

BREAKING THE LAW:
**VISUAL, SONIC AND DISCURSIVE TRANSGRESSION IN EXTREME
METAL MUSIC**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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BY

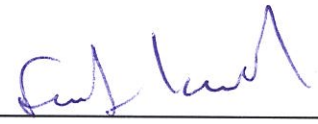
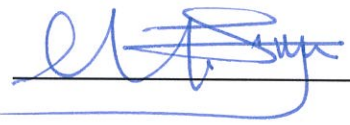

ALİ EMİN KARAGÖZ

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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Cultural Studies

Examining Committee Members:

	DECISION	SIGNATURE
Prof. Ferhat Kentel (Thesis Advisor)	<u>Accepted</u>	
Assoc. Prof. Menent Savaş Cazala	<u>Accepted</u>	
Assist. Prof. Özge Özyılmaz	<u>Accepted</u>	

This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of İstanbul Şehir University.

Date

07.08.2019


Seal/Signature

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and standards of ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and standards, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

First Name, Last Name: Ali Emrah KABAGCIZ

Signature 

ABSTRACT

BREAKING THE LAW:

VISUAL, SONIC AND DISCURSIVE TRANSGRESSION IN EXTREME METAL MUSIC

Karagöz, Ali Emin

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Extreme metal is a musical subgenre that has its origins in heavy metal. In this thesis, I aim to determine how transgression occurs in the extreme metal scene. I examine the concept of transgression in visual, sonic and discursive dimensions as fields where become most evident. For that purpose, I analyze the transgressive practices taking place in visual dimension in the contexts of cover artworks and stage performances in the light of Bakhtinian terms “grotesque” and “disgust.” I scrutinize the sonic transgression by focusing on vocals in death metal and the special sound settings employed by drone metal. I establish a common link between sonic practices in extreme metal arguing that how death metal and drone metal impoverish certain musical elements while empowering others to provide highly transgressive listening experience to the audience. Lastly, I analyze the transgressive discourses of extreme metal by focusing on the lyrics to display how sexual violence and misogynistic discourses are instrumentalized by death metal bands to create transgressive scenic discourse. In addition to that, I argue about the fascist, anti-semitic and anti-religious discourses of National Socialist black metal to demonstrate how politics play a part in extreme metal’s discourse.

Keywords: Extreme metal, transgression, visuality, sound, discourse

ÖZ

KURALLARI YIKMAK:
EKSTREM METAL MÜZİKTE GÖRSEL, SONİK VE SÖYLEMSEL TRANSGRESYON

Karagöz, Ali Emin.

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Ekstrem metal kökleri heavy metal'e dayanan müzikal bir alttürdür. Bu tezde transgresyon kavramının ekstrem metal'de nasıl meydana geldiğini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktayım. Transgresyonu kavramını, en belirgin olarak ortaya çıktığı görsel, sonik ve söylemsel düzlemde incelemekteyim. Bu amaçla, görsel boyutta meydana gelen transgresif eylemleri, albüm kapakları ve sahne performanslar bağlamında, Bahtinyen kavramlar "grotesk" ve "iğrenme" ışığında analiz etmekteyim. Sonik transgresyonu ise death metal vokalleri ve drone metal tarafından kullanılan özel ses ayarlarına odaklanarak irdelemekteyim. Ekstrem metal'de meydana gelen sonik pratikler arasında bir ortaklık kurarak, death ve drone metal'in bazı müzikal unsurları baskıarken bazılarını ise nasıl güçlendirerek dinleyicilere son derece transgresif bir dinleme tecrübesi sunduğunu tartışmaktayım. Son olarak, ekstrem metal'in transgresif söylemlerini analiz etmekteyim. Bu sebeple, transgresif bir sahne söylemi yaratmak için cinsel şiddetin ve kadın düşmanı söylemlerin death metal tarafından nasıl araçsallaştırıldığına dikkat çekmek amacıyla şarkı sözlerine odaklanmaktayım. Buna ek olarak politikanın ekstrem metal'in söyleminde nasıl bir rol oynadığını ortaya koymak için onun bir alttürü olan Nasyonal sosyalist black metal'in faşist, anti-semitik ve din karşıtı söylemlerini tartışmaktayım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekstrem metal, transgresyon, görsellik, ses, söylem



Dedicated to my father

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this thesis is to unravel the transgressive practices and the motivations behind such practices in the extreme metal scene. The concept of transgression is contextualized in three different dimensions as following, visuality, sound and the discourse. Transgressive visuality is discussed concerning Bakhtinian terms “grotesque” and “disgust” revealing, different subgenres of extreme metal while utilizing these concepts vary in methods. Sound of extreme metal is argued regarding “unrecognizability” -a term coined by Michel Philppov’s and “tactics” by Michel de Certeau.

My motivations behind writing this thesis are the result of a long-lasting passion for metal music. The first time I encountered with metal music I was fifteen years old. I was amazed by the sound of it. It had not sounded anything like I heard before. The intensity of guitar sounds and the vocals were dazzling. I started to read everything I could find about metal music when I was in high school. Unfortunately, I did not know English. I had to be satisfied by reading Wikipedia pages and forums in Turkish. I was not interested in artists themselves but the music itself. Therefore, I read about different genres as well as stylistic and thematic differences between them. However, I was simply a listener with irresistible curiosity up until three years ago.

In the last semester of my undergraduate studies, I submitted a paper for a class. I chose metal music as a subject. While doing the required research to write the paper, I realized that extreme metal was, in fact, an academic discipline. There were academics interested in metal music, approaching it with scientific curiosity. Academic from different backgrounds have been publishing articles and books, organizing symposiums and conferences all over the world. At that moment, I had already known what I was going to study at masters.

While I was writing this thesis, I employed a qualitative research method, which is mainly based upon the literature review to investigate the extreme phenomena that have been mentioned throughout this thesis. I selected case examples to elaborate and clarify the matter at hand. While selecting, I attempted to include cases which I believe are the best to represent the transgressive nature of the extreme metal. The information regarding musical bands mentioned in this thesis is either taken from another researcher or Encyclopedia Metallum which is the largest online information portal on the internet. Encyclopedia Metallum is a rich reference source that has been frequently utilized in metal music studies. Majority of the lyrics discussed are also taken from Encyclopedia Metallum.

This thesis consists of seven different chapters. Following this introductory chapter which is chapter one, chapter two discusses the history and the evolution of heavy metal music to extreme metal that is the main focus of this thesis. In this chapter, I argue that extreme metal is the result of a stylistic and ideological break from the heavy metal due to metal music's unrestrainable desire for transgression. This chapter also points out the reasons and consequences of the extreme metal's diversification into different subgenres.

In chapter three, reviews the literature that has been produced over the years in metal music studies. By pointing out the canonical works that determined the course of metal music studies, this chapter aims to introduce readers to some of the most influential works in the history of metal music studies.

Chapter four draws the theoretical framework of the concepts such as "transgression" and "carnival" to explain in what context are these concepts being used throughout this thesis. In the following, chapter three argues the visual transgression in extreme metal with respect to those concepts attempting to demonstrate how visual transgression occurs. The transgression that takes place in visual dimension is scrutinized in the context of death metal and black metal, examines the ways that two subgenres utilize different methods and techniques in order to produce highly transgressive visuals.

Chapter five dwells on the sonic properties of extreme metal concerning transgression. In this chapter, I investigate the vocals in death metal arguing that the vocals are deliberately disrupted to mask the meaning and emotions conveyed through music. In the remaining of this chapter, I argue the sound of drone metal by pointing out the specific sound settings employed and the consequences of these particular settings in the human body. I concluded that the sonic properties of drone metal evoke physical responses which could cause severe medical conditions. Lastly, I contend that death metal and drone metal impoverish certain element of music while consolidating others. The results, however, is sonically transgressive due to the corrupted musical narrative which is entirely against the conventional musical aesthetics.

Chapter six addresses the problematic discourses of extreme metal. Firstly, I explore the representation of extreme sexual practices in death metal then, the relationship of these practices with the misogynistic discourses that are manifested in the lyrics. Secondly, I tackle with black metal's fascist and racist discourses which propagated through heathenism movement in the scene. After that, by pointing out the proliferation of such discourses with regards to heathenism, I analyze the national socialist black metal (NSBM) phenomenon through lyrics of notorious bands in the scene to illustrate internal dynamics of NSBM.

CHAPTER II

FROM HEAVY METAL TO EXTREME METAL

2.1. History and Evolution of Extreme Metal

Extreme metal music has been one of the most controversial forms of popular music for almost fifty years. Its unique and unprecedented sonic features when combined with the daring attitude towards delicate subjects like gender, sexuality, violence, and politics, ultimately create an extremely transgressive form of music. Extreme metal acquired its defining characteristics gradually over the course of many years by going through different stages. To be able to comprehend the extreme metal phenomenon, these stages should be explored first. Hence, in this chapter, I shall attempt to demonstrate the historical development of extreme metal regarding its origins, which is heavy metal. Subsequently, I intend to display how heavy metal transformed into extreme metal by pointing out the different subgenres that emerged throughout the years.

The origins of extreme metal go back to heavy metal and heavy metal surely did not appear independently of social and geographical conditions. "There appears to be a strong consensus amongst academics and established journalist that heavy metal and hard rock emerged during the late 1960's/early 1970's in the industrial Midlands of England." (Cope, 2010, p. 7) Harrison argues that:

Origins of heavy metal can be traced directly to the industrial, working-class neighbourhoods of Birmingham, England in the late 1960's Birmingham bands Black Sabbath and Judas Priest created and defined the genre, drawing upon the industrial geography of the city and their working-class backgrounds for inspiration, both of which are reflected in their music -both lyrically and instrumentally (Harrison, 2010, p. 145).

Birmingham then did not only important as the place where it all started but also important in terms of the sonic influence which it has during the heavy metal's formative years. Birmingham is a heavily industrialized city, which is famous for the

metal industry and coal mines. The industry in Birmingham has a huge impact on the invention of heavy metal's sound. Tommy Iommi, Black Sabbath's iconic guitarist determined the heavy metal's guitar sound by accident. According to Deena Weinstein, he was working in a factory however, one day he was assigned to work with a machine, which he was unfamiliar with. It was a machine that cuts the steel but accidentally Iommi sliced the tip of his two fretting fingers while working. It was excruciating for him to play with bare-bones therefore, he made himself tip of fingers out of leather, which allows him to play guitar (Lashua, Spracklen, & Wagg, 2014).

Although this event is unfortunate for Iommi, it was a groundbreaking discovery in terms of rock music. Iommi's leather fingertips generated a down-tuned dark and gloomy sound of the guitar that ultimately set the sound of Black Sabbath's musical sound. In this respect, considering Black Sabbath's influence on other heavy metal bands Iommi then might be solely held responsible for the creation of heavy metal's guitar sound eventually leading to contemporary extreme metal music.

While Tommy Iommi's invention of fingertips formed the guitar sound, Birmingham also influenced the Black Sabbath's drummer Billy Ward's style which later on determined the basic drumming technique in heavy metal. Harrison argues that:

As a child, Ward remembers how the sound of stamp-forges from nearby factories influenced his style of playing: 'you could hear the drop of the stamp-forges and I'd be laying in bed at night, just kinda tapping on the headboard, putting extra rhythm into the stamp (Lashua et al., 2014).

Forging sounds from the factories which reverberating in Billy Ward's head, when reflected in actual drums, it created musically revolutionary rhythms. Wherefore, two important elements - guitar sound and rhythm- originated dependently the conditions that geography shaped. Birmingham's industrialization then, directly determined the foundations of heavy metal sound.

Although Black Sabbath strikes here as the band who set the fundamentals of heavy metal there was an ongoing disagreement in metal music academia about the title of “first heavy metal band”, Black Sabbath is considered to be the first heavy metal band by most of the academics (Walser,1993; Weinstein, 2000; Harrison, 2010; Cope 2010). Andrew L. Cope argues in his book *Black Sabbath And The Rise Of Heavy Metal Music* that, even though some scholars attribute the title Led Zeppelin, meticulous musicological analysis (carried out by Cope) on the other hand, suggests that their sound is more similar to hard rock than heavy metal (Cope, 2010). Hence, considering their stylistic influence on the formation of heavy metal and the technique that they developed, Black Sabbath then must be considered as the first heavy metal band.

Black Sabbath is the first heavy metal band from Birmingham but not the only one. Judas Priest is also a greatly influential heavy metal band from Birmingham/England formed in 1971 which is a very significant band that developed a certain dress code for heavy metal music. “As heavy metal crystallized, the dress code was gradually modified. A second option, which became dominant among bands playing in larger venues, was the biker look. Introduced into heavy metal by Judas Priest in the mid-1970s (Weinstein 2000, p.28). Later on, this particular style became associated with heavy metal and frequently utilized by other bands as well. The framework of sonic dimension in heavy metal created by Black Sabbath and visual dimension which became popular among the heavy metal bands was developed by Judas Priest thus, aesthetic boundaries for two important elements of a musical subculture is defined by two different bands from Birmingham.

In the beginning, it was mentioned that heavy metal is a controversial form of music. The source of this controversy, however, neither sound nor the visual element that musicians created in the early period of heavy metal. The controversy arises from mostly the verbal elements of it. The most important verbal element in heavy metal is the lyrics that usually triggered the social panic and caused the demand for censorship from the public. Renowned metal scholar Weinstein argues

that lyrical themes in the heavy metal can be categorized in two as "Dionysian" and "Chaotic" and she elaborated as following:

Dionysian experience celebrates the vital forces of life through various forms of ecstasy. It is embodied in the unholy trinity of sex, drugs and rock and roll. The Dionysian is juxtaposed to a strong emotional involvement in all that challenges the order and hegemony of everyday life: monsters, the underworld hell, the grotesque and horrifying, disasters, mayhem, carnage, injustice, death, and rebellion. Both Dionysus (the Greek god of wine) and Chaos (the most ancient god, who precedes form itself) are empowered by the sonic values of the music to fight a never-ending battle for the soul of the genre and to join together in combat against the smug security and safety of respectable society (Weinstein, 2000 p. 35).

Lyrics that involve sex, drug, and joy of life then, constitute the Dionysian themes in heavy metal. For instance, Manowar's song "Pleasure Slave" or AC/DC's "Rock or Bust" perfectly exemplify the Dionysian themes in heavy metal. Chaotic themes, on the other hand, incorporate elements of horror, destruction, rebellion and so on. Iron Maiden's "Fear of The Dark" which is about a man who fears that something will strike from the dark or Black Sabbath's famous song "War Pigs" which is about death, destruction and war. These songs provide thematic discourse appropriate to the chaotic themes in heavy metal.

Dionysian and chaotic themes in music evoked a sense of fear and moral panic in public during the early days of heavy metal. The Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) emerged as a result of this moral panic. "PMRC was founded by the wives of several United States senators, was only concerned with the lyrical content of rock music. No objections were made to its sound."(Weinstein, 2010 p. 249) Walser argues that:

PMRC has been quite successful in articulating a reactionary cultural agenda and accomplishing its political goals. Since its founding, the group has pressed record companies into placing warning stickers on recordings with "adult" lyrics and has underwritten partially

successful campaigns to persuade state legislatures to censor certain types of music, chiefly rap and heavy metal (Walser, 1993, p 138).

Nonetheless, the PMRC's call for censorship and successful attempts of labeling the recordings could not stop the evolution and growth of heavy metal. Throughout 1970s heavy metal gained huge popularity worldwide. Many newly formed bands embraced the codes, which are created by Black Sabbath and Judas Priest. Bands like AC/DC, Motörhead, Scorpions, Kiss helped heavy metal to gain popularization even further.

The period 1979-81 was marked by an explosion of new heavy metal bands on the British scene. The period became known as the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM). No single musical or lyrical style was associated with the New Wave: each band tended to be rather unique (Weinstein 44, 2014).

Iron Maiden- a British band is the most famous one which emerged successful among other NWOBHM bands. They achieved incredible commercial success and quite a fan from all over the world. Iron Maiden today continues to be one of the most popular bands in the entire heavy metal scene. Other NWOBHM bands such as Venom, however, were not commercially as successful as the Iron Maiden. They had a smaller group of fans. Even though Venom had fewer followers than Iron Maiden, it is still a quite significant band. Venom's second album "Black Metal" which was released in 1982 set the name for one of the most extreme subgenres of heavy metal. The 1980s were a critical period for heavy metal for which it began to expand. As Walser explains:

The expansion of the metal of the metal scene during the 1980's, however, was accompanied by its fragmentation. Genres proliferated: magazine writers and record marketers began referring to thrash metal, commercial metal, lite metal, power metal, American metal, Black (satanic) metal, white (Christian) metal, death metal, speed metal, glam metal-each of which bears a particular relationship to that older, vaguer, more prestigious term "heavy metal (Walser, 13).

Such fragmentation occurred as a result of the unrestrainable desire to transgress mainstream musical and normative rules. During this diversification of genres, each focused on a different aspect of music and introduced the global scene to various stylistic novelty. While thrash and death metal developing a different musical style, -which introduces the listener faster, more aggressive music- black metal created a darker, ambient form of music, which put transgressive emphasis more on socially controversial issues such as religion and evil. All of these subgenres of heavy metal demonstrated something unprecedented that the audience has never experienced before. Thrash and death metal transgressed sonic features of music that previously established and provided the audience with new forms of listening practices. Black metal, on the other hand, attempted to transgress the foundational, normative structures of society by incorporating metal music satanic and anti-religious themes.

