University Of Alberta

Aesthetics, Symbols, Metal: Religion and Defilement in a Post-Secular Age

By Matthew Peter Unger

A thesis submitted to the Faculty for Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Fall 2013
Edmonton, Alberta

Abstract

This dissertation relies on the wager that we live in an age in which seemingly archaic religious symbols contribute to how people orient themselves, respond to, and explain things in the world. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur's early texts on religion, symbolism, evil, and defilement, I analyze three predominant interpretations of the return of religion, or the post-secular. I examine how these three interpretations, which I label regression, authenticity, and contingency, in fact rely upon each other and their mediation allows a theory of symbolic aesthetics that reflects the contingent coalescence of the political, the moral, and the juridical. The empirical portion of my study—the analysis of the musical subgenre and subculture of heavy metal, extreme metal—reinforces the idea that even deeply irreligious, transgressive, and grotesque art forms exemplify the unique manner of religion's significance in the post-secular moment. Contrary to the idea that religion functions as a semi-autonomous social sphere, I argue that the symbols of defilement, authenticity, and purity signify that religion, social discourses, and phenomenological experience co-create and co-constrain each other. A close examination of this interaction within popular culture exemplifies the evocative nature and deep historical import of these symbols. My fieldwork and discourse analysis of extreme metal reflects this confluence and coalescence of the psychological, the social, the juridical, and the political.

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped see me through the long process of writing this dissertation.

I would first like to extend my sincere and heartfelt thanks to my supervisors, advisors, and mentors who have been with me throughout my PhD. Without a doubt, and with no exaggeration, I would not have made it through graduate school without my very good friend, mentor, and academic coach, Dr. Leendert P. Mos. That he saw something in me worth encouraging, is one of the greatest gifts I had received during my academic schooling tenure. This dissertation took shape in no small part through the many discussions over much scotch with Leo, his relentless and seemingly limitless patience, and tireless assistance in the many presentations I have given, essays I have written, and drafts through which this dissertation has been. No word of thanks can truly express the depth of my gratitude. Dr. Charles Barbour also deserves my gratitude for the patience he showed me and assistance given to me both during his time at the University of Alberta, and even afterwards, when he had left to take a position in Australia. He challenged me to think and write in ways I may not have without our many discussions. Finally, Dr. Stephen A. Kent deserves many thanks and much appreciation for helping me through the PhD, for his tireless support, and encouragement, ("now get to work!"), even when much of my writing went in surprising directions.

My cohort from the University of Alberta, Department of Sociology made the PhD an extremely rewarding and challenging experience through discussions, classes, reading groups, nights out, and general camaraderie.

Of course, my family has been an immeasurable source of support during the writing process, from gentle encouragements ("just get the damn thing done!"), to listening to me mull through what, I am sure, seemed like crazy ideas, from help with editing, to just a friendly meal when needed.

Finally, my love and gratitude goes to Ipek Oskay, whose patience, support, and encouragement was a continual source of strength for me, and who put up with me through the many different stresses and anxieties that writing a dissertation inevitably brings. She has my heart for all of our talks and beautiful walks. Her zaman kalbimdesin.

Aesthetics, Symbols, Metal: Religion and Defilement in a Post-Secular Age

Table of Contents

List of figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Drawing on the recent 'religious return' observed in contemporary social theory, my dissertation will examine a curious if generally overlooked concern with metaphysical and theological issues in popular culture. While academicians have been inclined to think of popular culture as something less than serious, even incidental to serious human culture, it remains a significant barometer of predominant issues, social patterns, and ways of thinking. In particular, some cultures, such as extreme music subcultures, are fascinating for the way in which they address themes and concepts traditionally the purview of theology and aesthetics: the sanctity of life, the nature of sin, and the moment of defilement or the profane that conditions our experience of the sacred. In other words, embedded within these cultures are *human* questions that reflect broad societal concerns and even engage with the meaningful, the beautiful, or the ethical. My contention is that the more transgressive subcultures—in the case of this dissertation, extreme metal—are a part of a long tradition of art that articulates our experience of the sublime, the grotesque, and our fascination with horror and transgression. Relying on Paul Ricoeur's (1913-2005) hermeneutic phenomenological study of defilement in *The Symbolism of Evil* (1969), I examine the ways in which extreme metal articulates a deep structure of human symbolic experience, one from which religious and philosophical metaphysics arise. I argue that the familiar critiques of extreme metal and similar forms of popular culture, far from being simple examples of moral outrage or even moral panic, actually are symptomatic of a certain forgetfulness of the significance of

defilement in contemporary culture. In this introduction, I begin by providing a general overview of the concept of 'defilement', with particular attention to its place in the work of Paul Ricoeur. I then briefly introduce the empirical topic of this dissertation—extreme metal music, aesthetics, and culture—as a way of showing how sound and music are paradigmatic of a certain experience of defilement in contemporary society. I then lay out the methods that I used to collect my data on extreme metal. Finally, I sketch a brief outline of the flow of argumentation within this dissertation.

The Age of Defilement?

This dissertation relies on the wager that we live in an age in which defilement—a set of symbols and ways of thinking often believed to be archaic, forgotten, and deconstructed—actually contributes to how people orient themselves, respond to, and explain things in the world. That we are forgetful of the condition, symbolism, and experience of defilement may only reinforce its contemporary significance and may even be indicative of the fact that we are possibly living in its 'age.' In fact, the sense that we have overcome defilement in the age of critique only underscores its ubiquity. Rather than argue whether we can broadly characterize a particular time and place—for example "the West at the turn of the century"—I attempt to understand the current age in light of some of its major characterizations, including post-metaphysical, post-critical, post-religious, post-secular, and the age of interpretation. Paul Ricoeur's work of the 1960s and his long-term preoccupation with understanding the human as culpable, fallible, and fragile helps situate these broader characterizations.

Scholars of religion have long thought that defilement has had an important place in the history of religious thought and experience. In fact, most scholars that have discussed defilement—from Robertson Smith (1894) to James Frazer (1922); Emile Durkheim (1912) to Mary Douglas (1966); Paul Ricoeur (1969) to, most recently, Julia Kristeva (1982)—believe that it is the most basic principle upon which the sacred and profane distinction is founded in most religions. While there are many cognate terms associated with the experience of defilement that are symbolically specific to individual religions and modes of religious behavior and rituals, the basic definition of defilement refers to the primary metaphorical and symbolic experience of social stain or taint and the associated methods and related rules used to mitigate this impurity. These scholars argued that, traditionally, foundational distinctions between clean and unclean, pure and impure, defilement and its expiation have dictated the religious and normative fabric of the social world.

According to Ricoeur, defilement is the symbolic expression of a deeper constitution of the human subject. Essentially, defilement is the first-order, abstracted, symbolic expression of an innate and ubiquitous experience of human life. The human, plagued by the inability to reconcile the two fundamental poles of its existence—the voluntary and involuntary, the finite and infinite—is constitutively a fragile creature, subject to a fallible nature (1986). The contingent experience of living—necessity—which includes desire for what lies outside the subject's boundaries, undermines every attempt for wholeness. In *The Symbolism of Evil,* Ricoeur argues that one can only gain access to this experience through

that which lies outside the self, namely through the analysis and interpretation of the symbolic expression of this marked split.[1] This important realization necessitated for Ricoeur a distinct shift from his earlier phenomenological reduction of this innate experience with profound implications that Ricoeur contended with throughout his career. He never abandoned this conception of the fallible self but transformed it according to the philosophical problems he analyzed throughout his career as is evident from his most explicit text on ethical philosophy, *Oneself as Another* (1991).

A fundamental question of Ricoeur's early texts of the 1960s is to query the significance of these symbolic expressions in a post-critical/post-religious age (2004) and their transmutations as signified by historical and philosophical texts (1969). Defilement, as a foundational social experience expressed in symbolically religious terms, may be a part of the current age but has become abstract and difficult to see because of its transformations, rationalizations, and secularizations within the symbolic present. In this sense, for Ricoeur, defilement is a symbolic expression of an innate structure of human experience that changes through history contingent upon the *zeitgeist* of ethical thinking—from sin to guilt as portrayed within myths and the stories we have of our existence.[2] The post-critical

[1] I will be using the historical present tense to talk about authors and their writings in this dissertation.

[2] It may be prudent to assert that, for Ricoeur, the symbolism of defilement cannot be an ontological category. As will be shown in more detail in Chapter 4, he believes that it is a culturally specific expression of an innate structure of human experience that he analyzes through his philosophy of the will in *Fallible Man* (1986). The dialectic of will and necessity that establishes human fragility is what establishes the conditions of possibility for something like a symbolism of defilement, or the possibility for human evil, to develop. He writes: "Fragility is not

age has deconstructed the possibility of the etiological significance (i.e. their potential for explaining the world in a truthful manner) of these myths such that we can no longer believe them as truth but as stories and myths holding deep symbolic import of historical and linguistic experience. Ricoeur also states that this experience of defilement is ineradicable precisely because of its significance in expressing an innate and irreducible structure of human experience. This tension in Ricoeur's work inspires the direction of this dissertation. If defilement is ineradicable and perpetually finds expression contingent upon our historicity, then this means that even in a post-metaphysical age defilement exists and makes its appearance. If we follow Ricoeur in his characterization of the post-critical age as the destruction of the god of metaphysics, then we can infer that those dogmatic structures of religion that once constrained our experiences and thinking are open to the possibility of critique. By extension, maybe the question should hinge on the manner in which it is expressed, uncovered, or transformed in the present. [3]

---

the "locus", the point of the insertion of evil, nor the "origin" starting from which man falls; it is the 'capacity' for evil. To say that man is fallible is to say that the limitation peculiar to a being who does not coincide with himself is the primordial weakness from which evil arises" (Ricoeur 1986, 146). The *Symbolism of Evil*, then, is the hermeneutical analysis of the phenomenological transformation of symbols, such as defilement, sin, and guilt that remain the expression of this fundamental disproportion that informs the experience of evil and fault.

[3] Indeed, the significance of symbols such as purity and cleanliness—the corollary experience of defilement—are foundational terms to social existence, a part of our most mundane self-characterizations, but also the root of some of the fundamentally most destructive ideas made explicit with movements such as eugenics, National Socialism, and social engineering. All of these expressions are, at some level, the social and political condensation of the desire for a clean, pure existence, free from metaphorical stain and taint (Bauman 1989). More than just a destructive idea, however, it is a fundamental aspect of social experience with repercussions reaching into

The theoretical foundation of my dissertation depends on a close reading of Paul Ricoeur's texts on the consciousness of fault—texts that constitute a specific moment in Paul Ricoeur's career, which spanned the 1960s. The three major texts I will look at by Paul Ricoeur include *The Fallible Man* (1960), *Symbolism of Evil* (1960), and *the Conflict of Interpretations* (1974). While Ricoeur wrote immense, careful, and rigorous monographs, he was a particularly exceptional writer of essays, who explored issues both in the marginalia of his major works or presented excellent summations and "reductions" of these texts. The early texts allow me to study an important time in Paul Ricoeur's career, along with important philosophical debates from epistemology (how to know something) and ontology (the problem of being) to the problem of a philosophical 'working-through' (hermeneutical response) that is constitutive of the critical phenomenological hermeneutics that Ricoeur came to espouse.

With my reading of Paul Ricoeur's early works, I extricate a dialectic of the theoretical orientations and ontologies that I see to be foundational to a good amount of his writing during this time. This synthetic reading of Ricoeur's early work has allowed me to think somewhat 'metatheoretically' in order to categorize and evaluate the academic work on extreme metal and to understand how this music may reflect current cultural conditions and ways of thinking. In other words, these terms have allowed me to understand better Ricoeur's work, his significance for contemporary social theory, and the approaches devoted to

---

secular popular culture, judicial structures, contemporary religious cultures, and expressed in the rise of nation-states and identity politics.

understanding the significance of religious symbolism, transgression, and the grotesque in extreme metal.

I distill these orientations into three terms: Regression, Authenticity, and Contingency.

1. **Regression:** Regressive modes of analysis, beginning with Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, depend on a critical reading of the potential and ostensible motivations that underlie an event, expression, or social fact. The exemplary form of this mode of analysis is psychoanalysis. In order to understand the contemporary significance of defilement we need to reveal the psychosocial functions, condensations, compensations, and archaic resemblances of various social discourses, such as religion as an archaic mode of interaction with the world, or even a false consciousness. In an age of critique, this revelation of underlying motivations allows for the deconstruction of what Ricoeur calls "the corrupt parts of religion" (Ricoeur 1974d, 437). If defilement does exist today, then it would merely be a regression to old established (cathected) social patterns at odds with modern thinking and rationalities. While it is now impossible not to characterize defilement as regressive, the difficulty with this argument is that, as Ricoeur argues, even our seemingly most rational social structures, such as juridico-ethical discourses, may have at their base these very elemental expressions of defilement.

2. **Authenticity:** What we need to analyze further is the manner in which defilement reappears in our contemporary age if, in fact, it is not merely a regressive experience but new for each epoch. For instance, we can understand

the post-metaphysical age as the deconstruction of the etiological significance of myths thereby allowing the revelation of symbols to come alive again as symbols. We can get a sense of what authenticity might mean with authors I explore in more detail in chapter two, with characterizations such as "the age of interpretation" by Gianni Vattimo (1998). In this sense, authenticity is the corollary experience of regression. Where, on one hand, a regressive analysis reveals defilement as the expression of the 'return of the repressed', authenticity, on the other, expresses the occurrence of a positive expression of something thought to be irreducible. For example, in a post-metaphysical era, people can experience faith as a positive and possibly 'true' experience of religion once overarching metanarratives and religious dogma have ceased to determine religious experience. In the scholarship on extreme metal, scholars express authenticity within socio-political interpretations wherein metal, through transgression, is the innate expression of freedom and liberation, or even an authentic self, as for example in some documentary films of metal (Dunn 2005, 2007).

3. **Contingency**: Contingency has had a long history within social theory and philosophy that reveals a complicated, ambiguous, shifting idea, but is most significantly related to contemporary theoretical understandings of power (Foucault 1976; Rorty 1982) and recently, for understanding the current return of religion (de Vries 2007; Rorty and Vattimo 2007). Theorists typically have understood contingency in contrast to depth wherein social processes, norms, and relations function and exist on the level of the surface. That is, meaning should

not necessarily be found in progressively deep layers (i.e. structuralism), but rather through understanding the immediate conditions of its arrival as the effects of ubiquitous networks of power, history, and discourse. Nevertheless, I come to an understanding of contingency that I derive from Ricoeur's interpretation of the temporality of the symbol. Through a sublation of the previous two terms, we can understand contingency to mean the revelation of symbols according their potentialities, their transformations, and their possible futures.

We can most clearly see the symbolism of defilement when examining cause. In my estimation, the experience and critical inquiry of cause has provided a level of clarity for our existential condition; yet cause, as suggested by some of the hard sciences, is infinitely complex. This complexity mixed with our need for explanations often brings us to the border of the rational. In other words, defilement appears often where mystery exists. This experience of our world as mystery allows ever-new expressions of defilement. Herein lays the significance of Ricoeur's suggestion that defilement is ineradicable and the depth and richness of its symbolic import has no limit. Defilement becomes *more* important, not less, when we have no guaranteed master-narrative that encapsulates the entire human experience within its reach.

One can argue that defilement exists as the truth of our situation once the destruction of myths has taken place: we are still corruptible, fallible, but we can no longer blame metaphysical structures of evil, or fear the reprisals of a vengeful god arbitrarily meting power and wrath for inexplicable behaviors and

transgressions. Hence, affronts to human normative experience do not necessarily repose merely upon social norms but more significantly, the experience of the beautiful, the ethical, and the meaningful in their most contemporaneous paradigmatic state: religion within an age of authenticity, limits of the human body, health, hygiene, what is proper and decent, pure and authentic. Hence, someone experiences defilement at the boundaries of the self and identity—disease, madness, bodily fluids, insects, violence experienced, social expressions that are not understandable, radical evil, bad will. We may not experience defilement as what the early anthropologists understood as the transgression of a divine interdiction for early cultures or as expressed in books such as the proscriptions of Leviticus in the Old Testament. Now, however, we may only experience it within a particular kind of immanence. In the purported immanence of our situation, we experience defilement imaginatively and symbolically in our experience of causal relations, as the violation of normative social boundaries, and is reflected in discourses of authenticity and purity.

Extreme Metal as Paradigmatic of Defilement

This experience of elusive cause and affronts to normative frameworks is what makes extreme metal an interesting example to explore. As an extreme music, it exists at the boundaries not just of seeming norms of behavior and appearances, but in the sonic constitution of our normative world. Jacques Attali (1975), the professional French economist, famously argues that noise reflects and heralds the normative constitution of our social relations. Sounds have a particular normative imperative that we understand viscerally and almost naturally, as seemingly pre-

verbal experiences that affect and transform our social, emotional, and mental worlds. In this sense, we naturalize sound in a way that we cannot with words and images. At the same time, sound and music have also gone through those same periods of symbolic transformations, deconstructions, rationalizations, and formalizations that words, ideas, and the visual arts have. Sound is just as much about ideas, ethics, and aesthetics as any of these other disciplines, yet we contemporaries experience sound and music as something immediate, normative, yet inexplicable. The normative necessity of sound can partly explain why at the same time, noise is also profoundly controlled and mediated through various social and judicial institutions. Attali argues that music, beginning with an economy of sacrifice of which it was an integral part, has always been subject to social control because it has always elicited both the ideals and the threats to the hegemonic order of the time. In my estimation, extreme musics in the West have reflected generally the nihilistic tendency of western society since the rationalization of social and intellectual discourses that Weber had spent much of his career documenting (Weber 1905, 1946, and 1958). Other more recent texts, such as Steve Goodman's (2009) *Sonic Warfare,* have shown also the extent to which governments and militaries have used sound, music, and noise as a form of coercive force and even a form of weaponry, from using extreme metal in interrogation and torture rooms, to "sonic bombs" to terrorize the inhabitants of the Gaza strip. What these texts show is that noise is capable of both altering affective social landscapes and at the same time making apparent the meaningful, normative, and intellectual limits and boundaries of society.

By existing at the normative boundaries of music, extreme metal has caused a great deal of concern. People from many countries have found extreme metal to be offensive, implicitly carrying the possibility of negatively affecting or even *corrupting* the people listening to it, leading to the judicial control of the music and its creators (Christe 2004). This particular experience of corruption is most telling of the phenomenological and historically dense symbol of defilement. Extreme musics, and especially extreme metal music, then reflect a complex of social, economic, and cultural processes. My aim in this dissertation is to attempt to elucidate those broad meaning frameworks that predispose ethical and normative categories that impinge upon the nature and experience of religion in the present.

Methodology

My research will follow Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of Michel Foucault's methodology on the paradigmatic explication of "propositive historical phenomena" to "establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems" (Agamben 2002). This methodology has a long and established history within social research that incorporates the use of empirical data to explore deeper social issues. Using the method of a paradigm then, extreme metal represents for my project an exemplary experience of the way in which transgressive performances are reminiscent or even expressive of a broad contemporary experience of defilement that exists at the heart of modern social discourses. I contend that one cannot properly explain the significance of the experience of defilement that is endemic to extreme metal through psychological or functional explanations alone.

What is required, rather, are phenomenological, hermeneutical, and genealogical methods of analysis in order to understand the meaning and content invested within such experience.

My research project consists of several research methods and modes of analysis to understand the contingent symbolic expressions of extreme metal and conceptions of causal relations. First, I have engaged in qualitative research that consists of reading and examining closely the sociological literature and empirical aesthetic discourse of extreme metal to understand its symbols and the nature of its transgression. I have read at least 4000 pages of magazines, interviews, and promotional materials that I have collected mostly consisting of a full collection of a prominent underground extreme music and metal magazine, *Unrestrained*!. I have also collected books and art from the extreme metal scene. I have engaged in participant observation research at several metal festivals in Europe in July and August of 2008, and have done participant observation in the extreme metal scene in my hometown of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada for over 3 years, including 4 months of interviews and filming between January and April of 2011. Apart from attending many shows, collecting aesthetic and promotional materials, and interacting with scene members, I worked closely with one of the most prominent extreme metal bands in the Edmonton scene, and well-known across Canada—Death Toll Rising. The band generously allowed me to videotape and conduct interviews with them over a period of four months. During this time, I closely observed their practice sessions and performances and interacted with them and their friends. In order to understand the compositional process of extreme metal

songs, the guitarist of Death Toll Rising sat down with me for several hours to teach me their songs and discuss the processes, feelings, and ideas in the writing of their own songs. These invaluable interactions formed the foundation of one the two studies on extreme metal in this dissertation. I obtained Death Toll Rising's permission by approaching the band after I had conducted some research into the scene and saw them play live.

For my study on Christian extreme metal, I have conducted internet-based research including forum participation and responses, email interviews within the Christian extreme metal network, including several bands and scene members. Since this scene is disparate in Canada and North America, it has made substantial and productive use of social networking and internet-based market flows in order to establish itself. I found utilizing social networks the most productive manner of analysis. I obtained participants through forum discussions I had established on the relationship between extreme metal and Christian extreme metal. While the sample base has been quite limited in this aspect, I was able to conduct email interviews with five bands. I received roughly fifty responses to my questions on these forums. The conclusions that I have reached in my analysis of Christian metal have, I feel, been confirmed from further forum investigations, and analysis of Christian metal aesthetic materials.

Outline of Project

Including this introductory chapter, my project consists of six major chapters. Chapter 2 discusses contemporary thinking regarding religion within the context

of what has been termed “the return of the religious”. The return of religion has been of considerable significance in many fields, particularly in philosophy and the sociology of religion. A large amount of texts devoted to the idea of secularisation, a cornerstone in sociological theory of modernity, have been published over the past two decades, which signifies a substantial and contested field of inquiry (Berger 1999; Calhoun, et al. 2011; Habermas 2006; Martin 2005; Stark and Bainbridge 1986; Swatos and Olson 2000; Turner 2010; Warner 2010). Chapter 2 examines what the secularisation model means for the contemporary state of religion. I argue that a foundation of the secularisation model depends on a certain understanding of the separation, or autonomy, of the discourses of modernity and religion. In this sense, if we examine religion as a set of fluctuating symbols and discourses that interact with and co-constrain discourses of modernity we can begin to develop a theory of how those symbols function in the present.

The third chapter is a synthetic reading of Paul Ricoeur’s early work. As a philosophical anthropology, Ricoeur develops an intricate mediation between symbols, consciousness, and their concurrent evolution through history. Within this framework, I interpret his understanding of how symbols may function in the post-critical present. This section of my dissertation will compare Ricoeur’s characterization with prominent thinkers’ summary terms for the current cultural climate of broad meaning frameworks in the West to explicate a theory of the temporality and contingency of the symbol.

Chapter 4 continues a close reading of Ricoeur's text, *The Symbolism of Evil*, with an examination of the particular symbol of defilement and its possibility for reading contemporary conceptions of causal relations. I compare Ricoeur's understanding of defilement with those of contemporary theorists of transgression and the abject in order to ground a more social reading of this particular symbol and to understand its significance in contemporary society. As a foundational religious symbol, defilement can help us understand the historical and experiential path symbols have taken and the manner of their transformation. My first task is to attempt an analysis of how defilement both transforms other social discourses and these other social discourses, in turn, affect the experience of defilement. The next task will be to examine the manner in which this symbol constrains aesthetics as the paradigm for the interaction of social discourses and their reflection of contemporary conceptions of fault.

Chapter 5 consists of an analysis of extreme metal and the themes that instantiate it as a discourse of transgression and defilement. I argue that these genres have a lot to say about the current experience and expression of religion and religious signifiers. In this chapter, I develop a theory of symbolic aesthetics based on Ricoeur's early texts that allow us to understand how symbols become structuring elements of the music and the experience, and expressive of various social discourses. The upshot of this chapter is that symbols, abstracted from their origins, become floating signifiers for a diffuse set of experiences, dependent on context, history, and community. This chapter will examine how the aesthetic experience of extreme musics can help us understand the manner in which

defilement still informs ethical discourse and social relations. In the end of this chapter, I reflect on whether extreme metal represents a paradigmatic example of the indeterminate and determinate ethical responses to human experience.

I reinforce my understanding of the contingency of religious symbols and signifiers in the final chapter with an analysis of the specific experience of Christian extreme metal music and the manner in which the genre recreates the Christian experience. My argument is that the religious symbols, expression, and even experience are constrained through the privileging of various aesthetic modes of the genre of extreme metal, which exemplify the manner in which religious discourses interact with other social discourses in contemporary society.

The intention when I began this project was to see whether Ricoeur's early texts can say anything about extreme metal, and if extreme metal can help extend Paul Ricoeur's philosophy to understand contemporary issues and ideas. Toward this end, I feel that I have been able to show that that Paul Ricoeur allows one to read extreme metal with particular insight, and that, conversely, extreme metal works upon understanding Paul Ricoeur.

I must reinforce the significance of my reading of Paul Ricoeur's early work and my limited exposure to his later work, even though I hint that we can use my reading to understand some of Ricoeur's later work. His oeuvre is so vast and complicated I cannot claim the hubris of finding a 'key' to his work as a whole. What this delimited reading of Ricoeur does allow me to do is engage in a particularly important moment in intellectual history, symbolized by the 1968

university riots that extended all over the world, but with particular intensity within France. This important moment is the juncture of structuralism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and the beginning of deconstruction, all of which have transformed humanities and social science disciplines worldwide. With these theoretical tools and methodologies, I complete a broad circle through which I come to an understanding of the aesthetic genres of horror and transgression and how they relate to contemporary understandings of our world and ourselves.

Chapter 2: Secularisation and the Post-Secular

Introduction

The contemporary rise in broad nation- and global-based religious fundamentalisms (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003), as well as localized and transnational ethnic-based faith ideologies (Warner 1998), indicates that we have not "outgrown" religion, in whatever sense, in the modern post-industrial world. Rather, the same technologies that once were thought to herald a new era of independence and emancipation have given a medium through which religious and ideological based groups can develop ways to grow, develop, evangelize, proselytize, gain recognition, and fight for common causes (de Vries and Weber 2001, Derrida and Vattimo 1998). In the very least "religion" has not suffered the demise that scholars in sociology and philosophy predicted. In fact, religion has shown to be incredibly resilient and has grown in surprising locations such as the United States (Warner 1994). This "return" of the religious (Giddens 1991), if it is indeed a return, has given theorists of religion the need to revise previously held conceptions of what constitutes religion, what place religion holds for people, and how it interacts with modernization processes in different places (Asad 2003). Indeed, these social and cultural developments as of late have forced the re-thinking of religion amongst scholars in many different disciplines.

The concern for many scholars is whether to re-conceptualize the assumptions of post-Enlightenment thinking that had predicted that by the increasing awareness, maturity, and capability of humanity, the social and individual significance of religion will decrease substantially in influence. Sociologists, social theorists, and

philosophers seem to believe that now is a good time to rethink the possibility of religion without totalitarianism, despite—or rather in spite of—the current rise in totalitarian fundamentalisms and violent extremism.

Since its beginning, sociology has been marked by an invested 'prediction', or witnessing, of the demise of religion. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) believed that sociology, as the queen of the sciences, could supplant religious and superstitious thinking for rational methods of deducing the solution to a broad range of human difficulties (Comte [1875] 1973). Additionally, the three major founders of sociology, Karl Marx (1818-1893), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), and Max Weber (1864-1920), all thought that scientific thinking (or civil religion, in the case of Durkheim) would either replace, or significantly lessen the impact and significance of religion, even if religion served an important function in human relations. Durkheim, significantly, also believed that religion would slowly erode even though, at the same time, he thought those sacred rituals of sacrifice and purification actually founded society (Durkheim [1912] 2001). Furthermore, secularisation has been an assumed component of the modernisation process, which has proved more or less correct in Europe (Berger 1999). Nevertheless, more research on the relationship between religion and economic development for different countries has shown, according to Jose Casanova (1994, 2004), that for every example of modernity a different relationship exists between religion and processes of rationalisation typical of late capitalist development.

This chapter will examine understandings of the current state and status of religion within western society. While secularisation is an immensely complicated topic supported by an exceptional amount of research and data over the past 100 years, I will limit my writing on the topic to discuss two major aspects of secularisation that both Mendieta (2002) and Pierucci (2000) analyze in order to move the discussion towards the symbolic constitution of religious language and social change. My goal for this chapter is to set up how Ricoeur understands religion in the contemporary moment concerning the movement of symbols and their traversals through human consciousness. In the end, this chapter provides a brief analysis of what contemporary sociological thinkers since Nietzsche have thought of as "the death of God" and the conceptual, metaphysical, and social conditions that effect and reflect such a change.

Secularisation in Social Theory

The secularisation theory in sociology and social theory depends largely on Weber's theoretical principle of secularisation. Weber calls this a process of disenchantment because of the various social processes that increasingly relegate religion to the private sphere, thereby affecting the public spheres of politics and economics less and less (Weber 1946). He writes in "Science as Vocation" that "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (Weber 1946, 155). The broad meaning frameworks that previously had governed and conditioned thought structures had been thoroughly religious, but through science, technology, nation states, and the development of rational forms of thinking and acting, these broad

religious categories have lost their over-arching capacities. C. Wright Mills describes this process as such:

> Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularisation, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm (Mills 1959, 32-33).

Weber's focus on forms of rationalization—ways of thinking and acting in the world—forms the essential components of the secularisation theory and has influenced profoundly social scientific understandings of the role of religion and culture. Mendieta writes that there are two fundamental parts to Weber's secularisation thesis. The first part of Weber's secularisation entails the increasing interiorization of religion. Traditional world-views and religions lose their status among groups as myths, rituals, justifying metaphysics, and traditions become increasingly personal (Mendieta 2002, 20). This component of Weber's secularisation thesis is a fundamental aspect of most theories of secularisation that also speaks to religion's role in, or increasing separation from, modernization processes.

The normative structure of Weber's thought paints a bleak picture for the state of religion in modern society. While Weber thinks that the scholar must refrain from making normative statements or judgments about the object of research, as he

believes that these assertions only reaffirmed the metaphysical assumptions that he sought not to develop, he nevertheless was predisposed to viewing the current social world through a pessimistic lens (Weber 1946). His insights into rationalization as the backdrop for secularisation suggests a notion of meaninglessness, or a flattening of the social world, as a consequence of modern existence. At an extreme level, the rationalization process that occurs through modernization within contemporary capitalism strips people of their humanity through the loss of ideals with the increasingly pervasive substantive rationality of scientific reason. More succinctly, Weber believes that scientific rationality had become so pervasive that it had affected all other forms of thinking and acting that in turn transforms rational action previously guided by value rational and ethical thinking. Weber postulates that scientific thinking, as a specific form of substantive rationality, eventually would replace action based on absolute ethical claims. Thus, meaningful action is constrained by efficiency and utilitarianism based upon scientific rational ideologies.

The second aspect of Weber's theory of secularisation—largely ignored within sociological discussions of secularisation but becomes exceedingly important in the current context of the resurgence of religious movements—is what I would like to focus on. This facet of secularisation refers to Weber's differential theory of rationalization processes within different religions and other social groups. The rationalization of religion and social groups refers to the way in which traditions and worldviews, including their various rituals and structures of transcendence are "constructions that do both at once: criticize tradition and reorganize the released

material of tradition according to the principles of formal law and the exchange of equivalents (rationalist natural law)" (Mendieta 2002, 21). Rather than merely replacing and excluding all previous forms of traditions and world-views, the rationalization process allows a critical engagement with traditions, world-views, myths, and rituals.

