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## **Phonè and the political potential of metal music : a scholarly intervention**

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# ***Phónè* and the Political Potential of Metal Music: A Scholarly Intervention**

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door

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geboren te Taiwan  
in 1984

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## Introduction

*“In our world, a lot of people can yell and make angry music and be like, ‘The system sucks’ . . . But Freddy [Lim] did something. He took a concrete step to try and change things for the better.”*

(Randy Blythe, vocalist of groove and trash metal band Lamb of God, “From Heavy Metal Frontman to Taiwan’s Parliament”)<sup>1</sup>

### i.

#### Hypothesis and Research Question

In January 2016, Freddy Lim (林昶佐), the frontman of the Taiwanese metal band Chthonic (閃靈), was elected a member of the Parliament of Taiwan. Many people’s jaws dropped at Freddy Lim’s successful entrance into Parliament, as he had been constantly attacked as “mentally abnormal, with his hair longer than a woman’s,”<sup>2</sup> an accusation that critics thought would resonate with the relatively conservative voters in the Zhongzheng and Wanhua Districts.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the general public’s attention was drawn to Freddy Lim’s so-called abnormality, the heated debates taking place in the local Taiwanese metal community went unnoticed by most. Here, Freddy Lim’s election was at least as controversial, albeit for different reasons. Some felt that Freddy Lim’s turn to politics broke with metal’s aesthetic purity. Consequently, he was condemned for tainting metal with the, in their eyes, undignified sphere of politics.

One example of this criticism can be found in *Extreme Metal in Taiwan* (2007) where I-Kai Liu (劉逸凱) interviewed members of the Taiwanese metal community about their opinions on the relationship between metal and politics. Jax Yeh (葉啟中), the ex-bassist of the Taiwanese power metal band Seraphim (六翼天使), captures the mindset of those who detest the political implications suggested by metal:

I think music should not be messed up with politics. I think music is music, politics is politics, they are two different concepts. I think if you want to play music, then you just concentrate on it. I don’t like music with political connotations because that will debilitate music. I know some foreign bands glorify political implications, but that’s their own business. For us, music is music, and I think musicians should not involve political ideas into music. (Yeh, qtd. in Liu 65)

In this “music for music, politics for politics” line of thinking,<sup>4</sup> politics is narrowly defined, not

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<sup>1</sup> Qin, Amy. “From Heavy Metal Frontman to Taiwan’s Parliament.” *The New York Times*, 26 May 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/world/asia/from-heavy-metal-frontman-to-taiwans-parliament.html?smid=pl-share&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/world/asia/from-heavy-metal-frontman-to-taiwans-parliament.html?smid=pl-share&_r=1).

<sup>2</sup> “Elections: KMT Rivals Slam Long-Haired, ‘Abnormal’ Freddy Lim.” *Taipei Times*, 10 Jan. 2016, [www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2016/01/10/2003636862](http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2016/01/10/2003636862).

<sup>3</sup> In traditional Chinese: 袒胸露背，不男不女.

<sup>4</sup> In traditional Chinese: 音樂歸音樂，政治歸政治.

only as the application of state power and the art of governance, but in the Taiwanese context even narrower still: Yeh's comment connotes the vicious, corruptive brawls between political parties. Some others, however, voiced positive opinions about Freddy Lim's<sup>5</sup> attempt to "try and change things for the better," such as Randy Blythe, the vocalist of Lamb of God, in the earlier quotation. For these people, politics is more broadly defined as the multiple power relations running through everyday life that affect both collectives and all individuals. In the Taiwanese context, this vision of politics is summarized by an increasingly widespread dictum: "everything is political; no one stands outside politics" (沒有人是局外人). One example of someone expressing this vision is Louie Lu (呂鴻志), the frontman of the Taiwanese metalcore band Burning Island (火燒島). During the Hohaiyan Rock Festival (貢寮海洋音樂祭) in 2017, Lu called for the audience to actively participate in transitional justice.



An image where Louie Lu held a stripe of "everything is political; no one stands outside politics."<sup>6</sup>

Yet, even for those with a broader understanding of politics, there existed a discomfort with Freddy Lim's use of metal music in an electoral campaign and his self-branding as a "rockstar Olympus" bringing "change for Taiwan."<sup>7</sup> Some questioned whether the promised

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the thesis, when I refer to him, I use his politically-implicated stage name "Freddy Lim" in full, for two reasons. First, "Lim" is the English spelling of how his family name is pronounced in the Taiwanese dialect. His family name "Lin" (林 in traditional Chinese) is pronounced differently in Chinese. Using the stage name is a matter of respect with regard to Freddy Lim's political message. Second, and more of a practical consideration, as I refer to several people whose surname is Lin, using Freddy Lim in full avoids confusion.

<sup>6</sup> *Liberty Times Net*, 6 Aug. 2017, [talk.ltn.com.tw/article/paper/1124757](http://talk.ltn.com.tw/article/paper/1124757).

<sup>7</sup> The phrases "a Rockstar Olympus" and "change for Taiwan" are from the documentary *Metal Politics Taiwan* in which Freddy Lim frames Chthonic and Taiwanese metal in the Taiwanese political context as a form of activism and political dissent. 11 Nov. 2016, [www.facebook.com/Metal-Politics-Taiwan-584506105048693](https://www.facebook.com/Metal-Politics-Taiwan-584506105048693).

transformation could be taken seriously or whether it was mere rhetoric. In contrast, some others questioned whether Chthonic's music was Taiwanese enough and metal enough for the band to have serious political ambitions. Central to these discomforts and questions is Chthonic's use of Taiwanese *folk* music that denotes a Taiwanese collective identity. For some members in the Taiwanese metal scene, Chthonic is not qualified to represent Taiwan because the band labels itself as "orient metal," a highly controversial term, since the term "orient" evokes the history of the Western gaze on the East and thereby recalls images of feminization and emasculation of Asians in Western pop culture.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, some also criticize Chthonic's emphasis on certain types of folk music for failing to account for the heterogeneity of Taiwan.

The specific case of Freddy Lim and the responses to his election, both from within and from outside the metal community, bring attention to the complex cultural status of metal music and its ambivalent relation to politics. Metal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Jeremy Wallach, Harris Berger, and Paul Greene observe in *Metal Rules the Globe* (2011), has become a global idiom with distinct local accents (20). Not only do cultural meanings ascribed to metal vary according to environments and contexts, even *within* a specific scene, divergent understandings of the nature of the music and the subculture will coexist.

The hypothesis of this thesis is that the ambivalent relation between metal and politics is the consequence of metal's use of amplified and distorted voices and sounds, which Wallach, Berger, and Greene describe in terms of "sonic attack" or "affective overdrive": they are felt by the listener's body, whether one likes this feeling or not, and overwhelm the listener's ability to accurately process meanings (12-13). Since the canonical Aristotelian definition of the human being as an animal who is by nature political because it possesses a voice that can articulate speech,<sup>9</sup> politics—both in its broad and narrow definitions—has been understood as essentially related to the use of language, whether for public debates, or the expression of interests, values and ideas. Metal, in that its loud and distorted voices tend to hinder sheer comprehension, appears to be fundamentally at odds with such political deliberation. Yet, this has not stopped people who surround metal from commenting on socio-political as well as everyday events from a wide range of perspectives, from the far right to the far left of the political spectrum. As such, metal does not stay outside politics. On the contrary, I will read it for its potential to address pivotal political issues.

In this thesis' exploration of metal's ambivalent relationship with politics, my overarching question is: how do metal's amplified, distorted voices and sounds act in favor of, or counteract certain forms of politics? What is the politics of metal's sonic attack or overdrive—or, as I will come to call it, its politics of *phónè*? To understand this question, we first need to explain the two central terms of this question, politics and *phónè*.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Contextualizing Asian Masculinity in Media Post-Race: A Critical Race Theory Inquiry on Metadiscourses* by Michael Kyung Park. 2014. University of Southern California, PhD Dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> See Cavarero's *For More than One Voice*, especially the chapter "Logos and Politics" for how the Aristotelian understanding can be found in classical and contemporary political theories. See also Amanda Weidman's tracing of the dominant part of Western metaphysics in the cultural imagination of the human voice signifying political agency in "Voice" in *Keywords in Sound* (2015) edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, pp. 232-45.

## ii.

Politics and *Phónè*

My use of the terms “politics” and “political” is informed both by contemporary political philosophy and by my personal Taiwanese perspective. I understand politics as the ubiquitous power relationships that now permeate every aspect of life and shape people’s ways of being, of thinking, of knowing, and speaking. Theoretically, I take my cue from Michel Foucault’s and Giorgio Agamben’s notions of biopower and biopolitics. Foucault coined these terms to describe the heterogeneous flows of power that seek to regulate life (*History of Sexuality 1*, 139-41). Re-interpreting and radicalizing Foucault, Agamben observes that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century biopolitics has encompassed all aspects of life. He argues, moreover, that Western metaphysics is biopolitical in nature, since its goal is to politicize and orient human existence (*Homo Sacer* 5-6). Foucault’s and Agamben’s insights of how politics orients people’s ways of behavior and thought resonate with my Taiwanese perspective; I will return to this later (and extensively in my concluding Chapter Four).

The other central term of this project is *phónè*, a Greek word meaning both voice and sound. My use of this term is inspired by Adriana Cavarero’s critique of Western metaphysics from a vocal perspective. In her seminal *For More than One Voice* (2005), Cavarero points out that, in Greek, *phónè* not only means voice and sound as sonic objects and phenomena, but that it also denotes the simultaneous and reciprocal relationships between sonic phenomena, the sensory experiences they evoke, and the meanings derived from such phenomena and experiences (29-31). If, for instance, a metal singer is grunting, this involves sound, but to an audience the singer is also expressing something, giving a voice to something that has an impact on an audience. That is to say: *phónè* is multivalent, libidinally charged, and charged with cultural sediments. It stirs strong, often involuntary responses, it shapes forms of identity and subjectivity, and evokes individual and collective memories and histories that are intersubjectively negotiated. Tuning in to *phónè*, I am able to dig into diverse experiences and contextually-specific interpretations of metal.

Secondly, according to Agamben, the notion of *phónè* has played an essential, but ambivalent role in the Western metaphysical tradition (*Homo Sacer* 7-8; *Language and Death* 38-39). *Phónè* is crucial to an understanding of:

- *logos*, considered as language, speech, order, and system;
- *polis*, considered as the embodiment of politics;
- *bios*, considered as the proper form of life;
- *oikos*, considered in terms of household and governmentality.

The four onto-political concepts taken together, so Agamben argues, are a biopolitical apparatus that effectively distinguishes an articulate voice from sounds and divides people into different categories according to the distinctions made above:

- those who can reason and those who cannot—in the sphere of *logos*;
- those who belong to the political collective or not—in the sphere of the *polis*;
- those who are worthy of life or not—in the sphere of *bios*;

- those who belong to the house or not—within the sphere of the *oikos*.

In all these, an articulate voice determines whether a subject's existence is positively or negatively attributed. Still, important as the distinction between voice and sound may be, the biopolitical divisions involved in fact confuse it. This is because these distinctions all operate by way of a series of affirmation and negation. Whereas the positive pole receives further articulations, the negative pole is dis-articulated again and again, to the point that entities at this pole become indistinctive and come to overlap with mere sound. This inarticulate sound, according to Agamben, is intrinsic to the articulate voice. He also terms it the fundamental negativity of metaphysics, implying that the positive not so much conquers the negative, but cannot do without it. Consequently, *phónè* assists as well as undermines biopolitics.

Likewise, in his psychoanalytical reflection on subject formation, Jacques Lacan observes that *phónè* is a site where the subject meets its intrinsic otherness-within-self (a theme developed further in Chapter Three).<sup>10</sup> In this context my contention is that metal music, though at odds with articulation and distinction from the perspective of language, is not exempted from biopolitics with its amplified and distorted *phónè*. On the contrary, its being appreciated as "other" through sonic attack is pivotal to subcultural constructions of alternative meanings and group identity. A conceptual grounding of *phónè* thus allows me to scrutinize the power dynamics of the contexts in which metal is practiced. I will explain the contexts I focus on in this research project in a later overview.

### iii.

#### The Scholarly Context of Metal and Metal Music Studies

One way to illustrate how *phónè* is central to metal's political ambivalence is by looking briefly at the disciplinary formation of metal music studies. Metal was once a source of moral panic, evaluated negatively by scholars as equivalent with or responsible for deviance.<sup>11</sup> From the 1990s onward, however, scholarly works with positive evaluations of metal began to emerge, and in the 2010s metal music studies has become a cross-disciplinary field, drawing scholars from diverse backgrounds, and spawning an increasing number of books, conferences, and even academic journals such as *Metal Music Studies*. As Wallach, Berger, and Greene observe in their overview of the field, a central issue is the relations between metal and the diverse scenes and contexts that surround metal's *phónè*. Often obscure to people not familiar with metal, these relations, according to them, require scholars in-the-know to shed light on them (*Metal Rules the Globe* 10-13). Although not specific to metal, a recurring topic of debate remains the position that scholars should assume in relation to the scenes that they are describing.

<sup>10</sup> Agamben's major biopolitical works include *Homo Sacer* (1998), *Potentialities* (1999), *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), *State of Exception* (2005), *The Highest Poverty* (2013), and *The Use of Bodies* (2016); major works of Lacan with biopolitical implications include *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1981) and *Écrits* (1989).

<sup>11</sup> For such moral panics in the US, see Walser's final chapter in *Running with the Devil*, titled "Can I Play with Madness? Mysticism, Horror, and Postmodern Politics." Just a few examples of scholarly works evaluating metal music negatively are: *Metalheads: Heavy Metal and Adolescent Alienation* (1996) by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Music Exposure and Criminal Behavior: Perceptions of Juvenile Offenders" (1999) by Susan C. Gardstrom, and "Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Suicidal Risk" (2001) by Eric Lacourse, Michel Claes, and Martine Villeneuve.

The ways in which influential metal scholars position themselves and engage with metal are in turn influenced by British *cultural studies*. Inaugurated by the Birmingham University Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and founded in 1964, cultural studies was initially concerned with subcultural groups such as mods, skinheads, teddy boys, and pre-teen British girls. CCCS was groundbreaking to scholarship in the 1970s due to the sociological and semiotic approach its scholars took, through which they interpreted social and political behavior that formerly would have been considered to be marginal or deviant. The central argument of the Birmingham school was that subcultural activities can be decoded semiotically and interpreted as symbolic acts of resistance, subverting or pushing against mainstream, hegemonic norms. In the 2006 edition of *Resistance through Rituals*, a seminal cultural studies text first published in 1975, John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts describe and define subcultures as follows:

Working-class sub-cultures, we suggested, take shape on the level of the social and cultural class-relations of the subordinate classes. In themselves, they are not simply “ideological” constructs. . . . They explore “focal concerns” central to the inner life of the group: things always “done” or “never done,” a set of social rituals which underpin their collective identity and define them as a “group” instead of a mere collection of individuals. They adopt and adapt material objects – goods and possessions – and reorganize them into distinctive “styles” which express the collectivity of their being-as-a-group. (138)

Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts understand subcultures as consisting of working-class youths pulled together by shared concerns. Subculture members engage in distinctive rituals, often involving forms of re-use of mass cultural materials in nonstandard ways or in unusual combinations. These rituals, according to the authors, provide a subcultural solution or mode of resistance against the economic, social, and cultural pressures of hegemonic groups in both symbolic and practical ways. Such resistances, however, will ultimately fail, so they argue, since the youths will enter the workplace and will soon be forced to conform to the norm.

Although groundbreaking at the time for its sympathy for subculture, the work of the CCCS was later criticized for its lack of empirical research (Gelder 81). Furthermore, due to a Marxist bias, CCCS scholars tended to over-emphasize the role of class in the formation of subcultures. Both of these critiques led to the emergence of what was called subcultural studies in the 1980s. Subcultural studies downplayed class distinctions, considered other social distinctions such as race, gender, and sexuality, and the interactions between subcultures and the mainstream. Scholars of subcultural studies tend to favor empirical ethnographic investigations and positioned themselves as “critical insider scholars.” Equipped with subcultural knowledge, the insider scholar is capable of shedding light on otherwise obscure subcultural groups. Whereas scholars of the CCCS mainly focused on interpretations of subcultural styles,<sup>12</sup> scholars of subcultural studies were more interested in observations and descriptions of subcultural

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<sup>12</sup> Influential works by CCCS scholars include *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) by Dick Hebdige, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1980) by Stan Cohen, and *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991) by Angela McRobbie.

behavior.<sup>13</sup>

Metal music studies, as it developed in the 1990s, inherited from cultural and subcultural studies the double focus on the semiotic interpretation of subcultural styles and ethnographic observations of the behavior of subcultural communities. Influential metal scholars tend to combine the insider/empirical perspective of the cultural ethnographer and the interpretative approach of the semiotician. Deena Weinstein, for instance, approaches metal cultural-sociologically in her seminal *Heavy Metal* (1991) and interprets metal in connection to the formations of scenes, emphasizing her own status as that of an insider. Robert Walser approaches metal from the perspective of musicology and critical theory in the similarly seminal *Running with the Devil* (1993), elaborating on how metal and society mutually influence each other, while emphasizing that his own position is that of a metal guitarist. In *Death Metal Music* (2003), Natalie Purcell similarly positions herself as an insider and provides detailed generic descriptions, historical developments, and observations of the scenes, explaining that death metal, as a subculture, is socio-political in nature because it rebels against the norm. Approaching extreme metal with a combination of empirical research and critical theory in *Extreme Metal* (2007), Keith Kahn-Harris also positions himself as a metalhead to explain the ideological contradictions inherent in the genre.

