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“White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers”: An Exploration of Far-Right Political Extremism in Heavy Metal Music

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by

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ABSTRACT

"White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers": An Exploration of Far-Right Political Extremism in Heavy Metal Music

by

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The main question of this dissertation is to consider why black metal in particular has become and remained so appealing to those on the far-right, despite the genre's fringe aesthetics. In these chapters, I seek to establish a historical account of how this appropriation has occurred as a complicated nexus of both socially and culturally derived meanings of the same set of generic sounds. The first chapter, which discusses the ways in which meaning was ascribed to the genre from those outside of the scene, and often in contradiction to the experiences described by both musicians and fans, that lent itself to political appropriation. By the time NSBM had coalesced into a more defined genre, historical lineages seem to be very important, as most NSBM bands place themselves simultaneously into historical lineages of both black metal and the Third Reich through thematic emphases on Satanism, paganism, and violence. In addition to themes often demonstrated through the lyrics, I use spectrograms to analyze the noisy timbres so coveted by metal and black metal bands to help explain the appeal through a theoretical approach to embodied understandings of music and its role in facilitating real-world political action through affective participation. Despite NSBM's efforts to inscribe meaning onto black metal aesthetics, the spate of bands that use logics of internet trolling to eradicate the far-right in the metal scene demonstrate the

malleability of musical meaning. While NSBM bands have attempted to ascribe specific political meanings onto black metal aesthetics, RABM and trolling bands like Neckbeard Deathcamp have demonstrated the ways in which music can be inscribed and reinscribed with meaning even when dealing with oppositional political stances. While the idea of creating meaning through neo-fascism is certainly disconcerting, the ability to reinscribe music means that these artistic forms remain an open ground with the possibility of fighting back rather than an inevitable cultural or artistic loss.

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Introduction

The first wave of black metal developed in the early 1980s with bands like Venom and Bathory, but it was ultimately the genre's second wave iteration that would have the most impact on both the metal and non-metal scenes. Black metal's second wave appeared in Norway as a reaction to what they felt was the over commercialization of death metal, or what Ian Reyes would refer to as the "hegemony of heaviness."[1] The new subgenre would take the metal world by storm, favoring fast riffs, blast beats, shrieked vocals, and an experimental fervor with intentionally poor recording practices. The aural result of such experimentation is a loud, chaotic, and heavily distorted set of musical aesthetics. Due to the noisy nature of such music, it was unlikely to be heard over mediums like the radio or television and instead relied on routes of circulation like tape-trading. These alternative and underground forms of communication helped foster the sort of extremity that the genre had been seeking.

Black metal experimented with taboo topics, especially Satanism and occultism. Most evocations of such figures were often done in the name of fun, however, these fantasies soon bled into the non-metal world as band members took the cultivation of an "evil" persona to the extreme. Several members of the Norwegian scene ended up committing real-world, violent, and shocking crimes. Beginning with the violent suicide of the band Mayhem's lead singer in 1991, the violence in the scene quickly escalated. In 1992, the drummer for the band Emperor, Bård 'Faust' Eithun, murdered a gay man in

[1] Ian Reyes, "Blacker Than Death: Recollecting the 'Black Turn' in Metal Aesthetics," *Journal of popular music studies* 25, no. 2 (2013): 240–257.

Lillehammer. Around the same time, multiple members of the Norwegian black metal scene were responsible for a rash of church arsons. And in 1993, the founder and sole member of Burzum, Varg Vikernes, stabbed the Mayhem guitarist Øystein 'Euronymous' Aarseth to death. Those part of this inner cohort of black metal musicians were referred to as the "black circle" and their crimes quickly made international news, both in and outside of the metal world, for their real-world enaction of the violence that the genre's critics had often ascribed to it. These crimes have also become a fascination for many, resulting in books, documentaries, and movies made about them. But the story for some of these figures continues past the initial crimes that made for the most riveting headlines.[2]

A year after he was convicted of murder and sentenced to 21 years in prison in 1994, Varg Vikernes began the Norwegian chapter of a group called the *Allgermanische Heidnische Front* (AHF). This band of groups advocated national socialist political ideologies and combined it with the mythological focus of racist paganism, something enmeshed in the actual Third Reich as well.[3] Throughout his time in prison, Vikernes would continue to develop ideas around national socialism, antisemitism, and paganism leading to a number of publications before his release in 2009. Although in some ways Vikernes was part of a larger trend in black metal music in moving from thematic topics centering on satanism to centering around paganism, this inclusion of racial politics was (unfortunately) influential within the black metal music scene. The combination of these politics and music lead other acts putting them together more explicitly than Vikernes himself did in his first albums. This subgenre became known as National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) and has

[2] For more on the Black Circle, see Moynihan and Søderlind (1998).

[3] Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 307.

become a kind of catchall term for any group that puts far-right political ideologies into their black metal output. Although the percentage of black metal bands who engage in these politics remains an incredibly small percentage of black metal bands, NSBM has continued into the present day.

For many, the use of black metal as political ideological propaganda may seem counterproductive due to its emphasis on distortion and illegibility, and yet NSBM has continued to propagate. This seeming disconnect has created the largest driving research question of my dissertation. Namely, how, and more importantly, why do NSBM musicians choose to combine far-right politics with black metal music? In answering this question, I also consider what effect far-right politics has on the listening experience, how various listeners have negotiated the existence of NSBM and violence in their listening habits, and how musical meaning or meanings can be ascribed onto a set of aesthetics. To answer these questions, my dissertation interrogates both how bands have included far-right politics in heavy metal and how listeners have understood and negotiated these politics in their listening experiences. I seek to establish an account of how this appropriation has occurred as a complicated nexus of both socially and culturally derived meanings of the same set of generic sounds.

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, I rely on both primary and secondary sources to provide a larger historical and political context around both black metal as a genre and subculture and various neo-fascist groups. This includes engaging with scholars who have worked with music and radical politics as well as sources such as fan produced publications (‘zines) and interviews with bands discussing both musical and political views. These sources, while available to the public, come with their own set of academic

challenges. Namely, some of these sources craft their answers to align with specific worldviews or present contradictory statements over time. While this complicates certain aspects of this research, many of the figures I discuss in the black metal scene hold forms of cultural capital through their contributions to the black metal and NSBM scenes. As such, their interviews, even if contradictory or flat-out falsities, are still important to their fans and demonstrate important aspects of the scene's values at that time.

I also engage with forms of online ethnography to construct a broader view of how political negotiations occur for black metal listeners. Scholars like Kiri Miller have used internet spaces such as YouTube comment threads to conduct online ethnographic work, but Reddit has recently also become a site to do such work in a variety of different academic disciplines.[4] Reddit, a public chat forum, is broken into different subforums, known as subreddits, that center on different topics. Because of Reddit's popularity and large user base, users can generate a variety of highly engaged threads on a variety of topics, and scholars have begun to use these threads for qualitative analysis in a number of different disciplines.[5] Reddit users, or redditors, remain anonymous in their interactions online, using chosen pseudonyms rather than their actual names. Nevertheless, some information from Reddit's userbase is available and show that the website is used predominantly by

[4] See for example: Kiri Miller, *Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2012.

[5] See for example: Rachael A. Record, Will R. Silberman, Joshua E. Santiago, and Taewook Ham, "I Sought It, I Reddit: Examining Health Information Engagement Behaviors Among Reddit Users," *Journal of health communication* 23, no. 5 (2018): 470–476; Chris Du, Wai Lee, Dena Moskowitz, Alvaro Lucioni, Kathleen C Kobashi, and Una J Lee. "I Leaked, Then I Reddit: Experiences and Insight Shared on Urinary Incontinence by Reddit Users," *International Urogynecology Journal* 31, no. 2 (2019): 243–248; and Megan Lavengood and Nathaniel Mitchell, "/r/musictheory: Making Music Theory on Reddit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Music Theory*, ed. J. Daniel Jenkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

Americans[6] and that American users tend to skew male.[7] Reddit's metal communities boast large subscriber numbers, with around 68,000 members in the black metal subreddit (r/BlackMetal) and 1.5 million users in its general metal music subreddit (r/Metal; also cutely referred to as "shreddit") at the time of this writing. Topics on the metal forums range from posting and discussing specific albums, songs, or artists, and more general discussions around the genre and the scene. Comment threads around black metal and NSBM provide valuable insights into how the broader metal community discusses, engages with, and negotiates political topics.

Much of this dissertation's discussions also rely on considering affective responses to black metal, politics, and the combination of them. To discuss the multifaceted ways in which listeners react to and understand the music they listen to and the politics that surround them, I engage with several moments of critical theory. Jean Baudrillard's theories on the hyperreal will help understand the overwhelming affect of panic during the 1980s. George Bataille's theories on surplus and its necessary destruction help to explain how overwhelming affective experiences can be channeled into political aims. And Sianne Ngai's work can help understand the affective experiences of listening to politically coopted music. These instances of critical theory help explore the role of affect in the intersection between music and politics. Such theory also allows me to explore the role of affect as it

[6] "Regional Distribution of desktop traffic to Reddit.com as of May 2022 by Country," Statista, June 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/325144/reddit-global-active-user-distribution/.

[7] "Distribution of Reddit Users in the United States as of February 2016, by gender," Statista, February 2016, https://www.statista.com/statistics/517155/reddit-user-distribution-usa-gender/.

relates to specific musical aesthetics as a propaganda tool as well as how such propaganda can be understood and interpreted by its listeners.

Finally, these questions require elements of musical analysis, especially with an emphasis on timbre, to consider how black metal aesthetics have been appropriated for political aims. Using these methodologies, I argue that concern around heavy metal and its lyrics in the US during the 1980s established a discourse around metal that lent itself to appropriation, but it was ultimately the history and thematic topics of black metal that allowed for a more direct convergence of musical and political histories. I also argue through the use of timbral analysis, that black metal appeals to neo-fascist groups not despite its aesthetic qualities but because of them. Finally, I also explore the range of reactions to NSBM and how such politics have been negotiated by listeners. Such answers to these research questions will be appealing not only to those who listen to this more fringe genre, but also to those who are interested in how neo-fascist communities have formed and sustained themselves through musical engagement.

The question of politics and its connections to music has more recently become a question for many scholars and several works that investigate the connection between far-right politics, music, and how they can become intertwined with one another have been published. Thus, this dissertation will rely on the painstaking work that these scholars have already done. For example, Benjamin Teitelbaum's monograph *Lions of the North* (2017) explores neo-nationalism and white supremacist ideologies in Scandinavia to consider how music has been used to create reformist nationalist identities in a post-skinhead era. Teitelbaum utilizes ethnography through personal interaction to frame his discussions and to consider the ideologies of various Scandinavian neo-nationalist groups, all of whom

generally hold problematic and xenophobic views. The transformation of neo-nationalist groups and philosophies has also caused a large shift in groups' musical practices and how music and discourses around music can "offer insight into this shrouded population as it transitions from a marginal subculture into a powerful political and cultural force."[8] Through his ethnographic research, Teitelbaum painstakingly details these groups' use of music, especially as they attempt to move away from their former associations with the skinhead punk movement, often by employing different music genres. Teitelbaum discusses the appropriation of folk and rap music as well as the role of women (especially as singers) and the use of music's affective power for political recognition.

Jonathan Pieslak's recent monograph, *Radicalism and Music*, does explore some of the heavier genres and their histories of far-right appropriation. Pieslak explores the music associated with racist skinheads and music's role in shaping both individuals and communities.[9] For each group, Pieslak argues that music plays a vital role in creating culture within different radical groups that work to recruit new members, create identity, and propagate their ideologies. In turn, that understanding of musical choices and the discourses surrounding them may help us understand the groups' ideologies, political aims, and what can potentially motivate acts of violence. Although Pieslak explores a number of radical groups throughout his monograph, his chapter on racist skinheads historically situates the communities' emergence as stemming from underground music scenes (often associated with hardcore punk and metal) rather than a far-right political sphere. Pieslak also considers

[9] Pieslak defines radicalism as "cultures or groups at the fringe or beyond the fringe of historical societal mainstream values and perspectives, who tend to adopt and express dogmatic and often idealistic racist, superior, intolerant, absolute, hateful, or illegal views and actions in violent or nonviolent forms," 5.

how music has been used as a vehicle for these belief systems and how it has been used as a tool to recruit new members and bond them together socially. Pieslak further argues that this music often normalizes violence, pointing to well-known white power bands such as Skrewdriver and Hammerskin Nation, and that white power music has had a strong impact on real-world violence, using Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik as an example.[10] While Pieslak's monograph also uses a historical framework to situate the rise of the racist skinhead movement, his work predominantly focuses on the movement in the United States and hardcore punk music with some mention of less heavy genres towards the end.

Others have approached metal more specifically in some of their analyses. Nancy Love's *Trendy Fascism* (2016) has recently garnered a lot of attention for her discussions on music's role in politics with an emphasis on white power music. Specifically, Love focuses on "the prominent role white power music plays in conveying ideas, funding activities, recruiting members, and promoting violence for a growing transnational white supremacist movement."[11] Love further claims that she seeks to discuss the connections between "aesthetics, democracy, and politics" in considering how popular culture helps inform politics.[12] Paying particular attention to how music can help create communities within larger identity or national groups, Love emphasizes aesthetics, politics, and culture to

[10] Anders Breivik was responsible for a terrorist attack in Norway on July 22, 2011. Breivik first set off a bomb, which killed eight people, before making his way to a summer camp associated with the Workers' Youth League and shooting and killing 69 more people. Before the bombing and the shooting, Breivik had written and sent a long manifesto as well as uploaded a 12-minute YouTube video that blamed Muslims and immigration for ruining Norwegian society. The murders were meant to shock people into seeing what Breivik thought of as the dangers of multiculturalism.

[11] Nancy Sue Love, *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016), 2.

[12] Ibid. 2

explore how white supremacist movements have mobilized and the role music has played. Love's case studies cover a range of musical genres from folk to punk and includes a heavy metal case study. Focusing on the Canadian band Rahowa, Love delves deeply into the philosophies of Ben Klassen, the founder of the World Church of the Creator and Rahowa. Her analysis of Rahowa's music focuses predominantly on the band's lyrics, which she describes as aggressive and hateful.[13] as well as a brief discussion on the role that generic cues play in promoting certain affective states in its listeners. Despite her introductory emphasis on musical aesthetics, Love's discussion does not focus on more specific musical qualities. Instead, most of her discussion relies on Rahowa's lyrical content and then considering how affective states created through music can transfer to anger or hatred of other people. Undoubtedly, metal is often regarded as "angry," and this emotional content of the music plays a role in its appropriation by far-right bands. However, I believe that to adequately address the use of music, and metal in particular, in mobilizing racist ideologies, more careful attention must be paid to the musical aesthetics and characteristics of both the genre and case studies.

While these in-depth studies have emphasized the role of politics in music, and some heavier music, there has yet to be a more in-depth discussion of heavy metal specifically and its role in political and ideological propaganda. Despite aesthetic similarities to genres like punk, I argue that aspects of metal's specific history, modes of scene participation, and musical aesthetics play a role in the emergence and proliferation of NSBM music that began in the 1990s. As such, this dissertation also engages with work in metal music studies, to consider the particularities of the genre both musically and culturally.

[13] Ibid., 118-19.

In contemplating musical aesthetics, many scholars have noted that timbre plays an integral role in analysis of metal music, especially because of the emphasis on distortion.[14] Some scholars, such as Robert Walser, have discussed distortion in heavy metal as a form of power – a way to control the uncontrollable.[15] Walser emphasizes the role of the guitar in creating this distorted effect, but also notes the role of the distorted voice, something emphasized more in extreme metal subgenres.[16] Keith Kahn-Harris has also written about the extreme metal scene more specifically, which includes the black metal subgenre, to consider the emphasis on transgression both socially and musically.[17] While such an emphasis has led to innovations within the genre musically, it has not stopped an exploration of racist ideas as an exploration of taboo and play.[18]

Other scholars have noted a gap in heavy metal scholarship between the emphasis on sociological analysis and the subsequent lack of musical analysis. Zachary Wallmark's work seeks to bridge this gap by devoting careful attention to music and the construction of

[14] Robert Walser and Keith Kahn-Harris have discussed the importance of distortion in their monographs on heavy metal and extreme metal respectively; however, it would be difficult to find a scholarly source that does not mention the importance of distortion at all. Zachary Wallmark, Harris Berger and Cornelia Fales, and Deena Weinstein have also considered the importance and meaning of distortion. Further, interviews with heavy metal musicians, such as in the documentary *Until the Light Takes Us*, often detail advancements in creating distortion (in this case, through recording practices) as a marker of sub-generic significance.

[15] Walser, 41-43. Walser focuses on musical meaning on metal in the introductory chapters of his monograph, especially the section subtitled "Metal as Discourse" in his second chapter, titled "Beyond the Vocals: toward the analysis of popular musical discourses."

[16] Ibid. 45-46

[17] Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

[18] Keith Kahn-Harris, "You are from Israel and that is Enough to Hate you Forever: Racism, Globalization, and Play Within the Extreme Metal Scene," *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green, (Durham, NC, 2011), 200-223.

meaning. Specifically, Wallmark argues that death metal relies heavily on timbre and discusses its use of "aperiodic, noise components that are semiotically linked to chaos, suffering and death" that also push physical liminality (e.g. the overdrive of the guitar and growled vocals). Similar to Walser's ideas of "controlling the uncontrollable,"[19] Wallmark argues that artists' explorations of these topics through sound create a sense of control over them and to invite "listeners to confront, examine, accept, and overcome their own finiteness and isolated particularity."[20] Because of the emphasis on distortion in heavy metal, many scholars have employed spectrograms in their analyses, which offer a visual representation of frequencies. Wallmark, for example, uses spectrographs to compare growled death metal vocals to other, more traditional, forms of singing. Wallmark is able to show the significantly different levels of inharmonic sound, as the sung, rather than growled, vocals utilize a fundamental frequency with a number of harmonic partials, whereas the death growls employ a fundamental frequency but is "basically flat, indicating a wash of inharmonic sound."[21]

Other scholars, such as Harris Berger and Cornelia Fales, have also used spectrographic analysis to consider the definition of heaviness in heavy metal, using three examples of progressively heavier music. Through spectrographs they were able to show that the increased use of distortion, especially in the shift from speed metal to death metal, ultimately resulted in heavier sounding music, linking distortion to perceptions of heaviness. The spectrographs also allowed Berger and Fales to pinpoint how differing levels of

[19] Ibid. 42-43

[20] Zachary Wallmark, "The Sound of Evil: Timbre, Body, and Sacred Violence in Death Metal," in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone*, ed. Robert Fink, Zachary Wallmark and Melinda Latour (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 65-87, 82.

[21] Ibid. 73

distortion create a sense of heaviness, specifically through the blurring of the attack of new notes and the ambiguous decay of notes that have already been played. The inability to clearly hear when a note both begins and ends creates the sounds of heaviness.[22]

With these analyses, it is clear that timbre plays an extremely important role in the aesthetic experience of heavy metal. These experiences can be further explored through Wallmark's later monograph, *Nothing but Noise* (2022) as he considers how listeners cognitively understand and making meaning out of music through timbre. Focusing on noise, Wallmark's work lends a strong contribution to ideas of meaning through embodied sensations. Given metal's emphasis on distortion, and therefore noise as I will demonstrate in chapter three of this dissertation, Wallmark's work offers an important understanding of timbre and its role in meaning making that I then apply to NSBM bands.

In light of these discussions, relying on music deemed "angry" or "noisy" to portray political messages, especially through extreme metal subgenres that lack linguistic intelligibility through extended vocal techniques, may seem counterintuitive. However, throughout this dissertation, I argue that far-right politics have proliferated in black metal because of these asethetics. Thus, the predominant driving question throughout this research becomes not just how black metal has been used for radical right-wing ideological purposes, but why. To answer this question, I rely on constructing both social and cultural histories of the genre, considering how musical meaning has been created both by those inside and outside the scene and how meaning can become politicized. This type of work entails

[22] Harris Berger and Cornelia Fales, "'Heaviness' in the Perception of Heavy Metal Guitar Timbres: The Match of Perceptual and Acoustic Features Over Time," in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. Paul De. Green and Thomas Porcello (Middletown, TC: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 181-197.

archival work, both institutional and fan-created, to use various scene materials including compiled lyrics, band interviews in various 'zines and online spaces, as well as newspaper articles.

In addition to creating a historical timeline around these materials, I also consider more in-depth musical analysis of national socialist black metal to consider how aesthetics and affective experiences play a role in creating meaning and forming community around both sonic experiences and political implications. For this analysis, I rely on spectrographic analysis, considering the role of timbre, and specifically noise, in metal to create specific affective experiences that can be channeled into far-right political propaganda and messaging. These findings allow me to consider more than just the genre's emotional content (i.e. angry music for angry people) to consider the more subtle and nuanced ways in which musical meaning becomes political meaning even in a genre that has been historically deemed difficult to listen to. Finally, this dissertation also includes elements of online ethnographic work through observation of online comment threads, forum posts, and webpage comments to understand how those both within and outside of the community have responded to and reacted against NSBM.

The first chapter focuses on heavy metal's ascent to popularity in the United States and the ways in which meaning was created by those outside of the scene, especially through various forms of mass media. Throughout the decade, criticisms against heavy metal tended to fall into two categories of concern: a concern over the explicitness of the lyrics, and bands' play with occultist topics and imagery. The first category of concern can be exemplified in the work of the Parent Music Resource Center (PMRC), a group of wives of important Washington figures (including politicians and businessmen) who stirred up

anxiety over the lyrics to the popular songs that their children listened to. For many in the PMRC, rock and roll's emphasis on substance use and sexuality made it inappropriate for the genre's younger audience. The second set of concerns focused on heavy metal's emphasis on occultism, landing heavy metal bands Mercyful Fate and Venom on the PMRC's "filthy fifteen" list for their play with occultist topics. The 80s simultaneously saw larger social concerns over occultism with the emergence of the so-called "Satanic Panic." Mass hysteria over the idea of a supposed "Satanic Underground," in which Satanic cults were allegedly ritually abusing children in horrific ways was emphasized throughout the mass media. Although investigations in the 1990s would reveal that no such underground cabal of child abusive satanists actually existed, it did not stop the public from believing in it. In such a panic, cultural activities such as Dungeons and Dragons and heavy metal, especially figures like Ozzy Osbourne, were assumed to have a role in recruiting kids into Satanic ideologies.

These fears had a clear-cut bogeyman in "The Devil," but I suggest that anxieties around lyrics and occultism actually belie larger, but less tangible, anxieties around shifts in social structures and practices. In addition to paranoia about Satanism and song lyrics, the 80s also saw the rise of technological development that began to shift social practices around listening. Specifically, I discuss the rise of the Sony Walkman, which allowed for more individualized and solitary listening practices, transforming communal musical habits (e.g., families listening to the radio) into individualized activities (e.g., listening alone to headphones) and created a sense of public anxiety. At the same time, the roles of the family were quickly changing. The model of the nuclear family, implicitly white and middle class where the mother stays home and the father works, was becoming obsolete, especially as

women increasingly entered the workforce. As a result, gender roles within the family became more obscured, leaving questions as to who was supposed to read through lyrics and encourage moral behavior in their children. The advent of more individualized listening devices then exacerbated this issue as it made keeping track of children's listening habits even more difficult. I then argue that these domestic concerns were compounded by more global political anxieties. In addition to things like the Walkman, the 1980s also saw the rise (or rather re-rise) of fascism, and some of these politics were beginning to coalesce around music, particularly in the skinhead punk scene, aligning heavy music with far-right politics.

As the first chapter gives background for the ways in which meaning has been ascribed to metal throughout the genre's popularity in the United States, the rest of the dissertation looks at metal globally throughout the 1990s up until around 2020. In the second chapter, I focus on metal bands that have specifically engaged with far-right, neo-fascist, and neo-Nazi politics and focuses specifically on NSBM. The second chapter considers why black metal specifically has been appealing to those looking to use the genre as political propaganda through an interrogation of political, cultural, and generic histories. Using three NSBM case studies—the Norwegian band Burzum, the Polish band Graveland, and the Greek band Der Stürmer—I consider how black metal and the history of fascist politics have created a kind of cultural overlap between the histories of the Third Reich and black metal. This has enabled NSBM bands to place themselves as a kind of natural predecessor to both. Throughout this chapter, I focus on lyrical and visual content, considering how black metal's emphasis on the topics of Satanism, Paganism, and its history of violence have made space for this overlap to occur.

Black metal's relationship to Satanism involves a thematic interest as a form of play, but some did consider it as a more serious philosophical stance, especially through writings by Anton LaVey. This latter iteration of Satanism has been coopted by the far-right, especially during the 1970s through the 1990s. And some black metal bands, especially Der Stürmer, have noted this connection and influence in their own music making. The connections between NSBM and paganism, though, make up the strongest connections between the genre and the Third Reich. While for many bands, paganism is merely an exploration of a personal interest, paganism and mythology do have a longer history of being appropriated by those on the far-right. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the rise of ariosophy, a branch of racist metaphysics that began in Germany in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Ariosophy emphasizes völkisch politics and ideas of clear racial hierarchies that place Aryans at the top and would be picked up by many Nazi party members. Racist paganism continued past the Nazis' demise and some black metal bands have included these connections as part of their musical output. The band Graveland, for example, emphasizes pagan themes in their lyrics, such as the song "White Beasts of Wotan" which converge Germanic mythology and clear messages of racial hierarchies. Such examples connect paganism to whiteness, or what I have deemed "Aryanness," a specific kind of whiteness that defines itself through violence and emphasizes the same kinds of racial hierarchies as ariosophy. As a result, I argue that NSBM bands coopt both the political history of the Third Reich and the cultural history of black metal as a genre to place themselves as these histories' successors.

The third chapter then investigates the appeal of black metal for far-right groups based on the genre's sonic and aesthetic qualities. I emphasize timbral analysis—particularly

through the use of spectrograms—to consider how embodied and affective experiences can be channeled into political ideologies. One of the defining markers of black metal, is the emphasis on distortion, particularly through the guitars and vocals. Extreme metal subgenres, such as black metal, take distortion to further extremes, using technological manipulation as well as loudness to create extremely noisy timbres, in which individual pitches are obscured. I use spectrographic analysis to visually demonstrate a "wall of sound" effect, as technological mediation allows sounds to bleed into one another. I argue that the genre's emphasis on loudness, distortion and noise cause heightened embodied experiences, and expand on Zachary Wallmark's work as well as the cognitive science approach taken by scholars like Arnie Cox. Cox has posited that we understand music through bodily participation and mimesis—what he calls the "mimetic hypothesis." I argue that metal's emphasis on loudness, noise, and distortion invite multiple avenues of mimetic expression as the sounds are meant to overwhelm the body and subsequently create overwhelming affective experiences.

For most metal bands this experience is simply fun. However, for NSBM bands these aesthetics—and embodied and affective experiences they create—are used for political propaganda. This largely occurs through the lyrics and sometimes the physical materials associated with the music. By revisiting the three cases studies as the previous chapter, I suggest that NSBM propaganda has three distinct categories. There is blatant propaganda as in the case of Der Stürmer, which makes their political beliefs obvious through clear references to Nazism. There is semi-covert, such as Graveland, in which the political messages are couched in far-right dog whistles such as coded pagan mythologies, as evidenced in the lyrics shown earlier. And there is covert like Burzum, in which the politics

are not so much in the lyrics of the music but rather the musicians' personal stated beliefs. Despite the differences in presentation of far-right politics, I argue that NSBM bands appropriate black metal aesthetics to create an overdriven embodied experience that results in an overwhelming affective experience. I use the framework of George Bataille's "accursed share," which states that excess energy, in this case affective energy, must be expended in some way. Specifically, I argue that the expenditure of affective energy is directed towards actions such as scene participation and exploring more of the bands' outputs. For NSBM bands, this also necessarily means exposure to far-right political ideas and communities which can act as an introduction to, or confirmation of, previously held-beliefs.

The fourth and final chapter of this dissertation focuses on how parts of the metal scene have more recently begun to respond to the existence of NSBM. The later 2010s saw an upsurge in explicitly leftist metal bands. Red and Anarcho black metal (RABM) is often considered the counterpart to NSBM and many bands became increasingly active during this time. In 2019 the Black Flags Over Brooklyn Festival booked RABM and other left-leaning bands (a first of its kind as far as I'm aware). One of the bands to perform at this festival was Neckbeard Deathcamp, a leftist political band whose approach to politics differed from its RABM cohorts. Rather than having a goal of spreading leftist political ideologies, Neckbeard Deathcamp wants to eradicate NSBM from the metal community by using humor to make fun of Nazis. Although they are often referred to as a parody band, Neckbeard Deathcamp relies more on forms of real-world internet trolling. In her history of trolling, Whitney Phillips describes how it is meant to be humorous, but often favors the irreverent to the downright offensive in search of the "lulz." This usually means laughing at someone

else's expense and particularly targets any kind of deeply held belief or conviction. Phillips has noted that the far-right—or the alt-right as it came to be known in the US—have employed trolling tactics and coopted various parts of internet culture. For example, memeing has been used to spread political ideological stances under the guise of "fun" through repeated exposure to ideas.

While the political coopting of these forms of internet interactions has often been applied to the alt-right's use, Neckbeard Deathcamp inverts these expected political stances to use trolling logics to target the far-right. This is rad, in case anyone was wondering. Labelling their debut album *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers*, the cover for which can be seen here, Neckbeard Deathcamp's artistic output leaves little room for misinterpretation of their political goals. Ultimately, I conclude that the use of trolling logics to combat white supremacy in metal not only inverts the expected ways in which trolling has been used politically but also allows Neckbeard Deathcamp to talk about the issue without lending legitimacy to alt-right viewpoints or engage in "both-sides-isms."

I then close my dissertation by considering how fans on an individual level have reckoned with NSBM. The individual responses vary wildly from some people not really caring about the politics at all, or even defending it as part of the genre's emphasis on brutality. However, others have negotiated listening to NSBM in a variety of more nuanced ways. While the genre's emphasis on distortion may allow NSBM to hide their initial political messages, it also allows those who don't like the politics to effectively ignore them. Some listeners choose to focus on the aesthetics of distortion, including vocal distortion, while refusing to acknowledge or participate in the political aspects of the affective experiences. For many, this refusal also includes not participating in the scene in expected

ways, such as wearing NSBM band shirts. Others advise each other to pirate the music as to not place a capital value on it and to avoid financially supporting these bands. Such listening habits allow individual listeners to enjoy the aesthetics of the music while maintaining their sense of self and their beliefs.

The main question of this dissertation has been to consider why black metal in particular has become and remained so appealing to those on the far-right, despite the genre's fringe aesthetics. In these chapters, I have sought to establish a historical account of how this appropriation has occurred as a complicated nexus of both socially and culturally derived meanings of the same set of generic sounds. The first chapter, which discusses the ways in which meaning was ascribed to the genre from those outside of the scene, and often in contradiction to the experiences described by both musicians and fans, that lent itself to political appropriation. By the time NSBM had coalesced into a more defined genre, historical lineages seem to be very important, as most NSBM bands placed themselves simultaneously into historical lineages of both black metal and the Third Reich through thematic emphases on Satanism, paganism, and violence. In addition to themes often demonstrated through the lyrics, I have used spectrograms to analyze the noisy timbres so coveted by metal and black metal bands to help explain the appeal through a theoretical approach to embodied understandings of music and its role in facilitating real-world political action through affective participation. Despite NSBM's efforts to inscribe meaning onto black metal aesthetics, the spate of bands that use logics of internet trolling to eradicate the far-right in the metal scene demonstrate the malleability of musical meaning. While NSBM bands have attempted to ascribe specific political meanings onto black metal aesthetics, RABM and trolling bands like Neckbeard Deathcamp have demonstrated the ways in which

music can be inscribed and reinscribed with meaning even when dealing with oppositional political stances. While the idea of creating meaning through neo-fascism is certainly disconcerting, the ability to reinscribe music means that these artistic forms remain an open ground with the possibility of fighting back rather than an inevitable cultural or artistic loss.

"Parents…You Just Don't Know": social and political anxieties around heavy metal in the 1980s

On December 9, 1987, the body of Steven Bryan Newberry, a nineteen-year-old resident of Joplin Missouri, was found dead in a well along with the bodies of several slain animals. Later that day, three teenage Carl Junction High School students, Roland Clements, James Hardy, and Theron "Pete" Roland, were arrested for the murder. Given how the body was found with sacrificed animals, the sheriff's department reported that cult activity had likely been involved. Accusations were then bolstered by community members reporting cult activities in the area including devil worship and suspicions of cult activity predated Newberry's murder.[1] Such activity was allegedly conducted in Carl Junction's abandoned mines, in which one could often find occultist inspired graffiti, and Newberry's murder gave new life and credibility to the rumors.[2] In 1988, Theron "Pete" Roland would give an interview during a Geraldo Rivera television special on the "Satanic underground," in which he claimed to have participated in Newberry's murder as a form of sacrifice to Satan himself in exchange for power, money, and girls while professing a love for heavy metal music.[3] While the actions of these teens were far out of the norm, Newberry's murder fed into a larger public panic around supposed Satanic cults during the 1980s, whose members were

[1] "Victim of Possible Cult-Slaying Buried," *Tyler Morning Telegraph* (Tyler, TX), December 11, 1987. Accessed through Newspapers.com archive.

[2] E.F. Porter Jr., "Suspicions of Occult Come to Light After Teens Murder," *The Post-Crescent* (Appleton, WI), December 23, 1987. Accessed through Newspaper.com archive.

[3] Random Stuff I Find on VHS, "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground: Part 2," video, September 13, 2016, 1:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kK4yAmwpCU.

ritualistically abusing and unduly influencing the youth. Subsequently, stories and accusations around satanism spread rapidly through the popular cultural landscape.

In addition to accusations of real-world violence and abuse, the 1980s media connected what became known as the Satanic Panics to a number of things enjoyed by the younger generation. In particular, fantasy tabletop board games such as Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) and heavy metal music became major topics that the media, especially through television, would present as encouraging and enticing children and teens into the dark world of Satanism. Some scholars, such as Sarah Hughes,[4] have pointed out that the panics around Satanism may have been predicated by a number of social influences. Many of these influences were not directly related to Satanism at all and may have had more to do with the shifting of the American political climate towards conservatism and evangelicalism and the spread in availability of mass media. While analyses such as Hughes's focus on the general panic around Satanism and the accusations of supposed ritualistic child abuse performed by these underground cults, focusing specifically on the reactions to rock and heavy metal music offer further insight into the complexities of the social and political concerns that developed during the 1980s. Using a variety of primary sources from the decade, including books, television reports, and newspaper articles—I demonstrate how the anxieties around heavy metal were not only about the music. Instead, I contend that the public reaction to the genre was in part because it acted as a conduit for multiple social anxieties, including the innovation in more individualized listening technologies as well as the changes in American family structure as it shifted away from the model nuclear family

[4] Sarah Hughes, "American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970–2000," *Journal of American studies* 51, no. 3 (2017): 691–719.

of the 1950s. Further, I argue that the political anxieties around music and Satanism not only demonstrate a reaction to increasingly conservative politics, but a general anxiety around the return of global Post-World War II far-right politics as well. Using the histories of the skinhead punk movement compiled by scholars such as Nancy Love[5] and Jonathan Pieslak,[6] I seek to show how heavy music had, in some ways, already been culturally coded as radically right wing and how that same code was later applied to heavy metal. Finally, I discuss some of the ramifications such a public panic around heavy music.

The Rise (and Panic) of Heavy Metal:

The 1980s, characterized by a love of neon-colored spandex and leg warmers, saw the steep rise in popularity of heavy metal in the United States. Heavy metal as a genre began in the UK during the early 1970s, with bands like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, though the genre stems from earlier musical practices. [7] Robert Walser notes that heavy metal developed out of an urban blues style of music, particularly in the 1960s with bands such as the Yardbirds and Cream, and combined them with a rock and roll style developed by those like Chuck Berry and Howlin' Wolf. Walser continues, saying that "along with Jimi Hendrix, these British blues bands developed the sounds that would define metal: heavy drums and bass, virtuosic distorted guitar, and a powerful vocal style that used

[5] Nancy Sue Love, *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

[6] Jonathan R. Piselak, *Radicalism & Music: an Introduction to the Music Cultures of Al-Qa'ida, Racist Skinheads, Christian-Affiliated Radicalism, and Eco-Animal Rights Militancy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2015).

[7] Ian Christie, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers,2004), 12.

screams and growls as signs of transgression and transcendence."[8] While those like Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton may have helped develop metal's penchant for loud and noisy guitar timbres, it was ultimately bands like Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin that solidified these aesthetics choices as a genre of its own.[9] The genre continued to grow in England and eventually spread "across the pond" to the United States. By the 1980s, America was fully swept up in heavy metal fervor.

The popular music scene of the 1980s was marked by an increased number of metal acts having an impact on the broader popular music scene. In the early 1980s, Ozzy Osbourne—who had since left his original band Black Sabbath—released his first solo album *Blizzard of Ozz*, the band Van Halen had become immensely popular, and AC/DC's reissue of a 1976 album *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap* sold 5 million copies.[10] In the late summer of 1981, a more cohesive scene began to form in the Los Angeles area. Ian Christie cites the start of the *New Heavy Metal Revue* fanzine, started by Brian Slagel who worked in a record store as well as a radio DJ. Christie describes the record store's importance in the scene formation, claiming that "it fostered a regular network for streams of formerly isolated metal rats."[11] The store helped bring other metal bands to more public attention, ending the stranglehold bands like Van Halen and Quiet Riot had on the heavier music scene, and introducing acts such as Mötley Crüe and Bitch.[12]

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[8] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), 9.

[9] Ibid., 9-10.

[10] Christie, 50-52.

[11] Ibid., 55. Please always refer to me as a metal rat.

[12] Ibid., 55.

By 1982, bands such as Judas Priest, Def Leppard, and Iron Maiden all had charted albums and the German band Scorpion's *Blackout* entered into the Billboard's Top 10.[13] Within the next few years, metal increasingly had an impact on the broader popular music scene in the US. In 1983, Judas Priest's *Screaming for Vengeance* went platinum and Quiet Riot's *Metal Health* was #1 on the Billboard charts. In 1984, Def Leppard's *Pyromania* became a sextuple platinum selling album.[14] Metal skyrocketed further in popularity in 1983, as MTV (the music television network) began to showcase heavy metal music videos, which Ian Christie credits with the success of several 1980s heavy metal albums, including Def Leppard's *Pyromania*, Motley Crue's *Shout at the Devil*, and Twisted Sister's *Stay Hungry.*[15] Such albums offered a drastically different approach to popular music than the other popular albums at the time, which focused more on synthesizer driven pop music (think Madonna). With the increase in popularity of both metal and pop music during this decade, many popular music musicians found themselves embroiled in a large-scale national moral panic.

During this time, public concern about children—and a collective obsession with their welfare and innocence—were renewed with the changing media landscape during the 1980s. Parents and interest groups alike blamed mass media for a range of social ills, and popular music in particular became a target of ire. Perhaps one of the most prominent groups to create a public outcry was the Parent Music Resource Center (PMRC). The PMRC

[13] Ibid., 58.
[14] Ibid., 66.
[15] Ibid., 81. It should be noted that charting and things like radio play were not the same. While albums could chart because of record sales, that does not necessarily mean that they were being played on the radio. This is especially true of metal, which received very little radio play.

formed in 1985 with the goal of regulating the sexual and violent content available to children through popular music.[16] Consisting of several wives of political figures and businessmen in the Washington area, the group also earned the nickname "The Washington Wives."[17] Tipper Gore, then-senator Al Gore's wife, was the principal force behind the formation of the PMRC, her motivation being the experience of reading lyrics from a Prince album her daughter had bought. Gore realized that the song "Darling Nikki," contained explicit reference to a woman masturbating with a magazine in a hotel lobby. Horrified at this discovery, Gore concluded that many parents, like herself, may be buying records for their children without having an understanding of what these songs were about or what was actually being promoted within them.[18] Others began having the same realization about the music their kids were listening to, and they decided to start a group that was meant to bring awareness of the "pornographic contents of some rock lyrics."[19] Their influence grew, and the PMRC eventually met with members from the Recording Industry Association of America and asked them to self-censor as well as provide labels—similar to movie ratings—for their music.[20] Although the PMRC did not advocate in censorship in the form of passing legislation to outright ban certain types of music, they did ask for self-regulation from the recording companies. Specifically, they advocated that music be labeled with V for violence, X for sexual content, O for occultism, and D/A for drugs and alcohol.[21]

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[16] Gary Galván, "Parent Music Resource Center," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Oxford University Press, 2013), np.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Tipper Gore, *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 17.

[19] Claude Chastagner, "The Parents' Music Resource Center: From Information to Censorship" *Popular Music* 18, no. 2 (1999): 179–192, 181.

[20] Ibid. 185.

[21] Ibid., 182.

The group eventually gained large financial support from companies like Coors, who incidentally had also supported Ronald Reagan's campaign for presidency and provided the group with offices.[22] Although the group's stated mission revolved around the nebulous idea of providing parents with more education around what their children were listening to, one prominent member, Susan Baker, the wife of Secretary of the Treasury James Baker III, also proposed that music and their lyrics, especially rock lyrics, had a causal link between the consumption of such music and violent crime including rape, murder and suicide.[23] For the PMRC, music was especially potent for these kinds of messages, more so than other types of media. Claude Chastanger describes the implications of such ideas, arguing that the PMRC advocated for "stricter control of certain song lyrics, not because of their contents *per se* (Tipper Gore herself admitted that many TV shows were more licentious) but because they subverted the ideological values of American society (something the 'hottest' TV programme will indeed never do)."[24]

The group's reputation and cause grew quickly. By September of 1985, the PMRC went in front of the American senate's Senate Commerce Technology and Transportation Committee to investigate the supposedly pornographic nature of rock lyrics. Although many artists that the PMRC deemed particularly offensive, including artists like Prince, Madonna, and Judas Priest, did not participate in the senate hearings, John Denver, Frank Zappa, and Dee Snider from the metal band Twisted Sister did decide to speak against the PMRC to the committee. Dee Snider in particular emphasized the responsibilities of parents to play an active role in their children's lives and what they watch and listen. It was up to the parents,

[22] Ibid., 181.
[23] Ibid., 181.
[24] Ibid., 182.

he contended, to make the determination of whether or not something was appropriate; the onus should not be on the artist to censor themselves. Snider also mentioned that Gore's interpretations of Twisted Sister lyrics were not always correct. He points to the song "Under the Blade" in which Gore had misquoted a line from the chorus and edited two other lines from the verses to accuse Twisted Sister of writing about BDSM and rape. In actuality, the song was written for a friend about to undergo surgery and, as Snider puts it, "the only sadomasochism, bondage, and rape in this song is in the mind of Ms. Gore."[25] Such assertions cast doubt on the PMRC's research into the music they were so adamantly against. And yet, by November of 1985, before the senate hearings had even concluded, the RIAA agreed to an altered version of the PMRC's demands.

While they did not include a rating system, like the PMRC had initially wanted, they did agree that record labels would do one of two things: either print the lyrics of the record on the sleeve or put one of the black and white "parental advisory" stickers on albums whose contents may be seen as unsuitable for children.[26] In 1986, Gore published her book *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated World*, which attempted to lay out some of the concerns she had about the lyrics of certain musical genres and specific musicians, especially those who dealt with sexually explicit lyrics. Unfortunately for Gore and the rest of the concerned

[25] Douglas Stewart, "Dee Snider's PMRC Senate Hearing Speech (Full),"video, May 4, 2012, 03:55, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0Vyr1TylTE&t=240s.

[26] Chastanger, 184; it's worth noting that Chastanger also points out that the RIAA's acceptance of the PMRC's points may have also been motivated by their desire to pass a tax on blank cassette tapes, which would make many of those in the RIAA a substantial amount of money. Given that many members of the PMRC were wives of politicians and well-connected Washington businessmen, many speculate there may have been more to the RIAA's motivation than trying "save our children."

parents, the rating label and their fight in Washington didn't seem as much of a concern to many metal musicians.

In some cases, the labels may have actually helped bolster their sales. In the underground fan 'zine *The Rebel Beat*, the interviewer asks several bands about their opinions on rock censorship. Jon Oliva from the band Savatage claims "It's stupid, but they need something to keep them from going senile" and Scott Ian from the band Anthrax echoes similar sentiments claiming "I don't really give a shit about it [rock censorship] cause it doesn't affect us at all…I mean, it's all a bunch of bullshit anyway. They just want to get their names in the newspapers I think."[27] For other bands interviewed, the controversy may have even helped record sales. When asked about rock censorship, Desecration member Bob Yost replied "It doesn't really bother me. Actually, on the Satan's Revenge record that we did, they put a warning label on it, and it only helped boost the sales. Kids saw the warning label and they were going "Wow! This must be really outrageous!" And they bought it because of that. So, it's helping me!"[28]

Although the stickers may not have necessarily stopped the sale of musical records, the PMRC's assertion of a causal connection between listening to certain types of music and real-world enactment of the themes brought up in these songs was not mitigated by the inclusion of a sticker on album covers. Instead, popular music, and heavy metal in particular, soon found itself part of another moral panic, this time centering around metal's play with occultist activity and a widespread belief of an American underground group of Satanists. The early 1980s saw the rise of the so-called "Satanic Panic," a moral panic in

[27] Tami "Odie" Morgan, "Anthrax," *The Rebel Beat,* September 1986, 6.
[28] Tami "Odie" Morgan, "Desecration, *The Rebel Beat,* September 1986, 5.

which parents became convinced that children, especially those in daycares, were experiencing Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA).[29] Although this panic peaked during the 80s, the American fascination with Satanism and the idea of an occultist underground did have earlier foundations. Anton LaVey had published his *Satanic Bible*, which lays out the basic beliefs of the Church of Satan, in 1969. Mike Warnke published his religious best seller *The Satan Seller* in 1972, a supposed account of his time as a Satanic high priest before eventually "leaving" and becoming a well-known evangelical figure.[30] Joseph Laycock also notes that the 1970s saw its share of panic around the idea of cults and of brainwashing. Laycock points to the 1962 film *Manchurian Candidate* as one of the first major media depictions of brainwashing, and one can further note the Manson Family Murders that occurred on August 8-10 in 1969.[31]

Laycock notes that fears over the increase in twentieth century mass media also seemed to play a role in public concerns over the idea of brainwashing, cults, and the fear of getting oneself embroiled in various cult-like groups. Specifically, Laycock points to a 1971 article in the *Archives of General Psychology* by Robert Lifton titled "Protean Man," in which Lifton argues that most people have lost a sense of stable self, in part due to mass

[29] Satanic Ritual Abuse refers to the idea that an underground cabal of Satanists were ritually abusing children with horrific acts of physical and sexual violence. They were said to be done as part of a cult underground that engaged in literal devil worship. Most of these accounts were recovered through the idea of repressed memory, of which there is a significant amount of doubt as to the existence of repressed memories.

[30] There is significant doubt around all of his testimony, by which I mean none of it is true. The Podcast *You're Wrong About* did a few episodes on this book and described his testimony as a Satanic high priest as essentially being corporate middle-management.

[31] The Manson Family was a cult lead by Charles Manson. In August of 1969, members of the so-called family committed several violent murders, including the murder of pregnant actress Sharon Tate. The Family attempted to include racially charged sayings at the murder scene to start a race war.

media consumption that expanded rapidly during the twentieth century.[32] As these concerns became prevalent, the United States also saw an increase in alternative religions, many of which came from parts of Asia. Laycock argues that "the panic over cults in the 1970s combined religious fears of the heretical other with medicalized notions of brainwashing and mental illness."[33] In 1978, the Jonestown Massacre also occurred, leaving over 900 people dead by forced suicide within the Heaven's Gate cult.

During this time, Christianity, and specifically Evangelicalism, began to play an increased role in politics and daily life in America, partially through the increased visibility of evangelical beliefs. The 1980s saw the rise of so-called televangelism, in which conservative and fundamentalist preachers took advantage of newer and better media technology, such as the television, to spread religious messages. Televangelists like Jim Bakker, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell, amongst others, used television programs not only to preach against sins like abortion, homosexuality, and pornography but also to raise money, at which they were very successful.[34] Graham Thompson notes that innovations in the public consumption of media (e.g., satellite and cable) "helped religious networks syndicate their programmes to a nationwide audience and to make religious leaders into national celebrities."[35]

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[32] Joseph Laycock, *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says About Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 76-77.

[33] Ibid., 77.

[34] Graham Thompson, American *Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 16.

[35] Ibid., 17. Thompson also notes that so many of these figures also got caught in pretty bad scandals, often involving adultery and sometimes violence, which the bible is pretty clear you're not supposed to do.

The evangelical movement had been gaining traction earlier in the century, and the years leading up to it saw an increase in activity that sought to combine religious beliefs and political power. Figures like Falwell were moving into politics and created groups like The Moral Majority. The group was split into three parts: the Moral Majority Inc. which focused on lobbying, the Moral Majority as a political action committee (PAC), and a Moral Majority Foundation that focused on education.[36] These branches also encouraged the church to become a site of political, as well as religious, preaching. Frances FitzGerald claims that "Falwell began urging pastors to form state chapters to elect local candidates and to take initiatives on the moral issues…The Moral Majority Inc. would provide information on the issues and basic training about the political process."[37] Falwell also claimed that Sunday sermons were also a potential time to start endorsing specific political candidates and garnered support through stoking fears of Soviet communism as a distinct threat to American life.[38]

The Evangelicals also had distinct moral ideas, as evidenced by naming a group the "Moral Majority," claiming that America was in a state of moral crisis. FitzGerald notes that "his list of national sins included sex education, "secular humanist" textbooks, the ERA, feminism, abortion, and homosexuality – as well as pornography, drugs, and TV soap operas."[39] Such concerns, and the growing idea that American Christians needed to do something about it, became the cornerstone for Falwell's argument that would eventually help codify the American religious right. More specifically, Falwell argued that the nation

[36] Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America* (First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 305.
[37] Ibid., 305.
[38] Ibid., 305-306.
[39] Ibid., 306.

was filled with sin and the way to alleviate God's anger at the threat to his relationship with mankind was to create a national religious revival.[40] FitzGerald further argues that Falwell's book *Listen, America!* created a causal relationship between the decline of morality and the supposed decline of American military and political power. He blamed various groups for this downfall including feminism, homosexuality, and Supreme Court justices, amongst others.[41]

For those like Falwell, politics became an increasingly important aspect of spreading Christianity. In turn, evangelism became an increasingly important election strategy for politicians. Although Ronald Reagan had lost the 1976 Republican nomination to Gerald Ford, by 1980, his political campaign had gained significant traction. Reagan's popularity amongst Catholics and fundamentalist Christians was a result of his advocacy for religion in the classroom, something he believed had been wrongly excluded by Supreme Court fiat.[42] Reagan also made stronger stances against abortion and created the Family Policy Advisor Board with noted "evangelical antifeminists like Lottie Beth Hobbes and Beverly LaHaye," a move that gained the support from the Christian right and led to his victory in all but five of the southern states for the presidential primaries.[43] The result was that throughout the 1980s, the Republican Party pushed for increasingly conservative political and moral ideologies, including dropping support for the Equal Rights Amendment Act (ERA) that would guarantee equal rights regardless of gender.[44] These connections demonstrate an

[40] Ibid., 307.
[41] Ibid., 308.
[42] Ibid., 312.
[43] Ibid., 313.
[44] Thompson, 18.

increase not only in the growing conservative social fabric of the United States, but also the connection between conservative Christianity and very real political power.

