UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

LOCATING EXPERIENTIAL RICHNESS IN DOOM METAL

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

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2013

DEDICATION

To Eleanor and Chris, Sophia and Spiros.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

LOCATING EXPERIENTIAL RICHNESS IN DOOM METAL

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Music

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This dissertation takes as its central topic the musical genre of doom metal. Largely absent from the scholarly literature on metal music, doom metal is set apart from other genres by its use of extremely slow tempi, repetitive and processual forms, and a thematic focus on mortality and weakness. It draws attention to the moment of

experience, in terms of both bodily and emotional response, and away from closure and resolution.

I divide my study of doom metal into three threads: musical analysis, thematic content and the experience of a live performance. I begin with a concise history of the genre, followed by close analyses of two exemplary songs. Through this, I argue that doom metal is best understood as relying on groove for organization and propulsion. Rarely invoked in the study of metal, groove accounts for repetition and bodily entrainment and provides a framework for discussing both musical and experiential phenomena. Following this, I discuss the thematic content of doom metal and its relationship with that of other metal genres. By analyzing album artwork, lyrics, and the related medium of horror films, I demonstrate that doom metal is overwhelmingly concerned with the anxiety of death and the powerlessness generated by mortality. Unlike other genres that suggest solutions to or escapes from anxiety, doom metal bluntly forces a confrontation with uncertainty and denies resolution. I conclude with a reading of the experiential content of a doom metal performance largely through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the concepts of *jouissance*, abjection, and the grain of the voice. I argue that performances of doom metal stretch volume, repetition and timbre to extremes to challenge the sense of self of audience and performer alike.

Doom metal practitioners utilize these sounds, themes and performances to work against the resolution of anxiety and uncertainty; instead, they emphasize bodily

immanence and the present moment. Through this combination, they create a context in which they are free to gain access to otherwise unattainable experience and knowledge that aid in an exploration of mortality, powerlessness, and the limits of the self.

I.
INTRODUCTION

I should state, at the outset of this dissertation, that I am first and foremost a fan of metal. Raised primarily on Western art music, I grew increasingly enamored of the grunge and alternative rock to which I was introduced by friends in middle and high school. This exposure led to a life-changing moment when, en route to a series of wind ensemble concerts in Northern California, a friend placed headphones on my ears and played a homemade cassette tape of KMFDM, a German industrial rock band, and, more importantly, Pantera, a thrash/groove metal band. Somehow this music made immediate sense to me; it was love at first listen, and my friend had to plead with me to share access to his cassette player for the rest of the trip. On arrival back home, I immediately sought out not only Pantera's recordings but those of other thrash metal bands. This led me quickly to explore death metal, black metal and their myriad and specialized styles. My pursuit of metal was largely interrupted when I began an undergraduate program in music performance; I suddenly felt the need to be serious about art music. This impulse continued into graduate school, and really only dissipated when I found myself becoming increasingly disconnected from my scholarly work. I yearned for that sense of physicality and bodily engagement that I had found, about a decade before, in metal.

I thus made my return to metal fandom and pushed farther into more obscure and less commercially successful territory. On this more recent journey, I was

introduced to doom metal and, like my earlier encounter with Pantera, it made immediate sense to me. I sought it out, engaged local musicians in conversation and found certain of its aesthetic components infiltrating my own musical practice as a tubist. At a certain point I became a fan of doom metal, and I resolved to make it the center of my scholarly pursuit.

To be sure I take this fandom to be prior to, and the basis of, my scholarly interest in the genre of metal. It is precisely the disconnect I have felt between my experiences as a fan—and the testimony offered to me by other fans—and the account presented in the scholarly literature on metal that motivates the current study. Academic accounts do not represent my experience. While I find value in this dominant scholarly narrative, one revolving around catharsis, violence and musical "usefulness," I contend, however, that there is a need for a different understanding. Here, I treat doom metal as a space of pleasurable exploration, discursive questioning, productive unproductivity. I offer this dissertation as an alternative voice in the understanding of doom metal in particular and metal and other "extreme" musics in general.

The academic literature on metal, as a broad genre category encompassing the gamut from heavy metal to extreme metal, is a variegated nebula of works that has never satisfied me as a scholar or as a fan of the music. The topics it covers are as heterogenous as the various subgenres of metal music, from glam metal to thrash metal to nü metal to black metal and everything in between. Robert Walser's heavy

metal, for instance, includes bands like Poison and Bon Jovi, two mainstays of the 1980s explosion of pop metal (Walser 1993). Deena Weinstein extends Walser's topic into less commercially successful metal of the 80s, including discussion of speed metal and thrash metal (Weinstein 2000). Glenn Pillsbury provides an in-depth investigation of thrash metal through the specific history of that subgenre's most successful band, Metallica (Pillsbury 2006). Natalie Purcell, on the other hand, covers death metal, a subgenre that has remained largely underground, likely because of the difficulty in commercially exploiting its aggressively antagonistic themes (Purcell 2003). The approaches guiding the literature are similarly heterogenous, from culturally-oriented musicology to analytical musicology to engaged ethnography to a more survey-based sociology. Jeffrey Arnett provides a sociological study of metal fans, analyzing the trends in data gleaned from survey responses and ultimately attempting to make claims about the subculture as a whole (Arnett 1996). Harris M. Berger, like Purcell, addresses death metal but through a framework that blends ethnography and phenomenology to shed light on the processes of composition and performance (Berger 1999). Keith Kahn-Harris' contribution is a mix of sociological and ethnographic data on the global extreme metal scene, with surveys hinting at trends and intimate interviews filling in the details (Kahn-Harris 2007).

These works are concerned with the establishment of a cohesive definition of the genre and "genre culture" of this music. Fabian Holt, following Simon Frith and Keith Negus, uses the term "genre culture" to refer to "the overall identity of the

cultural formations in which a genre is constituted" (Holt 2007, 19). That is, these book-length studies seek to define what Holt calls the networks (the systems of communication between agents that practice a genre) and conventions (the codes, values and practices) that comprise the genre's identity. They thus establish that metal music is characterized by loud, distorted guitars and pounding drums, that metal fans are primarily young white males from deindustrialized areas, and that metal is frequently concerned with power in some form. After establishing this foundation, each author provides more pointed definitions of the specific kinds of metal with which they are concerned. Holt refers to these smaller groupings (e.g. doom metal, death metal, heavy metal) as subcategories, while insider practice generally dictates referring to them as genres in themselves. As something of a compromise, I use the term subgenre to indicate their positions both as variants of a larger genre and as distinct practices giving rise to their own rich variation (ibid., 15). Thus in this dissertation, "metal" will refer to the larger genre with the core characteristics noted above, while the major variations of metal, including doom metal, will be referred to as subgenres, owing to potentially substantive differences in networks and conventions between, for instance, doom metal and black metal. Insiders make further distinctions, within these subgenres, between styles that are aesthetically distinct without significant divergences in networks or conventions. Traditional doom metal and death/doom metal, for example, are consistently distinguishable by their sound, but they typically share the fan practices of the doom metal subgenre. Figure 1.1 provides

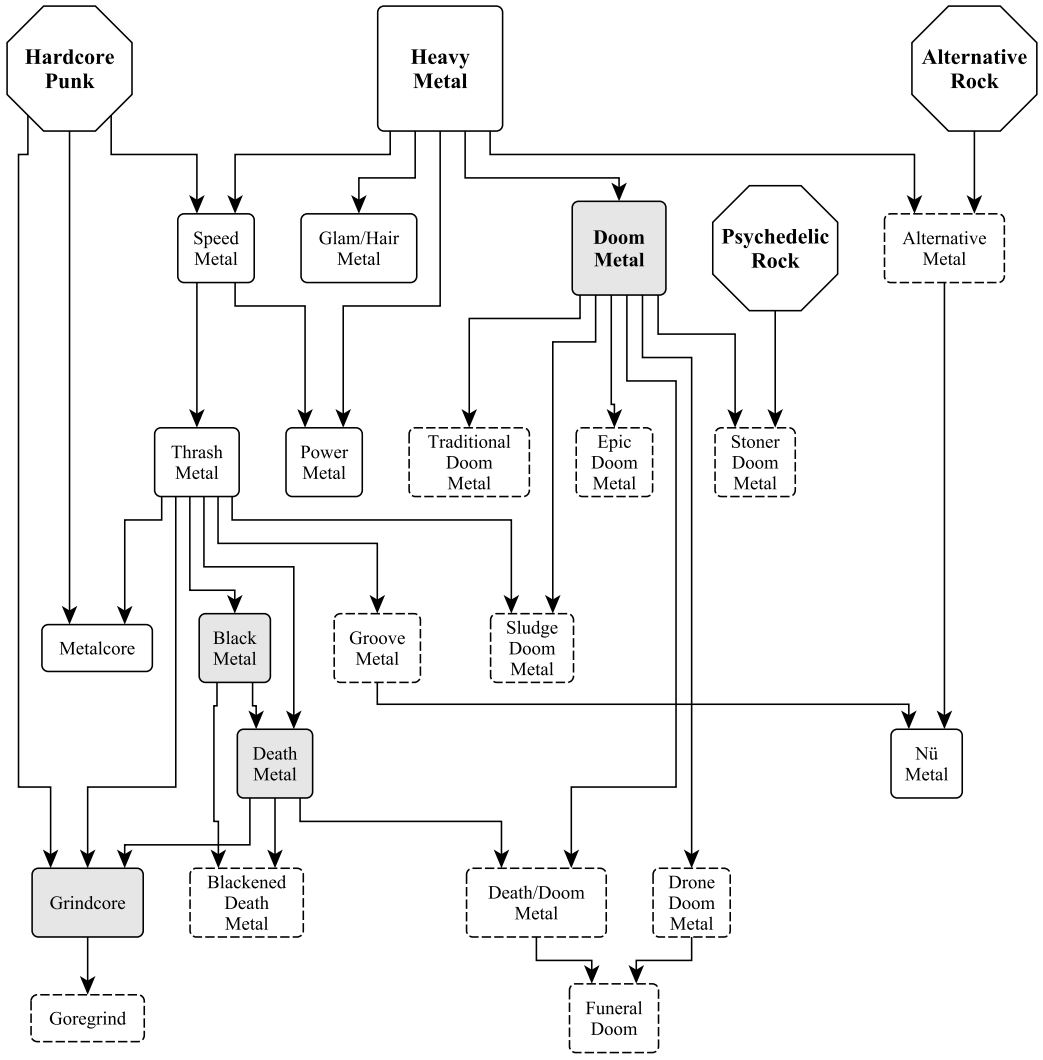


Figure 1.1: A map of the various subgenres and styles of metal. Separate genres that have contributed to the development of metal (hardcore punk, alternative rock and psychedelic rock) are indicated with octagonal outlines. Styles of various subgenres are indicated with a broken outline. The "extreme metal" subgenres (doom metal, black metal, death metal and grindcore) are indicated with a grey background. The map is not strictly chronological (the advent of goregrind preceded that of nü metal, for example), but reflects the flows of influence between the various subgenres and styles.

an outline of the various subgenres of metal and some of their styles, with an emphasis on the styles of doom metal discussed in Chapter 2.

After these foundational texts outlining the characteristics of metal and its various subgenres, a number of scholars have contributed to an emerging field tied together under the heading of "metal studies" (Weinstein 2011a). Metal has been the subject of conferences and journals, and, as a topic of inquiry, has grown to include scenes and subjects far beyond the purview of the book-length studies mentioned above. These works assume that the networks and conventions outlined in earlier studies are largely intact, while looking specifically for ways that the subgenres have developed or expanded (Weinstein 2011b). Of particular interest to scholars of late are burgeoning metal scenes outside of the United States and England, which the books above (with the exception of Kahn-Harris') largely consider to be metal's home base. The collection *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World*, for example, addresses metal in China, Indonesia, Nepal, Brazil, Norway, Israel, Japan, Malta, Slovenia and Easter Island (Wallach, Berger and Greene 2011). In other publications, scholars have studied metal in Brazil (Harris 2000), the Middle East (LeVine 2008), the Basque Country (Weston 2011) and Bali (Baulch 2003, 2007). Thus the networks of metal have expanded to include non-white audiences though they are still primarily male, even if the proportion of participating women has risen. And many of these scenes flourish in places that have not been industrialized, much less deindustrialized, so that the disempowerment that earlier authors tie to that process is now reframed as a general frustration (such as against politics or religion).

For all this variety, though, there are striking similarities running through the literature. Most of the authors, particularly the ones trading in ethnographic or sociological data, bring a number of common assumptions to their work. They are typically surprised, perhaps unsurprisingly, at the realization that metalheads (as fans of metal frequently self-identify) are not all deviant, sociopathic or fiercely opposed to mainstream society. Whether this is genuine personal astonishment on the part of the authors or a sort of feigned surprise meant to connect with readers, it is oddly persistent and often undermines the text. Walser, for example, spends the majority of his book framing heavy metal as musically virtuosic and culturally relevant, defending it from harsh critics like Tipper Gore and the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC). Yet, in his introduction, he expresses being caught off guard at the fact that "fans overwhelming rejected the categories of the pissed-off and the fantastic" when identifying the qualities that most drew them to heavy metal (Walser 1993, 19). It is difficult to not keep this passage in mind through the rest of the book, and one wonders how genuinely Walser wishes to overturn the criticism aimed against the genre and its fans. Purcell, in a sociologically-minded study of death metal, continually seems surprised that fans of death metal lie outside of the stereotypical categories created for them. Here it is particularly unclear if Purcell is expressing genuine surprise or if she is using surprise as a rhetorical device to highlight the baselessness of the stereotypes she overturns. That death metal fans are not overwhelmingly depressed is surprising; that they are not all anarchists is surprising;

that they are not all acutely interested in violence and sociopathic behavior is surprising. This surprise is, again, at odds with the project of the book, which is largely aimed at saving death metal from these stereotypes and instead providing meaningful (both to insiders and outsiders) discussion about the music and the associated culture. But she is undermined even on the back cover of the book, which states that the text "provides a key to comprehending deviant tendencies in modern American culture." No matter how hard Purcell works to argue that fans of death metal are, more or less, like most other people, she is continually undermined by the persistent notion that the music and its fans represent a dangerous deviance.

The Violence of Metal

Also running throughout the majority of these texts is the apparently common sense idea that metal is violent. I should state at the outset that it is not my intention to argue that metal is necessarily non-violent. It cannot be denied that many of the lyrics of metal songs represent violence, putting forth racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and all-around xenophobic views. Murder and physical violence are common themes, and an entire style of metal, goregrind (and the substyle pornogrind), is based on the imagery of horrific accidents, bodily violence, and invasive medical procedures. And further, metal shows frequently involve slamdancing or moshing, a form of dance much maligned by outsiders as profoundly violent (Arnett 1996, Kahn-Harris 2007). With fans colliding with each other, often at a full run and with arms and legs flailing,

the assessment of violence is perhaps an easy one to make. But as most commentators are quick to point out, the mosh pit is a communal environment wherein fans help each other and work together to avoid serious injury (Hawley 2010, Riches 2011). Pits get shut down, after all, when someone gets hurt.

Yet those same commentators who remark about the (surprising) safety of the mosh pit are still quick to decry the music as violent, seemingly without consideration as to what, exactly, that means. Walser writes that punk and thrash metal are both characterized by "speed, noise, and violence" without elaboration (Walser 1993, 14). Kahn-Harris claims that "the pleasures of extreme metal music derive from the excitement of violence and aggression" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 52). Arnett titles an entire chapter "A Heavy Metal Concert: The Sensory Equivalent of War" (Arnett 1996, 7). Again, it is not my intention to argue that metal is not violent. It is striking, however, how readily these authors use a word and concept as loaded as violence (or war) to describe the music. Violence, after all, entails a complex web of interactions between multiple agents, harm done by one against another, and a host of ethical issues surrounding the legitimacy or illegitimacy of each action and each response (Strathern and Stewart 2006, 3). Drawing from the pioneering work of anthropologist David Riches, scholars engaging with the concept of violence in recent years have repeatedly emphasized that "many acts of violence are seen differently by different people. Riches argues that an essential feature of violence is that its legitimacy may be contested" (ibid., 5). Depending on the viewpoint and positioning of the witness, one

act can be understood simultaneously as violent or nonviolent. Generally speaking, the perpetrator of the act is usually the last one to lay claims to violence. It is odd, then, that commentators on metal are so quick to use the label "violent" when the "perpetrators" are the musicians themselves. To refer to the music as violent seems to be in fundamental disagreement with and even disapproval of the very people engaged in the production of that music.

What, exactly, makes metal violent? Walser, who I have pointed to as referring uncritically to the "violence" of metal, provides an extensive analysis of the sound and musical characteristics of metal without once using the term "violent." Instead, he repeatedly uses descriptors such as "extreme," "powerful," "exciting," and "physical." It is conceivable that these terms and the phenomena they describe might be transmuted through interpretation into "violent," especially when the interpretation is done by someone for whom the power or excitement is not particularly meaningful. However, as Walser argues, "ultimately, musical analysis can be considered credible only if it helps explain the significance of musical activities in particular social contexts" (Walser 1993, 31). Claims of violence do little if anything to explain the significance of metal in the context in which it occurs. Labeling the music (and by extension those who participate in it) violent only serves to disrespect and misunderstand it and validate to some extent the host of critiques against metal as the music of pissed off youth. But such claims also serve to block off meaningful engagement with the culture for those outside it. By labeling phenomena as violent

without critical reflection, "we remove them from that very context that makes them meaningful to others, if not ourselves" (Whitehead 2004, 11). Had these authors engaged with fans of metal and gathered ethnographic data at the outset of their studies, it seems unlikely that these assumptions would ever have materialized.

The Catharsis of Metal

The last of the significant commonalities, or at least the last that I consider to be crucial to the metal literature, is the insistence on catharsis as the ultimate purpose for metal. In almost every major academic work on the topic, metal is explained away as cathartic. Arnett states plainly that "heavy metal songs served the function of helping to purge [the fans of their] destructive and self-destructive urges" (Arnett 1996, 19). According to Kahn-Harris, "listening to extreme metal is seen as giving voice to aggressive emotions and, in the process, reduces depression and frustration in exhilarating ways" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 52). Purcell is less direct with her assertion, stating that, beyond "for the music,"

> the other often-cited reasons for attending shows center on "the experience" which provides an adrenaline rush or a release. Metal fans themselves were not specific about the nature or function of this release, except to indicate that it is a relief of tensions and an expression of uninhibited freedom. This seems to mesh well with the theory that metal music and mosh pits provide a form of catharsis. (Purcell 2003, 154)

Interestingly, the survey responses that Purcell provides to the reader barely address this at all. Of 28 responses provided, two of her informants mention aggression, two

mention an adrenaline rush, one mentions unwinding, and only one actually uses the term "release." It is odd that an interpretation so central to the understanding of metal would barely be mentioned at all by the practitioners surveyed. And yet, in a way, this makes perfect sense. For most of these writers, metal is something that needs to be justified as worthy of their scholarly consideration. Arnett and Purcell need to position metal as worthy of sociological study. Kahn-Harris needs metal to be seen as a serious topic for music scholarship. And, it would seem, what makes a musical culture worthy of study is providing some sort of value not only to its listeners but also to society at large. The value of metal, then, lies in catharsis.

Catharsis here, in addition to allowing metal to function as serious music (worthy of academic study), ultimately provides a social good. The story, told over and over, is that "violent" music allows adolescents to work out their negative emotions in positive, healthy, and safe ways (Roberts, Christenson, and Gentile 2003). Angst-ridden teens can listen to metal to purge their aggression, and then reenter society as calm and law-abiding individuals (Puri 2010). Thus the "violence" inherent in metal is rendered largely harmless. In a way, the catharsis and violence arguments feed into each other: violence as a major component of a musical culture is apparently excusable, or at least understandable, so long as it produces a social good through catharsis (the calming and even pacification of youth), and catharsis as the ultimate explanation only really works so long as the music is violent in some way (at least, it seems, as far as metal is concerned).

But there is weakness in both sides of this argument. As stated above, the claim of violence usually goes unchecked or unchallenged. It is simply accepted as fact that metal is in some form aggressive or violent. Similarly, it assumes that the feeling of calm after an intense experience (what most commentators generally take for catharsis) is truly the ultimate goal of engagement with metal. Just as I do not claim that metal is entirely free from violence, I do not claim that listeners and concertgoers do not feel relaxed, in some way, after their experience. But the claims that violence defines the music and catharsis defines the experience miss the point, and ultimately are overly simplistic. Again, the argument ignores the ethical questions raised by the use of the term "violence." In a way, it seems the authors who invoke the term do so to accomplish what violence itself does best: turn heads, pique interest, and gain attention. Just as violence is profoundly efficient in making others take notice of a cause or situation, labeling a music as violent has the same effect. People notice violence. Even the term that typically comes in second as a popular descriptor of metal music, "brutal," tends to carry far less emotional weight.

But as the violence claim plays on emotion, the catharsis claim largely dismisses it. The model of experience outlined by catharsis, at least as it is used by most of these authors, consists of a buildup of negative emotion, a release, and a final state considered positive purely through its lack of negative emotion. By labeling the first segment of the experience as negative, it is easy to push aside. Instead, commentators focus on the last segment, the positive-by-default state. This is,

according to the catharsis theory, what all fans of metal aim to achieve. Again, this validates metal as ultimately good, and it validates fans as ultimately not such bad kids. But, in my experience and apparently in the experience of Purcell's fans, metal is almost never about feeling "good" (again, good defined as the lack of negative emotion) after the experience; it is about the experience itself, the bits that are dismissed as "negative," the parts labelled as "violent," the rich set of phenomena pushed aside to valorize metal as a positive influence in the lives of troubled youth.

Instead of dismissing fans as at-risk youths or mindless thrill seekers, and instead of dismissing the music as simply aggressive or somehow violent, it is my goal to focus on the rich spectrum of meaning and experience between the two sides of this argument. There is pleasure in metal beyond release, and there is pleasure in metal beyond violence. But there is also discomfort, unhappiness, depression, anger, and fear. Rather than following the knee-jerk tendency to label all of these emotions as inherently negative and, therefore, in need of elimination, I argue that they are extremely productive spaces for experience and exploration. While I believe this position is applicable to all forms of metal, it is particularly appropriate for the study of doom metal, a subgenre that has become more popular in recent years despite turning many common assumptions about metal upside down. Doom metal is the topic of the next three chapters; here, I investigate the concept of catharsis and explore alternatives for understanding the musical experience of metal.

In everyday parlance, the concept of catharsis is invoked in reference to a release of tension, a moment of relaxation, a shedding of stress. We might speak of a cathartic shower after a tough day, or a long, cathartic run. The implication here is that we enter into a situation feeling negatively and emerge feeling positively. This is not terribly different from the rigorous understandings of catharsis that find their grounding in, on the one hand, classical Greek philosophy and aesthetic theory, and on the other, psychoanalytic theory. Each conception carries with it different implications for the individuals involved, yet both have become tangled up in the version of catharsis that is used in these discussions of metal.

Aristotelian Catharsis

The first version, from Aristotle, is concerned with the workings of dramatic theater. Aristotle provides a frustratingly vague description of catharsis, stating merely that the ultimate aim or *telos* of a tragedy is the catharsis of pity and fear (Schaper 1968, Ford 2004). Much has been said, and many words have been traded back and forth, about what precisely this catharsis might mean. Most interpretations have tended to orbit around a cleansing or purgation, or, more recently, an ethical edification or clarification (Golden 1962, 1973, Kruse 1979). A cleansing might involve a general tidying up of one's emotional state, while a purgation is taken to involve a full expelling of a negative emotion (primarily fear or pity), analogous to a medical purging of toxins or bad humors. The interpretation of catharsis as ethical

edification holds that a cathartic moment is not about expunging a particular emotion, but is rather about learning the proper way to experience it. These three different slants on Aristotle's terse definition provide interesting fodder for debate; they are all ultimately centered around the notion that negative emotions should be removed or suppressed.

Also of interest in the debate around Aristotelian catharsis is the exact procedure by which such a catharsis is meant to occur. Concerned as it is with the workings of dramatic theater, Aristotelian catharsis is based on the presentation of a narrative and the interaction with an active set of performers and a passive audience. The narrative, in fact, is taken to be absolutely primary in this equation; though the process relies on the interaction between performer and audience, catharsis is held to be ultimately a function of the plot. Wrapped up in this version of catharsis, then, is the presence of a narrative structure with clearly developing emotional content, the strict division between performer and audience, and an empathetic relationship implied between the performers as presenters of narrative and audience as both receivers of narrative and final points of the emotional process. At least one author has written on the fact that performers themselves experience emotion and are thus apt to have a cathartic moment (Moreno 1940), but for the most part catharsis stands as a process culminating with a receptive audience.

The Aristotelian notion of catharsis depends on the notion that all audience members experience largely the same emotions, as the emotional content is directed

by the narrative and not their individual histories. It also assumes the division of the performers and audience members as is typical of most Western dramatic and musical events. Further, it depends on an ontology that mirrors that of most Western music, namely the preexistence of a narrative (the score) to be interpreted by actors (musicians), with the narrative taking primacy over its performance (such that Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* can be good even when performed badly). By putting the emotional content in the transmission and not in the receiver, this model places the onus of negativity with the artistic presentation. If there is indeed negative emotion to be dealt with in metal as a cultural phenomenon, Aristotelian catharsis positions it squarely within the music (as a narrative) as presented by the performer.

The literature on metal does very little to address the relationship between performer and audience during a show, and most commentators who invoke the concept of catharsis when discussing musical experience do not refer to a narrative or even a developing emotional structure. It should be entirely possible to imagine a metal show as a structured sequence of emotion and meaning, but again this is missing from the literature. In fact, the only connection I have found between catharsis and some kind of analysis of narrative comes in the disagreement between Donna Gaines and Glenn Pillsbury over the ultimate effect of Metallica's "Fade to Black." Pillsbury argues that the song is a narrative representation of a suicide, complete from contemplation to execution (Pillsbury 2006).[1] Gaines, on the other hand, believes that

[1] It is worth noting that Pillsbury suggests we are not meant to hear the song as the suicide of vocalist James Hetfield—there is no mimetic flattening of character and performer as is typically the case in dramatic theater.

the narrative stops short of suicide (Gaines 1991, 204). Thus Pillsbury argues that the completion of the act is cathartic, while Gaines holds that catharsis lies in the return from the brink. In the Aristotelian sense, Gaines is closer to the mark, as the tragic heroes of Greek drama rarely die regardless of the severity of their downfall.

Psychoanalytic Catharsis

The second version of catharsis is developed in psychoanalytic theory, first by Josef Breuer and later Sigmund Freud. In this process of catharsis, a patient exhibiting symptoms of behavioral disorder is directed, via hypnosis or free association, back to their memories of a traumatic experience (Breuer and Freud 2000). The patient thus relives the emotional content of the trauma that was either repressed or forgotten and, ideally, the impact of the past trauma on their present behavior is minimized or even erased. Unlike Aristotelian catharsis, there is no pressing need for a narrative beyond the sequence of events comprising the traumatic experience. There are no characters to follow outside of the patient's virtual past self, and there is no split between performer and audience. Despite the presence of two parties, at least in a clinical environment, the therapist-patient relationship is dramatically different from that of performer-audience. Instead, psychoanalytic catharsis consists of the patient initiating, with the aid of a therapist, a confrontation with their own past, thus triggering the experience of negative memories and emotions in order to let go of them.

The psychoanalytic notion of catharsis allows for each audience member to have their own experience of the music, which avoids the thorny question of the potential for literal and consistent representation in music. Because the emotional content of psychoanalytic catharsis comes from within the patient/listener, there is no need for the perfect communication of emotion through sound. This version also accounts for the possibility for music to exist outside of the performance space, when there is no physically present performing body. The metal literature, particularly Arnett's *Metalheads*, focuses on the cathartic effect of listening to recordings, highlighting the apparent individuality of the experience. However, this model does little to address the interpersonal dynamic of a live performance, that is, how listeners relate to each other and to musicians and how those relations impact the cathartic process. Because the emotional content in psychoanalytic catharsis is ultimately located in the listener, the experience of a show is either tangential or irrelevant to the cathartic moment.

The catharsis that is alluded to in the literature on metal seems to be a combination of both of these constructions. It locates the emotional content of the experience somewhere between the listener and the music, with an emphasis depending on the nature of the study. Pillsbury's extremely detailed musical analysis thus pushes the content toward the musical end, while the more sociologically oriented studies, especially Arnett's, locate the content more with the listener. Along these lines, there is a sense that the initiation of the teleological drive of catharsis happens

somewhere between the audience and the musicians. Because most of these studies attempt to explain (or explain away) why metal fans would ever choose to like metal, the drive for some kind of purgation must come from them in some capacity. Yet to fully identify with the psychoanalytic model of catharsis, the claim would have to be made that every listener has had a traumatic experience that shapes their behavior. Arnett comes closest to this, as half of his book consists of "profiles" of metal fans that are essentially laundry lists of familial trouble and "bad behavior." Most commentators downplay this possibility by then shifting negativity back toward the music. Hence we return to the need for metal to be violent.

Pillsbury, in disagreeing with Gaines on the ultimate effect of "Fade to Black," provides a succinct account of the apparent need for the catharsis argument:

> In some ways Gaines needs to save "Fade to Black," to read it as ultimately positive and regenerative, because her overall project in *Teenage Wasteland* is social justice. Her work tells the stories of and gives voice to a segment of society much maligned and discarded as "losers" or "burnouts." Most media images of her research participants throughout the 1980s were decidedly one-way and decidedly negative, and she rightly challenges the misconceptions and stereotypes that informed those images. (Pillsbury 2006, 53)

Of course, Gaines is not the only author to attempt to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes—most of the authors on metal do just that. They are undermined, though, by their own appeals to "surprise" or, in Purcell's case, what likely amount to editorial decisions regarding the ultimate positioning of the work. And while not all of the authors are after what Pillsbury calls social justice, for the most part, they avoid pinning the fans as bad or deficient or in need of therapy while simultaneously

framing metal as ultimately a positive force because it helps its fans with their problems. Metal must be violent so that its fans can experience catharsis, and fans must experience catharsis because metal is violent.

My aim here is to provide an alternative voice to the dominant narrative, which, regardless of stated intent to debunk myths or overturn stereotypes, never quite manages to shake the assumptions imposed by metal's detractors and critics. To put it bluntly, most metal, at least outside of the glam and hair metal addressed in Walser's study, is about the bits of existence that are typically hidden from view, only a few of which include filth, despair, anger, disease, decay, hegemony, weakness, abjection, loneliness, aggression, exploitation, and death. I am guided in this by a small point made by Berger in his study of death metal in Akron, Ohio: "musicians, moshing crowds, and listeners come together at events to evoke, explore, and utilize a wide range of related emotions and qualities: anger, rage, aggression, pure and explosive energy, grandeur, depression, lumbering heaviness, confusion, and countless others" (Berger 1999, 271). Berger argues, however briefly, that while metal *can* be about the cathartic release of emotion, it is equally viable as a mechanism by which to *explore* those emotions. This valuable inquiry, in which metal practitioners are given the space to look inward and reflect on their emotional states, is brushed aside by authors arguing that those emotions are negative and in need of purging.

Of course, metal is not monolithic. Most commentators are quick to point this out, even if the point does not stick through their analyses. Walser writes about

"heavy metal," but really only engages with the most commercially successful pop-oriented music of the 1980s, ignoring a vast amount of other heavy metal. Purcell notes that there are differing styles of death metal, even though she ultimately boils them down into one category for the sake of her sociological study—fans are only fans of "death metal" without any freedom to navigate between the different types and emphases. Kahn-Harris' study of extreme metal boils death metal, black metal, grindcore and even doom metal down into a cohesive phenomenon, despite significant differences in musical features, guiding themes and fan practices.