The manifest forms of religious life become sites of contestation and innovation while at the same time allowing the ability for the preservation and transmission of traditions and world-views in the modern world. Therefore, all world outlooks, whether religious or traditional, are subject to a rational justification process. The concurrent transformation of a people's *Weltanschauung* helps to explain the history of theology and metaphysical speculation that is a product of the modernization of major religions. Mendieta states,

> Secularisation, in short, means that religious as well as metaphysical outlooks become the site for their own delegitimation and relegitimation. Tradition is discovered at the very instant that it becomes open to reconfiguration and rational analysis. […] Or formulated in slightly different terms: the tradition of modernity is the critique of tradition for the sake of tradition. (2002, 16-17)

Some authors, such as Steve Bruce (2002), employ a form of secularisation similar to, or influenced by, the first aspect of Weber's theory wherein scientific rationalities subsume religious and traditional world-views such that they lose their authority. This perspective, as shown by the many authors that criticize the

significance of secularisation (Calhoun 2011; Martin 2005; Stark and Bainbridge 1986; Turner 2010; Warner 2005; etc.) may occlude how people subjectively and rationally renegotiate their religious and traditional world-views for them to be able to survive, transform, and even thrive in modern times. I will explore the theory of rationalization in the next section, since it is foundational for understanding how religious and cultural groups' rationalities and world-views transform within the broader context of the political and economic conditions in which they exist.

Weber's Conception of Rationalization

Secularisation finds its primary impetus within Weber's theory of rationalization, even if many early social theorists anticipated and predicted that religion would decline in importance and eventually disappear. Weber was amongst the first thinkers to outline a nuanced and complicated understanding of the way in which religion would evolve and change in contemporary society. The notion of rationalization refers to the human capacity to interpret experience and the world meaningfully through particularly broad categories of thought or world-views. Rationalization speaks to those forms of thinking that affect and transform the social, economic, political, and legal processes of a society. Weber is interested specifically in rationalization as a means to examine how modernization unfolds specifically in the West but also how it contributes to different characteristics in other cultures and religions. This realization of different forms of consequential social processes resulting from certain forms of rationalities is where Weber's sense of cultural relativity exists, which allows a revision of the theory of

secularisation, based on processes of relativization.

The West's form of rationalization occurs in the move from action based on traditional forms to more substantive forms of rationalization. The West's particular form of substantive rationality has culminated in a disenchanted social world governed predominantly by modern capitalism, scientific thinking, and the increasingly bureaucratic organization of social institutions. We can follow Talcott Parsons on the three major aspects of rationalization that can help us understand the function of rationality and rational action within the principle of secularisation. Parson's summary will provide also the grounds from which to focus on Weber's cultural relativity that is similar to Roland Robertson's principle of relativization. As already implied in the above discussion, rationalization refers to the theoretical idea wherein world-views come under revision due to intellectual clarification, systematization, and the specification of the ways in which people conceive of their relationship with the world. The first aspect of rationalization refers to the notion of theoretical rationality. Theoretical rationality plays an important role in the process of rationalization because it provides a coherent and meaningful framework from which people can understand themselves in relation to the world in a way that gives meaning to their actions, orientations, purposes, and goals.

The second aspect of rationalization consists of the normative control of people's means-end rational action. This aspect relates to what Kalberg (1979) describes as value-rational action wherein people orient their actions according to values and

normative guidelines.[4] These rationally justified actions based on normative principles are themselves subject to a broader and more fundamental cultural normative order. Parsons is clear to acknowledge that people do not necessarily, or always, align their actions according to a grand normative order, but rather, there are multiple and shifting cultural orders that change according to meaning referential patterns. Accordingly, "rationalization is thus intellectual and existential property as well as normative and teleological in that it places obligations on men [sic] with respect to their conduct" (Parsons 1963, xxxiii).

Finally, Parsons explains that rationalization processes comprise the motivational commitment to these intellectual and normative ideas that lead to specific forms of rational actions. He states, "Rationalization concerns the systematization of a pattern or a program for *life as a whole*, which is given meaning by an existential conception of the universe" and the fields of meaning in which this action is carried out (Parsons 1963, xxxiii).

Religion participates within the rationalization process in a potentially infinite number of ways. For example, Weber describes religions as a particular form of substantive rationality in which action comes out of value-rationalized theoretical and ethical thinking. While religion has played a major role in the rationalization processes of civilizations, we only can understand the rationalities embedded

[4.] Kalberg (1979) describes four different forms of rational action that variably interact with different aspects of rationalities that determine the actor's relation to the world: affectual, traditional, value-rational, and means-end rational action. The four kinds of rationality (practical, theoretical, formal, and substantive) influence the four forms of rational action, which may function autonomously from one another, or rationalize and order action differently from the others.

within them and their resulting rationalization processes within the broader frames of reference and the worldviews of which religions are only a part. Weber states that while the religious determination of people's practical rationality or "economic ethic"—that is, the ability for religion to order the everyday actions of individuals—may have a great degree of autonomy, it is only one influence on people's practical rationality and everyday action (Weber 1946, 268). The religious determination of action then exists mostly in relationship to and in dialectic with broader social, geographic, political, and economic factors. Thus, religion is itself the object of and the process through which rationalization occurs. By focusing on the notion of rationalization, it is possible to examine how a religious or cultural group's specific forms of rationality can interact with the broader cultural forms of political, economic, and cultural patterns in accordance with their particular world-view and rationalities.[5]

Globalization and Religion

The principle of relativization has its specific theoretical origin within theories of globalization and more specifically in Roland Robertson's scholarship on the global processes of religion and the function of religion in the process of globalization.[6] It is not my intention in this section of this chapter to examine

[5.] This can help explain how, for example, Saudi Arabia actively interpreted modernization within a decidedly Islamic perspective (Asad 1993).

[6.] Other theorists of globalization come to similar conclusions regarding how social groups change within a global society. Theories of reflexivity are similar concepts that indicate that the primary point of reference for a group's identity has shifted to a global scale. This has had an effect of changing how social and cultural groups identify themselves and project their identity to others. See for example, Appadurai (1996), Beyer (1994), and Giddens (1991).

comprehensively theories of globalization. Rather, I intend to look at the principle of relativization, which comes out of globalization literature, as functioning in a compatible way to Weber's theories of rationalization. The major motivation for introducing relativization into a theory of rationalization is that the normative implications of the relativization thesis may help deal with the issues and criticisms brought up earlier in this chapter. My goal in this respect is to bring the principle of relativization in preliminary contact with an analysis of rationalities that can determine a social group's action, identity, and world-view. This theoretical amalgamation forces the analysis of the implicit normative structure of the theory of rationalization by framing it as a continuous process of transformation. This transformation does not necessarily lead to secularisation as such, but to the transformation of social systems, in both the economic and political spheres, as well as cultural processes such as religion determined by a group's specific substantive rationality.

While there was previously some consensus as to how groups deal with social change brought on through processes of globalization, the current trends of the religious resurgence is forcing scholars to think through these terms in different ways. Secularisation theory has now come under criticism through the examination of non-Western countries and the relationship between religion and social orders, politics and economics. It is clear that cultures and societies modernize in no single manner, and the various political orders—including democracy and capitalism—develop far differently than what people believed to be the prototypical modernization process exemplified by western European and

North American cultures (Casanova 1994).

What is clear though is the fact that groups respond and react, though varyingly, to the increasing proximity between cultures, ideas, politics, and their integrally intertwined economic orders. Cultures and societies may not rationalize in the same way the West has, but the current social and economic climate forces all cultures to respond to each other. This has profound effects on a culture's identity. Roland Robertson writes that "Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world, and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole...both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole in the twentieth century" (in Waters 1996, 41). The complex of processes and events that make up the phenomena of globalization represents a significant shift, both in world-order, but also for how social scientists theorize and understand the world. Global consciousness refers to the generalization of the global perspective where groups begin to frame their self-conceptions—political, economic, and cultural—in relationship to broad centers of power. For religion, this generalization implies and inadvertently forces certain forms of reflexivity. That is, groups increasingly identify and construct their identities with mutual reference to one another in terms of the global conditions that constrain the group.[7] Robertson writes:

> Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide

[7] Giddens's (1991) discussion of the production of localities as part of the process of globalization helps explain why certain ethnic and national conflicts and movements are not necessarily anti-globalization movements but rather a consequence of the global spread of technology, institutions, and systems of national self-determination, democratization, and administrative rationalization.

> social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanciated relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space. (Robertson 1992, 8)

This quote explains the way in which identities emerge historically in the interaction of a) the force of global economic, political, and social pressures and b) the imperative of local identities to assert themselves in the face of these pressures.

Despite the fact that Robertson defines religion in a functionalist manner—similar to Durkheim's "serious life" that encompasses anything from civil religions to traditional religion—his conception of the principle of relativization remains compatible with Weber's rationalization. It is compatible for a couple of reasons: first, relativization is not a developed theoretical framework with a coherent ontological, epistemological, or normative framework that requires a systematic synthesis and immanent critique in order for it to fit in with the rationalization thesis. Second, as an empirical category, it can help describe how certain cultural groups, religions, and societies have adapted themselves to broader global conditions, which we can understand in reference to the transformations of rationalities. Robertson believes that religion, through the process of

globalization, is one example whereby cultural and social processes become sites of contestation. Contestation as a reflection of globalizing tendencies refers to the process whereby cultural and social products are subject to certain rationalities that are able to transform world-views and action in reference to global circumstances.

One example of how religion has become a site of contestation is religion qua religion as a globally generalized differentiated concept of religion. Many authors, such as Robertson, Peter Beyer, Talal Asad, and Jose Casanova, share the idea that religion, as a socially differentiated and functionally autonomous system, is a Western concept. This concept subsequently has forced other religions, systems of transcendental thinking, world-views, and even frameworks of action based on ethical-rational thinking to relativize or redefine themselves according to standardized notions of religion and identity. If not all manners of relating to transcendental and practical concerns experience the modern world are the same, we should ask the question whether certain local traditions actually fit the reductionist and autonomous Western conception of religion, or if it is possible to differentiate the religious dimensions of society from its overall identity. This limited definition of religion has been subject to contestation as to what counts as religion and what relation religion has to broader societal identities. The putative understanding of religion as a relatively autonomous social system among other social spheres may be only one mark of a particular kind of modernization process and may be just one way global modernization occurs.

Another site of contestation is in universalizing discourses that deal with general human condition questions that originate from both secular and religious sources. The fact that universalizing discourses may act like substantive rationalities that determine action similar to certain religions reflects the potential arbitrariness of the differentiation of religion as an autonomous sphere. In fact, the idea that substantive rationalities can determine action based on value-rational and means-end rational thinking can help illuminate how symbols and broad meaning frameworks change in the modern world. The interaction of rationalities and symbols, in turn, constrains, influences, and organizes the development of social and cultural institutions.

Post-Secular Thought

A term with rising currency in sociological circles is the idea that we live in an age characterized broadly as "post-secular". While the term has received some criticism, especially in its relative ambiguity (Pierucci 2000) and for the proliferation of "posts", we can use it heuristically to attempt to capture broadly the conditions that belabor society that reflect all these theoretical difficulties explored earlier.

In my estimation, the post-secular can speak to, at least, two different conditions. The original understanding of the post-secular explained the manner in which secularisation theories have not fulfilled their putative promise of inevitability, and we see a rise—and according to some, an explosion—of the significance of the religious world-wide in the forms of public religions, fundamentalisms, new

religious movements, and a widespread increase in faith (Pierucci 2000). The second condition speaks to the manner in which the religious once again has become a topic of discussion amongst social theorists and philosophers. Scholars such as Hent de Vries (1999), Gianni Vattimo (1998, 2007), and others have documented this change in attitude towards religious thinking. What is significant for the sake of the direction of this dissertation is that these two observed understandings of the post-secular actually might reflect similar conditions. That religion has once again entered our consciousness as something with continuing significance has far-reaching implications not only for understanding contemporary society, but also for rethinking the foundations of sociology and other disciplines, and analyzing our own categories of knowledge.

Jose Casanova (2006) suggests that secularisation theories are flawed by the limitations of the model of religion and its relationship with modernity. According to Casanova, religion—as evidenced by the variety of world religions—interacts with modernity in a potentially infinite number of ways because all religions embody different forms of rationalities and ways of encountering the world. He cites the Asian religions of Confucianism and Buddhism as examples that do not exhibit a tension between transcendence and immanence, or between religious thought and worldly thought that Western religions experience. Because of the pragmatic nature of these religions, secularisation theories do not hold much water in those contexts. At the same time, Islam, an Abrahamic religion with a similar transcendent experience to Christianity, interacts far differently with modernity than does Protestantism whereby the separation of church and state

came about through the revolution of the interiorization of religion and rationalization of official social spheres. For instance, Turkey's attempt to modernize is different from the West where modernity and capitalism are actually products of religious rationalities. The secular modern republic of Turkey has attempted to modernize through the suppression of religion only for religion to become a prime motivating factor of modernization (Azak 2010; Cinar 2005; Davison 1998).

In all these ways, understanding religion solely as a system that is counter to different processes of modernization makes apparent the normative imperative of the secularisation model and its limitations. At the same time, as Casanova contends, in the West, secularisation cannot be denied in terms of the functional differentiation of social spheres, the disenchantment of the cosmos, and to a lesser and different extent the privatisation of religion. What we need to understand further is the changing nature of religion through modern discourses. What is at stake here is the understanding of the mechanisms of forgetfulness within secularisation discourses that have potentially obfuscated an understanding of the manner in which religion functions and survives today.

Conclusion

Religion and secularisation have experienced a revitalization of thinking and an explosion of writing from social theorists. For the sake of delimitation, my task for the next chapter, however, is to read Ricoeur's thoughts on religion for a possibility to speak to the current condition of religious symbolisms. In particular,

rather than examining the state of religion in terms of belief and un-belief in a particular society, we can examine how contemporary religious discourses are transformed through other discourses that may seem to be exclusive of religion. The transformation of the contemporary religious consciousness in the West is a confirmation of Charles Taylor's (2007) thesis of the secular age as one of transformation of the conditions of religious belief, which profoundly affect the nature of religion, self, and identity. Using Ricoeur's theoretical writings of the 1960s on symbols, I argue that symbols reflect experience even if the conditions of this religious experience are opaque to analysis. The ways in which people evoke symbols represent deeper structures of social experience, broad meaning frameworks that lay the groundwork through which we are entitled to experience symbols. Rather than argue whether the West is experiencing a religious return, or a particular and peculiar kind of re-enchantment as Partridge (2005, 2006, 2009) claims, bracketing symbols and their use within popular culture can provide us with a clue to this experience. This form of argumentation also has the advantage of avoiding difficult arguments based on ideal conceptions of what religion may or may not be. What I see in this formulation is that religion is not an autonomous sphere of social life, but rather a fluctuating and structuring discourse that intertwines and weaves through other social discourses, both changing and being changed in these interactions. The kind of analysis that I am proposing can illuminate how people use religious symbols, which Taylor characterized as transformed by the nature of choice or, in Ricoeur's terms, transformed because of the nature of the age of critique. In this manner, the conditions that Taylor

speaks of have profound implications for symbolic conditions. For Ricoeur, this change in the use of symbols would reflect a deeper experience of the nature of religious discourses and symbolisms.

Chapter 3: Regression, Contingency, Authenticity: Paul Ricoeur and the Symbolic Constitution of Religion

Introduction

This section of the dissertation will parse what I see to be three of the major orientations in contemporary thinking on the religious return signified by three terms: regression, authenticity, and contingency. I will be focussing on some of the early writings of Paul Ricoeur, to examine his engagement with all three of these orientations. I will weave my analysis of Ricoeur with several major thinkers that I see signifying these three orientations, in particular Anthony Giddens (1991), Jacques Derrida (1998), Gianni Vattimo (1998), and Hent de Vries (2007).

Ricoeur is concerned about those social conditions that reflected Nietzsche's ([1882]1974) formulation of "the death of God". Ricoeur believes that this pronouncement signified a profound cultural event, reflected in language, symbols, and ethical relations. For Ricoeur, Nietzsche's famous phrase describes not merely a philosophical condition but rather a profound change of the conditions through which we use symbols. That is, Ricoeur understands the death of God to be a symbolic condition. Before the critical age, religious symbolisms and discursive structures formed the foundation of our thinking, explanations of the world, and ethical relations. Now, however, critique and the ideas from the famous hermeneuts of suspicion—Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx— have transformed religion irremediably. For Ricoeur, the death of God is primarily constituted by the death of the God of morality (1974e) wherein what has passed

are the metanarratives that structure our relationships with others and the world. Contemporary frameworks of meaning that have transformed irrevocably are those meaning structures, rationalities, and ethical relations traditionally dictated by tradition, religion, and metaphysical structures of authority. In a similar manner, Kant characterizes the critical age emancipating people from the chains of their own thinking (1784).

I see within Ricoeur's early analysis of religious symbols (as exemplified in his essay on the symbol of fatherhood [1974e]) a consistent use of a tripartite schema—including a regressive analysis exemplified by Freud, a phenomenology of spirit by Hegel, and a phenomenology of religion influenced by Mircea Eliade. In my reading, this schema is homologous to his philosophical anthropology of an essential fallibility (Ricoeur 1986). In these texts, Ricoeur develops a dialectical synthesis of human experience that allows him to move towards the treatment of significant symbols in human history as representative of the movement of consciousness in history. In essence, consciousness follows the circular movement of symbols and thought. Symbols allows the abstraction of experience, including the possibility of speculative and reflective thinking, which then transforms our experience of the world that conversely works upon symbols. New symbols and structures of thought do not replace the old symbols, but rather, they sublate the previous depth and weight of these symbols such that they find expression within the new contemporaneous experience of the world.

Another figure that I see as exhibiting this scheme will help me explore the symbolic dimensions of my interpretation of Ricoeur while at the same time presenting a poignant paradigmatic example: Hans Holbein the Younger's painting from 1522, Dead Christ in the Tomb, as it has been interpreted within Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (1868). My contention is that the significance of the painting within Dostoyevsky's work opens up the possibility for this figure to function not only as an analogue to Ricoeur's early engagement with the symbolic significance of religion but also as an extrapolation of the particular use of symbols in the present. In my estimation, the figure of the painting in the novel can represent the three stages that correspond to the three terms in my title.

As many commentators have stated, Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* gives a striking interpretation of this painting, an imitation of which hangs in the doorway of a dark corridor in the home of the neurotic, jealous, obsessed, and ultimately murderous, Rogozhin. Dostoyevsky gives an account of this painting through two characters in the novel—a naive, intelligent, simple, and compassionate Prince Myshkin and a relatively minor character, a (possibly inverse) double of Myshkin, Hippolite. Myshkin, the main character, gives a brief, evasive yet strong reaction to the painting after Rogozhin pushes him to comment on the painting minutes before Rogozhin attempts to kill Myshkin. Despite this strong reaction, Dostoyevsky leaves the embellishment of the impact, that possibly Dostoyevsky himself felt when he saw the painting at the Basel museum,[8] to the voice of

[8] Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun* suggests that Myshkin's reaction may be the same reaction Dostoyevsky had to the painting when he and his wife saw it in a museum in Basel (Kristeva 1987, 107).

Hippolite. This final account Hippolite gives much later in the novel in the reading of his own suicide letter that disrupted Myshkin's party. As I will try to show, the painting inhabits a very significant position in the novel that requires simultaneously closer and broader readings, both helped by the concepts of regression, authenticity, and contingency.

This example of *The Idiot* is by no means accidental or tangential—Ricoeur evokes Dostoyevsky throughout his career. In *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with Francois Azouvi and Marc de Launay* (1998), he mentions that Dostoyevsky has always fascinated him (Ricoeur 1998, 5). *The Idiot* is particularly significant for Ricoeur and he evokes the figure of Prince Myshkin several times. In *Freedom and Nature* (1966), Ricoeur evokes Prince Myshkin as a poetic figure that reflects back to us our own limitations: a figure that "both surpasses and transcends" (Ricoeur 1966, 478). One can argue that this form of transcendence is of particular significance within Ricoeur's writings that forms the ground of a kind of ethics that, I argue, he hints at throughout *Conflict of Interpretations*. Finally, Ricoeur also evokes Prince Myshkin in his later books, *The Course of Recognition* (2005) and *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2004). In *The Course of Recognition,* Ricoeur characterizes Prince Myshkin as an unforgettable figure of innocence who acts in situations not according to general principles, but out of 'just' action (Ricoeur 2005, 224-225).[9] In this manner,

[9] For example, Dostoyevsky's other novels such as *Notes from the Underground* (1864) discuss postulates such as Rousseau's *amour propre* or "the sublime and the beautiful" wherein the underground man acts (out) reflexively according to high-born concepts and ideas. These ideas, however, are anachronistic in the context of the novel and further isolate the underground man.

Myshkin is a figure similar to Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith' since he does not act out of a resignation to abstract concepts of justice, but rather, he simply *acts* justly.

The Regressive Turn

Sociologists, such as Anthony Giddens (1991) in his *Modernity and Self-Identity*, have often characterized the return of religion as a kind of return of the repressed where religion, previously pushed into the personal realm in the face of modernizing forces and secularisation, now ruptures through previously suppressive measures. Giddens suggests that religion returns because of the need for consolation, ultimate questions, values, and morals in the modern world. Within a typical secularisation paradigm, the increasing political efficacy of religion and the concomitant proliferation of various religious types of movements, organizations, and personal therapies is a curious situation. Giddens describes this reappearance in terms of a Freudian theory of repression and the corollary reactive rupture of such repression.[10] Giddens in particular sees the return of the repressed at the root of the various religious formations but also at the root of various resurgences of different and alternative substantial rationalities in contemporary culture. Through the framework of the return of the repressed, modern social structures are both repressive and suppressive of religion by the

[10] If we recall Freud's texts, such as *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), *Totem and taboo* (1914), and *Civilization and its Discontents (*1929), then we can see that Freud speculates that religion itself is a return of the repressed. Religion, for Freud, exists as the phyologenetic ersatz memory of the original, primal killing of the horde's patriarch. In *Moses and Monotheism*, he writes, "what is forgotten is not extinguished but only 'repressed'; its memory-traces are present in all their freshness, but isolated by 'anticathexes'... they are unconscious—inaccessible to consciousness" (Freud 1939, 94).

overwhelming secularizing and rationalizing tendencies of abstract structures of technology, economy, and politics. Religion, or God, no longer exists as the guarantor of social structures, thinking, and ethics, but becomes increasingly merely a matter of belief, the soft aspects of our social existence. In this interpretation—and this is the kind of argument that Derrida, Vattimo, and de Vries all respond to when they speak of the return of religion—religion functions as a regressive, archaic expression within an infantile economy of desire.

Jacques Derrida (1998) describes this understanding of regression within popular and academic understandings of the return of the religious in the contemporary world astutely in his essay "Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone". Derrida argues that in fact, the return of religion is not a mere return but rather, *resembles* an archaic regression within the current intellectual climate. This regression would necessarily signify a step back from the "various enlightenments". To some, the return of religion appears archaic but rather depends upon the categories of thought that structure this interpretation. If religion and technology have similar origins, then they may develop in concert with each other embroiled in each other's resources. Consequently, this possibly signifies the arrogant illusion of the autonomy of reason, critical thinking, religion, and the idea that perhaps the world could do without religion, belief, the sacred, or the sacrosanct.

Nevertheless, if we turn to Ricoeur, then we can situate important aspects of the regressive analysis to take up in the next term. Ricoeur finds the critique of

religion exemplified by Nietzsche and Freud as a necessary step in the evolution of consciousness that works towards a new understanding of the implicit motivations within contemporary cultural expressions such as religion and art (Ricoeur 1974a, 1974d). The turn towards critique and regressive analyses represented a profound epistemological shift that transformed the nature of explanation. Where logical deduction ultimately amounted to a kind of "Gnostic" grounding for knowledge acquisition, the new forms of critique opened up the possibility for social and psychological archaeological and genealogical analyses (Ricoeur 1974a). As a homology to his earlier deduction, a regressive analysis represents the possibility of a new kind of 'finite' analysis of human experience. Or rather, it requires the analysis of those phenomenological structures of human experience that lie at the foundation of pragmatic living. For example, a regressive analysis would scrutinize the immanent experience of motivations represented by the various repetitions of earlier myths, narratives, and symbols, such as the Christological story exemplified by the painting.

We can understand the imitation Holbein painting in Rogozhin's house through a regressive analysis. The painting rests displayed above the doorway in Rogozhin's home, itself an antiquated house built of old money. He received the painting, along with other paintings and objects in the house from his father who won it at an auction for only a few roubles. Dostoyevsky was more than likely evoking the painting as anachrony within a Russian orthodox context of the indexicality of images and icons with devotion (the significance of which is great). Within the context of Rogozhin's house, however, the painting exists as

another kind of anachrony where a discussion of worth flattens the symbolic nature of the painting. That is, while Rogozhin finds the painting curious, its significance is that of a hand-me-down from his father and people attempting to purchase the painting confirm its worth. The painting has then entered into not only an economy of desire signified by a relationship to his father, but also a monetary and utilitarian economy. The painting seems invested with all the unresolved psychological attachments, ambivalences, and neuroticisms Rogozhin feels for his own father. The father/son relationship between Rogozhin and his father is also a repetition of the father/son drama the painting is representing. The painting in Rogozhin's house as an imitation of the Holbein painting is itself a mediatisation of a symbolic drama. Later, Hippolite reflects on the abandonment of the Son by the Father and what that could have meant to the apostles looking at the corpse displayed as Holbein painted it. In this sense, the painting is an imitation of a mediatisation that inhabits the space of a series of repetitions (and displacements) within the novel. I will explore further below the significance of the repetitions embedded within the novel in the contingency section of the chapter, but suffice to say that repetition both evokes and overcomes the anachrony and the regressive nature of the painting. Through repetition, we see the potential invested in the symbolic import of the painting.

While the symbol of Christ in the tomb is lost to Rogozhin, Myshkin sees the painting somewhat differently. Rogozhin's statements about the painting are purely superficial but Myshkin, after much prodding by the aloof Rogozhin, foreshadows Hippolite's later interpretation. Myshkin exclaims "That picture!

Some people might lose their faith in seeing that picture!" (Dostoyevsky 1868, 201). While Dostoyevsky only elaborates upon this statement later in the novel, this statement could only be possible in a certain context. In seeing the dead Christ, Dostoyevsky is evoking the experience of the death of an *idol* (and possibly an icon), the sacrifice of the son by the father within the Russian Orthodox context of an assumed indexicality (or relationship) between sight and meaning (devotion or knowledge). During the interaction with Rogozhin, the painting represents the flattening and forgetfulness embedded within a kind of nihilism that the subsequent attempt on Myshkin's life suggests: the flattening of sacred symbols causes the vanquishing of the ground of values and morals such that symbols, ideals, values, and morals become superficial. In the novel, Rogozhin becomes a symbol of a base atheism which instantiates him as a murderous Judas, a character that signifies the nihilism of the present and a symbol of the destruction of values under the sign of the dead Christ.

The regressive analysis (that is, the analysis of cultural expressions based on their putative motivations) can illuminate an interesting aspect of current religious resurgences, but is also insufficient for a number of reasons. First of all, the idea that the current religious resurgence represents a regressive and archaic step backwards wherein those energies embedded within the cultural unconscious find rupturing expression through the various frustrations of a late modernist period represents hypostatic notions of both modern discourses and the idea of religion. In this line of thinking, religion becomes a kind of rationality that remains exclusive of modern rationalities. Also, depending on an understanding of religion

as false consciousness, a regressive analysis requires the uncovering of the underlying motivations in order for us to understand, critique, and move beyond such motivations. Regressive analyses may also retain the conception of the transparency of inferentialist thinking that does not allow the critique of our categories of knowledge. Specker (2003) for instance demonstrates that the knowledge of religious conditions through the tally of observable facts depends upon the perspective of the scholar. Similarly, Taylor (2007) also argues that religion cannot be understood through 'brute data' and observable 'facts', but rather we have to understand the social conditions through which one believes to see how religion has changed in the contemporary period.

Despite the issues involved in the argument of the "return of the repressed" summed up in the first term, we can follow Ricoeur to take a few aspects of this line of thought to integrate within our final argument. At this point, Ricoeur might also have something to say regarding this religious resurgence. As we will see in the second term, authenticity actually depends on a regressive analysis. That is, through a regressive analysis, we can critique those aspects of religion that actually are false consciousness or a product of repression or suppression. This discussion leads into a possibility of seeing religion, the religious, as an authentic category of experience that has been properly uncovered through the critical age.

Authenticity in a Post-Religious Age

In order to understand religion in the present, both Ricoeur and Dostoyevsky express the need to go beyond a regressive analysis without losing sight of what a

regressive analysis has allowed us to understand. Additionally, embedded within a regressive analysis is already a second manner of interpretation—the manner in which a regressive analysis points towards the "infinite" aspects of human experience and the significance of religious meanings, history, and symbols is in Ricoeur's analysis of Freud's theory of culture. For Ricoeur, Freud's theory of culture is not a mere analogical formulation of an individual psychological model, but rather an explicitly social understanding of the psychological and language. As well, Ricoeur sees Freud as suggesting that culture, art, and religion are not purely symptomatic, reflecting merely a psychological condensation and compensation, but also signify simultaneously a kind of creative repetition.

This is a point where it seems that Ricoeur is also invoking a temporal theory of symbolism and ethics that intertwines his understanding of history, the present, and the future. In fact, one can see an ethics of hope in his reflection on the regressive/progressive synthesis within "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture" (1974). In this synthesis, regression and progression do not reflect two diametrically opposed psychological or cultural processes; but rather, they are, in Ricoeur's terms, "abstract terms deduced from a single concrete process whose two extreme limits designate (pure regression and pure progression)" (Ricoeur 1974b, 137). Ricoeur continues to characterize this synthesis in question form:

> Do not the most innovative forms an artist, writer, or thinker can generate not have the twofold power of concealing and revealing, of dissimulating

> the old, in the same way dream symptoms or neuroses, and of revealing the most incomplete and unrealized possibilities as symbols of [humanity] of the future? (Ricoeur 1974b, 138)

Ricoeur suggests that what is foundational to human existence, broadly speaking, is the interminable dialectic between the finite and the infinite aspects of our experience. Indeed, within an analysis of the economy of desire these artefacts also represent an eschatological desire for a beyond.

Thus, the significance of religion exists not merely in the archaic, but also in what he deduces through a critique of the God of morality—in the fallible foundations of our desire and effort to exist. For Ricoeur, the only way to gain access to this is to enter into dialogue with the symbols of the religious that appear to us in both their contingency and their historical significance. Ricoeur writes,

> we are never certain that a given symbol of the sacred is not also 'a return of the repressed;' or rather, it is certain that every symbol of the Sacred is also simultaneously a return of the repressed, the re-emergence of both an ancient and infantile symbol […] There is always some trace of the archaic myth which is grafted to and operates within the most prophetic meanings of the sacred (1974b, 329).