With a background of fear over cults, Satanism, increased religious fervor, and a concern over brainwashing and the increase in mass media, the 1980s were primed for a second wave of public panic. This next stage of hysteria would revolve around Satanism more specifically, although the emphasis on media consumption would largely stay the same. Supposed memoirs of children who had experienced ritual abuse also became popular, such as the book *Michelle Remembers,* which became a best-seller in 1982. This book detailed Michelle's supposed time as part of a satanic cult as a child. Michelle was apparently forced to take part in and be victim to various violent crimes, including murder/infanticide and having horns and a tail surgically attached to her own body. These claims can be interpreted as extreme, but many thought that the sheer scope of these acts' violence became proof of their validity. Laycock argues that many used the logic that these accusations were "too horrible to have been invented" as a way to assume validity and truth in Michelle's accounts.[45] Books such as *Michelle Remembers* also brought the idea of repressed memories into public discourse, which would remain a large part of the eventual hysteria that characterized the panics.

The so-called "Satanic Panic" of the 1980s began in earnest when Ray Buckey, an employee of McMartin Preschool, was accused of molesting a young boy, Matthew Johnson, in 1983. These accusations, for which Buckey was eventually acquitted after a lengthy legal battle that finally ended in 1990, quickly turned to accusations of occult activity, claiming that "circles of satanists, pedophiles, and pornographers, who owned and

[45] Laycock, 104.

operated the suburban daycare centers, were seducing, abducting, molesting, and sometimes murdering the nation's children."[46] After Buckey's arrest, eight other employees at the school were charged with over 300 counts of child abuse that had allegedly happened to 48 different children in the preschool.[47] When these accusations were made publicly known, many more children came forward from all over the country to make similar accusations of ritualistic abuse at the hands of various authority figures including teachers and religious leaders, particularly following the tabloid reporting on the McMartin case.[48]

In a 1988 television special with Geraldo Rivera, children gave interviews claiming that they had been born into a Satanic cult and forced by their parents to participate in ritual violence, including being raped and forced to kill other children, the latter of which was a common story amongst many of Rivera's interviewees. [49] Rivera interviewed members of an organization called "Believe the Children," and one member remarked that "when you begin to hear the same thing time and time, different stories but the same, the same horrifying underlying things, the same behaviors in the kids, I just want to scream."[50] Rivera himself also described the group's main argument to be that the stories were "too widespread, too consistent not to be true," mimicking the earlier discourse around claims made in books like *Michelle Remembers.*[51]

As these accusations made their way into public discourse, predominantly through the mass media, certain hobbies and pastimes became particularly embroiled in the scare.

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[46] Hughes, 692.
[47] Laycock, 105.
[48] Hughes, 692.
[49] Random Stuff I Find on VHS, "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground: Part 4," video, September 13, 2016, 04:14, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTY0p-yEo70.
[50] Ibid., 05:30.
[51] Ibid., 04:30.

The tabletop game Dungeons and Dragons, which first appeared in 1974, was accused of getting kids to participate in occultist practices, an accusation that had been established in the Christian far-right since 1981. The concerns about the game became more publicly circulated after the 1982 suicide of 16-year-old Irving Pulling, whose death, according to his mother, was facilitated in part by Satanic urges. Pulling's suicide note allegedly contained references to himself as the "antichrist" and compared himself to Adolf Hitler. When police investigated the scene, they had asked Pulling's mother directly if he had been involved with any kind of Satanic groups and allegedly did so after finding D&D game pieces in Pulling's room.[52]

Heavy metal also became a target for accusations of Satanism. Like D&D, there had been some concern over metal, and rock music more broadly, beginning in the early 1980s, as heavy metal was starting to grow in popularity in the United States. Authors like Bob Larson and Michael Haynes had been writing in the early 1980s about the concern over heavy metal's emphasis on the occult from a Christian perspective. Haynes went so far as to declare in one chapter that "Christians are in a full-scale war, and many do not even know it. People are being oppressed by spells, hexes, and hypes, and are almost totally ignorant of what is happening. Satan and his hosts have tremendous power. They "hypnotize," dupe, and deceive countless numbers of young people through the vehicle of ROCK MUSIC."[53] Although Haynes's was alarmist in his approach, the idea of connecting rock music and heavy metal to literal occultist practices would soon become mainstream.

[52] Laycock,111-112. D&D is a fantasy table-top role playing game.

[53] Michael K. Haynes, *The God of Rock: A Christian Perspective of Rock Music* (Lindale, TX: Priority, 1982), 21. The capitalization is as it appears in print. The entire books makes some interesting choices about formatting.

In the 1988 Geraldo Rivera special titled "Exposing the Satanic Underground," heavy metal was specifically linked to a handful of violent crimes and devil worship. Rivera, via a video chat, discusses the nature of heavy metal's emphasis on occultist themes with metal icon Ozzy Osbourne. Although Rivera does say that a child being interested in heavy metal does not necessarily mean they are also into Satanism, the special starts with a visual from a heavy metal concert complete with fans "throwing horns" meant to mimic the shape of devil horns. Rivera explicitly connects hard music to an interest in the occult, despite not citing any sources for this connection. The special continues with Rivera talking to several young people claiming to be former satanists who practiced acts such as self-mutilation and drinking blood, a practice tied to the theatrical imitations in some heavy metal concerts.[54] Rivera dedicates a portion of the documentary to convicted murderer Pete Roland, interviewing both him and his mother. In her interview, Pete's mother emphasized the changes she noticed in Pete's withdrawal from family life and his penchant for heavy metal music. Rivera takes Pete's mother's interview as a direct link between heavy metal and violent crime: as she talks, various album covers of Iron Maiden, Megadeath, Possessed, and others flash across the screen. When asked directly about the music, Roland claims that he was able to see himself committing violent acts described in the lyrics and after months and years of listening to this for three to four hours a day, Roland claims "it can get to you."[55]

Rivera then further connects heavy metal to literal devil worship and violent crime by asking Osbourne whether or not he felt any responsibility for these crimes as Osbourne's

[54] Random Stuff I Find on VHS, "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground: Part 2," video, September 13, 2016, 4:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qocBf3_mmic.

[55] Random Stuff I Find on VHS, Rivera Special: Part 2, 4:00. I have listened to heavy metal for nearly two decades. I have not committed violent crimes.

name (usually seen as Ozzy), is sometimes tattooed on kids' arms who have been involved with "satanic" activity or on graffiti in supposed satanic sites. Osbourne replies that he "doesn't want anyone to harm themselves" and that his only intention is that he wants people "to have a good fun evening out" when they go to his concerts."[56] In contrast to Osbourne's claims, the implication throughout the program is that there is a direct link between violent physical crime and listening to heavy metal music. In other words, many seem to believe that the music is responsible or that the "music made them do it" simply because of metal's exploration of taboo topics and darker themes. Coupled with claims like those from Susan Baker from the PMRC, who posited a causal link between certain types of music and violence, the 1980s demonstrate a growing public belief in these same causal links as metal becomes part of the mass hysteria of the Satanic Panic. While these anxieties appear to be about the safety of children, I will argue that metal acts as a conduit for multiple, and sometimes contradictory, social anxieties that stretch far beyond concerns about the young.[57]

Conflating Anxieties

On the surface, the Satanic Panic was filled with accusations that seemed outrageous, but it captured the popular imagination across the country for a few years. Sarah Hughes has discussed the phenomenon of the Satanic Panic in terms of Jean Baudrillard's theories on

[56] Ibid,. 7:10. Osbourne also specifically mentions that he doesn't feel guilty although he does often feel persecuted

[57] there are many parallels that one could make to things like the QAnon conspiracies, often touted by those on the right and centered on large-scale conspiracies of devil-worshiping child sex trafficking rings.

simulation and hyperreality. According to Baudrillard, and Hughes's citation of it, the "hyperreal" refers to a simulation of reality becoming more real than the original reality the simulation is meant to copy. Baudrillard claims that:

> The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, model of control - and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere.[58]

As the hyperreal replaces the real, Baudrillard continues, saying that "it is no longer a question of imitation nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real…"[59] For Hughes, theories of the hyperreal help to explain how the Satanic Panic took hold across the country. She explains that "within a hyperreality, viewers mistook manufactured electronic images and sounds for authentic experiences."[60] In the case of the panic, the hyperreality of widespread Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) replaced reality, as this type of abuse was not actually happening. For Baudrillard, media plays a large role in the creation of the hyperreal, claiming that it acts as "not only communication but the social functions in a closed circuit, as a lure-to which the force of myth is attached. Belief, faith in information attach themselves as tautological proof that the system gives of itself by doubling the signs of an unlocatable reality."[61] In other words, the media reinforces the hyperreal by reinforcing the "reality" that it supposedly represents, particularly through

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[58] Jean Baudrillard and Sheila Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.

[59] Ibid., 2.

[60] Hughes, 695.

[61] Baudrillard, 81.

the use and advancements related to mass media that allowed for images on a screen to become "more 'real' to them than their natural lived experiences."[62]

Hughes's research often emphasizes the use of visual media, particularly the television, in propagating ideas and claims of widespread SRA to the American public. However, in the case of heavy metal, a genre at the center of the panics, Baudrillard's theories of mythmaking through media can help describe the phenomenon around the hyperreality as it pertains to sound and listening media and technological developments. Baudrillard claims that myth is attached through the social and communication functioning through a closed loop circuit as they seemingly reinforce one another through the media consumer's supposed "faith in information." In the case of heavy metal, myth gets attached through repetition of information around the genre, particularly the very public assumptions of its connections to Satanism and violence. During the 1980s, the panic around heavy metal intensified, with those invested in it often citing concerns over the violence and allusions to Satanism and the occult in the music's lyrics. The concern by those such as the PMRC and the fears around the Satanic Panic can be seen in multiple books that were written to decry the genre's supposed nefarious plot to ruin children. For example, the back cover of Bob Larson's book *Larson's Book of Rock* asks of parents "Is the music that youth listen to hour after hour an innocent diversion-or a harmful influence that leads youth into loveless sex, drug abuse, and the occult?"[63] Similar sentiments are conveyed in Rob Godwin's book *The Devil's Disciples: The Truth about Rock*, in which he claims heavy metal, and rock more

[62] Hughes, 696.
[63] Bob Larson, *Larson's Book of Rock* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), back cover.

broadly, contain groups "outshocking the last through a never ending parade of outrageous displays of sick, warped, psychotic behavior," and causing "the destruction of our society."[64]

Within heavy metal's obvious play with transgressive and taboo topics, including satanism and violence, myth-making occurs through the willful misunderstanding between theatricality and reality. During Rivera's television interview with Ozzy Osbourne, Osbourne claims that "the only sense of responsibility I feel is that I'm a true musician in what I play. I don't want to make anyone start doing all this devil-worship crap because that's not my intention even though I have sung on a few songs about the devil. That's about it, you know, I don't want anyone to harm themselves." In the same interview segment, Osbourne claims "I have felt persecuted by everybody, I'm not a bad guy."[65] Osbourne's interview clearly denotes the separation he feels as the artist between something real (i.e. actual devil worship and violence) and something meant for theatrical fun (i.e. singing a song about the devil). However, Rivera, and ostensibly the viewers at home, have a "different point of view"[66] about the situation, clearly taking the agency of creating musical intent away from the musician and placing it into the hands and minds of its listeners and, in this case, the genre's detractors.

This exchange between Rivera and Osbourne demonstrates with more clarity the hyperreal of heavy metal, as Osbourne insists that the reality is that the music is meant for fun while Rivera creates new meaning for the music that is meant to be seen as more real than "The Real." Despite Osbourne's explanation of the music, the audience is supposed to

[64] Rob Godwin, *The Devil's Disciples: The Truth About Rock* (Chino, CA: Chick, 1985), 12.

[65] Random Stuff I Find on VHS, Rivera Special: Part 2, 07:12.

[66] Ibid., 08:10.

continue to understand his music as a dangerous social force because that myth has already been created and then reinforced through media outputs like Rivera's. Even when presented with Osbourne's intentions by Osbourne himself, Rivera and the audience do not believe his claims, instead focusing on the dialog around heavy metal that has been established previously in the decade. They choose the myth of meaning around heavy metal over the actual musicians' intentions. The insistence on metal's mythical meaning can be understood as a product of the media, as most metal listeners are not actually devil worshipping or causing harm (although using Satanic symbols and imagery can be a form of play in itself for rebellious teens). In other words, meaning around the myth of metal has been constructed by those outside of the scene and that meaning has been created by the publicity around the genre, rather than what the musicians of the genre are actually doing or trying to do. In this sense, metal also exists within a sort of hyperreal that has attached scary myths that the public has learned to fear through repetition in the media.

The concern around metal was not only aimed at Osbourne. As metal became an increasingly solid fixture of American popular culture, it also drew more negative attention from those concerned about the lifestyle the genre seemed to glorify and promote. Many metal bands play and explore with darker themes, such as the occult, violence, substance abuse, amongst others. Most bands consider this a form of play or an exploration of more serious subject matter, but some of metal's detractors have taken this as advocating for these topics. Bob Larson devotes an entire chapter in *Larson's Book of Rock* to the occult-aptly titled "Sympathy for the Devil." In this chapter, he informs his readers—presumably the parents of children who listen to rock—that they are living in "today's occult explosion."[67]

[67] Larson, 49.

For Larson, "the occult" seems like a broad category that deals with anything metaphysical or non-Christian, including pointing to musicians interested in Sufism, palm reading, seances, and UFOs.[68] He argues that listening to these records and musicians will inevitably influence a child's behavior and will "profoundly [threaten]" the desire for a Christian parent's house to "serve the Lord."[69]

Tipper Gore's advocacy for better warning labels on music also suggested a rating for "occult" and Jeff Godwin's *The Devil's Disciples: The Truth about Rock* perhaps makes occultist anxieties the most clear. His chapter titled "Demons in the House,"[70] opens with the proclamation that "there is no question that Christians everywhere believe that a satanic conspiracy exists solely for the purpose of bending and warping our young people's minds to its insane wavelength through the medium of Rock & Roll."[71] For authors such as Larson, Godwin, and to a lesser extent Gore, rock has been directly related to the devil and devil worship, sentiments that would be echoed throughout the 1980s. These fears were heightened by connecting rock to violent crimes such as "The Night Stalker" who allegedly—according to Godwin—left the words AC/DC and "Jack the Knife"—taken from a Judas Priest song—on the walls next to the victims.[72]

Although the public discourse surrounding heavy metal music may have been centered around fears of devil worship and violence, the mythmaking around the genre stems from metal acting as a conduit for a variety of public anxieties. Hughes has discussed the ways in which the satanic panics can be understood as a form of anxiety over political

[68] Ibid., 50-51.
[69] Ibid., 55.
[70] Arguably making it sound totally awesome
[71] Godwin, 35.
[72] Godwin, 36.

liberalization that occurred during the 1960s and 70s, and social activists, such as those fighting for gay rights or gender equality, were seen as a particular threat, especially to right-wing evangelicals.[73] Hughes also points out that Ronald Reagan's election in the 1980 marks the beginning of "the trend of demonizing sixties liberal types" and its "[intersection] with depictions of suburbia as populated with the paranormal."[74] However, the treatment of heavy metal reveals further anxieties that have become wrapped up in fears about the music. Specifically, the introduction of technologies that allowed for more individualized listening practices, rather than communal ones, fostered the growth of fears around the music as their introduction coincides with metal's rise to popularity in the United States.

The Walkman

By July 1979, Sony produced the first Walkman—a portable stereo that connected to headphones, allowing the listener to move around publicly while listening privately. By December of the same year, the Walkman was selling out in US stores.[75] For many consumers, the idea of being able to listen to music privately in public was a large part of the device's appeal. In July of 1980, the New York Times ran an article about the device. One woman described "listening to Pavarotti's Greatest Hits as she walked along East 57th Street. She raved 'its sound is so fantastic and it shuts out the awful sound of the city."[76] While the Walkman was not the first device to allow for portable music listening—the boom

[73] Hughes,693.
[74] Ibid., 694.
[75] Rebecca, Tuhus-Dubrow, *Personal Stereo* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2017), 38.
[76] Ibid., 38-39.

box for example allowed listeners to take their music with them—it was one of the first that did not create a potential public distraction for those around the listener. These differences clearly had a large commercial appeal for American consumers, but it was not without its own peculiarities. Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow describes the strangeness of the device as having "to do with the disjunction between sight and sound." She argues that this created a series of unsettling scenarios:

> First of all, the sounds that corresponded to what you were seeing - the driving cars down the street, people chatting on the subway - were gone, or at least much diminished. This in itself suffice to alter one's encounter with reality. Not only that, other sounds were streaming directly into your ears. And whereas usually music came from some clearly external sources - whether speakers at a concert or the stereo system in your living room - with headphones it almost felt like the sounds were originating in your own head.[77]

Tuhus-Dubrow emphasizes the ways in which the individualized nature of the Walkman's

sound distorts reality around the listener as it severs sight from their expected sounds. Her description of the Walkman experience indicates that when one uses the Walkman, the auditory reality becomes part of reality in the visual sphere, even though that reality is not part of everyone else's. Such an observation creates a sort of individualized hyperreal in which the auditory reality becomes more real than the auditory reality of the world outside

[77] Ibid., 45-46.

the headphones. Descriptions of the music being able to block out the sounds of an urban landscape, for example, further imply that the music replaces the soundscape and becomes more real to the listener than the real.

While many listeners sought out this experience, as evidenced by the device's popularity, the severing of the visual and auditory realms also created a sense of anxiety. Some of these fears stem from practical concerns about hearing loss due to high volumes in close proximity to the listeners' ears. However, a trend also began to emerge that centered social concerns about the Walkman, specifically about the device's ability to sever its listener from the social world. For example, Rich Sheinin, whose article appeared in multiple newspapers across the country, argues that not only has the Walkman become a concern for hearing loss or traffic safety but that it creates an unhealthy social and psychological state of mind. He argues that "they say people may be using [the] Walkman to blot out unpleasant thoughts about life and work or, in the case of shy people, to turn inward so basic social skills needn't be learned."[78] Sheinin continues, quoting Stanford psychologist Philip Zimbardo as saying "The Sony Walkman phenomenon is clearly a socially isolating one like video games, an aspect of modern technology that makes people irrelevant for other people."[79] Sheinin is not the only one to express such concerns over the Walkman's social impact. Another article written by Bob Greene echoes similar sentiments about the social effects of the Walkman. Greene argues that the individualization of sound that has made the device so popular with listeners has a detrimental effect on listeners' ability to interact with society. In recounting a day trip to the Ohio State Fair, he writes:

[78] Rich Sheinin,"Walkmen may cause deafness, accidents, and neuroses," *The Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham, WA), December 22,1982.
[79] Ibid.

> of all the saddening signs of a troubled society, I saw perhaps the most chilling of all the other afternoon. There, on the midway of the Ohio State Fair, strolled teenagers wearing Sony Walkman earphones…As I watched the young fair-goers walk obliviously around the fairgrounds wearing their Walkmans, my eyes teared over at the thought of how jaded they have become at such an early age. When I was as young as they, not only did I have no desire to shut out the sounds of the fair…I was part of the sounds at the fair."[80]

Like Sheinin's article, Greene's was also published in several different newspapers, including the *Chicago Tribune* which ran the article under the alarmist headline "First, drug abuse; now, earphone abuse."[81] While concerns around traffic accidents or hearing loss may represent the more pragmatic side, the popularity and the republishing of articles such as these demonstrate larger anxieties about listening technologies' effects on the very functioning of society.

The anxiety present in articles like these mentioned above arguably stems from a sensation of displacement. Sianne Ngai has discussed the affective experience of anxiety as often being depicted through some form of displacement. She examines how anxiety has been represented artistically through films such as Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, books like Melville's *Pierre*, and philosophy such as Heidegger's *Being and Time*, arguing that "the

[80] Bob Greene, "Walkman Earphones at the State Fair," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, TX), August 28, 1981.

[81] Bob Greene, "First, drug abuse; now, earphone abuse," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 24, 1981.

topologies of dispositioning produced here, marked by physiological motifs of dizziness or vertigo, suggest that the logic of 'anxiety' and that of 'projection,' as a form of spatial displacement, converge in the production of a distinct kind of knowledge-seeking subject."[82] Ngai's argument emphasizes the ways in which anxiety is portrayed and its relationship to demonstrations of intellectualism, often showcasing ideas of displacement to characters seen as intelligent, curious, or in some way a "knowledge-seeking subject." In these articles, the authors act as the "knowledge seeking subject" in their attempts to reconcile, seemingly unsuccessfully, with newer technology.

Alongside this psychological displacement, *physical* displacement has also been a defining feature of the Walkman. Shohei Hosokawa has described the Walkman as a form of Musica Mobilis, or "music whose source voluntarily or involuntarily moves from one point to another, coordinated by the corporal transportation of the source owner(s)," and describes that "the Walkman represents parasitic and/or symbiotic *self* which has now become autonomous and mobile."[83] With the emphasis on musica mobilis, Hosokawa defines the Walkman as a technology of displacement, allowing the self to "become autonomous and mobile" in a way that it had not been before. As such, the Walkman's ability to displace not only sound in expected ways of listening (e.g. stuck to where a stereo might be physically present), it also allows the listener to be sonically displaced from their surroundings. For many, this displacement was part of the device's appeal, claiming that the Walkman allowed them to create their own soundtrack for their lived experiences.[84] For those like Sheinin and

[82] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 215.
[83] Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 105.
[84] Tuhus-Dubrow, 47.

Greene, however, this displacement creates affective experiences of anxiety—to use Ngai's term—which has played into their concerns over supposed social retreat. In these cases of the Walkman and the individualized listening experience the device offers create anxiety in almost the opposite way that Ngai describes. Rather than displacement being a symbolic representation of anxiety, the anxiety around the device can be understood as caused by the spatial displacement the Walkman affords its listeners.

As the Walkman's popularity was increasing, heavy metal was becoming an increasingly mainstream genre, particularly amongst the youth. Although the genre had been percolating in the UK in the previous decade with bands like Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, its migration to the United States was a resounding success. Thus, as the Walkman's popularity was increasing, heavy metal was becoming an increasingly mainstream genre, particularly amongst the youth. As these popularities began to increase at the same time, so too did the anxieties around both, and they fueled one another. I suggest that the concerns around listening technology and metal, which would eventually become part of the large-scale Satanic Panic, were certainly enhanced by these fears surrounding the listening practices of the Walkman, but ultimately both became a stand-in for larger social anxieties.

Shifts in the Nuclear Family

Public discourses around the role of the nuclear family also proliferated in the 1980s, noting the changing roles in the family unit and the multiple alternative family models. In 1980, the American futurist writer Alvin Toffler wrote and published a book titled *The Third Wave* which argued for three major stages of civilization. The first wave consisted of

prehistoric societies while the second wave, consisting of the previous two to three centuries, came into being through the advent of technology and industrialization. During this time frame, Toffler argues, the nuclear family (i.e. a husband who acts as the family breadwinner, a wife who probably stays home, and children) became the predominant model as it allowed more mobility for migration to cities for individual families without an excessive number of extended family members living in the same house.[85] Toffler claims that "the nuclear family became an identifiable feature of all Second Wave societies , marking them off from First Wave societies just as surely as fossil fuels, steel mills, or chain stores."[86] However, the shift that Toffler points to in the last few decades becomes what he calls the Third Wave, in which the idea of "family" begins to shift dramatically away from the nuclear family. He notes that "we are told repeatedly that "the family" is falling apart, or that "the family" is our Number One Problem. President Jimmy Carter declares, 'It is clear that the national government should have a pro-family policy…There can be no more urgent priority.'"[87] Although Toffler does not characterize the shift away from the nuclear family in negative terms, and in fact seems to view the expansion in acceptable family forms generally as a positive, his description of social responses to this change indicates a level of large-scale anxiety around the ways in which the family was being perceived during this time. Namely, that the shift away from the nuclear, patriarchal family, caused enough concern to be recognized in a culturally visible and often alarmist manner.

Toffler was not the only one to note the decline in the nuclear family. An article that ran in the *Hartford Courant* by Donna Larcen on August 24, 1980, also notes the shift in

[85] Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: NY, Bantam Books, 1980), 28.
[86] Ibid., 28-29.
[87] Ibid., 209.

attitudes specifically towards women and their role within, and outside of, the family structure. Larcen cites two surveys conducted by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau Project (one in 1971 and the other in 1979) and notes that over half of women now had jobs outside of the home, while college campuses had a more equal split in gender enrollment.[88] The surveys also found that women's attitudes towards working were changing as well, with many women finding work outside the home to be meaningful and fulfilling rather than only a method of financial security and that the "working woman" was expected to become more common in the future. Additionally, Larcen notes that the view that working women do not spend enough time with their children had started to decrease—although she does note that the views between working and nonworking women did differ on this question. In 1967 60% of responding women to a national survey agreed that a woman's place was in the home and by 1975, that number had decreased to only 26%. The changes in attitudes also predicated a higher support of free child-care—notably, the same type of place that would become the beginnings and center of the Satanic Panic that would emerge a few years later—and working women had a higher rate of support for abortion access.[89] Further, the idea of homemaking being a full-time and fulfilling role for women was beginning to decrease, leading Larcen to eventually conclude that "the increasing trend for women, even with small children, will be on finding employment outside the home as the traditional nuclear family becames [sic] a smaller part of the American scene."[90]

[88] Donna Larcen, "Views on Working Women Shift Over 10 Years," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), August 24, 1980.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

Like Toffler, Larcen does not seem to imply that the increase in women working as a negative or socially destructive; rather they are both noting a definitive shift in views of gender roles during this time. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, gender roles were becoming increasingly egalitarian and ideologies such as feminism were becoming more prominent within mainstream society. In a 2004 article on the shift in gender roles from the late 1970s to mid-1990s, Catherine Bolzendahl and Daniel Myers assert that "the most consistent and robust finding in this literature links feminist attitudes with women's participation in the workforce."[91] Citing a variety of studies from the 80s and 90s, Bolzendahl and Myer explain that the shifting gender attitudes created through women's increased participation in the workforce may stem from an increased concern in equitable pay as well as increasing expectations that men help within the home.[92] An article from the 1980s titled "Working Women Launch Agenda" that ran in The Marshall News Messenger in Marshall, Texas reports that working women were also beginning to understand their political power. The group 9 to 5, the National Association for Working Women, which boasted 12,000 members and included women from every state, advocated for safer working conditions for women, including supporting legislation to end workplace discrimination and to close the gendered wage gap. The article quotes Karen Nussbaum, 9 to 5's executive director as saying "It's certainly appropriate that 62 years after women won the right to vote, we're beginning to flex our political muscle. Working women are now a forced to be

[91] Catherine I Bolzendahl, and Daniel J Myers, "Feminist Attitudes and Support for Gender Equality: Opinion Change in Women and Men, 1974–1998., *Social forces* 83, no. 2 (2004): 759–789, 763.

[92] Ibid., 764. It is worth noting that both Bolzendahl and Myer note that there are several other factors that contribute to how gender roles are viewed, including how many hours are worked, what percentage of the family's income women contribute, amongst others.

reckoned with."[93] While the authors of these articles maintain a more objective look on the topics,[94] there is an undeniable shift in the ways in which the family functions and with gender roles in the typical suburban household. Such drastic social changes also inevitably threaten certain structural models intertwined with ideas of "family" such as gender roles and specifically women's roles within the household, as the model beings to dwindle in favor of lifestyles that can be read as more "liberal."

With the changes in women's roles, notions of masculinity also shifted during the 1980s and not all of these changes were met with enthusiasm for gender equality. Emily Contois has argued that this decade also saw a change in masculinity, prompting social anxiety related to traditional ideas of masculinity versus the "new man." Borrowing from feminist theorist Rosalind Gill, Contois describes the "new man" as being sensitive, respectful of women, having a sense of emotional maturity, and being concerned with his physical appearance.[95] In response, many began to become anxious around ideas of masculinity as men became, to some, more feminized. Contois points to the shifting gender roles in the 60s and 70s through feminist and other civil rights movements resulted in "a moment of masculinity crisis." [96] This crisis resulted in satirical books such as Bruce Feirstein's book *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*, which meant to poke fun at gender anxiety but instead also found a set of readers who took the book's general premise in all seriousness.[97]

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[93] "Working Women Launch Agenda," *The Marshall News Messenger* (Marshall, TX), September 2, 1982.

[94] Remember when the news actually did that?

[95] Emily J.H. Contois, "Real Men Don't Eat Quiche, Do They?: Food, Fitness and Masculinity Crisis in 1980s America," *European journal of American culture* 40, no. 3 (2021): 183–199, 185.

[96] Ibid., 186.

[97] Ibid., 184.

The increase in women working and gaining more political power was also met with anxiety from certain groups, particularly the increasingly powerful evangelical Christian movement. In addition to increased visible feminist activity in the decades preceding the 80s, Kristin Kobe Du Mez also notes the increase and popularity of guidebooks to help women become better wives. Such examples include Marabel Morgan's 1973 advice book titled *The Total Woman* and Elisabeth Elliot's 1976 *Let Me be a Woman*. Books such as these instructed women to become subservient to their husbands, often calling on Christian religious ideologies as support for these distinct and hierarchically defined roles. Despite the call for more stringently enforced gender roles, some conservative women opted into politics to make these beliefs more formally codified.

Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic woman who entered the political sphere decades earlier in the 1950s with a failed run for congress, continued her political activism throughout the 60s and 70s. In addition to being staunchly anticommunist, Schlafly was also particularly well known for her work against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that would help guarantee equal rights for women in the United States in the 1970s. Additionally, she advocated for traditional, nuclear family models, claiming that "women's libbers were radicals waging war on marriage, children, and the family," and that "what feminists failed to understand…was that women *liked* to be housewives and homemakers."[98] For those like Schlafly, these ideas were necessarily bound up in religious ideologies. Kobes du Mez notes that one of Schlafly's STOP ERA campaign workers referred to her as a "religious

[98] Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, first edition (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 68. There is, of course, the irony that Schlafly is looking for political power while arguing for less legal protections for women. She referred to her political engagement as a "hobby," but it also spanned multiple decades.

leader…because it's women who generally keep the family's faith and it's women who support Phyllis."[99] Kobes du Mez further notes that "as women like Marabel Morgan and Elisabeth Elliot helped unify white Christian women around a shared domestic identity, Schlafly converted these women into political activists," implying that religion, gender roles, and politics became intertwined in the decade leading up to the 1980s.[100]

However, changes to the structure of the nuclear family were arguably caused by more than changes in gender roles and the work of various feminist women in the preceding decades. Toffler describes the concerns around the decline of the nuclear family as being at least in part due to the innovations in technology. He claims that if society wanted to halt this change in the predominant family model—one that is also implicitly white and middle class—one would need to take the following actions:

> freeze all technology in its Second Wave stage to maintain a factory-based, mass-production society. Begin with smashing the computer. The computer is a greater threat to the Second Wave family than all the abortion laws and gay rights movements and pornography in the world, for the nuclear family *needs* the mass-production system to retain its dominance and the computer is moving us beyond mass production.[101]

Toffler goes on to say that society would further need to "ban the increasingly specialized media, beginning with cable television and cassette, but not overlooking local and regional magazines. Nuclear families work best where there is national consensus on information and values, not in a society based in high diversity."[102] Noticeably, Toffler points to the

[99] Ibid., 73.
[100] Ibid., 73.
[101] Toffler, 210.
[102] Ibid., 211.

"cassette" specifically, allowing for not only more individualized listening experiences but implicitly relating the shift in families towards technology like the Walkman.

The concern over listening technology like the Walkman may be partially rooted in valid concerns over hearing loss or traffic safety, but I suggest that the Walkman also became an implicit symbol for the deconstruction of the nuclear family and, as a result, the seeming deconstruction of the "ideal" middle class lifestyle. As these ideas permeated into the larger social sphere, the concerns over the Walkman/individualized listening technologies and the nuclear family are also compounded by the concern over rock music and heavy metal. Other publications from the 1980s take a significantly more alarmist stance than Toffler to the changes around family and social life and directly link this anxiety to not only the listening practices but to the musical output.

Metal Music and the Family

Given metal's penchant for the abject and the timing of both the genre's and the listening technologies' popularity, heavy metal seemed to act as the perfect conduit onto which these fears can be mapped more readily. Anxieties around the formation and function of the family can be found in many of the books warning parents against the evils of rock that were published in the 1980s, often through the framing that parents are unaware of what their children are listening to or doing at concerts and the effects it may have on them. For others, the role of Rock n' Roll has a more insidious effect in its apparent abilities to emotionally separate children from their parents. Michael K. Haynes laments this trend in his book *The God of Rock: A Christian Perspective of Rock Music* published in 1982 and

implores parents to use his methods to take more precautions over their children's listening habits. He writes: "I have seen families reunited in my lectures concerning THE god OF ROCK. I have seen parents stand in a noncondemning manner alongside their young people, and I have watched them pray and commit themselves to God, and ask for His power to break the bondage that Satan has in their homes."[103] Haynes's assertion that families have been reunited through his lectures obviously works in a self-serving way, as seeming proof of his methods' validity and therefore worthy of the money parents are no doubt spending on his materials, but also implies that families, specifically children and parents, have become isolated from one another.

Bob Larson repeats a similar refrain. In a particularly alarmist passage, Larson declares to parents that "rock is more than a form of music to the teenager. It is a way of life that consumes his every waking moment. Rock musicians mean more than his parents because they have become a surrogate family."[104] Larson continues, saying that the list of people who a teen might go to in times of trouble or when in need of advice often do not include a teen's parents, but rather their "friends, school counselors, clergy, even casual acquaintances."[105] While people like Larson and Haynes frame their arguments around the idea that parents need to be more watchful of their children, the underlying anxiety is that parents seem to have less influence over teens than they once did and that music tastes were indicative of specific lifestyles. These authors like to blame rock for this phenomenon, but

[103] Haynes, 20. The formatting of THE god OF ROCK is consistent throughout the entire book.

[104] Larson, 96.

[105] Ibid., 96. In Larson's defense, he does at least say that parents should be telling their kids they love them without attaching it to achievement or the like, so I guess that's pretty cool at least and not the worst advice people give in these books.

realistically, these concerns are more accurately attached to shifting dynamics in the role of the nuclear family, the ways in which social formations happen outside of that unit, and the ways in which music and listening are perceived to play a role in it.

Such an assertion is further implicated in the PMRC congressional hearings concerning lyrics in rock music during Twisted Sister musician Dee Snider's testimony. Snider argues that it is the parents' responsibility to check for appropriateness in musical lyrics for their children. When asked by the committee how he planned to do that, Snider responds that both he and his wife would look through the album lyrics often printed on the cover jackets when he was not on the road with his band. When he is touring, he says that his wife will do this, which he acknowledges can be a difficult situation in which his wife essentially acts as both parents at these times.[106] In response, the senate committee asks how such a system would work if both parents had to work, which he describes as increasingly common. On one hand, the committee makes a valid argument: looking closely through lyrics does require having the time to do so and when both parents work, this may be more difficult to achieve. However, the concern over solutions that would require further domestic labor also implies that both parents working outside the home, rather than having a more traditional nuclear family in which the wife works as a homemaker, results in a reduced ability to keep their children safe from potentially "dangerous" influences like those found in adult rock lyrics. Subsequently, the concern over rock lyrics belies not only fears over exposing children to inappropriate material but also anxieties around the shifting role of women within the household and how that might affect the children of the family. Given the

[106] Stewart, "Dee Snider's PMRC Senate Hearing Speech (Full)," 28:50. Snider also discusses how he plans to retire early and spend more time with his son, saying that being able to retire early is "one of the beautiful things about rock and roll," 28:40.

increasingly conservative nature of American politics during this time period, these anxieties may have been particularly pronounced.

This concern becomes an issue when rock lyrics have been explicitly tied to acts of violence and abuse through the public media. However, just as Hughes has suggested that the Satanic Panic arose in part as a reaction against the increase in liberal politics during the 1960s and 70s, I also propose that the panic around heavy metal is similarly not as clear-cut as the media may have made it seem. Instead, the primary sources from this decade imply that the panic over heavy metal hides anxieties around changing dynamics in family social structures, especially as women begin to work outside the home at higher rates and with more public acceptance, as well as anxieties around listening technology and their surge in popularity at the same time as heavy metal music, resulting in intertwined, and potentially misplaced, anxieties. Concerns over the decline of the nuclear family in favor of different family dynamics are conflated with anxieties over the individualization of listening technologies, which becomes even further placed onto heavy metal. These anxieties become compounded and then misplaced onto a genre of music meant to be fun (as musicians like Ozzy Osbourne have explained), and the American media landscape in the 1980s creates meaning for the music that was never originally part of it. Further, the exact process becomes obscured. Nobody directly discusses heavy metal as a concern over family politics in the primary sources discussed earlier, and instead favor narratives of violence and Satanism that fit easily onto the genre given the content often intended as a form of play for both listeners and musicians. Heavy metal then gives us an insight into how the hyperreal was created through media and news cycles, and in turn, created new meaning for the original, and how the hyperreal disguises and conceals the process through which it works.

Heavy Metal and Politics

While anxieties around emerging technology and the changes in family structures were mapped onto heavy metal, larger scale political anxieties also found their way into the public discourse surrounding the genre. The case of heavy metal and its relationship to political anxieties reveals a more complicated picture of political concerns during the 1980s. The argument I have made concerning metal's relationship to the supposed decline of the nuclear family represents a fear of political liberalization on a more localized scale, an issue that affects the individual in their immediate lives and surroundings (i.e., their home and family life). However, changes in family life more associated with liberal or progressive politics were not the only concern during the 1980s. Instead, this decade also saw a rise in concern over far-right wing politics as well. Newspaper articles and headlines from 1970-1999 demonstrate an increase in the term "Neo-Nazi." While the term appears in newspapers 18,000 times during the 1970s, that number roughly quadruples in the 1980s with the term appearing in 75,000 times in newspapers throughout the United States. By 1999, that number would almost double, with the term appearing 137,000 times.[107] What these numbers imply is that the progression of more leftist politics was not the only concern during this time period. In this section, I will discuss the history of far-right politics and heavy music through the connection between punk music and racist skinhead groups.

[107] Keyword search "Neo-Nazi," Newspaper.com. Accessed May 26, 2022. Notably, the number of mentions likely changes as more newspapers are added to the archives. However, even as the exact numbers may shift, there is a significant increase in the number of mentions between the two decades.

Through this connection, metal becomes a conduit for political anxieties not only around the liberalization of politics, as Hughes has suggested, but also around the increasing emergence and visibility of global far-right politics.

As American conservatism grew and became more visible in during the 1980s, with many attempting to hold fast to social and family models quickly becoming obsolete, various parts of Europe were also starting to see an insidious rise of far-right politics, which crept back into public life and discourses. Arguably, fascism and National Socialist beliefs never truly disappeared, even after the defeat of the Nazi regime. By 1962, Britain saw its own wave of Nazi resurgence, when Colin Jordan founded the World Union of National Socialists that grew out of the Cotswold Conference.[108] Jordan's Union would eventually include a more international membership including the American George Lincoln Rockwell as well as Savitri Devi and Germany's Bruno Ludtke.[109] Jordan is also credited with forming the British National Socialist Movement as well as continuing the British arm of the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS). However, disagreements between members would eventually lead to a fracturing, including John Tyndall and Martin Webster branching off and creating the National Front in 1967.[110]

Of course, the United States was not immune to an inclination towards far-right politics. By 1959, George Lincoln Rockwell, who would join the World Union of National Socialists, had created the American Nazi Party (ANP), a group that idolized Adolf Hitler

[108] Jeffrey Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of White Power: a Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), *146.*
[109] Ibid., 146.
[110] Ibid., 147.

and continued the use of Nazi symbols including the Swastika.[111] His introduction to Colin Jordan began a more explicit connection between Europe and the United States, based on shared racist and antisemitic views "as well as his impatience with right-wingers and fellow racists who were reluctant to take bold action and risk public censure.[112] Rockwell's meeting with Savitri Devi, a French woman who became interested in Aryan mysticism and was a fervent supporter of Hitler, and Bruno Ludtke further instilled the vision of an international organization that glorified the Nazi party and sought to bring about its resurgence.[113] In 1962, Rockwell traveled to the UK to meet with Devi, Jordan, and Ludtke that led to a document that contained what they believed to be the "final settlement of the Jewish problem"[114] and WUNS was created as a global network of far-right racists. By 1963, the group had grown more international, boasting chapters in South America, Africa, Australia, and Asia.[115] The national socialist parties, particularly in the UK and the US, did not gain a significant amount of political power in terms of elections and the WUNS and Rockwell's death in 1967 left the group without its "charismatic leader."[116] By the 1970s and 80s, WUNS no longer functioned like it did in the 60s, however other groups began to form and while they may not have always been politically successful, they did help to foster later iterations of far-right politics and groups, including the "the violent racist skinhead and the

[111] Jeffrey Kaplan, and Tore Bjørgo, *Nation and Race: the Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 34.
[112] Ibid., 35-36.
[113] Ibid., 36.
[114] Quoted in Kaplan, 41.
[115] Ibid., 43.
[116] Ibid., 52.

neo-fascist/neo-Nazi movements in Europe and America at the beginning of the Cold War era."[117]

The decline of WUNS then left room for other far-right political groups to form, especially in the UK. Nigel Felding describes the National Front as a larger collection of smaller radical right groups in the UK during the 1960s.[118] By 1974, when Tyndall became a well-known figure within the National Front (NF), the group had become the predominant far-right political group in Britain.[119] Felding further describes the NF as having several aims: to grow the organization and recruit new members, to have an effect on legislation and exert political influence, and to introduce more people to the group's ideologies.[120] Felding describes the National Front's ideologies thusly:

> It is possible - though it is not the whole truth - to interpret the NF ideology as that sort of conservatism which revers the traditional society, a society with closed boundaries. Such a society defined a noumenal moral order whose spirit the NF seeks to resurrect. In a sense, NF ideology is an implicit attack on ideology, a wish for a return to a world governed by respect for order.[121]

Felding further notes that the NF's ideologies emphasize elements of traditionalism as well as at antagonism towards what it sees as threats to that traditionalism, namely, internationalism, integration, and miscegenation.[122] The connections between this type of thinking and those of the Nazi Party (and subsequently of WUNS) are obvious; however, their thinking around identity does diverge in significant ways. Namely, Felding describes

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[117] Ibid., 52.
[118] Nigel Fielding, *The National Front* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 19.
[119] Ibid., 20, 23.
[120] Ibid., 26.
[121] Ibid.,61.
[122] Ibid., 65.

that the NF does not attempt to harken back to an idealized past in the same way the Nazis did through völkisch thinking.[123] Instead, the NF viewed themselves as more modern while fabricating an idealized past in which they emphasize a unity under Empire (implicitly through a racial lens) that historically never occurred.[124] However, these ideas clearly resonated with people as the group grew in support during the mid-1970s. Poll numbers also indicate a growing amount of support for the far-right during the 1970s in the UK. Stan Taylor, for example, notes that the NF's total shares in the 1976 elections indicated a marked increase from 1974. Although Taylor does note that the increase could be from either growing support for the group or "the effects of a differential turnout," the numbers do seem to suggest that the NF was gaining more political power in the 1970s.[125]

As the NF gained more ground with other racists, their messaging became increasingly aggressive and soon began to promote physical violence as part of their rhetoric. Felding describes this shift as stemming from Webster's Remembrance Day speech in 1974, in which he advocated "physical action against opponents."[126] After this event, threats of and glorification of physical violence became increasingly common, with the NF relishing in conflict with the left, going so far as to claim that during a meeting with leftist disruptions, they "ejected the red rabble by use of the tried and trusted East London methods of the boot and fist."[127] Felding characterizes the group's comfort with physical violence as being underpinned by the assumption that most "decent" people thought like they do but

[123] See chapter two for more in-depth explanations of Nazi ideology and its relationship to metaphysics.
[124] Fielding, 72.
[125] Stan Taylor, *The National Front in English Politics* (London: MacMillan, 1982), 46.
[126] Fielding, 189.
[127] Quoted in Fielding, 189.

were too afraid to say so.[128] Although Felding acknowledges that violence was not carried out by all, or perhaps even most, group members, they do seem to accept explanations for the alleged necessity of such actions, and that certain parts of the group can be categorized as having a "subculture of violence."[129]

While the NF was slowly gaining political momentum,[130] another group with similar politics and rough style began to emerge: skinhead punks. The skinheads formed on London's east side in 1968-9, but spread into other parts of England by the 1970s. Football matches in particular became points of interaction, that allowed skinheads to meet and discuss politics face-to-face with other football fans, often those associated with hooliganism.[131] Jonathan Pieslak has also discussed the skinheads as an offshoot of "mod" culture during the 1960s and as a reaction to the economic stagnation Britain experienced in the aftermath of World War II. Pieslak argues that the lack of economic growth, coupled with bad housing markets and an influx of immigration leading to more competition for jobs, led to a form of social disillusionment amongst the working-class youth who rejected the hippie flower power movement as a counterculture.[132] Instead, skinheads sported looks that drew attention to the industrial laborer with "a shaved or closely cut hairstyle, work denim pants, suspenders, tattoos, and polished Doc Marten steel-toed boots."[133] The group's origins were not necessarily rooted in the same racist ideas the skinheads would eventually

[128] Ibid., 189.
[129] Ibid., 190-191.
[130] although that momentum would not result in significant political power, it did show that more support for far-right politics as a broader trend and movement across the UK.
[131] John Pollard, "Skinhead Culture: The Ideologies, Mythologies, Religions and Conspiracy Theories of Racist Skinheads," *Patterns of prejudice* 50, no. 4-5 (2016): 398–419, 399-400.
[132] Pieslak, 56.
[133] Ibid., 56.

symbolize—Pieslak even notes that early skinheads included a number of Jamaican youth—but they did emphasize a negative attitude towards immigrants, particularly those of East Indian and Pakistani descent, as they were viewed as a threat to an already precarious labor market and the decency of their neighborhoods.[134] Although the skinheads eventually came to hold far-right wing political beliefs, they started specifically as a group concerned with British nationalism.[135]

In addition to their style and idealization of the working class, the skinheads became particularly well-known for their use of music. While their musical style initially emphasized Afro-Cuban music, including Jamaican ska music (which Pieslak notes the irony given their eventual descent into racism) by the mid-1970s, the skin heads began to prefer the noisy sounds of punk.[136] Specifically, the skinheads gravitated towards a subgenre called Oi!, which represented an "aggressive, harder, and lower-brow" form of punk that sought to reclaim some of the genre's early authenticity.[137] Although Oi! Was not intrinsically attached to the skinheads as a group, a synonymous meaning was eventually culturally constructed between the music and the group. The aesthetic of punk, namely its emphasis on shock value, also helped facilitate this transition from concerns over British nationalism and a fear of immigration to more explicit and aggressive ties to neo-Nazi ideologies. Pieslak notes that during this time, parts of the punk subculture began experimenting with Nazi symbolism as a form of shock value, particularly with punk rock precursors like Iggy Pop, David Bowie, and Lou Reed sporting Nazi symbols like the

[134] Ibid., 56.
[135] Ibid., 57.
[136] Ibid., 56-57.
[137] Ibid., 57.

swastika or the SS symbol.[138] Some like Dick Hebdige would argue that their use of Nazi symbolism was meant to strip the racist connotations from the symbols by wearing them without believing in the cultural meanings they have come to have.[139] Pieslak suggests that the use of these symbols as shock value (rather than semiotic warfare) may have inadvertently contributed to the merging of skinhead groups with neo-Nazism. Between a shared symbolism, whether in seriousness or play, and a shared interest in Oi! the neo-Nazis and skinheads found connections to one another amongst the cultural rise in Britain's right-wing nationalism allowed points of connections between the two groups.[140]

Where the skinheads coalesced into a more organized group around more specific right-wing ideologies can be seen with Ian Donaldson, who formed the band Skrewdriver in 1976. The band began performing in local British pubs but was eventually offered a contract by Chiswick Records for the song "All Skrewed Up." Around the same time frame, punk was becoming increasingly blatantly political rather than emphasizing nihilism and the abolishment of meaning. In 1976, when Skrewdriver was forming, Rock Against Racism (RAR) was also coming into public awareness, with bands such as The Clash hoping to "catalyze an antiracist, working-class cultural, economic, and political rebellion in Britain," and gaining support from large music industry names like Bob Marley.[141] As RAR may have been gaining traction, Skrewdriver and Donaldson gripped more tightly onto their racist

[138] Ibid., 57.

[139] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 116-117.

[140] Pieslak, 57. Notably, Pieslak does mention that there is not a total overlap between these groups and there are skinheads who do not have the same racist beliefs and there are skinheads who do not identify with Nazi ideologies; however, there is a large enough overlap between skinheads and neo-Nazis to talk about this groups in a similar manner.

[141] Love, 40. Love also includes a delightful tidbit about Marley writing the song "Punky Reggae Party" as a tribute to the shared antiracist sentiments between many of the Jamaican reggae and punk rock musicians.

skinhead ideologies. Skrewdriver became an official skinhead band in 1977 and refused to kowtow to pressure from the RAR to denounce the growing number of the band's racist fans. Thus, many of the band's fans also had connections to groups like the National Front and the British Movement. The connection between these far-right groups and skinheads were further connected through the start of Rock Against Communism—a moniker clearly borrowed from Rock Against Racism but meant to denote a politically right counterpart—in 1979 by skinheads and the Youth National Front.[142] According to a 1979 printing of their newsletter *Bulldog*, RAC was created to "fight back against left-wingers and anti-British traitors in the music press. We hate the poseurs in R.A.R. who are just going to brainwash real rock fans."[143] Donaldson would become a prominent figure with RAC, which planned to hold tours and concerts, in the 1980s.