Rather than make explicit claims for all of metal, I focus specifically on the relationship of doom metal with death. I choose doom metal for reasons of personal affinity but also because it has been largely absent from the scholarly literature on metal, this despite becoming increasingly popular in recent years (though still, in larger contexts, a rather small cultural phenomenon). Kahn-Harris, for instance, includes doom metal under his umbrella term of "extreme metal," but spends very little space in his book addressing it specifically. Albert Bell's study of metal in Malta points out that doom metal exists there and is significant in the local scene, but says very little about the music of doom metal, either what it is or how it is different from other kinds of metal (Bell 2011). I believe that doom's engagement with death is especially meaningful when we take a step back to look at other subgenres of metal and even other forms of popular culture, many of which hold death near the center of their thematic worlds.

Insistent Positivity

In subscribing to the catharsis/violence model as an explanation for fan participation in metal, scholars argue, explicitly or implicitly, that the emotions and themes of metal are inherently negative and that the "purged" state after an encounter with metal is inherently positive. But why should this be so? What makes an emotion or thought in and of itself negative or positive? And even if an emotion or thought is definable as negative, why do we rule out the possibility of its experience being productive for an individual? Why are we so quick to insist that a "negative" emotion shouldn't be the goal of an experience? In *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that this division between positivity and negativity has become an unquestioned facet of American society since the mid-19th century (Ehrenreich 2010). She traces the development of the "New Thought" movement and its eventual transition into the generic notion of "positive thinking," but she begins the historical narrative with the doctrines of Calvinism in the 16th century.

Ehrenreich writes of what essentially amounts to a divine contempt for the worldly, with mankind trapped in a state of total depravity on the basis of original sin and having been predetermined, at the beginning of eternity, to either heaven or hell on an individual basis. This, in turn, is manifested in the unconditional insistence on productive labor being tied to divine salvation, with any potential enjoyment or pleasure—with even a break in labor considered pleasurable—being tied to eternal

damnation. She sees this work ethic holding over in contemporary secular life, particularly in American society, with people celebrating their stress and bragging about their busyness. But as America expanded, slowly transforming the vast western frontier from a place of mystery and danger into hospitable territory, the grip of Calvinism, and of Protestantism in general, began to fade. In its place, thinkers like Phineas Parkhurst Quimby and Mary Baker Eddy developed ideas of metaphysical happiness in what was called "New Thought." This doctrine was based on transcendentalism and mysticism, with all of humanity linked with the divine in an omnipotent Spirit or Mind. But because the Spirit/Mind was held to be perfect, and therefore humans were capable of perfection, any perceived imperfection was viewed as curable through mental engagement with Spirit/Mind.

This New Thought proved effective in curing an emerging medical disaster, neurasthenia, a vague collection of symptoms evoking contemporary ideas of depression and stress disorders: "back problems, digestive ills, exhaustion, headaches, insomnia, and melancholy" (ibid., 75). Quimby theorized that the symptoms of neurasthenia were caused by an engagement with the doctrines of Calvinism, but without an actively laborious lifestyle, that is, a mindset focused on total depravity and the lottery of determination without any sort of distraction from work. As a cure, he proposed "a 'talking cure,' through which he endeavored to convince his patients that the universe was fundamentally benevolent, that they were one with the 'Mind' out of which it was constituted, and that they could leverage their own powers of mind to

cure or ‘correct’ their ills” (ibid., 79). Eddy, after being “cured” by Quimby, adopted his methods and went on to found the religion of Christian Science. In Christian Science, the notion of Spirit or Mind is simplified such that reality is comprised entirely of the pure and perfect substance. Any experience of imperfection, then, is a temporary hiccup that can be solved through prayer or introspection.

Christian Science was then passed on to William James, a pioneering psychologist who taught the first psychology course in America. Through James’ influence, the practices of New Through were solidified as therapeutically effective and thus scientifically sound. Further, New Thought was seen as having cured the morbidness of Calvinist and other Protestant theologies. And while the notion that thought alone could cure disease slipped out of mainstream belief (thought it has made a dramatic comeback in recent years), the ideas of the New Thought movement went on to inspire the doctrine of positive thinking. Pioneered by Napoleon Hill and Norman Vincent Peale, positive thinking has become a centerpiece of contemporary American culture, from motivational speakers to life coaches to self-help books to the overprescription of anti-depressants. But, as Ehrenreich argues, New Thought and positive thinking are far from opposite to Calvinism. While they might have shifted emphasis away from hellfire and eternal damnation, these newer concepts still orbit around judgement, self-monitoring, and constantly laboring at thinking positively, acting positively, and eliminating anything and everything that stands in the way of

positivity. If you believe in success and think about success at every waking moment, how could the universe not reward you with success?

The insistence on catharsis in the metal literature seems to work similarly to the basic tenets of positive thinking. There is no clear explanation provided as to why songs with lyrics about anger or sadness or death are inherently negative; instead it is taken for granted as a common sense understanding. And because a thought about death is negative, no reasonable person would want to hold on to it for any appreciable amount of time. Thus, teens and young adults who have thoughts about death turn to metal so that they might, through a cathartic experience, eliminate those thoughts from their psyche and, therefore, reach a state of positivity, or at least neutrality from which to pursue positivity. But why, as I have asked above, should these thoughts be instantly branded as negative and in need of purging? Why should certain emotions be eliminated as quickly as possible and at all costs? While Ehrenreich's argument works toward explaining the American aversion to all things negative, or at the very least the obsession with staying positive, the quickness with which the label "violent" appears and the bizarre nature of our relationship with death and mortality are more extensively explored by Carol M. Jantzen.

Death and the Necrophilic/phobic Habitus

In her series "Death and the Displacement of Beauty," Jantzen traces the parallel development, albeit in different directions and at different rates, of the

concepts of death and beauty in Western civilization from Homeric Greece onward.[2] What she finds, repeated over and over in literature, philosophy, religion, politics, medicine and many other facets of society, is a fascination with death amounting to a collective necrophilia. Jantzen uses the term necrophilia in the rather standard sense of an erotic attraction to dead bodies, "but widen[s] it still further, to signify a cultural fascination and obsession with death and violence, a preoccupation with death which is both dreaded and desired" (Jantzen 2004, 5). Half of her thesis, though, depends on the idea that we are just as concerned with hiding death away, with relegating actual evidence of mortality to special, walled-off contexts. Contemporary American medical practice is concerned above all else with prolonging life, with death as a failure of medicine. And when medicine fails and someone dies, that death is typically kept as hidden and as quiet as possible to the point where "a good death is thought of as a death that is hardly noticed" (ibid., 13).

To reconcile these two positions, Jantzen turns to psychoanalytic theory wherein "deep dread and denial such as we often find manifested in relation to death is closely related to unacknowledged desire: the anxiety indicates preoccupation. Although the preoccupation with death presents itself as a dread or fear, literally a phobia, Freud has shown how such phobias, as obsessions, are simultaneously a love or desire for the very thing so dreaded" (ibid., 5). Necrophilia and necrophobia are, thus, two sides of the same coin. And this collective neurosis is not merely a part of

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[2] Jantzen's intended project was to reach contemporary society through six volumes, but she passed away having reached the Quakers with her third volume.

our society; Jantzen argues that it has come to inform the overarching Western habitus, a fact so central to our language (we even think about bringing death to the things that kill us, e.g. “battling” with cancer), our common sense and our understanding of the world that it goes completely unnoticed, even as we grapple with its symptoms.

In this, Jantzen traces the genealogy of death in the fashion of Michel Foucault. With a “systematic skepticism,” Foucault proposes an archeology of knowledge, an excavation of those ideas that seem to be fixed in meaning (Foucault 1994, 317). Foucault famously “uncovered” the genealogies of madness and sexuality, for example, by showing that these concepts, despite their apparent grounding in biological fact, are entirely contingent upon continually shifting cultural meanings. This “does not mean that these notions refer to nothing at all,” of course, but rather that we should “wonder about the conditions that made [them] possible” (ibid.). Jantzen applies this logic to the notion of death. To deny the very real existence of death as a biological fact is foolish, but death has come to mean so much more than that.

The premise that the Western habitus is one obsessed with death is largely grounded on the centrality to so much Western thought of the idea that “all men are mortal.” While this is necessarily true, Jantzen states that

> upon this fact a whole inventory of cultural, moral, and religious constructions have sedimented, often purporting to be as constitutive of human mortality as the biological fact itself. In this way, I would argue, not only death itself but also violence and the obsession with death has been assumed to be rooted in “nature.” Necrophilia has been naturalized. (Jantzen 2004, 23)

Jantzen finds the obsession with death and the naturalization of violence in the writings of Freud and Darwin, representing their respective fields of psychology and biology. In Freud's case, Jantzen argues that the notion of the death drive, or Thanatos, is used to justify aggressive and destructive behavior. And in psychoanalysis more generally, a central notion of (male) infant development is the moment of castration, when the subject is separated from the mother. The desire for the mother, then, is sublimated and frequently returns, subconsciously, as aggressive behavior whether inward or outward. From Darwin's account of evolution and natural selection, we are given the idea that all of nature is a struggle for survival and that only the strongest survive. The notion that human society is guided by the same principles as nature has persisted in myriad ways. A central tenet of the modernist project, after all, is that society moves from a primitive state to an advanced one, with violence a basic fact of the primitive side of the spectrum. Violence is never eradicated in this equation, though, only directed through approved outlets. And as though to soften the assertion that everyone is violent, researchers have recently attempted to locate genetic predispositions for violence, such as the "warrior gene" (McDermott et al. 2009). It might not be the case that everyone is violent, but those who are, are biologically determined to be so.

Jantzen questions both the biological and psychological assertions of innate violent tendencies by asking, rather plainly, "where is the proof?" She concedes, as it seems one must, that there is a disturbing level of violence in the world, for Darwin,

for Freud, and for us. But, she believes, neither Darwin nor Freud question this violence as evidence for their claims. "What they do instead is look around them at all the aggression and violence in the world, and move directly from the perceived ubiquity of violence (sometimes, as in Freud, acknowledging that they find it in their own hearts also) to the assumption that it is innate" (Jantzen 2004, 27). Jantzen argues that an equally valid explanation for the prevalence of violence is that it is rooted in social formations and cultural values. But she does not stop there, instead proposing more and more pointed questions: Why is violence so much more prevalent among men? Why are some men more prone to violence than others? If violence is in our nature, how can we explain the radically different levels of violence among different cultures? It is possible, at this point, to understand the attempts to naturalize violence as actually rationalizations, and self-reinforcing ones at that, of the violent state of Western society.

As mentioned above, the roots of this necrophilic/phobic habitus are traced back to Homeric Greece, with Jantzen's analysis beginning with the *Iliad*. As a story about warfare, the *Iliad* is filled to the brim with accounts of death. The majority of the deaths, though, are of a very specific sort. Those who fall are young, male (naturally), beautiful, in peak physical condition, and heroic. They represent the closest that mankind can come to perfection. As such, theirs is a bittersweet existence. As close to perfect as they are now, they can only ever move toward sickness, frailty and decay. Because they would rather be remembered and revered for their youthful,

quasi-divine state, it is best for them to die violently in battle, rather than peacefully in old age. In fact, those who avoid impending death are shamed for their decision. Yet for all their glory, their death prevents them from joining the immortal gods, as the sight of a corpse was imagined to pollute the gods' eyes, whether or not the death was a beautiful one. Homer's writing thus reflected a milieu in which early, violent death was valorized over a peaceful passing at the end of a long life, albeit with both kinds of death being offensive to the divine. Of course, this milieu does not end with the end of Homeric Greece. Jantzen details the profound influence of Homer over Greek tragedy and Alexander the Great, that of Alexander on prominent medieval thinkers and eventually the engineers of European nationalism, that of Greek tragedy on the European arts (including, of course, the notion of catharsis), and so on with a continual sedimenting of the necrophilic/phobic neurosis.

Jantzen ultimately wishes to propose a therapeutic solution for this collective neurosis. Her recommendation is to, in effect, perform a society-wide rewind and take Western civilization back to the moment when it first prioritized death over beauty. From there, it should be possible to recreate the social fabric around "natality," the fact of having been born, rather than mortality, the fact of imminent death. In a sense, the therapeutic process that Jantzen calls for is a cathartic one: a collective social confrontation with what has been repressed—death, dying, mortality—in order to free the crippling hold that mass necrophilia/phobia has on the very foundations of Western culture. In this way we might devote our energy to the pursuit of beauty.

I do not propose that doom metal accomplishes anything nearly so magnanimous as this. Similarly, I do not propose that doom metal attempts to re-imagine the prioritization of death and beauty. Practitioners of doom metal make their choices quite explicitly, placing death front and center in their thematic world. However, the version of death that doom presents is neither the glory of youthful, violent death nor the death hidden behind a white curtain in a sterile hospital wing. I believe that what doom metal accomplishes is, rather than a celebration of death and violence, a serious confrontation with the Western attitude toward death and dying. It interrogates, critiques and questions the necrophilic/phobic neurosis. It is a look inward, an embrace of the idea that if "the body is a key site within which the self is realized, arguably, it is precisely toward the period of its deterioration and disposal that we should train our eye" (Hallam, Hockey and Howarth 1999, 5). The potential for catharsis that doom metal offers, but that it does not necessarily require, is that of a collective release from the imposing shadow of death and mortality. This is not a nihilistic stance toward death nor an embrace of death as desirable negation, as the emerging specialized field of "black metal studies" implies (Masciandaro 2010, Pattison et al. 2012, Price 2013). It is a stance of anxiety, of confusion, of vested interest. Death is not necessarily desired, but confronted and examined in an effort to reduce its mystery.

Doom Metal Music

Doom metal music shares a number of characteristics in common with metal at large. It is almost always performed by a band consisting of loud and distorted guitars guitars, including a bass guitar, drums and vocals that are generally delivered in a manner mimicking the distortion of the guitar, whether growled, screamed, shrieked or yelled. The key musical characteristic that sets doom metal sharply apart from other subgenres is that it is, in a word, slow. Indeed, this slowness and effective separation from other subgenres provides a likely explanation for doom metal's relative absence from the scholarly literature. In eschewing this fastness in favor of extreme slowness, doom metal fits uncomfortably into, or even challenges, common understandings of metal music.

In Chapter 2, I engage extensively with the music of doom metal. I provide a short history of the subgenre, which, like the rest of metal, claims the first two albums by Black Sabbath as its founding texts. But whereas heavy metal was characterized by taking Sabbath's blueprint and gradually speeding up, the earliest doom bands (now retroactively referred to as proto-doom) mimicked Sabbath's plodding, relaxed character. This early doom emphasized the repetition of simple guitar melodies and mostly basic drumming patterns with a relaxed approach to timing instead of the increasing virtuosity and precision of heavy metal. I argue that this repetition, simplicity and imprecision, combined with the massive spaces between beats at extremely slow tempi (often slower than 60 beats per minute), is best understood as a

form of groove, a musical concept typically utilized in discussions of jazz or dance music (Feld and Keil 1994, Keil 1994, Iyer 2002).

When doom metal became a distinct subgenre in the mid-80s (resulting both from its slowness and the general trend toward fastness in the rest of metal), it fragmented almost immediately into a variety of styles. I provide an overview of these styles and their salient features. Two of these styles, death/doom and funeral doom, are treated extensively with close readings of an exemplary song from each. Through this, I demonstrate the prominence of groove and the lack of teleological forms in the aesthetic of doom metal. Without a clear teleological aim, the ascription of Aristotelian, narrative-driven catharsis to this music is weakened.

Meaning in Doom Metal

Chapter 3 moves away from the sound of doom metal music to consider alternative sources of meaning. I argue that metal, and popular musics in general, are informed by an extended process of musicking that incorporates, among other things, album artwork, lyrics and other media such as horror films. Album artwork, an extremely important component of meaning construction in metal, has received rather little attention from scholars, particularly regarding its ability to not only generate meaning within a subgenre but also to create and reinforce distinctions between multiple subgenres. By considering color, subject and typography, I argue that doom

metal artwork largely trades in signifiers of unease and dread, in stark contrast to the artwork of other subgenres that frequently represents violence or gore.

Lyrics function similarly in metal, generating both consistent internal values and inter-subgenre differences. The role of lyrics in constructing meaning in metal, though, has been a contentious issue throughout their study, both because of a performance practice that obscures intelligibility and content that is potentially disturbing. Just as doom metal music has gone largely undiscussed in the literature, so too have doom metal lyrics. These lyrics eschew the representations of violence and gore common to some other subgenres, instead utilizing themes of weakness, despair, fragility and mortality to create an atmosphere of anxiety and dread. Where other forms of metal signal power and control, doom metal signals ambiguity and uncertainty.

Meaning in metal music is further reinforced and modified through its relationship with horror films, a genre that both developed into what is often called its "modern" period largely concurrently with the emergence of heavy metal (1968 for horror films, 1970 for heavy metal) and reached widespread commercial success at around the same time (late 70s and 80s). Crucially, though, the films of the early modern period—those films that apparently inspired the sonic and thematic content of Black Sabbath's genre-defining albums—are significantly different in their content from the slasher films of the 80s that are commonly linked to metal (such as in Purcell's comparison of slasher films and death metal). These earlier films, including

Night of the Living Dead and *Rosemary's Baby*, subvert the cathartic relief that accompanies the death of the monster and the return to normalcy. Instead, these films leave the audience questioning anything from dominant social institutions to life itself.

When these three potential sites of meaning—album artwork, lyrics and horror films—are considered, it becomes apparent that doom metal actively challenges the dominant understanding of metal as a music of feeling powerful and in control. Similarly, it challenges the potential explanation of catharsis as motivation for engagement, as listeners are unlikely to feel relief when the music stops. The questions raised about existence, society, death and dying are never answered, but rather left to fester and inspire uncertainty.

Experiencing Doom Metal

In Chapter 4, I focus on the experience of a doom metal performance in an effort to illuminate the rich set of perceptions and sensations that occur *during* the event, as opposed to the relief that might be felt *after*. The chapter relies primarily on a self-ethnographic account of one such performance. I frame my interpretation of this experience as a form of ecstasy. Weinstein, in *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, provides a diminutive section titled "Ecstasy" in a larger chapter about the concert experience (Weinstein 2000, 213). For her, ecstasy is a primarily positive sensation:

> the extreme form of pleasure and enjoyment, the attachment of heightened excitement to sources of delight. An ecstatic experience

> eliminates calculative rationality and circumspective concern. It removes the everyday-life world, with its remembrance of things past and its anticipation of things to come. It is the experience of falling into the moment; time stands still. (ibid., 214)

To explore this potential ecstasy at a doom metal performance, I focus on three salient experiential features—volume, repetition and timbre—through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concepts of *jouissance*, the abject, and grain. These three notions are concerned with the boundaries between self and other, subject and object. More specifically, these ideas point to the blurring, confusion and outright dissolution of these boundaries. They call our attention to what is outside of us and inside of us, that which we tend to hide or gloss over in order to maintain a contained, rational sense of self. In our encounters with them, we gain access to knowledge and experience from which we are otherwise barred.

Ultimately, I interpret the intentional efforts at challenging and even dissolving the self as enactments of Georges Bataille's expenditure, an activity providing no social utility, such as a safe and socially sanctioned venue for the release of "negative" energy (Bataille 1985). These activities can even be construed as conscious attempts to subvert utility, the sense that one must be "doing something" at all times. In this, practitioners are sacrificed—made sacred and separate from discourse and ideology, allowed to step outside however briefly from social norm.

It is the nexus of *jouissance*, the abject and sacrifice on which I focus my attention. I believe that this provides a fruitful space in which to understand not only the pleasures of doom metal but also its productive capacities as a challenge to

dominant discourses around death and dying. This is not to say that this nexus is the only source of pleasure or purpose for fans of doom metal. I do not deny that there is pleasure to be had in the cathartic release of emotion, or even that there is pleasure in a genuine pursuit of violence. But just as *jouissance* is an experience outside of discourse, as abjection is a jolt away from meaning and the firm boundaries of the self, as sacrifice is a step toward difference, this dissertation is an alternative voice to the dominant narrative, one which celebrates the "unproductive" and the "useless," one that treats the *moment of* as more meaningful than the *moment after*.

II.
DOOM METAL MUSIC
Origins, Grooves and Fragmentation

Metal, as an umbrella comprising numerous musical subgenres, is typically understood to include "loud, distorted guitars; prominent and aggressive drums; emotionally extreme singing techniques; and musical complexity and esotericism" (Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2011, 4). The various metal subgenres—heavy metal, thrash metal, death metal, black metal and more—combine these core characteristics with different elements, whether musical, thematic, performative or a combination thereof, to reach distinct stylistic and affective spaces. Heavy metal uses virtuosic solo guitar passages, clean and catchy melodic lines and high-pitched singing to evoke a sensation of power. Death metal employs extremely fast drumming and guitar picking along with extreme vocal sounds, notably deep growling, to create a "brutal" sound. Black metal combines intentionally low fidelity recording techniques, fast tempos and shrieking vocals into a hateful and misanthropic sound. Doom metal, put simply, is "heavy." This is not the "heavy" of heavy metal, which as Walser writes is first and foremost about "the musical articulation of power" (Walser 1993, 2). Instead, this heaviness is quite literally a sensation of weight, typically a weight that overpowers and overwhelms.

Heaviness is central to the identity of the doom subgenre, as it is of all varieties of metal, serving as a guiding principe and a metric of evaluation—the heavier and more crushing a band is, the better (Berger 1999, Berger and Fales 2005). As Harris

M. Berger notes, “heaviness” varies somewhat from subgenre to subgenre (Berger 1999, 58). The quality of weight in doom metal is based on a combination of several factors. Slowness is an immediate sonic marker of doom that is set apart from the generally fast tempi of other subgenres. Loud and distorted guitars, more or less necessary in metal, are tuned lower (often significantly so) than is standard, resulting in a sound “like a gravitational force, deep and resonant” (Matthew Thudium, guitarist of Thou, personal email correspondence with the author, 28 September 2012). Structure and harmonic progression as foundational or guiding principles are deemphasized, often to the point of irrelevance. Instead, most songs are driven by modal melodies featuring minor seconds and tritones and repetitive rhythms that entrain the listener’s body into a propulsive groove. It is important to again note that the heaviness discussed here is based on the musical features of early heavy metal, but the two are not coterminous. Heaviness as an aesthetic qualifier can be present in any metal music (though, again, it is crucial for doom metal), while heavy metal as a subgenre does not always meet all the criteria of heaviness as applied to other subgenres.

It was a common occurrence in the course of my research to hear or see references to this weight, notably the ability of good doom to “crush” the listener. If there is a power in doom, it is not the power of the self as in Walser’s heavy metal, but rather a power directed against the self. In the words of Orion, singer for Washington, DC band Ilsa, “good doom metal should posses a haunting and hypnotic quality,

ponderous and draining. Listening to doom metal is not about feeling strong or powerful. Its a weakness in the knees…uncertainty and dread" (personal email correspondence with the author, 29 September 2012).

In this chapter I provide a brief account of the development of doom metal and the quality of heaviness, from 1970 to 1985, followed by an overview of its major styles and their salient features. Because the various styles of doom were developed largely concurrently based on the musical features that crystalized around 1985, rather than as an explicit succession of styles building on each other, this latter section is less a history than an explication of sound. I provide, when possible, both musicological descriptions of melodies and chord structures *and* narratives of the visceral experience, or more specifically *my* visceral experience, of what these melodies and structures sound and feel like. I focus on a musical analysis of two of doom's styles, death/doom and funeral doom, to demonstrate the rich cross-pollination present between contemporary metal styles in the former and also the limits to which the aesthetics of metal are taken in the latter.

The Beginning of Doom

The history of doom, without recounting the entire history of metal, begins with Black Sabbath, a quartet (vocals, guitar, bass guitar and drums) from Birmingham.[1] The most important feature of Sabbath, as far as this chapter—and

[1] Some would argue, of course rather myopically, that the history of metal itself begins with "Sabbath," as they are referred to by insiders.

doom metal—is concerned, is guitarist Tony Iommi's right hand. Iommi worked in a sheet metal factory, and in an accident in 1966 severed the tips of two of the fingers on his right hand (Wilkinson 2006, 18). While for most guitarists this would not be a major issue, Iommi is left handed and thus relies on his right hand for fretting. He nearly quit playing, but was inspired on hearing a recording of Django Reinhart, who had similarly lost the use of two of his fret-hand fingers. To compensate for his injury, Iommi fashioned thimbles to wear as finger tips. However, he was unable to fully form chords on the fretboard. As a result he performed almost exclusively with chords comprising the root and fifth, otherwise known as the "power chord," now a cornerstone of metal (Cope 2010, 31). The power chord is used both to emphasize harmonic structures, as when open fifths are sustained through the course of a bar, and to strengthen the sound of a melody, as when each note in a line is harmonized.

Of course the power chord is hardly an innovation of metal. It may have been a practical development for Iommi, but the open fifth has been significant throughout Western music history. Indeed there are far too many examples of open fifths to cover; suffice it to say that the interval carries importance both as a musical signifier and as an acoustic phenomenon. When two notes a perfect fifth apart are combined, their component frequencies interact to create resultant tones heard both above and below the original pitches. A low E played on the open 6th string of a guitar, for example, resonates at around 82 Hz while a B above it is about 123 Hz. The combination of the two results in the appearance of a frequency based on their

difference, 41 Hz, an E one octave lower than the 6th string E, and on their summation, around 206 Hz, a G♯ above the B.

This is compounded, of course, by the presence of a rich harmonic spectrum in both notes, especially when driven through powerful amplifiers with extensive distortion. In addition to the obvious effect of boosting the guitar's sound, thus strengthening the audibility of the low resultant tone, distortion emphasizes the higher component harmonics of each note, leading to a resulting sound much more complex than the initial combination of I and V. And because of the absence of an explicitly played III (the III, both major and minor, is present in the resulting harmonic spectrum), the power chord can *seem* to be either major or minor, depending on the intervallic content of the melodic line. Power chords played on a I-♭III-IV sequence, for example, will likely *sound* minor, while I-III-IV will likely *sound* major. This helps to avoid the problematic tuning of thirds on the guitar which, with frets based on equal temperament, will always be out of tune.

Even with Iommi's thimbles, the tension of the strings produced a great deal of pain in the injured fingers. So, quite simply, Iommi loosened his strings. His guitar was initially tuned down a half step (from the standard E tuning) and eventually lowered one and a half steps to C♯. It is now almost par for the course that metal bands downtune their guitars, even beyond Iommi's C♯ to C, B or A. While this downtuning has the obvious effect of lowering the overall pitch of Iommi's and Sabbath's sound, it produces, in concert with tendencies toward more and more

powerful amplification, a greater degree of physical "presence" to the sound. That is, the lower guitar sound, combined with a downtuned bass guitar, emphasizes and embraces the ability of low-frequency sound to be felt as much as, or even more than, it is heard. This lowness and presence are major contributors to Sabbath's heaviness, as the downtuned guitar takes on a thick, almost muddy quality that is amplified into a powerful bodily sensation.

Also central to Black Sabbath's musical style and contribution to the development of metal is the hinting, ever so slightly, of a shift away from the blues-based rock that was popular at the time. This is not to say that Black Sabbath eliminated blues influences entirely from their music, but rather that these influences were tempered by the band's move toward a simpler, more intentionally ominous sound (Christe 2004). To this end, Iommi's riffs, defined by Richard Middleton as "short rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic figures repeated to form a structural framework" (Middleton 2002), and chord progressions with Black Sabbath emphasized the pentatonic minor along with modal harmonies, notably the Phrygian mode with its flattened second scale degree, which has been used throughout Western music history as a signifier of distress, irrationality, passion and sorrow (Cope 2010, Moore 2011). In what could be taken as a nod to the blues-based heritage of metal, Iommi's playing also featured the tritone. In the blues scale this would likely function as a "blue-note" inflection of either the fourth or fifth scale degree, as Cope argues that it does in many of Led Zeppelin's songs. However, Sabbath embraced the tritone

as a harmonic destination in itself, capitalizing on its long history in Western music as a signifier of "malevolence, fear and danger" (Cope 2010, 52).

These musical features—the consistent employment of the power chord, loud and distorted guitars and riffs and chord progressions based on modal rather than blues patterns—were fundamental to the emerging genre of heavy metal and quality of heaviness. Sabbath's two 1970 recordings, their debut *Black Sabbath* and the more successful *Paranoid*, are typically considered to be founding texts of the genre. These features were subsequently developed and intensified—louder guitars with distortion provided deliberately by pedals rather than amplification alone, even less obvious blues influence—through the 1970s and early 80s by loosely affiliated groups of bands like the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) and the Los Angeles scene led by Van Halen. These later bands ramped up their tempi as they turned up their amps, leading to faster and faster, and more and more distorted, styles like thrash metal, death metal and grindcore, which were all active, though not mainstream, by the early 80s. Next to examples from these styles, Sabbath is comparatively slow, simple and plodding. In the lineage of metal generally, then, Sabbath are imagined as having laid a groundwork of heaviness upon which progress—especially in terms of fastness—could be made.

Doom metal, for the most part, ignores this decade of getting faster. For doom practitioners, Sabbath's slowness, simplicity, plodding quality and all-around heaviness are not viewed as artifacts of history to be discarded by the progress of

tempo. Instead, they are precisely the features that are embraced, developed and intensified to define the style as different from the rest of metal.

The Rise of Proto-Doom

Drawing directly from the stylistic developments of Black Sabbath and their move away from blues-based rock, Pentagram, based in Alexandria, Virginia, pushed further into a new territory now retroactively called "proto-doom." Though they began playing and developing this style in 1972, they did not release their official debut recording until 1985. Despite that, their longevity (the band is still active as of this writing) and stature in the underground exerted a powerful influence over many other bands and musicians. Their music takes the heaviness of Sabbath, amplifies and intensifies it, and throws away much of the rest. Specifically, the heavy proto-doom of Pentagram is separated from the heavy metal of Black Sabbath by the tendencies toward: slower and simpler guitar riffs; relatively static drumming with minimal syncopation; vocals that weave more thoroughly into the texture of the band, rather than rising above it as in much Sabbath and other heavy metal; an overall shift toward the "middle" of sounds privileging sustain instead of attack, such that the music seems to be perpetually behind the beat or somehow slower than it "should be;" and a move away from the virtuosity and flashiness that guided other metal musics at the time.

Iommi's guitar riffs emphasizing the flat second and tritone are continually referenced but simplified. Whereas Sabbath's early recordings bear sonic

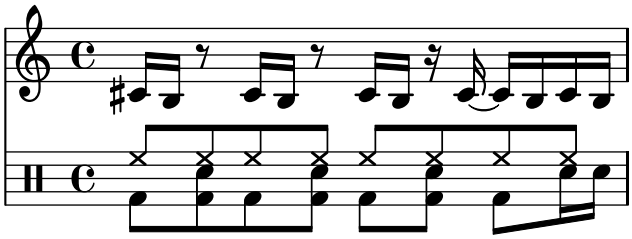


Figure 2.1: Opening riff of "Relentless" (0:00-0:20)

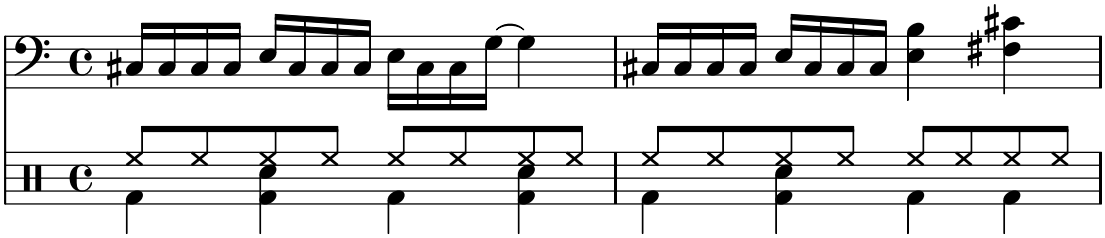


Figure 2.2: Second riff of "Relentless" (0:38-0:48)

resemblances to the flashy guitar virtuosity of the 1960s, Pentagram's riffs eschew this tendency, frequently using no more than three notes each. "Relentless," from their 1985 debut album, opens with a repeating two-note riff alternating between C♯ and B (see Figure 2.1). At two points during this opening section, the guitar leaves the riff to sustain an A moving to a G♯. These notes, taken with the C♯ and B of the riff, function as a ♭VI-V progression moving back to I and thus strengthen the tonic function of the C♯. The guitar then drops down an octave to begin a new riff comprising two smaller four-beat phrases, each grounded on C♯ with momentary interruptions by E. The first phrase jumps awkwardly up a tritone to G, while the second phrase moves deliberately, and with power chords, from E to F♯ to set up a plagal cadence (Figure 2.2).