The years following this compartmentalization in heavy metal history is known as extreme metal. To crystallize, heavy metal is the umbrella term for the entire musical genre. However, over the years heavy metal has taken a radical form in its visuals, sounds, and discourses. The era of heavy metal following the radicalization is called extreme metal. Yet, extreme metal also divided into several subgenres and eventually became an umbrella term for those subgenres. Nevertheless, all extreme metal subgenres share certain characteristics which allow us to refer to extreme metal as a single category. The entirety of extreme metal might be summarized as notably more transgressive, aggressive and musically multifaceted.

Thrash metal, death metal, and black metal are the three major genres in extreme metal. All other subgenres are born out of either diversification within each genre or fusion of different elements from other genres or geographically named after where it was born. (eg. Thrash-black, Brazilian thrash metal, teutonic thrash metal, blackened death, brutal death metal, technical death metal, Norwegian black metal, depressive suicidal black metal, national socialist black metal, etc...).

After the fragmentation period, heavy metal transformed into a more underground genre due to its newly acquired features which are more transgressive, vociferous and vehement. Thrash metal is one of these genres that possess all. "Thrash metal style coalesced in the San Francisco Bay area and Los Angeles in the early 1980's, with groups like Metallica, Slayer, Testament, Exodus, Megadeth and Possessed" (Walser, 1993, p.14). Heavy metal and Punk constitutes Thrash's musical influences. Thrash metal's biggest novelty is speed. Thrash bands played their songs in fast tempos with the accompaniment of aggressive vocal style that determines its musical boundaries. "Speed/ Thrash was most directly influenced by NWOBHM groups, such as Venom, Diamond Head, and Iron Maiden, all of which made rhythmic innovations" (Weinstein, 2000, p. 48). Heavy metal's notorious themes of sex, drug, and alcohol are rarely mentioned in thrash metal. Its "lyrical focus on the bleak but concrete horrors of the real or possibly real world: the isolation and alienation of individuals, the corruption of those in power, and the horrors done by people to one another and to the environment" (Weinstein, 2000 p. 50). Among all thrash metal bands only the "Big Four" Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth and Anthrax achieved international commercial success. Also, the big four is still active today in the metal music scene.

Thrash metal brought the essential element, which will be one of the core tenets of extreme metal music. Speed is that element in which all extreme metal genres - except doom metal- (it is played in slower tempos to increase the effects of melancholia which is an essential feature of doom metal) employs. When speed merged with technicality then, death metal was born out of this unification. Death metal is a both fast and technical subgenre of heavy metal that is known for complex song structures. Musical elements such as rhythm, tempo, and guitar riffs constantly change in death metal music thus, listening to death metal is exhaustive practice for the listener. These constant changes stem from the technicality that death metal music introduced to the audience. These certain peculiarities of death metal make it unique in terms of sonic features. Due to the specific traits of it, songwriting and performance in death metal require extraordinary skills. Bands like Death, Cannibal Corpse, Carcass, Morbid Angel, Obituary, Deicide are associated

with death metal. They have set the frame for death metal sound and help death metal to gain popularity across the world.

Death metal is located on the edge, considering its lyrical themes that are extremely transgressive. Horror, gore, and pornography constitute death metal's main themes. Even though in very limited numbers, there are bands that deal with subjects outside horror, gore and pornography. Melechesh -an Israeli band that continues their work in Holland and Germany- is one of those bands which embrace Mesopotamian mythology in their lyrics.¹ Nile is an American band dealing more on the lyrics based upon Egyptian mythology.²

Of course, more bands are dealing with topics that are non-gore and horror but Melechesh and Nile are the most popular ones. After the formative years of death metal, it has been fragmented within itself and several subgenres of death metal established throughout the years. Nowadays, along with grindcore and goregrind, several numbers of subgenres are also well known such as melodic death metal, technical death metal, brutal technical death metal, deathcore, blackened death metal, and pornogrind. Each of these subgenres differentiates in terms of the sonic or lyrical element that they incorporate in the music. Whilst, melodic death metal introduces keyboards and excessive use of guitar solos and technical or brutal death metal alters the sound of death metal with the barely comprehensible vocal style and constantly changing riffs. As for pornogrind, this subgenre of death metal utilizes pornographic depictions in lyrics, album covers, however, the sound of pornogrind resembles technical or brutal death metal.

When death metal gained considerable popularity black metal was a nascent subgenre that has been just established. Formation of black metal started in Norway in the 1990s with the spearheading bands Burzum, Darkthrone, Emperor, Satyricon, and Mayhem. It is "characterized by scream high-pitched vocals, extremely rapid tempos, 'tremolo' riffs a 'trebly' guitar sound, and a simple

¹ <https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Melechesh/424>

² <https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Nile/139>

production values” (Harris, 2007). Such bands that are established in the formative years of black metal is often referred to as the “first wave of black metal.” These band adopted low production values. Therefore, while recording albums they used underdeveloped recording methods (eg. self-recording, self-mixing, etc...) which made the sound dirtier and raw. Black metal was a more transgressive genre in terms of lyrics. Black metal bands heavily utilized satanic themes. The glorification of Satan, anti-religiosity, and misanthropy are the central themes for black metal.

The first wave of black metal followed by the second wave with the following bands like such as Marduk, Gorgoroth, Dimmu Borgir. After the second wave of black metal low production values abandoned due to a rapid acceleration in black metal’s worldwide popularity. Many bands started to be established outside Norway for instance, Cradle Of Filth from England, Behemoth from Poland, Absurd from Germany and many more. Black metal also began to diversify into numerous different subgenres as symphonic black metal, depressive suicidal black metal, nationalist socialist black metal.

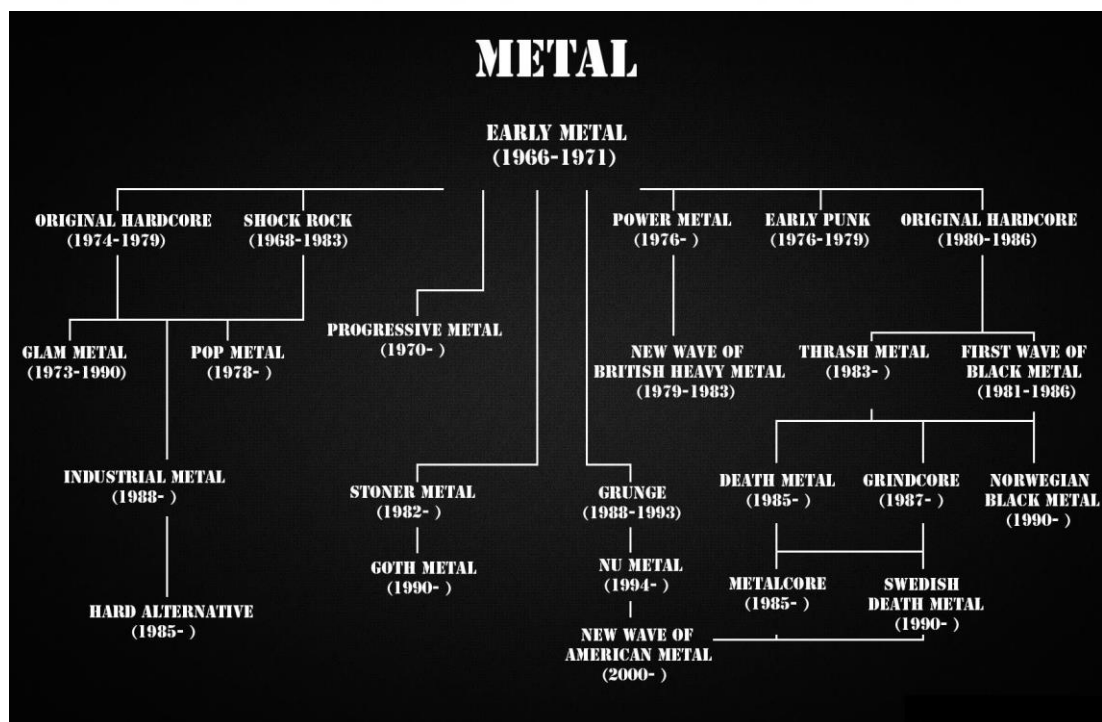


Figure 2.1. Heavy Metal Evolution Tree

Each of these subgenres integrates a different element to the music through little but influential alterations either in musically and thematically. For instance, symphonic black metal spearheaded by band Dimmu Borgir and Cradle of Filth incorporates themes from gothic literature, horror with bow instrument and keyboard which perfectly suits to express an intended dark atmosphere.³ Depressive suicidal black metal (DSBM) on the other hand, introduce themes revolving around misery, depression, apathy, and self-harm and to be able to portray such feelings employs scream vocals resembling wailing or crying. Shining and Silencer from Sweden, Xasthur from the United States and Forgotten Tomb from Italy are renowned examples of DSBM band in the global extreme metal scene. Lastly, national socialist black metal (NSBM) is worth noting. The themes of NSBM are associated with far-right and fascist movements. Their lyrics include anti-semitism, the superiority of white race, and anti-Christianity.

Throughout the history of extreme metal, there have always been experimentations with the sound to offer new sonic features to music to be able to claim authenticity. These experiments led to the emergence of plentiful different new subgenres. One exceptional example of these newly formed subgenres is drone metal which was emerged in the 1990s in the United States and Japan (Owen Coggins, 2014). The drone metal artist tampered with what is generally believed to be the key features of extreme metal such as distortion, bass and shattering guitar riffs and created a genre which is overwhelmingly intense in terms of musical qualities (Owen Coggins, 2014). Songs are composed in a way that is extremely slow -uncharacteristically long and unmelodious within extreme metal standards. For instance Sleep's Dopesmoker (1996) album is one hour long and monolithic that consisted of only one track. Other pioneering bands from drone metal scene are Earth and SunnO))) from the United States and Boris from Japan. The sound of drone metal is though overwhelming but innovative for that reason it is quite distinct from the

³ https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Cradle_of_Filth/24

mainstream metal sound.⁴ Therefore, it is authentic in its musical qualities and non-mediocre- able to provide different listening experience to the audience.

In summary, as a musical genre/musical subculture heavy metal then, is not a single-dimensional, linear phenomenon. It is rather complicated multifaceted musical subculture with complex genre taxonomy.⁵ For this reason, historically, it is addressed as heavy metal and extreme metal to simplify when referring to a broad category of music in general. Whereas heavy metal implies the period during the formative years, the years that heavy metal formed and developed, extreme metal refers to the period from 1980's -the years heavy metal began to fragmentize- to this very day. Extreme metal, while diversifying also moved into underground due to thematic and sonic radicalizations. Such radicalizations allowed the extreme metal to be transgressive. Transgressive nature of heavy metal has become even more apparent. However, before beginning to discuss the transformation of transgressive practices in the extreme metal scene, I believe it would be clarifying to overview the scholarly attention towards metal music and some of the foundational literature on heavy/extreme metal.

⁴ The particular sonic qualities of death, black and drone metal will be analyzed elaborately in the following chapters.

⁵ <https://www.boundbymetal.com/en/common/metal-genres-graph>

CHAPTER III

METAL MUSIC STUDIES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Heavy metal/Extreme metal music has long been ignored by academics because it is thought to be “unworthy” of scholarly attention. Theodor Adorno and other critical Marxist from Frankfurt School “did not consider that very much contemporary popular music was capable of offering resistance” (Martin Morris, 2015 p. 290). Academics who continue to remain loyal to neo-Marxist tradition of music scholarship such as Center For Contemporary Cultural Studies have taken heavy metal for granted for not being resistant enough. CCCS’s expectations from musical subcultures were them to be political and revolutionary. Heavy metal remained unresponsive, non-reflexive to politics until very recently.⁶

The rapid increase in the popularity of extreme metal, successfully altered the minds of academics and as a result of such improvements, heavy metal grabbed considerable attention and became a scientific subject of study. Although other popular music genres are widely studied by various academics, first books about

⁶ National socialist black metal - a subgenre of black metal established in early 2000’s is notorious for being closely tied right-wing political ideologies and groups. It could be considered as one of the strongest political formations within extreme metal scene.

heavy metal were published in the mid-'80s and early '90s by researchers from sociology and musicology disciplines.⁷ That being the case, it would be accurate to say that metal music studies are relatively younger when compared to other popular music genres such as jazz, blues, and hip-hop.

Heavy metal, however, -thanks to growing interest- has covered large distance especially after 2000. As of today, heavy metal studies is an interdisciplinary academic field of study, which academics from different backgrounds are contributing and from a wide range of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, musicology, literature, and religious studies departments have done numerous research on different aspect regarding heavy metal and they continue to do so. Although, it is not possible to mention all the names and works, in this chapter I will attempt to summarize notable names and works and provide examples from the field of metal music studies literature.

Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology is published in 1991 by Deena Weinstein is one of the earliest publications about heavy metal. In this work, Weinstein formulates an approach to discuss heavy metal from a cultural sociological perspective. She also argues that heavy metal deserves scholarly attention as a serious subject, which could potentially allow wide-range of analysis due to its controversial nature.

Running With The Devil, Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music published in 1993 by Robert Walser. This book is one of the canonical works that has been frequently cited in metal music studies. In this work of his, Walser first starts the books with an introduction that explains the basics of heavy metal then takes a sharp turn by making an interesting suggestion regarding methodology in metal music studies. According to Walser, while analyzing heavy metal rather than focusing on lyrics, one should take music itself as the primary material. Due to his musicology background, he proposes a method of musicological approach when analyzing heavy metal. In the second and third chapters of his book excessive use of musicological terms, however, becomes excruciating for those who are not familiar

⁷ Deena Weinstein is a sociologist and Robert Walser is a musicologist.

with such terminology. Walser meticulously investigates Van Halen's songs called "Eruption" and "Running With Devil" through note sheets. He also establishes relationships with classical musician Bach and Vivaldi and heavy metal in terms of musical style and tradition.

In the following, he focuses on gender issues in heavy metal. He suggests that although it seems to be a clear contrast conventional dress code of heavy metal, glam metal musician's flamboyant, vivid style is related to power.⁸ Even though general masculine tendencies that exist within the heavy metal scene. Walser explains, this phenomenon with the term androgyny. Androgyny he argues, strengthens metal musicians position and adds a powerful stance to them therefore, they can attract more audience. There is also a higher possibility of glam metal could attract more female fans as opposed to other genres -due to its flamboyant, cheerful stance. He also states that masculinity is forged and it is a social construction. It is "not a set of abstract qualities but something defined through the actions and power relations of men and women-because, with or without make up, there are no 'real men'" (Walser, 1993 p. 136).

In the last chapter of *Running With Devil* Walser, argues that heavy metal is not just a Dionysian utopia of Rock N roll, sex, and drugs but it is much more sophisticated. He claims that heavy metal is inspired by mythology, history, and postmodernism by elaborating his assumptions through lyrics taken from notable metal bands such as Ozzy Osbourne, Metallica, and Iron Maiden.

Another important work from early days of metal music studies is Deena Weinstein's canonical book called *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (2000) which is one of the first books published in this particular area. Her book is an invitation to heavy metal music and expanded version of the aforementioned book she published in 1991 with additional chapters. She approaches metal music from a cultural sociology perspective. For this reason, she does not only explain metal

⁸ Musically more melodic and visually more flamboyant subgenre of heavy metal which first appeared when heavy metal becomes to diversify.

music based on lyrical analysis but attempts to elucidate through including production and distribution processes, as well as its reception by the fans. She dwells largely on-stage performances of metal musicians and refers to them as “proud pariahs.” While doing so she appears to be taking a semiotic approach similarly to Roland Barthes’s analysis of wrestling. She utilizes such method of analysis to elaborate on various elements of metal music and metal musician’s position in the eyes of the fans.

She also focuses on how metal music is produced and distributed in the scene. For that, Weinstein introduces the reader to magazines, videos and important music festival organized in the founding years of metal. In regards to media, Deena Weinstein argues how heavy metal received large amounts of criticism due to moral panic pumped up by media, people associated with the church and right-wing party members in the United States. In the final chapter of her book, Weinstein shortly notes the diversification of genres in metal music, which begins in the late ’80s and early ’90s.

Throughout the years, such ramifications generated a demand for different approaches towards what is known as extreme metal. In 2006 Keith Khan Harris published *Extreme Metal: Music And Culture On The Edge*, which is frequently cited in metal music studies. Harris executed a similar methodology with Deena Weinstein but his focus was on the extreme metal scene. Harris’ work is academically quite comprehensive. He offers a variety of explanations to different issue within the scene. For instance, employing Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital” Harris discusses scenic power relations that members acquire through an accumulation of cultural capital within and outside the scene. He also utilizes Michel de Certeau's conception of “tactics” to explain how scene members interact with each other inside the scene and with people outside the scene in daily lives. He, with reliable theoretical insights on his back, introduces the reader not only the scene which is established in the United States but also Europe, the United Kingdom, Asia, and the Middle East. Thus, Harris provides a wide scope of research for the readers and academics who are interested in extreme metal.

Politics is an unavoidable consequence of making, distributing and writing about metal. Hence, *Extreme Metal: Music And Culture On The Edge* by touching upon the political atmosphere of extreme metal demonstrate that there is an obvious relationship between right-wing movements (Neo-Nazis, antisemitism, nationalism, religious fanaticism, etc...) and certain metal music genres, which I will be pointing out later in the thesis. To sum up, shortly, Harris work is quite significant and impactful in terms of creating new paths to study extreme metal and bringing up some of the concepts which are now frequently used the very first time.

As mentioned above, while metal music continues to branch out even today, so does the studies about metal music. In this regard, studies started to concentrate on these newly emerging genres to make sense of them. Death metal is one of the first extreme metal genres that evolved out of heavy metal. For this reason, firstly, let's take a closer look at the *Death Metal Music: The Passion And Politics Of A Subculture* published by Natalie J. Purcell in 2003.