#### iv.

#### Positioning Myself Inside-out

Similar to most musical scenes, metal scholars' repeated insistence on their status as insiders, is symptomatic of a shared intuition that metal cannot be studied in isolation from its scenes. The problem that remains is that there is no such thing as a homogenous metal scene, nor one key "inside" definition. More specifically, the problem is what the scale and nature of this "inside" is. Walser, for example argues that the meaning of metal to its listeners cannot be dissociated from the larger socio-political context. Yet, his "guitarocentric" reading of metal tends to underestimate other elements in metal that are also meaningful. Nevertheless, Walser's guitarocentric approach toward metal shaped many later scholarly works on metal. As influential as it was, however, some metal scholars came to question and criticize Walser's privileging of the guitar, his masculinist reading of metal, and his bias against certain aspects of metal. I will discuss the political stakes raised by Walser and other influential scholarly works on metal in the next chapter.

Harris M. Berger approaches metal from an ethnomusicological perspective as well as from the perspective of a Husserlian phenomenology in his *Metal, Rock, and Jazz* (1999), and, influenced by Walser, focuses on the small scale socio-political context of local scenes, explaining listener activities such as moshing and headbanging. Still other insider metal scholars skip the scene, whether macro or micro, in order to pay more attention to musical styles. Steve Waksman, for example, closely examines musical crossovers between metal and punk in *This*

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<sup>13</sup> Influential works of subcultural studies include *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (1995) by Sarah Thornton, *Inside Subculture: the Postmodern Meaning of Style* (2000) by David Muggleton, and *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture* (2002) by Paul Hodkinson.

*Ain't the Summer of Love* (2009), and he does so in contrast to metal scholars' tendency to oppose metal and punk because of their different political implications and connotations. Staying "inside" the music, Waksman argues that political interpretations and comparisons of the two genres fail to do justice to the music. Similar to Waksman, in *Death Metal and Music Criticism* (2012), Michelle Phillipov argues that metal exposes the limits of politically defined music studies. On the basis of a combination of a formal analysis of music and lyrics, as well as an analysis of practices in death metal scenes, she contends that metal resists political interpretation and classification, and should be understood for the alternative pleasures it offers, rather than for the meanings it communicates (16).

It may be clear that these are conflicting interpretations by insider scholars equipped with scenic knowledge. Obviously, even among insider scholars, there is no consensus on the scale and nature of what counts as political and which music styles are political or unpolitical enough to be metal. Walser's and Berger's socio-political interpretations of metal do not go well with Waksman's and Phillipov's arguments against political interpretations; Waksman's observations about the affinity between punk and metal do not go well with Wallach, Berger, and Greene's opposing metal to punk (*Metal Rules the Globe* 4). Even more conflicting, scholars' objections to political interpretations are themselves politically motivated, and their scales of what counts as political tend to fluctuate. This is most clear in Phillipov who upholds that metal's loudness and distortion exceeds politics. Positing herself an inside scholar, she argues against outsider scholars' interpreting metal as "politically reactionary" and contrasts it with other "politically progressive" genres (13). Yet even taking into account her objections to political readings by outside scholars, I note that Phillipov admits to be disturbed by scenic misogyny. In a perturbed tone, she concludes that "an intellectual politics sometimes at odd with personal politics" is required to approach "metal on its own." Intellectual politics, according to her, is more productive for appreciating metal aesthetically and affectively, though she also acknowledges that such an intellectual politics is difficult, as it restricts one from critiquing the political or ethical problematics of metal (159-61). Due to her oppositional definition of or negative approach to the political and politics, Phillipov ends up reasserting the *scenic* ideology of metal's aesthetic value, a value that transcends political and ethical critiques at the *intellectual* level.

At play in these conflicting interpretations are scales and natures of the scene, of the inside, of forms of knowledge, and politics. My contention is that they all come together at the site of distorted and amplified *phónè* in metal, like a Gordian knot. For instance, the repetitive insistence on the status of the "inside," is itself a simultaneous scenic and scholarly form of control. It is a scenic and scholarly politics that inevitably creates an outside. Rather than shedding new light on metal, metal music studies instead mirrors metal's complexity and replicates scenic paradoxes and ironies.

Indeed, in both metal scenes and metal music studies "insider knowledge" functions as a discursive apparatus that marginalizes listeners and ways of engagement that are considered not-metal-enough. Such acts of scenic and scholarly exclusion are most observable in *Metal Rules the Globe* (2011) where Wallach, Berger, and Greene assert that *all* metalheads view metal as the opposite of light entertainment (8; original emphasis). This presupposition of an oppositional other is followed by celebratory enumerations of metal as offering "heroic individualism," "in-group solidarity," and "appreciation of 'great art'" —in sum, empowerment

of people who identify with the “metal canon” or *metal tradition* (8-9, 13, 27; my emphasis).

Appealing as this *metal community* may be, the de facto *metal identity* here is predominantly white, masculine, and insider oriented. It subdivides the very metal community, often with disturbing gender and racial undertones. In this context, I for one—being Asian, female, and gay—quite often find myself left out. Moreover, it often appears to me that even metal scholars working in gender studies, postcolonial studies, and ethnic studies tend to replicate and intensify marginalization and exclusions by selectively accepting or rejecting political, cultural, or musical interpretations from the dominant discourses of metal music studies.<sup>14</sup> So, despite the good intentions of metal scholars and some critics, the inclusion of one or two groups usually means the exclusion of others (Dawes 386-88). Make no mistake: there are passionate calls for acceptance and tolerance.<sup>15</sup> Yet, these calls leave me feeling schizophrenically included and excluded at the same time.

For a project which tackles power dynamics enacted in metal’s *phônè*, I consider it of importance to position myself and to intervene in these scenic and scholarly problematics.

## v.

### Reading against the Grain – Chapter Overview

With this project I do not aim at substantiating scholarly theories and concepts by way of metal music, or vice versa. Rather, I opt to bring theories and metal into political confrontations and dialogues that are “phonic” by nature. I do so through a combined critical, and in a sense *radical*, reading of and listening to both theories and metal music. A few clarifications are in order here. Formally speaking, my readings of the songs are not radical, as they fit in a generally accepted mode of analyzing music—although it must be noted that such readings are not often performed in the study of metal. My intention, however, is not to reconstruct the meaning of the songs, in terms of music and text, by means of established reading methods. Instead I bring them in dialogue with my philosophical arguments. With “radical reading” I mean to say that I will be reading against the grain at points. I do not only immerse myself in the music, nor do I simply want to experience it; I also want to engage with it critically and reflectively. My approach connects here to methods of reading developed in the late eighties in feminist circles and that have since proved to be of value for many other marginalized groups. Such an approach, then, is a form of political engagement. I am influenced here as well by critical theories that are generally referred to as deconstruction, and which aim to undercut presuppositions or binary oppositions that ground systems of meaning-making.

As stated, I am not only reading, or listening to songs, but also to texts and theories as developed in the field of metal studies. In Chapter One, I critically review pivotal scholarly

<sup>14</sup> Just a few examples: “‘A Dream Return to Tang Dynasty’: Masculinity, Male Camaraderie, and Chinese Heavy Metal in the 1990s” (2011) by Cynthia P. Wang, “[I] Hate Girls and Emo[tion]s’: Negotiating Masculinity in Grindcore Music” (2011) by Rosemary Overrell, “The ‘Other’ as Projection Screen: Authenticating Heroic Masculinity in War-themed Heavy Metal Music Videos” (2015) by Wiebke Kartheus, and “Postfeminism and Heavy Metal in the United Kingdom: Sexy or Sexist?” (2015) by Heather Savigny and Sam Sleight.

<sup>15</sup> On this, see Dave Everley, “Does Metal Have a Problem with Race?” *Metal Hammer*, 27 Mar. 2016, [teamrock.com/feature/2016-03-27/does-metal-have-a-problem-with-race](http://teamrock.com/feature/2016-03-27/does-metal-have-a-problem-with-race); or Lyndsay Helfrich “On Not Being a Douchebag: The Moral Obligation to Confront Sexism.” *Metal Music Blog*, 20 Apr. 2017, [ismms.online/?p=394](http://ismms.online/?p=394).

concepts in metal studies. I explain how, as a result of studies' concentration on specific voices or sounds in metal and how they build on scenic discourses, these conceptualizations effectively function as forms of identity control. Against these concepts and controls, I introduce my own phonic approach and methodology, which offers a more balanced analysis of metal. Chapter One, in sum, offers a discursive analysis of metal scholarship, and an introduction of my own approach to the music in terms of close reading.

In Chapter Two I dig into *phónè* in two metal songs. To concretize the forms of scenic-scholarly politics at stake, I read a controversial metal song, AND WE RUN (performed by Within Temptation), and examine how this song exposes the internal contradictions of metal's white masculine insider identity. Drawing from Agamben's critique of the politicization of the human voice, the second part of this chapter reads a canonical metal song, NEMESIS (performed by Arch Enemy) in which the human voice has a pivotal role. I explain why the song's criticism of scenic politics also applies to the socio-political context in which metal is situated, and map *phónè*'s onto-political position. As a whole, Chapter Two stresses metal's biopolitical relevance.

Chapter Three explores a biopolitical agency in metal. To this purpose I engage with two versions of ENJOY THE SILENCE, performed by Depeche Mode and Lacuna Coil respectively. As the title of the song already indicates, it is paradoxical that people are singing about the enjoyment of silence. In my reading of the songs (musically and textually) I trace characteristic layers of *phónè* that lead to different philosophical implications in each version. This allows me to zoom into *phónè*'s libidinal dimension, taking my cue from Lacan's psychoanalytical reflection on *phónè* as the object voice. I then confront metal with Agamben's biopolitical critiques that fixate certain dimensions of *phónè*. The aim of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, I am interested in what propels the politicization of the voice, as it has been observed and critiqued by Agamben. On the other, I also want to investigate whether metal's amplified and distorted *phónè* makes audible what philosophy has marginalized and excluded. As such, Chapter Three is a (bio)political critique from the perspective of *phónè* in metal.

Chapters One, Two, and Three, then, explore the relationship between metal and politics on three levels: a scenic-scholarly level (Chapter One), a socio-political level (Chapter Two), and a philosophical level (Chapter Three). In all these, my readings of the theories and songs illustrate how *phónè* is common to people's experiences and their making sense of their surroundings. Furthermore, it is also in and through *phónè* that people politically contest or negotiate what they feel and perceive as meaningful.

Chapter Four leads me to a new step in my readings against the grain. Here the readings are related both to my theoretical inclination, but also to my personal experiences being Taiwanese. As an inhabitant of Taiwan and as someone trained in Taiwan, I am culturally shaped to understand voice/sound (聲音) holistically, as reciprocating and co-composing elements of an ethically charged soundscape (萬籟). I will elaborate on the political-ethical implications of such a soundscape in this final chapter. It will prove to be important to bring attention to the polytheistic, in-flux worldview of a soundscape in a Taiwanese context. This is different from the authoritative use of the term soundscape by composer, writer, and music educator Raymond Murray Schafer. More importantly, this chapter brings me to an argument that is political in the basic meaning of that term. Taiwanese metal music cannot be considered apart from Taiwan's complex political histories and its current cultural-political situation. As such, I will offer my own particular readings of these histories and situation to support/inform

my reading of soundscapes.

vi.

## Soundscape and the Taiwanese Context

In his study *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977), Schafer puts forward a definition of a soundscape as an “acousmatic environment” analogous to “a given landscape.” Advocating for what he calls an “uncounterfeiting analysis” and insisting that a sound figure cannot exist without its ground, Schafer categorizes significant sound features based on whether they are foregrounded, consciously heard or not (7-9). Adapting Schafer’s formulation to a Taiwanese context, in Chapter Four I explain how Taiwanese soundscapes connote and embody forms of (un)consciousness and identity. Elaborating on Schafer’s ideas with regard to soundscapes, I focus on how Taiwanese metal appropriates soundscapes for political purposes. To somehow transmit the many voices and sounds of my home soundscapes, I examine a cluster of songs variously dealing with the question of what it means to be Taiwanese: *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* (performed by The Chairman), *FUNERAL* (Flesh Juicer), *JUST Not Meant To Be* (Crescent Lament) *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*, *Takao* (Chthonic), *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?* (Burning Island), and *ISLAND’S SUNRISE* (Fire EX).

My final chapter thus takes me to Taiwan, a topic that I cannot *not* write about. The unquenchable urge to write about Taiwan foremost stems from the precarious international status of Taiwan—an independent political body not recognized as an official state. This is visible, for instance, in the following screenshot, where the editors of the BBC cannot decide how to refer to Taiwan.



Image of BBC’s indetermination on Taiwan being a place or country<sup>16</sup>

In terms of international politics, the Taiwanese are somehow voiceless, and often subjected to political oppressions in various guises, whether from the Chinese, Japanese, or Western side.

<sup>16</sup> “Taiwan: a Country or a Place?” *udn*, 25 May 2017, [udn.com/news/story/10966/2483803](http://udn.com/news/story/10966/2483803).

Domestically speaking, Taiwan is noisy, with the Taiwanese still struggling with their traumatic past and searching for a voice and an identity. Such a simultaneously voiceless and noisy situation cannot be separated from the “unofficial” dictatorial state that ruled Taiwan for decades and its atrocities, which still linger in individual and collective memories.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the two understandings of politics in response to Freddy Lim’s election only make full sense when considered in light of Taiwan’s dictatorial past. The phrase “music for music, politics for politics” sounds much like a variation on the all-purpose-formula “X for X, politics for politics” (Hsu 7; Liu 63; Wang 60). This phrasing and mindset was a product of the dictatorial indoctrination and intimidation preempting the Taiwanese to meddle in state affairs. That is, it was a form of political control and oppression. In this context, the dictum “everything is political; no one stands outside politics” is more than a constative description; it is already a political act that resists oppression and refuses to be silent.

As a Taiwanese person who experienced the final phase of the dictatorial period and who has recently spent years abroad, I have come to realize that shunning politics only precipitates the situation of Taiwan. I therefore also aspire to give a voice to Taiwan. I am, of course, aware that I am speaking as a cultural and social “insider” here. My uneasiness with this position is reflected in the often ambivalent tone of the partly-autobiographical Chapter Four. I think the ambivalence of this chapter is best captured by the cover of Chthonic’s 2018 album: 政治 *Battlefield of Asura*.



<sup>17</sup> By unofficial state, I mean the KMT rulership (Kuomintang of China or Nationalist Party of China). Formerly ruling China in the name of the Republic of China (ROC) from 1912 to 1949, the KMT party fled to Taiwan in 1949 after being defeated by the Communist Party of China. Though merely ruling Taiwan, the party nevertheless insisted (in the name of the ROC) to be the embodiment of China’s true sovereignty. The party used to be a member of the UN, until the ROC was replaced by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1971. The KMT party lost the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2016, but is still the largest political force in Taiwan.

By dictatorial atrocity, I mean the Martial Law (戒嚴令) from 1949 to 1987/1992 that banned public gatherings, suspended democratic elections, and launched political persecutions and massacres. Though partially lifted in 1987 and abolished in 1992, the legacy of the Martial Law, also known as the White Terror (白色恐怖), still haunts Taiwan in the late 2010s after three decades of rapid democratization. This will be the focus of the final chapter.

Album art of *Battlefields of Asura* 政治<sup>18</sup>

In the album art, Freddy Lim is portrayed as an asura (阿修羅), a demigod of which one can never be sure whether he is good or bad. Freddy Lim is wearing a suit that abides by the dress code for a member of parliament. Apparently, the former rockstar is now a many-headed and many-handed semi-god of passion, rage, and vengeance, fighting in several political battlefields that make up the political context of Taiwan. This reading of the album cover is suggested by the release date of the album—October 10, the National Day of the Republic of China (ROC) which was proclaimed by the dictatorial state once ruling Taiwan (see footnote 16). It is also suggested by the two album titles. The Taiwanese title 政治 implies politics in a quite straightforward sense. The English title *Battlefields of Asura* symbolically conveys the intensity of power struggles in Taiwan.

