

Brutal Theory: Luciferian Brutalism and cultural critique in extreme metal music

by

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Abstract

Heavy metal is a misunderstood genre of music. It is a music of brutality, of savage extremity in its unrelenting attack that pushes the boundaries of the extreme; it is perceived as a rebellious fad in the lives of young people; it has morphed from the stereotypical and dated connections to the miscreant, unwashed masses to the soundtrack of a new wave of metal fear-mongering in a post-Columbine world in which metal consumption took much of the blame for psychological damage to youth listeners. Fans of metal exist on the margins of society and its mainstream expectations. Metal studies, a burgeoning area of scholarship, has worked to debunk the myths of metal, exposing a strong community that offers positive impacts on listeners and fans of the genre. It has begun to expose this subculture as a place that thrives on its attempts to remain on the outside of mainstream markets despite the continued draw of capitalism, on the fringes, for those who feel no sense of belonging with the popular culture. This research proposes the idea that metal does more than provide a communal space for fans, that it creates – through brutalization – a space within popular culture where it can subvert the mainstream – the conservative cultural center that has established what is considered the acceptable and normative styles of consumption, in short, the popular and common - and offer crucial cultural critique and that this genre of music offers more than a passing fad or a means to anger or scare a conservative establishment. Heavy metal is a subversive style of music, from its sounds to its lyrics to its imagery, and it uses these transgressions to disrupt the normative societal expectations; it is a brutalization of the theory that currently exists, and from this, it is able to create something new and previously unthought.

Keywords: Heavy metal, cultural critique, mainstream, brutality, extreme metal

Contents

Abstract	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Brutalize	5
1.0 Issues in Metal	5
1.1 The Loudest Critique	8
Chapter 2: Definitions	9
2.0 Literature Review	9
2.1 Poststructural Anarchism	11
2.2 State of Scholarship	15
2.3 Mind the Gaps	16
2.4 Cultural Critique	17
2.5 Historical Context of Metal	18
2.6 Defining Metal Genres	22
2.7 Creating Space	25
2.8 New Theory	27
2.9 The Violence of Thought	29
Chapter 3: Metal as Subversion	31
3.1 Transgression, controversy, antagonism	31
3.2 Grindcore and the political	42
3.3 Deathgrind and the decapitation of man	46
3.4 Black metal and the absence of light	49
3.5 Death metal and the absence of life	56
Chapter 4: Dark Space	59
4.1 The outside versus the inside	59
4.2 Difficult music	67
4.3 Chasing the dark	75
Chapter 5: Fringe Spaces	78
5.1 Outsider Status and Space for Subversion	78
5.2 The War Machine	84
5.3 Fight	88
Chapter 6: Life and Politics	98

6.1 Subculture	98
6.2 Metal as Apolitical	106
6.3 In Pursuit of the Brutal	114
Chapter 7: Luciferian Brutalism	124
7.1 Theoretical Outline	124
7.2 Luciferian Brutalism and Control	129
7.3 Application to Metal	130
Chapter 8: Conclusions	135
8.1 Back to the Front	135
8.2 Brutal Theory	137
References	140
Appendix	152

Brutal Theory:

Luciferian Brutalism and cultural critique in extreme metal music

Introduction

Heavy metal is a unique musical subgenre. It has become much more than music: it is identity and lifestyle for those who have become engaged in these subcultural divisions of heavy metal music. It opposes the normative societal values of seeking beauty in sounds: the pleasing chords, the smooth transitions, the catchy chorus, the addictive lyrics; in fact, extreme metal is the opposite. Popular music focuses on the aesthetic pleasures of the musicians to accompany the music itself: a glossy focus on sexuality, physical appearance, and fashion trendiness. This is not the case within metal circles, as it removes the gloss to observe an interpretation of a harsh reality. The analog production techniques and standards used in the metal genre reinforce this idealism, running contrary to the digital and synthesized productions of pop music. Metal is attempting to “deform into truth” (Britt-Darby, 2020). It is constantly seeking more brutal methods of providing a message to the fans: a message of subversion, of change, of critique in a modern world where “there seems to be fewer and fewer prohibitions to transgress” (Pawlett, 2013, p. 26).

In the world of heavy metal, the word brutal has escaped its traditional negative denotation to become a goal, a pursuit of the musicians in the genre. To be brutal is to be extreme. In the music, brutality is heaviness, a confrontation with the musically grotesque and obscene. Like the art of Francis Bacon, it is “very, very ordered chaos” (Britt-Darby, 2020). It is a compliment. In extreme metal music, and like the notions of Georges Bataille, brutality and death are “intensely desired, as attractive even in [their] repulsion” (Pawlett, 2013, p. 74).

This pursuit of brutality takes the shape of harsher, more grotesque lyrics¹, more vulgar album art, a more intense, grinding, tension-filled sounds, more intense live experiences, and experimental song lengths. Extreme metal has worked at brutalizing these norms by providing live shows that provide “the staging or dramatization of extreme violence within social boundaries” (Pawlett, 2013, p. 23), and by annihilating the method of what a song is or a song structure should be. The ‘microsongs’ of bands such as S.O.D., Napalm Death, and early-era Cattle Decapitation are examples of stripping our understanding of what a complete piece of music can be. In opposition, the epic song writing of Blood Incantation creates massive death metal songs longer than a dozen minutes, while Bell Witch takes this even further with their 2017 album *Mirror Reaper*. This work contains one song that lasts one hour and twenty-three minutes. These bands have pushed the boundaries of the brutal through their pursuit of new rules and working outside the theories of music that currently exist. However, extremity in metal advances past a list of quantifiable materialisms. It provides an intensity that is *felt*, containing the embodiment of affective² qualities created by the music. It offers a sense of freedom. Here, it is in “risking death, in not fearing death, we may sense sovereign life” (Pawlett, 2013, p. 28).

Metal generally offers more of everything. More speed, more complexity, more of it all. It is the pursuit of the extreme, continually redrawing its own borders of blasphemy when the fringes are pushed further than previously thought possible. However, not all metal contains the additive feature of the ‘more’, the drive towards excess. There are several movements within metal that add to the music via subtraction. Examples here include some branches of black metal that aim for a stark bleakness, creating music that is monochrome to the black. The push

¹ Cannibal Corpse and Carcass remain the standard-bearers when it comes to offensive, overly gruesome lyrics. Cannibal Corpse focuses on the obscene like the gore of a splatter horror film while Carcass focuses on medical tales and the human abject.

² While falling outside the scope of this thesis, the study of affect theory as it pertains to heavy metal music is an interesting, yet underdeveloped, area of metal scholarship, and perhaps one for further inquiry and research.

for excess would also exclude the metal subgenre of drone music, where bands such as Boris and Sunn O))) will hold single notes for excessive amounts of time, creating a discomforting affect in the listener as the music blows a hole through their minds. Despite the importance of the subtractive elements of metal, this research will focus primarily on the additive, the quest for more, as the ideas of Bataille are reflected here: “By expanding excess in collective, ritual practices which suspend everyday, productive existence, excess energy can bind being and communities” (Pawlett, 2013, p. 22-23).

This thesis offers many mentions of the ‘norm’, the ‘normative’, or the ‘social norms’; therefore, it stands to offer an elaboration of this terminology. Even in the discussion of music and popular culture, there are definitive connections to the political, specifically to the values and traditions of neo-liberal politics. The norms here are considered as the expected and the socially accepted: the average. They are the heteronormative, politically centered, non-controversial blandness that serve as the centerpiece of the Western version of the ‘ideal’. The norms are that which are not intended to offend or promote controversy, but to promote capitalist values and ensure sales that reflect these values.

Adversarial since the proto-metal days and the advent of bands like Coven and Mercyful Fate, “heavy metal has retained a controversial edge precisely because controversy has been so deeply ingrained in the genre itself” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, & LeVine, 2011, p. 18). My intentions are to explore the adversarial side of metal to respond to the central question of how do the subgenres of extreme metal, through the brutalization of the social normative, create a dissenting space for the critique and subversion of Western popular culture and existent musical methodology? The research will exist where “nothing is set at the beginning of the work” (Jackson, 2017, p. 667), yet it will contain the hope of thinking with theory and creating new

ideas as to what people are attempting to subvert³ while engaging with this subculture, and how the brutalization of social theory can enable liberation within the structure of a unified collective. How this belonging can serve as a critique of the structures of popular culture in the Western world, and how creation is able to be born of destruction.

This work will aim to brutalize theory, to exist in violent spaces created between theories and methods. The task of these ideas is not to “tell us who we are or what we ought to do. Philosophy does not settle things, it disturbs them” (May, 2005, p. 19). Some of the thinkers that are of great significance to this research include Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and their concepts of the nomadic war machine, overcoding, and lines of flight. The work of Todd May will be included as well, the research pointing to his interpretations of Deleuze along with his scholarship on death and his creation of post-structural anarchist theory. Hakim Bey’s notions of the Temporary Autonomous Zones, Nathan Snaza’s ideas of the endarkenment, and Alecia Youngblood Jacksons’ concept of thinking without theory will also provide foundational pillars for this research to stand on and explore. This is not to mention the various important theories put forth by metal scholars which serve obvious importance to this work, including the struggles of metal with capitalism in the work of Niall Scott (2011, 2014, 2016) and the ongoing elements of controversy in metal music in the work of Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and LeVine (2011). While the brutalization to be undertaken is not meant to represent an ongoing critique or destruction of existing ideas, it does mean that pieces from prior works will be stripped away and taken to create something new: an ugly beast of new theory that will help future metal scholarship. This work is intended to play a dual role. It is meant not only to serve as a social exploration and

³ Metal is a multi-functional genre of music, with the ability to mean many things to different people. For some, metal is a means of rebellion and transgression, which will be the focus of this thesis. However, metal serves other functions: therapeutic functions, escape, stress relief, safe spaces for the release of tensions or violent tendencies, a community. This research does not intend to ignore or not recognize the many values that metal provides for listeners; however, not all can be explored here for the purpose of brevity.

analysis of metal, but as a manifesto for the cultural pedagogy of this music and its power to brutalize convention.

Chapter 1: Brutalize

1.0 Issues in Metal

“Innocence, torn from me without your shelter/ Barred reality, I’m living blindly.”

(Metallica, 1988)

Examining extreme music – primarily death metal and black metal – offers many gaps and opportunities for deeper exploration. Room for the creation and development of theory exists along with the interrelations between philosophy and this brutal music. This thesis is theoretical, expanding current research of this cultural pedagogy to create new theory that exists “the outside of method” (Jackson, 2017, p. 666).

A common misconception of metal fandom is that it serves as little more than a phase for angry teenagers, something to be grown out of, or moved beyond, as they mature and begin to understand the obligations of the world for themselves. Research (Guibert & Guibert, 2016; Rowe, 2017) indicates that there is more longevity to metal fandom than perhaps originally thought⁴. It can be a lifelong dedication that includes an adherence to a set of social values and norms within this niche and tight-knit community of music fans that exist outside of the mainstream in a dissenting place they have created through the debauchery of the abstract idea of the status quo. The status quo is an ideal created by capitalist forces with aims to keep people

⁴ Metal was frequently connected to deviance (including Satanism), perhaps never more famously than during the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) hearings of 1985. The PMRC fought for warning labels to be added to album covers that contained sex, language, or violence deemed inappropriate. Many of the acts singled out and impacted were metal bands such as Venom, Mercyful Fate, Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, and AC/DC. The focus of the PMRC boiled down to the concern that listening to illicit music that does not fit within the regulations of the normative – the viewpoint of conservative America – was psychologically damaging through negative influence.

in a constant state of pursuit and failure to achieve an idealized version of expected happiness. It is to strive for a manner of living, of how life ought to be lived, that has been determined without individualized needs or desires having been considered. This creates a tiring existence for many; therefore, they choose a path of transgressing the status quo.

The primary, though not solitary, focus of metal scholarship to date has been on identity (Guibert & Guibert, 2016; Rowe, 2017; St. Laurent, 2019), subcultural belonging (Blackman, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Hodgkinson, 2016), and the rebellious nature of the music (Brown, 2017; Cardwell, 2017; Epp, 2019). These foundational fragments serve as “scraps: bits and pieces along the way that function to produce the work” (Jackson, 2017, p. 667) of revealing not simply *what* subcultural members aim to subvert, but *how* and *why* this music is able to help them do it. Extreme metal is not just brutal for the sake of brutality. There is purpose behind it, part of which is to bring people together under one banner as a unified symbol of strength and subversion. To engage them in thinking, something that “happens by force, by chance, and through an encounter. This force – this violence – is an intrusion” (Jackson, 2017, p. 669). Extreme metal serves as this force. This is not to suggest, however, that all genres of metal fall into this category of community building and support. While death metal is featured in many major festivals, there is debate as to the intentions of black metal in the development or eschewing of community. There are many misconceptions as to what may draw listeners to this gruelling style of music, elements such as shock value, rebellion, and the defiance of social expectations. Certainly, these elements play a role to varying degrees; however, extreme metal music mounts a challenge on both common sense and its actualization in popular music, and so too, the aesthetic-politics of the neoliberal consumer.

This intense style of music is rife with tensions, on the inside and outside of the metal scene. Extreme metal is “trapped between being a form of popular culture as resistance and a

movement that has the capacity to resist popular culture” (Scott, 2016, p. 33). I will not ignore these tensions.

The focus of this research is the critique of popular culture, and it will lend itself to the examination of how an individual joins a community and how they – either consciously or unconsciously – use it to usurp the norms of common culture. While metal does not produce the individual, it aids in creating the space needed to maintain a transgressive community that can create space for culture critique.

1.0.1 Justification of research

This research will further the demystification of heavy metal music, a genre that has become more researched and understood by scholars, but often remains riddled with stereotypes and misunderstanding by the general public. Metal, specifically extreme metal, remains cause for frequent bewilderment from those on the outside of the genre. The purpose is to explore how extreme music can create space for cultural critique.

Extreme music exists on the fringes of popular culture, in a unique cultural position, as Niall Scott (2011) elaborates: “The heavy metal movement [...] works both as a barometer of social change and as a consumer of its own product. It [...] can [...] provide, as an art form, a critical insight into contemporary culture, and [...] a looming threat to [the] social and political realm” (p. 236). Metal, through this description, exists both within and without, playing a complex dual role in society, critiquing both the culture along with its role within it. It can brutalize both itself and the realm in which it exists.

It is important to understand what extreme metal music threatens in our contemporary social milieu, and to not only view “what we can understand *about* metal [but also] what we can learn *from* metal” (Savigny & Schaap, 2018, p. 550, original emphasis).

1.1 The Loudest Critique

“My head is talking to me/ I don’t know what it needs/ But the loudest voice/ Is the one I heed”

(Megadeth, 1999)

1.1.1 Connections to New Ideas

Extreme music is an important cultural identifier and a significant portion of an individual identity. People existing on the fringes of the mainstream seeking to understand the “social complexity of the metal world and its fandom” (Guibert & Guibert, 2016, p. 185) – the musicians, the fans, the scholars – are there for a reason that goes beyond their love of music: that they are there to fight against something or to acknowledge that things have gone awry in normative culture, and that there must be an avenue, a “liberated environment” (Scott, 2016, p. 32).

The approaches being undertaken in this work stem from the foundational idea that there is a fight out there worth fighting – a cultural battle zone against all forms of injustice and the common sense forced upon us by the State, which is “by nature oppressive, [...] a force for conformity” (May, 2004, p. 142) – and that the voice of the people is spoken through the music they choose to listen to. Music is the pop cultural matter in which space can be created to engage with this fight – more so than any other cultural formation. Music has long been a “powerful symbol of anti-establishment rebellion” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 392), connecting a “particular peer group based on certain shared ideas, ideals and practices” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 394). Building on existing theory to develop the new, this study will follow the Deleuzian notion that “concepts only ever designate possibilities” (quoted in Jackson, 2017, p. 673) and that “thinking is an act of creation, not one of recognition” (Jackson, 2017, p. 669). Here, the “task of philosophy is to create concepts” (May, 2005, p. 21) because, as May (2004) continues in his interpretation of

the works of Deleuze, “there is always more to think. There is always more philosophy to be done” (p. 21).

The proposed concept from this research has been dubbed Luciferian Brutalism. This concept invokes the controversial moniker of Lucifer for several reasons, including its connotations of enlightenment, along with the traditional (and often stereotypical) connections between extreme metal music and the dark forces of the Devil. The concept could also be called Enlightened Brutalism, and these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. It explores possibility and provide a theoretical framework custom-made for metal scholarship while exhibiting a “general resistance to common sense” (Jackson, 2017, p. 668) while “erupt[ing] from and carry[ing] with them philosophical attachments” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 61). Luciferian Brutalism can also be used to think alongside other areas of research and academia, despite being created for the analysis of metal and the behaviors of metal subcultural adherence. The concept could be a lifelong work in progress, this point functioning as its philosophical inception.

Chapter 2: Definitions

2.0 Literature Review

“A voice of fire screams from the abyss/ This book of the witch’s hammer to provoke this raven deluge.”

(Goatwhore, 2006)

Extreme music, and particularly the genre of heavy metal, is a form of musical expression riddled with controversy, stereotypes, misunderstandings, and hatred. It has, over the course of its history, been considered the music of the Devil, a style against common morality, the inversion of good taste, a negative influence on youth, even as music to murder to.

It has been considered music that is “killing, literally and spiritually, the nations’ youth” (Weinstein, 2016, p. 25). While metal has flirted with the mainstream – such as the popularity of hair metal and its dominance of MTV in the 1980s led by bands such as Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, and Poison, or the worldwide domination of Metallica following the 1991 release of their self-titled fifth album⁵ - extreme metal has remained in the shadows, in the loud, dank clubs that thunder with pummeling riffs, blast beat drums, and guttural vocals. The places that serve as the containment of perceived and barely controlled insanity. It is the blasphemy of the normative, the brutalization of the desired.

Within the obscene sounds, brutal band names, and grisly imagery, metal has been frequently dismissed for its lack of political ambition and generally apolitical nature (Scott, 2011), but within this transgressive music, there is a space created for poignant and intense cultural critique, often enacted through the music itself. There is more than teenage rebellion contained in the works of these bands and in the people who choose to listen to it; there are the tools provided for a lifelong rebellion against the symbolic order, allowing listeners to discover their own path in the way life ought to be lived. The scenes of extreme metal are important subcultural groupings that are meaningful to those engaged with them, providing metalheads with a sense of community (Blackman, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Hodgkinson, 2016; Varas-Diaz, Rivera-Segara, Rivera Medina, Mendoza, & Gonzalez-Sepulvedo, 2015) that they are unable to acquire elsewhere, as they have been rejected by – or have chosen to reject – the mainstream. It is within these communities and niche groupings that people can express their disdain for what they perceive as being the ills of society, the grotesque or corrupt structures in place that have become ingrained in life, requiring criticism and possibly revolutionary change.

The central argument of this thesis will be furthered by thinking with theory – which “does not come at the end of anything but is emergent and immanent to that which is becoming”

⁵ Commonly referred to as *The Black Album*.

(Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 719) – to explain how individuals in a group setting engage in cultural critique and the brutalization of the normative to create, and become, something new, something different than they were before, a transgressor. Historically, music has played an important role in revolution and cultural subversion (Haukkala, 2017): rock music invaded the radio waves as America attempted to shed its post-war traditional values in the 1950s; it was the soundtrack to the protests of the Vietnam War and the establishment of a generational counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s; it was the anthem of a disaffected Generation X as they faced the hopelessness of the 1990s. Extreme metal is continuing that tradition putting a microscope to society despite not having the commercial success of Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, or the Seattle grunge bands.

This research will attempt to balance ideas of Todd May's poststructural anarchism, heavily influenced by the works of Deleuze and Guattari, and thinking without method while exploring the subversive nature of extreme metal and the ways in which it is able to create dissenting spaces. Imagery, lyrics, and symbolism all engage in significant roles in the transgressive behaviors of extreme metal. There will also be focus on the individual seeking a personal enlightenment prior to engagement with a community where shock and subversion is a primary goal. Extreme metal is harsh, brutal music, bringing listeners face-to-face with the harshness that exists in the world: the gruesome, the evil, the abject, the death. It uses this abhorrence to shift the focus back on the world that permits it in order to critique it and debauch it.

2.1 Poststructural Anarchism

“Rip the mike, rip the stage, rip the system/ I was born to rage against them.”

(Rage Against the Machine, 1992)

This research will occasionally connect to poststructuralist anarchism⁶, not so that it guides and frames the work, but to work alongside it. This is a theory influenced primarily by Todd May and his 1994 work, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*. The critiques (Moore, 1994; Wolters, 2013), explanations (Spinosa, 2013), and expansion of May's ideas (Critchley, 2012) will serve as a philosophical parallel to this research. Evren's (2011) work outlines the meeting of poststructuralist ideas with those of classical anarchism, even pointing to a specific time and place⁷ where the two ideas merged, clashing to create something new. Seattle was a "decisive event in the development of contemporary practices of resistance" (p. 4), itself a very 'metal' protest – a moment when people had reached their boiling point and were ready to have their voices heard, and have them heard loudly. They debauched the normalcy – in this case, the abuses of mega-corporations and capitalism – that had become too accepted in their minds. They wished to "first murder the idea – blow up the monument inside us – and then perhaps the balance of power will shift" (Bey, 2011, p. 21). Post-anarchism is not a perfect balance between poststructuralism and anarchism, and is "better understood as an anarchist theory first and foremost" (p. 10); it incorporates the poststructural logic of opposition by "demonstrating how political oppression is linked to the larger cultural processes of knowledge production and cultural representation" (p. 8). To combat this oppression, it is significant to produce a set of knowledge in the form of theory that begins in the realm of metal. Post-anarchism wants to combine the desires for freedom and equality with an "acknowledgement that radical political struggles today are contingent, pluralistic, open to different identities and perspectives" (Newman, quoted in Evren, 2011, p. 5) – essentially, poststructuralist. Metal does much of the same, in its own way, opening itself to different iterations and identities within the overarching genre as a furthering of its subversive qualities.

⁶ This theory is also referred to as 'post-anarchism' and both terms will be used interchangeably in this research.

⁷ The 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) that took place in Seattle, Washington – often referred to as the "Battle in Seattle" – is viewed as the birth of poststructuralist anarchism.

This thesis will not use every element of May's theory. However, it will donate pieces, morsels of flesh to be used in the creation of a theoretical monstrosity of rebellion and cultural critique created by extreme metal. The research will indicate that some metal subgenres do not have anarchistic hopes with their music: there is no desire to destroy everything⁸. This research will demonstrate that there is an understanding that the 'system' is a necessary component of subversion. A structure must first be in place to afford the opportunity to critique it and hope to change it. The acts of transgression not only require an object of derision but need to use the portents of that system to deliver the anti-systematic message. For example, a band – without the music industry, the 'system' – would not have a means or a medium to pass along their message of change and critique. The music industry is how their music is (generally⁹) produced and delivered to the masses: it is an essential part of spreading the word of subversion. The system that is subject to critique, in this instance, is ironically the delivery system for the message. This paradoxical arrangement creates many of the tensions in the metal world and the difficult balance between success and authenticity. Metal subverts a structure that it is very much a part of. For example, an underground metal band may offer critique of a gluttonous capitalist world, yet they must continue to charge their fans for concert tickets, and rely on the sales and profits from their merchandise to pay their bills and continue living the life of a touring band. There is a need for criticism and transgression within this 'system', this apparatus of the Deleuzian 'State', a nomadic war machine that perceives the broken and that which requires change; it is riddled with issues, injustice, and imbalance. In many ways, it has removed hope from some people. And within this awareness that the establishment can not –

⁸ There are exceptions here within metal, including the basic desire to destroy life itself that is present in some subgenres such as suicidal black metal. Perhaps this adheres to Andrew Culp's (2016) notions of the Death of this World, that "admits the insufficiency of previous attempts to save it and instead poses a revolutionary gamble: only by destroying this world will we release ourselves of its problems" (p. 66).

⁹ This is not to ignore the recent increase of self-released music across all genres, including metal. Online platforms such as YouTube, Bandcamp, and SoudCloud have provided artists with a do-it-yourself (DIY) mentality that allows them to subvert the need for record labels. However, record labels still provide the best opportunity for bands to have widely released and available music.

and should not – be destroyed and eliminated, there is still a recognition that there is a fight worth fighting, a battle worth engaging in, thinking worth brutalizing, that the push for change is important in all possible manners. There is an awareness that this is a battle to be engaged in perpetuity, as Hakim Bey (2011) has questioned, “[w]ould we like to just once stand on the ground where laws are abolished and the last priest is strung up with the guts of the last bureaucrat? Yeah sure. But we’re not holding our breath” (p. 63). Yet, there is no movement to give up. In this case, that push to continue comes from extreme metal.

Recent examples here could be extreme bands such as Psycroptic and Cattle Decapitation using the proceeds from their merchandise sales to support relief efforts for the 2019 Australian wildfires. These acts of charity, while helpful to the cause, could also be perceived as acts of subversion and critique of a shattered system, a system in which people annihilate nature for profit. However, these bands require systems in place in order to further their campaigns: merchandise printers, online forums to spread their messaging, support from management and record labels, and the systems equipped to receive and properly use their raised funding. The subversion of Cattle Decapitation and Psycroptic, while honorable in their attempts to provide aid during an environmental catastrophe, still required a system to allow it to take place.

Critchley (2012) observes philosophy from two primary viewpoints: that of political disappointment, and that of religious disappointment. He examines how we make ethical decisions alongside the politics of our modern times, while considering ideas of subversion of the State through nonviolent action of rebellion. His desire for subversion – not complete destruction – of the State is a key differentiator between post-anarchist views and those of classical anarchism, which was desirous of a complete obliteration of the State and all of its constructs – to eliminate all power structures, instead of finding structures that can be tolerated and worked with. Extreme metal aims to restructure power, not annihilate it, so that the masses

may have a voice, and may have a space where they are able to share that voice – to become one in the unification against something. There are, however, historical examples of extreme metal acts promoting anarchistic destruction through violence. The anti-Christian values of the Second Wave of Black Metal¹⁰ resulted in the promotion of church burnings in attempt to annihilate not only the symbols of Christianity, but the structure of the religion as a system of belief and ideology no longer representative of the disenfranchised members of the Norwegian State.

This research will lead to the proposal and development of a theory based on the examination of metal studies and its ability to critique culture: Luciferian Brutalism. This theoretical lens, in its original iteration and first phase of development, can be applied not only to metal studies, but the study of other subject areas and lines of inquiry as well. This work will serve as the foundational piece to this concept creation, what “opens up the think, object, process, or event – the real – to becoming other” (Jackson, 2017, p. 671), and the research will help create the basic tenets of the theory: the subversion of the traditional notions of enlightenment to gain a personal understanding to become a part of a community of subversion and the significance of change and destruction as a means of creation.

2.2 State of Scholarship

“Living only for ourselves/ As if tomorrow we will die/ We are vulturous.”

(Cattle Decapitation, 2019)

¹⁰ Black metal, and specifically Second Wave Black Metal, will be explored in more detail in a later section.

Much metal research to this point has been documenting the genre, as though continually explaining to outsiders how the genre came to be and focusing on the elements of metal scene identity: what it means to be ‘metal’ and why people turn to this style of music. Metal scholarship has made great advancements over the years – a monster staggering forward from the misty shadows – with dedicated academic journals¹¹ and an international society of scholarship¹². The past decade has demonstrated a rise of analysis of the music and of metal culture, moving beyond the descriptions of what it *is* into what it *does*. Within these advancements remains open spaces – new areas for ferocity and brutalization – to examine metal in new ways and through different lenses, including metal as a cultural pedagogy. This work will attempt to fill some of these gaps, to debauch those spaces.

2.3 Mind the Gaps

“I know the pieces fit ‘cause I watched them fall away/ Mildewed and smoldering, fundamental differing.”

(Tool, 2001)

A primary issue with current metal scholarship is that “it is under-theorized and under-methodologized” (Weinstein, 2016, p. 29). Metal studies is reliant on outside theory to help explain the phenomena within the subcultures of extreme music. The intention behind Enlightened Brutalism is that it will partially expose and explore this theory gap in metal studies, providing the discipline new theoretical approaches for furthering research, as opposed to using the pre-existent outside theory and looking to make connections. This under-theorization provides a contextual situation where this research can exist and serve as contributor to the field of metal scholarship. However, this research exists without a pre-

¹¹ *Metal Music Studies* and *Helvete: A Journal of Black Metal*, among others.

¹² International Society for Metal Music Studies (ISMMS).

determined methodology as it aims to engage with brutal theory – the absence of a restrictive framework that could limit the boundaries of thought. Weinstein (2016) continues her critique, stating that there exists too few studies to “extract generalizations for theory building” (p. 30). This research aims to engage with these generalizations in order to build theory.

A significant gap is directly addressed through the focus of this research is that of the space *created* for cultural critique in extreme metal subgenres. There has been research conducted on various aspects of the transgressive nature of heavy metal music. This included the rebellious nature of the music (Hjelm, et al., 2011; Riches, 2016; Scott, 2016) and teen Satanism (Emerson & Syron, 1995; Lowney, 2008; Olson, 2017; Swist, 2019), but there is not much on the specific critiques and the manner in which the music and its fandom is able to generate these dissenting spaces required for cultural critique. There is a general scholarly acceptance as to what metal is fighting against (the State, the normative social expectations, Symbolic authority); therefore, the question must shift to *why* it is undertaken and *how* it is accomplished.