Purcell's book limits her study with the death metal scene in the United States where the birthplace of death metal is. She explains the technical/stylistic differences between famous death metal écoles such as melodic death metal, technical death metal, brutal death metal grindcore, deathcore, and pornogrind. In terms of information provided about death metal, I think it's very inclusive and quite sufficient.

However, all the information given in the first chapters regarding the birth of death metal, leave its place to the furious defense of metal music and death metal in particular. In the third chapter, she quotes from different oppositional views to death metal and endeavors untiringly to deflect those attacks towards death metal. Her work also aims to demonstrate the censorship that was planned to implement to metal music in the emerging years of death metal. Interestingly she displays that demand for censorship did not come from the public but the so-called "concerned" politicians in a top-down manner. Following part deals with demographic features

and ethical values of the American death metal scene members. In the rest of her book, Natalie J. Purcell turns her focus to internal dynamics of USA death metal scene and discusses the subcultural politics of the scene concerning major themes employed in death metal such as horror, gore, and porn.

There are numerous books published about death metal that contributed to metal music studies greatly. For instance, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History Of Death Metal & Grindcore* by Albert Mudrian in 2004 and *Extremity Retained: Notes From The Death Metal Underground* which was published by Jason Netheron in 2014 are worth noting due to elaborate subcultural information that it provides since the authors themselves are an active musician in the death metal scene.⁹ The common aspect of these works is that they provide valuable insight regarding the personalities, internal dynamics, and scenic relationships of the death metal scene from a journalistic perspective.

However, I would rather mention another scholarly publication in detail, which is called *Death Metal And Music Criticism: Analysis At The Limits* written by Michelle Philipov in 2012. Philipov problematizes the previous approaches about music criticism in general and criticism of death metal in particular. This substantial work of hers could be roughly divided into two parts. The first part is where she points out the problematic aspects of musical criticism applied by previous scholars and the second part is where she developed her approach by confuting those approaches that she demonstrated before.

Mainly, her confutation appears to be targeting one particular proposition of music criticism suggested by Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Philipov argues that CCCS reasoning is in a way blinded by neo-Marxist tradition and interfered with their critical thinking strategies. Scholars of CCCS, while endeavoring sociologically explain the dynamics of subcultures, act upon a certain

⁹ Jason Netheron is in fact both musician and academic. He is a member of death metal band Misery Index. He is also a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.

presumption that musical subcultures should be reflexive towards politics that could generate enough transformative power. Since according to CCCS scholars and many others death metal is non-political, therefore, have taken a dismissive attitude towards it. However, Phillipov challenges such argumentations by claiming that 'being political' is not a valid criterion to determine whether a musical subculture is worthy of studying.

In the second part of her book Phillipov strive after displaying that death metal despite being 'non-political' achieves to be equally and even more transgressive than other subcultures, which CCCS and other scholars valued. To do so, Philipov argues how death metal employs horror, gore and pornographic elements to disturb authority and subvert the power. In short, she concludes that to analyze death metal, politics should not be prioritized because neither death metal musicians nor the audience has no intentions to be political. They purposefully prefer to stay non-political. Yet, death metal music is transgressive enough to challenge the social and normative structures of modern society.

Earlier, discussions regarding the sound of heavy metal have been made by musicologists Robert Walser and later on by Andrew L. Cope. As one would expect their analysis was focused on the sound itself through selected note sheets of songs from bands or heavy metal personalities. However, in *Sound, Symbol, Sociality: The Aesthetic Experience Of Extreme Metal Music* published in 2015, Matthew P. Unger explores the sound of metal music with a specific emphasis of its sociological implications. Unger utilizes French sociologist Paul Ricoeur's ideas to proclaim that sound of extreme metal is as transgressive as lyrics and performative action that take place within the extreme metal scene. In his work Unger refers to "defilement" a concept, which was first articulated by Ricoeur in his remarkable work called *The Symbolism Of Evil*.

For Unger extreme metal flattens the symbols which are socially and religiously sacred by transgressing them. Such transgression elicits a Bakhtinian sense of carnival where hierarchies and norms are destroyed as a result the ultimate

defilement occurs. According to Unger, defilement is not a mere transgressive act but the totality of all the discourses in extreme metal including grotesque idols, nationalist discourses, satanic and occult statements made by musicians and fans as well as the stage performances.

In metal music studies literature, articles that focus on certain aspects of different subgenres of extreme metal are being published in various journals. Black metal - a genre of extreme metal - appears to be the subject of an article numerous times. I believe such a phenomenon is not confidential. It stems from the fact that black metal is controversial in nature. That being the case, studying black metal allows researchers to explore various aspects including its relationship with Christianity, nationalism, racism, occultism, and Satanism. For instance "Dark Epistemology: An Assessment Of Philosophical Trends In The Black Metal Music Of Mayhem" by Jesse McWilliams is a striking example. McWilliams nicely elaborates how black metal band Mayhem incorporates philosophical phenomena in lyrics, darkness, pessimism, misanthropy, and irony. "Ritual Black Metal: Popular Music As Occult Meditation And Practice" by Kenneth Granholm also demonstrative in a sense how occult practices take place in extreme metal. Article by Michelle Phillipov "Extreme Music For Extreme People: Norwegian Black Metal And Transcendent Violence" another significant piece of work tackling with aggressive and violent behavioral trends that changed the course of black metal history. Politics of black metal is argued by many scholars yet, "Voice of our blood: National Socialistic discourses in the black metal" by Benjamin Hedge Olson is worth mentioning because of valuable insight that he provides regarding extremist politics of black metal which is highly controversial and concerning issue in the extreme metal scene.

Death metal, another highly controversial subgenre of extreme metal is also investigated in numerous publications. "From 'The Undead will feast' to 'The time to kill is now': Frankfurt School and Freudian perspectives on death-metal" by Kieran James which is meticulously written piece about how death metal's obsession with murder and sex is related to the Freudian concept of life and death instinct. Other insightful works about different aspects of death metal's obsession

with killing and murder are published by Catherine Hoad. In “‘Split Wide Open’: Cannibal Corpse and Carnographic Pleasure” she deals with how mutilation, decapitation, and disfigurement is presented in death metal as a form of gratification. As for “‘Scream Bloody Gore’-The Abject Body and Posthuman Possibilities in Death Metal” in this article she illustrates the death metal’s relationship with the abjectified human body.

The problematic discourses of death metal raised concerns in metal music studies academia. In “Death Metal and Limits of Musical Expression”, Keith Khan Harris argues the ethical concerns that might arise due to controversial discourses of death metal and whether “intellectual policing” is necessary. However, he ultimately refuses the exercise of censorship as a response to eliminate such discourses. Instead, he offers a solution which may modulate the tone of these discourses. Michelle Phillipov is another scholar who argues the ethics of death metal. In “‘None So Vile?’ Towards An Ethics Of Death Metal” she questions problematic aspects of death metal ethos. Similar to Harris, Phillipov also object the interventionist models of ethical criticism and argues that when approaching death metal it should be evaluated on its terms cautioning that “the consequences of imposing a ready-made ethico-political model onto experiences which essentially evade easy systematisation and evaluation may need to be more carefully considered” (Phillipov, 2006, p. 83).

Metal music studies is an interdisciplinary field of study, which embraces thus, attracts the interest of academics from various departments. Hence, articles that are published might also be categorized by field of study as well. For instance, academics from Classics and History departments published(ing) many insightful articles providing different perspectives. “Strangers of Popular Culture - The Verbal And Pictorial Aesthetics of Mythological Metal Music” can be exemplified as notable work written by Janos Fejes. In the article, Fejes attempts to display how mythology is utilized by metal musicians in lyrics and cover art to evoke aesthetic experience correspondingly to reception theory. In this particular article, Fejes employs Ancient Mesopotamian mythology, Biblical stories, Old Testament, Greek and Roman

mythologies, Ancient Egyptian mythology and Viking mythology along with Hungarian folk tales to establish connections between artistic work of metal musicians and different mythologies of various cultures around the world.

Articles written from the gender studies perspective constitute an important part of metal music studies literature. In this field, however, one name steps forward and that is Rosemary Lucy Hill. Her studies regarding metal music entirely dedicated to gender studies, using a feminist approach. One of her articles as following "Using Women's Listening Pleasure To Challenge The Notion of Hard-Rock and Metal as 'masculine' Music." This particular article deals with the notion of masculinity which is often referred to when describing metal music. She challenges this idea that metal music is entirely masculine in terms of listening practices. She argues that not only men listen to metal, but there are also, a considerable number of female fans. She asserts that women are also listening to metal music as much as men, therefore, it would be inaccurate to label metal music as 'masculine.' Another article by Hill "I'm a Metalhead: The Representation of Women Letter Writers In Kerrang! Magazine", she explores how women are represented in metal media Kerrang! -a famous metal music magazine published in the United Kingdom. One of her latest publications about metal music is titled as "Metal and Sexism" in this article she attempts to understand what sexism means in the context of metal music through a series of interviews that she conducted with British women fans. She discusses that scene provide female fans with temporary liberation in which they feel genderless. Nevertheless, the feeling of genderless is only possible through assimilation to the male culture that usually overlooks women. Yet, she points out that however brief they may be, those moments of liberation are valuable ones.

Lastly, I will touch upon several important books and articles that focus on metal music scenes around the globe. Although, that metal music originated and flourished in the Christian world but did not stay in the same place. Due to the process of globalization, metal spread around the world. This phenomenon demanded new studies from a global perspective with special emphasis on the

concept of the scene. *Metal Rules The Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around The World* edited by Harris Berger and Paul Greene was published in 2011. This book contains several sections dedicated to important issues of metal music such as gender, nation/nationalism, extremist ideologies, the music industry, and small nation/small scene case studies. This work is quite significant in terms of introducing researchers with local scenes such as Nepalese, Slovenian, Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian metal scenes and making the way for further studies about these local scenes and their relations with the global.

When it comes to case studies metal music produced in Muslim countries in the Middle East constitutes an important field of study within metal music studies. Metal music scene Islamic countries of the Middle East is diverse. *Heavy Metal Islam* a book published by Mark LeVine in 2008 investigates the metal music scene in countries which the Muslims constitute the majority of the population. LeVine points out how metal music is embraced in Islamic countries as a tool of resistance and struggle. He also attempts to explain the difficulties that metal musicians faced due to authoritarian regimes of those countries. LeVine's book consists of six chapters in which he focuses on a different country in each chapter. He deals with metal music scenes in countries as following; Morocco, Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, and Pakistan. Unfortunately, his analysis does not include countries such as Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia which have a major Muslim population and strong metal music scene.

Thanks to German researcher Pierre Hecker who filled the gap -at least for the Turkish scene with his book *Turkish Metal: Meaning and Morality In A Muslim Society* published in 2012. Hecker successfully summarizes topics including the history of metal music, media response and perception of metal music in Turkey since the formation of the scene.

In conclusion, metal music studies are an independent and newly emerging field of academic discipline. This independence allows it to be more emancipated from the approaches and perspectives of any academic field. Therefore, it is not monopolized

by certain schools of thought nor it is inclined towards one. Such freedom then provides an open ground for those who wish to study metal music from various perspectives with an interdisciplinary focus.



CHAPTER IV

VISUAL TRANSGRESSION IN EXTREME METAL

4.1. Defining Transgression

In the chapter where I explore the history and evolution of heavy metal, it has been mentioned that heavy metal music took a sharp turn after the fragmentation period which was followed by extreme radicalization in sound, discourse and visuality and the following era of heavy metal is called extreme metal. This radical transformation did not occur uniformly. Each subgenre of extreme metal inclines towards the different aspect from sound, discourse, and visuality according to its internal discourse. Those collections of discourses are the characteristics that define a certain subgenre. There is a bilateral relationship between music and the discourse, visuality, and sound that are being produced in extreme metal. Music takes shape accordingly to those very elements. However, all of these elements, which constitute the extreme metal serve a single crucial purpose that is to transgress almost every existing norm.

I argue that the transmogrification of heavy metal into extreme metal started to achieve its ultimate goal of transgression. Heavy metal, as a non-political working-class musical movement sparked and lit the fire, which is necessary to release the transgressive energy it possesses. Therefore, what should be looking for is that what is it that extreme metal tirelessly attempts to transgress and why does extreme metal desire to transgress, how does it aim to transgress. To be able to provide an answer for those questions throughout this thesis such questions will be problematized to understand the nature of transgression in extreme metal, regarding Bakhtinian concept of carnival/carnavalesque which, I believe that constitutes an illuminating theoretical background for this thesis.

However, before I proceed to explore the transgressive nature of extreme metal in the rest of this chapter -with regards to the carnival, I believe it is quite significant to explore the concept of transgression for proper analysis. For this reason, I will be arguing the transgression as an extreme phenomenon concerning ideas of philosophers and scholars whom I think that will enlighten us by facilitating to comprehend idea regarding the true nature of the transgression.

“Transgression, like extremity implies a sense of testing and crossing boundaries and limits” (Harris, 2007 p. 29). “To transgress is to go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention, it is to violate or infringe” (Jenks, 2003 p. 2). These two definitions from Harris and Jenks allow us to have an idea about transgression. In the light of these definitions, it is reasonable to utter that transgression is a behavioral and discursive act in which we can associate with adjectives such as abnormal, out of ordinary and extreme. Transgression knows no rules or no limits including moral, ethical and religious ones. “Transgression, then, is that conduct which breaks rules or exceeds boundaries” (Jenks, 2003, p. 3). regardless of the values of such rules and boundaries.

Social dynamics within a society consist of complicated multifaceted relationships. Interpersonal intra-group relations are taken place according to the limits and boundaries, which are based upon written or non-written rules. Such rules are no

doubt socially constructed, as we inherit them from our forefathers. Inherited rules, in time, are valorized and highly esteemed. As a result, they turn into preconceived ideas, which are quite difficult to eliminate or ignore. Preconceived ideas that set the limits and draw the boundaries are also the ones that keep people together and make them feel safe. Therefore, any attempt to break such boundaries, “limits that are physical, racial, aesthetic, sexual, national, legal and moral” (Jenks, 2003, p. 8) generates a great sense of anxiety in those who live by those boundaries/limits, psychologically feel threatened.

The relationship between transgression and the limit is an interesting one. Both transgression and the limit require to recognize each other’s existence to exist. As Foucault argues:

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows (Foucault, Bouchard, & Simon, 1977, p. 34).

This, however, brings us to a position, which suggests an intermingled relationship between transgression and the limit that is being crossed.

Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust (Foucault et.al., 1977, p. 35).

The transgressor possesses the required knowledge regarding the very nature of the existing limits and boundaries and aware of the fact that one cannot exist without the other. “Transgressive behavior, therefore, does not deny limits or boundaries, rather it exceeds them and thus completes them” (Jenks, 2003, p. 7). Exceeding a certain limit meanwhile creates another newly established limit to transgress.

This suggests that historically, transgression and the limit emerged and started to coexist as at the same time as the emergence of human beings on earth. Transgression, whilst including laws and rules implemented by humans. And yet, cannot be confined to it. It is beyond the secular, worldly rules and legislations created by people. Transgression is inclined to be the problem of the divine and the profane. In *On The Genealogy of Morality*, “Nietzsche repeats that morality is always a historical construct and that any investigation of the past will reveal the evolution of moral concepts” (Jenks, 77). According to Jenks, “The very essence of what we know to be ‘good’ is paradoxically what Nietzsche sees as ‘bad’ thus what the contemporary morality regards as ‘evil’ may hold the key to the future (Jenks, 2003, p. 77). This is all, of course, synchronized with Nietzsche's idea of “revaluation of all values.” Nietzsche despised the ideas that Christianity has brought to the Western world. He considered the very idea that Christianity exhorted to people, as weakening and passivating. He was incredibly raged by the “Turn to the other cheek” approach of Christianity which, for him is based upon a moral system that exalts abstinence over lust, death over life. For this reason Tanner points out that “Nietzsche is the first philosopher to exult the fact that value is not something we discover, but something we invent” (as cited in Jenks 2003, p.20).

However, there are values whether we invent them or discover thus, rather than being a passive person following the masses, by questioning the imposed morality, one needs to recreate his moral system so that one can be an individual once again. Jenks argues, Nietzsche believes that:

The survival of the human spirit no longer rests in the hands of the collective but in the affirmation of the new triumphalist, individual in the incarnation of the *Übermensch* (the overman). Humankind must escape from the protective and pacifying politics of order into celebration of life as ‘the will to power’. This is not a route for all, but for some. We cannot all transgress” (Jenks, 2003, p. 70).

As one might rightfully interpret from Nietzsche’s approach that, the process of individualization occurs via transgression. However, to be able to transgress, the first one has to revalue all the values, values, which are imposed upon. By

questioning the preconceived ideas, constructed moral codes, the person, who wishes to become an individual takes the first step. Then, when he attempts to transgress the boundaries in which, he is confined to, he gets even closer to being an individual. Yet, such a process is endless as every limit exceeded a new limit occurs and awaits to be transgressed.

However, as Chris Jenks argued, “we cannot all transgress.” People who belong to the masses cannot transgress. People, who are pleased with the workings of the world cannot transgress. More importantly, people who don’t have an agenda of their own cannot transgress.

One does not always openly transgress by challenge laws rather, accomplish such desire through art. I assert that art is one of the most transgressive forms that exist. It is my understanding that transgression is performed much more aesthetically when art is employed. Different artistic forms use various methods to transgress and to endorse their agenda depending upon the nature of that agenda. It could be political, religious, economic or moral.