Skrewdriver were sympathetic to, but did not necessarily entirely align with, far-right politics at first, but losing their contract with Chadwick Records and their banishment from various British venues eventually led Donaldson to decry punk's leftist turn.[144] The band went on hiatus due to the mounting pressures about their refusal to set themselves apart from white supremacy. Meanwhile Donaldson became increasingly involved with the National Front and specifically with the Young National Front that sought to recruit the youth into far-right politics. Despite a tumultuous first few years, Skrewdriver continued to garner support throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s. With his connections to the National Front, Donaldson also eventually created the White Noise Club, a record label financed by

[142] Piotr Żuk, and Paweł Żuk, (2019), "The national music scene": the analysis of the Nazi rock discourse and its relationship with the upsurge of nationalism in Poland, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42* (15), 2700–2722, 2703.
[143] Quoted in Żuk and Żuk, 2703.
[144] Love, 41.

the National Front that focused on producing white power records, including those by Skrewdriver.[145] By 1984, Donaldson had also made connections with the German record label Rock-O-Rama in order to sell White Noise records across Europe as well.[146]

Donaldson's influence affected not only the scene in western Europe, but Skrewdriver and RAC also became important aspects of white power music's spread into Eastern Europe and North America. Russia and Poland both saw an increase in far-right nationalist sentiments as the skinheads in these countries became more politically active through ideas propagated by these groups.[147] The availability of Skrewdriver's music, as well as other white nationalist bands, also became increasingly available in the United States, leading to a growth of skinhead culture that developed predominantly from this British youth subculture rather than exposure to the American far-right.[148] Of course, Skrewdriver was not the first racist band to exist in Europe or the United States—Pieslak notes the existence of many white power country acts, such as Johnny Rebel, who had existed far before white nationalists turned their attention to punk.[149]

The American skinhead scene was also predicated on the American neo-Nazis, especially through the likes of figures like Rockwell. However, where the skinheads succeeded and Rockwell had failed was in creating and establishing a vibrant culture around these ideas. Music played a large role in this process. Pieslak describes this phenomenon by saying that Rockwell did not "effectively establish a thriving culture that could recruit widely, build a community out of dislocated supporters, and generate the essential income

[145] Pieslak, 58.
[146] Ibid., 59.
[147] Żuk and Żuk, 2704.
[148] Pieslak, 59.
[149] Ibid., 60.

necessary to sustain the movement's activities. As we know, the music of racist-skinhead culture successfully achieved these goals - one of the principal reasons why the skins still exist as a movement today."[150] By the mid-to late-1980s and into the 1990s, the American racist-skinhead movement grew quickly and the infrastructures quickly developed to both create and distribute white power music. The creation of record labels devoted to white power rock music as well as fan-run underground 'zines helped create the American racist punk scene. People like Donaldson, before his sudden death in 1993, also cultivated ties to other far-right political organizations in the United States.

Donaldson ended up severing ties with the National Front in 1987 over record sales monetary disputes, and he eventually created a group called Blood and Honour—a name taken from the Nazi slogan. Through this group, Donaldson formed connections to pre-established far-right American groups and figures such as Tom Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance, and William Peirce and National Alliance. The latter was further connected to Resistance Records, an American record label that specialized in distributing white power music.[151] Such connections demonstrate that while skinhead groups may have migrated to the US from the UK, part of their success relied on the fact that the US already had groups that were willing to embrace Donaldson and the skinheads. Once established, the skinheads did cause some social consternation. In 1985, the merchants of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood planned a demonstration in the streets to protest violence perpetrated by some skinhead members, including what the San Francisco Examiner detailed as "sporadic beatings, harassing customers and breaking the windows of two

[150] Pieslak, 61.
[151] Love, 43.

businesses."[152] The demonstrations, according to one of the merchants, began due to the police's inaction in curtailing the violence being perpetrated.[153] What the increase in both skinhead activity and the public concern around it implies is that it was not only the leftist liberalization that led to serious political anxieties in the United States. Instead, a concern over the reemergence of fascism and far-right politics are part of the socio-political fabric of this decade. As I will demonstrate, this political backdrop played into the public hysteria of heavy metal and other heavy musics.

Since its inception, heavy metal has intentionally courted controversy. An article by Lynn Van Matre that ran in 1985, although printed in earlier papers as well, describes their attitudes as "they want to be just outrageous enough to outrage civic groups, get themselves banned once in a while and keep their name in the press."[154] Flaunting the "rock star lifestyle," complete with drugs, sex, and rock and roll, became an expected part of bands' public personas and play with Satanic imagery was especially popular.

Heavy metal also soon became a site of these larger political anxieties through their use of controversy, as some bands began to focus on imagery that flirted with political controversy as well. In the 1980s in particular, some bands began to play with imagery from World War II, including Nazi symbolism and a fascination with the German Panzer Division. The thrash-metal band Slayer, one of the bands to help pioneer the subgenre, played with Nazi imagery and topics fairly frequently. For example, the S in Slayer's logo

[152] Marsha Ginsburg, "Merchants Tell the Skinheads to Act Civilized," *The San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), April 12, 1985.

[153] just in case you thought the cops protecting the racists and not the actual people living in an area was a new phenomenon.

[154] Lynn Van Matre, "Metal of Honor: Hardest of Hard Rockers Speak," *The Central New Jersey Home News* (New Brunswick, NJ), January 3, 1985.

clearly resembles the S on the Nazi SS uniforms and the band's official fan club was called the "Slaytanic Wehrmacht," referencing the name of the Nazi armed forces. Slayer also released a song on their 1986 album *Reign in Blood* called "Angel of Death" that uses Nazi doctor Josef Mengele as a subject and makes clear references to the Holocaust. Although lyrics like "sadistic surgeon of demise / sadist of the noblest blood / destroying without mercy / to benefit the Aryan race"[155] do not necessarily glorify or praise Mengele's contributions to war and Holocaust atrocities, an argument can still be made about Slayer's use of and aestheticization of historical traumas to bolster their own evil and dark image being problematic. Motorhead's singer and bassists Ian "Lemmy" Fraser Kilmister was also known to collect memorabilia from WWII Axis countries, which included objects from Nazi Germany. Although Kilmister has claimed it to be part of a historical fascination and nothing more,[156] it does add a political dimension to the personas cultivated by many metal musicians. For many, including Slayer, the use of Nazi imagery or topics have been nothing more than a theatrical ploy and do not denote the bands or their members' actual political beliefs, but it did stoke public anxieties particularly those around the growing concern over far-right politics.

[155] "Angel of Death: Slayer," Encyclopaedia Metallum, accessed May 16, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Slayer/Reign_in_Blood/212.

[156] Sean Michaels, "Motörhead's Lemmy in Nazi photoshoot scandal," *The Guardian*, July 11, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/jul/11/news.culture. As far as I know, he has never had actual ties to white supremacist groups or purported their ideologies, but it's super weird and we should all be pretty uncomfortable with this.

Although several publications from the 1980s, such as those discussed earlier in this chapter, play into the larger social panic around heavy metal emphasize the use of the occult and Satanism, readers can catch glimpses of political anxieties as well. For example, in Tipper Gore's 1986 book *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated World* she includes a cartoon meant to condone musicians who use excuses of theatricality to perpetuate what she feels is potentially detrimental to young listeners. In the cartoon, the band claims its name as "Fascist Lust" and then denying any kind of "sex and violence charge."[157] Gore's inclusion of this comic is clearly meant to be facetious: why would a band convey or flirt with certain topics and then be confused when people take them seriously? The addition of the term "fascist," though, in the band name clearly denotes a more political element, even though it does not make up the majority of Gore's book or her explicit concern around rock music and its lyrics.

Others, however, made concerns over music's political influence more emphatically clear. Godwin, for example, compares heavy metal and punk and their surrounding cultures to both communism and fascism, claiming that the music and their interest in chaos and disorder are inherently "un-American." Some of Godwin's concerns do revolve around a fear of more liberal or leftist politics, further corroborating Hughes's assertion that the Satanic Panic occurred as part of a reaction against the liberalization of politics. Godwin, in a suitably alarmist tone, claims that "we may even now be poised on a seething cesspool of Punk/Metal revolutionary hatred that could make the Sixties anti-war protests look like a kid's birthday party…Surely no one alive today can fail to remember the role Rock played

[157] Gore, 31.

in the vicious Vietnam youth peace protests of the Sixties."[158] However, later in the same chapter on politics, Godwin claims that fighting against the influence of rock/punk/metal is

> a simple case of survival of the things generations of Americans have broken their backs and lost their lives for: decency, freedom to enjoy culture and things of lasting beauty, love of God and one's country. What the Nazis did in Germany the street punks could do in America and England, if they're allowed to get stronger and stronger, even more violence and destruction.[159]

Godwin's use of politics associated with both the left (the Vietnam protests) and the right (Nazism) indicate a broader picture of political anxieties during this time and the idea that rock music, particularly punk and metal, were somehow responsible for both. Godwin therefore seems to imply that anything outside of the status quo, or "things of lasting beauty" (whatever that means), becomes potentially dangerous and violent.

The conflation of heavy musics and the conflation of more radical politics, even ones diametrically opposed to one another, indicates a further social concern around deviancy and the public's either inability or unwillingness to parse these apart. In describing far-right political groups in the UK, particularly the National Front, Nigel Felding uses the term "deviant." For Felding, political deviancy refers to those whose "perception of social reality not only differs rather abruptly from that of the majority but also does so in an unusually coherent manner."[160] Although the meaning of this abrupt difference can be thought about in a multitude of different ways by different sociologists, the National Front and other groups associated with the far-right clearly fall into this category as their politics tend to turn more

[158] Godwin, 261.
[159] Ibid., 270.
[160] Fielding, 2.

abruptly away from the majority, as described earlier.[161] In defining deviance on a broader scale, Stuart Henry discusses multiple possible interpretations. One possible way of categorizing deviance is to consider statistical deviance, in which behavior that differs from social norms in a more extreme way becomes socially defined as "deviant."[162] Another would be to consider behavior that deviates from public laws and moral codes, in which deviance is defined through its ability to produce discomfort, or even outrage, from the public.[163] Of course, what these types of potential definitions mean is that what is considered deviant behavior can change within a society and the socially constructed nature of deviance can be heavily dependent on who and what groups are considering the behavior in question.[164]

When considering heavy metal, the genre can be understood as deviant in many ways, particularly through its departure from the increasingly conservative politics of the Reagan era in the 1980s and the emphasis on Christian morals as seen in the reaction to the Satanic Panic. For example, heavy metal's emphasis on devil and occult imagery is often categorized as deviant by those who oppose it. For many Christian authors during this time, the use of devil and occultist imagery remains a major concern, as those like Bob Larson claim that in musical lyrics "your generation indulged sex and alcohol, but some of today's entertainment heroes have added other vices - satanism and the occult."[165] Nearly all of the

[161] Unfortunately, whether or not far-right politics still count as a minority may not be as clear nearly 30 years after Felding's book was published, but I also refuse acknowledge this kind of ideology as normal.

[162] Stuart Henry, and Lindsay M. Howard, *Social Deviance*, Second edition (Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, 2019), 9.

[163] Ibid., 10.

[164] Ibid., 13.

[165] Larson, 50.

books mentioned in this chapter that explore the reactions to heavy metal have a chapter that specifically details the use of Satanism in music and Tipper Gore's proposed rating system included an "O" rating that would tell parents if the record contained occult themes and the PMRC's "filthy fifteen" included two metal songs because of their occultist references. Specifically, Mercyful Fate's "Into the Coven" and Venom's "Possessed" drew the group's ire due to the songs' lyrical contents. For example, "Into the Coven" includes lyrics such as "Come, come into my coven / And become Lucifer's child / Suck the blood from this unholy knife / Say after me: my soul belongs to Satan" and "Possessed" includes the lyrics "Look at me Satan's child / Born of evil thus defiled / Brought to life through Satanic birth / Raised in Hell to live on earth." Both songs include explicit references to the Christian devil and arguably glorify this figure. "Into the Coven" especially emphasizes this point as the lyrics invite its listeners to connect with this figure, especially in requesting that the listener say "my soul belongs to Satan." For these bands, this sort of Satanic evocation is meant to be fun play with taboo topics, but for those mentioned above, such evocations present a serious concern for the spiritual welfare of the youth who listen to this music and a form of spiritual deviance outside of Christian morality and values.

In the context of American society during this time, a fascination with satanism, the occult, and similar interests also clearly defy the national emphasis on Christianity through the country. Although the Christian God has been evoked in public and political spheres well before the 1980s, it was Reagan's presidency, beginning in 1981, that emphasized the role of Christianity in high-level American politics. For example, Kevin Coe and Sarah Chenoweth have noted that during his presidency, Reagan emphasized religion in presidential speeches moreso than his predecessors, including an increase in invocations of

God and mentions of prayer.[166] Coe and Chenoweth have also noted that evocations of the Christian God increased 100% and there were 200% more presidential visits to religious sites following Reagan's presidency, including by George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Additionally, post-Reagan presidencies have shown an increase in mentions in prayer during presidential speeches and a greater emphasis on ideas of "religious nationalism."[167] Coe and Chenoweth also argue that presidential speaking help create political and religious discourses in American politics, implying that Reagan's presidency helped to create these emphases and that they can be seen as a broader national interest in Christianity. As such, while many of the books decrying rock's emphasis on occultist may be understood in some ways as a religious hyper-anxiety, they do reflect shifting attitudes in religion at a national level. Against this backdrop, metal's play with Satanic and occultist imagery clearly go against social norms, creating a sense of deviancy away from the increasingly religious-centered national fabric of the 1980s.

The increase in religious politics further connotes that a deviancy against the predominant religious frameworks, in this case Christianity, also implies a sense of political deviance as well. If presidents have begun to increasingly emphasize a sense of religious nationalism, deviancy against the religious aspect of the nation's identity is also a deviancy against the nation and its politics. As such, the deviancy between the rejection of Christian values and symbolism becomes conflated with a seeming deviance against American

[166] Kevin Coe and Sarah Chenoweth, "Presidents as Priests: Toward a Typology of Christian Discourse in the American Presidency," *Communication theory* 23, no. 4 (2013): 375–394, 377.

[167] Kevin Coe and Sarah Chenoweth, "The Evolution of Christian America: Christianity in Presidential Discourse, 1981-2013," *International journal of communication (Online)* (2015): 753–773, 755-756.

"democratic" politics. Godwin's proclamations that metal and punk are connected to both communism and fascism, which were seen as threats against the US, may therefore not be as much of a paradox as it originally appears. It also demonstrates that the American public was willing to conflate multiple types of deviance without parsing apart what social and cultural values from which these bands were actually deviating. As a result, this conflation plays into further creation of the hyperreal around metal music, in which meaning is added onto the music that was not intended by the public's socio-political anxieties, creating meaning that was never necessarily intended. Instead, theatricality and literalness become the same thing for many in the general American public.

Heavy metal's deviancy, however, does not only apply to the lyrics, imagery, and band members' stage personas. Zachary Wallmark has noted that for the discourse around metal lead by those like Tipper Gore and the PMRC "critiques of the brutal soundscape were largely absent in the first phase of the public debate" during the 1980s.[168] However, the genre's musical aesthetics, while perhaps not fore fronted in the 80s discourse, still likely played a role in the panic around it. In describing metal aesthetics and the genre's emphasis on noisy timbres, a discussion that will be picked up and expanded in chapter three of this dissertation, Wallmark claims that:

> Metal musicians' embrace of extreme volume, speed, and these particular timbral qualities thus demonstrates a dynamic manipulation of listeners' ingrained perceptual mechanisms. The symbolic order of these sounds is buttressed by listeners' innate arousal: we are tricked into hearing the high-tension timbres of the guitar and the voice as instantiations of actual physical danger, when in fact they are carefully controlled and regulated…Brutal sounds simulate high-arousal states by forcing the listener to, on some

[168] Zachary Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise: Timbre and Musical Meaning at the Edge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 156. Wallmark's chapter also considers the continued fear and backlash around metal during the 1990s, making the controversy in the 1980s the "first phase of the public debate" around the genre.

> level, mimetically engage through subvocalization and other forms of embodied enaction.[169]

For Wallmark, the brutality of metal, and particularly extreme metal, are in part why some listeners find themselves so averse to the music, often describing the music as painful in some way.[170] This description, though, also indicates the largely embodied understanding listeners have of metal and that part of the strong reactions come from a dislike of the way that the music feels when listening to it. In this sense, metal also becomes a form of sonic and embodied deviance, a step away from popular music norms. While for the genre's fans, these feelings are part of the fun of heavy metal (because like Ozzy said in the Rivera special, the genre is actually about having fun), the highly embodied nature of metal listening also drove part of the panic around it.

Concern around the effects of such embodied listening is highlighted through several examples from this time. Authors like Godwin, have described rock's influence as "hypnotic," claiming that the "words, choruses, and certain instrumental parts of the songs are repeated over and over to the point of saturation…Rock's young addicts are actually being hypnotized and brainwashed by the music they adore so much!"[171] Larson describes metal in a similar way, claiming that "rock will be shown to capitalize on a hard, driving beat, the same of which is used in most forms of white or black magic ceremonies. It is used to addict and hypnotize."[172] Like Godwin's proclamations, Larson uses similar language of "hypnotism," asserting that rock music somehow overcomes the listener's ability to think

[169] Ibid., 155.
[170] Ibid., 55.
[171] Godwin, 9.
[172] Larson, 21.

critically about what they are hearing. Similarly, the Geraldo Rivera special on the supposed "Satanic Underground" takes an uncritical look at the discussion around metal, as Pete Roland's mother claims that she should have been more careful about what her son was listening to. Such an assertion implies that the music was able to override her son's agency and autonomy, making the music not only spiritually dangerous—as Larson and Godwin have proposed—but also physically and tangibly violent. Sources such as these demonstrate a public discourse around metal music as something that can make its listeners do things they would not otherwise do. This type of discourse around metal proved to be a lasting one. Wallmark notes that the music of Judas Priest was described something that led its listeners to be "mesmerized" during a 1990 trial in which the band was sued due to concerns that the band had brainwashed listeners into attempting suicide.[173]

Although Larson and Godwin are more concerned about the explicitly anti-Christian messages, and arguably the implicit political messages around it, these descriptions of the music reveal a connection between how metal was considered and how the overtly political racist skinhead punk music was, and is, often discussed. Fans of bands like Skrewdriver also describe the music as "magical," a quality associated with what Nancy Love has referred to as "Ian Stuart's pounding guitar chords, frequent strong modulation, and thundering drum beats."[174] Other white power groups have similarly been described as "catchy" and George Burdi of RaHoWa—a white nationalist hard rock band from Canada that stands for Racial Holy War—has claimed to use repetition in his music to "infect" his listeners with the types of racist ideologies his band propagates.[175] While punk and heavy metal are distinct genres

[173] Wallmark, 157.
[174] Love, 55.
[175] Ibid., 54.

with their own ideas about music and meaning, they do share many musical characteristics, including an emphasis on distorted guitar, extended vocal techniques (yelling, screaming, growling, etc.), and, often, fast and heavy hitting rhythmic sections. These types of musical characteristics, in addition to being considered a type of musical deviance, also connect the genres and become a major point of interest for many of their listeners.

But for those outside the scene, these types of musical characteristics are often considered by those outside the scene to be "noise" or something outside of musical expectations. In this way, genres like metal and punk provide not only lyrical and social deviance, but musical deviance as well, particularly as evidenced by the concern the public showed towards its influence on youth. For fans, by contrast, the distorted guitar in particular is the appealing part of the genre. Robert Walser has argued that the guitar in metal acts as a form of power for its listeners as the use of distortion allows musicians to control the otherwise uncontrollable aspect of electronic feedback that creates it.[176] Like the play with satanism and occultism, for the vast majority of listeners, this type of listening experience—one that perhaps results in feelings of power—is part of the genre's fun and appeal. However, authors of the more alarmist literature have discussed, these types of musical characteristics as those that create a "hypnotic" feeling that supposedly pulls the youth into Satanism and, according to some during this time period, lulls its young listeners into acts of extreme violence including murder and suicide. I suggest that the same experiences of power and embodiment that these types of musical characteristics can cause have already been linked to politics through their use in skinhead punk and Oi! Music.

[176] Walser, 42.

Skrewdiver is a case in point: the lead musician is overtly political and channels these same feelings and musical expressions into political ideologies. [177]

Given the growing concerns during this time about both far left and far right politics, as well as the increasing visibility of skinhead punk music, the public during this time may have conflated not only metal's theatricality with literalness but also the political meaning of punk's similar musical aesthetics. As such, the public's alarmist response to these genres may be undergirded by the ways in which the music had already been used politically. While I do not imply that the concern over the occult was not genuine for those that believed in it, I do suggest that a concern over musical deviance also belies a set of political anxieties that may or may not have been consciously understood as part of the growing concern over metal music during the 1980s.

The problem with the public's perception of heavy metal, then, can be understood as stemming from two important issues. The first is that some audiences, but particularly those outside the scene "looking in," conflated theatricality with literalness. The genre's play with satanic/occultist or even fascist imagery was, in many of the cases discussed throughout this chapter, taken as genuine advocation for satanic activity or certain political ideologies. Within the context of the Satanic Panic, many considered this supposed advocation as being responsible for horribly violent crimes including murder despite musicians' insistence that these themes were simply meant to be fun for their listeners. As Sara Hughes has suggested, this imagery becomes part of Baudrillard's framework of the hyperreal, in which a reproduction of the real becomes more real than reality itself. In this case, occultist or

[177] chapter three of this dissertation will explore the connection between music, noise, power, and politics more in depth.

political play becomes understood as a genuine advocation, particularly emphasized through the media.

What this section has also shown is that extra meaning is added onto heavy metal music as it becomes a focal point for many for underlying political anxieties, many of which are not immediately apparent or seemingly relevant to the genre. Subsequently, the hyperreal around metal specifically can be understood as a way to control political forces, both on the far left and far right, that the average citizen generally cannot. Understanding the reaction against metal as a reaction against these politics also casts new light on the way in which we understand groups like the PMRC, whose attempts at having governmental intervention in music adds a political tinge to their goals. Of course, the PMRC critiqued more than just heavy metal but anxieties over occultist themes in music was one of the group's major concerns. While the PMRC were attempting to change the music industry on the regulatory level, being able to monitor children's musical choices more closely at home also provided the everyday family with a feeling of control over social and political anxieties during this decade. They may not be able to stop the increase in neo-Nazi activity, but they can control the kind of music their children are allowed to listen to. For some, that may have felt like the same thing.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the concern around heavy metal may not be as related to the actual music as it was presented and discussed during the 1980s, but rather that heavy metal had become a touchstone that perfectly captured a complicated network of social

anxieties into something that was easier for the public to categorize as something "evil." The public panic around metal during the 1980s may have had some more unintended consequences in terms of metal's role as political propaganda. During this decade, the anxieties around politics—particularly the far-right politics—crystalized around bands that did not actually promote these political viewpoints themselves. By the 1990s, however, heavy music was beginning to be used as a right-wing political propaganda tool by some bands who *did* hold such politically extremist views. The next several chapters of this dissertation will explore the musical and socio-cultural aspects of the genre that have created metal's appeal to those on the far-right, but I also suggest that the public panic around metal during the 1980s may have had some more unintended consequences in terms of metal's role as political propaganda. Although heavy music had already been linked socially to far-right politics through the emphasis on skinhead music and bands like Skrewdriver, the 1990s saw a further increase in neo-fascist political activities in the heavy music scene. The Southern Poverty Law Center describes how "in the early 1990s, hate music grew from a cottage industry into a multi-million dollar, worldwide industry that was a primary conduit of money and young recruits to the radical right."[178] By the late 1990s, the notoriously racist record label Resistance Records had formed with help from the National Alliance, a neo-Nazi group who, at one point, had been powerful within the radical right scene, although both the group and the record label eventually folded.[179]

The rise in radical right heavy music then begs the question of why this particular genre grew to be so popular for those in this political sphere. The panic around metal in the

[178] "Hate Music," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/hate-music.
[179] Ibid.

1980s may have laid the foundation for some of the circulation of far-right politics through this genre of music. While in the 1980s, bands affiliated with neo-Nazi or explicitly white supremacist viewpoints remained mostly on the fringe (technically protected by American free speech laws), by 1993, George Hawthorne (born George Burdi) of RaHoWa founded Resistance Records in Detroit, Michigan. Sharon Hochhauser describes Resistance Records as having "become a clearinghouse for all manner of hate metal and has influenced many white supremacist groups in North America."[180] Along with the growing accessibility of the internet in the 1990s, white supremacist heavy music became increasingly easy to get, especially as Resistance Records was able to create a "definitive direct-order music business" that was not subject to the same regulations by the Federal Communications Commission.[181] The label was able to sell over fifty thousand racist records in the first eighteen months of their existence and spawned a newsletter named *Resistance Magazine* that was circulated to over nineteen thousand people.[182] As the decade progressed, white power music continued to circulate with increasingly higher numbers. More labels like Resistance Records were created and they began to sponsor events, including white power music festivals in the United States and eventually in Europe. Hochhauser points to the number of white power concerts in Sweden in particular as there was only one in 1992 and twenty in 1995.[183]

[180] Sharon Hochhauser, "The Marketing of Ango-Identity in the North American Hatecore Metal Industry," in *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green (Durham, NC, 2011), 161-179, 169.
[181] Ibid., 169.
[182] Ibid., 169.
[183] Ibid., 170.

In addition to the increased number of routes of circulation for many bands and the creation of more racist record labels, one of the most disturbing tactics of circulating music was by targeting younger children. In 2004, the radical-right Panzerfaust Records launched what was referred to as "Project Schoolyard USA." This "project" sought to bring white power music to younger kids. From a now defunct part of Panzerfaust's website, they describe the project as

> an expression of the increasing level of international solidarity and cooperation between White nationalists, Project Schoolyard has crossed the Atlantic and is being continued here in the US. *Panzerfaust Records is pressing 100,000 copies of a pro-White sampler CD to be handed out to White youth from coast to coast in every state, including Hawaii*. Volunteers from every pro-White group and organization in the US have signed up to assist us in this project, as well as numerous unaffiliated individuals, consisting mostly of our customers/supporters who are high school students themselves. These CDs will be handed out in middle schools, high schools, university campuses, shopping malls, sporting events, mainstream concerts, parties, etc…[184]

Panzerfaust describes the project further claiming "We don't just entertain racist kids: we create them."[185] While the content of the project's scope is certainly disconcerting, their description of *creating* racist kids actually mirrors much of the discourse around metal in the 1980s. Specifically, the idea that music "creates" certain subjectivities, rather than acting as an expression of them, reads eerily similarly to the idea that listening to rock, punk, or metal music would turn children into, or "create," actual violent social deviants. Susan Baker from the PMRC, as was discussed in the beginning context of this chapter, argued that heavy music caused people, and especially teenagers, to commit violent crimes. Murderer Pete

[184] Panzerfaust Records, quoted in Richard C. King and David J. Leonard, *Beyond Hate : White Power and Popular Culture* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 46.
[185] Ibid., 46.

Roland and his mother made similar accusations about heavy metal and how the genre put violent ideas in his head in addition to the various descriptions of hard music as "hypnotic." In assertions such as these, it is not that the children may have already had prior predilections and propensities towards these crimes, but rather that the music fundamentally changes their subjectivities to the point of committing crimes they otherwise would not have. Panzerfaust's description of the project makes a similar claim: white power music can fundamentally change the subjectivities of its listeners to become racists when they, implicitly, were not before.

This discussion, of course, is not meant to place blame on people like Susan Baker, Tipper Gore, or any number of authors writing on the supposed ills of rock music for the existence of white power music. Such an assertion would be an oversimplified version of what are inevitably complicated social processes. However, groups like the PMRC and television programs like Geraldo Rivera's special on the "Satanic Underground" did help to create a social and cultural discourse around heavy music that eventually lent itself to appropriation by white power groups like Panzerfaust almost 20 years later. So, perhaps we should not consider Panzerfaust's tactics surprising. After spending the 1980s embroiled in a very public debate centered on heavy music's ability to create and change a person's subjectivity, the idea that music could be used to change people for ideological reasons does not seem entirely unexpected or shocking. Instead, we can consider whether Panzerfaust thought targeting kids through heavy music would work because we spent the better part of a decade telling them it would.

Gods and Devils: The cultural overlaps between black metal and far-right political ideologies

As an avid listener of thrash metal and hardcore punk throughout middle and high school, my introduction and subsequent love of black metal in college followed a fairly common trajectory: start with something softer and progressively work your way into heavier genres. My introduction was also typical in the bands that I first listened to: Darkthrone, Mayhem, and Burzum. These Norwegian bands began the second wave of black metal in the late 1980s and have arguably had the most impact of the genre's modern iteration. They are also probably better known for the highly sensationalized and highly violent actions of the "Black Circle," a small group of musicians who ended up committing crimes such as arson, murder, and even alleged cannibalism.[1] Despite this reputation, I consumed their music rabidly, intrigued by their intentional use of poor recording equipment, heavily distorted guitars, and shrieked vocals to blur every sound in the recording studio together.

With enough Google searches for the lyrics—an extremely common practice given the unintelligibility of the words—I eventually got to know more about the bands themselves. I found interviews, watched a couple of documentaries, and eventually came across the blog of Varg Vikernes. Vikernes is the sole musician of the band Burzum who created albums by playing each of the parts himself and then layering the recordings to

[1] Michael Moynihan and Didrik. Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: the Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Venice, CA: Feral House, 1998). For discussions around the violence committed by members of the black circle, see chapters four and five.

create the different songs. His album *Filosofem* (1996) was by far one of my favorites and was the soundtrack to many late-night study sessions. To see that he had a blog was exciting, but it did not take long to realize that his blog was not, in fact, about music. Instead, it was incredibly political and advocated abhorrent conspiracy theories grounded in virulently racist and anti-Semitic ideologies. It was at this point I started to realize: *black metal has a Nazi problem*.

While this dissertation as a whole seeks to characterize black metal's appeal to national socialist, or other radical right, ideologies as a complicated nexus of historical and musical narratives, this chapter will explore the ways that the history of the black metal scene has lent itself to racist appropriation. Scholars such as historians Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke and Jeffery Kaplan and sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris have already done some painstaking academic work to trace some of the histories of radical right groups, both within the black metal scene and as movements more broadly. However, one aspect that has yet to be explicitly explored and theorized while remaining implicitly ever-present is these groups' relationship to their own whiteness. In this chapter, I argue that the black metal scene has been appealing to national socialist group members through a number of cultural overlaps, and that the main appeal lies in its space for NS members to redefine their whiteness in terms of power and violence.

This redefinition of whiteness, which I will refer to as Aryaness distinguishes itself from more recent scholarly discussions of whiteness. While scholarship on whiteness has tended to focus on the extent to which whiteness is often treated as an unmarked category, invisible by virtue of its hegemonic cultural position, presumed to be universal. By contrast, Aryaness marks whiteness as difference and one assumed to be culturally and biologically

superior. The history of black metal specifically, including its engagement with both serious and nonserious racist play, emphasis on transgression, as well as its now highly sensationalized history of violence, has made it an ideal space for this redefinition to occur. Through these overlaps and space for redefinition, national socialist black metal (NSBM) bands have placed themselves within a historical lineage of national socialist politics and the black metal genre simultaneously.

More broadly, black metal and national socialism have provided an alternative to everyday society that have been appealing to some, especially for younger audiences. For example, Vikernes (born 1973), the creator of the band Burzum, has expressed dismay with society multiple times both in his youth and later in his life. His tweet, seen in ***figure 1***, clearly denotes his dissatisfaction, claiming that society has been in decline since the 70s.[2] Although his tweet does not expand on why the 70s were ideal, he notes in interviews that he felt his childhood was less commercialized, less urbanized, and more

figure 1: Tweet from Varg Vikernes's now suspended Twitter account

[2] Varg Vikernes (@gandalfthewhi19), "Yes, the zenith of this civilization was reached in the 70ies…," Twitter, accessed December 30,2020, twitter.com/GandalftheWhi19/status/1319313775862992896.

homogeneous.[3] In his defense of grave desecration, he has explicitly stated that "I have no respect for the people who built this society" because they "built this society, *which we are against*."[4] Statements such as these reveal a tension between old and new. He desires a return to an idealized past while simultaneously disrespecting that past through grave desecration. The Polish band Graveland has similarly expressed dissatisfaction with how they perceived Polish society, particularly its emphasis on Christian religions. In a 1994 interview with *The Oath* zine, Robert "Rob Darken" Fudali expresses frustration with Polish society's emphasis on the Catholic church and claims that Poland's emphasis on democratic politics will "once again [lead] this country to devastation" just as communism had done in the past (which he refers to as a "real shit").[5] And still others, such as the Greek band Der Stürmer, have described an ideal society as being "the opposite with [sic] the modern society where ignorance and stupidity reigns."[6] This type of social dissatisfaction is not uncommon in black metal bands, especially given extreme metal's association with sonic and social transgression.[7] For each of these bands, their music has also become associated with their far-right politics, which bear striking resemblances to national socialist doctrines, even if they themselves have rejected the label "Nazi."

Throughout this chapter, I will focus on Burzum, Graveland, and Der Stürmer as case studies for the overlaps between black metal and extreme right politics. Burzum and

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[3] Aaron, Aites and Audrey Ewell, *Until the Light Takes Us* (San Francisco, California, USA: Factory 25, 2019), DVD, 22:15.

[4] Moynihan and Søderlind, 155

[5] Alan Averill, "Graveland," *The Oath #2*, 1994,16-17.

[6] Interview with Der Stürmer, accessed September 1, 2020, http://www.thepaganfront.com/dersturmer/interviews/PSICOTERROR2007.html.

[7] Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 10-11, 29.

Graveland are particularly well-known in the black metal community, especially because Burzum helped develop black metal's unique sound in the 1980s, and Der Stürmer has amassed a following specifically from far-right listeners. All three of these bands have been placed within both black metal and national socialist historical lineages through their emphasis on occultism—including Satanism and Paganism—as well as their emphasis on racial identification through violence. As a result, Burzum, Graveland, and Der Stürmer combine political and generic histories to lend credence to their ideologies and espouse them to their listeners. While it should be obvious that not all black metal bands engage in these types of political ideologies—just as not everyone with social dissatisfaction becomes a Nazi —this chapter seeks to explore why black metal in particular has become notorious for fringe right-wing political beliefs.

Black Metal History

Many parts of black metal's unique history have become highly sensationalized through various forms of media, and thus a discussion of the historical and cultural events that characterized the genre can help us understand this phenomenon by drawing comparisons with other scenes. Heavy metal's origins are intertwined with the British working class with bands like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, and Judas Priest. By 1980, British heavy metal bands had already boasted an impressive recording output and had become an integral part of Britain's popular music landscape. Bands began to tour more extensively, especially in countries abroad and heavy music publications like *Kerrang!* were circulated internationally and bands from various countries began to experiment with similar

sounds.[8] The aesthetics developed by these bands have often been associated with a white, working-class, and male audience, particularly in the United States and Europe. However, this categorization does not always reflect the increasingly global nature of metal and extreme metal. Kahn-Harris has noted that extreme metal subgenres have developed communities-referred to as "scenes"-in a variety of global spaces, making the exact demographics of the genre more varied than one might initially assume.[9] As metal began to expand in terms of listeners, more experimentation with musical aesthetics also increased.

The so-called "first wave" of black metal began in the early 1980s with the band Venom. Like their heavy metal predecessors, Venom favored heavier and distorted guitars and loud in-your-face stage presences. However, Venom quickly took metal's musical aggression to a higher level, combining metal's heaviness with punk's raw sound.[10] In addition to combining two music genres, Venom also began to take their lyrical content in a new direction. They began to focus on themes related to Satanism. As Didrik Søderlind and Michael Moynihan so colorfully explain, "their elaborate endorsement of Satanism [was] to a degree which would have caused wet dreams for medieval inquisitors."[11] These themes were further cemented through text featured on their album covers, which read statements like "We drink the vomit of the priest / Make love with the dying whore / we suck the blood of the beast / and hold the key to death's door."[12] Album names often evoked evil or dark imagery, with the albums *Welcome to Hell* (1981), *Black Metal* (1982), and *At War with*

[8] Ian Christie, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers,2004), 43-44.

[9] Kahn-Harris, 11

[10] Moynihan, 10-11. Abaddon has claimed in interviews that situate Venom's music as being "born on the back of the Punk explosion in England."

[11] Ibid., 12

[12] Ibid., 12

Satan (1983).[13] Lyrically they emphasized similar themes, as seen in the following lyrics to their song "Black Metal:" "come ride the night with us, rock hard and fight / united legions we stand / freak hard and wild for us, give up your souls / live for the quest Satan's band."[14] Venom viewed these themes simply as a form of blasphemous play, even though the topics may have seemed serious. Moynihan cites a 1985 interview with the metal magazine *Kerrang!* in which Cronos, the band's frontman, claims "I don't preach Satanism, occultism, witchcraft, or anything. Rock and Roll is basically entertainment and that's as far as it goes."[15]

As the sounds were evolving, so too were routes of musical circulation. Tape trading became a staple for metal community, and those who made tapes would often add other songs from bands they liked which would expose listeners to more music from different parts of the world.[16] Tape trading's underground nature also allowed for the fomentation of heavier music. Ian Christie claims that the development of death metal was a product of tape-trading culture. He says "cultured on grotty little demo tapes decorated with skeletons, blood, and guts, early death dealers sent listeners hunting for maps" through the international nature of these tape networks.[17] The post office, Christie, explains, became a "site for sacred rituals."[18] Black metal's circulation followed these same traditions. Reyes describes that these tape trading networks "made it possible for several decades of music to

[13] Ibid., 12
[14] "Black Metal: Venom," Encyclopaedia Metallum, accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Venom/Black_Metal/861.
[15] Moynihan, 13-14.
[16] Christie, 49.
[17] Ibid., 241.
[18] Ibid., 241.

be shared across continents, facilitating a global conversation about the best direction for metal's future with regards to its present and past."[19]

These networks fostered more global participation in metal and black metal and allowed more music from more countries to be circulated alongside big-name bands that had already left their musical mark. Reyes argues that these networks also acted as an archive for metal recordings and allowed more exposure to more listeners.[20] The raw and aggressive sound from bands like Venom and the use of taboo subjects caught on and other bands in the early 80s began to follow suit. Bands from Scandinavia would pick up on these extreme genres with gusto, and bands like Merciful Fate from Denmark and Bathory from Sweden would become prominent within the genre. The latter band would also eventually move away from Satanism to explorations of Nordic mythology and heathenry, exploring more local mythologies as part of an increasingly global aesthetic.

Despite the initial insistence the Satanic themes and imagery was merely in good fun, especially for bands like Venom and Merciful Fate, black metal's obsession with the occult and transgression quickly took on more sinister iterations in the mid-1980s. This period saw the beginnings of what is often referred to as the second wave of black metal in Norway, a scene often recognized for its brutality in terms of both music and real-life violence. The band Mayhem (originally called "The One True Mayhem" to differentiate themselves from an American band with the same name) was formed in 1984 by the guitarist Oystein Aarseth (stage name: Euronymous) when he was sixteen years old.[21] Mayhem took inspiration from death metal bands such as Napalm Death, but also sought to

[19] Reyes, 252.
[20] Ibid., 252.
[21] Christie, 270.

reject what they viewed as the degradation of death metal. For many in the scene, death metal had become what Ian Reyes describes as "too baroque, as evidenced by overproduced recordings of music that was unduly complex."[22] Bands were also continuing to seek heavier aesthetics, something they felt had been exhausted by the current metal trends and sought a paradigmatic shift as an alternative to backing down into less heavy music.[23] One solution to these problems was to refer back to bands from the earlier 80s. especially those like Venom and Bathory.[24] Venom's legacy in particular became especially influential and Mayhem took their generic moniker from Venom's 1982 album *Black Metal*.[25]

Mayhem released their first EP, titled *Pure Fucking Armageddon,* in 1985, which combined fast and raw guitar riffs with shrieked vocals and a particular penchant for all things dark and Satanic. These types of themes and musical styles caught on and several other prolific black metal bands formed in Norway over the next few years. Norwegian bands Darkthrone formed in 1986 and Immortal, Emperor, and Burzum all formed in 1991. This wave of black metal brought about not only a new musical style, but a visual style as well. Ian Christie has described the visual aesthetics as "creating a bizarre and altered atmosphere" and that they "returned theatrical flair to heavy metal with a vengeance."[26] This theatricality included taking on different, often sinister, stage names, painting their faces

[22] Ian Reyes, "Blacker Than Death: Recollecting the "Black Turn" in Metal Aesthetics," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 2 (2013), 240-257, 242.

[23] Ibid., 242. Somewhat ironically, Reyes also points to the idea that death metal had become too political, especially concerning the United States and they wanted to go back into more universally "metal" topics such as the occult. This rejection, obviously, would not last long.

[24] Another solution, less germane to the topic of this chapter, was to introduce further distortion into the recording practices, as Reyes continues to describe throughout his article.

[25] Christie, 270-1.

[26] Ibid., 272.

with “corpse paint” (sinister looking black and white face paint), and “[posing] for group portraits waving torches, mean-looking daggers, axes, and spiked clubs.”[27] Album covers also often featured nature-centric imagery, including the dark Scandinavian forests and emphasized an aura of introversion and exclusive elitism.[28] As these bands developed their generic style musically and visually, they also set themselves apart from their earlier predecessors in their seriousness about the topics that included tangible, real-world acts of violence.

The early 1990s saw an influx in creative output from black metal bands, including the significant Darkthrone album *Transylvanian Hunger* in 1994, as well as the continued growth in the number of bands producing more black metal style music. However, the early 90s also saw the beginnings of what would become black metal’s infamous history of extreme violence, beginning with Mayhem’s vocalist Per “Dead” Ohlin’s suicide in April of 1991 when Ohlin shot himself in the home he shared with several of his bandmates. Upon discovering his body, Aarseth took pictures of his friend’s corpse and allegedly made necklaces for other Black Circle members out of part of his skull before ingesting pieces of the brain.[29]

Violence and other taboo behavior in the scene only progressed from there. On June 6th, 1992, Norway’s historical Fantoft Church, erected in the twelfth century, burned to the ground. On August 1st, 1992 the Revheim Church also burned and later that month the Holmenkollen Church was torched. Two more churches near Oslo were burned in

[27] Ibid., 272.
[28] Ibid., 272-3.
[29] It is unclear if the necklaces or the *brain eating thing* actually happened. Many believe that it was simply posturing to make them seem more “evil” but that they never actually did this. The photos, however, are very real.

September of that same year, another in October, and a few months later, the Asane Church in Bergen was also consumed by flames.[30] These arsons were later connected to the Black Circle, a group of black metal musicians in Norway that included members of Mayhem, Emperor, and Burzum. Kristian "Varg" Vikernes, Aarseth, and Bård "Faust" Eithun were suspected and/or charged with many of these crimes. These acts of arson committed at historical Norwegian churches also underscored the growing anti-Christian sentiment held by many young black metal musicians. In interviews for the 2009 documentary *Until the Light Takes Us,* Vikernes has claimed that his hatred stems from what he views as Christian cultural imperialism, which started when Christians came into Scandinavia and overtook the Nordic pagan traditions. This included the practice of building Christian churches on sacred pagan ground.[31] The theme of burning churches quickly became a black metal staple, and Burzum's 1993 album was titled *Aske,* which translates in English to "ashes."[32]

Unfortunately, the rise in church arsons were not the only, or even the most violent, crimes committed by those in the black circle. Suspicion for these crimes was cast upon this group of early twenty-somethings after they were connected to far more violent acts. Eithun, a participant in many of the church burnings, eventually escalated his violent behavior culminating in the murder of Magne Andreassen on August 21, 1992. Andreassen, a gay man living in Oslo, met Eithun and invited him to a nearby park for implied sexual contact,

[30] Moynihan, 78-80.

[31] Aites, *Until the Light Takes Us*, 39:40. The section leading up to his discussion of church burnings, Vikernes also talks about Christianity being a Jewish religion and that they gave Jewish names to the gentiles to cleanse them of their pagan souls. Such remarks give an indication of his politics around race.

[32] "Aske: Burzum," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Burzum/Aske/377.

where he subsequently stabbed Andreassen to death.[33] Because Eithun was unknown to Andreassen before this crime, Eithun resisted suspicion for a little over a year. Eithun claims that the connections only began to be made once Vikernes began bragging about the Black Circle's crimes to the press, including the implication that one of them had committed a murder.[34] Although the attack was not necessarily premediated as an attack on the queer community, Andreassen's murder ultimately meant that physical and structural violence could sometimes become synonymous in the scene. This conflation would eventually be discussed more explicitly by scene members who gravitated towards far-right politics, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

The Black Circle's reign of terror quickly came unraveled with the discovery of Mayhem guitarist Øystein Aarseth's body after he was murdered on August 10, 1993. The ensuing investigation revealed that Vikernes was responsible for Aarseth's death, a crime for which he was sentenced to twenty-one years in a Norwegian prison. However, this investigation also revealed the connections to the other crimes the black circle had committed. A sixteen-year-old Swedish girl named Ilsa told police that Eithun had privately confessed to the Andreassen murder, and Eithun eventually confessed to the police. Vikernes was also eventually arrested, and his description of the events belie an unrepentant attitude for his crimes, claiming that the police "went on to the next guy, and to the next guy, until everything was revealed. It's typical, these unimportant people could be important this

[33] Moynihan, 108.

[34] This whole thing gets really weird. Varg claimed that he was messing with the press by falsely confessing to and talking about these crimes, but that they took him seriously and arrested him (probably because he was confessing to crimes and also because he did, in fact, commit those crimes).

way, by ratting each other off. So they did."[35] Once Vikernes was charged with Aarseth's murder, the rest of the black circle's crimes quickly became apparent and many of them, including Vikernes, Bard, and others were arrested and sentenced to prison time.

These crimes, already highly sensational in nature, were further sensationalized in media coverage. After Vikernes's arrest, the story of the black circle's actions and of Vikernes in particular was picked up by many major news outlets, including global news broadcasts and the metal and punk music magazine *Kerrang!*. *Kerrang!* is a very well-known and widely circulated magazine that was founded in 1981 and emphasizes topics around heavy music. Their website claims that they were the "biggest-selling weekly rock magazine" and that their now global magazine reaches an astounding 45 million people per month.[36] In 1994, the publication ran an article that documented the scene and its crimes in Norway and the apparent copycat arsons that had occurred in Britain. The same year, the BBC Southeast news report also detailed some of the crimes committed in the UK and the connection to "Satanic" black metal.[37] The global media attention surrounding Vikernes, transformed him into what Ian Christie refers to as "Norway's black metal bogeyman," and he enjoyed the media spotlight even while still in prison.[38] The media attention also led to an emphatic reaction by big-name metal bands. Slayer vocalist Tom Araya referred to the Norwegian black metal musicians as "creepy white folk freezing their brains, thinking real slow" and Morbid Angel guitarist Trey Azagthoth clarified his stance on Christianity saying

[35] Interview with Vikernes in Moynihan, 128.
[36] "About Us," accessed July 6, 2022, https://www.kerrang.com/info/about-us.
[37] Simon Young, "Remembering When an Unknown Metal Band Sent Britain into a Satanic Panic," *Kerrang!*, March 16, 2021, https://www.kerrang.com/satanic-terrorism-grips-britain.
[38] Christie, 278.

"I don't believe in attacking Christians and burning churches. It was never about attacking Christians physically, it was about attacking their chains and illusions, their beliefs."[39]

Despite these disavowals, the violence associated with black metal continued to spread globally.[40] Christie notes that "headbangers in Germany, Sweden, Japan, and Poland boasted of church arson and graveyard desecration" denoting that black metal as an artistic export could also come with the same violence.[41] Adam "Nergal" Darski, of the Polish band Behemoth, has noted the reverberations of the Norwegian scene first-hand, saying that the "events in Norway actually echoed quite loudly in Poland…black metal was talked about. People began to notice it."[42] The similarities took a more disastrous turn with the murder of German fifteen-year-old Sandro Beyer. Beyers death was connected to members of the German black metal band Absurd, a band that claimed to have been in contact with Aarseth before his death. The three Seventeen-year-old members of Absurd were sentenced to prison in 1994 for six to eight years.[43]

While the crimes and public concern around the music have lessened in the decades since, fascination, or perhaps abject horror, continues to be a point of fascination for many. The monograph *Lords of Chaos* was written in 1998 about the topic by Didrik Søderlind and Michael Moynihan, and the documentary *Until the Light Takes Us,* which traces the events from the viewpoint of Vikernes and Darkthrone musician Gylve "Fenriz" Nagell, was

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[39] Quoted in Christie, 281.

[40] There are many within the black metal scene who have sought to distance themselves from these violent actions and the vast majority of musicians do not engage with this type of violence. Cannot stress this enough, this was the actions of a small group of people, not everyone in the black metal scene.

[41] Christie, 284.

[42] Adam "Nergal" Darski, *Confessions of a Heretic: The Sacred and the Profane: Behemoth and Beyond* (London, UK: Jawbone Press, 2015), 62.

[43] Moynihan, 257.

released in 2008. In 2018, a fictionalized account of the events that focused on the "friendship" between Vikernes and Aarseth was also released, aptly named *Lords of Chaos* after the well-known book.[44]

Violence was not only the blight that would stain the black metal scene. Racism has also made its way into black metal's history, whether musicians are serious or not. Keith Kahn-Harris has noted that play within the black metal scene has always been an important part of the genre, which includes the use of "evil" occultism, discussed previously. The emphasis on taboo topics, however, can sometimes include racism—either was a way to flirt with social transgression or to wind up other members of the scene as a joke.[45] Like the use of Satanism, racist play is not always meant to be taken seriously or indicate a person's genuine beliefs, but it has gotten bands into public trouble. For example, Darkthrone's 1994 album, *Transylvanian Hunger* bore the label "True Aryan Black Metal" on the back jacket and a press release claimed that anybody criticizing the album would be showing "obvious Jewish behavior." These statements drew a significant amount of criticism, leading the band to eventually apologize (albeit poorly) and change the label on the back to read "Pure Norwegian Black Metal." In their next album, *Panzerfaust* released in 1995, the band made explicit statements that they were not Nazis or political and that they did not hold those ideological beliefs.[46]

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[44] I have a lot of opinions on this last one. I was, to be frank, not impressed.

[45] Kahn-Harris, 219. Use of Nazi imagery in non-serious ways has also been linked to the punk movement. For more, see Hebdige (1979).

[46] John Wiederhorn, "Happy 20th Birthday to Darkthrone's Controversial Black Metal Masterpiece, Transylvanian Hunger: Parsing the Album's Complicated Legacy," Noisey: Music by Vice, 03/02/2014. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/r7qdyr/happy-20th-birthday-to-darkthrones-controversial-black-metal-masterpiece-transilvanian-hunger. Darkthrone's apology included a nod to general anti.emitic sentiments in Norway and that

Vikernes is also known to have boasted of his relationship to the Norwegian Nazi Party, an admission that was not immediately taken seriously and assumed to be insincere by other musicians and members of the scene.[47]Vikernes's racism would eventually become more widely known as he began to connect racist and national socialist-like theories to aspects of paganism. These thoughts were disseminated through his blog, which he started while in prison, and then through his YouTube channel and Twitter accounts (the YouTube channel has since been deactivated; the Twitter account is still very much alive). While Vikernes may be one of the loudest black metal members (or former member, depending on the interview), since the mid-1990s, black metal has become the genre of choice for many racist metal musicians.

This incorporation of serious, rather than playful, racism has spawned its own generic moniker: national socialist black metal (NSBM). NSBM, as the name would imply, refers to those with Neo-Nazi affiliations, but can also be applied to bands that promote white supremacy more broadly, whether they consider themselves Nazis or whether or not they consider themselves black metal musicians. Although the label can be complicated at times, certain aspects of the black metal scene have created various interlocking parts and overlaps that have made Nazi appropriation easier. The following sections will discuss these overlaps in greater detail.