These statements mark Ricoeur's eschatology. For Ricoeur the destruction of religion for Nietzsche and Freud amounted to a critique, not of religion as such, but of the underlying motivations and archaic desires that exist as the "corrupt

parts of religion" (Ricoeur 1974d, 437). To think of the underlying motivations, archaic significances, and overarching dogmas is for Ricoeur to think positively through this destruction of metanarratives, which in the end, points toward the possibility of authentic living or thinking.

Thus, while Ricoeur at this point in his career did not witness the resurgence of religions within the contemporary world, he nevertheless laid some groundwork for understanding its "return". For Ricoeur, this return might signify a particular revelation that would arise from the ashes of the god of metaphysics and look again backwards with new eyes in order to see a structure of repetition that resembles hope, consolation, and contentedness. Does this mean that the religious return amounts to the authentic representation of the religious? I do not necessarily think so. While Vattimo has a similar interpretation of Nietzsche's witnessing/pronouncement/testimony of the death of God, he suggests that this religious return has all the characteristics of contingency, historicity, and builds on the structures of the technology (Vattimo 1998.) At the same time, if technology, as Vattimo writes, is the height of these metaphysical structures and hence the furthest point of forgetfulness from "hearkening", then the religious return might reflect this same condition. Here, however, we can take a couple more steps to attempt to understand the manner of religion's apparent resurfacing.

A common sentiment in continental philosophy following phenomenology, especially for Heidegger (1977), is that how and what we see depends on that of what we are conscious. Our consciousness is always a consciousness *of*

something, directed to the world based upon contingent models of privileged ways of seeing. We cannot say that because social theorists of secularisation and modernity failed to underscore the significance of religion in modern ways of seeing the world that those social conditions did not exist. Rather the conditions of our categories of knowledge structured our consciousness in such a way that obfuscated our seeing it. This is the message of our time for Vattimo. As an age signified by the destruction of over arching meta-narratives that determine our explanations, interpretation encapsulates our historical moment. That is, we can only understand and interpret phenomena from within our historical situation, from our contingent categories of knowledge and the manner in which things appear to us.

At the same time, as Vattimo understands, something else must be at work in the manner in which religion now reveals itself to us with such an urgency and necessity. Vattimo argues that the fact that many scholars did not see religion previously is tantamount to saying that a good deal of thinkers and writers were not cognizant enough to see it. His suggestion is something similar to the following metaphor of mine. If we can think of knowledge metaphorically, we might say that it functions like a flashlight in the dark that illuminates only that which is in its beam, allowing clarity for a particular moment and space. As the flashlight moves, however, more things appear in our vision while others recede into darkness. In other words, when we try to grasp religion and how it interacts with modernity, how and what we see is always already conditioned by a kind of retrospective teleology dependent upon culturally and historically specific

categories of knowledge. So then, what appears to us in the present can never appear to us as fact, but as a particular interpretation, which conditions the revealability of religion.

To return to Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot,* we can see one particular way in which religious discourse, rationalities, and symbols function differently according to time and space. The novel explores the regressive aspect of religion quite poignantly, but also requires the reader to go beyond this understanding. Rather, Dostoyevsky's representation of the Holbein painting allows us to see a positivity that is specific to Russia at the time. In one sense, the painting represents the absolute immanence of Jesus, since, as height of the Renaissance humanist tradition of painting, it displays Christ, in realistically visceral and human ways. Suffering as a human, dying as a human, decomposing as a human—dead flesh as dead flesh with the last vestiges of suffering still upon the face of this tortured body, cut off from any form of transcendence. According to Hippolite's interpretation, God is dead and he was flesh, and it would be difficult to imagine the apostles mourning and the feelings of betrayal experienced—the truncated frame precludes any transcendence from above or from below. At the same time, Dostoyevsky, through Hippolite, sees it as much more than this. In fact, Dostoyevsky's representation of the painting in the novel is suggestive of Ricoeur's understanding of contemporary nihilism in the critique of religion captured in the final sentence of "Atheism, Faith, Religion:" "an idol must die so that a symbol of being may speak" (Ricoeur 1974d, 462). Nihilism is a stage of mourning of these idols, but mourning, for Ricoeur as it is for Freud, contains the

potential for working-through in which something is lost but also gained. For other scholars, such as Vattimo, this mourning is one that instantiates a new kind of morality and Ricoeur might agree. The death of God signifies the destruction of the God of morality and the pseudo-Gnostic ground of values and morals. This destruction for Ricoeur allows the possibility to establish an ethics based on the foundation of the essential human structure of the effort to exist, which language expresses. For Ricoeur the effort to exist is a significant step on the way to establishing a form of consolation bracketed from desire, the consolation of existing with the *hearkening* that Heidegger evokes—a kind of silent listening to Being through word, or *Logos* (Ricoeur 1974d, 445-447).

In short, the conditions of religion's revealability have changed through its interaction with differing social discourses and social conditions. Authenticity can express a significant and undeniable interpretation of religion within the post-metaphysical present—the 'newness' of these expressions after the critique of dogmatic structures of thought. Just as the first term, regression, begs a further step in this analysis, the authentic analysis also points towards another. Just as the second step does not destroy 'regression', both terms will now incorporate and sublate into the third term, contingency.

Contingency and Ethics in the Revealability of the Religious Present

Contingency has had a resurgence of thinking in the wake of the different traditions of pragmatism variably influenced by Michel Foucault and his anti-phenomenological and anti-ontological understanding of social discourses and the

historical constitution of the subject. In this section, I will focus on how Ricoeur develops his particular understanding of the historical development and flow of symbols. My contention is that the early Ricoeur is rather closer to contemporary understandings that bridge theories of repetition and virtuality (de Vries 2007) than he would be to a strictly historical understanding of contingency as exemplified by Rorty (1989, 2007). Through the mediation of the previous two terms, regression and authenticity, we can see foundational structuring differences between these frames of thought and how the early Ricoeur can be brought to bear against contemporary theorists. Philosopher of religion, Hent de Vries (2007) has accomplished recently this kind of synthesis in his term "virtual contingency" or "deep pragmatism".

We can begin to describe this mediation by recourse to the Noetic and Noematic poles of experience that Ricoeur discusses in *Fallible Man* (Ricoeur 1986). For Ricoeur, in order to come to a description of the fullness of experience we need to have the means to understand both the subjective and objective aspects of experience. Yet, the understanding of the self and consciousness cannot take a direct route, but requires understanding and interpreting language and symbols, which exists outside the self. As such, within Ricoeur's early texts, the other is a necessary structuring component for the self. Through the dialectic between these poles of experience, one can deduce a kind of ethics that begin, as Ricoeur writes, not from a source of nothingness as in a metaphysical age, but from effort and desire. If the only access to this source is through the representations of

consciousness, then its opening is through symbols, myths, and narrative. Ricoeur writes that:

> The progressive order of symbols is not exterior to the regressive order of fantasies; the plunge into the archaic mythologies of the unconscious brings to the surface new signs of the sacred. The eschatology of consciousness is always a creative repetition of its own archaeology (Ricoeur 1974a, 329-330).

The movement of consciousness is concurrent with the movement of symbols, but rather than absolute knowledge as with Hegel, the eschatology that is hinted at with a deduction of consciousness is that of a promise, hope and faith, for which the products of our existence are a clue. As such, Ricoeur states that, "these symbols are the prophecy of consciousness. They manifest the dependence of the self on an absolute source of existence and meanings, on an eschaton, an ultimate end toward which the figures of the Spirit point" (Ricoeur 1974d, 329).

We can see this kind of historical development on his meditation of the transmutations that defilement has traversed (Ricoeur 1969). For Ricoeur the symbolism of defilement lies at the beginning of religion that subsequently becomes increasingly interiorized, rationalized, and formalized as social structures that relate to fault. The contemporary expression of this origin is not merely a regression, but one of perpetual revealing; an uncovering of a transgression of the sacred that exists at the heart of ethics and philosophy. While Ricoeur believes that in the post-critical, or post-Kantian, age we have the

responsibility to fill and renew language, his philosophy at the same time suggests that we are also condemned to re-experience the perpetual and inexhaustible symbolism of defilement. As such, Ricoeur sees in the recovery of the structure of defilement an unlimited potential of symbolic richness:

> It is because the symbolism of defilement still clings by its manifold root hairs to the cosmic sacralizations, because defilement adheres to everything unusual, everything terrifying in the world, attractive and repellent at the same time, that this symbolism of defilement is ultimately inexhaustible and ineradicable. (Ricoeur 1960, 12)

This experience of defilement is ineradicable not only because it exists as a second–order symbol that merely stands in for the pragmatic experience of stain and taint, but rather because it references an innate structure of human existence which this symbol references.

Derrida (1998) provides an example of a contingent understanding of the religious return. Derrida's interpretation of the contemporary reactive cultural, ethnic, religious formations and resurgences is that they carry an inherent contradiction that represents the foundation of their own potential unravelling. This contradiction lies in a double movement—a foundationalist movement backwards towards the positing of some kind of spectral origin, and the contingent historical experience of participating within a technological world-view and their use of enlightenment thinking. This double movement of the search for "the safe and sound", or for sacred origins, combined with the political realities of the

contemporary world create the impression of a mystified and reactive relation with technology. In other words, this resurgence represents a kind of fetishism (in Marx's sense of the term) whereby the "spectral aspect of this experience" is increasingly "primitive and archaic" (Derrida 1998, 56). Yet, despite the impression of these resurgences as primitive, they in fact represent a contingent formation based in the symbolic potential of the religious past and future.

The conditions of the revealability of religion (how religion appears to us), as Derrida suggests, is intimately intertwined with technology and those structuring discourses that lie in the foundation of technology, science, and knowledge. For Derrida, this recurrence is not purely a regression, despite the fact that the increasing reactive cultural movements and formations appear to some as taking a step away from enlightenment thinking. Rather, Derrida believes that these religious formations are not just a return of the repressed, but a kind of contingent repetition, conditioned by the structuring discourses embedded within the globalizing tendencies of current technology, what he calls "tele-technoscience:" the eruption of technology aimed at communication, broadcast, and dissemination.

Dostoyevsky also exhibits an eschatology arising from within a contingent historicity. Within Hippolite's speech detailing the impact he felt about the imitation Holbein painting, we see an interesting dialectic of seeing and knowledge and the opacity of the present. Within this speech, Hippolite evokes a predominant concern for thinkers during his time (and possibly ours) that the

shock and trauma of seeing the body of Christ is in seeing this Christ figure suddenly subject to the awesome power of nature. For Hippolite, or possibly Dostoyevsky, this shock instituted the possibility of other ways of knowing and thinking.[11] The question of religion for Ricoeur leads precisely to the kind of knowledge that testifies to the impossibility of a natural history, an inferential past, while at the same time allowing the possibility of a depth beyond 'natural laws.'

Furthermore, the ironic character of Prince Myshkin signifies a particular focus on seeing and interpretation in the novel. He is a figure who can teach the Yepashkin's—a wealthy Russian family with a romantic perspective of things European (like so many of Dostoyevsky's characters)—something about seeing, painting, and representation. For instance, earlier in the novel (Dostoyevsky 1868, 58-59), where the Yepashkin women are talking with Myshkin about painting, Adelaida asks the Prince about learning to see in order to paint. This exchange is significant and suggests a flight into epistemology—the inferential relationship of sight to knowledge—where Dostoyevsky seems to be criticizing certain European philosophical tradition's value of empirical observation as necessary to knowledge and truth claims. Madame Yepashkin's ironic statement reflects Dostoyevsky's critical perspective well: "he's been to Europe, of course he can see" (Dostoyevsky 1868, 58). Myshkin again reinforces this irony when Rogozhin

[11] Kant has a similar distinction between Noumena and Phenomena in order to distinguish between knowledge and reason. While Kant suggests the possibility of empirical knowledge by bracketing the ability to know things like spirit, soul, and will, his distinction nevertheless provides an interesting point of comparison.

pushes Myshkin to speak about the painting. Myshkin responds that he has seen this painting in Europe and feels able to comment on the quality of its imitation.

Indeed, Prince Myshkin is a figure that represents a kind of compassion that exists in the literal, the present, and the immediate—exhibiting transcendence in the immanent and forgiveness as a condition of the present. Myshkin's continual forgiveness of those that deeply wrong and manipulate him reflect this compassionate immediacy, even though the other characters interpret his generosity as gullible, naive, and possibly even stupid. Myshkin's developing distrust is what corrupted him. Myshkin began developing a distrust and resentment of others during Hippolite's plot to steal Myshkin's money, but in his eventual forgiveness of Hippolite, he was able to transform himself and the others involved in the plot. In contrast, the other major characters interpret the present with perpetual distrust, signifying an impoverished and even deceptive present. These characters experience a present wrought with irony and critique, bloated with a resentment of the past and a disingenuous, selfish teleology.

I believe Myshkin is not just a Christ-like figure, but is a direct analogy to the Dead Christ in the Tomb. Because of his illness, Myshkin is someone who has no past and no future, but inhabits a certain virtual relationship to both. In fact, my opinion is that through Myshkin, Dostoevsky was painting a pragmatic analogue to Holbein's painting—a truncated subjectivity much like the truncated dimensions of the painting signifying an aborted transcendence. Much like the painting, Myshkin is a truncated figure with only a virtual past and future. To me

this is suggesting Dostoyevsky's paradoxical ethic of the present: we cannot live authentically if we just have the present, but we need to live with the realization of the depth of the present, the significance of history, and the possibility of eschatology. Dostoyevsky enacts this kind of authenticity with the repetitious sequence of death and conversion: the dead Christ, Myshkin, Natasya, Hippolite, Rogozhin, the story about the criminal pardoned of his crime seconds before the execution. For Dostoyevsky, where one has gone does not necessarily allow one to see, but rather, the testimony of death and one's submission to its inevitability allows authentic living and living with categories beyond the empirical. Dostoyevsky, as does Ricoeur, understands human existence as the mediation between the divine and nothingness, an existence that requires a relationship with that which exceeds the self in order to be itself. [12]

What this means for understanding the religious return is that in order to understand this so-called return of religion, we must have not only an understanding of both the future and the past, but also more profoundly, have an understanding of the condition of knowledge that enframes these categories. This could be the reason that Hent de Vries has called his current series "the Future of the Religious Past" (2007) in contradistinction to the repetitive interest and

[12] An important aspect of Ricoeur's understanding of religion during his earlier period is the notion of repetition. Kierkegaard and the non-dialectics of early modern philosophy such as Spinoza influences greatly Ricoeur's interpretation of repetition. This could be one reason why Don Ihde suggested that *The Symbolism of Evil* is quite Kierkegaardian with respect to an interpretation of religion (Ihde 1975). This influence has profound implications for understanding Ricoeur that helps bring his earlier understandings and writings into contact with contemporary discussions influenced by Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze.

concern for “the future of religion”. This concern in light of my thesis may be the same as the secularist theorists who celebrated the inevitable demise of religion. Concern over the future can come only when categories of eschatology are present, however implicit. Yet, in order to deconstruct eschatological concerns, we have to deconstruct both current categories of thought, which includes examining how we see the past. Thus, a premonition of the future can only come about through particular conceptions of the past.

Ricoeur believes that the post-critical age destroys the etiological significance of myths so that their symbols may live. He interprets the current age as one of forgetfulness wherein the secular discourses of a modern age forget their theological and mythological origins. The essay, “The Interpretation of the Myth of Punishment”, can help us think through post-secular notions of contingency and authenticity influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche. In this essay, Ricoeur examines the contemporary understanding of justice and punishment as marked by several paradoxes that reflect an internal logic that undermines the putative rationality that is at the heart of even the most secularized incarnations of justice. At the core of what is the incontrovertible rationale for punishment is what Ricoeur terms the drama of Judaeo-Christian sin, guilt, and salvation that lends symbolic weight to the development of a logic of equivalence and proportion—the logic that allows people to judge equivalences between a crime and its punishment. While this particular example may seem far removed from the various resurgences, fundamentalisms and foundationalisms, religious mediatizations, and commoditizations that constitute the religious return, this

argument allows us to glean a complicated understanding of the historical situatedness and symbolic depth of punishment.

In the end, Ricoeur posits a specific kind of history that explicates precisely what I intimate in the term contingency. History is a text that is rolling and folding back in on itself, emptying, filling, and gestating with all that has gone before, selectively infusing the present and future with not purely the full symbolic weight of the past, but a past evoked according to the consciousness of the present. The symbols, orientations, and inflections of the past and unwritten potentialities of the future comprise a contingent historicity of the revelation of the present. Thus Ricoeur in his early texts comes to embody an ethics *to come* that is bound to the past and present in a kind of repetition, compassion, and forgiveness, a kind of ethics that Dostoyevsky might have been intimating in the tragic character of Prince Myshkin.

Chapter 4: Defilement, the Post-Secular Age, and Social Theory

Introduction

Having traversed ideas relating to the place of religion in the contemporary world in the previous chapters, we have come to an understanding of the contingent manner in which people experience and express the religious. The mediation through which we understood these symbols has brought us to Ricoeur's understanding of the potentiality of religious repetition. This repetition is at once a creative expression of a more fundamental aspect of our existence that comes out of a desire for wholeness despite necessity, the involuntary, and an essential fallibility. We cannot understand these experiential aspects of our lives except through the products of our existence—namely through symbols, myths, and what Ricoeur would broadly term "poetry", the creative products of our lives.

This chapter will take the hermeneutical axiom essential to the sociological imagination since its inception—namely, that for social theory and the interpretation of social phenomena to stay relevant and salient, one must be aware of the historical, social, and cultural structures that determine interpretation. Following scholars such as Anthony Giddens (1991), Jurgen Habermas (1990, 2002), and Michel Foucault (1976), my project concedes that:

> The present age encourages an experimental attitude towards life that increasingly begs for answers to the most fundamental questions of meaning and purpose. […] Were social theory to turn towards philosophy,

> then its future might be secured and its relevance for a post-modern age made palpable (Farganis 1993, 21).

My research also assumes that social events, including art and subcultures, exhibit implicit and explicit contemporary social issues that require interpretation and adequate hermeneutical responses. My perspective is that a theoretically informed sociology should attempt to focus a "social analyses on the deeply disturbing contemporary issues that seem to require philosophical reflection in order to provide a critical awareness of the historical moment that we occupy" (Farganis 1993, 22). In this manner, my project will find its place within both the classical theory tradition of sociology while at the same time be a contribution to contemporary social theory in order to examine current social concerns.

Questions of religion, of the sacred and profane, and the boundaries that establish normative structures of experience, all relate to longstanding debates in social theory. My goal is to bring the early ideas of Paul Ricoeur to bear directly upon the interpretation of a misunderstood subculture. With the work of Paul Ricoeur, I confront issues within prevalent discussions of the abject that rely upon models of paradox without resolution. My research program helps to place the ethical experience of the abject within social modes of relatedness that exist synchronically (within social institutions), but also exist diachronically (deep within the history of our mythical, religious, and philosophical consciousness). These discussions have significant implications for social theory since, as foundational theoretical debates, they come to inform the nature of representation

and the interpretation of social phenomena. Indeed, Ricoeur suggests in *The Symbolism of Evil*, that theoretical thinking is always a specific, historically located, cultural, and social theory (Ricoeur 1969, 23).

Post-structuralist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (1998) and Gianni Vattimo (1998) suggest we are not free from religiously influenced structures of experience or thought. They believe that in the contemporary age the critique of metaphysical and religious dogmas is itself religiously grounded, albeit implicitly, in our social experience and that the "religious return" is a 'condition' of its implicit structure. At the same time, our current age is one that has "weakened" (Zabala 2005), if not abandoned, the boundaries that Kant's critical philosophy establishes between faith and reason. The weakening of metanarratives allows the possibility that religion is "natural" to our social condition and, as such, is open to critique. If we take a sociologist of religion like Max Weber (1920, 1946) seriously to know that the conditions of our secularity are a part of the larger historical Protestant theological climate of the Enlightenment period, then the difference between a religious consciousness and a secular one is a formal designation. Those structures of religiosity find their expression in some manner within our secular framework. As such, Ricoeur intimates within *The Symbolism of Evil* that despite the current challenging of the etiological significance of myths, defilement continues to haunt our conceptions of fault.

By examining defilement as historically grounded in symbolic, mythical, and theological understandings of evil, we can get beyond forms of interpretation that

reify our individual and communal experiences of disgust, horror, and transgression in theoretical models of privative logic. As well, by focusing on the abject, the grotesque, and defilement as formless (*informe* in Bataille 1985), and unable to come to representation, the good and bad potential of these discourses become regimented. In other words, this form of thinking may perpetuate the bracketing of this discourse from discussions of ethics, experience, and the historical progression and permutations that defilement has taken from the project of critique. By opening these discourses up to a phenomenological, hermeneutical, or genealogical analysis, we can come to interpret and move towards understanding the various contingencies of these discourses that ultimately ground our understanding of ethics.

This chapter of my dissertation will explore the manner in which extreme metal is transgressive in its exploration of themes of horror and brutality, irony, humor, violence, sexuality, as well as mythological and religious/anti-religious themes. Extreme metal is exemplary for my project since, as a marginalized discourse within popular culture, it represents the normative boundaries of our contemporary existence, the significance of religious signifiers, and the interaction of different social discourses and spheres often thought of as separate. My discussion highlights that these themes participate in horizons of meaning that can reveal the historical significance of transgression. If extreme metal is a genre of transgression (Kahn-Harris 2007), it will be necessary to explain not just what the music transgresses, but how extreme metal participates within a broader social experience of transgression.

I will discuss the contemporary experience of the grotesque in relation to Paul Ricoeur's understanding that our current age challenges the etiological significance of myths—that is, the value of myths to serve as explanatory discourses of origins—and the indeterminate expressive aspects of language. The grotesque also has gone through significant changes throughout history, as Kayser and Bakhtin both discuss. The grotesque has functioned to provide a popular critique of prevalent mores, values, and trends, which has been instrumental in the critique of reason and faith as transcendental categories. At the same time, grotesque discourse is expressive of these fundamental symbolisms. If the grotesque is a way of exploring defilement and challenging conceptions of evil, then the contemporary critique/confrontation with evil in popular culture is one mechanism through which our age analyzes its demons and gods. In current contemporary scholarly debates, aesthetics has come to represent the indeterminacy of human experience that exceeds representational understandings. The familiar critiques of extreme metal place causal origins of violence within aesthetic experience and in effect over-determine an important and telling aspect of human experience. In extreme metal, transgressive symbolics are performative of contemporary cultural issues that lie at the intersection of religion, aesthetics, and identity in contemporary popular culture.

Extreme Metal: a Social Stain

The recent September 13, 2006 shooting in Montréal that killed two and injured many others is one of a long and familiar list of violent youth crimes that have evoked strong and widespread discussions regarding the role of music in the lives

of individuals and communities (CBC 2006). Extreme metal has been at the center of social and political debates surrounding censorship since the 'satanic panic' of the mid to late 1980s, exemplified by a series of articles published in April 2000 in the *Albuquerque Journal* (Cole 2000). These articles aligned the lyrics of extreme metal music with actual violent and brutal acts such as school shootings and adolescent violence without looking to the broader social contexts of the reception of the music and its listeners. The popular media, exemplified by these articles in the *Albuquerque Journal*, generally imply a causal correlation between extreme youth violence and an individual's interest in certain counter-culture musical genres, lifestyles, and predilections.

While these articles and similar debates have derided extreme metal for the grotesque, abrasive, and transgressive elements in its sonic, visual, and lyrical material, most of the empirical sociological studies done on extreme metal show no direct correlation between lyrics, youth identification with extreme metal, antisocial tendencies, and violence. Rather, as Natalie J. Purcell (2003) writes, more evidence shows that the ostensible correlation between extreme metal music and teen violence is entirely spurious. According to Purcell, these studies show that many other contributory factors exist in extreme teen violence, which obfuscate simple causal explanations. From Purcell's perspective, even though certain psychological and social predictors are coincidental to certain lifestyles, musical preferences, and violence, this coincidence does not mean that youth who listen to this music are necessarily violent or criminal.

Recent qualitative scholarship has attempted to come to an understanding of this music and its fans without normative judgment (Mudrian 2003; Walser 1993; Weinstein 2000). Rather than attempting to determine or disprove causal correlations between extreme metal and youth violence, these studies seek to understand extreme metal and the extreme metal community as a distinctive sub-culture, with its own unique values and beliefs. Purcell alerts us to these values when she states that, "by its very nature, metal permits individualism by discouraging judgment and declaring acceptance of the socially unacceptable" (Purcell 2003, 159). Thus, the recent literature on extreme metal has suggested that its fans engage in this music for a sense of belonging based on a deeper ethic of subjectivism and individualism (Purcell 2003, 123-139).

In light of these recent sociological and qualitative contributions to the study of heavy metal and extreme metal, perhaps we should be less concerned with the question of possible causal correlations between extreme metal and violent acts than with assumptions that are at play in the invocation of music as a causal factor in tragic and violent crimes. I argue that these discussions implicitly propose that music and aesthetics are more than merely individual choice and preference, but as sociologist of heavy metal Robert Walser maintains, are "site[s] of social contestation and formation" that reflect individual and communal hopes, aspirations, and fears (Walser 1993, xiv). What needs further study is the way in which extreme metal and its sibling aesthetic genres of horror in popular culture evoke broad ranging social structures of experience, meaning, and boundaries that

historically were explicit in thought for which we have become amnesic such that the explicit meaning and significance of these issues are now possibly "hidden".

The censorship debates and moral indignation of the music and its potential harm and risk for contemporary youth perpetuates the forgetfulness of the historical experience of the grotesque in art and popular culture. Walser, for instance, examines several of the criticisms levelled against heavy and extreme metal as being forgetful of the same 'problems' exhibited in the canonized classical music genres that have consistently employed elements of the grotesque, images of horror and terror, and dystopic visions (Walser 1993, 150-164). This qualitative research is important in dispelling the fears and moral panic that popular media and censorship debates perpetuate. My project will assume the most recent scholarship on extreme metal to look further beyond it, towards the deeper structures of experience that generate grotesque art and its appreciation throughout the history of human culture.

Expressions of the grotesque as shown in aesthetic popular culture phenomena then cannot exist as purely nihilistic, asocial phenomena; rather they make structures of meaning more apparent by the transgression of the boundaries of meaning and implicit value systems. If the sublime needs the grotesque (as Chao 2006 argues) then extreme metal reasserts the normative assumptions of our culture by representing the hidden face of our deepest fears, frustrations, and existential concerns. I contend that grotesque art utilizes the symbolism of defilement in order to evoke the sense of disorientation and to transgress sacred

social norms. As well, the various themes that extreme metal evokes have affiliations with one another through the pervasive symbolism of defilement. I argue that transgression speaks from this symbolism of defilement—even performs defilement—and that this structure of defilement is the foundation of those seemingly basic visceral experiences of horror, terror, and the grotesque within aspects of contemporary popular culture.

In particular, I am concerned with popular normative conceptions of causal relations that place music as a foundational indication and even a causal factor for youth violence, and foundational, implicit motivations for the evocations of evil and defilement in the music itself in band and album art, self-representations, and lyrics. In essence, the aesthetics of extreme metal represent for my research a paradigmatic limit case for the contemporary understanding and experience of evil in popular culture. My argument is that more than merely an aesthetic category, the grotesque articulates metaphysical or even theological experiences that modernity has attempted to erase but through which the symbolism of defilement keeps alive. Modernity has also sought to expunge this same symbolism of defilement in its attempt to flatten metaphysical conceptions of the good.

What is Extreme Metal?

As Purcell (2003) and Kahn-Harris (2007) both discuss, extreme metal is a genre of transgression and extremes. Consequently, within the various genres of extreme metal, transgression exists not only in the lyrics, but also within the

sonic, instrumental, musical, artistic, and performative material. The high standards of musicality within the various subgenres of extreme metal, as Walser and Kahn-Harris also maintain, allow the sonic material, timbre, and rhythm to contribute to a highly specialized symbolics of transgression significant for the extreme metal community. These symbolics of transgression have gained widespread significance since they are what lead 20th century avant-garde composer and performer John Zorn to adopt an aggressive hardcore punk styling throughout his career and collaborate with heavy metal experimentalist singer Mike Patton. While the many recordings by John Zorn and Mike Patton have a sense of irony to them, they still rely upon these transgressive symbolics.

In this section, I will describe the common technical characteristics and innovations that typically characterize the extreme metal sound. I will then talk briefly about its history, major figures, bands, and finally touch on its controversies. People outside of the metal community generally recognize extreme metal by the gruff, low vocals often jokingly called "cookie monster vocals". Within the metal community, however, the many variations of vocal performance constitute one important way of differentiating the various subgenres of extreme metal. The diversity of these techniques are signified by one metal vocal coach's website as "low guttural screams, Midrange screams, High screams, death whispers, pterodactyl screams, pig squeals, the demonic multi-harmonic scream (2 pitches voiced at the same time), grunts, growls, sirens" (*Screaming*). Typically, extreme metal vocals transgress ideas of melody, timbre, and technique traditionally thought to be the hallmark of good singing. In consequence, extreme

metal has developed very innovative forms of vocal performance either not found in other musics, or used in very novel manners.

Extreme metal is generally low, powerful, intense, often virtuosic, and technically demanding music played at high volume levels. The major instruments that bands employ in much of extreme metal are guitars, bass, and drums, but depending on subgenre, bands may use many other instruments and arrangements. For instance, European symphonic metal, such as Swedish band Therion, often uses classically trained opera singers, orchestral instrument sections, and keyboards. Ian Christe, metal journalist and author, writes about the Swedish brand of extreme metal bands: "Stockholm bands Entombed and Dismember, followed by Gothenburg acts In Flames and At the Gates, administered a regional Swedish sound that poured melody atop grotesque imagery" (Christe 2004, 251).

Other sub-genres emphasize a particular instrument out of the primary rock instruments. For example, most extreme metal genres emphasize frenetic, double-kick drumming, intermixed with rapidly changing and compound time signatures, rhythms, and tempos that to the casual listener may sound chaotic, but to the aficionado are technical or "brutal". "Blast beats", prevalent throughout extreme metal but especially within technical death metal or brutal death metal, consists of extremely fast, articulated, 16^{th} and 32^{nd} notes. The death metal triple time drumming is different from the standard double time of thrash or speed metal.

Similarly, the musicians usually detune their guitars and basses lower than standard guitar tunings. They then process their instruments, and sometimes their

voices, heavily with a thick and grating distortion that contributes to a powerful, guttural, and aggressive sound. The level of virtuosity also depends on the sub-genre. For instance, the once very influential technical death metal band from Montreal called Cryptopsy, with albums such as *Blasphemy Made Flesh* (1994), *None So Vile* (1996), and *Whisper Supremacy* (1998), uses extremely virtuosic and fast guitar riffs and solos, with varying tempos and time signature changes, and very prevalent drumming with frequent blast beats. A recent album, *Once Was Not* (2006)—while more experimental and less popular than their previous albums—exhibits chaotic chordal, harmonic, and rhythmic structures, with very prominent, virtuosic drumming. Doom metal, which is another subgenre of extreme metal, is generally much slower with heavily detuned instruments and less virtuosic passages in order to increase a heavy, ominous, and foreboding atmosphere.