With the message of *Battlefields of Asura* in mind, it is a bit easier to convey my uneasiness in writing about Taiwan. I confess that I am not always comfortable with bringing *phónè* into confrontational political dialogues. I nevertheless do so to prompt people in and beyond Taiwan to critically reflect on their investment in *phónè* and to listen to each other's desires and struggles.

Finally, my project is profoundly modulated by the soundscapes that surround me. This affectionate, sometimes tensed, but always reciprocal relationship is, in my opinion, fundamental to *phónè*'s multivalence. My preliminary answer to the question raised earlier about how metal acts in favor of or counteracts biopolitics, is thus: metal's *phónè* is a site of passion; it enlivens as well as exhausts desires, constantly endangering one's self-identity and subjectivity. The image below visualizes how passions incited by metal can be trite and analogous to overconsumption.



Image from *The International Day of Heavy Metal*<sup>19</sup>

The image repeats, critiques, and ironizes a form of uncritical, unreflective engagement with metal, as if it was a kind of branding or a musical equivalent to fast food. I will try to position myself throughout this project counter to such branding and such “food,” in listening to and writing about what I passionately love: metal music. Listening to it, and reading about it, I will try to preserve a constant alertness to my ways of thinking that also form a political act of resistance. My aim is to resist both intentional ignorance and my becoming an unintended

<sup>18</sup> Books.com.tw, [www.books.com.tw/products/0020207864](http://www.books.com.tw/products/0020207864), n.d.

<sup>19</sup> *The International Day of Heavy Metal*, n.d., [www.heavymetaldays.co.uk/galleryimages6.htm](http://www.heavymetaldays.co.uk/galleryimages6.htm).

accomplice to (bio)political oppression.

## Chapter One

### Political Problems in Metal Music Studies: A Phonic Approach and Formal Innovation

This chapter offers an overview of some of the key studies on metal music and a critical assessment of the political implications of these studies. I will look at three discourses; discussions that take place within the metal scene, in a discourse that I will call “scenic,”<sup>1</sup> a wider discourse on music, and the academic field of “metal music studies.” I will argue that across these three discourses, key concepts carry conflicting meanings and are evaluated in highly different ways. Moreover, elaborations on and specifications of these key concepts tend to replicate and intensify existing political tensions and contradictions. Theoretically, this chapter is inspired by Jacques Attali’s *Noise* (1977), which has the telling subtitle *The Political Economy of Music*. *Noise* is a socio-historical study in which Attali observes the material, technical, and social entanglements of music, noise, and politics, and argues that music can be a form of political organization aimed at the controlling of noise.

Although Attali’s conceptualization of noise is more about the commodification of music as a form of social and political control and does not deal with metal music as such, I bring his concept of noise to bear on metal, for several reasons. First, metal music has quite literally been called noisy; a description embraced by the scene, as the ubiquitous slogan “let’s make some f\*\*\*\*\* noise!” at the start of a concert makes clear. Second, Attali’s insights about the social and political dimensions of music allow me to consider how discourses about metal music are politically implicated. Take the aforementioned slogan “let’s make some f\*\*\*\*\* noise!” This seemingly simple “call” functions along two trajectories simultaneously. On the one hand, the use of “let’s” addresses a group of people, urging them to make “noise,” thereby positioning themselves as outsiders vis-à-vis non-noisy forms of music. On the other hand, the call for and the claim of the ability to make noise also *organizes* metal music’s numerous internal voices and sounds, which do not necessarily agree with each other, into an order based on their opposition towards non-noisy music. Hence discourses about metal music that describe metal music as noisy implicitly create distinctions between “real” (i.e. “noisy”) and “fake” (non-noisy) metal. As a result, discourses *about* metal, both within the scene and outside, effectively function as forms of *noise control*. As Attali suggests, such attempts at noise control inevitably have cultural and political implications.

My third reason for turning to Attali lies in his argument that music is not definite, but changes over time: “Bear[ing] the marks of the time” and “echo[ing] with the time” (5). This allows me to investigate the historically specific complexities internal to metal music and the discourses about it. Like notions of music changing in time, notions and evaluations of metal music are constantly changing according to different cultural and political contexts.

Finally, I believe that the case of metal is an excellent example of how the conjunction of noise, music, and politics functions as a way to perceive the world (Attali 4-7), or, better, to listen to the world. In the following sections, I will delineate and assess the political implications

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term “scenic” refers to the metal “scene” in general, or to specific metal “scenes” that Keith Kahn-Harris points out to be more associated with theatrical scenes. See Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal* 15.

of discourses about metal. My question is whether an alternative approach to metal through voice-and-sound, that is to say through *phónè*, can solve some of the political problems that arise from the scene.

# 1.

## Writing about Metal Music

### i.

#### Noisy, but not really Noise

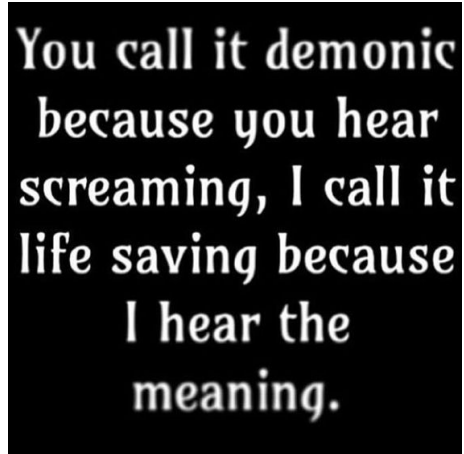
*Heavy metal: pimply. Prole, putrid, unchic, unsophisticated, anti-intellectual (but impossibly pretentious), dismal, abysmal, terrible, horrible, and stupid music, barely music at all . . . music made by slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, bulbous-inseamed imbeciles in jackboots and leather and chrome for slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, downy-mustachioed imbeciles in cheap, too-large T-shirts with pictures of comic-book Armageddon ironed on the front. . . . Heavy metal, mon amour, where do I start?*

(Robert Duncan, qtd. in Walser 20)

*A final word of advice: never make the mistake of describing heavy metal as “noise”—or Bon Jovi as a heavy metal group. That would mean the certain end of any conversation.*

(Roccor 92)

The two quotes above highlight how metal music carries quite different, even conflicting, meanings and understandings within different contexts. Metal may strike people who are unfamiliar with it as *noise*, as “abysmal, terrible, horrible and stupid... barely music at all.” To them it seems like it is made by musicians attacking their instruments; songs are growled and screamed by the vocalists who do not seem to want to make much sense; made by and listened to by ‘imbeciles,’ as Robert Duncan puts it in an ironic passage in his book *The Noise: Notes from a Rock 'n' Roll Era* (1984). But, as Duncan continues, for people who enjoy metal, so-called metalheads, metal’s noisiness is enjoyable and meaningful; its loudness and aggressiveness are experienced as liberating. As a ritual, headbanging to metal songs may channel frustrations and angers from everyday life (Attali 28). Being part of the subculture of metalheads offers people a community, to which they can belong and with which they can identify (Walser, *Running with the Devil* 84). An image made by a metal fan captures these two different understandings of this music:



A fan-made image capturing the intersection of noise and music, screaming and meaning, in metal music<sup>2</sup>

Yet despite a shared appreciation of “noise,” there is no real consensus within the scene as what types of noises are regarded as *metal* noise(s.) When one browses insider websites such as *Metallum*, *Metal Storm*, *Metal Hammer*, *Kerrang!*, *Terrorizer*, *Metal Injections*, and *Metal Sucks*, one realizes that there is no agreement within the metal scene on what counts as metal. Instead of a clear definition of the genre, one finds an ever-proliferating range of genres and subgenres, as well as bands jumping or roaming between these genres. Attempts to answer the question “What is metal?” often start with the relation between metal music and noise. This is for instance how Gonzo critic Lester Bangs describes it in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll* (1992):

[H]eavy-metal rock is nothing more than a bunch of noise; it is not music, it's distortion – and that is precisely why its adherents find it appealing. . . . it's noise is created by electric guitars, filtered through an array of warping devices from fuzztone to wah-wah, cranked several decibels past the pain threshold, loud enough to rebound off the walls of the biggest arenas anywhere. Add the aural image of a battering ram, and you've got a pretty good picture of what heavy metal sounds like. (459)

Yet, is it really only possible to determine metal music on the basis of a dichotomy between music and noise?

The repeated reference to noise is significant. The boundary between music and noise, as Jacques Attali argues, is never stable. According to him, noise does not exist in itself; noise is noisy only in relation to the system in which it is inscribed (26). Especially since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the boundary between music and noise has become difficult to determine. In this context, the prevalent use of the term noise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to Michel Chion, functions primarily as a “segregationist” strategy/tool (241-42). That is: the term noise is more a figure of speech used to defend the self and demean an other, or even *the* other. Metal music, by its being situated in, and moving between noise as sensory experience and as a socio-cultural other, captures the intertwined and reciprocally reinforced structure that defines how music

<sup>2</sup> *Pinterest*, n.d., [nl.pinterest.com/pin/401875966720465999](https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/401875966720465999).

produces meaning by exiling noise, or by transforming what was once noise into meaningful music by means of definition. This dynamic is politically charged, and it changes, moreover, in different times and environments. My aim is to trace this dynamic between music and noise by focusing on the discourses that try to grasp what metal music is about, and to tease out from these the political implications of specific forms of grasping. This chapter will therefore not focus on the music itself, but on the discourses about metal music and their various attempts to describe what the ‘meaning’ of metal’s noisiness is. Following Attali, I will argue that defining noisiness always carries social and political implications, as even the embrace of noise, the desire ‘to make some noise,’ and the enjoyment of noise is implicitly predicated on the rejection of other noises.

Specifically I will look at three different metaphors that are recurrently used to describe the meaning of metalheads’ enjoyment of noisiness: empowerment, transgression and the ‘other’. These three different metaphors emerged in response to different stages of the development of the genre. I will argue that a careful study of the use of these tropes that are used both within academic texts and within the metal scene, reveals a desire for what I call a politically motivated form of ‘noise control.’ I will conclude this chapter by proposing a different analytical approach to metal music, in order to be able to better assess its use of noise.

## ii.

### Metal Music and Discourse

The issue of whether metal is noise or music was avoided by Robert Walser when he observed that metal is more about the emotions stirred by it, because of its tendency to be either passionately loved or hated (Walser, *Running with the Devil* 35). Metal music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene suggest in *Metal Rules the Globe*, can now only loosely be termed a “sonic attack” or “affective overdrive,” and has rather come to denote “a cluster of rock music styles that emphasize loud, distorted guitar, prominent and aggressive drums, emotionally extreme singing techniques, and musical esotericism” (3-4). Still, not all metal genres share the above characteristics. Moreover, most of these characteristics can be found in other musical genres as well. Finally, different listeners do not necessarily understand these characteristics in the same way, or may use radically different discourses to talk about metal. A review for the Taiwanese metal webzine *Pub Metal Music News* will address Mandarin-Taiwanese-speaking metalheads rather differently than when metal music is approached through academic language. In short, what counts as metal is an effect or an affect that touches, overwhelms, absorbs, disturbs, or stirs experiences, which in turn can only be described tentatively, by means of descriptions and figures of speech.

In dealing with music, and here metal music is no exception, there is always the awkward issue of the discursive dimension. This dimension involves how peoples describe and interpret their experiences of metal music; it involves descriptions and interpretations that become sets of vocabulary and language; it involves the ways these sets then come to influence how people experience the music; and it involves the ways in which these sets interact and change within

scenes, societies, and times.<sup>3</sup> This entanglement of music, language, and society, is what Attali both proposes and studies. Referring to Roland Barthes' reflection on the relationship between music and language, Attali agrees that "music cannot be equated with language" (25), because musical meanings cannot escape "the poorest linguistic category" which in this case is the adjective (Barthes, qtd. in Attali 19). Yet, however non-linguistic it may be, metal music is still inseparable from language and discourse, a matter that Deena Weinstein and Robert Walser, arguably the founding mother and father of metal music studies, are very conscious of.

In the groundbreaking *Heavy Metal* (1991), a canonical text in metal music studies, Weinstein cautions about the danger of writing about music:

[W]riting about music is like dancing about architecture. Critics of all stripes constantly resort to similes and metaphors, often based in the other senses . . . when they discuss a piece of music. (23)

The sentence "writing about music is like dancing about architecture" is a famous quote that many people have been credited for; its "original" source (if there is one) is scarcely traceable. Still, analyses and descriptions of music inevitably rely on language, on adjectives, on similes, and metaphors. If writing about music in general is like dancing about architecture, writing about metal is like tuning into a dysfunctional radio whose voices and sounds are inevitably distorted and twisted, or like scientists attempting to define dark matter by observing gravitational curves. Metal cannot be put into words without recourse to certain logical twists, simplifications, or exaggerations, as if both the listener and the subsequent language used are altogether "blown away" before being "pieced together" again.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, when discussing definitions of music genres in *Running with the Devil* (1993), Walser argues that such descriptions are discursive in nature:

A society's discourses depend upon its linguistic (or musical) raw materials and upon its historically circumscribed ideologies. Discourses are formed, maintained, and transformed through dialogue; speakers learn from and respond to others, and the meanings of their utterances are never permanently fixed. (61)

Discourses are more than mere language, as Foucault argues;<sup>5</sup> they are forms of political organization, that extend to the ways music, images, and practices are perceived, interpreted, negotiated, and communicated. Discourses *teach* people how to listen, how to play and perform, and how to talk or write about music. However, as may have become clear, there is no

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<sup>3</sup> The discursive dimension in metal music is perhaps most obvious if one spends time comparing the numerous fan-made images stating what metal music "is." Sometimes they support each other; most of the time, however, they contradict each other.

<sup>4</sup> The term "being blown away" is common metal jargon used to describe the intensive and bodily experiences of metal, often used interchangeably with terms such as "bombarding" and "blasting."

<sup>5</sup> In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977) that Walser refers to, Foucault defines discourses as "delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories" that take place in "technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behavior, in transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical" (199-200). Thus formulated, discourses can be roughly described as the construction of power and knowledge that is sited in everyday practices.

definitively fixed discourse, only sites of endless struggles (Walser 33). Reflecting on the development of metal music and metal music studies, Weinstein thus points out that “a genre cannot be known until sometime after its existence. . . . [H]eavy metal, like other genres of popular music, existed before it had a name” (“Globalization of Metal” 36). Becoming a genre is a kind of legitimate birth that is paradoxically also a retrospective codification and crystallization (36-37). Prior to this legitimation and codification, metal hides in the dark, as unknown, mysterious, “original and authentic,” a phenomenon that is detectable in the numerous attempts to trace its “origin” and equally feverish searches for the “real” and “authentic” “metal gods.”<sup>6</sup>

That metal is often denounced as a form of noise by people unfamiliar with it, and described by metalheads as bombarding, blasting, or overwhelming, is not coincidental. In fact, one purpose of this study is to show how metal music borders on several discursive limits. It disturbs musical, cultural, social, and political discourses that try to define what counts as “proper” or “acceptable.” Accordingly, metal has its own vocabularies and languages that are often figurative, that try to flip norms or make the “improper” and “unacceptable” an alternative norm. Consequently, any attempt to speak about, talk about, write about, elaborate on, define, or specify metal cannot escape figures of speech and tropes mediated by the outside, non-metal world.<sup>7</sup> Metal has never been just about “let’s rock and enjoy the music.” Rather, it is an art of playing with the ever-changing notions of music and noise, a playing that mirrors or echoes cultural, social, and political norms in which it is situated. Similarly, academic observations and interpretations of metal are an art of playing with existing languages and discourses, with respective concerns and contexts.

Still, such an art of playing has its anchoring points. As previously stated, I will examine three key terms or tropes in the development of metal music studies: “empowerment,” “transgression,” and “the other,” to then assess their political implications.

## 2.

### Determining Tropes and their Political Implications

#### i.

#### Empowerment

*What heavy metal takes seriously is power. The sonic power of the music—its inherent meaning—contributes to every delineated meaning that appears in its lyrics. Any lyrical theme, even despair or suicide, is empowered by the heavy metal sound.* (Weinstein, *Heavy Metal* 35)

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<sup>6</sup> The origin of metal music has always been highly controversial, as it is scenically associated with musical originality and authenticity. Since this topic has been discussed by many metal critics, metalheads, and scholars to no avail, I do not intend to jump into this. For importance of authenticity in metal scenes, see Weinstein’s *Heavy Metal* 27-46; for traces of the term “heavy metal,” see Walser 37-39.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Metal Hammer*’s self-conscious making fun of how “improper” words, terms, and topics are literally the “norm” in discourses about metal, especially the final paragraph: “A sturdy effort featuring vomit, shit, blood, pus, public nudity and keytars? Simone Simons, we salute you.” 16 Aug. 2017, [www.loudersound.com/features/how-metal-is-epicas-simone-simons](http://www.loudersound.com/features/how-metal-is-epicas-simone-simons).

