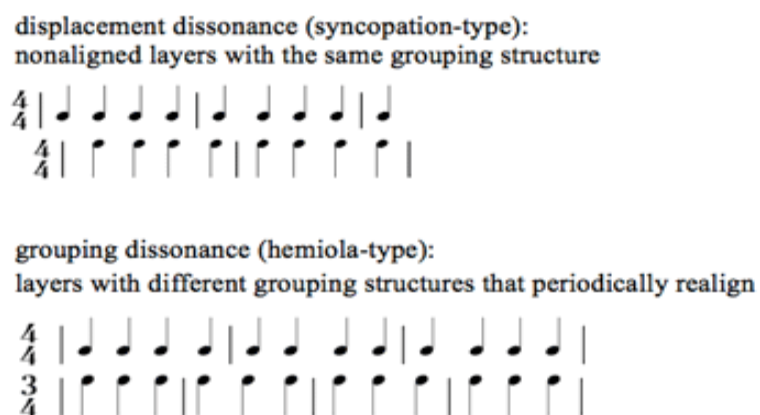


Figure 3.2. Two kinds of metric dissonance (Image from Biamonte, 2015, 2)

¹⁹⁹ Berger, “The Practice of Perception”, 476.

²⁰⁰ See Maury Yeston, *The Stratification of Musical Rhythm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

²⁰¹ Mark J. Butler, “Hearing Kaleidoscopes: Embedded Grouping Dissonance in Electronic Dance Music”, *Twentieth-Century Music* Volume 2 Issue 02 (2005), 226.

²⁰² See Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

There seems to be a recurring kind of displacement dissonance in metal that is characterized by a motif with a ternary grouping structure with equally distributed rhythmic values that vacillates between a downbeat and an upbeat emphasis. The interest of this phenomenon for this thesis lies in the technique used to create this kind of displacement dissonance resulting from what I have dubbed a ‘pivot note’ (demonstrated with a star in figure 3.3). A pivot note displacement dissonance is the addition of a note with half the rhythmic value of the preceding one in the ternary grouping structures, e.g., a grouping structure of three quarter notes adds an eighth note pivot note at the end of the ternary grouping structure. The concept of a pivot note will be elaborated further when analyzing the music of Meshuggah and their use of the technique. For now, pivot note grouping dissonance as described in my above example can simply be seen as a way of playing in 7/8. A typical example is in the introduction section of “Deliverance” by Opeth – the second Swedish outlier death metal band mentioned in the first chapter – which is illustrated in figure 3.3. The 7/8 time signature is made emphatic by the tritone accent played by guitar.



Figure 3.3. (0:00-0:20) Opeth – “Deliverance” (2002) (Transcribed by author)

In his analysis of grouping dissonance in electronic dance music, Mark Butler describes a ‘loop’ by drawing on Krebs’ idea of a ‘cycle’.²⁰³ The cycle refers to “the amount of time from one point of alignment to another [...] [between] the layers involved in a grouping dissonance.”²⁰⁴ A hemiola is an example of such a grouping dissonance ubiquitous in Western music. Grouping dissonance cycles that realign at the subtactus, tactus, or metric level can be thought of as short-term superimposition as opposed to long-term superimposition in which the re-alignment of a cycle occurs at the ‘hypermetric’ or ‘section level’.

In her analysis on the function of metric dissonance in pop-rock music, Nicole Biamonte conceptualizes the five levels of temporal organization in pop-rock music in which metrical

²⁰³ Butler, “Hearing Kaleidoscopes: Embedded Grouping Dissonance in Electronic Dance Music”, 226.

²⁰⁴ Butler, “Hearing Kaleidoscopes”, 226.

dissonance can occur.²⁰⁵ (See figure 3.4) David Huron’s research in music cognition has also “observed the increased preference for duple-based groupings at higher levels of organization.”²⁰⁶ Huron refers to this as the binary default.²⁰⁷ Biamonte notes that “hypermetric dissonances disrupt the well-established pop-rock norm of 4-bar units.”²⁰⁸

Small-scale metrical dissonance in rock often functions as a way to begin or conclude musical ideas either at the metric (phrase), hypermetric, or section level. The common functions of large-scale metrical dissonances in rock, according to Biamonte, serve “to enhance contrast between sections and create a large-scale interplay between tension and stability.”²⁰⁹ (See figure 3.5) Biamonte identified such functions for metrical dissonance in the music of The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and Jimi Hendrix, and also to progressive rock groups Radiohead and Tool. One of Biamonte’s conclusion was that Tool’s corpus was by far the most metrically dissonant in comparison to the other aforementioned bands and it is precisely because of this that Tool is regarded as a progressive rock/metal band.²¹⁰

LEVEL	UNIT	NORMAL GROUPINGS
section level	section (groupings of phrases)	Variable
hypermetric level	hyperbar (often aligned with phrases)	duple and quadruple
metric level	bar (groupings of beats)	usually quadruple
tactus level	tactus or beat	often quadruple
subtactus level	subdivisions of beat	duple, in-between, triple, quadruple

Figure 3.4. Temporal organization of pop-rock music (Biamonte, 2014, 1)

²⁰⁵ Nicole Biamonte, “Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music”, Society for Music Theory Volume 20 Number 2 June (2014), 1.

²⁰⁶ Biamonte, “Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music”, 2.

²⁰⁷ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 195-6.

²⁰⁸ Biamonte, 2.

²⁰⁹ Biamonte, “Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music”, 9.

²¹⁰ Biamonte, 9.

SCALE OF METRICAL DISSONANCE	FORMAL FUNCTION
small-scale	initiating dissonance cadential hemiola partial-bar link
large-scale	loose verse / tight chorus dissonant bridge dissonant frame

Figure 3.5. Formal functions of metric dissonance (Biamonte, 2014, 9)

Lerdahl and Jackendoff referred to this musical practice as “metric deletion” and William Rothstein adopted a similar approach with his idea of “metric reinterpretation.”²¹¹ Borrowing from both, Biamonte refers to partial-bar links as “small-scale grouping dissonances at the ends of formal sections which function as sectional boundary markers and connecting turnarounds into the next section.”²¹² Additionally, Biamonte noted that anomalous measures in rock are usually truncated, e.g., a measure of 2/4 in a regular 4/4 context – the function of which is to have the “melodic arrival on beat 3...reinterpreted as the downbeat of a new unit to create the 2/4 bar.”²¹³

I propose an addition to Biamonte’s idea of partial-bar links in regards to its formal function. As opposed to only occurring at hypermeters in rock music, progressive metal often uses partial-bar links at metric and hypermetric levels. This means that it functions as a transitional tool to other sections as well as a cadential tool for repeating themes at metric or hypermetric level.

²¹¹ Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, p.101; William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 52.

²¹² Biamonte, 6.

²¹³ Ibid. 6.

The image displays a musical score for the song "43% Burnt" by Dillinger Escape Plan. It is a transcription by Brad Osborn from 2010. The score is arranged in three systems, each featuring three staves: Guitar (top), Bass (middle), and Drum Set (bottom). The music is written in 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is characterized by frequent changes in time signature, including 5/16, 3/8, and 1/4. The guitar part consists of complex chordal textures and melodic lines, while the bass and drum parts provide a driving, syncopated rhythm. Three specific annotations are present: "Partial-beat" is labeled in two boxes, one under the guitar staff and one under the drum staff, indicating a contraction of the beat. "Partial-bar" is labeled in a box under the drum staff, indicating a contraction of the bar. The score is marked with various musical notations, including rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Figure 3.6. (0:00) *43% Burnt* – Dillinger Escape Plan (Transcription by Osborn, 2010)

I have adapted Biamonte’s notion of partial-bar links to a smaller level and dubbed it a ‘partial-beat link’. There are two main distinctions between partial-bar links and partial-beat links the most important of which being the thematic contraction occurring at the tactus or subtactus level instead of the metrical one. Brad Osborn made a similar distinction in his work on math rock’s conception of rhythm and meter: changing meters which preserve primary pulse as opposed to disrupting it.²¹⁴ A piece with changing meters that disrupts the primary pulse results in a greater sense of metrical instability for the listener. This is especially true in pieces where a meter is established and the partial-beat link occurs only after several repetitions of the initial phrase. The opening theme in Dillinger Escape Plan’s *43% Burnt* is a pertinent example that contains both partial-bar links and partial-beat links. Additionally, each hypermeter increases in metrical consonance. (See figure 3.6)

²¹⁴ Brad Osborn, “Beats that Commute: Algebraic and Kinesthetic Models for Math-Rock Grooves”, *Gamut* 3/1 (2010), 48-50.

The musical passage above might be described as one that disrupts the listener's cognitive expectations because of the change in time signature at the end of each phrase (at every four bars). However, Huron's terminology of the "contrarian aesthetic" seems quite pertinent for a discussion on metal as well.²¹⁵ Huron conceives of Stravinsky's rhythmic work – more precisely, in "Augurs of Springs" from *The Rite of Spring* (1913) – as 'contrametric' because of the music's tendency to disrupt a listener's usual expectations in regards to rhythm and meter. "Segments of his music exhibit a systematic organization whose purpose is to actively subvert the perception of meter."²¹⁶

ABAC Metric & Hypermetric Organization

Some of Dream Theater's additive metrical process have been described by McCandless as having an ABAC form structure, in which 'A' represents a certain time signature, 'B' represents one that is greater, and 'C' represents a time signature greater than 'A' and 'B'. "These changes in metric cardinality rarely sound random," says McCandless, "but rather involve direct relationships between motivic transformation and metrical expansion/contraction, creating coherence despite the lack of periodicity."²¹⁷ The resulting hypermeter contains within it an interrupted additive process on the surface level.

McCandless's theory of the ABAC metric structure in Dream Theater's describes an organization of the metric and hypermetric level that is analogous to the organization of surface detail musical material such as periods and sentences. Thus, the ABAC metric structure can be conceived "as a kind of reconciliation between linear additive process and a typical rock subphrase/phrase structure."²¹⁸

The piece *Constant Motion* contains a large scale ABAC additive process that develops in three different temporal level (See figure 3.7). We hear the ABAC at every four bars at the metric level. By grouping every two bars together it also occurs over the span of eighth bars – the first half of the sixteen bar span. Finally, by grouping every four bars together it also occurs over the span of sixteen bars, i.e., the duration of the whole development. Using as a guide Biamonte's graphic of 'temporal organization of pop-rock music' (figure 3.4), we can conclude that the ABAC additive metrical

²¹⁵ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, 332-3.

²¹⁶ Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 332-3.

²¹⁷ McCandless, *Metal as a Gradual Process*, 3.

²¹⁸ McCandless, 3.

process in *Constant Motion* creates ‘metrical dissonance’ at the metric, hypermetric and section level. Dissonance occurs independently at each of level, by means of displacement dissonance.

The musical score for the introduction of "Constant Motion" is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-8) includes a drum staff labeled "York-style Rhythmic Reduction" and a guitar staff labeled "Electric Guitar (w/dist.)". The tempo is marked as quarter note = 172. The guitar part features "Internal Repetition" markings (x2) and a "Guitar first time, then full band" instruction. The mode is identified as "N.C. (E Locrian)". The second system (measures 9-16) continues the guitar part, with a "N.C. (B Locrian w/ E pedal)" instruction at measure 9. An "Addition" at measure 16 is noted as creating a metrical transition into the following section in 4/4 time.