Satanic Black Metal

"Jewish" was often used as a negative for something and that they were using common phrases and sentiments. Notably, since this album, Darkthrone has not made similar antisemitic comments and they have avoided talking about politics completely. However, the choice of naming their next album *Panzerfaust* is questionable at best.

[47] Kahn-Harris, 220.

Satanism in heavy metal has been an established topic in heavy metal, and one that led to its inclusion in the American Satanic Panic in the 1980s. For black metal, this topic has been included since the genre's inception. Venom used prominent Satanic imagery to appeal to "more aggressive appetites with militant Satanism" and valued occult topics combined with extreme speed and heavy distortion.[48] While Venom may have been simply playing with this type of imagery to "scare off critics," some later musicians considered Satanism a serious form of spiritual and/or ideological beliefs.[49] For those who consider it a spiritual practice, Satanism has remained esoteric. It also provides an overlap between black metal and small groups of twentieth century national socialists. Both groups emphasize satanic themes as a representation of a better society. Satanism is prevalent in heavy metal and the devil has often been used as a symbol of transgression throughout a variety of the genre's sub-iterations. However, black metal has taken a particular affinity to Satanism and a lyrical emphasis on the topic has become one of the genre's defining features. While the amount of engagement with Satanism, and the seriousness of that engagement, varies widely between individuals in the scene, for some Satanism has taken on more political implications. Following a history of esoteric incorporations of Nazism, some bands use Satanism as a connection between far-right political beliefs and black metal musical outputs.

Many, if not most, bands have espoused outward manifestations of Satanism as a form of blasphemous and transgressive play often meant to perform a kind of "dark" persona. Satanic themes in major black metal bands can be exemplified in Mayhem's lyrics,

[48] Christie, 42.
[49] Ibid., 42.

which have included the topic since the very beginning of their musical careers. For example, their song "Pure Fucking Armageddon" includes lyrics such as "Anarchy / Violent torture / antichrist / Lucifer / Son of Satan / Pure fucking Armageddon,"[50] and their later album *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* includes lyrics from their title song such as "In the circle of stone coffins / we are standing with our black robes on / holding the bowl with unholy water."[51] These lyrics also include various Latin phrases, including "Heic noenum pax" meaning "here is no peace" and other phrases with similar dark meanings or simply Latin gibberish, evoking ideas of Satanic rituals. However, there are those that have taken the philosophy of Satanism more seriously as well. Quoting M.W. Daoloth from the Greek metal band Necromantia, Moynihan notes that while the number of black metal musicians who engage seriously in Satanism is relatively small, these members remain influential in the scene because they are part of prominent bands.[52]

For those who have taken Satanism more seriously than an attempt to explore the taboo, Satanism does not involve the worship of an actual Devil figure from Christian theology. Instead, Satanism in this context refers more to a philosophical stance that explicitly rejects the major philosophies of Christianity. Anton LaVey's *Satanic Bible* is a key text in understanding these ideas. First published in 1969, LaVey's account of Satanism is not so much about blasphemy as it is about a broader rejection of Christian morality and ideology. The resulting philosophies are often individualist, with "commandments" such as "I break away from all conventions that do not lead to my earthly success and happiness" or

[50] "Pure Fucking Armageddon: Mayhem," Encyclopaeida Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Mayhem/Pure_Fucking_Armageddon/50127.
[51] "De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas: Mayhem," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Mayhem/De_Mysteriis_Dom_Sathanas/254.
[52] Moynihan, 193.

"say unto thine own heart, 'I am mine own redeemer.'"[53] Other sections of the book directly contradict common Christian ideologies, and evoke the rhythm of well-known biblical verses in doing so. For example, LaVey writes that "Blessed are the powerful, for they shall be reverenced among men - Cursed are the feeble, for they shall be blotted out!," "Blessed are the bold, for they shall be masters of the world - Cursed are the "righteously humble," for they shall be trodden under cloven hoofs!," and "Blessed are the victorious, for victory is the basis of right - Cursed are the vanquished, for they shall be vassals forever!"[54] Here, LaVey clearly contradicts the Christian idea that "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" in favor of advocating for strength, victory, and power. Later sections advocate for action in getting what one wants rather than a reliance on passive notions of "hope" or "fate," among other ideas that directly refute Christian sentiments.

In black metal, LaVey's ideas, or similar ideas related to Satanism, have also become prevalent as more than provocative play with blasphemy. Ihsahn, the vocalist for the black metal band Emperor is one such figure who has taken this further step. He has developed his own belief system that stems from Anton LaVey's form of Satanism. When asked about LaVey's *Satanic Bible*, Ihsahn replied that it was a book that was "very easy to agree with. Most people can associate with what it says."[55] Ihsahn continues, saying that:

> My form of Satanism has very little to do with ritual; it's much more a philosophy - you come to logical explanations for anti-Christian behavior. The *Satanic Bible* describes how most people live and how most people react…I think there's also more to Satanism besides the philosophy. There are very many

[53] Anton Szandor La Vey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 12, 15.
[54] Ibid., 15.
[55] Quoted in Moynihan, 198.

> emotional elements as well. I try to give very much of myself, and my emotions, to the music which I create" and that "It's [Satanism] very important to me, and has affected my whole life and my way of thinking.[56]

Ihsahn moves beyond the image of Satanism as evil for the sake of evil perpetuated by both the media and often black metal itself. For members like him, Satanism offers a viable and attractive life philosophy that fits in well with black metal's rejection of major religions, especially Christianity. Considering Emperor's popularity, musicians like Ihsahn hold a significant amount of cultural capital, making his views influential.

Ihsahn's views also indicate the various roles that Satan and Satanism has played in black metal's history. Early black metal bands, such as Venom, viewed Satanist themes as a transgressive joke, meant to be shocking but not necessarily serious. Others in the beginning of the second wave of black metal (i.e., the Norwegian metal bands such as Mayhem and Darkthrone, which began in the mid-1980s) took on the Satanist theme to give a more serious perception of being "evil." Yet, still others, such as Ihsahn, view Satanism seriously but regard it as a philosophical stance rather than a literal version of devil-worship. Thus, while Satanism is pervasive throughout black metal as a genre, the ways that it is regarded and enacted varies drastically between bands and individual musicians. Various other members also considered Satanism as a spiritual and philosophical practice and have had varying relationships with LaVey's works.[57] These iterations of Satanism demonstrate that it

[56] Quoted in Moynihan, 198-199.

[57] Varg for example had gone back and forth with identifying or being identified as a Satanist. For Varg, he eventually emphasized Norse Paganism, as I will discuss in the following section. Further, it should be noted that by "spiritual practices" of Satanism, I refer to the idea that Satan is a deity to be worshiped. For those who view Satanism

became a form of transgression against cultural norms as well as a more nuanced set of practices that the American media would make it seem. They also show that the topic of Satanism and occultism have remained a prominent part of black metal.

Similar threads of Satanism, or at least a fascination with occult thinking, also appear in some Neo-Nazi groups, not in small part due to connections made by LaVey himself. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke writes that as LaVey was developing the Church of Satan in California in the mid-1960s he "was also drawn to the evil aura of the Third Reich. The Church of Satan's 'Law of the Trapezoid' was prefaced by the Nazi anthem 'Germany Awake' written by Dietrich Eckart," and that various Satanic rituals had been "based on the distorted angles of German expressionist film and performed in Nazi Germany by the elite of the SS."[58] The connection between Nazism and Satanism was eventually made more literal by Satanist Michael A. Aquino, who eventually broke away from the Church of Satan to form a cult called the Temple of Set.[59] This cult viewed Satan literally rather than philosophically. Aquino also believed that the Schützstaffel (the Nazi paramilitary organization responsible for enacting the Third Reich's genocidal policies, or the SS) had been part of a Satanic/occultist conspiracy that key figures in the Nazi party, such as Heinrich Himmler, had actually been "a satanic initiate" and "imagined the Wewelsburg as a major terrestrial focus of evil powers."[60]

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philosophically, Satan or "the Devil" are often viewed metaphorically, but can (and often do) retain spiritual practices more closely aligning to atheism or agnosticism.

[58] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*. (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 214-215.

[59] Ibid., 215. Aquino believed that Set was the Egyptian deity that the Christian devil was based on.

[60] Ibid., 215.

During the 1970s, British far-right Satanist groups also appeared, the most prominent of which was led by David William Myatt. Myatt was a member of the British Movement, a political movement that revived national socialist ideologies in the 1970s.[61] Myatt's theories about the relationship between Nazis and black magick[62] went even further, arguing that "interwar fascist movements represented a bid by Left Hand Path Adepts (i.e., black magicians) to disrupt Nazarene/Magian forms" and viewed immigrants of color as a "massive 'barbarian horde' with the territories of Western civilization."[63] The result of such views led Myatt to develop a positive outlook towards groups like the skinheads and Nazi metal bands, whom he claimed were "among the best of our race…real warriors who 'think with their blood.'"[64] Many of the Nazi Satanist groups also deplored Christianity and instead favored Nietzschean philosophies of the übermensch, and "the Social Darwinist concern with power, conquest and the survival of the fittest found in old National Socialist doctrine."[65]

Myatt in particular became more active in the Neo-Nazi scene in the 1990s, during which time he, and the Nazi Satanist groups he was a part of, became more active, coinciding with a resurgence of a militant far-right underground in Britain in the mid-1990s.[66] Others in the American radical right groups, such as James Mason, also became interested in LaVey's ideas of Satanism and advocated that the scene include "evil" figures beyond Hitler. Specifically, Mason advocated for the inclusion of Charles Manson as a key

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[61] Ibid., 216.

[62] In this instance, I use the spelling "magick" to denote its use its association with a spiritual practice, rather than as a type of party trick or something found in fantasy novels.

[63] Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 221.

[64] Quoted in Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 221.

[65] Ibid., 231.

[66] Ibid., 222-223.

occultist figure and "regarded Manson as the supreme outlaw and adopted the convicted criminal as the spiritual leader of his new Nazi group, the Universal Order (the name came from Manson)."[67] Although the pairing of Manson and Hitler as staples of Mason's spirituality may seem puzzling, the "Manson Family" motto, "air, trees, water, and animals" fit in well with ideas of purity and Manson's own connection to the national socialist ideology was made clear by carving a swastika into his forehead.[68]As a result, Mason created a form of spirituality that centered Nazi politics, often idolizing figures like Manson and Hitler.[69] In taking Satanism seriously as a religious and philosophical standpoint, national socialist groups have a potential overlap with black metal subculture.

Interest in Satanism or black metal does not immediately imply Nazism, but these spiritual and philosophical ideas have been explicitly tied together by some NSBM bands. The Greek band Der Stürmer, who formed in 1998 and remain active today, often mixes satanic themes with neo-Nazism and have explicitly connected these two ways of thinking. When asked in an interview about their thoughts on Satanism and Nazism for the 'zine *Psicoterror*, Der Stürmer musician known by his stage name, Jarl von Hagall, explained that:

> As long as this kind of Satanists recognize the inequality between cultures, species and human races that constitute the eternal laws of nature and they spot the Jew and Zionism as the no 1 enemy and threat for our existence, we support them. In fact that we

[67] Ibid., 19.

[68] Jeffrey Kaplan and Leonard Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press,1998), 139.

[69] Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 19.

are very influenced by Nietzschean philosophy and Supremacist authors like Jack London and Ragnar Redbeard that have influenced many Fascist Satanists too, may make our lyrics look

"Satanic" to some people, but just happens to share the same background.[70]

In this quote, Hagall recognizes the importance of social stratification based on race, and that these ideas have a history within the Satanic subculture. However, Hagall makes the connection between his own Nazism and Satanism/dark occultism clearer later in the interview. Delving further into his personal occultist beliefs, he claims that: "the Occult is an important factor of my ideology and for my quest for the truth and wisdom," and espouses practices and beliefs such as Runes, and the Wodenic mysteries.[71] Hagall also names The Order of Nine Angels as an influence, a sect of Satanists with which Myatt was involved, and still another part of the interview also praises Myatt himself.[72] With bands such as Der Stürmer, the esoteric subcultures of Satanism and Nazism have had a direct influence on them and subsequently on their music.

It is necessary to note that these bands do not always view Satan or Satanism as "The Devil" in conventional religious or folklorist ways. Yet, some band members do suggest similarities in their own beliefs to the lineages presented above. Bands like Der Stürmer are careful to avoid Christian notions of the devil, not only because they want to continue the

[70] Der Stürmer Interview, Psicoterror, accessed October 2, 2020, http://www.thepaganfront.com/dersturmer/interviews/PSICOTERROR2007.html.

[71] Ibid.

[72] The answer to this question is basically just a laundry list of influential people, but they never answer how they are actually influential or to what extent.

lineage of anti-Christian sentiments established by earlier and non-NSBM bands, but because Christianity stems from Judaic traditions, confirming their virulent antisemitic beliefs. When asked about Satan's relationship to Christianity and their thoughts, Hagall responds with

> [I]f we speak about Satanism that is based on the biblical references and a Judeo-Christian background, then there is nothing but Jewish archetypes in it and I think that you'll agree with me. But a Satanism that is based in the Shadowside of the European soul, the western magical tradition and the dark lore of the pre-Christian Aeonic aspect of western civilization and the acknowledgment of national socialism as the Destiny of the West…[73]

Thus, while bands like Der Stürmer borrow from very real Nazi occultist traditions, like the practices espoused by David Myatt, they often view it in a less literal sense, instead evoking Satanic imagery for what Satan is thought to represent rather than his role in religious mythologies. These types of occultist beliefs resemble musicians like Ihsahn's philosophical relationship with Satanism as well as continued anti-Christian sentiments. These views then not only connect Nazism and Satanism together, but also place them within the ideological frameworks of black metal more broadly. The result is a merging of histories between Satanism, Nazism, and black metal.

This understanding of Satanism, which emphasizes notions of individualism, strength, and darkness, are rampant within the band's lyrics. For example, from their first demo album *Europe Erwache!,* taken from the Nazi slogan "Deutschland erwache," released

[73] Ibid.

in 1999, includes the song "Fur Den Kommenden Mann." Der Stürmer includes lyrics such as "Loyal to our blood, loyal to our cause / the time has come to smash our foes / our Aryan lands are under occupation / take up the arms for racial salvation."[74] Lyrics like these echo tenets found in LaVey's *Satanic Bible*, specifically ideas of exerting strength, rather than mercy or humility, and an emphasis on victory. In the case of Der Stürmer, victory is tied to maintaining and defending "Aryan lands" for "racial salvation." Notably, Der Stürmer also talk about non-Aryan peoples in a similar manner to Myatt, who has referred to them as "Barbarian hordes" while Der Stürmer describes them as an "occupying" force. Here too, Der Stürmer has placed the topics of their lyrics within a lineage that occupies both black metal and Nazi Satanist histories. The use of German for the title connects their song to Germany and the Third Reich when considered in conjunction with the lyrics. This linguistic connection echoes Vikernes's use of German in interviews discussing his racist worldviews.[75] Further, the use of English for the lyrics, despite the German title and the band's Greek origins, connects their music to the larger world of black metal as well as English is the predominant language of most black metal music. The song therefore merges a more global set of musical expectations with more specific political histories.

The overlap between occultist theology and racial ideology is not entirely unexpected. Black metal's emphasis on Satanism—with varying degrees of seriousness as seen in the previous discussion—has allowed overlaps between genre and ideology to occur. Although for many, the Satanist-schtick is simply transgressive fun, high profile musicians

[74] "Fur Den Kommenden Mann: Der Stürmer," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/Europa_erwache%21/23601.

[75] They do not mention Vikernes specifically as an inspiration for doing so, but it does draw a striking commonality in the use of German for NSBM music.

within the scene have also taken Satanism more seriously as a philosophical and theological framework. This more serious form of Satanism tied to more specific guiding principles has created a point of connection between those in black metal and those on the occult fringe of post-war national socialist movements. This does not mean that this connection was created intentionally or that everyone involved with more LeVey style of Satanism holds national socialist beliefs. Rather, I am suggesting that the general interest in Satanism in the black metal scene has created a potential avenue for those on the occult fringes of neo-Nazi movements to express their ideologies. When considering why black metal in particular has become the genre of choice for fringe political beliefs such as these, these overlaps provide at least a partial explanation of the genre's appeal.

The specific Satanic overlap with black metal in particular may be similarly appealing because of the genre's history of violence. Goodrick-Clarke has noted that Nazi cultural groups view "the erosion of all gender, racial, national and cultural differences is seen as a threat to human evolution, which it is claimed can only progress through struggle and war."[76] Given that Nazi-Satanist groups and those sympathetic to them, such as Der Stürmer, emphasize the idea of "struggle and war" against cultural liberalism they see as ultimately destructive to (Aryan) society, the genre's history of violence against Christians and LGBTQ individuals aligns with Nazi-Satanist goals and ideologies.

Pagan Metal Gods:

[76] Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 216.

The genre's initial emphasis on Satanism continues with bands like Der Stürmer, but other black metal bands have expanded their fascination with the occult also evolved to include broader pagan religions as well. Adam "Nergal" Darksi from the (non-NSBM) Polish black metal band Behemoth, has described the shift in emphasis:

> Imagine a guy in a Venom T-shirt, a pentagram on his neck and a beer in his hand. When you met him a year later, he'd be wearing a Burzum T-shirt, with a wooden figuring around his neck, and instead of a beer, he'd be drinking mead. *Now* he'd say that your views weren't sufficiently Aryan and that you were profaning the faith of your ancestors.[77]

He indicates a very distinct move away from an emphasis on all things Satanic to an emphasis on paganism and a growing connection between paganism and ethnic heritage. Darksi continues, claiming that others during this time questioned his own artistic choices, including his use of Mesopotamian deity for his stage name rather than a Slavic one with questions like "You sing about Perun? So why is your nickname Nergal, and not Mirmil or Maslaw?"[78] This line of questioning, in conjunction with his previous statement, reveal telling characteristics about two aspects of black metal's thematic growth: 1) Paganism, in addition to Satanism, is a highly used lyrical topic and 2) for some, this topic is also tied specifically to race and considered a demonstration of one's ethnicity. Of course, not all bands who use pagan themes immediately fall into this category. Pagan metal is, after all, its own subgenre of metal. However, within black metal's specific history, part of the appeal of

[77] Darski, 82.
[78] Ibid., 82. It should be noted that Perun is a powerful Slavic deity.

paganism seems to be its connection to Aryan identity and the expectation that white musicians will pay homage to these traditions.

Early black metal bands like Bathory eventually shifted their focus to paganism as well, most notably in their 1988 album *Blood, Fire, Death* which includes chanting and sounds of horses in their intro, titled "Oden's Ride Over Nordland." As Ross Hagen has pointed out, Norse symbolism can also be seen in band logos—like Enslaved's, which uses Thor's hammer as part of the design, as well as typography that recalls Viking art. It is also common, to see band art reminiscent of medieval imagery, including the use of Viking-like helmets, chain mail, cloaks, or weaponry from the Middle Ages.[79] For many bands, paganism and mythological ritual have also become part of a larger ideology that emphasizes strength, and views Christianity in particular as a weakness that is antithetical to the strength of the, usually, Norse and Germanic gods of old. For some bands, the introduction of mythology also became more appealing than the genre's previous emphasis on Satanism and the devil, eventually leading to a slight generic break and the creation of Viking metal.[80] For most, the exploration of mythology is an emphasis on and exploration of strength, or perhaps merely a personal interest.

An interest in mythology may not be the only driving factor for some bands to include these figures and topics. Darski's account also notes the sudden emphasis on the Norwegian band Burzum, Varg Vikernes's black metal project. Vikernes has shown a particular interest in Norse mythology because he believes it is connected to racial purity. He rejects Satanism,

[79] Ross Hagen, "Music Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal," in *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 180-199, 189.

[80] Ibid., 191-192.

especially LaVey's version, for being part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In a 1994 interview with the magazine *Petrified* Vikernes claims that while he is not against working with those also against Christianity, The Church of Satan has certain Judaic and Hellenic elements which contradict our Norse nature, also the whole Anton LaVey ideology is "soporific" asit [sic] discourages any illegal activity at all. Nothing will change if we have such an [attitude].[81]

Instead, musicians like Vikernes follow and emphasize aspects of Nordic paganism and heathenry, which, like Satanism, also has a history of use in national socialist and other far-right spheres. Within the context of black metal, some bands have taken the occult to more politicized ends, linking mythology to race in an echo of the Nazi-era metaphysical beliefs about Germany's superiority. Although there are many pagan groups that embrace elements of multiracial and multicultural practices, paganism and magickal practices more broadly have had a long and complicated history of being appropriated by Nazis.

Paganism and Occultism in the Third Reich

Trends around a fascination with the supernatural in Germany began in the nineteenth century with a handful of German intellectuals. Guido von List (1848-1919) and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) were some of the first leaders to begin combining *Völkisch* politics with racialized underpinnings. For List and Liebenfels, *Völkisch* politics touted nationalist ideas that were combined with feelings of "common creative energy,

[81] "Interview with Varg Vikernes," *Petrified Magazine* #3, 1994. Accessed through https://burzum.org/eng/library/1994_interview_petrified.shtml.

feelings, and [a] sense of individuality."[82] Specifically, List and Liebenfels posited the idea of ariospohy to their followers in Germany and Austria, which combined völkisch nationalism with supernatural beliefs that described a golden age of German ruling that had been predicated on the ruling of the "superior" German (or Aryan) race over others. According to this belief system, the German rulers had been ruined by emancipating the other races, which they believed caused major world disasters including wars and economic downturns.[83] For example, Liebenfels's form of esoteric mysticism, which heralded a race of "heroic Aryan God-men," advocated for a stratified society based on perceived racial purity that posits Germans at the top, as well as the subjugation of those who did not meet these standards.[84] Historian Eric Kurlander has described such groups as a "*Völkisch* milieu" that "created a vision for the future that transcended traditional left and right, religious and scientific, racist and cosmopolitan" dichotomies.[85] Although the various groups involved with and interested in metaphysics may not have always agreed on everything, Kurlander notes that they similarly felt "the need for German renewal."[86]

Many of these occultist tendencies flourished further during the Weimar Republic, particularly through the fascination of so-called "borderland sciences," in which supernatural or unseen knowledge was collected and explored. Borderland science encompassed a wide range of knowledge, including astrology, parapsychology, hand reading

[82] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: the Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1890-1935*(Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press, 1985), 3.
[83] Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots*, 2.
[84] Ibid., 202.
[85] Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters* (Yale University Press, 2017), 32.
[86] Ibid., 32.

(chirology), mediumism, and telepathy.[87] Kurlander notes that the use of magical powers, or the perception of having magical powers, gained public appeal. Parapsychology, which Hitler would have been familiar with through engagement with Ernst Schertel's work,[88] sought to answer religious or mystical questions and study elements of the human soul, but some parapsychologists took these ideas further and claimed that magic itself existed and had the ability to affect and manipulate the subconscious of other human beings.[89] Those like Schertel argued that one could reclaim this unconsciousness as a form of paranormal power. These ideas around power also had racial connotations, as others before Schertel had argued that these powers were related specifically to the Aryan race and had been lost through the act of race mixing.[90] This kind of power was also intriguing to someone like Hitler, whose charisma had a particularly profound effect on those whose realities had "collapsed into a psychic disorder of apocalyptic proportions" following the First World War.[91] As a result, people leaning towards the political right during the Weimar era found themselves particularly susceptible to the occult and magical thinking that underlined the growing trend of *Völkisch* politics.

In addition to Hitler, other top-ranking Nazi officials maintained a fascination with the occult. Those such as Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Himmler were big proponents of other ariosophic theologies that specifically combined *Völkisch* politics with ideas of racial

[87] Ibid., 23.

[88] Ernst Schertel wrote the 1923 book *Magic: History, Theory and Practice*, an occultist treatise. Kurlander describes Schertel as "one of Germany's most prominent esotericists" (62). Hitler was known to own a copy of Schertel's book. His work also included advocation for homoerotic love, making his work also well-known among sexologists such as Freud and Magnus Hirschfield.

[89] Kurlander, 68.

[90] Ibid., 69.

[91] Ibid., 73.

superiority. For example, Gardell notes that "Rosenberg believed that all high cultures of human history were the creations of a superior Aryan master race that had swarmed out from their northern motherland Atlantis" and that "[r]acial memories of a prehistoric Nordic tradition were present in mythologies of southern Europe, North Africa, western Asia, Persia, India, and China."[92] Similarly Himmler believed in trying to create a type of Aryan super race, and emphasized history that highlighted and valorized what he viewed as racial accomplishments. These goals resulted in Himmler recruiting various scholars both within and outside of mainstream academia to help construct this history.[93] Goodrick-Clarke has posited that such occult interests became especially prevalent after Germany's defeat in World War I to fight off the humiliation that defeat, and subsequent economic collapse, had created.[94]

Ideas around the supernatural and *Volk* eventually coalesced into more organized groups, some of which would eventually come to have significant political power. Theodor Fritsch started the German Order around these ideas and sought to combine them with a more politically minded branch to disseminate these ideas called the Reich Hammer Association. This particular association was named after Fritsch's publishing company, *Der Hammer*, that was known for its racist and anti-Semitic ideologies. Once the German Order spread to various parts of Germany, The German Order eventually splintered into different groups, including the Thule Society.[95] Like its predecessors, the Thule Society maintained and championed an ariosophic viewpoint combining metaphysics with Aryan racial

[92] Ibid., 26.
[93] Ibid., 27.
[94] Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots*, 63.
[95] Kurlander, 35.

ideologies and sought to redefine the German Order during the Communist Republic of Munich in 1919 to avoid leftist criticism. However, the Thule Society was also notoriously violent and "kept the dual agenda of ariosophic mysticism and terrorist activities."[96] Historian Mattias Gardell further describes the group's activities, noting that they "infiltrated communist cells, stockpiled weapons, and engaged in violent assaults against leftists."[97]

In 1918, the society created the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or the German Worker's Party to appeal to the working classes. This faction appealed to a young Adolf Hitler, and by 1920, he had reorganized the society into the National Socialist German Workers Party, which would act as a precursor to the Nazis.[98] The idea of the *Völk* would remain an important aspect of the Nazi's ideology. They emphasized ideas around the Aryan race being above others and would often advocate for the subjugation and destruction of those considered inferior. This line of thinking maintained two major appealing points: 1) the Nazis acted as a "power fantasy" for the already demoralized Germans and 2) gave them a scapegoat for this demoralization, namely the Jewish community. Many had bought into the conspiracy that claimed the Jewish community actively sought out the destruction of the German empire and that they had agents in various social and political groups working towards this end. The result was an apocalyptic-like notion that eventually led to the Holocaust.

[96] Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: the Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 26.
[97] Ibid., 26.
[98] Kurlander, 32.

This rhetoric was also reinforced through musical choices made by the Nazi Party. Many ariosophic members of the Nazi Party adopted Richard Wagner's music and operas, a composer whose own antisemitism and deep interest in Nordic mythology has been well-documented and present in his operas. The German Order used Wagner's music as part of their initiation ceremony for newer recruits, especially from his operas *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser,* drawing on the operas' mythological themes. This music was used in conjunction with symbols like spears meant to represent Wotan's spear and some members dressed in white robes with horned helmets, resulting in what Goodrick-Clarke has referred to as a "strange synthesis of racist, masonic, and Wagnerian inspiration."[99] Wagner's music also became an important tool as part of Hitler's cultural propaganda as Wagner's music continued to be performed during The Bayreuth Festival – festival specifically to showcase Wagner's works-during the war, and as part of the Nuremberg political rallies. Although Wagner's use of pagan and mythological themes was not always in favor with other Nazi officials due to the other members' interest in Christianity, nor were Wagner's operas always popular with the German mass-market in their entirety, the composer's known antisemitic attitudes and connection to mythology remained appealing to some in the Third Reich and his music helped define the Nazi Party sonically.[100]

These ties between esoteric magical beliefs and national socialism (or racist movements more broadly) did not collapse with the Third Reich. The 1990s saw a revitalization of racialized pagan belief systems, for those who attached themselves to Nordic mythology. Many in this vein believe in a biological component of spirituality,

[99] Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots*, 129-130.

[100] Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (First edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 535.

claiming that ancestral knowledge can be passed down through DNA and that acts of race mixing can muddy and blur these spiritual memories and lead to religious disorientation.[101] This type of biological spirituality, which has inevitable racist connotations is particularly evident in the reprisal of Astaruism, also sometimes referred to as Odinism, by those in the far-right political sphere.[102] In the 1970s, the United States saw a resurgence of interest in Nordic paganism, as evidenced by the emergence of Odinist and Asatru movements.

These movements explicitly tied Nordic pagan beliefs to racial ideologies. Some practitioners, like Else Christensen, who founded the Odin Fellowship in 1969, preached racial tribalism in conjunction with Nordic pagan beliefs. While many people practiced these beliefs without a racial segregationist mindset, racist paganism continued to grow, eventually culminating in the *Pagan Revival* publication started in the 1990s by Wyatt Kaldenberg. This publication emphasized both notions of pagan spirituality and history, but also included articles about racial politics and reviews of white power music.[103] Various Norse pagan groups sprung up in the 1990s, and the commonality between these groups of racist pagans is the belief that Asatrusim or Odinism is, in essence, an ethnic or blood religion. Some groups, such as the Odinist Fellowship, argued that Norse paganism was the "racial soul of the Aryan folk" and that "heathen gods and goddesses [are] race-specific and genetically engraved archetypes."[104] These types of religious beliefs easily intermingled

[101] Gardell, 17.

[102] Asatruism and Odinism are forms of neopaganism that celebrate Norse deities and practices. As a note, Asatruism, Odinism, and Pagnism more generally are large categories that encompass a wide variety of beliefs. I hope that it's obvious, but not all of these groups are racist or buy into national socialism. Rather, it is a small set of subgroups within paganism/Asatruism/Heathenism that hold these beliefs.

[103] Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 263.

[104] Gardell, 166.

with national socialist inclinations. Australian Odinist Alexander Rud Mills took the idea of racialized spirituality and claimed that the Jews were actively conspiring to trick Aryan people into worshiping them; which subsequently made the previously-strong groups, including the Nordics, weaker. For people like Mills, this "trick" has resulted in modern-day forms of Christianity, particularly those that preach equality.[105] Christensen, who eventually favored a more subtle approach to racialized pagan ideologies, shared many of these anti-Semitic sentiments. She believed in a Jewish cabal that runs the world and that Hitler should have focused on his "original, socialist and folkish agenda" rather than moving to far-right authoritarianism.[106]

Of course, this "folkish agenda" is steeped in the racialist ideologies of the *Völkisch* movement Hitler had connections to before and during his role as Führer. But these ideas have become a much more wide-spread phenomenon.[107] Thanks to the increased ease of circulation through routes such as the internet, ideas are able to be shared more broadly. Many groups also continue their independent publications that include material about national socialist, neo-fascist, and xenophobic and racist rhetoric. While these examples have emphasized an either ideological or religious belief in paganism/occultism, the influence of paganism on racist right-wing movements can be seen in many of its various iterations. Most notably, pagan and Nordic symbology has become extremely prominent.

[105] Ibid., 167.
[106] Christensen, quoted in Gardell, 172.
[107] For more on the crossover between European and American radical right movements, see Kaplan 1998.

Symbols such as the swastika, Celtic cross, and Nordic runes have become visual markers of many racist groups.[108]

For bands who have taken this latter route, their music shares similarities to racist pagans in how both communities use Nordic and/or Germanic mythology to denote racial superiority. Varg Vikernes from the band Burzum, for example, has done several interviews about his pagan beliefs while he was in prison. In a 1994 interview with the Norwegian 'zine *1000 Years of Lost Pride and Dignity*, Vikernes explains his self-identification as a pagan and some of his more occultist beliefs. When asked what religion he espouses Vikernes responds "A heathen," but that the term "satanist" could also be used as he considers himself "an opponent" of the Christian God.[109] Vikernes continues later in the interview to connect heathenry to race, noting that "I'm proud of my blue eyes, dark blond hair…and white skin. If I know love, it is love for my own race and culture (heathen) and land." He "believes in pureness. A pure heathen white arian [sic] Norway…"[110] Vikernes reiterates many of the same points in various later interviews, including a 1996 interview in which he claims that he is "against anything alien for us [presumably talking about heathens]. This goes not just for religion, but also counts for politics and race."[111] He also advocates for "race hygiene" which he seems to define as not procreating between races.[112] Using pseudo-scientific

[108] "A Look at Racist Skinhead Symbols and Tattoos," Southern Poverty Law Center, October 19, 2006, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2006/look-racist-skinhead-symbols-and-tattoos.

[109] Olv. Svíþjóð, "Burzum: Up from the Ashes, or into a Prison?" *A 1000 Years of Lost Pride and Dignity*, 1994, 32. Accessed through Burzum.org.

[110] Ibid., 34. Interestingly, the interviewer also seems pretty skeptical of Varg and shades him throughout the interview. For example, he questions in an editor's note why Varg would have dyed his hair black if he were so proud of his blondness.

[111] "Jailhouse Rock: Interview with Varg Vikernes," *Metal Hammer Magazine*, January 1996. Accessed through Burzum.org.

[112] Ibid.

theory, Vikernes posits that race mixing does not create a person with the strongest characteristics of both races, but rather a watered-down version, resulting in weaker humans. Notably, these views bear a striking resemblance to those of the Nazi-era parapsychologists of the *Völkisch*, including Schertel and others as part of the Völkisch movement. Later interviews solidify Vikernes's beliefs around race and its connections to paganism. In a 1997 interview, he claims that he has actually never been a Satanist, as all major religions (including Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism) have no relation to the Nordic races.[113]

Vikernes's increasing interest in heathenry and Nordic paganism is mirrored lyrically in Burzum's music. The first few albums Vikernes produced and released in the early to mid -1990s focus on dark fantasy-type themes. The lyrics consists of mythical creatures, such as the Mesopotamian god Ea, dark destructive spells, and descriptions of dark and dreary landscapes. However, later albums begin to focus on Nordic pagan traditions more explicitly. In his 2014 album *The Ways of Yore*, Vikernes refers multiple times to Nordic gods and goddesses—including Odin and Freyja—and he references to a "tree of life" that bears resemblance to the Norse myth of Yggdrasil, a tree whose branches make up the cosmos.[114] These references in the context of Vikernes's beliefs signify a racial ideology in a more subtle way. Vikernes does not need to include phrases like "white pride" or "white power" to convey the same ideas to his listeners, as he has already connected these mythological figures to concepts of racial purity and white supremacy.

[113] "In the Cell with Varg Vikernes: Interview with Varg Vikernes," *Fritt Forum/Norsk Blad*, 1997. Accessed through Burzum.org.

[114] "The Ways of Yore: Burzum," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Burzum/The_Ways_of_Yore/409483.

Vikernes is not the only black metal musician to espouse pagan based racial rhetoric. Graveland, a Polish black pagan metal band has similarly incorporated references and allusions to Germanic and Norse mythology. The result is a mish-mash of mythological references, which make up Rob Darken's own paganistic belief system. In an interview with FrostKamp zine, Darken has explained his beliefs by saying

> Many years ago I started to refer to my own imagination of the culture and beliefs of the people…and especially to German pagan roots. I replaced Odin with Wotan because in the German personification of his God I see the God of war and warriors. Women warriors Valkyries are essential part of my own world of warriors and heroes. The legions of Valkyries next to the Chariot of Wotan come to the battle helping White Beats [sic] of Wotan to win. White Beasts of Wotan are warriors who fight for fatherland and freedom of their folk.[115]

In these beliefs, Darken clearly mixes the German Wotan with the Norse Valkyries in order to emphasize ideas of "warriors" and "war," presumably as embodied stand-ins for concepts of strength. However, like Vikernes, Darken has also placed these ideas within an implicitly racialized context. The references to the "white" beasts of Wotan (which is also the name of a song in their 2001 album *Creed of Iron*) as well as the desire to protect his "folk" imply a sense of community that is based specifically on whiteness. Similarly, in a 1994 interview with *Petrified Zine*, former drummer Capricornicus has stated that Graveland stands for a "New European pagan Empire," and "united Aryan power […]."[116]Like Vikernes, these ideas bear a strong resemblance to the *Völkisch* movement in Germany in the early twentieth century.

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[115] "Graveland Interview," FrostKamp Zine, published August 5, 2008, https://frostkamp.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/graveland-interview/.

[116] "Interview with Capricornus of Graveland," *Petrified*, 1994, 14. Accessed through sendbackmystamps.org.

These ideas have been consistent for Graveland throughout several of their albums. Their 2001 album *Creed of Iron* also includes images of a romanticized past, specifically a medieval one.[117] The album cover includes the use of Viking-like helmets, chain mail, cloaks, and medieval weaponry. While these tropes are also fairly common in black metal writ large, they have been appropriated by NSBM bands.[118] Graveland's album cover illustrates this combination more explicitly by incorporating the medieval imagery with Nazi symbolism seen in the, albeit small, swastika on the flag, noting that this imagery is meant to convey a glorification of the Aryan race. Subsequently, the band's politics are reinforced through personal beliefs and visual elements of their creative output.

Where Graveland's musical output differs from Burzum's is how these views have been present in their lyrics and materials more explicitly. The song "Semper Fidelis" mentions both Wotan and Valkyries as the band describes themselves as "the warrior sons of Wotan" who are defending the "honor and secure[ing] the existence of our people."[119] Lines such as these create a direct link between pagan figures and white supremacist attitudes, which is evidenced not only through Darken's own understandings of these gods discussed earlier but also in the latter quotation's connection to the "14 words," a widely recognized and circulated slogan started by known white supremacist David Lane that states "we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."[120] When these themes

[117] Album cover available at https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Graveland/Creed_of_Iron/1445.

[118] See Ross Hagen's entry in *Metal Rules the Globe.*

[119] "Dawn of Iron Blades: Graveland," Encyclopaedia Metallum, accessed October 29, 2021, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Graveland/Dawn_of_Iron_Blades/58760.

[120] White supremacists continue to use this phrase, and the number 14 has become a dog whistle for them to covertly signify their beliefs.

are stated so explicitly within the music, they add political meaning to affective listener experiences.

While racist metaphysical beliefs like ariosophy sought to construct Aryans as powerful and hierarchically superior to other races, NSBM further propagates these ideologies through affective feelings of power by coopting black metal musical aesthetics. The aesthetics of black metal revolve around ideas of power, and in the context of far-right lyrical tropes this power becomes heavily politicized. Powerfulness that may otherwise be experienced as a form of catharsis or simple enjoyment, now becomes a potential tool for introduction to or reinforcement of already-held racist political beliefs. Graveland's music also allows these affective experiences to become a potentially communal experience, in which listeners can experience this politicized power together.[121] In these examples, NSBM musicians have largely maintained the early Nazi fascination with German and Norse mythology, which aligns more-or-less with their Norwegian and Slavic ancestry respectively. The idea of racializing mythology, however, has not only stayed within these, perhaps expected, traditions and others have taken and adapted these connections to a more local sensibility and infused them into their production of black metal.

Der Stürmer is a particularly striking example, as they have combined Nazi-like *Völkisch* thinking with allusions to Greek mythology. For example, in their song "Guards of the Solar Order" from their 2002 EP *Iron Will and Discipline*, Der Stürmer includes lyrics

[121] For more on hatred as a social activity in racist groups, see Kathleen Blee, *Understanding Racist Activism: Theory, Methods, and Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

that cast them as "defenders of cosmic order" and "guards of the solar order."[122] The idea of trying to repair some sort of cosmic social order also hearkens back to many Nazi occultist ideologies, particularly ariosophic beliefs that combine ideas of spirituality with an emphasis on starkly stratified social orders. However, Der Stürmer's references to the "solar order" also tie in allusions to their own Greek heritage. The lyrics include statements such as "guards of the solar order / the Olympian ideal / the wisdom of Hellenic greatness / in light and fire revealed" and "We'll lead into oblivion / this Jewish mind's breed / baptized in Apollonian light / unshakeable will to win."[123] In these stanzas Der Stürmer makes references to Classical Greek mythology by invoking the name of Apollo, Zeus's son and the god of the sun, as well as references to the Olympians, the twelve gods and goddesses who ruled on the mountain of Olympia. However, these ideas are also directly connected to national socialist beliefs and ideologies both through their inclusion in Der Stürmer's broader lyrical context, which explicitly emphasizes ideas of Aryan might and supremacy.

Der Stürmer combines Greek mythology in the same song as a reference to fighting the "the Jewish mind's breed." In this example, Der Stürmer has not only posited themselves as a sort of continuation of the powerful mythological Greek lineage, but they have also made clear that this lineage is based on a sense of racial purity in the way they have characterized the Jewish community as the antagonist in this narrative. Der Stürmer's use of Greek mythology in this example clearly borrows ideologies from those like Vikernes, who has posited the same ideas but with Norse mythology/heathenry. And further like Vikernes,

[122] "Iron Will and Discipline: Der Stürmer," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/Iron_Will_and_Discipline/25277.

[123] Ibid.

these lyrics also bear a striking resemblance to national socialist doctrines around *Völkisch* politics, particularly the ariosophic beliefs of List and Leibenfels.

In these instances, Der Stürmer demonstrate a carefully curated negotiation of local and global sets of aesthetics and historical lineages. The use of English for their lyrics, despite their Greek heritage, as well as heavy distortion throughout the song allow the band to participate in metal's global aesthetics. Many extreme metal bands, regardless of nationality, predominantly use English for their lyrics. The Norwegian and non-NSBM band Dimmu Borgir has said in interviews that their choice to use English for most of their lyrics was a deliberate choice, as it allowed more fans from around the world to connect to their music and did not require translations. Their guitarist, Silenoz, explained that "in order to expand our music, we would need to sing in English."[124] Such an assertion implies that English lyrics have become part of a global aesthetic for metal that is meant to appeal to a wider number of audience members. They also merge local histories with the political histories of the Third Reich, employing mythology specific to Greece that function in the same manner as Nordic mythology functioned for the Nazis and, later, for NSBM musicians like Vikernes.

The album cover for their 2006 album *A Banner Greater than Death* makes the connection between Nazism and their Greek heritage through visual media as well.[125] The cover, seen in depicts the Nazi flag being flown in front of ancient Greek ruins. This

[124] Darryl Smyers, "Q&A: Dimmu Borgir's Silenoz on English being Metal's Official Language and Listening to Lady Gaga When Drunk," Dallas Observer, December 6, 2010, https://www.dallasobserver.com/music/qanda-dimmu-borgirs-silonez-on-english-being-metals-official-language-and-listening-to-lady-gaga-when-drunk-7057698.

[125] Album cover available at https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/A_Banner_Greater_than_Death/89067.

imagery further connects Der Stürmer's use of imagery to the Third Reich by incorporating elements of ruin gazing. German literature scholar Julia Hell notes that Hitler had himself photographed looking at ruins of ancient Rome as an "act of imperial mimesis" that would "[promise] a *Reich* that will last a thousand years."[126] Hell continues, explaining that such imagery also instilled the "European subject in the position of scopic mastery," and implies a future Aryan ruin gazer.[127]Similarly, Der Stürmer's placement of the Nazi flag in front of ancient Greek ruins invite the viewer to consider the longevity of Nazi politics within the framework of Greek heritage. Additionally, the foregrounded Nazi flag further implies not only a European scopic master, but a specifically Aryan one. With the absence of a specific person as ruin gazer and the level vantage point of the photograph, Der Stürmer's album cover invites the listener to become the gazer as well and view the ancient Greek history through a heavily politicized lens.

What this particular use of Greek mythology seems to imply is that racialized mythology has become a sort of global aesthetic for NSBM. Well-known musicians such as Vikernes have undoubtedly help to solidify these beliefs within the metal community. Der Stürmer's song then demonstrates the ability to adapt this global aesthetics into more local mythologies and traditions. They continue to use heavy distortion that has become a hallmark of the genre while also using English for their lyrics, a commonality for many black metal bands even from non-English speaking countries, to appeal to a larger metal community. In contrast, their use of Greek mythology points to a more specific locality. Although these local traditions may differ between bands, they have all been connected to

[126] Julia Hell, *The Conquest of Ruins: The Third Reich and the Fall of Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 384.
[127] Ibid., 385.

ideas of racial purity and the desire to maintain racial purity even, and perhaps often, through violence. In this way, the manifestations of national socialist beliefs within black metal can actually be malleable to conform to Norse, Slavic, or Greek local mythos while maintaining the beliefs in overarching national socialist racial structures and hierarchies.

Der Stürmer strongly encapsulates this idea, as they have moved away from the Norse mythology popularized by earlier artists like Vikernes to incorporate their Greek heritage. However, Graveland's Rob Darken also indicates the flexibility of adapting mythology to political and racialized topics in his mixing of Norse and Germanic mythologies to accommodate his emphasis on war and warrior-like dispositions. Many of their ideologies maintain similarities to the *Völkisch* movements that conceives of Aryans as a group that needs protecting and preserving in addition to ideas of race separation. These views are also imbued with a sense of the supernatural or mythological, relating back to ariosophic ideas posited by Hitler and other high-ranking members of the Third Reich. Furthermore, these lyrics also indicate that national socialist philosophies can be adapted to accommodate different localities and mythological histories. As a result, we see the merging of two historical lineages: 1) the continuation of Hitler's and the Third Reich's racial ideologies and 2) the continuation of black metal's mythological lyrical tropes. By combining these two histories, black metal has been not only a vehicle for bands to spread national socialist ideologies, but also a method of adapting them to local histories.

Redefining Whiteness Through Black Metal

While bands within the NSBM scene make an obvious point of denigrating anyone non-white or non-Aryan, we can also understand their lyrics and beliefs to be about constructing whiteness. George Lipsitz has argued that whiteness often seeks to, and succeeds in, remaining invisible, a sort of backdrop against which everything else is defined in opposition. Lipsitz writes that "race is a cultural construct, but one with deadly social causes and consequences," and explains that that whiteness functions as "the unmarked category against which difference is constructed," and thus it "never needs to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations."[128] Lipsitz discusses whiteness within a specifically American context, emphasizing the invisibility of the white hegemonic status quo. According to Lipsitz, whiteness maintains a vested interest in remaining invisible to make whiteness appear as a sort of common-sense default that maintains structures of white supremacy. What NSBM bands, and national socialism more broadly is that they seek to make the structures of white supremacy visible and obvious and in ways that celebrate these racist and xenophobic structures. They believe that whiteness should be more visible, not because it would help illuminate and subsequently undo white supremacy, but rather because they want to reinforce it. As Lipsitz's definition of whiteness has become prevalent throughout many academic papers, I will refer to national socialist definitions of whiteness as "Aryaness" throughout this chapter to distinguish these two ways of thinking about whiteness.

[128] George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: 1998), 1-2. Others more recently such as Philip Ewell and Joe Feagin have also used similar constructions of whiteness in their work.

Neo-Nazism obviously borrows many of its racial ideologies from the German Nazi Party.[129] In *Mein Kampf,* Hitler details a political proposal which combines a critique of socialist democracy with what is referred to as the "Jewish Question." Albrecht Koschorke describes Hitler's writings, saying "[i]n its treatment of this key theme, the text constructs a kind of two-story structure. Its ideological message claims that the eradication of Judaism which—conspiracy theories are confusing for the nonadepts—is simultaneously supposed to be the driving force of capital and the force behind the anticapitalism of the working class, will put an end to the class struggle.[83]" Koschorke argues that Hitler's ideas provided a link between middle/upper classes and the lower class by combining elements of xenophobia (common in many parts of the bourgeoisie) with language of class struggle, claiming to have been poor himself in the past. Hitler's theories for grasping for power also stem from the need to discredit the Socialist Democrats by creating a scapegoat, and because his political stances are deeply rooted in German nationalism. According to Koschorke, this scapegoat needed to be "the person who does not fit into the schema of the national: among the racists and sectarian *Völk* ideologues around 1900 … this person is the Jew."[130]

The ideological result of this scapegoating is a clear racial hierarchy, on which much of the Nazi racial rhetoric is based. In an analysis of *Mein Kampf,* Felicity J. Rash notes that Hitler "saw Aryans as innately superior, a state ordained by God and Nature together and

[129] In the term "Neo-Nazism," I also include radical right racists more broadly, whether or not they identify as specifically "Neo-Nazi" or share an affinity for the specific Nazi party rhetoric.

[83] Albrecht Koschorke, "Ideology in Execution: On Hitler's Mein Kampf." *New German critique* 42, no. 1 (2015): 1–22, 11.

[130] Ibid., 8.

argues that 'Aryans are founders of culture' above all other races."[131] And, "he metaphorized the Jews as a black race and the Aryans as white…"[132] Of course, the Jews were not the only race Hitler considered beneath Aryans. Those of African descent are also described in *Mein Kampf* as "well-trained animals."[133] Rash further indicates Hitler's adoption of Christian messaging (in contrast to the occult and supernatural beliefs that permeated the Reich as discussed in the previous section) to emphasize selflessness and to emphasize the collective, rather than individual, good. For Hitler, this was a natural quality in the Aryan race; whereas he believed the Jews did not have this trait, and, indeed, emphasized selfishness and individual gain. The perceived attempt to dilute the Aryan bloodline through marriage and race mixing was a primary concern for Hitler.[134] He claimed that the Jewish community in particular was a threat to racial purity and led to weak bloodlines that resulted in Germany's loss of World War I.[135] These sorts of ideologies would infamously become the driving force behind the Holocaust.

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[131] Felicity J. Rash, *The Language of Violence: Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf* (New York: P. Lang, 2006), 58.

[132] Ibid., 58.

[133] Ibid., 59.

[134] Ibid., 55, 621. To illustrate this idea, Hitler writes that "each time Aryan blood has become mixed with that of an inferior people the result has been an end of the culture-sustaining race. North America, the population of which consists for the most part of Germanic elements, which mixed very little with inferior coloured nations, displays humanity and culture very different from that of Central and South America, in which the settlers, mainly Latin in origin, mingled their blood very freely with that of the aborigines. Taking the above as an example, we clearly recognize the effects of racial intermixture. The man of Germanic race on the continent of America having kept himself pure and unmixed, has risen to be its master; and he will remain master so long as he does not fall into the shame of blood mixing," (Hitler, English translation, 121)

[135] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Sentry ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1943), 121. There are several points at which he says this, but perhaps none so clearly as saying that "The exact opposite of the Aryan is the Jew" (125) and goes on to refer to the Jewish community as "parasites in the bodies of other nations" (127).