Painting, dancing, writing, and music-making might be quite transgressive with the right tools - tools that artists who are occupied with one of the many artistic forms employs in which, they are provided by the art itself. For instance, the painter has brushes, paints and the canvas as tools which could be quite transgressive when utilized correctly. A dancer has the whole body as a transgressive ground. A radical figure that he/she demonstrates could become shockingly transgressive. A writer possesses words in his transgressive arsenal. When it comes to music, however, one has plenty of tools as well. The Sound, lyrics, visuals (album covers, concert stage, symbols) etc... And all of these tools become an incredibly powerful instrument in terms of accomplishing transgression.

Extreme metal with all the tools at its disposal turns into the most transgressive form of not only music but the form of art in general. Extreme metal is an art form in which the demonstration of Nietzschean ideals, Nietzschean philosophy through

the carnivalesque aesthetic of Bakhtin mentioned above which is driven by the only goal- and that is the act of transgression.

After the transmogrification period beginning in 1980s extreme metal has undergone a significant change. Philosophical foundations of heavy metal consisted of sex, drugs and rock 'n roll all of these, which are significant yet limited attempts of predominantly white, working-class men's endeavors of taking the most out of this life. Extreme metal, on the other hand, has emerged as a musical movement that is misanthropic, misogynistic and anti-religious and most importantly, immensely transgressive. In extreme metal transgression, according to sociologist and metal music scholar Keith Khan Harris, occurs in three fundamental dimensions as discursive, sonic and bodily. It is my intention throughout this thesis to employ this categorization as the skeleton of the thesis except for bodily transgression instead I propose visuality as an alternative in this particular thesis.

In those three dimensions, extreme metal utilizes the tools it possesses including, notes-sounds, album covers, stage performances, statements or interviews. By either inverting-turning upside down, reframing, reshaping or recontextualizing them. This particular strategy enables the extreme metal to "represent[s] a certain kind of aestheticization of transgression through the sounds, symbols and lyrical material that portrays madness, death, Satanism, horror, and gore" (Unger, 2015, p. 40). Extreme metal's exceptional strategy and tactics are resembling Bakhtinian 'carnival' in a way that as "with carnival circumstances are altered, albeit temporarily, while roles, status, and hierarchies become inverted in a riot of pleasure, excess, misbehavior, and misrule. The conventional world is turned upside down" (Jenks, 2003, p. 162).

Strategies and tactics that extreme metal make use of, corresponds to the dynamics of Bakhtinian carnival, which he conceptualized in his canonical book "Rabelais and His World" (1965). Due to unignorable parallelism between strategies-tactics of extreme metal to transgress and the nature of carnival, extreme metal will be

elaborated through the concept of carnival regarding tactics, which enable the extreme metal to be even more transgressive.

In the following, I will attempt to argue, how extreme metal incorporates transgressive visuals in the scene by using explanatory cases such as album covers, stage performances from the extreme metal scene.

4.2. Style As Transgression: Punk Example

Visual transgression comprises major part in transgressive nature of extreme metal music scene. Yet, extreme metal is not the only music scene that has employed or produced extreme visuals. Much has been presented regarding extreme visuality in other musical scenes as well. Punk subculture for instance heavily depended upon extreme visuality as a way of expression. In *Subculture: Meaning Of Style* Dick Hebdige points out how punk subculture employs visuals in a transgressive fashion.

In particular, the illicit iconography of sexual fetishism was used to predictable effect. Rapist masks and rubber wear, leather bodices and fishnet stockings, implausibly pointed stiletto heeled shoes, the whole paraphernalia of bondage - the belts, straps and chains -were exhumed from boudoir, closet and the pornographic film and laced on the street where they retained their forbidden connotations (Hebdige, 1979b, p. 108).

Objects and tools which, suggest eroticism or fetishism has been purposefully worn by punks to create shock and disalienation effect, -to remind society of their disapproval of conventional norms of dressing. To pursue their "cause" punks even wore tools and objects which are not originally design for dressing.

Objects borrowed from the most sordid of contexts found a place in the punks' ensembles: lavatory chains were draped in graceful arcs across chests encased in a plastic bin-liners. Safety bin were taken out of their domestic 'utility' context and worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek, ear or lip. 'Cheap' trashy fabrics (PVC), plastic, lurex, etc.) in vulgar designs (e.g mock leopard skin) and 'nasty' colours, long discarded by the quality end of the fashion industry as obsolete kitsch, were salvaged by the punks and turned into garments (fly boy drainpipes, 'common' miniskirts) which

offered self-conscious commentaries on the notions of modernity and taste (Hebdige, 1979b, p. 107).

As Hebdige nicely puts above, punks used ordinary, mundane pieces to establish a particular sense of fashion, which is quite interesting, quite transgressive. Visual transgressivity of punk stems from the creative way of employing random tools and turning them into a fashion trend - a trend that makes others scared, stumbled or angry due to unconventional stylistic imagery. Composition of this subcultural style, however, according to Hebdige is shaped via “bricolage” (Hebdige, 1979b, p. 103).

On the other hand, the extreme metal scene as a distant relative of punk expanded the “bricolage” and the methods of combining which were first brought by punk scene. However, rather than gathering random pieces together, extreme metal juxtaposes two or more elements which unitedly creates a discomfiting moral, aesthetic and sensual experience in those who engage.

Extreme metal visuality aims transgression through multiple methods depending upon the context. In the following, I shall attempt to describe extreme metal visuality with respect to two major genres and one scenic activity. First, I will demonstrate, how grotesque elements in death metal visual aesthetic produce immensely transgressive materials. After that, I will continue with the black metal subgenre. In this subsection, I will investigate how the combination of religious symbolism is inverted for the production of highly transgressive album covers with respect to black metal ideology and agenda. Lastly, I intend to refer to grotesque elements of stage performances as the essential and extremely transgressive practice of extreme metal carnival.

4.3. Grotesque Visuality Of Death Metal

The reason for mentioning punk subculture at the beginning of this chapter is practically to draw a framework of workings regarding visual transgression. Punk is merely exemplary here to ease the passage over visual transgression in extreme metal. Therefore, I confined my example with one aspect of visual transgression in

punk subculture. On the following pages, however, I will deepen my analysis of visual transgression in the context of extreme metal as intended.

Extreme metal, while practically sharing some important similarities with the punk subculture, theoretically differentiates in some fundamental points. Metal music subculture produces transgressive images and employs them in different scenic institutions in much more blatant, offensive and vulgar manner.¹⁰ Also, the technique that extreme metal makes use of - is notably different. Rather than juxtaposing irrelevant items or symbols, it purposefully either inverts or subverts what is already in its disposal.

Extreme metal scene, with all its institutions, personnel, tools and devices acts as the modern carnival. It is the recreation of carnival that was once celebrated in the middle ages. A tradition that is dismissed and prohibited by the church a long time ago thus, gradually forgotten. As Mikhail Bakhtin points out there has been a steady decrease in carnival practices starting from the seventeenth century. The carnivalesque practices first withdrawn to indoors and then, only celebrated as holidays. (Bakhtin, 2005, p. 61) Extreme metal revitalized this custom in the modern age. Extreme metal carnival operates by the same principles and yet with different tools and different methods.

Grotesque realism is one of the methods that extreme metal actively incorporates in various settings. Album covers are exquisite examples of how grotesque realism represented in visual dimension. "Grotesque realism images the human body as multiple, bulging over or undersized, protuberant and incomplete" (Stallybrass&White, 1986, p. 9). Such representation is beyond our perception of aesthetic. It is because conflicting nature of grotesque aesthetic challenges our classically trained taste. As classically trained engagers we require beauty and order to enjoy artistic forms. However, grotesque imagery when compared to classical aesthetics is horrendous, monstrous and ugly. Therefore, as an art form that is

¹⁰ The term "scenic institutions" include numerous settings where the music or musician is present. (e.g. concert halls record companies, album covers concert posters, interviews etc...)

unclassical, the visual aesthetic of death metal is far from being appealing. Rather, it exposes those who engage, to grotesque ugliness and disgustingness.

Within the extreme metal scene, death metal and its subgenres incorporate grotesque elements based on disgust, more intensely compared to others. For example, prominent death metal band Cannibal Corpse systematically accommodated grotesque imagery in their albums. Bakhtin states that grotesque realism pictures the human body as something unfinished-incomplete and transgresses own borders. Organs branches, open mouth, genitals, breasts penis, belly, and nose are underlined (Bakhtin, 2005, p. 53). Cannibal Corpse's cover art corresponds the Bakhtin's description of grotesque. Through excessive use of zombie figures Cannibal Corpse, pictures half bodies, bodies missing one or multiple organs or bodies with mutilated organs in the album covers. *Bloodthirst* (1999) *Gore Obsessed* (2002) and *The Wretched Spawn* (2002) album cover artworks depict such representations. In *Bloodthirst* album a monstrous creature holding a head with extended arms, next to him a headless body lies down, covered in blood. *Gore Obsessed* album cover similarly renders a group of zombies walking towards the deceased male body while one zombie holding a bloody human brain in his hand.

The *Wretched Spawn* album cover artwork on the other hand slightly differentiates from other Cannibal Corpse artwork. It is simply because of coinciding with the important principle that Bakhtin stresses, to explain as "lowering." He explains that lowering means being preoccupied with lower body and with life inside the abdomen thus, fertility, pregnancy and giving birth (Bakhtin, 2005, p. 48). Extreme metal is preoccupied with these concepts as it is preoccupied with death and murder. In this particular album cover, there is a woman, centered in the cover. She appears to be giving birth to three different monstrous creatures from her mouth, belly, and genitalia while three alien creatures with bulging skull standing next to her. It is clearly understood that this cover artwork lacks the beauty and purity that is traditionally associated with giving birth and babies. The reason for such deconstructive approach is to lower the meaning attributed to childbearing, which is usually conceptualized as sublime, divine and beautiful -simply to an event in

which, “a disgusting creature comes out of a person.” To accomplish this intended subversion, babies that are about to be born are illustrated as disgusting, monstrous, obnoxious creatures in *The Wretched Spawn*.



Figure 4.1. *The Wretched Spawn*, Cannibal Corpse (2002)

Disgust is a significant tool for lowering which is the fundamental postulate of grotesque for Bakhtin (Unger, 2015, p.43). Cannibal Corpse is not a particular example of which incorporates disgusting, grotesque elements in the visual aesthetic of death metal. It is merely an example among the many others. Albums *Reek Of Putrefaction* (1988) and *Symphonies of Sickness* (1989) by Carcass from the United Kingdom and *Hallucinating Anxiety* (1990) by Cadaver from Norway are also striking representatives for utilization of element of disgust in visual transgression. Michelle Philipov points out that:

Each album’s purported “obscenity” related principally to the cover artwork. The cover art for *Reek of Putrefaction* featured a collage of decomposing corpses and diseased and dismembered body parts, all cut-and-pasted from pathology textbooks. *Symphonies of Sickness* added images of meat and cutlery to a similar montage of decaying human remains (Philipov 2012, p. 108).

As for *Hallucinating Anxiety*, it features, seemingly a bull’s eye and maggots along with some pieces from internal organs such as bowels. These illustrations have

unconventional taste in terms of customary visual aesthetics of cover artwork. Thereby, utilization from excessive loathsome imagery allows the extreme metal scene to produce visuals ichnographically highly transgressive.



Figure 4.2. *Reek of Putrefaction*, Carcass (1988)

All of these albums demonstrate the elements of grotesque realism. While aestheticizing what is ugly and repulsive, transgress the conventional, normative aesthetic categories. Also challenges the standards of beauty. Thus, elimination of established traditional aesthetic judgments generates transgression in visual dimension but at the same time draws new limits in visual arts which opens a way to further transgressions.

Nevertheless, this is only one aspect of grotesque realism in entire visual carnivalesque art. Application of grotesque realism in extreme metal appears in varying contexts. Bakhtin states regarding carnival that, as part of it, in grotesque realism, the emphasis is on the genitals (Bakhtin 2005, p. 54). The portrayal of such imagery in extreme metal usually, implicated by death metal bands. Some bands in death metal depend upon excessive sexual imagery, sex-related content through their careers in extreme metal. After death metal genre is well established, such bands were begun to call what became to known as "Porngrind." Barron defines porngrind as following:

This is a subgenre of metal that fuses the lyrical content and sound of death metal with a particular focus on sexual explicitness, sexual violence, and misogyny, and it is best represented by underground American and European bands such as: Soldered Poon, Anal Penetration, Anal Whore, Waco Jesus, Lividity, and Meatshits (Barron 2012, p. 68).

Overtly explicit content that porngrind produce, reflected upon the cover artwork as well. Album covers mostly consisted of naked women with genitals or explicit scenes taken from pornographic movies. Due to such features, porngrind is considered as visually one of the most transgressive subgenres in extreme metal.

It [extreme metal] is an example of popular music that takes pornography as its inspiration source. However, in addition to painted artworks, the consistent thread that runs throughout porngrind is the extensive use of photographs that display extreme imagery of female bodies, sexual scenarios, genital penetration, fellatio and other sexual acts, many evidently drawn from pornographic texts, and often displaying 'underground' or fetish images (anal sex, oral sex, S&M, and the use of faeces, urine, vomit or mucus). Hence, pornography and pornographic imagery are not causal or tangential reference points; rather, they are the essence of porngrind (Barron, 2012, p. 72).

In porngrind women are in the center of album covers. However, they are portrayed as being submissive to the will of the men. In most of the time, women are tortured or physically repressed by men in album covers. Their body is offered to male gratification and they are usually, illustrated as 'things' rather than a person with feelings. Porngrind, openly displays what remains to be hidden for engagers. The female body is exposed and exploited for the male gaze. Visual transgression in porngrind occur via this discomfoting repetitive exposure. It is discomfoting because it explicitly features sexual activity in a tormenting, abusive context.

Humans as a species are encoded to respond with quick reflexes to those they find repulsive and unattractive. Those reflexes are based upon withdrawal to avoid-disease. According to psychologists, people tend to avoid the unpleasant ugly and disgusting because disgusting objects or situations are perceived as carriers of

disease (Oaten,Stevenson, & Case, 2009, 303). Therefore, disgust avoidance serves as a disease-avoidance mechanism as a self-protective measure. That being the case, considering the porngrind scene, such images possess all the qualities that humans innately regard as abhorrent, create a tremendous amount of discomfort for individuals who come across such imagery. Therefore, knowing that this will cause discomfort, porngrind artists while consistently employing images to push the limits of human toleration and transgress the limits of this toleration by exposing such imagery as realistically as possible.

4.4. Transgressive Inversions of Black Metal

Black metal is an extreme metal genre which is ferociously anti-religious. “Although, extreme metal is produced across the world, its transgressive practices are always, at least in part, aimed at specifically western targets” (Harris, 2007,p. 48). As a form of popular music, which arises from the modern western civilization, black metal’s anti-religious attitude is mainly directed to Christianity. Black metal scene perceived Christianity as restricting, ethicist thus, against the nature of humankind. Black metal ideology adopts the LaVeyan Satanism’s perspective and while rejecting Christian God exhorts seeking the salvation not from any form of divinity but oneself. (LaVey, 1976). As opposed to Christian belief system which promotes asceticism-avoiding from worldly pleasures, black metal embraces hedonistic philosophy which aims to live life to the fullest as Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan proposed in the “nine satanic statements” which was written in *The Satanic Bible*.¹¹

Since Christianity is the mortal enemy to black metal, transgression occurs by inverting everything that Christianity holds dearly. This so-called “inversion reflex” that black metal developed, throughout the years and is sustained in visual transgression as well. Black metal’s trademark is inverted cross. The inverted cross is the symbol which is a cross but turned upside. However, the new symbol that is used by black metal musicians denotes Satanism as well as anti-Christianity (Lewis, 2001, p. 20). Black metal adopted and used this symbol from the early days of

¹¹ <https://www.churchofsatan.com/nine-satanic-statements/>

establishment as an extreme metal genre until this very day. This is a fine example of symbolic inversion that is repeatedly used in extreme metal. Symbolic inversions are the essential aspect for Bakhtinian carnival because “carnival for Bakhtin is both a populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy of the ‘high’ culture” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 7). Christianity for black metal ideology assumes the role of the high culture. It dominates Western thinking by shaping and providing a basis for it. Thus, it is charged as guilty of everything contemporary Western world has experienced.¹² As for symbolic inversion, it is “any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts abrogates or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistics, literary or artistic, religious, social and political” (Babcock & American Anthropological Association, 1978, p. 14). When considered from this point of view, symbolic inversion is a powerful, potentially destructive tool within the subversive practice of extreme metal carnival.

If we are to return to the subject of the inverted cross, as a black metal iconography, it is identified with black metal which means, anti-Christianity. It is visible in almost all institutions of the black metal scene, As the trademark of the scene, many black metal bands incorporates it in their band logo. For instance, bands like Mayhem, Dark Funeral, Marduk, Behexen, Abigor and many more placed the inverted cross in the center of their band logo. Thereby, it is the first thing that people see when they take a look at the logo. This, of course, is done purposefully. At first glance, it does not seem so significant yet, semiotically it merges every single antagonistic thought, attitude along with the collective hatred that black metal scene bears against Christianity. Such negativity is expressed in one single symbol. It is for this reason, the inverted cross alone bears a tremendous transgressive value in extreme metal.

¹² This point will be elaborated in the fourth chapter where I discuss the discursive transgression in extreme metal.