2.4 Cultural Critique

“It’s time to spread the word/ Let the voice be heard./ It’s time to rise.”

(Pantera, 1992)

Foundational understandings exist within metal studies: metal music is an important signifier of cultural identity (Banchs, 2019); it creates and provides a sense of belonging and community (Epp, 2019); it is fiercely self-protective of its values (Ferrero, 2016; Gibson, 2019; Puri, 2015; Smialek, 2016); it offers a place of belonging for outsiders who have been rejected by the mainstream, or who have chosen to exist outside of the mainstream. Finally, and significantly for this research, there is value in the insubordination created by metal music

(Haukkala, 2017; Hjelm, et al., 2011; Kirner-Ludwig & Wohlfarth, 2018; Riches, 2018; Scott, 2011, 2016). Within this cultural¹³ critique exist many areas for specific criticism that are the focus for bands in these extreme fringes of metal music. Examples of these concerns and the bands that champion (against) them include political injustice (Napalm Death), religious abuse and tyranny (Deicide, Immolation, Morbid Angel, Zeal & Ardor, Thy Art Is Murder), harsh patriarchal values (Castrator), environmental crisis (Gojira), the Anthropocene and post-humanist values (Cattle Decapitation), unequal division of wealth (System of a Down), governmental corruption (Megadeth, Lamb of God), the inhumane practices of big business and globalization (Pig Destroyer).

Metal musicians have many possible reasons to feel disconnected and dismayed by the state of the world in which they exist. There are often issues with religious institutions, and many are “angry at Christianity [...], hypocrisy [being] a standard accusation” (Dyrendal, Lewis, & Petersen, 2016, p. 204) along with the “god of monotheistic religions [being] lambasted as unethical” (Dyrendal, et al., 2016, p. 204). Outside of religion, many musicians take issue with capitalist inequalities, somewhat ironically as the view of musicians has typically been as wealthy, decadent rock stars. This is, of course, untrue, especially in the metal underground where touring bands are often barely able to eke out sustainable livings. There is a general dismay with the greed, closed-mindedness, and abuses of power in the world.

2.5 Historical Context of Metal

“What is this that stands before me?/
Figure in black which points at me./
Turn ‘round quick
and start to run,/ Find out I’m the chosen one.”

¹³ ‘Culture’ is utilized as an umbrella term for various social and societal areas and institutions that will also include areas of popular culture.

(Black Sabbath, 1970)

To situate the history of heavy metal music in the context of popular culture, the following section provides an overly simplistic history of metal for the purpose of brevity¹⁴. This is not an all-encompassing overview of metal history, which falls outside the scope of this work.

Heavy metal music emerged from the rubble of the mega-bands of the 1970s, a response by those disillusioned with the great decadence of the era. The wild, exorbitant lifestyles of Led Zeppelin, The Who, The Rolling Stones, Elton John, and Queen had further detached the musicians from their audiences. People who could no longer relate to the excess and astronomical wealth of some of the biggest bands in the history of rock music were faced with the gloom of their own lives and began to embrace the darkness, an aesthetic turn introduced by the proto-metal bands that was more focused on both the real and fantastical dismay existent in normative culture. The music-buying audience was becoming increasingly nihilistic about their working class lives and began seeking something more extreme that could also serve as a reflective vehicle for surveying the destruction of the given world, of how life ought to be lived. This coincided in an increased 'dirtiness' in the music being created by popular acts. More distortion in the guitars and the increased use of power chords created heavier sounds, a brutal advancement of the traditional pop song. The heavy metal 'riff' can be traced back to 1964 and the hit single "You Really Got Me" by The Kinks, which pushed music in a harsher direction. People began to see corruption and brutality in their own worlds, wanting that mirrored in their music. Enter Black Sabbath.

There is ongoing debate as to which group is considered to be the progenitor of metal, or even which specific song¹⁵ signifies the birth of the genre, it is clear and accepted that Black

¹⁴ Detailed histories can be found with Ian Christie's *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*, or with Wiederhodn & Turman's *Louder Than Hell: The Definitive Oral History of Metal*.

¹⁵ Many point to two songs from 1968 as the possible 'first' heavy metal song: "Summertime Blues" by Blue Cheer and "Helter Skelter" by The Beatles. There are many disparate opinions on this, however, yet there is an

Sabbath followed the groundwork laid by the proto-metal bands and forged something new, dark, and terrifying. They played the most significant role in developing this new breed of music and bringing it to the masses, starting with their eponymous song from their debut album, perhaps the most sonically ‘evil’ song that had been put to vinyl at the time, with a crawling tempo of held single guitar notes, the plaintive whining of Ozzy Osbourne, and lyrics invoking witches and evil.

From the proto-metal days, the genre morphed into the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM), which spawned legendary bands such as Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Mercyful Fate, and Diamond Head. The music got faster and darker, incorporating elements of the occult into the lyrics and imagery. Motörhead pushed this further, making music that was still faster, louder, and filthier. Metal managed to produce a more ‘evil’ form of thinking with sound.

In America, there was a split in the young genre of metal between bands that took on the theatricality of Alice Cooper and Kiss to become known as glam metal or hair metal, and there were the bands who started to look towards the extreme, creating thrash metal. A similar split occurred in Europe, with the more extreme bands on both continents playing enormously significant roles in the ongoing development of metal. Thrash emerged from California’s Bay Area and spawned many of the most famous and enduring heavy metal bands of all-time, including those considered as the ‘Big Four’ of the genre: Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax. A similar group emerged from Germany to play an equally important role in the growth of European metal. The ‘Teutonic Big Four’ comprised of Kreator, Sodom, Destruction, and Tankard. Hair metal focused on big hair, gender-bending makeup and outfits, catchy hooks, and songs about partying, enjoying tremendous commercial success with the help of MTV. Many

understanding that all the pieces ripped apart by these influential bands, each brutalization of standard popular music represents an important part of the new whole – heavy metal.

bands in this genre enjoyed success through the 1980s. However, the genre quickly became diluted with hair-sprayed and made-up men writing power ballads: Mötley Crüe, Poison, Skid Row, Warrant, Whitesnake, Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, and more. Thrash – with its focus on speed, heaviness, and anger – lurked in the underground for a decade before experiencing its own commercial emergence thanks largely to the growing success of the ‘Big Four’. Careers were ground out from stellar live performances despite very minimal radio play. These bands gained their fame through the tape trading underground, a relentless touring schedule, and the releases of what are generally considered truly classic metal albums. The ascent of these bands was itself a brutalization of the normative, as the thrash bands all achieved much longer careers than their glam counterparts by subverting the system and working outside of normalcy. This initial glam/thrash schism created the grand division of metal, and the fracturing and brutalization has never ceased. There are endless metal sub-categorizations that reflect the nuance, cross-pollination, and creativity that exists in the genre today. It is no longer as simple as glam or thrash, as there are dozens of subgenres under the umbrella of metal.

A second major rift, which will serve in creating definitions essential to this research, was the splintering and morphing – both the literal and figurative brutalization – of thrash metal into death and black metal, the most extreme example of an already extreme genre. Death metal grew from two distinct geographic scenes: Tampa, Florida, and Sweden. While the locations may seem odd and out of place, the scenes there were essential in laying the foundation for the bands to follow in their footsteps. Black metal began as a European version of metal before growing internationally. The three first-wave bands were from across Europe: Bathory (Sweden), Venom (England), and Hellhammer/Celtic Frost (Switzerland). Their work served as the primary influence for Second Wave Black Metal that grew in Norway and the other Scandinavian metal scenes.

2.6 Defining Metal Genres

“I like smoke and lightning./ Heavy metal thunder.”

(Steppenwolf, 1968)

2.6.1 Heavy metal and metal

For the purposes of this work, the terms ‘heavy metal’¹⁶ and ‘metal’ will be used interchangeably and refer to the entire musical genre. When discussing ‘extreme metal’, the intention will be to include all subgenres of metal that exist well beyond the mainstream and past the fringes of normalcy, specifically death metal, black metal, grindcore, and deathgrind. These four subgenres, along with all extreme metal divisions, remain firmly in the underground and have made very few inroads to popular culture. These extreme subgenres have been specifically selected as they are the most transgressive of subgenres, having pushed the boundaries (arguably) further than anyone else, and they offer a unique cultural critique that differs greatly from more ‘accepted’ or commercially viable¹⁷ branches of metal. These include subgenres such as thrash, doom, New Wave of American Heavy Metal, New Wave of Traditional Heavy Metal, or metalcore.

2.6.2 Death metal

Death metal is the heaviest of all metal subgenres. Defining ‘heaviness’ in music requires the “combination of [...] sonic weight and sonic density” (Miller, 2018). It can be argued as a “material element of rock [music], something to be felt rather than cognized” (Miller, 2018), and

¹⁶ Heavy metal is typically a term specific to ‘classic’ metal (bands of the NWOBHM or power metal) and related to the imagery of leather, spikes, motorcycles, and dragons. Bands such as Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Dio, and Manowar fit this typical designation.

¹⁷ While metal is an ‘outsider’ music, there are bands that have more commercial success and more crossover appeal. These viable branches and bands manage to appeal to non-metal fans, whereas the more extreme bands typically only appeal to metal fans. Examples here would include successful thrash bands Metallica and Megadeth, New Wave of American Heavy Metal band Lamb of God, or metalcore group Avenged Sevenfold.

there are different aspects of the varied metal styles that constitute ‘heaviness’. For example, up-tempo metal may provide the sounds of brutality or bludgeoning, while slower songs may create an aura of physical heaviness and doom. While some argue that metal is “simply too diverse a genre to make any blanket claims” (jimjamjanx, 2019) regarding a single definition of heavy, there is the “density of loudness, the sensation of being physically overwhelmed by the music” (Miller, 2018). Death metal uses heavily distorted, low-tuned guitars that create “the particular timbre that low tension strings with a lot of saturation have” (McMurphy, 2019), combined with aggressive and complex drumming that often includes blast beats. Death metal is most defined – and most recognizable – by its low, guttural, frequently indecipherable vocals (called ‘death growls’ or ‘Cookie Monster’¹⁸ vocals) and hyper-violent imagery and lyrics that focus primarily on, unsurprisingly, death. Dying, rotting, the gruesome happenings of what takes place after death, along with the many ways we able to kill or be killed. Death metal, to non-listeners, often sounds like an aural bludgeoning, not unlike lyrics from Cannibal Corpse’s (1993) song “Hammer Smashed Face”: “Violence is now a way of life/ The sledge my tool of torture/ As it pounds down on your forehead.” It is a machine gun assault on the senses and it is a notoriously, and purposefully, difficult genre of music to listen to and appreciate, primarily because of the animalistic vocalizations. Outsiders accuse death metal bands of all sounding the same, yet fans can discern the differences and complexities of the work, as the “connoisseur exhibits knowledge and mastery of a subject” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 449). This includes knowing and hearing the unique differences between bands as well as appreciating the intense technicalities of the genre. Some of the most significant bands in the genre include Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, Death, Possessed, Entombed, and Deicide. These bands have been brutal since the beginning, not wavering from their mission to destroy the expected and brutalize everything they can.

¹⁸ As the name suggests, this refers to the large, blue, cookie-adoring character from *Sesame Street* who speaks in gargled, incomprehensible tones.

2.6.3 Black metal

Black metal differs from death metal in several ways. Its focus is not always on 'heaviness', but on a different kind of brutality and the creation of tense, cold, and frightening atmospheres. This is created by tremolo-picked guitars¹⁹ (instead of the heavy palm-muting²⁰ technique used in death metal), screeched vocals, rapid-fire drumming, and often purposefully low quality (lo-fi) recording techniques. This technique came as a response to the perception that death metal had started creating "overproduced recordings of music that were unduly complex" (Reyes, 2013, p. 242). Therefore, black metal swung in the opposite direction, using primitive recording techniques that created bleak, fuzzy recordings. Corpsepaint is frequently used as a part of the black metal stage presence, an physical appearance that brutalizes an "age of surface aesthetics, Botox, and extreme make-overs [...] the corpsepaint face is cracked, moribund, and sometimes bloodied illustration of faciality in its deranged, most exposed figuration" (Wallin, Podoshen, & Venkatesh, 2017, p. 165). Black metal became infamous during its second wave movement in Norway in the 1990s, primarily due to a series of church burnings and murders associated with bands of the genre²¹, more so than for the music itself. Influential bands in this genre include Mayhem, Darkthrone, Immortal, Burzum, Emperor, and Watain.

2.6.4 Grindcore and deathgrind

Metal suffers from a glut of subgenres, an over-indulgence in divisions and separations often focusing on subtle (if not minute) differences in musical styles, influences, or techniques,

¹⁹ Alternating upward and downward strokes on one string that allows for high-speed playing.

²⁰ The process of laying one's palm across the base of the strings in order to create a muted, heavier sound.

²¹ A key text that discussed these controversial events is Moynihan & Soderlind's *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*.

making the exploration of them all very difficult, convoluted, and nearly impossible. Two specific subgenres have been chosen for this research: grindcore and deathgrind.

Grindcore combines metal and hardcore punk to create fast, aggressive music that combines growled and shrieked vocals often focused on political or social issues (Riches, 2016). One of the innovating, and most well-known grindcore band is Napalm Death, who began their ongoing careers in the mid-1980s. This subgenre is known for its raucous live performances, active audience participation, and angry vocalizations. If death metal is blood and guts, and black metal is ice and terror, then grindcore is raised fists and sweat. Notable grindcore bands include Extreme Noise Terror and Pig Destroyer.

Deathgrind, as the name suggests, is a combination of death metal and grind, creating a very fast and very heavy hybridized genre. It is an intense and technical subgenre that has vocals that range from the deepest death metal growls to the most unnerving screams and everything in between. In some bands, such as Cattle Decapitation, the vocalist may employ a variety of ‘voices’ to get their message across. Cattle Decapitation uses death growls, clean vocals, and a shriek reminiscent of a tortured troll. Many deathgrind bands have lyrics that focus on political injustice (van Ouijen, 2015) and dystopian visions for the end of the world – or at least the end of humanity, hence their inclusion in this work. Among the more well-known bands in this subgenre are Misery Index, Cattle Decapitation, and Dying Fetus.

2.7 Creating Space

“You know my only pleasure/ Is to hear you cry/ I’d love to hear you cry/ I’d love to feel you
die.”

(Mercyful Fate, 1983)

The association with evil and the Devil has fueled endless controversy in heavy metal. Since the beginning days of the genre, they have been a perfect match made in hell. Metal music remains contentious, as “heavy metal has retained a controversial edge precisely because controversy has been so deeply ingrained in the genre itself” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 17). It has retained its sharp edge from the very beginning, still being used as a scapegoat for evil doings. There are many examples from this, from Marilyn Manson being blamed for the Columbine school shootings, to the metal fandom of the West Memphis Three, and court cases involving Judas Priest and Slayer. In his own defense, Manson spoke intelligently on the issue of scapegoating and fear mongering in Michael Moore’s controversial 2002 documentary, *Bowling for Columbine*. Through this, he was able to critique the media culture with the subversive tactic of an unanticipated intelligence and well-spoken argumentation. This controversy can be utilized to create a separation – a transgressive space – between the outside and the inside, allowing the room to critique culture. It is still considered to be morally abject and a genre of music that has the power to warp the minds of young people and drive them to Satan, suicide, or murder. While the Satanic Panic²² of the 1980’s and 1990’s has ended and the world has moved on to new religious and moral enemies, accusations of wrongdoing and moral corruption are still lobbed occasionally in the direction of extreme metal. A few of them are valid, the majority are based on hearsay. Fear is a tactic to create space for the critique which extreme metal focuses on the societal institutions and frameworks that deride it. Metal has long rejected the normative ‘good’ of society, brutalizing a path into the wilderness, a monster escaped from its laboratory. The extremity of the music itself is a blatant rejection of the tropes of music that is considered appealing or desirable, and the lyrics serve as an overt perversion of good taste. While the genre provides endless examples of vile and disturbing lyrics, there are those seen as having more corruptive potential than others. The lyrics contained within some Depressive

²² The Satanic Panic was a period of widespread fear and conspiracy where stories exploded in the media of Satanic cults, kidnappings, and ritual abuses.

Suicidal Black Metal (DSBM) and National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) are not merely transgressive, but incendiary and containing the potential for true corruption of the listener as they serve not only as hyperbolic and cartoonish violence, but calls actual calls to violent action. An example here is from the DSBM band Nocturnal Depression, whose 2007 song “Hear My Voice...Kill Yourself” taunts the listener towards suicide: “Everyone has the right to kill himself/ Families and friends are only excuses/ It’s stupid to say, I want to die/ When you don’t have the courage to kill yourself”. Even the ‘uniform’ of the metalhead works counter to the norms of society – in this case, the fashion norms and trends eschewed for black tee shirts, denim, and leather. This rejection reaches its apex with the disrespect, inversion, and brutalization of religious practice and symbolism. All of these rejections serve as space creators – they push away the dominant culture in order to leave a gap between interiority and exteriority, the insider and the outsider; an open space like no-man’s land on a battlefield, one that will eventually be filled with critique and subversion.

2.8 New Theory

“New Gods/ Arise!/ Your followers are weaponized.”

(Thy Art Is Murder, 2019)

Some research has established the idea of cultural critique and the role of extreme metal, it has not yet – to this point – been brought together under one theoretical umbrella, which is the hope of Luciferian Brutalism. This theory will provide an opportunity to “experiment with a new starting place for inquiry” (Jackson, 2017, p. 666). The development of this idea stems from the exercise of undertaking this methodless research and the realization that all theory used in metal studies comes from outside fields of inquiry. If metal, as a musical genre, puts so much effort into striving to distance itself from the mainstream ideas, then so should the theory and scholarship that studies it. The research undertaken in the writing of this work have led to the

disruption and defilement of existing theory, flaying it and removing the strips of flesh in order to press and form it into something new, a new beast to serve as a lens in which to observe the community of metal, but the world of the outside as well. Andrew Culp (2016) has noted that “true thought is rare, painful, and usually forced on us by the brutality of an event so terrible that it cannot be resolved without the difficulty of thought” (p. 10). I hope to further this idea by suggesting that the brutality he mentions is not a terrible thing, but something that allows an individual to move towards personal enlightenment and inhabitation of the spaces between the war machine (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) and the mainstream.

Luciferian Brutalism’s central idea is the role the individual plays as a part of a subversive collective. The metal community could be perceived as being a mass of clones, as they are often portrayed in documentary form²³: a group of beer-swilling long hairs brought together by crazy music to dress in black together and slam into one another while the singer barks at them from the stage. Luciferian Brutalism will focus on that individual who has gained insight and enlightenment – from a metaphorical Lucifer – and works to right themselves before entering the fray as a community of critique. To be effective at cultural critique, the enlightened individual must have a certainty of their place on the outside of society before understanding their role as a part of the transgressive collective. This will create a stronger group, filled with individuals certain of themselves due to their achievement of some kind of personal enlightenment – something that the group is unable to provide: an understanding of what is wrong with the world and what needs to be critiqued. From this point, the enlightened individual can seek out – or be drawn to – the style of music that reinforces the ideas that they already have. Enlightened Brutalism argues that metal reinforces the thoughts of intelligent outsiders, not indoctrinate them with their ideals. Metal, through the frame of Luciferian

²³ Some of the documentaries that have contributed to these perceptions include *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* (1986), *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years* (1988), *A Year and a Half in the Life of Metallica* (1992), or even Sam Dunn’s *Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey* (2005).

Brutalism, allows a space for individuals looking for space to embrace the rage they sense against a normative society they have chosen to reject. This space is created by the nomadic war machine that is extreme metal music. Luciferian Brutalism allows them to find the community that matches their ideas and explore them in subversive manners. This permits a more realistic opportunity to enact change, having sought out and found a group based on one's own ideas, instead of being recruited or falling subject to proselytizing.

The research will connect to these ideas and develop them over the course of the remaining sections.

2.9 The Violence of Thought

“They think our heads are in their hands/ But violent use brings violent plans./ Keep him tied it makes him well/ He's getting better, can't you tell?”

(Metallica, 1986b)

There are “monolithic and stifling” (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 3) limitations to be faced and dealt with when research is too focused on appeasing a specific methodology. The intentions are to resist these restrictions through destruction; its own form of creation. “Method relies on common sense and recognition to maintain its universality” (Jackson, 2017, p. 671), and this reliance on what ‘everybody knows’ can be obtrusive to new understandings: “methods will constrain” (St. Pierre, 2015, as cited in Guttorm, Hohti, & Paakkari, 2015, p. 18) . Common sense has its place in scholarship, providing a foundation to studies and new thought, but “common sense does not violate thought” (Jackson, 2017, p. 669), and it is based on “a real that never existed: (St. Pierre, 2015, as cited in Guttorm, et al., 2015, p. 17). It is in this violation – this violence, this chaos – that exciting new concepts may be uncovered in the areas of the unthought. New concepts must be considered, as “Deleuze and Guattari scold those who criticize

without creating as the plague of philosophy” (Culp, 2016, p. 9). If strategies and concepts “do not come from predetermined, stabilized forms of method” (Jackson, 2017, p. 667), then there is room to move, to consider, to be free, to think, to escape what “we’ve structured, formalized, and normalized [...] so that most studies look the same” (St. Pierre, 2015, as cited in Guttorm, et al., 2015, p. 16). This freedom is the brutalization of theory. If there is not a willingness to think, and “the less people take thought seriously, the more they think in conformity with what the State wants” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 44).

Like much of the extreme music that is the focus of this work, the goal is to create through violence. As Jackson (2017) iterates through the works of Deleuze, “violence is both a destruction and a creation. That is, to create something new, the dogmatic image of thought must be disrupted and destroyed. We do not try to understand, recognize, or resolve this force. Instead, we create” (p. 669). All in pursuit of understanding how extreme metal can create a space for cultural critique. In the development of new theory, there should be a “demonstration of habitual repetitions and sedimented, or inherited, ways of being” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 719). Further to this, the theory must be tested against metal music and other facets of popular culture, to see “how it functions *within* problems and opens them up to the new: *theory is responsive, not merely an application of a reflection*” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 721, original emphasis).

The hope for this concept, as surely is with all concepts, is that it is “experimental and creative and not [...] mere contemplation, reflection, and communication” (Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 643). There is a possibility that this theory may not function as I have intended it, that it will not be as brutal, or harsh, or cruel as intended, that the monster will take on a life of its own, but there is validity in attempting to create through destruction. Perhaps the brutalization is as important as the product that emerges from the rubble. This theory will take turns and engage in transformation as it develops. In the spirit of brutality, an open mind will be maintained for

its possible destinations as they begin to appear. Without beginning there can be no progress, and this serves as a starting point for my scholarship in this field. Gilles Deleuze noted that “something in the world forces us to think” (quoted in Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 644), and the intentions with this work is to take that thinking, that violent brutalization of what is out there, and to do what Jackson urges in her work: create.

Chapter 3: Metal as Subversion

3.1 Transgression, controversy, antagonism

“Confusing the sacred oath, I got mutation/ Antagonize the caustic host.”

(Suicidal Tendencies, 2000)

Heavy metal music is a wild genre. It is extreme; it is loud. All at once, it can be “freedom, rebellion and chaos” (Olson, 2017, p. 57), all rolled into a massive wall of sound, a screeched lyric, a heaving mosh pit. Since its earliest days, metal has been a “form of rebellion against the establishment” (Ferrero, 2016, p. 214), refusing to go quietly and refusing to be unheard. Extreme metal is a “genre of transgression” (Unger, 2016, p. 40), and its goal is to transgress the many ills that the members of this subculture perceive as extant. Metal has long held a preoccupation with inequality and injustice, stemming from its working class roots. Injustice and inequality exist everywhere, blatantly apparent to some, deeply embedded in societal institutions, and therefore invisible, for others in society. There are many things that have gone wrong in the world – not many would suggest that we live in a utopic society - and there are many ways in which to point out the flaws, problems, and injustices that are perceived in the structures of society. Consumers of heavy metal have chosen the most extreme style of music on the planet - music that is more aggressive and violent sounding than anything that has

ever come before it – to express their disdain, their disappointment, their disapproval. And they have chosen it because it allows them to create a space in their lives where they are able to execute their transgression and subversion, where they are able to go to battle against the ills that they see in the world. It has become the music and the place where individuals can go to become a part of a group, a community, and raise their horns together in protest of something wrong²⁴. Typical incorporation and existence in the normative structures of society does not always permit or enable subversion. In fact, it aims to counter it, to have members submit to power and authority structures: to render the self voiceless and muted. This removal of the sound a person can make, their ability to speak up, is a removal of their personal power. This stems from, and serves to further engrain, the social inequalities created through neoliberal consumerism and the societal structures that further these consumerist agendas. To regain – or attempt to regain – this strength, members of societal structures (such as the structures in place in their employment) require an avenue in which their expression can be pure and unfiltered. Metal offers this possibility for many through its “construction or expression of community [that] is enabled by an ability to articulate private but common desires into a shared public language” (Nilsson, 2009, p. 164).

Subversion of cultural norms is nothing new to heavy metal, and it is one of the many reasons why this has been a controversial genre since it began. Metal is a genre of music that “has a history of controversy in terms of its relationship to dominant ideas, institutions, and societal political moralities” (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, & Scott, 2016, p. 4), and this controversy has helped to move its agenda of subversion forwards. Metal, for the most part, has been able to “create a feeling of community and empowerment by establishing an antagonistic opposition to outsiders” (Nilsson, 2009, p. 163). Metal is more than a response to inequality, as it has always taken the outsider position in society and has been representative of the voice of

²⁴ As previously mentioned, this is not encompassing of all metal bands, subgenres, or live performances. Not all metal communities aim for transgression, or even for the feeling of community.

the working-class people since its beginning. Many metal musicians came from blue collar, working class upbringings and low socioeconomic status, cementing their authenticity and right to serve as the voice of the working person against the oppression of an enslaving system. The controversial nature of the music, the lyrics, the visual imagery, the live performances, the themes, and the sounds have brought the music to the forefront of the public consciousness at different times of its existence despite being a genre and lifestyle that exists out of the spotlight, far from the glare of recognition and attention. Metal is blamed for a gamut of ills in the world. Metal has ingested the criticism, brutalized it, and used it as the hateful fuel to push the music further into the extremes, further past the edges of taste and societal acceptance, beyond the fringes and margins of the mainstream, into its own dark territory. Here it can relish in its self-imposed Otherness²⁵. Controversy is a necessary part of heavy metal, it is an “integral part of heavy metal culture – almost to the point where it is in the nature of heavy metal to be controversial” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, & LeVine, 2011, p. 8). Perhaps metal without the controversy would simply be loud, heavy music.

Metal has never shied away from the controversies that it has created, facing them head on, embracing them, and using them to continue their quest of subversion. There is no hesitation in picking the scab of critique. In fact, the further controversies have been used in order to continue the pursuit of the extreme – of brutality – in the music, so that the boundaries can be pushed even further beyond what may have ever been expected, itself an act of rebellion and transgression of norms. The very existence of the genre is an offense to people: the fact that it exists, continues to exist, and in some dark areas, flourishes. This is demonstrated through the continued banning of bands and their tours in certain countries, the censorship of album art, consistent outrage by the religious right, and by retailers refusing to sell the music of certain

²⁵ Notions of Otherness, in psychoanalytical discourse, refers to the defining of majority and minority identities, that which ‘belong’ to what is considered and accepted as the normative, and that which exists outside of this view of normalcy, the ‘Other’.

bands. If extreme metal music continues to exist, it seems, it will continue to offend *someone*. The controversial elements are often “materialistic in the sense that ideas as such do not create controversy; it is people that create controversies” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine, 2011, p. 7), and it is against those people who brew controversy that many of the elements of metal are directed against. There are, however, many controversial elements of metal that venture beyond the superficial and evoke controversy at the level of signification, yet it remains the individuals that label a signifier as controversial, or as an affront to a set of normative beliefs. The ideas of metal subversion, left untouched by meddling outsiders, remain simply ideas. It is the people who stir the controversy, ironically providing reasons why metal needs to continue to attempt to create a space for its subversion and cultural critique. In this sense, the mainstream is fueling its own critique.

Metal is transgressive, therefore controversial. These are elements of the music that could remain insular and private to the genre, and metal is generally at ease with remaining quiet and private. It is the people that find the music abhorrent that end up dragging metal from its monstrous shadow world into the harsh societal light. It could remain the monstrous vampire of the music world, sentenced to the shadows forever, scurrying from the attacks of normative culture. But that would not be very metal. Metal fights back. It is the “transgressive aspects of metal [that] make it antagonistic in different social contexts” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine, 2011, p. 6); it is the occasional lashing out that keeps those who feel threatened by the existence of this music afraid of it, and helps those who love it, love it more. These are the moments when metal can demonstrate what it is fighting against, and how it manages to do so.