While these ideas are, at this point, well-known and attributed to Hitler and the Nazi Party, it is worth looking at not only how Hitler defines the Jewish and other communities defined as non-Aryan, but also the specific language he uses to describe the Aryan race. Throughout Chapter 10 of *Mein Kampf*, titled "Nation and Race," Hitler uses language associated not only with strength, but also violence. For example, towards the beginning of the chapter, Hitler claims that in order to have peace, a land must first be "thoroughly conquered and subdued…to the extent of making himself sole master of it…Otherwise it means that humanity has passed the highest point in its development, and the end is not domination by any ethical idea, but barbarism, and chaos to follow."[136] At another point, Hitler claims that "as a conqueror he overthrew inferior men, and their work was done under his control according to his will and for his purpose."[137] Statements such as these emphasize the idea of strength and power through violence. Using philosophies that bear resemblance to "social Darwinism" —which applies the "survival of the fittest" motto to social hierarchies—Hitler clearly constructs Aryaness as strong and that this strength is created through violence.

This characterization of Aryaness has clearly resonated with some members of the NSBM scene, as many of these sentiments can be found echoed in NSBM rhetoric. Members of bands like Burzum, Graveland, and Der Stürmer—all of whom have been discussed above— clearly believe in a racial hierarchy and use similarly violent language describe it. Der Stürmer has implicitly defined whiteness through what they term "European

[136] Ibid., 121.
[137] Ibid., 124.

values," which consist of "nobility, honor, pride, and racial awakening."[138] For these bands, such values are preached through doctrines of national socialism and they have lauded this ideology in what they refer to as a "folk awakening."[139] By connecting these qualities to the "folk awakening" of national socialism, Der Stürmer has already begun to implicitly connect racially-derived values to the violence of Hitler's Reich. This connection between whiteness, white supremacy, and violence is strengthened further in a 2007 interview with the 'zine *breidablik* with Der Stürmer's bassist/guitarist, Hjarulv Henker. When asked about what they thought about non-national socialist black metal, the interviewer refers to the music as "harmless, pacifistic, and "feminine" sounding." In response, Henker agrees with this characterization and proceeds to claim that the current "harmless" black metal scene has become reflective of "the condition of the average European man," which he describes as "useless." As a point of contrast, he posits that "the Aryan religion is built upon the ethics and psyche of a warlike, conquering people, not to some pot-influenced hippie mumblings. In general, all these [homophobic slur] are part of modernity."[140] In this interview, Henker connects ideas of Aryanness, referred to as "the Aryan religion," to connotations of violence through the words "conquer" and "war-like." Additionally, Henker brings up the idea of modernity, using a gay slur to denote femininity, and subsequently weakness.[141] This notion of modernity as a slur is not new. It has been used historically as a derogatory term to refer

[138] "Der Stürmer," Mirgilus Siculorum, accessed May 26, 2022, http://www.old.mirgilus.com/interviews/dersturmer.html.

[139] Ibid.

[140] "Der Stürmer Interview," accessed September 1, 2020, http://breidablik-zine.narod.ru/interviews/der_sturmer.html.

[141] There is obviously a lot wrong with this and I'm not affirming the idea that feminine means weak, but this is the belief of the interviewer and the interviewee.

to multiculturalism or cosmopolitan urban spaces.[142] What Henker's quotation indicates is a conflation of identities deemed "lesser than." While race obviously plays a large role in the hierarchy that Henker describes, his use of feminized language also implies that Aryanness also includes specific gender and sexual identities. Specifically, that Aryanness necessarily means heterosexual and male whiteness and that true Aryanness is defined and characterized by enacting violence upon others. Given the scene's history of violence that included an attack on a gay man—Eithun's murder of Andreassen—these definitions fit well into black metal's violent history.

Graveland's Rob Darken has made comments using similar language when asked about his political beliefs. Darken connects the relationship between paganism and race to ideas of war and violence. He admits his desire to use Wotan instead of Odin is because of Wotan's categorization as the "god of war and warriors" and continues saying that he believes in "pride and honor…values that lead warriors to eternity." He continues, saying that "[t]yrants of Cruelty roam the world leading us to higher values."[143] For Darken, these "higher values" and the warrior ethos he mentions have already been tied to race through his discussions of pagan mythology, particularly through his claim that the people of Wotan are from the North and his reference to the "white beasts of Wotan." Darken's comments also imply that these higher values are begotten through violence, through the emphasis on the so-called "tyrants of cruelty" as well as the repetition of the warrior/warlike figure throughout and the invocation of war-related Pagan figures.

[142] Leo Botstein discusses these changes in the Grove Music Online entry for "modernism." Botstein discusses the term modern as a negative connotation for things that related to modern life such as trade and industry in the 19th century.

[143] "Graveland Interview," Frostkamp.

Vikernes has also made similar statements, using violence to connect his racial and pagan ideologies to ideas of power and strength. After going to prison for Euronymous's murder in 1994,[144] Vikernes continued to take interviews from prison, many of which began to focus on his neo-Nazi beliefs. When asked about his "ideal society" in a 1994 interview with *C.O.T.I.M Magazine*, Vikernes responded in German, saying "[d]ie dritte Reich. En judenfrei Welt," translating to "The Third Reich. A Jew-free world." Continuing, he says that the "scum (*Abscahum*)" of the world would be doomed.[145] Given the beliefs he has espoused in various online channels, Vikernes's belief in the superiority of the Aryan race and his racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic views have been well established. However, in this interview, Vikernes specifically describes supposed Aryan superiority through this language of strength and violence. When the interviewer asks Vikernes about his use of the term "Übermensch," Vikernes replies that his definition is "a white Aryan man with strength and pride. Both mental and physical strength."[146] Vikernes continues to use the word "strength" throughout to describe his ideals, claiming it is one of the "virtues" he holds dear and that he believes in a "survival of the fittest" type of mentality and likens himself to a "strong animal." Throughout several of his interviews, he also refers to Wotan/Odin, claiming that Wotan is the "God of war and death," and the Asgardsrei, or the "name for all

[144] As discussed in the history of black metal section, Euronymous was the guitarist for Mayhem who Vikernes murdered. He was sentenced to a 21-year sentence in 1994 and released in 2009.

[145] Werner "Nyar" Linke, "Interview with Varg Vikernes," *C.O.T.I.M Magazine*, 1994. Accessed through Burzum.org. Exact phrasing: "Das istder Lauf der Welt, daß der Abscahum der Menschheit todgeweiht ist."

[146] Vikernes also answers this in German. Exact phrase "My definition of an Übermenschen ist ein weiß-arische Mensch mit Stäarke und Stolz. Both mental and physical Stäarke.

the warriors who have given their lives to Wotan ritually."[147] Given the prior connections between Norse/Germanic mythology to Aryaness, his focus on warriors and war-like gods and figures continues the emphasis on strength and violence as part of an Aryan identity. Further, Vikernes's reputation for violence, especially given that many of these interviews were done while he was in prison, indicates that these principals of violence have been put into tangible action.

Each of these these groups has used similar language to define black metal. In the interview with Der Stürmer's Henker, he laments the "harmless, pacifistic, and 'feminine," black metal being produced and argues that newer, non-NS black metal musicians are "no better than the average pop wanker that walks on the streets" and play "harmless black metal."[148] Henker's interview not only works to define Aryaness, but also connects this to what he considers to be "real" black metal. Vikernes has also connected black metal to ideas of hatred and destruction, even before he committed his own violent acts. In a 1992 interview with *Orcustus - The Shadow of the Golden Fire Magazine*, Vikernes claims that he enjoys the idea of black metal growing in popular influence—something seemingly antithetical to black metal's emphasis on strictly underground and anti-mainstream stance. Vikernes states, though, that he enjoys Norwegian black metal becoming a trend if those trends can result in destruction and evil, indicating that black metal is, or at least should be, inherently tied to violence.[149] Graveland has also shared similar views, saying that true black

[147] Tolis Yiovanitis, "Interview with Varg Vikernes," *Metal Hammer,* 1997. Accessed through Burzum.org.

[148] Der Stürmer Interview, http://breidablik-zine.narod.ru/interviews/der_sturmer.html.

[149] Bård "Faust" Eithun, "Interview with Varg Vikernes," *Orcustus – The Shadow of the Golden Fire* Magazine, 1992. Accessed through Burzum.org.

metal are "band[s] created by people who really feel this kind of music and try to spread the message of Darkness by this evil music."[150]

These types of descriptions connect these bands' definitions of Aryaness to black metal, but also to national socialist ideologies. The emphasis in these bands' ideologies and Hitler's on the need to conquer or "win" in some sort of violent battle demonstrates how these bands have placed themselves into a continued political history that stems from beliefs in the Third Reich. The common language of war, violence, and overall aggression is used to explain the supposed supremacy of the Aryan race, denoting that Nazi race ideologies at least partially define Aryaness through perceived physical strength and the ability to commit violence against others, which demonstrates that innate strength and create a racial hierarchy. The linguistic similarities between national socialist ideologies, Aryaness, and black metal connect them to create NSBM.

Because views on Aryaness depend heavily for bands such as Burzum, Der Stürmer, and Graveland on ideas of strength through violence, black metal's history of violence has been particularly appealing. For NSBM bands, the choice to use black metal allows them to merge the genre's history with fascist political histories. For this reason, black metal has allowed for an ideal space to place racial ideologies that connect Aryaness and white supremacy to violence. For these bands, violence and destruction have become defining characteristics of the genre and place themselves within this history whether they have committed actual acts of violence themselves or not.[151] For those that define Aryaness

[150] "Graveland," *The Oath II*, summer 1994, https://sendbackmystamps.org/category/all-bands/bands/graveland-pol/#jp-carousel-8132.

[151] To my knowledge, Graveland and Der Stürmer members have not committed acts of violence such as church burnings or murder.

similarly, the emphasis on black metal's violent history and now infamous reputation due to this lineage have provided an overlap between black metal's specific generic history and the ways that metal neo-Nazis talk about and define whiteness. Part of black metal's attractiveness to those who define whiteness in this way is that it allows them to place themselves within a history of actual violent action, rather than mere fantasies of destruction. Subsequently, black metal has become an ideal genre for a Nazified redefinition of whiteness through strength and violence to occur as they can coopt the violence, and "strength" already found within the genre.

Conclusion

In addition to the cultural overlaps and space for racial redefinition in the preceding sections, Vikernes himself must be understood as a major influence in black metal's adoption of far-right political ideologies. His blog, which started while he was in prison, was Vikernes's main way of spreading propaganda before he used various social media platforms. Vikernes's influence in the sonic maturation of black metal must also be acknowledged. Burzum, along with bands like Mayhem and Darkthrone, helped create black metal's second wave aesthetic in Norway, experimenting with various sound and recording techniques to give the genre its musical qualities. Such participation placed Vikernes in high social standing in the scene before his arrest and his violence had only made him more notorious. For those seeking to define whiteness through violence to uphold racial supremacy, Vikernes acted as a sort of role model. As Darski's comments previously have

made clear, black metal's "right turn" was marked by the sudden interest in and display of Burzum shirts.

The attractiveness of black metal for those seeking a musical outlet for far right and Neo-Nazi political ideologies can be understood as a multi-faceted and interlocking set of cultural overlaps that draw on various musical and political histories. By drawing on the political histories of the Third Reich and Nazi connections to occultist thinking, NSBM bands have been able to fit themselves into the history of black metal's historical use of pagan and occultist tropes. Although many who use these tropes are not doing so with political aims, they have allowed bands to place themselves simultaneously within both a Nazi and black metal history. Similarly, the genre's history of violence converges with racial beliefs posited by those of NSBM bands and Hitler himself, allowing bands to further place themselves within a Nazi political history. Despite these overlaps between the political and cultural histories of black metal and the Third Reich, it must be made clear that not all bands who engage in some of these tropes (e.g., Satanism, paganism) are placing themselves within this same political history. However, these overlaps have made black metal particularly appealing for those seeking to push political ideologies through music. These sociological factors may at least partially account for the appeal of black metal for those in the far-right political sphere, but the music has been less discussed. The following chapter will explore the musicological and aesthetic appeal of black metal for use as a political vehicle.

If it growls like a Nazi…: the role of noise and affect in national socialist black metal

Introduction

Black metal's racist fringe has become notorious in the metal community, despite the fact that the number of active bands who promote national socialism is actually a very small percentage of the scene.[1] And yet, recently, the topic of heavy music and its connections to racist political extremism has attracted scholarly interest. Nancy Love's 2016 monograph *Trendy Fascism*[2] spends a chapter focused on RaHoWa (short for "racial holy war"), a Canadian heavy metal band that emphasizes and promotes white supremacist ideologies, while part of Jonathan Pieslak's monograph on music and radicalism explores the history of the skinhead punk movement as well as the uses of this music in publicly violent acts.[3] Still others, have discussed National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) and racist ideologies associated with extreme metal more specifically. Sharon Hochhauser has explored the aims of NSBM labels and their exploitation of youth culture seeking alternative recording

[1] According to the Encyclopaedia Metallum, an online archive that tracks metal bands around the world, there are currently 21,746 active black metal bands and only 310 of them are labeled as having National Socialist lyrical themes. There are 2 listed as having "Odalist" themes, referencing racist ideologies under the guise of mythology. The archive also lists 744 bands of any metal genre as having national socialist themes when not accounting for current activity.

[2] Nancy Love, *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

[3] Jonathan R. Piselak, *Radicalism & Music: an Introduction to the Music Cultures of Al-Qa'ida, Racist Skinheads, Christian-Affiliated Radicalism, and Eco-Animal Rights Militancy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2015).

practices[4] and Keith Kahn-Harris's analysis of racist play within the genre has revealed an extremely fine line between genuine racist and anti-Semitic ideologies and mere flirtation with these ideas for a sense of anti-social thrill.[5] These scholars have predominantly focused on the sociological elements of the genre, generally favoring discussing social networks, circulation, and music's use in propaganda, which has led largely to a dearth of discussion of NSBM's musical elements.

While the current scholarship has focused on how metal has been used to recruit and enforce political ideologies, these authors have not yet considered why metal has been used or why these groups have chosen black metal as their preferred vehicle for these political extremisms. In this chapter, I explore the role of musical sound in creating and shaping political ideologies and communities for both musicians and listeners through spectrographic analysis. My analyses emphasize the role of timbre in heavy metal, particularly the use of distortion in the guitar and vocals, to create a noisy soundscape that is heightened through the genre's emphasis on loudness. I take three musical examples from NSBM bands Der Stürmer, Graveland, and Burzum who convey their political messages through lyrics and their online presences with varying degrees of blatantness. Using Michael Heller's, Arnie Cox's, and Zachary Wallmark's theories of music and embodied experiences, I then argue that metal's emphasis on noise and loudness create an

[4] Sharon Hochhauser, "The Marketing of Ango-Identity in the North American Hatecore Metal Industry," in *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green (Durham, NC, 2011), 161-179.

[5] Keith Kahn-Harris, "You are from Israel and that is Enough to Hate you Forever: Racism, Globalization, and Play Within the Extreme Metal Scene," *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green, (Durham, NC, 2011), 200-223.

overwhelming physical response that forces listeners into a state of affective overdrive. Adapting George Bataille's theories of the "accursed share," or an excess of energy, I further posit that bands working within neo-Nazi ideological frameworks manipulate this affective excess to push listeners towards these political aims and the importance noise plays in community formation regardless of the band's subtlety.

Black Metal Musical Aesthetics and Noise

Extreme metal, a label that usually refers to black, death, and doom metal (and its sub-subgeneric categories), differs from its thrash/speed counterparts in terms of harmonic construction and how much distortion is added to various aspects of the playing and recording process. According to Keith-Kahn Harris, extreme metal often uses Phrygian or Locrian modes (rather than Dorian or aeolian, which are used most often in other heavy metal genres), and these modes have connotations of being the "darkest" sound.[6] However, the biggest musical difference between these subgenres is the emphasized use of distortion. Whereas heavy metal (including speed and thrash) utilizes more sung vocals, extreme metal relies on heavily distorted voices that growl or shriek, often making the words mostly incomprehensible. Further emphasis on guitar distortion is also common. Many bands have experimented with ways to create more distortion that add to overdriving the amplification

[6] Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 10-11, 31. It should be noted that Kahn-Harris writes the term as 'darkest,' noting that this meaning is more of an association around the music rather than something inherent to the modes themselves.

systems. For example, some bands use down-tuning, a practice in which the guitar strings are loosened to tune them to the next pitch down. The strings' looseness causes the pitches to sound muddier and more distorted. Kahn-Harris has also noted extreme metal's emphasis on guitar riffs (repeated melodic sequences) rather than the virtuosic guitar solos often found in other heavy metal genres.[7] Black metal in particular has also experimented with incorporating distortion through the recording process.[8] Gylve "Fenriz" Nagell, a member of iconic black metal band Darkthrone, has recalled the band's early days, when they were looking for intentionally bad recording equipment and amps in order to further distort the sound, in an effort to make the music to sound "cold." Varg Vikernes of Burzum has also recalled using bad equipment, including an old head set microphone to achieve a "necro sound" in his recordings.[9] These techniques result in unique soundscape that eschews common practices of hi-fidelity recording.[10]

When considering metal's aesthetic appeal to those with neo-fascist or neo-Nazi tendencies, the genre is often talked about in terms of its social scene or its emotional content.[11] Nancy Love, for example, has argued that racist bands deliberately use emotional effects in their music to "manipulate their audiences and create their desired responses."[12]

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[7] Ibid. 31.

[8] Aaron, Aites and Audrey Ewell, *Until the Light Takes Us* (San Francisco, California, USA: Factory 25, 2019), DVD.

[9] *Until the Light Takes Us*, 0:14:16.

[10] The movie *Lords of Chaos*, a cinematic narrative of the Norwegian Black Metal scene, also emphasizes this aspect, including how mic placement was used to make the recording as reverberant and muddied as possible.

[11] See Keith Kahn-Harris and Sharon Hochhauser for more on extreme metal's scene and racism within it.

[12] Love, 117.

Love points to RaHoWa's[13] use of high-arousal negative emotions such as anger, distress, fear, and hate that are combined with music that is often considered "aggressive" and lyrics/music that is meant to "'amp up' concert audiences emotionally and physically" through "rapid beats, ascending pitches, and loud volumes."[14] Love emphasizes the music's emotional content, referring to RaHoWa's music as full of "anger, hatred, and violence" that works to bind their audience to each other through these emotional experiences and by manipulating basic survival instincts for political gains.[15] While the association between metal and negative emotions such as anger or rage seem like common sense, more analysis is needed to consider how these emotions and affective experiences are mapped onto both black metal aesthetics and political viewpoints. This exploration hopes to demonstrate not only how but why neo-fascist ideologies have been drawn to this genre and this subgenre more specifically.

Metal and Noise

An important aspect of metal's soundscape is noise, which has taken on several definitions. Caleb Kelly, in an overview of various definitions of noise, introduces one possible definition using information noise theory. This theoretical framework defines noise as "anything extraneous to the message," which can include both sonic noises as well as

[13] RaHoWa, which stands for Racial holy war, is a Canadian heavy metal band whose messages advocate for the survival of a pure white race. Nancy Love's *Trendy Fascism* has a more thorough history of the band and its creator.

[14] Love, 117.

[15] Ibid., 116-117.

visual.[16] Kelly also notes that others, such as Paul Hegarty have argued that noise is entirely subjective and consists of any unwanted sound specific to the individual listener and context.[17] Still others, like Michael Serres, argue that noise is not always negative. Instead, Serres argues that noise is always in the background and keeps everything from becoming repetitious, and therefore "dying," because noise is constantly changing. In this theory, noise is not necessarily considered a negative sonic occurrence, but rather something that allows life to remain vibrant through change.[18] Still others, such as Jacques Attalli and Garret Keizer, define noise in terms of its cultural and political context, arguing that noise can function as a symbol of political power. According to Attali, noise is something that is meant to be eliminated, which often means that noise is defined against the status quo. Attali notes that totalitarian regimes often try to ban noise because it demands "cultural autonomy, support for differences or marginality."[19] Keizer also mentions that noise tends to affect those without political power and is often caused by those who have it.[20]

When discussing noise in the context of heavy metal, I am referring to the obscuration of individual pitch frequencies through technological means. In other words,

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[16] Caleb Kelly, *Cracked Media: the Sound of Malfunction* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009), 71. For visual noise, Kelly points to examples like a smudged newspaper or even the overcrowded newspaper page with headlines, pictures, ads, and text.

[17] Ibid., 73.

[18] Ibid., 77. Notably, this idea is not unique to Serres. John Cage had similar ideas about the importance of sound as noise, music, etc. as well as an emphasis on change, resulting in ever-changing pieces like *4'33''*.

[19] Jacques Attali, "Noise: The Political Economy of Music," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 29-39, 32.

[20] Garret Keizer, *The Unwanted Sound of Everything we Want: A Book about Noise* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2010), 4.

noise in this context is the intentional use of distortion that causes a "wall of sound" making it difficult to hear individual pitches, their attacks, and their decays clearly. Attali's approach to noise may seem to fit in this context, as he describes noise obscuring "meaning through the interruption of the message, and through the freed imagination of the listener within pure noise."[21] In metal, noise obscures meaning by obscuring the clarity of individual pitches. As scholars like Robert Walser have established, this "interruption of the message" (i.e., distorting clear pitches) is ultimately what creates feelings of power for the audience.[22] To discuss noise through a framework of obscuration lends itself to possible interpretations of informational noise theory. However, in the context of metal—and heavier genres more generally—noise is not extraneous to the message. Rather, noise is the message in its ability to create desired affective responses.

In considering several black metal examples, both neo-Nazi and non-politically affiliated groups, aesthetic trends begin to appear, particularly the emphasized use of noise to obscure pitches. The Spectrograms of these examples look like literal walls of sound, in part because of the prominence of overtones layered above the actual pitches. These overtones likely occur from the use of distortion through the guitar's amplification system, which clips the soundwaves and then maximizes the volume to make normally inaudible overtones audible. The audible overtones can be heard up until around 5000 Hz range, while some may go significantly higher at certain points in the song. The spectrogram example below, taken from Gallhammer's song "Beyond the Hate Red" seen in ***Figure 1***. Gallhammer is not an NSBM band, but they do demonstrate typical black metal aesthetics.

[21] Kelly, 81.

[22] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993).

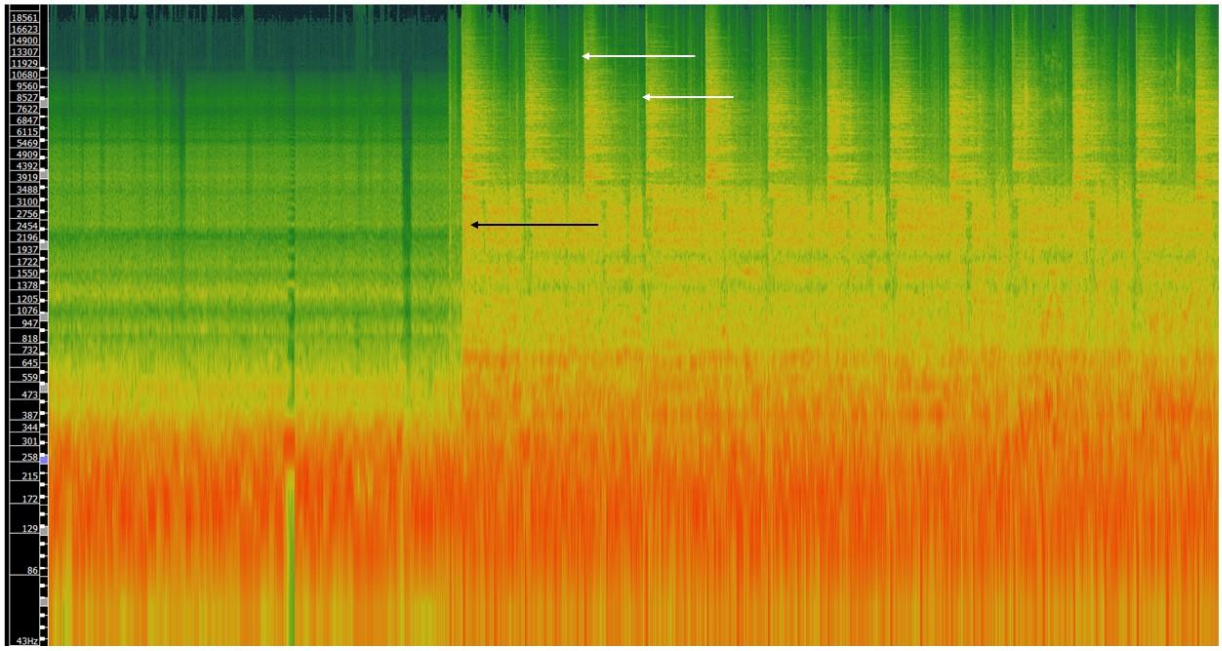

Figure 2: "Beyond the Hate Red" (0:00-0:37): percussion hits (white arrows) are visible in the upper partials and increased noise with the introduction of the vocals and percussion enter (black arrow), audible pitches seen lower, overtones and less loud pitches seen in yellow and green spaces.

The Y-axis represents sound in Hertz (Hz) that measures the frequency of the sounds while the X-axis represents time. The different colors represent volume and audibility. The darker sounds in red are at a higher decibel level, while the yellow is less so, and the green would not be heard as easily, especially as they are covered up by the louder frequencies in red.

This Gallhammer example indicates extended and sustained pitches, making the attacks difficult to see amidst the noise. Harris Berger and Cornelia Fales refer to the changes in amplitude over time as the dynamic-temporal envelope. The attack would show an expected density in the spectrogram at the time of the attack and then gradually fade as the pitch fades. With the use of electronic manipulation, such as through a sustain pedal, heavy metal

allows the note to sustain for an unnaturally long time. Berger and Fales have noted that while some earlier heavy metal songs by bands such as Judas Priest maintain visible amplitude spikes during the attack of a note, later and 'heavier' songs demonstrate a flattened dynamic-temporal envelope, meaning the attacks are difficult, if not impossible, to see as a spike of amplitude.[23] Although Berger and Fales have focused predominantly on the sound of the guitar, the above spectrogram example shows similar trends. Often, the vocals are the most visible section and are usually denoted through pitch changes rather than differentiation between attacks. A similarly flattened dynamic-temporal envelope can be seen in Gallhammer's spectrogram above. The attacks that are most visible are the percussion hits, resulting in more noise above the pitched noise of guitar and vocal distortion.

There are several factors that create the flattened dynamic-temporal envelope in these examples. The use of technological manipulation to create distortion remains one of the hallmarks of heavy metal aesthetics. Distortion created through equipment like sustain or distortion pedals alter the sound's waveforms that make the attacks difficult and obscure the clarity of the played pitch. Metal also relies on instruments and techniques that are also inherently noisy, such as the use of drums and growled, yelled, or shrieked vocals. Finally, metal places a heavy emphasis on loudness. Using amplification systems to increase the volume to potentially ear-damaging volumes allows more closely spaced upper partials to be

[23] Harris Berger and Cornelia Fales, "'Heaviness' in the Perception of Heavy Metal Guitar Timbres: The Match of Perceptual and Acoustic Features over Time," in *Wired for Sound*, ed. Paul Green and Thomas Porcello (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 181-197, 190-191. Notably, Berger and Fales have emphasized the use of distortion specifically in the guitar. Heavier metal, and extreme metal especially, compound this distortion through the vocals.

heard more clearly, resulting in a rougher sound. These elements work in tandem to create the signature noisy sound that metal has cultivated and that black metal has taken to an extreme.

The Effects of Noise

The significance of noise in black metal, and metal more generally, has a few possible interpretations. Robert Walser has argued that distortion, which causes the noisy timbres, acts as a form of power for musicians and listeners. Distortion results from overdriving the amplification systems beyond the machine's ability to produce a clean sound, resulting in a layer of noise surrounding each pitch and the sustain pedal allows notes to be held longer than they can acoustically.[24] For Walser, these elements result in feelings of power, of being able to control the otherwise uncontrolled aspects of technological overdrive. Zachary Wallmark's analyses emphasize the guitar, but also consider vocal distortion that becomes increasingly important in later, heavier metal genres.[25] Wallmark notes that vocal distortion occurs through the use of extended vocal techniques, including grunts and growls that signify extreme metal and further argues that these sounds are meant

[24] Walser, 42.

[25] Walser, whose book was written in 1993, focuses predominantly on thrash and speed metal. This genre, while heavier than its predecessors in the 1970s is still more "listener friendly" as it emphasizes sung vocals and lyrics that are generally easy to understand. Genres of extreme metal, including black, death, and doom, emphasize the use of screams, shrieks, and growls for their vocals. Both of these characteristics of distortion can be easily seen in the examples discussed above.

to signify inhumanness or even demonic possession.[26] This "inhumanness" stems from the use of guttural and noisy timbres not often associated with typical human vocalizations.

Academic conversations around noise have also begun to expand beyond thinking of noise as a purely sonic ephemerality to explore its relationship to the physical body. For Wallmark, this physicality is especially noticeable when listening to extreme metal vocals. He argues that these vocals should be "understood from the perspective of the body, particularly our own internal sound generators, our vocal chords" and that "listeners do not merely respond empathically to the painful sound of an overtaxed amplifier."[27] While the audience may not be able to understand the exact feelings of an overdriven machine, the connections between machinery and the physical body may be more linked than Wallmark initially implies. I argue that noise resulting from distortion creates a biophysical response that shapes a listener's experience with extreme metal, regardless of whether this response can be described as empathic.

Keizer's exploration of noise predominantly demonstrates the negative effects noise can have on the body. These effects have been a larger social concern for decades, as indicated by the creation of the Noise Control Act of 1972, which was overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as the International Commission on the Biological Effects of Noise.[28] Keizer characterizes noise as having:

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[26] Zachary Wallmark, "The Sound of Evil: Timbre, Body, and Sacred Violence in Death Metal," in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, ed. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 65-87, 75.

[27] Ibid., 68.

[28] Keizer, 69.

> other negative effects on human health, mostly owing to the fact that noise is a stressor, even at levels well beneath those that can damage the ear…Noise is known to elevate so-called stress hormones like cortisone and adrenaline, useful chemicals in a fight-or-flight, but needless and costly physiological expenditures in those instances where no threat exists but the noise itself.[29]

Noise has also been linked to higher blood pressure and a higher resting rate of systolic blood pressure in children. Keizer further points to studies that show higher blood pressure when sleeping due to noise even if the noise is not loud enough to wake someone up.[30] Studies in public medical journals also connect noise to the effects of stress which can have long lasting effects. In 2011, the Environmental Burden of Disease Working Group found that

> the disability adjusted life-years due to nine selected environmental stressors including transportation noise, were estimated. Traffic noise was among the top three stressors with the highest estimated overall public health impact. DALYs due to traffic noise exposure were estimated to be in the same order to magnitude as DALYs due to passive smoking.[31]

More inconsistent studies have found possible connections between noise and the onset of cardiovascular diseases or even breast cancer.[32] When combined with loudness, the effects of noise can be painful and more permanently damaging to the body, including issues of hearing loss or the development of tinnitus.[33]

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[29] Ibid., 32.

[30] Ibid., 33.

[31] Mathias Bosner, Mark Brink, Abigail Bristow, Yvonne de Kluizenaar, Lawrence Finegold, Jiyoung Hong, Sabine A Janssen, Ronny Klaeboe, Tony Leroux, Andreas Liebl, Toshihito Matsui, Dieter Schwela, Mariola Sliwinska-Kowalska, Patrik Sörqvist, "Icben Review of Research on the Biological Effects of Noise 2011-2014," *Noise and Health* 17 no. 75, (2015), accessed on May 26, 2022, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4918662/#ref2.

[32] Ibid. Although there is no direct link to causation, there does seem to be a potential connection.

[33] Keizer, 26.

Throughout these examples, there are two points of clarification that need to be made. First, Keizer and the studies in public medicine journals, have overwhelmingly focused on the negative aspects of noise on the body. In these studies, noise is viewed as a destructive force that needs to be regulated for the safety of a population. Second, these studies have often conflated issues of noise with issues of loudness, particularly in the examples of nightclubs and entertainment. The onset of medical conditions such as hearing loss and tinnitus occur not necessarily because of noise, but rather because of sounds, both noise and not noise, that exist at extremely high volumes. The point I wish to emphasize is that these studies exemplify how bodies can be affected by sound whether or not we realize it, and we must consider sound—and noise and loudness—as corporeal and that listeners interact with sound physically as well as aurally.

Sound in terms of both noise and loudness play a crucial role in heavy metal in terms of both aesthetics and listener response. Michael Heller has discussed the effects of loudness on the body in positive terms through the concept of listener collapse. Listener collapse consists of the blending between the listener as an individual and their physical surroundings, a blending of the subjective and spatial. Heller refers to this blending as "in-between-ness."[34] For metal fans, this experience is often pleasurable and even desired. In her dissertation Olivia Lucas recounts experiences at a Sunn O))) (pronounced "Sun") concert, an experimental drone metal band that emphasizes low-pitched drones and loudness. Lucas writes:

> The throbbing bass competes with my heart for control over my bodily rhythms, and my chest feels tight and fluttery. I wonder if I can last an hour, or even twenty minutes. But

[34] Michael C. Heller, "Between Silence and Pain: Loudness and the Affective Encounter" *Sound studies (2015)* 1, no. 1 (2015): 40–58, 42.

> as each sound spins through me, pulsing and reverberating in all my hollow spaces, the slowly shifting vibrational scheme takes on a sinuously soothing character. I am overcome by a strong urge to lie down and close my eyes; the sound envelops my body, cutting me off from other sensations, making me safe. Closing my eyes, I sway slowly from side to side to the slow beat of vibrational pulses. I am touching sound.[35]

My own experiences at metal concerts have similarities to Lucas's in that the sound acts like a energetic charge moving throughout the body and rhythmic pulses can be physically felt as well as heard. Being able to "touch sound" also makes you aware of your body in ways you were not before. As Lucas's and my experiences demonstrate, embodied physicality is heightened as listeners become aware of their own bones, teeth, or "hollow spaces" we may forget about until something brings them to our attention. In these experiences, Heller's concept of listener collapse results in a kind of hyper-awareness of the body as the boundaries between yourself and the space (and other bodies) begins to fade away.[36]

Metal, Music, and the Mimetic Process

My emphasis on physicality also helps us understand how musical meaning and understanding are created in heavy metal through embodied cognition. More specifically,

[35] Olivia Luca, "Loudness, Rhythm and Environment: Analytical Issues in Extreme Metal Music" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2016), 48.

[36] Heller, 47 Heller further asserts that listener collapse can occur even when listening alone, such as through headphones, through "imagined loudness," in which the listener can evoke "haptic [memories] of pleasurable listener collapse.

Arnie Cox suggests that musical cognition is aided through a process of mimetic comprehension. Mimesis occurs through an embodied imitation of the sounds and their creations when listening to music. This can either be overt (e.g., pretending to play an instrument along with the musician) or more covert in imitation that exists in the listener's imagination. According to Cox, mimesis is grounded in two main questions: "*What's it like to do that?* And its twin question, *What's it like to be that*?"[37] Cox argues that mimesis can be invited through any number of musical characteristics, including pitch, duration, timbre, and loudness. Ultimately, the exact form mimesis takes depends on the types of music being used (and thus the different types of mimetic invitations the music offers) as well as the individual listener and the types of knowledge they bring to the listening experience.

Metal offers a variety of possible mimetic avenues. Some they share with a variety of different genres, including foot tapping, nodding along to the music, or even very subtle movements such as the contraction of the abdominal muscles. Other avenues are more specific to metal, such as headbanging, moshing, or "throwing horns,"[38] and are particularly prevalent during live shows. Due to metal's emphasis on loudness and noise, as seen in the Gallhammer spectrogram above, I suggest that metal's effects on biophysical responses to sound make metal's mimetic invitation particularly strong. These processes deeply affect our ability to understand music as mimetic participation can result in a shared sense of belonging as well as being a "central source of musical affect."[39]

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[37] Arnie Cox, *Music and Embodied Cognition: listening, moving, feeling, and thinking* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 11-12. Emphasis Cox's.

[38] Headbanging refers to throwing one's head violently back and forth and throwing horns refers to making devil horns with your hands by extending your pointer and pinky fingers while curling the rest in towards your palms.

[39] Cox, 53.

The significance of mimetic comprehension is not limited to considering how people move to understand music; Cox has also posited that mimesis plays a large role in creating and shaping experiences of musical affect. He describes affect as "everything that might be described in terms of *feeling*, including emotions, moods, desires, and urges as well as the feelings of exertions, balance, alertness, warmth, and other sensory experiences that, by themselves, do not constitute any particular emotion and yet are integral to the feeling of various experiences."[40] He further claims that "*Musical affect* includes what one feels in performing music and in response to musical stimuli."[41] For Cox, embodied cognition plays a large role in shaping musical affect either consciously or unconsciously.

Cox posits that musical affective experiences can be considered through eight avenues: mimetic participation, anticipation, expression, acoustic impact, implicit and explicit analysis, associations, exploring taboos, and the invisibility, intangibility, and ephemerality of musical sounds.[42] Within these avenues different genres may emphasize components to create a musical experience for its listeners. Although metal uses a variety of techniques to shape listeners' musical affective experiences, it makes particular use of several of acoustic impact, expression, and taboo to create certain affective experiences for their listeners.

Cox defines acoustic impact as thinking about how sounds "come at us," which are shaped by pitch, duration, timbre, strength, and location.[43] In metal, timbre and strength (i.e.,

[40] Ibid., 177.

[41] Ibid., 177. Greg Seigworth has also described affect as a physical response, calling it "visceral" and that it acts as a "gradient of bodily capacity" capable of moving into the very cells, muscles, and tissues of our bodies (Seigworth, 1-2).

[42] See Chapter 8 for more in-depth discussions of each category.

[43] Ibid., 185-187.

loudness) arguably play the largest role in creating the generic aesthetics. The loudness has an assertive, if not aggressive, way of coming at us while timbre, especially through distortion, makes the sound seem diffuse rather than focused. This diffusion at loud volumes arguably creates the feelings of being "enveloped in sound," which is corroborated by Lucas's and my own experiences. The spectrograms of Gallhammer's music discussed above also visually demonstrate this effect, as the sound forms a literal wall that "comes at" the listener. Although Cox admits that acoustic impact is not as connected to the mimetic process, it still plays a large role in how we interpret sounds and musical aesthetics.[44]

The concept of expression more directly relates to the mimetic hypothesis. My own analyses will show how this plays an important role in considering how music can be used to promote political ideologies. Expression in this case refers to an emotional expression and our perception of it. Although expression can be considered objectively through observation, the mimetic hypothesis allows us to engage with expression more empathetically. To do so, the audience must first discern who the expressing subject is. While this can be complicated in some genres (is it the performer? Composer? Character?), in metal this process is more straightforward. The expressing subjects are the people on the stage or the people playing the instruments, and the composers and performers are often the same people. Even though they may be playing a character of sorts using stage personas, they are often not considered completely divorced from the performer's usual subjectivity.[45] As such, the performers act as the expressing agents with whose emotions we are meant to engage, whether these

[44] Ibid., 185.

[45] Discussions of how this conflation of theatricality and literalness is discussed in further detail in chapter 1, particularly concerning the moral panic it incited during the 1980s.

emotions are real or performative. Through processes of mimesis the listeners then simulate the behavior they see on stage (or the behavior they imagine if they are listening individually) and then consider what emotions are often associated with those behaviors. As a result, the music helps to create an affective experience through feeling the performers' perceived emotions oneself.[46] In metal, this affective state is usually predicated on more aggressive feelings, as movements typical of the genre are often frenzied and somewhat violent. While these actions can quite easily be associated with negative emotions like rage, for most heavy metal fans, these actions translate into feelings of power.[47]

Finally, metal places a special emphasis on the exploration of taboo to create certain affective experiences. Unlike other aspects of the mimetic process, what is considered taboo can vary depending on culture and individual. Cox explains that musical taboo can cover a wide variety of concepts depending on performance expectations. Generally, musical taboo can include certain pitches (e.g., chromaticism or scooped notes), timbre (e.g., guitar distortion, yelling), and strength (e.g., loudness or softness) among others.[48] The context for these sounds is important, as not all sounds are considered taboo in all performance or listening situations. For example, Wallmark has noted that guitar distortion has become so common that it has arguably lost its sense of taboo.[49] Yet, in music, taboo is often aestheticized and is meant to be pleasurable. As an example, Cox notes that chills, a biophysical response meant to protect an organism's skin, create a sense of tabooed vulnerability, a sense of being in danger without actually being in danger, that becomes

[46] Cox, 183.
[47] See previous discussion of Walser's work for more about metal as power.
[48] Cox, 193.
[49] Wallmark, "The Sound of Evil," 72. However, Wallmark does note that listeners can still understand distortion as a form of technological failure.

pleasurable.[50] In metal music, taboo sounds are often emphasized, especially as taboo is felt and understood through embodied experiences. Wallmark has discussed this idea of pseudo-danger, especially in extreme metal genres through extended vocal techniques. Screaming, yelling, growling, etc. can all cause extreme damage to the vocal cords if not done carefully, but Wallmark argues that the performance of potentially dangerous techniques becomes a site of pleasure for many of metal's listeners.[51] Lyrical topics in metal also cover a range of topics considered "taboo" including war, drug addiction, capital punishment, Satanism, other occultism, murder, amongst others.

Cox's discussion focuses on specific musical characteristics and their invitation to mimesis as a form of affective creation while others have discussed how affect can be created through other aspects of embodied understanding. Zachary Wallmark has asserted that "*e*motion is intimately connected to motion."[52] Drawing on the English philosopher Herbert Spencer in particular, Wallmark argues that vocality plays an especially important role in the creation of affect through embodied musical experiences of timbre.[53] Such an assertion works in tandem with Cox's mimetic hypothesis. Wallmark argues that "subvocalization" that "consists of the interior rehearsal of the voice, a form of motor imagery in which musical sound (pitches, rhythmic patterns, inflections, and timbre) is traced out by the voice."[54] In other words, subvocalization is what helps us answer the question "what's it like to do that" posited by Cox. However, the subvocalized actions of the

[50] Cox, 194.
[51] Wallmark, "The Sound of Evil," 79.
[52] Zachary Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise: Timbre and Musical Meaning at the Edge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 36.
[53] Wallmark also notes that Cox, whose work I have discussed in-depth earlier, also argues for a Spencerian model of creating musical meaning.
[54] Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise*, 39.

listener are not necessarily the sole factor in the creation of affect; instead, the subvocalization acts as an initial response and affect is "mediated by many factors."[55] For Wallmark, timbre is an integral part to this mediation, and he focuses particularly on the use of noise and of vocal noise.[56] Wallmark explains that voices that appear to be overexerted in some way, such as growling or vocal distortion through overdriving the voice by placing more pressure on the supraglottal structures, "can play a vital affective role in the articulation of musical meaning."[57]

Although vocality may have a special emphasis for embodied processes of understanding, especially if these vocals in question are distorted, instrumental timbre maintains a significant role in affect creation. Wallmark continues, arguing that motions of subvocalization continue even when the listener is not cognitively reproducing vocal sounds. Drawing from Andrea Halpern's brain-imaging studies, Wallmark notes that the studies "found activity in the brain's supplementary motor area (SMA), a region of the motor cortex involved in imagined movement, when people listened to nonvocal timbre," suggesting the appearance of subvocalized motion for instrumental timbres.[58] Wallmark draws attention to previous studies that emphasize the use of distortion in vocal timbres that increase "biomechanical precursor[s] to fight-or-flight reflexes."[59] Similar effects were reported for nonvocal instruments that employed the use of distortion, and other studies demonstrate that

[55] Ibid., 39.

[56] Wallmark defines noise as "pitched sounds with spectral and temporal elements characteristic of high-arousal vocalization that deviate from a specific situationally defined default norm of sound production," 40. It should also be noted that this chapter was written in its initial stages before the publication of Wallmark's book.

[57] Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise*, 43.

[58] Ibid., 47.

[59] Ibid., 49.

noisy timbres in nonvocal music "increased affective arousal in listeners."[60] Further studies done by Wallmark and neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni tested affective experiences in noisy versus less noisy tones and found that the noisier timbres "recruited significantly stronger motor (premotor cortex, primary motor cortex, and SMA), somatosensory, limbic (amygdala), and paralimbic (insula) activity compared to the regular versions of the same sound producers."[61] Wallmark concludes that the parts of the brain that demonstrate higher activity levels imply that "listening to noisy timbre is *doing* and *feeling* noisy timbre."[62]

While Wallmark's and Iacoboni's studies emphasize the use of noise in embodied musical cognition, these studies do not indicate the importance of loudness, something that Wallmark does acknowledge in his analyses. I suggest that high volumes, combined with distorted and noisy timbres, would further heighten these embodied sensations. As Heller and Lucas have discussed, loudness allows sounds to seep into the cervices of our bodies, allowing us to feel sound in a more immediate way. Given the emphasis on noisy timbres and loud volumes in metal, and black metal in particular, I suggest that the genre's aesthetics invite us to feel sound in a more immediate way and allows for even more intense affective experiences.

[60] Ibid., 49. For this second claim, Wallmark cites a 2012 study done by Daniel Blumstein, Gregory Bryant, and Peter Kaye.
[61] Ibid., 53.
[62] Ibid., 54.

Affect, Mimesis, and the Propagation of Neo-Fascist Politics

For most listeners, metal musical aesthetics of black metal and the biophysical affective responses they experience result in pleasurable and fun experiences. These aesthetic choices are often paired with dark lyrical tropes about Satanism or dark forests to further create a dark and taboo atmosphere. However, others have begun to use these aesthetics to propagate racist and white supremacist viewpoints. The following section will discuss three case studies that combine black metal musical characteristics with white supremacist ideologies. Within the NSBM scene, I suggest three categories of national socialist activism in black metal: blatant, somewhat hidden, and covert. Blatant advocacy, as shown through the Greek band Der Stürmer's musical output, includes direct links to Nazi rhetoric and history, such as the direct reference to, and agreement with, Hitler and the Nazi Party, celebration of genocidal events such as the Holocaust, and direct use of hateful, racist, and anti-Semitic language. For blatant advocacy, Nazi imagery and references appear in various forms, including on album covers, through record label associations, and in the lyrics. For somewhat hidden bands, such as the Polish band Graveland, national socialist and white supremacist ideologies are evident in band materials and lyrics, but do not directly glorify the Third Reich. Bands within this category often cloak their ideologies behind ideas like paganism or heathenism that more covertly place their work within national socialist historical lineages but may not outright exalt Nazi figures like Hitler.[63] These bands also focus on a glorification of Aryaness, positing Aryaness and Aryan figures as powerful. Nazi

[63] See the previous chapter for further explanations on the history between Nazism and pagan mythologies.

symbols may be referenced, but to a lesser degree than those in the blatant category. Finally, bands in the hidden category, such as Burzum's earlier musical output, make little to no reference to national socialism through their music. Covert NSBM bands employ lyrical and image tropes to other black metal, such as Satanic imagery. However, looking into covert bands' ideologies—evidenced through interviews, social media presences, and other outlets—reveals often virulently racist and anti-Semitic ideologies that echo various national socialist beliefs. This section will provide an in-depth analysis of a song from each band that addresses lyrics, album covers, extra-musical engagement with national socialist beliefs, and each band's use of black metal aesthetics around noise.

Der Stürmer - Blatant

The Greek band Der Stürmer, whose name is taken from an anti-Semitic German tabloid published during World War II, express their political beliefs in several ways.[64] Their association with Nazi related groups is extremely obvious. Der Stürmer relies on the website *The Pagan Front* to publish updates, advertise new records or merchandise, and conduct interviews. *The Pagan Front* has ties to white power and Neo-Nazi record labels—including Blacksun Productions, Hakenkreuz Productions, and Totenkopf Propaganda—as well as several well-known NSBM bands. Der Stürmer's page on the site further glorifies Nazi imagery, and several of the band's pages include a watermarked background of Hitler's

[64] Notably, even bands that have played with racism or anti-Semitism have not named their band for it, rather it comes out in extra-musical ways or perhaps in the labelling in their album, or the lyrics of a single song.

face.[65] Further, in interviews, Der Stürmer musician Jarl von Hagall (not his real name), has also expressed admiration for Rock Against Communism for being one of the first white power musical movements. He has also proudly claimed affiliation with the Hellenic National Socialist Movement "Golden Dawn" and refers to Adolf Hitler as the "most important figure of all time."[66]

Der Stürmer's music contains similarly blunt national socialist ideologies. Their song "The Hammer Falls on Zion," was released in 2001 on their album titled *The Blood Calls for W.A.R.!* This album appears to have two possible cover art depictions, one which depicts a grainy drawing of a soldier with a German style helmet,[67] and the other, significantly more graphic, option depicts a man who has been hung wearing a sign reading "Jude" or "Jew."[68] Just as the title of the song leaves little room for uncertainty as to the band's political messaging, the lyrics similarly emphasize their national socialist beliefs. The song includes the following lyrics:

> Awaken Immortal Gods of our Blood
> Are pointing us the way to the fight
> Marching under the Hakenkreuz Flag
> The return of Aryan heathen might
>
> The Iron Eagle has risen again
> To sweep Europe as purifying storm
> Mud perish through "Night & Fog"

---

[65] Not even a joke, this is a real thing they have on their hosting site.

[66] Interview with Jarl Von Hagall. *The Stormer Zine*, 2005. Accessed July 1, 2020, http://www.thepaganfront.com/dersturmer/interviews/THE%20STORMER.html. See also the previous chapter for more on interviews with the band about their political affiliation.

[67] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/The_Blood_Calls_for_W.A.R.%21/21473.

[68] Album cover available at: http://www.militant-underground.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=1265. Other albums include similar references to Nazism, including their album *A Banner Greater than Death*, which shows the Nazi flag being flown in front of empty ancient Greek ruins. Subtlety is not Der Stürmer's strong suit.

Jewish world "order" is crumbling down

Steel is always stronger than gold
The hammer falls on Zion
Our bullets are your just reward
The hammer falls on Zion[69]

These lyrics bluntly reference Hitler's belief in the superiority of Nordic and Germanic ethnic bloodlines, the iron eagle—a common Nazi symbol depicting an eagle with wings spread atop a swastika—and the Hakenkreuz Flag—the now infamous red flag with a large swastika in the middle. The band's reference to the Jewish World Order also references far-right conspiracy theories. Sharon Hochhauser has described the underground far-right's conspiracy of the Zionist Occupied Government [ZOG], in which scene members believe the government is secretly run by a Jewish cabal to restrict the public's access to information and various forms of music.[70] In this sense, Der Stürmer's lyrics explicitly reference both symbols associated with the WWII era Nazi regime as well as more modern conspiracy theories born out of anti-Semitic sentiments. "The Hammer Falls on Zion," a reference to anti-Semitic ideologies, is also not the only song from this album or from their discography to make such explicit claims. Many of their songs from this album and others often make references to "Aryan might" or glorify the Third Reich.

[69] "The Hammer Falls on Zion: Der Sturmer," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 26, 2022. https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/The_Blood_Calls_for_W.A.R./21473. There are, somehow, more lyrics to this song that have not been included.

[70] Sharon Hochhauser, "The Marketing of Ango-Identity in the North American Hatecore Metal Industry," in *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green (Durham, NC, 2011), 172. Hochhauser further argues that this type of self-identification (i.e. as a band against the Jewish Order or ZOG) allows the bands to label themselves as an alternative source of information that rejects government censorship and as a "champion for the people" (178).