Lyrics generally vary between the different subgenres, but certain recurrent themes exist. For instance, black metal bands such as Mayhem, Emperor, and Gorgoroth from Norway have developed a peculiar fascination with extremely evil, satanic, or occult motifs that the writers evoke to challenge the typical Christian beliefs of the country. In addition, the Florida and South Carolina death metal scene, with bands such as Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, and Nile, typically use gore, horror, as well as mythological and anti-Christian themes. Other genres such as gore-grind, with European bands such as Carcass, General Surgery, Regurgitate, and Necrony, and American bands, The Meat Shits, Lividity and Waco Jesus, evoke medical terminology and the defilement of the

human body for mostly disturbingly comedic reasons. A prevalent lyrical motif throughout all extreme metal genres is the critique of religion and anti-religious or anti-Christian themes (Purcell 2003).

The seeds of extreme metal music lay in early forms of metal and hard rock. The interest in the occult and Satanism came from very popular bands in the 1960s and the 1970s, including The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, and Ozzy Osbourne. Musicians often used a musical interval and motif called the tritone not merely as a musical decision and trope, but for its previous understanding as the devil's chord, which authorities prohibited from use in Renaissance and Baroque times. Second-wave black metal uses this chord and interval frequently.[13] Several authors attribute the specific origins of death metal to early 1980s European metal bands, Venom, Bathory, and Hellhammer. American Bands, such as Possessed and Slayer, exhibited similar thrash metal traits (such as early Metallica and Megadeth), but were more gruff, heavier, faster, with raspier, rougher vocals. The content of their lyrics and their stage personalities also reflected something extreme—overt satanic, mythological, or Norse themes became common. Possessed established what would later set death metal apart from thrash with low, grunting vocals. Somewhat of a controversy exists about the first death metal album; most sources suggest either Possessed's

[13] Even classical music uses the tritone frequently in order to create tension in music. The significance of its knowledge for a lot of early metal has to do with its association before the baroque period as a prohibited musical harmony. To me this is significant in the sense that music has always reflected normative structures of our world-view. Extreme metal tends to use the tritone in conjunction with and as a part of diminished scale structures, typically to undermine the sense of any determined scale and melody, destabilize the listener, and add an exotic flavor to songs.

demo called *Death Metal*, or Chuck Shuldiner's band, Death, and their album *Scream Bloody Gore* released in 1987. Both albums were very significant for this budding genre because they were faster and more technical compared to earlier incarnations of metal. Shuldiner also had a distinct voice that introduced a more guttural growl to the genre and the music was more virtuosic, dark, and minor in tonality.

By 1989, several labels had signed quite a few extreme metal bands. For instance, Earache out of England and Combat Records from the United States began promoting and distributing Napalm Death's material in 1985. Eventually, the big labels, Sony and Columbia, jumped on death metal in the early 1990s to change the scene dramatically. The most influential bands of the death metal scene—most of whom are still performing and recording—are Obituary, Morbid Angel, Cannibal Corpse, and Deicide from the so-called Florida scene.[14]

The band Napalm Death was the most popular of a new subgenre of grindcore, profoundly influencing and becoming death metal in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Europe. Napalm Death and grind-core generally, wrote and performed extremely fast and short songs that were less technically proficient than the American death metal bands at the same time. Napalm Death's lyrics "were notable for their sociopolitical content and critical commentary" (Purcell 2003, 21). Bill Steer of Napalm Death later started a band called Carcass, which helped

[14] This is so-called because it refers to more of a particular studio and production style that was very significant around the early to mid 1990s. These bands were actually from different parts of the United States (mostly East Coast), but all recorded at Morisound studios in Florida.

inaugurate the gore-grind subgenre of extreme metal by using elaborate medical terminology, intricate guitar riffs, and extreme solos. Carcass's albums traversed many extreme metal genres and influenced a number of metal scenes, from the Swedish scene (including In Flames, Dark Tranquility, and Arch Enemy) to grind-core, and others (Purcell 2003, 22).

Justin Broadrick was an early original member of Napalm Death, but later left to form several other influential projects, most notably Godflesh, which experimented with several sub-genres of extreme metal such as industrial, gothic, and doom. Broadrick captured what could be the aesthetic précis of extreme metal in an interview: "there's a real beauty to brutality. Even the most graphic violence can be beautiful if it's presented in an artistic way", expressing an important adjective used regularly in extreme and death metal, "brutal" (Guitar World 1995). In a different interview, he expressed another important descriptor within the extreme and death metal community: "I often ask myself how I can make things more sick sounding. Sickness is really a big part of our sound" (Guitar 1999). These terms, sick and brutal, have a colloquial meaning that refers to the manner in which the music corresponds to the ideals of the community, which includes the emotional, atmospheric, and sonic import, as well as to the transgressive nature of the music.

A recent album by Napalm Death, *Smear Campaign* (2006), somewhat of a crossover album, uses various elements from the different subgenres of extreme metal, from death metal to Swedish melodic death and from early grind-core to

the very beginnings of the Norwegian black metal scene of the early 1980s. In particular, on the song “In Deference”, a distinctive female vocalist talks over a rhythmically driving guitar riff and is spoken by lead singer for the melodic death metal band, The Gathering. This motif directly references early black metal band and one of the first extreme metal bands, Celtic Frost, from the song, “Return to the Eve”, on their first album, *Morbid Tales* (1984). This homage to Celtic Frost is significant since it acknowledges the founders of this genre. The homage also references the many different styles Celtic Frost evoked in their long career, exhibiting influences on thrash, doom, symphonic, and even industrial metal. This homage may signify that the transgression and dissolution of the boundaries that Celtic Frost initially established for the genre is in fact what constitutes the foundation of extreme metal. The fan and magazine reviews of the latest Napalm Death album are positive, but also mixed because of the crossover elements that some people in the metal community see as very particular to their specific genre of choice.

This slight narrative of Napalm Death can take us back to the beginning of the history of black metal, which intersects with death metal but differentiates itself on many grounds. In particular, the death metal stage aesthetic is one of jeans, black t-shirts, and sneakers, in contrast to the stage personas of other metal genres such as the elaborate gender-bending fashions of glam metal or the pyrotechnical stage shows of the major thrash metal bands. Death metal performers gave the impression that they were more or less just like their fans, apart from the goregrind bands who would dress in surgical uniforms or drape themselves in

fake blood. Black metal bands conversely wanted to be the visual expression of the content of their lyrics and ideological dispositions and hence started donning corpse paint, leather, spikes, and bullet belts with stage shows that gave an ominous, dark, and evil atmosphere.

Sonically and musically, black metal is quite different from death metal. While black metal also employs distorted guitars, voices, and other instruments, played at a very fast pace, the sonic characteristics, atmospheres, modes, and scales differ as does the musical production and level of technical playing. Musically, the focus is on chromatic scalar structures, quite often employing the tritone interval. Tremolo strumming and pendulum strumming played over minor and diminished chords are important to create a dense sonic texture and dark atmosphere. Guitar solos are rare and some bands even use drum machines. Often, only one member in the band plays all the instruments. Some will not perform live both because of the logistics of a single member band playing live, but also to increase a particular mysterious, individualistic, and esoteric aesthetic. Amongst the instruments mentioned earlier, black metal may also incorporate the use of keyboards, classically trained singers, orchestras, organ, and choirs. Vocals are slightly different as well; they are mostly screamed, high pitched, but are often layered with effects to create atmosphere, intensity, and depth. Lyrically, black metal bands have much in common with each other. They gained from the early satanic metal a fascination with evil and satanic imagery, but since the proliferation of genres also affected black metal, other influences such as Norse mythology, fantasy themes, nature, and environmental themes have entered into the genre.

This diversification of themes also allowed the further differentiation of generic boundaries, which include subgenres such as Viking metal, folk black metal, and others. The most prominent lyrical themes for black metal are explicitly anti-Christian and anti-humanist.

The second wave of black metal was in the early to mid 1990s and consisted of bands such as Immortal, Burzum, Emperor, Mayhem, Darkthrone, Satyricon, and others. Where death metal lost a good amount of popularity due in part to the commercialization and stagnation of the genre in the mid 1990s, black metal became quite popular, and more so than death metal had been at the time. Related to the black metal movement in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, was a series of historical events that gained international notoriety such as a rash of church burnings, murders, a suicide, and other violent crimes that were the subject of many documentary films and a book called *The Lords of Chaos* (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003). A major media event was the suicide of Mayhem's singer, ironically named "Dead" and the subsequent spectacle of his brain matter and skull. Apparently, when band member Euronymous found Dead, dead, he made necklaces with bits of his skull and took a picture of the scene that was to become a limited run of one of their album covers. The most prominent of these crimes were a series of arsons that burnt down over fifty ancient churches including several by Varg Vikernes, of one-man band Burzum. Varg is a notorious member of the black metal community who recently was released after serving a twenty-five-year jail term for the murder of member of the band, Mayhem, "Euronymous" (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003).

While modern black metal is relatively free from these sorts of violent happenings, there has been some controversy surrounding the band, Gorgoroth, previously led by singer with the pseudonym, Gaahl. The controversy consisted of a concert in Poland shown on national Polish television that shocked the conservative Catholic nation when the band supposedly performed a "Black Mass" on stage replete with bloodied sheep skulls and two naked individuals hanging from crosses on the stage (Gorgoroth 2004). Gaahl's and Gorgoroth's black metal ideology reflects that of the second wave of black metal, where musicians use extreme satanic symbolism in order to evoke the corruption of a strong Norse history through a complacent and middle-class Christianity (Christe 2004, 260-290). Often Satan is a restitutionist symbol of a return to a prior state, one that is purer and more authentic (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003). In particular, Gaahl from Gorgoroth stated in an interview for heavy metal documentary film *Heavy Metal: A Headbangers Journey* that Satan represented "freedom" for him and that "we have to remove every trace that Christianity and the Semitic roots have to offer this world" (Dunn 2007). Yet, apart from exceptional cases such as some bands within the Norwegian black metal community, it becomes clear throughout the film that evil motifs are not necessarily genuine expressions of belief in Satan, but rather, are expressive of transgression and the evocation of an individualistic ideology.

Subcultures and Metal

The study of music as related to cultural processes was common through the 1970s, analyzing subcultures as a response to cultural conditions established by

the superstructure or the economic structures of society. For people such as Albert K. Cohen (1955), Stanley Cohen (1972), Stuart Hall (1977), and Dick Hebdige (1979), subcultures are a reactive response to the mode of production and a rebellious attempt to deal with the complexities and paradoxes of late industrial capitalism during a specific political moment (for example, during Thatcherism in 1970s Britain with the aggressive neo-liberal policies). In other words, theorists have understood subcultures primarily through a regressive analysis because, as Hebdige famously states in his *The Meaning of Style*, "Subcultures represent noise (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media" (Hebdige 1979, 90). Since this time, subculture studies have reflected mostly on the subcultural social patterns, but have lost a kind of social historical and theoretical approach that analyzes how the musical forms, sounds, and timbres, and the significance of the music for the subculture reflect contemporary cultural conditions.

Another way to understand metal and transgression is to take into account different schools of thought from the early Chicago School of Sociology into the 1960s. The Chicago school in particular used the concepts of deviancy and transgression to understand subcultures as responses to anomic conditions of urban life. The later Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies tried to understand the transgression of subcultures through theoretical models of anomie, alienation, and futile resistance and hegemony. That is, participation in subcultures reflected an attempt to compensate for challenging socio-economic conditions, broad social disenfranchisement, and loss of social

cohesion. The fascinating thing about these schools and research is that they attempted to understand subcultures as reflective of broad social concerns. Yet, the biggest problem of these studies (broadly speaking) is that they invoked foundational errors of inductive reasoning that only may have reinforced the idea that subcultures were transgressive with little positive value (they were futile attempts after all). Several studies on metal have used the concept of alienation to denote the manner in which the metal subculture, being a form of deviancy because of its transgressive nature, was a response to the alienating conditions of modern life (Arnette 1993, Harris 1999).

Transgression, however, is only one aspect of the 'negative' experience of metal and possibly a reductionist mode of interpreting the symbolic significance of the music. In other words, transgression often obscures the understanding of the subject's relationship to others and the full, meaningful subjective experience of the music. Keith Kahn Harris (2007) illuminates this well with his discussion of cultural and social capital within the metal scene, but we can also think of other significant reasons such as music for "its own sake", participation within a community, feelings of freedom and liberation, and other positive aesthetic considerations.

In the end, while these studies broadly reflect regressive modes of analysis, we can nevertheless retain transgression as a useful heuristic tool. In other words, transgression can serve as a constructive way of illuminating a deeper social experience of some interesting implications for what it might be able to say

about our contemporary, "post-metaphysical" conceptions of fault—the experience of a collective consciousness that is predisposed towards particular understandings of cause.

Voices from the Past?

Extreme metal has been at the center of social and political debates surrounding censorship since the 'satanic panic' of the mid to late 1980s. These debates typically exhibit causal correlations between extreme youth violence and an individual's interest in certain counter-culture musical genres, lifestyles and predilections (for discussions on the prevalent censorship debates and major figures, see Christe 2004, 290-303; Dunn 2005; Purcell 2003, 83-93; Walser 1993, 137-172). Yet, to look more closely at those criticisms, we can see that, in one sense, they arise from the tacit understanding that youth identification with counter-cultural music constitutes more than merely individual musical choice. Rather, these criticisms understand that musical preference presupposes lifestyle, identity, ethical considerations, and even metaphysics (abstract concepts that we deem to be real). What is implicit in the criticism of extreme metal is the correct assumption that while taste bears upon issues that pertain to the identity of the individual it also has to do with the transgression of established social, political, and religious categories of the meaningful, the beautiful, or the ethical. What is questionable in the popular criticism of extreme metal is the psychological assumption that anti-social tendencies in the individual are the sole motivation for identification with this music. What censorship debates, popular media explanations, and early sociological literature on metal see as individual, reactive

and anti-social behaviors may actually express a deeper social experience of a shocking, morally transgressive, and darkly critical and ironic aesthetic experience.

My contention is that Ricoeur's thoughts can help deepen an understanding of the grotesque as more than merely an aesthetic category. Rather, the grotesque comes out of an imperative within what Ricoeur calls the "symbolism of defilement". Ricoeur maintains that defilement is fundamental and ultimately reminiscent in our current secular age to any experience of the sacred or the good, whether modernity has repressed, forgotten, or even flattened these conceptions. Ricoeur maintains that our current age conceals the basic structure of defilement precisely because of the manner in which scientific understandings of the world and the language of clarity have taken over the etiological significance of myths. In extreme metal, and especially in the way it combines grotesque art with an experience of transgression, we see the residual effects of the repressed structure of defilement. In this sense, and in the manner in which it provokes an experience of indeterminacy and disorientation in the audience, extreme metal evokes distant voices from the past.

What follows in the next two chapters is an attempt to move through three different stages, or steps, towards uncovering this deep significance. Ricoeur's texts on evil inspire my method wherein he attempts to move past the horizontal understanding of a comparativist, through a hermeneutical deepening of a text according to the text, towards a reflective and critical response. This section will

place extreme metal in the context of social theories of the grotesque and will analyse defilement as a modality of transgression.

Metal, Modernity, and Transgression

Because transgression always exists within a certain horizon of values, it can serve as a significant sociological term that highlights the privation of values that animate this genre. That is, the experience of fear, dread, horror, and humor (such as in the grotesque) comes from the experience of transgressing the limits of frameworks of meaning and seeing the dissolution of those frameworks. Indeed, one theorist of horror film suggests that the genre exists as a "modern defilement rite" that seeks to "bring about a confrontation with the abject" (Jancovich 2002, 75). As well, this rite of defilement "works to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability" (Jancovich 2002, 75). Chris Jenks (2003), another scholar of popular culture and transgression, suggests that transgression and the desire to transcend the limits of our empirical existence within a modern framework becomes the contemporary exemplary state. Jenks concedes that, "modernity has unintentionally generated an ungoverned desire to extend, exceed, or go beyond the margins of acceptability or normal performance. Transgression becomes a primary postmodern topic and a responsible one" (Jenks 2003, 8).

The first step towards understanding the significance of extreme metal is to show the historical lineage of transgression and its affiliation with other discourses of the grotesque and the way in which it represents analogous issues to discussions on the grotesque in the work of literary theorists Wolfgang Kayser (1957) and

Mikhail Bakhtin (1965). In this stage, I am concerned with conceptual and intentional analogy to exemplify the significance of extreme metal. Foundational discussions of the grotesque explore the way in which the grotesque images and performances through history were transgressive of classical genres and the philosophical privileging of high art forms over popular culture art forms. Kayser expounds upon those aspects of the "nightmarish and ominously demonic" in the Romantic grotesque and located its philosophical depth in images of the world going to pieces, or the "estranged world" (Kayser 1957, 181-82). For Kayser, the grotesque represents a foundational significance of the estranged and alienated world and "our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (Kayser 1957, 185). Kayser's contribution to the study of the grotesque is his understanding of the grotesque as a quasi-ontological structural necessity with implications for "serious philosophical discourse" (Barasch 1995). In this way, Kayser understands the structural elements of grotesque art and performance as something that exists deeper than literary tropes. These elements are indicative of a trans-historical relation and drive towards the darker elements of existence expressed through fantastical themes and unconventional rhetorical tropes.

The grotesque begs questions of the place of aesthetics in ontological and experiential categories. Put simply, aesthetics evokes issues of individual choice, but in that choice there are implicit concerns relating to ethics, identity, and broad social values that allow the expression of historical and experiential concerns. Bakhtin (1969), in his famous text on *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* by sixteenth century novelist, Rabelais, explores the significance of the carnival and

the grotesque of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance prior to its increasing judicial control. He believes that grotesque realism is a mode of embracing and incorporating ambivalence of the social order through exaggeration and inversion, a focus on the visceral, the body, and dark humour. For Bakhtin, carnival festivals such as the "Feast of Fools" of the medieval ages were important creative rituals that inverted the mores of the time using grotesque imagery and revelry. The carnival also functioned to resolve temporarily ambivalences related to the paradoxes and difficulties people experienced of the social order. The carnival functioned as a sanctioned violation of all social norms, which combined and flattened conceptions of the sacred and the profane.

Within the grotesque realism of these early French novels, Rabelais describes lives and adventures of the giants Gargantua and his son Pantagruel in lurid, visceral, and obscene terms. For Bakhtin, these texts, and by extension grotesque art, represent the "totality of life", since grotesque art's fascination with orifices and bodily openings expresses the creative potential of life through basic visceral experiences such as laughter and shock (Bakhtin 1969, 240-255). Durkheim's student and social theorist Georges Bataille (1985) also has strong affiliations with Bakhtin's notion of the "totality of life", whereby the grotesque expresses a visceral opening to the totality of life. According to Breton, for Bataille "horror does not lead to any pathological complaisance and only plays the role of manure in the growth of plant life, manure whose odor is stifling no doubt but salutary for the plant" (in Lechte 1995, 118).

Defilement, the Grotesque, and Metal Aesthetics

The social issues that Bakhtin describes in sixteenth century Rabelaisian France, as well as those signified by contemporary censorship debates, both relate broadly to understandings of the world and self-conceptions. I believe a contrast exists between past ideals and the current seemingly counter-cultural rebelliousness of extreme metal. The historical chasm between these discourses show that the grotesque elements of extreme metal do not come out of nowhere (as it now possibly seems), but are grounded in past social-cultural forces, experience, and the need to embrace ambivalence and difference.

Transgression in the form of the grotesque is a mode of social critique and is one way in which our post-metaphysical condition analyzes its demons and gods. In this sense, the grotesque, as an aesthetic category, is instrumental in the critique of reason and faith as transcendental categories. Joyce Carol Oates, author and commentator on grotesque aesthetics, writes regarding our continuing fascination with the irreducible sense of grotesque:

> if we were not now, in this Age of Deconstruction, psychologically and anthropologically capable of deciphering seemingly opaque documents, whether fairy tales, legends, works of art or putatively objective histories and scientific reports, we should sense immediately, in the presence of the grotesque, that it is both ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ simultaneously, as states of mind are real enough—emotions, moods, shifting obsessions, beliefs—though immeasurable (Oates 1993).

This quote exemplifies a major preoccupation of contemporary theory of human experience: namely the opaqueness of meaning and the significance for aesthetic categories to express this indeterminacy.

One scholar of heavy metal suggests that the extreme versions of heavy metal such as the various subgenres of extreme metal have more in common with the horror genre of films, than they do with other forms of popular music genres (Walser 1993, 160-164). Members of the extreme metal community, such as former singer of Cannibal Corpse, Chris Barnes (Cole 2000), affirm this sentiment in interviews. Expressions of the grotesque as shown in aesthetic popular culture phenomena then cannot exist as purely nihilistic, asocial phenomena; rather, they make apparent structures of meaning by transgressing the boundaries of implicit value systems. The significance of the grotesque as a critical discourse suggests that the role and significance of aesthetics in human experience is important for understanding contemporary ideas.

Extreme metal's relation to broader historical trends of grotesque art tell us that the absurd and offensive themes within extreme metal do not arise out of nothing, but potentially a trans-historical drive to darker, more flamboyant, or absurd elements of existence. The conceptual relation of the specific to a universal requires an understanding of the intentional aspects within the trans-historical. Paul Ricoeur's understanding of defilement gives us a way of understanding changing conceptions of evil and the manner in which defilement continues to furnish those conceptions. The themes of sexuality, violence, mythopoeia, anti-

religious motifs, the defiling, and mutation of the human body, and social commentary and criticism within extreme metal are suggestive of the deeper experience that Paul Ricoeur calls the "symbolism of defilement" (Ricoeur 1969).

Kristeva and Mary Douglas on Defilement

Conceptions of evil, the grotesque, and defilement relate closely to long-standing debates within social theory in the form of theories of difference and the abject. Various social theorists have engaged in understanding issues related to defilement and its significance in contemporary society. Mary Douglas is an important figure in any contemporary discussion of defilement because of her significance in anthropology and religious studies for the study of early civilizations and their rituals. Kristeva writes that, "Mary Douglas seems to find in the human body the prototype of that translucid being constituted by society as symbolic systems" (Kristeva 1982, 66). She goes on to say that defilement "assigns in turn different statuses to the human body; as ultimate cause of the socio-economic causality, or simply as metaphor of that symbolic being constituted by the human universe always present to itself" (Kristeva 1982, 66). In other words, our understanding of the world is normatively hierarchical according to a metaphorical understanding of that world. Defilement plays into these normative understandings by abstracting those elements of the human body that gives us feelings of disgust and repulsion. Rituals, then, help restore cultural and normative boundaries violated by various transgressions. For Douglas, one can read defilement rituals as though they were metaphors for the boundaries of the group and so represent the maintenance of order and the eradication of difference

that has penetrated the group. Defilement exists as a metaphor of the boundaries and borders of the self and the collective. The significance of Douglas's work is that she essentially re-invigorated religious studies and theological understandings of defilement by giving scholars of purity a new interpretive language through which to understand the significance of the rituals designed for the purification and expiation of the transgressions of the sacred in primitive societies and early biblical times. Yet, her research asserts a functionalism common at the time that attempts to seek the hidden, structural purpose of religious consciousness and rituals, rather than their meaning for people.

Julia Kristeva (1984) includes defilement under the general category and experience of the abject: any experience that relates to a visceral feeling of disgust and repulsion. For Kristeva the abject indicates something that an identity must expel in order to retain a sense of a stable self. While the abject is a psychological metaphor that extends into the symbolic and social domain, the implications of this concept underscore the relationship between identity and difference. Understandings of difference have been essential to social theories of power and gender, as well as for theories of how the unconscious reflects these concerns. The violent reaction in the expulsion of the abject is reflective of the fear that it evokes in people, which becomes a structuring principle for the experience of social difference (Kristeva 1984). For Kristeva, the foundation of the experience of the abject relates to the subject's need to separate itself from the maternal body in order to conceive of itself as an independent being. In other words, the feelings of repulsion and disgust are phenomenological archaisms of expulsions of the

maternal body. In Kristeva's understanding of the abject, each culture experiences the abject uniquely, which suggests different ways in which social orders interact with the feminine and the maternal body.

Ricoeur and the Symbolic Constitution of Defilement

In contrast, Ricoeur takes defilement as both a historical principle of those same causal relations discussed by Douglas, Kristeva, and Bataille, but sees it located within language and symbolism that change through history. Similar to these previous scholars, Ricoeur understands defilement as a part of the deep origin of religious and socio-economic understandings of the world. Ricoeur, however, locates the significance of defilement in the classical distinction between the finite and infinite aspects of human existence. Defilement references not ontology, but a particular phenomenological experience of the conditions of human limitations, expressed through the abstraction that is implicit within the linguistic nature of our being. Defilement is then a specifically linguistic and symbolic experience and expression that sits at the beginning of our conceptions and experience of fault, social transgression, and evil.

By "symbolism of defilement", Ricoeur means the sense in which excess and transgression condition and make possible sacred categories. Norms, rules, laws, and order are first articulated and become explicit in the transgression of what people consider good. The establishment of these norms is expressive of Ricoeur's maxim, "the symbol gives rise to thought", since the rationalizations subsequent to the formalization of norms influences and produces objective

meaning structures in which social actors engage (Ricoeur 1969). In this sense, defilement is the stain or taint that has grounded historically our religious, philosophical, and even scientific thought. Defilement is a sort of "first causality" on top of which all subsequent conceptions of causality rest. Bakhtin understands that the grotesque functions in much the same manner, wherein the Carnivalesque sanctioned violations of social norms, social hierarchies, and conceptions of the sacred actually reinforce their significance.

Ricoeur conceives of defilement as a foundational symbolism on top of which symbols of evil and purification are abstract expressions of our consciousness of fault (understandings of sin and guilt, for instance). The symbolism of defilement on the one hand, expresses the basic structure of what Ricoeur calls the confession of evil—the manner in which we understand, experience, and confront evil—and, on the other, it expresses a deeper sense of social transgression. Ricoeur argues that defilement continues to furnish our discourses of causal relations such as religious consciousness, legal systems, and any system of thought that relies upon ethical distinctions. The language of stain and taint, purity and purification, just and unjust animates the symbolism of defilement within the confessions of evil. Put simply, people's experience of evil and the ways in which they have attempted to purify and protect themselves from this evil are historical expressions of defilement.

Ricoeur thinks the modern experience of defilement is profoundly ambiguous wherein it is at once too expansive and at the same time too narrow. For Ricoeur,

this ambiguity points towards two distinct stages in the expression of defilement. On the one hand, we contemporaries experience the narrow side of defilement when it has to do with the understandings of the intentions of the agent. That is, our experiences of fault relating to ethical considerations, such as those expressed in juridico-discursive frameworks (the discourse of law), seem far removed from the symbolism of defilement. Yet, this same juridico-discursive framework still reposes upon purification through penalty and punishment. Whereas, on the other hand, we can see more easily the sense of disgust when something happens in the world that is marked off by the human environment.

The reason we do not have access to the immediate experience of defilement is the "thousand permutations" that it has undergone. What we understand as evil now has at first glance little in common with defilement. That is, our contemporary conceptions of causal relations have seemingly developed beyond the point at which happenings of the world reflect the transgression of some mythical or cosmic interdiction. For instance, we do not attribute cosmic understandings to the failure of farmers' crops. Yet, if we take a closer look at the contemporary experience of evil, it still clings to a sense of infectious contact, even when our current experience of that which, for instance, strays from order and reason is abstracted from this immediate sense of stain and defilement.

Ricoeur takes the visceral response of disgust, or what Kristeva terms the abject, that certain events evoke within us as a phenomenological archaism in the development of a sense of fault that informs subsequent, more ethical

considerations of fault. As such, he writes,

> the representation of defilement dwells in the half-light of a quasi-physical infection that points toward a quasi-moral unworthiness. This ambiguity is not expressed conceptually, but is experienced intentionally in the very quality of the half-physical, half-ethical fear that clings to the representation of the impure (Ricoeur 1960, 35).

The part physical, part ethical response to the impure is partly what conditions the aesthetic experience of grotesque art, and the genres of horror and terror, such as extreme metal. Ricoeur sees in defilement an unlimited potential of symbolic richness and, I would argue, exemplifies its affiliations with discourses of the grotesque, which can help explain the consistency and variety of themes expressed within extreme metal:

> It is because the symbolism of defilement still clings by its manifold root hairs to the cosmic sacralizations, because defilement adheres to everything unusual, everything terrifying in the world, attractive and repellant at the same time, that this symbolism of defilement is ultimately inexhaustible and ineradicable. As we shall see the more historical and less cosmic symbolism of sin and guilt makes up for the poverty and abstractness of its imagery only by a series of revivals and transpositions of the more archaic, but more highly surcharged, symbolism of defilement. The richness of the symbolism of defilement, even when this

> symbolism is fully interiorized, is the corollary of its cosmic roots (Ricoeur 1969, 12).

The inexhaustibility of the depth of meaning and significance of the symbolism of defilement can help affirm the opaqueness of the discourses that evoke horror and grotesque. Themes such as sexuality, the mutation and destruction of the human body, mythopoeia, and religious themes all find their expression within the grotesque precisely because of the manner in which defilement "clings to everything unusual".

Conversely, discourses of the grotesque, including extreme metal, attempt to lay bare those structures of which they are critical (for instance, the status quo, political debates, impending ethical issues, current metaphysics, science, technology, and the current flattening effect of the current social order) through tropes of irony, satire, absurdity, and violent metaphors and themes. In this sense, despite the chaotic and absurd representations found within extreme metal, respect for some form of order is the foundation of the inversion of standard mores and values. The next chapter will explore in more detail the many different modalities of defilement, including how extreme metal evokes discourses of purity, authenticity, as well as more immanent experiences of defilement in disgust and horror. What we will see in the next chapter is how these conceptions actually significantly constrain the genre.

Conclusion: Defilement, the Sublime, and Kearney

Extreme metal exploits the abject in its reaction to broad social values of which it is critical, while at the same time being redolent of the very same value structures. The symbolics of purity, authenticity, and the expiation of that which threatens a stable identity are prevalent motifs that motivate the transgressive nature of extreme metal. Ricoeur's analysis of the symbolics of defilement help us to understand that the thematics of transgression in extreme metal also relate to discussions of the abject and 'informe' while allowing for a more 'social' analysis of these structures than either Bataille or Kristeva offers. Ricoeur makes a more historical and social analysis by situating defilement as a symbolic archaism that remains in the depths of ethical, religious, social, and political causal thinking.

Ricoeur's student, Richard Kearney, has also given a hermeneutical response to these discussions and the manner in which he envisages the link between aesthetics, ethics, and judgment. In his (2003) analysis of the sublime within contemporary social theories and the ethical implications of aligning horror, terror, and strangeness with the sublime. According to Kearney, the sublime points to an excess that reinforces our ability to think through things, whereas the monstrous and the grotesque points to the excess of that which challenges reason. According to Kearney's reading of sublime aesthetics, aesthetic judgment concerns an intersubjective awareness that implicitly incorporates the individual's sensuous and ethical life with broader categories of judgment. The sublime is a challenge to our faculties of judgment because of its immensity. Yet, the sublime is not just the sensual experience of that which terrifies or threatens, but is rather

the innately subjective experience of our ability to rise above this experience because of the human capacity for reason. That is, in the face of a formless menace, we are able to achieve a critical distance (Kearney 2003, 88-90).