The most influential trope in metal music studies is no doubt *power*, first conceptualized by Weinstein in *Heavy Metal* (1991). Weinstein approached heavy metal as a unique youth subculture formed in the late 1960s in the UK and later in the US. Metal scenes were initially composed of white working class men in post-industrial cities, who identified with the power of metal and were captured sonically by its loudness, musically by its complexity, and vocally by its emotion. This sonic power, according to Weinstein, required visual and verbal support, such as spectacular live events, specific forms of album art, the choice of band names, album and song titles, logos (images of band names), certain modes of dressing, behavioral codes, and lyrical themes such as sex and chaos.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the combination of a forcefully singing voice and distorted instrumental sounds at high volume was defined as “heavy” or “powerful” (23-35, 101-17).

In the beginning, then, metal music functioned as a subcultural solution to cope with deindustrialization, unemployment and low-end jobs, which were all considered threats to working class masculinity. This solution was threatened, later on, by a middle class counterculture that appropriated metal as mainstream (108). Yet, emphasizing its initial impetus, Weinstein terms metal musicians and fans of metal “proud pariahs,” who belonged neither to mass culture nor to folk culture (97). Since, in her formulation, metal was a masculine subculture meant to empower white working class males, Weinstein takes it for granted that “authenticity” and “masculinity” were central values to the scene. She even suggests that the metal scene’s understanding of itself as powerful, and opposed to the inauthentic and “weak” mainstream, carries gendered connotations, as “weakness” was often associated with the feminine. In addition, women in metal were either sex objects or conformed to masculine codes (324). Although Weinstein’s book was groundbreaking as the first academic study of metal, her treatment of gender has often been criticized. Keith Kahn-Harris, for example, points out that extreme metal’s hyper-masculinity, which borders on camp, undermines Weinstein’s formulation of metal as inherently masculine (*Extreme Metal* 73-75). Similarly, Michelle Phillipov notes that “the notion that metal is both masculinist and misogynistic persists,” even though Weinstein later modifies her formulation (*Death Metal and Music Criticism* 87-88). Both imply that Weinstein is herself biased toward the feminine and is co-responsible for this problematic disciplinary development.

In *Running with the Devil* (1993), Walser approached metal from the perspective of musicology and critical theories, developing a “guitarocentric” approach. Walser’s focus on the guitar in metal resulted from his rejection of sociological approaches toward popular music during the 1980s that reduced music’s meaning to the lyrics, an approach that he implicitly accused of being logocentric (53). Despite Weinstein’s sociological approach of providing detailed scenic dynamics, her claim that “in heavy metal the lyrics are less relevant as words than as sounds” (*Heavy Metal* 26), and her repeated emphasis that the interpretation of lyrics must also consider musical, visual, and scenic elements, Walser nevertheless criticized Weinstein, arguing that “[Weinstein’s] book has all the virtues and faults of most strictly sociological studies of popular culture. . . . Weinstein has nothing useful to say about the music of heavy metal” (*Running with the Devil* 53-54). Walser’s guitarocentric approach intended to

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<sup>8</sup> Weinstein’s classification of metal themes does apply to early metal; yet, themes in metal music have expanded rapidly since then; they are now too broad/diverse to list.

modify “disproportionate significance” given to the lyrics and a lack of knowledge of “how music constructs meaning musically” (71). In the chapter “Beyond the Vocals,” Walser thus launched into detailed musical and technical specifications about metal, especially metal’s trademark, the distorted guitar solo, which he defined as the listener’s *center of identification*.

Musically, a dialectic is often set up between the potentially oppressive power of bass, drums, and rhythm guitar, and the liberating, empowering vehicle of the guitar solo or the resistance of the voice. The feeling of freedom created by the freedom of motion of the guitar solos and fills can be at various times supported, defended, or threatened by the physical power of the bass and the violence of the drums. The latter rigidly organize and control time; the guitar escapes with flashy runs and other arrhythmic gestures. The solo positions the listener: he or she can identify with the controlling power without feeling threatened because the solo can transcend anything. (84)

In Walser’s formulation, the power inherent in metal is double-sided, simultaneously *oppressive* and *liberating* or *empowering*. Walser locates the oppressive dimension of power in the rhythmic and harmonic structure of metal music and in instruments such as the drums and bass. Musical structure and accompanying instruments are limited or constrained, while the solo guitar occasionally seems to be able to escape and disrupt these limits; it embodies a breaking out that transcends the oppression. As such, the guitar solo can be regarded as the key identification of freedom. However, the celebration of the guitar solo as a liberating power comes with its own problems.

In his description of the solo, Walser argues against Theodor W. Adorno’s take on improvisation in jazz, which also focuses on solos. Adorno called soloing a form of pseudo-freedom as it is still bound to the underlying rhythmic and harmonic structure. Walser rejects Adorno’s critique, calling it “vague, vitriolic, and transparently racist” (66) and insists on the solo’s transcendental power.<sup>9</sup> Still, Walser’s celebration of the guitar solos is self-undermining when he admits that most solos are in fact composed and practiced ahead of time, which implies that they are indeed an orchestrated pseudo-freedom, and further states that listening to a whole album replete with guitar solos is tiresome (82, 131). This is why Bruce K. Friesen and Johanna S. Epstein observe in “Rock n’ Roll Ain’t Noise Pollution” (1994) that a guitar solo is in fact “controlled chaos,” perfected through careful calculation and repeated practice (6). They further point out that the lead guitarist in fact spends most of a song’s duration playing rhythm guitar.

Second, although metal is no doubt guitar-based music, it is the drums’ heavy, strong, seemingly simple and stable 4/4 meter that pulls voices and sounds together, and directly relates to the intensive bodily experiences of metal within the scene (Friesen and Epstein 4; Walser 78-80).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In my opinion, Walser seems to forget that the problem he has with an emphasis on the lyrics—what he calls a logocentric approach—is not solved by a move towards a guitarocentric approach as this is still a dimension of logocentrism. I will return to this in later chapters.

<sup>10</sup> Audiences who frequent live metal gigs know the consequences when the drums and other instruments are not in sync: the whole song collapses and literally becomes noise, mingling many voices and sounds. In the Afterword to the 2014 edition of *Running with the Devil*, Walser also acknowledges that he should have written more about

Third, by emphasizing the role of the guitar solo, Walser downplays the importance of the voice, which he tends to conflate with the lyrics. To be sure, he acknowledges that a distorted metal vocal can have a similar effect as a distorted guitar and that certain solo vocalists are powerful (74). Yet, compared to his lengthy analysis of the role of the guitar, Walser spends little time reflecting on the vocal parts. In Weinstein's formulation of metal, the guitar and the vocals are of equal importance, and are in a kind of affectionate rivalry due to the manner in which voice too is regarded as sound rather than words in metal music (*Heavy Metal* 26, 45). Similarly, Friesen and Epstein argue that the vocals, as the main source of the melody and a display of bodily singing techniques, no doubt attract identification (6).

Finally, whilst Walser acknowledges the *oppressive* side of power inherent in metal, by positioning the guitar solo as the main domain of empowerment and liberation, he tacitly exiles this oppressive side to the rhythmic structure and accompanying instruments.

That the guitar solo is a form of controlled chaos, composed and practiced ahead of time through careful calculation and repeated practice, uncannily echoes Attali's argument that music is noise control or "a means of silencing" (Attali 111). According to Attali, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, music has gradually become repetitious. With technological innovations enabling mass accessibility, music has become a cultural product that can be purchased and stockpiled, and live performances are often expected to sound the same as the record, leaving little room for error, hesitation, and deviation (106). The exclusion of noise in the repetition of perfection or fidelity thus becomes, according to Attali, a form of social and cultural control. Or, the repetition of consumable music provides individuals with compensatory identifications in a decentralized and manipulated society (124). Yet, to perform perfectly, musicians rely on technological assistance usually beyond their control (95-97, 102-06). Music as repetition puts the musician in a schizophrenic role. Barely in control of their assisting technologies, musicians resort to "scientism" and "universality" to justify their music and claim authenticity, often assuming an "elite" attitude by repeatedly deciphering and reorganizing their music (113-16).

Attali's observation of music as repetition no doubt also applies to metal music. The guitar solo as "controlled chaos" is one example, but there are more. As people who frequent live metal events know, performances of songs seldom deviate from album tracks and true improvisations are rare, even exceptional. To attract an audience, the songs have to sound the same, that is, perfectly repetitive. This means that perfect repetition necessarily resorts to prerecording, back-taping, and syncing (Friesen and Epstein 8; Walser 74). Metal as a source of identification and empowerment, then, is reliant on sound equipment and technology that musicians themselves cannot fully control. Or, without sound technology metal might sound "messy" instead of "powerful and empowering."

Yet, as important as sound technology is to metal, it is seldom discussed. It may be referred to as "cheating" within the scene, and is selectively ignored in order to be able to maintain a focus on the "authentic" music and musicians. This neglect of sound technology leads one to the conclusion that metal's "empowerment" has a certain theatrical, make-believe dimension.

Walser not only *empowers* the guitar; he associates guitar empowerment with masculinity

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the drums and thought about them in other ways rather than solely in terms of oppressive rhythmic regulation (215).

and authenticity (84, 151). Unlike Weinstein, who focused on early metal scenes composed mainly of white males, Walser deals primarily with heavy metal from the 1980s, when the music had already become mainstream and attracted both male and female fans. Walser thus had to tackle a binary under-investigated by Weinstein, and ideas of masculinity and authenticity are his primary focus. Tracing the term heavy metal back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Walser argues that metal and power are closely tied to masculinity in the Western patriarchy. He refers to the OED's definition of "metallurgies":

Metallurgies

1828 Webster s.v., Heavy metal, in military affairs, signifies large guns, carrying balls of a large size, or it is applied to the balls themselves.

1882 Ogilvie s.v., Heavy metal, guns or shot of large size; hence, fig. ability, mental or bodily; power, influence; as, he is a man of heavy metal; also, a person or persons of great ability or power, mental or bodily; used generally of one who is or is to be another's opponent in any contest; as, we had to do with heavy metal (*Oxford English Dictionary*, qtd. in Walser 1).

According to Walser, the technique and science of metal, or the art of forging desired metal, has, at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, been a technical and metaphorical term associated with aggression, power, and masculinity. The entrance of metal into the mainstream reflects the masculine crisis of the white, heterosexual, middle class in the mid-1980s:

The purpose of the genre is to organize the reproduction of a particular ideology, and the generic cohesion of heavy metal until the mid-1980s depends upon the desire of young white male performers and fans to hear and believe in certain stories about the nature of masculinity. (154)

Now, masculinity is not a coherent idea, but rather a cluster of cultural, social, and political discourses that shape identities; the power associated with heavy metal provides a way to identify with and interpret an *ideal masculinity*. Referring to Ann Kaplan's *Rocking Around the Clock* (1987) and her psychoanalytical discussion on gender in metal, in *Running with the Devil* Walser suggests that ideal masculinity is dependent on misogyny and an "exscription" of the feminine (153-56). Misogyny denotes various levels of violence against women, who are considered to be threatening male superiority. *Exscription* refers to a strategy of expressing masculinity and male bonding, by intentionally excluding the female and ignoring the homoeroticism often implied in an excessive display of masculinity (158-162).

Both misogyny and exscription, psychoanalytically speaking, are thus defense mechanisms, that disavow the internally conflicting aspects of masculinity and its changing definition over time. As Walser has it:

Masculinity is forged whenever it is hammered out anew through the negotiations of men and women with the contradictory positions available to them in such contexts. It is also forged because masculinity is passed like a bad check, as a promise that is never kept. Masculinity will always be forged because it is a social construction, not a set of

abstract qualities but something defined through the actions and power relations of men and women—because, with or without makeup, there is no “real men.” (179)

The idea of masculinity, even an *ideal masculinity*, socially and discursively constructed, is never stable, always changing, but it nevertheless persists. Walser thus conceptualizes masculinity as “makeup,” that is, a *mask* or a *persona*; psychoanalytically speaking, masculinity is a fantasy that can never be achieved beyond an imaginary level.

Walser’s insight lies in his awareness of the discursive construction of masculinity and authenticity. In line with scholars of popular music like Simon Frith, who argues that authenticity is discursively construed to fend off what is considered to be falsifying, Walser too rejects authenticity as discursively construed in the same way as masculinity (Frith, “Art vs Technology” 109; Walser 233n24). Still, Walser replicates the notions he criticizes. Notably, he distinguishes real and fake authenticities based on the gender of metal music fans. Walser’s discussions of male fans tend to focus on “serious” metal that appropriates classical music, while his discussion of female fans is based on music analyses of lite or pop metal faulted with “fake authenticity,” that is, contaminated by mainstream middle class appropriation (166), enjoyed by women swooning and screaming at live events and gazing at posters of male musicians (175).<sup>11</sup>

Fake or not, the myth of authenticity has always been a part of metal scenes in relation to their proximity to campness, as Brad Klypchak points out (81-86). Or, as Owen Coggins observes, it is a characteristic of metal culture “that music that is taken very seriously can without contradiction be simultaneously considered with a humorous sense of the ridiculous” (62). Indeed, Walser’s dichotomy of masculinity versus femininity and real and fake authenticity/seriousness falters most clearly when he discusses androgyny in glam metal, a distinctly camp aspect of the metal scene. Walser argues that “[male] androgynous musicians and fans appropriate the visual signs of feminine identity in order to claim the powers of spectacularity for themselves” and asserts that “[i]t is certainly important to understand heavy metal androgyny as patriarchal” (*Running with the Devil* 171).” Apparently, then, androgyny performed by male musicians and fans is not so much about loosening up the definitions of masculinity in relation to femininity, but about the individual empowerment of males. Given Walser’s critique of Weinstein’s “virtually ignor[ing] women’s responses to heavy metal” (55), his replication of masculinity versus femininity and real and fake authenticity is a bit puzzling. Moreover, in the light of Attali’s argument that music is social and political in that it is also discursive noise control, it appears that Walser’s guitarocentric-masculine-empowerment-authenticity grounded formulation of metal is a form of academic-political-discursive control that silences and excludes certain voices and sounds in metal and its scenes.

In sum, the illusive empowerment by means of the guitar musically oppresses other instruments like the bass and drums that Walser conflates with the oppressive dimension of power, and scenically oppresses female fans of metal music. Still, written during the 1980s and first published in the early 1990s when metal hit the charts, all the while being accused of

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<sup>11</sup> The distinction of serious metal and lite or pop metal is, of course, arbitrary, as metal’s being deviant is based on the rejection of a vague mainstream, which is also highly diverse and changes with contexts. Still, heated arguments about these terms reappear again and again.

promoting deviant behaviors, *Heavy Metal* and *Running with the Devil* empowered and legitimized metal by bringing it into academic discourse. In this context it is of relevance to recognize that the importance of Weinstein and Walser's observations and interpretations also lie centrally in how their research, which focused on questions of authenticity, masculinity and empowerment, fundamentally shaped later discussions in the field.

I will now consider a second trope that characterizes discourses on metal music and that was already operative in the term "deviant behaviors" mentioned above: transgression.

ii.

Transgression

*Paradiso would contain the lite metal and nu-metal bands that top sales charts and receive exposure on TV and commercial radio. Purgatorio is where there is a possibility of entering Paradiso (mainstream media and its financial rewards), after working off one's sins; styles like power metal would fall into such a limbo. Musical styles classified as extreme metal would be confined to Inferno, damned forever to marginal-to-the-mainstream media status, never to see the light.*

(Weinstein, "The Globalization of Metal" 43)

Whereas "power" is a central term in the discourse about metal in its "classical" stage, a key term for scholars working in extreme metal is *transgression*: transgression in extremity. It has become common to say that extreme metal is so radical that it is necessarily transgressive, dark, and doomed to remain in the dark. The term extreme metal, coined by Kahn-Harris in his influential *Extreme Metal* (2007), designates metal genres rebelling against metal's assimilation into the mainstream and forms of entertainment that could be regarded as not serious or light (Wallach, Berger, and Greene, *Metal Rules the Globe* 8). Although extreme metal includes a huge diversity of genres, three genres receive particular academic attention: black metal, death metal, and doom metal. Kahn-Harris, who works mostly in the field of subcultural studies, devotes much attention to black metal. Michelle Phillipov, working in the field of music studies, focuses on death metal in her similarly influential *Death Metal and Music Criticism* (2012). And Ronald Bogue approaches death, doom, and black metal from a Deleuzian perspective in "Violence in Three Shades of Metal," collected in *Deleuze and Music* (2004). Despite their different approaches, Kahn-Harris, Phillipov, and Bogue echo each other, in stating that extreme metal is a musical, bodily, and discursive form of transgression (Kahn-Harris 34), death metal is thematically and lyrically transgressive and musically on the edge of noise (Phillipov, 21-22, 106), and that the three metal genres, in their seeking to be or become musically "other," constantly disrupt and re-assemble the notion of music (Bogue 97, 100-01). Transgression is implied when extreme metal is described as a musical inferno, as is suggested in the above quote from Weinstein.