3.1.1 The grotesque and band names

There is not one singular focus in heavy metal’s disdain for the world; there are many objectionable aspects of the world and its institutional structure, so metal attempts to spread its

messages of repulsion across all institutions and issues. There are, however, some areas of focus that receive more attention than others, and it will be these areas that are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Metal perceives issues that exist in the world not simply as small problems that require a tweak to fix completely - they witness fundamental issues in the operation of our societies that are broken, possibly beyond repair. It is not the responsibility of the heavy metal musician to fix these problems, yet they have often taken up the mantle of responsibility without hesitation to point out these problems to their fans in hopes of sparking action among them. Bands are often able to expose the marginalization of the audience, whether these marginal aspects of their lives were prevalent before or not. It is the sensation of feeling marginalized in a group setting that can incite unity in the crowd. They are the individuals attempting to create a fervor amongst the many to promote change. These changes are not often in the form of revolution²⁶, but smaller ones. Examples here include the promotion of a vegetarian lifestyle by Cattle Decapitation, the call of unjust (typically anti-right and conservative) politics, or the cries of climate change by Gojira. If an audience member attends a metal show where they feel that they are marginalized members of society – perhaps due to socio-economic inequalities related to their working class status, and they take these ideals and views to the polls the next time there is an election, then change has been made. Subtle change, and the change to one person of many, but change, nonetheless. As viewed through Luciferian Brutalism, the bands act as the enlightened individuals who understand societal issues along with a comprehension of self that affords them the comfort and strength to stand in a position of responsibility. Here, they share their enlightenment with others, those who have found the spaces through their own journey. In this sense, there is a collision between two parties, each having arrived at a sense of social awareness

²⁶ Although this could change given the protests of May and June 2020 related to police brutality in the United States and the massive demonstrations for the Black Lives Matter movement. While many metal musicians have already pledged their solidarity and support to the movement, it is unseen at this point what long-term impact metal may have in this quest for social justice and equality.

through their own manner. This collision, this violence, affords the melding of ideas and a need for a space in which to exact these thoughts. It is not the collusion of war, or of opposition, but one of symmetry and of resolute determination to move forwards as a unified front, as a monster gaining strength from its increased assemblage of participation.

The genre of metal is one that is “transgressive and explores the abject” (Unger, 2016, p. 62), that which is “any experience that is related to a visceral feeling of disgust and repulsion” (Unger, 2016, p. 46). Many of the more critical bands in the genre view societal issues as grotesque, and they use extreme music to expose and discuss these repulsions. In dealing with the grotesque, many extreme metal bands use the grotesque themselves to provide a “critique of prevalent mores, values, and trends. As such, the “grotesque has been instrumental in the critique of politics, reason, and religion” (Unger, 2016, p. 41). The lyrics and lyrical themes of the extreme metal band Carcass will serve as an example here. Carcass writes songs detailing the most extreme of the bodily abject, discussing surgery and other anatomical events in visceral (and medically correct) detail. Some song titles that serves as examples here include “Crepitating Bowel Erosion”, “Feast on Dismembered Carnage”, “Genital Grinder”, and “Manifestation of Verrucose Urethra”. These lyrics could be viewed as a simple obsession with the gore of the human body, or they could be interpreted as offering critique on the deification of science. Or perhaps they are aimed at demonstrating how grotesque the human body can be, thusly critiquing the ideas of humanism and the placement of people atop the hierarchy of beings – how could something capable of being so disgusting be worthy of such praise?

Metal bands use the grotesque in a manner of other forms, including band names. A band name serves as the first interaction between musician and fan. It is an identifier and a signifier of the style of music and possible messaging of the music. The band name is the first opportunity to state subversion and a dedication to the appalling. They are meant to illicit fear and repulsion, and many of the names themselves exhibit an abject sensibility, or an inversion

of good taste. A list of extreme metal band names reads like a survey of splatter horror films or the exhibits in a museum of the grotesque: Infant Annihilator, Dying Fetus, Cannibal Corpse, Witch Vomit, Goatwhore, Aborted, Genocide Pact, Cattle Decapitation, Impaled Nazarene, Rotting Christ, and of course, Anal Cunt. The names of these bands simply *sound* subversive. While some bands come up with offensive names simply to provoke and disturb, or as a part of an infantile sense of humor, others use them as attention grabbers to the causes they wish to explore and expose. The names create space between those willing and unwilling to be a part of something, of this often-vile community. There are a select group of people who will purchase an album from a band called Skinless or Decapitated.

As a historically rebellious form of music²⁷, there is the expectation that metal is at least attempting to combat the “power, oppression and discrimination imposed upon it from the outside” (Scott, 2016, p. 22). If this is the rebellious music, the songs of the subversive, then it *should* be attempting to challenge these structures of power that exist as imposition in our lives. If it does not, then it is no longer rebellious music²⁸. This removal of the rebellious tendencies would leave it as a part of the mainstream instead of as something that works in opposition to it. This music, and those involved in creating it, is aware that there are prevailing societal structures that cannot, or should not, be destroyed in an anarchist fashion, but still must be challenged in hopes of providing a discursive model for resisting the orthodoxies of social existence. It is not to be ignored or accepted as unchangeable. Extreme metal pushes back against the imposition of cultural normativity and oppressive forces, whereas other areas may simply accept the rules and move forwards within them as a type of blind faith and supposition that the mainstream manner in doing things are, in fact, the correct ways of doing things. Metal

²⁷ Heavy metal and all its associated subgenres are frequently connected to teenaged rebellion and other stereotypically rebellious actions, such as motorcycle culture.

²⁸ The question can be posed here as to what modern, 21st century western rebellion looks like. This is a complex issue, especially with the packaged corporate rebellion seen in festivals such as Coachella, where rebellion is co-opted and overcoded by the excess of neo-liberal consumerism. This could be explored in further research but is outside of the scope of this thesis.

prides itself on being on the outside of these standards that have been created and set on their behalf without their opinions or insight and are hoping to brutalize them at every opportunity.

3.1.2 Religious inversion

As a manner of intense subversive focus, there has always been an “antagonism in heavy metal culture to Christianity” (Scott, 2014, p. 14), as metal is “completely preoccupied with religion and has been since its inception” (Olson, 2017, p. 49). This began with the satanic compositions of Coven on their 1969 album *Witchcraft Destroys Minds & Reaps Souls*, which included a thirteen-minute black mass as the final track and a controversial poster depicting a satanic ritual being enacted with Jinx Dawson, their nude lead vocalist. Religious critique, both in the form of metal musicians being outraged at religion, and religion being outraged at metal musicians²⁹, is a staple of this subcultural world, and one that will presumably remain a part of metal for the foreseeable future. Anti-religious messaging remains a focus among many modern (or established and ongoing) metal bands, including the likes of Watain, Gorgoroth, Thy Art Is Murder, and Marduk. Organized religion, specifically those of the Christian faiths, has demonstrated and perpetuated innumerable ills over the years. As Christianity took rise as a world religion during the era of Charlemagne, the forced conversions took shape as a brutal manner of individual suppression and limitation of freedoms that resulted in the deaths of thousands of those who resisted a new religion forced upon their lives. Endless religious wars have occurred in the name of Christianity, including the several bloody iterations of the Crusades, and the many substantial and prolonged wars between the religious factions in Europe following the schism of Catholicism and Protestantism. Blood has been spilled in the

²⁹ Religious conservatism has often used heavy metal as a scapegoat for societal ills, especially among youth. This culminated in Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) hearings of 1985 and the Satanic Panic of the 1980's and 1990's.

name of organized religion for thousands of years, and a perversion of morality and abuse of power has been ongoing. As a powerful institution that has served as a guide for the moral lives of all followers (and moral judges for non-followers), the institutions of the Christian denominations have embarked on a lengthy series of abuses, from the selling of Indulgences³⁰ that helped spark the Protestant Reformation, to the current cover-ups and controversies of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. For many, including many within the metal community, Christianity is a hypocritical system of belief, one that preaches peace and love but exhibits anything but. A part of the critique of religion within metal then “explores the contradictions, complications, ethical quandaries, and absurdities of Christian and philosophical metaphysics at the symbolic level” (Unger, 2019, p. 249). Much of the critique undertaken by metal exists on the symbolic level, as a frequent method of subversion related to the inversion or brutalization of Christian symbolism. The inverted cross serves as a common example, one of “black metal’s anti-icons. The antithesis of a revelation of light, it signifies an original blasphemy” (Shakespeare & Scott, 2015, p. 1). As the “demonic haunts the divine” (Shakespeare & Scott, 2015, p. 3), metal offers a “critique of underlying motivations and archaic significances embedded within the religious experience” (Unger, 2019, p. 249). Pushing symbolic brutalization further is the use of Satanic motifs³¹ in the music, the “most common mode of lyrical and aesthetic transgression in this genre” (Unger, 2019, p. 248). The metal community has often taken “great pleasure in stoking the fires of satanic conspiracy that were proliferating through mainstream [...] culture” (Olson, 2017, p. 52), and this promotion of fears has remained common through metal history. This has created a large opening of subversion for the critique of religion, as Satan has kept outsiders to the genre on the outside for decades.

³⁰ Indulgences were essentially free passes for people who sinned. They were able to purchase Indulgences that permitted them forgiveness for the sins they committed. This ploy was a massive generator of income for the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, despite its ignorance of many ethical or moral considerations.

³¹ A full exploration between metal and its use of Satan has been the focus of much of my previous research and scholarship but falls outside the scope of this paper. It is a complex relationship of subversion, belief, and authenticity that serves as an important part of understanding metal as a genre.

Metal, through its observations and personal experiences of religion, has taken on the role of moral critic towards religion: moral critics for the moral critics. For a long time, extreme metal served as one of the more outspoken – or at least visible – critics of organized religion. The more recent rise of atheism and modern Satanism, in terms of subversive, non-theistic groups such as The Satanic Temple, has removed some pressure from this music and its role as culture and religious watchdog.

Not all subgenres of metal take aim at religion as their focus for cultural critique (this will be explored further in the next section). Some reasons for subversion are individually focused, or stem from individual and personal experiences, as “the personal is political” (Evren, 2011, p. 6). They are worthy of critique simply if it has impacted the life of a person who witnesses it. The willingness to critique is important to fans of the music, one of the further reasons to enjoy the genre, as “its subversive rejection of mass culture that arguably has the most profound impact” (Scott, 2011, p. 229). Metal music has to be willing and able to reject culture as a whole, to make possible this space within a broad subversion to critique specific cultural issues such as religion, morality, or oppression.

3.1.3 Horror of performance

Beyond the names of the bands themselves and the use of inverse religious imagery for creating subversive and grotesque spaces, the musicians in extreme metal “discursively transgress conservative sensibilities by exposing, through lyrics³², album artwork, song titles, and publications, the darker aspects of the human condition such as death, violence, war, the occult, and suffering” (Riches, 2016, p. 128). To extreme metal musicians, these horrors of life are often the results of the abject caused by the terrible and broken institutions of our world. For

³² Lyrics, and specifically the unintelligibility of death metal lyrics, will receive more focus in a later chapter of the research.

example, war and death is frequently blamed on organized religion, while much of the suffering in the world can be blamed on the inequality created by the globalized system of capitalism. This darkness is demonstrated not only through the recorded music and imagery of the albums, but through the live show, which is “awash with ritual, symbolism and meaning” (Scott, 2014, p. 13). There are many examples of extreme performances in subversive metal shows. Many of these comprise of black metal acts but serve the purpose of creating a space – both literal and figurative – between the musicians and the mainstream. Gorgoroth and their shows have included live, nude humans latched to crucifixes while the band roared through their set, the stage lined in severed and rotting and vivisected animal heads. Watain engaged in several notorious concerts where audience members were drenched in rotting blood and animal rot, eliciting vomiting from the show attendees. There are several examples of self-mutilation being enacted on stage, the musicians inflicting pain upon themselves in response to the pain that they feel from the outside world. Their actions serve as a brutalized response to this pain, embodying the suffering thrust upon them and inflicting it on themselves, effectively removing the power to oppress and inflict pain from society. Metal is not always enacting transgression for the sake of shock in their performances; there is meaning in their actions and purpose behind their subversions. They are pointing out the hypocrisy of the world, attempting to reveal it through their subversive actions. These examples demonstrate a subversion of normative expectations in a live environment and in a performance. These bands push the boundaries of what is expected at a live musical performance by providing audiences with something that has never been seen before. One does not typically attend a concert expecting to be coated in fetid blood, something so grotesque that it induces physical illness. Expectations become ‘common’ sense, and bands continue their attempts to disrupt what they perceive as State apparatus. On stage self-mutilation runs counter to the instinct of self-protection, opening oneself to harm and pushing through both the fight and flight boundaries in order to provide shock and the subversion of elements of basic humanity.

There exist many subdivisions of the metal genre, and these often focus on different areas of transgression and critique. This is a style of music riddled with subgenre categorizations, subcategorizations, cross-categorizations, and over-coding. Metal loves to place its music into small, niche sections that have become hyper-specific. This causes confusion to outsiders, a purposeful act to maintain a safe distance from those not dedicated enough to fully engage with the minutiae of the genre. The ability to distinguish between these minute differences is a source of pride and subcultural capital for those in ‘the know’. Some of these subgenres are more political than others, and different subgenres – and therefore, different subcultures – often have a different focus in their targets for subversion. Within each subculture and subgenre there is “a solution to a specific set of circumstances, to particular problems and contradictions” (Reyes, 2013, p. 243) and each style of music goes about their methods in a slightly different manner. That which is problematic and worthy of cultural critique for one subgenre is not necessarily an issue for the next. This subversive specificity allows metal to cover a broad spectrum of social ills. To this end, I will examine the cultural critiques of four separate metal subgenres: grindcore, deathcore, black metal, and death metal.

3.2 Grindcore and the political

“For a political rally/ There was a man shouting/ Above all the others.”

(Queensrÿche, 1999)

Grindcore sounds violent. It is the aural equivalent of whiplash from a car wreck combined with the disenchanting fury of hardcore punk rock. Like its punk originators, grindcore has taken with it some of the political activism associated with that type of music, blending it together with the heaviness and heathen grunts of metal that made something

completely new. Within grindcore, “many musicians share a commitment to and affiliations with various political and ethical causes such as animal rights, environmental groups, and anti-war initiatives” (Riches, 2016, p. 125-126). This began with Napalm Death, a highly political and outspoken band that has maintained their transgressive stance through all their iterations and lineup changes. Napalm Death established the template for the blending of grindcore with political action and subversion. The political nature of grindcore has been surprisingly buoyed by support from media, as the genre has “probably received the most positive attention from music critics because of its fiercely political orientation” (Riches, 2016, p. 126), essentially removing a boundary of negativity in getting its political message out there. Positive reviews and critical support allows grindcore musicians to provide their message more often and more directly to the fans who desire it through frequent live performance, sharing their voices of subversion and permitting grindcore to “open up spaces for social critique and [as] as form of corporeal politics and pleasure for its fans” (Riches, 2016, p. 127).

The live grindcore show is an essential component of its politics, functioning as a political soapbox, an opportunity to stand in front of the masses, mic in hand, and share their ideas, discuss their perceptions of inequality, and develop the fury and outrage of the crowd. Consider the mosh pit as a metaphor: it begins as a group of individuals with independent thoughts and ideas, enjoying the music individually. The headbanging or other corporeal movements build and escalate with the music, bringing others into their enactments of transgression. This is the spread of ideas, of frustrations, of critiques. The individual becomes a group, the group grows, eventually becoming a heaving horde of bodies slamming into one another, sharing their distaste, and demonstrating their cultural despondency. This pit becomes an escape, and “escape is never more exciting than when it spills out into the streets, where trust in appearances, trust in words, trust in each other, and trust in the world all disintegrate in a mobile zone of indiscernibility” (Culp, 2016, p. 70). Grindcore enables the individual to become the horde, unifying its power. There are instances at a live show when the “social and political

issues [are] stressed more than the music” (Epp, 2019, p. 111), creating an intense atmosphere backed with a mistrust of power structures and institutions. It is within this intensity, in the most pit or at the bar, where fans can “voice working-class frustrations and speak out about the dire socio-economic conditions” (Riches, 2016, p. 132). It is in this place where the grindcore fan can exist outside of the normative structures of the world. Their support of grindcore bands enables the maintenance of the physical subversive space to continue to exist.

The irony within grindcore is that much of the genre’s aggression is “directed toward the machinations of late capitalism, and identities that are seen as complicit with dominant culture” (Riches, 2016, p. 126), yet this form of capitalism is needed in order to continue creating and performing this music that wishes to subvert it. Without capitalism, there would be no (or at least very few) musicians willing or able to tour and perform their songs on a nightly basis, and their messages of transgression would be quieted. Grindcore, whether they approve of its tenets or not, needs capitalism for two reasons: 1) to create and maintain the system in which bands are able to produce music and record albums before touring to support them, allowing the musicians to be paid in order to continue touring, and 2) to exist so that the musicians can attempt to subvert and change it with their music. In short, to give them something to complain about. This tricky dichotomy is one that metal and other rebellious forms of music have struggled with over time. Because of this, some see “anarchist or socialist revolution as the only suitable solution” (Riches, 2016, p. 126): the complete destruction of the power inequalities that exist.

Many of the ideas of classical anarchism focus on power and the structures of power. For anarchists, “the concentration of power is an invitation to abuse” (May, 1994, p. 11), and it is within these abuses that political grindcore bands wish to make a difference, by at least pointing out these imbalances and questioning them before a live audience. The power structures are everywhere, in every facet of life, and they are often in need of dire change as some people suffer

under the yoke of power structures. In music, record companies are controlled by a few massive conglomerates, able to control media output and the ebbs and flows of popular culture. This is a structure that often strangles the originality from artists, not to mention limiting the financial rewards they earn for their hard musical work. Too often, the highly sought-after record deal is nearly criminal in the demands and compromises it places on the artists and their share in the revenue³³. These bands could have a vision of a more equal partnership between musician and record labels, a more equal distribution of power while understanding that there must exist some form of power structure. Many bands have attempted to subvert the power of record companies through the development of independent labels, or by releasing music without the support of any label backing, but the power in the industry remains firmly entrenched with the major labels and their economic clout. The anarchist belief would be that “where there is no power, there can be no injustice” (May, 1994, p. 11), but from the more modern, and arguably realistic, poststructural anarchist view, there is an understanding that “changes of power at the top do not bring social transformation” (May, 1994, p. 11), and that to crave the annihilation of all power structures is simply an impossibility. There would need to be changes of power in all social areas, not only in one small aspect of the recording industry. Post-anarchy would view the need to create a new power structure as the current method does not function; however, it would desire to create and organize a new power structure that is more equitable and palatable for all involved, one that provides definite benefits to all. This is the alternative to classical anarchism.

Some foundational elements of Luciferian Brutalism (LB) can be traced back to in the grindcore scene. While LB is focused on the enlightenment of the self prior to the involvement of the collective, similar to the development of the mosh pit noted earlier, grindcore demonstrates how it is “excessive, testing and breaking boundaries, invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, while simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and

³³ A strong exploration of record contracts and the demands and restrictions placed on musicians can be found in *How Music Works* by David Byrne.

potency” (Riches, 2016, p. 128). It is within these spaces, this “formless oblivion” where the individual finds their strength; something that they can bring to the group, which in turn creates a collective with more might. A team full of strong players is, without debate, more powerful than a team full of weak players. LB posits that individual strength and self-discovery can be provided by the various metal scenes, creating a stronger –more unified in their subversion – group. The members of this collective are empowered by their acceptance and belonging to the Othered group of metal fans, a place where they are able to find their own voices and join in transgression with the group, calling out the ills of the world together in an insulated and protected place that they have created by listening to the music that they do.

3.3 Deathgrind and the decapitation of man

“Actions begged to be killed/ A sacrifice chosen/ Laughter at the sight of blood.”

(Dying Fetus, 2009)

Deathgrind is a true example of a “bricolage, or a type of hybridization of different musical styles and genres” (Gibson, 2019, p. 194). The extreme subgenre mixes and mashes several influences, brutalizing the theory of the musical styling that came before it in order to create something gruesome and terrifying, a sound and aural feeling of excess and punishing brutality. If “excess is the stuff of metal” (Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007, p. 59), then deathgrind may be the most metal subgenre out there. In many ways it has passed the limits of the extreme and come back around to lap them.

Deathgrind veers from the political affiliations and critiques embraced by grindcore and focuses more specifically on the ills that humans have created, with a strong “resistance to war and injustice” (Scott, 2016, p. 24). Deathgrind also takes issue with the human creation of

corrupt government structures, the Anthropocene, climate change, and the anthropocentric destruction of the environment for capitalist purposes and human usage.

Some bands, such as Cattle Decapitation³⁴, focus on a post-humanist inversion to create an alternate hierarchy of beings, “the inversion of power between man and animal” (van Ooijen, 2015, p. 73), or looking at “social upheaval in a comic mode, suggesting the possibility of a new order which may at first seem absurd, yet, at second thought, shockingly feasible” (van Ooijen, 2015, p. 74). Cattle Decapitation demonstrate and explore the cruelty that man inflicts on the environment by reversing these depictions of grotesque violence – both in their lyrics and on their album covers – and having them occur to man, perpetuated by animals and the environment. This helps to expose the ills created by humans. The lyrical and visual depictions of extreme violence allow us to see the brutality of human (and masculine) methods by making “explicit how the apotheosis of dominant masculine sexuality is expressed in the raping, dismembering, cooking, and eating of feminized, animalized flesh” (van Ooijen, 2015, p. 76). The lyrics can be shocking, but there is a truth in them that is subversive in its exposure of these brutal realities: they are simply realities that we would rather not think about, hear about, or discuss. They are the truths we wish were untruths, the human darkness that should remain in the darkness. Cattle Decapitation exposes our ills and our objectionable behaviors, laying out there an watching us ironically recoil in horror. Deathgrind has created a “chaotic violence where everything and all relations must be dissected, switched around and reassembled in [...] new and eerie combinations” (van Ooijen, 2015, p. 77). This is true for the music itself, as well as the politicized viewpoints of the bands of this genre. For Cattle Decapitation, this new order, or new assemblage in which everything dies under the reign of man, may become one where

³⁴ Cattle Decapitation is one of the more popular deathgrind artists. They were formed in 1996 and hail from San Diego, California. Their most recent album, 2019’s *Death Atlas* has a thematic focus on our entrance into the Anthropocene and the irreversible damage that humans have caused to the Earth.

animals are the dominant species, inflicting the abuses on humans that humans inflicted upon them in our current hierarchy.

Typical lyrics in the extreme metal genres focus on the violence humans commit against humans³⁵ and the innumerable ways in which one person can inflict pain upon another. Deathgrind often flips the script, focusing on animals abusing humans, or the environment fighting back against the capitalist violence it has faced, or a world free of corrupt human government control: the “violence against man is not fuelled by nihilism but rather by the foreboding suspicion that only the killing of man may end human tyranny” (van Ooijen, 2015, p. 79). The musicians here portray an image of acceptance that humanity is the great scar on the planet. This could be perceived as a glib appreciation of human life, or it could be viewed as a harsh warning that the planet cares little for our existences and will attempt to restore its own balances. They are exposing our issues and are critiquing the way we operate on this earth. The music of deathgrind is suggesting that perhaps there is a “potential for obliterating violence by means of violence” (van Ooijen, 2015, p. 85). This can be observed and understood as a metaphorical violence, in this case. Instead of further abuses, this may signify the brutalization of the way things had previously been done.

Deathgrind is clear in its subversion, and it makes space for this transgression and cultural critique through its explicit lyrical content and the imagery that it uses. The subgenre does not pull any punches, providing listeners a clear understanding of the ills that they perceive. The lyrics of deathgrind are not typically hidden through veils of metaphor, instead providing a visceral violence for the listener to become engaged in. This space of honesty and clarity reveals that the cultural critique that they are exploring is clear and easy to understand for all. The images of the bull as a butcher of human flesh on the cover of Cattle Decapitation’s *Karma.Bloody.Karma* serves as an example. It is very clear as to their intentions to explore a

³⁵ Refer to any lyrics by death metal veterans Cannibal Corpse as an example.

world in which humans are not at the top of the food chain, providing an inversion of the sacrificial spectacle. Within this space, the horrors have been exposed and are there for all to witness; here they can share repulsion and voice their desires for change. They can rub the noses of the mainstream in the mess they have made.

3.4 Black metal and the absence of light

“Glance into the blackness hidden beneath your surface/ And enjoy your suffering.”

(Dimmu Borgir, 2001)

Black metal is the most frequently studied of metal subgenres. Since the advent of Second Wave Norwegian Black Metal³⁶, there has been a scholarly fascination with this haunting music from Scandinavia: where it came from and what it was, what it currently is, what it could be, and why fans have been drawn to a style of music that could be more readily described by its absence rather than its presence. Black metal is a subgenre that is “indifferent to human expectations” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 29), which allows for its “constant stylistic evolution, [where] they do not always agree on the actual direction it is taking” (Ferrero, 2016, p. 224). It can be difficult to pinpoint black metal to a single definition, to something that it is, as it can be many things, all at the same time. Black metal could be perceived as a genre that is continually evolving, and continually becoming something different – perhaps something more – than what it already is. This subgenre has itself spawned myriad of subgenres below it, from Cascadian

³⁶ First Wave Black Metal includes the progenitors of the genre, including Venom, Bathory, and Hellhammer. They were heavily influential to the Second Wave bands that exploded in fame and notoriety in the 1990’s with connections to a series of violent crimes and church burnings. Second wave bands include Mayhem, Emperor, Enslaved, and Burzum.

Black Metal³⁷ to Black n' Roll³⁸ and everything in between, including many symphonic elements. There is ongoing debate – among scholars, fans, and the musicians themselves – as to what *true* black metal is, what specific tenets are to be strictly followed, and which can be broken. Black metal has, perhaps surprisingly, become one of the most open and adaptable styles of metal. It is continually brutalizing its own rules, which, in turn, is perhaps the most metal thing possible. It is a genre born out of defiance, and it continues that tradition. It may seem that black metal has truly accepted the cliché idea of ‘the only rule is that there are no rules’. This comes with its own set of tensions however, as there are those that expect the genre to adhere to a certain set of rules and regulations. While this may encourage music that is more authentic to the origins of the genre, it is counter to the desire of black metal to explore all the unexplored boundaries in the pursuit of the brutal. This could help in explaining how bands such as Wardruna or Myrkur are still considered to be black metal by some, even though they have moved beyond all traditional tenets and identifiers of the genre³⁹.

The sounds of black metal, while diverse in its subgenre divisions, feature some similarities, including “high-pitched screaming vocals, full chord progressions and a droning, buzzing sound resulting from the guitar technique of buzz picking [...] coupled with the drumming technique of the blast-beat” (Ferrero, 2016, p. 210). It is a sound that is “bleak, because of the almost absent low frequencies reproduced on the recordings” (St. Laurent, 2019, p. 380), and the pursuit of ‘heaviness’ in the genre has been “divorced somewhat from its

³⁷ A small subgenre which focuses on black metal bands hailing from the Pacific Northwest in the United States. The bands frequently have strong connections to nature and atmospheric sounds feature prominently in their music. An example of a Cascadian Black Metal band is Wolves in the Throne Room.

³⁸ This subgenre is a mixture of black metal with classic rock grooves, creating a lighter sound with catchier hooks than typical black metal. Examples of black n' roll bands include Midnight and Abbath. The style of music created by Motorhead could be viewed as significant to this subgenre.

³⁹ Both Wardruna and Myrkur have embraced Norse folklore in their music and their sounds are those of ancient and traditional folk music more than anything related to black metal. Yet, they often remain lumped into this category based on their previous work or the black metal history of the group. Einar Selvik, the primary composed for Wardruna, was the former drummer for Gorgoroth and Gaahl (also formerly of Gorgoroth and currently of Gaahl's Wyrð) spent time as a Wardruna vocalist.

associations with low frequencies and has instead become associated with harshness and timbral density” (Reyes, 2013, p. 242). Black metal does not pursue heaviness in the same manner as other metal genres - specifically death metal - which is continually looking for lower sounds to provide a ‘weight’ to the music. Black metal has gone the other way, the treble to death metal’s bass. This is a notoriously difficult genre of music to listen to, and many aspects of black metal are meant to keep it elusive, troublesome, and exclusive. This begins with the nearly unreadable band logos (this technique is also used in death metal and other sections of extreme metal) that are meant to keep outsiders on the outside. The name of the band is like a secret that only some are deemed privileged enough to know. Black metal has managed to create sounds that represent the “ontological absence of good” (Wallin, Podoshen, & Venkatesh, 2017, p. 160), demonstrating that often, “our hatred propels us” (Culp, 2016, p. 64). The music is the transgression of the ‘good’; it runs opposite of the pursuit of happiness that has become a near-universal societal goal. The sonic evil created in the music is often enough to create space from the mainstream, as black metal purposefully, more than any other genre, attempts to subvert that which is considered normal.