Der Stürmer's song "Those Who Lived and Died Like Heroes" demonstrate many of these qualities that have become sonic markers of the black metal genre. This can be seen in ***figure 2***, particularly the use of noisy timbres. The upper horizontal band that occupies the 2450-2800 bin indicate the upper partials that are not specific, played notes, but rather created by overdriving the amplification systems, which results in the distorted sounds in the guitar. Similarly, the pitches blend into one another and picking out where one note clearly begins and ends is more difficult. While the drum and cymbal hits can be seen more clearly in the upper partials, indicating the noisiness of the drums, there are relatively few vertical lines to be seen in the actual pitches being played in the guitar and, to some extent, in the vocals. In accordance with Berger and Fales, this example has a flattened dynamic-temporal envelope, especially in the guitar. The only visible frequency peaks are in the vocal lines, which also indicate a noisy timbre through a flattened dynamic-temporal envelope. The inability to see individual horizontal lines from either the vocals or the guitar/bass further show the high level of noise used in these examples. The emphasis on distortion in both the vocals through growling and the electronic manipulation of the guitar to create distortion indicate a reliance on noise as part of the music's aesthetics.

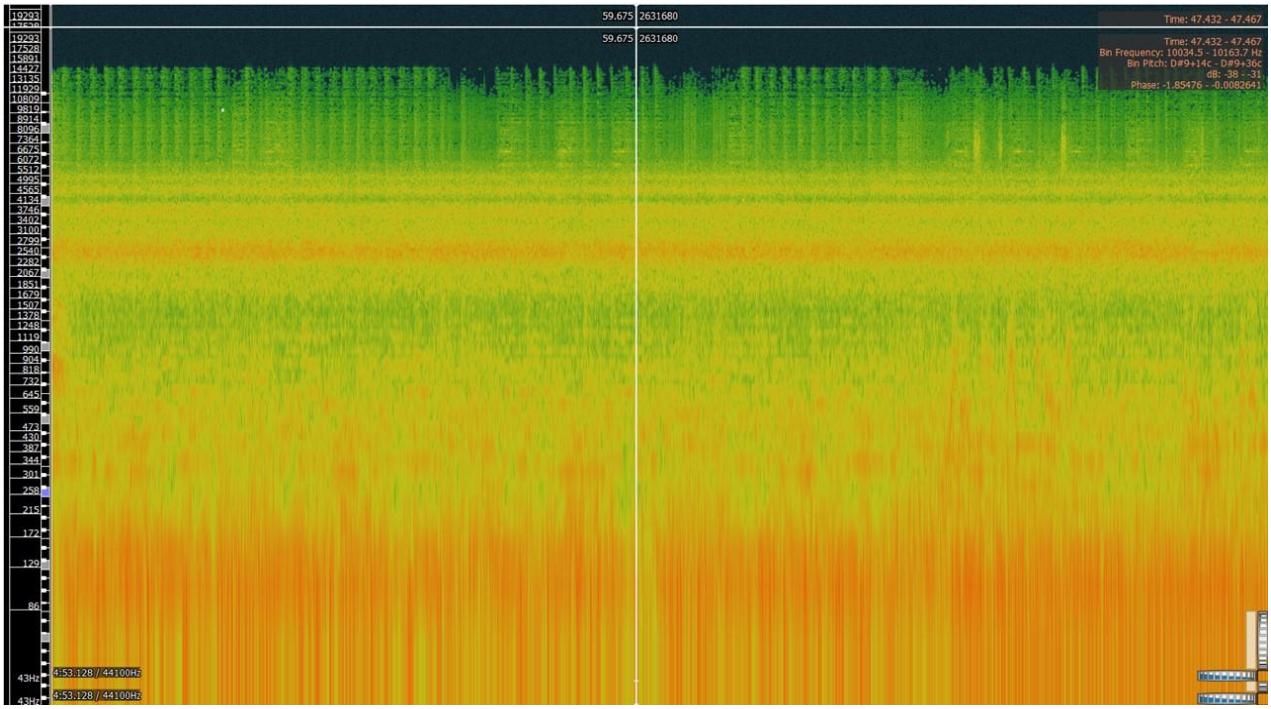

Figure 3: "Those Who Lived and Died Like Heroes" (0:42-1:18), lack of clear vertical lines in audible sections demonstrate a flattened dynamic-temporal envelope.

"The Hammer Falls on Zion," and arguably Der Stürmer's entire discography, represents one end of an NSBM spectrum. As discussed above, these noisy timbres are paired with obvious national socialist themes through the materials related to the music (such as album cover art) and the lyrics. The messaging behind them is unmistakable and nearly impossible to misinterpret. However, not all NSBM bands are so obvious in their political ideologies. Others prefer to subtly insert politics through references to paganism, heathenism, or other branches that have both national socialist and non-national socialist implications. Many of these bands still make their politics clear, but through the guise of mythology rather than by making blunt statements of hatred.

Graveland – Semi-covert

Graveland's use of paganism serves to introduce political sentiments that are like Der Stürmer's but are less obviously connected to national socialist doctrines and history. Graveland's viewpoints have been discussed through interviews in the previous chapter, and these views have been woven into the lyrics and materials related to their music. In the song "White Beasts of Wotan" from the 2000 album *Creed of Iron*, Graveland uses the following lyrics:

> White Beasts of Wotan
> Bloody faces full of pride
> For eons on war in the name of honor and pride
> Born among death, pain and sadness
> Bred in the shadow of the swords
> And among the sound of war drums
>
> White beasts of Wotan
> Blue eyes bringing fright
> White hands swaying swords
> With Swarozyc on their flags
> With cry of hatred on their mouths
> Always they're where blood is shed with rivers[71]

The song contains several more verses with similar sentiments and language, and this section exemplifies the racial undertones. As discussed in the previous chapter, the emphasis on Wotan and pagan Gods recalls the Third Reich's fascination with esoteric practices and ariosophy, but these lyrics also implicitly define the victor and strong as Aryan. Specifically, the consistent reference to the "white beasts" or, in another verse the "white sons," and claims that there are "blue eyes bringing fright" clearly denote an Aryan warrior

[71] "White Beasts of Wotan," Encyclopadia Metallum, accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Graveland/Creed_of_Iron/1445.

"protagonist." Graveland also mentions Swarozyc, the Slavic pagan god of fire, that connects the band's national and racial identities.

These ideas are further emphasized through album covers and band artwork. The cover for *Creed of Iron* depicts a horde of medieval, Crusader-like warriors.[72] While the images may seem fitting for the band's general pagan-warrior aesthetic, the Bandcamp cover noticeably includes a large swastika on a banner held by one of the warriors.[73] Although Graveland's politics are not as blatant as a band like Der Stürmer's, when combined with their views on race (as expanded upon in the previous chapter), the implications and history of paganism in their lyrics, and the inclusion of Nazi symbols on their album covers, their politics remain more subtle but still clearly signaled to potential listeners.

Despite these subtle differences in messaging, Graveland maintains a similar musical aesthetic to Der Stürmer in that Graveland's music also shows a significant emphasis on noise. In the spectrogram below, Graveland's "White Beasts of Wotan" demonstrate similar "wall of sound" effects, and the differences in ***figure 3*** demonstrate the importance of the guitar and voice for these distorted effects. The first spectrogram shows an instrumental section of the song. Like Der Stürmer and Gallhammer, Graveland's music uses noisy timbres and the exact pitches are obscured. The bass and guitar lines can be seen in the red section towards the bottom of the spectrogram, and the vertical lines in the upper part of the

[72] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Graveland/Creed_of_Iron/1445.

[73] Interestingly, this album is also available on Amazon and the band's website, but the swastika has been edited out and the band's logo has been changed to emphasize an image of Thor's hammer. The album and its cover was available on the band's now defunct BandCamp page, but they have since removed themselves from the site as of my last checking on July 13, 2022. Instead, a message is included that all music will need to be listened to on their website because "BandCamp supports cancel culture." The image is still available on Encylopaedia Metallum as part of the band's entry.

image align with the high-hat beats, showing some change in the dynamic-temporal envelope, but this distinction is only seen in inaudible ranges.

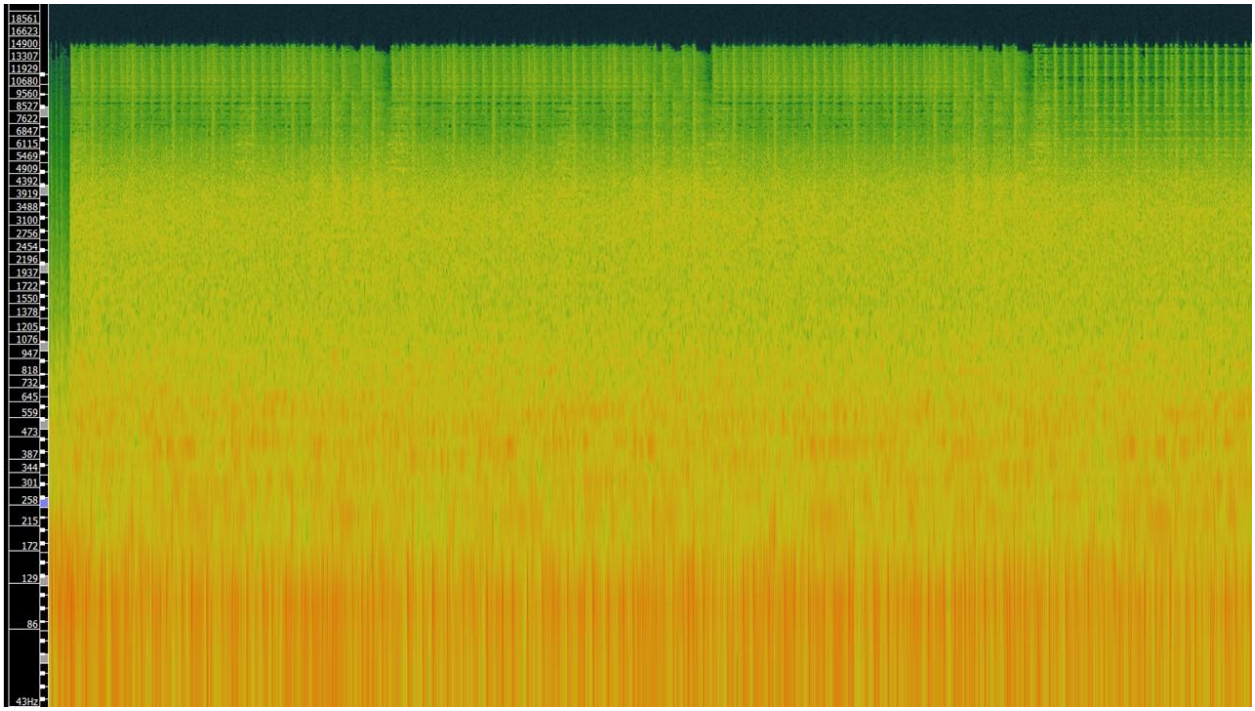

Figure 4: "White Beasts of Wotan" (0:00-0:36), lack of clear horizontal and vertical lines indicate noisy timbres around more audible pitches (red lines).

The next section, seen in ***figure 4***, demonstrates an increase in audible timbres with the introduction of the vocals. Once the vocals enter, the spectrogram demonstrates a sudden increase in audible partials that span vertically rather than horizontally once the vocals enter. What this shift indicates is that there are more pitches that are heard, both through the pitch being "sung" as well as the partials above that are audible through black metal vocal techniques. The result is more audible noise, which works to obscure the exact pitches being heard and creates audible partials that distort the sound.

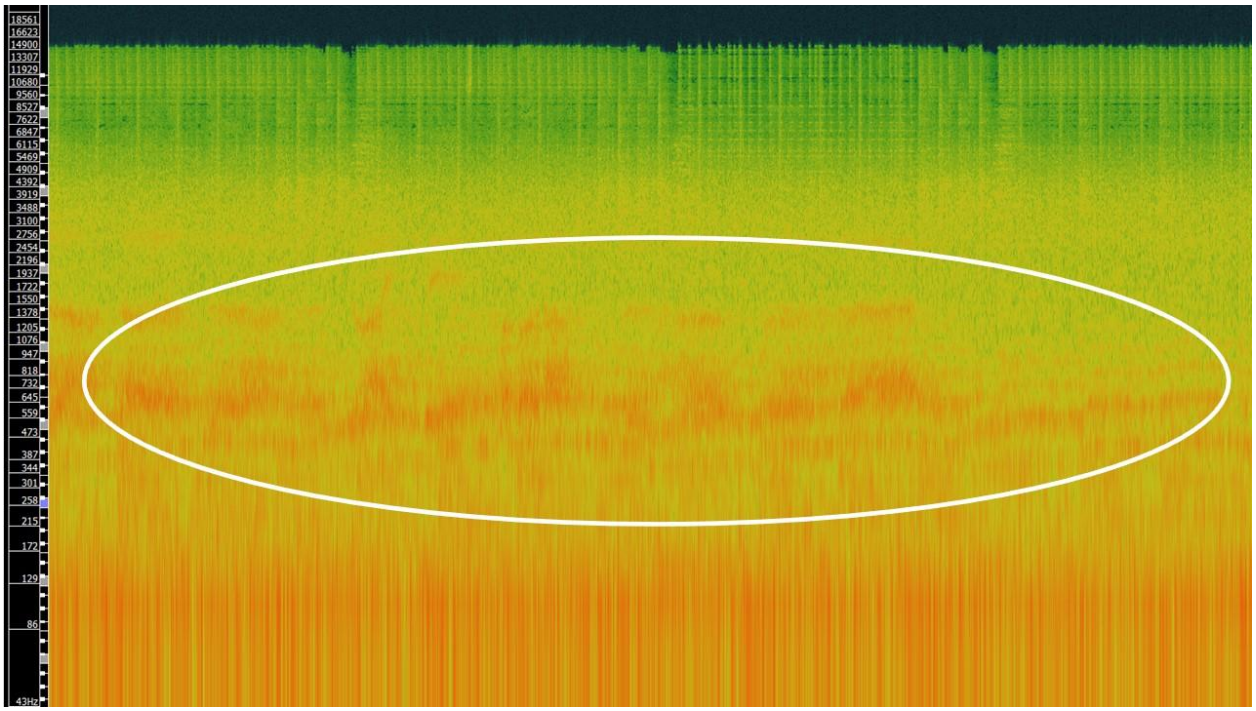

Figure 5: "White Beasts of Wotan" (2:40-3:15), increased audible pitches (white circle).

Burzum - Covert

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Burzum's music demonstrates a similar level of noisiness in their black metal albums, but unlike the previous two examples, Burzum's advocation of national socialist beliefs relies on extra-musical references rather than being present in the songs themselves. Burzum relies on an extremely noisy timbre, as evidenced by a visibly flattened dynamic-temporal envelope as seen in the song "My Journey to the Stars" in ***figure 5.*** However, their vocal styles remain more distinct. Vikernes's vocal style, which is more shriek-like than Der Stürmer's, has a much noisier timbre, and as a result the vocals are also visible as blocks of sounds with higher partials. It is nearly impossible to tell where certain words begin and end as the attacks cannot be clearly heard, which is demonstrated in ***figure***

6 (a close-up of ***figure 5***). The breaks seen in the spectrogram occur when the vocals stop either at a cadence or for Vikernes to take a breath. For this album, Vikernes adds more noise through the recording process, not only through vocal or guitar distortion. Vikernes has expressed an preference for equipment like a headset microphone to make the recorded sound less clean. While this practice was common in the early Norwegian scene, not all black metal bands choose this type of recording practice.

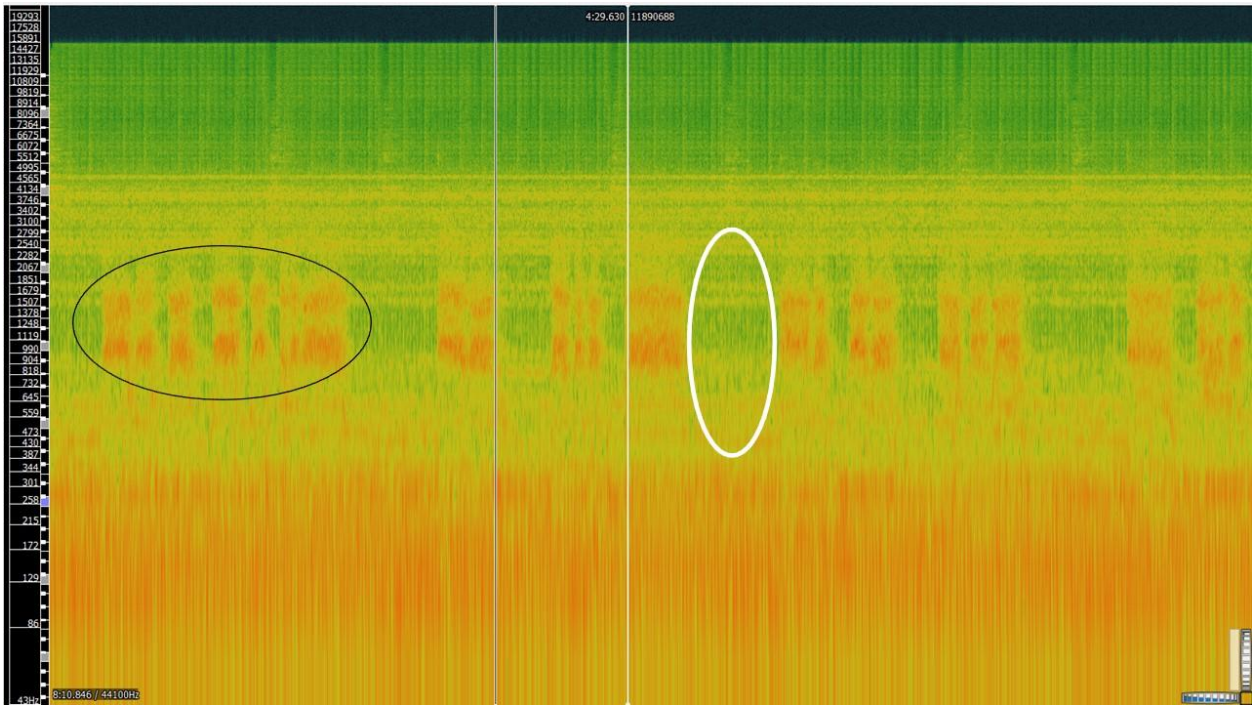

Figure 6: "My Journey to the Stars" (4:12-4:48), demonstrated flattened dynamic-temporal envelope with addition of screamed vocals (black circle) and breath cadences (white circle).

While bands like Der Stürmer advocate Neo-Nazi ideologies outright in their lyrics, and Graveland uses more subtle references to paganism and mythology, Burzum represents a more complicated version of musical politics. Many of Burzum's songs do not explicitly or implicitly mention racism like Der Stürmer or Graveland, and instead most of Burzum's

black metal albums mention a Tolkien-like dark fantasy world.[74] The song includes the following lyrics:

> To consume the sphere
> Of immense power
> And to become immortal
>
> Darkness hate and winter
> Rules the earth when I return
> War between races
> A goal is reached
> Chaos, hate
> Hate, hate, hate, hate, hate, hate, hate, hate, hate, hate…[75]

Throughout the song, Vikernes lays out an elaborate fantasy in which the song's narrator comes across a powerful sphere that, when consumed, bestows him with immortality and dark powers. Upon the narrator's return to earth, a hellscape now ruled by "darkness, hate, and winter" Vikernes also describes a "war between races" before claiming that a "goal is reached / chaos, hate." Although he does not extrapolate further on the idea of a race war in the lyrics, Vikernes's political messages in Burzum's black metal necessitate understanding his beliefs outside of his music. His relationship to NSBM is arguably more complicated as the black metal itself is not necessarily a vehicle for political ideologies, but his success as a black metal artist and his infamy for his violent crimes has given him a significantly larger

[74] Burzum is a reference to Lord of the Rings, meaning "darkness" in Orc (CHECK) and Vikernes's earlier stage name "Count Grishnack" also references the fantasy language. It should also be noted that many of Burzum's later songs and albums do reference paganism, which Vikernes has directly related to racial ideologies, as expanded upon in the previous chapter. However, these albums feature very different aesthetics, usually using chanting and more ambient synthesizer sounds. For this section, I will be focused on his use of black metal rather than the band's later musical styles. (Vikernes also really likes to say that he is no longer working on Burzum, and then releasing a new Burzum album).

[75] "My Journey to the Stars," Encyclopaedia Metallum, accessed May 26, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Burzum/Burzum/376.

audience onto which to introduce his views. Resultingly, Burzum's black metal music acts to interest listeners to dig deeper into his interviews, blogs, and social media.

Through these other mediums, Vikernes is very forthright about his political views and reportedly enjoyed talking about them and insisting people knew the validity of his claims. Vikernes has been active on social media and used to run a YouTube channel called Theulian Perspective—a reference to the Thule Society that advocated German Occultism and *Völkisch* beliefs of racial purity discussed in the previous chapter—as well as a blog by the same name and a Twitter account. His blog's tagline also includes the phrase "For Blood and Soil," referencing the Nazi party's belief that nationality should be based on ethnic purity. Given the context of Vikernes's views, the reference to a "race war" seems unlikely to be a generic exploration of dark topics.[76]

In this sense, Burzum represents a deviation from the other two case studies discussed. Whereas Der Stürmer's Nazism is blatant, and Graveland's white supremacy is at least partially obscured behind references to paganism, Burzum's lyrics maintain an emphasis on a fantasy-like world. Out of the five albums recorded before Vikernes went to prison, the short mention of a "race war" is the closest the lyrics get to revealing his racial ideologies through his earlier (pre-prison) black metal albums.[77] In fact, it was not until after Vikernes was imprisoned that he began to state his ideas around race and white supremacy

[76] Later Burzum albums make more direct references to Norse mythology that tie his politics and music together more directly. Burzum's later music, however, differs drastically in tone than the previous album, opting for a more electronic-ambient sound with chanting rather than the harsh distortion and vocals associated with black metal. As a result, this chapter will focus on the black metal aesthetics of his earlier work.

[77] It should be noted that the album *Filosofem* was recorded in 1993 but was not released until 1996 after Vikernes was imprisoned.

loudly and explicitly.[78] Burzum thus represents somewhat of a paradox in his NSBM label: Vikernes's politics have been predominantly asserted through nonmusical mediums, meaning that the political understandings of his music are often applied retroactively and rely on extramusical context to fully understand.

Nonetheless, Burzum's use of black metal aesthetics in his earlier music work in tandem with his later political ideologies for listeners who enjoy his earlier albums after 1994 (the year his prison sentence began). Yet, for the full effect of Burzum's music to be used as a vehicle for racism, it requires the listener to do more than merely listen to the music. Instead, it requires one to look into Burzum and Vikernes to see his online activity, including his blog and social media accounts discussed above. While this use of black metal to retroactively spread political meanings may at first seem unintuitive, Burzum's emphasis on noisy timbres may prove this vehicle more effective than it initially seems.

Although each of these bands demonstrate a difference in the ways that their politics are presented, the spectrograms above show their use of similar aesthetics. Noisy timbres, especially through guitar and vocal distortion, play an important role in black metal, for both national socialist and non-national socialist bands. As I will discuss in the next section, noise and loudness play a large role in propagating each band's politics, regardless of their subtlety.

The following section will discuss the importance of noise in black metal for political ideologies, which applies to all three bands and political circumstances discussed in this chapter.

[78] See interviews on Varg's website, racial ideologies are brought into the fore in the 1994 interview after he was sentenced to prison.

NSBM and Affective Overdrive

While I have discussed forms of the mimetic process as they can, and often do, occur in heavy metal more broadly, bands with political extremist leanings co-opt these processes for political aims. As discussed in the examples of Der Stürmer, Graveland, and Burzum, noise plays a large role in these bands' soundscapes, in addition to the lyrics and the cultivation of online presences that glorify far-right politics. Perhaps the most obvious creation of affective experiences would be the use of taboo. As with most metal, taboo sounds through distortion and loudness- and, in Burzum's case, recording distortion—as well as lyrics are common in NSBM. While covering topics such as the Holocaust or German WWII forces can be and are taboo, NSBM bands differ drastically in their seriousness about the lyrical positions. This can be seen in the contrast between Der Stürmer, who proudly proclaim themselves to be members of Golden Dawn (the Greek National Socialist Party) and Vikernes whose political views are made clear through his online presence. Taboo in these cases is not only formed through the specific songs themselves, but rather through the audience's engagement with these musicians and bands through various mediums other than musical recordings. Subsequently, the effects of taboo are strengthened in extra musical ways, especially as audience members realize that the musicians' thoughts are not part of black metal's tradition of play.

Expression also plays a large role in considering how political messages can be interpreted by the audience. In metal, the expressing agent nearly always remains the performer, even if a musician is using a stage persona, who can use their political views in

their music. Although some musicians choose to take an apolitical stance concerning their music, many in the NSBM or NSBM-adjacent genres proudly display their political beliefs in the music or through other forms of social media (as seen in the previously discussed interviews with Der Stürmer and Vikernes's use of blogs and Twitter). When these beliefs are made known, the audience begins to interpret the expressing agent through these political lenses, conflating the musician as expressing agent with the political ideologies the musicians uphold personally. Wallmark has also noted that cognitive studies demonstrate a model of "shared affective motion experience" or the SAME model. Wallmark explains that the SAME model "holds that the motional qualities of music […] lead to motor resonance in the listener consistent with the affective intensions of the performer."[79] I argue that these affective experiences open a point of entry for listeners to engage with both the music and the politics. Noting that the expressing agent plays a role also implies that the NSBM label can, and often is, applied to a wider range of bands. For example, Burzum's earlier black metal lyrics do not have direct or explicit references to national socialist ideologies. However, the band is often labeled NSBM because of Vikernes's personal beliefs posited online and his role as a musical expressing agent can become entangled with his politics.

This interaction with musicians on multiple levels means that audiences relate to them on more than just their stage personas. When connection to the expressing agent is combined with the noisy timbres and loudness for which black metal is known, the expressing agent arguably becomes more powerful in creating affective responses through mimetic invitation. As Heller has discussed, the concept of in-between-ness created through loudness and imagined loudness creates a sense of melding with the space around the

[79] Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise*, 53.

listener and loss of subjectivity. Heller further notes that this loss means that there are connections across musicians and other listeners as subjectivities meld into one another. I believe that the connection created through loudness and noise also primes listeners to connect with musicians as the expressing agents, which can include their political beliefs. Such a supposition implies that listener collapse also includes more than the immediate surroundings and that affective responses to listener collapse rely on the listener's understanding of the expressing agent through both performance and non-performance-based avenues.

Once this shared experience has been established, NSBM musicians then work to manipulate the listener's affective responses. While I have previously discussed the ways in which affect is created through metal's emphasis on activating biophysical responses, black metal bands work to create an excess of affect that must be spent and NSBM bands push that expenditure towards political aims. George Bataille refers to excess that must be spent as an "accursed share." He describes this phenomenon as the following:

> I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.[80]

Bataille continues, claiming "if we do not have the force to destroy the surplus energy ourselves, it cannot be used, and, like an unbroken animal that cannot be trained, it is this

[80] George Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1988), 20.

energy that destroys us; it is we who pay the price of the inevitable explosion."[81] While these examples emphasize economic expenditure, he also argues that organisms necessarily possess a greater amount of energy than is required for basic survival, as evidenced in an organism's growth and possible reproduction that use up this excess energy.[82] Economically, this surplus (in this case, of wealth) would be destroyed through consumption in non-productive ways, meaning luxury. Bataille also argues that expenditure of energy can also be seen in violence, either through warfare or, in older civilizations, through the violence of human sacrifice.[83]

In the context of black metal, and arguably the metal genre more broadly, this energetic surplus can be applied to and understood as an excess of energy that is spent to create an excess of affect. Wallmark has also acknowledged the creation of physical energy through embodied listening practices. Quoting Marc Leman, Wallmark notes "the human body can be seen as a biologically designed mediator that transfers physical energy up to a level of action-oriented meanings."[84] As such, both Wallmark and Leman confirm that listening practices can indeed be transferred into a sense of physical energy that can be expended. In black metal as a broad categorization (both NS and non-NS bands), this energy can be spent in a multitude of ways. In general, the energy created by feeling "amped up" through the music can be burned by physically participating in the genre through headbanging, moshing, or other movements. If one is listening alone, through headphones or another type of device, other forms of physical activity through the mimetic process may

[81] Ibid., 24.
[82] Ibid., 27.
[83] Ibid., 45. See especially Part II, "Sacrifices and Wars of the Aztecs."
[84] Leman, quoted in Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise*, 50.

occur in more subtle variations. Notably, these movements also make up a form of mimesis, meaning that as physical energy is expended, affective energy is being created.

This cycle would also account for how listeners tend to feel "pumped up" the more they listen to metal as their affective responses become more intense the more physical energy is spent through physically demanding movement or even through the quickening of one's pulse. Yet, the intense affective experience creates its own form of surplus, especially because metal emphasizes extreme physical experiences even during individual listening. As such, some listeners may need to find places to expend this buildup and surplus of affect. Scholars such as Jonathan Pieslak and J. Martin Daughtry have discussed the ways in which heavy metal has been used by American soldiers in the Middle East as a way to pump themselves up before going into combat.[85] In these examples, much like Bataille's assertions of expenditure through human sacrifice, the expenditure of metal's cyclical energy can be expended through wartime violence. Although neither Pieslak nor Daughtry make mention of specific actions of headbanging or moshing, Daughtry notes that metal in particular plays a large role in "amping" soldiers up, through increasing their heart rate or lip syncing to the song's lyrics.[86] These movements, either conscious or unconscious, lead to an effective form of mimesis that shapes a soldier's affective state that prepares them, in this case, for possible violence and battle.[87]

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[85] J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 2015). See also, Jonathan R. Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[86] Ibid., 230.

[87] This example is far from the only connection between metal and violence as the previous chapters have shown. Black metal specifically has its own reputation for highly sensationalized acts of violence in Norway during the early and mid-1990s that included church arson, murder, violent suicide, and even alleged cannibalism. These acts, many of

For NSBM bands, the excess energy that lends itself to intense affective experiences, is meant to be spent in following political ideologies that can occur in several ways. Looking up bands, especially to find lyrics, remains a common practice amongst metal fans. For many of the bands discussed in this chapter (Der Stürmer, Burzum, and Graveland), these searches often lead one to find band websites, hosting or promotional sites (e.g., the Pagan Front), and the band members' personal social media pages, which often lay out their political ideologies in unambiguous terms. Energy spent trying to learn more about bands then becomes a site for potential indoctrination, especially if the listener is exposed to these sites repeatedly or engages with others who hold these beliefs. As these political ideologies become apparent, the idea of connection and community building begin to take on new meanings as it turns into not only a connection socially or physically, but a connection through shared exposure to these ideas. Bands with national socialist aims or who otherwise include problematic political ideologies in their music manipulate the excessive affective energy to point it towards sources that propagate these ideas. In other words, this energy is directed towards sites and communities where these ideas would be reinforced, especially with repeated listenings.

The effectiveness of these goal often relies on concealment, at least at first. In Bataille's theories on the accursed share, he further posits that concealment plays a large role in the accumulation of wealth. Using the example of Calvinism's eventual connection to accumulation of profit, Bataille argues that

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which Vikernes has been involved in, have been part of the larger black metal aesthetic framework that maintains a sense of misanthropy and anti-religion (and anti-Christian specifically) sentiments.

> the Reformation, from an economic standpoint, did not so much depend on the stating of principles as on the swaying of minds; the latter could not effectively be achieved except on one condition, that it be concealed at first…What was needed was less to give complete freedom to the natural impulses of the merchants than to tie them to some dominant moral position.[88]

Like Bataille's assertion that economic and religious connections must be hidden at first to be effective, NSBM functions through concealing national socialist messages. Concealment in these cases can take a variety of forms that differ in strength, but all work to hide the band's intended message. For bands like Der Stürmer, whose political leanings are obvious through their lyrics, recording materials, and interviews, concealment takes the form of extreme vocal distortion. This tactic makes it easy to conceal the political messages in the lyrics until the listener decides to look up the band, if they decide to at all, but also ties listeners to the aesthetics of the music first. Other bands, such as Burzum and Graveland, hide behind not only vocal distortion but also behind pagan themes that glorify Aryan heritage. As bands conceal these messages, it acclimates the listener to the message by incrementally having the message reveal itself through the listener's actions. For these bands, the listener ideally continues to consume the political message and, eventually, comes to agree with it.

Such political indoctrination does not always happen. There are plenty of metal listeners, myself included, who have listened to NSBM music—either intentionally or accidentally—and do not find themselves aligning or agreeing with these types of ideologies. Instead, this music attempts to target a wide audience through concealing the message at first and then hoping for listeners that expend the surplus of affective energy into

[88] Bataille, 125.

learning more about their political aims. This is compounded by those who also manage to use major music sharing platforms, such as Graveland's former use of pages like BandCamp. Yet, even still, to find themselves attracted to these types of messages in the first place requires a previous introduction to xenophobic, anti-Semitic, racist (and, really, and other -ist) ideologies. Just as metal does not make one suddenly violent after listening to it, it does not immediately make one a Nazi either. Instead, the success of these bands relies on people buying into these ideas which further relies on several very individualized factors and experiences.[89] NSBM in this context is meant to be either an introduction to far-right ideologies, which may or may not resonate with listeners, or a confirmation of already held beliefs.

Conclusion

The connection between embodied affective experiences, musical consumption, and political propaganda is not unique to black metal. Music played a role in propaganda during the Nazi regime, arguably relying on similar physiological responses to musical stimulus. Kirsten Paige has discussed the role of embodied affective experiences in Wagner's music and reception. Using reviews from the time period, Paige argues that audience members "were experiencing not just physical reactions to Wagnerian spectacle, but affective responses, too. Eduard Hanslick attested to the composer's scenic inventions and ethereal, atmospheric music 'cooperating in the strengthening of certain emotions" during

[89] Hochhauser has also discussed this conclusion in considering how metal has been used to "cast a wider net" to get people interested as a recruitment technique.

performances at Bayreuth."[90] Paige further points to various responses to Wagner's work that emphasize the idea of climate or atmosphere within the music that resulted in what Paige refers to as "multisensory." She notes that "when spectators described multisensory sensations in response to Wagnerian spectacle or used metaphors of vapor, scent, or atmosphere in their accounts of performances, they were, in a sense, acquiescing to an artistic vision ideated by Wagner, in which a multisensory atmosphere hovered over them, invaded their bodies, and negotiated their senses."[91] These descriptions of sound as an embodied and subsequently affective experience imply that Wagner's music functions in a similar manner to black metal.

Although Paige does not expand on the political implications Wagner's music would come to be associated with, the Nazis use of Wagner's music imbued it with political meaning. Alex Ross has noted that Wagnerism became, for many, synonymous with Hitlerism during the 1920s and 30s. He writes that "The critic Ludwig Marcuse, who had earlier scorned the Wagnerian left, wrote in 1938 that the Third Reich 'has no greater ancestor and no more perfect representative of its ideology' than Wagner. This formulation was very close to pronouncements emanating from the Third Reich ("*Hitlergiest ist Wagnerist*")."[92] Ross further points out that Hitler used excerpts of Wagner's writings and music in his speeches. He writes that "*Meistersinger*'s thunderous chorus of "Wach auf" – "Awake" – blended with the slogan emblazoned on Nazi standards and banners:

[90] Kirsten Paige, "'Art and Climate' and the Atmospheric Politics of Wagnerian Theater," *The Opera quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2019): 147–178, 147.

[91] Ibid., 148.

[92] Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (First edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 550-551.

"*Deutschland erwache!*"[93] In addition to Hitler's own penchant for Wagner, performances of the composer's music also became part of Hitler's propaganda. Ross notes that at the Day of Potsdam, March 21, 1933, the Nazis created a "propaganda spectacle" that sought to establish Hitler as dictator. The conclusion of this spectacle was a performance of Wagner's *Meistersinger*.[94]

As a result, the embodied and affective drive that Wagner's music had been known for during the composer's life, as Paige has noted, becomes connected to specific political ideologies. The use of music's embodied and affective qualities as form of political propaganda and medium through which to emphasize far-right politics bear a striking resemblance to how I have suggested NSBM functions as a vehicle for political ideologies. While not all NSBM bands are necessarily aware of Hitler's penchant for the music of Richard Wagner, there is a connection between these bands and a musical-historical lineage between the use of music as political propaganda between these bands and the Third Reich.

Of course, radical right movements have used a variety of different music as part of their political propaganda, from operatic composers like Wagner to black metal. Although radical right movements have begun to shift away from the use of "angry" sounding music and branching into more mainstream movements, black metal has maintained a fringe community of national socialist adherents who use this music as a recruiting tool. Sharon Hochhauser has argued that NSBM, or "hatecore" music, has proliferated in the late 1990s and 2000s because it "exploit[s] listeners' dissatisfaction with the mainstream music industry and cleverly disguises the fact that its product involves more than just music."[95] She

[93] Ibid., 529.
[94] Ibid., 534.
[95] Hochhauser, 162.

argues that this initial disguise allows bands to reach out to fans who may not initially have these political inclinations. However, as the examples above demonstrate, NSBM bands portray their politics in different ways, meaning we cannot and should not think of the genre as entirely monolithic in how these political messages are spread. Similarly, the audience for each type of NSBM band likely differs as well. However, as Hochhauser also notes, it would be unfair to characterize metal fans as gullible or overly impressionable. Hearing NSBM does not automatically lead to adopting these views themselves nor should we assume that listeners are so easily misled.[96] (To put it bluntly, we can Google things now). However, the continued existence of a national socialist fringe in black metal does not allow us to completely write them off, either. But the question remains of why black metal would be appealing to potential Neo-Nazis and why it has continued to be an effective recruiting tool despite the non-traditional aesthetics and generally off-putting fascination with Satanism and violence. Why has black metal continued to have political meaning inscribed onto it and how has it managed to have longevity?

Kathleen Blee has argued that the motivation for individuals to join larger hate groups has several possible explanations. For example, Blee suggests that "social camaraderie, a desire for simple answers to complex political problems, or even the opportunity to take action against formidable social forces" play a part in joining these types of groups.[97] What Blee's argument makes clear is that a consideration of "intergroup hatred," in which hatred is viewed as a group rather than individual phenomenon, is necessary. Such an assertion necessarily implies the importance of community in shaping

[96] Ibid. 178.

[97] Kathleen Blee, *Understanding Racist Activism: Theory, Methods, and Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 71.

hate groups, and as such, the formation of community must also be considered. In her 2020 book, *Sisters in Hate*, Seyward Darby reiterates the importance of community building, writing that "since at least the 1970s, capitalizing on the reach and power of popular music, far-right extremists had been founding racist bands and underground labels. Their targets were young impressionable audiences looking for community and identity."[98] Darby notes that these scenes developed in racist punk and heavy metal scenes, but that more recently it has expanded into more approachable music, including folk.[99]Darby's account of Corinna Olsen, a former white nationalist and member of the National Socialist Movement (NSM), details her searching for communities that offered her "meaning and camaraderie," that, in part, led her to white nationalist movements.[100]The community that racist groups have to offer should not be discounted. In many ways NSBM attempts to exploit our need for community through music's biophysical reach.

Of the bands discussed in this chapter, Graveland seems to have one of the more active bands to create a community around music and politics, particularly through social media. While Varg Vikernes continues to use Twitter and occasional YouTube and Der Stürmer have a very limited social media presence (at least in the United States),[101] Graveland has managed to build a community that blends both an interest in black metal

[98] Seyward Darby, *Sisters in Hate: American Women on the Front Lines of White Nationalism*, first edition (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2020), 61-62.

[99] See also, Love *Trendy Fascism* and Teitelbaum *Lions of the North* for more in-depth looks at some of the genres that have become more popular with the radical right such as folk music and, rather ironically, reggae.

[100] Darby, 77.

[101] Vikernes continues to post to Twitter and occasionally through YouTube, although he often complains about being "shadow-banned" on Twitter by having a warning appear before showing his content. There is limited engagement from people on Twitter with his ideas and many seem to disagree with him.

with some of their political stances. Although Graveland has more recently tried to tone down their explicit Nazi references, they continue to build this community through their music and social media presence. People commenting on the band's YouTube channel often remark about how much they love the music, but other parts of their social media platforms turn towards right-leaning political talking points. In particular, Graveland has recently begun lamenting being kicked off the Steelfest lineup, a metal music festival in Finland that has a reputation for booking bands with problematic politics. Graveland blames this posts on

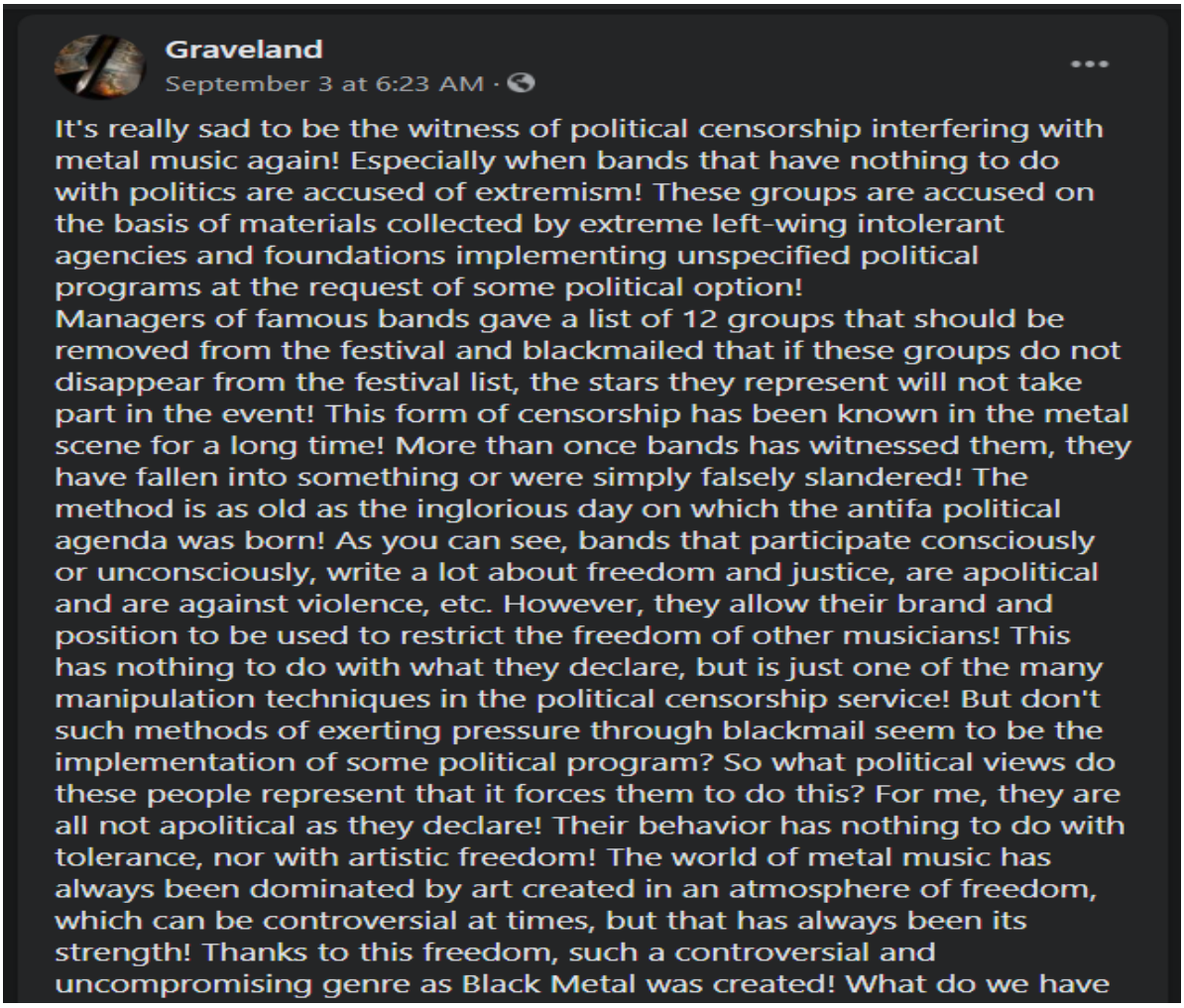

Figure 7: excerpt from Graveland Facebook post

the subject, as well as the antifa political agenda, an excerpt of which can be seen in the screenshot in ***figure 7***.[102]

Fans on their Facebook page continue to show support for the group, claiming they are coming to the festival just to support Graveland or reiterating the idea that censorship doesn't belong in art (needless to say, this is not political censorship). Others claim that black metal is all about war and extremism, so the inclusion of national socialism should not be considered more morally objectionable within the genre.[103] These types of responses reinforce the idea of censorship around metal music and defend Graveland's use of National Socialist politics in the past and present. Fan reactions on Facebook demonstrate how communities formed around an appreciation for the music can easily become entrenched within the politics espoused by these bands as well. These connections demonstrate the need for us to look at the musical aesthetics and its role in how communities like these may form.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the noisy aesthetics of black metal led to certain affective experiences that can be channeled into political aims, but I also suggest that black metal's aesthetics create room for bonding and community building experiences. Heller and Cox have noted the importance of sound and noise's role in creating shared experiences through biophysical responses. Heller argues that loudness creates a loss and blending of subjectivities while Cox claims that the mimetic hypothesis can be a bonding experience as people participate in mimesis together. Heller's arguments around listener collapse is furthered by Cox's assertion that the mimetic hypothesis, which I have argued is heightened

[102] Graveland, "It's really sad to be the witness of political censorship interfering with metal music again!," Facebook, September 3, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/gravelandofficial.

[103] Ibid.

through the use of noise and loudness, can "result in a sense of belonging and shared achievement"[104] through a shared embodied experience with performers and other listeners.[105] When combined with lyrics and expressing agents (i.e. performers) who espouse explicit or implicit far-right ideologies, this participation and connection through noise, loudness, and embodied cognition begin to push the listener towards certain ideological beliefs. Although this shared experience can most likely be felt the strongest during live performances, Heller's concept of imagined loudness leaves the possibility that this process can also occur through personal listening.[106] By employing both loudness and noise to strengthen the body's biophysical responses, black metal creates an opportunity to feel connected to other listeners that is predicated on the political meanings that has been inscribed onto the music through band's various interactions and usages of national socialist lyrics, ideologies, album art, and other outlets—musical and extra-musical.

By creating shared experiences of music through loudness and noise, listeners share affective experiences that work to bond them to each other as well as the expressing agent. For many, such as Lucas, this experience is usually pleasant and can be part of the appeal for bands, such as Sunn O))), who rely on noise and loudness as part of their musical aesthetic. For bands such as Der Stürmer, Graveland, and Burzum, this bonding experience is not purely sonic; it is also highly political. In these cases, the bonding experience shared through loudness, noise, and mimesis work to strengthen community bonds while simultaneously

[104] Cox, 53.

[105] Cox also provides anecdotes in which cultural constraints have been abandoned because of a desire to participate mimetically, including a man who begins to sing along with a singer during a recital or a jazz saxophonist who begins to play during Miles Davis's trumpet solo.

[106] This would be especially effective for bands like Burzum who do not play live shows.

reinforcing political ideologies amongst listeners. This is, of course, not to say that everyone who hears the music live or through recordings automatically joins or bonds with hate groups. To imply such a sentiment would be to ignore the number of complicated reasons that people initially join these types of organizations. However, the aesthetics and shared experiences may help explain the appeal of black metal for NSBM bands who want to use music as a vehicle for propagating their politics.

100 Nazi Scalps: Black Metal and Trolling Aesthetics in the Musical Output of Neckbeard Deathcamp

In Quintin Tarantino's 2009 World War II film *Inglorious Bastards*, the audience is introduced to the film's protagonist, Lt. Aldo Raine, in a speech given to a handful of American soldiers. Lt. Reign, played by Brad Pitt, claims that he is looking for eight Jewish-American soldiers for a special task force to be dropped into France, where their express goal will be to cause as much pain and death to Nazis as possible. However, admittance to this taskforce comes with a requirement. Raine tells his men "When you join my command, you take on a debit. A debit you owe me, personally. Each and every man under my command owes me one hundred Nazi scalps. And I want my scalps." Raine's speech from the movie was especially memorable in popular culture and the phrase "100 Nazi scalps" has entered internet culture through its adoption into memes.[1] Though *Inglorious Bastards* was released in 2009, after the 2016 American election, the phrase "100 Nazi scalps" reemerged as part of meme culture as a response to the election of Donald Trump as the 45th American president and the

Figure 8: Meme about Nazi

[1] Britannica, s.v., "Meme: cultural concept," last modified July 19, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/meme.

The term meme, as defined by the Encyclopedia Brittanica refers to "a unit of cultural information spread by imitation. On the internet, memes refer to various images with text superimposed over them or specific text formats that are then circulated with minor changes while maintaining the original image and/or text structure, often meant to be funny.

similarities of his campaign platform to those of Nazi Germany, as seen in the example in ***figure 1***.[2]

In recent years, those who identify as leftist or progressive have begun to use memes and other aspects of internet culture against the alt-right and their racist, sexist, homophobic, and other bigoted agendas. Similarly, some members of the black metal community have begun to push back against alt-right and other national socialist adjacent politics. Many musicians and scene members have made outright statements of condemnation and advocated for boycotting bands with known or suspected Nazi affiliations. Meanwhile, record labels have produced explicitly anti-NSBM albums which showcase a variety of different artists. These efforts have largely been within the scene and for scene members. The anti-fascist push against NSBM increased after the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States in 2016. Between 2016 and 2018, several bands formed whose members pushed more leftist politics and directly confronted NSBM and its influence within black metal. Bands such as Anal Trump not only made the target of their ire clear through their choice of name, but also used Trump quotes and tweets as the basis for their songs, with titles such as "Grab 'em by the Pussy," "Trump Tower has the Best Taco Bowls," and "I'd Date my Daughter." Other musicians like the single-man UK band Gaylord penned lyrics that openly discuss issues of transphobia, which took on a particular poignancy coming from a gender non-conforming musician.

These types of bands have become more common, and the black metal band Neckbeard Deathcamp has become one of the more publicly well-known bands due to their

[2] "New One Hundred Nazi Scalps Memes," *Meme*, https://me.me/t/one-hundred-nazi-scalps?s=new.

unconventional methods of confronting Nazis through mockery and humor. Although the band has been described as a "parody"—a descriptor accorded them in the media that they themselves use too—in this chapter I demonstrate how their use of music can best be explained through the mechanisms of online internet "trolling." Using Whitney Phillips's analyses of internet trolling, which often propagate and uphold racist, sexist, and other problematic aspects of public culture, I discuss how Neckbeard Deathcamp have inverted these internet subcultural frameworks—often the same ones use for alt-right and radical right propaganda—in an attempt to eradicate far-right political ideologies within the metal scene.