Figure 3.7. (0:01–0:40) Dream Theater - “Constant Motion” (Transcription from McCandless, 2013).

Organization of the metric and hypermetric as described above is not exclusive to Dream Theater’s music and in fact seems to be a common approach or a number of progressive metal bands as well as technical death metal bands, e.g. Between the Buried and Me, The Human Abstract, Spiral Architect, Blotted Science, Necrophagist, Animal as Leaders, Meshuggah, and Gojira. This list is far from exhaustive but it nonetheless demonstrates that a musical organization of the higher temporal level is a characteristic of progressive metal and death metal at large as opposed to being unique to Dream Theater.



Figure 3.8. *Esoteric Surgery* – Gojira (0:42 – 1:19) (Transcribed by author)

Gojira’s take on the ABAC structure differs slightly from Dream Theater. The similarity between both approaches is that of an expansion occurring at hypermeter end point. However, in the music Gojira, the expansion is calculated by the addition of full measures as opposed to Dream Theater who create an expansion with the addition of beats, e.g., hypermeters are marked by the addition of one full bar instead of one additional beat. Such an example occurs in both the verse of *Esoteric Surgery* and the introduction of *Oroborous* (both pieces from *The Way of All Flesh*, 2008). *Esoteric Surgery*’s verse consists of an ABAC structure in which A equals three measures, B four measures, return to A, and finally C equals six measures. So the difference between Dream Theater and Gojira’s use of the ABAC technique is the temporal level at which the expansion occurs, i.e. Gojira expands their themes by chunks of measures while Dream Theater expands their themes at the beat level.

Esoteric Surgery is an example of embedded grouping dissonance in the first two bars of each verse repetition: a 4:3 on the tactus level resolving every three beat is embedded within a larger 4:3 on the metric level. The smaller level grouping dissonance completes two cycles whereas the larger level grouping dissonance reaches the half-point of its cycle before being interrupted. (See figure 3.8)

Metric & Hypermetric Superimposition

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Berger describes a metal performance as characterized by a juxtaposed dual temporality that combines additive and divisive processes. The specific type of metrical dissonance discussed below is characterized by two temporal layers (additive and divisive process) that are much more distinguishable from one another. Common terminologies of such phenomena include: polymeters, acute out-of-phase cycles, and superimposition.²¹⁹ All three terms can be salient descriptions of some of progressive metal's rhythmic/metric complexities. However, there are cases in which such terminologies fall short of accurately and precisely describing certain bands with idiosyncratic rhythmic/metric phenomenon, e.g., Meshuggah.

For now, I will use the term 'superimposition' which was adopted by both Pieslak and Stafylakis. Their respective analysis of Meshuggah and Tesseract elucidates salient discrepancies between both band's use of superimposition.²²⁰ Meshuggah is characterized by superimposition that I dubbed 'section-preserving' (superimposition during the entirety of a section, i.e., four hypermeters) whereas Tesseract are cycle-preserving (the superimposition only ends once the cycle between grouping dissonance ends).

My interest in this chapter concerns the effect of superimposition on preserving or disrupting one or various temporal levels. By this I am referring to Waters' distinction between grouping dissonance which preserves the measure as opposed to grouping dissonance which preserves the hypermeasure.²²¹ More specifically, this refers to out-of-phase grouping dissonances in which the superimposition resolves either after one measure or one hypermeasure. (See figure 3.9) The analysis of Meshuggah below elaborates on Water's work by conceiving of one additional approach which I have dubbed 'section-preserving grouping dissonance' (which could also be structure-preserving).

²¹⁹ "Acute phase cycle" was opted by Lerdalh & Jackendoff whereas "superimposition" is prominent in Pieslak's work.

²²⁰ See Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah"; Stafylakis, "Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract".

²²¹ Waters, "Blurring the Barline: Metric Displacement in the Piano Solos of Herbie Hancock", *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 8 (1996), 19-37.

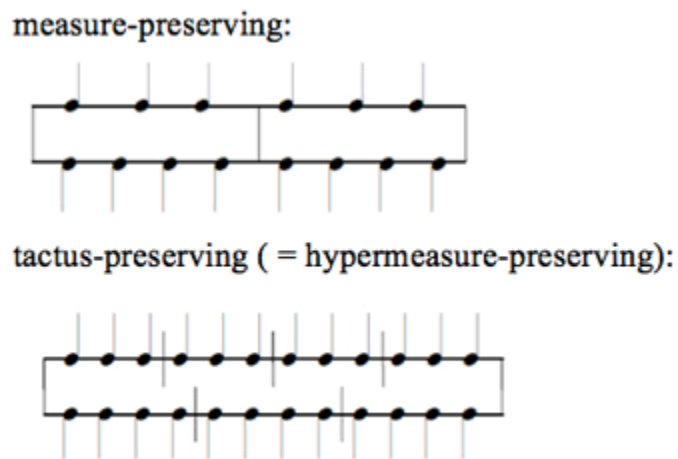


Figure 3.9. Water’s two kind of grouping dissonance (image from Biamonte 2015, 2)

Pieslak was the first to conceptualize Meshuggah’s music with his analysis of the piece “Rational Gaze” (*Nothing*, 2002). His research was an architectonic examination of the music’s underlying structure that elucidated Meshuggah’s conception of rhythm and meter: an additive process built with “large-scale odd-time signatures, mixed meters, and metrical superimposition” resulting in two distinct temporal dimensions in which the additive process is juxtaposed with the divisive process.²²² The latter allows for very complex rhythmic structures to be embedded within a symmetrical hypermetric frame – such a frame equates to Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s notion of the metric grid discussed in earlier (See figure 3.1). For Pieslak, the rhythmic organization in Meshuggah can be conceived of in two ways: as “two simultaneous, but independent, rhythmic layers” that resembles large-scale polyrhythms or as “metrically dissonant (after Krebs) with two interpretative layers whose cardinalities are different and are not multiples/factors of each other.”²²³

For example, the intro to *Rational Gaze* superimposes a guitar riff in 25/16 over a 4/4 time signature. However, instead of completing the full superimposition cycle – something that would be expected of a polyrhythm, for example – the fifth repetition is marked by a metric prolongation of an additional three sixteenth notes for a total hypermeasure of one hundred and twenty-eighth sixteenth notes: the same totaled amount as eighth measures of sixteenth notes in a 4/4 time signature. This approach allows Meshuggah to remain in a symmetrical hypermetric frame and thus, “Rational Gaze” can be conceived as dissonant on every level of temporality but consonant at the sectional level.

²²² Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah”, 220.

²²³ Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal”, 221.

The example below analyses another Meshuggah piece which was subsequently released ten years after “Rational Gaze” and which adds an additional musical practice to Meshuggah’s palette of temporal techniques discussed so far (large-scale odd-time signature, mixed meters, and metrical superimposition). Dovetailing Krebs’ notion of displacement dissonance as well as Biamonte’s conception of different levels of temporality, I dubbed Meshuggah’s more-recently adopted temporal technique: ‘hypermetric displacement dissonance’.

II. Analysis of Meshuggah

My choice of piece for analysis was due to two reasons. First, the theoretical terms used in the above paragraph are not quite sufficient to describe the rhythm processes in this piece unless an additional temporal technique (totaling at four) is taken into consideration. Second, “Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave It Motion” (*Kolos*, 2012), provides readers with a pertinent example of Meshuggah’s illusion of simplicity. A similar phenomenon was first noted by Harry Stafylakis in the music of English progressive metal band Tesseract.²²⁴

For Stafylakis, a possible reason for the apparent simplicity in Tesseract, “is the band’s constant emphasis on groove”, often grooving on rock and metal idioms such as the ubiquitous archetypal 4/4 backbeat and the archetypal half time feel with the snare drum on beat three.²²⁵ The Meshuggah piece under analysis below has the same emphasis on groove as what Stafylakis noted in Tesseract. However, in the case of “Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave It Motion”, the illusion of simplicity seems even more drastic partly because almost every single parameter in the music actually *is* somewhat simple, i.e. the piece’s complexity can be attributed almost solely to temporal parameters as there are barely any pitch variation, or melodic structure whatsoever, and the harmony remains static on a tritone for the majority of the section transcribed. In other words, Meshuggah’s music gives an impression of simplicity in almost every parameter except those related to time: rhythm and meter. The grouping dissonance beginning at the twenty-eighth second of “Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave It Motion” is described below and readers can also refer to the transcription in figure 3.10.

- clear ‘archetypal 4/4 backbeat’ played by cymbals and snare drum suggests a divisive process

²²⁴ See Harry Stafylakis, “Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract”, (PhD diss. New York City University, 2014).

²²⁵ Stafylakis, “Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract”, 3-4.

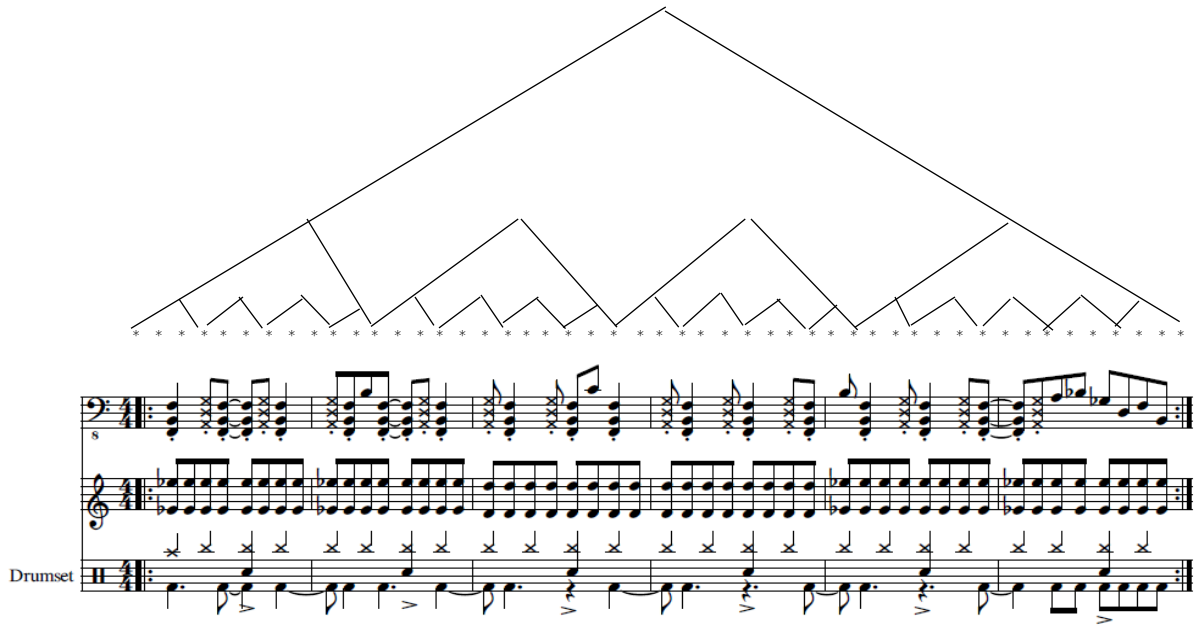


Figure 3.12. (0:29-0:50) “Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave it Motion” – Meshuggah (Transcribed by author)

Meshuggah’s piece under analysis also serves as an example of an additional technique in Meshuggah’s palette of rhythmic quirks, something I dubbed ‘hypermetric displacement dissonance’. The six bar cycle of the guitar riff repeats for five complete cycles and a partial sixth one. However, each cycle is grouped in pairs of two for a total of three pairs of cycles. What I refer to as ‘hypermetric displacement dissonance’ occurs at the end of each pair of cycles, i.e. every twelve measures. The length of two cycles (twelve measures) is demonstrated in figure 3.12.