On the other hand, to strengthen its transgressive value, even more, another visual icon that possesses this much transgressive value is often combined, in order to put together one powerful display of visual transgression. The female body which is widely incorporated in other extreme metal genres -such as death metal- to intensifies the shocking value of the image. However, when this female body represents to a reprobate nun then, it doubles the amount of transgressive value of the visual. This kind of imagery also allows the recreation of Bakhtinian carnival. Carnival is presented by Bakhtin as “a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled” (Stallybras & White, 1986, p. 8). Reprobate nun image is strikingly portrayed in Finnish band Anal Blasphemy’s split album cover of *The Perverse Worship of Satanic Sins* released in 2014. This album’s cover artwork depicts a female who appears to be a nun. Yet, her upper body and genitals are not covered with clothes but her face and chest are covered with blood. There is a script saying that “Satan” written with blood in her chest. Her hands reach to her genitals with a pleasurable expression on her face. The image suggests that she is masturbating.



Figure 4.3. Anal Blasphemy, *The Perverse Worship of Satanic Sins* (2014)

The symbolic inversion that occurs in this image might be interpreted in multiple dimensions. First, the appearance of the inverted in the band logo that is placed on the cover. Secondly, the image of a naked woman who turns out to be a nun, not only naked but also masturbates. She, in such representation most definitely defies the Christian morality of chastity. Something completely unacceptable and against the moral codes of Catholic Christianity. Finally, the element of grotesque represented in the "Satan" caption, written by blood on her chest. The transgression here then reproduced from the combination of these each dimension. This combination also signifies the subverting, inverting, degrading and defiling aesthetics of carnival. Because when considered, everything that extreme metal carnival aims to accomplish is embodied in this image. Through this image the nun no longer symbolizes the purity, on the contrary, she yields to Satan and embraces indulgence, hedonistic pleasures, and the impurity. Christian God replaced by Satan who promotes worldly desires, and indulgence.

4.5. Transgression On The Stage

The stage has an enormous significance in the extreme metal scene when it comes to visual transgression. The stage is the temple of the musician, as the place where bands perform their art as if it is a ritual. Within the extreme metal scene, stages are places that one can starkly experience the visual transgression. Many bands actively transgress, via defilement of the sacred or by engaging in profanity, through the employment of grotesque and sacrilegious elements on the stage. Halnon argues that grotesque in extreme metal context "[...] is dramatized by a communal flow of human excretions such as spit, blood, vomit, urine, semen, and faeces" (Halnon, 2006, p. 37). Bodily fluids that are secreted in the human body are exposed in extreme metal. These excretions are openly displayed in all visual dimensions within the scene but stage as places where theory is put to practice carries special significance. For this reason, to elaborate my claim I will provide some examples by

referring to important concert events which grotesque elements such as bodily fluids are used to accomplish the desired level of transgression.

The German industrial metal Rammstein is famous for their unusual stage shows during the concerts.¹³ For example:

During the *Live Aus Berlin* concert... Controversially, during the song "Bück Dich" simulated sodomy with Lorenz using an artificial penis, which then sprayed liquid across the stage and into the audience for the duration of the song. Similarly, during *Völkerball* Lindemann emerged during the song "Mein Teil" (the subject of which is cannibalism) dressed as a blood-covered butcher, with Lorenz in a cauldron. During the act Lindemann sang into a giant butcher's knife and blasted the cauldron with a flamethrower. This transgressive tradition continued on the 2011 *Made in Germany* tour, with Lindemann using large cannon resembling male genitalia to fire foam into the audience, simulating ejaculation (Littlejohn & Putnam 2013, p. 35).

Infamous, self-proclaimed "Antichrist Superstar" Marilyn Manson is another extreme metal artist who frequently utilizes human excretions as a part of the show. Halnon notes that:

Anal and excremental obscenity is regular ritual at Manson concerts, where he throws an ass-wiped towel or American flag into the audience. Manson's stage spectacle includes a bent-over body and hand held exposed crack from which dripping, dark liquid excrement rolls down the crease and leg of the anal liberator (Halnon, 2006, p. 37).

In extreme metal, what is grotesque and transgressive are interconnected. As in this example, what is believed to be human nature is demonstrated regardless of its obscenity. This, in the end, produces highly transgressive stage performance where grotesque and transgressive elements assist each other in the production of desired transgressive effects.

¹³ Industrial metal is a subgenre of extreme metal which merges industrial music with metal guitar riffs, heavily utilizing synthesizer and steady rhythms creates electro-dance music like atmosphere.

Gorgoroth's momentous concert at Krakow is another clarifying example of this relationship between grotesque and transgressive. On 1st of February 2004 Gorgoroth performed in Poland. The concert is known as Black Mass Krakow. During this concert, the legendary Norwegian band Gorgoroth displayed sheep heads on stakes, Satanic symbols, a bloodbath using 80 liters of sheep's blood and four naked crucified models on the stage.¹⁴ When grotesque elements such as nudity, blood and animal heads accompanied by sacrilegious satanic symbols like inverted cross and pentagram all together generate powerful and violent transgression which is at the center of the extreme metal carnival. Thus, the relationship between grotesque and transgressive is based upon support - the existence of one empowers the other.

An incident similar to Black Mass Krakow took place in 2014, Brooklyn, New York. This time Swedish black metal band Watain was on the stage. Watain is a black metal band, infamous for performing rituals on the stage. In this concert, they threw pig's blood from the skull of a goat at the crowd.¹⁵ Using fake blood as a part of the show is accustomed and in extreme metal scene. However, using real blood is rare and thus, shocking. Therefore, some people in the audience started to vomit and some started to scream. Such a live display of gore and grotesque elements are highly transgressive in fact far more striking than album covers.

In the state of carnival where all rules and norms are being suspended everyone plays his part to subvert the power. Rammstein and Marilyn Manson assume the role of the entertainer on the stage within this extreme metal carnival. Their method of transgression is based upon the risibility of human nature. Although, as obnoxious as they are, inappropriate farting, urination, and defecation perceived as ludicrous. Nonetheless, it is contrary to the seriousness of the Church's godly judgment. Yet, since, in the state of carnival all hierarchies are suspended, all moral

¹⁴ <http://www.metalinjection.net/lists/top-10-crimes-committed-black-metal-musicians/3>

¹⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2660598/Blood-curling-Shocking-moment-Swedish-metal-band-throws-pigs-blood-crowd-start-vomit.html>

codes imposed by the Church are also withheld. For this reason, jesters of extreme metal, act freely without being subjected to any kind of moral imposing.

As for Gorgoroth and Watain, they are the epitome for blasphemous, devil-worshipping heretics of the carnival. Their method is, however, while ostensibly more brutal and blatant, philosophically is scaffolded on the deeper ground, as black metal throughout the years has taken on a different path that is more austere and darker.

I argue that stage is somewhat special when it comes to transgression. In terms of transgression, the concerts are the most notable examples, as in concerts the experience of the audience is shaped by the spontaneous performance on the stage. In my opinion, such performances of Rammstein, Marilyn Manson, Gorgoroth, and Watain, beyond being immensely transgressive. They might also be considered as the reenactment of the carnival. When complex stage settings, an atmosphere where hierarchies suspended, worldly pleasures embraced along with symbolic oppositional attitude against the church, combined with anti-religious symbolism all together, they represent the foundations of carnival that Mikhail Bakhtin described earlier.

Consequently, visuality is a fundamental part of extreme metal carnival as it was the same in the medieval carnival. Carnavalesque elements present themselves in visual dimension through album covers, various symbols and most importantly in stage performances. In his analysis regarding Rabelais' work *Gargantua* Bakhtin argues that in Rabelais we witness, the joy of the carnival, the disrespect of democratic priest, the speech and jesters of charlatan of middle ages. (Bakhtin, 2000, p. 93). Moreover, we can witness similar representations in a slightly modernized version within extreme metal carnival. Essentially this extreme metal carnival thrives upon mainly three components; grotesque imagery, sexual imagery, and anti-religious imagery. In visual aesthetics of extreme metal already existing images, symbols are used in a transgressive way. However, "new symbols and structures of thought do not replace the old symbols, but rather, they sublate the previous depth and weight of those symbols such that they find expression within

the new contemporaneous experience of the world” (Unger, 2015, p. 57). Visual transgression expresses itself in albums covers and stage performances. While the album covers heavily depending upon grotesque elements and using “disgustingness” as an instrument to achieve transgression, -stage performances generally appears to be as a ground where grotesque elements and anti-religious symbolism come together. Through employment of disgusting and grotesque imagery, extreme metal challenges, suspends the very ideas, norms, and conventions of the modern Western world, constantly looking forward to transgressing the limits that have been previously set by societal institutions and authority – in a idiosyncratic carnivalesque settings. When challenging the power (it’s the Church in this context) the extreme metal faces a dilemma. While opposing and attempting to disgrace the powers and its authority, the extreme metal though it transforms those symbols and discourses produced by the power when using them acknowledges its existence.

CHAPTER V

SONIC TRANSGRESSION IN EXTREME METAL

In the previous chapter, I argued the album covers and symbols used in the extreme metal scene, along with stage performances as different visual domains in which transgression manifest itself. Furthermore, I attempted to elaborate on the subject that why these visual domains of extreme metal are indeed transgressive concerning “grotesque” and “disgust” which Mikhail Bakhtin discussed as the essential elements of the practice of carnival (Bakhtin, 2005).

In this chapter, however, I will focus on the sound of extreme metal. The sonic dimension, just as the visual dimension is another significant area in which transgression becomes evident. Unlike its predecessors such as classic rock and punk, extreme metal is sonically diversified.¹⁶ This has allowed the extreme metal to be an affluent musical genre, offering its enthusiasts numerous stylistic varieties in terms of sonic attributes. The existence of sonic diversity compels musicians to be more creative and initiative to produce originaive/non-mediocre sounds. To be able to achieve originality, extreme metal musicians transgress the norms of extreme metal's scenic musical style which is defined by extreme speed and aggressiveness. As different subgenres are established stylistic variations became more apparent and technical details of music has altered significantly through new sonic attributes introduced by newly formed bands and established subgenres. As a result of such derivations, musical narratology of extreme metal has taken a new path, which is sonically transgressive, for both classically trained ears and the ears that are accustomed to extreme metal's musical aesthetics. Therefore, the sound of extreme metal in some aspects is transgressive not only for the non-metal audience but also for metal music audience as well.

In an attempt to explain and elaborate how sonic transgression stems from these sound-related differentiations as well as similarities with regards to extreme metal, in the following, firstly I will scrutinize the sound of death metal. Even if there are studies that are briefly touching upon the sonic transgression in death metal, they appear to be mainly concerning the composition or the listening experience which death metal provides in general (Harris, 2003; Purcell, 2003; Philipov, 2012; Bogue 2007). However, I will put special emphasis on vocals to discover the ways that vocals allow death metal music to be transgressive. In this respect, I argue that within death metal's sonic aesthetic vocals masks the meaning and emotions thus, direct the listeners focus on the composition itself and make way for even more intense, transgressive listening experience. In the rest of this chapter, I will dwell on the drone metal phenomenon by focusing on its sonic attributes to unravel my claim that drone metal is sonically transgressive both for general audience and the

¹⁶ <https://mapofmetal.com/>

metal music audience. Moreover, I shall argue that similarly death metal, drone metal also alters the listening experience by masking not only meaning but the external stimuli to direct listeners attention to the music itself to maximize the intensity of the listening experience. In pursuit of making my point, I will track down the traces of sonic extremities in the music of prominent drone metal bands Sleep and Sunn O))) to elaborate my claims regarding sonic transgression of drone metal.

5.1. Death Metal: The Sonic Monster

Death metal is one of the three major extreme metal genres along with thrash and black metal. Together they designate the sonic foundations of extreme metal. Death metal arose in the mid-'80s in US Florida as a genre defined as overly aggressive, rapid and heavily distorted in terms of musical qualities (Manea, 2016, p. 50). Similarly to thrash and black metal, it also branched out into several subgenres such as grindcore and goregrind, melodic death metal, blackened death metal, technical death metal, brutal death metal and porngrind.¹⁷ Nonetheless, all of the subgenres listed above share certain sonic characteristics that enable us to approach death metal as a whole.

For instance, in death metal, almost all vocals are either growls or grunts and guitars are played at down-tuned setting in very fast tempi (Mesiä & Ribaldini, 2015, p. 388). “[...]Drums are often very dominant and very fast. Hyper-double bass blast beats, which mimic the sound of a machine gun firing, are common and are utilized frequently” (Purcell, 2003, p. 9). The reason that death metal is so rapid is that other instruments accompanying the drum has to be synchronized with it. Since drums are extremely fast, guitars and vocals are necessarily follows the same tempo or at least it needs to be complementary in terms of the general rhythmic structure of a song.

As “a music of frenetic speed and constant intensity” (Bogue, 2007, p. 41) sonic makeup of death metal is surely transgressive in many ways. First of all, I can most certainly say that death metal is overwhelming for people who are not familiar with it. During my research, I have come across countless new bands. Each time I

¹⁷ <https://mapofmetal.com/>

discover a new band, I asked one of my friends or family members to listen to a couple of songs of this new band and comment on it afterwards. Some of them were horrified by the barbarous, inhumane vocal style, some, other hand were struck by the speed, loudness and constantly changing riff sections which makes almost impossible to follow the rhythm. However, they all seem to agree on one point, which is death metal is a form of music that cannot be appreciated via conventional musical aesthetics. This is because it does not conform to any of them. The non-conforming character has led death metal to be transgressive in sonic dimension.

Couple of people whom I asked to listen to death metal, referred death metal as “böğüren adamlar”¹⁸ which translates as yelling or shouting men into English. As hilarious as it sounds, I believe this sort of labeling provides a crucial insight about the vocals in death metal. In other genres of popular music, vocals are the main and the most significant component of music therefore always prioritized and put special effort to make them clear, as understandable as possible. On the contrary, death metal vocals are extremely distorted and low pitched and that cause major difficulty in understanding lyrics. Michelle Philippov refers to death metal vocals as “Cookie Monster vocals” and also, she points out the impossibility of comprehension of lyrics without appealing to a lyric sheet. She discusses that some “cookie monster vocals” are so excessively distorted that cannot be recognizable as language (2012c, p.75). A considerable number of songs made by porngrind (subgenre of death metal) bands such as Gut, CBT (Cock and Ball Torture) and Torsofuck fall under this category. With the aid of sound effects and special vocal techniques, the artist achieves to produce very low quality distorted vocals even syllables are becoming indecipherable, let alone meaning. For instance, in the song “Raped by Elephants” of Torsofuck the vocalist Mikko Friberg makes noises as if he is snorting for the entire song.¹⁹ The song has official lyrics however, it is impossible to grasp the meaning out of vocals.²⁰

¹⁸ The term is used in a derogatory fashion to emphasize the repulsiveness/dislike of the music

¹⁹ Torsofuck, “Fucked by Elephants”, *Erotic Diarrhea Fantasy*. 2004.

²⁰ <https://genius.com/Torsofuck-raped-by-elephants-lyrics>

I was visiting in Africa two months ago
My goal was to see all those wild animals
Most excited I was when I came close to elephants
They were so big and somehow so scary
Something happened when I snapped a picture
Three elephants surrounded me
One of them ripped off all my clothes
Second elephant came on me and started to spread my buttocks
With its huge trunk
I screamed in agony when I felt it started to shove up my ass
Third elephant forced me to take its giant cock in my mouth
I sucked like a whore while I was ass-fucked by elephant trunk
After all it wasn't too bad at all
It took only about ten minutes and cock in my mouth started to cum
Extremely huge load of elephant sperm filled my throat and
Spurting all over my face
I was completely fucked up, but elephants had one more thing to do
All three of them huffed and puffed shits on me
Then they left me alone with my ripped asshole
I'll never go to Africa again.

The song begins with lyric above and continues with a vivid depiction of three elephants raping the tourist who only wish was to visit Africa. However, even with the help of a lyrics sheet, it is not possible to understand what the lyrics are, because the vocalist does not produce meaningful sounds which can be interpreted as words. The reason for that is because the vocalist employs particular screaming vocal style.

“Extreme metal screams can be performed by either inhaling or exhaling, resulting in two very distinct styles of screaming” (Smialek & Depalle & Brackett, 2012). In this song, while performing Friberg, does articulate the words yet, the sound he makes appears to be ridiculous. The rhythmic noises Friberg produce are made by inhaling the air rather than exhaling -which is the conventional method. The specific technique (inhaling scream) that Friberg use, facilitate him to use his voice as a percussive instrument. Because, while exhaled vocals are considerably more balanced, inhaled vocals are perceptibly more agile, therefore, allows singers to use

his voice in a wider-spectrum and increase its instrumentality (Smialek & Depalle & Brackett, 2012). As in this very example, death metal vocals;

[...] Transgress the ideas of melody, timbre and technique traditionally valued as the hallmark of good singing. In consequence, extreme metal (in this case-death metal) has developed very innovative forms of vocal performance either not found in other music, or used in very novel manners (Smialek & Depalle & Brackett, 2012).

Using vocals in such particular manners is a unique transgressive *tactic* of death metal scene. Michel de Certeau defines the tactic as “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus” (de Certeau & Rendall, 2011, p. 36). In this case, death metal carefully calculates and at the right moment deploys its resources to a degree that is so extreme that meaning disintegrates. It is deterritorializing the language through this tactic.

Death metal has come up with this particular way of vocal style to direct the listeners' attention towards the music itself rather than lyrics which can be relatively distracting. In my opinion, listeners tend to perceive lyrics as an external part of a musical composition. They ponder over them while listening. Therefore, this results in a significant shift in the primary focus from the musical composition causing listeners to allocate their attention equally to composition and lyrics. Since, this situation is undesirable for death metal musicians, through unrecognizability, the scene develops a tactic, a countermove.