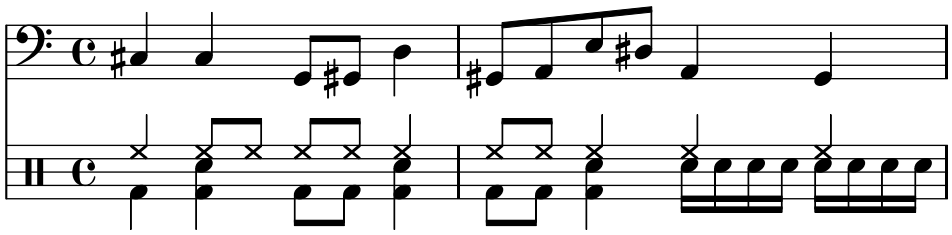


Figure 2.3: Third riff of "Relentless" featuring minor seconds and tritones, with an exemplary drum fill (1:47-2:05)

After a repetition of these two riffs, the song moves to its most complicated material, melodically and harmonically speaking. This third riff is loaded to the brim with semitones and tritones, effectively outlining the Phrygian mode (with a lowered fifth scale degree serving as an embellishment): C♯-G-G♯-D-G♯-A-E-D♯-A-G♯ (Figure 2.3).[2] The riff outlines a fairly basic i-♭II-v progression, though three quarters of it are spent away from the C♯. And, because of the prevalence of semitones and tritones, there is a certain amount of ambiguity in harmonic direction. The semitones in particular provide a fluidity that both tugs back toward significant harmonic points and pulls away from them. The first G, for example, scoops reassuringly to G♯. But the A in the second bar is a disconcerting departure from the relative stability of the G♯ downbeat. It is unclear where this A might lead. There is a certain stability, however, provided by the drum pattern. Compared to the pattern accompanying the opening riff, the drums here are a steady anchor that keep the riff steady. At this point in the song, C♯ has been been repeated so persistently, so relentlessly, that it seems

[2] It should be noted, though, that a power chord on the fifth scale degree, G♯, will result in a sounding D♯, which is generally absent in Phrygian.

unshakeable as the tonal center. The minor seconds really only embellish what have already been established as important pitches: C♯ (i), E (♭III) and G (the tritone), with the new addition of G♯ (v). The song's bridge, in the sense that it is the only section in which the tonic is remotely challenged, features a riff on F♯ but that inevitably gravitates back to C♯. Following this brief section, the song embraces C♯ and never looks back.

All in all, the simplicity of the melodic and harmonic material creates a sensation approaching stasis, albeit a stasis saturated with extremely thick, dark timbres. This feeling of stasis is aided by the drumming, which is similarly minimal. The majority of the song features a simple drum pattern with a snare accent on the weak beat and hi-hat throughout. This pattern is played twice as quickly during the C♯-B riff, but otherwise plods along at about 92 beats per minute (bpm). There are a handful of fills (as at the end of Figure 2.3), "drum accents and embellishments," scattered throughout, but these are mostly just groups of sixteenth-notes on the snare (Feld 1988, 100). Nothing about the drumming is particularly virtuosic or remotely polyrhythmic. Nor does it necessarily drive forward in any obvious way. It is, rather, relentless in its situatedness.

The same can be said for the vocals. Singer Bobby Liebling, the only constant member of Pentagram over its now 41-year existence, follows firmly in the footsteps of Ozzy Osbourne's work in Black Sabbath. Osbourne's voice is decidedly nasal, seems to struggle stabilizing on intended pitches, and lacks a certain amount of

articulation and clarity. Liebling adopts the last of these two features, pushing articulation even further back in the mix and sliding in and out of pitches in a relaxed fashion. Crucially, Liebling's voice is almost antithetical to Osbourne's in its timbre. Where Osbourne's nasally voice sounds—and feels—high up in the pitch space and direct in its attack, Liebling's is much darker and rounder as though emanating from the very bottom of the throat. As a result the timbre of his voice blends more readily with that of the band. It is enveloped by the overall texture, evoking an ominous and oppressive mood. This, in concert with the heavily grounded guitar riffs and drum patterns, anchors the proto-doom style and sets the stage for the development of bonafide doom.

The Crystallization of Doom

The first major bands to perform and record something recognized as doom metal, rather than proto-doom, are Saint Vitus (Los Angeles), Trouble (Aurora, Illinois), Candlemass (Stockholm), and Witchfinder General (Stourbridge, England). All four released their debut albums between 1982 and 1986 and, amazingly, the first three are still active in some form, with Witchfinder General having reunited briefly in 2006 after a 22-year hiatus. All four make extensive use of tritones and minor seconds in harmonically stable structures, distorted and downtuned guitars through powerful amplification, and a manner of playing that deemphasizes attacks. Their vocalists, much like Bobby Liebling, typically sing in a clean style without much "grit," the rasp

or strain that is often present in aggressive vocal performance. They sit in what sound like comfortable ranges, even as they are clearly pushing to create volume and projection. The exception is Eric Wagner of Trouble, whose voice tends to distort from straining to sustain its high melodies and thus fits more in line with what was, in the early 80s, the emerging preference in heavy metal (and the other nascent strains of extreme metal) for gritty vocals.

The Experience of Time in Doom Metal

Interestingly, the drum patterns employed by these early doom bands are decidedly more complex than those in the proto-doom of Pentagram. There are far more subdivisions and syncopations (while still not approaching a polyrhythmic complexity) in repeated patterns, and there are many more fills that are much more active, in the sense of fitting more notes into rhythmic spaces. While a greater temporal density alone contributes a sensation of movement and drive that is not present in Pentagram, these bands compensated by slowing down considerably. Where Pentagram's music tends to move along at about 90-100 bpm, most of Candlemass' 1986 debut album, for example, crawls at between 60 and 70 bpm. There is, therefore, a tension between the apparent fastness of the drumming and the slowness of the overall texture that informs much of the subgenre. In short, there is a sense that, no matter how quickly certain elements move, doom will *always* be experienced as slow.

Doom metal is not alone in the larger metal family in having this tension between tempi that can be measured as bpm or notes per beat and the speed, as a perceptual phenomenon, that is felt based on the resulting sound and texture. This is readily apparent, for example, in death metal, one of the subgenres that embraces fastness as a defining feature. Death metal is most recognizable for both its extensive use of tremolo guitar playing and "blast beat" drumming, a technique involving a steady stream of sixteenth-notes, typically on the kick drum, and its abrupt tempo and meter changes that break songs into distinct chunks rather than coherently related sections as in most popular music. But the fastness of the tremolos and blast beats confuses the perception of speed. Sixteenth-notes played at 60 bpm are easily traceable as discreet events. At 150 bpm, on the slow end of the death metal spectrum, sixteenth-notes fly by at a rate of ten per second and blur together into a stream of attacks. They are still perceptible as fast, but more so qualitatively than quantitatively. That is, they collectively become an event to be *felt* as fast, rather than individual events to be *measured* as such.

Ronald Bogue addresses this tension in death metal between objective fastness and perceptual speed by referring to the concepts of Chronos and Aion (Bogue 2004). As defined by Gilles Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, Chronos refers to a metered time as measured by a clock, "the regulated movement" of the present, while Aion is a time without direction, the "pure empty form of time" without any sense of the present (Deleuze 2004, 187, 189). Both are at work simultaneously in most music—Chronos

is effectively the time kept by a metronome, while Aion is, more loosely, the emptiness of duration, an endless past and future without rational measure. Bogue argues that in death metal, because of the shift from quantitative to qualitative fastness, we experience the streams of blast beats and tremolos as Aion, free and directionless time that *feels* fast but without any real measure or orientation (Bogue 2004, 105). Chronos is overloaded by the sheer quantity of notes, unable to function as it would at slower tempi. Instead he claims that we feel Chronos more at the structural level, owing to death metal's abrupt section changes, in what he calls the "hyper-Chronos." But we do not somehow perceive death metal to plod along at the rate of its structural progression, as this would be glacially slow. What seems to get lost in this description is that there is a temporal experience of death metal, and indeed all styles of metal, between tempo and structural changes. A useful mechanism for discussing this, absent from the metal literature, is the notion of groove.

The Groove of Doom

Referenced most frequently in the discussion of African and African-derived musics, groove is simultaneously an immediately intuitive and objectively elusive concept. It has long served as a core component in the parlance of musicians when referring to what Richard Middleton calls "the characteristic rhythmic 'feel' of a piece": "this is a good groove," "what a groovy song," "I can really get into this groove" (Middleton 1999a, 143). Loose and contingent on context, the term has

several different meanings that are somehow perfectly obvious to insiders describing a familiar practice.

Since the late 1980s, scholars, particularly in ethnomusicology, have taken an interest in theorizing groove. Crucially, though, these definitions have remained purposefully vague in order to preserve the fluidity of the vernacular usage (and thus avoid colonizing the discourse). As Vijay Iyer argues, "the concept of groove seem[s] to have no analogue in rational language" (Iyer 2002, 388). Charles Keil and Steven Feld, for example, insist on maintaining a certain looseness:

> To groove, to cycle, to draw you in and work on you, to repeat with variation…That repetition and redundancy, which to most people is a bore, is music's glory. That's where a groove comes from…When we say 'It grooves,' we're also saying there's something that's regular and somewhat sustainable, identifiable and repeatable. 'Grooves' are a process, and it's the music that grooves. (Keil and Feld 1994, 23)

Groove is a sensation that, for Keil and Feld, is based on "the changing same," slight variation to a core idea as it is repeated. This core idea generally consists of a series of rhythmic syncopations, or as Berger writes, "a pattern of accents and timbres that is layered on top of the time signature" (Berger 1999, 98). Middleton sees this as a potential basis for an entire piece of music, with groove being "a feel created by a repeating framework within which variation can then take place" (Middleton 1999a, 143).

Keil provides a somewhat more pointed, yet still rather loose, clarification of groove by defining it as the play between meter and rhythm (Keil 1994). Keil's major aim in theorizing groove is to respond to what he sees as a lack in Leonard Meyer's

Emotion and Meaning in Music. In that work, Meyer attempts to analyze the musical experience, derived wholly from Western art music, as trading exclusively in syntactic forms and structures, which are in turn heavily dependent on harmonic or melodic progressions. Keil finds this to be entirely lacking when applied to musics outside the Western art tradition, as Meyer attempts to do. The major concern is the relevance of a syntactic understanding to musics that deemphasize form and structure. If, as Meyer argues, form and expression are intimately connected, what is the fate of expression when the importance of form is downplayed?

Groove is thus used to account for an alternative source of "drive" in music that is not governed by teleological forms. Keil argues that jazz (which in his essay is located primarily in the 1950s and 60s tradition exemplified by Thelonius Monk and Miles Davis, among others), in a dialectical relationship to European art music, is still teleological in that it is characterized by a sense of propulsion forward in time, yet it finds its propulsion in the tension between a steady pulse and a rhythmic practice that typically emphasizes moments *just off* from that pulse. He provides examples of two distinct approaches to groove in jazz: that of being largely on the beat but using that on-ness to throw the syncopations between beats into stark relief (as in the playing of Kenny Clarke and Roy Haynes), and that of consistently being slightly off the beats in such a way that the meter is tugged at in different directions (played by Art Blakey and Pete LaRoca). These tensions both generate motion directed forward in time and provide a stream into and around which other musical elements can fit. The metaphor

of groove as a stream is extremely useful for Keil, as he uses it against the architectonic notion of Western music as a structure with form supporting harmony, melody, embellishment, and so on upward.

But also tied up in the vernacular usage of groove is an ease of bodily entrainment, or the idea that one can easily move along with the groove, that is highly dependent on repetition and cyclicity. This sense of the term is employed frequently in studies of musical perception. Iyer, discussing embodied music perception, describes the response to groove as "clearly involv[ing] regular, rhythmic bodily movement as a kind of sympathetic reaction to regular rhythmic sound" (Iyer 2002, 392). Guy Madison, in a clinical study analyzing the potential for groove-based entrainment in various kinds of music, writes about the "quality of music that makes people tap their feet, rock their head, and get up and dance" (Madison 2006, 201). Bodily entrainment is combined with the ethnomusicological focus on repetition in Jeff Pressing's study, in which he attempts to quantitatively define groove as being characterized by recurring pulses, the perception of an identifiable temporal cycle, and "effectiveness in engaging synchronizing body responses" (Pressing 2002). This particular sense of groove is extremely important in the function of popular musics that depend on cyclically repeating rhythmic patterns to "lock" listeners into a bodily response. This form of groove functions even in musics that avoid the rhythmic looseness or "changing same" described above, such as the impeccably precise music of James Brown or even the electronically sequenced music of Kraftwerk. These

examples are able to entrain bodies into repetitive movement based primarily on their cyclical and repetitive organization.

Groove, as it has been theorized to this point in both ethnomusicology and music perception studies, thus comprises three interrelated yet distinct phenomena (though it is not dependent on the presence of all three): groove as the tension between a steady pulse or tempo and a rhythmic practice that pushes and pulls against it; groove as large-scale repetition with slight variation that acts as a guiding principle—a source of organization and propulsion—for a piece of music (whether alone or in concert with something like form or harmonic progression); and groove as the ability of music to entrain the body into a synchronous physical response with a cyclically recurring pulse. To this last point about bodily entrainment I would add an emphasis on Keil's metaphor of the stream. Just as a stream is able to carry weight in a direction that is ostensibly "forward" without having a definite end in sight, a groove is capable of carrying a listener—hence the feeling of being *in* a groove—forward through time but without an explicit goal. Whatever goal there is in a groove is simply ahead of the current position. And to continue the metaphor, a stream is not a raging river. Its flow is undeniable and persistent but relaxed and situated. Similarly, a groove is a comfortable, enveloping phenomenon that pushes one forward gently yet incessantly. I believe that this is ultimately the most significant component of groove, the culmination of the tensions and cycles discussed above.

That the first of these two phenomena are present in metal should not be particularly surprising; many, or even most, forms of popular music frequently feature either syncopated or intentionally imperfect rhythmic performances and are based on repetitive rhythmic motives. Walser hints at the possibility of groove in metal by positioning rhythm as an organizing principle, at least on a small scale: "Although most metal is in 4/4 time, the rhythmic framework is organized more basically around a pulse than a meter…Larger metrical patterns, usually two measures or four, function like harmonic progressions in indicating short-term goals" (Walser 1993, 49). It is the third sense of groove, though, the engagement of the body, that tends to be missing, or even explicitly denied, in the literature. Again Walser, in an indicative passage: "Metal's relatively rigid sense of the body…reflect[s] European-American transformation of African-American musical materials and cultural values" (ibid., 17). Here, Walser both argues that metal's engagement with the body is limited and connects this limitation to its European-ness, with the implication that an African-ness would mean something opposite.

To be sure, this oppositeness of bodily response in white and black musics is something of a common trope. Its basis is quite nicely summed up in Theo Cateforis' article contextualizing avant-pop band Devo in the dance music culture of the late 70s. Writing about "the robot," a rigid and highly controlled dance popular among white audiences, Cateforis claims that "the self-denial, the self-control required to avert the physicality of other dancing"—such as those dances popular with black audiences

—"underscored the cultural construction of the audience's whiteness" (Cateforis 2004, 568). This claim is based on the assertion of Richard Dyer that the "triumph of mind over matter" constitutes a white cultural ideal, that "white European and American cultures for centuries have had extremely uncomfortable relationships with their bodies" (ibid.). But regardless of the level of bodily comfort held by an audience and the communication of this comfort through movement and dance, the notion that the dances of white audiences are somehow lesser—"relatively rigid," as Walser writes—has sedimented into the popular, and academic, mindset.

It is never stated why, exactly, forms of dance like headbanging and moshing/slamdancing are to be taken as "rigid," other than the implicit invocation of "whiteness." All of the major works on metal address the occurrence of these movements during musical engagement, though generally in a dismissive or accusatory tone (headbanging is "vigorous nodding" (Walser 1993, 180), moshing is "intense and violent physical activity" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 44)). But headbanging is not simply vigorous nodding; it requires the use of the full body. Nor is moshing simply intense and violent physical activity; rather it constitutes a complex and nuanced social event, as demonstrated recently by Gabrielle Riches (Riches 2011). Standing rigidly and only moving the neck back and forth continuously is painful, but also represents a rather weak engagement with the music. It is frequently the case that headbangers will stand with feet at least shoulder-width apart, knees somewhat bent, with one foot slightly forward as if to indicate a potential lunge. The back will be

slightly arched, with arms in some display of effort—sometimes down by the sides, sometimes in the air, but generally with some amount of muscular tension. And still the head does not simply pivot on the neck; the entire body undulates back and forth, up and down, to propel the head (and often long hair) through space in a spectacular display.

While it is generally acknowledged that headbanging represents an engagement with musical time, it seems to fall short of being considered a genuine embodied response. There is virtually no attention paid to it as a reflection of experienced musical time—it is simply taken as mirroring the meter. But this ignores the plainly observable phenomenon of metalheads immediately shifting their headbanging to changes in rhythmic feel over the course of a song. If the drums go into a half-time feel, so do heads. If the last 4/4 measure in a four-bar phrase is accented in a 3+3+2 feel, the banging of heads will change to match it. Headbanging is not simply an automatic motoric response to meter that is initiated like a metronome. It is a sensitive and reactive embodied response to musical feel, reflecting both that headbanging is more than simple nodding, and that metal relies on potentially shifting temporal experiences beyond basic meter.

It must be said that moshing and slamdancing, while not as immediately sensitive to changes in tempo as headbanging, are highly dependent on the speed of music to function. Or, more directly, moshing needs *faster* music than doom metal generally provides. This is not simply a matter of genre-based expectations or

accepted norms. I have witnessed several instances of a crowd attempting to mosh to doom metal but being entirely unable to sustain the energy needed for the dance based on the music being played. In one particular instance, the audience at a performance by Mastodon, a popular sludge doom band (this style is explained later in the chapter), was intent on slamdancing. Several attempts were made to start up the dance, with people moving in circular patterns and pushing each other playfully. Each time, though, the dancers lost their momentum within a minute or so and resorted to headbanging. The tempo was simply too slow for the dance, and thus slamdancing was impossible.

To be sure, headbanging and slamdancing are outside the notions of dance that are immediately called to mind by the term "dance music." That category of practice is typically framed as sexually oriented, gendered as female and racialized as non-white (Gilbert and Pearson 1999). But it is clear that headbanging and slamdancing represent embodied and sensitive responses to musical experience—they represent an audience feeling and physically marking the groove. Even outside of the live performance context, listeners will tap their toes, bob their heads (in a smaller-scale version of headbanging) and otherwise allow their bodies to move with the music. The other two phenomena of groove—a tension between pulse and meter and the repeating same—are similarly central to the music of doom metal and are readily demonstrated with a musical example.

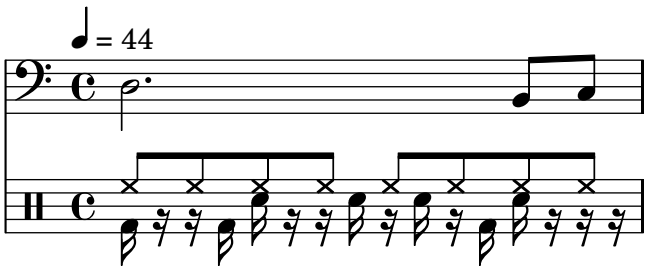


Figure 2.4: Basic groove pattern of "The Psychopath"

Saint Vitus' "The Psychopath" (from their 1984 debut recording) is a highly repetitive song featuring multiple layers of rhythmic activity that vary over time. The drums work in two layers, with the snare and bass drum outlining a very slow (44 bpm) syncopated line and the cymbal keeping a steady pulse at twice that rate, as illustrated in Figure 2.4. The snare and bass drum are constantly felt as somewhat behind the beat, which of course is only really noticeable because of the cymbal. Were the cymbal absent, it seems unlikely that the tempo could be reliably and accurately tracked. Indeed, the tempo here is so slow and the beats so far apart that one feels a sense of constantly leaning in or falling forward, anticipating the next beat that never arrives quite soon enough. The lack of articulation on the third beat by either the snare or bass drum momentarily frustrates this anticipation, further demanding an intervention on the part of the listener as though some kind of bodily response is required to fill in what is suddenly lacking in the music. Aside from this moment, though, the drums—particularly the cymbal—fill in the massive spaces of the beats and help to satisfy the tension created not only by the slow tempo but also by

the irregular—or inaccurate—rhythmic articulations. Yet the guitar and bass melody complicates and counteracts these tensions by moving very slowly, with its first note lasting for about four seconds. This extremely long note serves to build anticipation for the fourth beat, in which the melodic line finally moves more rapidly, though only in a push to restart the cycle. The anticipation central to this melody works with and against the propulsion of the drum rhythm to create a further tension between pushing ahead and pulling back.

This tension between multiple layers of potential tempi is a frequent feature of doom, and is typically tempered in much the same way: fast guitar means slow drums; fast drums means slow guitar; fast vocals means slow band. It is interesting, though, that in heavy metal and other faster styles, the occurrence of a half-time feel in one instrument greatly alters the resulting groove. This is readily apparent in live performances as heads might suddenly bang half as fast. But in doom, one instrument moving more quickly than the groove tends not to disrupt it. There is a sense that doom is slow and will always be slow. This is likely a result of the combination of generally slow playing with an overall low pitch space, dark timbre and disregard for precise attacks—namely, its heaviness. More to the point, groove in doom metal functions in an affective capacity and contributes directly to this heaviness. Doom metal simply would not be as heavy, as crushing, as enveloping without groove.

As Keil points out in his exploration of the concept of groove, the mere presence of a groove is not in and of itself remarkable. The significance of groove as

an analytic concept arises in situations in which it serves as a guiding principle of a piece of music. Keil argues that this is, in fact, largely absent in Western musics, at least when they are understood primarily in terms of syntactic structure, harmonic progression and other large-scale concepts. Grooves guide music by establishing streams of motion into and around which various pieces fit together. In the Saint Vitus example, the groove solidifies the entire song by acting as a "changing same" and using the massive spaces of slow beats to create a forward-directed anticipation. The core rhythmic cell repeats throughout with small variations—an extra note on the kick drum to provide an additional ounce of propulsion to a snare drum hit, or a string of sixteenth notes replacing the eighth notes in the melody to drive more urgently to the downbeat. Complementing this, there are recurring events outside of the groove, such as the descent of the melodic line to outline what might be called a i-♭VII-♭VI-v-i progression. But these happen rather unpredictably, and as such can hardly be said to provide a sense of propulsion to the entire song. The one constant, the thing that keeps moving the song ahead in time, is the groove. It creates a stream in which the music is both highly situated and gently pushed along, forward but without any particular aim.

If this slow groove—as the small-scale tension inside each measure, the large-scale repetition of a slightly varied core idea and the constantly moving stream of anticipation—is to be taken as a primary principle of doom metal, it should not be a surprise that structure is, if not explicitly deemphasized, then at least less important

than in other genres of popular music. Standard verse/chorus forms, for example, are particularly rare in doom metal. Instead, doom songs are frequently built out of chunks that may or not repeat, and these repetitions may or may not be regular or predictable. And even if some amount of regularity is present, the pace of doom metal makes the perception of measured recurrence difficult. With songs usually lasting longer than five minutes, frequently eight or more, and fairly commonly over ten, keeping track of the repetitions of particular sections across an entire structure is tedious and perhaps even insignificant for listeners. Some doom styles even make this insignificance explicit, with songs that are most accurately described as formless expanses of sound without any sense of return or repetition. But even without going to this extreme, doom metal in general deemphasizes structural syntax and instead allows groove to propel it forward, however slowly.

The Fragmentation of Doom

It is fairly remarkable that doom metal survived the 1980s, given the unrelenting drive toward fastness that governed most of the metal universe. That decade saw the coalescence and development of thrash metal, death metal, black metal, power metal and grindcore, along with myriad combinations and cross-fertilizations of their salient features. All of those subgenres and their assorted styles share a push to play faster than the heavy metal that had come before them, sometimes, as discussed by Bogue above, even to the point where fastness becomes

superfluous. It seems that the doom scene collectively bided its time, waiting until the late 80s and early 90s to emerge as a viable and productive environment for new styles. At this point the metal world was ready, after a decade of transcendent fastness, to be crushed by the heaviness of doom. The first few years of the 90s saw the release of numerous recordings in myriad styles of doom. In what follows, I offer an overview of these offshoots, which collectively comprise the majority of doom metal practice and thus provide a comprehensive sense of the subgenre's variety. I do not attempt to establish a familial chronology here, as the styles developed more or less simultaneously and as such are more coherently legible as distinct trajectories than as one constant stream of activity.

One of the most significant styles of doom, even to the point where it might be considered a fully parallel subgenre alongside doom, is stoner doom, often simply called stoner metal. This style developed largely concurrently with the rest of doom, reaching back to the late 60s. Where doom metal takes the work of Black Sabbath as its cornerstone, stoner metal looks to bands like Blue Cheer, whose output straddles the line between early heavy metal and psychedelic rock. Thematically, stoner doom eschews the morbidness and darkness of other doom styles (this will be addressed at length in the next chapter), instead engaging with issues around drug use. Musically, it follows doom's embrace of slow tempos and simplified riffs, though, in a nod to its psychedelic roots, its melodies tend to incorporate blues-based features without the preponderance of minor seconds and tritones common in doom. Stoner doom was

propelled into the 90s by California bands Kyuss (of Palm Desert) and Sleep (from San Jose). The latter's final album, *Dopesmoker*, comprising only one song, truly capture the essence of stoner doom. The lyrics begin "Drop out of life with bong in hand / Follow the smoke toward the riff-filled land" (over about 45 seconds) and go on to describe the trek of the "Weedians" through the desert to Nazareth. The song lasts for 63 minutes, and in that time remains firmly planted in a C-minor tonality. It chugs along with a constant pulse at around 100 bpm, but tends to be felt as a much slower groove, either 50 when in duple meter or a suffocating 33 in triple. This is accomplished primarily through the incessant slowness of the guitar melody, which almost never moves at the faster pulse. The guitar's slowness then encourages a sort of qualitative slowness, as even the full 100 bpm pulse feels somehow slower than it should.

Few of the assorted doom styles can match *Dopesmoker*'s 63-minute length, but drone doom comes the closest, with songs frequently clocking in at around 15-20 minutes.[3] Drone doom is most closely associated with two bands from Seattle: Earth (an homage to Black Sabbath's original name) and Sunn O))) (an homage to Earth and the Sunn amplifier brand),[4] with both bands being heavily influenced by Melvins, from nearby Montesano, a hardcore punk band that played more and more slowly through the 80s, and the 1960s drone music of composers such as LaMonte Young.

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[3] During the writing of this dissertation, drone doom band Sabazius released an 11 hour track, "The Descent of Man," on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrmBnN7aQ9s).

[4] It is simply pronounced "sun" and generally written "Sunn." Sunn O))) is a typographic representation of the logo for the Sunn brand.

Sunn in particular stretches the features of doom metal to their extremes: drums are done away with almost entirely (typically appearing only on collaborative projects), vocals are used purely as atmospheric texture when present at all, and the guitars are frequently tuned all the way down to A. The result is a dense and gut-wrenching mush of distorted guitar played at extreme volumes, to the point where the music becomes more about physicality and the bodily experience of sound than anything else. Melodies dissolve into wandering sequences of pitches that are at times difficult to distinguish precisely because the sound is so muddy and overloaded. Harmonic sequences become difficult to track, as the sheer amount of time taken to move through them renders any note a potential landing point. There are definite gravitational centers to the tonal space, but whether one is the same as the last is insignificant. Disorientation is key: giving up on listening for the standard (Western) constructs of music frees one to bathe, or perhaps drown, in the smothering drones.

Epic doom, though its name seems apt to describe something along the lines of the expansiveness of drone doom, evokes more of a grand and heroic sort of epic quality than an extensive and massive one. It remains slow, of course, but not to the extremes of drone doom. It comes fairly directly out of the work of Candlemass (whose debut album is even called *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*), treating this early style as a scaffold on which to build a more epic sound. Guitar riffs are often kept simple as in early doom, but just as often employ the virtuosic flash of heavy metal and rise high above the rest of the texture. Similarly, drum patterns split their time

between straight-ahead simplicity and highly active driving lines. The style of singing common to epic doom is frequently marked as its biggest differentiator against the rest of the doom nebula. Rather than fitting in with the rest of the texture as most doom vocals do, epic doom vocals soar above the fray. They are delivered cleanly and with a powerful vibrato, similar to much of the vocals in 80s heavy and glam metal, in what might be called an almost operatic quality.

With this marker of epic doom stripped away, though, a band is likely to be referred to as traditional doom. This moniker emerged purely in response to the development of the various styles, even though traditional doom usually incorporates certain virtuosic or progressive characteristics that are mostly lacking from the doom of the 80s. There tend to be thematic differences between epic and traditional doom, but again they are very similar sonically, save for the distinct vocal style of epic doom.

Where traditional doom finds musicians reaching back to an imagined uniformity of style to counteract an explosion of variation, sludge doom (or sludge metal) was consciously created out of a mixture of styles and influences. Sludge developed primarily in New Orleans (NOLA) out of the introduction of the slower music of Melvins and late Black Flag to the local hardcore punk and thrash metal scene, which itself had been influenced by the blues-based style of southern rock. As told by Phil Anselmo, singer of thrash metal band Pantera, the slowness of these recordings encouraged musicians in the scene to experiment with slowing down themselves. This, in turn, led to an exploration of the back catalogue of doom: “With

that, all the old Black Sabbath came back around and then you start digging and you come to your Saint Vitus, your Witchfinder General, your Pentagram, etc" (Bennett 2009, 268). The result is a combination of the aggressiveness, particularly in the vocals, and structural variability of hardcore punk and thrash metal (in their juxtapositions of fast and slow or fast and faster) with the laidbackness, downtuned guitars, modal riffing and overall darkness and heaviness of doom metal.

Sludge doom is perhaps best exemplified by NOLA stalwarts Eyehategod, who began playing in 1988. Their album *Dopesick* encapsulates many of the salient features of the style. The opening track, "Dixie Whiskey," begins with a riff that could very well be written by Tony Iommi, but through thicker distortion and with greater low end amplification. The drums alternate between comfortable grooves reminiscent of Pentagram and driving fills, with the syncopation and rapid changes in metric feel (moving in and out of half-time, for instance) common to hardcore and thrash. But perhaps the most obviously different aspect of sludge, and particularly Eyehategod, is the vocal style. Frontman Mike Williams delivers his lyrics in a painful-sounding cross between screaming and grunting, stretching out his vowels into throat-splitting sounds. Listening to this delivery seems to demand some amount of empathetic engagement with Williams, and particularly his vocal cords. More specifically, one is confronted with the sensation of his voice tearing down the middle, his vocal cords transformed from wondrously functional mechanism into strips of raw flesh flapping against his desperate breath. It is a sound that is truly *filthy*, a monstrous emanation

from the dark and disgusting swamp of distorted guitar and pounding drums. As Keith Sierra, drummer of fellow NOLA band haarp, told me, "it's [like] drowning in tar" (personal email correspondence with the author, 8 October 2012).

Death/Doom

Like sludge doom, death/doom represents a self-conscious attempt to fuse the salient features of multiple subgenres. Texturally it is similar to sludge in that it combines the slow tempos of doom with a typically more aggressive vocal style. The two are separated, though, by the (admittedly sometimes small) distinctions between the thrash that informs sludge and the death metal in death/doom. Where the NOLA strain of sludge frequently includes bluesy melodic passages, death metal is almost entirely free of direct references to the blues. Death/doom, by extension, privileges modal riffs over blues riffs, emphasizing the minor second and tritone as destinations rather than inflections. The structures used in death/doom are like those in sludge in that they emphasize rhythmic and metric differences between sections. But death's structural sections tend to be far less related to one another than those in hardcore and thrash. Moving from one section to the next might entail a new tempo, a new metric feel, and radically different melodic material all at once. More often than not a song feels like a series of blocks glued together without a unified, coherent thread running through them. Vocals are similar to those in thrash and sludge, emphasizing the sounds of pain and straining, but tend to be pushed back in the overall texture, such

that precise articulation is deemphasized, and to the extremes of the pitch space, up into shrieking and down into growling.