Intriguingly, Kahn-Harris, Phillipov, and Bogue all use the term "noise" to describe extreme metal, and defend extreme metal as something more than noise by offering detailed generic, musical, and technical specifications and definitions that resort to adjectives such as "excessive," "formless oblivion" (Kahn-Harris, 31), "nihilist," "relentless" (Phillipov 103), or

“unnatural,” “non-organic,” and “metallic” (Bogue 100). It is as if extreme metal is so radical that attempts to write about it inevitably needs heightened language in which adjectives, “the poorest linguistic category” (Barthes, qtd. in Attali 19), substitute each other. Put another way, it is as if extreme metal is so radical that discursive tropes and musical specifications and definitions can no longer be definitive.

This strange mutual complement and supplement between musical definitions and descriptive languages is something Bogue is aware of; he warns that his description says little about the music. As he acutely points out, attempts to write about death, doom, and black metal necessarily and continuously move between deterritorialization and reterritorialization (100-01). That is, writing about extreme metal is a constant movement between linguistic and discursive articulation, dis-articulation, and re-articulation, between organization, dis-organization, and re-organization.

Extreme “transgression” or “brutality,” to use metal jargon, is doubtlessly central to both scenic and academic discourses about extreme metal. Kahn-Harris, for example, summarizes extreme metal as follows: virtuosic guitar playing is replaced by extremely downtuned riffs; double bass drums play intricate patterns and do not necessarily coordinate with the guitar; and whilst the rhythmic structure of extreme metal sticks to the 4/4 meter and its variations, it is most transgressive because the actual speed reaches 500-600 beats per minute (BPM); the melody is jettisoned; the vocals are radicalized to the point of being incomprehensible (31-33). Similarly, and in line with Walser’s rejection of the listener’s identification with the vocals, Phillipov argues that death metal is musically so heavy, intense, and complex, and the death vocals so relentlessly repetitive, that a death metal song is a single unit rejecting phonologocentric identification with the singing voice (103-05).<sup>12</sup> Extreme metal, then, transgresses the guitarocentric discourses of metal and it empowers metal music and listeners who do not identify with this.

Yet, both Kahn-Harris and Phillipov point out that extreme metal also replicates and intensifies an oppressive dimension inherent in metal, both musically and scenically. Musically speaking, attempts to explore the radical potential of metal paradoxically result in strict music control, as when feedback and improvisation are forbidden (Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal* 30-33).<sup>13</sup> Scenically, the vague boundary between insider and outsider develops into a sharp distinction between the elite “connoisseur” who is positioned against “the herd” (Allett 169-171). Adopting Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytical conceptualization of the abject,<sup>14</sup> Kahn-Harris observes that the affirmation of metal elites relies on displacing or externalizing the abject to the loathed “others” and fixing on an imaginary ideal ego/self, a strategy quite similar to Walser’s “exscription” and “metallic sheathing,” be it only that the abject is more than an elusively threatening femininity (Kahn-Harris 30; Walser 158). Phillipov further observes that

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<sup>12</sup> The prefix *phono* designates voice and sound, while *logos* designates *meaningful* voice and sound as in language and speech. Phonologocentrism used in popular music studies means an identification with the singing voice delivering lyrics. Referring to Ronald Barthes’ “grain of the voice,” Phillipov argues that extreme metal offers the listener affective pleasure beyond linguistic signification and articulation.

<sup>13</sup> Technically speaking, feedback is reverberation (reverb) between audio inputs and outputs. Although feedback is one crucial element in metal’s affect, it is connoted differently in each subgenre. In extreme metal and genres emphasizing musical complexity, feedback is considered to be distracting.

<sup>14</sup> It should be emphasized that for Kristeva, the abject is simultaneously self and other, inside and outside (*Powers of Horror* 7). In other words, the abject is *liminal*, the *loathed otherness in/of self* that has to be externalized.

establishment of being an authentic elite relies on a display of hegemonic or ideal masculinity and one's ability to appreciate musical complexity (87-88). Such a sharp distinction between the elite and the herd, as both Kahn-Harris and Phillipov note, stems exactly from the alternative identification mechanism discussed above. Extreme metal no doubt offers the listener affective pleasures beyond conventional musical and linguistic registers, yet these affective pleasures cannot escape scenic discourses, which reorient ways of listening that are necessarily codified but nevertheless imagined to be transgressive (Kahn-Harris 113). Even worse, exclusive elitism proclaims the privilege of "radical individualism" or "heroic individualism" where an imaginary but still disturbing transgression may justify persistent sexism, racism, and homophobia, tacitly denied by metalheads "knowing better but deciding not to know" (Kahn-Harris 42, 145, 161; Phillipov 85, 121).

Harris M. Berger offers an ethnographic example of this strange constellation of transgression-elitism-individualism in his *Metal, Rock, and Jazz* (1999). Berger conducted twelve interviews with Dann Saladin, a death metal musician, and recorded Dann's ambivalent attitude when asked if radical toleration or individualism leads to discrimination:

I started asking Dann if death metal's radical toleration may have negative consequences of making racism and sexism seem normal and acceptable. After a long pause, Dann said "Yeah, maybe, I would almost say so." . . . Not being African-American, female, or gay, Dann explained, he had a hard time understanding what it is like to experience prejudice. . . . Dan said, "There is so much tolerance [in the scene], things that ordinarily would not be tolerated become tolerated." . . . When I suggested that the issue might always be handled well in death metal, Dann said that metal's broad toleration was not a negative thing. . . . [I]t just means accepting the fact that it [racism] is there. (281-82)

Dann can be considered to be part of an elite, in the sense that he is an experienced death metal musician, well versed in metal's history, genres, scenic codes, activities, and discourses. He admits that radical toleration may have negative consequences, in its silent justification of racism, sexism, and homophobia, but states that radical toleration itself is not negative, but rather implies an acceptance that such problems exist. Dann's ambivalence is typical of what Kahn-Harris terms reflexive anti-reflexivity, "knowing better but deciding not to know" (*Extreme Metal* 151-52).

In contrast, transgression, in any form, is dangerous, Kahn-Harris emphasizes, because "music and the scene can never be detached from flows of power and capital and hence a non-political scene is an impossibility" (29, 155). Phillipov's critique of the constellation transgression-elitism-individualism is even harsher; she points out that transgression in extremity is more a matter of rhetorical values that intend to cover up the fact that metalheads are simply immersed in "banal and uncontroversial activities" such as producing and consuming music (121). Transgression in extreme metal, in other words, is not unlike the spectacular empowerment in heavy metal. Or, put differently, it is a performance of radical individualism and a showing-off of one's subcultural capital.

Similarly to the empowerment-grounded academic discourses about heavy metal that legitimize metal music and empower a segment of its fans, the transgression-grounded

discourses legitimize extreme metal. However, this legitimization leads to and produces unsettlingly real violence. The series of murders, assaults, and church burnings in the Norwegian black metal scene in the early 1990s are an example of when real violence is later scenically transformed into a legend as well as source for jokes.<sup>15</sup> It is a legacy that still lingers on in the public imagination, as is apparent in the following fan-made image.



A fan-made image normalizing people that listen to metal<sup>16</sup>

Much like the above image, and in their own ways, academic discourses about extreme metal fight off demonization and empower individuals equipped with music and scenic knowledge. Still, just as the image above claims a special appreciation for the “true music” which makes metal people not “just like you,” this academic empowerment is established by distinguishing those with knowledge from those without.

For the transgressions performed in academic and scenic discourses about metal to become real, other tropes are required. The most dominant of these tropes is “the other” who does not love the “true music.” This involves a strategy that replicates and intensifies the distinction between authentic and fake empowerment. The oppression that results from this can be all the more violent because othering is often under-recognized in the scene and discourse. For instance, Linda Dawes observes that both scenically and scholarly, the persistent assumption is that metal has a universal potential to “address *all* participants,” is an assumption that conveniently excludes discussion about black and queer experiences within metal scenes (385-87; original emphasis). Not coincidentally, sexual, racial, and homophobic jokes, insults, or verbal assaults, however violent, are simply not taken seriously by the scene.<sup>17</sup>

Scholars approaching metal from the perspectives of gender and ethnicity have uncomfortably acknowledged that the *othered* others in metal music rely on this process of *othering* to reassert the self. Jenna Kummer, for example, notes that othered female

<sup>15</sup> These events took place between 1993 and 1995. According to Phillipov, the Norwegian violence was a symptomatic outbreak, when pursuits of transgressive subcultural capital ran out of control. For academic discussions, see Kahn-Harris’ *Extreme Metal* 44-48 and Phillipov’s “Extreme Music for Extreme People?” (2011). For one example among many others about the legendary status of the Norwegian black metal scene, see the article “Top 10 Worst Crimes Committed by Black Metal Musicians” on *Metal Injection*, 17 Feb. 2011, [www.metalinjection.net/lists/top-10-crimes-committed-black-metal-musicians](http://www.metalinjection.net/lists/top-10-crimes-committed-black-metal-musicians).

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Fail Center*, n.d., [www.dailyfailcenter.com:8080/342797](http://www.dailyfailcenter.com:8080/342797).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, comments disavowing racism on *Metal Hammer*’s article “Does Metal Have a Problem with Race?” 7 Apr. 2016, [www.facebook.com/metalhammer/posts/10154092130779764](https://www.facebook.com/metalhammer/posts/10154092130779764).

metalheads often re-appropriate femininity in ways acceptable to the masculine dress code, such as by cutting parts of metal T-shirts up. In doing so, they construct the other in females who do not dress in a manner conforming to this code, such as by not wearing black (151-55, 159-63). Jamie E. Patterson observes a similar paradox in black female metalheads. On the one hand, by identifying with metal authenticity, they attain a sense of self-empowerment; on the other, as this self-empowerment often comes in a form of performing hyper-femininity, they also risk self-objectification. And much like the female metalheads observed by Kummer, black female metalheads do not speak well of females who do not abide by the metal code (128, 134).

In a more complex vein, Kevin Fellezs observes that *black* metal musicians,<sup>18</sup> torn between empowerment and racialized stereotypes, often resort to the repressed and forgotten jazz and blues elements in metal (196-97). Jazz and blues, indeed, strongly influenced metal. Weinstein's genealogy of heavy metal already mentions jazz and blues influence (*Heavy Metal* 16-17); Walser notes that "[a] metal genealogy ought to trace the music back to African-American blues, but this is seldom done" (39); and the 2011 documentary series *Metal Evolution* confirms that metal, or at least early metal musicians, were indeed inspired by jazz musicians.<sup>19</sup> Jazz and blues, then, were once selectively repressed and forgotten in discourse in and of metal. Still, retrospective tracing these missing origins comes with its own problems, since this once othered origin may in turn launch otherings of genres deemed not-jazz and not-metal enough.<sup>20</sup>

The above observations, in sum, highlight how the identity of being metal operates through tropes based on power, self-empowerment, transgression and forms of oppressing the other. Authentic empowerment (that fits within the metal tradition) versus fake empowerment (the result of scenic ignorance) and the elite versus the outsider are accompanied by more binary pairs: man versus woman, masculinity versus femininity, and white versus black (or other ethnicities and races). Given that transgression is a *performance* of radical individualism, it is remarkable that academic discourses about extreme metal still focus on transgression. Academic discourses about extreme metal are themselves ambivalent discursive acts, characterized by simultaneous critical self-reflections and disavowals. Karl Spracklen, for example, admits that extreme nationalism and racism exists in black metal, but explains it as "liberal in nature" (91), that is, "radically tolerant," to use Berger's words. Scholars know, consciously or intuitively, that transgression is grounded in loose, elusive binary pairs and series of selectively justified exclusions, but nevertheless resort to the notion in order to defend extreme metal.

In any case, the combined use of empowerment, transgression, and the other renders the already predominantly masculine discourse of metal music studies itself masculinist. This is indeed what Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone argues in her *Queerness in Heavy Metal* (2015). She contends that "metal music studies" is itself "masculinist and heteronormative," and that the

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<sup>18</sup> Here, black metal musicians mean musicians of *black color*, not to be confused with musicians of black metal.

<sup>19</sup> This is in episode 1, "Pre-Metal." According to Sam Dunn, producer and director of the series, early metal is strongly influenced by classical music, jazz and blues, and rock and roll.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, *Guitarre&Bass's* interview with Robert Trujillo, bassist of Metallica, where Trujillo enumerates jazz traces in famous metal musicians. His othering attitude is most apparent in the comment that "you average heavy metal fan" simply does not understand the fusion between jazz and metal. 20 Aug. 2015, [www.blabbermouth.net/news/metallicas-robert-trujillo-explains-connection-between-heavy-metal-and-jazz-video](http://www.blabbermouth.net/news/metallicas-robert-trujillo-explains-connection-between-heavy-metal-and-jazz-video).

discourse reifies masculinity in order to ignore queerness. For instance Walser may speak of male bonding but this reinforces masculinity; and Kahn-Harris does acknowledge a form of camp inherent in metal but this does not lead to a straightforward denial of the heteronormative (Clifford-Napoleone 11; Walser 152; Kahn-Harris 147-49). Clifford-Napoleone claims that the masculinity in the general discourse of metal music studies is itself a performance and an illusion (11), indeed a “makeup,” and considers the problem of metal’s “effeminophobia,” meaning the pervasive fear of the feminine. According to Clifford-Napoleone, effeminophobia even penetrates into queer communities to the extent that a distinction is developed between the proper, healthy-gay versus the improper, unhealthy-gay (136). Similarly, Gabby Riches argues that metal music studies is trapped in its own ever-changing ideal masculinity, which leads discourses of metal music studies to replicate and intensify dualistic pairs (265, 268).

In this context it may be of use to translate Attali’s ideas on repetition in music to the field of discourse about music. According to Attali, repetition is oppressive and deadly, but can be used to subvert political control (132). On the one hand, perfect repetition as discursive, social, and political noise control creates a repetitive society, a norm heralding forms of “death” at individual, social, and political levels (126-27). On the other hand, excessive repetition also leads to a proliferation of “radical subversion, a new mode of social structuring, communication that is not restricted to the elite of discourse” that slowly takes place (131-32). Considered alongside Attali’s formulation of proliferation, extreme metal and the scenic and academic discourses about it, seem ambivalent. On the one hand, extreme metal no doubt transgresses the authenticity-masculinity-empowerment-based discourse. Yet it does so only to re-structure, replicate, and intensify it to a transgression-elitism-individualism-based discourse associated with universal empowerment. Discourses about extreme metal, both scenically and academically, then, are also discursive and political forms of identity control, in their silencing of others in extreme metal.

To make the above controls worse, the “others” again replicate externalization and othering. Ultimately, discourses about heavy metal and extreme metal become a battlefield rife with selective replication, valorization, and intensification of binary pairs. Even more paradoxical, despite numerous contradictions inherent in metal, discourses about it nevertheless fall back on and justify each other. It is a scenario which Attali calls a “political spectacle” in which the “detriments” or others take control of discursive power, “without . . . a dissolution of power” (132). In sum, metal music studies can itself be considered a series of noise control strategies that empower certain parts of the scene and music while oppressing others. These controls, paradoxically, end up othering each other. The result is a “noisy” battlefield.

### 3. Irony

Several scholars approaching metal outside from metal music studies have noted the discursive formation that has led to the noisy battlefield discussed above. In his Introduction to *Music at the Extremes* (2015), Scott Wilson, for example, observes that the alternative hierarchy of the

marginal music community always replicates hierarchies that exclude and demonize such a community in the first place (10). Referring to Attali's formulation of noise control and Kahn-Harris' observation of transgression as dangerous, "walk[ing] on a knife edge" (*Extreme Metal* 166), Sabatino DiBernardo observes that in discourses about metal, musical elaborations, linguistic interpretations, and scenic vocabulary are cyclical and fall back on one another, undermining as well as justifying each other. Referring to Linda Hutcheon's conceptualization of irony as indicating occurrences of power struggles, DiBernardo argues that metal as a whole, with all of its internal and structural paradoxes, is tense and ironic:

Although metal music is not typically viewed as ironic, there are many senses in which heavy metal walks an ironic edge, a subversive and transgressive double edge that makes a "scene" that can "put people on the edge" as it functions by way of a double meaning. (199-200)

Politically speaking, metal walks an ironic edge. Its subversion and transgression "make a scene" that is not to be taken seriously entirely, but that does have a "knife edge" that can "cut" or hurt. In other words, metal provokes as well as disavows touchy issues. To incorporate DiBernardo's critique into my own, I consider both academic and scenic discourses as a politics of noise control.