Hypermetric displacement dissonance refers to a grouping displacement as conceptualized by Krebs but the grouping structure is much larger in the case of Meshuggah. A total of six bars (the cycle mentioned above) is grouped and metrically displaced by an eighth note. Readers may recall the earlier example of Dillinger Escape Plan in figure 3.6 in which each hypermeasure disrupted the listener’s expectations by changing meters. For Meshuggah however, the cymbal and snare-drum never disrupt the backbeat groove, which is why the variation of an additional eighth note at every twelve measures results in a hypermetric grouping dissonance. Readers can refer to Appendix I for the transcription with every instruments and in which each system represents two cycles for a total of twelve bars per system. Additionally, readers may notice that the rhythmic motif in the second system begins one eighth note later whereas the rhythmic motif in the third system begins two eighth notes later. This is what I refer to as ‘hypermetric displacement dissonance’. Below is a more detailed description of the phenomenon followed by a transcription of the entire thirty-two bars under discussion. The purpose of the graph in figure 3.13 is not a detailed view of the transcription

but rather, to demonstrate the underlying structure of the entire section – something made possible by borrowing from Lerdahl & Jackendoff's metric grid discussed in the beginning. (See figure 3.13)

- the first six bar cycle is played as indicated above
- thematic expansion of an additional 8th note at the end of guitar riff prevents clear resolution on the downbeat of the 2nd cycle $(3+3+3+2) \times 3 + (3+3+3+2+2+2)+\underline{1}$
- the added 8th notes falls on downbeat of 3rd cycle, resulting in a displacement dissonance between the backbeat and the whole guitar riff now shifted an 8th note later
- another hypermetric displacement dissonance occurs during the 5th cycle between the backbeat and the whole guitar riff now shifted two eighth notes later than the first cycle

As mentioned before, rhythmic complexity is characteristic of death metal but not of black metal. The analysis of Meshuggah demonstrate an example in which rhythmic complexity is pushed to the extreme. By comparison, a more typical example of rhythmic complexity in the death metal subgenre is usually characterized by the use of odd-time signature without any metrical and hypermetric superimposition. In other words, most death metal bands' conception of rhythm is not marked by the out-phase cycle between the additive and divisive process. For example, "Deliverance" by Opeth – which was briefly discussed earlier in the chapter (figure 3.3) – is played in a 7/8 time signature by both the guitar and drums. If Meshuggah were to play such a riff, it is more likely that the drummer would play the 7/8 time signature with the double-kick bass drum but the cymbals and snare would keep a steady 4/4 pattern. However, as readers can see in the example of Opeth below, the drummer plays rhythmic accents which emphasize and support the 7/8 time signature (see figure 3.14).

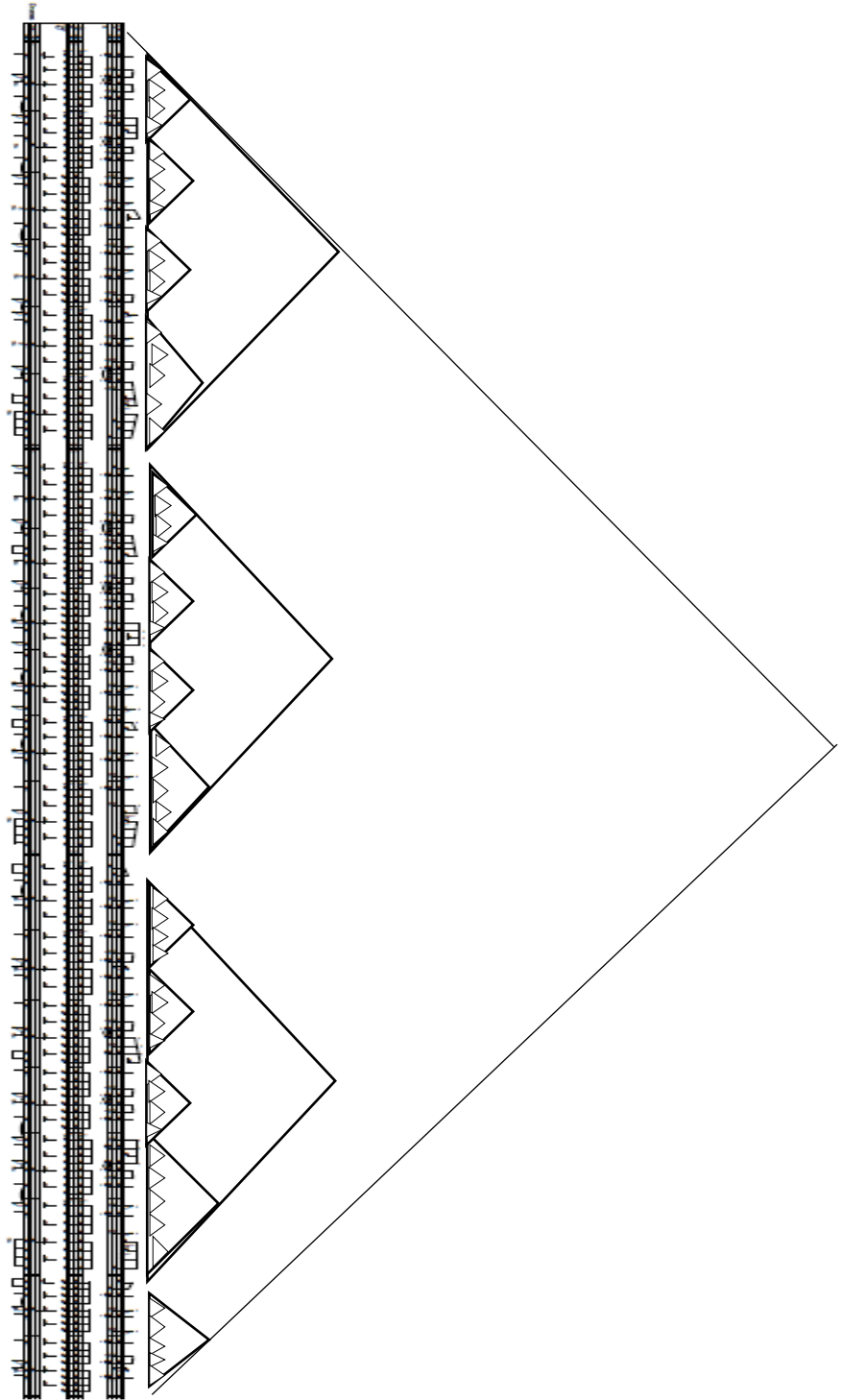


Figure 3.13. (0:28 to 1:25) “Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave it Motion” – Meshuggah (Transcribed by author)

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the song "Deliverance" by Opeth. The first system is labeled "Electric Guitar" and "Drumset". The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 195$. The second system is labeled "El. Guit." and "Drs.". Both systems show a complex, syncopated rhythm with many beamed notes and asterisks indicating specific drum sounds.

Figure 3.14. (0:00-0:20) Opeth – “Deliverance” (Transcribed by author)

Conclusion

This chapter was an exploration of how rhythm and meter are conceptualized in some progressive metal but also in certain death metal bands who share musical practices with progressive metal. Dream Theater is the only band discussed in this chapter that is not categorized as death metal largely because of the absence of vocal distortion. Thus, all the other bands discussed throughout this chapter can be considered either as death metal because of the vocal distortion or as progressive metal because of the ubiquity of rhythmic & metrical complexities in the music.

As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, the goal is not to resolve the issue of subgenre taxonomy engendered by Meshuggah – the issue being whether they are death metal or progressive metal. Instead, the music of Meshuggah is best conceived as existing at the nexus of death metal and progressive metal. The Swedish band shares many similarities with death metal – vocal distortion as well as the use of tritones and minor seconds. However, the above analysis of Meshuggah demonstrates a specific approach to rhythm that is unconventional for death metal and in fact shares more similarities to progressive metal. Hence why Meshuggah’s music is best characterized as existing on the genre boundaries between the subgenres of death metal and progressive metal. Subsequently, the next chapter explores, amongst other things, why death metal and progressive metal place considerable value on complexity and virtuosity whereas for black metal, such musical practices are perceived as lacking emotion and self-indulgent.

CHAPTER 4. THE PARADOXES OF ACQUIRING SUBCULTURAL CAPITAL: DEATH METAL, BLACK METAL, AND PROGRESSIVE METAL

This chapter aims to, amongst other things, understand certain differences between fans of death metal and fans of black metal. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital', once applied to subcultures, is the underlying sociological theory that links the various topics in this chapter, which looks at the essential differences between the subgenres of death metal and black metal from a sociological perspective. Both subgenres will be approached as broadly as possible here except when mentioned otherwise – for example, progressive metal will be the focus in the last sections because it shares genre boundaries with death metal. However, instead of discussing rhythmic complexity specifically, the focus in the last section is a broader conception of virtuosity and complexity. Ultimately, this chapter aims to understand – at least in part – certain fundamental questions concerning the extreme metal subculture at large: Why is there a desire among fans and practitioners to make ubiquitous use of various shock effects? More specifically, is the liaison between metal and Satanism merely for purposes of shock? Are there certain individuals who legitimately consider themselves as Satanists? Is there a subgenre of metal more closely affiliated with Satanism? The sociological approach undertaken in this chapter – in addition to elucidating some of the above – will be used to distinguish death metal from black metal.

I. Mundane Subcultural Capital and Transgressive Subcultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of 'cultural capital' refers to various social assets one possesses which offer social prestige and social recognition.²²⁶ Cultural capital includes, but is not limited to: wealth, education, intellect etc. From this model, Sarah Thornton adapts Bourdieu's idea in order to introduce what she calls 'subcultural capital'.²²⁷ Subcultural capital still refers to social assets one possesses but those assets will only be recognized as containing prestige by those who share the same subculture (punks and metalheads) within a larger society. Followers of different styles have a different interpretation of the way subcultural capital is obtained. Consequently, the result is that subcultural capital is more fragmented and has less value compared to cultural capital.

²²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1979), 12-4.

²²⁷ See Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

Drawing her research on black metal from the work of Thornton and Fiske,²²⁸ Allett concluded that “fan cultures have their own practices of distinction and forms of ‘popular’ or ‘subcultural’ capitals that serve to communicate social prestige and ‘authentic’ collective fan and music-centred [*sic*] identities.”²²⁹ This means one’s subcultural capital is not worth much outside of that person’s own subculture.