The bleakness of this music provides it the opportunity to incorporate repeating themes and focus on its primary cultural critiques. The music of black metal “usually harnesses themes of resistance and rejection” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 27), while also bringing forth thematic “experiences of pain and suffering” (Morris, 2015, p. 293). This “reality of desolation, despair, and even death” (Wallin, et al., 2017, p. 161) represents a “response to oppression, where the metaphors of the underground, darkness and hell reflect such a culture in the dark” (Scott, 2007, p. 209). Darkness could both represent the darkness of the music, or the literal darkness experienced by Scandinavian bands whose northern latitudes blanket them in darkness during the long winter months. This literal dark is a key contributor to the bleak sounds in the music, along with the stark and barren landscapes of the north. Many of the sentiments stemming from black metal are reactionary to oppression and other perceived injustices, such as (for

Scandinavian bands) an “extreme reaction against mainstream European culture” (Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007, p. 68). This includes religious culture and the spread of Christianity, along with the views of some that Scandinavia is distant from the rest of Europe. This stems from historical associations to Viking culture, the geographic distance from parts of Western European centers that create a more isolated existence, and the different life and culture associated with such northern areas of the world.

A part of the status quo that serves as the primary focus for black metal subversion and critique is Christianity, as “black metal often expresses an opposition to religion, but this rejection extends to all forms of transcendental ideology that claims to supersede the limitations of subjectivity” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 32). In this music, there is a “direct ideological tension with the State Church, bourgeoisie ideals, and the often sheepish, trend-following consumer” (Wallin, et al., 2017, p. 169). Black metal tends to take issue with all aspects of normative culture, often demonstrating a general disdain for life itself. Religious rejection and Satanism were hallmarks of the Second Wave of Black Metal bands, and their music revealed an “extreme and obsessive loathing of Christianity” (Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007, p. 63) because “Christianity represents [a] control and despotism” (Olson, 2017, p. 58) that was deemed unacceptable. The rationale behind this religious rejection harkens back to the age of the Vikings when Christianity was spreading across Europe and many defeated peoples were subjected to forced conversions. There remains a “certain tendency against Christianity as the destroyer of the Heathen religions in Northern Europe” (Van Helden, 2010, p. 36), and that black metal is a starting point to return to the heathen and polytheistic belief systems in place before the arrival of Christianity, when the people were free to believe in whichever gods they wanted. Some noted black metal bands, such as late-era Bathory or mid-career Enslaved, shifted

their musical inspiration to the ancient folklore of the Vikings⁴⁰. The work of these bands helped to create the Viking metal movement. Christianity is viewed as oppressive and suppressive of individual choice and liberty. Looking back to the era of the Vikings allows black metal to “[recall] the past in a nostalgic way, also [allowing] them to severely criticize the society in which they are living” (St. Laurent, 2019, p. 395) by noting its lack of individual freedoms compared to the open and varied spirituality of the Viking era. They perceive the “life of their ancestors having been infinitely simpler, less stressful and more authentic” (St. Laurent, 2019, p. 395).

Similar to how grindcore needs the music industry in order to have something to critique, black metal, despite its desire to destroy the institution of the Church, is “quite dependent on the Christian legacy for its imagery and as a target against which to rebel” (Scott, 2007, p. 209), providing reason for the “aesthetics of transgression and darkness” (Unger, 2019, 245) that draw on “dark, nihilistic, anti-Christian, pagan, and anti-modern themes” (Morris, 2015, p. 292). Despite the desire to destroy the Church, as demonstrated through the actions of burning churches in Northern Europe in the 1990s, black metal requires the institution to remain to continue to critique it. If it were gone, then so would vanish the primary enemy of the music, possibly leaving it confused and directionless while lacking a common enemy. Post-anarchism demonstrates an understanding of this dichotomy, with one offensive system needing another to survive. The organized system of the Church will not be demolished by black metal music; however, it will continue to be critiqued as an institution that is corrupt and evil, one that creates more harm than good in the eyes of those who oppose it. Many bands will continue to promote the values of Satanism as a contrary measure to Church power, despite the tensions that arise over the use of Satan as being an inversion that in fact reinforces the doctrine of Christianity, because no matter “how evil Satan gets, He still plays by – and validates –

⁴⁰ This is a common theme in Viking metal, a branch of heavy metal that can incorporate several genres, such as black, death, or power metal, combined with lyrics harkening back to the days of Odin and Thor and glorious warrior lives of the Vikings. The currently most well-known Viking metal band is Amon Amarth.

Christianity's rules" (Gardenour-Walter, 2015, p. 20). Black metal will remain an "antagonistic force aimed at the symbolic apparatus" (Wallin, et al., 2017, p. 169) of the Church as long as it remains an institution that promotes power differentials, and if these power differentials are still viewed as an invitation to an abuse of that power.

Black metal creates space for these religious critiques using their bleak, nihilistic music, and their blood-soaked imagery. A high proportion of black metal musicians wear corpse paint, creating the illusion of death that makes the space to critique life itself and the light that it brings. Perhaps there is no greater visual subversion to life itself than attempting to look devoid of life, of light. The shock of their appearances make room for religious critique as it creates an enormous gap between their rejection of belief and those who believe. They fill this gap with subversion.

Nathan Snaza (2016) argues that black metal is rebelling against more than injustice, it is a rebellion against the light:

The [...] rebellion against the light is, then, not an expression of pure human freedom but of absolute obedience to *what is not real*, to what is not human, and to what carries him toward an altogether different world that will come into being after this one burns down. (p. 86)

This obedience to non-humanity creates a unique level of subversion for black metal musicians and fans alike. Black metal does not always engage in subversion directly against an object or a social ill such as grindcore or deathgrind, but against something beyond the perils of society. Against our very human-ness. It is pursuant to the unnatural, the darkness, and it "affects the listener, producing a 'noise' that makes it difficult to sustain an enlightened self while listening" (Snaza, 2016, p. 82). The darkness of the music takes us along with it, through the light and into the absence of it; it is a "liturgy of opposition, articulating the transcending of human limitations" (Scott, 2014, p. 20). This space – this blackness – is where subversive thought roams free and where cultural critique transpires. The pursuit of the blackness

demonstrates the failure of the light to provide the recognition of self and can be accomplished. Here, the “bleak form of aesthetics has been theorized as engaging with the abject as a mode of criticizing the status quo” (Unger, 2019, p. 246). It is an enlightenment filtered through an endarkenment: a loss of self to find placement among a group or community.

Black metal exhibits a volatile relationship with life, and “disgust with humanity and reveals the misery that one finds when the falseness of our lives is revealed” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 32). It is through this hatred of humanity that this genre of music can be subversive and critical of the world. Black metal can be riddled with the hatred of many things, and within this hatred, within this darkness, there is a source for personal enlightenment: the realization of the nihilism of the world, the embracing of the darkness. While there may be a sense of counter-intuition with its enlightenment related directly to the pursuit of darkness, it remains a discovery, an understanding. It is a furthering of knowledge of the functionality of the world and our place within it. In the Luciferian tradition, this learning is the light that was brought. There was no promise that it would only be positive things, and black metal not only accepts this, but embraces it. From this point, there is the potential and the opportunity to critique society, having undergone the realization of its ills: if it means nothing, then it is simple to critique it in hopes it can become *something*. The brutalization of the light is a key tenet of this genre of music, endarkening its listeners to an absence of good.

The personal enlightenment related to black metal is not an enlightenment at all, as it is “responsive to local religious and political oppression while maintaining a disposition toward rebellion and individual agency” (Wallin, et al., 2019, p. 168). This personal agency is significant to the formation of Luciferian Brutalism and black metal can easily be viewed as a music through this lens. There is a willingness to destroy that serves as a personal liberation, creating the agency that is required, through the lens of LB, to achieve a state where group subversion is possible.

3.5 Death metal and the absence of life

“Prepare for the coming mass genocide/ Death becomes welcome, the pinnacle of bedlam.”

(Suffocation, 2013)

Grindcore, deathgrind, and black metal all have specific societal issues that they battle: political injustice, inhumanity, religion. Death metal, on the other hand, is fighting against life itself. In constant pursuit for the heaviest sounds, it is “the music of hell” (Brackett, 2008, p. 280), using “gore and horror-inflected lyrics combined with religion” (Unger, 2019, p. 247) to create the ultimate brutality in music. The sonic attack of death metal uses “deliberately offensive sonic landscapes, lyrical content, and physical imagery [that are] generated from within, not without” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, & LeVine, 2011, p. 10). There is a sense of personal exploration of the gruesome developed in this music that is provided to the audience in an unfiltered assault on the senses. Members of the death metal scene continually push themselves to be harsher, more brutal, viler, and more grotesque in a competition of the abject. This competition runs counter to the popular method of being a musician in attempt to gain fame; death metal attempts to offend and ostracize as many as (in)humanly possible. The sounds and words that are produced create soul-crushingly heavy music that has occasionally caught the attention of the mainstream⁴¹ due to its highly offensive, almost hilariously anti-mainstream content.

This genre, like all genres of metal, has undergone changes, transformations, and maturations over its lifetime. Classic death metal “relied often on a relatively crude revulsion to religion as mass delusion” (Unger, 2019, p. 244), while modern versions of the genre often focus on “the fact that we die is the most important fact about us” (May, 2009, p. 4) and that “death is

⁴¹ The most famous brush with the mainstream came via a cameo appearance by Cannibal Corpse performing “Hammer Smashed Face” in a scene of the 1994 comedy *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*.

always possible” (May, 2009, p. 4). This is a disquieting inevitability that most people would simply prefer to ignore. Death is perhaps the most uncomfortable topic, as there is a near-universal struggle of understanding and acceptance. Death metal takes pride in outlining as many different variations of these possible deaths – or ways that someone can be killed - that may transpire and goes to great lengths to describe them graphically. Modern death metal has also “become more political, focusing on current events rather than on traditional metal matters like fantasy, the occult, or the supernatural⁴²” (Reyes, 2013, p. 242). This has aided in bringing death metal into the realm of cultural critics, providing voice and substance behind their brutalization of the beautiful.

As the name implies, death metal confronts death head on. This confrontation is intimidating for the mainstream, as death is an uncomfortable topic. A genre that “incessantly explores the dark side of humanity will always [...] be provocative to some sections of society, particularly in more conservative religious cultures” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 15) who spend much of their time and doctrine in pursuit of immortality, the chance for a life after death⁴³. This is understandable considering the role that death plays in our lives: it is literally the end of life, and it is something that is unavoidable for everybody, something that we will all experience at any given time. Death is the great equalizer among humans. Being alive is the core of our existences. “How then, can we confront death without succumbing to the fear it inspires in us” (May, 2009, p. 24), and how are death metal bands able to so casually discuss and confront that which is the most terrifying thing for the majority of people? The fascination and willingness to explore death is itself an action of transgression. They are attempting to subvert the very thing that is the end of us all; this “fascination with death and the abject becomes an important motif

⁴² These themes tend to fall into the realm of classic Heavy Metal or Power Metal and bands like Iron Maiden and Manowar.

⁴³ While outside of the focus of this research, the concepts of literal and symbolic immortality serve as central components of Terror Management Theory (TMT). There are many opportunities outside of this research to forge connections between TMT and extreme metal.

for expressing a form of transgression as a virulent attack on the status quo, humanist forms of reason, normative forms of community and as an affront to decency” (Unger, 2019, p. 248). The music is a rebellion of how we are intended to value life above all else, to see it as a supernatural gift to be treated in the most respectable and precious manner. So, how are we able to listen to music that not only discusses and mentions death, but celebrates it, reveres it, and fantasizes about it? The confrontation with death enables the removal of its power, that “by putting themselves in death’s way they seek to master their own deaths: not by avoiding it, but precisely the opposite – by courting it” (May, 2009, p. 34). If there is no fear of death, then there is no power contained in its possibility. In a sense, this dance with death could provide an enlightened view of life, and a way to live it more fully and less fearfully once concerns for the end are alleviated. While the status quo – mainstream culture – spends the majority of their time avoiding death, death metallers are “dwelling on it [which] can be a way of trying to control it” (May, 2009, p. 35). They are taking an alternate route in the way they are attempting to subvert death. This is transgressive as it is running counter to what has been societally created sets of norms and expectations for the ways in which we are supposed to deal with death.

Questions of death are not treated softly in this style of music. There is no grace or euphemism. There is an employment of the grotesque and the obscene in the lyrics and imagery that is used as a direct confrontation of death. The gruesome creates a “violent reaction in the expulsion of the abject [that] is reflective of the fear that it evokes in people” (Unger, 2016, p. 46). Those who choose to listen to this music are the ones who are not afraid of facing their fears, as death metal itself is the space that is created to eliminate the sense of foreboding that death has over life. Facing death allows us to move forward, and “extreme metal is always a movement against the fixation of life within doctrine and reason” (Unger, 2016, p. 52). This annihilation of the norms of death and thoughts of death represents a veering to the outside of normative reasoning, and against the teachings of society and religion when confronting these

issues. Fixation or stagnation is equal to death, a non-movement and non-growth of the person and the individual.

Death has the possibility to make life whole “by ensuring that nothing is left over of that life” (May, 2009, p. 26). Death is the completion, and without completion, there is no action. The violence of death outlined in this extreme music, the brutal collision of life and its ending, demonstrates a “violence [that] is both a destruction and a creation. [...] To create something new, the dogmatic image of thought must be disrupted and destroyed” (Jackson, 2017, p. 669). The action here is thought, guiding people towards an enlightenment. The violent encounter with death created in death metal urges an openness to it that allows for creation and thinking (Jackson, 2017, p. 670). Death metal is celebrating this ending instead of fearing and avoiding it, creating a sense of personal liberation and enlightenment through created thought, free from the chains of inevitability. Within that freedom is subversion as we are *supposed* to be afraid. The freedom from fear allows us to be strong within ourselves, as individuals who are prepared to contribute to a greater cause, much akin to the notion of Luciferian Brutalism.

Chapter 4: Dark Space

4.1 The outside versus the inside

“Riots in the burning street/ Crystal nights outside/ Brutal music in the night, enough to make
you cry.”

(Motörhead, 1993)

The different subgenres of metal have near-individualized foci of transgression, each with their own abject aspect of society that requires cultural critique. This transgressive scope is a demonstration of “extreme metal as that which pursues all manner of transgression” (Reyes,

2013, p. 243), not limiting itself to one particular focus across the genre: there are many ills, and extreme metal has demonstrated a willingness to confront them all. Despite being “dismissed as ‘anti-taste’ in the mainstream music press” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 12), metal is a genre that is “seen to express the collective interest or point of view of a community” (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, p. 33). Those on the outside may not like it, or may not comprehend its function, but within the world of metal, there can exist a feeling of community that boasts shared interests and worldviews. Frequently, these interests transfer across metal subgenres and subcultures, as they are not working completely independently from the whole, but as a part of a larger collective that holds all the pieces together. They are unified under the banner of metal, first and foremost. Further divisions become secondary. Critics of metal could argue that the factions and divisions within the overarching genre weaken it and its message, but metal is a rebellious music; therefore, it “should be rebellious, even within its own genre” (Scott, 2016, p. 31). Were metal required to follow strict requirements within its own existence and not permitted space to experiment and explore, it would lack credibility when attempting to critique the culture at large. Metal would not be able to critique the impositions against individuality created by mainstream conformity if it were guilty of doing the same. With this, there is a complex relationship within metal and the adherence to rules and expectations and its guidelines of authenticity. However, these rules do not impose on its transgression. Space to transgress the mainstream is available because the genre is even willing to transgress itself.

Within the confines of its own identity structures, metal is willing to be experimental with its genres. There is bending and brutalizing the rules of identity and genre adherence, which allows a space for self-critique within the metal world in the pursuit of improvement and in the endless search for the brutal. While metal is often perceived in a negative light –often painting itself in this fashion in order to maintain a dissenting space – there are positives that come from the process of experimentation and genre defilement: “Experimentation, unlike transgression, seeks positive alternatives rather than revolt” (May, 1994, p. 13). This

experimentation is a look within the community of metal, where changes are sought at the foundation of that community and its membership - a focus on the self - whereas transgression is a view towards the exterior, the culture as a whole in which transgression and significant cultural change needs to take place. This outlines the progression of metal cultural critique from the individual phase of self-analysis and desire for improvement to the experimentation that leads to transgressive critique of the larger cultural structure.

Metal is a type of “*amusic* and that [...] is at the heart of its creative force and its rebellious form” (Scott, 2016, p. 21): it is a form of music unconcerned with the criticisms from the outside, accepting and often encouraging them, using outside criticisms as a fuel for their own responsive critique. It has a “distinctive commitment to ‘transgressive’ themes” and is willing to engage in the practice of “boundary crossing [...], questioning and breaking taboos [...], and questioning established values” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 14) through the “aesthetic experience of defilement” (Unger, 2016, p. 60). An example of these values that are disfigured would be the basic understanding that music is traditionally meant to be a collection of beautiful sounds to pursue happiness and pleasure. These continual challenges from the spaces created by the metal world help to “garner a sense of collective social action” (Riches, 2016, p. 134) through an appreciation and enjoyment of the music that “[transgresses] the boundaries of acceptable music, of acceptable discourse, [and] of acceptable practice” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 14). Even the variety of subgenres in metal demonstrates a form of resistance: the subtle differences between the music nudges open spaces for thought and subversion, while altering considerations of what is normal or expected, and brutalizing adherence to the rules that have been set previously. According to Blackman (2005), resistance is more than viewing a “struggle within a dominant hegemonic culture; [...] resistance is individually located in the most minute subtleties” (p. 18). Challenging and resisting (whether that resistance is towards the “outside” – the mainstream –

or focused inwardly) allows for personal liberation in true Luciferian⁴⁴ fashion. This liberation requires “a reordering of morality centered on the self and the concomitant rejection of social codes and values” (Gardenour-Walter, 2015, p. 21). The concept of morality is not changed or obliterated, simply shuffled to focus on the individual. This creates individuality within a collective, in this case a genre, or collective, that is “established through similarity” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 27). Strength of the individual allows for strength in the group, one that is prepared to challenge and brutalize.

This is not to indicate that metal is irrefutably positive, a genre of music fighting the good fight against the evils of the world. There are many evils that exist within the genre and subgenres of extreme music. An example is the existence of National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM), a neo-fascist subgenre of white supremacist Nazi sympathizing bands. This deplorable genre was spearheaded by the ideas of the notorious Varg Vikernes of Burzum and the German band Absurd. Often, the strength of a movement is not used to improve injustice, but to create it and perpetuate it, and extreme metal music is no exception to this.

4.1.1 Niche of disdain

Participating in a subculture suggests that a person can be “separate and unlike the majority of the population” (Blackman, 2005, p. 2), which is exactly what metal strives to be. Within this grouping of the “unlike”, there is space being created away from the expectations of the mainstream, of the majority; it is a distinct separation between the inside and the outside. Subculture, as a concept, is concerned “with agency and action belonging to a subset of social group that is distinct from but related to the dominant culture” (Blackman, 2005, p. 2). Those

⁴⁴ This is about the original Judeo-Christian story of Lucifer, the high-ranking angel who was banished from heaven. This Luciferian fashion refers to the concept and willingness to question and challenge even the highest of authorities regardless of the consequences. Lucifer as the rebellious angel and provider of free thought and enlightenment will remain a focus in this work.

engaged in the culture choose to demonstrate their agency through the expression of their disdain and their critique of normative Western popular culture. Although metal frequently believes it has nothing in common with the mainstream culture, it is still music – a commodity that is produced, bought, and sold. It is not something that is ‘lesser than’, but something that is simply a division, or offshoot, or a larger whole. Metal, as a subculture from mainstream music, and the many subgenres within metal, is a “liberated environment in which [music] creates a space for community and art” (Scott, 2011, p. 224) for those whom metal is for: “a group of people that transcends other, pre-existing cultural and national boundaries” (Guibert & Guibert, 2016, p. 169); those for whom metal culture becomes their primary identifier. Metalheads desire to exist apart from its conformist stylings, hoping to tread the line of being both inside and outside the main culture simultaneously.

Liberation serves as a “release from repression” (May, 1994, p. 44) and is able to create collective action – metal shows and performances – where fans are able to “generate forms of collective action that enables [...] people to either conform or take part in resistance towards authority” (Blackman, 2005, p. 7). This action is the space, the niche, from where metal fans can express their disdain to the dominant normative culture. Within these spaces, the performance of extreme metal can give voice to more than the vocalist of the band: it gives “dissenting voices [...] legitimacy, visibility, and authority” (Riches, 2016, p. 136). The gathering of hundreds, or thousands of metalheads to celebrate their music creates a physical “cultural space in which [...] transgression could [...] be explored in ways that were simultaneously fun and empowering” (Olson, 2017, p. 52). This physical space runs alongside the emotional place from which poignant subversion can be enacted. Individuals gain strength from the participation in these spaces, as there is a sense of validation and understanding of ones’ subversive desires. They are brought to this dissenting space where their ideas, and therefore themselves, can be empowered. Empowerment leads to action. Concerts “and other public musical events can act as fora in which people are exposed to the reactions of others to the music” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 396),

strengthening the sense of community. They can see that the reactions are the same. Not just towards the music, but towards the message and critique. This serves as a site where “the struggle for and against the powerful is engaged” (Scott, 2016, p. 26-27), the powerful being the cultural norms that require subversion. This cultural power is created in Western culture through economic status and the ability to accumulate wealth, therefore increasing the ability to consume. Those with the highest ability to consume, greedily and lustily, enjoy higher levels of both cultural and political power, in that they have the ability to guide taste and cultural normativity with their ability to set trends through their accumulation of materiality. This system – the few controlling the many – is a central area of critique for metal.

Engaging with, and involvement in, these spaces is what enables outward and extensive transgression – brutalization – to transpire in a collective environment. The strength of the individual creates the safety of the group, making it a safe space for collective brutalization of societal norms. The space is needed as a physical collective gathering spot for those who require a more public forum to express their private distastes. And there is the desire to share the space with those who share their ideas.

4.1.2 Rejecting the mainstream

That fans of extreme metal enjoy being on the outside of the mainstream, away from the normative standards and desires of society, is confounding to those who are a part of the dominant culture. The mainstream is designed specifically as an entity that seeks to invest the desire of the individual, not one to be rejected. The mainstream is built on structured levels of conformity and those who blatantly reject this conformity - the values and cultural aspects of the main culture – no longer fit with the mold of the ‘typical’. Nor do they want to, which is the most confusing part. Those “proud pariahs, [who know that] metal is a style of music hated by a very large majority of the population” (Guibert & Guibert, 2016, p. 174) are able to subvert

mainstream culture by being proud to not be a part of it. From this rejection stems the calls of ‘freakishness’ and Otherness, not only because they do not fit with the archetypes of the normative, but because they actively reject them and desire distance from them. Metalheads “begin to embrace these accusations and use them as central aspects of their subcultural identity” (Olson, 2017, p. 50). The harsh words from the inside are brutalized by the outside and used as a source of pride, further confounding the normative culture. Older fans have spent years refining their likes and dislikes, and “are now very proud of their tastes” (Guibert & Guibert, 2016, p. 174) despite the perception of others.

Metal fans *want* to be on the outside, for the most part. It is often a self-imposed othering, as they are simply not interested in what the mainstream is offering. That which exists outside of their scene “are seen as threatening and members attempt to keep them at bay” (Riches, 2016, p. 128). The created spaces of transgression serve here as a buffer against encroachment on individual desires. These politics threaten their scene, which has become the place where they belong. They, like the music they love, “rejects most forms of incorporation: it offers the Great Refusal to both politics and domination from external forces other than which it generates from within” (Scott, 2011, p. 236). Metal has pushed its way to the outside, a monster scratching and clawing its way out of the lab, brutalizing anything it must to escape and break free. Metal did not arrive on the scene as an intact being. It was formed and brutalized from the many influences that came before it, slowly taking pieces from mainstream influences and adding it to its monstrous collection. When strong enough, it emerged as a monster, something objectionable and shocking enough that people no longer recognized the pieces of the popular it had used to get to that point on the outside of the normative. It wishes to remain there, untouched and unmolested from the inside that they have chosen to reject. This is the space they have created, and they want it to remain theirs. This has become increasingly difficult with the commercialization and commodification of subcultural ideas and merchandise. The mainstream demonstrates an awareness of the outside, understanding that a manner of tempering its

rejection is to begin to incorporate pieces of it. The increased cultural appropriation of metal can be witnessed in the rise of ‘ready-made metal’ shops like Hot Topic that have entrenched themselves in major retail malls. Metal and its subversion must navigate a tricky and complex relationship with this type of commodification and the balance of exposure versus authenticity.

4.1.3 Spaces of conflict

Fans of extreme metal will engage in a self-imposed ostracization from the mainstream, or assumed normative, culture. There is a disconnect between their desires and the expectations of popular culture, and this separation allows them to express their “distinctive individuality [that demonstrates how] members of a subculture differentiate themselves from the rest of society and identify as part of a particular group” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 444). These are the two sides of a ‘wall of death’ mosh pit⁴⁵, standing separated from one another, staring at each other across the dusty expanse of exposed and unclaimed turf, the space created. Within this dissenting space is the subversion and the commentary on what does not work in the world and what needs to be changed. This allows people to exist in a radical space, an environment where their critiques of capitalism and religion can be heard, explored, and understood. Simply arriving to this space shows transgressive qualities in the individual. Here, people can occupy “a potentially conscious and critical position in the maintenance of a radical and democratic space beyond the abject reality of capitalism” (Riches, 2016, p. 130). They are liberated from the constraints of the structures they are trying to escape. Here is there escape from even the structures of obligatory happiness, where they can embrace something not typically viewed as providing enjoyment.

⁴⁵ A wall of death mosh pit begins with the put splitting in two, with a large space between the two factions. At a certain point in a song, or at the beginning of one, the two sides sprint towards one another, violently colliding into each other. From here, the pit normalizes into a standard mosh pit. The wall of death is often seen at large, outdoor metal festivals.

This space, which could easily be one of conflict, is more a violence of thought than of violent action, in the vein of poststructural anarchism. There are not the calls for the bloody destruction of societal structures and institutions, but there is an understanding that the structures are broken and need to be transformed to make them more equitable for all. In metal circles, these shared thoughts of dissent are a unifying factor for members in more than one manner: they unite those with an enjoyment of the same music and similar worldviews, while also uniting them on the *outside* of main culture: the place they have chosen to avoid. It is not the enjoyment of the mindless masses, the “space cadet glow” (Pink Floyd, 1979) of the brainwashed; yet, it is an enjoyment that keeps them coming back to concerts and events, enjoying that there is the space where they can engage in a personal reckoning, or release, that is fuelled by the music.

4.2 Difficult music

“I’ve been a man of brutal means/ Dealing out my business, it’s so obscene.”

(Anthrax, 2011)

The desire of metal fans and musicians to exist on the outside of the normative standards – to not be like everyone else - is furthered by the actions and opinions of some of the bands themselves. For example, Corey Taylor, the outspoken lead vocalist of modern metal veterans Slipknot, has noted that when “every other show is a *Glee* project or *American – X Factor – Idol* crap, all predestined to be big and yet didn’t do anything to get there, metal’s the last bastion of real music” (quoted in Kaplan, 2012). Fans of the genre have an “urge to protect what the music means to [them], to keep it for [themselves]” (Hawking, 2014). Metal, in many ways, is a ‘closed’ subculture, and “fans are trying to preserve their way of doing things which is different from

what the herd wants to do” (Hawking, 2014). Or, at the very least, it is uninviting to those on the outside. A spot on the inside of the community must be earned in the view of metalheads. This allows the individualized space of subversion to remain exclusive to those deemed worthy of belonging, those have faced challenges and fought to be there. Metal responds to mainstream pressures in manners which are “further asserting and promoting heavy metal as an exclusive subculture” (Ferrero, 2016, p. 219), by promoting the extreme and the further pursuit of the brutal.

4.2.1 Brutal Imagery

The first point of entry for many new music fans are the names of bands, their logos, and their album covers⁴⁶. Yet, many metal bands use imagery that is “harsh and obscure: everything from the convoluted and almost unintelligible band logos to the menacing stage names and the use of corpse-paint had to suggest an image of inaccessibility and mystery” (Ferrero, 2016, p. 210). This is used specifically to keep outsiders away, to the point where it is troublesome to even read the name of a band. They are not attempting to gain fans through slick, pleasing design; they strive for the opposite. This is a brutalization of the norms of promotion and advertising, but a brutal logo gains respect within the community for its subversion⁴⁷. These logos are a “conscious challenge to meaning, the incomprehensible and inaccessible being celebrated over reference and meaning” (Scott, 2014, p. 19).

Here, four examples are provided of album covers that provide varied levels of brutality: *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* by Darkthrone, *Humanure* by Cattle Decapitation, *Korn* by Korn,

⁴⁶ There could be an argument made that album artwork has become less significant with the advent of online streaming services and many listeners have less exposure and interaction with the album art.