Following Kearney's understanding of social theoretical thinking of the sublime since Kant, we have to understand that the experience of the sublime does not occur at the sensual experience or the subsequent media rationalizations but rather within a capacity to transcend this experience. If the sublime depends on a reflection on ethical distinctions, then we need to understand the extent to which both the media response to extreme metal, and the violent and destructive events that members of the black metal community have carried out, are an adequate or profound response. Rather, I would argue that censorship debates and the derision of extreme metal, and some responses by extreme metal, do not represent the ability to judge properly the experience of the grotesque as exhibited within extreme metal through an understanding of a higher-order evaluative judgment based on ethical thinking. As this chapter discussed, the articles within the *Albuquerque Journal* are evocative of a base-level guttural response reactive to the experience of evil. The media response to extreme metal is evocative of Ricoeur's understanding that vengeance is internal to the experience of defilement. What this discussion entails for my dissertation are the conditions of ethical judgment that relate to the experience of aesthetic genres of horror and terror that exceed determinate categories of knowledge.

The challenging of the etiological significance of myths in contemporary culture is indicative of the degree to which modernity also flattens conceptions of the good, the sacred, truth, and beauty. These changing normative conceptions are significant because they relate to established categories of knowledge and values, and, by extension, changing conceptions of what is unknown and horrific. Hence, grotesque aesthetics and performances also change through history such that they can remain transgressive of reason and rationality. In this way, extreme metal is always a movement against the fixation of life within doctrine and reason in contemporary society. While extreme metal is often heavily critical of religion, it still relies upon structures of thought and experience based on historical theological understandings of evil. What this signifies is that actually metal may reinforce the structures of thought that it transgresses while at the same time participating in discourses of the grotesque that have at their root a critique of religion, dogmatism, social issues, and basic understandings of taste.

Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the consciousness of fault is particularly insightful and can help clarify (through a phenomenological, hermeneutical, and genealogical reading of the language) symbols, aesthetics, and themes evoked through extreme metal and the contemporary experience of horror, terror, and transgression. In the end, my goal has been to bring these conceptions to bear on the possibility of judging aesthetics of the grotesque by interpreting the symbolic nature of transgression within these genres. If conceptions of aesthetics relate to normative social structures, ethics, and conceptions of causal relations, then how far can we take an understanding of defilement and at which point does it becomes too

broad; can defilement relate to all transgression? A foundational motivation for my research relates to the manner in which the structure of defilement is contingent upon ethics and deeper evaluative judgments of transgression that necessarily depends upon distinctions. These ethical distinctions may relate to what happens when defilement becomes an ideal—the sublime. Does defilement then become a perversity without foundations, existing for its own sake? How is one able to judge discourses of the grotesque that rely upon defilement, such as extreme metal? More fundamentally, in what way is defilement a condition of ethical thought? Does it challenge the very notion that there can be an ethics? One response can be that 'the ethical' is made possible by its transgression and that the ethical only makes sense to the extent that it has limits and sets its own limits so that the experience of evil needs to be understood as internal to the experience of the ethical.

Chapter 5: The Symbolic Constitution of Extreme Metal Music

Introduction

Extreme metal consists of a dizzying array of disparate and often polarizing symbols and aesthetic choices. For instance, it is famous for being intricately theatrical and conversely serious and austere, letting the music speak for itself. The lyrical stories that extreme metal tells can be ones of horror, but can also be epic, historical, or based on myths. The genre can be profoundly disgusting but can also be humorous, ironic, and absurd. Metal has always had a relationship to religion, mostly negative, but can be both vehemently anti-religious and at the same time evoke spiritual ideas and orientations. It is irreverently individualist, obsessed with authenticity, but also obsessed with ethnic and national origins. It can be racist and misogynist, but can also be socially conscious and feminist. The music depends upon international market flows, but also draws on the profoundly situated. The musicianship can be serious, virtuosic, and extremely technical, but some genres are simple and restrained. Most of these distinctions appear in their subgeneric divisions, but not always. For instance, from its beginnings, black metal has been anti-Christian, anti-humanist, and nihilistically individualist. Yet, something in black metal has attracted people to create Christian black metal, which is deeply reactionary to the perceived darkness of its satanic counterpart and use opposing symbols of light, hope, joy, and love in their music. In my fieldwork, I have witnessed black masses and group prayer. I have also seen bands incorporating a various number of different Asian symbolisms, religious concepts, and instruments such as the Mongolian horsehair cello. In addition, I

have seen black metal from Romania that employs folk instruments such as the pan flute, Semantron, and frame drum that attempt to evoke the spirit, or even spirituality, of the Transylvanian landscape. I have also seen ironic Vancouver metal, tongue-in-cheek Finnish troll metal, and ultra-serious brutal death metal from Montreal. Something about the aesthetics of this music allows the expression of many different symbols and the ability to hold often-contradictory ideologies and world-views.

Take for example a performance at Wacken Open Air festival in 2008 from a band named Voodoo Kungfu. The leader of the band, Li Nan, attended a Christian high school in Beijing, later to join an esoteric Christian group in China. According to Wiki Rock-in-China, the lead singer of Voodoo Kungfu had gone on a diverse spiritual journey afterwards which found him in Mongolia and Tibet searching out "many mysterious pagan religions" and spiritualities (Wiki-Rock in China).[15]

This band's aesthetic stage presence consisted of a mix of different symbols, instruments, visual displays, and expressions from the metal genre, Chinese, and Mongolian traditions. Their sound also consisted of many musical elements, including metalcore and grind-core elements with fast and simplistic guitar patterns and riffs. They also incorporated heavy groove-based rhythms, as well as breakdowns (half time sections of songs that promote a feeling of groove and release) juxtaposed by softer melodic parts and sparse instrumentation. There

[15] Rock-in-China Wiki describes this band as, "Beijing-based Experimental/ Black/ Industrial/ Folk/ Nu Metal."

were also elements of doom metal with long, slow, drudging riffs repeated to create a somewhat melancholic atmosphere. The singer's vocals ranged from melodic, classically influenced vocal progressions and techniques, to ethnic throat and overtone-singing, from death metal, false chord vocals to metalcore screams as well as high pitched, black metal influenced screams. His vocals were predominantly of the heavy fry[16] vocalization style. The band consisted of a drummer, guitarist, bassist, vocalist, and one band member who played the Mongolian horsehair fiddle throughout the show.

Figure 1: Voodoo Kungfu

The band's stage presence was intentional and theatrical. The singer enacted different stances, positions, and facial expressions that were expressive of the stage of the song they were performing. In the softer melodic sections, the singer

[16]Melissa Cross discusses "Fry" in her training video, "Zen and the art of Screaming", to describe the manner in which the false vocal chords pinch the vocalizations such that a rougher tone emerges from the throat. The significance of this style for Cross is that it produces overtones that can reference melodic and tonal structures (Cross 2007).

had a soft, meditative facial expression and with his traditional mountain Asian long jacket with different beadwork, light suede leather, and colorful arm tassels, which gave the outward display of ethnic/national culture and musics. Behind him sat the Mongolian horsehair cello player that never moved beyond his playing position. The Mongolian horsehair cello player also donned traditional clothes and sat in front of a painting/wall hanging/banner whose instrument the distorted guitars and drums often drowned out when the music picked up. Nevertheless, the instrument served to provide the melodic component of the music filling in for interludes and often processed with effects and distortion, providing the 'solo' function for the band.

The bassist, drummer, and guitarist appeared to hold the non-traditional symbols. The dress of the bassist and guitarist made me think about place, status, and symbols. It occurred to me these musicians' presence in the band helped to reaffirm and justify their presence within the metal genre. These members of the band represented the "metal" aspects of the stage presence where the guitarist was wearing something resembling a death shroud covered in blood. The bassist and drummer wore non-descript clothes with the bassist wearing a black dress shirt and dress pants. Both the guitarist and the bassist wore white corpse paint on their faces, splattered with red to simulate blood. In addition, the guitarist's stage presence was heavily theatrical. During the slow parts, his facial expression conveyed zombie like mannerisms: slow, dazed, deliberate actions, eyes closed, mouth open as if in a trance. During the fast parts, he made scripted metal facial expressions and movements: mouth opened simulating screaming and aggression,

masculine, animalistic, and fierce facial contortions. At these points, both he and the singer threw their hair around and banged their heads to the tempo.

Figure 2: Fast Heavy Section

Figure 3: Slow Melodic Section

The guitarist was dressed in a single cloth covered in fake blood to connote an image of a ghost or a hospital catastrophe. The ghost imagery is significant though wherein "mogwai"—the Chinese conception of ghost, demon, or evil spirit, came to mind while watching this band. What I found significant about this symbol is that the context of a certain cultural experience determines the

symbolism of folklore, gore, and the grotesque within extreme metal. Consequently, these are not necessarily just displays of gore as might be common in the West, but rather, displays of the ancient Chinese and Buddhist mythologies that find a point of coherence with the symbolisms of the extreme metal genre itself. To say it differently, the genre allows a certain homologous use of symbolisms, a certain kind of bricolage that can really only be understood within the genre itself.

One common characteristic at this festival amongst nearly all bands was the presence of national flags. This performance was no exception with audience members flying Tibetan national flags during the entire performance of Voodoo Kungfu. Despite the fact that the band members are from Beijing, except the Mongolian cello player, I found it interesting that the audience flew a Tibetan flag. To me, the presence of national flags represents aesthetic abstraction due to symbolic and generic constraints, which I will discuss later in this chapter. These kinds of bricolages evoke for me similar problems that comparative religious studies face due to the potentially irreducible experiential aspects of different religions and cultures. Yet, the confluence of different symbolisms does not necessarily impinge upon this critique since the genre grounds the homology within broader symbols, the culture, and the sonics, both abstracting symbols and re-contextualizing them. In this way, the genre itself is what gives coherence to the seemingly disparate symbolisms within such metal shows.

Let us look at another performance by Romanian band, Negura Bunget, a black metal band previously mentioned.

Figure 4: Negura Bunget

Negura Bunget, a black metal band from Romania, was also of significant interest at this festival. The music resembled a wash of distortion that created both atmosphere and intensity: it was harmonic, as opposed to melodic, and dense, but also complicated by diverse musical elements. The band employs typical black metal tremolo guitar picking, double bass drumming, but the musicians also used ethnic instruments and ethnically inspired folk melodies that helped create an atmosphere of foreignness. The singer varied between clean and melodic to typical thin and raspy black metal style vocals.

The dress of the band was also of an ethnic, traditionalist, Bohemian style of a long and loose cut, most of which appeared to be made of cotton. The female keyboardist appeared to be dressed in a gothic style but her long black dress with embroidery around the neck could also signify something ‘ethnic.’ The guitarist and acoustic, ethnic instrumentalist also wore a loose burgundy colored cotton

shirt, and played the acoustic instruments such as the wooden piccolo, a Romanian pan flute. The singer also played a long wooden Romanian gong called a Semantron. Various sources consider Negura Bunget a black metal band, but the members were not wearing metal shirts nor did they don typical black metal uniforms.

This is a stark contrast to most of the bands at the Wacken festival and especially to the many concerts I attended in Edmonton, where the ethnic identity imperative, while strong especially with multiculturalism, does not represent such a confluence of authenticity and ideology as it was at the European festival. It appears to me that in North America, authenticity relies more upon genre uniqueness and specificity. Ethnic signifiers in extreme metal are not a very common statement of authenticity, but rather, of orientalism or exoticism. An example of this is American extreme metal bands such as Nile, who base their music around ancient Egyptian narratives, myths, and musical motifs. Other extreme metal bands also evoke Middle Eastern, or eastern European motifs with "Phrygian" mode musical motifs and diminished scales that contain the infamous tritone (diminished-fifth), the musical interval often used in classical music to evoke the Ethnic other.

Folk black metal is a sub-subgenre that is comprised by the confluence of identity politics, various national ideologies, and a discourse of musical authenticity. The manner in which this music displays these elements, however, is of a very particular order of identity presentation and authenticity. The representation and

display of authenticity relates to genre: the singing references black metal, as do some of the instruments, the heavy distortion, fast drumming and blast beats. Yet, symbols of authenticity in some European-specific genres of metal represent statements of place and nation, which quite often are of a pre-modern, pre-Christian, or pagan character. These expressions are not just typical of metal, but reflect a certain collective consciousness, a current cultural climate of expressive national identities. Specificity exists, however, within the normative standards of this genre, in that the expression of ethnic identity that coincides with national identities is transformed by the privileged discourses and symbols within the genre.

Figure 5: Negura Bunget

Instrumentation and equipment are further signifiers of metal identities. The amplifiers were typically high gain metal tube amplifiers, such as Marshall and ENGL, but the guitars and basses used were not typically, or solely, metal instruments. The instruments were neither black nor did they have aggressively styled shapes. Rather, they consisted of wooden finishes and classic shapes and colors: for instance, the bassist played, what appeared to be a vintage Fender Jazz

Precision with a natural, aged finish. Typically, in an extreme metal show guitars are black and often with plastered with stickers. It appeared the musicians took good care of these instruments and actually held them in a non-metal position as well: higher up for easier playability, as opposed to the low slung guitars of most other metal acts.

Figure 6: Negura Bunget and Ethnic Instruments

These performances are but one example of the many different ways in which symbols, sounds, and atmosphere interact in extreme metal. This is something that had struck me as both puzzling and deeply interesting in the different sites of fieldwork that I participated in over the past four years. The relationship between aesthetics and symbols in extreme metal is also something that scholars have had difficulty, or even avoid, interpreting. One way of describing this is to use the term "homology" from Dick Hebdige (1979)—whereby the genre creates an umbrella of meaning and the subculture is involved in a constant cycle of appropriation and reappropriation with mainstream symbols. Another way, from Keith Kahn-Harris (2007), is to use the term "transgression"; that transgression situates the predominant aspects of the genre and that there are many different

levels of transgression invested within extreme metal. Early subcultural theorists would talk about how subcultures reflect broader cultural trends and the psychological/sociological effects of modernity (Cohen 1955; Hall and Clarke 1974; Hebdige 1979). For the early subculture theorists, subcultures reflects young people's alienation from the social world and their resultant attempts to compensate for feelings of anomie.

I believe these terms and ideas have utility, but scholars have shown a distinct shyness from the many disparate aspects of the genre including the offensive themes, symbols, and ideas for which this genre is infamous. Rather, what we see is a continuous bracketing of any meaningful engagement of these uncomfortable topics because scholars appear to feel uncomfortable in their affiliation with the genre or its certain negative and violent aspects. What this ostensible critical position towards the extreme metal culture inadvertently can amount to is an occlusion of the interaction of different social discourses and the significance of aesthetics in people's lives.

For an explanation of the relationship between these symbols and the experience associated with extreme metal, I find great utility in Paul Ricoeur's early texts on symbols. While these texts have little to say strictly about aesthetics, per se, we can still gleam an interpretation of a core symbolic experience of extreme metal that determines and constrains the genre's aesthetic decisions. The significance of this experience extends beyond extreme metal, I believe, and is actually a focus for what I call conceptions of causal relations. I believe if we can query the

relationship between sounds and themes then we should be able to understand an aspect of the nature of aesthetic judgment in a post-metaphysical moment.

In this dissertation so far, I have examined how Ricoeur conceives of the post-metaphysical or post-critical moment and how symbols and language reflect this moment. Symbols, he writes, are always in a process of demythologization. To me, this process of demythologization can equate to the aestheticization of symbols via the poetic aspect of language—that symbols are always in abstraction of the experience they attempt to signify. This chapter will attempt to explore this idea in order to understand the manner in which extreme metal evokes symbols and the grounds upon which various disparate aesthetic choices resonate with each other in the genre. I argue that that discourses are not autonomous—even religious discourses—but ground each other and constrain each other and the demythologization of symbols and understandings of fault (defilement) that allows an aesthetic resonance to develop within the genre. Therefore, people are able to employ certain symbols within the genre in myriad ways precisely because these symbols are (always) already profaned. The current era flattens symbols, but in this flattening, symbolic meaning arises. The varying resonances and effects of symbols for different people is what allows people to create, experience, and interpret this music positively.

Methodology

This chapter will incorporate an analysis of the fieldwork that I have undertaken in the extreme metal community both in Europe and in Canada. I will be

incorporating my fieldwork in this chapter as well examining the production of the music within the genre. I will be using two different sites of fieldwork to explore the manner in which defilement is a particular symbol through which to understand the genre of extreme metal. In the first instance, I will draw on my participant observation research from my fieldwork trip to three European metal festivals. I believe these are significant sites for understanding extreme metal, but they still have interpretive difficulties. I believe these festivals are significant sites for research for several reasons. First, they are globally significant events: one festival, Wacken, is the largest metal festival in the world offering a global perspective of metal showcasing bands from all over the world. The bands at this festival comprise the entire genre, from mainstream metal to the most underground, from obscure bands from different subgenres, to popular and world-famous heavy metal bands. This festival has become synonymous with the music and up to 70,000 people from all over the world travel to attend this festival. Second, the other festivals I attended offered significant contrasts to this festival and displayed different aspects of the genre, slightly different populations, and different locales. In other words, the festivals were contrastive—from the largest metal festival in the world that included all different metal genres, to a relatively small festival in which only a particular kind of metal was primarily represented, and finally another festival that offered more diversity than the second mentioned festival, but not the nearly the diversity of Wacken. The festivals were primarily in Europe, two festivals in Germany and one in the Czech Republic, but I have also attended a small festival in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, which offers

substantial spatial and cultural contrasts providing both interpretive difficulties and utility. The character at these festivals were all significantly different but also offered some interesting points of confluence which I will be drawing upon. Some interpretive difficulties that I would foresee in this process is determining whether the differences I noticed were the result of cultural and geographic localities, from differences in the genre, or from the contingent production of festivals themselves. For instance, what I could have interpreted as a significant aspect of the genre might be specific to festival social patterns that have developed over time. At the same time, one could argue that what is present in the festivals is significant to the genre as a particular aspect of the metal experience, different from other scenic aspects such as bars, clubs, and other venues, but no less significant since festivals are such large meeting spots for the metal scene.

The Demythologization and Aestheticization of Symbols

Now that we have traversed the relationship between symbols, history, and consciousness according to Ricoeur, a major implication that I see in Ricoeur's early work that I would like to explore is the inherent abstraction of symbols and myths. I argue that this abstraction amounts to a kind of aestheticization of symbols for Ricoeur. Ricoeur argues that symbols follow a movement of demythologization, yet they retain elements of each layer through which they have progressed. As we have seen, the movement of defilement includes a movement towards the increasing interiorization of experiences of fault through which our conceptions of causal relations find expression. For Ricoeur, defilement has moved inwards from a system that attempts to expiate the tension

and feelings of dread and fear derived from the violation of a divine command towards more ethical understandings of fault reflected in the symbols of guilt and sin. In the end, these symbols reflect a deeper symbol that all these abstractions revolve around. These expressions of fault become a kind of historical repetition of a foundational experience of fault. Ricoeur suggests that these three symbols of fault express a contingent confession and experience of evil. Therefore, with each new context these symbols find themselves at once transformed and transforming by what Ricoeur calls the evolution of an essential experience.

If we recall that Ricoeur had moved from a phenomenological approach attempting to understand the conditions of the essential experience that condition what Ricoeur calls the "limit experience" of evil, then we can also understand that his engagement of symbols forced him to re-evaluate the significance of symbols for the constitution of the human subject. Henceforth, Ricoeur had became a hermeneutical phenomenologist understanding how symbols express possibly fundamental experiences and fundamental social experiences that always already exceed the reach of a phenomenologist. This movement in Ricoeur's thought also transformed his perspective of history and grounded a latent theory of ethics fleshed out in a much later work called *Oneself as Another* (1991).

Aesthetics as Symbolic Abstraction

Ricoeur's ideas of symbols changed throughout his career reflecting a progressive shift towards discourse and narrative. The early Ricoeur, however, offers a model of great utility in examining the manner in which contemporary symbols reflect

hidden and opaque experience that is often difficult for analysis. A fundamental point that I take from Ricoeur is that symbols function differently in a post-metaphysical time such that they are historically, experientially, and meaningfully separate from their dogmatic origins in their original, naïve, social experience.

In his initial engagement in symbols from *The Symbolism of Evil* (1969), Ricoeur explores symbols using three major ontologies. Ricoeur argues that symbols are comprised of Cosmic, Oneiric, and Poetic levels, which serve as a holistic conception of the profundity and depth of symbolic experience. The Cosmic aspect of language comprises the transcendent aspects of religious discourse and symbols. Oneiric means "of dreams" and relates to the echo of symbols deep within the individual. Finally, poetic language is the creative reconstitution of symbols within the productive imagination. For Ricoeur, these do not reflect strict, historical, or structural separations, but rather phenomenological distinctions that modulate throughout time and are constrained by contingency. As mentioned in chapter three, the tripartite development of the symbol consists of influences from Hegel, Eliade, and Freud. From Hegel, Ricoeur uses the movement of consciousness in history signified by important symbols; from Eliade's phenomenology of religion, he uses the perspective of transcendence and the religious consciousness; and from Freud, Ricoeur uses the conception of the dream life, which allows him to connect the immanent and transcendent with the visceral experience of symbols. The interaction of these three aspects and ontologies grounds what I call the aestheticization of symbols. As such, through

an aesthetic analysis, we can uncover an understanding of the resonance between the various disparate aesthetic choices.

Symbols, Ricoeur writes, are always in a process of demythologization, which I argue amounts to an aestheticization by route of the poetic aspect of language—symbols are always in abstraction of the experience they attempt to signify. This demythologization in a critical era lifts symbols out of their etiological origins towards a creative repetition of more fundamental symbols such as defilement. The previous significances and meanings of more primary symbols are not necessarily destroyed with each contemporaneous repetition for each new epoch, but are rather animated by it within the present. A more current term, virtual, comes to mind here where the putative origin is both constraining and constrained. So, profanation of symbols—their abstractions, transformation, and opaqueness—allows people to use symbols in myriad ways. Ricoeur would argue that the current age is one of forgetfulness and the flattening of symbols, but in flattening symbols gain aesthetic meaning as symbols—what we have forgotten is the truth significance of symbols. For these reasons, musicians can use symbols for purely evocative reasons, for the sake of atmosphere, or for other generic reasons. The dispersion of meaning also allows the condensation of political, transgressive, horrifying themes, or for the purpose of edification.

The nature of symbols is such that they enter the world of discourse as abstractions wherein various social discourses become interdependent, influencing and constraining each other. Ricoeur writes that the primary symbols

of fault (such as defilement, guilt, and sin) have broad ramifications in the cosmic, the ethical, and the political (Ricoeur 1969, 11). In other words, social discourses such as aesthetic, religious, political, and judicial discourses are not autonomous but ground and constrain each other. The inherent abstraction of symbols allows their discursive constitution to function as floating signifiers, wherein discourses have resonance with each other because they refer to similar phenomenological experiences. Essentially, the ambiguity, enigma, and mystery of symbols allows the interaction of many different social discourses. I contend that this is one reason why atmosphere, especially a "dark atmosphere", is so important with some genres of extreme metal but interpreted sonically and symbolically in many different ways (see the next chapter, for instance). Ricoeur would argue that myths function in this way. For him, myths enter into discourse not through their ability to become translated into clear language as in allegory (as a tenet of wisdom), but rather through the enigma of symbols and what they reflect. They reflect an ability to say something about the universal condition of human existence expressed as a narrative—an ability to tie human experience not to the merely present, but to a 'human' history through symbols. Finally, they reflect the ability for myths to express an "ontological bearing" (Ricoeur 1969, 163). When he speaks of demythologization, Ricoeur is careful to distinguish the term from "demythization", signifying not the destruction of myths, but rather the emptying of the explanatory powers of myth.

Within the poetic function of language, Ricoeur discovers a teleology inherent within symbols. This teleology of poetic language effectively situates aesthetic

judgment since symbols allow us to think and experience the world; symbols animate our lives and condition what we find significant. The poetic imagination, according to Ricoeur, is the "welling point of language" (Ricoeur 1969, 11). I believe that extreme musics tend towards marginal beliefs, identifications, and ideology because of the teleology of poetic language—any aesthetic as a possible symbolic confluence may point toward something beyond itself, which forces thinking.

Symbols give pause for thought and, as such, aesthetic expressions always point towards some concept, social act, or kind of verisimilitude, such as identity, belief, history. The fact that sometimes extreme metal tends towards an aesthetic of purity can make sense with this kind of framework; purity and authenticity exist as the corollary defining points in a discourse of defilement. People such as Derrida (1998) have made this connection between purity, the search for origins, and the contemporary collective consciousness of identity.

Defilement as a Foundational Symbol within Extreme Metal

We can take my argument further using Ricoeur's early works with the particular symbol of defilement. My contention is that the symbol of defilement situates the many different aesthetic and generic choices, symbols, and discourses. For example, it helps to explain the privileging of atmosphere, the use of grotesque, horror, gore, and the tendencies towards authenticity and ideology in the genre.

The confluence of these different moral, ethical, and physical experiences that call for some kind of social action towards expiation is something that we have seen

with the often-intense social and judicial control through censorship that this music has experienced. The social control of these musics is justified often with seemingly psychological explanations of cause resulting from influence. Yet, the degree to which people react to this music and some bands has been one that exceeds the bounds of reason, wherein the notion of 'influence' is marked by these previously metaphysically charged significances of infection and corruption. These conceptions of corruption and infection (not merely influence) could be why groups such as the PMRC act to prohibit the music's ubiquity and why popular media sources often attempt to explain intense youth violence with affiliations to this music.

Those basic visceral feelings that the experience of fear, mystery, and social reaction evokes are precisely what Ricoeur posits wherein, "the representation of defilement dwells in the half-light of a quasi-physical infection that points toward a quasi-moral unworthiness. This ambiguity is not expressed conceptually, but is experienced intentionally in the very quality of the half-physical, half-ethical fear that clings to the representation of the impure" (Ricoeur 1960, 35). The visceral response that these events evoke within us Ricoeur understands as a phenomenological archaism bound in language and symbols that informs subsequent, more ethical considerations.

Extreme Metal and the Symbol of Defilement

My contention is that the various themes that extreme metal evokes have affiliations with one another through this pervasive, yet opaque, symbolism of

defilement. I argue that this structure of defilement is the foundation of those seemingly basic visceral experiences of horror, terror, and the grotesque within extreme metal.

In a close examination of extreme metal, we can see that this symbolism reflects current and contingent expressions of fault and contemporary causal relations since we can see the many modalities of fault in contemporary society by the symbols evoked within extreme metal. We can witness these modalities not just in their aesthetic material such as lyrics and album art, but also in the public response and popular media response that I examined in the previous chapter. As well, through the symbol and necessity for authenticity, defilement situates many other significant aspects of the genre, which extends deeply into the genre grounding many aesthetic decisions from song writing to lyrical themes; and from artistic material to stage aesthetics. The next section of this chapter will lay out the major modalities of defilement that extreme metal expresses.

Public Response

The popular responses towards early death metal and black metal show a tendency towards the judicial treatment of the music, including its banning, prohibition and court cases (exemplified by the Parents Music Resource Center association).[17] Also significant are newspaper sources like the *Albuquerque Journal* that offer often sensationalist interpretations of the music. Another

[17] I will not examine these cases in detail since many metal and popular music scholars discuss PMRC cases. Rather, I argue that it is part of a broader social construction of the different conceptions of causal relations.

significant aspect of the popular media response is the causal placement of youth violence and deviancy in the music itself when situations involving young people occur, suggesting that the fear of the music has to do with a fear of the music's influence on younger generations. We can examine, for instance, the manner in which censorship debates exemplify the symbolism of defilement by how they evoke the language of purification. Extreme metal, read through this interpretive framework, becomes the evil that taints the youth into committing evil acts: it makes the kids 'less good' by the mere fact of their exposure to this music. The juridical control of these discourses becomes the act of purification of the corrupted youth. In this sense, the structure of defilement reappears and informs the rationalization of discourses of evil now expressed through meaningful juridico-discursive frameworks. This has a genealogy within our consciousness of fault that is born out of a deep structural experience of the persistence of a language of defilement. Indeed, the articles within the *Albuquerque Journal* were evocative of a base-level guttural response reactive to the experience of evil and corruption. The media response to extreme metal is evocative of Ricoeur's understanding that vengeance is internal to the archaic experience of defilement.

The particular understanding of influence suggested in the popular media response resonates with a few different symbolic origins. First, the implication of causal origins has the general hue of psychological thinking of 'cause'. This immediate experience/understanding of cause is the reason I chose the phrase "conceptions of causal relations" to designate the manner in which people attribute explanations to things in the world that are typically difficult to

understand. For instance, people find it difficult to explain why a young person commits extreme violence against his classmates, or why they would want to appear evil. Events that are difficult to understand often force people to attribute reasons and explanations, such that violations of social categories of taste often repose on ethical issues. Unsurprisingly, in the era of scientific explanation and rational reason these explanations reflect current cultural conditions. Yet, the idea of influence is a very difficult topic to explore with entire disciplines concerned with childhood influence. My contention is that conceptions of corruption, infection, and stain compound even the most scientific attributions of cause related to youth and music.

I would like to examine two documentary films devoted to the controversies surrounding black metal in the early 1990s. The first documentary, called *666 Calling at Death: Impressions of Death and Black Metal* (Vain 1993), shows that Black Metal is a prime example for Stan Cohen's (1972) thesis in his seminal text, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics,* that youth subcultures are in large part created through a certain public moral reaction and outrage. The popular media misrepresents disparate acts of violence as originating from a coherent group, thus giving these acts and those involved a coherence they possibly do not have. In other words, the public creates a coherent group of people (subculture) by instilling the fear that these disparate acts are broad movements that threaten the public's own children of which they may or may not be a part. The media reaction to these events is disproportionate to the amount of people involved and thus misrepresents the individuals as part of a collective that might not have existed

prior to the media reaction (Cohen 1972).

This social reaction provides fruitful grounds from which Stan Cohen's notion of self-fulfilling prophecy takes root. By representing these acts as a product of a collective of individuals with a coherent structure that threatens the moral fabric of society, the media actually provides the structure of meaning and behavior that people attracted to those acts can adopt. The structures of collectivity and behavior that were born out of fear and misrepresentation become the normative frameworks through which disparate people attracted to these structures and meaning frameworks find their own identification. Essentially, subcultures, according to Stan Cohen, are not an inevitable by-product of, and reaction to, socio-economic disparity, but are the product of a widespread fear perpetuated and solidified through popular media sources.

According to the makers of *Calling 666*, the disproportionate media response to the murders and church burnings associated with members of the black metal allowed black metal to find its foothold within Norway and discover its franchise around the world. According to this documentary, the black metal movement began with individual acts of church vandalism, but really expanded when one of the more outspoken members of the black metal community killed another member (as discussed in the previous chapter). Apparently, the black metal community was relatively small until the media represented these acts as an epidemic of Satanist rituals. Afterwards, the great amount of newspaper real estate devoted to covering these events inspired a wave of church burnings that

essentially solidified a subculture that previously had not existed (Vain 2003).