The amalgam of death/doom privileges doom's heaviness over death's technicality. Songs are, above all else, crushingly heavy. An example of this is "Blood Rituals" by Ilsa, from Washington, DC, released in 2010 on their album *Tutti Il Colori Del Buio*. At a little over six minutes in length, "Blood Rituals" is somewhat long by death/doom standards but relatively short in the larger doom context. It readily illustrates the mixture of death and doom, with several other influences discernible in the extremely dense sonic texture. Ilsa, first envisioned as a punk/metal band, emerged from a black/thrash metal band that itself was originally a studio-based black metal project. Each member brings personal histories and preferences both from outside of doom metal, notably hardcore punk (which has a rich history in the DC area), and from among doom's various styles. Orion, the group's vocalist, notes their affinity for "dirtier bands" as opposed to the cleaner sounds of traditional and epic doom. He points to Coffins (a Japanese death/doom band), Pentagram (who have been active around DC for several decades), Black Sabbath, Candlemass, Earth, Sunn and sludge bands like Eyehategod.

Like many other lead tracks on extreme metal albums, "Blood Rituals" opens with high, piercing guitar feedback. This initial sound is joined by another layer of feedback one half-step lower, creating a din that threatens to tear the auditory mechanism in half until seven massive hits—guitar, bass and drums at once—drop the

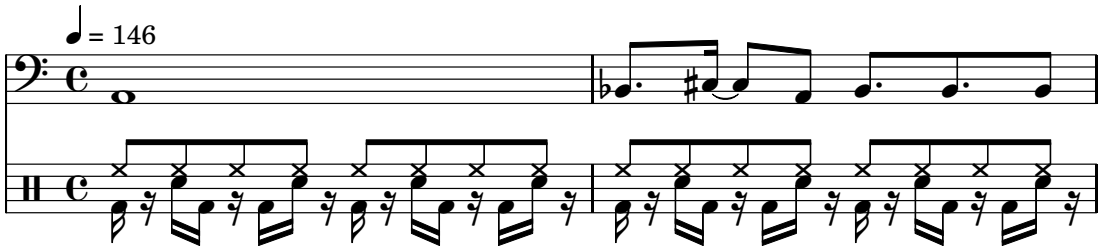


Figure 2.5: Opening riff of "Blood Rituals" with accompanying d-beat (0:23-1:15)

texture down to a stomach-churning low A (an extreme downtuning). This A is held as a drone for what feels like an uncomfortably long time, to the point where the listener might expect the drone doom of Sunn had it not been for those driving hits a moment earlier. After about seven seconds the drums launch into a beat that is jarringly fast—about 146 bpm. The rest of the band soon joins in with the riff that grounds the first structural section of the song, a simple alternation of a long A (or a series of articulations of A—the guitar and bass are so distorted that, while pitch is fairly discernible, articulation without pitch change is difficult to distinguish) and a turn, albeit with a minor and an augmented second, to B♭ (see Figure 2.5). The result is a rocking undulation between A and B♭, establishing A as the tonal center and setting up expectations for a harmonic language rife with minor seconds. The B♭ here functions much as a dominant V would in a tonal context, as a move away from the center but with a built-in desire to return. The rhythmic repetition of the B♭ (as dotted-eighth–dotted-eighth–eighth, or "almost triplets") also draws us back, momentarily, to the opening hits which are now retroactively felt as triplets in this tempo. This short sequence is played through four times, with this larger grouping

occurring four times (a total of sixteen statements). On the second and fourth groupings, the riff is complicated by the guitar playing the turn an octave higher in the first measure. This speeds up the sense of undulation, both from the more frequent repetition of the A-B♭-A movement and the jumps in pitch height.

Grounding this riff is a drum beat that is typically referred to as the d-beat, popularized by late-70s punk band Discharge. D-beat has come to serve as the name for an entire style of hardcore punk that both is stylistically inspired by Discharge and utilizes the d-beat. As a drum pattern, it is motoric and propulsive and, particularly at faster tempi, its syncopation leads to a feeling of constantly falling forward into the next downbeat. Unlike the grooves discussed above, this insistent beat is almost impossible to feel at half-speed despite being paired with an a slowly moving guitar riff. It is simply too fast and thus overcomes the heaviness of the surrounding texture.

This section also features the introduction of the vocals, which are delivered in a shout that is extremely forceful and strained at the same time. The result is a sound that, like that achieved by Mike Williams of Eyehategod, tears down the middle of the vocal cords and explodes outward into a guttural rumble and upward into something approaching pure white noise. It is an extremely rich timbre that covers a wide spectral range, and at times feels more like a highly distorted instrumental sound than a voice. But when perceived directly as the product of someone's vocal apparatus and the listener empathizes with that apparatus, it provokes an intense sensation of
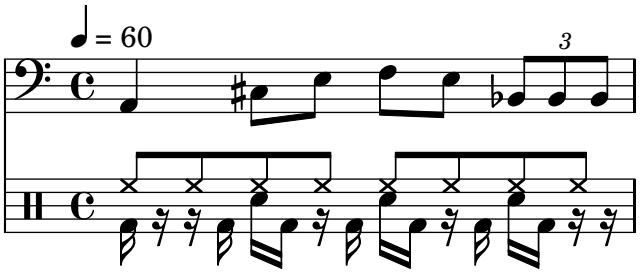


Figure 2.6: Second section of "Blood Rituals" (1:31-2:06)

pain. The singer, Orion, told me that it is not his intention to hurt the listener or make his delivery *about* pain, but that Ilsa's goal in performance is "to drain and paralyze [the audience] as they share our experience" (personal email correspondence with the author, 29 September 2012). But it is impossible to ignore that it is a painful way to sing ("I've luckily never lost my voice…to scream for more than twenty minutes is hard for me!"), and thus a listener sharing the experience is bound to empathize with that pain to some degree.

The tumbling, off-kilter fastness of the d-beat is ultimately unsustainable, as after the sixteenth times through this pattern the song disintegrates back into a drone on A. The pattern *attempts* to reestablish itself, though, with several groups of four hits mirroring both the tail end of the opening riff (the "almost triplets" on B♭) and the opening salvo from the beginning of the song. But the triplets are unsuccessful, slowing down markedly to set up the next section which further cuts the tempo in half, to a crushing 60 bpm. This pattern, notated in Figure 2.6, is repeated nine times, in what seem to be two major groups of five and four repetitions each. The band sets

about accomplishing the sensation of paralysis referenced by Orion in that the music really *grooves* here. The drum pattern is active enough to be physically engaging, but not enough to feel particularly directed or goal-oriented. Pickups from the kick drum to the second and third beats push through the middle of the bar, but lacking is any sense of propulsive rhythm leading to the downbeat. The converse can be said for the guitar melody, which grows more rhythmically dense though the bar and culminates in the B♭ triplet figure to drive back around to the next measure. This melody features the C♯, which earlier had been used in an augmented second against the B♭, but here it helps to outline a rising major triad. Any potential references to the affective quality of a major triad are quashed, though, by the descending F-E-B♭ figure, featuring a minor second and a tritone, which is used to drive back down by another minor second to A. These two parts combine to create a feeling of propelled stasis: the music is certainly *moving*, but without much emphasis on a destination. The only real sense of large-scale motion comes when, in the second of the large groupings of the pattern, the kick drum suddenly explodes into sixteenth notes, then thirty-second notes, then thirty-second note triplets. This last point of intensity is literally unsustainable, quickly falling apart into quick, sporadic bursts before the drums join the guitar in one last series of triplet hits. The texture once again crumbles into a drone on A, matched by a painfully long howl from the vocalist—again, split viscerally and sonically across a wide spectrum.

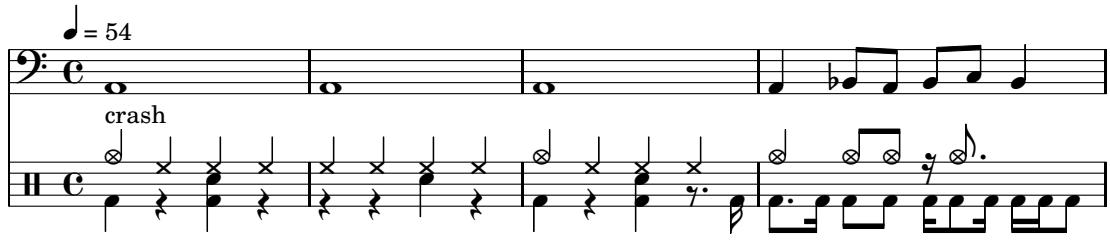


Figure 2.7: Third section of "Blood Rituals" (2:45-4:27)

The third section is the slowest of "Blood Rituals," crawling along at 54 bpm. It is made up of six repetitions of the pattern in Figure 2.7, to this point the longest pattern by far. The first three bars are largely static—the guitar simply sustains a low A, while the drums keep a very simple beat on the high hat with hits on beats 1 and 3. The only real activity occurs in the fourth bar, in which the guitar performs a simple figure oscillating around B♭ that again serves to drive back down to A in the next repetition of the cycle. Similarly, the rhythm played on the drums serves to propel the pattern forward through the bar to the following downbeat. But despite these moments of drive, the section feels paralyzing, like the previous section, but also paralyzed itself. The near lack of rhythmic activity through the first three bars, comprising about thirteen seconds, drags the song almost to a halt. This is compounded when, for the third and fourth times through the sequence, the drums abruptly drop out entirely. Their absence is jarring, opening up an uncertain void that makes even the barebones pattern they had been playing feel profoundly active. It is comforting, then, when they reenter in the bar leading to the fifth occurrence of the sequence; the texture feels grounded and stable again. Unlike the previous two

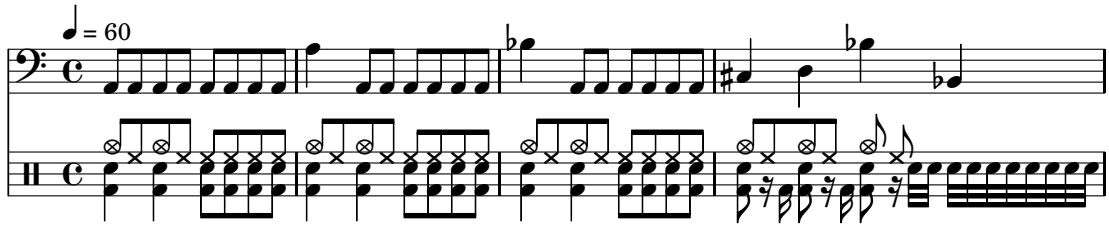


Figure 2.8: Fourth section of "Blood Rituals" (4:43-6:02)

sections, which ended by falling apart at the seams into a drone, here the band unites on an incessant articulation of eighth notes for four measures, ramping the tempo up, ever so slightly, again to 60 bpm.

The fourth and final section (Figure 2.8) finds the band as a whole at its most active, despite being less than half as fast as the opening. It is largely a variation on the previous section, with the guitar now articulating eighth notes rather than sustaining whole notes. The melody in the fourth bar, instead of a turn contained within a minor third, reintroduces the C♯, here as a leading tone to D, and leaps upward to the (comparatively) high B♭ before crashing down an octave to lead back, yet again, to the low A. The drums are significantly more active than previously, but at the same time accomplish the same effect. Despite now outlining eighth notes (and sometimes even sixteenth and thirty-second notes) instead of quarter notes, the first three bars sit comfortably without any real direction. It isn't until the fourth bar, again, that there is any sense of propulsion, as various fills (one example of which is notated here) push deliberately forward to the next downbeat. The section is played a total of five times, with the first four increasing steadily in rhythmic density in the

drums. For the final repetition, the drums abruptly return to the original eighth note articulations. The cycle crashes through to the next downbeat, at which point the song falls apart, perhaps unsurprisingly, into the low A drone. But even this proves to be unstable, as feedback rips through the dense texture and brings the track to a close.

The structural segments of "Blood Rituals" do not fit together into any coherent or logical form. Instead, they are joined together by virtue of the A-B♭-A motion common to each segment and the presence of a crushingly slow and expansive groove. The first section, marked by the quick d-beat pattern, of course does not share this groove, yet the fact that the groove is preceded by this frenetic section makes it all the more heavy by virtue of contrast. And once established, the groove locks the body of the listener into a highly repetitive stream and drives the song forward to nowhere in particular beyond the next beat. The sensation of listening is that of falling ahead in time endlessly, at least until the song simply falls apart.

Funeral Doom

Funeral doom, unlike death/doom, does not represent a conscious attempt at blending what are normally considered to be distinct metal subgenres. Instead, funeral doom is an amalgamation of some of doom's styles, borrowing heavily from death/ doom and drone doom. From the former, guitars are generally heavily distorted, sectional logic is deemphasized, and vocals are usually delivered in a forceful style like shouting or screaming; from the latter, tempi are dramatically slow (dirge-like, as

per the style's name) and textures are often drawn out to the point of being ambient or atmospheric. Funeral doom bands regularly play with genre expectations, employing keyboards and brass and string instruments, and occasionally using cleanly delivered, even spoken, vocals. While not as drawn out as most examples of drone doom, funeral doom is among the longest styles on average, with songs tending to hover between eight and fifteen minutes in length.

The style of funeral doom is well illustrated by Evoken, from Lyndhurst, New Jersey. Originally forming as Funereus in 1992, the band changed its name in 1994. Both of these names can be understood as explicit statements of stylistic identification, as the new name is also the title of a song by funeral doom pioneers Thergothon, a now-defunct Finnish band that began playing in 1989. Evoken have themselves become recognized as a significant reference for the funeral doom style, with very long songs packed into very long albums (three of which contain at least 70 minutes of music), extremely dense and varied textures, and the use of keyboards and cellos. They are also notable for their approach to timing and rhythm. Where other doom bands (and metal bands in general) are typically precise about timing such that it is possible to reliably set a metronome to many recordings, Evoken capitalizes on the inherent difficulty in becoming entrained to slow tempi and the musical tension that creates. Stated simply, Evoken's tempi sway widely over the course of a section (as, like Ilsa, they tend to change tempo from section to section), sometimes up to 10 bpm. The effect is a push and pull, sometimes barely perceptible, that unsettles whatever

cycle into which one might be entrained. This disruption, rather than weakening the physical sensation of groove, only intensifies it by drawing attention precisely to the phenomenon of entrainment. One becomes much more aware of the fact that one is moving to a beat when those beats fall at unexpected times. Movement is hurried when beats come early, and it is drawn out when beats come late. The listener is tugged at and pushed by these uneven grooves, always forward in time.

"The Mournful Refusal," from their 2005 album *The Antithesis of Light*, not only captures Evoken's idiosyncratic style but represents the tendencies of funeral doom as a whole. At 13 minutes and 30 seconds, it is the longest song on the album and one of the longest in their catalogue. It opens with a crushing low A, covered with layers of distortion, and a pulsating drum pattern at 56 bpm (though, again, Evoken's tempi are anything but precise; the tempi given here are averages) accenting beats 1, 3 and 4 (see Figure 2.9). The melodic instruments move up to a B♭, then back down to A before the riff is propelled upward an octave only to fall back down, through a downward tritone, a rising minor third and finally a downward minor sixth, to the B♭ in time to start again on the A (much like the riffs in "Blood Rituals"). This movement back around, from the final B♭ to the opening A, is emphasized by drum hits on the last two sixteenth-notes of the cycle. This section accomplishes two things: the tension between quick motion in the drums and near-stasis in the melodic instruments is established; and the intervalic content immediately contextualizes the piece not only
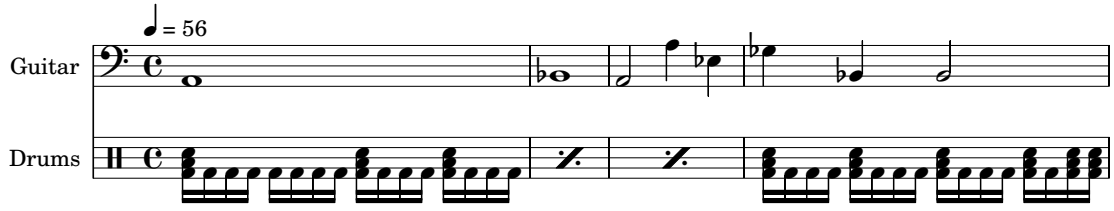


Figure 2.9: First section of "The Mournful Refusal" (0:00-0:34)
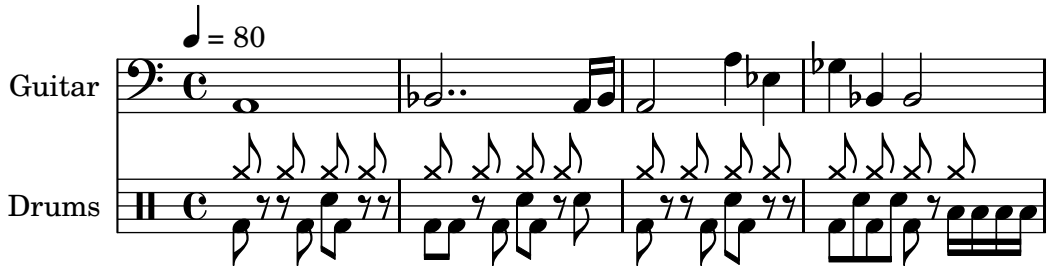


Figure 2.10: Second section of "The Mournful Refusal" (0:35-1:23)

as metal but as doom metal (beyond the I-♭II-I motion, the rising octave and falling tritone seems to reference "Black Sabbath").

This melodic material is preserved, with a small ornament added, in the second section of the song. The change here is temporal, as the tempo shifts abruptly to 80 bpm and the drums thin out to a much "groovier" pattern (see Figure 2.10). Here, the emphasis lies primarily on the snare hits on beat 3. The kick drum, on the "and"s of 2 and 3, provide play around the downbeat. The drummer uses these surrounding notes and their relationship to the snare hit to shift the feel of the third beat, forward or back in the bar or faster or slower in tempo.

This section also sees the entrance of the vocals. The style of singing here is not the splitting shout of Ilsa's vocalist. Instead, it is an extremely guttural, low sound that gives the sensation that it emanates entirely from the bottom of the singer's body. It is still distorted and largely incomprehensible, but the effect is decidedly less aggressive and more introspective, as if the intent is to uncover something buried deep within the self.

The song suddenly shifts abruptly to a radically thin texture and to a tonal center a tritone away. The guitar is played cleanly, with no distortion, over an extremely simplified drum pattern. After two iterations, the bass enters. This entrance is significant, as a distinctly noticeable bass line is somewhat rare in extreme metal. The absence of bass is certainly felt, but because it is generally used to double the playing of an already low guitar melody, it is difficult to discern as an individual musical line. The keyboard is the next instrument to enter, doubling the bass to harmonize the guitar melody with something similar to, but not quite, E♭ minor. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this harmonic line consists of two tritones a semitone apart. Here, the driving force shifts to a combination of melody and harmony. The D in the bass and keyboard, a semitone under the apparent tonic of E♭, seems to want to rise upward. The melody in the guitar creates a sensation of slowly falling forward that is never satisfied. The drums continue to push forward, but it is difficult to say that they provide a pervasive and propulsive groove. This quartet texture, shown in Figure 2.11,
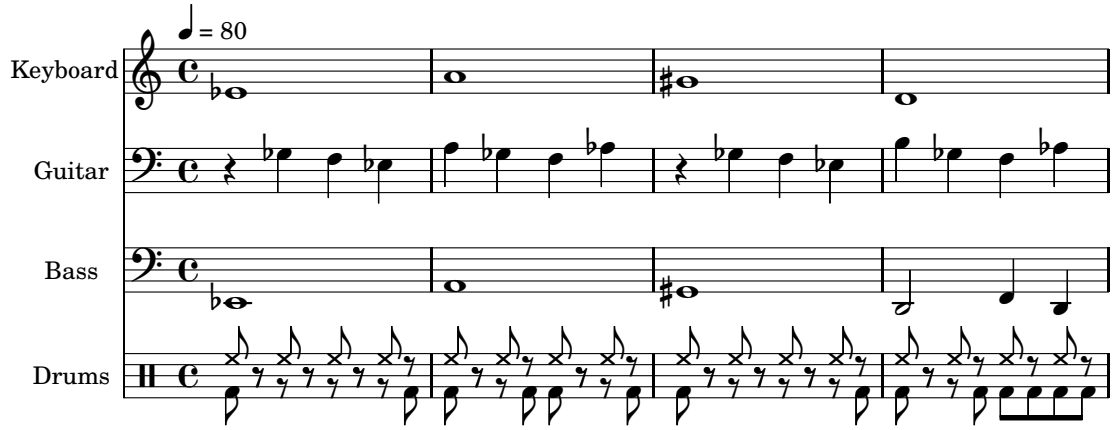


Figure 2.11: Third section of "The Mournful Refusal" (1:23-2:54)
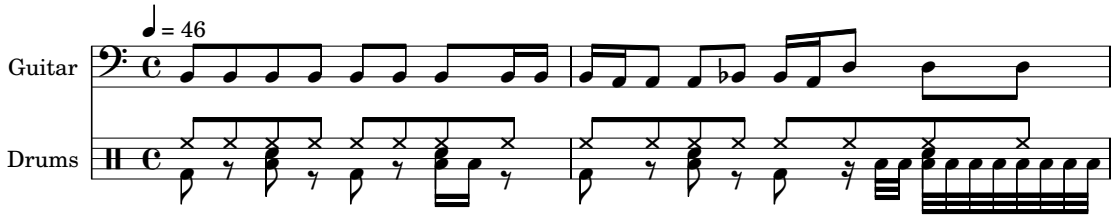


Figure 2.12: Fourth "static" section of "The Mournful Refusal" (2:54-4:04)

is slowly covered up by a meandering and distorted solo guitar line that gradually becomes noisier and louder until it overwhelms the texture entirely.

The noise of the guitar solo gives way to a section that chugs along extremely slowly, now at 46 bpm (Figure 2.12). The guitar, once again distorted, provides a driving melodic line emphasizing B, while the drums merely count the beats (save for the fill at the end of the cycle). This is by far the most static section of the song, as neither melody nor groove really provide any sense of motion. After having come from an E♭-oriented section, the B is not quite settled and the D at the end of the

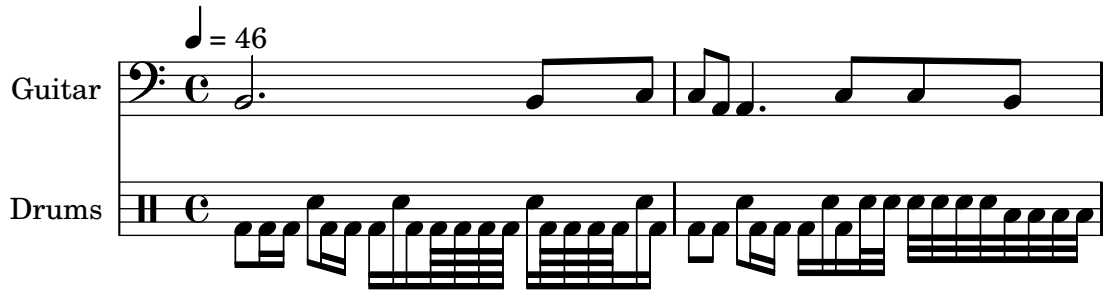


Figure 2.13: Fifth section of "The Mournful Refusal" (4:04-5:16)

melody bears no obvious relationship to the "tonic" in the way that the B♭ did to the A in the opening. The drums provide no sense of temporal play or messiness. Again, the only real motion in the drums is given by the thirty-second notes in the last beat.

The next section sees the same material exaggerated: the guitar melody is consolidated into far fewer and longer notes, and the drum pattern becomes active to the point of almost being erratic (Figure 2.13). This activity in and of itself does not necessarily generate propulsion. As in the second section, though, the use of notes in close relationship to each other, and particularly notes *around* beats, allow for a sense of temporal play and messiness that drives the music. The third and fourth beats of the first bar are notable. The initial three sixteenth notes, kick-snare-kick, provide a propulsive motion that can be altered, subtly or significantly, by the precise positioning of each note. And the streams of sixty-fourth notes, effectively tremolo upbeats to the snare hits on the downbeat and "and" of beat four, are variously delayed ever so slightly, and thus rushed, to create anticipation and anxiety or played strictly in time to generate a sense of control and rigidity. It is precisely this interplay between

anxiety and control that pushes the section forward. The absence of one negates the other, leaving the music to feel stagnant as in the previous section. After two iterations, a guitar solo enters over the texture, outlining several dissonant intervals against the lower guitar line. It grows more and more active over several iterations through the cycle, culminating in virtuosic flourishes that are rarely found in doom metal.

At the height of this complexity, the song abruptly returns to the quartet texture in of the third section for a total of four cycles. This texture is then dramatically interrupted as the song slows and a solitary guitar outlines a new semitone-based melody (Figure 2.14). The drums, with a slower and extended version of the pattern from the fifth section, join in the second measure. Here, the combination of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic motion is at its most explicit. The keyboard harmonizes with the guitar melody in major thirds, which, given the intervallic content of the rest of the song—and metal in general—sounds almost jarringly different. The introduction of harmonic tritones in the second bar (A against E♭), despite the inherent tension of that interval, relieves the tension created by the "alien" major third. The third bar of the cycle loses the tension of the semitones and tritones, but the solo guitar melody reintroduces those intervals in the fourth bar such that the last two beats of the cycle are mired in harmonic anxiety.

After this massive, effectively symphonic, section, the song revisits the opening, at a faster tempo, to reestablish the A-centric tonality. It then moves to new
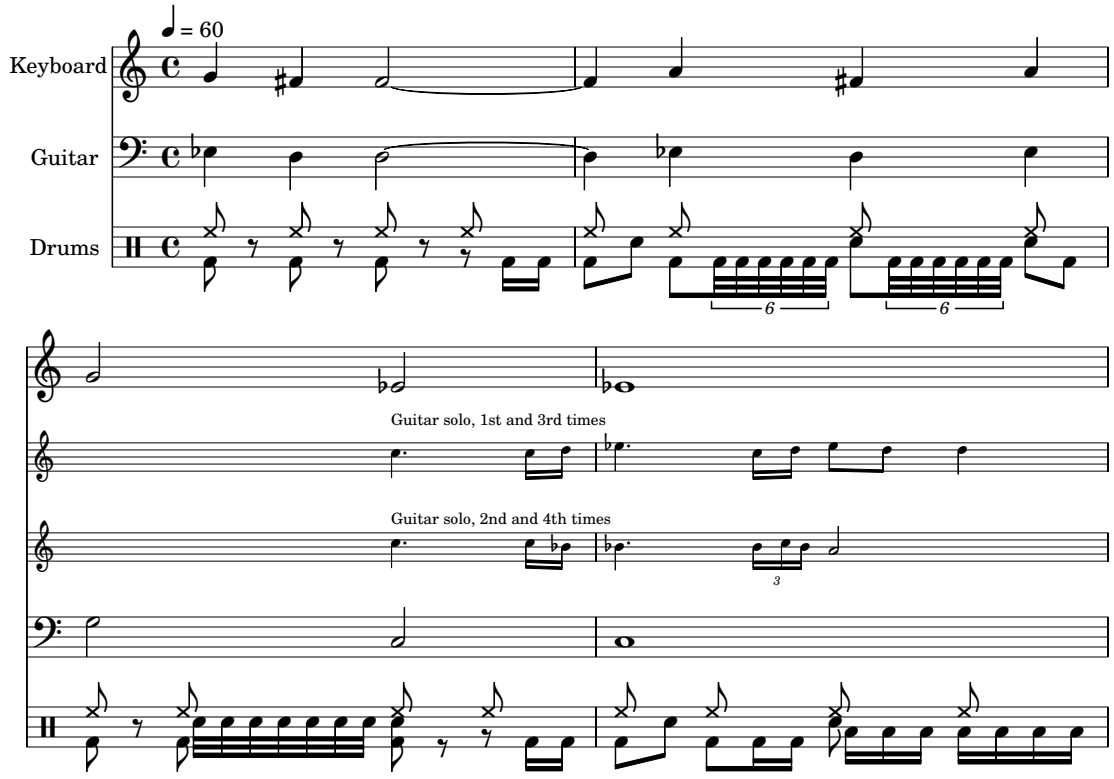


Figure 2.14: Sixth section of "The Mournful Refusal" (5:59-7:25)

material, as seen in Figure 2.15: a fairly sparse drum pattern and a guitar melody, played without distortion, outlining an A minor arpeggio. This melodic line is notable not only because it overtly creates a triadic harmonic space (with the G♯ leading tone as well) but because it is the first melody based entirely on rising motion. Whereas the opening melody features a rising octave, that motion seems to be employed specifically to emphasize the downward tritone that immediately follows it. Here, however, the melody simply rises for the sake of rising. The novelty of the section is emphasized by the vocals, which are delivered in a low, gravely whisper. The combined effect is a feeling of emptiness and vulnerability, as the ensemble is

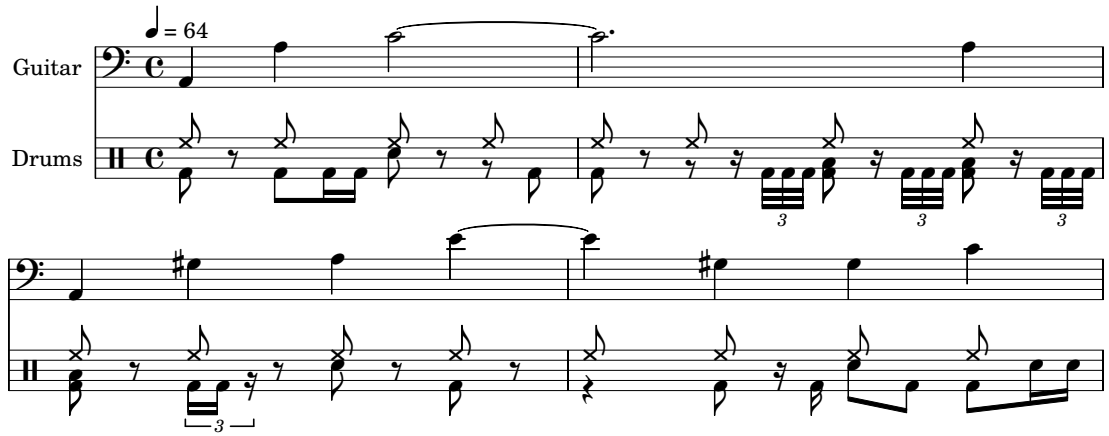


Figure 2.15: Seventh section of "The Mournful Refusal" (8:24-10:24)

suddenly profoundly exposed without the protection of distortion.

This does not last, though, as the song soon plunges down to an extremely distorted and sustained guitar line oscillating slowly between A and C♯ and a straightforward, pounding drum pattern (Figure 2.16) with assertive and raspy vocals. The solo guitar, once again, adds motion by first sustaining a B♭ against the low A and then by maintaining a moving line through the fourth bar. While not quite as static as the fourth section, the music here begins to lose momentum. The drum pattern provides some motion, notably with its syncopated rhythm in the last bar. The motion from A to C♯ and back has none of the urgency of the A-B♭ pair in the opening or any of the tritones throughout. The music sits comfortably, without any real need to move.