⁴⁷ Many of these band logos are considerate and skilled in their design, balance, and symmetry. Impressive examples include Deafheaven and Wolves in the Throne Room, while purely brutal examples include Blood Incantation.

and *Dawn of the Black Hearts*, by Mayhem (see Appendix for images). All four bands demonstrate the usage of band logo fonts that are more difficult than plain text. While all logos can be deciphered with diligence, they are more recognizable as images to begin with instead of text. Darkthrone uses stark imagery and minimalism that is common in the black metal genre (thanks partially to their influence). The album provides the image of a creepy, corpse-painted man that appears to be in motion, almost soaring through the air like a vampire moving towards a kill: mouth agape, hand looking claw-like. There is a brutality in the bleak desolation of the image, one of manners that black metal moved away from the near cartoonish violence of death metal of the era. Cattle Decapitation does use a drawn image on their cover, depicting a cow defecating human remains. The artwork is befitting of the themes that the band creates with their music, but the image is grotesque, bloody, and shocking. It is meant to be brutal to the eye; it is meant to disturb while promoting thought, not unlike the works of Francis Bacon (though far less subtle than his works). Cattle Decapitation provides an alternate reality to consider with their visual imagery on *Humanure*. Korn, on the other hand, uses real-life fears on their self-titled debut album cover. Depicting a young girl on a swing set, we see the elongated, creepy shadow of a man looming over her. It provokes thoughts of great societal fears, including child murder, abduction, and pedophilia. The lengthened fingers in the shadow create a vision of abnormality, an almost alien-like quality in the man. His tilted head indicates a chilling and disturbing curiosity with the child on the swing. Unlike Cattle Decapitation or Darkthrone, Korn tapped into real fears that exist in the world, instead of more fantastical or post-humanist concerns. The final example, Mayhem's *Dawn of the Black Hearts*, uses real-life gore as the centerpiece of their album art. The image is of the original vocalist for Mayhem, named Dead, who committed suicide. His body was discovered by his bandmate Euronymous, who took

photos of the gruesome scene before alerting the authorities⁴⁸. The brutality is apparent in this album cover, as it shocks the viewer to see actual death on the cover of anything. These four examples serve to demonstrate the ability of a band to create images and a visual template that runs counter to the normative and mainstreamed visions of art and what art should be. There are no beautiful, airbrushed singers, or pleasant photos of scenery to be found here.

4.2.2 Brutal Sounds

If a prospective fan makes it through the challenges of band logos and album art, they are next faced with the music itself, which is “often disharmonic and challenging to listen to” (Wallin et al., 2017, p. 161). Bands have made their music purposely difficult to listen to; naturally, they have the option to make it intelligible and pleasant sounding, but have made the purposeful choice not to, to keep people away. The music of extreme metal pushes outsiders away from the subcultural space that the music has created for them. If the music were easy, then listeners would not have ‘earned’ their way into the scene, and therefore, into the subversion. Further, to make something “truly hard to like [is] a tried and true tactic of heaviness” (Reyes, 2013, p. 248-249). In the pursuit of heaviness and brutality, keeping the mainstream away is a badge of honor, not something to be ashamed of in metal bands. Praise and subcultural capital can be earned through the difficulty created. An example here is the purposefully poor recording techniques used in black metal – an emblematic example being Darkthrone’s *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* - or the extremely limited runs or pressings of albums to maintain an extremely niche audience. Members of the metal scene accept the challenge,

⁴⁸ Several stories have emerged, almost as urban legend, surrounding this incident. This includes the tales of Euronymous posing the body for the photos, collecting skull fragments from Dead’s body, or stories of him cooking them into food for the rest of the band to consume.

appreciating extreme metal's "technical complexities in terms of speed, difficulty, and relative inaccessibility" (Kirner-Ludwig & Wohlfarth, 2018, p. 404).

Darkthrone is one of the most important bands of Second Wave Norwegian black metal, and their 'unholy trinity' of albums – *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, *Under a Funeral Moon*, and *Transilvanian Hunger* – are considered to be extremely significant black metal albums, helping to form and influence the genre. *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* offers listeners a new, brutal sound that is significantly different from the polished, thunderously heavy, and heavily produced death metal music of the early 1990s. Darkthrone offers a stark, minimalist sound that provides a different brutality, and an affront to the slick recording techniques used in metal at the time. The sound is analog and fuzzy, production value akin to a band recording their live jam on a one-track cassette recorder. While the sonic landscape of Darkthrone's black metal provides jokes at their expense in statements such as "Instruments: Drums, electric shaver" (Myers, 2018) due to the extreme distortion heard on the guitar, it also creates a sound that is recognizably distinct for listeners. Many comments on the YouTube video of the album (Extreme Metal Music Full Discography, 2016) refer to the cold and the snow, while it is noted that *Blaze* creates "an ambiance so wrong that its [sic] right" (Lavey, 2017). The album, along with many of the albums in black metal and the other extreme subgenres, defies the normative expectations of what music should sound like.

This music provides listeners with an enlightened understanding of what music can become, and how far from the normative center it can stray. Darkthrone exemplifies this. This enlightenment, in the views of Luciferian Brutalism, allow the listener to comprehend the transcendent and transgressive abilities of music, affording them an understanding that there is more out there that may appeal to them outside of the pre-packaged offerings of mainstream culture. This makes for a strong individual, able to decide their tastes for themselves, escaped from State control of their desires.

This is a test to preserve the otherness that metal bands, musicians, and fans have come to embrace. The challenges of the music allow, and force, listeners and members to listen to the unlistenable, to witness the unseeable, to consider “that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought” (Snaza, 2016, p. 83). Metal can provoke and promote this unthought through counter-realities (Blood Incantation’s *The Hidden History of the Human Race*) and dystopic visions (Cattle Decapitation’s *The Anthropocene Extinction* or Megadeth’s *Dystopia*) that serve to destabilize and often violate the founding ideas of Western culture. This is how someone passes the test to enter the world of the subversive.

4.2.3 Brutal Lyrics

One of the more controversial and divisive aspects of extreme metal is the style of vocals employed by bands across the spectrum of subgenres. Death metal vocals resemble the feral and guttural sounds made by a beast in pain, while black metal vocals range from screeching to full-out screaming, able to vocalize extreme psychological and physical pain. Extreme metal vocalizations can be difficult to listen to, partially because they completely obscure the lyrics. These vocal styles are a subversive act, a “deliberate disruption in language and comprehensibility, presenting and distorting the [...] tools of speech and audible clarity” (Scott, 2011, p. 236), further disassociating themselves from the main herd. Vocals are a brutalization of the norm, of the expected in music. A song can employ a narrative structure to draw the listener in to the story, to have them as a part of the tale. This is typically presented through clear, discernable lyrics and vocals that allow the listener to understand the story that is being told. This is a method of drawing the audience in, of connecting with them. That connection, or desire to connect, is a part of the normal, established views of what music is, and should be. Extreme music does the opposite.

Critics of the genres may argue that the “message might be lost in the screaming and growling” (Olson, 2017, p. 54), or that the “majority of protest songs are not heard as protest songs due to a lack of lyrical intelligibility or misinterpretation” (Riches, 2016, p. 129). Yet, metalheads claim that they can “identify with the songs whether [they] understand the words or not [...] because it is the voice – not the lyrics – to which we immediately respond” (Riches, 2016, p. 129). The voice can reflect the sentiments, regardless of the words being said. The inflection of the growls can speak volumes. Lyrics can serve as a “rallying cry for popular consciousness and even exhort political action” as they have done in the past, such as with the calls for action and revolution during the Vietnam War era in the United States. The politicized lyrics of this era helped to establish an anti-establishmentarian counterculture that pushed back against the war machine of the government of the time. However, the lyrics in metal music are not as important as the folk singers of the 1970’s, as fans “prioritize the music over lyrical content” (Scott, 2016, p. 31). This raises a significant point in relation to the general question of this research. Is metal able to critique culture if they are not directly telling their audiences what to be critical of? Or not always being specific and clear about what they want to subvert? Or even not saying anything intelligibly in their songs? The message, then, if not told through the lyrics, must come from the music itself, and fans enjoy the “energy and the anger, and [...] the lyrics come second, if not last, for a lot of people” (Scott, 2016, p. 31). This further dissects the argument that outsiders create regarding violent lyrics making violent people: this is not true as even insiders struggle to comprehend the lyrics, and even when they do, they do not play an important role in the appreciation of the music. The brutal sounds can share a message that could be as effective as “horrible, splatter-movie-like lyrics [aimed] to deter outsiders to enter the scene by shocking them, whereas insiders learn to read transgressive texts” (Kirner-Ludwig & Wohlfarth, 2018, p. 426) for what they are: subversive – and often tongue-in-cheek - commentaries on cultural missteps.

Cattle Decapitation provides another example here, with their song “Forced Gender Reassignment” from their 2012 *Monolith of Inhumanity* album. While the lyrics are difficult to decipher due to the low growls being used by vocalist Travis Ryan, they offer poignant critique of a society that, while having become more accepting over time, often continues to ignore or misunderstand the issues of gender. The band empathizes with the constructs of gender: “Why do we hate what we don’t understand?/ Forced into a body and damned with intelligence/ Shoved into a soul, wired with circuitry you cannot control” while pointing out the ignorance of those who do not comprehend, those who are not enlightened. Ryan grunts, “Some feel it was a choice and use morality/ To strengthen their voice”. The band furthers their critique of the unenlightened, focusing it specifically on religious values, calling archaic gender beliefs “Christian indoctrination”. For fans of the band, there may not be a sense of rebellion that comes from the lyrics, but from the intense music and vocalizations. Upon further examination, however, the listener could read and interpret the lyrics for the actual transgression and critique they are providing instead of only the musical one. Cattle Decapitation have something important to say in “Forced Gender Reassignment”, and while the sounds and lyrics could serve as a shock, they do offer intelligent critique on societal issues.

Extreme tactics are used by this extreme music. It is done as an insular strategy, as both isolationist and protectionist. If metalheads have been rejected by the mainstream – or rejected themselves – they want to keep it that way, and want to avoid the invasion and commodification of the underground music that they enjoy, and that allows them the space that they require for their transgressive thoughts. For those in these subcultural communities, this is something that needs to be protected, and bands have helped in this measure, attempting to ensure that only those ‘deserving’ of being on the inside are able to make it there. This helps explain the fierce band loyalty that exists in the metal community, as well as the extreme protection against the

notion of selling out.⁴⁹ Once a spot inside the subculture is earned, it is a place forever, and not many end up leaving it. Protect the inside to critique more effectively the outside. To do this, the outside must be kept on the outside, where it belongs.

4.3 Chasing the dark

“Let there be darkness/ Let there be blood tonight/ Let there be riots/ Come start the fires tonight.”

(Kreator, 2012)

Metal has an intensity unlike other musical genres that contributes to its ability to be a subversive style of music. In pursuit of liberated, or even transcendent, spaces that offer the freedom to challenge and subvert, extreme metal engages in a continued pursuit of brutality. It is a chasing of the edges, to brutalize even the spaces that have already been flayed, to reshape them, reform them into what they need to be for subversive thought to continue and thrive. The monster is not to remain stagnant, but is to be adapted, updated, and improved upon so that it may continue to be an effective source of critique. In these many subgenres, there is a hunt for the corruption of the light, the pursuit of the shadows, of a space in between the light and the dark: the twilight. The spaces created by metal are where there is the “collapsing of light into darkness [that] opens a new way for thought” (Shakespeare & Scott, 2015, p. 5).

The variations between the light and the dark, in terms of the thoughts of the Western Enlightenment, have remained static: “Light is knowledge, morality, goodness, purity, the

⁴⁹ The notion of selling out is representative of extreme metal’s fierce protection of its own music. If, suddenly, music is being created for and sold to outsiders, to those who have not earned their way into the group, it is perceived as a major ill for a band. They are then perceived as caving to capitalist pressures, which is not respected in the metal community. This, of course, is a further metal paradox, as bands require the selling of goods and music to continue existing.

divine, the color white. Darkness signifies ignorance, evil, badness, contamination and being spoiled, the demonic, the color black. Light is civilization. Darkness is the wilderness and brutality.” (Snaza, 2016, p. 85) Yet, if the Enlightenment is, as Snaza (2016) continues, about “absolute obedience to laws” (p. 87) and “citizens [doing] what they’re told because they trust the commands” (p. 87), then twilight could provide a liberation from that servitude. Metal is not about obedience; it is about the pursuit of the outside of the obedience to norms. Metal can enlighten through the darkness, as we “dwell in and with this [world] differently. The difference is darkness” (Snaza, 2016, p. 95). There are new challenges to be presented and undertaken, new issues to be addressed and countered, and metal is one route in which people can take to arrive there, at a place where they feel at a point where subversion is possible, with the embracing of the encroaching darkness as the agent of understanding and change.

If the “enjoyment of heavy metal cannot be separated from the negativity of the music and the scene” (Morris, p. 2015, p. 296), then it should be possible to accept that in metal, “blackness, the absence of colour, is the authentic state of existence” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 31). The aesthetic of the genre is focused on black - the absence - and this affords the opportunity towards “an understanding of the transcendent value of absence, nothingness and ultimate meaninglessness grounding one’s experience” (Scott, 2014, p. 24). This transcendence nudged open the space to give meaning to the meaninglessness through the music. If it is possible to understand that there is a lack of meaning in life, then to fill in that space with meaning can be made in the forms of subcultural adherence or communal subversion. The means to subvert absence may only begin once the recognition of absence is present; the quest for meaning begins with the understanding of meaninglessness. The views and tensions presented in metal can afford this possibility of meaning within a “content of the work [focused on] negation and inversion” (Scott, 2016, p. 16) in which there is an attempted annihilation of pre-conceived meaning and structure.

Nathan Snaza (2016) outlines the concept of the Endarkenment in his work, which is about working “toward and through an opposition to the Light; it is to pursue evil, brutality, and blackness” (p. 85). This is the pursuit that is central to metal and to its desire for the creation of transgressive spaces. The message of the music, that of negation of the normative - of the light - may allow for a “gateway to nothingness, an obliteration of the self in its celebration of meaninglessness” (Scott, 2016, p. 25), a cleansing that serves as a reset to create new open spaces, which in turn may afford the opportunity to consider and enact new means of subversion. Through the void, the “absence of experience that indexes an interruption of [the] self” (Snaza, 2016, p. 81), there can be a “liberation [that] is truly achieved when the blackened self dissolves into the very darkness it attempted to convey, and find liberation in unity with the void”. Connecting to the darkness offers freedom from the shackles of the normative. There is an unprecedented freedom on the path to the black, in the twilight in between. It is a new and unknown space rife with an unknowing, yet due to this, it holds infinite potential and possibility for exploration and therefore, creation. The use of the darkness as a creative space allows for a deeper critique of that which has been sold to us as the ‘Light’, the correct path and manner of living life, the correct set of rules to be followed.

This ‘Light’, that which serves as the standards and the foundation of the mainstream culture, is not the same light that is considered with the ideas of Lucifer. The Luciferian Light is that of rebellion and questioning, not of conformity and adherence to anything. In the rationality of Luciferian Brutalism, the light is a personal sense of enlightenment, an understanding of the placement of the being in the larger scheme of community and society, and an acceptance of that place. Luciferian Brutalism is a promotion of change and subversion, instead of the traditional views of Enlightenment being a strict adherence based purely on rationality. LB invites the questioning of rationality, and the defilement of traditional thought. When the individual can create and exist within this space, then they have achieved a personal state of understanding: they have embraced the potential of the Black, the inversion of the

traditional Light. At this point, there is an embracing of the potential for meaninglessness, and the knowledge and ability to try and do something about it: to subvert it and to brutalize the overabundance of meaning that attempts to explain reality.

Chapter 5: Fringe Spaces

5.1 Outsider Status and Space for Subversion

“From the outside, my sight is goddamn electric/ And these eyes have seen a world.”

(Pantera, 2000)

Metalheads choose to exist on the outside of the mainstream, socially accepted world, and they have welcomed and embraced this position on the fringes. It is accepted; it is desired. Traditional media has represented “brooding, loner metalheads at school as ticking time bombs” (Rowe, 2017, p. 723) prepared to wreak havoc on a system they hate. This is an image created from negative stereotypes and misunderstandings, easily perpetuated due to a public eagerness to place blame on scapegoats that exist as ‘other’. Yet, this status as the societal outsider aided in creating a social space, as “metal then offers a space for those who may feel alienated by their social context. It provides an alternate community [...] The metal community represents a site of resistance and alternatives to existing power structures and sites of oppression” (Savigny & Schapp, 2018, p. 551). For metalheads, this is a space needed to pursue their individual joys found in the music, the music that outsiders typically decry as ‘just noise’. This is the noise of metal, and “noise is endarkenment at the level of sonics” (Snaza, 2016, p. 91). The desire to pursue this darkness through music, while being excluded as social pariahs, allows them the freedom in the endarkened emptiness of this space to enjoy what they love despite the perceptions that there is nothing they care about or love. Their noise comes from the inside, where they want it, and not from the outside.

5.1.1 Independence before community

Luciferian Brutalism requires individuals to attempt to show strength in themselves prior to being integral parts of a collective able to enact meaningful social change. They should face the potential areas for weakness that are pointed out in metal music: the fragility of the human body, impending doom in the face of apocalyptic horror, fears of death, and uselessness in the face of an overbearingly powerful State. One must face these and not succumb to the fears or paralysis of acceptance and inactivity to demonstrate the strength required of Enlightened Brutalism. This individual strength manifests itself in a variety of ways. It is not to indicate that each member of a collective must be a confident, self-assured individual prior to making the decision to be a part of a group or to promote change. Strength reflects an individual's awareness of the need for change, and a personal conviction of beliefs. Luciferian Brutalism posits that at this point of an individual's journey, they can exhibit a strength in their own opinions free from fleeting suggestions from the outside or fickle pursuits that never resonate with the true character of the individual. Once this type of strength is achieved, then the person may enter a collective as a valuable contributor. While it could be argued that metal communities are a haven that attracts those who are lost and without a social place, LB counters this with a reversed perspective. Metal communities are places to be *found* by those who understand and accept their social placement on the outside. The spaces do not seek out the individual; the person seeks out the spaces. LB theorizes that those who enter these dissenting spaces without the individual strength needed to promote change are there as tourists only to take up the dissenting space that could be utilized more effectively by others. However, there remains an inclination among people, as socialized beings, to "create a worth for oneself in the opinion of others occasioned by the attempts of others to gain a hated superiority over us" (Scott, 2007, p. 201). This is the root of social inequality and the basis of tension between the

outside and the inside. The values comprising worth differ and change based on cultural trends and adherence to them and these values are controlled and directed by the mainstream. This inequality, experiences of “class alienation [...] and subordination are transformed into a collective experience of solidarity, empowerment, protest, and resistance” (Riches, 2016, p. 129). It is prior to this collectivity where the individual can understand the source of their disdain – the causes of it – allowing them to seek out their proper avenue, the one that works for their individualized needs and contempt, which they choose to express this towards the outside world.

Once the individual finds their version of enlightenment – the Luciferian notion of gaining an understanding of a societal issue, it affords a “broader understanding of politics [that] allows [them] to be a component of the social that extends beyond government and the State”, (Scott, 2011, p. 228). These individuals would like to exist outside of typical structures. Further, it is understood that to make substantial claims against society, “we need to do more than simply reflect on our own individual experiences” (Savigny & Schaap, 2018, p. 552). The experiences of the individual must be brought to the collective spaces to strengthen the experiences of the collective. The collective space allows the fans “to express their rage against their social powerlessness in domains such as the family, school, [and] job” (Morris, 2015, p. 300) from a position where they are empowered by group identity. Problems from the outside world are brought to the community. The communal experience, true for a variety of communities along with metal ones, is an “important aspect of everyday survival as support, manifested via resource sharing, emotional encouragement and other actions, can be vital for continued existence” (Varas-Diaz, Rivera-Segarra, Rivera Medina, Mendoza, & Gonzalez-Sepulveda, 2015, p. 88). This success of subcultures in the critique of culture and expression of disdain enables the perpetuation of these groups, allowing them to continue to work for others moving forward.

Subcultural communities, such as the niche sectors of fans committed to deathgrind, grindcore, death metal, and black metal, have moved well beyond having “[challenged] their parents’ worldview, [appearing] dangerous and menacing and [immersing] themselves in a subcultural community that [provides] belonging, identity and play” (Olson, 2017, p. 52). They have become a “powerful vehicle for fans and musicians to critique the politics and social dynamics more broadly across their societies” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 11).

People who turn to metal have often been marginalized by the mainstream, and now they exist and thrive in those margins. They have learned to use the power of community to their advantage, to combat their marginalization. The dominant culture attempted to strip them of their power, instead providing an invitation for the reverse to happen. They have found their power from the outside, and they have enjoyed the brutalization of social norms as a part of a subculture, an “individual solution for reclaiming power and disrupting dominant social norms” (Rowe, 2017, p. 713). The committed individual can be impactful once they have formed the group that serves as the best outlet for them.

5.1.2 Metal minds and education

The traditional view of the metalhead has remained relatively unchanged since the birth of the genre. Regardless of how society has managed to alter its perceptions of people from all walks of life, how society has shifted to an all-inclusive environment, the perception of the fans of this tiny genre of music stays the same. Traditional tropes of the metalhead include the assumption of a blue-collar background or a lack of education that was cemented in the public consciousness documentaries such as 1986’s *Heavy Metal Parking Lot*. The short film promotes the notion of most male metal fans as being shirtless drinkers who feel required to yell at any camera that moves past, while women are portrayed as potential, or wannabe, groupies. As one female fan states regarding Judas Priest’s lead guitarist, “Glen Tipton we love you and want to

fuck your brains out!” (Heyn & Krulik, 1986). Men demonstrate the traditional tropes of blue-collar background due to their workmanlike clothing (jeans and bandanas) and primary concern with partying. One fan, when asked what he usually does when attending a metal show, gleefully responds, “Get fucked up, drink a couple beers” (Heyn & Krulik, 1986). It is interesting that he does not mention the music here, which would seem an important piece of the entertainment of attending a concert. If they – metal fans – are gathering en masse and sharing their music, certainly it is not the intellectual elites that are doing so, or so the perception is perpetuated. Metal has never been perceived by the mainstream as intellectual music, it is viewed as music meant to connect with the angry side of one’s being, not with their mind. It is generally seen as a music of emotion instead of thought. Music that is revered enough to be considered alongside the intelligentsia is typically the classical music of the great composers or the high-brow output of experimental or art-rock musicians.

However, “consumers of heavy metal are now quite varied and different from the working-class groups which the music represented in its origins” (Varas-Diaz, et al., 2015, p. 98). The style of employment for metalheads no longer aligns with the traditional blue-collar backgrounds of traditional stereotypes; nor do their levels of education. According to the work of Chaker (2014), the “majority of heavy metal fans have an academic background” (quoted in Epp, 2019, p. 108), which signifies a radical departure from traditional assumptions. This is reinforced through the modern data collected by Guibert & Guibert (2016) at the 2011 Hellfest festival in France, where 83.4% of respondents had achieved at least a professional high school diploma or higher⁵⁰ (p. 172). This includes 1.8% of fans that held a PhD. This means that there are formally educated people able to think about the music and its message, making them a subversive threat to the mainstream. Knowledge plus anger can create a formidable cocktail of transgression, and people are able to use this in the spaces they have created to critique culture

⁵⁰ Data collected in different eras would naturally demonstrate different results, especially from surveys conducted in the 1980s.

and possibly enact change. For some, transgression occurs “through the very act of listening to something abrasive, [...] alien to traditional social boundaries” (Coker, 2018). Members of the scene can be intellectuals focused on theoretical struggles – how to solve issues of the Anthropocene, how to balance the scales of justice, how to regulate the inequality created by the Church, how to cure the capitalist world of its corruption? There may not be a single answer - or an answer at all - to these questions, but there exists value in asking them and considering the possibilities. This consideration moves beyond the metal concert itself. While the critique may not occur at the show – it would be unlikely to overhear a conversation between two metalheads in the mosh pit discussing the unequal distribution of wealth in Western capitalist societies – the ideas are mobile, or nomadic. They travel with the engaged audience member outside of the show and into their real lives. While considering these problems may not guarantee that an answer is ever found, *not* thinking about them does guarantee that an answer – a better way to live – will never be discovered. Metal serves as the brutal conductor for these thoughts, helping – or enabling – people to see new perspectives of the same truth by presenting them through a lens of monstrous rage and sonic assault, through the hyperbolized violence of an album cover or the corporeal enactments of dismay generated by the live performance of violent music. This is the “accessible, transgressive spaces, away from mainstream regulation and control” (Riches, 2016, p. 129).

Metal is an escape from the power structures that exist in the mainstream. While there is no desire to destroy the structures, there is an understanding that there will always be an “intersection of social practices that are also practices of power” (May, 1994, p. 35). There is the need to work within these structures, to brutalize them - manipulate and reorganize them - into something more palatable, more equitable, more just. Any given metal community contains many more people with formal educations than previously believed. Through mainstream perceptions, this may aid in legitimizing not the music – for it remains too extreme – but the messages and actions behind it, or created through it. However, the world of extreme music

does not seek the approval of the normative, educated or not. This personal enlightenment achieved through traditional conceptions of education can be helpful in aiding the collective achieve their goals of subversion and critique through an intelligent brutalization – the tactical removal of a target – instead of only the all-out thunder and decimation of rolling tanks aimed at total destruction.

5.2 The War Machine

“In the fields, the bodies burning/ As the war machine keeps turning.”

(Black Sabbath, 1970b)

Metal provides the sounds of many different things, the soundtrack to varied states of existence. Black metal creates the endarkened soundscapes in the pursuit of the black. Deathgrind offers the sensation of gritting one’s teeth until creating a self-induced migraine. Death metal is the low rumble of our death rattle as life leaves us; it is the soundtrack to the cacophony of war.

Todd May (1994) offers analysis and interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the war machine, representative of “that which is outside, the Other, of the State” (p. 40). As the State “wishes to have a monopoly on how people interrelate” (Robinson, 2010) and is defined by its “perpetuation or conservation of organs of power” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 11), the war machine stands in opposition to the State as a force of creativity. This machine is the violence of thought – creating an “economy of violence” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 77) - that exists on the outside and is prepared to challenge and undermine the values and the theory of the normative. In this sense extreme music serves as the war machine, “not that of the hunter [...], but that of the hunted animal” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 77) in that it is the smaller, less powerful of the combatants when placed in opposition with the strength of the State and its mainstream apparatuses. It serves to oppose the encroaching mainstream, the State that “operates to restrict, prevent or channel these flows of creative energy so as to preserve fixed

social forms and restrict the extent of difference which is able to exist” (Robinson, 2010). The State desires consistency, and the created threats from the outside are dangerous to this consistency; creativity offers escape from the normative. The metal war machine desires a push towards the extreme, beyond the territorialized spaces of society, into new spaces; it is a “nomad invention which does not in fact have war as its primary object” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 113). While the State is “perpetually producing and reproducing ideal circles, [...] a war machine is necessary to make something round” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 29). This continues the conflict with the State as their goal is the “deterritorialization of the rigid fixities of state space, often to create space for difference or for particular ways of life” (Robinson, 2010).

The creative spaces explored by the war machine are “not tied to any given social arrangement, they are continuously creative, but their creativity is not naturally bound to any given types of categories of product” (May, 1994, p. 40): the war machine is free, having located “something intolerable outside ourselves that we will leap beyond shame and transform our paltry undertakings into a war of resistance and liberation” (Culp, 2016, p. 29). It is prepared and desirous to create something new, to “destroy in order to create” (Culp, 2016, p. 9), to demonstrate Bey’s (2011) ideas of the empowerment achieved through creativity and Chaos. He states that “Chaos is not entropy; [...] Chaos is continual creation” (Bey, 2011, p. 41). Metal can be nomadic, a genre of music that, in many of the bands, offers a malleable style, willing to move and shift. These metal nomads “chart their course by strange stars” (Bey, 2011, p. 75) and are often able to create their own spaces, Bey’s ‘Temporary Autonomous Zones’, where there are no pressures of formal mainstream structure and control. The diversity and sheer quantity of metal’s forms are emblematic of its nomadism. These spaces are where the creativity exists, and therefore the transgression and the critique, they are the “camps of black tents under the desert stars, interzones, hidden fortified oases along secret caravan routes, liberated bits of jungle and bad-land, no-go areas, black markets, and underground bazaars” (Bey, 2011, p. 75), the places where the “concept of music as revolutionary social change” (Bey, 2011, p. 90) exists. There is

enlightenment to be gained in these nefarious spaces and this is used to create the new. The changeability of metal serves as its psychical nomadism, peeling what it desires from that system which already exists and using it for its own creative purposes – creating an outside that “appears like Frankenstein’s monster, with a crack of lightning late into the dreary night while the atomist’s rain patters away from the outside” (Culp, 2016, p. 58) – leaving the rest behind, discarded and unwanted.

These ideas run parallel with the conceptualization of Luciferian Brutalism as a theoretical explanation of the potential change that is created through metal spaces that provide escape, not escapism: “Escapism is the great betrayer of escape. The former is simply withdrawing from the social, whereas the latter learns to eat away at the social and penetrate it” (Culp, 2016, p. 47). It is here where “we must realize the moments and spaces in which freedom is not only possible but actual” (Bey, 2011, p. 95). Much like Bey (2011), LB posits that information and knowledge is a key element in the fracturing of the existing structures, that enlightened knowledge is a tool of subversion and transgression. Creativity (deterritorialization) functions alongside the brutalization of theory (psychical nomadism) to create spaces (Temporary Autonomous Zones) that can serve as areas of disruption and transgression.