According to Keith Kahn-Harris, subcultural capital exists in two different forms in the extreme metal scene: “mundane subcultural capital and transgressive subcultural capital.”²³⁰ The former is obtained by those who demonstrate thorough knowledge or expertise of their respective scene. As an example, developing and proclaiming a familiarity with “complex and extended song forms [...] serves an important subcultural role in demonstrating one’s accumulation of mundane subcultural capital.”²³¹ As for transgressive subcultural capital, it is defined as a “practice of boundary crossing, symbolically and/or practically, the practice of questioning and breaking taboos, the practice of questioning established values.”²³² Transgressive subcultural capital is regarded as more valuable compared to mundane subcultural capital. This provides a first glimpse into what both the public and practitioners value as key components that define their subculture.

Mundane subcultural capital can be obtained by those who demonstrate an expertise of their respective scene. Broadly speaking, one can acquire subcultural capital by either having a knowledge of the bands or of the institutions of a specific scene.²³³ The former kind refers to knowledge with respect to a scene’s history and the familiarity with the full gamut of bands within it. This form of subcultural capital is generally obtained by the public itself, i.e. the fans. Allett, who takes a discursive approach with fans of extreme metal, attempts to learn more about their value systems and consequently the position they take in defining themselves as ‘connoisseurs’. Such a position demonstrates how prestige is attributed to extreme metal fans who exhibit “thorough knowledge” of

²²⁸ John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom”, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, (1992), 30-49.

²²⁹ Nicola Allett, *The extreme metal ‘connoisseur’* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 171.

²³⁰ Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (New York: Berg, 2007), 122-130.

²³¹ Eric Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015* (PhD diss. McGill University, 2015), 102.

²³² Titus Hjelm, Keith Kahn-Harris & Mark Levine, *Heavy Metal: Controversies and Countercultures* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2013), 10.

²³³ Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, 127.

the music and the accompanying culture.²³⁴ Such knowledge includes “extreme metal music history, subgenres, underground bands, instruments, music labels, and terminologies.”²³⁵ Eric Smialek, speaking about the “sheer volume” of metal genre taxonomies and their role to “confer mundane subcultural capital,” says that “it is little wonder, then, that fans can be quick to criticize the charts. By drawing attention to inaccurate or omitted subgenre labels, musical examples, or relationships between subgenres, fans can appear to be knowledgeable at the expense of the author.”²³⁶

Compared to this, scene-knowledge on the institutions and practices of the given scene refers to expertise most likely found in producers, promoters, successful musicians in the scene, concert reviewers, etc. Scene-knowledge of this kind (on the institutions and practices) is more commonly possessed by practitioners of the scene as opposed to the more common scenic knowledge held by the public. In both cases (public and practitioners), one’s ‘mundane subcultural capital’ increases “through a commitment to the collective.”²³⁷ That certain fans will be committed to their scenic collectivity is relevant because it highlights a key difference between mundane subcultural capital and transgressive subcultural capital and parallels the dichotomy between the collective and the individual. In other words, mundane subcultural capital is characterized by a commitment to the collective as opposed to transgressive subcultural capital – which is acquired by a commitment to the individual.

The identity created by fans and musicians of metal as part of a counter-culture stems back to the roots of heavy metal. The subculture of metal identifies itself in opposition to the larger domain of popular culture: the subculture identifies itself as a collective counterculture. However, the counter-culture ethos also leads to micro-counterculture: a counterculture within the counterculture. Since fans identify themselves as part of a counter-culture, they consequently see others in the same counter-culture as being part of a ‘family’. This means that having a “commitment to the collective” becomes an honorable thing to strive for.²³⁸ It thus explains why members of the scene aim to acquire mundane subcultural capital. However, fans with a stronger identification with the counter-cultural identity will most likely eschew the community and in a way, remain as a counter-culture within a counter-culture.

²³⁴ Allett, *The extreme metal ‘connoisseur’*, 172.

²³⁵ Allett, 172.

²³⁶ Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015*, 36.

²³⁷ Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 127.

²³⁸ Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 127.

As mentioned by Kahn-Harris, transgression refers to “the practice of boundary crossing, symbolically and/or practically.”²³⁹ Subsequently, a distinction can be made between three different types of transgression: “sonic, discursive and bodily transgression.”²⁴⁰ The latter refers to fans with tattoos, bodily modifications, or abuse of drugs and alcohol. Discursive transgressions refers to lyrics whereas sonic transgressions refer to various sets of musical practices such as: instrumental distortion, vocal distortion, fast tempi, heavy chromaticism, hyper-realistic and raw production, etc. Sonic transgressions, such as the aforementioned, were discussed at length in previous chapters and as readers can now see, transgressive subcultural capital may play some role as one of the reasons for the ubiquity of such musical practices in extreme metal. Other characteristics of extreme metal can also be defined as transgressive because they are about being “excessive, testing and breaking boundaries, invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, while simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and potency.”²⁴¹

A key difference between transgressive and mundane subcultural capital is that the former is obtained “through a radical individualism, through displaying uniqueness, and a lack of attachment to the scene.”²⁴² Thus, critiquing the scene itself becomes another way of obtaining transgressive subcultural capital. For Kahn-Harris, “transgressive subcultural capital involves a desire to be different, to challenge and transgress accepted norms within and outside the scene.”²⁴³ There exist just as many ways that one can be ‘different’ as there exist ways to ‘challenge and transgress accepted norms’ and the range of possibility varies from the benign to the dangerous. For the sake of pertinence, the following discussion will draw from three different ideologies (for lack of a better word): solipsism, elitism, and a desire to shock. All three of these ideologies are linked in one way or another to the ways transgressive subcultural capital is acquired. They also provide an interesting view on the way metal’s association with Satanism is a hodgepodge of the three ideologies (a desire to shock, solipsism, and elitism).

This philosophy of individualism is most prominent in black metal musicians and their fans. This style of metal has seen its fair share of controversies in the past but the most pertinent to this

²³⁹ Hjelm, Kahn-Harris & Levine, *Heavy Metal: Controversies and Countercultures*, 10.

²⁴⁰ Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 30-46.

²⁴¹ Kahn-Harris, 30.

²⁴² Ibid. 127.

²⁴³ Ibid. 128.

chapter is the association between Satanism and black metal.²⁴⁴ The use of satanic imagery in metal and hard rock (Led Zeppelin) can be mainly attributed to a desire to shock. However, before the advent of the early 1990's Norwegian black metal scenes, member didn't actually proclaim themselves to be Satanists.²⁴⁵

The doctrine laid out in Anton Lavey's *Satanic Bible*, from 1966, is referred to as LaVeyan Satanism. This philosophy has in fact nothing to do with traditional theology; it is a rejection of religion in favour of atheism. LaVeyan promotes living a life that is strongly centered on the self, a "hedonistic individualism in contemporary capitalism."²⁴⁶ As King, formerly of Gorgoroth, a seminal black metal band, noted, "Black metal, or at least Gorgoroth is about the individual and creating your own moral out of chaos, and be your own God more or less."²⁴⁷ In line with this, LaVeyan Satanists commonly ascribe to Social Darwinism and make use of satanic imagery in order to scare those 'too weak' to independently investigate the church's real philosophy. Whether one agrees or not with this philosophy is another question altogether.

Elitist views of the sort just described stem from a "misappropriation of Nietzschean ideals related to power and elitism," as Smialek states.²⁴⁸ For Smialek, it seems that such views "appeals more specifically to the elitist sensibilities so often expressed by fans and practitioners of raw black metal."²⁴⁹

As Smialek notes, lyrics on controversial subject such as Satanism – or lyrics which emphasize the supernatural – are not exclusive to one of the two subgenres under discussion. The center column of figure 4.1 provides readers with an example of the common emphasis on the supernatural in death metal as well as black metal lyrics. As Smialek notes, in the case of both subgenre, controversial lyrics "function as a marker of authenticity for fans in contradistinction to

²⁴⁴ See Michael Soderlind & Didrik Moynihan, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 1998).

²⁴⁵ Except for Mercyful Fate, a Danish metal band whose singer, King Diamond, endorsed LaVeyan Satanism during the mid-1980.

²⁴⁶ G r me Guibert & Jedediah Sklower, *Hellfest: The thing that could not be?* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 107.

²⁴⁷ *Black Metal: A Documentary*. Dir. Bill Zebub. 2006. Interview with King, formerly of Gorgoroth, a seminal black metal band.

²⁴⁸ Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015*, 140.

²⁴⁹ Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015*, 140.

abject subgenres.”²⁵⁰ However, a distinction can be made between death metal’s use of the word ‘Lord’ and black metal’s use of the word ‘Satan’ – on the right and on the left column respectively. Smialek notes that death metal lyrics refer to Christianity by “sardonically screaming, ‘Your Lord’, for example” and that such lyrics often “mock religious zealots from an atheist point of view.”²⁵¹ By contrast, Smialek notes that black metal lyrics “usually position the lyrical protagonist *within* a Christian universe, typically through statements of allegiance and admiration towards Satan.”²⁵² As a comparative between lyrics in both subgenre, readers can refer to the two different lyrical excerpts below (death metal on the left and black metal on the right). Thus, once again, the semiotic codes of black metal affords to fans a connotation of evil – in this case with an allegiance toward Satan – whereas the semiotic codes of death metal affords fans with a connotation of power, or empowerment – because the lyrics sarcastically mock something considered to be an institution of power.

Deicide “Fuck Your God” (*Scars of the Crucifix*, 2004)

Who could believe in a lord that's demanding?
 Hard to believe when we die we vanish
 In his deny and for all his creation
 Fuck your god and his righteous hatred
 You and your son, you are nothing but absence
 Something not there that controls this planet
 Only deceit do I see in your hallow

Gorgoroth “Incipit Satan” (*Incipit Satan*, 2000)

Run chain of the Hebrew
 Rechain the proved new
 earth
 When blood rages in the sky
 Chaos and destruction
 Incipit Satan
 Incipit Satan
 Incipit Satan
 Incipit Satan

The various connections of metal with Satanism suggests two methods of acquiring transgressive subcultural capital. First, Satanism advocates for the individual over the collective, as discussed earlier with respect to Gorgoroth. Second, although the satanic imagery is less able to shock today as it did three decades ago, the early use of such imagery was nonetheless important in order to establish early heavy metal as part of a counter-culture. Additionally, lyrics that deal with the supernatural – or more specifically Satanism – is a shared trait of both death metal and black metal and functions as a marker of authenticity within the subculture..

²⁵⁰ Smialek, 113.

²⁵¹ Smialek, 134.

²⁵² Ibid.