Confirming suspicions that the song was losing momentum, the texture falls apart completely and leaves only a piano playing a contemplative, perhaps "mournful," melody with a great deal of sustain (Figure 2.17). The left hand outlines
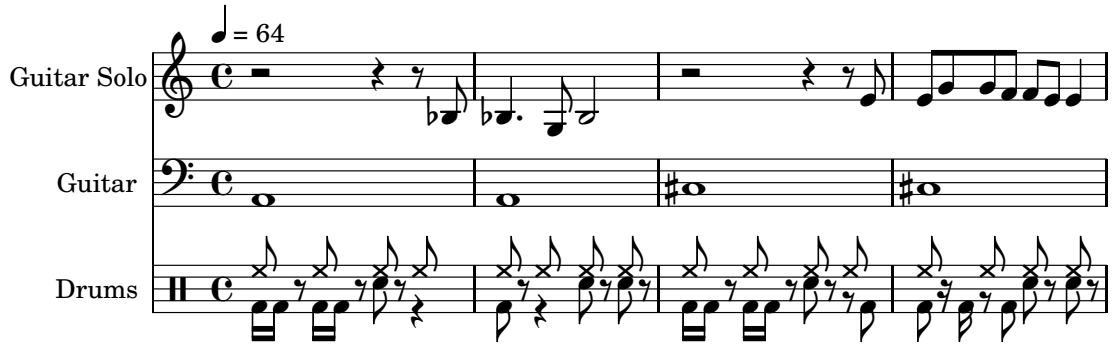


Figure 2.16: Eighth section of "The Mournful Refusal" (10:24-12:05)
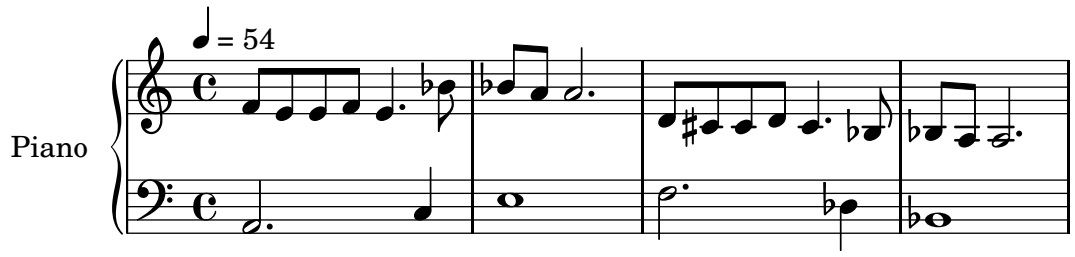


Figure 2.17: Ninth section of "The Mournful Refusal" (12:05-13:17)

two triadic harmonies, A minor and B♭ minor, in an up-and-down arc. The right hand is stuck primarily on semitones, with a tritone and an augmented second providing a dose of instability. The fourth bar of the cycle, featuring an A against a low B♭, is not as unstable as the interval would indicate. Because the B♭ is so low, the precise identity of the note seems to fall apart and yield only the general sensation of a low piano tone. The song finally, after more than thirteen minutes, comes to a close with the lowest A on the piano. Again, the note falls apart as quickly as it is played, leaving the vague impression of lowness and darkness.

Conclusion

"Blood Rituals" and "The Mournful Refusal" both rely on the centrality of a slow and constant, though not necessarily steady, groove as a primary musical feature. "Blood Rituals" employs simple melodic riffs driven by the alternation between A and B♭ in an arrangement that denies any coherent structural logic. What is left to unify the song are a consistent tonal center and a persistently present, if somewhat shifting, groove. "The Mournful Refusal" is more complex in that it explicitly deemphasizes the importance of groove at times. Both harmony and melody are used as guiding principles, generally along with groove either simultaneously or variously within a section. Structure functions in a limited capacity as it calls attention back to earlier moments, though only as a reminder and not as a sign of what is to come. But while these principles guide the song briefly, it is the groove that drives it almost throughout.

These songs also challenge the teleological orientation to climax. "Blood Rituals" becomes slower, drawn out and more deliberately situated throughout. It exhausts itself by the end of the first section, only to crawl through the next three. "The Mournful Refusal" climaxes near the middle, in the texturally rich sixth section (Figure 2.13). From there, its momentum slowly unwinds as the sources of tension—the prevalence of semitones and tritones, melodies leading to significant moments, driving grooves—thin out and leave the music progressively more relaxed. By the entrance of the piano melody at the end, it is difficult to say that there is any sense of

teleological resolution or, more radically, orientation. The song ends simply by virtue of ceasing to sound, not because it has somehow satisfied a large-scale imperative.

In denying the push to climax, "Blood Rituals" and "The Mournful Refusal" also subvert the logic of cathartic release. In the strict narrative-driven sense, as employed in the disagreement between Glenn Pillsbury and Donna Gaines about Metallica's "Fade to Black," these songs fail in that they are not based on a logic of narrative structure. The example of Metallica relies on the guitar solo, which occurs fairly reliable near the end of songs in most metal subgenres and, at least in the case of thrash metal, is highly flashy and virtuosic. (The solo is present in doom metal, as here in "The Mournful Refusal," though it is not as ubiquitous as in other subgenres. Like doom at large, it is typically less flashy or virtuosic.) As such, the end of the solo and the absorption of the guitar into the band's unified texture can signal, at the close of a larger structure, the death, for Pillsbury, or the resocialization, for Gaines, of the individual-as-virtuosic solo (Gaines 1991, Pillsbury 2006). But these songs have no such structural cues. They unfold spontaneously, without direction, satisfying only the immediate aim of creating an intense and potentially overwhelming experience. And the looser sense of catharsis, which often only holds that release follows some (presumably negative) experience, effectively blocks the immense bodily pleasure of being locked into a hypnotic and paralyzing groove, of being crushed by sound.

In being so heavily dependent on groove as a guiding principle, these two songs, and doom metal in general (along with a huge amount of music from other

metal subgenres), are more readily understood as processual, in Keil's sense as an apparently spontaneous unfolding, rather than syntactic and structured. That is, they rely more on repetition, cyclicity and bodily entrainment than on the relationship between structural sections or harmonic progressions. And while the same could be said for a number of other popular musics, this is a significant point in the context of the academic study of metal. Scholars have identified other logics, including harmony, melody and structure, at play in metal, but the processual qualities of this music are rarely, if ever, discussed.

In other words, metal is frequently denied its ability to groove. It is important, given the prevalence of an academic attitude that seems bent on an outright denial of the body's presence in this music, that metal be understood as working with both sets of principles. It is not my intention to swing the discussion entirely away from structure, form, harmony and other such concepts, but merely to assert that metalheads have bodies, too, and that those bodies love to groove.

The combination of this love of groove and a taste for harsh, aggressive and even brutal sound can be understood as a conscious attempt by doom practitioners at subverting the narrative of catharsis. Doom metal, again, was confined in its early history to the periphery of metal at large. Proto-doom, represented most notably by Pentagram, attempted to preserve certain elements of Black Sabbath's early output, namely its slowness, simplicity and, in general, its heaviness. As the rest of metal became faster, more complex and more virtuosic, adopting elements that could more

readily be understood as fitting a cathartic logic (a frenzied drive toward an obvious climax, a propulsive harmonic progression, a solo representing the triumph of the individual), proto-doom insisted on a version of metal that denies release as its ultimate goal. When the various doom styles exploded in the late 1980s and early 90s, it seemed to be a conscious and widespread response to the proliferation of faster and flashier subgenres in the late 70s and early 80s. In other words, the establishment of doom as a viable subgenre marks a rejection by its practitioners of the cathartic logic that had crept into metal. In doing so, it projects back on the metal of the early 70s, to which it claims a historical connection, but also the metal of the 80s, 90s and 2000s as not being as relentlessly focused on the cathartic narrative as is commonly understood.

III.
MEANING IN DOOM METAL
Multidimensional Musicking through Album Art, Lyrics and Horror Films

Beyond doom metal music's ability to create a sonic environment of envelopment, oppression and heaviness, it is necessary to consider the ways in which other aspects of doom metal, particularly non-sonic aspects, work toward similar ends. In this chapter I focus on lyrics and album art in doom metal and the relationship between metal and horror films. This examination serves two purposes: to highlight the diffuse nature of listening and musical engagement in popular music practice and to explore the thematic differences between doom and other kinds of metal. In short, I consider the multidimensionality of doom metal musicking, especially when those dimensions extend beyond the momentary engagement with musical sound.

Christopher Small's concept of musicking has proved extremely useful in the academic study of popular music. Small posits musicking, as the verb form "to music," as roughly meaning "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composition), or by dancing" (Small 1998, 9). Or, more directly, musicking shifts the focus away from the objects (scores, recordings) and abstractions (works, pieces) upon which musicology has long been based and puts it squarely on processes and experience, which have typically fallen under the purvey of ethnomusicology. For musicologists focusing on popular music,

the concept of musicking is potentially liberatory. Popular music, when positioned as a form of mass culture, is readily digested as a series of statistics, with meaning and popularity determined by consumption, and specifically the consumption of the objects of recording (records, CDs, MP3s). Reframing popular music as an instance of musicking, on the other hand, begs that it be understood not only in its use via objects but also in its sonic/musical content and the social processes, notably the live performance, that constitute its practice.

It is significant that, almost immediately after providing a definition of "musicking," Small goes on to clarify that in his conception, the broad ontological category of "performance" includes not only the live event with physically present musicians but also the event of playing back a recording. This point seems to be left out, though, in discussions of musicking, perhaps precisely as a reaction to the early tendency to study popular music as mass culture and thus as the consumption of objects. This approach is especially prominent in the work associated with the Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Notable among these is Dick Hebdige's book on punk, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, which defines the culture and genre almost entirely in terms of engagement with material goods (Hebdige 1979). Robert Walser's *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* is a revealing example of an effort *against* this tendency. Walser presents an account of heavy metal that deals almost exclusively in recorded materials, whether albums or music videos, while focusing on the social and

cultural processes around the music (Walser 1993). Crucially, he provides very little in the way of an analysis of the processes directly related to the use and consumption of recordings. The result is a sense that heavy metal is disseminated on recordings, and indeed dependent on recordings for its existence, but somehow without those recordings contributing significantly to its experience or meaning.

There is also the more practical and somewhat banal reasoning that the live performance is quite simply more spectacular, both in the sense of being a spectacle and in being an impressive, large-scale production. This is certainly true of the various metal subgenres, many of which take spectacle extremely seriously. Glam metal (or hair metal) is defined as much by its musical characteristics as by its emphasis on androgynous makeup, hairstyle, dress and stage theatrics. Black metal similarly relies on spectacle, from makeup and dress ("corpsepaint" to signify death and decay and weapon-like accessories such as bullet belts) to extremely graphic stage sets. Perhaps the most notable example is the controversial 2004 performance of Norwegian black metal band Gorgoroth in Krakow, Poland, in which sheep heads were displayed on stakes, four nude models stood "crucified" on giant crosses and sheep blood was spread liberally across the whole set.

And beyond the spectacle, of course, is the simple fact that live performances are overtly social events—tens, hundreds or even thousands of human bodies are present. This massive physical presence contributes something all its own, from a basic "energy" to a chaotic mosh pit. The live performance also allows fans and

musicians to interact with each other in more mundane ways, such as conversations about other shows, recordings and various scene-related activities and behaviors. In other words, the live performance reveals much of the functioning of a scene almost instantaneously. As Deena Weinstein puts it, "the concert is the event that epitomizes the cultural form and brings it to fulfillment" (Weinstein 2000, 199).

Clearly, the live performance offers something that is simply missing from the act of listening to a recording. But it must be said that a focus on spectacle and the live concert event leaves out the possibility of unique and significant experiences that can only be had with recordings. Many, if not most, fans of metal purchase recordings to gain repeated access to their favorite songs and to support their favorite musicians. And importantly, as with other genres lying outside of mainstream popular culture, musicians generally do not have the resources to embark on lengthy tours over large distances. For many fans, a recording will be the only way to hear a great number of bands.

That is to say, recordings play a large part in the experience of music. Their persistent nature means that they are experienced outside the moment of listening and continue to shape an experience of music well after the sound of music has stopped playing. They might trigger memories of sound or of a moment at a performance, encouraging a reflection on meaning and significance. Similarly, listening to music will recall traces of the persistent object, such as reminding the listener of the album artwork, the wording of liner notes, a photo of the band seen on a website or a t-shirt

that they saw at a show. Extending the musicking process even further, the lyrics, artwork and musical expression might remind them of other media, notably horror films, and even multisensory information like the smells of sweat or the vibrations of extreme volume at shows. All of these things form points in a larger network of musicking that extends well beyond the ephemeral experiences of listening and the social engagements of a live performance. Experiences and objects (and the experiences of objects) all fit together into a mesh through which fans and musicians navigate as they musick. They are musicking when they attend a show or put on an album, but they are also musicking when they decide to put on a t-shirt of their favorite band, when they hold an album in their hands and consider its visual meanings or when those meanings become so strongly associated with particular films that viewing invokes the experience of listening.

Recordings, and the objects through which they are disseminated, are of particular importance for metal. In *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Keith Kahn-Harris discusses the use of recordings as important components in metal practice, particularly as carriers of cultural capital in the extreme metal scene (Kahn-Harris 2007). As his study is driven by sociological concerns, recordings are treated more as musical *objects* than as *musical* objects. That is, Kahn-Harris is primarily interested in the ways that recordings are collected and disseminated and the structures of power that grow up around these processes. They—both recordings and networks of distribution—allow fans to build up discographies of their favorite bands and

musicians, whether for the purposes of repeated listening or for accumulating cultural capital. For many bands these discographies become sonic histories, accounting for lineup changes and stylistic shifts. Recordings and distribution also serve as the basis for various social events and processes connecting musicians and listeners, as when a band promotes a new release at shows or, more recently, via Facebook or Twitter. Fans also connect with each other when new recordings are released. Numerous websites keep calendars of upcoming releases and allow fans to discuss both their anticipation before the release and either satisfaction or displeasure afterward. And though listening to a recording is frequently an individualistic exercise, it is common for fans to socialize around recordings, both new releases and older collections.

Like other non-mainstream genres, metal recordings are consistently released on CD, vinyl and via digital download. While the music industry has largely shifted toward an emphasis on digital distribution over the last few years, many labels representing genres with smaller market shares (notably indie-rock, punk and the more "extreme" sorts of metal) have emphasized what might be considered less convenient media, notably vinyl and even cassette tapes.[1] The commonness of vinyl in metal recordings is probably less likely due to any sonic differences between digital and analogue media (which is not to say that there are no differences) than to the political implications of the material. Vinyl, after all, faded from mainstream popularity in the

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[1] Cassettes in metal have largely been limited to releases of black metal. This is likely due to both an attempt to maintain obscurity and the overall sonic tendencies of black metal. The hiss common to cassette tapes can be taken as contributing to the aesthetic of black metal, which is generally saturated with high frequency sounds.

80s and has remained mostly marginal since. Thus the simple fact of vinyl's use sets the music inscribed on it apart from mass culture. It also serves to connect the music back, temporally, to the music of the 60s and 70s. This could be seen as a move both to position the music in a historical continuum and for musicians to align themselves with the bands of the time who insisted on the album's integrity as a work of its own, unlike CDs and MP3s which allow instantaneous skipping and reordering. But significantly, and also commonly overlooked, there is the fact that a vinyl record simply provides more space for artwork. Album art, pushed aside from most popular music in favor of photographs of the musicians, has remained extremely important for most metal releases and continues to inform the practices of metal musicking.

The Artwork of Doom

Album art is frequently the first encounter with a new piece of music, and the tone that it sets can have a profound influence on the listening experience. Fans will expect different thematic emphases, ideological stances and artistic tendencies based on differences in artwork. Not only does album art strongly influence the experience of listening to an individual album, it provides a tool by which the different subgenres of metal, particularly extreme metal, can be differentiated. This is rather significant for a group of subgenres that are admittedly quite easy to confuse as one chaotic jumble. This is equally valuable for fans as it is for outsiders, as artwork can hint at subgenre identification when, for example, flipping through bins at a record shop.

Despite this, album art has received little attention from scholars, who instead have focused visual attention on the spectacular elements of fashion and performance style. That metal fans are readily identifiable by a typical uniform of jeans and a band t-shirt, usually black, with long hair has been thoroughly established. And the more extreme dress of black metal fans and musicians, with bullet belts, spiked armbands, bondage-esque accessories and corpsepaint is well explored by Kahn-Harris (Kahn-Harris 2007). But, again, the visual signifiers distributed with recordings are rarely examined in any detail, with just a few notable exceptions. Deena Weinstein, in *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, provides a very short take on the general state of album art in the commercially successful heavy metal of the 1970s and 80s, noting a split between those two decades. The 70s saw the use of imagery that is "somewhat ominous, threatening, and unsettling, suggesting chaos and bordering on the grotesque," while the artwork of the 80s shifted to include "the iconography of horror movies, gothic horror tales, and heroic fantasies; technological science fiction imagery; and impressions of studded, black leather-clad biker types" (Weinstein 2000, 29). After Weinstein, the few mentions of album art have been apparently limited to extremely specific studies of a single band or several bands in a single, geographically limited scene. Notable among these are Imke von Helden's study of viking metal (a subset of black metal focusing on pre-Christian Norse imagery), Idelber Avelar's treatment of locality in the music of Sepultura, and Paul D. Greene's investigation of the extreme metal scene in Nepal (Helden 2010, Avelar 2011, Greene 2011).

As both an investigation of the particularities of doom album artwork and an explication of the ability of album art to provide markers of difference between separate subgenres, it is worth comparing generic trends among the different strains of extreme metal: death metal, black metal, grindcore and doom metal. All four of these, rich as they are with styles and cross-pollinations, are rather distinct as a group from the more ubiquitous heavy metal that saw widespread commercial success in the 1980s. Where heavy metal is characterized by bright colors—neon spandex, leopard-print shirts, platinum-blonde wigs, glitter makeup—and a certain playful whimsy, not to mention Weinstein's "black leather-clad biker types," extreme metal is dominated visually by a certain austere seriousness with black as its primary color.

Beyond this, the four major subgenres exhibit a number of significant differences in visual signification.[2] Death metal and grindcore both incorporate a wide color palette, even if it still emphasizes black and red, that fills up the entire face of an album cover. The artwork is typically representative in some sense, and tends to feature images of violence, whether in-progress acts or resulting effects, that are intensely graphic and often quite accurate. A potential feature that helps in differentiating between a death metal album and a grindcore album, from artwork alone, is that grindcore art is frequently more cartoonish and intentionally evocative of a do-it-yourself aesthetic reminiscent of the hardcore punk that helped give rise to the subgenre. The artwork is occasionally made to look like a photocopied drawing with

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[2] These differences can be witnessed by a simple search on Google Images for the genre name and "album art." Though far from exhaustive or rigorous, this provides a quick comparative glimpse of popular artwork.

"ransom note" lettering, a likely reference to punk album art and flyers used to advertise punk shows. Conversely, death metal typography is almost always hand drawn in nearly illegible fonts meant to aestheticize, in an aggressive or violent style, the band's name into a logo. Letters are frequently drawn as though bleeding, on fire, exploding, growing thorns or in some general state of disarray.

Black metal artwork, perhaps unsurprisingly, is overwhelmingly dominated by black, frequently with white as the only secondary color. The artwork rarely depicts enacted violence. When it is representational, it tends to feature images of an individual in corpsepaint or a demonic figure, whether Satan or otherwise. Other covers use bleak photographs of forests or ancient buildings, hinting at the explicit pagan (or anti-Christian) sentiments at the heart of so much black metal. One of the most notorious black metal covers is that of *Aske* (*Ashes*) by Burzum, featuring a black and white photograph of the remains of a Norwegian stave church after its destruction by arson (with the sole member of the "band" widely suspected of having both committed the arson and taken the photograph). But regardless of the exact image used, the most significant feature of black metal artwork is its overwhelming darkness, which is generally emphasized by the use of negative (black) space around an image. Typography in black metal artwork is similar to that in death metal in that it frequently employs hand drawn and often illegible logos, but it just as frequently makes use of "gothic" fonts meant to evoke medieval, and specifically Germanic and Norse,

writing. Even these fonts, though, are sometimes ornamented with blood- or thorn-like features that obscure legibility.

Doom metal artwork, like black metal, features black and rarely makes use of obvious violent imagery. It also frequently uses negative space as a dominant aspect of the image. Like death metal and grindcore, it often expands the color palette out from black. Unlike those subgenres, which use red in depictions of violence, doom metal more often uses a subdued blue or yellow to depict cold or otherwise hostile atmospheres. This is one of the primary visual signifiers in doom metal artwork: expansive spaces that invoke sensations of loneliness, emptiness or dread. This motif is used effectively by Solitude Aeturnus, an epic doom metal band from Arlington, Texas. The cover of their 1991 debut album *Into the Depths of Sorrow* features a man, dressed in a modern outfit consisting of jeans and a black jacket, sitting alone in an archway under a crumbling stone wall (Figure 3.1). The archway looks out onto a barren landscape punctuated by a dead tree. The sky is overcast, with the sun hidden but diffused throughout. The man looks downward with arms crossed, perhaps shielding himself from cold or wind. He seems entirely alone in an unforgiving space, trapped in "the depths of sorrow." The typography of this album is also significant in that, while it still makes use of a vaguely gothic font, it is clearly legible. In general, typography in doom metal artwork rarely employs an aggressive aesthetic (as with exploding logos in death metal). Again, both doom and black metal employ gothic



Figure 3.1: *Into the Depths of Sorrow*, Solitude Aeturnus, 1991

fonts, but the latter makes use of sharp, almost weapon-like ornamentation that is largely absent in the former.

Other frequently used images include the expected skulls or demonic beings, but just as often angelic creatures, the likes of which are effectively absent in the other subgenres. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show examples of each of these. The first, from Candlemass' debut *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, is a rather odd image, at least for metal. The skull is clearly demonic, as evidenced by the horns. Yet the skull is impaled on two spikes forming a cross as if to imply that the demon has been defeated by Christianity. In true metal fashion, though, the defeat has apparently occurred in a



Figure 3.2: *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, Candlemass, 1986

brutal and painful way. The gothic font used for the band's name adds an implication of historicization, as though placing this graphic image squarely in a medieval setting. The result is clearly evocative of metaphysical or religious signification, but in an ambiguous way. It is unclear if we are meant to sympathize with the demon or celebrate its demise. The only certainty is an uncertain dread.

On the cover of *Songs of Darkness, Words of Light* by My Dying Bride, what appears to be a statue of an angelic figure cries in apparent pain. Her head is missing above the mouth, her wings are in poor condition and there are cracks, scratches and other blemishes on her body. She sits in front of a misty forest setting that imparts a



Figure 3.3: *Songs of Darkness, Words of Light*, My Dying Bride, 2004

sense of mystery or dread. The entire scene is disturbing, and raises more questions about the state of this angel than it answers. Rather than a simple depiction of violence or resistance to Christianity, the image begs us to ask why the angel is crying and how it became broken and bloodied. It is worth noting that My Dying Bride's logo is more stylized than Candlemass', and it seems to bleed or otherwise decay in a nod to death metal. This is likely attributable to the band's position in the death/doom style, which marries musical elements from death and doom metal. The logo does not explode, though; its decay is slower and more deliberate. Like the cover of *Epicus*

Doomicus Metallicus, this artwork presents something threatening and potentially harmful, but with an ambiguity that challenges the immediacy of that threat.

The album artwork used in doom metal is set apart from that of other metal by its emphasis on emptiness, loneliness and ambiguity. Again, this serves a dual purpose. It distinguishes doom metal albums—including the music contained on that album and its packaging (and sometimes even the color or printed image of the record itself)—from those in other metal subgenres. It also sets the tone for the listening experience, from the moment when the listener first sees the artwork to every subsequent encounter with the music, even at a live show.

The Lyrics of Doom

Lyrics in popular music have experienced something of a roller coaster in scholarly attention and apparent usefulness. Popular music analysis of the 1960s and 70s was based primarily in lyrical analysis, as though the key to understanding the meaning of a piece of music lay in its linguistic content. A song's message could be summed up in its words, interpreted essentially as literature, and thus the public's acceptance of that message could be determined by the song's popularity, read through record sales (Frith 1988). Through the 80s and 90s, though, lyrical content was downplayed in significance due to an increased effort to treat music as *musical sound*. The impetus for this shift is summed up by Simon Frith, who noted that "most rock records make their impact musically rather than lyrically. The words, if they are

noticed at all, are absorbed after the music has made its mark. The crucial variables are sound and rhythm" (Frith 1981, 14). The premise is straightforward enough: songs with identical lyrics yet from different genres will necessarily *mean* something different, even if only slightly. Meaning is shifted from lyrics-as-literature to musical sound as a potential site of discursive creativity. Lyrics, then, become a mechanism by which the range of possible meanings of musical sound can be shifted, directed and focused, but rarely created.

At the time of writing, scholars have found renewed interest in the lyrics of popular music. A number of anthologies on the subject of popular music studies, as a general field, include lengthy sections on the analysis of lyrics (Middleton 1999b, Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002, Shuker 2008, Shuker 2012). Unlike the tendencies to treat lyrics as literature or to relegate them to a distant second-in-significance, these studies largely treat musical sound and lyrical content as equals in the construction of meaning, or at least as working together without the need for one to be declared more or less significant.

Lyrics in metal, specifically, have been treated rather differently than lyrics in other kinds of popular music. This is apparently motivated by two major issues, the combination of which seems particular to metal. The first is that, for varying reasons, lyrics are typically framed in the scholarly material as being of negligible importance to the overall experience of metal. The opposite is true of popular responses to heavy metal, which have instead taken lyrics to be the most significant marker of meaning

and thus the most direct target for critique (see Binder 1993 for a quantitative analysis of this literature). However, this is not necessarily meant to be taken in the same way that commentators are often dismissive of pop lyrics, as if to say that the lyrics are mere pabulum of little consequence. Instead, it is likely because certain bands, and even whole subgenres like glam metal, put more emphasis on stage theatrics than lyrical content. Even more likely is that vocal performance practices in certain kinds of metal, notably the extreme metal subgenres, render lyrics largely unintelligible.

The second major issue is the simple fact that a great deal of metal engages directly, through its lyrics, with the imagery of death, the occult, violence, misogyny and racism. Lyrics are likely to be disturbing or offensive to mass audiences, and are easily labelled as dangerous or profane by critics. This might mean that lyrics are left out of an analysis entirely or referred to only generally, as when Harris M. Berger refers to the centrality of individuality, tolerance and critical thinking in death metal lyrics without providing any examples (Berger 1999). When scholars choose to engage with examples of these lyrics (that is, when they do not allow the unintelligibility of lyrics to deny the capacity for significance), it is often in the context of an investigation into causal ties between music and violence (Kinsey 2008, Kirsh 2006) or a study of the adaptation of metal lyrics to a specific region and culture (Bendrups 2011, Greene 2011, Weston 2011, Wong 2011). Scholars who attempt to tease apart the meaning of the lyrics run up against a complex balance. Without metaphorizing them the lyrics are left as disturbing, thus potentially rendering fans

disturbed, yet too much metaphor denies the immediacy and visceral nature of the content. This tension is addressed in an intentionally inconclusive manner by Keith Kahn-Harris in an article about the lyrics to "Fucked with a Knife" by death metal band Cannibal Corpse (Kahn-Harris 2003). Kahn-Harris notes that the lyrics are intensely violent and misogynistic and attempts to metaphorize them into a desire for control and power. Yet making the song simply about control and power denies the disgusting and disturbing nature of the lyrics, which Kahn-Harris refuses to print, even in an appendix. He is left staking a shaky middle ground where the lyrics are allowed to be transgressive and vaguely empowering but not acceptable. Rather than arguing for an explicit censorship, he advocates a sort of implicit censorship through "sustained intellectual policing" thereby implying that insiders might not have the capacity to police themselves (ibid., 94).

Lyrical Comprehensibility and Interpretation in Metal

Weinstein opens her discussion of lyrical interpretation by fans with the statement that "heavy metal is not a genre that privileges lyrics and its followers do not evaluate them as elements in a coherent, fully articulated, worldview" (Weinstein 2000, 123). By this she suggests that, overall, metal lyrics are not particularly meaningful or part of an artistic statement—that they neither purport to be nor are interpreted as such. She goes on to cite statistical data about adolescent attention to lyrics in popular music that paints a grim picture: "only 12 percent claimed to attend to

lyrics carefully" (ibid.). Despite this she asserts that these studies do not account for heavy metal. In her estimation, a majority of metal fans would likely cite lyrics as important. Knowledge of lyrics constitutes a sort of cultural capital, as fans compete with one another either through recitation of lyrics or discussion of potential interpretations. While her statements about the importance of lyrics to fan practice seem to contradict her assertion that "metal is not a genre that privileges lyrics," she clarifies by arguing that while fans may *know* the lyrics, they do not necessarily *understand* them. Thus the fact that metal fans might be more aware of lyrics than fans of other popular genres in and of itself is of little importance. She provides an anecdote about demonstrating her superior understanding of a set of lyrics to a group of fans, suggesting that few listeners truly *understand* the lyrics they are hearing. At the end of this analysis, we are left with the sense that even if fans put forth the effort to engage deeply with lyrics, they are unlikely to ascertain their true meaning if in fact the lyrics mean anything at all.

Walser's *Running with the Devil* largely dismisses lyrics at the outset (Walser 1993). Given that a major component of Walser's project is the analysis of the *sound* of heavy metal music, it is reasonable that lyrics might be framed as less important. But the chapter in which Walser outlines the possibilities of discursive meaning in musical sound opens with a quote from Eddie Van Halen intimating that he doesn't know the lyrics to the songs to which his name is attached (as the guitarist, but not lyricist, of the band Van Halen). As Van Halen is established in the book's narrative as

one of the most important heavy metal bands of the 80s, it is difficult to not extend this anecdote outward to the conclusion that lyrics don't really matter. Indeed, this is effectively what happens through the rest of the chapter. Walser, in his efforts to outline the discursive capabilities of the *music* of heavy metal, relegates lyrics to the company of costume and performative gesture as merely guiding or shaping the meaning that is created by sound, but without generating meaning on its own. Instead, the meanings of heavy metal, all of which, according to Walser, crystalize around the articulation and pursuit of power, are conveyed through musical means: harmony, melody, timbre, rhythm.

But despite this apparent dismissal, Walser, in a later chapter, engages in a rather frank reading of lyrics from Black Sabbath, Judas Priest and Iron Maiden in an attempt to defend heavy metal from its critics, notably Tipper Gore and the Parents' Music Resource Council (PMRC). Those critics famously brought heavy metal and rap to the attention of the United States Congress in the 1980s for their potentially adverse effects on listeners. Most criticism against heavy metal is based on its lyrics, which are frequently framed as consisting of little more than the glorification of drug use, sexual promiscuity, violence, the occult and anti-Christian world views, particularly Satanism (Gross 1990). Walser addresses these points effectively, demonstrating that in each instance of a "deviant" tendency it is possible to find a basic attempt to acquire, assert and come to terms with power. But of course this can only be done by treating the lyrics as significant in some capacity. Through this later

chapter, lyrics and music are taken together as co-constructors of meaning, even if the music acts as something of an anchor for the lyrics.

Kahn-Harris and Natalie Purcell, later commentators who both acknowledge Walser's as a foundational and guiding text for their work, go beyond Walser's comment about inconsequentiality to plainly point out the incomprehensibility of extreme metal lyrics. Kahn-Harris, writing broadly about extreme metal, describes the vocals as being "screamed or growled in ways that generally make lyrics impossible to decipher without the aid of a lyric sheet" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 32). Purcell states much more pointedly, and in a more dismissive way, that "the lyrics in death metal are most frequently unintelligible, and many devoted death metal fans would be unable to recite the lyrics of even their favorite bands" (Purcell 2003, 39).

In most performances of extreme metal, lyrics are obscured by vocal delivery. This could even be said of lyrics in other subgenres of metal that make less pronounced use of strained vocal techniques. Vocals often become more like instruments, timbres to fit into an overall texture, rather than carriers of linguistic meaning.[3] It is frequently possible to discern breaks in words or phrases, but commonly these breaks are the only clues provided as to the unfolding of language. In some styles, vocals literally become a continuous stream of sound with no relation to spoken speech. In brutal death metal, for example, vocal practice is even standardized

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[3] Refencing this, or perhaps making light of it, at least two bands have used animals as "vocalists": Hatebeak (a likely nod to metalcore band Hatebreed), featuring a parrot, and Caninus, featuring two pitbulls.

across bands such that the sound of the vocalist is as predictable as the sound of the guitarist, bassist or drummer.