Another example of how discourses about metal are full of irony is the notion of "metal community and tradition" which is central to metal identity. Examining the global spread of metal music in *Metal Rules the Globe*, Weinstein first raises the question of whether the codification and crystallization of metal impedes the inclusion of other genres. She then formulates metal differently; as a cultural form that "continues to generate varieties and hybrids while maintaining a continuity of code and a self-conscious tradition," thus forming a kind of alternative "internationalism" that responds to political-economic casualties caused by industrial and post-industrial technology ("The Globalization of Metal" 56-57). Despite her emphasis on metal code and tradition, Weinstein's formulation of metal identity considers the social-political dynamics involved in various metal scenes and treats metal music and its community as heterogeneous. In contrast, and referring to a so-called "Weinstein Hypothesis," Wallach, Berger, and Greene *homogenize* the metal community. Acknowledging the complexity involved in different scenes, they nevertheless argue that the metal community is global and transnational, the metal canon "offer[ing] *heroic individualism, in-group solidarity* . . . and the appreciation of 'great art'" (*Metal Rules the Globe* 25-27; my emphasis). Such an idealized transnational metal community not only conceals ceaseless hostilities but also fetishizes both metal and its community. Back in 2000, Rocco had already argued that metal music and the metal subculture had fragmented to the point that it was difficult to perceive metal as a single entity (87). What still tied metal together was not so much identification with the tradition, but rather the negative evaluations of the tradition by outsiders. Hostilities were always rife within the metal community and, indeed, sometimes erupted as real violence (89, 91).

This repetitive emphasis on a metal code or tradition raises the question: what is such a metal code or tradition; how could it be defined? Is its key characteristic power, for instance in the form of overwhelming loudness (Weinstein)? Is the distorted guitar, and especially the transcending guitar solo, pivotal (Walser)? Are the radicalized vocals, that are nearly

syntactically incomprehensible, the essence (Kahn-Harris and Phillipov)? Or should we focus on the somewhat neglected but still crucial drum rhythm and bass pulsing with the listener's heartbeats; or the changeable combinations of all the above, which can be collectively termed sonic attack and affective overdrive (Wallach, Berger, and Greene)? As this list shows, just as there is no consensus about what counts as metal, there is hardly a consensus about what counts as the metal code or tradition. People attracted by metal experience it differently; they have different definitions of and attitudes towards metal. For some people, taking a code or tradition so seriously might be oppressive, or simply downright ridiculous, as Coggins observes (62). Even metalheads and metal musicians occasionally make fun of, or even question the very notion of tradition. Below, for instance, we find a fan-made image that makes fun of how mundane and banal metal can be.



A fan-made image making fun how mundane and banal metal can be.<sup>21</sup>

Another example: Philly Byrne, the vocalist of the Icelandic thrash metal band Gama Bomb has expressed his dissatisfaction with the metal tradition, which he termed “clichés.” With this he refers to the similarity of visual designs and musical patterns, the comforting homogeneity of a black dress code representative of universality, and above all the retrospective, fervent worship of metal gods.<sup>22</sup> Byrne sharply points out the internal contradictions in the metal tradition and recalls the ignored or forgotten “accidents that ignored the [metal] rules”: like the fact that the “founding band” of metal music, Black Sabbath, is obsessed with jazz, that the nowadays jeered-at British rock band Queen was once considered metal, and that the American heavy metal band Twisted Sister was once punk in drag, derided as posers or fakes.

Celebrating a homogeneous metal community and tradition, idealized as universally empowering and liberating, is, I argue, simultaneously a form of noise, and an ironic one at that, and a form of identity control through which scholarly discourses and discourses within the scene justify each other. No doubt, there are a few people convinced of this imagined community and tradition. Still, for others, it is more likely that the metal community and its tradition is a *make-believe*, the seriousness or non-seriousness of which is dependent on contexts.

<sup>21</sup> Pinterest, n.d., [nl.pinterest.com/pin/549791066992626393](https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/549791066992626393).

<sup>22</sup> Byrne, Philly. “Metal is being Killed by Clichés - I Know because I Am One.” *Metal Hammer*, 18 Jan. 2016, [teamrock.com/feature/2016-01-18/metal-is-being-killed-by-cliches-i-know-because-i-am-one](https://teamrock.com/feature/2016-01-18/metal-is-being-killed-by-cliches-i-know-because-i-am-one).

Commenting on the formation of metal music studies, Nicola Masciandaro cites Giorgio Agamben's reflection on language and discourse to highlight the problematics of the existent discourses of metal music studies:

[T]he problem of knowledge is a problem of possession, and every problem of possession is a problem of enjoyment, that is, of language.<sup>23</sup>

The problematics of metal music studies as a cross-disciplinary field of knowledge, which I earlier termed a noisy battlefield and a form of identity control, result from conflicting claims of possession of the correct language and knowledge about metal. The enjoyment of possession, however, is also an obsession. A lack of wariness of the discursive dimension in metal music studies easily gives way to exorcizing rituals: the abject part of self must be externalized or exorcized to an other, hence the never-ending arguments about who or which genres are to be included or excluded, as well as which approaches toward metal are valid and which are not. Walser ambivalently acknowledges this noisy battlefield in the Afterword of *Metal Rules the Globe*:

[T]he danger of assimilating the Other has perhaps been allowed too much to overshadow its opposite, the fetishizing of difference to the point that respect for others becomes more theoretical than empathetic, and such that scholars of differing music cultures feel that they have no shared concern, nothing relevant to say to one another. (333-34)

Although Walser does not to explain what he means by "the Other," in the above quote, he appears to suggest that the distinction of self and other and the recognition of otherness in/of self is more of a matter of theories, and that differences in real life are fetishized to the point that scholars approaching metal from different disciplines, and with differing concerns, have entered into a discourse with a dead end. Walser thus calls for a "scholarly dialogue" to "register fully the complexities of the cultures and lives in which metal music is meaningful" (336). To rephrase, I suggest that Walser recognizes that metal music studies has become a collection of forms of discursive controls that are silencing each other, that is, othering each other, and that a conversation or mode of communication, instead of argumentation, between metal scholars from various disciplines, is necessary to understand metal's complex meanings.

Whereas Walser's call for dialogue has metal scholars in mind, I would like to extend his call to even more disciplines. Distinct from the dominant cross-disciplinary school, there are also philosophical discourses about metal, especially black metal, involving scholars such as Niall Scott, Scott Wilson, Sabatino DiBernardo, and Nicola Masciandaro who work in ontology, biopolitics, and ethics, and appear in various publication such as *Hideous Gnosis* (2010), *Metal Void* (2010), *Music at the Extremes* (2015), and *Heavy Metal Studies and Popular Culture* (2016). Although philosophical approaches to metal have provided insightful observations on the conjunctions of metal music, discourses, politics, and philosophies, so far the dominant school of metal music studies and the philosophical school of metal appear to regard one another as

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<sup>23</sup> Agamben, *Stanzas* xvii.

“the other,” whose engagement with metal is inauthentic. In Chapter Four, I will further discuss this scholarly battlefield, and intervene in it. For now, it suffices to point out that both “schools” tend to over-focus on specific dimensions of metal. I think it is pivotal for the two schools to enter into a dialogue so as to intervene in and modify their respective limits and shortcomings. This will be further discussed in the next section.

#### 4.

#### A Phonic Approach toward Metal Music: Beyond a Formal Analysis

*[Music] constitutes the collective memory and organizes society, often in ways less idealized.*  
(Attali 30)

In the above sections, I have clarified my argument that “metal music studies is an art of playing with languages and discourses.” I traced and contextualized how tropes such as empowerment, transgression, and the other are elaborated upon on the basis of double meanings and dialogues of power, which are selectively valorized in scenic and academic discourses about metal. Metal, like other music, constructs collective memory and identity. Meanwhile, such a construction also idealizes the collective, and can be politically problematic. This is what has happened during the disciplinary formation of metal music studies, where the notion of noise in opposition to music functions as a form of identity control, or a negative “loop” that functions to diminish or even silence others. The next aim of my project is to define how we can get out of this bind. I suggested this could be done by opening up the scholarly debate to more circles interested in metal. Yet, how would that work out analytically?

#### i.

#### *Phônè*: Where Forms of Knowledge Gather in Tension

In what follows I will offer an approach to metal that I call a “phonic” approach. Let me first clarify my position, in terms of cultural and analytical specificity. As may have become clear it is my assessment that underlying metal’s scenic-scholarly politics is the presumption that metal and its *phônè* empower all participants. One example can be found in the work of Jeremy Wallach and Alexandra Levine. In their anthropological and ethno-musical examinations of metal scenes, Wallach and Levine argue that the “materiality of the *musical sounds themselves*” limits possible interpretations (130; original emphasis):

[C]ertain sonic elements . . . and the iconic relationships . . . with environmental sounds and human vocalizations . . . are not subject to random variation depending on cultural context. (131)

According to Wallach and Levine, interpretations of sounds are not infinite. Interpretations may vary, but they are all based on the physical properties of sounds that exist regardless of culture. As powerful and provocative as this suggestion may be, Wallach and Levine nonetheless admit

that this is a dangerous claim, declaring that “[t]o posit that the material form of musical sounds or any other cultural object can circumscribe the range of possible interpretations only makes sense if we posit the existence of universal properties of sensory experience” (131-32). As we will see in what follows, I do not adhere to such a universalist position.

From the perspective of physics, sounds are simultaneous vibrations of sound waves of amplitudes/dynamics/loudness, wavelengths/frequencies/pitches, and timbres. Sounds can then be reduced to an objective description unrestricted by cultural differences, as illustrated by Allan F. Moore in his Introduction to *Analyzing Popular Music*:

We hear a sound when our eardrum vibrates, say, 440Hz, having been sent in motion by sound-waves vibrating at the same speed. They, in turn, have been set in motion by the vibration of some material, again at that speed, even in the presence of conflicting vibrations from other sound sources. . . . This is an objective description of what happens. In saying this, I mean that any person with normal or near-normal hearing, from whatever culture they come, will have their eardrums vibrate at the same speed. (7-8)

Even though the physical aspect (in Wallach and Levine’s use, sounds’ materiality; in Moore’s use, sound itself or sound *per se*) can be objectively described, it has little to do with the ways people experience and interpret sounds. Differently to Wallach and Levine, who subordinate interpretation to the materiality of sounds, Moore stresses the interpretative pole. Arguing that perceptions of sounds are always already culturally and socially rooted, Moore conceives of meanings as arising from layers of contexts and entailed interpretations.

[I]n choosing whether to use that code [such as the sound ‘A above middle C’], we are entering into the act of interpretation, but it is an interpretation of the cultural context of the sound, of how to understand it, rather than the sound itself. . . . By subjecting this sound to analysis, we are in fact making an interpretation of the relationships between it and antecedent, simultaneous, and consequent sounds, an activity into which it is impossible not to insert the self, because such relationships only become apparent in the presence of a perceiver. (8)

Moore’s conceptual emphasis is on how meanings of sounds are contextually and discursively construed, rather than derived from the sound themselves.

Similar to Moore’s formulation, but extending it to musical interpretation, and with further emphasis on contestations between people, Walser argues that interpretations and meanings are never fixed.

Since subjects are formed in culture, all understandings are intersubjective; since there is no way to stand outside cultural understandings, there can be no Archimedean objectivity. Thus we must work all the time with interpretations. . . . Musical interpretations are always open to refinement and contestation, but they are never arbitrary, and there is no way to avoid committing interpretation. (“Popular Music Analysis” 23)

Both Moore and Walser consider the dynamics and complexity of discursive constructions in meaning-making. Moore tackles this from the perspective of “the self,” Walser from the perspective of “the intersubjective.” Their focus is the interpretative politics surrounding sounds. At stake, then, are the multivalent interpretations of *phónè*, as well as the power struggles between modes of knowledge-making. The insights of Moore and Walser would be compromised by resorting to a vaguely universal sensory experience, and arise from their focus on specific political and epistemological nuances. This is a focus I share throughout this project.

Still, it appears to me that Moore’s and Walser’s conceptualizations are not unproblematic. Notably, although they acknowledge the physical or material aspect of sounds, there remains a gap between sound and interpretation. In fact, the difference between the conceptualizations of Wallach and Levine, and Moore and Walser, is the question of whether materiality or discourses determine meanings of sounds and music. This question poses a misleading separation and even a false opposition. Defining sounds as emplacement of the material, the medium, and the mental collectively, Tim Ingold observes that even scholarly conceptualizations easily fall back to rigid, binary divisions (11-12). Central to Ingold’s critique is not so much which aspect of sounds is to be privileged, but how scholarly maneuvers, uncritical of the binary mode of knowledge making in the West, result in an attitude that leads to scholarly confinement and deafness (13).

Ingold’s caution against the binary conceptualization of sound is especially relevant to metal in relation to one particular *physical* aspect. Weinstein points out that metal is experienced as powerful and meaningful because “the music can be felt, not only metaphorically, but literally, particularly in the listener’s chest” (*Heavy Metal* 25). Similarly, Walser observes that the physicality of metal’s *phónè* impacts the listener bodily as well as perceptually:

Music affects the experience of space as well as time. Loudness mediates between the power enacted by the music and the listener’s experience with power. . . . [T]he music is felt within as much as without, and the body is seemingly hailed directly. (*Running with the Devil* 75-76)

Importantly, as indicated by Walser’s phrasing “seemingly,” this aspect associated with the body and the material should not be opposed to the mind’s interpretative endeavor. Rather, it is constitutive to how metal is experienced and perceived as empowering or oppressive. That is, meanings of metal are simultaneously material and interpretative, and cannot be reduced to either one. To rephrase this by way of Wallach, Berger, and Greene, metal’s loud and distorted *phónè* overdrives or attacks, or does both at the same time.<sup>24</sup>

The scholarly conceptualizations of musical sounds dealt with above, help to clarify my own position. *Phónè*, so I hold, circulates between the material, the perceptual, and the

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<sup>24</sup> Here, one might also read Walser’s wording and observations in terms of affect as it was formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Bogue (discussed in the section “Transgression”) highlights the affective dimension of metal. As my project concerns political struggles taking place in metal and its *phónè*, I focus more on the discursive and contextual dynamics. An exploration of metal from the perspective of affect will be the topic of a follow-up project.

cognitive, between the individual and the collective, and embeds power dynamics in different contexts. In my own, rather technical, phrasing, *phónè* concerns the vibrations of sonic energies, *as well as* the auditory sensations and meanings evoked by these vibrations. The latter are never culturally fixed or stable. Spending most of my time in the Netherlands over the last couple of years, for instance, I have grown used to the quietness of the environment—from a Taiwanese perspective, that is. Like many people in the Netherlands, I consider the sounds of washing machines at midnight annoying *noise* produced by inconsiderate people. However, during my short stays in Taiwan, where I grew up, I consider the sounds of washing machines at midnight as “choirs,” as part of the melody of life, a kind of *lullaby* by my fellow people. Washing machines “voice” something differently in the Dutch and Taiwanese contexts. Analogously, people’s perceptions of *phónè* are always culturally and politically informed, echoing within their worlds, although, there are always phonic moments that get away or go away, forcing people to reexamine their positions. In other words, it is *how* the *materiality* of *phónè* is dis/re/de-articulated, dis/re/de-organized, and dis/re/de-negotiated, in sum, *mediated*, that interests me.

## ii.

### Methodology: the Analysis of Sound Blocks

Taking *phónè* as its vantage point, the current project can be termed a phonic approach toward metal. My analysis first of all focuses on how metal manipulates and organizes amplified, distorted *phónè*. I then consider the phonic and musical levels alongside the thematic and visual levels. Here, “themes” refer to recurrent topics found in metal, such as chaos (as in the song NEMESIS in Chapter Two), violence (two versions of ENJOY THE SILENCE in Chapter Three), and hauntology (JUST NOT MEANT TO BE and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT in Chapter Four). Although primarily located on the level of lyrics, where the “narratives” or stories take place, themes also influence how *phónè* is musically organized and how visual components, such as album art and music videos, are designed. My use of theme and narrative is thus to be understood from the perspective of literary analysis. This use is in line with both scenic and academic discourses about metal; Walser’s discussion about themes in metal such as madness, mysticism and horror, for example is based on thematic and lyrical conventions in metal genres (*Running with the Devil* 181). That is to say, metal’s phonic, musical, thematic-narrative, and visual levels are all interrelated. Due to the complexities involved, I have come up with an innovative notational system that can also visualize my analyses.