Another documentary produced in Norway called *Satan rir Media (*in English: *Satan Rides the Media)* (Grude 1998) also explores early second wave black metal and its controversies. This documentary actually mimics the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies arguments on whether subcultures create themselves or the media inadvertently creates them. This argument adds a third option wherein both are true and provides a critique of the Stan Cohen's moral panic argument wherein the media not only over-represents a certain event, but that members of the subculture are able to manipulate the media in order to create the moral panic. The idea that subcultures also have agency in the representation of their group is similar to the thesis put forward by the subculture theorist of the Birmingham CCCS, Angela McRobbie (1991). According to the makers of this documentary, however, the small group of people who constituted the black metal scene at the time intentionally exploited media's penchant for spectacle in order to increase their international presence and notoriety. The result was that the resulting satanic panic (very similar to America's satanic panic of the early 1980s) and fear of satanic ritualism actually helped to create the genre.

While it is debatable whether the media reaction helped to establish a subculture that previously did not exist, or helped to motivate further destructive events because of their notoriety, documentaries such as these do help to examine moral panics that have developed around this music.

Horror and the Grotesque

Discourses of horror, profanity, gore, and the grotesque that some extreme metal groups explore constitutes another modality of the contemporary experience of defilement. In these subgenres, we can witness current trends towards the increasing experience of the immanence of defilement. For instance, we see that what is grotesque and horrifying is not merely the fear of a metaphysical infection or corruption from outside of us. We neither fear the vengeance and retaliation of the violation of a divine interdiction that constitutes the transgression of the social body. Rather, through the lyrics, themes, and symbols within much of extreme metal we can see how evil can exist within us where our bodies and minds can threaten our sovereignty and undermine our will. Madness can reach any of us and can even corrupt the putatively rational origins of science. For example, many goregrind and brutal death metal bands explore an idea of "science gone mad" or explore the horror of someone in a position of expertise gone mad and the danger associated with knowledge. Where some might have feared possession or supernatural corruption, now, however, we fear the possibility that our minds are subject to corruption and decay with the potential to deceive and force us to act in a way that belies our will and destroys our sovereignty. The fear for the possible corruption of children also stems from the understanding of the possibility of naïve, unwitting evil (as opposed to radical evil). The modern trends towards the pathologization of our physical, mental, and social being, or what is called in social psychology the medicalization of pathology, have integrated within previous abstractions of defilement such that our own body can be threatening and

fearful (Conrad 2007). Our experience of the possibility of pathology now expresses similar feelings of dread previously encapsulated by the experience of sin and guilt.

Search for Origins

Another modality of defilement expressed in some sub-genres of extreme metal, such as black metal, Viking metal, or National Socialist black metal, is the search for origins and the corruption of a prior, more pure past. The black metal movement in Norway often evokes the symbolism of defilement in the use of extreme satanic symbolism in order to criticize what they understand to be the corruption of a strong Norse history through a complacent and middle-class Christianity. Satan often stands in as a symbol of authenticity arising from the intentional use of mainstream transgression, whether to situate "the authentic" in the past before Christianity came to Norway, or in "the self", as an expression of an individualist aesthetic and ideology. When black metal evokes Satan, it is usually for establishing an ideology of authentic self. These ideologies, however, motivated the burning of Christian churches as an indication that Christianity was a defilement of the original Norse paganism. Swedish bands Bathory and Amon Amarth, and Norwegian band Enslaved all sing about the historical period, conquests, and battles of the Vikings and specifically of times, conflicts with, and their relationship to Christianity. These themes are mixed with even more explicitly racist and nationalist lyrics with the band Burzum.

Derrida suggests that the search for a pure, authentic identity is always a search for the "safe and sound", for origins, and the sacrosanct. Similarly, Ricoeur believes that defilement always points to a transcendent, sacred experience. Possibly, the search for an authentic, sacred, and transcendent could be what much of extreme metal aims, which suggests that transgression, while situated undeniably in regression, also points to the possibility of a creative repetition towards an authentic experience.

Authenticity

Charles Taylor's (2007) discussion of the age of authenticity reflects this widespread aestheticization of discourses via symbols, their demythologization, and resultant interiorization that Ricoeur describes in *Symbolism of Evil* (1969). We might understand the post-metaphysical era and the destruction of all encompassing metanarratives as the transformation of previously significant religious symbols by the prevalence of choice and the ability to choose belief. As the pinnacle of this movement of interiorization, the ability to choose belief radically transforms the experience of fault further than defilement, sin, guilt, into an internal experience of authenticity, intimately tied to identity and self. Many aspects of our social worlds from national and ethnic identities, to new religious movements, from what Christopher Partridge (1995) calls "soft orthodoxies", to different ideologies expressed in popular culture, all reflect the current movement towards the necessity of authenticity. One source of this social experience of choosing belief can be through Protestant notions of piety and the individual and subjective justification of religious adherence.

We also can understand authenticity to be an abstraction of the symbol of defilement that governs broad aesthetic choices within extreme metal. One can see with the description of extreme metal in the previous chapter that there has been an explosion of genres and subgenres under the extreme metal banner since its inception. I believe the proliferation of subgenres in metal is a product of a search for authenticity, for newness, and difference. For instance, new subgenres are generally born out of a critical relation to the previous ones as new techniques, sounds, and influences change the original authenticity of prior genres that become more popular. Fans often see generic innovations as betraying the original boundaries of the genre and are thereby marked by inauthenticity. We can see this not only by the manner in which people react to violations of authenticity in different genres, but also in how people judge, experience, and write their music. Musicians do not want only to develop thoughtful, complicated songs for the sake of the genre, but also take seriously the judgment of the community. Take for example a controversy surrounding popular Canadian extreme metal band, Cryptopsy, once considered one of the most significant technical death metal bands. When they started experimenting with styles that were associated with different subgenres of extreme metal, such as metalcore and melodic death, they appeared to have lost many fans and garnered much criticism over their most recent albums. Death metal fans often express the privileging of different periods of a band's career. For example, many people separate the band into different eras—early and late Cryptopsy—and tend to prefer the earlier incarnation. The band members themselves have actually responded to the community on their

social networking sites, and have even rearranged the constitution of their band to include an old songwriter and guitarist, and to move towards their earlier styles (Cryptopsy).

One manner in which we can examine the effects of the symbolic abstraction of defilement as a primary node within extreme metal is to look at the contingent expressions of aesthetic judgment within the music itself. In contrast to Kahn-Harris' argument that transgression exists at the level of song writing and that metalheads do not have a deep experience of the music, I believe that the music consists of a high level of judgment, both unconscious and explicit, high standards of musicality and technicality, and more sophisticated conditions of judgment than typically expected.

Take, for example, the song writing of the death metal band, Death Toll Rising, from Edmonton, Alberta Canada. I sat down with Drew, the guitarist, for several hours as he taught me the music and talked with me about how he writes, puts together and structures songs, as well as the difficulties with writing extreme metal music.[18] Several themes became very apparent:

The necessity for complexity and smart song writing: Several times during my discussions with the band, Drew discussed the difficulty in writing extreme metal music. The nature of his insecurity is indicative of the imperative of community in aesthetic judgment. As a result, song writing was collaborative and dialogical between all members of the band. I will analyze in some detail their song "Judas

[18] For a detailed structural analysis of two songs by Death Toll Rising, please see Appendix 3.

Cradle". The band was particularly proud to have written this song. For the band members it was catchy, complex, collaborative, fast, and incorporated a lot of different techniques and rhythmic components. Actually, one predominant writing technique appeared similar to early conceptions of the rhetorical sublime where orators would perform a slight, hidden shift intended for the audience to experience something psychologically equivalent to the sublime. Here, Drew recounted how in casual listening different aspects of the songs would sound relatively straightforward, but under scrutiny would reveal a subtle complex shift: a bar that would resemble 4/4 time, but is actually 3/4 time. Alternatively, musicians would offset beats of a pattern in order to keep the groove and feel of the song, but also to throw in a slight shift. My fieldwork confirms Kahn-Harris's sentiment that what might appear to be a collection of random riffs, extreme metal musicians take song writing very seriously (Kahn-Harris 2007, 33). Musicians choose riffs intricately, based on the relationship to the primary motive and modal/tonal signature of the song. Drew often discussed how riffs relate to each other in terms of developing and releasing tension—from more "brutal and blasting", to "thrashy and groove oriented". A recent article discusses the significance of complexity in metal by analyzing one extreme metal band in particular, Meshuggah, which has become renowned for extremely complicated rhythmic patterns that obscure 'easy listening' (Pieslak 2007; Smialek 2009). Extreme metal, broadly speaking, is not for easy listening.

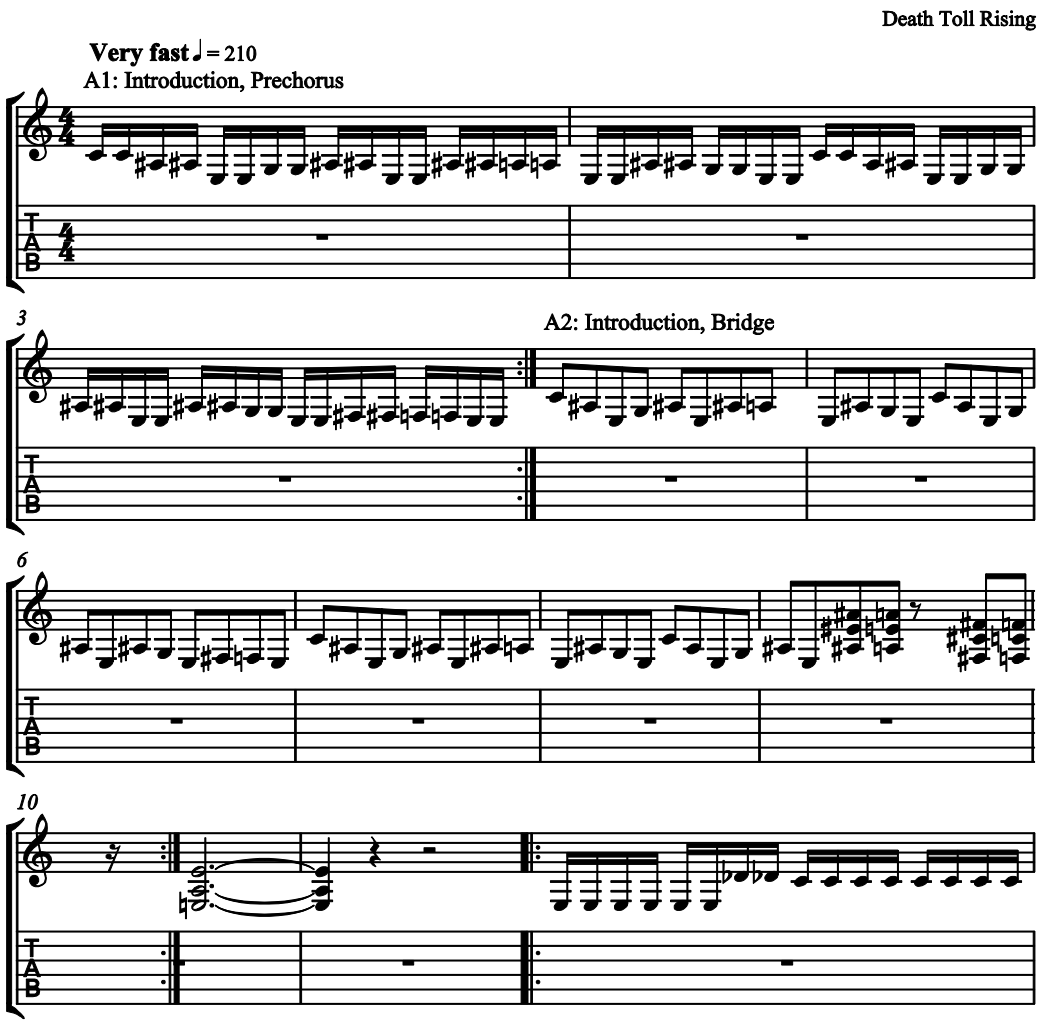

Figure 7: Babyslitter Introductory Parts a1 and a2

Motivic writing: A very important aspect of extreme metal writing is the necessity for writing in terms of motifs and patterns, rather than melody and chord progression. Motivic writing in extreme metal can consist of rhythmic patterns, melodic patterns, or interval patterns. We can see a few important aspects of the experience of song writing in the above notation that shows the first two riffs of the introduction to Death Toll Rising's "Babyslitter". Firstly, no "key" exists to

the song as of yet: the notes comprise a typical chromatic scale but tend towards diminished at the end of the pattern and sometimes lean towards D# minor. The power chords are at the end of a2, which foreshadow and comprise a significant motivic pattern in this song. This chordal pattern repeats itself in a slightly modified form in two different riffs within the chorus section of the song. During my interview with Drew, he underscored the significance of DTR's songs (and death metal songs generally) to not merely recycle previous riffs and motifs, but rather to modify them throughout the song. For this song in particular, Drew was proud of the manner in which the song writing reflected a progressive development of patterns and motifs. Another significant repeated and modified motif throughout the song in different sections—including the following verse sections—is at the very end of the above notation. The 1/8 note pattern that includes the notes E, D flat, C, A, and A flat reflects a D flat harmonic minor, with the notes E flat and E natural towards the end of this pattern (not shown). This pattern continues in double time and in modified forms with the recurrent D flat harmonic minor key returning throughout the song. In another song, "Judas Cradle" (see appendix 3), the predominant motif is a repeating, descending tritone pattern that changes as the song progresses.

Judas Cradle is an extremely fast song where the guitars follow a tremolo rather than a continuous 1/8 note pattern at a high BPM (beats per minute). Another metal musician informed me that we should gauge the BPM of a metal song according to how fast one would naturally nod one's head to the song. This would make 105 beats per minute and increase the relative speed of the tremolo to 16th

notes. Death Toll Rising, though, understands their music to sit roughly around 210 beats per minute, which suggests more of an experiential understanding rather than its formal understanding of tempo. The song thus feels fast because of the technicality of the playing. Also significant in Judas Cradle is the intentionally ambiguous time signature. While the above notation looks like a typical 4/4 time signature, and often feels like it, Drew actually wrote the song in 3/4 time, which is less ambiguous later in the song towards the climax. Drew intentionally wrote the deceptive patterns to upset typical listener expectations.

Another aspect of how musicians describe their songs at the micro-experiential level relates to an intricate understanding of their audience effects in relation to other songs on the set list, or on their albums, as a way of almost choreographing the audience experience. Therefore, even though popular music terminology would be difficult to employ to describe the construction of song writing, we can extract rather a particular set of aesthetic judgments and even begin using musicological terms to better describe the music**.**

Authentic band identity: The need for a band to be unique but faithful to the genre is paramount, and for Death Toll Rising in particular. Drew recounted to me discussions with his band mates during the song-writing process that often hinged on the question: “does this sound like a Death Toll Rising song?” Many other things correspond to authenticity in a band’s identity and self-promotion. Song writing appears to be, by far, the most significant aspect of defining authentic band identity and depends on an intersubjective dialogue between self, identity,

and genre. Self-constructions are important in extreme metal, with bands reacting to the different genres that they disagree with. For instance, black metal was at one time extremely critical of the sweats and t-shirt non-aesthetic of death metal and created an extremely theatrical, choreographed stage presence, atmosphere, and props (Purcell 2003). Yet, the close focus on virtuosity and intensity counterbalances the austerity associated with many of the death metal groups. Death Toll Rising expresses this sentiment by its members' move away from their earlier stage attire that included blood spattered clothes to typical death metal stage aesthetics: black clothes and metal t-shirts with actions that express an engaged intensity, such as hair spinning and head banging.

Genre awareness, cultural capital, and genre critique: Implicit within song writing is the necessity for a critical engagement in the scene, genre boundary divisions, and history. For instance, in the construction of a song, Drew would often critically engage with the scene, with both thoughtful reinterpretations of important motifs, themes, and song construction decisions. Thoughtful and critical song writing is apparent in the song Babyslitter. The song starts with an extremely blasting, all-out riff but then steps back to a set of riffs and patterns designed to offset the entrance to the actual song (see Figure 4). This riff includes different stops and motifs altered from patterns that occur throughout the song, which foreshadow predominant patterns. One band in particular, the Crown, influences the introductory riffs of Babyslitter by the manner in which they suspend the beginning of their songs. As well, DTR uses a common recurring pattern influenced by the band Exhumed. Furthermore, they use a fourth harmony

reminiscent of the band Slayer. Another moment in which song writing acts as a critical commentary to the genre is also in the song, Babyslitter, when the blasting and fast chord progressions give way to what musicians call a breakdown about three-quarters of the way through the song. Common in other types of music, breakdowns consist of moving from a fast rhythm into a slower one, which contributes to feelings of relief by dropping to half-time tempo. Breakdowns are common in metalcore genres, which are typically more popular and mainstream. Metalcore is less virtuosic in nature with a vocalization that is more reminiscent of a screaming punk voice, rather than false chord vocals or the fry technique that is common in death metal. In Judas Cradle, the guitarists wrote a type of breakdown that is in contrast to the typical expectations of a breakdown in metalcore. The band uses the breakdown to give pause in a song, give breath, but also to destabilize the audience's expectations of a typical breakdown. It begins with a chugging pattern, typical of most metalcore, but moves into a complicated rhythmical pattern and progresses into a melodic, fast, and technical scale.

Atmosphere: One of the most important factors of black metal is the creation and maintenance of a dark or evil atmosphere. We can see the focus on atmosphere clearly in interviews with black metal bands. While atmosphere is a difficult aesthetic aspect to describe because of its subjective character, we might define it as the confluence of subjective experience, aesthetic judgment, and the intersubjective experience of the sonic expression of intended symbols. For example, the black metal atmosphere attempts to evoke an immediate feeling of evil, foreboding and unsettling, using sound, voice, imagery, stage, and

performance. Therefore, black metal gives more importance to and holds more of a focus on tonality and technique that can accentuate the ‘feeling’ associated with the music. Guitars depend on pendulum and tremolo picking to create a ‘wash’ of sound. Drums are perpetually driving a single tempo with double bass, blast beats, but are less technical than some of its generic contemporaries. The aesthetic packaging of the music also tends to accentuate the sonic experience with equivalent imagery and logos. For instance, the band logos tend to be incredibly difficult to read because they themselves are as distorted as the voice and guitars. The idea for most black metal is to create a wall of harmonic/inharmonic noise of relative indistinction that helps to establish a sonic impression and equivalency to darkness and evil.

Conclusion

So far, we have moved past the idea that extreme metal reflects primarily something pathological about the individual playing or listening to it. The response is something that we can analyze more—if pathological is anything outside of the ordinary (mainstream), then it reflects the limits of the mainstream and the harshness in which difference is perceived, controlled, and conceived. So then, what does the music reflect if anything? We have gone through a regressive analysis saying that we cannot deny that the music places people within a social universe and in relation to their psychological makeup. I have argued, however, that we must understand the music first before we can place the individual in relation to pathology; otherwise, we risk creating a kind of ‘gnosis:’ the reinforcement of knowledge based upon an inductive analysis. Another way of

understanding extreme metal is through transgression, the grotesque, and what amounts to its negative relation to mainstream values. This works for a number reasons, but cannot capture the positive and contingent value of aesthetic judgment. I argued in this chapter that another path through which we can understand these experiences is to examine how the symbols invested within the music constrain the aesthetics of the music and reflect a culturally contingent experience. That is, I have explored how defilement becomes a predominant node through which all aspects of genre find their origin. Using a theory of aesthetics extracted from Ricoeur's understanding of symbols can help us understand the manner in which different social discourses interact. I have therefore argued that the aesthetic equivalent to symbols, ideas, and ideologies within metal music underscores the intertwining of ideas, ethics, and aesthetics within social discourses. We see that within extreme metal, because of the manner in which symbols, divested from metanarratives, become diffuse, creative, and poetic expressions, defilement is the nodal point around which significant contemporary social discourses converge.

We can see also that extreme metal participates within broader social discourses and the social structuring patterns of what Derrida calls the "transcendence of tele-technology" and "techno-science". These predominant discourses of technology structure our contemporary world and how we participate in the world. Martin Heidegger (1954) famously writes about technology as not just a tool, but also a structuring discourse through which we see the potentialities of the world. We do not just see the wheel in the water any longer, but that the world

becomes enframed[19] as unbounded potentiality, so the water becomes standing reserve for the dam. [20]

We can analyze authenticity such that we can understand it as a particular historical experience that did not exist in the past as we might now know it. Through symbols of purity and authenticity, discourses of identity in the current age become endemic to the negotiation of the social world, self-understanding, and presentation of self. The upshot of this chapter is that within expressive and representational discourses such as those articulated by the extreme metal community we can witness this contemporaneous postulation of pure and bounded identities.

[19] "Enframed" is a term Heidegger uses in his "Essay Concerning Technology" to mean the manner in which discourses, perspectives, and worldviews are constrained and transformed according to a new influential and broad social frameworks, such as technology (1954).

[20] Consumerism, which one could argue is a part of the framework of technology that Heidegger discussed, functions in this manner as well; it makes the social environment appear as standing reserve and transforms our experience of the world according to its structuring possibilities. The relationship between consumerism, media, and the current postulation of pure identities makes the constraining potential of technology very apparent. Zygmunt Bauman (1998) might talk about the relationship between technology, consumerism, and identities this way—that through the fragmentation of and development of liquid forms of modernity in the current age of consumerism, the need to postulate an identity becomes increasingly salient.

Chapter 6: Heilig Verunreinigung:[21] Contingency and the Symbolic Experience of Christian Extreme Metal[22]

Introduction

The music is so loud and the microphone is distorting to such an extent it is difficult to discern the guitars, bass, drums, and singing. The musicians on stage are focused and intense. They don faded theater make-up, what black metal musicians call 'corpse-paint': darkened around the eyes, whitened face that gives the impression of evil, decay, and death. The musicians playing on stage appear to be quite talented—the two guitarists are playing complicated chorded patterns in a rapid tempo while one is enunciating low guttural vocals that sound less like singing than they do growling, what is called "false-chord vocals" for the use of the larger mucus membranes that sit above the true vocal chords. The guitarists are often playing the same passages, but they also play complementing minor third, fifth, and octave harmonies. The vocals, however, seem to fit with the rest of the music sung through often scowling and angry faces. The guitarists are amplifying their guitars through a thick distortion that is grating, sharp, and rich. Listening closely to this band's album reveals the distortion is also heavy with overtones at once intense but also somewhat pleasing, possibly due to the even order harmonics caused by overdriving a signal through tube and solid state transistors. In this performance, however, it is difficult to hear these nuances. The bassist's hands are quickly running over his bass following the root note of the

[21] In English, this can mean 'holy defilement.'

[22] A version of this chapter appears under the same name in the collection "The Oxford Handbook of World Christian Musics," Dueck and Reiley, Eds. Oxford, 2013.

guitarist's fast chord progressions. All three musicians hunch over their instruments spinning their heads so that their hair follows in wide arcs in time with the music, caught on the sweat and make-up of their faces and shirtless torsos. The drummer is performing what seems to be an intricate barrage of beats. The bass drum is alternating between frenetic 32^{nd} and 16^{th} notes and one can hear a resemblance to a typical punk rhythm consisting of alternating bass and snare drums but played in double or triple time—a "blast beat". The song they are performing includes rhythms and drum patterns that shift just as rapidly as the guitarist's chords with short burst fills linking the quick succession of different song sections. You can gauge the beats per minute by the rocking and swaying movements of both the audience and those of the musicians, but the speed at which the music moves makes everything feel, look, and sound much faster and much more intense.

The audience is predominantly male, dressed all in black and, from this angle, one can see lots of hair. Along the sides of the stage, people are standing relatively still with arms crossed, with looks of both cool indifference and appreciative judgment, and with the occasional head movement betraying the stoic exteriors for enjoyment of the music. The people line the front of the stage, their arms raised making fists with extended index and pinky fingers, their heads lowered and covered with blankets of hair moving up and down to the beat. Behind the first row, people are moving quite a bit more chaotically and violently, frantically pushing and running into each other. Some are grabbing others to throw into the

rest of the chaotic moving mass, all with little discernible rhythm but a frenetic expressivity integrally connected with the music that the band is playing.

I am watching videotaped performances of an American extreme metal band called "A Hill do Die Upon". These performances are similar to any extreme metal show that I have attended over the past several years during my fieldwork in Germany, the Czech Republic, and in my home country of Canada for my dissertation on the philosophy of religion, defilement, and extreme metal music. The crowds are similar, the audience response is similar, and the band fits within typical generic boundaries of extreme metal: a mixture of black and death metal common in northern Europe. Fans and commentators compare the band's sound to Polish band Behemoth, a prominent second wave black metal band that began incorporating death metal style guitar sounds, riffs, and low guttural vocals, leaving behind the thin raspy vocals typical of Norwegian black metal. Even A Hill to Die Upon's album artwork also looks like a typical extreme metal album. The front cover is a beautifully detailed painting depicting a scene that could have been out of a movie like Lord of the Rings: an epic battle with strange creatures, people wearing medieval-type body armor riding destrier warhorses underneath a dark canopy of foreboding and ominous clouds.

Despite the similarity in appearance to other extreme metal shows, bands, and artwork, the band actually relies upon market flows outside the typical extreme metal circuit, supported by other musicians and producers that are firmly located within the Christian metal scene. In interviews, the members of the band are not

shy to talk about their Christian faith and they play both the secular band circuits as well as the Christian festival circuits (Smith 2010). Bands like these have been harassed previously, received death threats, and have been subject to endless 'trash-talking' online about their apparent paradoxical character. Some find it surprising and even somewhat ironic that an extreme Christian music exists since people often interpret it as mimicking a form of music that is explicitly anti-Christian and anti-religious to the point of almost religious adherence and ideological devotion, and, as such antithetical to the Christian message. Some people have even taken great offense to Christian extreme metal bands in much the same way that extreme metal has often evoked the condemnation from mainstream society with its offensive themes and artwork.

In German, 'Verunreinigung' means defilement, pollution, stain, and taint. Extreme metal thrives on imagery derived from horror, the grotesque, and evil—the contemporary equivalents of defilement—and musicians often intentionally try to evoke feelings related to defilement, such as disgust, horror, and the abject. Yet for many, Christian extreme metal represents a defilement of the original intention of metal that betrays the authenticity of a certain aesthetic sensibility and social ethic. Christian black metal band from Australia, Horde, was subject to such a controversy when it released its seminal album, *Heilig Usvart* (Holy Unblack), in 1994 that lead to death threats from secular extreme metal fans. More recently, prominent black metal band, Enslaved, refused to play with Christian black metal band Slechtvalk because of its members' Christian background and beliefs. According to lead singer of Enslaved, however, the

refusal occurred because of the collectivist Christian ethic that the band disagrees with and believes that black metal should stand against as a genre (Stevens 2010).

Metal also thrives on mythology, history, fantasy, and epic storytelling, which in large part is one thematic node around which Christian extreme metal finds its aesthetic resonance. A Hill to Die Upon in particular explores often mythological and folkloric themes in the lyrics, but the band explores stories surrounding biblical themes that do not stand apart but rather carry the very same aesthetic signature as their other songs. As well, unlike pop music, these lyrics lack "I feel" statements opting for third person, relatively utilitarian descriptions of a particular epic verse. In these songs, the lyrics do not preach or express personal devotion. For A Hill to Die Upon, proselytizing is not the band's focus. Streck and Howard (2004) may call this band "acculturationist" Christian music—music without the explicit intent to evangelize or reinforce other Christian beliefs. To distinguish Christian extreme metal based solely on artistic intention, however, fails to capture what I understand to be a foundational difference between Christian extreme metal and secular extreme metal, which lies in its reception.

While historically, Christian contemporary music has followed those established generic boundaries from mainstream culture, its relationship to mainstream culture is more complicated than mere mimicry. Indeed, the complexity that I hinted at in the opening paragraphs reflects that the adoption of these generic discourses presents a unique problematic, not as apparent in more popular forms of Christian contemporary music. The nature of secular extreme metal allows

points of confluence—secular extreme metal has developed into a complex, discursive, and scenic institution integrally tied to, but also abstracted from, the music itself. Discursive abstraction allows metal to function metaphorically: one can describe many non-musical things as "metal". Metaphors, as abstracted parallelisms, are open to interpretation by communities and individuals that resolve the significance of the analogy. Secular extreme metal uses 'extreme themes' such as lyrics evoking gore or Satanism. Extreme levels of volume, tempo, and distortion characterize sonically both the secular and Christian variants. Christian extreme metal embraces all of these elements, but reinterprets their significance them to Biblical narrative and other Christian discourses. By connecting Biblical narrative and extreme music, Christian extreme metal resignifies the Christian life as 'brutal' and 'extreme' and by extension very 'metal'.

My contention is that through a hermeneutic and phenomenological analysis of the relationship between Christian extreme metal and secular extreme metal we can gleam an interesting aspect regarding the place of religion in today's world. The empirical data that supports the ideas in this chapter is the product of fieldwork within the extreme metal scene, including participant observation study of several metal festivals in Europe and the local scene in my hometown in Canada. I have conducted forum questionnaires and discussions with two prominent Christian metal websites and have asked the respondents to talk about their opinions and experiences of Christian extreme metal—what makes it unique for them, and its relationship with secular extreme metal. I have conducted email

interviews with several Christian extreme metal bands from the United States and from northern Europe. Furthermore, I will be drawing on Christian metal aesthetic materials, including album art and lyrics, as well as scenic zines, websites, and promotional material. Through these materials, I will conduct a discursive analysis of the specific experience of Christian extreme metal and examine what this might mean for contemporary religious expression.

My analysis confirms some of the major assumptions of religion and its place within popular culture. In particular, now it is commonplace to understand that secularisation is not happening as predicted by early sociologists such that religion now has a major place on the world stage as far as influencing people, culture, ideas, and world politics (Asad 2003; Berger 1999; Casanova 1994; Habermas 2006; Habermas 2008b).

As well, some scholars have criticized the long-standing idea within sociology that religion functions as a separate sphere of culture, semi-autonomous to other spheres such as economics and politics. Rather, religion may function as discourse that interacts with and influences other social discourses and that significant social discourses, such as capitalism (Derrida 1998; Casanova 1994; Weber 2003) and technology (de Vries 2007), actually have come out of religious discourses. These scholars criticize the autonomous definition of religion as a particularly Western notion with a very specific history which itself stems from religious, and specifically Protestant, categories of thought (Asad 2003; Casanova 1994). Basing an understanding of religion on these categories of thought has the

potential to occlude perspectives of the manner in which religion functions in the contemporary world.

One effective way to analyze these problems, as Christopher Partridge (2005, 2006, and 2009) rightly suggests in many of his writings, is to look at popular culture, since popular culture is a significant barometer of the collective consciousness of current cultural proclivities, fascinations, ideas, values, privileged knowledge, and systems of ethical thinking and conceptions of causal relations. In this chapter, I use a hermeneutic analysis of its symbolic and contingent features to understand the so-called rise of religious signifiers, what many have called "the return of religion" or the post-secular turn (Derrida 1998; de Vries 1999; de Vries and Weber 2001; de Vries 2007; Habermas 2008a; Taylor 2007). After all, it may be precisely because we live in a disenchanted world that we can explore particular fascinations, things otherworldly and mysterious, and that dark and other social discourses, even very secular discourses, can bring us toward a deep symbolic experience of the world. Paul Ricoeur's (2004; 1969) early understanding and interpretation of religious symbols will form the theoretical groundwork for my understanding of the use of religious symbols in extreme metal. My contention is that religion is constrained in the post-metaphysical present by the possible 'irreligious' use of religious symbols in popular culture, which suggests the evocative nature and deep historical import of these symbols.