Although there are a few exemplary bands with socio-political agenda such as Napalm Death²¹ and Cattle Decapitation²² majority of death metal bands are ignoring the message and focusing on ways to improve the intensity of the music. In spite of greatly intensifying the music, death metal vocals compromise the message by making the meaning impossible to recognize. Listeners are stunned by

²¹ https://noisy.vice.com/en_us/article/64ydn/napalm-death-barney-greenway-interview

²² <http://exclaim.ca/music/article/cattle-decapitation-talk-environmentally-friendly-monolith-of-ihumanity>

overwhelming vehemence of vocals despite without having any clue about the lyrics except for the hint, provided by the title of the song.²³

Death metal vocals are unsettling for listeners but, accommodating for death metal scene itself. Simply because it is compatible with death metal's agenda which is based upon to create disturbing and chaotic, but most importantly intense transgressive musical aesthetics. Unrecognizability strikes as transgressive quality in death metal's musical aesthetic and it is a direct result of extremely distorted vocal style employed in the death metal scene. Through unrecognizability, death metal is stripping away the primary functions of vocals which are to convey the meaning and emotion to prevent listeners from being distracted.

Ronald Bogue asserts regarding death metal (as well as doom and black metal) vocals that "the most important function of the vocals are to provide a broadly affective, percussive reinforcement of accents and phrases" (Bogue, 2007, p. 46). This may be true for other genres of extreme metal but death metal is an exception. Lyrics are considerably more decipherable in other genres compared to death metal. In death metal's case, the lack of discursive meaning provided by vocals significantly affects the emotive meaning and prevents it from being emitted. According to Philippov "the excessive distortion and limited modulation of the death metal voice restricts opportunities for the expression of emotional truth, and as a result, the voice rarely signifies emotions in a clearly identifiable way" (2012c, 77). A monotonous, excessively distorted singing voice which is usually in low registers relinquish ornamental elements that add melody to the vocals (Harris, 2007, p. 23). Therefore, huge discrepancy seems to exist between the emotions evoked by the lyrics and singing voice. The lack of fluctuation in vocals prevents emotions to be truly conveyed, despite the existence of powerful emotions such as fear, anger, hatred in the lyrics. Hence, in a technical sense, the role of vocals in death metal is percussive rather than affective. When meaning is obliterated, emotions become less and less clear in the music.

²³ https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Cattle_Decapitation/2840

The diminished effects of both meaning and emotion stemming from the monotonic vocal style in death metal reposition the privileged status of vocals and the other instruments within the musical hierarchy of extreme metal. Since vocals do not evoke meaningful and emotive language, they do not shine through other instruments but share the same status. In death metal's case, voice is just another instrument used in accordance with other instruments. Thus, vocals do not possess priority over other instruments such as guitar, bass or drums. In contrast, death metal diminishes singing into a complementary status to create a piece of intense transgressive music. In the absence of intelligibility and emotional properties, vocals are instrumentalized and blended into a musical composition where they only serve as percussive instruments. Therefore, death metal by restraining semantic and affective capacity of vocals through unrecognizability, it directs all attention to the composition itself and evokes an intense transgressive sonic experience in listeners.

Thus far, in this chapter I have explained sonic transgressivity of death metal by focusing on vocals, from this moment on, I will dwell on the drone metal phenomenon and try to elaborate on how drone metal utilizes the same strategy in a similar pattern even though it differs from death metal radically in terms of musical qualities.

5.2. Drone Metal: The Sonic Attack

After I decided to include drone metal in this thesis, I wanted to listen to pioneering drone metal band Sleep's groundbreaking album *Dopesmoker* which was first released in 1988. However, I hadn't found out yet that the first track of this album which bears the same name with the album itself "Dopesmoker" is 1.03.31 minutes long. However, I was even more intrigued, simply because the song is quite long even for a drone metal track.²⁴

²⁴ Sleep, "Dopesmoker", *Dopesmoker*, 1988.

After I started to listen to it, approximately fifteen minutes later I began to experience strange physiological reactions. First, I have gradually developed a headache, not merely discomfort because of the noise, but actual pain inside my skull. After a while, towards the middle of the song, I started nauseating though it was not a very strong sensation, it was quite a strange experience considering the pressure on my chest along with it. I have never experienced something similar to this before. Although, I am used to feeling as if my heart is beating in my mouth from the concerts that I previously attended yet I have never felt headache, nausea and chest pain at the same time. At the end of the first track “Dopesmoker”, I was completely exhausted and couldn’t even listen to the second which is also the last track of the album. This was indeed a unique musical experience for me. Note that, I was listening using my earbuds, not headphones which I am sure could have led to much more severe physical reactions in terms of causing odd bodily sensations.

Starting from this point, in this section of the chapter, I would like to inquire about what caused these reactions to occur? How come listening to music, which is a quite pleasurable act, becomes very disturbing and painful? And why and how drone metal is sonically transgressive?

Answers to those questions lie behind the sound of drone metal. To be able to have a clear image and to internalize the sonic topography of drone metal in our minds it is necessary to understand what “drone” refers to those who listen to it. Owen Coggings argues that:

The meaning of drone for listeners includes drones in the technical sense of sustained notes at a constant pitch, but also signifies other sonic aspects such as slowness in tempo or development, repetition, loudness, limited tonal range or monotony, downtuning, lowness, bass, distortion, unsegmented continuity, extension and length (Coggings, 2018, 77).

Among all the signifiers, slowness and loudness are the sound-related trademarks of drone metal. Drone metal songs are usually more than ten minutes long and consist

of long sections of uninterrupted, sustained notes or riffs which are played in sluggish tempi and repeated multiple times over the course of a single song.²⁵

I believe that extreme slowness plays the chief role in creating transgression together with extreme loudness. Remember that one of the signature characteristics shared by the majority of extreme metal genres, especially death metal is extreme speed. However, it appears that drone metal has abandoned this core principle of extreme metal music and replaced it with extreme slowness. Instead of employing extreme speed, which has made mundane and routinized by thrash, death and black metal, drone metal transgresses metal's boundaries by slowing down the tempo as much as possible. This way drone metal breaks the metal music free from the obsession of speed that has long been dominating the history of extreme metal. In this respect, slowness points out the sonic break and the search for more avant-garde sonic aesthetic. As Michel Foucault argues that once a limit is transgressed then, new limits are set to transgress (Foucault & Bouchard & Simon 1977, p. 34).

In the heavy metal aesthetic and the early days of extreme metal, speed was one way of transgressing conventional musical norms (Walser, 1993 & Weinstein, 2000). Classical heavy metal and early extreme metal genres (thrash, death, and black) depended on speed to create a shock effect and ultimately to transgress. Drone metal, in the search of new ways to transgress introduce extreme slowness. Drone metal's "introduction" however, is equally transgressive for both in-scene and non-scene milieu. Extreme slowness is transgressive for the metal scene because it is against the established sonic aesthetic of the scene that has been built up over the years. It suggests a radical sonic shift in extreme metal sound and challenges the tradition, which is itself derived from. Furthermore, it is also transgressive for a general audience because of extreme slowness due to long sustained sound, -lacking melody and harmony- challenges the classical understanding regarding music.

²⁵ To have an idea about the drone metal sound please check albums *White 1* (2003), *White 2* (2003) *Monoliths&Dimension* (2009), and *Life Metal* (2019) by Sunn O)))

While breaking one obsession namely speed, drone metal introduced extreme metal scene with another obsession- the extreme loudness and extreme slowness- as a result of such avant-garde search. The famous drone metal band Sunn O))) is exemplifying a case of this rather innovative obsession. The band logo "O)))" is an implication of "sensate opening and cosmic enormity of volume itself" (Shvarts, 2014, p. 208). Olivia Rose Lucas reports that the name Sunn O))) comes from the brand logo of vintage amplifiers they use. She discusses that the band creates 75-90 minute mainly improvisational stage shows focusing on bass (60-300 Hz) and sub-bass (20-80 Hz) tones, played at roughly 120 dB(A) which is very near to the threshold of pain (approximately 130 dB(A) (2016, pp. 48-49). This means that Sunn O))) performs live shows that lasts almost one and a half hours which are dangerously loud and played at extremely low frequencies.

This specific sound setting is crucial in making sense of drone metal. When extraordinarily loud bass and sub-bass low frequencies combined with repetitive, steady and highly distorted riffs, altogether they produce unbearable, violent drone noise. That drone noise is transgressive because the sheer noise not only makes impossible to interpret the music within a contextual musical narrative. It also transforms sounds into a sonic weapon attacking to those who listen to it. Owen Coggins points out that, drone metal contrast with classical music or thrash metal which might be approached or understood through musical narratives. He argues that drone metal's ongoing on repetition and noise resists musical structuring, for this reason, it also resists the language as an analog of that structure (Coggins, 2018, p. 70).

As a result of such progressive, avante-garde sound, drone metal creates an indescribable musical experience. Drone metal cannot be made sense of aesthetically in terms of musical structure. It is because there isn't any structure that is carefully designed/composed/notated. In drone metal's case, there are only blocks of sound coming from amplifiers at varying intervals. The composition of sound blocks, on the other hand, is carefully created by Sunn O))) by using down-

tuned guitars in an extremely slow pace, at low frequencies and exceedingly high volume. In an interview, Stephen O'Malley - the central figure of Sunn O))) responds upon a question about their debut album *ØØ Void* as "We were trying to create sustained sound. This is why the tracks are as long as they are, why the speed of the compositions is so absurdly slow, that's why the tuning's lower."²⁶ Thus, O'Malley's remarks suggest that there is a specific agenda behind SunnO)))'s unique sound that has identified with drone metal.

In my opinion, this agenda results in unprecedented transgression pushing up the boundaries of human bodily tolerance towards the edges, by over empowered sound. "In drone metal, the central position of the amplifier over any other musical equipment" (Coggins, 2018, p. 116). This is another differentiating point of drone metal sound from mainstream extreme metal aesthetics. While in thrash, death and black metal base their sound to guitars, drone metal base to the amplifiers. The powerful amplifiers maximize the volume for drone metal and greatly empowers the sound. With the abovementioned special sound settings, drone metal then unleashes a sonic beast which attacks the listener. Therefore, people who listen to drone metal experience unpleasant symptoms causing various sensations. For instance, the drone metal concert attendees that Owen Coggins interviewed as a part of his field research, have reported abnormal physical effects "these included having difficulty breathing, noticing different areas of the body vibrating differently, or being unable to move or swallow" (2018, p. 96). Their descriptions are considerably more severe than what I have experienced when I listened to "Dopesmoker" by Sleep for the first time. It is simply because I was listening on headphones at home. They, on the other hand, were at the concert hall constantly hit by those "blocks of sound" for almost two hours.

SunnO))) is famous for live shows which are surrounded by dense fog. Sometimes they start the smoke machines quite a while ago, before entering the stage. Thick, intense fog fills the stage and makes it difficult to see. By doing so, the amount of

²⁶ <https://thequietus.com/articles/07783-sunno-stephen-o-malley-interview-void>. Accessed on 25/02/2019

visual stimulus that listeners have to engage is reduced to a minimum. During the concerts “blocks of sound” emerging from the giant amplifiers and dense fog generated by the smoke machines shut off all irrelevant, interfering auditory stimulus- except theirs- and thus, dominates the entire venue by sound and fog. As Lucas argues:

As Sunn O))) floods the performance space with artificial fog, they demarcate it as their own, exerting sensory control over the environment. Forcibly decreasing visibility in the performance space, they activate the capacity of other senses to attempt compensation for the one that is lost (Lucas, 2016, pp. 56-57).

Thus, whilst the incoming visual sensory information is weakened and reduced, perception and the interpretation of auditory sensory information is enhanced. In consequence of such manipulation listeners fully feel the presence of powerful sound and its vibrational force as they are moving in their entire body. Since the control of the venue is in the hands of the performers, listeners can direct their attention to only those that are allowed by the performers on the stage. Therefore, the particular tactics of Sunn O))) enables them to re-establish power relations between the performer and the audience. After the show begins, listeners as the subjects with will and power gradually hand over their will and the power to those who are on the stage from the first until the last note. Sunn O))) meticulously employs methods, which ultimately manipulates the listeners' experience. Furthermore, Sunn O))) also reset the power relationship between the musician and the audience by establishing total dominance over their musical experience and their body.

In conclusion, drone metal sound emerges as oppressive and tormenting noise. The sound that drone metal has formulated (usage of certain sonic configurations such as low frequency and high decibel volume etc...) results in as being quite disturbing. The sound of drone metal completely alters the listening experience providing something unprecedented for the audience.

The mere noise of drone metal attacks and induce bodily reactions such as vomiting, headache, fainting, etc... in listeners. Therefore, it is sonically transgressive for being quite coercive in terms of sonic qualities which challenge the limits of musical expression and the tolerance levels of human physiology.

Yet, there seems to exist notable similarities between transgressive aesthetics of death and drone metal. The specific fog-induced tactics are very much akin to death metal's method of manipulation. Both death and drone metal impoverish certain elements but intensify others. For example, when death metal ignoring the melody and intelligibility of lyrics whereas over-intensifying riff segments and drums. Drone metal disregards vocals, melody, and rhythm altogether while heavily intensifying volume and slowness. As Ronald Bogue nicely puts in the quotation below:

Hence, in musical as in literary experimentation, not only does innovation require a limitation of the elements to be subjected to deterritorialization, but it also may operate through a deliberately ascetic impoverishment of elements, an intensification of musical components through their simplification (Bogue, 2007, p.41).

In conclusion deprivation of musical quality as well as sharpening it serves a purpose in extreme metal musical aesthetics. It is a tactic to transgress within determined settings in which extreme metal is confined to by scenic institutions. Therefore, death metal and drone metal operates within predetermined scenic institutions such as albums, the stage, etc... Yet, extreme metal resists with the tactics that they invent and the result is rather incredibly transgressive.



CHAPTER VI

DISCURSIVE TRANSGRESSION IN EXTREME METAL

As I have attempted to demonstrate so far, two of the transgressive dimensions - visuality and sound- of extreme metal scene are notoriously extreme. Excessive grotesque imagery and distorted musical narrative most certainly enable metal music to gain an “extreme” characteristics in terms of these two (visual and sonic) particular fields. However, there is a third and even broader transgressive category

which reinforce and solidify extreme metal's controversial nature and it is the "discourse" of extreme metal.

In this chapter, I will discuss the 'discourse(s)' of extreme metal by locating death metal and black metal in the center. To elaborate my analysis, I am going to argue extreme discourses that have been reproduced by these two scenes regarding delicate subjects which have strong sociological correspondence to our daily lives. With this purpose in mind, firstly, I aim to investigate transgressive discursivity of death metal hoping to shed some light onto transgressive sexual practices and misogynistic discourses generated within the scene through lyrics. Following that, I will focus on the black metal scene and carefully scrutinize its transgressive relationship with religion and politics with respect to Satanism, heathenism and alt-right movements which have many supporters even today. Finally, I will argue that, although each category of transgression could be separately investigated in their discourses, they are in fact, interconnected and therefore, supportive of each other. When all three categories of transgression come together ultimately they create what I call "The Extreme Metal Ideology" - a meta-discourse which demarks the boundaries of all extreme metal discourse(s).

6.1. "Used, Abused and Left for Dead"²⁷: Discourses of Death Metal

The controversial characteristics of death metal certainly are not limited to visual and sonic dimensions. Death metal has always been questioned, criticized and even censored due to its visual and lyrical explicit content. The perpetual flirtation of death metal with transgression, evoked sense of hostility and danger in widespread media and public. Textual transgression in lyrics has established a misperception of causality leading public for jumping into conclusion that the scene members are inclined to practice such horrible acts and those who listen to death metal are potential murderers and rapists. As the result of raising concerns from the public,

²⁷ This title is taken from Lividity song from the album with the same name that was released in 2006.

“from October of 1996 until 2006, the sale of any Cannibal Corpse recording was banned in Australia; upon their re-release in 2006 and 2007 the band’s album were given R rating and sold to those over 18, often with alternate or censored cover” (Hoad, 2013, p. 19). Also, the band’s first three albums have been prevented from being sold and displayed, in Germany and the band is not allowed to play any song from these albums until June of 2006.²⁸

However, this, of course, does not stop death metal from stirring up a hornet’s nest. Over the years death metal continued to deal with extremely delicate subjects. Bands such as Cannibal Corpse, Carcass, Lividity, Gut, Cock and Ball Torture and many more continually flirted with themes of murder, torture, and rape and eventually such acts have become the determining themes of death metal in general.

Among these themes, excessive discourses sexuality is the most intriguing from various aspects. Various scholars have (Harris, 2001; Phillipov, 2006; Hoad, 2013) indicated in their individual researches that, sexuality in death metal is male-dominated, misogynistic and otherizing. Death metal artist seized every opportunity to bring forward humans animalistic nature by emphasizing all primal instincts of humankind. Philosophically, death metal considers human beings as animals on the contrary to common belief, advocating the superiority of humans over animals. As Hoad suggested:

In fact, “death metal rejects human ‘comportement’ as a myth, and suggests that the human is ultimately animal. Within this, death metal does not force a revaluation of the animal itself; rather deliberately panders to a representation of the animal as savage, instinctual and violent (Hoad, 2012, p. 4).

These animalistic, savage attributes imputed human beings by death metal bands, are best manifested in practices depicted in lyrics which constitute the major part of death metal discursivity.