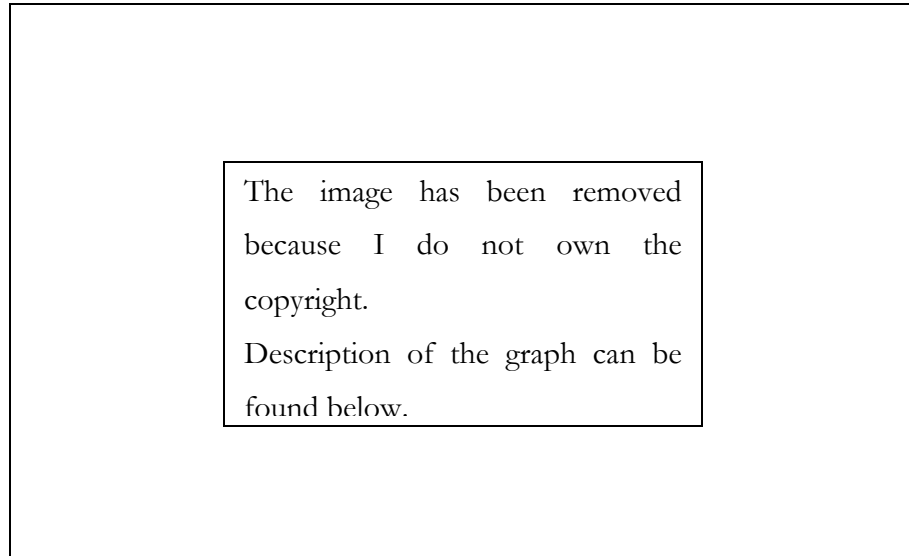


Figure 4.1. Words which reoccur most often in each subgenres (Graph from Smialek, 2015, p.132)

The Desire to Shock

Metal subculture has always had an insatiable desire to shock the rest of society. As Ryan Moore says, “from rock and roll to the hippies to the punks, the collective identities of deviant youth cultures have depended on their ability to provoke authorities and ‘straight’ people.”²⁵³

What is important to remember is the *reason* why fans and musicians would want to use such types of transgression. This should not be taken lightly because if we can understand the reasons behind extreme metal’s stance on glorifying what the rest of society considers to be transgressive, repulsive, or inappropriate, then we might be able to collectively decide if we should be cautious about the extreme metal scene. I will attempt to demonstrate how the use of transgression – in different areas of metal – has more to do with the desire to shock and disturb the rest of society than actually causing harm to it. Over the years, bands that have achieved this effect of shock have had their status elevated in the extreme metal scene. Cannibal Corpse, Carcass, and Mayhem are among some of the bands that have created this effect. Fans who are unaffected by this type of shock can gain subcultural capital within the scene.

There are at minimum three reasons why metal bands continue to use shock via visual, lyrical, and musical transgression. First, because they are following – consciously or unconsciously – the norm within the culture of metal itself, i.e., imitating bands from the previous generation. Some

²⁵³ Ryan Moore, “Alternative to What? Subcultural Capital and the Commercialization of a Music Scene”, *Deviant Behavior* 23:3 (2005), 249.

may identify more strongly than others with the collective identification of the metal scene as counterculture to the mainstream culture. Ironically, fans identification as part of a counterculture also leads to an expectation to ‘conform to non-conformity’. For example, metal culture continuously tries to push the boundaries of controversy, as Hjelm notes, “in order to conform to the expectations of the extreme metal genre.”²⁵⁴

Second, “metal has used controversy as a tool not merely of identity, but also of marketing.”²⁵⁵ The shock factor of a performance can only be considered as successful if it genuinely surprises and causes a reaction from the media and public at large. A wider public attention increases the likelihood of financial success therefore shock can also function as financial incentive. Although anecdotal, the following example underpins the marketing success of shock. Alice Cooper was once involved in a controversy because of various rumors that accused him of sacrificing chickens during his shows. Although the rumors were unfounded, Alice recalls the advice given to him by Frank Zappa: “Well don’t tell anybody! Everyone hates you – that means the kids will love you.”²⁵⁶

Third, using shock to show hidden aspects of our society that no one wants to talk about. For Walser, “heavy metal explores the ‘other’, everything that hegemonic society does not want to acknowledge.”²⁵⁷ Iconography and lyrics are perceived as authentic specifically because they don’t shy away from subjects deemed unacceptable. In no way does this mean that the ‘hidden truths’ in such iconography are factually correct. Rather, it is the ‘brutal honesty’ of the message that seems to resonate as most meaningful for fans because, as Walser notes, “it offers a way of overcoming those feelings of loneliness and hopelessness. Even when it models musical despair, heavy metal confronts issues that cannot simply be dismissed or repressed.”²⁵⁸ The result is one that “positions listeners as members of a community of fans, making them feel that they belong to a group that does not regulate them.”²⁵⁹

However, certain issues are not addressed explicitly in the above paragraph: very rarely does an unfiltered communication occur between performers and listeners, i.e. the emitter’s conception

²⁵⁴ Hjelm, Kahn-Harris & Levine, *Heavy Metal: Controversies & Counterculture*, 8.

²⁵⁵ Hjelm, Kahn-Harris & Levine, *Heavy Metal*, 5.

²⁵⁶ Hjelm, Kahn-Harris & Levine, 41.

²⁵⁷ Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 162.

²⁵⁸ Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, 151.

²⁵⁹ Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 151.

of his or her delivering message almost never coincides with the receiver's interpretation of the message. Various listeners can interpret the same message in myriad ways and that is but one issue. Alan Moore noted similar communication problems between rock vocalists and their fans.²⁶⁰ Moreover, as was discussed in Chapter Three, for fans, "a song's inherent meaning of vital power is more important than any delineated meaning presented in the lyrics."²⁶¹ Might not the problems of communication mentioned above be mitigated in the case of extreme metal fans who might not care as much, in the first place, for the delineated meaning of the text in a song?

For such fans, the precise meaning of lyrics might not even be important in the first place. However, this also means that the primacy of the music is even more likely to raise problems of communication between performers and listeners. It is usually much harder to clearly communicate an idea if the underlying language is more abstract, e.g. music in comparison to a text. However, as the following paragraphs below will argue, one of the things shared among extreme metal fans is the feeling of overcoming a sonic challenge. In this case, extreme metal vocals are meaningful for fans precisely because they challenge them and subsequently often lead fans to believe (perhaps naïvely) that they belong to a rare few who can appreciate such music, which inevitably leads certain fans to develop a sense of self-perceived elitism.

I can now elaborate on the relationship between black metal sound production and the subsequent elitism it sometimes engenders among fans. The section below explores elitism in black metal and the accompanying paradox created by the relationship between elitism and solipsism. Elitism seems at first to coincide with the earlier discussion of black metal's penchant for social Darwinism – and it does to an extent – however, as readers shall see, the boundaries between elitism and depression appear to be thinner than what one would expect.

Elitism & Solipsism in Black Metal

Elitism is especially prominent within the black metal scene. Members view their music as a 'higher art' that is only meant to be understood by a few. Even though establishing a connection between Darmstadtian music and black metal might seem like a stretch, there is common ground in the way practitioners of both styles of music view their work: a high art that should make no compromise to facilitate the listening experience for the public. However, there are differences in

²⁶⁰ Alan F. Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock. Second edition* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 181-91.

²⁶¹ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991), 34.

the reasons black metal takes such a stance. I will discuss what I consider to be the most salient point regarding elitism: sound production in black metal's recording process. As far as I know, it is the only style of music in which the recording process aims at delivering a product with the lowest quality of sound production possible. The music must sound cold, dense, harsh, and lack definition. The focus for this section is on the underlying motivation and the philosophical foundation for such a production.

Most uninitiated listeners of black metal will likely dismiss it as mere noise on their first exposure. Although a generalization, it could be argued that – for the elitist fans of black metal – this sonic chaos is seen as a 'hard-to-digest' music that can only be understood and appreciated by those who can recognize such a form of 'high art'. "By being 'off the radar' [counter-culture]," writes Allett, "the extreme metal fan is able to feel 'elite' because she/he has the refined taste of only a select few."²⁶² The undecipherable quality of black metal's sound production will only be perceived as containing transgressive subcultural capital by the black metal aficionado. The majority of metalheads will most likely react negatively to such an audio production.

As opposed to most music scholars today who strive for a mediation between classical music and the general public, bands/artists who merely attempt such a mediation – between black metal and a larger audience – would likely diminish their subcultural capital in addition to betraying their authenticity (as perceived by other members of the scene).

An example of solipsism's ubiquity in black metal is the plethora of one-man-bands. Leviathan, Striborg, and Xasthur are three emblematic one-man musical projects. These three musicians have rejected the collectivity of the scene in several ways. The documentary *One Man Metal* sheds light on this.²⁶³ At the time of the filming, in 2011, all three musicians had between fifteen and thirty releases each (E.P, L.P, demo). All three composed, performed, and recorded every instrument on each one of their albums. Sound production is kept at a minimum because of the black metal ethos but they nonetheless still handle that task themselves. For the most part, their albums are released digitally online. As prolific as they are, all three have chosen to never perform live. Also, for two of them, the film was the first time they ever accepted to be interviewed.

²⁶² Allett, *The extreme metal 'connoisseur'*, 176.

²⁶³ *One Man Metal*. Dir. Noissey Staff (Vice's Music Channel). 2012.

The above paragraph mentions but a few examples demonstrating how “black metal [musicians] reject community as we understand it.”²⁶⁴ However, the same could be said regarding a portion of black metal fans whose “identities reside in a realm outside of a desired collective identification and tightly knit community [...] as a way to signal repugnance with society and a reverence of individuality.”²⁶⁵ The paragraph below, however, shows the paradoxical nature of a reverence for individuality juxtaposed with a misanthropy.

For the black metal scene, Leviathan, Striborg, and Xasthur represent the symbol of individualism, a road to follow for some. However, a closer look reveals that all three musicians suffer from depression and exhibit deep anti-social behavior (Leviathan and Xasthur also expressed misanthropic beliefs).²⁶⁶ Thus by “eschewing their community”, one-man-band black metal musicians are “instead portraying a fiercely bleak and individual-focused ethos that emphasizes death, loneliness and destruction as the great unifier.”²⁶⁷ An interesting perspective on black metal’s general perception is conveyed during an interview with members of black metal band Wolves in the Throne Room:

Why are we sad and miserable? The world around us has failed to sustain our humanity, our spirituality. The deep woe inside Black Metal is about fear that we can never return to the mythic, pastoral world that we crave on a deep subconscious level. Black metal is also about self-loathing, for modernity has transformed us, our minds, body and spirit, into an alien form, one not suited to life on earth without the mediating forces of technology.²⁶⁸

As Jesse McWilliams reminds us, “postmodernism rejects the presentation of any example as an absolutely authentic archetype” and black metal is no exception to this.²⁶⁹ For example, the above discussion demonstrated that “although the Nietzsche’s valuation of strength and vitality are arguably consistent with examples of elitism in black metal, the music of many artists emphasizes depression or even suicide.”²⁷⁰ Even if an absolute archetype of black metal does not exist, José

²⁶⁴ Vivek Venkatesh, Jeffrey S. Podoshen, Kathryn Urbaniak and Jason J. Wallin, “Eschewing Community: Black Metal”, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, April (2014), 2.

²⁶⁵ Venkatesh, Podoshen, Urbaniak & Wallin, “Eschewing Community: Black Metal”, 1.

²⁶⁶ Cited from *One Man Metal*. Part III. Leviathan says: “I fucking can’t stand being around people.”

²⁶⁷ Venkatesh, Podoshen, Urbaniak & Wallin, “Eschewing Community”, 2.