Christian Extreme Metal

My argument in this chapter (following Marcus Moberg's (2009) study of Finnish Christian extreme metal, Howard and Streck's (2004) study of Christian rock, metal, and CCM) is that Christian extreme metal is a spontaneous and contingent generic confluence of various cultural expressions. It mobilizes the resources of its secular counterpoint in order to develop a parallel and related generic scene, and yet interprets that scene through its own ideological lens. Moberg (2009) describes Christian metal as a transnational music scene with its own loose generic boundaries and privileged networks, while at the same time being a non-denominational Christian spatial reconstruction of a unique secular scene—allowing the expression of an alternative Christian spirituality. Whether the music functions for ministerial or evangelical purposes, or as a reinforcement of a particular Christian identity and edification, it nevertheless creates a unique, but shifting, generic discourse that can incorporate and make sense of various symbolisms, spaces, and expressions. Just as secular extreme metal[23] can be seen to be a bricolage of many disparate symbols, so too does Christian extreme metal express many disparate theologies, ideologies, expressions, symbols, social patterns and structures under its broad umbrella. The often-intense reactive

[23] I am using the terms secular extreme metal only to contrast it against Christian extreme metal as heuristic categories. It would be remiss to characterize all extreme metal as 'secular' because of the wide variety of ideologies, beliefs, symbols, and themes expressed within extreme metal, just as not all Christian extreme metal can characterized by the need to evangelize or express devotion. Moberg (2007) rightly suggests that people should not consider Christian extreme metal a genre in its own right. Yet, the distinction allows a productive tension that reveals interesting social dynamics.

response between secular and Christian extreme metal connects them in very fundamental ways.

Christian metal generally mirrors secular extreme metal in terms of subgeneric boundaries and musical styles. For instance, just as in the proliferating genres emerging within extreme metal, there also exists Christian oriented gore metal, grindcore, death metal, deathcore, black metal, doom, tech death, brutal death, Nordic, melodic death, as well as nu-metal, speed metal, and thrash to name only the most prevalent. An online metal archive lists most Christian extreme metal bands, with the only differentiation being lyrical and thematic ("Encyclopaedia"). While the thematic distinction appears to flatten the differences based only on lyrics, I will show that the differences, while subtle, extend far deeper than this suggests. The uniqueness of Christian extreme metal, however, is difficult to establish because the distinctions that separate Christian extreme and secular extreme are eroding. As underground musical scenes, Christian and secular extreme metal tend to mobilize the very same resources to promote and distribute their material as well as the same social networks and venues for performances and gigs.

At the same time (and as shown within Moberg's analyses), with the creation of Christian specific metal festivals supported by complex international networks, Christian metal has developed its own specific institutional framework that includes churches as scenic centers and promoters of the music. Unfortunately, a dearth of scholarship exists about the contemporary Christian extreme metal scene

in Canada and the United States. From my preliminary research, forum respondents and interviewees suggest that apart from mainstream metal genres, such as hardcore and metalcore, the extreme metal scenes are underground and rely upon the internet, broad international, as well as secular networks. The scenes appear to converge upon many North American Christian music festivals.

Christian Metal History and Controversy

Early Christian rock and metal developed in the 1970s as an alternative source of evangelism and entertainment with bands such as The Resurrection Band and even reached substantial mainstream success with glam metal bands such as Stryper in the 1980s. As secular hardcore punk became heavier, faster, more aggressive, and combined with other metal genres such as thrash and speed metal in the late 1980s, Christian extreme metal also turned towards a more aggressive and heavier direction in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Of this heavier and extreme version of Christian metal, two notable Australian bands gained recognition and/or notoriety outside the Christian metal market: Mortification, the most popular of early Christian death metal, and previously mentioned Horde. Other important bands that were more extreme than the glam metal of Stryper and Holy Soldier of the late 1980s include Believer, Vengeance Rising, led by controversial former Sanctuary International minister[24] turned Satanist and finally atheist, Roger Martinez, and Californian band named Tourniquet. Heavier bands that gave Christian metal mainstream recognition are groups such as As I Lay

[24] Sanctuary International was originally a church, turned online and travelling ministry, founded in LA in the late 1980s by Pastor Bob (Bob Beeman) to cater to people that felt ostracized in mainstream Christian congregations because of their lifestyle choices based on the metal culture.

Dying, Underoath, Demonhunter, as well as doom metal progenitors from Chicago, Trouble.

Howard and Streck write that Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) has always had a complicated, contradictory, and controversial existence due to competing ideas and goals for the music (Howard and Streck 2004). Streck suggests that the Christian metal controversy exists not only between mainstream society and the evangelical market, but also between members and groups of Christian communities. Both within and outside of Christian communities people criticized and condemned Christian metal in large part because of competing ideas of evangelism and mainstream success and understandings of the proper place of Christianity and Christian music within the world.

The controversy between members of the Christian evangelical communities existed because of certain understandings of the relationship between popular and rock music with the profane world. Popular and rock music has always carried a sense of rebellion, an unabashed relation to the body, and enjoyment for things of the world. Since its beginning, rock and roll has been the scorn of parents, community leaders, and church institutions. The development of heavy metal in the 1970s was no exception to this condemnation by extending issues of rebellion, excess, and the body, and by exploring issues such as the occult, Satanism, madness, and other ‘dark’ themes and imagery. The sound of metal, including the distorted guitars and screams of the singers, has been enough to offend and scare people and has served to prevent the infiltration of its ranks by people not so

inclined towards the metal ethos. Yet, metal became one of the most commercially successful forms of popular music in the 1980s (Weinstein 2000). The development of metal with a Christian lyrical emphasis, played by professed Christians, has caused also the scorn not only from the non-Christian metal scene, but also from the broader Christian communities, leading to the development of metal specific churches throughout the world (such as Sanctuary International). Not only did perspectives within CCM and broader Christian communities decry the allying of Christians with such a worldly, profane, and blasphemous cultural form, but also metal-heads who embraced the putative secular and anti-Christian foundations of the metal ethos also criticized the music. CCM, including early Christian rock and metal, nevertheless developed into a complicated and established market with subsidiary mainstream networks and an extensive online presence with radio stations, forums, zines, online music distributors, and producers.

Numerous forum discussions, websites, and off-handed remarks to 'youtube.com' videos of Christian extreme metal bands show that Christian extreme metal is confusing for many people. In one article entitled "Boycott Christian Metal: Metal Ideology Conflicts with Christian Propaganda", the author compares the "ideology" of metal—metal as ethos—and that of Christianity ("Boycott"). This kind of interpretation understands metal to come out of a structuring discourse, a belief system, a set of aesthetic judgments, and a rational ethic abstracted from the musical genre itself. In this sense, metal becomes discursive. Rather than just music one listens to, the sonic elements of metal have become metaphors for a

particular way of looking at the world that is symbolic of social values, lifestyle, and particular ideologies that are seemingly antithetical to the Christian message and can be even deeply anti-Christian. After all, extreme metal has been at the center of many moral panics because of its relationship with Satanism and criminal events, most especially related to the black metal scene (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003). Indeed, extreme metal has explored a range of ideologies and beliefs with varying degrees of commitment from individualism, anti-humanism, nihilism, different kinds of symbolic and theistic Satanism, the celebration of certain putatively pure and pre-Christian ethnic and religious origins, to even national-socialist, anti-religious, and anti-Christian sentiments, including many bands who also explored horror, the grotesque, and the abject.

Yet, at the same time, Christian metal depends on an understanding of metal that is also discursive, but has isolated certain aspects of this abstraction of the musical components of metal. Christian extreme metal fans and musicians offer an interpretation of the significance of the genre as 'merely' music, as a kind of musical container comprised of whatever intentions, lifestyles, and ideologies one desires. This statement by a Christian metal forum member shows a common understanding of metal and the Christian variant:

> From everything I've seen, there are two camps when it comes to black metal: those who see black metal as simply a musical style, and those for whom the term "black metal" encompasses not only the music, but the philosophy and lifestyle. I fall into the first category. For me black metal

> is defined by the sound of the music, not the lyrical content, nor the philosophy behind the lyrics.[…] I feel that the music itself is neutral, and that it is the skill of the musicians, and possibly the producers, that creates the sonic atmospheres, which often sound very much alike, but may feel vastly different due to the intent of the musician behind the music (CEMForums).[25]

Christian metal fans see metal as a vehicle through which one can express one's faith experiences and explore biblical themes and theological issues. The debate about the nature of what is considered properly metal, whether as a particular social ethic or an open aesthetic, entails complications for both Christian extreme metal and secular extreme metal and is quite telling about the significance of genre. One can find contradictions in the comparison between these two kinds of music, in fact. For instance, the existence of Christian extreme metal reveals the arbitrary nature of the relationship between music and ideology, which reaffirms that the *genre* of extreme metal is what provides the vehicle through which scenic members can express their ideologies, commitments, and symbolisms. Yet for Christian extreme metal, I want to underscore the importance of the way in which the genre constrains the expression of certain aesthetics, values, and beliefs, and consequently a particular type of Christian experience. The constraining element of metal exemplifies the manner in which present concerns transform religious discourses. Marshall McLuhan's (1969) phrase "the medium is the message"

[25] For the sake of anonymity, I have not used the screen names of the forum respondents and have created a pseudonym for the website in which this forum discussion occurred.

comes to mind here where the form is what conditions the expression in fundamental manners. My contention is that with Christian extreme metal, the medium, metal, is the message in just as significant a fashion as is the message within the lyrics and the orientation of the artist.

Metal, Symbols, and Religious Discourses

Metal, famously, has had always a particular relation to religious discourse, and bands often employ religious symbolism in their lyrics and aesthetic materials. In his texts on the re-enchantment of Western society, Partridge (2005, 2006) argues that processes that he calls re-enchantment challenge typical understandings of secularisation. He argues that heavy metal is a part of this current prevalence by what he terms "dark occulture" within metal lyrics and aesthetics, which is the fascination with demonology and occult themes. According to Partridge, metal music signifies one particular example that our thinking is not necessarily, and purely, secular. While one can speculate about the significance of these examples for the state of cultural religiosity, "this phenomena shows that people are still drawn to the unknown in an era of science" (Partridge 2006, 332). If we look at how metal evokes religion, however, we would not find that its use is religious or enchanted but, rather, evocative, in order to develop a dark aesthetic or atmosphere, or for transgressive reasons. While extreme metal is home to marginal ideologies, belief systems, and transgressive thematic portrayals, it often relies upon the symbols that the genre itself is reacting against, such as evangelical Christianity and secular humanism (Kahn-Harris 2007, 40; Clark 2003). Yet, the manner in which secular extreme metal evokes the religious,

mythical, epic, and violent is not religious in itself but rather comes predominantly out of a particular kind of "aestheticizing" of these same themes. The allying of aesthetics and different religious discourses and symbols can speak precisely to a certain "profanation" which could only occur through the disenchantment or transformation of the conditions of the symbols' usage. This profanation of religious symbols relies on the removal, or flattening, of the etiological value of symbols. Rather something has happened to the meaning frameworks that house these symbols such that people can use symbols in this particular manner.

Paul Ricoeur's interpretation of symbols in his early texts on the symbolism of sin, guilt, and defilement (Ricoeur 1969; Ricoeur 2004) provides an interesting explanation for this change in meaning frameworks. For previous generations, according to Ricoeur, religious and significant myths contained explanations of how things in the world worked and why they were they way they were. Contemporary trends of nihilism and the predominance of science and rational forms of thinking have divested these symbols of their etiological value. Our frameworks of meaning have passed through the age of critique. Yet, symbols do not disappear after critique but rather come to life as symbols because of the critique of religion through the major thinkers of Nietzsche, Freud, and the discipline of sociology. In Ricoeur's words, "an idol must die so that symbols can begin to speak" (Ricoeur 2004, 467). As symbols, they become rich, culturally significant, and historically profound signifiers of our historical selves. Rather than disappearing, myths and religious symbols lose this explanatory power as

truth statements but come alive artistically and poetically in our imagination (Ricoeur 2004, 461). As such, these symbols and myths open a world to us in their unlimited potentiality of signifying one's relationship to the world. Yet, they structure our contemporary consciousness in a far different manner than they had in previous eras. Contemporary conceptions of causal relations structure religious symbols such that they have meaning predominantly in relationship to the person, group, or work of art for which they exist. One fundamental point in understanding the evocation of these symbols within secular extreme music is that the music is transgressive and explores and dwells within the exploration of the abject, but is not fundamentally obscure since it participates within broader frameworks of meaning and significant market flows that depend on shared intersubjective understandings of consumerism and technology. In other words, the music is still 'understandable'. Extreme metal also depends upon discourses that come out of these contemporary frameworks, such as the predominance of authenticity and identity erupting from the contradictory tendencies of globalization (Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2011). Hebdige (1979) argues that subcultures generally express a certain level of transgression and resistance but still reflect predominant values in a many ways. The 'noise' that subcultures represent is still expressive 'noise' and is symbolically interpretable. What is significant about the way in which extreme metal uses these symbols is that they 'are already profaned' and that people experience and evoke them according to a certain kind of historical resonance and aesthetic sense that extreme metal, as a genre, has privileged. Christian extreme metal employs the aesthetic sensibilities

and privileged conditions of judgment of extreme metal while at the same time reacting against the genre to create an inverted aesthetic, often ironic, but more often devotional, ideological, and evangelical.

The progenitors of the metal genre, those who came afterwards (especially extreme metal), and other related underground music genres use these symbolisms to create an atmosphere or aesthetic that evokes "darker", sinister, mysterious, and mythical aspects of the human experience. Yet, this dark aesthetic is discursive, cultural, and historical and as such open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Julia Kristeva (1982) emphasizes the point in her seminal text on the abject that even though the abject may express a deep psychological or ontological significance, people can only experience the abject culturally and symbolically.

All aspects of the music express this dark aesthetic such that a homology exists between most aspects within the musical genre of extreme metal, from art, lyrics and sonics, to scenic behaviors. What is interesting for me is the question of what promotes the resonance between the aesthetic realms of lyrics and sound in the first place. Kahn-Harris (2007) argues that transgression situates the resonance between the various elements of extreme metal (Kahn-Harris 2007, 27-49). While transgression is a major factor in the production of this music, I argue that it stands in for experiences that are more significant. Feelings and ideas that promote dark, eerie, creepy, brutal, harsh, and heavy aesthetics have a metaphorical relation to the ideas and themes of the music itself. These

experiences, aesthetics, and discourses of metal provide the foundation upon which Christian extreme metal fans and musicians produce their music.

Dark Aesthetics in Christian Metal

A productive way that we can analyze the relationship between Christian extreme metal and secular extreme metal, and the relative distinctiveness of Christian extreme metal, is the fundamental difference that separates the music itself that forum members assert is lyrical. While lyrical themes and band art often follow the aesthetic and generic requirements of the subdivisions of extreme metal, Christian extreme metal follows the subgenres of its secular counterpart. Most bands write according to the aesthetic signature of extreme metal—with themes such as war, apocalypse, epic verses in the bible, gore, and contemporary issues. Where secular extreme metal explores discourses of transgression and the abject, Christian musicians may explore similar themes but often approach social issues from a Christian perspective or find an equivalently themed discourse within the bible. Many Christian extreme metal bands employ the bible for writing lyrics that range from passages that reflect metal's penchant for obscure mythological themes and aesthetics, to didactic biblical quotes that help reinforce particular moral viewpoints.

A CD by Swedish extreme metal band, Pantokrator, called *Songs of Solomon* (later released as a split CD with Christian black-death band Sanctifica in 2001) exemplifies the transformation of the experience of extreme metal through the symbolic abstraction of different aesthetic experiences. Pantokrator performs a

mixture of black, death, thrash, and doom metal. The musicians employ thick sounding, heavily distorted guitars, vocals that range from the high, thin, and raspy black metal style, to low, death metal style growls, and a range of tempos from fast double-time and triple-time to slow, down-tempo, doom-like passages. On this particular album, they also use female melodic vocal elements, acoustic guitars, and violins. The song, "Come Let Us Flee", is an interesting example of Christian extreme metal lyrics and themes that shows the counterbalance of themes and imagery to secular extreme metal ("Pantokrator"). In the first place, Christian extreme metal, like CCM, employs the use of biblical passages, themes, and imagery, and this song is a lyrical interpretation of a particular passage within its namesake book in the Old Testament, "Song of Solomon".

In this song, we see a few themes that act as a particular counterpart to secular extreme metal not only with the expression of love and hope but also with ideas of purity and authenticity. This song expresses color and hope erupting out of a bleak landscape of horror, destitution, and destruction—a scene that secular extreme metal would often depict in lyrics. For instance, the line "the winter is over and gone and the rains has [sic] passed away/ the gentle flowers appear in the blackened earth" expresses hope in regeneration, providing a stark contrast with extreme metal's predominant themes of destruction, gore, and apocalypse. The metaphor of a flower appearing in the midst of a scorched landscape suggests an allegorical interpretation of the place of the Christian in the world, which may represent how Christian musicians often place themselves and their bands within the extreme metal scene. Oftentimes, Christian extreme metal bands see

themselves as a light in the darkness—a strong ideological motivation for many Christian black metal bands. As with the interpretative ambiguity of the book of the Song of Solomon in the Bible, Pantokrator's song can be both a poetic call to a lover, but one can also interpret it allegorically, referencing the biblical commandment to be in the world but not of it. For instance, this ambiguity is signified by the lines, "I am bound by thee, my crown I lay down/My royal masquerade/To you I am just a simple man/naked is my soul, my heart is yours", suggesting the submission of one's worldly self to that of a higher calling.

One final point, and no less significant, is the first two lines that read "How fair you are/how undefiled" that reference predominant themes within secular extreme metal yet stands in stark contrast to them. Secular extreme metal employs defilement as a fundamental node around which the genre hinges its aesthetic means of transgressing social norms and values, as well as the transgression of bodies (in brutal death metal and goregrind) and ideas (for instance the idea of science gone mad). In this particular song, however, bodies have a negative relationship to defilement; they are beautiful and to be edified, yet the metaphor still hinges on defilement and purity.

Transgression in Christian Extreme Metal

If metal consists of different forms and mechanisms of transgression, then Christian metal is also reflective of this discursive constitution, while interpreting transgression through different aspects of the Christian experience. Christian extreme metal has developed its own sense of authenticity to the metal ethos, and

forum members emphatically assert that their perspective is implicitly metal. Fans and band members often reinforce a discourse that has been a part of Christianity since its inception; that Christianity is itself an anti-worldly and anti-mainstream orientation to the world. The following quote from a forum respondent expresses the idea that an authentic metal experience means to be not only rebellious towards the world, but also towards mainstream Christianity itself:

> For me, Christian extreme metal is unique in that it is the most underground and forsaken of all music genres. Mainstream Christianity and church culture rejects it, secular extreme metal hates it, and mainstream consumer culture ignores it. It has the smallest audience of any musical form I'm aware of, and…most people…are antagonistic towards it. All because it subverts a musical form that represents itself as the most evil or hateful, by infusing that form with faith, hope, and love. A lot of people in this world aspire to be rebels or counter-culture; Christian extreme metal is at the height of achieving that (CEMForums).

We can see from the above response an ideology apparent within a lot of Christian extreme metal, but especially with Christian black metal, whereby authenticity is justified by the degree of marginalization. The extent to which one is persecuted and marginal is an indication of the extent of the adherent's, or musical, authenticity. In this way, Christian extreme metal actually provides a certain kind of restitutionist ideology whereby fans of Christian extreme metal are the marginal of the marginal, outcasts of the outcasts, and the rebels of rebels.

Luhr (2005) also suggests that early Christian metal provides an interesting spotlight into evangelical America:

> Christian heavy metal music also provides insights into traditions of opposition in American society […] Christian metal bands redefined the nature of "rebellion" in an effort to show that in a post-Christian (and post-1960s) world, true rebellion was to be identified as obedience to biblical authority and resistance to a sinful world (Luhr 2005, 125).

Christian extreme metal continues in the CCM tradition of developing discourses of rebellion and worldly separation that are endemic to evangelical Christianity but are quite often inversions or oppositions to mainstream expressions of rebellion. Christian metal actually developed and employed similar implicit anti-mainstream values by instead, drawing from evangelical American culture to express issues of alienation and rebellion specific to the culture. Luhr insightfully states that:

> to proselytize within the dominant culture in the 1980s, Christian bands did not have to invent a new vocabulary or "co-opt" secular culture. Rather, as bands sought to become cultural insiders, they drew upon their long-standing traditions of dissent and engagement with the secular marketplace to reinterpret the meaning of popular music themes (125).

As such, Christian musicians did not only have to go beyond their own discourses of rebellion to participate actively within the metal scene, but also drew several

discursive resonances between evangelical and biblical discourses and the extreme metal genre. Christian extreme metal bands often respond to the typical characterizations of themes associated with secular extreme metal, such as darkness, hopelessness, and despair with a polarized and selective counterbalance of themes in order to promote a sense of difference from secular extreme metal, such as shedding light and hope into a dark world as expressed in the short documentary entitled *Light in Darkness: Nemesis Divina* (Rydehed and Nilsson 2010). This film title is suggestive of the conflict that has followed Christian black metal and its participation in the mainstream black metal market. It is a play on the title of an album of early secular black metal band, Satyricon, called *Nemesis Divina*, effectively inverting the initial intended 'divine enemy' in favor of Christian metal.

The active play of opposites and inversions is common on the forums, albums, and other aesthetic materials. Yet these same themes also provide the ground for reinterpreting the Christian experience in ways that are both in line with evangelical Christianity but also in line with a particular metal experience. For instance, particular experiences of biblical themes can coincide with different extreme metal aesthetics. As one respondent writes, "…biblical contexts are readily compatible with deliciously brutal metal" (CEMForums). The correlation between metal aesthetics and biblical discourses seems to provide one way of making current the language of the Old Testament to provide a sonic and imaginative structure for scene members. In this manner, the genre provides an affective resonance for the language and themes in the Bible and in effect

provides a vehicle for a particular kind of anachronism that stories and language of the Bible contain. One could argue that the themes explored within an extreme metal framework recreate biblical narratives as anachronistic because of secular metal's primary fascination with mythical and epic stories. Yet, members of the Christian extreme metal scene express an often profoundly sincere devotion with the evocation of the Old Testament. Consider a statement from one forum respondent:

> Christian black metal shares the Gospel in all its brutality, which in turn makes it all the more beautiful. It demonstrates the true meaning of strength and honor, of being a warrior, giving life to the petty lip service that satanic black metal pays to such concepts. To my mind, Christian black metal is a perfect vehicle for sharing the Gospel, as well as perfect music to feed the soul of the spiritual warrior (CEMForums).

The Narrative of Christian Extreme Metal

So far, I have argued that the genre of extreme metal privileges a particular aesthetic experience that conditions the expression of spiritual themes and religious symbols. At the same time, the religious orientation of both the musician and listener conditions a qualitatively unique narrative of the music that belies the boundaries of secular extreme metal. Fans experience Christian extreme metal in many ways and experience and narrate the music within a social and experiential field. Even though it may seem somewhat ironic that the genre of extreme metal provides the aesthetic framework through which people find one way of

connecting with these writings in a religious and edifying manner, it nevertheless provides a way of co-influencing the listener's world, faith and how metal scene members write, experience, and deploy the music. For instance, one respondent describes his personal experience of the significance of metal for his experience of religion and faith:

> When it comes to Christian metal, I have found that the feelings of power, triumph, and even comfort that I find when listening to metal are often amplified if what I'm listening to is Christian, and my mood becomes one of worship, praise, and joyful triumph in Christ. I've probably had more meaningful worship and communion with God driving in my car, or sitting at home listening to Christian metal over the years than I've had in church song services (CEMForums).

The response continues describing how, as a Christian prior to becoming a metal fan, his initial experience of metal worked to reinforce his Christian faith in a more profound manner, which suggests that metal has the possibility to transform one's religious experience. The Christian variant of extreme metal appears to provide members with a feeling of timelessness (the transcendence of religion), within the immanent (the mundane experience of the metal scene as, for example, in Kahn-Harris, 2007). As strong music, metal provides a powerful affective force capable of transforming mundane experiences and contexts to the expression of conviction.

What one finds by delving into how Christian metal musicians and fans experience, narrate, and express their understandings of the music are quite often deep evaluative judgments surrounding what it means to be Christian and, at the same time, a metal-head. Deep evaluative reflection appears to come about by the way that Christian metal-heads reconcile their own commitments and ideological concerns with mundane concerns related to the negotiation of their scenic identities and social worlds. The results of this kind of decision-making process are often what motivate the creation of Christian-based music to begin with and, for listeners, a foundational means through which fans are able to bracket the perceived negativity of the secular genre. The desire to participate within the metal scene and listen to metal music creates a dilemma for some based on a theological division of the social world in terms of the sacred and profane. A common point of discussion in Christian metal forums is whether people should choose to listen to any secular music for fear of damage to their faith or lifestyle choices based on a sustained engagement with one's faith. One forum respondent discusses the bracketing in the following manner:

> When I first got into it, I wanted the experience of listening to metal, but I wanted the lyrical/spiritual/life-based influence of and fellowship with other Christians. So […] kind of the tofurkey effect—the experience of eating meat, while staying true to your vegetarian standards (CEMForums).

This quote suggests the primacy of identities in the mainstream world through which one can still live authentically as Christian, but also as authentically metal.

This deep evaluative reflection and judgment leads bands to define a particular function or goal for their music. For example, similar to A Hill to Die Upon, the music serves no other purpose beyond creative expression and broad scenic participation. For bands like Pantokrator, Horde, and other Christian black metal bands, the music should function as a light amongst the darkness in order to express counteractively hope, joy, and love. The strongest dichotomization of the social world in Christian black metal is in the use of ideas of spiritual warfare, apocalyptic writings, and their use of inverted signifiers, transforming secular extreme metal themes into their opposite, such as Horde's use of the neologism 'unblack', One insightful response that is useful here suggests that a predominant difference between Christian and secular extreme metal has to do with the listener's particular experience of the music. I would like to quote in length a forum member who describes his understanding of the relationship between Christian extreme metal and secular extreme metal in a particularly eloquent fashion:

> The harsh, stark sounds and atmospheres of black metal are often mixed with compellingly beautiful elements. Indeed the very harshness of the music contains a beauty all its own. To my mind, these elements perfectly reflect the Gospel of Christ, which is at times extremely brutal and harsh, yet beautiful both in spite of and because of that very harshness and

> brutality. […] Consider the stark loneliness of Christ on the cross, and His triumph over death. The emotions and atmospheres, beautiful and harsh, surrounding these events are well represented by the sonics of black metal music. Likewise, the daily battles that we face as Christians, the spiritual warfare that we engage in, the sinister temptations that we face, the loneliness, guilt, and depression that the enemy tries to burden us with when we occasionally give in to those temptations, the very essence of being human, and thus a fallen, sinful being by nature, are all perfect lyrical subjects for the black metal genre because the music reflects the brutality and sorrow inherent in these subjects, as well as the beauty of hope and triumph over such obstacles that we have in Christ (CEMForums).

This statement demonstrates that Christian extreme metal might sound a lot like its secular counterpart, but the experience and narration of the music is unequivocally different. The atmosphere, as a condensation of one's interpretation of the experience of the music and the social and cultural conditions of judgment, reflects a particular framework through which one experiences the world. Forum respondents affirmed that not only does the metal ethos condition the stories that can be told within Christian extreme metal, but also conditions the Christian experience itself by focusing, predisposing, and privileging certain ways of experiencing, interpreting, and narrating the world. While it might be obvious to say that Christian metal inadvertently mimics secular extreme metal, it might be less obvious, however, to understand how extreme metal contingently constrains

and conditions the Christian experience. I believe this shift in understanding is significant since it reflects the manner in which "religious discourse" is not merely a functionally autonomous sphere, but rather dependent upon (and reproduced through) significant social relations and a broad contemporaneous collective consciousness.

Conclusion

According to current social theorists, religion is not dying in the face of secularisation but has resurfaced in direct proportion to the ubiquity of media-centric technology (de Vries and Weber 2001; Derrida 1998). The abstracting mechanisms of science and technology constrain our often limited and particularly Western understanding of what constitutes religion. This critique of current scholarship of religion is a significant theoretical statement that opens up the field of analysis to understand the different manners in which religion interacts with and constrains (and is constrained by) other social discourses. I have argued in this chapter that the critique of religion in contemporary social theory suggests that we need different ways of understanding the possibilities and potentialities of religion as a discourse, or sets of discourses, that are not mutually exclusive of the rationalizing tendencies of modern society and technology. Christian extreme metal and its relationship with its secular counterpart allows us to examine a facet of this problematic, and obscures the ability to positively define religion and, especially, to define it against the rationalizing tendencies of science and technology. Christian extreme metal is exemplary for the manner in which it shows how religion exists in a complicated relationship to technology,

consumerism, and the media through the way it incorporates and reinterprets the discursive signifiers of its secular generic counterpart, extreme metal.

At the same time, Christian extreme metal allows us to examine the discursive, historical, and aesthetic expression of religious symbols, which depends upon the profanation, or flattening, of these symbols. Symbols divested of their etiological value become significant in their historical and expressive value. As well, Christian extreme metal reinforces the deeply interconnected nature of contemporary social discourses, which reflect an interesting contemporary Christian experience: religious discourses are not immune to worldly discourses but interact in a co-conditioning relationship with contingent historical and symbolic experience. For Christian metal fans this contingent and historical aspect of religion does not present itself as paradoxical: the brutal, heavy, and often dark aesthetics of secular extreme metal allows the expression of an aspect of their religious experience while at the same time allowing religious discourse to express a unique experience of a particular genre of metal.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have sought to examine the significance of the contemporary experience of defilement, purity, and authenticity—ideas typically thought to be extant and archaic. My analysis has consisted of an examination of prominent French Philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1986, 1969, and 2004) and the development of his ideas of the symbolism of evil from his early works. This project began with the understanding that religious symbols and discourses do not merely affect the private lives of individuals, as secularization theorists have insisted on for most of the previous century. Rather, through modern technologies (Derrida 1998), transnational networks and market flows (Appadurai 1996), and subcultures (Moberg 2011), we are able to see not only how religious discourses and symbols are transformed, but also how they play a transformative role of these very same social structures.

Paul Ricoeur's (2004; 1969) early interpretation of religious symbols has informed the theoretical groundwork for my understanding of extreme metal's use of religious symbols. For Ricoeur, evil is paradigmatic for the symbolic understanding of human action as both bound and free. Ricoeur traces this concept through "the long route" of the perpetual demythologization and interiorization of the archaic symbols of the experience of evil and fault. What is at stake in my reading of Ricoeur is a theory of contingency relevant to social theory and sociological interpretations of our contemporary conceptions of causal relations. I have argued that we could undertake a critical analysis of the predominant modes of analysis of contemporary religious discourse by focusing

on the manner in which symbols circulate in our collective consciousness, as evidenced in popular culture. In order to examine the significance of the interaction of discourses, it was necessary that I move through a mediation of terms condensed from Ricoeur's analysis of symbols in his early texts, the literature on extreme metal, and theories of religion.