Metal, as a malleable and changing genre of music, fits with May’s (1994) interpretations of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic war machine, a “creative but decentralized force that can be appropriated in any number of ways” (p. 40). Just as metal and its many subgenres are appropriated by other subgenres to create something new in a perpetual cycle of brutalization, auto-cannibalization, reincorporation, bastardization, and reinterpretation. This is how the subgenres continue to cross-pollinate and form ever-more new subgenres. While the nomadic war machine of metal “operates through creativity and unboundedness, the State-form works through parasitism and binding” (p. 40) as it has “no war machine of its own; it can only appropriate in the form of a military institution, one that will always cause it problems” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 7). The State-form “has a tendency to reproduce itself, remaining identical

to itself across its variations and easily recognizable within the limits of its poles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 16). The State takes, while the war machine gives. The war machine establishes temporary autonomous spaces, while the mainstream attempts to suffocate or incorporate them, as “it is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism, but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire exterior” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 59). This struggle has a typical result, however. Eventually, the State – or, at least the capitalist stakes that are able to dictate the actions of the State - is powerful enough that it can incorporate the creations of the war machine in a manner like the mainstream incorporating and appropriating the fashion of heavy metal into itself, as “when the State appropriates the war machine, the latter obviously changes in nature and function, since it is afterward directed against the nomad and all State destroyers” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 113) . No matter how powerful or inventive the war machine may be, “even the most terrifying nomadic war machine is overshadowed by the State, which calls its operations ‘keeping the peace’” (Culp, 2016, p. 46). Therefore, metal must create space within the “tension between freedom and control” (Reyes, 2013, p. 253).

This could easily be perceived as a perpetually losing battle. However, Bey has argued that in response to State pressures and the stifling of creativity and creative spaces, that the “pressure to restrict connections is so strong that simply finding time and space for other forms of belonging [...] is already a victory against the system” (Robinson, 2010), and that in the creation of these dissenting spaces, the war machine is like “an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere, before the State can crush it” (Bey, 2011, p. 70). This time and place is created by the dedication to extreme music. The guerilla tactics are reminiscent of Alan Parker’s 1991 film *The Commitments*, a musical movie about a distinctly non-metal Irish band with some

distinctly metal ideals⁵¹. The band manager states that The Commitments are the “guerillas of soul. [They] do not announce gigs. [They] strike and then [they] sink back into the night” (Parker, 1991). They provide liberation for their audiences and then disappear before they can be corrupted by anything the State has to offer. The goal of the war machine is to not always engage in direct battle, but “the tracing of a creative line of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 120). Open battle is not always the most effective method of transgression, as the war machine often requires stealth in its arsenal of subversive tactics.

The many creative outlets of metal afford it the opportunity to bludgeon its way into new creative spaces that had been previously unexplored in order to drive the war machine of the Other forwards, into the Holey Space that exists “itself to communicate with smooth space and striated space” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 415). The potential for transgression exists here , connecting with both sides, hoping to enunciate itself into the State-occupied spaces that require subversion and change: “If rebellion proves impossible then at least a kind of clandestine spiritual jihad might be launched” (Bey, 2011, p. 13). On the other side, the State apparatuses, and sedentary assemblages [...] make the holes resonate together [and] plug the lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 415). Here is a further example of the State attempting to overcode the original work of the war machine.

5.3 Fight

“And in the winter cold, with opened eyes/ You’ll find the strength to fight and stand up right.”

(Gojira, 2012)

5.3.1 Community

⁵¹ The band attempts to subvert the traditional views and racial lines of soul and R&B music, performing classic Motown songs in a method they consider “Dublin Soul”.

The strength of the transgressive tactics in metal lie in its “sense of community [that] can foster social engagement” (Varas-Diaz, et al., 2015, p. 91). The collective identity of extreme metal is “the locus for a huge range of practices, texts, institutions, and social phenomena” (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, p. 29), yet instead of a fractured community as the innumerable subgenres (and therefore, subcultures) could suggest, the metal collective “embraces a community, expresses tribal identities and is proud in voicing its connection to historical facts and myths of its working-class heritage” (Scott, 2011, p. 224). Metal, above many other genres, holds an understanding and respect for its origins. Knowing the history of the genre is in fact a part of the subcultural capital that distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic⁵², establishing a scale of worthiness of fandom. This thirst for historical knowledge and obsession with an ‘official’ genealogy of metal has provided a glut of literature attempting to provide the most encompassing history of the genre. This desire for knowledge creates a membership that is well-versed in its own subculture because mere surface knowledge does not garner respect. Metal subculture values the education of its own existence. While Luciferian Brutalism argues that people come to the subversive collective as individuals with a completed set of ideals and notions of the world, music aids in providing an environment where a “certain personal identity or worldview is formed, renewed and promoted” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 392). The promotion of this identity involves cultural critique. The argument could be made that metal, in its attempts to brutalize everything to critique social norms, should begin with the brutalization of the individual, the basic notion of ‘individual’ in which all social apparatus revolves. However, through the lens of Enlightened Brutalism, the goal is to promote knowledge – enlightenment – in the individual, not to destroy it. In seeking this enlightenment, however, rules and social norms must be brutalized; not the individuals themselves⁵³. Music, regardless of style, tells

⁵² Frequently referred to as ‘posers’, this term exists not only in metal, but in other musical genres as well, primarily punk rock.

⁵³ This is further countered by the existence of DSBM, as previously discussed, and its intentions to destroy the individual through suicide. However, this subgenre can be perceived as an outlier.

“stories that are part of a narrative that helps individuals find their place in the world” (St. Laurent, 2019, p. 389), which is incorporated into a worldview, a perspective on the manner in which society functions, for better or for worse. Music preferences, whether it is entire genres or down to specific subgenres or bands, is a “badge of identity that individuals use as an indicator of their own personality as well as the broader social groups that they identify with” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 394). This aids in establishing not only who people are, but what they may be fighting against, and the spaces in which they may engage in this fight.

Metal fights by refusing to accept the limits that the mainstream has laid out – in order to continue the battle, there needs to be an ongoing sentiment that the way things are is not enough, that there can be more; or, in the face of capitalist pressures, less. That “freedom was not free enough, equality was not equitable enough and imagination was not imaginative enough” (Evren, 2011, p. 6). This dissatisfaction with the status quo offers the fuel for an ongoing spirit of transgression. This rejection of complacency – whether that inaction is moral, ethical, or musical – is the metal war machine in that there is the desire for change to the structures of the State, the paragon of unchanging values.

This creates another complex tension within the metal world, however. With an attitude of transgression towards the status quo, there are numerous examples of when the metal community does not follow its own lead. Among many fans of the music, there is a general hesitancy against too much change from the original genre template in metal. In a sense, the metal world has created its own State, its own territories with normative codes, its own system of what is deemed acceptable and fitting within a set of pre-determined parameters. There are bands now that have themselves become war machines against not only the cultural mainstream, but against the State system of metal itself. The most famous example here is Metallica, once considered among the most extreme metal bands during the first period of their career, before undertaking dramatic risks and turns in their music through the 1990s and early-2000s. They are lauded by some for pushing the boundaries of their music, their interests, and

their perceptions and interpretations of metal: for being a war machine in the face of an increasingly strong and vocal metal state. Conversely, Metallica have been eviscerated by fans and metal purists for having abandoned many of the tenets of thrash metal, a subgenre they helped to create and define. The metal establishment tends to desire the achievement of a paradox: for bands to be boundary-pushing extremists while remaining confined to an acceptable set of metal norms. This is – and will surely remain – an unresolved tension in the extreme music culture.

5.3.2 Resistance to the normative

Those who seek out brutal music in the forms of extreme metal, especially in authoritarian societies, do so “in order to find a serviceable vehicle for some form of opposition to the system” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 395). This music enacts a “demonstration against mainstream and mass pop media” (Scott, 2011, p. 227) by revealing a “certain kind of aestheticization of transgression through the sounds, symbols, and lyrical material that portrays madness, death, Satanism, horror, and gore” (Unger, 2016, p. 40). All aspects of the musicality demonstrate transgression simply through its existence – the use of down tuning, the heavy distortion, the speed, the menacing vocalizations, the abnormal song structures, different chord progressions - are a continual form of resistance against the standard tropes and expectations of the normative music scene. For example, many mainstream musical acts will use a ‘standard’ tuning on their guitars (E A D G B E), while extreme metal bands such as Immolation (and many others) will brutalize this ‘standard’. They will often use a C tuning (C F A# D# G C) to create slack strings and thick, heavy sounds⁵⁴. The symbols utilize offense and obscenity to jar an audience – or, more effectively, outsiders of the genre – from the complacency of the average

⁵⁴ The guitar offers a myriad of tuning options, furthered by the more common incorporation of seven or eight-string guitars. While many metal bands have used standard tunings, in the realms of extreme metal, a typical view is that lower is better, because lower is equated with heaviness.

and the status quo. Album covers are perhaps the most common manner in providing gruesome images by extreme metal bands. Among many possible contenders, Cannibal Corpse's *Tomb of the Mutilated* is more offensive and more obscene than most. It features a nude, dead woman, with vicious knife slashes all over her body, her core rotting beneath her rib cage. To complete the image, she is having oral sex performed on her by a rotting, dismembered corpse. These controversial album covers create several intended outcomes for the bands that use them: controversial press, subcultural capital as being extreme, and a dissenting space to be occupied only by those willing to transgress along with them. While this space – when viewed from the normative culture, outside of the metal culture – would appear to be blending the tensions between dissent and misogyny, the enlightened individual understands that the violent images are there to subvert the misogynistic thoughts and actions of the State and its workings. They do not exist to promote violence against women. Instead, they are used to point out the hypocrisy of offense to an album cover that portrays violence against women in a society that does very little to curb *actual* violence against women. This is a piece of the “wider struggle of the subordinate against the institutions of the dominant” (Brown, 2017, p. 66). Metal and its fringe existence will forever remain in the position of the subordinate compared to the monstrosity that is the mainstream, but “collective bodies always have fringes or minorities that reconstitute equivalents of the war machine – in sometimes quite unforeseen forms – in specific assemblages” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 27) that are the vast array of metal subgenres and uses of imagery. This struggle has become deeply embedded in this culture and its membership.

Yet, metal excels in its underdog status, it is the bruiser always ready to go another round with the champion no matter how many lumps and beatings it takes. It is willing to itself be brutalized to continue its subversion – one can not continue the fray unless they are willing to stand in the ring. Further, some bands are not afraid to turn on themselves to further the brutalization – giving as well as they are able to take – as metal is a worldview that is also “embedded in as a form of popular culture, and also [has] the possibility of resistance to itself”

(Scott, 2016, p. 19). Bands such as Igorrr and Portal have excelled in these spaces, having demonstrated a willingness to brutalize their own genre by manipulating rules and expectations, or by completely disregarding them, creating “a new music [that is] totally insane” (Bey, 2011, p. 43). They have demonstrated their psychical nomadism across their careers, even leaving behind the tenets of their own styles, commonalities, and identifiers, taking whatever is of interest to their musical monster and leaving the rest to die.

Having always been a vehicle of dissent since the formation of this “ear-splitting subgenre, [it] rapidly became a vehicle to express and embody political and social discontent” (Riches, 2016, p. 126), metal has more recently been taking the lead from the social protest that took place in Seattle in 1999 that signaled a “decisive event in the development of contemporary practices of resistance” (Evren, 2011, p. 4). In its post-anarchist manner, metal continues to desire the shakeup of power structures that exists without destroying them, using the system against itself. Album sales can be examined here as a method of transgression from within the very system that metal wants to change. Several metal bands, across varying subgenres and levels of extremity, have achieved the status of #1 albums on the *Billboard* charts. This list includes Metallica, Guns n’ Roses, Mötley Crüe, Skid Row, Pantera, Rage Against the Machine, Korn, Tool, System of a Down, Marilyn Manson, and Slipknot. While none of these bands would currently be considered extreme metal (outside of a possible argument for Pantera during their heyday), they have transgressed the norms of popular music by infringing on taboos, “challenging norms, conventions, and regulations” (Kirner-Ludwig & Wohlfarth, 2018, p. 405), and challenging the expectations of what can be high-selling music, and what music people want to listen to that captures and reflects the public consciousness of a moment. A current example is the re-entry of Rage Against the Machine’s 1992 debut album to the *Billboard* charts amid the May 2020 protests in the United States against injustice and police brutality. The music of RATM once again is reflective of the public consciousness, which is reflected in its resurgence of popularity. While metal typically prides itself on being difficult - as “music capable of resisting

the politics of the culture industry is not necessarily music that is very accessible to contemporary publics” (Morris, 2015, p. 290) - in order to keep outsiders at a safe distance, there are times when subversion comes through popularity: a shakeup of the system from within.

5.3.3 Overcoding

The mainstream fights back. The State does not remain stagnant while fending off attacks from the war machine. It protects its dominance from outside threat, much in the same way that metal protects itself from the outside. A method of the State to resist the advances of the metal war machine is through overcoding with intentions of suppressing individuality and uniqueness. The Deleuze and Guattari concept of overcoding brings “disparate practices [...] together under a single category or principle” (May, 1994, p. 40), reducing any unique aspects of something into one over-arching, catch-all category that is generalized and reductive. An example is mainstream propensity to label all music that even has the slightest inkling of heaviness ‘metal’. This takes the many complexities, differences, and varieties makes them “merely another mode of the same” (May, 1994, p. 40). “Individualism represents a common value for metal fans” (Smialek, 2016, p. 107), and it is a focus of suppression by the State. If this individuality can be removed through overcoding, then the State is able to quash this important value, rendering metal fans into the ordinary – exactly that which they wish to avoid.

In overcoding, the State enables their own form of destruction and brutalization, by “overcoding various social codes [...] to ensure the continuance of some codes and the suppression of others, resulting in the appropriation [...] of some practices and the marginalization or elimination of others” (May, 1994, p. 41). This overcoding is a flexing of the muscles, a show of strength by the State, the mainstream, the socially acceptable, used in hopes of quashing the spirit of the individual; rendering them the same. This process demeans the

value of the unique, forcing similarity; it is conformity attempting to annihilate individuality, the State squeezing the creative productions of the war machine into heavily templated and bland categorizations. By tempering resistance through the elimination of human uniqueness, overcoding allows one subgenre to appear just as the next. The State wishes to remove notions of individuality by forcing them categories of forced identity and status, creating a hierarchy between delineated groups.

However, as it does, metal offers their own resistance. It resists the infringement, and it pushes back against the overcoding by continuing to adhere to its own set of specialized names for genres and subgenres⁵⁵. Metal fans can be somewhat fanatical when it comes to subgenre labelling and categorization, leading to endless debates over which bands belong in which category and why they merit one label over another. This avoidance of the overly broad overcoded terms of the State demonstrates this spirit of ongoing resistance. Despite State pressures, metal feels fortified in the spaces that it has created to “foster social and political dissidence by encouraging their fans to think for themselves and remain critically cognizant of their surroundings, instead of offering their audiences identifiable, ready-at-hand solutions” (Riches, 2016, p. 129). Metal gives their fans credit to use their own minds, while the State runs in opposition to this, attempting to provide the answers that it has deemed acceptable. Metal makes room for their individualized thought patterns and opinions, these spaces of questioning, consideration, and possibility. Here are the deterritorialized areas and the temporary autonomous zones where freedom – of thought, taste, and expression – occurs.

5.3.4 Results of transgression

⁵⁵ For example, within one subgenre of metal, death metal, there exists many subgenres. Some of these include deathgrind, blackened death, brutal death, technical death, deathcore, symphonic death, orchestral death, death n’ roll, and mellow death, among others.

Through its journeys and transformations, the transgressions of metal have become postmodern and poststructural in their desires “to call into question everything and every notion” (Gibson, 2019, p. 188), while engaging in politics that “attempt to construct power relationships that can be lived with, not to overthrow power altogether” (May, 1994, p. 43). Metal, generally, is not anarchistic in its subversion, unlike some pockets of the punk rock scene. There is the desire to ask the questions, point out the flaws, and desire change in the system that currently exists, reshaping it into something better.

The notion of extreme metal, and the bands within those genres, aiming for the creation of a ‘better’ world is often difficult, as it is counter the clichés and topos that we have become accustomed to in discussion of heavy metal. However, there are several bands in existence attempting to create positive change in the world. This may be through environmental causes (see examples of Cattle Decapitation and Psycroptic and the Australian wildfires earlier in this work, or the outspoken environmentalism of Gojira), charitable foundations (Metallica’s ‘All Within My Hands Foundation’ or Dio’s ‘Stand Up and Shout’ cancer fund), raising awareness for social issues (Black Sabbath’s – and many other bands’ - support of the Black Lives Matter movement, Rage Against the Machine’s focus on Tibetan freedom, System of a Down raising awareness of the Armenian genocide, Cloud Rat raising awareness of societal pressures for female physical appearance, or Glacial Tomb’s discussion of trauma associated with sexual assault), or offering support to causes through performances or limited-run merchandising. The changes enacted by these musicians may be small, in the grand scheme of the issues they are up against, but they are important in that they are providing the opportunity for knowledge to their fanbase, drawing attention to social issues that need attention drawn to them.

This occurs in the created spaces of metal – those safe places of subversion created by the desire to hear the music itself. These spaces can be physical ones: the local clubs where metal bands perform, or even sections within that venue, such as the mosh pit. Or, they can be emotional spaces, like the area of repulsion and disconnect create by vile lyrics or obscene band

names and album art. These are the “small [...] local practices that are disseminated throughout society and [are] unpredictable” (May, 1994, p. 39) in their results, but have the intentions of positive change. This is also where the body “becomes an area for resistance and conformity”⁵⁶ (Jocson-Singh, 2019, p. 269), and where people can find comfort and others who have chosen to impose “self-exclusion on [their] own terms” (Rowe, 2017, p. 722) from the mainstream.

Inside these spaces, there remains power – the bands hold the power over the fans, and there exist hierarchical levels of status based on subcultural capital among the fans. However, this hierarchy exists differently from that of the State. Here, “power does not merely suppress its objects; it creates them as well” (May, 1994, p. 30). To create an energy between music and the fans, to create a message, and to create new power in the forms of transgression. In the pursuit of liberation, “individuals and groups must retain their power; they cannot cede it without risking the loss of the goal for which all political struggles occur: empowerment” (May, 1994, p. 22). One metalhead does not gain more power or subcultural capital by removing it from someone else, it is an individual pursuit within the collective which is able to strengthen the community in its entirety.

The results of these resistances are that space has been created. The space can be used to push against the mainstream and push back against the pushback. Through this, metal has established an anti-establishment despite the best efforts of the State to curb it. The State attempts to quell the anti-establishment by incorporating the ideas of anti-establishment and appropriating the ‘rebellious’ outside through further overcoding. State-sanctioned pseudo-rebellion plays off the traditional tropes and clichés of metal in hopes that it is just rebellious enough to satisfy, or convert, metal outsiders to a more standardized and State-approved version of the music. An example of this type of scene is metalcore, the much-derided metal

⁵⁶ The body as a place of resistance can be explored in many different manners, including tattoos and other body modification practices. While there are many connections between these practices and the metal world, they are outside the realm of the research for this thesis.

variety that has become highly focused on aesthetics and image, where the music is frequently accused of being uninspired and all bands offering a very similar and derivative sound. Metalcore has become established and institutionalized to the point where the names of bands are formatted and sound similar: Protest the Hero, Asking Alexandria, Bring Me the Horizon, August Burns Red, All That Remains, Every Time I Die, We Came As Romans, A Day to Remember.

Chapter 6: Life and Politics

6.1 Subculture

“Move in to fire at the mainstream of bombers/ Let off a sharp burst and then turn away.”

(Iron Maiden, 1984)

A subculture, a “social subgroup distinguishable from mainstream culture by its values, beliefs, symbols, and often [...] styles and music” (Hodkinson, 2016, p. 634), is able to demonstrate the desire for change and difference simply by existing as a subculture, a smaller portion of the whole. It is a splinter from the normative whole, ensuring that the mainstream is not all encompassing, that there is an anti-conformist area of dissent and disagreement to ensure that the mainstream does not run unimpeded. Within subculture, there are further divisions, allowing “metal youth groups to make subculture-like distinctions between themselves and others by reference to the music categories” (Brown, 2017, p. 64) they listen to. These musical varieties allow subcultural members to “react imaginatively through consumption and identity to construct creative meanings that can be liberating from subordination” (Blackman, 2005, p. 8). The act of supporting this subcultural creativity allows them to be a part of the war machine that counters State – or mainstream – dominance.

Creativity is effective at enacting and creating change, at jarring the complacency of the State, as “disruption and confusion create a kind of cultural noise” (Olson, 2017, p. 55). It is within this noise that exist the sounds of subversion among the unintelligible growls and crushing guitars. The noise forces open the spaces needed to promote change and engage in critique, those spaces between the world represented as normative and acceptable and that which is represented as abnormal and outside. Without this space there would be a danger of mainstream absorption, where metal could be incorporated into what is deemed the ‘culturally appropriate’ and lose its voice of individuality and authenticity, a prime requirement for the demonstration of counter-establishment viewpoints.

6.1.1 Brutal Fashion

The music of metal, as previously discussed, is the brutalization of the normative expectations of pleasant sounds and this brutality is taken beyond the music, into more cultural aspects of daily lives. Listeners engage with the music, and as a part of their promotion and enactment of change, they take the brutalization of the music and enact it on themselves in the form of ‘metal’ clothing. The clothing choices of metal fans “indicate a certain tribal identity” (Morris, 2015, p. 294) and include some in individualized pieces unique to the subculture, such as the battle jacket, which are “very important within metal subculture as visual garments that display the fan’s individual identity as well as adherence to tacitly agreed values within metal communities” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 438). This denim or leather vest (or jacket) is brutalized from its normative fashion: it is torn and manipulated, adorned with the patches of bands, possibly embellished with spikes or studs. It becomes the garment of the other, who have repurposed a mainstream item for their own purposes, demonstrating a subversion of fashion, even a subversion of the workmanlike and blue collar origins of the clothing such as denim. They have enacted the war machine on the State, reversing the subcultural appropriation that is more

frequently enacted by the State. There is also the important and ever-present tee shirt in metal fashion, which plays a “key role both in defining the borders of the youth culture to those on the outside and as a means of signaling important differentiation within it to insiders” (Brown, 2017, p. 72). The tee shirt, long considered a ‘lower class’ garment based on its design for comfort and associations with the blue collar working class, or a ‘dressing down’ of the corporate world, is significant well beyond a simply clothing choice; it is revealing on many levels, both to the inside and the outside of the metal culture.

Metal, along with many other subcultures, uses “personal appearance [...] to [communicate] subcultural values” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 448). One can tell which set of metal values a person adheres to based on the band represented on their tee shirt or by the choices and organization of patches on their battle jacket. These “projects of the self [...] affirm permanence, identification and status” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, & LeVine, 2011, p. 16) through the destruction of what is normative fashion. There are several examples here. A battle jacket has many different rules that can be followed or disregarded based on the person wearing it. One could adhere to the values that patches should only be added if the band has been witnessed live. Others may choose to disregard this, instead having patches of bands they enjoy and know well. Some are adamant about creating the vest themselves, taking the time to sew on every little patch and detail, while others are willing to purchase a pre-made or custom-made vest. The adherence or disregard of these rules reveals information regarding levels of fandom as well as the perceived authenticity of the wearer. Even the organization of the patches can reveal facts about the owner: favorite bands, favorite genres, a history of live shows. It can serve as a roundup of one’s metal fandom and personal history with the genre. The clothing serves as another sign, a statement, that metal is not something that is simply going to vanish from the lives of those to whom it is important or from the public consciousness: it has been around for decades and will continue to critique mainstream fashion trends through its unchanging assemblages that neglect the transformation of the seasons or trends.

The uniform of the metalhead, displaying an “achievement of belonging that [can] be read on the body by others” (Rowe, 2017, p. 723), has its own issues with authenticity. Metalheads wish to distinguish and “[define] themselves in opposition to those from outside the subculture who appropriate elements of the style because it suits current fashion tastes” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 448). There needs to be a demarcation between insider and outsider, and clothing – as well as behaviors – can define an individual’s identity “in contrast to the rest of society” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 443). This separation and authenticity has become increasingly blurred with the subcultural appropriation in which the mainstream plucks from outsider culture to commodify the brutal fashion into the popular culture. When the State can overcode the creativity of the war machine to strangle its uniqueness or desire for differentiation. To take what was attempting to be intentionally unpopular to the center and making it popular; nothing could be more insulting to the metal community than to be considered a part of the central culture they want to avoid. This follows Hjelm, et als. (2011) notion of democratization of the extreme, in which popular culture “threatens to disenfranchise extreme metal’s extremity, because extremity does not have the cultural impact it once had” (p. 16), itself an adaptation or interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of overcoding. Metal must continue to pursue and resist this by never hesitating its pursuit of the brutal, both in the music and in the associated clothing⁵⁷. This is how the goal of brutalization can remain as a part of the process of cultural subversion and critique of mainstream culture. They must continue to use the spaces that they have created to ensure this pursuit of the brutal may be continued and engaged in an ongoing pursuit. The mainstream is always moving and changing, and so must this reshaping and brutalizing. The aesthetics of metal “represent a socially discursive field in which different and often-surprising social spheres interact” (Unger, 2016, p. 53), and need to remain so for advancements in transgression to occur.

⁵⁷ The ongoing pursuit of brutality will be explored in section 7.3.

Even that fashion is being brutalized and then appropriated represents a small gain for the ability of metal to critique culture – the messaging of the music is snuck into an unknowing central culture⁵⁸, creating subversive irony and mocking the lack of perceived values held by the dominant culture as it needs to reach beyond its boundaries to steal trends instead of having the ability to create for themselves. The mainstream is not a creative force, it is not its own war machine, therefore resorting to cultural appropriation in the place of non-common sense thought. Through the framework of Luciferian Brutalism, the State – the dominant culture – is both unwilling and unable to allow itself to change. The State will not brutalize itself to advance or to create. Metal, as the non-dominant culture, does have the ability of auto-brutalization and will use this ability to be creative and advance. This has allowed metal to thrive, perhaps against all expectations.

6.1.2 Ontology of Metal

The community of metal is more than fans who share a taste in music; it is a cultural pedagogy with ontological underpinnings that provide members a way of living, a “way of looking at the world and being in the world; it is a philosophy that is shown” (Riches, 2016, p. 140). This is created through the “cherished bond to music that is unrivalled as it forges links to those that claim this genre as not only their musical preference, but also their chosen way of being seen in the world” (Rowe, 2018, p. 285), establishing their worldview and sense of self, a niche of individuality - within that worldview. Metal ontology and the participation in it are being a “part of a marginal, underground scenic-infrastructure, where individualism and anti-conformity are privileged over the commercial interests of [the] mainstream” (Riches, 2016, p.

⁵⁸ An example here could be with the band Ghost, whose music has abandoned many of the regulations of metal subgenre adherence to become popular and catchy – closer to the mainstream than their doom metal origins. The music of Ghost subverts the mainstream as it is Satanic in nature and band aesthetics frequently incorporate inverted crosses and anti-Pope imagery – something that may not be recognized by all that support the band.

128). The primary ontological concern here is the pursuit of non-conformist ways in a conformist world, to search for individualized satisfaction and the dissent of the mainstream. Further connections with Luciferian Brutalism exist here, in that an individual is better to feel “placed” in their world with a strong sense of individualism to attempt to manipulate the ills within it. This placement is their choice, arrived at through their own enlightenment instead of through recruitment and manipulation. They have arrived on their own, as individuals prepared to work for space to allow for cultural critique.

This ontology works with concepts of the inside and the outside, and “various shades of insider status are pitted against numerous manifestations of outsider status” (Olson, 2017, p. 48) in order to create a workable hierarchy within the scene and gain “social approval from within the extended community of metal fans [that is] contrasted with the look of disapproval or incomprehension shown by those outside it” (Brown, 2017, p. 75). The relations and tensions between the inside and outside are significant, as “existence cannot be known without these relational foundations, and this connection with subjectivity prevents any perfect characterization of its nature” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 30). This knowledge is a portion of the enlightened state required to help a group with aims of subversion. Transgression without a firm placement and establishment of self is misguided and confused. It is errant and created from conformity as opposed to individuality. A personal understanding of one’s ontology and self-placement within it offers a vast significance for the individual. With a belief of how life should be lived affords a view to the outside and what may be perceived as wrong compared to personal belief. This distance is a space in which cultural critique may begin – the questioning of the gap between personal worldviews and culturally dominant worldviews.