²⁶⁸ Niall Scott, *Heavy metal and the deafening threat of the apolitical* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 239.

²⁶⁹ Jesse McWilliams, “Dark Epistemology: An assessment of philosophical trends in the black metal music of Mayhem”, *Metal Music Studies Volume 1 Number 1* (2015), 35.

²⁷⁰ McWilliams, “Dark Epistemology: An assessment of philosophical trends in the black metal music of Mayhem”, 35.

Filipe Silva's conception of black metal nonetheless offers a partial consolidation to the above dichotomy between elitism and solipsist self-loathing. For Silva, "pride", 'anguish' and 'hate' seem to be the predominant emotions of Black Metal: 'pride' of the ancient days; 'anguish' for that long-gone past and 'hate' for those who took it away."²⁷¹ More importantly, "what really differentiates generic Black Metal from other musical genres is merely the fact that those three main emotions assume the role of traces of character."²⁷² In the case of certain bands, there is emphasis on only one of the three emotions – such as the "Depressive-Suicidal Black Metal bands which dig deep in anguish and melancholy."²⁷³

Elitism will now be discussed in the context of the broader extreme metal scene by comparing how elitism sometime arises in extreme metal fans who regard mainstream music as inauthentic and thus implicitly attribute their own music preference as authentic. Whereas black metal claimed their elitism in part because of the sonic challenge accompanying the raw sound production, the discussion below will mainly pertain to fans who feel elitist because they 'overcame' the sonic challenge of appreciating extreme metal vocals. Natalie Purcell and Eric Smialek each provide an example of such elitism. Purcell does so by interviewing metalheads who said that "one of the beauties of listening to metal is being able to be elitist and you can't be elitist if the masses are singing along."²⁷⁴ Smialek's sentiment echoes the aforementioned quote: "fans and musicians demonstrate such identification when they speak of feeling 'elite' partially as the result of the inability for mass audiences to enjoy extreme metal vocals."²⁷⁵

Elitism against Mainstream Culture

Fans who display a knowledge of obscure bands is another example of subcultural capital acquisition. Boasting one's knowledge of obscure underground bands is another way to increase one's subcultural capital by solidifying one's identity as being vehemently against trends, so much so that that preferences for certain bands is often dependent on a band's lack of commercial success. In

²⁷¹ José Filipe P.M. Silva, "Black Metal: History, Trace of Character and Archetype", in *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast! An Approach to Underground Music Scenes*, ed. Paula Guerra and Tania Moreira (Porto: University of Porto. Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 2016), 217.

²⁷² Silva, "Black Metal: History, Trace of Character and Archetype", 218.

²⁷³ Silva, "Black Metal", 218.

²⁷⁴ Natalie Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 109.

²⁷⁵ Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015*, 259.

other words, “transgressive subcultural capital tends to be recognized in opposition to the conformity suggested by trends.”²⁷⁶ In such cases, subcultural capital is often equated with authenticity – which mirrors something noted by Walser in regards to guitarist Steve Vai, who tried to claim his authenticity by proving his “autonomy as an artist who is free of the corrupting influences of the very social context that makes his artistic statements possible and meaningful.”²⁷⁷

Demonstrating knowledge and affinity for an obscure underground band can sometimes equate to one’s attempt at signaling the degree to which he or she stands against popular trends. Not following what they perceive as a ‘herd mentality’ in mainstream popular culture seems to be a shared value amongst different metal fans. However, “what happens when musical conventions that previously signified the ‘extreme’ begin to signify the ‘mainstream?’”²⁷⁸ Ryan Moore offers an interesting answer to such a question:

When commercialization brings alternative culture to the mass market, young people who have developed an identity based on their opposition to mainstream society experience what I have called a liquidation of subcultural capital. Their claims to be independent of media hype and consumer conformity are threatened, and so they defend their subcultural capital by distinguishing between the authentic originators and the poseurs who hopped on the bandwagon.²⁷⁹

Smialek noted that certain fans tend to equate certain musical practices with a lack of subcultural capital: breakdown and a repeated chorus. The former will only be discussed in later sections pertaining to virtuosity because some consider the breakdown to be anti-virtuosic. The chorus might be more obvious to readers since choruses are an emblem of pop music and also tend to create for listener’s an easier accessibility into the music.²⁸⁰ Music which increases the listener’s accessibility in the music is considered by some fans as inauthentic because of the way the music conforms to the commercial sphere. The term ‘sell-out’ is a common adjective that fans attribute to bands whose sound evolved with increasing additional accessibility, i.e., fans perceived such bands as conforming to the commercial sphere of pop music. Thus, authentic music (as perceived by metal fans) seems to be music that provides listeners barely – if any – accessibility into the music.

Fans who construct their identity as part of a counter-culture may result in a paradox of contradictory positive and negative values and beliefs broadly categorized as open-mindedness and

²⁷⁶ Smialek, 67.

²⁷⁷ Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, 100.

²⁷⁸ Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015*, 67.

²⁷⁹ Moore, “Alternative to What? Subcultural Capital and the Commercialization of a Music Scene”, 249.

²⁸⁰ Smialek, 143.

elitism. The former is a positive value which results in fans creating identities as members of a collectivity who are free thinkers immune to corrupting outside influences. Values of open-mindedness and free thinking are frequently expressed by fans interviewed for scholarly research. “A recurring value expressed by informants is resistance to closed-mindedness. This appeared to stem from their experiences of rejection. Interview transcripts are replete with assertions of openness and accepting different people and new ideas.”²⁸¹

On the other hand, fans who attribute a band’s lack of commercial success to their respective extremely dense sound might do so in order to demonstrate that *they* – unlike ‘the herd mentality’ of the mainstream music – have the ability to appreciate music that requires ‘hard-work’ on the listener’s part. Some will perceive a challenge in the music that requires an active listening process on their part. In line with this, it is common amongst fans of extreme metal to perceive a quasi-teleological process in their quest for metal that seems heavier, faster, denser, and generally more extreme. Thus, fans who tend to gravitate towards bands more musically extreme, might simply perceived underground bands as superior due to the possibility of a sonic challenges that it offers for the connoisseur.

There is nonetheless a paradox between values such as open-mindedness and elitism which stems from the fact that someone truly open-minded would not perceive his different subjective musical taste as superior to the musical taste of others. Additionally, describing the metal culture’s open-mindedness as monolithic leaves a false impression on readers who are unfamiliar with the musical culture of metal. The open-minded ethos, although true, is paradoxically juxtaposed with a close-minded elitism for those who ‘sell-out’.

However, the paradox mentioned above may be slightly mediated by Smialek’s notion of the phenomenology of meaningful disorientation experienced by fans of technical death metal and which may explain certain elitist tendencies. Meaningful disorientation refers to “stylistic conventions that fans can draw upon to anticipate its most deceptive passages after repeated listening and gain a sense of mastery over the music.”²⁸² In this way, “disorientation becomes not

²⁸¹ Paul Conrad Henry and Marylouise Caldwell, “Self-Empowerment and Consumption: Consumer Remedies for Prolonged Stigmatization”, *European Journal of Marketing* Vol. 40 No 9/10 (2006), 1040.

²⁸² Smialek, *Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015*, 92-3.

only a kind of transgression against a perceived mainstream [...] but also a kind of personal challenge to overcome.”²⁸³

II. Subcultural Capital, Virtuosity, and Rhythmic Complexity

Attributes such as ‘virtuosity’ and ‘complexity’ are commonly given to progressive metal bands by their fans, writers and consumers of that culture. Within the broad metal scene, progressive metal is often described as being ‘highbrow’; implying that the scene in general views this music as overly-intellectual and prestigious. Although both attributes may be positive for some, others instead view progressive metal as being self-indulgent.

Although the academic research on progressive metal is nascent, scholars who have so far studied this case agree that bands must include a complex and intricate rhythmic language in their music if they are to be labelled as progressive metal.²⁸⁴ Progressive metal is broadly defined as a subgenre of metal heavily influenced from 1970’s progressive rock. “Formal complexity, virtuosity, and [a] sense of experimentation” were introduced to the traditional formula of metal: “rhythmic drive, aggression, and timbral preferences [distortion].”²⁸⁵ “Individuality and originality are highly prized in this subgenre, and bands frequently develop idiosyncratic musical practices to assert individuality.”²⁸⁶ This is similar to Kahn-Harris’ idea that transgressive subcultural capital is acquired “through a radical individualism.”²⁸⁷ This raises an interesting contradiction: transgressive subcultural capital can be gained by bands who manage to ‘develop idiosyncratic musical practices’, as a collective unit. In other words, bands develop a radical individualism by developing their own sound – as a collective – which sonically differentiates them from other bands in the scene.

Extreme metal and progressive metal differ in their acquisition of transgressive subcultural capital. For extreme metal, solipsism serves to position one’s self against the ‘commitment to the collective’. However, for progressive metal, individualism is either asserted by means of a virtuosic

²⁸³ Smialek, 92-3.

²⁸⁴ See Jonathan Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah”, *Music Theory Spectrum* Volume 29 Issues 2 (2007), 219-246;

See Gregory R. McCandless, “Metal as a Gradual Process: Additive Music Structures in the Music of Dream Theater”, *Society for Music Theory* Volume 19 Number 2 (2009);

See Harry Stafylakis, *Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract* (PhD diss. New York City University, 2014).

²⁸⁵ Stafylakis, *Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract*, 2.

²⁸⁶ Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah”, 244.

²⁸⁷ Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 127.

guitarist who represents the archetypal hero or by the band – as a collective unit - who make use of temporal variations or metrical disruptions that results in idiosyncratic musical practices.²⁸⁸

Progressive metal has three main ways to gain transgressive subcultural capital: individual virtuosity, collective idiosyncrasy (originality of a band), and elitism. As for mundane subcultural capital, another way of acquiring it is by demonstrating one's understanding of the rhythmic complexity in the music can be a way to highlight the perceived superiority of progressive metal compared to pop-metal.

Pieslak interviewed fans of pop metal, nü-metal, and progressive metal in order to discover the most appealing aspects for fans of both styles. His conclusion was that fans of pop metal and nü-metal were more likely to be attracted to the 'hook' of a song, "suggesting that the timbre and sound or the overall essence of the music might be the most significant for them."²⁸⁹ However, for fans of progressive metal, it was "the musical performance and pitch/rhythmic complexity" they claim to be "the most engaging."²⁹⁰ During interviews with fans of progressive metal, Pieslak mentions that they would "consistently emphasize the technical aspects of the music as a source, if not *the* source, of attraction."²⁹¹ The most striking is that most of these fans would not be able to describe their "analytical understanding of the music with theoretical terminology" but yet, "they are acutely aware of the relative complexity behind the music and admire it for its sophisticated structure."²⁹²

Individual Virtuosity

In *Running with the Devil*, Walser set out to demonstrate how heavy metal guitarists (especially from the early 1980's) re-appropriated the virtuosity of classical music, or more specifically, of Baroque music. According to him, prestige is "one of the most important reasons" why heavy metal guitarists re-appropriated the virtuosity of classical music in the 1980's.²⁹³ However, virtuosity functions differently in classical music than it does in metal. What is meaningful for a listener of

²⁸⁸ Stafylakis, *Altered States*, 3.