Memes, Internet Culture, and Politics

Although the Nazi (or as Lt. Raine would say "Nat-zee") scalps meme made its way around more left-leaning spaces, memes are also a well-known propaganda tool for the so-called "alt-right."[3] While the term "alt-right" does not necessarily indicate a specific and singular political ideology (in the same way that the term "feminism" does not either), there are commonalities in how these communities create discourse. American Studies researcher

[3] Whitney Phillips and Ryan Milner, *You are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 84-85. Whitney Phillips and Ryan Milner trace it back to Richard Spencer, a known white supremacist since about 2008. Spencer coined the term to make white nationalism more appealing to a larger audience and emphasized antiglobalist, isolationist, and anti-immigration stances. Others began to pick the term up again in 2015 in a global resurgence in right-wing extremism. By 2016, the term had become incredibly ambiguous and was adopted by several socially regressive groups including white nationalists, the men's rights movement, anti-feminists, amongst others. The term became especially well-known during Trump's presidential campaign, and while he never embraced the term, he also never rejected it.

Annie Kelly describes the alt-right as "both inspired and defined by a discourse of anxiety about traditional white masculinity, which is seen as being artificially but powerfully 'degenerated' with catastrophic consequences for the nation. It also argues that this discourse is dominant in much of the political and cultural mainstream."[4] In addition, Kelly notes that those in the alt-right view the feminization or "modernization" of men to be part of a larger scale conspiracy and seek to return to an idealized 1950s-style past (which did not actually exist) in which traditional gender roles and racial homogeny were assumed to be the norm.[5] Kelly also notes that terms like "cuck" or being "cucked" also has specific gendered connotations and that the process for "uncucking" oneself often involves a rejection of liberalized politics to "re-masculinize the self."[6]

Such terms not only indicate specific ideas about gender, but also about race. Various figures and sites associated with the alt-right often decry what they refer to as a "white genocide" in the supposed the erasure or demeaning of white identity within the public sphere.[7] Kelly notes that alt-right sites like Stormfront use the existence of media representation of mixed-race families or articles that encourage women to wait to have children until they are older as proof of this so-called "genocide."[8] Even the term "cuck" has racial implications: as the term comes from a genre of pornography in which a man watches his female partner have sex with a, usually but not always, black man. Kelly further notes that other factions of the alt-right claim that the process of "uncucking" oneself is inherently

[4] Annie Kelly, "The Alt-Right: Reactionary Rehabilitation for White Masculinity: US Alt-Right Extremism Is a Logical Consequence of Mainstream Neo-Conservatism," *Soundings (London, England)* 66, no. 66 (2017): 68–78, 69.
[5] Ibid., 73.
[6] Ibid., 75.
[7] Ibid., 73.
[8] Ibid., 73.

tied to race politics and the "reassertion of racist doctrine and fascist government."[9] This racism targets both BIPOC communities and Jewish communities, the latter of which has experienced marginalization in far-right politics from a large number of antisemitic historical and political movements. For some in the alt-right, antisemitism is inherently linked with antifeminism and misogyny. Kelly argues that many of these bigotries are compounded, noting in particular a Return of Kings article published in 2015 titled "Why is There Is There A Prolific Jewish Presence In The American Feminist Movement? An undeniable truth to the objective researcher?"[10]

The alt-right is also heavily concerned with creating a social in-group socially and actively demonizes those who do not adhere to the same ideals of white masculinity. To create this kind of in-group scholars Edwin Hodge and Helga Hallgrimsdottir have also noted that alt-right discourse often relies on specific terminologies to signify a sense of belonging to the alt-right even though the actual political stances prove more nebulous. Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir note that linguistic cultural objects associated with the alt-right include "the use of distinct jargon, phrases, or idiosyncratic spellings of words to signal adherence to alt-right ideology,"[11] as seen in examples like "cuck" or "snowflake."[12] An in-group is further created by demonizing those who do not agree with alt-right positions. Those who do not adhere to such ideologies, or have any kind of liberal or progressive

[9] Ibid., 75.

[10] Kelly, 74. Return of Kings is an alt-right website whose primary focus is antifeminism and has published a significant number of incredibly offensive and sexist articles. However, as Kelly has pointed out, antifeminism often goes hand-in-hand with other forms of bigotry.

[11] Hodge, Edwin, and Helga Hallgrimsdottir. "Networks of Hate: The Alt-Right, 'Troll Culture', and the Cultural Geography of Social Movement Spaces Online." *Journal of borderlands studies* 35, no. 4 (2020): 563–580, 568.

[12] Ibid., 568-9.

leanings, are often framed in terms of "deceitful hunger for power, betrayal of the nation-state, and support for societal subversion."[13]

For the alt-right's particular brand of white supremacy and ethnocentric jingoistic nationalism, memes and "internet culture"[14] have become important recruiting and propaganda tools for radical right politics in the 2010s and beyond. Memes are generally meant to inject humor into otherwise innocuous images, but they have also been used to introduce viewers to alt-right ideologies, particularly through cartoon aesthetics. Hermansson et al, point to the "Pepe the Frog" meme as an example, in which the image of a cartoon frog has been repurposed and reappropriated to signify radical right politics. Pepe, who originated in a 2005 short cartoon film called *Boy's Club* and can be seen in ***figure 2***.[15] It had become a popular meme on the internet, especially on 4chan, an internet site started in 2003 that describes itself as "a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images."[16] While the concept of 4chan may seem fairly innocuous at first, the site has become notorious for its use of foul language, graphic imagery, and its role in the development of

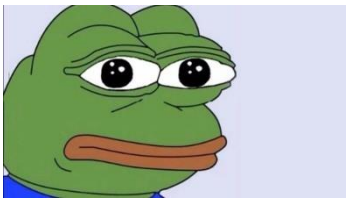

Figure 10: Pepe the frog

Figure 9: Pepe the Frog in a Nazi SS uniform.

[13] Kelly, 74.

[14] Phillips and Milner don't really have a solid definition of what this actually is, mostly because nobody seems to. Internet culture, more or less, seems to be anything related to being online and the types of interactions that occur in cyberspace.

[15] Patrik Hermansson, Patrik, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, and Simon Murdoch. *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 108. Image at: "Pepe the Frog," *Know Your Meme*, last updated 2020, https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pepe-the-frog.

[16] Home page, 4chan, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://www.4chan.org/.

trolling, particularly because of its focus on anonymous posting.[17] Although the original Pepe the Frog was not explicitly racist or antisemitic, the far-right has appropriated the frog by placing it in explicitly racist and antisemitic contexts. For example, in the meme shown in ***figure 3***, Pepe says his catchphrase "feels good man" while wearing a Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS) uniform.[18] Pepe has also been tied explicitly to contemporary alt-right figures including Richard Spencer and Donald Trump's son.

Trolling and memes played an important role in the 2016 American election. During Donald Trump's presidential campaign, online trolls embarked on what the posters referred to as pro-Trump "shitposting,"[19] many alt-right internet users engaged with memes as an effective propaganda and recruiting tool. Alt-right posters would include "ironic" bigotry, which Phillips and Ryan Milner have described as memes in which "a bigoted position was couched behind a trollish wink."[20] The use of memes allowed various forms of bigotry to exist behind "fun" images that were easier for readers to digest than outright hatred. Although these images had plausible deniability, in that they were not meant to be taken seriously, this practice caused repeated exposure to hateful ideas. Phillips and Milner also

[17] Whitney Phillips, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 52-53.

[18] "Pepe the Frog," American Defense League. Accessed May 27, 2022, https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/pepe-frog. The ADL website also includes the image shown in figure 3. The ADL also notes that not all iterations of the Pepe meme are inherently harmful or racist as its origins did not have such implications and Pepe's creator Matt Furie has expressed public dismay at what the symbol has become, a trajectory that has been the topic of a documentary titled *Feels Good Man.*

[19] Shitposting is an internet term for commenting or responding with memes that are meant to derail a comment thread from its original goal. Shitposting can be, in many instances, wholesome internet fun by derailing unimportant conversations with absurdity, which is my favorite, but as I hope we've realized at this point, the internet also ruins fun and generally everything.

[20] Phillips and Milner, *You are Here,* 85.

note that a leaked style guide for The Daily Stormer also claimed that mainstream media would be able to report these more innocent-seeming images more easily and thus expose larger audiences even further to these ideas.[21] Phillips and Milner further describe the alt-right's use of memes as a way to "cohere a knowing, snickering in-group," describing how they were used

> actively and deliberately, to antagonize liberals and progressives into responding. In doing so, liberals and progressives carried those memes well beyond the circles that created them. Had participants not provoked amplification beyond their own ranks, these memes and their underlying messages would have remained confined solely to reactionary silos.[22]

In other words, memes have helped foster not only a sense of community amongst the alt-right but they have also been an important tool for pushing the alt-right's agenda further than the confines of a few chat boards. As a result, memes have become a major recruiting and indoctrination tool for the alt-right that targets those in the younger generations.[23]

Leftist and Anti-fascist Politics in Metal

This project's focus on the emergence and proliferation of far-right political ideologies within heavy metal communities should not be taken as an indication that a history of leftist politics does not also exist within the genre. Red and anarchist black metal

[21] Ibid., 85. The Daily Stormer is a website known for its far-right and Neo-Nazi political affiliations. Users are able to post comments and have discussions around these politics.

[22] Ibid., 87.

[23] Of course, this does not mean that all memes are dangerous or that they are all pushing far-right politics. Many of them are simply fun and silly and do not reinforce forms of structural violence.

(RABM) —which, as the name implies, focuses on using black metal to propagate political ideologies aligning with communism and anarchism—as well as other metal subgenres that propagate leftist ideologies have existed since the 1980s. For example, the UK band Sacrilege released their album *Behind the Realm of Madness* in 1985. Their music combines early black metal and crust punk aesthetics with lyrics that condemn world hunger and consumerist cultures. A year later, the band Axegrinder, released the album *Grind the Enemy,* which includes lyrics that reference and condemn the Holocaust. Another UK-based band Amebix has used WWII imagery in their cover art, but instead of fetishizing the Panzer Division (as many metal bands would do later in the 1980s and 90s), they use imagery that shows the war's aftermath. Their 1984 album *No Sanctuary* includes a picture of mothers looking for their sons amongst dead bodies in Crimea in 1942.[24] RABM had roots in these earlier leftist bands of the 1980s and continued to develop through the 1990s and 2000s in a variety of different countries. For example, the band In a Spleen began in 1989 in Slovenia, Sorgsvart in 1999 in Norway, and Iskra formed in 2002 in Canada—these bands all contain lyrics that deal with anti-fascist or pro-leftist/anarchist themes.[25]

More leftist politics were also part of the metal scene not only as music but as part of the community's social practices. As early as 1987, fan created metal 'zines that called for boycotting bands with questionable politics. In the second issue of the German 'zine *No Trend Press* from 1987, the editors call for a boycott on the band Carnivore because "they

[24] B.K., "Amebix- No Sanctuary (1984)," *RABM* (blog), February 27, 2010, https://r-a-b-m.blogspot.com/2010/02/amebix-no-sanctuary-1984.html.

[25] Each of these bands can be found in the fan-run online heavy metal archive, Encyclopaedia Metallum, and have been labelled as having anarchist themes in their music.

are Nazis."[26] The 'zine points to lyrics from the band's second full-length album, including a song called "Race War" that contains lyrics such as "Don't call me your brother, 'cause I ain't your brother, we fell from different c***s and your skin's an ugly color." The article also points out that the band's logo bears a striking resemblance to the Hakenkreuz but with only three prongs. The article also states that Carnivore admitted that the logo bore a slight resemblance to the Nazi symbol. The 'zine entry ends with a call to boycott fascists bands, a category in which they obviously include Carnivore. What this particular article demonstrates is that the concern over Nazi symbolism and politics within metal is not a new phenomenon but rather something that the scene has been concerned with for decades.

In the later 2000s, even more leftist and politically progressive black metal bands emerged worldwide. Bands like Periodeater, which formed in 2019 in the Los Angeles area, write lyrics that exlore leftist and indigenous history. For example, their song "Periodeater" on the 2020 album *Worth More Than Your Life*, include lyrics such as "they smashed our altars/killed our gods/but the pendulum swings/and for us a new dawn/your kings, fed to the void/your empires will crumble."[27] Such lines explicitly draw attention to the violence inherent in colonial conquests, which often involve(d) destroying elements of the "other" culture, while simultaneously claiming that the colonial empires will crumble. Other bands, like Dawn Ray'd, have become particularly well-known for their hard left and anarchist leanings, which pervade their lyrics and shape how they participate in the scene. According to an article published in the music and culture news outlet *Hard Noise*, Dawn Ray'd use

[26] Boris Kadlicek and Servais Grivel "Boykottiert Carnivore: They are Nazis," *No Trend Press*, 1987, 9-10. Accessed through https://sendbackmystamps.org/2014/12/23/no-trend-press-2-germany-1987-auf-deutsch/#jp-carousel-645. 9-10.

[27] "Periodeater: Periodeater," Encyclopaedia Metallum, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Periodeater/Worth_More_than_Your_Life/881821.

their shows as platforms to sell/provide political material such as 'zines and to fundraise for various organizations. The band has also donated money made from selling band merchandise to organizations helping houseless people during the COVID-19 crisis.[28] *Hard Noise* reporter Shane Burley describes the band as "discontented with the world, but in solidarity with the masses."[29]As I have argued in the previous chapter, black metal aesthetics lend themselves to creating community through shared experiences of noise and embodied affect. In such experiences, Dawn Ray'd's choice of black metal may be particularly effective in trying to create "solidarity with the masses" through shared embodied experiences of noise present in the distortion in their music. Unlike the bands discussed in the previous chapter, however, Dawn Ray'd's music attempts to build community based on progressive and anarchist political ideologies rather than a shared hatred of certain groups of people.

The American band Awenden, formed in 2017, further emphasizes the importance of black metal aesthetics for progressive political activism. The band's creator, who goes by the name Gudrik, describes the lyrics on the band's second album *Golden Hour,* as "angry and mostly concern[ing] the necessary violence in liberation struggles, and the certainty of ever-escalating horrors as capitalism continues to lose stability and legitimacy, as well as the ubiquity of violence under Empire."[30] Gudrik further claims that they wanted the music to

[28] Shane Burley, "The Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: An Interview with Dawn Ray'd," *Hard Noise,* May 11, 2020, https://noise.thehardtimes.net/2020/05/11/the-burning-rage-of-a-dying-planet-an-interview-with-dawn-rayd/.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Caleb R. Newton, Awenden's Creator Explains the Project's Richly Immersive Cascadian Black Metal, *Captured Howls,* April 1, 2020, https://capturedhowls.com/2020/04/01/awendens-creator-explains-the-projects-richly-immersive-cascadian-black-metal/.

sound heavy to "compliment the lyrics," in a musical aesthetic described as "sonically dense" through both guitar distortion and added synthesizer to further complicate the album's soundscape. This statement implies that the political message is not something confined to the lyrics, which may or may not be intelligible without the help of a search engine anyway. For Gudrik, ideas of heaviness—discussed in the previous chapter as adding more distortion through various means—work hand in hand with the lyrics to help create the music's leftist message. The sonic density, and implicitly the listener's experience of it, are part of conveying the anger and despair felt because of the current western social, political, and economic structures. This sonic density comes, at least in part, from black metal's use of noise meant to convey an affective experience of political turmoil. In this reading, the use of black metal musical aesthetics is just as important as the lyrics in furthering leftist politics through the genre. Gudrik further notes that they explicitly consider Awenden to be anti-fascist and part of the RABM subgenre because they believe "it's very important to normalize and represent basic decency within the cesspool of racist or nationalist garbage that is black metal,"[31] explicitly acknowledging the genre's reputation as a draw for the alt-right. What makes Awenden's response to NSBM slightly different than their RABM counterparts is Gudrick's acknowledgement of how the musical aesthetics, and not only the lyrics, play a role in this political statement.

The popularity of Red and Anarcho Black Metal, or any black metal that is against NSBM, can be seen in the emergence of music festivals dedicated to leftist and progressive politics. The metal festival Black Flags Over Brooklyn took place in 2019 and featured explicitly anti-fascist and feminist metal and hardcore acts. Dawn Ray'd performed,

[31] Ibid.

complete with their emphasis on anti-fascist themes, in addition to bands like Closet Witch, a band from Iowa who evoke feminist themes, and Vile Creature, a Canadian band whose 2015 debut record was focused on exploring "the hatred and violence that queer persons, female-identified persons, and non-cis-gendered persons are subjected to on a daily basis, and [their] experiences with that."[32] Bands also sold merchandise such as stickers that read "end the statistic – arm trans women," and included talking points in between sets. The band Racetraitor, for example, discussed the ubiquitous nature of white supremacy claiming that "of course there's racists and Nazis in the fucking metal scene; there's racists and Nazis everywhere. And some a lot more dangerous than fuckers that go out in the woods and burn bonfires to Odin. There are Nazis in the fucking NYPD."[33]Although white supremacy has taken a specific vein in the metal scene, which I discussed at length in chapter 2, Racetraitor's statement serves as a reminder that racism and far right politics can reside in even seemingly quotidian places, not just in the sometimes-eccentric black metal scene.

The later 2010s also saw an increase in individual bands openly discussing and decrying NSBM specifically and white supremacy through their music, not just in personal statements to the press or online. For example, the 2016 election campaign, and many things Donald J. Trump said or implied during it, became fodder for the band Anal Trump, who released their first album in May of 2017. Trump's campaign platform was predicated on hard stances against issues like immigration, abortion, and general human decency that

[32] Hank Shteamer, "Brooklyn Anti-Fascist Metal Fest was Beacon for a Troubled Scene," *Rolling Stone*, January 28, 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-live-reviews/black-flags-over-brooklyn-kim-kelly-anti-fascist-metal-fest-785088/.

[33] UR_Ninja, "There's Nazis and racists everywhere…," Twitter, August 7, 2019, 8:31AM, https://twitter.com/UR_Ninja/status/1159124848402227200. The citation is for the group Unicorn Riot, a collective of leftist journalists. The video of Racetratior was posted to their Twitter account.

gained public and vocal support from notoriously racist figures such as David Duke.[34] The band, whose project includes grindcore and death metal aesthetics, uses song titles such as the one listed in the introduction and "My Daughter is a Piece of Ass," "Poor People are too Stupid to Get a Loan from Their Parents," and "Make America Great Again." These titles clearly reference either Trump's sexualization of his daughter Ivanka, Trump's business "success" as a project of his parents' hard work rather than this own achievements, and campaign slogans. The band's bio on Bandcamp also states "We know what's best for you and this country because shut up," noting a lack of actual reasoning behind Trump's campaign and his propensity for attacking his critics.[35]

Anal Trump's biting sarcastic humor in their music to promote a more politically progressive ideology, but they were not the only ones to use music and humor as political critique. In July 2018, the band Neckbeard Deathcamp released their first album titled *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers* by sharing it on BandCamp and advertising the album on social media platforms, especially Reddit's heavy metal forums. Similar to Anal Trump, Neckbeard Deathcamp relies on humor to make fun of radical right politics and the people who support them within the context of black metal musical aesthetics. However, unlike Anal Trump, who target Trump supporters, Neckbeard Deathcamp targets the NSBM

[34] Camila Domonoske, "Former KKK Leader David Duke Says 'Of Course' Trump Voters are His Voters," NPR, August 5, 2016, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/05/488802494/former-kkk-leader-david-duke-says-of-course-trump-voters-are-his-voters.

[35] "Anal Trump," BandCamp, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://analtrump.bandcamp.com/album/the-first-100-songs.

scene specifically. In an interview with Decaycast, one band member, using the pseudonym "Kriegmaster Hatesturm,[36]" explains their philosophy as:

> A MILITANT REPLY TO THE FASCIST SIEGE OV HEAVY METAL ENABLED BY CURRENT POLITICAL TIMES…OUR PHILOSOPHY IS ONE OV ABSOLUTE HATRED AND CRUELTY FOR THEIR DISGUSTING WAY OF LIFE AND OUR OATH IS TO ABSOLUTE INTOLERANCE OV THEIR CHILDLIKE ANSWERS TO THE HARD QUESTIONS.[37]

Another member, using the name "Hailz Komradez," states "OUR GOAL IS THE COMPLETE ERADICATION OV NATIONAL SOCIALISM."[38] While members specifically call out Nazism within black metal, and society more broadly, they also include critiques of other alt-right, politically conservative, or regressive social viewpoints. For example, song titles such as "I showed you my penis (please respond)" mock online misogynists who feel entitled to sexual experiences with women and their, simply titled "cucked," makes fun of the far-right's use of the word "cuck" to refer to anyone who is not sufficiently radically right wing.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of this style of mockery and humor to achieve the previously stated goals of eradicating national socialism, often inverting alt-right and neo-

[36] The use of stage names in black metal is common, although the use in this example is part for humor (given the names they've chosen) and part to remain anonymous, although their real identities have since been revealed.

[37] DecayCast, "DecayCast "Deathquestions" AKA an Interview with Anti-Fascist Metal Group Neckbeard Deathcamp, DecayCast, February 22, 2019, https://decaycast.wordpress.com/2019/02/22/decaycast-interviews-deathquestions-aka-an-interview-with-anti-fascist-black-metal-group-neckbeard-deathcamp. The band always uses all-caps in their interviews and social media posts, so this writing is how it appears online.

[38] Ibid. It should also be noted that the "ov" instead of "of" is also a very common spelling in black metal bands and song titles. For example, the band Behemoth has a very popular song titled "At the Left Hand ov God." I am not sure of the lineage of the spelling, but you will occasionally also see people refer to things as "kvlt" in the black metal scene, usually in reference to music deemed particularly cool, heavy, and or extreme.

Nazi symbols in humorous ways. For example, the logo for this album includes imagery meant to resemble the Nazi eagle, a symbol used by the Nazi party that continued to act as a Nazi symbol long after the end of the Third Reich. However, Neckbeard Deathcamp clearly twists the symbol by replacing the eagle's head and the individual eagle feathers with dicks, turning a serious Nazi symbol into a crude joke. The band further changes the Nazi dick eagle by replacing the swastika the eagle is usually shown holding with an image of Pepe the frog, the meme character co-opted by the alt-right in the 2010s.[39] Later albums also include images of known alt-figure Richard Spencer crying and being given a wedgie by a black metaller with spiked arm cuffs.[40] Such images take symbols and figures important to those on the far-right and turn them into an often crass joke.

Neckbeard Deathcamp and Musical Parody

Neckbeard Deathcamp's music relies on several forms of humor to try to achieve their goal of eradicating national socialism within the black metal scene. One such form of humor is their use of lyrical and musical parody to make fun of the alt-right and their political ideologies. According to Simon Dentith, parody in literary texts and other linguistic interactions can be characterized as "any cultural practice which makes a polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice."[41] While Dentith explains that parody

[39] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Neckbeard_Deathcamp/White_Nationalism_Is_for_Basement_Dwelling_Losers/725226.

[40] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Neckbeard_Deathcamp/So_Much_for_the_Tolerant_Left/772854.

[41] Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), 20

can have a variety of roles and functions, one purpose can be to criticize. Dentith explains that parody often involves taking a certain cultural idea, practice, or belief, and hyperbolizing it, often in a comedic way. In doing so, the act of parody is often critical as it "must first involve identifying a characteristic stylistic habit or mannerism and then making it comically visible."[42] Critical parody can be aimed at individual texts, but it can also be used against broader literary styles, genres, or aesthetics.

Neckbeard Deathcamp relies heavily on textual parody to create a humorous critique of the alt-right's positionality. For example, the album's intro is simply titled "Cucked," a clear reference to the ideologies discussed above. Other albums parody far-right talking points and anxieties. The song "The Left are the Real Fascists," includes the following lyrics:

> RICHARD SPENCER BEATEN TO DEATH DROWNED IN PISS BODY BURNED HILLARY CLINTON SUPREME CHANCELLOR TUMBLR T LONG RED FLAGS PINK HAIR COMPULSORY ANTIFA TRAINING COMPULSORY HOMOSEXUALITY COMPULSORY ISLAM COMPULSORY SJW SUPERKOMMANDOS WATCH ON EVERY CORNER EXOSKELETONS BUILT TO KILL WITH ONE PUNCH MILITARY PARADE TO HONOR LENIN TOTALITARIAN AUTOCRATIC NEOLIBERAL VICTORY.[43]

While lines like "Richard Spencer beaten to death" references white nationalist Richard B. Spencer—whom the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) refers to as "a kind of professional racist in khakis"[44]— do reference actual events, specifically Spencer being

[42] Ibid., 32

[43] "The Left are the Real Fascists: Neckbeard Deathcamp," BandCamp, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://neckbearddeathcamp.bandcamp.com/album/white-nationalism-is-for-basement-dwelling-losers.

[44] "Richard Bertrand Spencer," Southern Poverty Law Center, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/richard-bertrand-spencer-0.

punched during a live News program,[45] he was not, nor even close to being beaten to death, having his body burned, or being drowned in piss. Other lines frame their political enemies, such as Hillary Clinton, as power hungry, aligning with Kelly's description of the alt-right's positionality. However, Clinton's failed run for the American presidency falls far short of an attempted power grab at becoming "supreme chancellor." Neckbeard Deathcamp also references the website tumblr with a description of the "tumblr t"—a nod to the social media site Tumblr's logo. In the online world that the alt-right occupies, tumblr has become synonymous with the so-called Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) —a group of people who adhere to the progressive ideologies around social justice that the alt-right would consider being "cucked."[46]

These lyrics also include references to various "compulsory" identities associated with leftist politics, including movements like antifa (short for anti-fascism), aspects of identity such as homosexuality, or cultural and religious practices like being Muslim. These identities also align with being "cucked" as they deviate from the expected straight white male figure the alt-right chooses to exalt. However, they also represent an exaggeration of alt-right anxieties. Obviously, nobody is being forced to convert to Islam or to suddenly change their sexuality or identify themselves as antifa,[47] but the idea that a government could force them to become part of these groups demonstrates their anxieties around power-

[45] Paul P. Murphey, "White Nationalist Richard Spencer Punched During Interview," CNN, January 21, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/20/politics/white-nationalist-richard-spencer-punched/index.html.

[46] SJW is often used as a derogatory term for someone deemed too invested in social justice work or doing literally any social justice work or caring about social justice at all.

[47] As in people who identify and participate in the political and (often) anarchist group. Hopefully most people do actually identify as being against fascism whether or not they identify with "antifa" as a group.

hungry left (or liberal) politicians forcing them into a state of being "cucked."[48] The sentiments of having individual rights and personal freedoms taken away can also be seen in the phrase "totalitarian autocratic neoliberal victory," implying that the left intends to create an authoritarian-like rule over American citizens. Through these exaggerations of far-right talking points, Neckbeard Deathcamp imitates their fear mongering through mentioning groups already well-known to be feared and/or reviled by the right.

Although Dentith's frameworks around parody focus on text, several scholars have also discussed the role of musical parody. For example, Andrey Denisov defines musical parody as a piece that "forms a kind of *common artistic principal that shows itself in the semantic and structural reinterpretation of the original that has been parodied.*"[49] For Denisov, this type of parody can take multiple forms depending on what is being parodied, who is doing the parody, and in what context the parody takes place. Denisov further posits that parody can be broken into several categories depending on the methods used to create the parodic reinterpretation of an original text or song. These methods can include deformation, in which the music is distorted in some way from its original through various means. Examples of deformation can be seen in polarization—in which the parodic music represents a diametric opposition to the original (e.g. using high pitches when the original uses low) —and hyperbolization, which "emphasizes certain signs or the whole system of

[48] One only need look to the debacle of mask mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic to understand the right-wing fear of compulsory anything.

[49] Andrey V Denisov, "The Parody Principle in Musical Art," *International review of the aesthetics and sociology of music* 46, no. 1 (2015): 55–72, 56. Emphasis Denisov's.

signs in the original that has been parodied.[50] Denisov also notes that agglutination, or the use of disparate elements within a piece of music to parody the original, may also be used.[51]

In their song, "The Left are the Real Fascists" Neckbeard Deathcamp engage in some aspects of musical parody to target NSBM bands. For example, the band has discussed the lack of riffs in their music. Riffs refer to a harmonic pattern, usually played on guitar, that is repeated throughout the song. This practice is a major part of metal aesthetics and bands are often lauded for having "good" riffs.[52] Music deemed by its listeners to have a lack of riffs, or a lack of interesting or good riffs, is often considered a sign of the musicians' lack of creativity or compositional talent. However, Neckbeard Deathcamp's lack of interesting riffs stems from a direct parody of Der Stürmer, an NSBM band discussed in depth in previous chapters. In an interview with *DecayCast*, Neckbeard Deathcamp member Kriegmeister Hatesturm discusses Der Stürmer's music, claiming that "PEOPLE CAN TALK SHIT ABOUT US ALL DAY FOR HAVING NO RIFFS YET UNIRONICALLY GAS THESE GUYS [Der Stürmer]. WHO ARE LIKE UNFLAVORED OATMEAL SERVED WITH MAYONNAISE ON WHITE BREAD WITH A NICE GLASS OV WATER."[53] Once again, the band uses humor to emphasize their point, likening Der Stürmer's music to the flavor plainness of mayonnaise, white bread, and water.

Parody can be heard in comparisons between songs like Neckbeard Deathcamp's "The Left are the Real Fascists" and Der Stürmer's "Those Who Lived and Died Like Heroes." Both songs include a lack of riffs or harmonic variation throughout the song,

[50] Ibid., 58.
[51] Ibid., 58.
[52] good being a relative term to generic norms and the listeners own personal tastes
[53] DecayCast "DecayCast Interviews Deathquestions…"

instead favoring a single, and extremely simple, harmonic line repeated in the guitar. For example, Der Stürmer's song uses an A-aeolian scale and predominantly use the melodic line A-G-C-B-A. Although there are a few variations on this melodic idea throughout, they stay within a tight range. In "The Left are the Real Fascists," the melodic line in the guitar consists of "A-G#-C-B-A, using a similarly small range and presenting only a slight variation on Der Stürmer's melody. There are still small changes throughout the song, but this theme repeats several times. Of course, there are differences in how this melody repeats and the rhythmic patterns used, but the melodic line bears a striking resemblance to Der Stürmer's, especially considering Neckbeard Deathcamp's allusions to musical similarities between the two bands in the interview discussed above. While the musical similarities do not necessarily mean they constitute a form of parody, especially as Denisov as defined it, the lyrics in conjunction with extra-musical interviews do reveal a form of parodic play.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's musical parody is arguably for a more specific audience. While the exaggeration of alt-right ideologies in the lyrics are easier to understand by those outside the metal community if you look up the lyrics, the musical parody is much more geared towards those already familiar with metal and its musical conventions. Der Stürmer is arguably not well-known enough outside of specific NSBM audiences for this harmonic structural parody to be immediately obvious (or noticeable at all). But audiences familiar with metal aesthetics will likely comprehend that Neckbeard Deathcamp's music largely avoids creative or more complicated riffs. The connection specifically to Der Stürmer then is only accessible through interviews and actively seeking out more information about Neckbeard Deathcamp, which, as discussed in the third chapter, is not just part of metal listening habits but also aspects of scene engagement. As a result, the musical parody is only

accessible to those who understand metal's musical aesthetics *and* to those who participate in the scene in more specific ways.

Don't Feed the Trolls (unless it's really funny and aimed at Nazis)

Parodic frameworks may help to understand songs such as "The Left are the Real Fascists," but most of Neckbeard Deathcamp's songs do not include taking on the identity of a (sort of) hyperbolized radical right-winger. Instead, many of their songs and the related extra-musical materials work to make fun of neo-Nazis or other radical right groups outright. This does not fall into some of the definitions of parody discussed previously. Instead, most of Neckbeard Deathcamp's musical output can be understood as a form of trolling. Communications professor Whitney Phillips has done extensive research on internet trolling in the later 2000s. She describes self-identifying trolls as "motivated by what they call lulz, a particular kind of unsympathetic, ambiguous laughter. Lulz is similar to schadenfreude…but has much sharper teeth."[54] Trolls often revel in the anonymity afforded by the internet and are particularly drawn to anything they consider exploitable for lulz. Phillips continues in her description, noting that:

> There is a through line in troll's targeting practices: the concept of exploitability. Trolls believe that nothing should be taken seriously, and therefore regard public displays of sentimentality, political conviction, and/or ideological rigidity as a call to trolling arms. In this way, lulz functions as a push back against any and all forms of attachment, a highly ironic stance given how attached trolls are to the pursuit of lulz."[55]

[54] Phillips, *this is why we can't have nice things*, 24.
[55] Ibid., 25.

For trolls, lulz can come from a variety of places and can often be seen as irreverent and/or deeply disrespectful. Phillips notes the trends of "RIP trolling" in which trolls visit memorial pages on Facebook for people who have died and make jokes at the expense of those who visit these pages (including family members). Other controversial practices include making jokes about national tragedies such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York by superimposing silly images, like the Kool-Aid man, over images of the twin towers.[56] Phillips also notes that trolling often works to reinforce certain aspects of the status quo, whether intentionally or not. For example, she draws attention to the ubiquitous use of the n-word in troll forums, particularly sites like 4chan because of the political baggage the word carries. For trolls, the fact that there is political contention contained within the language is what makes it effective in successfully trolling someone; however, Phillips further notes that trolls often deny their role in perpetuating racism through reasoning that it is "just" a joke.[57] Of course, these racial slurs inevitably reinforce parts of the status quo, which continues to marginalize many groups, a point Phillips notes as an inherently problematic aspect of how internet trolling is often practiced.

Trolling and meme culture have become particularly tied to the alt-right and neo-fascist movements as a method of spreading political messages. Hermansson, Lawrence, Mulhall, and Murdoch have discussed the importance of trolling in creating alt-right spaces online. According to Hermansson et al, the alt-right connects to trolling when online antagonistic communities direct their ire towards "what they perceive as the left-liberal

[56] Ibid., 117.
[57] Ibid., 97.

political and social hegemony."[58] 4chan and their "politically incorrect" chat board /pol/ is particularly implicated in the formation of the alt-right movement.[59] Although 4chan's trolling initially targeted groups both on the right and left, between 2015 and 2018, the amount of racist and fascist ideas presented on /pol/ increased.[60] Hermansson et al thus describe the site as "unprecedented as a point of origin for far-right online campaigns, likely due to the similar pre-existing practices of the trolling subculture from which it emerged."[61] The combination of trolling frameworks and the use of alt-right politics—whether as play or in seriousness—also made the chat board ideal for recruitment, something that had been explicitly discussed on alt-right propaganda and recruiting boards like Swarmfront.[62] What Hermesson and Phillips agree on is the alt-right's use of *détournement.* Phillips claims that *détournement* can be defined as the "process by which the existing meaning of a particular statement or artifact is turned against itself,"[63] often as a way to challenge dominant ideologies. For those on the alt-right, "dominant ideologies" are usually defined as liberal or otherwise left-leaning politics.

The use of "politically incorrect" trolling and targeting the supposed dominant or hegemonic groups/ideologies was exacerbated by an event known as "gamergate." The scandal began when game developer Zoë Quinn's ex-boyfriend posted online that she had

[58] Hermansson et al, 123. In this context, "antagonistic communities are defined as communities online that "engage in exclusive, antagonistic behavior", 123.

[59] Ibid., 123.

[60] Ibid., 125. 4chan had another forum /new/ which also included overtly racist messaging, although this forum was removed in 2011 for this reason.

[61] Ibid., 125.

[62] Swarmfront is a subforum on the site Stormfront, another explicitly alt-right website and chat room. Hermansson et al note that Swarmfront had made explicit references to using 4chan boards as recruitment tools as well as boards on reddit.

[63] Phillips, *This is why we can't have nice things,* 68.

slept with several men within the gaming scene, including journalists, in exchange for positive reviews of her games in 2014. The story went viral and spurred discussions of not only ethics in video games but a panic about whether or not feminism had gone too far.[64] In addition to being an internet disaster in its own right, Hermasson et al also suggest that this incident was a radicalizing force that pushed some young internet users towards the alt-right through a consistent condemnation of feminism and women's roles in video games. This situation also allowed other alt-right media personalities to capitalize on the event to further their online reach.[65] What began as trolling Quinn for the perceived sin of trading sexual favors for positive reviews—an accusation that has since been debunked—eventually became a very real platform for the alt-right to continue spreading more political propaganda that reached further than this single incident. While this event had severe consequences for those targeted, trolling behavior has also impacted larger systems than niche interests-like video games-on the internet. Trolling and meme making were also influential in spreading disinformation in the 2017 French elections with the hashtag #MacronLeaks. Hermesson et al note that the hashtag was started by American alt-right internet users and was amplified with the use of bots to retweet the information on a larger scale before being picked up in France.[66]

[64] Hermansson et al, 126. From my own recollection of the event, "too far" meant "existed at all" and "how dare women play men's video games and get upset about violence against women in said games." This event was also following moral panics about feminist critics like Anita Sarkeesian's YouTube channel Feminist Frequency that often looked at misogyny in video games. Sarkeesian was heavily criticized by right-wing parts of the internet, which included not only blatant misogyny but also antisemitism.

[65] Hermansson et al, 125. See Milo Yiannopoulos in particular.

[66] Hermansson et al, 127.

In many ways, Neckbeard Deathcamp's music combines the internet aesthetics of the alt-right with the black metal aesthetics of NSBM to formulate a biting critique of far-right wing politics. In an interview with the group Unicorn Riot—a media collective made up of left-wing journalists—at the anti-fascist metal festival Black Flags over Brooklyn, one member describes how their project "was designed to take the things in NSBM, things that they think are cool, the symbols that they think are fun, all this bullshit, […] and hand it back to them and say how the fuck do you feel? You know, these guys, they come out and they pretend like 'argh, I don't have any fucking feelings,' but you can hurt them, you can make fun of them 'cause they get mad as shit."[67] For Neckbeard Deathcamp, the seriousness with which NSBM bands and fans take their political ideologies and the corresponding symbols are, to borrow Phillips's word, exploitable. Members of NSBM scenes hold an attachment to these symbols and ideas that leave them open to trolling because trolling revels in mocking and attacking emotional attachments. Trolling also challenges the idea that alt-right do not have the same emotional attachments to their politics that the left does. In short, Neckbeard Deathcamp seem particularly aware of this exploitability in the knowledge that neo-Nazis do, in fact, get "mad as shit" when someone makes fun of them.

Neckbeard Deathcamp participate in trolling aesthetics in multiple ways. By taking another look at the album cover for *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers,* the manipulated Reichstag eagle can be seen through this lens of taking a symbol that has historical meaning to the Nazi party and turning it into a crude and absurd joke. Later album art continues the trend of taking meaningful things to NSBM and making fun of them. For

[67] Unicorn Riot, "Neckbeard Deathcamp Interview at Black Flags Over Brooklyn Antifa Metal Festival," Vimeo, Video, July 25, 2019, 11:15AM, https://vimeo.com/350124704.

most, the trolling and the "lulz" in this example are obvious. Some of the song names function in a similarly legible manner, such as the song Zyklon /b/. Zyklon B was the name for a cyanide-based poisonous gas the Nazis used in the gas chambers at the Auschwitz and Majdanek death camps.[68] However, the song's use of the /b/ references the "random" boards of the site 4chan. The /b/ board, which is dedicated to random postings—unlike other boards, which are dedicated to more specific topics such as "anime" or "technology"—has been particularly noted in the beginnings of trolling culture.[69] Phillips has characterized this board in particular as andocentric and white-centric, though since users are anonymous we cannot concretely determine whether they are male and/or white. Regardless, male and white viewpoints have been centered and taken for granted as part of 4chan's user base.[70] The result of these centricities coupled with the power of anonymity has resulted in 4chan's /b/ boards becoming known for offensive posts. Phillips claims that "because there are no repercussions for posting racist, sexist, homophobic, or exploitative text and/or images, and because trolling is characterized by transgressive one-upmanship, /b/ is overrun by highly offensive and sometimes explicitly illegal content."[71] Neckbeard Deathcamp's song references this type of internet culture in the song title Zyklon /b/ by placing the reference to the 4chan boards in proximity to Nazism, noting the board's toxicity towards those marked as "other" outside of the prevailing white and andocentric viewpoints. While the joke does

[68] "Holocaust," Encyclopedia.com, last updated June 18, 2018, https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/judaism/judaism/holocaust#FROM_MASS_MURDER_TO_GENOCIDE.

[69] Phillips, 52.

[70] Ibid., 54.

[71] Ibid., 55.

rely on knowledge of 4chan internet culture and Nazi extermination practices, it does not require a familiarity with black metal culture or aesthetics.

But not all elements of Neckbeard Deathcamp's trolling are legible to a general audience and some of the jokes require a deeper understanding of metal culture and the politics associated with it. For example, the band's split album with Gaylord, a band with very similar goals to Neckbeard Deathcamp, reappropriates an image from the Nickelodeon cartoon Spongebob Squarepants. In the original segment titled "No Weenies Allowed,"[72] the cartoon's main protagonist repeatedly attempts to get into the "Salty Spitoon," a bar known for its uber-tough clientele. However, Spongebob is repeatedly rejected for being too soft and told to go across the street to Weenie Hut Jr., which is the image seen on the album cover. Notably, they have covered the Weenie Hut Jr. sign with the logo for Darker than Black Records, a label associated with producing NSBM albums and representing far-right political bands. The joke is that by putting these two images together, Neckbeard Deathcamp and Gaylord are implying that Darker than Black Records is for weenies who are too soft for the tougher labels. The juxtaposition between these two concepts—weenies and black metal—create the lulz at the Nazis' expense and suggest that the viewer see them as weenies.

This issue of legibility is similarly seen in the band's lyrics, which also utilize elements of trolling and contain a lot of the jokes the band makes at Nazis' expense. Songs like Zyklon /b/ makes similar references to alt-right subcultural norms and symbols. However, in this song, and many of the band's other songs on the album, these lyrics

[72] Season 3, Episode 8. The episode was originally aired on March 15, 2002.

actively mock Nazi and alt-right symbolism and stereotypes. The following are the song's lyrics:

> BATHE YOUR BONES IN BAJA BLAST GREASY FLESH STRIPPED WITH SOLVENT MASS GRAVE FOR ANGRY LOSERS BULLDOZED OVER SHRED FEDORAS TAKE YOUR SWASTIKAS AND SHOVE THEM UP YOUR ASS WOODED BOXES FILLED WITH MJOLNIRS SUNWHEELS TOTENKOPFS GOLD TEETH CHAINS AND CORDS ALLOWANCE FINANCED RELIGIOUS TRINKETS DYING GODS MELTED DOWN MAY EVERY COWARD WHO TAKES POWER IN FINDING EDGE ON FASCIST RAZORS BE CRUSHED UNDER THE VERY BOOTS THEY SOUGHT TO WEAR DIE WITHOUT HOPE DIE WITHOUT MERCY DIE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS MAY EVERY LAST SECOND OF THE END OF YOUR LIFE BE A THOUSAND YEARS OF AGONY YOU SPINELESS WORTHLESS SACKS OF SHIT GRIND YOUR CORPSES TO DUST AND PISS IN THE URNS FUCK YOU FOREVER.[73]

Part of these lyrics contain specific references to Nazism and NSBM. References to mjolnirs, sunwheels, totenkopfs, and swastikas directly reference Nazi symbolism and the NSBM fascination with paganism and Norse mythology.[74]Similarly, the phrase "dying gods melted down" is a reference to these pagan mythologies, which have been infused with political meaning by both the Third Reich and the various neo-political stances that have come afterward. The lyrics go further to outright condemn these ideas, claiming that cowards "who take power in finding edge on fascist razors be crushed under the very boots they sought to wear." The concept of "finding edge" or trying to be edgy fits into the black metal aesthetics of transgression, but Neckbeard Deathcamp makes it clear that this method of transgression (i.e. the use of fascist politics to be edgy) is an unacceptable use of the

[73] "Zyklon /b/: Neckbeard Deathcamp," BandCamp, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://neckbearddeathcamp.bandcamp.com/album/white-nationalism-is-for-basement-dwelling-losers. Lyrics have been reproduced here as they appear on the band's Bandcamp page, including capitalization and lack of punctuation.

[74] See chapter two for more on the connection between paganism and NSBM.

genre's ideals. Their declaration that Nazis can take their swastikas and "shove them up [their asses]" further clarify their condemnation of these politics.

These lyrics differ from the ones described in my earlier discussion of "The Left are the Real Fascists" because they do not pretend to take on a far-right wing stance. Instead, the band's politics and ideas about the alt-right are made palpably clear. For anyone who reads the lyrics, these ideas are difficult to misinterpret or mistake for being a parodic version of right-wing politics. They do, however, take symbols and ideals that are important to Nazis and mock them in an aggressive manner. I read their lyrical juxtapositions of Nazi imagery with fantasies of violent demises as a melding of black metal and antifascist trolling ideals. The brutality of lyrics like "grind your corpses to dust" or "Die without hope, die without mercy" bear resemblance to other black metal band lyrics.[75] Yet, these lyrics—while simultaneously serious in their disdain for neo-fascist politics and playful in their use of violent imagery—maintain a sense of humor.[76]

The joke in many songs such as "Zyklon /b/" is at least partially in the lyrics, and this makes it less legible for those who are not familiar with listening practices around black metal. This lack of legibility largely comes from the in-many-ways impenetrable aesthetics of the genre. Musically speaking, Neckbeard Deathcamp use many expected black metal aesthetic tropes. The spectrogram shown in ***figure 4*** of Zyklon /b/, demonstrates many of the same musical features, particularly their use of noise.

[75] For example, these can be compared to such lyrics as "Your lungs gasp for air but are filled with blood / a sudden crack as I crush your skull" from the black metal band Mayhem's song "Deathcrush."

[76] Seriously, though, who doesn't want to tell a Nazi "fuck you forever"? If you don't, maybe have a long, introspective look at yourself and your life choices.

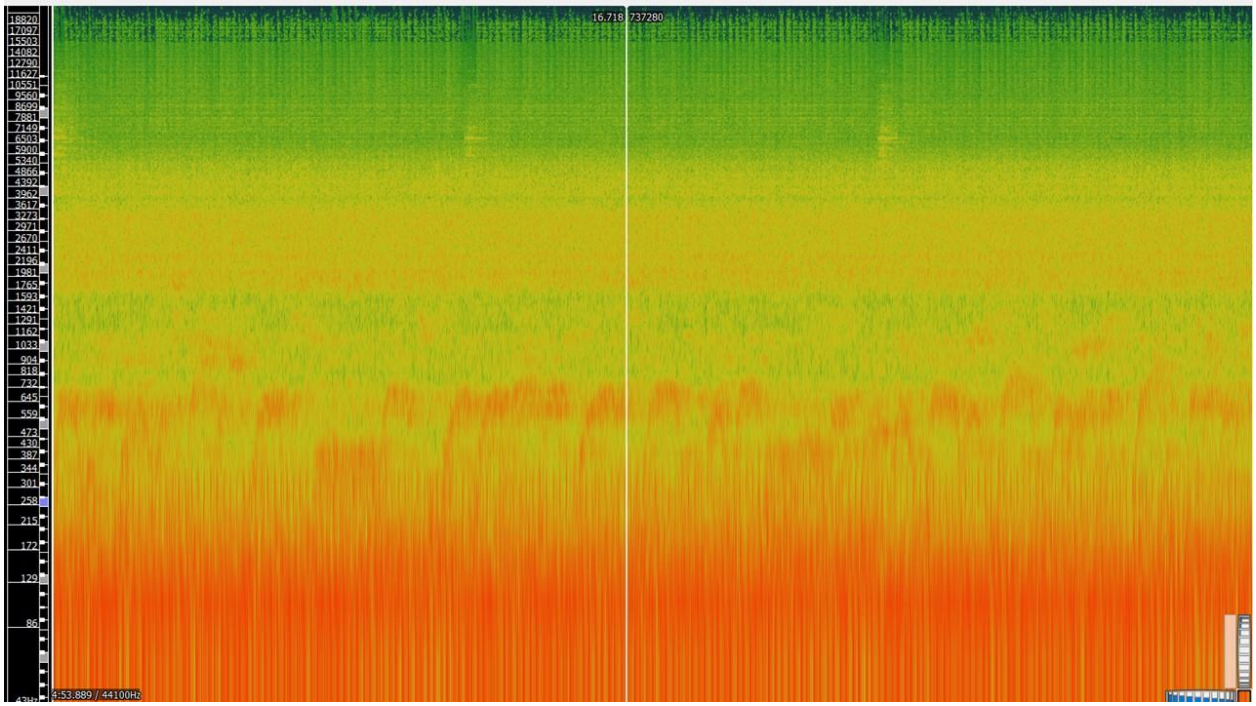

Figure 11: "Zyklon /b/" (0:00-0:35), the spectrogram demonstrates similar timbres to the black metal examples discussed in previous chapters.

Like many of the NSBM and non-NSBM bands discussed earlier in this project, their music includes a flattened dynamic envelope, in which the attacks and delays of individual pitches and notes cannot be individuated from one another. The lack of clear horizontal lines also indicates noisier pitches. Further, the sound of the band's recording practices draws similarities to their earlier Norwegian counterparts. The vocals in particular bear a sonic resemblance to the recording practices of Mayhem and even Burzum, in which the vocals are drowned out and distorted to the point of unintelligibility. As a result, not only are the instrumental parts difficult to listen to for those who do not already enjoy black metal, it makes the lyrics near impossible to understand without looking them up.

The irony of a political message being delivered through unintelligible lyrics is a point of questioning for those who were introduced to Neckbeard Deathcamp without being part of the metal community in some way or a regular listener to this type of music.

Commenters from the subbredit r/ListenToThis, a subreddit dedicated to music but not specifically heavy metal, have noted the contradictions in intelligibility of Neckbeard Deathcamp's project. One commenter writes "is it just me, or is it kind of counter-intuitive to have such a pointed political message delivered through lyrics that are almost impossible understand without a lyric sheet?" The same commenter then adds an edit saying "wait, *are* there lyrics? Or is it just growly noises."[77] Comments such as these indicate a conundrum specific to this genre, namely that the global aesthetics of growled vocals make words difficult to understand. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, this unintelligibility can be effective for NSBM bands as a way to hide or deflect the content of the music's lyrics that engage with extreme and problematic political ideologies.[78] However, in the context of Neckbeard Deathcamp's music, the lyrical content and the politics they are meant to convey, are not intended to be kept secret as "lulz" are created in more than just the lyrics. Yet, the continued use of growled and unintelligible vocals imply that the project is intended for an audience already familiar with black metal and the practice of looking up lyrics, meaning the unintelligibility of the vocals do not necessarily mean the lyrical meaning goes unheard. In this way, one must be "in" on the joke by being familiar with not only black metal's musical

[77] A_Canadian_Appears, 2019, Comment on "Neckbeard Deathcamp – White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers [black metal] (2018), https://www.reddit.com/r/listentothis/comments/92qqag/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for/. This comment is obviously my absolute favorite.