My phonic approach of metal combines two methods in order to fully consider music’s temporal-spatial dimensions, linearity and simultaneity, and their narrative interrelation. Music’s simultaneity or its vertical dimension is most crucial for my analysis, and for this, I am inspired by the Dutch classical composer Ton de Leeuw’s concept of “tone field.” In *Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (2005), De Leeuw observes that simultaneity influences how people experience music, but that this has been poorly addressed by music scholars, who emphasize instead the harmonic development in Western classical music (77). De Leeuw defines a tone field as a musical episode that is harmonically static, but still vertically active. He further summarizes the musical and technical details characteristic of tone fields, which include ostinato figures, long-

held notes, modal tone scales, and the predominance of timbre (83). Although metal does not contain all details listed by De Leeuw, it is unquestionably characterized by simultaneity and timbre, has several types of distorted *phónè*, several musical activities, and varying levels of loudness and distortion—that is, layers of *phónè*—that take place at the same time *as well as* over time. Because of its vertical-horizontal density, metal sounds *heavy*, even overwhelming, and tends to provoke strong reactions.

Drawing inspiration from De Leeuw’s formulation of tone field, and taking note of how metal’s simultaneity, linearity, and timbre impact how people experience and derive meaning from metal, I propose to analyze metal through vertically and horizontally vectorized “blocks” whose phonic and musical combinations “sound” in certain ways. My use of the term “sound block” intends to bring attention to how, during a part of a song, vocals, riffs, notes, chords, and drumbeats articulate, comment on, or disrupt each other, and how these activities together give a feel that is of narrative significance. As an analytical tool, the sound block first of all enables me to engage with nuances that may not always be immediately audible. Further, the sound block allows me to consider phonic manipulations by sound technology such as reverb and echo units, recording, overdubbing and downtuning equipment, and especially amplifiers and synthesizers. Sound technology is crucial for metal, but is often negatively viewed as it goes against the ideology of musical excellence and authenticity. I note here that several metal scholars observe this complexity but fall short of elaborating on it, let alone analyzing it. As I will show in later chapters, a consideration of sound technology offers insight to metal’s political and philosophical relevance.

Now, it is helpful to have an idea about what sound blocks look like in my notational system and visualization. Below are a few partially simplified sound blocks taken from AND WE RUN by Within Temptation on their album *Hydra* from 2014 (to be discussed in more detail in the second chapter).

1/A  
00:09-00:21

This sound block at 00:09-00:21 (horizontal dimension) offers a combination of sounds and a feel that I note as A (vertical-horizontal dimension). This block (shortened from sound block) is also the first narrative structure (horizontal dimension) of AND WE RUN, thus my notation of 1/A.

6/E1 and E2/Solo  
02:07-02:22, 02:23-02:37

6/E1 and E2 is a variation of my notation of the sound block. This block, the sixth narrative structure, takes place at 02:07-02:37 and offers an overall complexity I notate as E. E consists of a solo that bears particular significance in discourses about metal. Although E at 02:07-02:22 and E at 02:23-02:37 sound slightly different, the differences are not significant enough to be considered as “two solos.” I therefore notate them as sub-blocks, E1 and E2.

## 2/A and B

00:22-00:53, 00:54-01:06

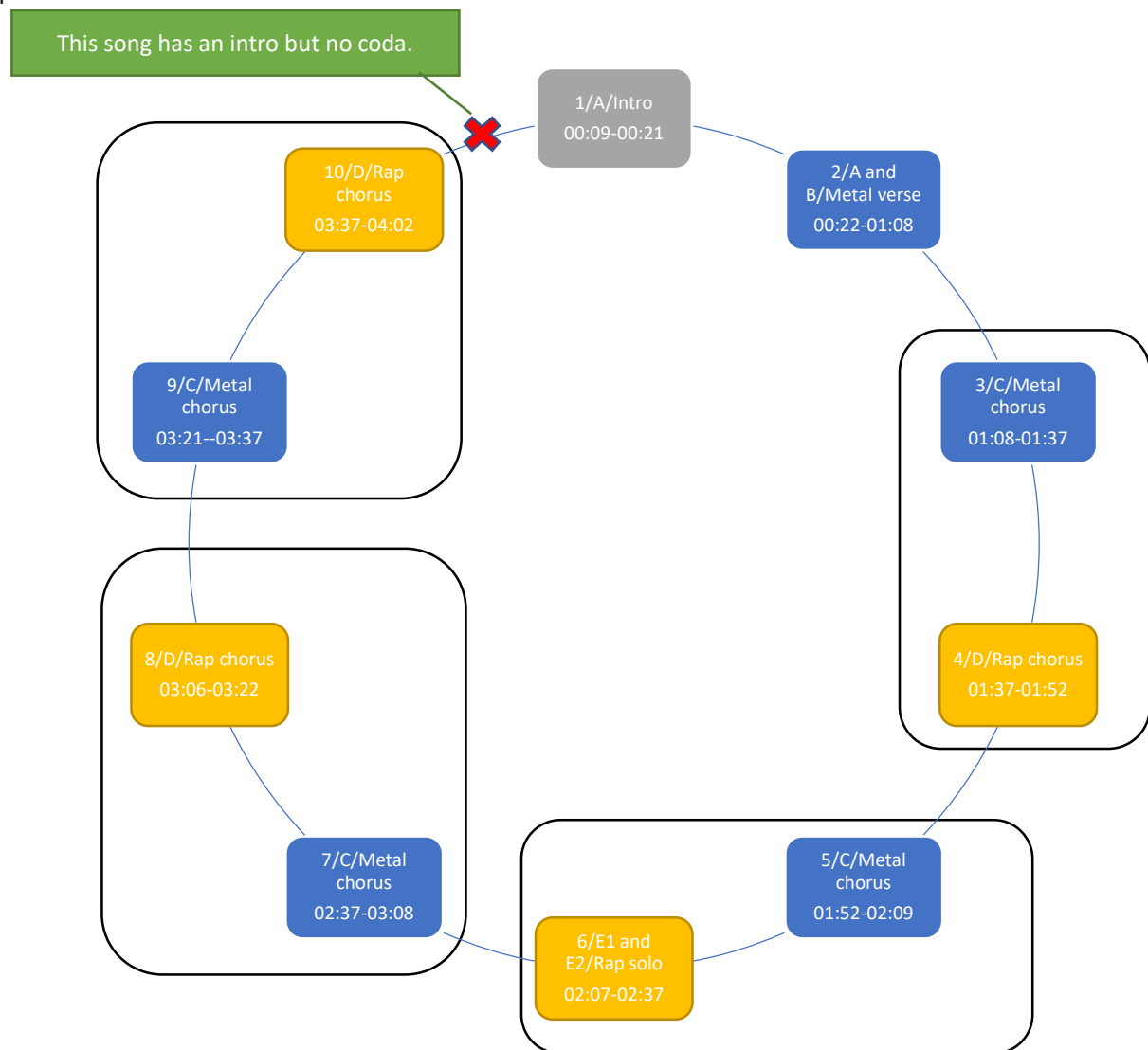
2/A and B is one more variation. The second narrative structure offers two different complexities that I notate as A and B, respectively at 00:22-00:53 and 00:54-01:06.

The third example, 2/A and B, however, raises the question: why are A and B, strictly speaking two sound blocks, notated as one? This leads me to my second methodological approach; treating a song structure as a narrative form, something commonly considered “lay” pop music analysis by the majority of metal journalists and critics. Although pop music analysis has been criticized for lacking in engaged musical analysis, its inclusive consideration of narrative themes, genres, visuals, and scenic discourses does offer a means of capturing metal’s complexity. I thus opt for pop music analysis, and add to this attentive musical analysis by incorporating sound blocks. In pop music analysis, a song is considered a musical and lyrical story composed by narrative structures like introductions, verses, choruses, transitions, and conclusions. Among these structures, the verse and chorus indicate where lyrics are delivered. A verse contains backgrounds, details, or description of the song’s story; a chorus makes clear the central idea previously elaborated in verses. Quite often, a song’s narrative structure, especially repetitions of verses and a chorus, form a circular pattern. Although metal often deviates from the verse-verse-chorus-verse pattern (or AABA pattern) followed by most pop music, the sound blocks upon which a metal song is built do have clear narrative functions, and generally conform to verse-chorus story-telling. Take, for example, 2/A and B discussed earlier, now with its narrative function added:

## 2/A and B/Verse

00:22-00:53, 00:54-01:06

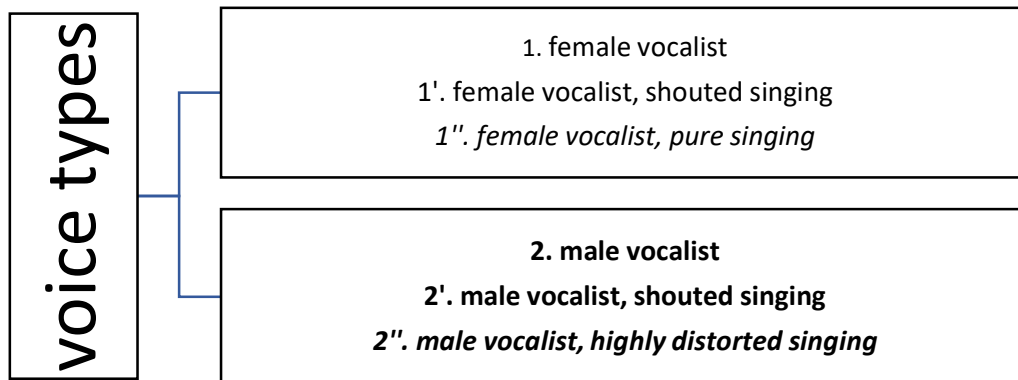
2/A/verse musically builds up tensions that explode in 2/B/verse (for a detailed analysis, see Chapter Two). Together, A’s and B’s musical organization and the lyrics provide the background story (verse). A, in this case, is about enslavement in fear that leads to the desire to run for freedom, while B is about when the decision to run is made. 2/A and B/verse is then followed by a chorus that is even more sonically intense and includes the line “and we run.” Below is the simplified and modified (semi)circular graphic of AND WE RUN:



From the graphic, it can be observed that the gist of *AND WE RUN* is how the song is largely built of repetitions of two sound blocks (C and D), that are tied to two types of voices (metal and rap) that reinforce the idea of “and we run.” Hence, it is better to consider A and B together as one narrative-musical-phonetic group or a bigger sound block, instead of separating them in a forced way.

Additionally, although *AND WE RUN* skips a conclusion and fails to complete the circle, this incompleteness or “(semi-)circle” does not contradict my observation that metal songs generally form a circular pattern by regularly repeating verses and choruses. Notably, until the final disruption—which I notate with an X mark—the song’s pattern of repetitions hardly changes. The song’s failure to complete a circle is in fact part of the gist, that is, a disruption. Since the metal songs I read either follow or disrupt the narrative-musical-phonetic circular structure, throughout the project I stick to this kind of graphic to avoid unnecessary confusion.

While my notation of sound blocks use numbers and letters, I use apostrophes to notate the types of human voice in sound blocks, and further format vocal and lyrical correspondence in **bold** and *italic*. Below is a simplified chart taken from *ENJOY THE SILENCE* (Lacuna Coil, *Karmacode*, 2006) discussed in the third chapter.



During the verses, the female (notated as 1) and male (as 2) vocalists sing together, but have different degrees of dominance in the lyrics. The lyrics of the verses are formatted as below:

Words like silence / Break the Silence / **Come crashing in / Into my little world** / Painful to me / Pierce right through me / **Can't you understand / Oh my little girl**

During the conclusion, the female vocalist only delivers phonemes, a type of singing scenically termed *pure singing* (notated 1''), while the male vocalist launches a *highly distorted singing* (notated 2''). The lyrics are thus formatted:

Ah... oh... / **Enjoy the silence**

I would like to clarify the notational differentiation between voice and sound to avoid misunderstanding. Both voice and sound are parts of sound blocks, neither claiming an analytical and interpretative privilege. At stake here is the pair of voice versus sound that we encounter again and again in different forms in this chapter—affectionate rivalry between the guitar and the vocal in Weinstein, music versus words-lyrics and guitar solo versus rhythmic voice and sound in Walser, a wall of noise versus phonologocentric identification in Phillipov, as well as materiality versus interpretation in scholarly conceptualizations of musical sound. All of these hierarchically-implicit pairs operate by way of misleading binary divisions. This binary mode of knowledge-making, as I pointed out through reference to Ingold, is often epistemologically and politically problematic. That is to say, although I notate voice and sound differently, I do not intend to fall back on binary divisions whose poles can be selectively articulated or neglected, empowered or oppressed. This “loop” is indeed what happens in metal music studies, in such a way that the discipline itself has become a noisy scholarly and political battlefield.

Why, then, this notational differentiation when it risks false opposition? My answer can be formulated along in two trajectories. First, pragmatically, it is in line with discourses about metal. Even though academic discourses about metal privilege musical sounds over human voice, both scenic and academic discourses strictly reserve terms like voice, vocal, and vocalist to human individuals. This distinction is influenced by the broader cultural narrative in which the voice is regarded as a human privilege and is associated with metal's ideology of musical excellence and authenticity. Problematic as this distinction is, I partially conform to it; without this preliminary distinction, analyses become unnecessarily redundant and confusing. Second, I consider this preliminary distinction a kind of necessary evil to bring attention to how the human voice in metal is a *political problem per se*. Clearly, discourses about metal, in this case the human-centric use of voice and the privilege attributed to sound, contradict each other. Underlying this contradiction are two sets of epistemological and political agendas coexistent in discourses about metal: the human voice as meaningful and musical sound as subculturally meaningful. In later chapters, I will explain why the two ways of meaning production concern forms of politics: *logos* in a larger (bio)political sense and metal *logos* that constructs a metal community.

### iii.

#### Formal Analysis and Beyond

Having sketched out my methodology, I want to clarify where and how I intend to intervene in relation to limits and shortcomings in current scholarly engagements. First, by examining components in sound blocks, I defy the scenic-scholarly common saying that a metal song is a "wall of noise" that renders musical analysis impossible. Second, I also go against an exclusive focus on one certain sound among metal's many voices and sounds, as is the case in Walser's guitar-centric approach. Third, by considering a song's sound blocks, theme, structure, and visual components, I intend to rectify both Walser's privileging of the guitar and his rejection of analysis of the lyrics, and scholars in the philosophical school whose analyses over-invest in metal's lyrics and images and neglect the music.

My phonic approach, then, tries to do justice to metal's complexity and endeavors in order to avoid selective scholarly interpretation that, as I have mapped and criticized, contributes to and precipitates scenic-scholarly noise- and identity-control. The goal of this phonic approach, I need to stress, is not so much about negating existent scholarly engagements. Rather, I am interested in querying presumptions and analytical hierarchies in these approaches and bringing their insights together. In my opinion, this scholarly analytical dialogue helps us to have a more comprehensive understanding of the ambivalent relationship between metal and politics, and might prompt people surrounding metal to converse with one another.

Put alternatively, with this phonic approach, my ambition is to listen to metal in terms of what Attali formulates as compositions, though my use extends Attali's definition. For Attali, music as repetition and proliferation has blocked communication between individuals, all condemned to be silent and to silence each other (134). Composition, as a new way of collective making and participating in music, might enable a new means of communication without predetermination or presumption (141-43). For me, to listen to metal as composition means

that discourses about metal can recognize and accept otherness in selves, that these discourses “re-use,” or dis-articulate and re-articulate tradition, and that they communicate; their consensus evanescent and fragile, their minds open to new interpretations and meanings. As Attali acutely puts it:

Composition is not inscribed in a repetitive world, but in the permanent fragility of meaning. (147)

Metal as composition is sensed and made sense of, experienced and interpreted, its meanings and understandings never fixed. As such, metal music, passionately loved or hated and bordering on so many discursive limits, offers a spectrum of voices, sounds, and desires which echo between many environments, a spectrum that might be an open community without limit.

Disciplinarily, the current project is informed by sound studies, media studies, metal music studies, and philosophical approaches to metal. Theoretically, the project can be summarized as a psychoanalytically-inflected interest in biopolitics, elaborated upon with reference to the works of philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Lacan, Adriana Cavarero, and Michel Serres. These will be more central in the coming chapters. After this first chapter, having examined the discursive formation of metal music studies, having pointed out the problematics of existent tropes, and having scrutinized the politics of replications of hierarchy and marginalization in metal, I would like to start listening to metal’s loud and distorted *phônè* that *attacks*: that makes forms of scenic, social, and political *noise*.