²⁸⁹ Pieslak, "Sound, text and identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", 45.

²⁹⁰ Pieslak, "Sound, text and identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", 45.

²⁹¹ Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal", 244.

²⁹² Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal", 244.

²⁹³ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 61.

metal might not be so for a listener of classical music. A possible explanation for this contradiction is that metal has “re-appropriated the more prestigious discourses of classical music and reworked them into noisy articulations of pride, fear, longing, alienation, aggression, and community”.²⁹⁴

There are at least two different intentions for musicians who want to gain prestige. First, re-appropriating virtuosity in order to gain *personal* prestige within the scene is analogous to acquiring transgressive subcultural capital. The most common example being a virtuosic musician that stands out as an individual from the rest of his band members. Second, if the intention is to bring prestige to the *style of music* (in this case: metal), we could more likely compare this an attempt at acquiring cultural capital (as opposed to subcultural capital); because if the social status of metal music gains approval among the rest of society, this may potentially result in a wider recognition of the virtuoso status of these musicians.

Seldom are the formal educational institutions aimed at popular musicians (that includes metal guitarists) who are striving to become virtuosos of heavy metal and progressive metal. California’s Musician’s Institute and the Berklee College of Music in Boston are two of those institutions. I would argue that such an education is a way of obtaining both cultural capital *and* subcultural capital because the former is obtained by receiving a formal higher education in music and the latter is obtained due to the musician’s newly acquired skills that will be sought-after by bands in the scene. How common is the possibility of acquiring both cultural and subcultural capital in other subcultures? Does this have a relation with metal juxtaposition of lowbrow and highbrow artistic aesthetics?

Rhythmic Complexity

Since I have proposed a re-definition of virtuosity in the past, the focus here is mostly on one particular nuance to be considered for a re-definition of virtuosity.²⁹⁵ Not only can virtuosity be attributed to solo musicians who have a complete control of their instruments but also to bands that have an incredibly high level of chemistry as a musical unit, i.e., bands who are musically ‘tight’ in

²⁹⁴ Walser, 104.

²⁹⁵ Poster presentation at the 2016 *Interdisciplinary Symposium on Virtuosity* held in Budapest, Hungary. Working with Professor Christine Beckett (Concordia University), we proposed a three part re-definition of virtuosity. The first part is pertinent for this paper: virtuosity can include speed and technical prowess, but extends to artistic decision-making re dynamics, expressive control, aesthetic choice, and how to create the desired impact on listeners at all tempi and in all contexts.

concert. Musical parts of each individual might sound like simple and bland on their own but can in fact be revealed to be extremely complex when heard in the context of the whole musical unity. A perfect example would be Meshuggah, whose music is characterized by a “distinct rhythmic and metric structure based on large-scale odd time signatures, mixed meter, and metric superimposition.”²⁹⁶ In a case like Meshuggah, individual parts sometimes give the impression of simplicity – and rightly so to an extent. However, by dissecting Meshuggah’s rhythmic language, one begins to perceive *the particular way* in which their music is complex.

Conclusion

This chapter was an exploration into the underlying motives and traits of character of fans in different extreme metal scenes. Although the desire to shock was only introduced in this chapter, I nonetheless attempted to provide certain hints of the shock aspect so entrenched in the metal subculture, e.g. the album cover artwork described in the first chapter. There have been various suggestions offered by scholars to explain metal’s love for shock. For Weinstein, the motive to bring chaos to the collective consciousness is a complex affirmation of power. “Of the power of the forces of disorder, of the power to confront those forces in the imagination, and of the power to transcend those forces in art.”²⁹⁷ For Walser however, metal’s fascination for the dark side – and thus shock – gives evidence of both dissatisfaction with dominant identities and institutions and an intense yearning for reconciliation with something more credible.²⁹⁸

The discussion on Satanism in this chapter highlighted how the use of satanic iconographies has several functions: as a marker of authenticity in both death metal and black metal, as a symbol of shock in itself, and also as a philosophy against the community in favor of the individual. On this note, José Silva’s perspective on the relationship between black metal and Satanism provides saliency. For Silva, the archetype of Satan represents the “Terrible Father that appears not to nurture and comfort but to challenge his own sons, kicking them out of docility and spiritual dependence and forcing them to face reality without any protection.”²⁹⁹ It is thus the reason why black metal is “cold” as well as raw and “this is why ‘black metallers’ need to build up their own armors, weapons

²⁹⁶ Pieslak, “Re-casting Metal”, 219.

²⁹⁷ Weinstein, “Heavy Metal”, 38.

²⁹⁸ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, xvii.

²⁹⁹ Silva, “Black Metal: history, trace of character and archetype”, 219.

and shelter.”³⁰⁰ After all, everyone needs a way to release their aggressions and frustrations – the debate seems more about *what* causes such aggressions. In the end, black metal and death metal function in a similar manner as numerous other genres: as a tool to transcend the frustrations rooted in our personal lives.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the various discrepancies between two of the most popular subgenres under the extreme metal umbrella: death metal and black metal. The order in which the chapters appeared was meant to gradually familiarize readers with both subgenres. The first chapter broadly introduced death metal and black metal which subsequently allowed for a deeper elaboration in the second chapter regarding the aesthetic intentions in both subgenres. More specifically, Chapter Two argued that studio production is a crucial element for distinguishing the aesthetic of ‘heaviness’ – characteristic of death metal – from the aesthetic of ‘raw’ which is typical of black metal. Continuing a similar line of thought, Chapter Three elaborated on another aesthetic term: ‘progressive’. As opposed to studio production, ‘progressive’ usually refers to bands whose music is characterized by rhythmic and metrical complexities.

Although there most certainly are bands considered to be traditional progressive metal – Dream Theater was provided as an example – most bands discussed in Chapter Three could be defined as either death metal (largely because of vocal distortion), progressive metal (largely because of rhythmic and metrical complexities), or a combination of both: progressive death metal. As mentioned to readers before, the purpose of Chapter Three was not to resolve the conflict of genre taxonomy between death metal and progressive metal, but rather, to highlight the musical practices that characterize certain aesthetic terminologies such as ‘raw’, ‘heavy’, ‘progressive’.

In Chapter Four, the focus switched from *what* the musical practices that characterize certain subgenres are to *why* certain musical practices are ubiquitous in a specific subgenre or in metal more broadly. In other words, instead of merely identifying the raw studio production of black metal, the goal in Chapter Four was partly to elucidate the sociological, philosophical, and psychological reasons for such a sound production, the reasons for a desire to shock the rest of society, the

³⁰⁰ Silva, “Black Metal”, 219.

reasons for making use of satanic symbolism, and also, the reasons for death metals adherence to virtuosity in comparison to black metal in which virtuosity is instead eschewed.

We are now in a better position to answer one of the hypothesis posed in the introduction to this thesis: the broad aesthetic intention of black metal is one that connotes evil whereas power is typically connoted from the broad aesthetic intention of death metal. Each chapter underpinned this hypothesis in a different manner. The history of black metal is tainted with transgressive acts that are absent in death metal scenes: murder, assault, church burning. Although such actions were mostly committed by a minority in the back metal scene, the general public nonetheless perceived the black metal scene as one filled with dangerous and evil individuals. Conversely, Chapter One also mentioned certain musicians who publicly announced themselves as being truly evil – although it could be argued that such a coming out was still part of an act. The point is that in comparison to death metal, the infamous history of black metal consequently resulted in fans affording ‘evil’ as belonging to their field of semiotic possibilities.

Although the concept of power in metal has often been associated with high volume and distortion, I would argue that the musical examples in Chapter Three (conception of rhythm and meter) connote an additional facet of power: a mastery of musical execution with regards to complex rhythms can also connote power. In a way, the power communicated by distortion and volume is related to the side of power associated with tyranny: it is imposed on fans during a concert in an analogous manner to a tyrant who imposes his will on others – albeit the former is much more benign than the latter. However, the power connoted from a flawless execution of complex rhythms – although other musical parameters are also possible – is more aligned with the power one feels by overcoming difficult challenges and subsequently results in an experience of transcending all those things that overbear us in our lives.

The sort of power described in the above paragraph is almost non-existent in black metal because most practitioners eschew complexity, virtuosity, and flawless production. In other words, black metal tends to never bestow fans with a sense of power that is aligned with musical control as well as overall musical competence. Consequently, fans are less likely to experience the power in the music as one that connotes something akin to overcoming the challenges in their lives. The fact that black metal prevents listeners from experiencing the kind of power described above could be construed as equating with evil: the sonic chaos that characterizes black metal could be argued to prevent listeners from escaping the chaos in their lives.

Appendix I

The musical score is presented in four systems, each consisting of three staves: Bass Guitar (bottom), Rhythm Guitar (middle), and Drumset (top). The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 140$. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, arpeggios, and rhythmic patterns. The first system is marked with a '5' above the staff. The second system is marked with a '7' above the staff. The third system is marked with an '8' above the staff. The fourth system is marked with a '10' above the staff. The score concludes with a double bar line.

(0:28-1:25) *Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave It Motion* – Meshuggah

Bibliography

- Adams, Kyle. "Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap." *Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, Volume 14 No2 May 2008.
- . "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music." *Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, Volume 15, No.5 October 2009: 1-12.
- Allett, Nicola. *The extreme metal 'connoisseur'*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2013.
- Arom, Simha. *African Polyphony and Polyrhythm*. Translated by Martin Thom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Baulch, Emma. "Gesturing Elsewhere: The Identity Politics of the Balinese Death/Trash Metal Scene." *Popular Music* 22, no.2 2003: 199.
- Berger, Harris. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1999.
- . "The Practice of Perception: Multi-Functionality and Time in the Musical Experiences of a Heavy Metal Drummer." *Ethnomusicology*, Vol.41 No.3 1997: 464-488.
- Biamonte, Nicole. "Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music." *Society for Music Theory*, Volume 20, Number 2 June 2014.
<<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.2/mto.14.20.2.biamonte.html>>.
- . "Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music." *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 32, Issue 2 2010: 95-110.
- Blakeley, Ryan. "Genre and Influences: Tracing the Lineage of Timbre and Form in Steven Wilson's Progressive Rock." *Master Thesis*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2017.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge, 1979.
- . *Sports and Social Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Bowman, Durrell Scott. *Permanent Change: Rush, Musicians' Rock, and the Progressive Post-Counterculture*. Los Angeles: PhD diss., University of California, 2003.
- Brackett, David. "Questions of Genre in Black Popuar Music." *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1/2 2005: 73-92.
- Brown, Charles M. "Musical Responses to Oppression and Alienation: Blues, Spirituals, Secular Thrash, and Christian Thrash Metal Music." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 3 1995: 439-452. 03 03 2018. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20007201>>.