²⁸ <https://www.atmostfear-entertainment.com/music/careers/cannibal-corpse-carnographic/>

When it comes to death metal, lyrical themes usually involve grotesque scenes of sexual practice, “charged images” and diverse first-person expressions of “anti-social desire” (Bogue, 2007, p. 46). However, these practices, images, and desires have always been hand in hand with violence. Formation of discourse in death metal, therefore, is problematic and ethically challenging to acknowledge.

The title of this subsection “Used, Abused and Left for Dead” is taken from the song in American band Lividity’s homonymous album released in 2006.²⁹ Lividity is a death metal band that started as a one-man project in 1993 which later on turned into a full band and still active ever since.³⁰ This particular death metal band and its song provide intriguing passages which might help us to analyze discursive transgressivity and the very foundations of death metal ethos. The entire lyrics of the song in the following:

Nighttime falls, as I creep into my room/Her eyes gazing, frantically
for her life
Preparing to die/I’ll drag her body to my lair violently reacting my
every command
Death will come/When you bleed
Nice and slow/Raging uncontrollably I
Rup off your arms/Then your legs
Leaving your torso/Twitching and convulsing as I
Force your mouth on my dick/Fuck the stumps where legs went
Use your arms for chopsticks/Then I’ll...
Use a knife like a dick/ ream your cunt till it rips...
Watch the blood and cum mix/Then I’ll
Cut your throat/as I thrust
Mutilate your cold snatch/My face glazed with your blood
I use it for lube too
Penetrate your tight ass/you are a bitch and a shit
Used for sex and much more/ Left for dead on a rural road
Left there for the bugs to eat you’ll...
Decompose/Rotting 'till there's nothing left
You fucking bitch/Used, abused and left for dead.

²⁹ <https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Lividity/1173>

³⁰ <https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Lividity/1173>

It is about an abductor/rapist who tortures a female to death in the most savage way. As it is clearly seen in the lyrics, the type of sexual practices committed by the perpetrator is most certainly abusive and ill-intended that establish total mastery over the female. Therefore, it is quite problematic as well as transgressive.

Death metal constantly fantasizes about dominating the female other. The subject of death metal seeks pleasure not only through conventional practices of sex but mostly through controlling and exploring female bodies. Rape and torture are the most frequent form of control that death metal scene appeals. However, the act of rape does not only remains by violating one's body. It also "transforms of victims into 'abjects', reconfiguring bodies into 'soiled' objects of disgust (Hoad, 2013, p. 22). This type of reconfiguration is quite obvious in Lividity's lyrics. Perpetrator calls her "You are a bitch and shit" and also proudly brags "used for sex and much more" and "used, abused and left for dead" as if her existence serves only for the satisfaction of his most perverse desires. As in this example, the way that Lividity addresses women is always in a derogatory fashion. Rather than uttering the names or titles, perpetrator refers his victims as "stupid bitch", "fucking slut", "stinking whore" or "worthless whore" and refuse to acknowledge and display any implication of attributing value to women.^{31 32 33} On the quite contrary, the perpetrator throws a series of insults in an attempt to dehumanize his victim.

Death metal's obsession with perverse sexual acts are apparent and usually, these acts are accompanied by other disturbing events which many would find horrifying. Lee Barron notes that:

Lyricaly, within songs such as 'The Urge to Splurge', 'Anal Action Wife', 'Oozing Vaginal Discharge', 'Dismembering Her Lifeless Corpse' and 'Sodomy Ritual', sex, pornography, torture, and murder are habitually, intermingled, with a frequent emphasis within the lyrics upon acts of rape, cannibalism, and necrophilia (Barron, 2012, p. 76).

³¹ Lividity, (2002), "Anal Autopsy" ...'Till Only The Sick Remain, Morbid Records.

³² Lividity, (2000), "Dismembering Her Lifeless Corpse" *The Age of Clitoral Decay*, United Guttural Records.

³³ Lividity, (2000), "Stench of Virginity" *The Age of Clitoral Decay*, United Guttural Records.

The nature of sexual intercourse portrayed in death metal and specifically in Lividity's musical discourse is harmful and abusive in essence. Within this portrayal, there is no indication that the sex is consensual and mutually pleasurable whatsoever. Gloria Steinem describes such form of sexual relationship as 'pornographic' which carries the message of "violence, dominance, and conquest" rather than 'erotic' that is "a mutually pleasurable, sexual expression between people who have enough power to be there by positive choice" (Steinem, 1995, p. 37). She also argues that "pornography is about power and sex-as-weapon- in the same we have come to understand that rape is about violence, and not really about sexuality at all" (Steinem, 1995, p. 38). Based on her description then, it is anything but appropriate to define death metal as pornographic based upon the power balance in sexual practices which it forms between men and women.

6.2. "Why don't I just kill you now?"

I believe, while it appears to be producing discourses about harmful and abusive forms of sexuality which are based upon total domination and control the female body (Hoad, 2013, p. 24). It is in fact, masking its real drives/motives behind sexual instincts which are claimed to be the representation of our animal side by death metal scene. I assert that there are psychological reasons that have sociological implications. Misogyny is one of them. As a pro-feminist male, I believe the importance of uncovering such motives to be able to have a better understanding of the scene and its problematic discourse(s).

Recalling Austrian psychoanalyst Freud would come handy at this point. He claimed that there are three instinctual wishes "incest, cannibalism and lust for killing" He also speaks about the necessity of repressing these wishes as a civilization (Freud, Strachey, & Gay, 1989, p. 6). And yet, death metal seems to have failed those urges. Lividity's songs such as "Anal Action Wife", "Dismembering Her Lifeless Corpse" and "Unrelenting Homicidal Obsession" largely deal with the desire for killing. Songs such as "Food" and "Processes of Disembowelment" on the other hand are

disturbing examples of cannibalism in Lividity's discography. Other songs including previously mentioned ones, deal with sexual violence against women.

"Projection and introjection are common in the lyrics of many of the death-metal scene's most influential bands. As it can be clearly observed in Lividity's lyrical discourse, misogynistic feelings are generalized and projected to all female figures and juxtaposed with violence. For instance, some of the lyrics from the song "Dismembering Her Lifeless Corpse" as following:

Burn you whore. Sins by the millions. Rot you bitch. Two-faced slut. United we stand against all those whores that stand before us... Make them feel the pain they've put you through... Piece of shit, total waste of human life. Waste of flesh, thought you said you were my friend. All lies!!! Expect no sympathy... If I've mistaken you for a whore, you must forgive me, you just act like one... You fucking bitch, you make me sick, I wish that you were never born... You are not the only one, memories burn inside of me.³⁴

The protagonist's hatred leads him to project his feelings towards other women. The ambiguous nature of text by Lividity allows us to speculate. Phrases like "two-faced" "thought you were my friend" or "If I've mistaken you for a whore, you must forgive me, you just act like one" implies strong recollections of infidelity. There is always a subtle danger in the interpretation of a text through its face value. Yet, in this case, Lividity allows us to discover the duality in meaning. These phrases could be interpreted either as if they were said after an ended relationship or very well be read as the projections and generalizations of protagonist's abhorrence. Considering the frequency of such ambiguous and sometimes quite evident lyrics, I find convincing that the misogynistic discourses of death metal certainly pose a danger in terms of ethics. However, they point out an important issue which at the end might explain the reasons underneath these discourses.

³⁴ Lividity, (2000) "Dismembering Her Lifeless Corpse." *The Age of Clitoral Decay*. United Guttural Records.

Misogynistic discourses and horrendous sexual practices imposed by death metal suggests that impotent subject of death metal feels an overwhelming need to secure his broken masculinity through a tour de force. In “Stench of Virginity” perpetrator says “[I] ignore your screams for mercy.... You will cry and scream.... Beg for me to quit! All the pain I’ve inflicted, why don’t I just kill you now?”³⁵ The subject of death metal rejoice in causing trauma, the idea is based on achieving control via subjugation of the weaker, victimised ‘other’ and in this case the victim is the female (Hoad, 2012, p. 6).

Death metal, when imagining the body as a site to be conquered, does not confront pure material but rather a living that is able to recognise pain, suffering and humiliation. Thus, what we are able to witness here is death metal desiring not only the ‘bloody gore’ but craving the ‘scream’ that affirming the power of the protagonist (Hoad, 2012 p. 6).

Through screams, torture, murder and rape protagonist reaffirms his broken masculinity experience orgasm-like state in which he feels relatively potent/able.

To briefly conclude, discursive transgressive practices in death metal mainly present themselves in the form of sadistic sexual practices which usually results in murder. Considering the coercive nature that one of the sexual partners- often a female is taken into captivity sexually abused, tormented and then killed, death metal transforms into a form of art which is beyond music. As is death metal becomes a snuff film- a genre of movie where actual murder scenes are displayed. The fact that bands tend to use the first person-narrative hence, allows listeners to see all actions from the eyes of the protagonist. To read death metal lyrics therefore, “necessitates an act of ‘looking’- listeners are denied an immediate image of the actions recounted within the lyrics, but construct a vision nonetheless” (Hoad, 2013, p. 26).³⁶ Thus, not only women are forced to take involuntary actions but the audience is also compelled to watch this grotesque display as well. Death metal scene,

³⁵ Lividity, (2000), “Stench of Virginity”, *The Age of Clitoral Decay*, United Guttural Records.

³⁶ Here Hoad only refers Cannibal Corpse lyric due to the scope of her article but I believe it could be applied to the entire scene.

wherefore, while expressing misogynistic thoughts through projection, provides an experience of power and control which scene members lack otherwise. Death metal music also provides transgressive musical entertainment for those who have perverted pleasures.

6.3. “In the Name of Our Aryan Blood”³⁷: Discourses of Black Metal

Discourses of black metal are no less transgressive than death metal but in its own way. In this part of the chapter, I shall scrutinize about the racist and anti-semitic discourses that black metal has produced over the years and the ways that these discourses evolved since the scene’s first appearance in 1990’s Norway. While doing so, I hope to illuminate black metal’s transgressive thus, controversial discursive practices around the religio-political ideologies that are cherished and embraced within the scene.

Black metal has always been the center of media and academic attention due to its extremely transgressive discourses regarding sensitive matters. In contrast to death metal, those matters that black metal tackles are religion and politics. Rather than dealing with gore, horror, and sexuality black metal engages in mythology, Satanism, anti-Christianity, and extreme right-wing ideologies.

The black metal scene started to develop in the 1990s as a responsive struggle to reconfigure the theoretical and practical basis of extreme metal (Harris, 2004, p. 100). For the pioneers of black metal, death metal had consumed all the possibilities for further sonic transgression. After all, death metal created the heaviest sounding music in the extreme metal scene (Reyes, 2013, p. 4). For that reason, as Ian Reyes points out:

The consensus of the globalizing metal subculture of the 1990’s was that death metal had exhausted the possibilities for heaviness, reaching the heaviest point imaginable within the current paradigm, a point from which the only response seemed to be to retreat to less heavy terrain (Reyes, 2013, p. 4).

³⁷ This is title is taken from a song by Ukrainian NSBM band Aryan Terrorism.

Such retreat is designated as “black turn” by Ian Reyes. Through black turn, the extreme metal scene has undergone a major change under the banner of black metal, resulting in much simpler sound. Despite the fact that the sound was simplified, themes on the other hand started to flirt with grand narratives such as mythology, religion and religio-political ideologies.

The one aspect of the “black turn” is the idea of the ‘past’, the pagan European values which have long been forgotten. Black turn in a sense is “a rehabilitation of the present through a revival of past values. The black turn was a fundamentalist movement appealing to and drawing from raw materials of history to imagine and create a metal blacker than death” (Reyes, 2013, p. 6). Varg Vikernes was the leading figure of fundamentalist movement within the black metal scene in the early 1990s. After his controversial incident with his bandmate Øystein Aarseth which resulted in Varg murdering him, he was sentenced twenty-one years of imprisonment.³⁸ “As time progressed following his arrest after the murder of Øystein Aarseth in the latter half of 1993, Vikernes began to refer his own ideology as heathen rather than satanist” (Moynihan & Söderlind, 2003, 151). He explains the shift in his philosophy by claiming that Odin is the enemy of Christian God. So, it might be viewed as satanic in this sense (Moynihan & Söderlind, 2003, p. 189).

From this moment on, Vikernes dedicated his life and music to heathenism movement. He gathered a considerable number of supporters for his ideology. He also “formed ‘Norwegian Heathen Front’ a loosely knit operation through which he will issue propaganda” (Moynihan & Söderlind, 2003, p. 166). His ideas are formed around the Odinism and Scandinavian mythology. In his book *Vargsmål* published in 1996 which translates as “speech or song of Varg” to English, Vikernes through Odinism proposed a set of ideas which propagate racist and white supremacist as well as anti-semitic notions which altogether shaped the heathenism movement he formalized.

³⁸ For more information about the incident, please see Moynihan & Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos* (2003).

His conceptualization of heathenism and interpretation of Odinism highly parallels to romantic nationalism. He glorifies and praises the pre-Christian, pagan Scandinavian way of life and values, arguing that Christendom corrupted the roots of Viking culture, made Scandinavians their glorious history and heritage forget. This idea finds a substantial place in his music. Kenneth Granholm points out that the theme of “lost tradition” appears in several Burzum songs including for instance, “Det som en gang var (Was Einst War)” (What Once Was) from Burzum’s album from 1993 and “A Lost Forgotten Soul” from its debut album from 1991 (Granholm, 2011, p. 528).

Year after year, his ideas about Odinism as religion and heathenism as a political movement became fused. In the formula of his composition, the gravity of religion remained the same whereas the impact of politics dramatically increased. “With his increasing racial nationalism, Vikernes sees himself as a successor to Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian political leader who headed the collaborationist government during the Nazi occupation of the Second World War (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002, p. 205). From a mere musician, Vikernes turned into a thinker an ideologue of religion-based racist political philosophy. The zealous efforts of Varg Vikernes reshaped Heathenism. The movement has taken a form beyond being a mere anti-Christian resistance movement and turned into a fascist ideology spreading hate towards everybody who is non-white and European.

Yet, before Vikernes made an appearance, multiple early Norwegian extreme metal bands and personalities were sympathetic already to Neo-nazi ideology, however, racist discourses were simply made to provoke public (O Ison, 2012, p. 137). For example, in 1994 when Norwegian black metal band Darkthrone released an album called Transilvanian Hunger they added a sleeve note saying that “We would like to state that Transilvanian Hunger stand beyond any criticism. If any man should attempt to criticise this LP, he should be thoroughly patronised for his obvious Jewish behaviour” (Harris, 2004, p. 104).

This incident exemplifies the prior anti-semitic and racist discourses that had already existed in the scene. Darkthrone's statement is definitely, anti-semitic because the rhetoric of "Jewish behavior" is used in a derogatory fashion. It is clearly understood that Darkthrone considers being and "behaving Jewish" as insulting so that, they used the term to insult others who would dare to criticize their album. However, later on, a public statement has been made by Darkthrone upon the pressure from the record company, claiming that the word "Jew" is simply a harmless metonymic term which was misinterpreted due to cultural discrepancies and means 'jerk' in Norwegian and they also rejected any fascist or racist affiliations (Harris, 2004, p. 104). Nevertheless, in the 1990s neither bands nor other members of the scenic structure were audacious enough to transgress certain boundaries. Even though, Darkthrone committed a hate crime the band was forced to take it back in order to survive within the scene. Thus, racist and anti-semitic discourses powered by extreme right-wing ideologies were not common, at least not apparent. When a band engages in such discourse that would eventually feel a certain pressure and would not go unnoticed.

Yet, the ideas that Vikernes expressed in countless interviews emboldened the dormant militia and triggered radicalization within the scene. He served as the catalyst in surfacing nationalist, racist and anti-semitic discourses within the scene. After Vikernes made his stance and gained publicity due to his outrageous statements, black metal scene members who sympathize or have political affiliation with fascist ideologies, felt themselves obliged to establish a new scene where they do not have to be politically correct -an area where transgression of the normative discourses is no longer drawn reaction- from apolitical scene members and public.

6.4. *The White Turn: Transgressive Politics of National Socialist Black Metal*

When black metal's fascination with pagan mythology and "the undefiled past" followed by Vikernes' heathenism ideology blended with the nation and race-based supremacy the scene quickly became politicized with a strong inclination towards extreme right-wing discourses (Radovanovic, 2016, p.55). Combined with the aforementioned 'need' to find a ground to freely operate, a new subgenre was

beginning to form out of black metal. The new subgenre is called National socialist black metal, because of scene members' direct affiliation with Neo-nazi and pro-white nationalist organizations as well as key lyrical themes of the music. Sonic features of NSBM remained unchanged- raspy vocals, blast beats and steady riffs mainly composed using tremolo picking technique- that are consistent with black metal aesthetics. Lyrical themes, on the other hand, are considerably more political, and continually flirting with extreme-right wing ideologies inciting hatred and violence towards Jews, Christians, and minority groups. Transgressive forms of music which is under the influence of Nazi ideology or other fascist notions have long existed actively within musical subcultures and largely associated with different underground far-right groups (e.g. Neo-nazi punks, or White noise) (Olson, 2012 p.136), it is because as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke nicely puts below:

Music and song have always possessed an extraordinary power to articulate myth and sentiment. This militant youth culture(s), exulting in gut feelings of anger, aggression and xenophobia, has(ve) been particularly susceptible to fascist myths of patriotic revolution, anti-communism and racial identity (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002, p. 195).