6.1.3 Controversy and Subversion

The transgression exhibited in metal has ensured it will “be a frequently controversial music” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 6) that continues to elicit “social reactions to perceived deviance, usually triggered by boundary-challenging events” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 7) Such events could constitute a variety of examples, from large-scale metal festivals to the stories of increasingly obscene or infamous individual shows⁵⁹. It could also increase the metal stories that have become lore, or the true – and often tragic – events that thrust metal to the forefront of the media and public consciousness once again. The examples of the Norwegian Black Metal scene are significant here, as they uncovered a subgenre movement and brought it into the mainstream media: the suicide of Mayhem vocalist Dead, the rash of church burnings across northern Europe, the murder of Mayhem’s Euronymous by Varg Vikernes, the murder of a gay man by Emperor’s Faust, and the murder of a classmate by Absurd’s Hendrick Mobus. Metal has been successful in its cultural critique and insubordination in its continued “rejection of modern life, Christian values, and especially industrial technology” (Morris, 2015, p. 293), which it has managed to maintain over decades and through a vastly different world from the one when heavy metal was developed. The concept of modernity has changed since Black Sabbath accused the government of being “War Pigs”, but the rejection has remained constant. Metalheads have been “walling [themselves] off from trends” (Puri, 2015, p. 73) – both inside and outside of the metal scene – for generations. Since the proto-metal bands⁶⁰ and the explosion of Black Sabbath, metal has been sharpening its tools of destruction that are ready to “perform subversive resistance in its use of language, image and capacity to lampoon and mock commodified popular music culture and at the same time not promote a notion of a dominant legitimated culture” (Scott, 2016, p. 33). This mocking has enforced the continued “pressing against the society in search of its weak-point and trying to open areas that would make

⁵⁹ See the examples of Gorgoroth and Watain described earlier in this work.

⁶⁰ Many bands have been credited with being forerunners to the metal movement due to a variety of stylistic influences. Some – but not all – of these bands include Led Zeppelin, Iron Butterfly, Steppenwolf, Coven, and Blue Cheer, all of whom laid groundwork for the genre that is most frequently attributed to Black Sabbath.

revolutionary change possible” (May, 1994, p. 24). Society is sensitive and defensive when under attack, and metal aims to expose this, to pick at a wound to infect it.

Over the course of its development, metal has used “controversy as a tool not merely of identity, but also of marketing” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 10), selling itself to like-minded individuals who may continue to subvert. Despite the generally anti-capitalist views of metal, there is an awareness of the need to market and sell, to continually have new blood willing to push forward an agenda of change and brutality: metal needs to find a way of “avoiding becoming infected with sameness, avoiding standardization [...] in order to retain its resistant and transgressive qualities” (Scott, 2016, p. 20). Andrew Culp (2016) further expands this notion that metal must continue to exist within the capitalist frameworks that affords its existence, noting that “the point is not to get out of this place but to cannibalize it – we may be *of* this world, but we are certainly not *for* it” (p. 8, original emphasis). Herein lies the future of the genre, not only musically, but in its subversion, as “the future we have comes when we stop reproducing the conditions of the present” (p. 13). The advancement of metal will remain complex as its associations with capitalism becomes more intertwined and unavoidable, with new layers of complexity such as corporate sponsorship, magazines, blogs, and merchandise becoming a part of the mix.

Metal, and the subversive battleground it has created, continues to use controversy to “battle over wider values in society and about the boundaries of appropriate popular culture” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 8). The controversial elements of the genre keep it grounded in the public consciousness. It could be argued that without controversy, metal would fade into the background and disappear, a monster without villagers to frighten. However, sometimes small headway is made and there is the occasional victory for metal⁶¹. Perhaps this is not a battle that

⁶¹ An example of a “victory” for metal would be the appearance that Dee Snider of Twisted Sister made at the congressional trials during the PMRC hearings in the 1980’s to speak on behalf of the virtues of heavy metal and to intelligently defend it against the conservative attacks it was faced with.

is meant to be won, simply one that requires continued engagement and devotion to ensure that the mainstream does not gain complete control, that the State does not become all-powerful and all-encompassing of cultural lives. If metal can simply keep the fight going, to stay in the battle, then there will always be something to fight against, and there will always be a system to subvert from the inside in true style of post-anarchy.

6.2 Metal as Apolitical

“They want to take the world/ And turn it into our hell/ Their power is a plague.”

(Cancer, 1992)

Extreme music is often stereotypically perceived as a highly politicized genre of music – one that strives to be a disruptive force against cultural institutions such as the government or Church. Visions of metalheads, influenced by the music of the Devil, gathering to enact their cravings for destruction, anarchy, and pain remains the embedded image for many without deeper understanding of the genre or the nature of its subversion. This is not always the case. Certain subgenres are more political than others; some are more transgressive than others. For example, there are only rare instances where a power metal band might be considered political, as their traditional fodder includes dragons, ancient warriors, and magic. Most of these bands rarely venture into the modern days, let alone the issues of modern society. However, there are bands buried in the depths of metal subgenres that have formed their careers around political causes⁶², while others are simply pursuing the creation of brutal music for the sake and

⁶² Bands such as Napalm Death and Cattle Decapitation have engaged in underground political messaging over the course of their discographies. More commercially popular bands, such as Rage Against the Machine, have gained success while being overtly political in all their musical actions. However, bands like RATM also find struggles within the tensions of music, consumerism, and corporate greed, exemplified by their strong anti-capitalist messaging contrasted with their universally high ticket prices for their 2021 reunion tour.

enjoyment of brutal music. This section will examine both sides, while engaging with some of the critiques of the often apolitical nature of metal.

The power that is created and enacted in metal “could never hope to engage in dismantling the totality” (Moore, 1994, p. 4) of social power structures, nor does it desire to. Instead, there is an aim to decentralize resistance in the same fashion that power and oppression have been (May, 1994, p. 24) in the metal world. Metal offers harsh music and harsher words, barked at the audience in guttural, beastly noises, sounds that “we can feel before they are statements to understand” (Riches, 2016, p. 127), in order to help with this process. These words and feelings are there to help formulate and maintain the spaces for transgression needed to enact cultural critique. The strength of metal critique stems from its unity, not its division, from its unified voice, and not the voice of one leader and many followers. There is an understanding in this music that “power comes from below” (May, 1994, p. 30), from the sweat and bodies clamoring in the mosh pit, and that the bands are there to fight alongside them⁶³. Bands that wish to demonstrate intelligence in their brutalization of the norms “offer analyses to those alongside whom he or she struggles, rather than sacred truths on tablets passed down to the oppressed” (May, 1994, p. 44): the musicians are there in the muck, sweating their sweat and bleeding their blood, the same as the fans that support them. This genre does not offer a leader preaching from a position of power, above others. A break from the typical societal power structure is offered, a breath of fresh air for many. There exists a levelled power structure and sense of unity that is rare in other genres, where band members – specifically vocalists – are often deified above the masses. Metal does not have the equivalent of U2’s Bono rubbing shoulders with world powers and the financial elite, a rich man sharing his feelings of equality with those struggling to make ends meet. Nor does it have men being knighted by the Queen of England or receiving other such cultural honors. Metal is most

⁶³ This serves a dual meaning in that the power of metal music has been viewed by some in the religious world as being music from hell.

frequently people who are struggling performing for other people who are struggling⁶⁴. There exists a camaraderie in this arrangement. This is the heathen masses pulsing together in one unified voice.

There exist dichotomies and tensions within this arrangement, as there is a constant push from the capitalist world where “everything, including the worker, appears in the form of a commodity – an isolated, exchangeable object with no relation to any sources in the social world” (May, 1994, p. 15). This world is attempting to commodify everything, including resistance itself. If the rebellion of the war machine can be subverted as an agent of the State, then this would represent a large State victory. Musicians require this capitalism, however, as it drives their message and allows it the opportunity to exist and spread. Because of this balance of capitalism and rebellion, there are times when proper resistance is “often outside the grasp of the actors engaging in them” (May, 1994, p. 35): they wish to make changes and critiques that they are simply unable to enact. They can only offer the words and the music to the revolution; they are unable to create the revolution itself as they attempt to “keep the dream of revolution alive in counterrevolutionary times” (Culp, 2016, p. 19).

6.2.1 A Place for Revolt

Fans take the messaging from music and use it to create the discursive spaces that allow for cultural critique. As previously mentioned, these spaces are both physical and mental, in the underground clubs where metal is performed, enacted, and ingested, along with the emotional distances created via metal’s visual insubordination of normalcy. As metal has become a “self-developing musical language and [...] form of expression” (Epp, 2019, p. 112) it has helped to

⁶⁴ There are of course exceptions to this in the metal world, as a select few members of the genre have become the metal elite, having accumulated vast levels of fame and wealth. However, these few musicians are rarely the ones to promote the virtues of financial equality.

navigate “several cultural fields [...] where polarized groups struggle for control over prestige, power, wealth, and a variety of subcultural currencies” (Smialek, 2016, p. 112). The expression can unify these groups under the umbrella of metal. Extreme music could be perceived as having “two main functions in revolutionary process: enabling the process and catalysing the event” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 389) so that people are able to demonstrate the “relationship of such groups with the rest of society, [...] the implications of collective values and practices, [...] the role of different spaces, [...] and the ways such groups reinforce or challenge [...] societal values” (Hodkinson, 2016, p. 636). The music is utilized not only to demarcate the dissenting spaces, but to demonstrate their utility in critique.

This is the liturgical “place of resistance to capitalist and bureaucratic norms” (Scott, 2014, p. 25), the metal show, the battered club that serves as the venue for the night, the place where people are brought together to “[catalyse] the revolutionary mood” (Haukkala, 2017, p. 389). Transgression is mobile in these spaces, moving from the ideas, the “something in the world that forces us to think” (Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 644), through the music and engaging in the “conceptual shift from the discursive to the corporeal [that] moves us beyond normative understandings of what extreme metal means and opens up new theoretical and methodological spaces to explore how extreme metal and its politics are felt” (Riches, 2016, p. 127). Finally, it moves back through to the individual, the one who was able to begin the cycle in the manner of Luciferian Brutalism, desiring change, and generating a “politics of dissent and dissatisfaction that is embodied and expressed through bodily practices” (Riches, 2016, p. 136): the mosh pit, the banging heads, the raised devil horns – the understanding that the normal just is not good enough for everyone, and that the space to critique it is needed. The energy created by dissent is funnelled through these people, thrown back towards society whose intolerance helped in its initial creation.

These physical spaces may look different in every town, in every incarnation of the metal scene: dilapidated auditoriums, former nightclubs, repurposed convention centres, old churches, purpose-built musical venues, converted basements, impressive concert halls. But the mental space is similar: a space of dissatisfaction and want for change.

6.2.2 Resisting outside pressure

The created spaces are needed to resist the pressures from the outside, the “wildly outrageous accusations by the [...] religious right-wing in America” (Weinstein, 2016, p. 25), and the critiques from the conservative mainstream. The spaces are the safe haven. They are reserved for fans of the music in order to “pursue a program of transgression”, even if this means there is “a resulting tendency toward instability” (Reyes, 2013, p. 243) that stems from a “rejection of mass culture [attempting to] level and standardize all values” (Scott, 2011, p. 230). Returning to the metaphor of the mosh pit as the ideal place for transgressive, non-normative behaviors, it is unstable in its rules as it is unstable in its results. No two mosh pits result in the same pattern despite the perceived similarities. Each pit is fueled by the dismay of the unique individuals within it, every time creating a unique assemblage based on the lines of flight present. And these spaces are filled with the “truth and honesty and belief in the riffs, melodies and the soul stirring clangor of that proud bombastic whole” (Scott, 2011, p. 228) that extreme music can create. The belief that change is possible, and that the critiques created by engaging with this subculture have the potential of enabling such changes.

Metal attempts to create “transgressive art and [use] artistic expression as outlet for one’s personal nature” (Dyrendal, Lewis, & Petersen, 2016, p. 8) to demonstrate its politics of dissent. Many musicians here must enact the “painter [who] must first destroy prior clichés before creating a new image” (Culp, 2016, p. 9) in order to create art that is both something new and something that is steeped in the potential for change and difference. One could not reveal

their true individual nature, their enlightened selves, by simply repeating what has come before them. They must create the new, to “build our own barbarian siege engines to attack the new Metropolis that stands in Judgment like a Heaven on Earth” (Culp, 2016, p. 64). It fills these transgressive spaces with the ideas and understandings that create the separation of thought and knowledge - knowledge being “a set of sedimented practices that devolve upon relations of force, while thought is the subversion of that sedimentation” (May, 1994, p. 29) – and the transgressive spaces are present to offer a place where subcultural unification transpires. A place where there can be “localized solutions to broader social problems” (Reyes, 2013, p. 243), or at least provide the sense – an indication - that something can be done, that differences can be made, that cries of subversion do not always go unheard.

Participation in these resistant spaces offers something to the participant: a place where “pride becomes a virtue, as does nonconformity” (Dyrendal, et al., 2016, p. 8) instead of being perceived as a negative where individual thought is chastised by the ideals of conformity. This pride is built through taking part in something outside the normative, outside the expected, and for mainstream culture, outside the desired, but it is a place where this pride is revered. The individuals who take part in this subversion and are a part of this collective space are faced with the prospect of needing to continually push forward the pursuit of their critiques and subversions, as that which “used to stand for resistance may no longer be so” (Scott, 2016, p. 29). Resistance must change in a culture that is always changing, or it is in danger of attempting to resist something that no longer is, an outdated version of the ever-changing State. Metal offers the spaces that can handle the fluidity of change and progress as transgression continues to push.

6.2.3 Critique of the Apolitical

A genre of music that is “overtly and overwhelmingly apolitical” (Morris, 2015, p. 292), metal has been criticized by scholars for “being too nihilistic, for not transforming its social and economic disgruntlements into tangible political goals” (Riches, 2016, p. 137) and for frequently shunning “politics in the governmental sense of the term, but also in the sense of avoiding conflict that can do damage to the unity of what it means to be metal” (Scott, 2011, p. 237). As with most aspects of the metal community, this is not a rule without exceptions. An example is the antifa movement in metal and those who believe that “metal should not be allowed to become a breeding ground for right-wing extremism” (Moynihan, 2019). The antifa metal movement, spearheaded in part by Kim Kelly and her organization of the Black Flags Over Brooklyn metal festival, exists to counter the “outsized visibility” (Moynihan, 2019) of National Socialist Black Metal and events like the pro-fascist Asgardrei Festival, entering metal into the realm of the overtly political. Kelly stated that “you can have militant politics and you can be a metalhead” (Moynihan, 2019) and that it is possible to critique the social formations of the metal genre itself. The existence of both the antifa and NSBM movements raises questions regarding the role that metal could – or should – play in the realm of the political and the agendas of social justice, yet the argument here is that metal is attempting to improve social ills. In this case, those ills include Nazi sympathizing and white supremacy. Kelly further wonders “how you can love something deeply, the way I love heavy metal, and not want it to be the best it can be” (Moynihan, 2019). The ‘best it can be’, in this case, includes the eradication of far right-wing ideals, while on the opposite side, the views of NSBM would surely insist that to achieve the ‘best’ would be to eliminate those who are considered unwanted under that ideology. Through antifa views, there should be an ethical dimension to metal society and there is a point where aspects or sections of the genre need to be brutalized, and perhaps censured⁶⁵; even if this

⁶⁵ The primary form of censorship in this case are the threats of antifa violence that have forced several musicians to cancel their concerts. Specific examples include Graveland’s cancelled appearance in Montreal and the forced cancellation of Taake’s 2018 US tour.

runs counter to the metal desires for liberation. It is this readiness for auto-brutalization within the genre that enables metal to strive towards a world cured of ills.

It is ironic that extreme music, often stereotypically considered among the most confrontational styles of music, may in fact be avoiding conflict instead of directly engaging in it. The argument here is that metal is meant to create dissenting spaces that allow for the enactment of transgression on the parts of the listeners. Looking for the opinions of metal musicians during heated political times will rarely yield results⁶⁶, as many bands focus on larger issues instead of singular political events. Perhaps this is an indication that they exist in a more hypothetical – or affective - realm of dissent. Is it the role of the musicians to tell listeners what they think, in turn telling fans what they should think? Or is the music there to serve as the fuel of transgression, not the transgression itself? A return to the musicians of NSBM bands serves as example here. Hoest, the central member of controversial Norwegian band Taake, has demonstrated the ability to fuse the notions of music being both the fuel and the transgression. He has appeared on stage at various times painted in anti-Islamic symbols or with a swastika scrawled on his chest for a show in Germany (this resulted in the remaining dates of his German tour to be cancelled), where this fascist symbology remains illegal. Hoest, despite his claims that Taake is not a racist band, has made outwardly racist (specifically anti-Islam) statements in the media, raising the questions if he is there to promote controversy and spread controversial ideologies, or if he is the controversy himself?

Questions and struggles are raised by critics of the genre (such as Kim Kelly and the metal antifa movement) as metal attempts to resist popular culture while – in a sense – being a part of popular culture, in that it “emerges from the popular” (Scott, 2016, p. 27). How can metal transgress without simply “reinforcing that which it is transgressing” (Unger, 2016, p. 245)?

⁶⁶ This is not to say that all metal musicians remain silent in the political realm. There are several musicians that are outspoken with their political views, such as Dave Mustaine from Megadeth.

Consider the ideas of theistic Satanism here. Meant to transgress the concept of God and perhaps religion, Satanism ironically serves to reinforce the doctrine of the Christian religions. Many ideas related to theistic Satanism are “taken from the dominant Christian narratives and symbols. They relate to mainstream religion by adapting the stories but inverting their value” (Dyrendal, 2008, p. 74). The worship of the Devil validates the stories of Christianity, as the “contraries reinforce one another” (Shakespeare & Scott, 2015, p. 2). How can metal resist avoid the trappings of punk rock, a “music and protest culture that was generated as a commodity from the outset contradicting the very anti-capitalist values it professed to represent⁶⁷” (Scott, 2011, p. 233)? Can it resist the commodification of its own protest to remain as pure as possible? Is pure protest possible at all in current society, or has the State managed to defeat the war machine? Are the discursive spaces brutal enough to remain separate from the mainstream? Issues such as these create an imperfect critique of the mainstream from its fringes as the issue is more complex than commenting on something that is deemed objectionable. But metal has not attempted to create a perfect place from which to subvert. It makes what it can with what it has, it encompasses the notion of brutalizing theory, it has demonstrated its psychological nomadism. Theory and society alike can not be brutalized to create something new in one fell swoop. There requires subversion as erosion: subtle changes over time. This process stands in opposition to some anarchist views looking for immediate and radical change through revolution. Extreme music is a plodding giant, the lumbering Frankenstein monster.

6.3 In Pursuit of the Brutal

“Self-inflicted pain/ Slicing his face to shreds/ Brutal blow to the face/ Sentenced to death/ By a
swing of a mace/ Blown out brains with a grenade”

⁶⁷ While the commodification of punk rock from its outset may be a controversial point of view, one might consider Malcolm McLaren and his role in creating The Sex Pistols as a partial means to create a fashion trend.

(Autopsy, 1989)

Metal has undertaken a responsibility to remain at the forefront of musical transgression, and the subgenres of metal take this responsibility seriously. Rock n' roll has played a subversive cultural role since Bill Haley wanted teenagers to "Rock Around the Clock", but rock music has largely disappeared in the popular landscape of the new millennium. It has largely been overtaken by waves of pop music, R&B, and hip hop. The pre-approved and socially accepted rebelliousness within the mainstream tends to focus on the pushing of sexual boundaries, mainly related to the clothing (or lack thereof) of musicians, or the 'de-virginizing' of teen pop sensations. In this case, they move from fresh-faced portraits of virtue and innocence through a very public sexualization⁶⁸. These transgressions have become expected and a part of the common sense of the music world. Metal has "become rock's last man standing and has come to approach being a metonym for rock itself" (Weinstein, 2016, p. 27). Extreme music must feed the rebellious sensibilities of the youth who seek escape from the mainstream, and it has a responsibility to continue to push boundaries, because even though "metal lingers in a state of crystallized motionlessness, extreme music is the true limitless form of music" (Ferrero, 2016, p. 217). Igorrr serves as an example again, as this music attempts to demonstrate extremity through its limitlessness.

Igorrr (French musician Gautier Serre) has pushed boundaries since its inception. The band combines several disparate genres, brutalizing all expectations in the meantime. Death metal rubs shoulders black metal, baroque, breakcore, trip hop, opera, waltz, and video game samples. The band has not hesitated to use many varied (and typically non-metal) instruments to create bludgeoning heavy music or unexpected sonic landscapes: harpsichord, qanun, oud,

⁶⁸ There are numerous examples here. The new era of the sexualized 'teen queen' began with Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, moving through Miley Cyrus, and leading society to the uncertain future of Billie Eilish, already a controversial and intriguing figure based on her clothing choices. The question here will be if she falls into the patterns laid before her or if she will break what has essentially become a societal expectation where maturing is often represented through the socially-acceptable shedding of clothing.

accordion, cello, sitar. Many songs will explore several themes and segues within the same composition, demonstrating that Igorrr is willing to attempt to be without limits in the music that they create. An example is the 2020 song “Paraping” (featuring the vocals of Cannibal Corpse’s George ‘Corpsegrinder’ Fisher) that includes switches between brutal death metal riffs, intense and heavy synthesizers, death growl vocals, and video game samples reminiscent of Nintendo’s *Duck Hunt*. The music can often be difficult to follow, and an Igorrr album provides a varied musical experience from track to track, each song pushing the boundaries of any number of genres at the same time, making the music truly hybridized. These attempts at limitless song writing and composition along with an unending desire for genre subversion makes Igorrr a band at the forefront of the extreme, managing to do things that have not been done before, exploring the uncommon.

There is a common understanding of this music, an expectation of it when viewed from the outside. For musicians in extreme metal, adherence to “common sense does not violate thought” (Jackson, 2017, p. 669) and existing within that common sense would place limits on the music itself. Therefore, extreme metal continues to push forwards, to continue to “shock recipients unfamiliar with their kind of music as well as to entertain those who have a predilection for it” (Kirner-Ludwig & Wohlfarth, 2018, p. 426). Extreme metal has undertaken many modern transformations to continue its pursuit of even more brutal sounds. Many bands refuse to stagnate, while others are more content to repeat themselves. Metal veterans Enslaved are an example of an ever-changing band, continually attempting new sounds and genres over the course of their long careers. Enslaved has gone through many iterations, including stints as a death metal band, shifting to becoming important in the birth of Norwegian black metal, helping to create and popularize Viking metal, and continually moving towards a more progressive metal sound. This is countered by bands like Iron Maiden and Slayer, who are ardent in sticking to their formula over the course of their careers. In metal, there is a unique dichotomy of music, as some follows strict adherence to the rules of the genre, while some does not hesitate to engage

in experimentation, or even in the ultimate acts of transgression that “are to be committed against the very expectations of the heavy metal genre itself” (Puri, 2015, p. 82). All the theory that can be brutalized is being defiled by modern metal bands at the margins of the extreme as they continue to push outwards, further from the center. Consider the Italian group Fleshgod Apocalypse, which employs two traditionally non-metal members in the form of a pianist and an opera singer as a part of their brutal death metal collective. In this sense, with different musicians being added and genres being ripped and sewn together, metal has almost become “the new jazz or classical music” (Ferrero, 2016, p. 225). Some bands have explored the grandiose, such as the symphonic or orchestral incorporations into black⁶⁹ and death metal, or the massive soundscapes created by atmospheric black metal bands⁷⁰, while others have simplified their sounds in pursuit of classic brutality⁷¹. They are all seeking the edges of musical sensibility, something unexplored, or a new twist on something old.

In a sense, this music has become a victim of its own success, as “the style [both of the music and the aesthetics] has such a stamp of authenticity that it is almost immediately subject to mimicry and begins to spread beyond its original context” (Brown, 2017, p. 66). An aesthetic example of this incorporation is supermodel Kendall Jenner sporting a Slayer tee shirt, or American pop singer Billie Eilish using a death metal-style font on some of her merchandise. The extreme gains an aura of ‘cool’ that is subverted by the dominant culture. This mainstream incorporation is yet another reason why extreme metal continues to push towards the outside, to pursue the unthought, to maintain their uniqueness in a world that trends towards being a repetition of the same.

⁶⁹ This has become common, specifically in black metal, with the relative popularity of bands such as Dimmu Borgir, Emperor, and Cradle of Filth.

⁷⁰ Such as the Cascadian black metal band Wolves in the Throne Room, or others such as Panopticon.

⁷¹ An example here is the throwback death metal of bands like Gatecreeper.

6.3.1 Notions of becoming

Extreme music has always embraced the challenge of a “ceaseless search for ever-heavier sounds” (Reyes, 2013, p. 242), willing to push boundaries of the extreme no matter how heavy or brutal the music has become. Even when there appears to be an end to the extreme – the edge, the bracketed end – there are bands willing and able to subvert the rules to create something different and therefore, more extreme. Over the course of metal history, the music has undergone continual changes. It became faster with thrash metal, heavier with death metal, starker with black metal, and more extreme with the blending of genres such as grindcore and deathgrind. Metal must continue to push boundaries, because “not working the limits would [result] in a failure to produce previously unthought questions and knowledge” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. 729) and this would represent stagnation and death of the music. It is important in order to continue a subversion of the common, a brutalization of the normative, that metal remains new and avoids the creation of copies of itself and the further development of ‘common’ sense in the genre. Simple reproduction works counter to the postmodern rejection of “any example as an absolutely authentic archetype” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 35). The new can be created, but it must be incited by “creating the outside” (Jackson, 2017, p. 667) first. Extreme metal must create the outside, occupy it, and then brutalize that by creating a new outside next. This is the movement of spaces and their nomadic qualities. There is a need for continual movement to ensure that the spaces that have been created remain safe for engaging in cultural critique. The State can move quickly in attempt to territorialize the newly created spaces: the war machine must accelerate its creation.

Extreme metal should not focus on the anarchist ideas of *being*, of existing in a certain space with no need or desire to change; it should focus more on the post-anarchist emphasis on *becoming* (Moore, 1994, p. 4): becoming metal. The established power structures, even within metal, is often a “matter of constraints upon action, [but this] does not imply that we must

define those constraints in terms of *restraints*” (May, 1994, p. 29, original emphasis) on the freedoms of the genre. It is the responsibility of the genre to reject and subvert restraints, to break from the rules that have been established and the expectations that have been put in place – to move beyond *being* – to explore the *becoming*.

This pursuit of the brutal in music “derives from the animality of the human” (Snaza, 2016, p. 91), a place where the rules are different or simply do not exist. There is a focus on instinct and a primeval understanding of life and death, and the struggle of existence between these two opposites. This allows for the blasphemy of the rules, the obliteration of the understanding of culture. From this point, there can be “true liberation through destruction” (Garndenour-Walter, 2015, p. 22) of the rules. Perhaps this is the most ‘metal’ thing possible: to exist in a place of musical creation where there only needs to be a loose adherence to any kind of regulation⁷². This is a place of honest subversion, when something is unable to be contained in any way as it *becomes* something new, leaving the tenets of *being* behind. This is where the musician can be a Luciferian Brutalist, with an individualized feeling of strength that they can bring to the group, in turn creating a strong collective.

6.3.2 Heavier than death

Heaviness in music is embodied by death metal. There is significant aural weight to the music, sounds that press on the soul and feel like the increased gravitational pull of an alien planet, crushing our bodies to the earth. If musical brutality is based on this style of heaviness, then death metal has reached the apex. Death metal is a genre that “had exhausted the possibilities for heaviness, reaching the heaviest point imaginable within the current paradigm,

⁷² There exist many examples of bands who push the boundaries and create from a place that is nearly rule-free. Some examples include the post-metal of Atlas Moth, the post-noise group KEN Mode, the black metal and slave spirituals mashup of Zeal & Ardor, the genre-bending experimentation of Igorrr, or the movement from death metal to progressive metal by Opeth.

a point from which the only response seemed to be to retreat to less heavy terrain” (Reyes, 2013, p. 242). There are not many genres that can admit that the boundaries were pushed so far that there was a need to pull back. Therefore, to continue to be brutal, to ignore stagnation, and to become even *more* brutal, death metal needs to shift the paradigm. Efforts are continually being made to make this style of music heavier. This includes using the voice as a nearly percussive instrument to add further weight to the music, and bands such as Dying Fetus, Behemoth, and Leviathan have managed to push death growls to new sonic extremes. Perhaps it is not possible for the music to get heavier, but there are spaces to continually be explored for the music to move forwards in its social transgression.

Yet, as death metal became more known and more familiar, the music that was “once undisputedly the heaviest of all metals had become unspectacular, [...] [and] innovating a sound heavier than death entailed a subcultural reorientation” (Reyes, 2013, p. 240). Perhaps the music did not actually become less heavy, but the *perceived* heaviness had changed. Fans knew what to expect from the subgenre, and as (according to Adorno) much “art relies on the predictability of anticipated audience response, [...] stereotypes are indispensable to the organization [...] of emotional experience, preventing us from falling into mental disorganization and chaos, [so] no art can entirely dispose with them” (Puri, 2015, p. 74). The expectation was for heavy music and growled vocals. Fans and non-fans alike began to understand what was coming from a death metal record. Eventually, it was no longer a surprise. Many bands fell into a trap of creation that was too reliant on a “sense of duty, allegiance and constraint [...] towards their original art form” (Puri, 2015, p. 73). They were too constrained by their own rules and their own success at making heavy sounds. They stopped pushing. While the music being created by stalwart death metal bands like Cannibal Corpse and Immolation was undoubtedly heavy, it began to lack creativity and forward movement: heavy, but no longer transgressive. It became the norm.