- Butler, Mark J. "Hearing Kaleidoscopes: Embedded Grouping Dissonance in Electronic Dance Music." *Twentieth-century Music, Volume 2, Issue 02* September 2005: 221-243.
- Byrnside, Ronald. "The formation of a musical style: early rock." Hamm, Charles, Bruno Nettl and Byrnside Ronald . *Contemporary Music and Music Cultures*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975. 159-92.
- Cateforis, Theo. "How Alternative Turned Progressive: The Strange Case of Math Rock." Holm-Hudson, Kevin. *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2001.
- Chen-Gia Tsai, Li-Ching Wang, Shwu-Fen Wang, Yio-Wha Shau, Tzu-Yu Hsiao, & Wolfgang Auhagen. "Aggressiveness of the Growl-like Timbre: Acoustic Characteristics, Musical Implications, and Biomechanical Mechanisms." *Music Perception, Volume 27 Issue 3* 2010: 209-221.
- Chester, Andrew. "Second thoughts on a rock aesthetic: The Band." *New Left Review* 1970: 75-82.
- Christe, Ian. *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Epstein, Bruce Friesen & Jonathon. "Rock 'n' roll ain't noise pollution: artistic conventions and tensions in the major subgenres of heavy metal music." *Popular Music and Society, Vol.18 No3* 1994: 1-17.
- Frandsen, Daniel. "Two Steps past Insanity: The Expression of Aggression in Death Metal Music." McKinnon, Colin A., Niall Scott and Kristen Sollee. *Can I Play With Madness? Metal, Dissonance, Madness, and Alienation*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011. 35-40.
- Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Gabrielsson, Alf and Patrik N. Juslin. "Emotional Expression in Music Performance: Between the Performer's Intention and the Listener's Experience." *Psychology of Music, Volume 24, Issue 1* April 1996: 68-91.
- Geliebter, David, Ari J Ziegler and Evan Mandery. "Lyrical Stresses of Heavy Metal and Rap." *Metal Music Studies, Volume 1 Issue 1* 2015: 143-153.
- Halliwell, Martin and Paul Hegarty . *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock Since the 1960s*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011.
- Harrell, Jack. "The poetics of destruction: Death metal rock." *Popular Music & Society 18/1* 1994: 91-103.

- Hayward, Philip. *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound, and Horror Cinema*. Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2009.
- Henry, Paul Conrad and Marylouise Caldwell. "Self-Empowerment and Consumption: Consumer Remedies for Prolonged Stigmatization." *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40, No 9/10 2006: 1030-1048.
- Hjelm, Titus, Keith Kahn-Harris and Mark Levine. *Heavy Metal: Controversies & Counterculture*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2013.
- Huron, David. *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*. Cambridge: First MIT Press, 2006.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. Ed. Martin Heidegger. Trans. James S. Churchill. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964.
- Irwin, William. *Metallica and Philosophy: A Crash Course in Brain Surgery*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing LTD, 2007.
- Jackendoff, Fred Lerdahl & Ray. *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983.
- Jung, Carl. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1963.
- Kahn-Harris, Keith and Andy Bennett. *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*. London: Palgrave, 2004.
- Kahn-Harris, Keith. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. New York: Berg, 2007.
- Kramer, Jonathan. "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time." *Indiana Theory Review* 17 (1997).
- Krebs, Harald. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Krims, Adam. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Lambe, Stephen. *Citizens Of Hope And Glory: The Story of Progressive Rock*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011.
- Levitin, Daniel J. *This Is Your Brain On Music: The science of a human obsession*. New York: Plume, 2006.
- Lilja, Esa. "Characteristic of Heavy Metal Chord Structures: Their Acoustic and Modal Construction, and Relation to Modal and Tonal Context." *Licentiate Thesis*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, May 2004.
- McCandless, Gregory R. "Metal as a Gradual Process: Additive Music Structures in the Music of Dream Theater." *Society for Music Theory*, Volume 19, Number 2 2013.
- McWilliams, Jesse. "Dark epistemology: An assessment of philosophical trends in the black metal music of Mayhem." *Metal Music Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1 2015: 25-38.
- Metal Evolution: Extreme Metal*. Dirs. Sam Dunn and Scott McFadyen. 2011.

- Metal Evolution: Progressive Metal*. Dirs. Sam Dunn and Scott McFadyen. 2011.
- Meyer, Leonard B. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- Moore, Alan F. *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock. Second edition*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2001.
- Moore, Ryan. "Alternative to What? Subcultural Capital and the Commercialization of a music scene." *Deviant Behavior* 23:3 2005: 292-252.
- . "Sound, Technology, and Interpretation in Subcultures of Heavy Music Production." *Doctoral Thesis*. Pitsburg: University of Pitsburg, 2008.
- Mynett, Mark. "The Distortion Paradox: Analyzing Contemporary Metal Production." Brown, Andy, et al. *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 68-86.
- Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. *Musicologie générale et musicologie*. Paris: Bourgois, 1987.
- Osborn, Brad. "Beats that Commute: Algebraic and Kinesthetic Models for Math-Rock Grooves." *Gamut* 3/1 2010: 48-50.
- Overell, Rosemary. *'[I] hate girls and emo[tion]s': Negotiating masculinity in grindcore music*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2013.
- Phillipov, Michelle. *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.
- . *Extreme music for extreme people?: Norwegian black metal and transcendent violence*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2013.
- Pieslak, Jonathan. "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah." *Music Theory Spectrum, Volume 29, Issues 2* 2007: 219-246.
- . *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- . "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'." *Popular Music Volume 27/1* 2008: 35-52.
- Purcell, Natalie. *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003.
- Reyes, Ian. "Blacker than Death: Recollecting the "Black Turn"." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25 2013: 240-257.
- Rivera, Jan. *Advanced Rhythmic Concepts for Guitar: An in-depth study on Metric Modulation, Polyrythms and Polumeters*. San Diego: Violet Anamnesis Publications, 2014.

- Roccor, Bettina. "Heavy Metal: Forces of Unification and Fragmentation within a Musical Subculture." *The World of Music, Vol. 42, No. 1, Gothic, Metal, Rap, and Rave - Youth Culture and Its Educational Dimensions* 2000: 83-94.
- Rothstein, William. *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1989.
- Scott, Niall. *Heavy metal and the deafening threat of the apolitical*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2013.
- Seeger, Charles. "On the moods of a musical logic." *Journal of the American Musicological XXII* 1960: 76.
- Sharman, Leah and Genevieve A Dingle. *Extreme metal music and anger processing*. May 2015. <<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00272/full>>.
- Silva, José Filipe P.M. "Black Metal: history, trace of character and archetype." Guerra, Paula and Tania Moreira. *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast! An Approach to Underground Music Scenes*. Porto: University of Porto. Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 2016. pp.215-220.
- Smialek, Eric. "Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal Music, ca. 1990–2015." *Doctoral Thesis*. Montréal: McGill University, 2015.
- . "Rethinking Metal Aesthetics: Complexity, Authenticity, and Audience in Meshuggah's I and Catch Thirtythr33." *Master Thesis*. Montréal: McGill University, 2008.
- Soderlind, Michael and Didrik Moynihan. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Port Townsend: Feral House, 1998.
- Stafylakis, Harry. "Altered States: Metrical Dissonance in the music of Tesseract." *Doctoral Thesis*. New York: City Univeristy, 2014.
- Tagg, Philip and Karen Collins. *The Sonic Aesthetics of the Industrial: Re-Constructing Yesterday's Soundscape for Today's Alienation and Tomorrow's Dystopia*. February 2001. 1 Septembre 2017. <<http://tagg.org/articles/virrat.html>>.
- Tagg, Philip. "Musical meanings, classical and popular. The case of anguish." Nattiez, J-J. Turin: Einaudi, 2004.
- Tagg, Philip. "Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and music." Bennett, Andy, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee. *The Popular Music Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994. 48-66.
- . *Tritonal crime and 'music as music'*. November 1998. 3 September 2017. <<http://tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/morric70.pdf>>.
- Venkatesh, Vivek, et al. *Educational, psychological, and behavioral considerations in niche online communities*. Hershey: IGI Global, 2014.

- . "Eschewing Community: Black Metal." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* April 2014.
- Wagner, Jeff. *Mean Deviation: Four Decades of Progressive Heavy Metal*. New York: Bazillion Points Publishing, 2010.
- Walser, Robert. *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993.
- Waters, Keith. "Blurring The Barline: Metric Displacement in the Piano Solos of Herbie Hancock." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 8 1996: 19-37.
- Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991.
- Whiteley, Sheila. "Progressive Rock and Psychedelic Coding in the Work of Jimi Hendrix." Middleton, Richard. *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 235-61.
- Williams, Duncan. "Tracking timbral changes in metal productions from 1990-2013." *Metal Music Studies Volume 1 Number 1* 2015: 39-68.
- Wilson, Scott. "Basileus philosophorum metaloricum', Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium, 1." 2012: 33-51.
- Yeston, Maury. *The Stratification of Musical Rhythm*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Zak, Albin. *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Discography

- Barnes, C., Webster, A., Owen, J., Rusay, B., & Mazurkiewicz, P. (1991). [Recorded by Cannibal Corpse]. On *Butchered At Birth*. Tampa: Metal Blade Records.
- Borgir, D. (1997). [Recorded by D. Borgir]. On *Enthroned Darkness Triumphant*. Ludvika: Nuclear Blast.
- Duplantier, J., & Duplantier, M. (2008). Esoteric Surgery [Recorded by Gojira]. On *The Way of All Flesh*. Prosthetic.
- Fenriz, Culto, N., & Zephyrous (1992). [Recorded by Darkthrone]. On *A Blaze In The Northern Sky*. Kolbotn: Peaceville Records.
- Filth, D., Pyres, G., Allender, P., Graves, R., Powell, M., Erlandsson, A., & Deva, S. J. (2000). [Recorded by Cradle Of Filth]. On *Midian*. Battle: Koch.
- Hanneman, J., King, K., & Araya, T. (1985). [Recorded by Slayer]. On *Hell Awaits*. Los Angeles: Metal Blade Records.
- Hetfield, J., Ulrich, L., Hammet, K., & Burton, C. (1986). Master of Puppets [Recorded by Metallica]. On *Master of Puppets*. Elektra.
- Mustaine, D. (1986). [Recorded by Megadeth]. On *Peace Sells...But Who's Buying?* Los Angeles: Capitol Records.
- Petrucci, J., Portnoy, M., Myung, J., Rudess, J., & LaBrie, J. (2007). Constant Motion [Recorded by Dream Theater]. On *Systematic Chaos*. New York City: Roadrunner Records.
- Shuldiner, C. (1988). Leprosy [Recorded by Death]. On *Leprosy*. Tampa: Combat Records.
- Tardy, J., West, A., Chartier, J., Peres, T., Tucker, D., & Tardy, D. (1989). [Recorded by Obituary]. On *Slowly We Rot*. Tampa: Roadrunner Records.
- Thordendal, F., & Haake, T. (2002). Rational Gaze [Recorded by Meshuggah]. On *Nothing*. Nuclear Blast.
- Thordendal, F., Hagström, M., & Haake, T. (2012). Break Those Bones Whose Sinews Gave It Motion [Recorded by Meshuggah]. On *Koloss*. Stockholm: Nuclear Blast.
- Vikernes, V. (1992). [Recorded by Burzum]. On *Burzum*. Bergen: Deathlike Silence Productions.
- Weinman, B. (1999). 43% Burnt [Recorded by D. E. Plan]. On *Calculating Infinity*. South River: Relapse.