The 'extraordinary power' that music possessed, have enabled the articulation of transgressive discourses in black metal through NSBM. Transgressive value of racist and fascist discourses have doubled with the emergence of NSBM. In addition to articulating Aryan supremacy and antisemitism, NSBM bands gathered around anti-Christianity which is another property that they inherited from early black metal. Although black metal emerged in Norway the NSBM has not been quite active in the country. Ironically, the stronghold of these NSBM bands are mainly the post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and as an exception -Greece.

Since the NSBM scene is formed in even more underground than the black metal scene its visibility is highly shadowed. This allows the scene immense liberty to articulate their racist and anti-semitic discourses without being detected. For instance, lyrics of Ukrainian NSBM band Aryan Terrorism -which is a side project of KV (Knjaz Varggoth) from Ukrainian black metal band Nokturnal Mortum- are

incredibly outrageous. Even though, the band released a single album in 2002 and split up afterward, they were able to target almost every group of people that the NSBM expressed hatred towards since its formation. The album is called “*War*” and contains eight songs. Some of the titles are as follows, “Jewish Provocation”, “Destroy the Church of Christ”, “Our Banner Swastika”, “A National Socialist Call” and “In the Name of Our Aryan Blood”³⁹ These lyrics below taken from the song “Jewish Provocation exemplifies the NSBM’s anti-semitic discourse:

They, who’re buying the world/Their moral-moral of false
Like a locust they devour on our souls/And sell them on Jehovah’s slavery

...

Jehovah, look how we will kill your children!/... But you will see nothing
...You will do nothing/Because you are just an invention
You are a lie/A Jewish Provocation.⁴⁰

These lyrics below taken from the song “Jewish Provocation exemplifies the NSBM’s anti-semitic discourse⁴¹, ‘feeble Jew’⁴² and ‘parasite’.⁴³ Besides being offensive and insulting, these lyrics also insinuating inferiority of the Jewish people while indirectly suggesting the superiority of Aryan race.

Since antisemitism is frequently utilized theme in NSBM discourses of antisemitism there are other bands which employ such discourses. Greek band Der Stürmer is another spearheading formation that propagates openly fascist notions within the scene. The name of the band comes from the Nazi propaganda tool and anti-Jewish newspaper that was published in Germany between 1923-1945 until the end of WWII.⁴⁴ The slogan of the newspaper was “Die Juden Sind Unser Unglück” which translates to English as “The Jews Are Our Misfortune.” Unsurprisingly, the band’s

³⁹ https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Aryan_Terrorism/7865

⁴⁰ https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Aryan_Terrorism/War/430863

⁴¹ https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Aryan_Terrorism/War/430863

⁴² This expression is used to address the Jesus Christ therefore, could be classified as both anti-semitic and anti-Christian. For this reason, it is hyper-transgressive.

⁴³ https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Aryan_Terrorism/War/430863

⁴⁴ <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/dersturmer.html>

discourse strictly matches the discourses of Nazi propaganda newspaper which they are named after.

In the song “Judas Burning” from Der Stürmer’s split album which they released with another NSBM band Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra in 2016, anti-semitic discourses are clearly apparent. Some of the lyrics follow as: ⁴⁵

Ignite the fires of cleansing
Rid the land of noxious decay
...
Judas burning/Fires of my hate
Judas Burning/Exorcize the vermin
...
Cathartic bone fires set ablaze/Your parasitic existing will be your
blame
Tears of deception will not save you now/Destroy the race of
treacherous disciple...

The anti-semitic discourse that is demonstrated in lyrics calls for the ethnic cleansing of an entire race of people. In addition to the open display of hatred towards Jewish people, along with accusations of treachery.⁴⁶ Der Stürmer’s discourse seems to be consistent with NSBM practices in this regard. Also, similarly to Aryan Terrorism, both bands label Jews as being “parasite” and “vermin” in an attempt to dehumanize and imply inferiority.

Emboldened discourses of NSBM also promote hatred against Christianity. Since the formative years of black metal, anti-Christianity has been a favorable theme within the scene. The first and second wave of black metal produced transgressive discourses of anti-Christianity, by replacing Christian God with Satan to meet the demand that requires constant transgression of already existing boundaries. However, with the rise of white turn under the banner of NSBM, anti-Christian themes were maintained as part of the discursive practices, the motivation behind practices, on the other hand, is slightly revised. NSBM, as Benjamin Hedge Olson

⁴⁵ [https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Der St%C3%BCrmer/7534](https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/7534)

⁴⁶ Here, lyrics refer to death of Jesus Christ and his alleged murder by Jews.

rightly states, “tends to characterize Christianity as being some type of sinister Jewish trick to subvert the minds” of Europeans and Americans (Olson, 2012, p. 142). Such characterization of Christianity is most obvious in lyrics. “Our Banner Swastika” by Aryan Terrorism includes references which reveal the NSBM’s perspective regarding the Christian-Jewish subversion of minds.

When z.o.g has a power we dont/There’s only one solution
A WHITE RESISTANCE/ARYAN TERRORISM
And total war/brainwash through mass media lies
Fed by hands of a Jew
...But we are the gods/Masters of the earth
A WHITE RACE/It’s a gift of the great gods!
Yet jewish anti-culture has a nerve to try to break the back of our
pride
With their churches and synagogues...

Z.O.G is an abbreviation for “Zionist Occupied Government” and popular conspiracy theory around the white supremacist, Aryan circles. According to this theory the US government is a Jewish puppet regime, therefore, the US is controlled and governed by Jews (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002, p. 19). Lyrics point out that Jews do not only control the government but also controls the media to brainwash the public. Yet, the most intriguing notion proposed by NSBM regarding Christianity lies in the phrase “with their churches and synagogues.” Close examination of the lyrics shows that in NSBM mentality churches and synagogues are the cultural heritage of ‘Jewish anti-culture’ even though, these places are the worshipping areas for believers who have different religious affiliations. Seemingly, the NSBM scene does not differentiate between Christianity and Judaism. Rather, the scene considers Christianity and Judaism as one tradition and Christianity as being the continuation of that tradition.

In NSBM discourse, since the Jews control everything and poison the minds of people with lies and trickery, for them the only solution to overcome the problem is to fight it. For that reason, NSBM declares war upon Christianity to regain their so-called pride and lands. At this point, the discourse of NSBM intersects with romantic nationalist imaginations such as “forgotten past” and “degenerated soils” which was articulated by heathenism.

One of the striking examples of the war rhetoric within the NSBM scene is illustrated in Der Stürmer's song called "The Blood Calls for W.A.R.!" This song elaborately identifies the reasons and parties of this so-called war waged by NSBM upon the "Judeo-Christians" as well as the remodeled heathenism within the European context.⁴⁷

W.A.R./We Must Proclaim Heathen W.A.R.!!
European Fatherland once Proud and Great/Our Lands are now degenerated
Poisoned by judeochristian lies and beliefs/We must make the traitors die on their knees
W.A.R./When the Duty Calls... W.A.R.!!
When the Blood Calls... W.A.R.!!
We don't believe in the prince of peace/Hail the Gods of War!
Zionists who now rule/Die by the Zeus' Thunder,
The Wargod Ares is on the loose/Slaves of the jew upon the cross
Religion of slaves, false equality/We will throw away from our Lands
The cursed judeochristianity
W.A.R./When the Duty Calls... W.A.R.!!
When the Blood Calls... W.A.R.!!/Burning churches, Aryan Might
Our Heathen Army now Arise/Racial Call and Spartan Might
Arise Our Ancient Gods Arise!!!

Der Stürmer's call for war begins with naming the struggle as "Heathen War." By defining the nature of the war as heathen the band establishes a connection with Varg Vikernes and his ideology. The discursive similarity between Vikernes and Der Stürmer is too obvious in the lines "European Fatherland once Proud and Great/Our Lands are now degenerated" to be ignored. However, in the heathenism proposed by Vikernes, the scapegoat was Christians alone. Der Stürmer's reformation of heathenism blames the Jews for the degeneration of the lands. Also, cultural references have seemed to be replaced as well. While in the original form of heathenism Vikernes pledges allegiance to Odin, Der Stürmer appeals to its own cultural heritage by pledging allegiance to Ancient Greek Gods of Zeus and Ares.

⁴⁷

[https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der St%C3%BCrmer/The Blood Calls for W.A.R./21473](https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/The_Blood_Calls_for_W.A.R./21473)

Furthermore, Der Stürmer identifies themselves 'Spartan' -hence Greek- to express their pride as warriors, rather than Viking.

In NSBM Pan-Germanic premise is also revisited. Regardless of the alterations in the heathenism movement, NSBM keeps the pattern of "them versus us" dichotomy to fan the flame. However, the borders of 'us' has been expanded in a way that will also include other Europeans who do not share Germanic heritage. Within the local scenes, every band connects with its audience through its own cultural heritage. For instance, Hate Forest is from Ukraine and identifies their music as Aryan/Slavonic but utilizes traditional vocals and Ukranian folk music elements. This, while making an affirmative impact on the nationalistic identity of Hate Forest in the local scene also increases band international appeal within the global scene (Olson, 2002, pp. 147-149). The term 'Aryan' facilitate Hate Forest to establish a connection with other members of the NSBM scene who are none-Slavonic.

Being European and white are the unifying traits that brought them together. This is the way of NSBM bands saying "I am not one of them, I am one of you." The Aryan identity exceeds beyond any political or national boundaries and sets the criteria for inclusion to the NSBM scene in the war against the Jews and Christians (Williams, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, regardless of the Germanic or Slavonic NSBM scene responds to the national socialistic call, to defend and save the European Fatherland from the enemy.

To conclude, it is my opinion that the emergence of the NSBM scene within extreme metal highly correlates with the emergence of heathenism movement in the black metal scene. Heathenism paved the way for scene members to explore their cultural heritage and connect with their national history. Yet, the connection that they made, while allowing scene members to familiarize themselves with the national and cultural heritage of their country, took an exclusionist turn which eventually ended up being dismissive with regards to other cultures. I define this phenomenon as "white turn" due to obvious emphasis on the glorification of the white race and Aryan identity in the discursive practices. The discourses of NSBM

promote hatred towards Jews and Christian - fed by white supremacist organizations and their ideology which are generally based upon the conspiracy theories generated within these circles. As the reflection of hatred against Jews and Christians, NSBM scene exceedingly engages humiliation and scornful insults against the members of these religious groups. Therefore, when the NSBM scene considered, it is fair to assert that the discursive practices which have been implementing since the formation of the scene are aggressive, offensive and hyper-transgressive.



CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I mainly concentrated on the concept of transgression and how it emerges in the extreme metal scene. My research has shown that transgression in extreme metal might be categorized and dealt with in three different dimensions. Visuality, sound and the discourse are the three fields in which transgression occur blatantly -in defiance of religious, social, political norms and taboos.

Extreme metal is always looking for opportunities to overturn the authority and power. For that reason, employs different tactics which weakens the authoritative power but strengthen its position. In the visual dimension, transgressive methods of extreme metal utilize tactics of the “grotesque” and “disgusting” to disturb those who engage the visual aesthetics. Visual transgression is most obvious in two areas of the scenic institutions; album covers and the stage performances. Extreme metal

recasts the already existing imagery and presents them in sacrilegious, profane and abhorrent context. Therefore, the transgressive visual aesthetics of extreme metal is blasphemous as well as repulsive.

One of the most intriguing aspects regarding extreme metal is the sound. Machine-like, the incredibly rapid sound of death metal, when coalesce into one with the unintelligible, grunting vocals constitute a complete opposition to traditional musical aesthetics. Unrecognizable voice patterns mask the meaning and emotion which would usually possible to infer from the musical narrative. Drone metal, on the other hand, disregards vocals and speed altogether, however, boosts the sound through special amplifiers and sound settings. Extreme loudness caused by these specifications leads to certain physical discomforts including nausea, temporary hearing loss, chest pain and even pulmonary rupture in severe cases. In drone metal musical settings are carefully altered to create desired conditions just like in death metal, while certain elements of music are impoverished, other elements such as volume are intensified.

The most controversial arguments about extreme metal, however, arise from discursivity. Extreme sexual practices constitute the majority of discourses in death metal. In the lyrical discourse of extreme metal, sexuality is a male-dominated and malicious, phenomenon. Women are usually portrayed as victims of sexual violence, as the abjects who serve the perverted pleasures of men. Abjectified women become the object of hatred. Scene members project frustration stems from their broken masculinity. This frustration manifests itself as an uncontrollable rage and violence against other women.

The transgressive discourses of extreme metal are not limited to sexuality. Black metal is the realm that fascist and racist discourses gradually arose and spread throughout the years. Romantic nationalist ideals about pagan past first verbalized by infamous black metal musician Varg Vikernes. The Heathenism movement which he led, turned into a racist, exclusionist ideology. The followers of Vikernes established national socialistic black metal which is a subgenre of extreme metal that has embraced his ideology and taken it even further. As opposed to all other

extreme metal subgenre NSBM is strictly political musical scene. Thus, racist and anti-semitic discourses are cherished by the scene against Judaism, Christianity and other minority groups. NSBM considers all non-white, none-Aryan groups as a threat, therefore, declares a holy war upon them. Uniting under the banner of whiteness NSBM calls for solidarity in the crusade against Judaism and Christianity.

Consequently, transgression in extreme metal appears in various dimensions and sometimes in a contradictory fashion. Therefore, it is multi-layered, multi-dimensional. And yet, the different forms transgressions seem to be interconnected. When the entirety of the scene is considered, transgression in the visual domain completes and solidifies the sonic and discursive transgression or vice versa. The totality of transgressions generates extremely powerful musical culture that pushes away the outsiders through despisal, disgust, and horror as if it wishes to remain in the underground. Eventually, all transgressive categories merge within each other and create an aggressive, profane, and extreme musical culture that in the end, the name "metal" alone accumulates enough transgressive value to spread terror to those who are outside the scene.

All of these practices within the scene suggest that when the extreme metal is evaluated, the societal conditions of which it was born into should not be ignored in fact, one would not be exaggerating if asserts that formation of extreme metal is shaped by the society which it emerged in. There is no doubt that the extreme metal is the product of modern Western society.. However, the extreme metal scene was not developed by the values of Western civilization but on the quite contrary, it developed under the influence of exactly opposite values that modern Western society had embraced. As a result, the extreme metal scene constituted a counter-culture against the Western social norms, - the one that constantly attempts to demolish, turn upside down or to undermine at the least- foundational values, ideas and norms of the Western world.

The extreme metal imagines the modernity as a system that corrupts and dismantles the foundations of society. Yet, the *society* that extreme metal refers to

– is not the current capitalist society rather, it is the ideal utopia of pre-modern, pre-industrial European society. The extreme metal positions itself against the post-capitalist Western society and makes tremendous effort to struggle against the structures, institutions and hierarchies that come along with modernity in order to obliterate the alienating effects of a post-capitalist society.

In a sense, extreme metal desires to break free from what Weber calls “Iron Cage” which confines the individuals within well established borders. The scene members, as individuals who are trapped inside this system - attempt to widen the gap between the bars of the cage.

This particular cage is forged by capitalism. Both Marx and Weber conceptualize capitalism as the direct result of economic relations within a society, and also as the determinant of the cultural products, belief systems and values. In short, to break free from the cage, one must break free the values associated with it. With this purpose, extreme metal employs various types of transgression to liberate itself. To this end, it produces extreme counter-discourses and to reinforce its position utilizes equally extreme visuals and sounds. Extreme metal vigorously struggles against modern capitalist society and its values through these images, sounds and discourses to escape from the suffocating atmosphere of the *cage*.

In extreme metal mentality the cage is strictly associated with Christian beliefs, values ethics. The scene therefore, targets Christianity as the major institution and the values of Christianity as the founding values of modern Western society. With the help of transgression, it aims to undermine the foundations of Western society and eliminate its alienating effects through different *tactics* such as grotesque and graphic visual content, sonic distortion applied to vocals and guitars as well as outrageous discourses that attack women and religion and religious groups.

To be able to carry out its fight against modernity, extreme metal distance itself from the modern society and religious institutions by constantly attacking them from a supposedly secular perspective. Paradoxically, extreme metal is while

exerting to establish a secularist agenda through employment of profane imagery and discourse however, it reaffirms the existing religious institutions by recognizing their deities and symbols. Moreover, it utilizes same properties to establish its agenda by replacing the God with Satan and reconfiguring cross the as the inverted cross. The extreme metal scene reinvents its agenda through Satan and evil that is associated with it. Yet, doing so means that repositioning and defining itself by the very ideas that extreme metal opposed to. Ironically, while the extreme metal desires to break free from the cage –created by the values of modern Western society, it finds itself in another cage created by extreme metal itself. Through the ideals of Satanism and Heathenism, it proposes an ideology which eventually turn into complex belief system. In this alternative worldview as opposed to modernity, concepts of evil, misanthropy, misogyny and racism come together to form a transgressive defense force against the values of modernity.

Although, the scene members' struggle against power and authority is quite admirable, the methods they employ become worrisome because of the transgressive nature of extreme metal. Discourses of the extreme metal are alarming due to certain ethical problems that they pose when it comes to matters that are already controversial. Open display of graphic visuality or discourse is one of the taboos of the modern world. Regardless of being secular or religious, people find overt imagery as distasteful. For that reason, employment of graphic visuals are act of transgression and the ones that extreme metal scene utilize frequently to simply provoke or challenge the public, the authority, the power. However, extreme metal while challenging the power, it disregards human life, justifies torture, exploit female sexuality and disrespects others' beliefs. Although the attempt to challenge the power is a valuable one however, with complete indifference towards other's morality, identity and integrity such attempt is problematic and unethical.



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