[78] Sharon Hochhauser, "The Marketing of Ango-Identity in the North American Hatecore Metal Industry," in *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green (Durham, NC, 2011), 161-179. Keith Kahn-Harris, "You are from Israel and that is Enough to Hate you Forever: Racism, Globalization, and Play Within the Extreme Metal Scene" in *Metal Rules the Globe*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Green (Durham, NC, 2011), 200-223, 162.

aesthetics, but also with other listening practices. And yet, this album has been surprisingly accepted by non-metal fans who enjoy the joke even if they do not care for the actual music.

David Futrelle, who runs the website *We Hunted the Mammoth*, which tracks the online "manosphere" (a term used to describe the various forums in which misogyny runs rampant and often intersects with various white supremacy movements), referred to the band as "the best parody Nazi incel black metal band ever (if you don't actually listen to them)."[79] In this blog post, Futrelle describes the band as "an amazing bit of musical trolling, if you set aside the fact that the music itself (which the band describes as 'FEDORA CRUSHING MILITANT BLACKMETAL') is unlistenable sludge, with growly unintelligible vocals that don't seem to have any relation at all to the printed lyrics."[80] However, Futrelle then praises the actual lyrics of the songs, clearly reveling in the jokes Neckbeard Deathcamp uses to troll the alt-right and NSBM scene. Similar sentiments can be found on Reddit, particularly in subreddits that do not focus on black metal or heavy metal more broadly. However, what Futrelle's engagement with Neckbeard Deathcamp's music demonstrates is a willingness for some outside of the metal community to engage with certain practices like looking up the lyrics to engage further with these types based on more legible jokes like the band's name or the album cover art.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's mixture of legible and non-legible elements to their music—at least to those outside of the metal community—is not only evident in their use of multiple trolling mediums (e.g., the lyrics and cover art) but also in their evocation of both

[79] David Futrelle, "Neckbeard Deathcamp is the Best Parody Nazi Incel Black Metal Band Ever (if you don't actually listen to them)," *We Hunted the Mammoth* (blog), July 26, 2018, https://www.wehuntedthemammoth.com/2018/07/26/neckbeard-deathcamp-is-the-best-parody-nazi-incel-black-metal-band-ever-if-you-dont-actually-listen-to-them.

[80] Ibid.

NSBM and alt-right internet culture. For example, the band's name refers to the internet trope of the "neckbeard." For purposes of defining terms that originated as internet tropes and slang, Urban Dictionary is probably more useful than more conventional resources such as the Oxford English Dictionary. Urban Dictionary defines the neckbeard as: "a type of man characterized by an inflated sense of self-worth and a powerful sense of entitlement, particularly to affection, subservience and sexual acts from women" whose trademark habits include consuming "copious amounts of Mountain Dew, Doritos, video games, and [maintaining] a sedentary lifestyle."[81] In addition to the characterization on Urban Dictionary, a running theme for this figure on forums like reddit's r/JustNeckbeardThings, in which users post interactions or screenshots of men who display these characteristics. These figures often demonstrate a fascination with the Joker figure from Batman, an affinity for Japanese animation (anime), and My Little Pony. The Neckbeard is often depicted as having a beard on their neck with little other facial hair, overweight with a fedora and terrible body odor, and implicitly lives in their parents' basement and spend all day on the internet or video games.[82]

Notably, the "neckbeard" trope is closely related to other types of internet figures, especially in their incitement of sexism and misogyny. They share this attitude with groups such as "incels," which stand for involuntarily celibate, who believe that they are marginalized in society because women will not have sex with them but choose to have sex

[81] ProfCDryDrunk, "Neckbeard," Urban Dictionary, October 24, 2020, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Neckbeard.

[82] There are, of course, problematic elements of this image characterization as well, but the overall gist is that they view themselves as entitled to "hot" women's bodies while not being conventionally attractive themselves

with other men.[83] This type of thinking can, and has, lead to offline acts of violence, including the shootings at UC Santa Barbara committed by Elliot Rogers in 2014, who posted a manifesto online decrying his lack of success with women before injuring fourteen victims and killing six others and himself in the campus's surrounding Isla Vista area. For those who ascribe to these views but do not necessarily commit acts of physical violence, their hatred mostly stays behind the screens of their computers, leading to the formation of "incel" (or "involuntarily celibate") forums online.[84] In addition to rampant misogyny in these online spaces, several analyses have shown the connections between misogyny and white supremacy.[85] These two problematic ideologies tend to appear in tandem with one another, particularly in online spaces.

Figures like the "neckbeard" are clearly noted in Neckbeard Deathcamps's name, allowing a point of entry for those who are familiar with internet culture, and the alt-right implications of parts of it, but this figure is further characterized in the band's lyrics for those who look them up. Considering the lyrics of "Zyklon /b/" again, lines such as "bathe your bones in Baja Blast, greasy flesh stripped with solvent, mass grave for angry losers, bulldozed over shred fedoras," denote the "neckbeard" figure more fully than just the band's name. The reference to bathing a person's bones in Baja Blast directly references the

[83] Consent is a lost concept for many of these people.

[84] Roberta Liggett O'Malley, Karen Holt, and Thomas J Holt, "An Exploration of the Involuntary Celibate (Incel) Subculture Online," *Journal of interpersonal violence* 37, no. 7-8 (2022): NP4981–NP5008. O'Malley et al discuss how incel communities formed and persisted in online communities and Rogers's participation in them. It is also worth noting that some of these forums have been banned from larger forum hosting sites like Reddit.

[85] For examples, see Kelly (2017); Koulouris (2018); and Gallaher (2019). These connections have also been tracked by non-academics, including David Futrelle, who runs the website *We Hunted the Mammoth* which tracks the online "manosphere" and often discusses the use of obvious racism in these spaces. Futrelle's blog has also been mentioned by the Southern Poverty Law Center

"neckbeard's" stereotypical love for Mountain Dew[86] and the fedora references the type of hat these figures are often depicted as wearing. For those outside of the metal community who do look up the lyrics, these lines are already understandable in their critique, but these lyrics combine these internet figures with the brutality expected of black metal aesthetics. The bathe someone's bones in anything is obviously meant as an indication of violence, but the choice of Baja Blast is clearly not the expected bone-bathing fluid. In this example, the lulz that come from this juxtaposition are aimed at people who fit into the neckbeard stereotype. The imagery of bulldozing fedoras also plays into the expected violence of the lyrics (the bulldozing) with humorous and unexpected objects of that violence (fedoras) through culturally recognized symbols of the neckbeard and the politics they have come to represent.

The "neckbeard's" obsession with women as sex objects and feelings of entitlement to their bodies also takes on racial implications in their obsession with east Asia, particularly Japan. Robin Zheng has argued that specific racial preferences for Asian people, often referred to as having "yellow fever," rely on racial stereotypes of "their purportedly shy, soft-spoken, submissive racial 'essence'."[87] For some, such as those who fit into the "neckbeard" trope, these stereotypes develop into a fetishization of Asian women and an assumption that Asian women want American, or white, men. Thus, Neckbeard Deathcamp

[86] Baja Blast is a flavor of the popular soda and is sold at Taco Bell.

[87] Robin Zheng, "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetishes," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2, no. 3 (2016): 400–419, 405. Zheng notes that these racial stereotypes are often applied to Asian women in a positive light as they experience what she refers to as a "double feminization" that causes Asian women to be considered more attractive but Asian men to be considered less attractive. Zheng notes that this is, of course, incredibly problematic as it often forces a burden onto Asian women as the recipients of "yellow fever" that leads to many of them feeling "depersonalized and homogenized," 407.

continues to create layers of legibility by making clear references to known internet tropes associate with the alt-right while also adding a deeper layer of meaning for those who are familiar with black metal aesthetics and expectations of black metal lyrics.

The "neckbeard" is not the only trope indicated in this song. It also implicitly references another online trope: the edgelord. The top-rated definition on Urban Dictionary defines an edgelord as "A poster on an internet forum, (particularly 4chan) who expresses opinions which are either strongly nihilistic…or contain references to Hitler, Nazism, fascism, or other taboo topics which are deliberately intended to shock or offend readers."[88] For some edgelords, racism or antisemitism are simply forms of racist play, much in the same vein as some black metal musicians discussed in chapter two. However, the use of racism for edginess can have far-reaching consequences in terms of propagating radical right ideas. The reference to this figure is more subtle, but the lyrics "every coward who takes power in finding edge on fascist razors" denotes the edgelord who attempts to seem "cool" or "powerful" through flirtations with fascist ideologies and interest in fascist figures, whether or not they actually believe in those politics.

The reference to multiple types of problematic internet trope figures—particularly the edgelord and the neckbeard—create a mishmash of culturally understood political leanings while simultaneously merging them with Nazi symbolism. Although the mention of swastikas makes the Nazi reference obvious to the vast majority of western listeners, the use of pagan symbols referenced alongside the swastika references NSBM's penchant for Norse mythology. The result merges together Nazism and socially maligned internet figures. In

[88] Petrus4, "Edgelord," Urban Dictionary, February 19, 2015, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=edgelord.

many ways, this merging reflects the reality of the cultures on notoriously far-right leaning (or play leaning) websites like 4chan's /b/ board or certain corners of Reddit. It also shows that the cultural assumption of what "alt-right" figures look like has begun to change and expand. While earlier NSBM often depicted white supremacy through mythological figures, such as Odin or Wotan,[89] figures such as the neckbeard, edgelord, or incel, demonstrate that there are many facets that the alt-right and white supremacy contain. There may be variations in how these figures are depicted but all of them share philosophies of racism, misogyny, or a combination of these stances. Rather than taking aim only at the NSBM iterations of far-right politics, which often emphasize the mythological figures mentioned above or a straightforward glorification of the Third Reich, Neckbeard Deathcamp expands the image of a "Nazi" to include those who do not identify themselves with swastikas or other obvious Nazi symbolism. This critique also necessitates looking at the ways in which far-right ideologies encompass a variety of problematic ideals, including both racism and antisemitism (as expected for Nazis), but also sexism and misogyny. Neckbeard Deathcamp's critiques, then, implicitly indicate the interconnected nature of far-right hatred towards different marginalized groups and the interconnectedness of these groups' oppression.

Their lyrical and visual artistic content allow an "in" for those outside of the metal community to get the joke, and other aspects of the band's projects create a deeper layer of trolling and meaning for those who understand black metal aesthetics. According to interviews with the band members, the musical and compositional choices are as intentional as their lyrics in terms of the band's message. Guitarist and bassist Superkommando

[89] See previous chapter for further discussion on NSBM lyrical references.

Uberweinerschnitzel (real name Daniel Martin) agrees "with the people [the band's listeners] that say it's shitty black metal, because I purposely played sloppy E-standard tuning, generic guitar riffs to parody how terrible NSBM bands sound. I was kind of annoyed at how successful [Neckbeard Deathcamp] became because of the minimal effort."[90]As I discussed in my analysis of "The Left are the Real Fascists," the musical style is intentionally similar to an NSBM style, and while Superkommando refers to it as parody, these choices arguably fit more into a framework of trolling. Combined with lyrics and imagery that clearly mock and contort neo-fascist symbolism in humorous ways, the band's musical choices become part of the joke. The lack of creativity or originality create the lulz by making fun of style choices, which Neckbeard Deathcamp have aimed at NSBM bands. Ironically, as Martin points out, this lack of effort is actually appealing to some of their listeners, who enjoyed both the musical and lyrical aspects of the project. However, it does denote that there is musical component to Neckbeard Deathcamp's trolling that requires an understanding of the genre to recognize the "minimal effort" musical structures of the piece.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of trolling has explored the various forms and tropes fascism takes, particularly within online spaces, but the band's final song, or outro, on *White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers* specifically calls out neo-Nazism and neo-fascism within the black metal scene by weaponizing black metal's emphasis on transgression against NSBM bands. The outro addresses a metal-oriented audience the most explicitly. While some may find the text humorous, especially because it differs from the rest of the album in the clear reading of the lyrics from what sounds like a feminine text-to-

[90] Kim Kelly, "Neckbeard Deathcamp are a Nazi-Stomping Black Metal Phenomenon," Vice, September 19, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en/article/kz5wp3/neckbeard-deathcamp-antifascist-black-metal-interview-gaylord-split.

speech reader, it employs specific black metal aesthetic and historical lineages to make the point. Musically, the song does not change much, emphasizing a steady quarter-note beat on the kick drum and a (as in singular) riff that consists of two tremolo-like chords throughout the song, and the first is played for several beats before changing for a single count. The result is almost drone-like. Lyrically, the speech-to-text reader is musically foregrounded throughout the song, further differentiating the outro from the album's other tracks, and emphasizing the words rather than the general musical aesthetic.[91]

Titled "The Fetishization ov Asian Women Despite the Demand for an All White Race," the outro is a joke in itself pointing out the hypocrisy prevalent in racist ideologies that insist on creating white babies while fetishizing the supposed submissiveness of Asian women. The outro predominantly uses black metal cultural logics as part of its trolling. The lyrics below demonstrate the direct address to the black metal and NSBM communities:

> And this entitlement to the bodies of women marketed as protection of the white race has gone on for more than long enough. It's time to identify these fucking losers for what they are, to stop pretending militant black metal is anything other than the allies they align themselves with and to stop letting neckbeards get away with marketing politics directly in line with the status quo is somehow revolutionary because they are draped in black. As it turns out, the black metal militants consistently prove themselves to be the least dangerous of all the extremists within the white identity movement. Making them not only petulant losers, but also huge fucking posers. You have the same political ideology as my racist aunt who lives in a $600,000 house on Long Island. You need only trade in your spiked gauntlets for acrylic nails. I'm tired of listening to your temper tantrums. Fucking posers (repeated).[92]

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[91] Zachary Wallmark, "The Sound of Evil: Timbre, Body, and Sacred Violence in Death Metal," in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, ed. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 65-87, 72. Wallmark discusses how for many metal bands, the exact content of the lyrics is less important than the vocal contribution to the overall timbre of the song. In other words, vocals are meant to add another layer of distortion and the lyrics are meant to match the brutality of the timbre, but are often not the actual focus of the vocal contribution.

[92] "The Fetishization ov Asian Women Despite a Demand for a Pure White Race: Neckbeard Deathcamp," BandCamp, Accessed May 27, 2022,

This portion of the outro references black metal and NSBM specifically but denies these genres the elements of transgression.[93] Black metal has thrived on elements of transgression and shock value, especially since the Norwegian second wave made international headlines for arson and murder. This transgression has also included racist play, as discussed in previous chapters, whether or not bands or individuals actually held the beliefs they promoted in their songs. The lyrics above directly undercut the transgressive deconstruction that is so central to the genre, making the assertion that these politics are not, in fact, transgressive. Instead, Neckbeard Deathcamp points out that these bands are more part of the status quo, implicitly acknowledging the systematic nature of racism and sexism, and making the transgression of looking scary seem incredibly superficial.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's comparison to NSBM bands to a hypothetical "racist aunt" with acrylic nails further places them outside of the typical black metal look. A lot of the visual black metal aesthetics rely on similar ideas of transgression, often favoring black or otherwise dark clothing, spikes, and "corpse paint," or black and white theatrical face painting. For many, this style is meant to look dangerous or scary in some way. Neckbeard Deathcamp's comparison of this style to a gaudy Long Island woman creates lulz in the juxtaposition of the two images *and simultaneously* recognizes the similarities of their politics. Here too, Neckbeard Deathcamp inverts the cultural logics of black metal to point out that there is nothing black metal about NSBM.

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https://neckbearddeathcamp.bandcamp.com/album/white-nationalism-is-for-basement-dwelling-losers.

[93] Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 10-11, 29.

Further, the outro refuses to place them within black metal's historical lineage of violence. As discussed in chapter two, black metal's history of violence has been integral to NSBM's racial self-definition, often conflating Aryan with strength and power through physical violence. Noting that black metal "militants" are the "least dangerous" removes them from the genre's violent history.[94] The idea of placing oneself in a historical lineage of "greatness" is not uncommon within the alt-right sphere. A similar phenomenon seems to happen with black metal's history of violence, as discussed in previous chapters, in which NSBM bands place themselves within a violent legacy in order to define whiteness as a form of power. However, none of these bands, to my knowledge, have ever committed physically violent acts. Instead they rely on the actions of their musical predecessors for their own sense of self-image. By pointing out that these bands are actually the "least dangerous," Neckbeard Deathcamp refuses to allow NSBM bands to place themselves within a legacy they did not help create or maintain through similar actions. There is undoubtedly the problematic notion in this outro that Neckbeard Deathcamp is essentially making fun of NSBM bands for not committing racially motivated violent crimes. And while the band is clearly using this lack of violence as a slight against bands who assume the violent historical lineage of black metal as a sort of misattributed marker of "evil" or "danger," it does not necessarily mean that the band should not be cautious in how these arguments are framed.

Perhaps the most damning piece of inverted cultural logics is Neckbeard Deathcamp's insistence that NSBM musicians/fans are "fucking posers." The term "poser" or "poseur" has a history in metal as an insult for those not deemed serious enough about the

[94] For many the term "militant" black metal often has the connotations of being related to far-right politics. The Militant Zone, for example, is a record label associated with producing NSBM.

music. Jeffrey Arnett, who has done sociological work on heavy metal scenes, define a poser as "heavy metal performers or fans who pretend to be part of the subculture, but who lack authenticity and sincerity."[95] The term poser also has a particular bite to it within the community, as ideas of "authenticity" are often held with utmost importance.[96] To say that NSBM bands are "fucking posers" is to effectively take them not only out of the history of black metal but it takes them out of the entire genre of "serious" heavy metal altogether.

In their use of trolling, Neckbeard Deathcamp castigates a variety of forms the alt-right can take. They have criticized the forms it takes in online spaces and the internet archetypes associated with the movement, and they have criticized the specific ways in which these politics take form within black metal. In doing so, the band has both acknowledged and criticized the nebulous nature far-right politics in the western world. Trolling, which by this point have become well-known in popular culture, also help create legibility for those outside of the metal scene. Such a dual focus allows for a wider range of listeners: those who understand the metal side of their critique and those who understand the internet culture side.

[95] Jeffrey Arnett, "Three Profiles of Heavy Metal Fans: A Taste for Sensation and a Subculture of Alienation," *Qualitative sociology* 16, no. 4 (1993): 423–443, 438.

[96] The topic of authenticity in heavy metal is arguably much more complicated than what can be described here. Ian Christie has noted in *Sound of the Beast* that in the 1980s, heavy metal musicians began to focus on one of two things: the visuals and being on channels like MTV (which focused on the visuals of a performance and making them seem TV-ready) and those who focused on the sound by touring and recording extensively. Those who focused on touring were often thought of as being heavier than their visual-focused counterparts, and therefore more serious. However, the socially constructed nature of "authenticity" within genres should not be overlooked in such discussions.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's Reception

While I have drawn attention to some of the positive reception Neckbeard Deathcamp received from outside of the metal community, the band has also received a large amount of support within the scene. On Reddit's main heavy metal forum r/metal—also cutely referred to as "shreddit"—their album was posted and boasts 1,381 upvotes and a 90% upvote rate.[97] Many of the listeners comment on the humor of the album but also note their enjoyment of the actual music. The OP (original poster) of the comment thread notes that "meme or not it's high quality"[98] and another notes that "usually bands with names like this suck … What a pleasant surprise."[99] Other commenters refer to the music as "kvlt,"[100]

[97] reddit allows users to either upvote content they like or downvote content they do not, which can affect the number of votes they have. A higher percentage of upvotes means that of the people who voted either way, a larger number of them liked the content.

[98] Towering_Flesh, 2019, comment on "Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for.

[99] Asinus_Sum, 2019, comment on Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for.

[100] [deleted], 2019, comment on Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for.

pronounced "cult" and has been used as a term of high praise in black metal.

while others express their interest in the music's brutality,[101] and one claims "It's disgusting, I love it."[102]

Some of the most telling comments, though, do not necessarily praise the lyrics or the music directly, but rather express relief for the band's very existence. One user writes that "this comment thread is refreshing, sometimes the local scene makes me forget that metalheads are usually opposed to being a sieg heiling blockhead,"[103] and another notes "we need more anti Alt-Right music."[104] Comments and reviews on the band's BandCamp page often reveal similar sentiments. User Tammuz also writes "Heavy metal event horizon for collecting the trash, grinding it into blessed subatomic silence"[105] and user tötwelker describes it as "THE BEST MEDICINE TO CLEAN OFF THE ORGANISM OF POISONOUS NAZI BULLSHIT."[106] In addition to demonstrating a positive reception to

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[101] xchadrickx, 2019, comment on Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for.

This is also a compliment.

[102] Gothmorg8, 2019, comment on Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for. This one is my personal favorite.

[103] Jelmo_Jurnas, comment on Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for.

[104] TechnoEquinox, 2019, comment on Neckbeard Deathcamp – White nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers (black)," https://www.reddit.com/r/Metal/comments/90xjdw/neckbeard_deathcamp_white_nationalism_is_for.

[105] Tammuz, (n.d.), Comment on "White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers," https://neckbearddeathcamp.bandcamp.com/album/white-nationalism-is-for-basement-dwelling-losers.

[106]Tötwelkr, (n.d.), Comment on "White Nationalism is for Basement Dwelling Losers," https://neckbearddeathcamp.bandcamp.com/album/white-nationalism-is-for-basement-dwelling-losers.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's music, these comments also imply that there has been a desire for more bands and music that directly critique NSBM as a genre and reject its ideologies without confusion or hesitation. As a result, the band has built a space for fans and musicians to express concerns about the proliferation of NSBM openly and find others in the scene—and outside of it as the previous discussion has shown—who feel similarly. These reactions also reveal the desire many metal listeners have to create a space around this form of music that is not intruded upon by far-right wing ideologies. And Neckbeard Deathcamp's music seems to be playing a role in creating that space, at least for these reviewers.

The praise for Neckbeard Deathcamp's music also inspired more troll-esque bands that target the alt-right. Musician Richard Weeks, for example has a variety of other black metal projects and created their own label called Blackened Death Records, which combines black metal aesthetics with social justice.[107] Many of Weeks's projects display clear leftist and progressive politics, including the project Olivia Neutered John (a pun on the name Olivia Newton John), which decries date rape in the song "Date Rape Castration Frenzy" (self-explanatory) or the song "Heterosexuals are Gay" which includes lyrics such as "stop using "gay" as an insult" and "stop being absolute fucking trash." In 2018, Weeks released Gaylord's first album titled *The Black Metal Scene Needs to be Destroyed.* Gaylord includes similar biting leftist politics, also entrenched in black metal's aesthetics of distortion and noise, to target the NSBM scene. The band's first album includes tracks such as "nice sun

[107] Kim Kelly, "Unmasking Gaylord, Black Metals' Latest Anti-fascist Enigma, Vice, August 21, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en/article/vbjnqx/gaylord-anti-fascist-black-metal-interview. It should be noted that Weeks identifies as non-binary and therefore they/them pronouns should be assumed singular unless otherwise stated.

cross tattoo asshole" which claims that the Norse pagan gods so revered in NSBM would shun them. Lyrics from this song include "You are not a Viking/Valkyries would never bring you to Valhalla/Odin thinks you're a cunt." Other songs target Varg Vikernes, the NSBM hero and murderer turned virulent racist on the internet, in songs like "Varg Impaled," growling "nice moustache grandad/your dating advice sucks shit/delete your Youtube account/get your ass back to jail."[108]

Don't Feed the Trolls (unless those trolls are countertrolls…and it's really funny)

The inclusion of trolling logics in black metal is still fairly novel, but the idea of inverting trolling logics is not an entirely new concept. Countertrolling, in which one trolls the trolls, has been done in some online spaces to varying degrees of success. At the end of her monograph *This is Why we Can't Have Nice Things*, Phillips questions whether or not trolling may have positive uses or benefits. Specifically, Phillips discusses the possibility of trolling through a feminist lens, in which trolling can be used for "strategic intelligence gathering."[109] Phillips continues, arguing that trolling can be used to encourage

> a suspected bigot and/or chauvinist to keep talking, interjecting only to goad the target into forwarding a stronger claim than he or she intended to disclose, feminist trolls are able to draw out the target's true loyalties - knowledge that can then be used to challenge or otherwise discredit an offending argument or person. That it also has the ability to befuddle and subsequently enrage a chauvinist - particularly when the chauvinist has taken pains to downplay his regressive political leanings - is an added bonus, at least for this feminist.[110]

[108] "The Black Metal Scene Needs to Be Destroyed: Gaylord," BandCamp, Accessed May 27, 2022, https://gaylord.bandcamp.com/album/the-black-metal-scene-needs-to-be-destroyed. Varg's style choices are…a choice.

[109] Phillips, 164.

[110] Ibid., 164.

In some instances, like the ones that Phillip's describes above, countertrolling may act as an effective weapon against trolls in online spaces that can be otherwise antagonistic towards women. Neckbeard Deathcamp's trolling, while focused on a somewhat different (though interrelated) target also intends to expose those with problematic views. But in contrast to the methods that Phillips describes in online feminist spaces, Neckbeard Deathcamp's tactics are arguably less about tricking one into exposing their political beliefs and rather more about attacking political beliefs that have already been explicitly stated. As such, countertrolling can be understood to include a variety of methods

Neckbeard Deathcamp's specific use of countertrolling enables a different kind of discourse around white supremacy than those that play out in the mainstream media. Especially after 2016, many have an increased awareness of what Jon Allsop at the Columbia Journalism Review refers to as "bothsidesism."[111] As the term implies, bothsidesism refers to a journalistic technique in which both sides of an issue are given equal coverage. While there are certainly situations in which both sides of an argument or discussion would be important to know, the critical issue with bothsidesism is that it can be applied to situations that are vastly unequal or can be used to spread disinformation, conspiracy theories, or other "alternative facts."[112] In the political sphere, bothsidesism can have the effect of making issues seem more polarized, making issues seem more partisan than they really are, or, at its worst, excusing ridiculous and unprofessional behavior on the

[111] Jon Allsop, "Both Sides, Columbia Journalism Review, December 16, 2019, https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/both-sides-impeachment-trump.php. It should be noted that Allsop did not coin the phrase himself, but rather recognizes a term that has been in use on platforms like Twitter.

[112] Ibid.

part of *certain* politicians. For example, professor of journalism at NYU Jay Rosen has tweeted his observations at the type of language used in the New York Times around Donald Trump's second impeachment, including the use of phrases such as "both sides engaged in a kind of mutually assured destruction" and "accused each other of being desperate and unfair" to imply that both political parties behaved in the same manner.[113] Such framing of events can become dangerous when applied to moments of white supremacist domestic terrorism. For example, Trump's indication that there was violence on "both sides" after the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA[114] "prompted the suggestion that his claims 'reinvigorated' the alt-right movement," and legitimized white supremacist viewpoints.[115]

In the realm of popular culture and media, bothsidesism runs into another issue: giving those with problematic rhetoric a platform that presents them as equally valid. Such a position can also make publicly discussing social issues such as white supremacy and those who spread it tricky to talk about without drawing more attention to individuals and their views. However, ignoring issues that have actively harmed those in marginalized groups does not seem to have worked either. Such a tactic would require the number of people who agree with white supremacist rhetoric to remain in the minority. Considering the large number of votes Trump received in the 2016 elections, this group is not enough of a minority to work, or a minority at all. This predicament has created somewhat of a

[113] Jay Rosen, "This is it, People. This is all they got…," Twitter, December 14, 2019, 7:03AM, https://twitter.com/jayrosen_nyu/status/1205865866291810309.

[114] The Unite the Right rally was a rally in Charlotesville, VA on August 12, 2017, that included a number of white supremacists including Richard Spencer. The rally drew a large number of counter protesters and eventually became deadly when one of the protesters ran their car through the rally, killing counter protester Heather Heyer.

[115] Isabelle van der Vegt, Maximilian Mozes, Paul Gill, and Bennett Kleinberg, "Online Influence, Offline Violence: Language Use on YouTube Surrounding the 'Unite the Right' Rally," *Journal of Computational Social Science* 4, no. 1 (2021): 333–354, 335.

conundrum in how to talk about and engage with debunking white supremacist viewpoints: is it better to talk about them, and therefore give them a platform that threatens to "both sides" racist and xenophobic viewpoints or is it better to try and refuse to engage with it and allow it to continue spreading and radicalizing more people, especially online. Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of trolling, however, is an attempt to circumvent this conundrum. By inverting and using online trolling frameworks within their music, Neckbeard Deathcamp is able to talk about issues of neo-fascism, neo-Nazism, or alt-right presences in metal directly without giving these ideas credence and without placing fascist and anti-fascist ideologies as anywhere near equality. Instead, trolling allows the band, and their fans, to mock and acknowledge the existence of fascists in the scene while simultaneously refusing to take anything they say or do seriously, presenting a third possible option for dealing with the radical right existence in the heavy metal scene.[116]

Trolling frameworks may also help make the presence and function of radical right politics more visible. While trolling can be acerbic and hurtful, even outside of political contexts, when combined with alt-right ideologies trolling takes on another malignant dimension. Although the term "trolling" during the American presidential election took on several different meanings, Milner and Phillips note that it was applied to various entities. For sites like the Daily Stormer as well as Russian disinformation campaigns and known alt-right figures, trolling also became a cover of deniability for those producing racist content on the internet as "just trolling" rather than acknowledging how this content played into larger structural inequalities.[117] However, as Phillips has described, the troubling aspect of

[116] Also, making fun of Nazis is rad.
[117] Phillips and Milner, 86.

trolling stems from other socially acceptable actions taken to an extreme. Phillips argues that the concept of RIP trolling (trolling on public memorial pages for those who have died) highlights "the media's proclivity for focusing on…the grisliest and most upsetting aspects of a particular tragedy. Trolls were able to exploit certain details, in other words, because those were details the media chose to present." Phillips continues saying that "the second the rumor and detail mill stopped grinding, so too would trolls. But the detail mill kept churning, and so the trolls kept trolling."[118] Phillips's argument indicates the reciprocal relationship between trolling and media, but it also explains that trolling is an extension of otherwise socially acceptable behavior (e.g. the ways in which tragedies are discussed in the media) when used in a different context. As a result, Phillips argues that trolling runs parallel to, rather than counter to, common social norms. Implicitly, trolls then make this type of behavior more visible by taking them to an absurdist (and often harmful) extreme.

Making Musical Meaning Visible

Within the context of Neckbeard Deathcamp's music, trolling also makes the mechanisms of NSBM and neo-fascist symbolism more visible. Phillips has argued that trolling tactics like RIP trolling help make visible the ways in which the media fetishizes the deaths of certain people. Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of trolling similarly makes visible the ways in which political meaning gets mapped onto music. By showing symbols known to be associated with the alt-right (e.g., Pepe the frog) or with national socialism specifically (e.g., the Nazi eagle) in manner that clearly mocks them, it is difficult to take these symbols

[118] Ibid., 86.

seriously and, by extension, it questions the seriousness of the politics themselves. The satirical appropriation of these symbols, taken to another extreme in this mimicry, also reveals how these symbols become political through their contextualized use. For example, the Pepe the Frog meme continues to be used in non-political contexts and does not always indicate far-right politics. However, by being used within a far-right political context on sites like 4chan, the meme has taken on political meaning through its association and appropriation by the alt-right. This association also indicates that meaning in these symbols is not necessarily inherent, but rather socially constructed based on the context in which they appear. Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of these symbols means something drastically different than it does for an NSBM band. Such a realization implies that the meaning of these symbols is not necessarily static—it has been constructed over repeated use in a specific political context.

These types of musical attributes shown through both listening and visual representations like spectrograms, sound and look extremely similar to the other black metal songs discussed earlier in this project. In the previous chapter, I discussed how these sonic characteristics can become inscribed with political meaning through both the lyrics and the political and genre histories in which these bands have placed themselves. Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of the same musical characteristics can be understood as not only as forms of parody or trolling but as more than another inscription of musical meaning placed onto black metal aesthetics. While politically left bands, such as those who label themselves RABM, use similar aesthetics to those discussed in previous chapters, the use of lyrics, imagery, and extra-musical activities (including their own personal activism, interviews, etc.) work to inscribe yet another form of political meaning onto what are otherwise the

same aesthetics. What makes Neckbeard Deathcamp's music different from RABM examples is that they use trolling to *reinscribe* the music with meaning as well as the symbols and lyrics that NSBM bands have used. The same type of aesthetics, which some band members have described as lazy and low-effort, in NSBM as well as Nazi and alt-right symbols mean something entirely different when used as a form of commentary on NSBM's artistic output. Rather than symbols and signifiers of power or political strength, the musical aesthetics, lyrics, and imagery of NSBM music instead become a joke and something at which audiences are meant to laugh rather than revere.

Black metal has become associated with the global radical right in many contexts—despite the actual number of NSBM bands being quite low. But this meaning is simply not stable, especially within the black metal community. Instead, Neckbeard Deathcamp's ability to *reinscribe* meaning onto sounds and symbols exemplifies the socially constructed nature of what music can mean and how that music relates to politics. Just as Neckbeard Deathcamp reinscribes music, the second significance of their music is that it also acts as a reappropriation of the music in a way that RABM does not. Despite RABM's inherent antagonism towards NSBM and other neo-fascist ideologies, both genres still exist simultaneously. The existence of one does not get rid of the other. Where Neckbeard Deathcamp's use of trolling aesthetics differ from RABM—despite their political similarities—is that Neckbeard Deathcamp seeks to eradicate and replace national socialist meanings when applied to black metal musical aesthetics.

This reinscription demonstrates that musical (and symbolic) meaning is far from static. Musical meaning is undoubtedly a broad term and exactly what it is and how it has been created has a number of possible interpretations. In a summary of this debate, Zachary

Wallmark notes that some, like the philosopher Mark Johnson, have argued that musical meaning is created through "an interconnected web of other meanings," while those like Suzanne Langer have argued that meaning is inherent only in the sounds themselves.[119] Still others have taken a middle ground. Lawrence Kramer has asserted that music should be considered within a "nonreductionist contextualism" that involves a "critical practice meant to affiliate richly with things beyond itself without *either* allowing it to fade into a mere echo of those things *or* succumbing to the illusion that it has any genuine identity apart from them."[120] Wallmark has also argued that meaning of the same timbral sounds may have contradicting meanings depending on its listeners, as what may be meaningful to some may be just "noise" to others.[121]

Neckbeard Deathcamp's album contradicts any assumption that music has inherent meaning away from the context it in which it is written, performed, and received; however, it does complicate the idea that musical meaning is only found in its relations to broader contexts. Because part of the musical joke is a lack of creative riffs that has been explicitly connected to the artistic practices of NSBM bands (like Der Stürmer), the sounds associated with that style of music already have a political meaning to listeners "in the know." If meaning were entirely relational, once put into a more leftist political context, the sounds would become indicative of leftist politics. But the far-right political connotations in what has been considered bad and uncreative musical structures remain an integral part of

[119] Zachary Wallmark, *Nothing but Noise: Timbre and Musical Meaning at the Edge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 36, 5. Wallmark quotes Langer as saying that music "does not point us to a meaning beyond its own presence."

[120] Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6.

[121] Ibid., 5.

Neckbeard Deathcamp's music because it is part of the joke. Perhaps, this fits into Kramer's notions of "nonreductionist contextualism" in which music cannot "'speak' with its 'own' voice until it finds a voice, or voices, amongst a multiplicity of others that constantly blend with, mimic, and chafe against the rest."[122] The multiplicity of meanings that this aesthetics have taken on become apparent in Neckbeard Deathcamp's album as layers of completely oppositional political meanings (i.e. far-right and left) exist simultaneously and inextricable from one another to make the joke work.

As for meaning in terms of black metal as a genre, these satirical bands are attempting something significant. By reclaiming the genre's core aesthetics in a way that seeks not to replace but to completely eradicate the political beliefs of NSBM in black metal, bands like Neckbeard Deathcamp and Gaylord attempt to stop the misappropriation of symbols, aesthetics, and other forms of cultural production that the far-right has chosen to adopt. As we have seen with various forms of internet culture, including memes, earlier in this chapter, those on the radical right have been progressively taking symbols and cultural objects and imbuing them with political meaning they did not initially have. This chapter has specifically focused on the alt-right's use of internet aesthetics, but this project as a whole has discussed the ways in which neo-Nazis, NSBM bands, and other types of radical right politics have invaded spaces that otherwise do not cater to these types of politics. For NSBM specifically, the incorporation of aspects like paganism, satanism, and even the history of black metal itself have allowed for footholds within the genre for this appropriation to occur. However, none of these parts of the black metal subculture are themselves inherently inclusive of National Socialist and far-right political ideologies. By calling attention to the

[122] Kramer, 6.

socially constructed nature of this political meaning and how it has been inscribed onto the music, rather than inherent in the music itself, these satirical bands are actually reclaiming this aesthetics. It reminds listeners that Nazis do not, in fact, get to just take symbols and have them permanently imbued with their political ideas. Instead, their music suggests to listeners that if meaning remains socially constructed in this way, we can take these symbols back. Nazis do not get to take Norse mythology, they do not get to take Satanism, and they certainly do not get to take black metal.

Epilogue: What do we do now?

The last chapter of this dissertation has emphasized the reaction against NSBM by certain bands, particularly those interested in the use of trolling or parody. However, such a shtick inevitably has an expiration date, especially those that were focused on Trump's election. Jokes, even good jokes, can only be done so many times. Anal Trump's most recent album, a compilation of their first 100 songs, was released in 2018. Gaylord continues to release music (their last album was released in November 2021), but most of the lyrics have shifted away from trolling and humor to using a more serious and solemn tone expected of most black metal. And Neckbeard Deathcamp's latest release, a split album with three other bands, was released in April 2020. The band's last tweet was from August 26, 2020, after a summer of national upheaval in attempts to reckon with, or, for some, deny, systems of structural racism following the brutal murder of George Floyd. The tweet simply reads "it is now time to stop fucking around."[1] It would seem that the joke has officially run its course.

However, the bands discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation are not the only ones to have conversations around the issue of far-right politics in metal. Although these bands represent a larger-scale response, the ways in which politics and aesthetics have been navigated and negotiated by those involved in metal scenes are arguably much more complicated, especially on an individual level and especially if that listening is accidental.

[1] Neckbeard Deathcamp, "It is now time to stop fucking around," Twitter, August 26, 2020. https://twitter.com/ndeathcamp?lang=en

My experience listening to Burzum that I have described in this dissertation brought up several questions with which I, and many other metal fans, have had to grapple. Can art be separated from the artist? Does it matter if I cannot understand the lyrics? What if I listen to the songs that do not allude to far-right ideologies (because many bands have these as well)? What if I just really like the music but do not visit hosting sites or see them in concert? What if I do not pay for the music? If I have enjoyed this at any point, does that mean I am sympathetic towards these ideas even though they are antithetical to my own beliefs? Am I a bad person? Answers to these questions inevitably never find a satisfactory answer and how individuals react to discovering a band they have heard or enjoyed promotes far-right ideologies varies widely. Yet, the affective experience of this realization is often just as intense as the affective response created through noise and (imagined) loudness.

This response and its intensity can be understood as part of what Sianne Ngai refers to as paranoia. Ngai describes paranoia as "a species of fear based on the dysphoric apprehension of a holistic and all-encompassing system,"[1] which often grows increasingly abstract. Ngai continues, claiming that paranoia will always have "something equivocal about it, particularly when it cannot be neatly separated from the "everyday fear" that sustains existing forms of compliancy and subjection. This is particularly the case if fear is part of the process of subject formation as suggested by psychoanalytic accounts of an ego constituted through a central fantasy of persecution."[2] For the accidental NSBM listener, this process works a bit differently. Listeners are still confronted with larger systems through

[1] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 299

[2] Ibid., 302

which their identity is created, but, in an inverse of Ngai's description, non-Nazi listeners of NSBM do not fear that they are persecuted through these systems (although they may be in some aspects of their identity). Instead, they begin to worry they have become the persecutors. For listeners who do not ascribe to far-right ideologies, and have thus understood a part of their identity as being "not a Nazi" whether consciously or unconsciously, this realization can, and I will venture to say almost always does, create a form of paranoia. Our subjectivities, and how we define them, have been brought into question as we find ourselves forced to recognize and acknowledge these abstract structural systems and question what our position in them. Pointing to the psychoanalytic framework of Lacan and Freud, as Ngai does, these questions being brought to the forefront tends to fragment our previous understandings of selfhood.

These feelings and anxieties can be further compounded by the sense of belatedness in recognizing the meanings of the music. Because NSBM tends to use various modes of concealment, either through distortion or non-direct allusions to national socialist ideologies, these realizations and questions tend to come up later for listeners after they have looked up the lyrics, the band, etc. And, perhaps more pressingly, they come up after the listener has already enjoyed the music. This belatedness, continuing with Ngai's affective framework, can exaggerate feelings of paranoia particularly because the listening, and therefore the "damage", has already occurred. As listeners are forced to confront their own subjectivity, listeners are also forced to confront "a threatening social reality [that] is realized with the outcome of disclosing the subject's *participation* in its formation."[3] Not only has the music

[3] Ibid., 328. Emphasis Ngai's

questioned our self-definition, it requires an active acknowledgment of how we, the listeners, have participated in the recategorization and redefinition of our selfhoods. And, we have realized it too late.

What one does after this realization has no singular response. Some choose not to listen to bands with national socialist themes, some choose not to listen to the genre at all, some choose to only listen to certain songs by these bands, and some choose to separate the artist from the art entirely. Whatever route a listener may choose often depends on case-by-case evaluations and the rules for listening are often inconsistent. For example, one Reddit user discussing the band Goatmoon, a Finnish national socialist band, claims that "I'm definitely bothered by the views and opinions of the band, but I find myself able to separate that and just listen to the music. As good as they are, I'm not going to wear a shirt or anything and be labeled as part of that ideology."[4] Another user has argued that "there are tons of NS bands that got good riffs out there. I dig the music, but I don't share their political views (I'm not even white to begin with). It won't stop me from enjoying the music, but I would never support them. In shorter words, piracy is an ethical way to enjoy NSBM."[5] Other users echo these sentiments saying that they "Don't give a fuck about

[4] Oldirtycrafter, "recently discovered Goatmoon and found out…," Reddit, 09/12/2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/BlackMetal/comments/d3cggf/can_we_talk_about_the_user_base_here_nsbm_and_the/

[5] Lord_syphilis, "There are tons of NS bands out there that got good riffs…," Reddit, 09/12/2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/BlackMetal/comments/d3cggf/can_we_talk_about_the_user_base_here_nsbm_and_the/

politics, or their views. I love the riffs"[6] while others claim that they do not research bands' ideologies and that they "probably listen to NSBM, or any other f'ed up ideology for that matter, without even knowing it."[7] These types of comments seem to be the most common where listeners have a desire to separate the art from the artist in order to focus on the musical sounds rather than the lyrics.[8] Considering the amount of distortion that conceals the lyrics, many find this fairly easy to accomplish.

While these comments suggest an ability to separate the art and artist, not all members of the metal community feel the same way. Other comments in the same discussion thread have said that while they can separate problematic individuals from their music, it crosses a line when the political message is included into the art itself. One commenter claims "when I hear those ideas in the music I really can't listen to it…they don't just hold abhorrent views, they make their art to spread and praise those views… and I just can't listen to it.[9]" Another puts the idea succinctly, asking "If the message of the music

[6] Condel666, "Came to say the sam…," Reddit, 09/12/2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/BlackMetal/comments/d3cggf/can_we_talk_about_the_user_base_here_nsbm_and_the/

[7] Sesseth, "Then it would enable the person who bought NSBM initially…," reddit, 09/12/2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/BlackMetal/comments/d3cggf/can_we_talk_about_the_user_base_here_nsbm_and_the/

[8] This is, of course, not specific to the metal community nor is it specific to discussions of NSBM. Conservative politician Paul Ryan has apparently stated his affinity for the band Rage Against the Machine, stating that he doesn't agree with the message but likes the music. I have no idea what machine Ryan thought he was raging against, but I really like the mental image of him screaming at a toaster.

[9] Heartfeltregret, "That's what I do when it comes to bad people with good art…," reddit, 09/12/2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/BlackMetal/comments/d3cggf/can_we_talk_about_the_user_base_here_nsbm_and_the/

is to spread racism and you aren't racist why would you listen to it?[10]" These responses, which are very small samples of the larger conversations going on in these discussion threads, highlight the vastly different responses within the metal scene to NSBM.

In many of these cases, lyrical concealment allows non-alt-right listeners to listen to NSBM bands without being as affected by the lyrics and message. Because of the extreme vocal distortion, lyrics are difficult, if not impossible, to understand correctly without guidance. While this makes it easier for accidental listening to occur, as the lyrics' message is not immediately clear, it also makes it easier to ignore the message in favor of the sounds. As several metal scholars have noted, and as this dissertation has made clear, for most listeners, the lyrics are not the most important part of extreme metal. Instead, listeners instead favor the noise of the soundscape's totality. While concealment allows for a wider audience to be exposed to the message, it simultaneously allows listeners to ignore it entirely. These listeners also tend to engage in their own forms of concealment to avoid spreading the message past their own personal listening. The commenters mentioned above advocate for illegally downloading NSBM music to avoid paying Nazi musicians and many also note a refusal to wear band merchandise such as T-shirts that would work as advertising. While Sharon Hochhauser has claimed that metal fans are no more or less susceptible to far-right politics in metal than other genres, the discussions above demonstrate a political conscientiousness about the messages found in music without a singular concensus.[11] For many, this means eschewing common metal practices such as looking up

[10] Le_fez, "If the message of the music is to spread racism…," reddit, 11/9/2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/LetsTalkMusic/comments/dtmyvn/where_is_the_line_drawn_between_art_and_message/

[11] Hochhauser, 178

lyrics and bands and publicly displaying support through T-shirts and other merchandise in order to enjoy the music only for the sounds. For these listeners, who enjoy the sounds but not the messages, these methods of concealment also allow them to maintain a sense of self-hood that is less fractured when confronted with abhorrent political ideologies.

Although listeners often circumvent these messages in various ways, the individuality of responses and prior political leanings must be taken into consideration. To treat responses to NSBM music as monolithic would be to fall into problematic discourse around the genre that this project has sought to avoid. The above responses do, however, indicate a different way of listening to metal, which becomes hyper-individualized rather than part of a community. Instead, the act of listening becomes deeply personal; they do not want to associate themselves with the bands or other fans openly. In these cases, the surplus of energy and affect that continues to be created must be channeled elsewhere, and these different paths are likely to be as individualized as the responses to NSBM music. Although personal listening (i.e. listening to recordings) is a common practice for metal listeners of any subgenre, it inevitably narrows the potential methods for the mimetic process to occur. Actions such as moshing, for example, are impossible to do alone and the energetic output used during actions such as headbanging may be diminished without others. If these actions do decrease, or at the very least limit, the options for mimetic processes to occur, the surplus of affective energy may also be limited. As such, purely personal listening may decrease the strength with which NSBM music can effectively promote national socialist or other far-right propaganda.

And yet, it does not mean that NSBM is not a serious issue as we witness the rise of the far-right. In August of 2017, several white supremacist groups and individuals held the

Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA to protest the removal of a confederate statue.[2] On February 14, 2018, gunman entered Marjory Stoneman Doulas High School and murdered seventeen people and injured seventeen more. The gunman, a student himself of the high school, was reported to have made racist and hateful comments to several of his classmates and participated in an Instagram group chat in which he espoused various forms of antisemitism, homophobia, and xenophobia.[3] Later that year on October 27, 2018, an attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA left eleven people dead. Before shooting, the perpetrator reportedly shouted "all Jews must die."[4] On April 27, 2019, six months after the Tree of Life shooting, a California man walked into the Chabad Synagogue and killed one person and injured three others. The affidavit reported that he had claimed "Jewish people are destroying the white race."[5] In June of 2020, police violence against people of color, and particularly Black Americans, became a widely discussed topic after the murder of George Floyd. On January 6, 2021, groups of Donald Trump supporters stormed the capital building in Washington D.C. in an attempt to stop Joe Biden from assuming office after he was fairly elected in 2020.[6] This is a drastically reduced list. There are several other events, groups, and individuals that could be mentioned that take place not only in the United States.

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[2] Andrew Katz, "Unrest in Virginia: Clashes over a Show of White Nationalism in Charlottesville Turn Deadly," Time, https://time.com/charlottesville-white-nationalist-rally-clashes/.

[3] "Terror from the Right: Archives," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed May 27, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/terror-from-the-right-archives#2018.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Terror from the Right," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed May 27, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/terror-from-the-right.

[6] Brian Duignan, "United States Capital Attack of 2021," Britannica, last modified January 6, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-Capitol-attack-of-2021.

Against the backdrop of such violent and serious events, the negotiation between individual listening and structural complicity becomes even more difficult to navigate. This is not to say that listening to NSBM immediately changes a listener's worldview. Such an assertion would fall into a historical trope of discourse around metal in particular that the music can somehow erase a person's subjectivity and the first chapter of this dissertation has problematized such rhetoric. However, recognizing individual listening subjectivities does not change that NSBM music still constitutes a potential threat to basic human decency, in that it does still promote a racist ideology that others may find attractive through introduction and repeated exposure. Moreover, these types of discussions reveal the common existence of these ideologies and that their existence has become somewhat normalized in the scene. Although listeners may choose to consume NSBM without financially or socially supporting the bands creating the music, which logically would mean the bands would eventually stop creating content, the reputation for hosting these types of ideologies means that black metal remains attractive to those already indoctrinated within these politics. Subsequently, the fact that bands like Der Stürmer and Graveland continue to release new music implies that there are enough people within the scene consuming the music with the intention of supporting the bands and their ideologies. The problem of ideological propagation then becomes less about accidental listeners, or listeners who refuse to support these projects, and more about a clearly large number of listeners who do ascribe to at least some part of these ideologies and use NSBM to reconfirm their worldview. Despite NSBM's fringe status within the scene, it is a fringe that seems to be ideologically thriving as the adoption of national socialist and national socialist-adjacent views become more pronounced throughout the western world.

So, the question becomes what do we do now? I do not have an answer, or a panacea, or a more direct path in how to move forward. In short, I don't know. In many ways, this dissertation has been an incredibly personal project. It has been my own attempt at understanding and reckoning with the totality of the metal scene, not just the parts that have been enjoyable and personally empowering to me. But I hope that this dissertation is also able to move beyond my individual feelings. I hope that it has helped explain how some of these politics function and how specific kinds of music have been implicated in spreading them. Such insight may be helpful in formulating a more cohesive response and reaction against not just NSBM but the spread of far-right politics more broadly. And part of this understanding has been how niche corners of artistic production, such as extreme metal, have plugged into larger historical and political contexts and how these contexts can be translated into different localities, as the second chapter has demonstrated. But I also hope that the last chapter of this dissertation holds at least a little bit of hope in knowing that the issue of far-right politics has not gone entirely unnoticed or ignored in these more unconventional scenes. There are cultural, grassroots, bottom-up reactions and pushback to what are incredibly structural, top-down, and daunting forms of oppression and violence. And of course, these reactions are and have been occurring outside of the metal scene for as long as these issues have existed. Realistically, these issues will require a plethora of activity, and there is no one panacea for inequalities that have been so structured into the very fabric of our daily lives as to become almost invisible. But Neckbeard Deathcamp is right: it's time to stop fucking around.

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