In Chapter 1, I posed the question of whether we live in an age dictated largely by conceptions of defilement. In order to answer this question, we had to move through different theoretical stages that hinged on Ricoeur's understanding of the post-metaphysical moment. If, as his text on the symbolism of evil contends, defilement is a phenomenological archaism that has grounded our conceptions of fault, then we should be able to find its contemporary expression. Following Ricoeur further in his understandings of the post-metaphysical present, the "death of God" represents the deconstruction of Gnostic ethical abstractions. In other words, the death of God is the death of a meta-narrative that structures our relationships with others. Since defilement lies at the beginning of this Gnostic abstraction of the primary symbols and experiences of social stain, taint, and corruption, this deconstruction possibly signifies an uncovering of a more primary experience.

In order to parse the significance of this possibility, we had to move through understanding current theories of religion in the modern period and what this deconstruction amounts to for sociology, since ours is also a time of increased religious influence in many social spheres and countries. That we also live in a

post-secular climate suggests that we need an analysis of this experience that takes into account what I see to be predominant ways of understanding the significance of this monumental change in our conceptions of causal relations. That is, authors typically have understood this change in terms of a negative relationship to other broader social discourses, such as modernizing rationalizations. As diametrically opposed to the increasing rationalization of modernity, the religious return represents a "return of the repressed" from a regressive analysis. We can see, however, that religion interacts with modernizing forces in a potentially infinite number of ways, expressed in ever-new ways. So then, we require a different kind of analysis to understand these transformations.

Chapter 2 examined the mediation of these three predominant approaches, signified by the terms regression, authenticity, and contingency. The mediation allowed me to explore phenomenological hermeneutics in order to analyze, amplify, and nuance what Hent De Vries (2007) recently coined as "virtual or deep pragmatism". In the final analysis, I argue that religious discourses exist as virtual signifiers that are simultaneously real and unreal, abstract but actual, constrained and constraining of the post-metaphysical present as they interact with broader social discourses and systems of thinking. A close examination of this interaction within popular culture exemplifies the evocative nature and deep historical import of these symbols. Ricoeur's distinct interpretation of "the death of God" thesis as not a purely philosophical idea expresses well the evocative nature of symbols. For Ricoeur, the death of God signifies a broad transformation of our consciousness of symbols and myths that constrain our social existence.

I have aimed to connect literature and theory on the return of religion (Derrida and Vattimo 1998) and post-secular social conditions (Asad 1993, 2003; Goski, et al. 2012) to the analysis of the implicit consciousness of religious symbolism in our current age, because most studies that examine religion in popular culture rarely get beyond mere description. In order to draw out the contemporary implications of Paul Ricoeur's texts for understanding religion in a post-secular age, I have examined the manner in which conceptions of defilement have become a symbolic node around which most extreme metal musicians make their aesthetic decisions. As a heavier, more serious and austere subgenre of heavy metal, extreme metal provides a unique lens into the manner in which people use religious symbols in contemporary society and how these symbols constrain broader aesthetic decisions.

As I showed in Chapter 4, extreme metal is a significant paradigmatic example for the post-metaphysical condition because of its unique standing in popular culture as a serious music that employs a diversity of transgressive symbolisms, aesthetic expressions, and often extremely technical and intricate musicianship. Significantly, coming out of the early heavy metal music of the 1970s that explored issues of the occult, religion, Satanism, and other norm-transgressing subjects, extreme metal also delves into these subjects common to horror movies of the time. At the same time, extreme metal expands on common horror themes such as gore, the grotesque, apocalypse, anti-religious ideas and ideologies, and insanity. In addition, extreme metal exhibits ideas of our socio-political climate such as authenticity ideologies, national and mythical history, mythopoeia, and

other cultural referents. Metal has followed these patterns of changing conceptions of horror, the strange, and the political to remain on the liminal boundaries of our normative frameworks.

Nevertheless, as I explored in Chapter 5, lyrical and aesthetic themes are not the only significant aspect of this liminality. Rather, the necessity of remaining at the borders has lead to very innovating techniques and very specific forms of modality, rhythm, and timbre has governed the music and song writing. The highly specialized conditions of judgment that are part of the genre are what allowed us to move beyond a purely regressive and towards an aesthetic analysis. By returning to Ricoeur's early works, I extracted a theory of symbolic aesthetics that shows the intricate and often unseen connections between different judicial, political, and religious discourses often thought of and studied as autonomous spheres. The necessity for authenticity is what, I believe, draws the music both into novel techniques, sounds, and ideas, but also into dangerous territory as exemplified in the second wave of black metal in Norway.

In the final chapter, I examined the various contingent factors that serve to constrain the music, the conditions of judgment, the experience, and the community of extreme metal by examining a significantly more marginal subculture within extreme metal. The interaction of the Christian variant of extreme metal and its more secular counterpart makes apparent how symbols structure the very experience of the music itself, while at the same time being structured by the necessity of genre.

I have argued that what we thought of as a set of previously extant and primitive set of symbols actually structures and constrains our contemporary collective consciousness. My contention was that we live in an age in which symbols of purity and authenticity play a foundational role in our social lives, and that in this age one of our most pressing social and political tasks is to deconstruct these conceptions. I believe that the consciousness of defilement (and its corollary experiences of authenticity and purity) lies at the heart of many areas of our everyday existence and informs our contemporary expressions of identity in relation to religion, nation, society, and culture. The danger of this mode of thinking in a late capitalist, nation-state consciousness is the belief that an identity is "authentic" leads to the judgment of non-authentic identities, which has the potential to continue some of the most destructive ideas our world has ever faced (Bauman 2000).

Many fields can exhibit this experience of defilement, especially in an age where the complexity of technology exceeds the grasp of everyone, barring high-level specialists. Hence, we still express this constitution of self that Ricoeur explores in *Fallible Man*, but in an age of science, the subject, hygiene, and the demystification of the body. Now, however, the transgression of the norms of the body, fear of technology, the terrible possibilities of science, and the immutable sense of the corruptibility of the individual expresses defilement. In this sense, defilement corresponds to widespread conceptions of causal thinking, expressed in the question "why has this happened to me?" and expressed in varying levels of complexity based on the field, demographic, and population to which this

question may correspond. For instance, Weber (1946) expresses these changing conceptions of the unknown in "Science as Vocation" wherein the experience of technology is now largely mystified because of its complexity to the average person, which forces us to experience/attribute cause in certain manners. While different religions may experience defilement in terms of the transgression of a divine interdiction, dominant cultures may, and often do, experience subcultures as "noise" and as expressions of the threatening of social norms. The threatening of normative social structures draws people to a kind of spectral thinking that leans towards the potential of 'corruption', as we have seen with extreme metal and its possible threat to young people.

The scientific age tends to subsume 'corruption' under the general heading of 'influence' such that it appears to us as a strange and foreign concept. Yet, the consequent fear and moral panic that occurs under the sign of its possibility is not necessarily a rational phenomenon. Corruption, as Ricoeur has shown, has a profound, almost primeval, history within our consciousness of fault that has subsequently structured our symbols, myths, social experience, and social institutions. Defilement then appears as a return of the historically foundational symbol of stain, disclosed immanently against the background of contemporary morals and norms.

While scholarship has begun to deconstruct conceptions of purity in our contemporary social world, defilement is still one of the last vestiges in our age of critique that scholars have yet to deconstruct and dismantle. For my research,

popular culture provides a unique lens into how the everyday, mundane level of existence distills these ideas. Since the current age challenges previously significant understandings of the meaningful, the beautiful, or the ethical, I have argued that marginal discourses and social patterns inevitably come to express that which modernity has repressed, and that contemporary popular aesthetic cultures constitute a privileged site for examining, in a novel manner, this unseen and implicit “symbolism of defilement”.

Works Cited

Adams, James Luther and Wilson Yates, eds. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections.* Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997. Print.

Agamben, Giorgio. "What is a Paradigm?" August 2002, European Graduate School, Saas-Fee: Switzerland. Web. 19 Oct. 2006.

Appadurai, Arjun. "The Production of Locality." *Religion in the Process of Globalization.* Ed. Beyer, Peter. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001. 99-124. Print.

---. *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

---. *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Print.

---. "Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity." Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Print.

Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech.* UC Berkeley: Townsend Center for the Humanities, 2009.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996. Print.

Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. Print.

Azak, Umut. *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2010. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World.* Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968. Print.

Barasch, Frances K. "Theories of the Grotesque." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Ed. Irena R. Makaryk. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 85-90. Print.

Bataille, Georges. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings. 1927-1939*. Trans. and Ed. Allan Stoekl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. Print.

---. *Theory of Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1989. Print.

---. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. New York: Zone Books, 1993. Print.

---. *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*. New York: Verso, 1994. Print.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000. Print.

---. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000. Print.

---. *Postmodern Ethics*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000. Print.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "Postmodern Religion?" *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. Ed. Paul Heelas. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. 55-78. Print.

Bauman, Zygmunt, and Benedetto Vecchi. *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004. Print.

Berger, Peter L. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. Print.

Beyer, Peter. *Religion and Globalization*. London: Sage, 1997. Print.

---. "Introduction." *Religion in the Process of Globalization*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001a. Print.

---. "What counts as Religion in Global Society?" *Religion in the Process of Globalization.* Ed. Peter Beyer. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001b. 125-152. Print.

---. "Islamic Revolution in Iran." *Religion in the Process of Globalization.* Ed. Peter Beyer. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001c. 227-258. Print.

"Boycott Christian Metal: Metal Ideology Conflicts with Christian Propaganda." Feb 8, 2006. Web. 12 Jan. 2012.

Bruce, Steve. *God is Dead: Secularisation in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. Print.

Broadrick, Justin. Interview. *Guitar World.* February, 1995. Print.

Broadrick, Justin. Interview. *Guitar.* June, 1999. Print.

Brown, Norman O. *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1959. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Calhoun, Craig, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen. *Rethinking Secularism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Print.

---. "Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a 'Universal Church'." *Religion in the Process of Globalization.* Ed. Peter Beyer. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001. 201-226. Print.

Celtic Frost. *Morbid Tales / Emperor's Return*. Noise, 1998. Audio Recording.

Christe, Ian. *Sound of the Beast: the Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*. New York: Harper and Collins, 2004. Print.

Chao, Shun-liang. "The Grotesque Sublime: Play with Terror" *Forum Postgraduate Journal*. Web. 8 Nov. 2012.

Cinar, Alev, and Srirupa Roy. *Visualizing Secularism and Religion*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012. Print.

Clark, Lynn. *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.

Cohen, Albert K. *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1956. Print.

Cohen, Richard A, and James L. Marsh. *Ricoeur as Another*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. Print.

Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2011. Print.

Cole, Thomas J. "Savage Sound." *Albuquerque Journal*, April 30 and May 1, 2000. Print.

Comte, Auguste. *System of Positive Polity*. 1857. North Stratford: Ayer Publishing, 1973. Print.

Conrad, Peter. *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders*. New York: John Hopkins University Press, 2007. Print.

Creed, Barbara and MacDonald, C. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film. Feminism. Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

"Cryptopsy." *Facebook*. 8 Nov. 2012. Web.

Cryptopsy. *Blasphemy made Flesh*. Invasion, 1994. Audio Recording.

Cryptopsy. *None So Vile*. Wrong Again, 1996. Audio Recording.

Cryptopsy. *Whisper Supremacy*. Century Media, 1998. Audio Recording.

Cryptopsy. *Once Was Not*. Century Media, 2006. Audio Recording.

Davison, Andrew. *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: A Hermeneutic Reconsideration*. Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Print.

Dauenhauer, Bernard P., *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998. Print.

Davidson, Scott. "Thinking After Ricoeur." *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 16.1/2 (2011): 1–8. Print.

Death. *Scream Bloody Gore.* Combat Records,1987. Audio Recording.

Death, Napalm. *Smear Campaign*. Century Media, 2006. Audio Recording.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Paul Patton. *Difference and Repetition*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." *Religion*. Eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 1-78. Print.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 1966. Print.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot.* 1868. Trans. Henry Carlisle, and Olga Carlisle. New York: Signet Classics, 2010. Print.

Dunn, Sam. Dir. *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*. Warner Home Video. 2005. DVD.

Dunn, Sam. Dir. *Global Metal*. Warner Home Video. 2007. DVD.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. 1912. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

Ekeroth, Daniel. *Swedish Death Metal*. Brooklyn: Bazillion Points Books, 2008. Print.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968. Print.

"Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives" n.d. Web. 13 Jan. 2012.

Farganis, James. *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1993. Print.

Farley, H. "Demons, Devils and Witches: The Occult in Heavy Metal Music." *Heavy Metal Music in Britain*. Ed. Gerd Bayer. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009, 81-104. Print.

Fletcher, John and Andrew Benjamin, eds. *Abjection. Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva.* New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Foster, Hal, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.* Washington: Bay Press, 1983. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976. Print.

Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough*. 1890. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. 1918. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. 1930. London: Norton, 1989. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-analysis and Other Works*. 1939. London: Hogarth Press, 1991. Print.

Giddens, Anothony. *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. Print.

---. *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Print.

Goodman, Steve. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009. Print.

Gorgoroth: Black Mass Krakow 2004. Metal Mind/Mvd, 2008. DVD.

Gorski, Philip S. *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print.

Grude, Torstein. Dir. "Satan Rides the Media." 1998. Video.

Gutting, Gary. *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990. Print.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*. Ed. Eduardo Mendieta. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002. Print.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008. Print.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Notes on Post-Secular Society." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25.4 (2008): 17–29. Print.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Religion in the Public Sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14.1 (2006): 1–25. Print.

Hahn, Lewis E. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Chicago: Open Court, 1995. Print.

Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2012. Print.

Halnon, K.B. "Heavy Metal Carnival and Dis-alienation: The Politics of Grotesque Realism." *Symbolic Interaction* 29.1 (2006): 33–48. Print.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge, 1979. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. New York: Garland Pub., 1977. Print.

Howard, Jay R., and John M. Streck. *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*. Tennessee: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. Print.

Ihde, Don. *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971. Print.

Jancovich, Mark. *Horror: the Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Jenks, Chris. *Transgression*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Jervolino, D., *The Cogito and Hermeneutics: The Question of the Subject in Ricoeur*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990. Print.

Joy, Morny, ed. *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997. Print.

Kahn-Harris, Keith. "'I Hate This Fucking Country': Dealing with the Global and the Local in the Israeli Extreme Metal Scene." *Critical Studies* 19.1 (2002): 119–136. Print.

---. "'Roots'?: The Relationship Between the Global and the Local Within the Extreme Metal Scene." *Popular music* 19.1 (2000): 13–30. Print.

---. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. New York: Berg, 2007.Print.

--- "Death Metal And The Limits Of Musical Expression." *Policing Popular Music*. Ed. Cloonan M. Garofalo. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003, 81-99.

Kalberg, Stephen. "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History." *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (1980): 1145-1179. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgment*. 1790. Trans. Bernard, J. H. New York: Hafner, 1951. Print.

Kaprow, Alan. "Impurity," News 61 (January 1963): 30-33, 52-55. Print.

Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature.* Trans. Ulrich Wisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. Print.

Kearney, Richard, ed. *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*. London: Sage,

1996. Print.

---. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004. Print.

---. *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion.* Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001a. Print.

---. *On Stories*. New York: Routledge, 2001b. Print.

---. *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*: *Interpreting Otherness.* New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Kemp, T. P., and Rasmussen, D. *The Narrative Path: The Later Works of Paul Ricoeur*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989. Print.

Korycki, Denise, dir. *The Zen of Screaming: Vocal Instruction for a New Breed*. Warner Brothers, 2005. DVD.

Klemm, David E., and Schweiker, William, eds. *Meaning in Texts and Action: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993. Print.

Krauss, Rosalind, and Yves-Alain Bois. *Formless: A User's Guide*. New York: Zone Books, 1997. Print.

Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Print.

---. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.

Lechner, Frank J. "Cultural Aspects of the World System." *Religion in the Process of Globalization*. Ed. Beyer, Peter. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001, 65-84. Print.

Lechte, John. Surrealism and the practice of writing." *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*. Ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill. New York: Routledge, 1995, 117-132. Print.

Levi, Ben, J., C. Houser, L.C. Jones and S. Taylor. *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992. Print.

Levitt, Peggy. "Local-Level Global Religion: The Case of United States – Dominican Migration." *Religion in the Process of Globalization*. Ed. Beyer, Peter. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001. 153-176. Print.

Luhr, Eileen. "Metal Missionaries to the Nation: Christian Heavy Metal Music, 'Family Values', and Youth Culture, 1984-1994." *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005): 103–128. Print.

Masciandaro, Nicola. *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium I*. Glossator, 2010. Print.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Berkeley: Gingko Press, (1969) 2011. Print.

McRobbie, Angela. *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to "Just Seventeen."* London: MacMillan, 1991. Print.

Meindl, Dieter. *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996. Print.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2008. Print.

Mendik, Xavier. "A Tasteless Art: Waters, Kaufman and the Pursuit of 'Pure' Gross-Out." *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon.* Eds. Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider. London: Wallflower, 2002, 204-220. Print.

Mendieta, Eduardo. "Introduction." *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*. Jurgen Habermas. Cambridge: MIT, 2002, 1-36. Print.

Milbank, John. "Sublimity: the Modern Transcendent." *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. Ed. Paul Heelas. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, 258-284. Print.

Moberg, Marcus. *Faster for the Master: Exploring Issues of Religious Expression and Alternative Christian Identity within the Finnish Christian Metal Music Scene*. Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2009. Print.

---. "The Transnational Christian Metal Scene Expressing Alternative Christian Identity through a Form of Popular Music." *INTER: A European Cultural Studies Conference in Sweden.* Sweden, June, 2007, 423-432. Print.

Moynihan, Michael, and Didrik Søderlind. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003. Print.

Mudrian, Albert. *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal and Grindcore*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2004. Print.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque*. New York: Dutton, 1994, 303-307. Print.

"Pantokrator." Web. 23 Feb. 2012.

Partridge, Christopher Hugh. *The Re-enchantment of the West (vol. 1): Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. Print.

---. *The Re-enchantment of the West (vol. 2): Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*. Vol. II. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006. Print.

Parsons, Talcott. "Introduction" in Max Weber. *The Sociology of Religion*, 1922. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963. xix-xvii. Print.

Pieslak, Jonathan. "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah." *Music Theory Spectrum* 29.2 (2007): 219–245. Web. 8 Nov. 2012.

Possessed. *Death Metal*. Independent, 1984. Audio Recording.

Purcell, Natalie J. *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*. Jefferson: Macfarlane & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2003. Print.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. 1950. Trans. Erazim Kohak. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966. Print.

---. *Fallible Man.* 1960. Trans. Walter J. Lowe, New York: Fordham University Press, 1986. Print.

---. *The Symbolism of Evil.* 1967. Trans. Emerson Buchanan. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. Print.

---. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. 1965. Trans. Denis Savage. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970. Print.

---. *The Conflict of Interpretations.* Ed. Don Ihde. New York: Continuum, 1974. Print.

---.. "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture" Trans. Willis Domingo. *The Conflict of Interpretations.* Ed. Don Ihde. New York: Continuum, 119-156, 1974a. Print.

---. "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I" Trans. Denis Savage. *The Conflict of Interpretations.* Ed. Don Ihde. New York: Continuum, 284-311, 1974b. Print.

---. "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: II." Trans. Charles Freilich. *The Conflict of Interpretations.* Ed. Don Ihde. New York: Continuum, 312-331, 1974c. Print.

---. "Religion, Atheism, Faith." Trans. Charles Freilich. *The Conflict of Interpretations.* Ed. Don Ihde. New York: Continuum, 436-463. 1974d. Print.

---. "Fatherhood: From Phantams to Symbol." Trans. Robert Sweeney. *The Conflict of Interpretations.* Ed. Don Ihde. New York: Continuum, 464-493. 1974e. Print.

---. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans Kathleen and David Pellauer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.

---. The Course of Recognition. Trans. David Pellauer. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. Print.

Riddick, Mark. *Killustration*. WWW.Riddickart.com, 2007. Print.

Robertson, Roland. "The Globalization Paradigm: Thinking Globally." *Religion in the Process of Globalization*. Ed. Peter Beyer. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001, 3-22. Print.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.

Rorty, Richard, and Gianni Vattimo. *The Future of Religion*. Ed. Santiago Zabala. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Print.

Sanctifica & Pantokrator. *In The Bleak Midwinter / Songs Of Solomon*. C.L. Music & Publishing, Sweden, 2001. Audio Recording.

Savage, Roger W. H. *Hermeneutics and Music Criticism*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Screaminglessons.com. n.d. Web. 20 Jan. 2012.

Smialek, Eric. *Rethinking Metal Aesthetics: Complexity, Authenticity, and Audience in Meshuggah's* I *and* Catch Thirtythr33. David Brackett (Internal/Supervisor), 2009. Web. 8 Nov. 2012.

Smith, Anthony Paul, Daniel Whistler, and Pamela Sue Anderson, eds. *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011. Print.

Smith, W. Robertson. *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: First Series the Fundamental Institutions*. 1889. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004. Print.

Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Print.

Starkey, John. "Ricoeur and the Symbolic Roots of Religious Experience." *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 16.1/2 (2011): 134–156. Print.

Stefan Rydehed and David Nilsson. *Light in Darkness Nemesis Divina, Parts 1-4, A Christian Black Metal Documentary*. 2010. Web. 12 January 2012.

Stevens, Brett. "Enslaved Cancel Concert Rather Than Play with Christian Band - Houston Metal Music | Examiner.com." 22 July 2010. Web. 25 Feb. 2012.

Swatos, William H., and Daniel V. A. Olson. *The Secularization Debate*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. Print.

Szerszynski, Bronislaw. "Rethinking The Secular: Science, Technology, And Religion Today." *Zygon.* 40.4 (2005): 813–822. Web. 17 Sept. 2012.

Smith, Si. "A Hill To Die Upon (ep.183)." *MetalCast - the Ultimate Metal Show*. Web. 5 Dec., 2010.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. Print.

Turner, Bryan S. *Secularization*. New York: Sage Publications, 2010. Print.

Thompson, John B., *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Print.

Unrestrained! Eds. Adam Wasylyk and Adrian Bromley.Volumes 1 – 39. Print.

Vain, Matt. Dir. *666 Calling at Death: Impressions of Death and Black Metal*. 1993. Video.

Vattimo, Gianni. "The Trace of the Trace." *Religion*. Eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 79-94. Print.

Volume! Special edition: "Les Scènes metal: Sciences sociales et pratiques culturelles radicals." Eds. Gérôme Guibert et Fabien Hein. 5.2 (2006). Web. 28 Sep. 2012.

"Voodoo Kungfu" *Wiki-Rock-In-China*. Web. 20 Aug. 2012.

de Vries, Hent. *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Print.

---. *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Print.

---. "Introduction: Why Still 'Religion'?" *Religion: Beyond a Concept*. Ed. Hent de Vries. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. 1-100. Print.

de Vries, Hent, and Samuel Weber, eds.. *Religion and Media*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. Print.

Wallach, Jeremy, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene. "Affective Overdrive, Scenic Dynamics, and Identity in the Global Metal Scene." *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*. Eds. Wallach, Jeremy, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, 3-33. Print.

Walser, Robert. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993. Print.

Wall, John, William Schweiker, and W. David Hall, eds. *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Warner, R. Stephen, 1993. "Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Scientific Study of Religion in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1044- 1093. Print.

---. *Gatherings In Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. Print.

Warner, Michael, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig J. Calhoun, eds. *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. Print.

Warner, Rob. *Secularization and Its Discontents*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010. Print.

Waters, Malcolm. *Globalization: Key Ideas*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Collected Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946. Print.

---. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. by Talcott Parsons. New York. Courier Dover Publications, 2003. Print.

Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000. Print.

Wiercinski, Andrzej, ed. *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*. Toronto: Hermeneutic Press, 2003. Print.

Zizek, Slavoj. *The Fragile Absolute–or why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* New York: Verso, 2000. Print.

Zabala, Santiago. "Introduction: A Religion without Theists or Atheists." *The Future of Religion: Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo*. Ed. Santiago Zabala. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 1-28. Print.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Christian Extreme Metal Email Interview

My name is Matthew Peter Unger. I am a University of Alberta PhD Candidate, and I am conducting research on Christian extreme metal, its culture and music, and its relationship with mainstream extreme metal. I would like to thank you for taking the time to go through these questions; your thoughtful responses are greatly appreciated. The information that you provide will help in the understanding of an important subgenre and subculture, and how this music is written and thought about. I use abbreviations for Christian extreme metal (CEM) and secular extreme metal (SEM).

1) What's your name and where do you presently live?
2) What bands have you been in and do you consider them to be Christian extreme metal bands?
3) What, to you, constitutes or does not constitute them as Christian?
4) What do you think of the Christian metal scene in North America? Is it fairly active?
5) Have you seen the scene change much since you started?
6) What is your experience of the Christian metal scene? Have the fans, music or scene changed that much since you've been involved in it?
7) Have the changes in the CEM scene followed the changes in secular extreme metal?
8) What particular differences exist between CEM shows and SEM shows?

9) As a Christian metal band, what were some scenic challenges to your success as a band?
10) What is metal for you and what characterizes the metal ethos?
11) Are there any particular ideologies that people in the CEM community live by that might be different than the mainstream, or SEM? How is the music reflective of that?
12) How important is your image as a band? Do you have to form a particular image for the stage?
13) Is humor used in CEM? If so, where is humor located? Lyrics, imagery, music or sonics?
14) What considerations do you take when you write music in your band—what are some terms, words, or ideas that represent what you strive for? For example: brutal, heavy, aggressive, etc..? Can you give me some examples? How do you embody those terms in your music?
15) Are there musical and sonic distinctions between SEM and CEM? What gives CEM its sonic signature?
16) Does CEM borrow from SEM? How so?
17) How does the music reflect Christian themes and orientations and do these themes determine the sonic material? Or, conversely how does the music influence the representation of Christian themes?
18) How significant are the lyrics in CEM and for the bands that you have been involved with?

19) I'm really interested in how you write your music – is there a typical way that you write your music? What do you and your band go through to put a song together?
20) How do your lyrical themes come about? Can you give an example?
21) What about musical influences? Are there players and bands that you reference or pay homage to when you write?
22) Are there particular modes, styles, or tonalities that you bring into your music?

Final Thoughts:

Thanks again for going through these questions. This project has been approved by the Canada Tri-council ethics committee and the University of Alberta. You may choose to remain anonymous in the study output which will consist of publications, academic presentations, and my final dissertation. Please respond to the following questions regarding confidentiality:

Do you grant me permission to use your responses in my research output?

Do you wish to remain anonymous?

Appendix 2: Forum Questionnaire

Hi there,

I am a PhD student studying extreme metal and Christian extreme metal. I have been a long time metal fan, am also Mennonite, and teach at a Christian based Liberal Arts University. I would like to ask forum members to respond to a problem that is continually debated wherever there is mention of Christian extreme metal, Christian black metal, unblack metal, or white metal. The issue is that of the relationship between secular extreme metal and Christian extreme metal. I would like to have the opinion of those that listen to Christian extreme metal regarding what makes the music unique to them. I hope that this can be a forum for people to express their opinions without slamming or judging each other, and would like somewhat of a discussion to occur. Please feel free to answer any or all of the following questions using as much or as little space as you like. Also, you are free to submit your responses to me via PM. Here are the questions:

What makes Christian extreme metal unique to you?

What is your opinion of the relationship between Christian extreme metal and secular extreme metal?

How does the fact that the music reflects Christian themes and orientations determine the sonic material? Or, conversely, how does the music influence the representation of Christian themes?

For those that participate within both scenes – what do you think are some distinct differences in scenic activity? Similarities?

The fine print: The owner and administrator has given me permission to ask this question for research purposes and as such the website, member identities, ip addresses, and nicknames will remain absolutely anonymous in my research output. This project has been granted permission by the Canada Tri-Council Committee and the University of Alberta. By contributing to this discussion, you are also granting me permission to use these responses under the condition of your anonymity in my research. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will contribute to a better understanding of the Christian extreme metal scene.

Final note: I am also interested in connecting with bands in regards to this question, so if there is anyone that is a member of a band interested in participating in this project, please PM me.

Thanks!

Appendix 3: Death Toll Rising Song Analysis

Judas Cradle

1) Introduction:
    a) Drum solo into blasting
    b) A1 x3 - staccato pseudo chromaticism with tritone dissonance – (A1a)-
    c) A2 – Octave revision of chromatic staccato riff x1 unison, 2nd time with harmony
        i) Same feeling, crazier, more thrashy
        ii) partially diminished major
2) Prechorus riff: (foreshadows chorus riff)
    a) B1 – new phrase and key signature –
        i) Breakdown
3) Verse 1:
    a) A3 – modified version of A1 for singing x1
4) Verse 2:
    a) A3 – after harmonics riff x1
5) Prechorus riff:
    a) B1a – modified B1 – Step down to A3
6) Repeat Verse 1&2 structure
7) Chorus:
    a) B1

b) B1b: Connecting diminished phrase (evocation of recurrent motif descending down fret board to reach next pattern)

8) Bridge: (@2min)
    a) C1: A tempo Tremolo riff to disjunct modification of A1a (rhythmically catchy/groove)
9) Pre-Breakdown
    a) D1: E based triplets to diminished section of A1 – (A1a)
    b) Singing – low grunts over D1
    c) D2 – groove reduction of D1 with verse
    d) Repeat 1x D1
10) Breakdown
    a) Revision of D1 (critique of metalcore breakdowns)
    b) Modal /diminished (inverse of B1b)
11) Prechorus 2: (@3min)
    a) C1-C1a – (call and response rhythmic tremolo)
12) Chorus:
    a) B1
    b) B1c: B1 + A1a
13) Ending:
    a) A1

Babyslitter

1) Introduction 1:
    a) A1 – D# minor tonality; Fast tremolo "crushing" riff that contrasts with "Bludgeoning", the song before.
    b) A2: Rhythmic stops in-between a1 and a2 that separates tremolo from single strike per note into a fast groove feel.
    c) Repeated pattern
    d) Primary affect: "Brutal"
2) Introduction 2:
    a) Rhythmical stops and suspension of verse
    b) B1c (foreshadows later riff B1): described as similar to "the Crown"
3) Verse 1:
    a) B1: connection to A1—B1a, B1b, B1c, A1a; Pseudo chromatic; 7/8 meter
4) Verse 2:
    a) B1 repeat
    b) A1a
    c) A1c – based on the last 2 notes of A1/A2
5) Bridge 1:
    a) B1d over slow blast beat
6) Verse 3:
    a) B1 repeat; tension still rising
7) Bridge 2:
    a) C1: ambiguous ¾ meter riff; chromatic ascending tremolo riff at 2:25

b) D1: Chorded whole notes

8) Solo:

a) Repeat C1 – D1 with harmony into solo

b) E1: Solo harmony 1

c) B1: solo 2

d) B1: solo continues; key change from D# minor to A# minor and back again after 2 repetitions of B1

9) Ending:

a) B1d

b) A1: chorus vocalizations, ending