Guitars can not be tuned lower⁷³, or drums pounded harder, so death metal has continued to push its subversive boundaries through increasingly vile lyrics and imagery, and sometimes (controversially) incorporating synthesized aspects of the music to make it faster and more complex, adhering to the consideration that “if the subject matter happens to be the sort of thing that makes parents, teachers or other guardians of moral wellbeing cross, then so much the better” (Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007, p. 59). They have also engaged in a variety of techniques in order to continue the brutalization of the rules: an increase in technicality and speed to near-impossible realms, seen in Canadian bands such as Archspire and Beneath the Massacre; a ferocious blending of genres to create more dense layer of complexity in the music; or veering in the other direction, looking to the sounds of the past – originators such as Death, Possessed, or Obituary – to show respect for the origins of the genre and make the old sounds new once again.

Death metal, perhaps more than any other subgenre of metal has, at certain points, constrained itself under the weight of its own rules and many “death metal artists sense that their genre suffered under the weight of its own formulaic decadence” (Reyes, 2013, p. 246). However, this music has a responsibility to live up to its name and continue to push to create music that “rather than expressing a life, [...] obliterates it” (May, 2009, p. 26). Death metal musicians have the choice of where they want to push their music, and how to use the spaces that they have created. Do they strive for the new, unexplored realms that death metal could offer, or do they attempt to hold open the brutal space that had been previously opened and attempt to fend off the encroaching mainstream?

⁷³ There can, however, be more strings added to a guitar. While the six-string remains the standard, nu-metal made the seven-string more common. Current tech-death bands will frequently employ eight-string guitars for ever-higher degrees of difficulty.

6.3.3 Black Metal: Beyond Brutality

Black metal began as not “just a music genre, but also a subculture and a way of thinking about demons and the demonic in a world of religious extremes” (Thacker, 2011, p. 11). “Black metal revels in the outside, in chaos” (Snaza, 2016, p. 83), feeding on uncertainty and the blackness of the unknown. It explores the clashes and tensions that “allow people to challenge norms” (Gibson, 2019, p. 191), and continues to do so as new boundaries of black metal are continually being explored. This genre continues to morph and change, often to the point where it can become increasingly difficult to see the connections to the original waves of black metal. The genre exists outside of limitations. There are many new subgenres and musical blends that continue the “desire to witness and create the sound of metal’s putrescence” (Reyes, 2013, p. 251). This may take form in the continually putrid live performances of Watain, the experimentation of a group like Gaahl’s Wyrð, or the collision of the beautiful and the vile in a controversial band like Deafheaven⁷⁴ and their blackgaze music.

This music remains challenging to listen to as it pushes the limits in all conceivable directions, seemingly leaving nothing unexplored in attempt to find the musical equivalent of human depravity, to find the twilight, and to pursue Snaza’s (2016) concept of the Endarkenment. Black metal has not only demonstrated a craving for the brutal, but has managed to redefine it, continually subverting any and all rules that stand in its way. This is not to say that all black metal is immune to the trappings of repetition of unoriginality that other genres must deal with. It very much exists and there is a certain level of ‘sameness’ within the

⁷⁴ Deafheaven is often at the centre of debate as to whether they belong in the black metal subgenre, or in the metal subgenre at all. Their combination of shoegaze and black metal has often been dubbed ‘hipster black metal’, and they have proven to be a controversial and divisive group over the course of their careers. This stems from the frequently light style of music they play that combines the screams of black metal, but also includes their breaking of traditional black metal rules, such as releasing a pink album cover on their record *Sunbather*.

music, yet one that seems to still hold the values of normative challenge and transgression as a primary concern.

The spaces created in black metal are there to critique culture. In the case of this music, that critique is specifically focused on Christianity. Here, second-wave black metal moved “beyond explicitly satanic lyrics in a much stronger reliance on the abject as a way of distancing itself from the mainstream” (Unger, 2019, p. 248). Many aspects of the genre moved from a “structure of opposition and inversion [to a] structure of exclusion and alterity” (Thacker, 2011, p. 16). The spaces very much exist on the outside, not just of mainstream culture, but of metal culture as well. Black metal, more than any other metal subgenre, has managed to Other itself from the normative. It is a niche within a niche, to the point where many within the metal community keep black metal on the outside of their fandom and expectations of extreme music. Black metal dwells in those unseen shadows with all aspects of the music contributing to a transgression, a brutalization, of all that might be expected.

This often leads to the creation and use of extremity in a more negative fashion, not simply for the subversion of cultural normativity, but for the subversion of basic ethics. The development of NSBM and bands like Absurd demonstrate that the music is not only used for the drive towards social change but can be geared towards a doctrine of hate. This becomes a difficult balancing act in metal, as the boundaries are meant to be pushed well beyond the State values of good taste. The lines of flight connected to the extremity of the music offer poor results in some cases, and the pursuit of racist values and neo-Nazi ideals are the most glaring obliteration of ethics. Despite metal, and black metal in particular, being a genre that prides itself on the brutalization of the normative, perhaps there does need to be a line in the sand, a point of no return, and ethics that should not be subverted.

Chapter 7: Luciferian Brutalism

7.1 Theoretical Outline

“Slavery, loathing, frenzy, tension.”

(Vader, 2000)

The cumulation of this research and thesis has resulted in the ongoing development of a new theory created from the work and from the interpretation of heavy metal music and its ability to create a usable space for cultural critique. As mentioned previous over the course of this thesis, the focus of Luciferian Brutalism exists in two parts: 1) a focus on the achievement of a subjective personal enlightenment to fuel individual transgression; 2) the focus on an enlightened individual able to bring themselves to a group setting in order to help in the promotion of critique and change. The desire for change is not a universal one in the realm of heavy metal and there exist many facets and lines of flight that maintain specific and closed views of the world: they are opposed to change. However, this section will continue to explore and develop the ideas that metal and its transgression can be a powerful force for transgression and change.

Luciferian Brutalism (LB) is a theory – an idea, a series of thoughts attempted to be organized into one outline, a lens in which to view this culture, a theoretical reflection - created from metal research, yet it owes many of its ideas to the brutalization of other theory: LB has taken strips from multiple different places, refurbishing them, and mutating them into one new hybrid theory. LB has taken notions from May’s poststructural anarchism and the concept of brutalizing a system from within that very system. Brutalization, in this case, is not the destruction of that system, but the functioning within it, using it, to gain a change that provides a more equitable result for all. It has stripped ideas from Snaza’s endarkenment and the pursuit of a void, a twilight where the individual may be found. LB has flayed from the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic war machine, in that metal is a changing entity that is used to counter

the normative values of the State. The metaphor of Dr. Frankenstein's monster has been used in several instances in this research, and it continues to serve as an apt comparison for this idea: the theory is composed of the pieces of other theories. Previous work has been dismembered and the parts needed for the new monster have been taken when needed. This is the brutalization of prior theory, the psychical nomadism and deterritorialization of ideas described by Deleuze: taking what is needed in order to piece it together to create something different. The end purpose of Luciferian Brutalism is twofold. First, it aims to exist as a theory created from the study of heavy metal music, to be used to further study this type of music, along with other areas and modes of popular culture, such as film and literature. Secondly, it aims to help explain the motivation and usefulness of individuals in a collective when attempting to critique mainstream culture. While the goal may not be a cultural revolution, it could serve as a precursor to such, at least helping to demonstrate the type of person willing to critique the normative. If there is no "revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement" (May, 1994, p. 13). Luciferian Brutalism, while perhaps not entering the role of the revolutionary theory itself, may aid in discussing the potential birth of a revolutionary theory along with how and why someone has become engaged in it.

The first step in the development of Luciferian Brutalism is an individual gaining a sense of personal enlightenment, which ironically can be achieved through the pursuit of the endarkenment, or the settling in between, in the twilight. This is possible completely on one's own, or with the help of a catalyst. In this case, the catalyst is heavy metal music, but LB proposes that it can manifest itself in many different forms. Enlightenment is a personal journey that offers relative results. Not all people will become interested in a cause, or seek to expose injustice, or pursue information and knowledge on their own. Many require the additional motivation and drive provided to them by an outside source. The biblical story of original sin – which enabled Eve to become enlightened with the truths of the world – was influenced by an outside source, the serpentine embodiment of Satan. The temptation provided by the snake

enabled Eve to make the decision to gain knowledge: the snake and the apple were the catalysts, but it was Eve who needed to make the final choice to bite into the forbidden fruit. This parallels Luciferian Brutalism in that there are a number of ‘temptations’ which exist, and they can lead an individual down a path where they are willing and able to critique the culture in which they exist. However, these ‘temptations’ are unable to make the decision for the person. They have free will, and they are able to choose for themselves. However, once chosen, a person can achieve the personal enlightenment they may have been seeking. Heavy metal music offers a new view for people who are new to the genre of the music, one that may open their eyes to a new way of understanding and a new way of rebellion (examples here include the violent nature of the lyrics or artwork discussed earlier, methods which are used to open up spaces for cultural critique) are provided with a different version of the available truth, one that is viewed through the traditionally rebellious and critical nature of heavy metal music, as has been explored in the previous chapters of this thesis.

The theory relies on the idea that the enlightened individual is more prepared to enact change than the non-enlightened one. That this light that has been brought to them in Luciferian fashion, has provided them with an understanding that they would not have previously possessed. It is the understanding that creates the stronger individual; the ability to see something in a manner that is different from the mainstream, and therefore transgressive. Extreme metal offers this; other music does not to the same degree. Metal, as discussed in the previous sections, attempts to exist outside of the mainstream, while popular music is a creation of the State to further the ideals of the State, particularly capitalist values. Pop music is meant to streamline the thoughts and potential transgressions of the masses, while metal attempts to be the war machine that combats the normative. However, “the State does not give power to the intellectuals or conceptual innovators; on the contrary, it makes them a strictly independent organ that is only imagined” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 30). Therefore, the individual, the intellectual, the metalhead, must fight for their dissenting space.

Much of the focus of this research has been on the manner in which a community – in this case, the heavy metal, and extreme music community – is able to forge a space in order to be used for cultural critique. The individual must take their enlightenment and move this to a group environment. However, this is not always a simple shift from the individual to the collective, and the “tension between individual empowerment and a commitment to the collective runs through the wider field of heavy metal” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, p. 17). The individual must seek the community that affords the most appropriate setting for the enactment of their subversive thoughts and desires, and be willing to engage in the path to transgression: the “descent into darkness begins with a protest: lightness has far too long been the dominant model of thought. The road there descends from the chapel to the crypt” (Culp, 2016, p. 16). The person is not recruited by a group to become a foot soldier in their revolutionary ideas; they thoughtfully choose that which works best for their individual needs. This, in turn, creates a person who is fully committed to the community they have chosen, and able to be a valuable contributor to it⁷⁵.

The lens of Luciferian Brutalism sees people who seek a community that helps in serving their needs, and not the inverse of this. People do not want servitude, to be engaged in it as either master or slave. They wish to seek their own knowledge and understanding and arrive at the place they need to be in their own manner, not by being told. The argument here is that the communities of extreme metal and its subgenres function as a system that work for the enlightened individual, not a series of individuals that work for the desires of a system, or a State. People – specifically metalheads – do not want to adhere to the norms established by the State (whatever that State may be, as even the metal community itself could be considered its own state that exists as a former piece of the mainstream). Instead, they want a place where they

⁷⁵ This is not to indicate that every fan of heavy metal music operates in the same fashion. There are many fans of this music who simply enjoy the music without any desire to engage in cultural critique. Further, there are many people who enjoy the music without taking any part of the community nature of heavy metal. It can be, and often is, a music that is enjoyed in an individual or solitary manner.

can question and challenge the rules and regulations of the State: they wish to embody the ideals of the nomadic war machine.

These spaces can be identified as the “tensions that exist between the willingness of subculturalists to identify with a group label and the postmodern tendency to navigate identity on a primarily individual basis” (Cardwell, 2017, p. 445). The space created by extreme metal is the resolution to this tension; it is the balance between the individual and the collective when both are brought together and able to function as one unified community. The space – of potential and possibility – will forever be a battleground, a point of contention, between opposing sides. The spaces created by metal forge an in-between ground, a no-man’s land that is “controlled by these two flanks, which limit it, oppose its development and assign it as much as possible a communicational role” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 57): the State does not want the war machine to gain ‘true’ power, only an imagined one. Unified transgression is much more powerful than a purely individual one, as there remains a strength in numbers, especially when standing in opposition to the power of the State. The war machine, in this instance, requires numbers to prevent territorialisation and overcoding, to “[prolong] the limits of the universe” (Culp, 2016, p. 23). There is always the possibility of one individual succumbing to the sways and influences of the mainstream; it is far less likely that a large number of people will shift their ideals to the normative when they exist in a transgressive or dissenting space that they have created specifically for the purpose of critiquing that very mainstream. These numbers of individuals make the war machine stronger, both in its ability to attack and defend.

The notion of brutalism and brutality is also of importance to this theory. This returns to the idea of dismantling and destroying what has come before to create something new. This brutality stems from the desire – from the craving of flesh – to take what works for an individual and to discard the rest. With Luciferian Brutalism, there is no need to incorporate all aspects of prior theory, only that which serves to improve and develop. The same applies to music theory:

there is no need to take all aspects of an influential band to incorporate them into new music, there is only the need to take the influential elements that are perceived as being helpful to the pursuits of the new band. LB affords the space to take only what is needed and to leave the rest behind. The flesh is removed from the carcass, and it is acceptable to leave the rest of the body to rot unused.

7.2 Luciferian Brutalism and Control

“Come forth for the cattle call/ Confront the evil river you can’t control.”

(DevilDriver, 2007)

The State does not look favorably upon attacks to its territorialized zones. It wishes to maintain its mainstreamed ideas and sensibilities and keep them protected from the outside war machines that may threaten to re-(or de-)territorialize its lands. Once the State notices that there is an emergence of new forms that exist outside of its views of the ideal, it begins to take control of the production. In music, this has happened long ago with record companies having enormous amounts of control over the artists in their employ and the type of music that is being created. This is continually being subverted by the smaller, independent labels, and metal has continually been at the forefront of this territorial battle. The indies versus the majors may never be a fair fight, yet it is one that is continually being undertaken and pursued. The indies continue to fund their war machines in hopes of creating the spaces needed to enact legitimate and necessary change.

To exact its control over production, the State allows the *normal* to create what was once *unique*. This is the mainstreaming of the ‘outside’, and how the State can saturate a scene with non-innovators, therefore crushing it. Perhaps there is no greater example in metal than the explosion of hair metal in the 1980s and of nu-metal in the 2000s; both metal trends suffered

from many of the same issues. Spawned as unique brands of the heavy metal whole, hair and nu-metal both took the scenes by storm with a rush of innovative and unique bands. However, once the State discovered methods in which to commodify these styles, they overcoded them and flooded the market with ready-made copies of the originals. They allowed non-innovators, the non-enlightened bands, to create music and receive the benefits of the full capitalist support to allow them fame, desecrating the authenticity and originality of the subgenres. Both hair metal and nu-metal suffered under the over-abundance of bands, the over-saturation of the market⁷⁶, and the lack of talent and originality that emerged from the capitalist-controlled scenes driven by profit.

Luciferian Brutalism resists this State control and hopes to support the intellectuals – the enlightened – in their quest to create a movement: something brutal and something unique that allows for the improvement and advancement of the genre in creating the spaces that are needed for it to continue to move forwards in its dissent and transgression. The resistance to State control, to attempt to maintain status as a war machine, is to continue to explore the potential that is created through dissenting spaces.

7.3 Application to Metal

“Ordered to advance/ Moving forward/ Screaming, rolling iron death.”

(Gatecreeper, 2018)

It has been mentioned that Luciferian Brutalism is a theory created from the study of extreme metal music. In examination of this style of music, the fans of it, and the bands creating it, there have emerged patterns that drive this theoretical reflection. There are ways in which the

⁷⁶ In nu-metal, for every Korn there was a Papa Roach; for every White Zombie there was a Powerman 5000; for every Slipknot there was a Mudvayne.

patterns repeat themselves that suggest a larger, or more observable, method of functioning that exist in the metal world. For example, a band begins making extreme metal music. Perhaps they have the desire to brutalize the theory that has come before them: they wish to exist in a certain subgenre of music that they personally enjoy, or that was meaningful to them in their own lives. They flay the corpse of the music that has come before them, piecing the strips of flesh together with other styles to create something that is unique to themselves. Perhaps what they have created is a completely new style of music, the birth of a new subgenre. Or perhaps it is a repetition that has come before, itself not a complete copy because it has been filtered through their own personal tastes, songs, and abilities. There is no true replication, but perhaps varied levels of homage seen in new music. Arizona death metal band Gatecreeper serves as an example here, as they are heavily influenced by the initial waves and bands of death metal, mimicking many aspects of their sound and guitar riff sensibilities. However, instead of being perceived as derivative or a copycat band, Gatecreeper has been lauded in their creation of something entirely new⁷⁷, brutalized from what had come before them. Their original music is their enlightenment, that which can be brought to the collective to aid in pushing forward the doctrine of metal: the continued desire for the creation of dissenting spaces for cultural critique.

A band creates the music in their individual manner: they are a collective of individuals who bring their own lives and influences to a larger group (the band). They create. Their truth of the music – their enlightenment – emerges from this creation. Then they bring these creations, these individual pursuits, to the larger collective that they have chosen as the medium for their work, the metal subgenre that will either accept or reject them based on their strength and ability to push forward an agenda of transgression common to the genre. As they are strong, enlightened individuals, they contribute to the whole. Returning to Gatecreeper, they have brought their ‘stadium death metal’ to the world of metal, and it has contributed to the strength

⁷⁷ This new style of metal has been dubbed as ‘stadium death metal’ by members of the band themselves and members of the metal media.

of the whole genre as their music has provided another unique view of what modern metal is able to be – in this case, a throwback style that blends the old with the modern. Their music, different from that which has come before them despite the flesh of influences stitched to it, is new, and has aided in bringing the brutal to new audiences, both sonically and geographically.

It is possible to analyze the contribution of any band to their metal subgenre through the lens of Luciferian Brutalism, as long as specific conditions are met: the band is creating original music; the band is seeking out the subgenre that is the most appropriate for their music and style of enlightenment, instead of allowing the subgenre and its State-esque rules to purely determine the creation of their art. To elaborate on this point, the example of deathcore and deathgrind may be used. If a band is creating music that follows as many of the rules of deathcore as possible, such as the large breakdowns and catchy choruses, simply because they want to be considered a deathcore act, then they would be functioning counter to the ideals of Luciferian Brutalism. That band would be working for the collective instead of allowing the collective to work for them. The same could be said for deathgrind: if a band is simply pursuing the tropes of the subgenre in order to fit with the subgenre, then they exist outside of LB as their enlightenment is not personal, it is not a war machine; it is dictated by a State. However, a band can be influenced by the tropes and rules of deathgrind as they brutalize that which has come before them in order to create the music that serves as their individual enlightenment: music that contains their truth of what metal is, existing “only in its own metamorphoses; it exists in an industrial innovation as well as in a technological invention” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 16-17). Afterwards, if that band determines that deathgrind is the most appropriate label for their music, or the community that best exemplifies their ideals, then they are a band who has adhered to the concept of LB. They are allowing the subgenre to work for them.

Yet, here an issue arises. If two bands that end up within the same subgenre arrive there through different means and varying levels of intention and authenticity, how is it possible to

determine which band has arrived to this place in an enlightened state, and which has arrived there simply by following the rules of the subgenre? Through the lens of Luciferian Brutalism, this comes down to the analysis of space and the discursive spaces created (or not created) by extreme metal bands. Enlightenment, in the view of LB, creates the potential for creating spaces. These spaces allow for the invitation for change, the new, the different: it allows for an area of dissent towards the pre-existent, transgression towards the State. Bands that bring their enlightened ideas to the collective are the ones that are creating this space with their brutalization of the past used to create something new, something different, even if this difference is slight. Yet their originality, even within the confines of a subgenre, continues to push for this space that allows for further originality to be born of it. This is the expansion of the battleground between the State and the war machine – the “pure form of exteriority, whereas the State apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 5). The enlightened band – the one willing to exist in the twilight between the light and the dark - creates space with their music; the non-enlightened band does not create space, they simply occupy it, existing within it. The enlightened, the war machine, “answers to other rules, [...] they animate a fundamental indiscipline of the warrior, a questioning of hierarchy” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 13).

The twilight space allows for the opportunity - the potential - of future dissent simply by existing, to create a transgressive schema against the mainstream. For example, a new subgenre emerges and is perceived as being more brutal than something that has preceded it. In this expansion of the ‘rules’ of the previous subgenre, new space is made, and this space is open for potential brutalization in the future, which could create an even-more brutal subgenre to replace the previous one on the mantle of extremity. Consider thrash metal as an example. The genre emerged from the original waves of proto-metal bands to stand as its own version of extreme music. It had a template and a set of rules that made it thrash. The original bands of this genre created music that was enlightened by existing in spaces that did not exist before; therefore, it

created space between itself and not only the mainstream, but previous examples of what metal was and had the potential to be. These spaces were then occupied and abused by the next generation of bands, who saw opportunities to use some of the rules of thrash, but to bastardize them further, into something more extreme. From these evolutions emerged death metal, made possible by the dissenting spaces created by the original thrash bands. This pattern of creation, space, and filling of potential is the centrepiece to the ideas of Luciferian Brutalism and its tenets.

The contributions of individual bands can be analyzed through LB, as can the contribution of one subgenre to a larger group (for example, the addition of stadium death metal to the overarching subgenre of death metal). LB also affords the ability to view music on a more micro level by looking at the bands themselves. Outside of the growing population of one-person black metal groups⁷⁸, bands are a collection of individuals who bring their unique set of skills and ideas to the larger group in the hopes of creating something important and meaningful. It could be argued, through the scope of Luciferian Brutalism, that a band is made stronger⁷⁹ if that collection is of enlightened individuals. In this sense, this enlightenment could represent a variety of things: a certainty of the style of music that speaks to them on the most honest level, the required amount of practice required to be a part of a successful band, large amounts of original ideas, a diverse group of influences. Enlightenment, as always, is tailored and defined by what specific individuals require to be in the proper place to be a contributor to a collective. If the individual is strong in any number of enlightened ways, then they are more likely to be a positive contributor to the message – the music – of the group.

⁷⁸ There are many individual black metal projects, including Panopticon and Leviathan.

⁷⁹ The strength of a band here could be defined according to several differing criteria, including the strength of bonds and relationships formed within the band, the strength of the dedication to the style of music, the strength of musical ability, etc.

Luciferian Brutalism allows for the analysis of heavy metal music as a part of a larger whole. How does the music of a specific musician, band, album, subgenre, genre, contribute to the whole? How does it allow for the creation of the dissenting spaces that create the opportunity for future critique and brutalization? What is its place in the world of metal, and did it arrive there in a manner that will be helpful to the genre as a whole; will it create or simply take up space? This theory aims to analyze more than the world of extreme music, despite this being its area of initialization and creation. Luciferian Brutalism is not a theory meant to be a catch-all to describe and detail the behaviors of all those involved in the metal communities across the world: it is meant to capture some components and explain certain patterns of action that have emerged through this research. For example, the desires for individuals to transgress the normative structures of the State and capitalism, the specific aims and targets of subversion (including religious ones), the manner of space creation, and the methods of pursuing the extreme in both music and its associated aesthetics. It can be applied in a variety of manners and textual situations (as will be demonstrated in coming sections), however, the “truth of a theory is not established through empirical corroboration of a hypothesis, because no number of finite observations is sufficient to conclusively verify a universal proposition with infinite applications” (McWilliams, 2015, p. 30).

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Back to the Front

“Do just as we say/ Finished here, greetings death/ He’s yours to take away.”

(Metallica, 1986a)

Music is an important piece to personal identity, as demonstrated through the importance of the metal community to those who are engaged in it. Metal offers a place that

serves as a safe space among like-minded individuals out to celebrate their Otherness from the mainstream music world. They are there to demonstrate their rebellion; they are there – for the most part - to transgress normative society. Through the lens of Luciferian Brutalism, they are there because they have reached some version of personal enlightenment and they have chosen this community as a means to demonstrate their transgressive thoughts and ideas, as a place where they may critique society. They are also there because they love the music, and despite its transgressions, violence, and brutality, they feel a connection to it, as though it speaks on their behalf.

This thesis posed the question of how extreme metal can create a space for the critique of normative popular culture. Over the course of this research, it has been demonstrated that extreme metal music uses a variety of methods to push away the normative: harsh sounds, violent lyrics, abrasive vocal stylings, grotesque album art, shocking live performances. These all constitute as techniques of transgression meant to keep the mainstream culture at an arm's length, leaving a dissenting space between outsider metal and the normative inside. These spaces become a battleground for territorialisation, where the metal war machine attempts to de-territorialize the lands of the powerful State, while the State fights back by attempting to overcode the unique features of the war machine and bring it under the umbrella of the normative. They attempt to commodify rebellion and to appropriate the extreme. This leads the war machine to pursue even more extreme methods in which to escape the encroaching mainstream. This battle is an eternal one, and the State is prepared for a long, drawn out battle, while the metal world relies on the passion of its fan base, those dedicated to the war machine that continues to roll forward despite its obstacles. The State wishes to destroy the creativity present in the music, as it is a perceived threat to the ideals of the acceptable.

Once these spaces are created through the transgressions created by extreme metal, they then become potential for change and subversion, perhaps even revolution. In these spaces

exists the possibility of brutalization, the pursuit of the unique, and the creation of the new. Here, there can be critique that may eventually lead to the development of even more space, where more critique can transpire. This critique helps to keep this genre of music alive. If the State continues to exist, then there will always be something to battle against, something to transgress. Metal does not share the ideas of classical anarchism in desiring the complete destruction of the cultural structures that are in place but seek to change them to create a world that is more just. The expression of these ideals can be demonstrated through the engagement with heavy metal and its associated lifestyle: listening to the music, supporting the bands, being present at live performances, purchasing and wearing the merchandise, spreading the word about the band.

Metal has been generally successful at creating this space for nearly half a century now. Despite the varying fads, stereotypes, and changing world, metal has remained a consistent force in the lives of the rebellious person. While not every metalhead is out there hoping to subvert the society in which they live, there are many of them, and they are becoming an increasingly intellectual group. They are enlightened individuals who have discovered a new viewpoint on the world and their own lives, perhaps aided by the music of metal. They have chosen this music as a part of their path, a part of their personal transgression, becoming a part of the group that supports the music and shares goals of rebellion and change.

8.2 Brutal Theory

“Another life to maim and kill/ A beast with brutal will.”

(Cannibal Corpse, 1998)

To brutalize theory is to strip the required pieces and leaving the rest festering for dead. It is to exist as psychological nomadism, using a system to gain a personal advantage. In this case,

that advantage may help in leading to personal enlightenment, which in turn leads to an advantage as a strong member of a collective, prepared to make the space needed for transgression and creation.

Over the course of this research and the writing of this thesis, I have been able to consider and develop the ideas that have been dubbed Luciferian Brutalism. One could only hope and intend for their work and opinions to make them a war machine, a man of war. But, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) suggest, “from the standpoint of the State, the originality of the man of war, his eccentricity, necessarily appears in a negative form: stupidity, deformity, madness, illegitimacy, usurpation, sin” (p. 5). While this may prove accurate, metal scholarship has existed for long enough that it has perhaps come time to have theories born of its study, instead of the typical appropriation of other social theory manipulated to fit the scholarship of extreme music. It is time for a “cataclysm [that] is not an end but a new beginning” (Culp, 2016, p. 60). LB discusses a personal state of knowing, the achievement of another view that is enables the individual to perceive their world differently, perhaps exposing the negatives and the injustices that should be fought against. This idea emerged from the reading and research that was undertaken for this thesis, and it began to serve as a lens that could be used beyond the study of music. Taking Jackson’s ideas of thinking without theory and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the nomadic war machine being used to subvert the State through the creation of the new, I embarked on the idea of creating my own theory that works in analyzing not just the subject matter at hand, but other aspects of popular culture as well. While Luciferian Brutalism is not intended to be a catch-all theory or a solution to any problems, it has demonstrated the flexibility to be a different lens to offer perspective on text. It is a theory under development, a monster still incomplete. It has demonstrated its psychical nomadism in taking from other theories, brutalizing them for the parts that have helped to create the monster. LB has dismembered ideas from Todd May’s post-structural anarchism, Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of the State, the war machine, and territorialisation, and Jackson’s ideas of the importance of

creating the new, and pieced them together into something new, something different, something created from metal.

In a sense, over the course of this work, I have attempted to brutalize theory in the same method in which I discuss metal bands and their use of influences to create something new. I have taken the pieces from what I need to achieve what I sought: a sense of personal enlightenment on this topic, stemming from my own interest and research. From this place of new understanding, in relation to the spaces created by extreme music in the critique of culture, I will be able to bring my work to a part of a collective in hopes of having it add to the whole, to push an agenda of transgression and change forward. In short, I have experienced Luciferian Brutalism while creating and writing about Luciferian Brutalism.

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Appendix