Kahn-Harris, despite his statement that lyrics are generally impossible to decipher, treats lyrics as more or less equal to music. Unlike Walser, whose goal is to establish the music of heavy metal as the primary site of meaning, thus establishing musicological analysis as a viable methodology for popular music studies, Kahn-Harris conducts a largely sociological study and is therefore not overly concerned with the primacy of either music or lyrics. But in assigning increased importance to lyrics compared to Walser's treatment, Kahn-Harris also seems less willing to provide an interpretive reading than Walser does. Whereas Walser finds the fascination with the occult and violence in heavy metal to be a largely metaphorical investigation of power whereby disempowered listeners vicariously experience the power of other, often metaphysical, entities, Kahn-Harris takes that fascination in extreme metal to be largely sincere. He is highly sympathetic to Walser's interpretive reading, but argues that the extension and amplification of those lyrical themes in extreme metal are *too* extreme to be understood as metaphorical. Instead, depictions of gore and bodily violence in death metal are taken to be literal fantasies about gore and violence. Repeated references to Satan in black metal are taken to be literal engagements with Satanism, whether as a religion or a more general worldview. Kahn-Harris writes: "Walser suggests that heavy metal is ultimately empowering and acts as a form of social criticism. Conversely, extreme metal appears to offer no possibility of hope or

redemption" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 36). But, as evidence, he simply offers examples of themes used by several bands and subgenres. He seems to assume that this claim is self-evident.

Purcell's subject matter overlaps with Kahn-Harris', as death metal is included under the umbrella of extreme metal. Her stance toward that subject, though, is considerably different. For Kahn-Harris, again, the excess of death metal and other subgenres is understood as overloading the capacity for interpretation—some violent imagery can indicate a fantasy of power, but a great deal of violent imagery likely indicates a genuine longing for violence. Purcell acknowledges that death metal lyrics are potentially disturbing, particularly because they are frequently communicated from a subject position identified as *doing* the violence. That is, the *I* does the violence, most often to an unspecified *other*. This prevents the listener from being the target of the violence but also allows them to identify with the *I* subject position.

But where we can imagine Kahn-Harris' wariness regarding this orientation, Purcell argues, based on extensive communication with musicians and fans, that the elaborate and excessive depictions of gore and violence in death metal are "bizarrely comical" (Purcell 2003, 44). In these cases, lyrical content allows for a sort of thrilling encounter with transgression, in which the participants in musicking can celebrate those things normally blocked off by mainstream society. This, of course, is predicated on the notion that the lyrics are not to be taken seriously. That is, even if the lyrics constitute a serious attempt at transgression, they are not seriously meant as

descriptions of actual events or calls to action. But Purcell is quick to point out that, while excessive descriptions of gore and violence constitute something of an entertaining approach to transgression, there are a number of bands that refrain from these extremes and engage in practices more readily legible as social commentary. Lyrics from these bands, she argues, *are* intended as serious statements and potential calls to action, motivating listeners to resist drug abuse, sexism, authoritarian governments, religious dogma and any number of other potential issues. In both categories, death metal lyrics aim at transgression. Close reading is necessary, though, to determine whether this is a more momentary transgression of delighting at appearances of the abject, or a rigorous effort at sustained resistance against an imposed order.

Walser, Kahn-Harris and Purcell seem to make the same assumption that metal music is consumed and experienced primarily, and even exclusively, as a live phenomenon. While this position highlights the useful implications of Small's notion of musicking, notably the rich layers of social meaning and interaction inherent in any musical event, it misses the fact that engagement with music continues well after it stops playing. For most fans of popular music, this is manifested in the interaction with recordings. It is important to remember, though, that recordings are not just collections of sound that can be played back. As mentioned above, they are packaged with artwork that informs the musical experience and they provide useful "non-musical" information about the music, musicians and producers that can locate the

music generically, geographically and temporally. But what frequently sets metal recordings, specifically recordings disseminated as physical objects, apart from recordings in other popular music genres is the inclusion of the lyric sheet.

The lyric sheet is, quite simply, a set of all or most of the lyrics in a recording, printed either on the packaging of the record or on a separate sheet that is distributed with the recording.[4] These are common in most kinds of metal, but are almost a necessity in extreme metal as though the musicians are aware that there is no other way for their lyrics to be understood. Lyric sheets are obviously not crucial for the playback of the recording, but they are frequently a significant part of at least the first listening. I have spoken with a number of doom metal fans about the significance of lyrics in their engagement with the music, and roughly half of them stated that they prefer to know the lyrics to a given song (sometimes even before listening), while the other half were primarily ambivalent. A small minority even stated that they actively avoid engaging with lyrics, claiming that they distract from the musical experience. I learned from these interactions that fans for whom lyrics are significant will often either hold the lyric sheet for continual reference or place it within a short distance in order to check it occasionally. One member of the online forum at Doom-metal.com even claims to print out his own lyric sheet for reference when one is not included with the recording (Baphomet 2013). Some fans will follow every word, attempting to match each word to each discernible vocal sound. Others will read quickly through

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[4] For digitally distributed recordings, lyrics are almost always available online. Some bands, like New Orleans-based Thou, publish all of their lyrics on their own website.

the lyrics to get a sense of what the song is "about" before listening. Occasionally the lyric sheet will be referred to when the recording is not playing. This is enough for many fans to memorize the lyrics in their entirety. It is a common occurrence, even at extreme metal shows, to see numerous fans singing along, in perfect time, with the band. Even when vocals consist of shrieks or grunts, fans can sing along with the words that the vocalist is purporting to deliver. A lucky fan might even be pulled on stage to sing with, or in place of, the vocalist for a few phrases.

This creates an interesting condition in which, for the most part, lyrics and vocals become two separate things, experienced through different media—lyrics through reading printed text and vocals through listening to sound—and yet are still part of the same bit of music. Fans understand fully that the lyrics are being sung, though in such a way that vocals become primarily timbral and textural. Thus they need a lyric sheet to discern the lyrics and to add that layer of meaning to the musical experience. Musicians, conversely, go through the effort of writing lyrics and understand that their performance practice obscures that effort. Thus they provide a lyric sheet so that that additional layer of craft can be conveyed to the listener. In this, lyric sheets constitute not only an important part of the musical experience, but also an important part of the social relationship between musicians and listeners.

The use of the lyric sheet clearly contributes to the musicking of metal. Where it is perhaps tempting to reduce the nebula of actions required to make metal music down to the spectacular live show, it is essential to consider that the live show is

incomplete if understood on its own. Any understanding must account for the fact that most fans present for a show have heard the songs performed on recordings, often multiple times and frequently with lyric sheets in hand (and album art in view). Thus to say simply that lyrics, because they are obscured by vocal practice, or other factors in the live show, are incidental to the musicking of metal misses the mark. Ignoring, or downplaying, the significance of lyrics on meaning and signification in metal also fails to account for the fact that a number of subgenres and styles are distinguished precisely by lyrical content. Grindcore, for example, musically combines death metal, industrial and hardcore punk. It leans, lyrically speaking, toward the politically-oriented stance of hardcore. A group of grindcore bands, notably Carcass, split off in the 1980s to create a style called goregrind. Speaking purely on the basis of musical sound, grindcore and goregrind are effectively identical. But goregrind eschews overt political messages in favor of graphic, medically accurate descriptions of gore. A further splintering occured when bands added sexual themes, particularly the eroticization of gore, to create pornogrind. Grindcore and pornogrind are, again, extremely similar in terms of sonic content, but are twice removed, in terms of stylistic classification, solely by lyrical content.

The Lyrical Construction of Doom

Lyrics in doom metal can be approached much like the lyrics of the extreme metal mentioned above. Similarly, the subgenre employs many of the same vocal

styles that render those lyrics incomprehensible. Even more, doom metal, just like heavy and extreme metal, can be framed as being concerned primarily with power. The nature of this power, though, is what separates doom metal from other subgenres.

In most analyses of heavy and extreme metal, power is framed as something desirable and yet somehow just out of reach for most fans. And, crucially, the power constructed in metal is overwhelmingly masculine (Rafalovich 2006). In Weinstein's *Heavy Metal*, metal fans are disenfranchised young males, white and from blue collar families, primarily in areas that have suffered the effects of deindustrialization (Weinstein 2000). They are excluded from economic and social power on multiple levels, despite the dominance of white males in positions of power in mass media. Thus metal provides an environment in which listeners can experience the thrills of power, always in the sense of *being powerful*. Walser similarly writes about heavy metal fans as disenfranchised in some capacity. He extensively cites media scholar John Fiske, who writes about the effect of mass media on perceptions of self, particularly amongst young white males (Walser 1993). This is particularly relevant for the presence of violence in metal. Fiske cites the example of *The A-Team*, a television show depicting male socialization based on violent (masculine) activity. Fans of the show are unable to act out this violence, normalized as male bonding, and thus feel somehow blocked off from the freedom and power that the show's characters enjoy. Heavy metal, then, can be understood as a way to live out fantasies of powerful and violent masculinity without the risk of social, and potentially legal, repercussions.

Extreme metal subgenres largely adopt this conception of and stance toward power as something desirable, though its target is frequently different. Whereas in heavy metal the imposition of femininity (and thus the threat against a masculinity already perceived as in danger) might be met with lyrics about control and domination, in death metal the response likely involves the destruction of the female body, brutally and recounted in great detail. Similarly, an objection in heavy metal to Christian morality might invoke images of the occult as an alternative source of metaphysical power. In black metal, there is likely to be a direct address to Satan and even a call to action against the institutions of Christian authority (brought to a head in the numerous church arson incidents connected to black metal in Norway in the 1990s (Moynihan and Soderlind 2003)). Recent work in an emerging field of "black metal theory" hints that the power in black metal extends far beyond an opposition to any church, instead signaling a Schopenhauerian opposition to all anthropocentric understanding and indeed all of humanity (Masciandaro 2010, Pattison et al. 2012, Price 2013). The satisfaction of this impulse, according to this work, is the obliteration of existence as we know it—that is, as it contains humans.

Again, this is a power directed outward. It is a power wielded by the subject against the other, whether that other is a woman, economic disparity, the church, "the world" at large or any entity perceived as threatening the power of the subject. Despite its potential messiness and offensiveness, it is *empowering*, giving its listeners a vicarious experience of the power they are otherwise denied. In some studies this

experience of power is framed as a form of resistance, particularly in areas outside North America and Western Europe in which metal is adopted precisely for its capacity to express and explore power (Kelly 2006, LeVine 2008, Greene 2011).

In doom metal, the power of metal is typically reversed. That is, power is not something to be wielded by the subject against the other. Instead, it is something held by the other and directed precisely against the subject. It tends not to deal with threats against masculinity (at least masculinity under threat by femininity) but rather engages with massive and ominous sources of power as threats against the very integrity of the self. The occult is thus strongly represented in doom metal. But, again, where subgenres like black metal use the occult as a source of power *for* the self as when aligning with Satan, doom metal treats the occult as a source of fear and dread, a potential destroyer of the self. This version of the occult is presented in Black Sabbath's song "Black Sabbath" (the title song from their 1970 debut album)[5]:

> What is this that stands before me?
> Figure in black which points at me
> Turn around quick, and start to run
> Find out I'm the chosen one
> Oh no!
>
> Big black shape with eyes of fire
> Telling people their desire
> Satan's sitting there, he's smiling
> Watches those flames get higher and higher
> Oh no, no, please God help me!

[5] The band was originally named Earth, but found that they were regularly confused for other bands of the same name. After writing the song "Black Sabbath," they chose it as their new name.

Is it the end, my friend?
Satan's coming 'round the bend
People running 'cause they're scared
The people better go and beware
No, no, please, no!

The song opens with a potentially ambiguous conception of power, as Ozzy Osbourne sings about being "the chosen one." Is he chosen to receive some great gift? Will he be rewarded with riches or authority? Will he be made *powerful*? This potential power is confused by the exclamation of "Oh no!," as though Osbourne knows either that there is an insidious consequence to this power or that his having been "chosen" is nothing to be celebrated. In the second stanza, it is clear that the power shifts rather decisively to Satan. Osbourne's stance is largely indifferent until the closing exclamation, which is now made more insistent and desperate: "Oh no, no, please God help me!" That God is invoked suggests that Satan is an entity to be feared absolutely, regardless of the ambiguity of the first verse. The third verse removes all doubt: Satan is "coming 'round the bend," and people are fleeing in fear. Again, the verse ends with the exclamation "No, no, please, no!" Osbourne is terrified of Satan and implores others to run and hide.

Further, nothing in the music ironizes this, as if to suggest that Osbourne is mocking Satan's victims or that he is genuinely excited to be "the chosen one." Nor is there any indication that the closing exclamation of each verse is meant to be delivered by a different subject. Instead, the musical content of the song is oppressive in its simplicity. The first section, lasting approximately four minutes at around 64 beats per

minute (bpm), is guided by a guitar riff that opens on the tonic (a low G), rises an octave and then falls to the tritone over the course of eight beats. This riff then repeats, without fail or hesitation, over which Osbourne delivers the first two verses. The second section lasts for the remainder of the song, about one minute and 40 seconds. It speeds up abruptly to 126 bpm, with the band launching into a triplet-based groove. After the third verse, the first real sense of harmonic movement is provided by an alternation between G and B♭, which at times is modified into the progression G-B♭-E♭-D. But just as the lyrics give no real hint of escape, salvation or transcendence, the music stays mired in the riff and the groove.

Just as doom metal musicians and fans claim Black Sabbath as having provided a musical blueprint, doom metal also follows these early lyrical tendencies as well. This is in contrast to much of the rest of the metal subgenres, which, again, are oriented primarily around a powerful subject. But a great deal of doom metal lyrics eschew an explicitly identifiable source of external power, e.g. Satan in "Black Sabbath." Instead, in many cases power lies vaguely outside of the subject, who is in turn powerless. This powerlessness is frequently constructed as a powerlessness to avoid death, a confrontation with the inevitability of death. It is, generally, not a celebration of the moment of death or the act of dying or killing, as is frequently the case in subgenres like black metal or death metal. Death might be framed positively when compared to a miserable life, but, significantly, doom metal lyrics are typically

written from the position of misery. This position is presented in Candlemass' "Solitude":

> I'm sitting here alone in darkness, waiting to be free,
> Lonely and forlorn I am crying
> I long for my time to come, death means just life
> Please let me die in solitude
>
> Hate is my only friend, pain is my father
> Torment is delight to me
> Death is my sanctuary, I seek it with pleasure
> Please let me die in solitude
>
> Receive my sacrifice, my lifeblood is exhausted!
> No one gave love and understanding
> Hear these words, vilifiers and pretenders
> Please let me die in solitude
>
> Earth to earth
> Ashes to ashes
> And dust to…
> Earth to earth
> Ashes to ashes
> And dust to dust

Without an obvious figure of external power, like Satan in "Black Sabbath," against which the subject is positioned, the lyrics of "Solitude" are especially power*less*. There is a vague reference to "vilifiers and pretenders," but otherwise there is no indication as to the cause of the subject's loneliness and torment. These feelings seem to be without origin, as though they are a simple fact of the subject's existence. Interestingly, the vocalist sings of death as sanctuary, as something to be sought out. It is noteworthy that the subject is even powerless to secure death in

solitude—it must be begged for. But, crucially, the song never gets there, lyrically or musically. The "Earth to earth" section is repeated over the band, loud and distorted, moving through a harmonic progression, with driving drum patterns and the lead guitar screaming above the fray. This gives way to the opening material, a subdued melody on unaccompanied guitar without any distortion. This moment is reminiscent of the end of the guitar solo in Metallica's "Fade to Black." As discussed in Chapter 1, the transition out of the guitar solo is interpreted by Glen Pillsbury as suicide and by Donna Gaines as stepping back from suicide (Gaines 1991, Pillsbury 2006). This moment in "Solitude" could potentially mean that the subject is finally dying and finding sanctuary from the misery of life. But the lyrics deny this possibility with a final statement of "Please let me die in solitude." The subject has not died, and indeed will not before the song ends. Instead, the subject—and the audience—is left in a state of misery as the song simply returns to its beginning as if to start the process again.

Natalie Purcell points out that a number of death metal bands utilize lyrics critical of social and cultural institutions and issues (such as government, economy, racism) instead of the more typical emphases on gore and violence. Both categories, though, can be understood as transgressive against authority and social norm. A similar point can be made regarding the idea of powerlessness in doom metal. The external power dominating the subject in "Solitude" is abstract and vague, while that in "Black Sabbath" is fantastical and draws from the occult. Some bands, in contrast, directly invoke actual social institutions as manifestations of power directed against

the individual. Thou, a doom metal band from New Orleans, frequently refer to imposing social structures that can be understood as having power over the lyrical subject. Their song "The Work Ethic Myth" is a succinct criticism of capitalism and labor:

> We have paved the roads that have led to our own oppression. Fear of the unknown, of rejection, has put brutes and villains in power. The fetters that restrict our arms and throats were cast by our own hands, just as we have set our own guards at the door. We drag boulders a thousand leagues to erect their palaces. We have established a system of education that celebrates sacrifice and creates generations of slaves. Hold hands in a ritual of deception. Hold hands in a ritual of desolation. Hold hands in a ritual of self-destruction. We are the accomplice class: footstools for our masters, spineless bastards all.

Here, the lyrical subject is the collective "we" of laborers, rendered powerless by capitalistic forces. There is no reference to the occult or to an explicit threat of death, and still the lyrics are just as bleak as either "Black Sabbath" or "Solitude." There is no escape, no recourse, no hope for ever being powerful within the rules of capitalism, no promise of a socialist utopia. "Fleurs de Mal" represents a sweeping, yet slightly different, critique of Western society as a whole:

> The demonic seed of European imperialists has swollen with ripeness. Its blossoms signal moral decay, salivating to conquer. A diseased concept of unalienable rights. A distorted view of sexuality. A plague upon evolution. Industrialists and aristocrats—rotting in your fancy suits, burning like cigars hung between weak lips, choking beneath the smokestacks of progress. Protectors and providers—teachers of self-loathing, sentinels of the abattoirs, guardians of status quo. May you choke on your own masochistic sermons and be ground beneath the heels of conformity. My dearest comrades and young rebels—we're just more of the same. Bourgeois shackles of pacifism and inaction

> enabling oppression. We are accessories to slavery. Bound together by invisible reins. Pulsing through the veins. The same tumultuous, glorious blood.

These lyrics are noteworthy for their combination of biting social commentary and the imagery of abjection: semen, saliva, disease, rot, choking, veins, blood. These read almost like a checklist from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, in which she describes the abject as that which threatens to upset the symbolic order of language and the imperative distinctions of self/other and subject/object (Kristeva 1982). In daily experience, these threats are manifested in bodily function and disfunction, things and experiences that we are momentarily unable to process through language and the symbolic order. The abject reminds us of our existence as organisms filled with and fueled by disgusting substances and process, or perhaps it scares us out of thinking that we are anything else.

In death metal, grindcore and associated subgenres and styles, the abject is something to be celebrated. Lyrics discussing disembowelment and violent sexual activity are thrilling and, from an insider's perspective, playful opportunities for transgression and the bending of social norms. But in "Fleurs de Mal," and in doom metal in general, the abject seems to be more of a chance at reflection on fragility and mortality. It is a reminder of the inevitability of death, of the brutal morbidity of being alive.

The Horror of Doom

In efforts to contextualize the themes utilized in metal both socially and historically, commentators have frequently turned to horror films. Though not strictly "musicking" in the same sense as album art or lyrics, horror films and metal occupy similar cultural spaces and explore similar themes and issues. For a variety of reasons, this other form of "violent" media has received far greater attention and thus has been theorized much more extensively, both as it relates to its contextual surroundings and as it is interrogated by the question "Why does anyone enjoy this?"

The connection between metal and horror films goes beyond the simple fact that both deal, in some way, with violence. Both use the imagery of the occult and sexual violence. Both emphasize fear, dread, shock and power. And, historically, the emergence of metal through the 1970s (coalescing into heavy metal at the end of that decade and broadening out into the other subgenres by the early 1980s) largely coincides with a flourishing of American horror films that began in the late 1960s. But there is also a much more direct way to establish a connection between metal and horror. Black Sabbath, while they were still known as Earth, were attempting to distinguish themselves as a unique act, and particularly as unique from other bands called Earth with whom they were confused. The band's bassist, Terence "Geezer" Butler, was extremely interested in the occult, particularly as it was manifested in the wildly popular horror movies produced by British film house Hammer Films in the late 1950s and 60s. His persistent engagement with horror and the occult began to

make its way into the lyrics and likely influenced the band's conscious decision to change its style (as they were effectively a blues-rock band at the time). Ozzy Osbourne describes the shift as a fairly quick and simple affair:

> We were waiting to go into a rehearsal in Birmingham one day and, across the road, there was a cinema and there was a horror movie on… and Tony [Iommi] said, "Isn't it funny, man, that people pay money to see a movie that scares the shit out of them? Why don't we try to put that to music—like an evil kind of music?" And that's really the way it started and we wrote the song "Black Sabbath," and on the ferry going to Germany to do some work in Hamburg, we said "Why don't we call the name of the band Black Sabbath?" Geezer thought of the name Black Sabbath. (Wilkinson 2007, 23)

It is significant that the members of one of the bands frequently credited with having created, or at least laying the foundation for, the genre of heavy metal (along with every other kind of metal, including doom) defined their musical practice as an explicit reference to horror films. Even the name chosen—Black Sabbath—is taken from the title of a 1963 horror film starring Boris Karloff. Witchfinder General, one of the first doom metal bands to be recognized as such, similarly took their name from a 1968 horror film. To be sure, the connection between the two media has been firmly in place through their respective histories.

Joseph Tompkins writes about the commercial motivations for tying together these media, both of which were extremely successful during the 1980s (Tompkins 2009). More than a marketing strategy, though, Tompkins argues that metal and horror share a deep affinity based on their themes ("monstrosity, grotesquery, and Satanism (or at least Satanic imagery)"), shared content (such as similar visual

markers and vocal sounds) and common public status as controversial or deviant (ibid., 76). These similarities are made manifest in a number of metal-laden soundtracks for horror films. Tompkins begins his account of this crossover with *Profondo Rosso* (*Deep Red*), released in 1975. The soundtrack was performed by Italian progressive rock band Goblin, who incorporated elements of the nascent heavy metal genre but are not, strictly speaking, a metal band. The metal/horror crossover was firmly established in the 80s, with films such as *Demons*, *Phenomena, The Return of the Living Dead* (all from 1985), *Trick or Treat* (1986, featuring cameos by Ozzy Osbourne of Black Sabbath and Gene Simmons of Kiss) and *Black Roses* (1988). A number of heavy metal bands and performers even wrote songs or full soundtracks specifically for horror films. Likely the first example of this kind of targeted crossover is Alice Cooper's soundtrack for *Friday the 13th, Part VI: Jason Lives*, from 1986 (Cooper's classification as metal is the subject of some debate, but his role in shaping the aesthetic of metal is difficult to deny). Cooper even released a video for the song "He's Back (The Man behind the Mask)" that featured clips from the movie. The *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise makes extensive use of the compatibility of the genres, enlisting the popular band Dokken to write the song "Dream Warriors" specifically for the third film (1987) and Iron Maiden vocalist Bruce Dickinson to record "Bring Your Daughter…to the Slaughter" for the fifth (1989) (Iron Maiden later rereleased the song under the band's name). And while these commercially successful crossovers fell off somewhat during the 90s, there has been a resurgence since the

early 2000s, including Rob Zombie (of the band White Zombie) directing and producing widely popular films (including a remake of *Halloween*), the founding of a film production company by members of the band Slipknot and the inception of a metal/horror film festival curated by former Pantera vocalist Phil Anselmo.

Walser notes the connection between horror and metal largely as a way to discuss the historical context of early metal (Walser 1993, 161). Film historians Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argue that the movies of the late 60s and 70s, an era of extremely popular American horror films, can be understood as reflecting the various crises facing the American public at the time: the Vietnam War, economic downturn, political corruption, changing ideas of sexuality and challenges to the nuclear family and other social institutions (Ryan and Kellner 1988). It is possible to frame metal similarly, as a response to widespread social anxiety and uncertainty. Again, Walser argues that heavy metal is particularly appealing to individuals (typically young, white, working-class males) who are simultaneously advertised as powerful and alienated from power. Metal allows them to work through this anxiety and make some claim to power, however small.

But it is similarly possible to look closely at the content of the films released early in this period and conclude that they are not about feeling powerful. Indeed, one of the major distinctions often made between the so-called "classic" and "modern" eras of horror film (typically divided by the year 1968) is the ambivalent, or even "bad," ending (Price 2004, Worland 2007). (Some scholars have challenged the idea

that a "modern" era could be separated from a "classical" one in such an abrupt manner. However, there are definite trends in horror film production that distinguish films of the early 60s from those of the mid- to late 70s (Hutchings 2004).) In these films, the good guy doesn't win, humanity isn't safe, the world in fact is likely to end after the credits roll. The year 1968 saw the release of both *Night of the Living Dead* and *Rosemary's Baby*. In the former, a seemingly unstoppable horde of zombies advances on a small and frightened group. The group shrinks, slowly but surely, through the film as members are eaten by zombies, killed in accidents or killed by each other. Ben, the last remaining member and ostensible hero of the film, makes it through the attack, only to be killed the next day by a rescue posse that mistakes him for a zombie. In the latter film, a young housewife, Rosemary, becomes convinced that the neighbors at her new apartment are somehow involved in a cult. She dreams that she is raped by a demon, and shortly after learns that she is pregnant. Her neighbors, with whom her husband has established a strong friendship, insist on playing a part in her care to the point where she fears for her life. She eventually gives birth to the spawn of Satan and, after she initially rejects the child, the film ends with her rocking its cradle with a smile.

These two films accomplish their goals very differently. *Night of the Living Dead* relies on depictions of graphic violence and gore, using convincing makeup and special effects. *Rosemary's Baby*, on the other hand, largely eschews graphic gore, instead opting for a more "psychological" kind of horror, often distinguished as terror

(Worland 2007, 10). But the goals of the two films are rather similar. Both utilize a monstrous force that is seemingly unstoppable (even though Rosemary uncovers the nature of this force slowly throughout the film), and both feature an ambiguous ending. In one, the only real heroic figure survives the great obstacle of the film and is then killed unceremoniously and without reason. It is impossible not to feel, at this point, that the entire ordeal is helpless: he gained nothing from evading the zombies and outlasting the other survivors; there was no way for him to *not* die. It could even be suggested that the real monster of the film was not, in fact, the undead but the living. In the other, the protagonist, regardless of her mounting suspicions, is unable to distance herself from an apparent danger. And once that danger is made real and her suspicions are confirmed, that is, when she learns that a group of Satanists has arranged for her to give birth to the Antichrist, she seems to have no option but to give in and join them. Her resistance is similarly futile, all previous effort rendered meaningless.

Furthermore, both films are remarkable for their settings. Like *Psycho* in 1960, they mark a shift away from the fantastic settings of previous horror films. Those settings were derived largely from gothic literature, with castles and grand laboratories, and German Expressionism, which featured highly angular and disorienting spaces. Instead, *Night of the Living Dead* and *Rosemary's Baby* utilize profoundly ordinary spaces, the former set mostly in a farmhouse and the latter in an apartment building. These settings make the overwhelming sense of dread *normal*.

Unlike classic horror films, in which the escape from an old castle back to a familiar home meant the end of the ordeal, in these modern films the home itself is the locus of terror. And with that focus on the home comes a focus on the family, which itself becomes a useful source of horrific material. The early 70s saw the release of multiple films exploring scenarios that challenge the safety of the family: monsters born into families, monsters infiltrating families and monsters *as* families. That such a basic social institution might be questioned was certainly nothing new, but its frequency in this era was unprecedented. Catharsis, which had been used to explain the appeal of horror up to that point, is suddenly weakened as an analytical device. These are films that make you feel *bad* or *confused*, rather than relieved or assured that everything will be okay. There is no comfort in or validation of existing social institutions, no going back to life as it was.

The content of these films is significant for their influence on several decades of mass culture, but they are also interesting in their specificity and uniqueness when compared to the films that follow them. Purcell, in her study of the relationship between horror films and death metal, makes almost exclusive reference to films of the late 70s and 80s. These later films, primarily of the slasher and splatter genres, make extensive use of extreme depictions of gore, to a degree largely unseen before the 1974 release of the hugely popular *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, though with an overall aesthetic that really crystalized around *Halloween*, released in 1978. They continue to emphasize the helplessness and utter despair of the victims, but with death

scenes that are so overblown that they almost become abstracted as spectacles of makeup and special effects technology. The connection between these films and death metal, with its lyrical content and associated artwork frequently focusing on intense, often comedically exaggerated, depictions of gore, is quite clear. Where the films of the late 60s and early 70s tend to use death as a means to highlight the fragility and ambiguous meaning of life, these later films, along with death metal, use death as a thrilling and vicarious engagement with the abject. Death, in other words, is made thrilling and entertaining.

Doom metal, unlike death metal, is much more strongly aligned with the earlier portion of the modern horror film aesthetic. It eschews the almost pornographic use of violent imagery in favor of slow yet unrelenting images of impending death. Even during the 1980s, when the rest of extreme metal had since shifted to a more slasher-like aesthetic, doom bands, like Candlemass cited above, continued on with this style. Just as the music of doom metal is based on a conscious historical alignment with the early work of Black Sabbath, its lyrics, artwork and general thematic content are similarly connected to popular culture of that time. Ilsa, for example, whose music is discussed in the previous chapter, takes its name from the 1974 exploitation film *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* and named its first full-length album after the 1972 movie *Tutti il Colori del Buio*, or *All the Colors of the Dark*.

The decision to align so thoroughly with the aesthetics of these films, and with the contemporaneous early Black Sabbath albums, speaks to the particular goals of

much of doom metal. Unlike death metal, with its emphasis on gore taken to entertaining extremes, doom metal is concerned with the exploration and investigation of death and dying, whether as an immediate threat or as a simple and unavoidable fact. There is a marked difference between doom's orientation to death and that in black metal. The latter, based nominally on the worldview and literature of Satanism, largely embraces death—and its inherent destruction—as something pleasurable and rewarding. Doom metal, on the other hand, presents an overt anxiety about death and dying. And, like the horror films with which doom shares a thematic affinity, it offers little hope for redemption in traditional institutions. The rationalization and morality of death presented in Christianity is, perhaps expectedly, rejected outright. Ilsa's vocalist, Orion, explains that "doom metal's themes to me seem more oriented around a search for some kind of spirituality beyond Christianity, a fearful longing to understand life and death that doesn't merely seek its embrace as escape from the pains of reality" (personal email correspondence with the author, 29 September 2012).

This anxiety, or "fearful longing," can be understood as a confrontation with what Grace M. Jantzen refers to as the collective necrophilia/phobia of Western culture. In her series *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, Jantzen engages in a Foucauldian archeology of the concept of death itself (Jantzen 2004). In this endeavor she reaches back to ancient Greece, finding direct threads of influence between the attitudes toward death contained in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the Greek philosophy and drama that has served as a foundation for so much of Western civilization. This

conceptualization of death is split between a glorification of youthful and violent death, as when physically perfect warriors destroy each other on the battlefield, and an effort to eliminate, or at least hide, death as a result of frailty. The two cross into each other frequently, especially when it is impossible to hide death. In these cases, we adopt the language of violence as though in an effort to glorify an otherwise difficult or tragic situation: we do battle with heart disease and destroy cancer. And when our valiant efforts fail, the resulting death is kept as invisible as possible. It occurs behind curtains and in silence. As Jantzen writes, "a good death is thought of as a death that is hardly noticed" (ibid., 13).

But this also creates a situation in which death potentially becomes something unknown and frightening. With a concerted and large-scale effort to eradicate death, and attitudes and rituals for dealing with death that tend to involve its invisibility, an anxiety about what death actually is, and what it might mean, is understandable. And much like Walser connects the anxieties in heavy metal and horror films with deindustrialization, social upheaval and the futility of war, it is possible to understand the attitudes in early doom metal, and the films that Black Sabbath likely would have seen around 1969 or 70, as closely related to the American public response to the Vietnam War and the end of the *Pax Americana* (which was similarly felt, to a lesser degree, in Britain at the time). Black Sabbath's second album even features the song "War Pigs," which equates Vietnam War generals to Satanic witches who eventually incur the wrath of God and the destruction of Judgement Day. The late 60s mark the

height of American protest, culminating in the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam in 1969 and the Kent State shootings in 1970. The latter, in particular, turns the protest against war into a futile exercise, with the peaceful advocates themselves, echoing *Night of the Living Dead*, being shot dead.

It is unsurprising that the themes used in early Black Sabbath should remain viable for doom metal forty years later. The anxieties around death have certainly not ceased, and if anything medical advances in the intervening decades have bolstered the idea that it is fixable, that death is a failure of medicine. Further, war has remained a nearly constant fact of life, guaranteeing that death is a permanent fixture in news and entertainment media. Doom metal provides a space in which musicians and fans can collectively—and safely—express their fears and anxieties. Its themes can be interpreted, at first glance, as extremely morbid and depressing. And while it is impossible to claim that "all doom metal fans are well-adjusted and happy" (just as that claim is impossible for any social group), to immediately pathologize an expression because of its basis in something uncertain and frightening misses the point. Doom metal fans do not have an unusual love of death or violence, nor are they particularly eager to die. They are scared and confused by it, and their music serves as an investigation of the very idea.

Album art and lyrics are crucial to the listening experience, both at home on a stereo and at a live show with hundreds of other fans, but also to the understanding of music that extends beyond listening. Much of extreme metal shares a rather small

sonic space, and at times it can be difficult to distinguish between grindcore and death metal, black metal and doom metal. Artwork and lyrical content provide additional layers of meaning beyond musical sound alone, and remain when the sound stops. These meanings are reiterated, reflected and reinforced in horror films, a medium whose historical trajectory is closely tied to that of metal. They also illustrate the permeability of what, at first, seem like distinct portions of the musicking process. Listening to recordings at home is not isolated from attending a show. To say that the lack of information in one setting indicates its irrelevance (such that the incomprehensibility of lyrics in a live performance suggests that lyrics are of negligible importance) forces a false separation of those experiences. Fans look at and interpret album art, and that impacts how they listen to music. Similarly, fans read lyric sheets and learn the words to their favorite songs, and they sing along, word for word, to performances that, to outsiders, consist of little more than grunting and screaming. And while not all metal fans are also fans of horror films, the two media are closely intertwined and reflect many of the same themes, with doom metal making frequent references to film through band names, album and song titles and even the subgenre's historical narrative. The process of musicking is sloppy and indistinct, and every moment in that process brings together multiple media and past experiences. Treating music as just a set of interactions with and consumption of objects blocks out a wealth of information, but so does treating music as nothing more than a momentary and ephemeral event.

IV.
EXPERIENCING DOOM
Jouissance, Abjection and Liberatory Uselessness

I first saw the Washington, DC-based doom metal band Ilsa play a show on 2 May, 2012. The online listing for the event placed it at Casa Fiesta, for which I could find no information regarding its status as a music venue. I went with a friend who had never listened, at least intentionally, to doom metal before. I explained that he was in for a treat; indeed, Ilsa's album *Tutti il Colori del Buio* had been on repeat on my computer and in my car for the past few weeks. He wore khaki shorts and a faded red t-shirt. I, being somewhat more familiar with standard metal fashion practices, came in jeans and a black shirt bearing the logo of Black Cobra, a sludge doom band from San Francisco. I also let my hair down, just in case the show was energetic enough for headbanging.

Not wanting to miss the other two bands on the bill—Zruda, from Atlanta, and Auroboros, also from DC—we showed up "early," which is to say at the time listed as the beginning of the show, 9PM.[1] It quickly became apparent why I couldn't find any information about Casa Fiesta as a venue—it is a Mexican restaurant in a well-to-do neighborhood dominated by retail outlets and American University. But we were definitely in the right place, as the crowd of people in black shirts milling around outside could mean little other than an impending metal show.

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[1] By "we" I refer only to myself and my friend, with whom I was able to verify a commonality of experience the next day. I have discussed my experiences and the interpretations thereof with many other fans of doom metal, primarily in casual and informal contexts, and have found numerous similarities in our stories. In the present discussion, however, I maintain a self-reflexive stance.

Inside, the restaurant is nondescript: a collection of tables and chairs with a bar at the back. There were still patrons finishing up their meals when the crowd was allowed inside. We asked a server where the show would actually happen, as there was absolutely no way this space could accommodate it. He pointed to a small staircase at the back, his body language suggesting that he was less than thrilled about the prospect of this event happening in his restaurant. The space at the top of the stairs was just as odd as everything else we had experienced to that point. It was an open, carpeted room, about 15 feet wide and 20 feet long, with catering-style tables and chairs leaned against one wall. Fake potted plants adorned the corners. It was unclear exactly for what purpose this room was intended. Surely, though, it was never meant for a metal show.

The bands had used one of the tables for displaying merchandise—shirts, CDs, LPs, pins, stickers and the like—in a corner. It was also here that we paid our $5 entry fees. My friend and I perused the goods for sale, hoping to contribute a few extra dollars to the bands, especially Zruda, who were on a small tour around the region. We learned that Auroboros wouldn't be playing. There was no reason given, and no one would be taking their place. For $5, though, we were in no position to complain.

Ilsa and Zruda set their equipment up against the far wall. As five- and four-piece bands, respectively, this took up a good amount of space, particularly after accounting for their massive amplifiers and speaker cabinets. The crowd—the scene equivalent of an audience—of about 40 or 50 people was left with a rather small

portion of the floor. It was tough to not notice details large and small about everyone there. As might be expected at a metal show, the crowd was largely white, with a few blacks and Hispanics. They were also mostly male, in what was about a 4-to-1 ratio of men and women. Two or three women were clearly accompanying men as romantic partners, but otherwise it could be said that everyone was there to enjoy the show. The majority of the crowd looked to be in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, with more outliers on the older than the younger side.

Nearly everyone was wearing the requisite band t-shirt. The subgenres represented varied widely: doom, death metal, black metal, darkwave and even glam metal, which, given the context, was likely worn ironically. Crucially, no one wore a shirt from either Ilsa or Zruda. This is an unspoken rule in metal, and indeed much rock-based music: don't wear a shirt of the band you're seeing. This might be taken as a method for increasing cultural capital by advertising one's knowledge and support of a large range of musicians, such that shirts of less popular bands are frequently on display. Alternatively, it can be understood as an attempt to not seem *too* devoted to the band playing, a strategy intimated to me by a number of indie rock fans. There was a good deal of long hair, some of it spectacularly long and some of it in locks. But there were also a number of people with short hair, mostly styled rather than simply buzzed. A handful had piercings, and similarly a handful had tattoos. More than anything, it was likely that most of the crowd left work, quickly changed into their black t-shirts and came to the show. Other than that obvious visual marker and

the above-average concentration of long-haired men, it would be difficult to tell this crowd apart from any other group of people.

Zruda, the first band on the bill as a result of Auroboros' absence (as a touring band rarely plays first), announced themselves and began to play. It quickly became apparent that almost no one in the crowd knew anything about them. The crowd was primed for doom metal, and Zruda was playing some blend of psychedelic and progressive metal. Nevertheless, the crowd was able to enjoy the band to some degree. They understood that their desire for an all-doom show didn't necessarily mean that enough bands could be found to make that happen. Instead, they simply seemed happy that *someone* was playing on the bill with Ilsa—a show won't happen with only one band. Short shows can present a problem for musicians and fans, as the development of a proper mood, for whatever style of music being presented, can simply take time. Opening bands, also known as warm-up acts, ease the crowd into a participatory state that in turn helps the headlining band to engage with them more readily and effectively. And, in simple economic terms, venue operators must ensure that enough people will come and, more importantly, stay to drink (frequently at hugely increased prices). This is especially true for businesses like Casa Fiesta, which must turn away restaurant patrons and keep their staff on the clock for extended hours in order to host these shows. The fans at this show were likely very aware of this reality—as long as they got to see the local heavyweights, the rest of the bill didn't really matter.

After Zruda's set, during which the crowd was polite but not particularly involved, we temporarily relocated to the downstairs bar area. At this point the restaurant was officially closed; $5 bottles of cheap beer were the only thing being sold. Everyone had the opportunity for one beer, or perhaps two consumed quickly, before we heard Ilsa begin their sound check. This was the unofficial call to come back upstairs, assuming that we wanted a good view of the band. Given the small size of the space, there would be no acoustic benefit to standing closer.

After a few minutes of checking, Ilsa prepared for their first song. They were rather relaxed, but more interested in each other than the crowd. The singer, Orion, generally kept his back to us, looking back only to ask if everything sounded good. We assumed that they were simply not fully in their performance personas yet, that at this point they were still individuals who had likely been at work earlier in the day (Orion, for example, runs a dog walking business).

Finally, Ilsa, began playing. The sound was overwhelming, temporarily paralyzing the crowd and cementing us to the floor. Everyone seemed to need a moment to adjust to the new physical condition of being completely saturated by vibration. As often happens when the headlining act goes on, Ilsa was demonstrably louder than Zruda had been. While I did not have a decibel meter handy, the sound was certainly above 120 dB, loud enough to rapidly cause hearing loss without significant protection. I could feel pressure in my ears even with dense earplugs. Most of the crowd was similarly equipped, though a handful of individuals wore no

protection whatsoever (including one man I saw without earplugs at several shows in the area). The band locked into a slow groove, and gradually the crowd loosened. It was okay to start moving, to start feeling the groove, to let our bodies move in time with the music. Some took this opportunity to bob or sway in small movements, maybe with a synchronous nod of the head. Others went much farther, enacting possibly the slowest version of headbanging I had ever seen. The most effective headbangers, perhaps unsurprisingly, were those with the longest hair. They could whip their hair through the air in circular patterns over the course of these very slow beats, often at around 60 beats per minute—once per second—or slower.

The show changed again when Orion started to sing. He never turned around; he kept his back to us, singing almost over his shoulder. The person sound checking and the person singing were no different; there was no change in persona to indicate he had entered into some kind of liminal space. Liminality, from Victor Turner, is theorized in the context of rites of passage as "*a limbo* that was not any place they were in before and not yet any place they would be in" (Turner 1988, 25). Many performers in metal take on a "powerful" persona, with a widened stance, hunched back and a furrowed brow, immediately before beginning to play. Glenn Pillsbury, for example, discusses the cultivation of a specific performance persona incorporating these gestures by James Hetfield, frontman of Metallica (Pillsbury 2006). This is sometimes jarring and even comedic if the performer is "normal-looking" otherwise. Orion made no obvious attempt to adopt another persona, but he was clearly aware

that he was in a performance and that there was something special happening. He acted as though torn between keeping this moment private and sharing it with the public, keeping his body turned away but his head back toward the crowd. What he had no control over keeping private, though, was the pain he was enduring in order to sing. His eyes shut as if from sheer force, his throat bulged, a vein in his forehead throbbed. He pushed and pushed, to the point where a change—a break, even—in his voice became audible. The sound was nearly inhuman, and probably would have stayed that way if it was played back from a recording. But being less than ten feet away from him, there was no choice but to confront the fact that a human body was being pushed to its limits to produce this sound.

The combination of sheer volume and obvious human pain was profound. Our bodies were shot through with sound, dissolved into semisolid masses of organic material. We became resonant objects, moving, it seemed, by will of the music and not by any deliberate choice. We were suddenly more aware of our bodies, as receptors of and co-vibrators with a powerful force and as empathetic mirrors of the singer's pain, and somehow less aware of them, as if there was no need to actually be aware of anything. Our bodies were marvelous mechanisms of musicking, but they also became fantastically fragile—being so aware of the body is a jolting reminder that it is a messy collection of flesh and bone and organs and blood, a fact generally hidden from our consciousness. The overwhelming sensory information of this experience forced us into this position of bodily epiphany, by which I refer not to an embodied

cognition or awareness, but to a heightened perception of the insides of our bodies, beyond the bits that we notice day-to-day (such as our stomachs rumbling from hunger or our hearts palpitating in nervousness). It was not necessarily pleasant or even comfortable, but it was irresistibly fascinating and entirely unlike any other sensory condition.

This state, so radically different from our existences before the show, continued through Ilsa's entire set. But it did not simply stop in time with the music. We were not released from the grip of this enormous sound and allowed to return to a quotidian normalcy. Along with the rest of the crowd, we stumbled awkwardly around the space for a few moments. Our eyes seemed to need to adjust, even though the lighting had not changed. We slowly made our way down the stairs and out to the street as wobbly masses barely contained by awakening consciousnesses. Once we reached my car, I had to pause briefly to make sure I could coordinate my body well enough to drive. We were in no hurry to get home, though, as time could not have been any less important in that moment. After taking my friend home, I drove the thirty-or-so minutes back to my place, though it could as well have been five minutes or an hour. I reached my bed exhausted, still a bit wobbly, eagerly awaiting the return of normality that the morning would bring but just as much wishing that I could go back, regardless of how utterly bizarre it was, to the state of disorienting messiness I had experienced that night.

The Performance of Doom

Doom metal performances, referred to, along with all other metal performances, as shows,[2] are exhilarating and pleasurable, but also overwhelming and crushing. They represent an extremely important portion of doom fan practice, functioning as both opportunities for social engagement with other members of the scene and unique musical experiences. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is the former of these traits—the articulation of the social dynamics of the musical scene—that has received the most attention in the scholarly literature. Little scholarly effort has been spent on analyzing the emotional, physical and psychical components of metal shows. Instead, these extremely important elements are summarized under the rubric of "catharsis," things to be gotten rid of in the interest of being stable, happy or perhaps "normal." This chapter represents an attempt to steer the discourse in the other direction, toward the experience and away from its aftermath.

The primary exception to this emphasis on the *afterward* is a small section in Deena Weinstein's *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* titled "Ecstasy," roughly four pages out of a larger, sociologically oriented chapter on shows. In this, Weinstein makes a case for the possibility of ecstatic states induced by metal—"the extreme form of pleasure and enjoyment, the attachment of heightened excitement to sources of delight"—largely as a result of extreme volume and multisensory stimuli (Weinstein

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[2] Additionally, bands typically "play" rather than "perform." Explanations for this range from an uncritical acceptance of insider jargon to a consciously oppositional stance against other cultural practices. As the singer of Thou explains, "I would never want to think of us playing a show as a 'performance' because it seems so contrived" (personal email correspondence, 29 September 2012).

2000, 213). Loudness is linked to an adrenaline rush, a safe, playful version of "the roar of a predator or the report of a gunshot signaling actual harm" (ibid., 215). Light shows and other bits of visual stimulation arouse a sense of excitement, riling up the crowd beyond what sound alone could.

Yet Weinstein's account of the ecstatic experience of metal does little to move beyond the idea of excitement—the volume is exciting, the light show is exciting, the adrenaline rush is exciting. She hints at a sense of stepping out of rationality and of "falling into the moment," a feeling that "time stands still" (ibid., 214). But the mechanism(s) by which this is accomplished are left unexplored, as are the bodily reactions that audience members might experience when they enter into a state of ecstasy. How might volume and adrenaline take us outside of time? How might excitement take us out of rationality?

The connection between music and states of altered consciousness is explored in depth in Judith Becker's *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*. Becker treats the phenomenon of what she calls "deep listening," a sort of engagement with musical phenomena that borders on "secular trancing, divorced from religious practice but often carrying religious sentiments such as feelings of transcendence or a sense of communion with a power beyond oneself" (Becker 2004, 2). Deep listeners are "persons who are profoundly moved, perhaps even to tears, by simply listening to a piece of music" (ibid.). She distinguishes between deep listening and trancing[3] largely

[3] The gerund form of "to trance," used to make explicit the processual, rather than static, nature of the act. Becker relates her use of the gerund to Christopher Small's "musicking," a similar attempt to emphasize process over stasis.

on the basis of context: deep listening is taken to be an engagement primarily with music, while trancing occurs mainly in religious settings involving many different activities. But deep listening is reliant on the same conditions as trancing, and indeed Becker treats it effectively as a kind of trancing.

Trance, for Becker, is defined as "a bodily event characterized by strong emotion, intense focus, the loss of the strong sense of self, usually enveloped by amnesia and a cessation of the inner language…trance is an event that accesses types of knowledge and experience which are inaccessible in non-trance events, and which are felt to be ineffable, not easily described or spoken of" (ibid., 43). Put succinctly, this seems, at first glance, to accurately describe my experience, and the experience of others as communicated to me, of live performances of doom metal. Becker argues, through a deft combination of ethnomusicology, evolutionary biology, neuroscience and phenomenology that the process of trancing is closely tied to a severance of consciousness from the self. This is not to say that trancers and deep listeners *lose consciousness*. Instead, she relies on the concepts of "core consciousness" and "extended consciousness," from neuroscientist Antonio Damasio.

Core consciousness is used to refer to the collection of sensations in and of the body, the awareness that perceptions cause changes in the state of the body and the conclusion that these changes happen to a self, the "me" (ibid., 135). Extended consciousness, the sense that is most likely referred to as simply "consciousness," is also referred to as the autobiographical self and entails the socially constructed idea of

self, the self about whom we create identities, memories and stories. Becker argues that, in trance, it is the extended consciousness that is separated from the individual, such that they are left only with their core consciousness. The quality of the trance state, then, is dictated by the presence of a sort of surrogate extended consciousness provided by the social context of the trance activity. Thus trancers in religious ceremonies take on the consciousnesses of deities or align themselves with a spiritual force, while deep listeners become attuned to a power beyond their bodies, whether social or spiritual.

And yet there is a feeling that Becker's deep listeners, a model closely tied to the ethnographic study of religious trancing, does not adequately address the specifics of an experience of doom metal. To be sure, live performances of doom metal are certainly ritualistic. They involve special spaces that might even be considered sacred (such as the stages of storied or historic venues), what might be considered acts of crossing liminal boundaries (paying admission, getting a hand stamp, consuming beer or other substances, putting on performative personas), liminal states during performances and returns to normalcy. In other words, doom metal shows share much in common with almost any other kind of performance. And while many, if not most, of doom's practitioners would scoff at the association with an activity closely tied to religious ceremony, there is the shared sensation of being opened up to something outside of the self, even if that something is no more spiritual than massively powerful sound waves blasting through bodies.

But it is precisely the fact of extreme bodily presence that is missing from Becker's account, at least as it could potentially apply to this musical practice. Where Becker finds trance occurring at the introduction of a surrogate extended consciousness, the experience of doom metal is intimately tied to an increased attention on core consciousness, a profoundly heightened awareness of the body that serves as the foundation of consciousness. Both challenge and modify the assumed "me" of extended consciousness, but the experience of doom metal seems to aim more squarely at unravelling the sense of "me" entirely rather than extended it upward and outward through a surrogate; Becker highlights transcendence while doom emphasizes immanence.

In this sense, the experience of doom metal is quite similar to the idea of ecstasy as used in the psychoanalytic literature. Becker specifically avoids using the term "ecstasy" in favor of "trance" because it is, as she says, "a happier term" (ibid., 8). This is the sense in which Weinstein employs the term, as pleasure, enjoyment, excitement and delight. In other words, metal concerts are *fun*, and overwhelmingly so. Therefore, the experience is one of ecstasy. But ecstasy, when used in a psychoanalytic context, is radically different from an incredibly fun experience. It is still an extreme form of pleasure, but it a pleasure so extreme that it begins to fold back over on itself and become uncomfortable or even painful (Evans 1996, 93).

Jouissance and Doom

The psychoanalytic notion of ecstasy, based primarily on the work of Jacques Lacan, is typically synonymous with the term *jouissance* as distinct from the less intense *plaisir*, or pleasure. Strictly speaking, *jouissance* is intimately related to the Freudian concept of the pleasure principle, which holds that an organism's goal, or one goal, is to maintain a certain level of pleasure in order to minimize anxiety and distress (ibid.). Crucially, though, this pleasure must itself be kept to a minimum. Too much pleasure at once potentially risks using it all up and dipping into distress. There is thus a limit to pleasure, one that marks the ideal boundary of the pleasure principle. There are moments, though, in which we inevitably break past that limit. In these moments, Lacan argues, excessive pleasure becomes displeasure and pain and we experience *jouissance*. The source of this limit is the moment of separation of the child from its mother and the introduction of that child into the world of language and symbolic meaning. Lacan refers to this metaphorically as castration, an event in which the subject is fully differentiated from the mother and experiences the lack of the phallus —not an actual phallus but the imaginary one that might keep the mother satisfied and thus unified with the child. The prohibition of excessive pleasure, then, is self-imposed to justify the apparent loss of the boundless enjoyment experienced in the attachment to the mother. Because the sense of the self, particularly the extended consciousness from Becker, is so thoroughly bound up in language (and thus post-castration existence), the experience of *jouissance* is both a return to pre-linguistic

pleasure and a temporary dissolution of the self. And because it entails the obliteration of the rational, linguistically-formulated and bounded self, the experience is necessarily uncomfortable, disconcerting and even painful.

In musicology dealing with popular music, the term is most frequently employed in the discussion of dance music, after John Gill's use in *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Music* to describe the particular kind of pleasure of the dance music experience (Gill 1995). But according to Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, this use of the term is generally stripped of its complex and potentially counterintuitive meanings as used in the psychoanalytic tradition (Gilbert and Pearson 1999). They argue that, instead of dance music invoking either a painful experience or simple pleasure, the *jouissance* of dance music is best understood for what it accomplishes, namely the regression to a state before gender and sexuality. This seems particularly relevant for the study of dance music, as it is historically connected to the expression of both gender and sex, positively or otherwise. Gilbert and Pearson thus argue that the *jouissance* of dance music, particularly rave, provides an alternative *asexual* pleasure that can only be achieved through the regression inherent in *jouissance*. But, crucially, they posit that the regression is not one to a pre-linguistic state. From Judith Butler, they present the thesis that the very notion of a pre-linguistic state is dependent on the existence of language, and as such is always out of reach, if it exists at all. Instead, they put forth a version of *jouissance* signifying "the interruption and displacement of particular

discursive terms. We might say that *jouissance* is what is experienced at the moment when the discourses shaping our identity are interrupted and displaced such that that identity is challenged, opened up to the possibility of change, to the noise at the borders of its articulation" (ibid., 105). *Jouissance*, then, is not strictly a regression to a moment before language and thus discursive structure, but an opportunity to step outside of discourse and experience an alternate reality, however temporary.

Clearly, though, doom metal is not particularly concerned with questions of sexuality and gender. If anything, those are as far from the explicit concerns of its practitioners as possible. (This could even be considered to be the case to a detrimental degree, as the assumption of masculine heteronormativity goes largely unquestioned by practitioners here and in most other sorts of metal.) However, as I have argued, it is concerned extensively with questions of mortality and death, both as a condition and as a process. In what follows, I treat three salient features of doom metal performances that not only help to define the experiences of those performances but that are also readily legible through the lens of psychoanalytic theory: volume, repetition and timbre.

The Abjection of Doom

While remaining in the psychoanalytic tradition and preserving the notion of *jouissance*, it is useful to consider the notion of the abject, as theorized by Julia Kristeva, as an alternative site of regression. Like Lacan, Kristeva is interested in, and

places great importance on, the moment in early development marking the transition from non-linguistic to linguistic states. In Lacan, this moment, metaphorized as castration, is quite abrupt and traumatic. Kristeva argues, though, that there is a transitional, liminal state before full adoption of language and thus the full entrance into the symbolic order (Kristeva 1982). During this state, our experience is characterized by the realization that we are somehow different from the world around us. We begin to package the bundle of perceptions and experiences and thoughts that center around us into a discrete entity called "myself." But, Kristeva argues, it is also characterized by repeated encounters with the abject, which she defines rather openly as that which poses the risk of undoing the crucial membranes between self and other, subject and object. The symbolic order, the world of language, allows for hard and fast distinctions between what is "me" and what is "not me," but we must first endure the confusing encounters with the abject in order to realize fully how to separate those two categories.

The abject, though, continues to confuse and challenge this separation. Kristeva argues that although the abject defines the transitional period sparked by the detachment from the mother's body, it does not disappear once the subject has fully entered the symbolic order. Indeed, the subject is never impenetrable or invulnerable but is constantly being defined and demarcated against things that accomplish what Kristeva calls *going beyond signifying*.

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat

> encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (ibid., 3)

In other words, the abject acts without signifying and thus brings us outside of the symbolic order and outside of ourselves. Where for Lacan *jouissance* is largely blocked off, for Kristeva it is a constant fact of existence—typically in minuscule amounts, but always threatening to undo us as rational selves.

These two points of regression—the abject for Kristeva and asexual, agendered pleasure for Gilbert and Pearson—seem equally valid and meaningful, but each one is emphasized to differing degrees in different contexts. I have experienced asexual pleasure at metal shows, but these have tended to be much larger shows with much larger crowds of people, moving and sweating, rubbing against each other either intentionally or chaotically. These moments are characterized by a sensation of being drawn out of myself and forced into relational engagements with others. In these moments, my being is guided by the question "How do I fit together with these other bodies?" I use them as a vehicle to increase sensation, both my own and theirs. I lose the sense of separation between myself and them, and we become a collective of energy and activity. At other shows, including every doom show I have attended, the events play out such that the connection between people is less important than the internal materiality of the individual. Interpersonal touch is rare, generally only an

accidental brush as people walk through the venue. The pleasure of these moments is directed internally, into the body, toward the abject.

When I attend a doom metal show, the abject is the farthest thing from my mind. But, in a way, this is precisely the point. My mind ceases to function the way it does before the intense barrage of sound and before my body begins to move, either by gently swaying or by thrusting my head back and forth, with the slowly pulsing beats. My self-awareness does not cease, and I continue to know that the collection of sensations being experienced are tightly connected to my body. But "my body" comes to mean something else entirely during these events. It is no longer the mechanism that gets me from place to place and that allows me to accomplish my daily tasks, including moving my fingers across a keyboard as I write this. The conception of my body as a mechanism seems to dissolve entirely. This is not to say that I perceive my body's mechanism as dissolved, but that the very metaphor ceases to be meaningful.

When the first note is played, I am suddenly aware of my gut, not as an abstractly understood system of organs that digests food or alerts me to hunger, but as a resonating, vibrating collection of flesh that cries out, compressed from the energy and yet somehow tugging and pulling on the rest of my body. I can feel its connections to my chest as my diaphragm is strained under the pressure against my lungs and heart. The process of breathing, typically so banal that our brains put it on autopilot, suddenly becomes one of actively combatting the force being applied to the torso from every angle. (At certain spots in certain venues, the powers of

amplification and sound wave reflection conspire to make breathing nearly impossible. People pass into these zones obliviously, note their effect and possibly enjoy it for a moment, then move on and avoid reentering these frightening spaces.) This force is felt on the skin, as it vibrates and tingles in every direction. And whereas I tend to understand my muscles as motor devices and only become aware of them as they are injured or sore, here they are suddenly resonating masses of matter, transmitting energy straight down to and through my bones. My body is suddenly bigger, heavier, denser, and somehow *deeper* and *clearer*. Every sensation is blown up, magnified, made more intense. But I am suddenly aware not only of the existence of the interior of my body; I am unable to shake the sensation that this whole massive set of flesh, bone, blood and whatever else is profoundly fragile. My encounter with the abject is both exhilarating and disorienting, even frightening. Or, as Kristeva says of the abject, "one does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully. A passion" (ibid., 9).

And it is not the case that is experienced by the audience alone. This is not a relationship between an aggressive musician and an unwitting, helpless audience, as the occasional qualifier "violent" would suggest. Nor is it even one between a dominating sadist and willfully submitting masochists. Doom metal musicians have also intimated that they imagine themselves as engaging with an outside power. If the notion of masochism is useful at all, it could be said that everyone in doom metal can be equally masochistic, submitting to the external power communicated through

sound. San Diego-based doom and noise musician Sam Lopez uses the metaphor of a physical altercation:

> But then it feels good when it hits you. Me, I guess. When I'm playing and it hits me, you can feel it, it hits you. And it's almost like you're wrestling with a bear. Volume to me works like that, for me, where I guess it's like [masochism], where I'm taking it out on myself by playing loud, being very physical. So that volume is something that's aimed more at me than it would be to anyone else. The audience would be secondary. You know, it's just me and this thing. And that's how I use volume. That's how I feel about it. You know, because it goes back to practicing. I mean, I rehearse in a room with the amp behind me, and I'm wrestling in this room with the sound, in this tiny little cage—it's a cage, right, and you're wrestling this thing. So that's where volume comes in. It's not for anybody else. It's a weapon against myself. (personal correspondence, conversation, 23 July 2012)

Even when Lopez is acting in his capacity as a musician, volume is still somehow an external force. It is the result of his actions in concert with technology, to be sure, but it is not an extension of himself or his will out into the world. It does not make him larger or more powerful. Instead, it collapses him inward and attempts to undo him.

Kristeva argues that the artistic value of the abject lies in its ability to help redefine the subject's position and thus once again block out the abject. Thus the encounter is "an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it" (Kristeva 1982, 29). Barbara Creed, a horror film scholar, similarly writes that "the horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and the non-human" (Creed 1993, 14). But the focus in doom metal experience seems to be primarily on a *continued* encounter

with the abject and a stepping-outside of the self. It is not so much an attempt to eject the abject or protect from it but to acknowledge the incredible fragility of the border between the self and the non-self, and possibly even to absorb some of the abject into the self.

The Repetition of Doom

The temporal experience of doom metal is based primarily on the phenomenon of repetition. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the main propulsive feature of doom metal is groove, an inherently repetitive process that must sustain some amount of tension through a phrase, a section, or even an entire song. It locks the bodies of musician and listener alike into a driving, pulsating engine even at extremely slow tempi. In most doom performances, these masses of sound/time last for anywhere between five and fifteen minutes, and sometimes more (and even much more, like Sleep's hour-long *Dopesmoker*). They are oriented around the repetition of music and sensation in a way that other metal musics, and indeed most other popular musics, are not. Even a five minute heavy metal song, long by the standards of that subgenre, is far from repetitive, as dramatic and narrative changes in melody and harmony occur frequently and drive toward an ultimate conclusion and release. Doom metal, with its tendencies toward static melodies and simplistic harmonies delivered through riffs, repeats over and over and over again. Heavy metal emphasizes the imminence of

change and ending; doom metal emphasizes the immanence of momentary presence, a process with the potential for infinite repetition.

Naomi Cumming argues that, despite the similarities between volume and rhythm in their capacity to induce a regressive state, the peculiarities of repetitive rhythms are worth considering in depth (Cumming 1997). In treating "Different Trains" by Steve Reich, a work heavily based on repetition, she discusses the processual nature of ostinati, a term that overlaps significantly with both riff and groove in its highly repetitive and highly propulsive nature. The ostinato is understood as a manifestation of the "chora," which for Kristeva is the earliest state of psychosexual development. (Kristeva herself borrowed the term from Plato, for whom chora or khora is a space between being and non-being.) In the chora, existence is almost pure materiality, without a division between subject and object or self and Other. Existence is dominated by overwhelming perception and drive. For Cumming, the ostinato mimics this through an envelopment, as it "encloses the listener" (ibid., 136) and becomes like "the maternal voice as a blanket of sound, extending on all sides of the newborn infant" (Silverman 1988, 72). She argues that this occurs through what David Schwarz calls "the meaning-stripping function of repetition" (Schwarz 1993, 43). Schwarz claims that, like hearing the same words spoken over and again, the repetition of sound strips it of its syntactic meaning. The same notion applies in musical repetition, whereby repeated sounds defy the possibility for formal syntax or structural logic. That is, many of the musical

parameters that are typically relied on heavily in Western musical practice are downplayed and deemphasized through repetition. Sounds changing imply progression and development; sounds repeating imply situated sensation and the pre-linguistic chora.

Elsewhere in the psychoanalytic literature, repetition is intimately linked with the notion of *jouissance*. Lacan, for whom the two are practically inseparable, derives his theory of repetition from Sigmund Freud. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud grapples with several cases in which an observed person repeats a process over and over, even if that process does not bring them pleasure (Freud 2010). This plainly violates the pleasure principle, which holds that an organism seeks to reduce tension to a minimum and maintain an equilibrium of managed pleasure and which Freud had believed to be the guiding principle of organic life. The compulsion to repeat, it seemed to him, hinted at a different principle, one that worked outside—or beyond, as it were—the pleasure principle. Freud termed this the death drive, or Thanatos (after the Greek personification of death), the innate instinct to return to a state of non-life. He went on to argue that all organisms are guided by the death drive as equally as they are by the life drives, which others have termed Eros, lending Thanatos a quasi-metaphysical quality.

For Lacan, all drives are reducible to the death drive, though not necessarily as the desire to return to a state of non-life. Instead, the death drive—all drives, that is—brings us to *jouissance*, the momentary dissolution of the subject—death as a fall from

the symbolic order and a joining with the real (Lacan 1981). It is a longing for a return to, rather than an encounter with, the real and thus existence outside the symbolic order. Crucially, though, drives are never really supposed to get us to their destinations. In this, drives are kept entirely separate from instincts, which are maintained as biological needs that can be at least momentarily satisfied. Drives, unlike instincts, circle around their destinations, giving us the pleasure of proximity but also the pain of distance. This endless circling around and around, forever spiraling *near* the object of the drive, is referred to rather plainly by Lacan as repetition.

Ultimately, repetition as a sonic blanket enveloping the subject in a chora-like enclosure and repetition as a means to incessantly encourage an encounter with the real are functionally similar if not identical. Both lead to an interruption of the self, though obviously the implications of each are somewhat different. For Cumming, the chora, linked to the maternal womb, is an apparently positive space, one in which the subject (who is not yet a subject) experiences pure, undifferentiated pleasure. Lacan sets up the real as painful, unsettling or horrifying because of its ability to destroy the symbolic order and blur the boundaries between what is me and what is not me, that is, to undo the self. Repetition, in both cases, accomplishes the dissolution of the self, though with divergent emphases and outcomes—nurturing pleasure for Kristeva and Cumming, senseless horror for Lacan. Whether the repetition of doom metal accomplishes a warm, sonic womb or a frightening dissolution of subjectivity is of

course entirely dependent on the particular participant. It is likely the case that the former is more frequent during at-home listenings or when volume is less likely to be felt as a physical force, as with the music that Cumming discusses. The particular combination of volume with repetition, though, seems more inclined to shade the experience toward the horror of the real.

The Grain of Doom

It is not only the sonic force of volume or unrelenting repetition at a doom metal show that initiates this feeling of fragility and precariousness. The musical material, specifically its quality of sound, also contributes greatly to the sensation of materiality. Gilbert and Pearson discuss the general avoidance, in Western music scholarship, of the issue of timbre. They argue that timbre is kept at the margins of discourse precisely because it is messy and indistinct (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 59). For them, Western musical practice dictates the search for "perfect" tone quality on any instrument, even the voice, such that variation and uniqueness—in short, differences—are hidden away. Of course this does not take into consideration the fact that the quality of a timbre is highly contingent on its context such that a "perfect" voice in one region or time period will be less desirable in another. Rather it follows from John Shepherd's argument that Western music is based first and foremost on syntactical concerns, the relationships *between* sounds, rather than the content of the sounds themselves (Shepherd 1995). To engage in a productive discussion about

timbre, they turn to Roland Barthes' idea of the grain of the voice, which he defines as "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" (Barthes 1977, 182). It draws on Kristeva's notion of *signifiance*, the ability of the signifier to act without reference to the signified. In the context of vocal performance, it is the ability of the *sound* of the voice to mean something without the effects of linguistic communication. Outside of vocal performance, it refers both to the literal "grain"iness of certain sounds and to the materiality of sound as a physical phenomenon.

In doom metal, both graininess and materiality are salient phenomena. The effects of the latter, as a result of volume, is what has helped to open up access to *jouissance* thus far. The grain of the sound, though, has been explored significantly less. Among the major writers on metal music, the dominant descriptor of timbre, qualified almost exclusively by the presence of distortion, is "powerful." The authors, particularly Berger, Walser, Weinstein and Kahn-Harris, write that the high level of distortion used in metal signifies the incredible amount of power wielded by the musicians, both as masters of their instruments and masters of the technologies used (Berger 1999, Walser 1993, Weinstein 2000, Kahn-Harris 2007). The symbolism of power is readily apparent as distortion, after all, occurs as a signal is powered beyond the limits of a transmission channel, whether electronic circuitry or the human body. When the output signal of an electric guitar is amplified beyond what the various components of the amplifier and speaker are designed to handle, distortion occurs. This causes the signal to clip against the limits of the device, generating additional

harmonics that can range in character from warm to destructively noisy. The same principle applies to the human voice, as it is possible to put too much energy into one's vocal folds and produce some amount of distortion.

For the authors mentioned previously, the signified power becomes more central than the signifying distortion, as power trumps the weaknesses it exposes. But if, in music overwhelmingly concerned with a *lack* of power, there is a consistent element—timbre—that hints at breakage and weakness, why must it signify anything else? In other words, as Barthes uses the notion of grain to hint at the *signifiance* of the voice, it should be possible to understand the *signifiance* of distortion as the sound of limitation and breakage. Indeed, it is difficult to sustain the argument that distortion equates to power in the context of doom metal. The timbre of doom is *powerful*, as a result of sheer volume as much as anything else, but it is also profoundly fragile and precarious. A single note struck on an electric guitar downtuned to A, processed through multiple layers of distortion and fuzz, throws out a dizzyingly expansive array of frequencies split across numerous octaves. There is an identifiable core frequency, the "note," but there is also a wide swath of noise that oscillates in intensity as the string vibrates and the whole signal chain feeds back. This noise seems to pull from the inside, grabbing the interior of the sound and ripping it outward. It explodes into countless pieces—component frequencies—sprayed across the sonic spectrum, upward into ear-splitting squeals and downward into bone-shattering rumbles. It is the sound of malfunction and rupture, potentially opening up another encounter with the

real as it explodes our expectations of what the guitar *should* sound like, and even what the guitar *is*. The meaning of the entire apparatus is interrupted and torn apart, and we are left to stitch its fragile pieces back together.

And this is not the steady, calculated noise that might be used in other extreme musics, including the eponymous "noise music." It grows and falters, becomes thicker and thinner, stretches in every possible direction seemingly at random. It is powerful, to be sure, but it is a power that acts almost incidental to the agency of the musicians. The power acts to tear apart not only the body of the sound but the bodies of the musicians and listeners as they are exposed as limited and weak.

The same can be said for the use of voice in doom metal, as vocal performance practice dictates the use of techniques that push the human vocal tract to—and even beyond—the point of breaking. This is evident not only in the sound of the voice, which splits into octaves that come from mysterious depths within the vocal folds, but is also legible in and on the bodies of the vocalists. Their faces turn red, with veins bulging from foreheads, temples and necks. Their bodies stiffen with each utterance, as if every muscle in the body must conspire to push out the last ounce of grit from their larynxes. And frequently, a marked change occurs in the quality of the voice during a performance. It is a shift or a break, sounding deeper, higher, raspier, grittier, more noisy, more broken.

Put simply, the timbres of doom metal are legible as the *signifiance* of fragility and breakage. The timbre of distortion itself is typically taken as a signifier pointing

toward power, and this reading is quite sensible in commercially successful heavy metal that can be taken as being about power and little else. But, particularly in doom metal, a musical practice that challenges the centrality of power, or at least of the powerful subject, there is a disconnect between the signifying distortion and the potentially signified power. The symbolic chain is broken, and distortion is left in a state of *signifiance*, meaning only weakness, decay, breaking.

The timbres of doom do not exist separately from its volume or repetition and similarly the experience of grain is not isolated from those of *jouissance* or abjection. These phenomena and experiences coalesce into the larger phenomenon and experience of a doom metal show, itself a rich and significant cultural event. In what follows, I step back from the detailed analysis of the preceding sections to investigate the meaning of a doom metal show and what it might provide its practitioners in a larger social context.

The Theater of Doom

During a doom metal show, I come into contact with the parts of myself that are generally hidden from my own awareness, that, in a way, I *must* hide from myself. I hide these things to separate myself from the rest of the world. The materiality of my body serves only to connect me back to the world, to blur the understanding that I am separate and distinct. And the degree to which I experience this materiality—every inch of my body bloated and bursting with sonic energy and screaming "I am

here!"—reminds me of its fragility, of the precarious nature of life, of the inevitability of death and the ultimate return to the world of matter. It is an experience that is simultaneously horrifying and extremely pleasurable, one that challenges my day-to-day understanding of myself and my role in the world.

In this, doom metal shows, and many other kinds of metal and extreme music shows, embrace the aesthetic of Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty (ToC), a concept that has proven both extremely elusive and prominent in 20th and 21st century artistic practice. The idea of the ToC, developed through the late 1920s and 30s and outlined in the 1938 publication *The Theater and its Double*, is a radical critique of theatrical practices and theories. "Cruelty" here is not meant in the sense that Artaud wished to do any harm to or inflict any pain on his audience. Rather, he intended to use the theater to challenge social convention and accepted understandings and to peel back the masks covering reality. This is articulated metaphorically in the essay "The Theater and the Plague," from his aforementioned 1938 book. Here, Artaud recounts an anecdote from the outbreak of plague in fourteenth century Europe (Artaud 1958). His telling of the story is notable particularly for its emphasis on the materiality of the plague, as opposed to a more abstracted medical understanding. The plague is a very real physical entity invading the body and destroying it from the inside. His language is riddled with references to that which Kristeva, decades later, theorizes as the abject. Beyond this materiality, what Artaud finds most interesting about the plague is its effect of radical behavior modification, as those infected—either by the biological

microbe or the metaphysical plague-as-idea attacking the popular consciousness—act in ways completely contrary to their normal, socially-prescribed ways: the miser giving away his money, the loyal son killing his father, the chaste man sodomizing his neighbor. Artaud declares that this combination of materiality and threatening, even undoing, of social convention should be at the heart of the ToC.

Crucially, though, Artaud never actually defines what the ToC should be or how it should function. He merely provides a general sense of what it might accomplish. Jacques Derrida attempts to remedy this deficiency in "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," at least by defining what the ToC should not, or cannot, be. The ToC must exclude: "non-sacred" theater, by which Derrida refers, through the work of René Girard, to theater's uniqueness and ability to generate social change (Girard 1979); "theater that privileges speech or rather the verb, all theater of words;" "abstract theater which excludes something from the totality of art, and thus, from the totality of life and its resources of signification;" "all theater of alienation," meaning that Artaud intended to keep the spectator at the center of the production; "all non-political theater" such that theater must be primarily participatory rather than passively pedagogical; and "all ideological theater, cultural theater, communicative, interpretive theater seeking to transmit a content or deliver a message" (Derrida 2004).

By this last exclusion, Derrida reaches his ultimate point about the ToC which is that Artaud's central desire was to eliminate repetition and the possibility of

something lasting beyond the limits of the theatrical event. Any semblance of permanence, of course, could result in its institution and the creation of new "masks," to which the goal of the enterprise is entirely opposed. Repetition, for Artaud, is precisely the source of everything he found dangerous and reprehensible about theater in particular and society in general.

It is in this absolute opposition to repetition that Derrida finds the ultimate failure of the ToC as Artaud seems to have intended it. If Artaud was truly interested in a representational theater, which generally was the case, then he is necessarily dependent on the processes of signification—put plainly, the means by which one thing stands in place of or points toward another. Signifiers, if they are indeed to signify, must remain stable and thus must be repeated. The elimination of repetition, then, destroys the ability of signifiers to signify and thus destroys the possibility of representation.

The application of the ToC to doom metal performances at first appears paradoxical, as doom metal is highly dependent on repetition while the ToC seeks to eliminate it. Put simply, it is precisely the repetition of doom metal that works toward the blockage of representation through the logic of *signifiance*. As Schwarz argues above, the repetition of one sound, be it a word, a vocal utterance or a musical idea, deprives that sound of its syntactic meaning and it eventually becomes something else entirely. Just as words no longer reach their points of signification, musical sounds

cease to reach beyond themselves into larger forms and structures. They point only to themselves, toward their momentary unfolding and immanent presence.

In this rejection of stable meaning, doom metal performances help to open up spaces for the interrogation of accepted and standardized social norms. Bodies, perceptions, selves and relationships to the world at large are questioned. It is in this that performances such as these offer up their ultimate power, which is to step outside of social expectation and discursive prescription, to be freed of obligation and exist as nothing, everything or anything.

Interestingly, Artaud raises the possibility of catharsis and in fact never explicitly rejects it as the outcome of the ToC. He even calls for the utopian condition of release and purification as participants are freed from their masks. But, significantly, he overwhelmingly focuses on the experience and not its aftermath. If catharsis is the outcome, it seems to be only a convenient byproduct of the endeavor. Further, his idea of utopian purification, while reminiscent of the cathartic release, is potentially subversive and radical. Instead of being purified as a means to reenter society as a productive individual, the ToC sets up the conditions by which an individual could be purified *from* society.

The Expenditure of Doom

Doom metal shows allow practitioners to step outside of society, however momentarily, in an act of what Georges Bataille refers to as expenditure. Bataille, best

known for his often pornographic interest in filth and its encounters with the sacred, developed his theory of expenditure in the 1930s as a response to what he saw as an overwhelming emphasis on the social utility—neatly summarized as material utility—of all human behavior. His concern was justified by the contemporaneous rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes around the world in which human will was subjugated to the demands of the state. He expressed his objection to this position rather bluntly: "there is nothing that permits one to define what is useful to man" (Bataille 1985, 116). Bataille was particularly concerned with the possible status of activities characterized by "pleasure, whether art, permissible debauchery, or play" in a society that allows only the pursuit of utility (ibid., 117).

In order to break out of the necessity of utility, Bataille points out that human behavior is not reducible to production. Humans—and all lifeforms—consume. He differentiates between the consumption that is necessary to sustain life and that makes production possible in the first place and consumption that is not productively oriented. He calls this latter form expenditure, which he believes is firmly rooted in loss. That is to say, expenditure is at its most meaningful when it carries the highest degree of loss. As examples, he discusses jewels, human and animal sacrifice, gambling and art. In these cases, he argues, the investment in an activity is far more important than the return, to the point that a lack of return on an absolute investment—trading one's savings for a diamond, sacrificing someone in a ritual, losing everything in a game of poker—is the truest sense of expenditure. His treatment of art is

interesting, if a bit frustrating, in that he divides artistic endeavor along the lines of apparent symbolic potential. That is, music, dance and architecture are kept separate from poetry, literature and theater on the basis that the latter group is intrinsically symbolic while the former (vaguely defined as "real expenditure") is only made symbolic via external significations (ibid., 120). The crux of this distinction is that, if all artistic activity is expenditure, then the truest expenditure—that which approaches loss most fully—is that which can *only* represent loss. And in this act of "creation by means of loss," Bataille argues that such art is effectively sacrifice, "nothing other than the production of *sacred* things," which are themselves taken to be of cultural, rather than utilitarian, value (ibid., 120, 119).

Bataille's sacrifice—simultaneously destruction and creation—is radically different from the much more established, at least in musicological literature, sacrifice proposed by Jacques Attali, which is essentially a mildly controlled version of destructive violence. The divergence of approaches is quite easily understood: for Attali, sacrifice is ultimately useful as a means of controlling the populace and establishing the rule of law that makes society possible. This sacrifice is ultimately cathartic; it allows a populace to flirt briefly and safely with violence, after which they are purged of their bloodlust and return to a condition of compliance with confidence in the authority of society. This is similar to the role of violence or aggression in scholarly discussions of metal, which generally claim that a safe version of violence is invoked such that aggression can be purged. For Bataille, however, sacrifice is

ultimately useless in that it does not contribute to "the conservation of life and the continuation of individuals' productive activity in a given society" (ibid., 118). And in so doing, the act of sacrifice makes the sacrificial victim just as useless. Or, as Bataille argues, the victim is carried to a position of ultimate subjecthood. As an entirely useless entity, the sacrificial victim is completely opposite of the utilitarian object. This, for Bataille, is the true status of the sacred: utterly useless in any sort of economic or utilitarian sense, but profoundly meaningful in a cultural sense. And any appeal to the sacred, to this condition of uselessness, is categorized under the notion of expenditure, an umbrella covering "activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves" (ibid.).

Rather than imagining the complete embrace, in doom metal performances, of the abject, the pain of *jouissance* and the symbolism of death and mortality as the penultimate moment of the cathartic process just before the return to usefulness, then, it is reframed here as the ultimate moment of sacrifice and expenditure. After all, sacrifice has no aim other than the revealing and creation of the sacred through uselessness, and expenditure has no immediate goal other than destruction. The space of musical experience, then, is transformed into a sacrificial venue, and the act of listening becomes one of being sacrificed. Once again, this sounds reminiscent of Attali. But it is also crucial here to maintain a separation, or at least clarification, between the two writers. Attali's theories

> imply that music functions like sacrifice; that listening to noise is a little like being killed; that listening to music is to attend a ritual

> murder, with all the danger, guilt, but also reassurance that goes along with that; that applauding is a confirmation, after the channelization of the violence, that the spectators of the sacrifice could potentially resume practicing the general violence. (Attali 1985, 28)

I would argue, though, that the process of listening to music, especially in a live setting, is more akin to *being* sacrificed in Bataille's sense than it is like attending a sacrifice in Attali's sense. Attending Attali's sacrifice means being witness to a spectacle that reminds us that society is possible, that difference can be eradicated. Participating in Bataille's sacrifice instead means being transformed into a pure subject removed from the logic of utility, convening with the sacred, and instead being reminded that difference is indeed worth celebrating, embracing, and even actively seeking out.

It is here in the attitude toward difference that the profound rift between Attali and Bataille, despite superficial similarities in language and subject matter, is made manifest. In Attali, music is that which smooths over differences between noises and sounds, making them legible as some form of communication. Whereas noise is a simulacrum of generalized violence, music is a simulacrum of the rule of law and order. It is profoundly useful from a productive standpoint and encourages the catharsis explanation. In Bataille, music, as a form of expenditure (in fact, "real expenditure"), is entirely useless and signals only the destruction of a surplus of energy. From this we can infer that music belongs to the realm of the heterogenous, that which emphasizes difference and betrays the logic of utility. Its opposite, the homogenous, is that which obliterates difference—is this not the grounding for Attali's

thesis regarding the nexus between music and noise, that noise is that which emphasizes difference and music is that which obliterates it? Music, then, functions vastly differently for the two sets of theory even while both authors employ concepts like violence and sacrifice, the sacred and the profane.

Conclusion

Bataille's notions of sacrifice and expenditure provide a potential alternative to the logic of catharsis, which itself is an answer to the question "what is the value of this music?" The scholarly literature to this point has largely used catharsis to justify the practices of heavy metal and extreme metal. Catharsis allows the music to have a definitive social value, namely the elimination of "negative" emotions and thus the possibility of normalized socialization and productivity. The celebration of disturbing or confrontational themes is excusable by this logic, as long as it means that teens and young adults will not stray too far from the norm once they are through the cathartic trajectory. But sacrifice and expenditure allow these activities to be utterly pointless according to society at large with its demands for productive participation and yet profoundly meaningful on their own terms.

The use of psychoanalytic theory and the aesthetic of the ToC are useful in countering the notion, difficult to shake even among metal scholars, that metal and its attendant experiences are inherently negative (thus requiring catharsis as justification). According to that idea, extreme volume is necessarily violent and distortion is always

about power, specifically the power of the (assumed male) musician over everyone else. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, allows for these extreme sensations to mean something dramatically different, even if that is nothing at all. More to the point, it allows for an outright challenge of meaning and the very process of signification by which meaning is constructed. Volume, repetition and timbre all contribute to the sensation of *jouissance*, the encounter with the world beyond language and the possibility of existence outside of discursive construction.

In this, doom metal approaches the aesthetic of the ToC, an endeavor impossible to execute in its entirety but which emphasizes viscerality and the interruption of social norm and decorum. Doom metal, with its close ties to the abject, handily unsettles notions of self specifically through a radical engagement of the body and thus opens up avenues for new discourses, meanings and understandings. Unlike the ideal form of the ToC in which a radical separation from society is possible or even necessary, doom metal does not propose to undo social norm or create a fully autonomous utopia. But this does not mean that catharsis is the goal, either. The return to society is a simple fact for the vast majority of individuals. Yet doom metal, in opening up possibilities for utter uselessness, allows for a radical critique of that society and its prescriptions, however brief.

V.
CONCLUSION

In "The Seven Geases," Clark Ashton Smith, recognized along with H. P. Lovecraft as having shaped American horror aesthetics in the 20th century, writes of a hero caught in a terrifying cycle (Smith 2006). This hero, a decorated and powerful official, sets out on a hunting expedition and stumbles across a ritual of arcane magic. For having interrupted this ceremony he is cursed to a geas, a "highly urgent and imperative form of hypnosis," that leads him to cast aside his weapons, walk into a cave and offer himself as a sacrifice to an ancient, subterranean deity (ibid., 60). When he comes across the monstrous deity, he is confused to hear his own voice, speaking as if by itself to inform the deity of the geas. He is rejected, though, and cursed to a second geas to tread further into the earth to a second monstrous entity. This process repeats up to the sixth geas, at the end of which he finds himself at the ultimate source of horror, a sentient pool of muck spewing forth misshapen creatures, and sometimes dismembered pieces of creatures, that attack the hero. Yet even this terrifying entity rejects the hero and condemns him to a seventh and final geas, to be cast back out to the outer world, to which the muck refers as "a bleak and drear and dreadful limbo" (ibid., 64). On his journey upward to the surface the hero falls into a pit and dies unceremoniously, bringing an abrupt end to the story.

"The Seven Geases," published in 1934, preceded the founding texts of doom metal (Black Sabbath's *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid*) by 36 years and yet closely,

almost uncannily, predicts its stylistic and thematic concerns. The power of the hero is entirely inverted; he gives up his weaponry and moves and speaks according to a will that is not his own. He meets with entities that grow more powerful and more horrifying, casting his own weakness into increasingly stark contrast. The story itself is highly repetitive, with the hero rejected over and again by these entities and pushed deeper into the earth. The pattern is established quickly and remains constant, but the reader is pulled forward by the promise of ever more horrible creatures. The anticipation of increasing horror is met with the anticipation of the hero's impending death, the fact of which is established early in the story and hangs in the air throughout. The reader knows the hero will die; they must read on to learn when and how. The story envelops the reader, suffocating them in the dread of mortality and horror and offering no possibility of escape. And when the hero finally dies and the story draws to a close, his journey is not concluded because it has reached a logical end or satisfied some internal imperative; rather, it simply stops. There is no resolution, no answer, no closure.

Doom metal invites its practitioners inside, begging them to be wrapped up in its sounds, meanings and experiences. More so than any other subgenre of metal music, doom creates enveloping spaces that fully surround its practitioners, musicians and listeners alike. These are not, however, spaces in which subjects have access to power, control or authority. Rather, doom metal works primarily to craft claustrophobic and overwhelming sonic environments that challenge the power of its

practitioners, making them subjects *of* power, control and authority. This stands in stark contrast to the dominant discourse in the academic study of metal that argues for the inherent ability of this music to empower its practitioners, whether they are musicians blasting loud sounds to convey their mastery over the world around them or listeners identifying with the subject position of those powerful musicians.

I have argued throughout this dissertation that doom metal actively subverts the teleological tendency to direct attention toward ends and resolutions. That is, doom metal is explicitly *not* about ending or resolving; it is about persistent and situational sensation and uncertainty. It is a music that directs attention to the present moment, rooted in the experience of weakness and anxiety, and creates an uneasy anticipation for the next present moment, never suggesting where or what the future should be.

The music of doom metal, analyzed in Chapter 2, eschews goal-oriented structures and harmonic progressions. Instead, it is centered around the repetition of small motives featuring modal melodies (frequently in the Phrygian mode) and rhythmic patterns that engage the listener's body in a steady stream of motion. I argue that this musical organization is best understood as a form of groove, a phenomenon that has proved difficult for scholars to engage with in a clear and consistent way. For my purposes, I take groove to refer to a combination of: the tension arising from a particular approach to rhythmic performance such that beats seem to variously push and pull against an objective meter; the propulsion generated from the subtle variation

of a repeating melodic or rhythmic cycle; the bodily entrainment resulting from the repetition of these cycles with pulses that remain regular, or at least nearly regular; and the sensation of being physically wrapped up in, or "locked into," a rhythmic process making use of these features. Groove thus provides a comprehensive means for discussing both musical features, such as rhythmic practice and cyclicity, and experiential qualities, particularly bodily entrainment.

This latter point is particularly significant in the context of metal studies, which have tended to deny or gloss over questions of bodily engagement in this music. Even when directly discussing metal's endemic dances (headbanging and slamdancing/moshing), certain studies have downplayed the contribution of the body (Walser 1993, Kahn-Harris 2007). The presence of the body, however, is extremely important for the experience of metal. Fans are compelled to move their bodies with the groove, whether that culminates in slamming against other fans in a mosh pit, rocking their bodies back and forth to propel their heads (and long hair) through the air at a performance or tapping their feet and bobbing their heads while listening to a recording at home. This is a music that is felt and moved to, that forces one to feel and to move.

The themes and meanings with which doom metal engages similarly point attention to the moment of experience rather than its resolution, as I argued in Chapter 3. Doom metal trades in anxiety, primarily the uncertainty of mortality and the confusion of death. Further, doom metal's anxiety about death, mortality and

weakness is directed nowhere but toward anxiety itself. Death is presented not as a solution to the misery of life, as in black metal, or as a source of transgressive excitement, as in death metal, but as a confusing and mysterious process that is entirely unknowable. Similarly, weakness is not presented as something that can be fixed with any simple or obvious solution, but more bluntly as something that exists, a fact of living. Even thematically, then, doom metal shies away from resolution and draws its practitioners inward, toward problematic issues and away from answers.

The experience of doom metal, discussed in Chapter 4, actively promotes these sensations of uncertainty and anxiety. Through the use of extreme amplification, repetition and distortion, doom metal works to confuse the sense of self that is so laboriously constructed and maintained in daily life. I have argued that this experience is legible through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, particularly Jacques Lacan's *jouissance*, Julia Kristeva's abjection and Roland Barthes' grain of the voice. These three concepts all point toward the dissolution of the subject by forcing an encounter with what is typically hidden and marked off from the rationally constructed and linguistically grounded self, such as when my bones rattle with sound and my muscles pulse with groove. By blurring the sense of self, the experience of doom metal hints at the literal, biological end of the self in death, thus allowing for a safe space in which fans can play with sensations and experiences that are otherwise available only in potentially dangerous situations.

It could even be said that, in these experiences, doom metal opens up an opportunity for a sincere challenge to masculinity as it tends to be constructed around a rationality depending on power, authority and boundedness (Eagleton 2003). *Jouissance*, abjection and grain all call attention to the body, and specifically the body as a poorly bounded collection of material and sensation. This materiality and sensuality have historically been coded as feminine, and are still frequently rejected in discussions of masculinity. This rejection is notable in the literature on metal, which deemphasizes the presence of the body in the context of a music that is largely assumed to be an expression of masculinity. Walser and Weinstein argue that heavy metal of the 1980s is most readily legible as a concerted attempt to address apparent threats against masculinity, including disempowerment as a result of deindustrialization and the confrontation with the feminine inherent in adolescent sexuality (Walser 1993, Weinstein 2000). But there, heavy metal reaffirms masculinity by constructing spaces in which men, or boys, are imbued with mastery and from which women are effectively forbidden. In doom metal, masculinity is actively eroded through bodily engagement enabled by the entrainment of repetitive rhythms, the vibration caused by extreme volume, and the materiality of the timbres central to the subgenre's practice. Rational and bounded masculinity is challenged and broken down, without the explicit aim of building it back up.

Crucially, doom metal only provides this experiential opportunity; it does not suggest clear explanations of the processes of death, the implications of masculinity or

the meanings of weakness. Rather, its practitioners are left only with the possibility of exploration and questioning. Uncertainty is not answered but left open and ambiguous.

Harris M. Berger writes that "musicians, moshing crowds, and listeners come together at events to evoke, explore, and utilize a wide range of related emotions and qualities: anger, rage, aggression, pure and explosive energy, grandeur, depression, lumbering heaviness, confusion, and countless others" (Berger 1999, 271). Most scholars, and additionally most observers not personally invested in metal, seem to capitalize on the evocation and utilization of these emotions but devote significantly less attention to their exploration. Or, perhaps, they assume that fans themselves are more interested in evocation and utilization than exploration. In the standard trope of catharsis linking heavy metal fans to the frustration and disenfranchisement of deindustrialization, angry and aggressive music is used to invoke anger and aggression in fans, who then feel less angry and aggressive, having used up a critical quantity of those emotions. While here there is at least an effort made to identify the source of these emotions (the residual effects of deindustrialization), there is little sense that fans are actually exploring them rather than simply avoiding or escaping from them. In accounts of death metal, the identity of a source for these emotions is even less distinct such that the music is simply about evoking and releasing anger and aggression. The exploration of these emotions is almost actively downplayed, as though the only

reason that someone might reasonably want to experience anger or aggression is to eliminate it.

Doom metal provides a vehicle for exploration, particularly of uncertainty, anxiety and dread. It points inward through its music, its meanings and the experiences it offers, opening up the possibility for confrontation with these emotions. Why, though, should anyone wish to explore emotions like these that are typically cordoned off as "negative?" This question is asked directly, and in rather different fashions, by musicologists Jerrold Levinson and Stephen Davies in the context of the Western art music tradition. Levinson's essay, "Music and Negative Emotion," addresses what he calls the paradox of finding value in experiencing negative emotions (anything, apparently, that does not feel good). He notes that this problem *can* be explained by catharsis, but argues that "cathartic benefits, while occasionally very real, seem too indirect and prudential to be the whole or even the largest part of why we crave the experience of negative emotion from music" (Levinson 1997, 231). Beyond catharsis, he argues for several distinct yet interrelated "rewards" derived from the encounter with negative emotion: the ability to savor an emotion without consequence (such as feeling sad without having experienced heartbreak); a deeper knowledge of an emotional state; and the cultivation of emotional empathy.

Davies, in "Why Listen to Sad Music If It Makes One Feel Sad?," asserts instead that it is necessary to reformulate the question: rather than "why do people concern themselves with music that makes them feel sad?" he proposes that we ask

"why do people concern themselves with music" (Davies 1997, 246)? Writing primarily about Western art music, he argues that enjoyment is typically a function of understanding (thus locating that musical tradition as a primarily cognitive enterprise), and that any piece from which we might derive the enjoyment of understanding is likely to be vigorously sought out, regardless of its emotional content. Ultimately, Davies moves back from this highly contextual sort of enjoyment to come to the extremely general conclusion that pleasure is entirely contingent on the person experiencing it.

I do not believe that these positions are mutually exclusive, and indeed both are equally applicable to the study of doom metal. This subgenre deals with a stable set of core themes (death, powerlessness, oppression) and emotions (anxiety, uncertainty, dread). Doom metal allows its practitioners to investigate these themes and ideas, many of which are likely to be present in some form in their daily lives, without direct consequence; no one will die as a result of listening to doom metal, but anyone can imagine what the implications of death might be. The dread of mortality, often covered up by the promises of science and modern medicine, can be considered safely and productively. What does it mean to die? How fragile is the human body? What is the nature of the powerlessness at the end of life? These questions, all of which confront the uncomfortable reality of mortality, are obviously impossible to answer. Doom metal provides no answers as such, but allows for them to be asked openly, honestly and meaningfully.

I must also emphasize that doom metal provides a pleasurable musical experience. This experience envelops the listener in something that might be variously described as special, magical, spiritual, amazing, or any number of other descriptors that place it outside of everyday, rational existence. It allows, or even forces, one to experience one's body in a novel way. Portions of that body of which we are normally unaware are suddenly at the forefront of consciousness; the body is subjected to processes that defy the strict control of rational subjectivity. It is an encounter with the immanence of these portions and processes, a reminder that we are not so simple and cleanly packaged as we might like to think. In these moments, practitioners of doom metal are opened up to experiences, knowledges and understandings from which they are typically cut off. They are provided with a space in which difficult and profoundly significant questions can be explored safely and meaningfully, all the while finding gratifying pleasure in the present moment.

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