## Chapter Two

### Analyzing Metal through Sound Blocks: Noise in Terms of *Phonè* and a Politics of the Undefinable

The previous chapter ended with my saying that the phonic approach defended in this thesis endeavors not only to initiate a conversation between people curious about metal, but also to bring attention to metal's philosophical and political implications. In this chapter I directly engage with metal's *phonè* by reflecting on noise in relation to scenic-scholarly identity politics. I consider how voices and sounds articulate, comment on, and disrupt each other in metal songs, how the ways in which people engage with these voices and sounds consolidate and undermine each other, and how these taken together make metal extremely "noisy," in the sense of it being complex and diverse. To take the complexity of metal songs into account and to avoid privileging a certain voice or sound, I make use of an analytical tool with a vertical and horizontal vector: the *sound block* that was explained and discussed in Chapter One. Though I will focus on sound blocks in songs, I will also consider their textual and visual components, so as to do justice to metal's full discursive complexity.

This combined consideration first of all enables me to break away from a metal tradition that can be considered standard, namely a white masculine metalhead insider identity. By analyzing the song *AND WE RUN* (*Hydra*, 2014) by the Dutch hard rock/alternative metal band Within Temptation, I expand on my argument in Chapter One, by making clear how metal studies is trapped within its own ironies, and explaining why the musical identity of being metal is a problematic factor that needs to be questioned and explored further. I do so by focusing on the multiple ways in which this song can be called noisy. Further, I will examine metal from perspectives within and beyond metal. Through analyzing the song *NEMESIS* (*Doomsday Machine*, 2005) by the Swedish melodic death metal band Arch Enemy. I demonstrate how the song, by manipulating a cultural imagination of voice, as standing for human subjectivity and political agency, critiques both the metal tradition and the larger political context within which that tradition is situated. The song precipitates interpretation of its overdriven or noisy *phonè*, which functions as a distorted version of "having a voice." That is to say, *NEMESIS* calls attention to *phonè*'s role in the dominant parts of Western metaphysics, and relates metal with the not-metal world.

This chapter, in short, attempts to reposition metal as inconclusive noise in order to demonstrate and attest for metal's political and philosophical relevance. I will explain my conceptualization of noise shortly in more detail; here it suffices to describe it as relational. That is to say, my repositioning of metal does not locate it in an autonomous, sheathed, metallic self, but accepts metal as *phonè* of selves and others.

#### 1.

#### Noise within Metal

*[There is] no logos without noise.*  
(Serres, *Genesis* 7)

Why apply the term noise, when metal scholars have spent years fighting and contesting the term? Metal, as I argued in Chapter One, encapsulates multiple meanings of noise. Metal is, certainly, constantly creating forms of internal noise, in the sense that its heterogeneous elements do not always go well with a metal tradition and its corresponding identity control, which I define as metal's *logos*. Or, without this internal noise metal would not have developed and evolved into what it is now. The French philosopher Michel Serres argues in favor of noise as renewing and energizing any order and system, that is, *logos*. No doubt this also applies to metal; or is perhaps even most applicable to metal.

Partially inspired by Serres and partially by a lack of consistent scholarly theorization, I propose to examine metal's formal, thematic and musical heterogeneity in terms of noise. Loose as my use of the term may seem here, I consider this under-defined definition appropriate for two reasons. First, as Serres, Douglas Kahn, and David Novak all observe, noise is not an unchanging entity, but rather something more procedural or even purely relational. Even if it is temporarily defined, noise continues to reappear anew and then wreak havoc within any given order or system that attempts to define it singularly (Serres 25; Kahn 21; Novak 126). Second, metal is primarily experienced as a sonic attack or affective overdrive that brings about forms of disorientation prior to any possible establishment of identity. That is to say: its audibility—the materiality of noise—is constitutive of people's experiences and perceptions of metal. Whereas in his article "Let's Have Done with the Notion of 'Noise'" Michel Chion traces the segregationist connotation of the term noise to *bruit*, *bragere* (to bray) and *rugire* (to roar) in Latin (241-42), in the chapter "Noise" in *Keywords in Sound*, Novak traces the term to the Greek *nausea*, meaning roaring sea or seasickness. Noise, according to Novak, strikes first as a disorienting sensory experience of *phónè* (Novak 125). Metal evokes strong responses from people because it disturbs the self; metal's heterogeneity, arguably, evokes even stronger responses because it endangers people's selves established by the metal tradition (metal *logos*) or by cultural and social norms (*logos* in the broader sense of the term). Confronted by indefinable otherings of selves, people are forced to re-examine their surroundings and to re-negotiate their positions, in order to be "in one piece." Commonly used in metal criticism and journalism, "in one piece" denotes regaining oneself after the "blasting" experience of listening to metal. These phrases highlight metal's affective dimension: one's self in metal is constantly being "attacked."<sup>1</sup>

Having explained my concept of noise as definable solely in relationality and audibility, and my reasoning for applying it to metal elements outside of the conventional metal tradition, I will now read the song AND WE RUN, paying special attention to the ways in which the song intentionally adheres to certain parts of the metal tradition while ridiculing other parts. Reading this dynamic as noise, I use this song to explain how metal can be ironic in multiple ways, as

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Manofmuchmetal's review of a metal gig, especially his description of first experience with an unfamiliar song and his struggle to pull himself together after the gig: ". . . if anything, this as yet unnamed track [relies on] keyboards, with giant atmospheric *walls of sound assaulting the ears*, ably assisted by some *chunky* guitar riffs underneath" and "thanks to some pre-prepared sustenance in the form of fizzy drinks and chocolate, I made it home *in one piece*" (my emphasis). It should also be noted that his mentioning of food and drinks reflects the mundane or banal dimension of metal that Kahn-Harris and Phillipov observe. 8 Apr. 2013, [manofmuchmetal.com/2013/04/08/an-evening-with-haken-a-live-review](http://manofmuchmetal.com/2013/04/08/an-evening-with-haken-a-live-review).

discussed in Chapter One, and how these ironies expose the limit of metal identity.

i.

AND WE RUN: Ironic Empowerment

AND WE RUN<sup>2</sup> is a song that incorporates metal and rap.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, its identification as metal or not is a site of heated discussions. In several reviews of the album *Hydra*, such as in the online metal archives *Metallum*, critics claim to be turned off by the song.<sup>4</sup> Some state that the song is bad because it is too simple and catchy; others find the song's association with rap, nu metal, and MTV culture too mainstream. It should be noted, though, that almost all reviews discuss AND WE RUN and that even critics with more positive evaluations admit that this song in particular is odd. Clearly, AND WE RUN disturbs metalheads because of its reference to nu metal.<sup>5</sup> Like nu metal, AND WE RUN includes rap elements. This combination of rap and metal has musical, cultural and social resonances, as both metal and rap were considered a "dark Other" for scholars in the 1980s and became chief sources of forms of moral panic (Walser, *Running with the Devil* 134, 181). Exploring the polyvocal music, languages, and practices of rap, in *Black Noise* (1994) Tricia Rose describes rap as "black noise," in the sense that rap, similarly to metal, adopts an undesirable position in relation to established musical, cultural, and political norms (xiv). In this context, metal and rap were never strangers: since the 1990s, the two genres have intersected and hybridized each other, for instance in the highly controversial nu metal, which, consequently, was and is often dismissed as fake in metal scenes. Even though they were once demonized and decried as noise, metal and rap have both become well-established music genres and disciplinary studies, that is, legitimized and normalized. In the light of socio-cultural, scenic and academic contexts, AND WE RUN offers a paradigmatic case of metal's heterogeneity.

The central component of AND WE RUN is the use of two distinct types of voice, the metal female vocalist and the rapper. The song offers a simple narrative about the pursuit of love and freedom, as suggested by a quote that is taken up in the video from Nelson Mandela: "Let freedom reign. The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement" that is presented at the opening of the music video. The traits of the two voices can be summarized as follow:

Female vocal: in the context of symphonic metal, the soaring female vocal is considered powerful, scenically dubbed "metal goddess."

Rap: typical of rap's highly rhythmic and emphatic way of delivering lyrics, the rapping

<sup>2</sup> AND WE RUN. 23 May 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=awvqli427\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awvqli427_A).

<sup>3</sup> Similar to metal, rap includes diverse subgenres. I use rap in line with Tricia Rose's definition in *Black Noise* (1994): "rap music is a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America" and "rap music is a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music" (2).

<sup>4</sup> *Metallum*, 11 Nov. 2018, [www.metal-archives.com/reviews/Within\\_Temptation/Hydra/393007](http://www.metal-archives.com/reviews/Within_Temptation/Hydra/393007). For an example of positive evaluation of AND WE RUN despite the song's oddity, see Ag Fox's review in *Metal Storm*, 12 Apr. 2014, [metalstorm.net/pub/review.php?review\\_id=12473](http://metalstorm.net/pub/review.php?review_id=12473).

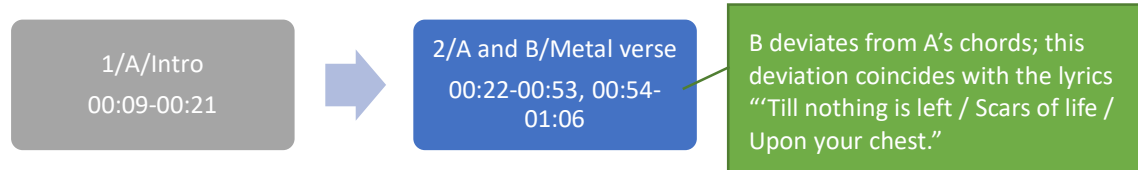
<sup>5</sup> *Nu metal* is a subgenre that incorporates hip hop and rap, and sometimes electronic music. For an example of its controversial status, see the article by iabris "Nu Metal – A Controversial Subject" in *Metal Storm*, 20 Oct. 2006, [metalstorm.net/pub/article.php?article\\_id=140&page=&message\\_id=](http://metalstorm.net/pub/article.php?article_id=140&page=&message_id=).

voice is also powerful and heavy, in the sense of loudness and emotional intensity.

Notable, the two types of voices, both powerful and heavy, often sing together, forcing the listener to focus their attention on their musical preference. To borrow Weinstein's formulation of the relationship between the metal vocal and the guitar, the two types of voice can be termed an alternative "affectionate rivalry" (*Heavy Metal* 45), one within which the voices do not always work well together—at least this is what some critics claim. Or, as Adam Rees points out, it is the mixture of the voices associative with "ethereal Euro-bombast" and "belligerent rhymes" that "raise the most eyebrows."<sup>6</sup> Further, different from the musical intricacy associated with symphonic metal to which Within Temptation belongs, the structure of AND WE RUN is so simple that it gives the listener an impression of the music being "cut, copied, and pasted together." The song thus appears to question the definitions of music genres, and metal music in particular.

In the following analysis, I first explain my visualization of the song structure and the sound blocks step by step, and consider them on a thematic-narrative level. I then pay attention to the visual narrative of the music video and compare it with the phonic, thematic narrative to complicate my analysis. A brief reminder of my notation: alphabetical letters stand for sound blocks and designate how phonic and musical activities sound during a given period of time; numbers stand for orders of appearance of phonic-musical-narrative groups (sound blocks as narrative structures). So, A, for instance, indicates sound block A; 6/A indicates the song's sixth narrative structure where A appears.

The structural simplicity of AND WE RUN is tied to the song's two types of voices and their respective sound blocks taking turns. Simple as this music and vocal organization is, there exists an internal tension or even hierarchy of degrees of intensity or heaviness; this tension is implied at the beginning of the song, in sound blocks A and B.



Characterized by the simple chords of a synthesizer imitating a piano, sound block A is the most dominant harmony of the song. 1/A is simultaneously the musical introduction and the narrative foregrounding, that is then elaborated in 2/A. Musically, 2/A gradually builds up in terms of heaviness and approaches distortion in line with the narrative line about love and a pursuit for freedom. The guitar riff strumming 8 beats in the 4/4 meter creates a sense of urgency, which is heightened by the bass drumbeats starting at 00:39 that parallel the guitar riff, and are strengthened by the reverberated lines of the female vocalist from 00:51 on. All this finally explodes in 2/B, with the intense, loud, and distorted guitar riff that starts at 01:07.

In contrast to A—the chords of which set the overall music organization from which sound blocks C, D, and E develop variations—sound block B makes use of different chords and is the only deviation throughout the song. As such, B can be considered significant.

<sup>6</sup> "Within Temptation: *Hydra*." *Metal Hammer*, 4 Feb. 2014, [www.loudersound.com/reviews/within-temptation-hydra](http://www.loudersound.com/reviews/within-temptation-hydra).

In terms of narrative, 2/A tells the story of an unspecified “you” that is trapped and enslaved by fear, but is gradually realizing their own slavery and desire to love and to leave, to break free. This I read in lines like:

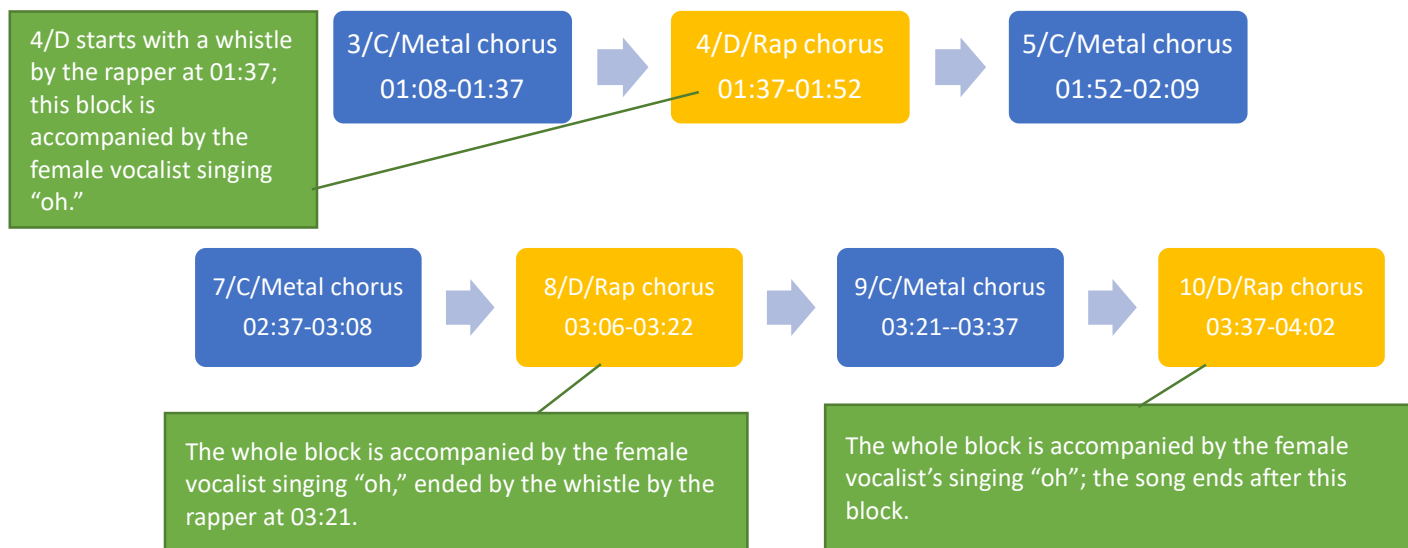
It burns into your heart / The darkness that you fear / You were never free / And you never realized / And love is a word / You never heard / Your heart ain’t cold, ‘cause it burns / A desire to leave the mire

Thematically 2/B, in contrast, involves a call to the unspecified “you” by a similarly unspecified “I” who acknowledges the “scars of life” in fear and slavery. This is evidenced by the lines:

Take your breath / ‘Till nothing is left / Scars of life / Upon your chest / And I know / Wherever it goes.

The building up of heaviness in A and the distortion, explosion, and deviation in B, then, associate musical heaviness and intensity with the emotional heaviness and intensity of both the “you” and the “I,” who together form the “we” who run for freedom and love in the song, as the title conveys. Still, subtle and brief as the musical and narrative changes are, B also forecasts the twisted ending of the song, which I will discuss in more detail later.

The contrast of intensity in the verse becomes more obvious in the chorus, and in the sound blocks C and D, which are tied to the metal female vocalist and the male rapper respectively. The blocks in this part of the song can be represented as follows:



C is a metal-centric sound block. It emphasizes the simultaneity of the female vocal and the sounds with an airy feel. This creates a soaring atmosphere that is known as “symphonic” in metal jargon, and that Adam Rees describes as “ethereal” and “bombastic.”<sup>7</sup> During this part, in

<sup>7</sup> “Within Temptation: *Hydra*.” *Metal Hammer*, 4 Feb. 2014, [www.loudersound.com/reviews/within-temptation-hydra](http://www.loudersound.com/reviews/within-temptation-hydra).

addition to the powerful vocals of the “metal goddess,” the most dominant element is the rhythmic unit composed by 1) the synthesizer imitating an orchestra, 2) the distorted, prolonged guitar and bass riff, and 3) drumbeats. The rhythmic unit appears to synchronize with the repeated thematic center of the I and you running, a continuous run that intensifies from 01:23 in block 3 and 02:53 in block 7. This intensification is principally conveyed by the drum’s increasingly faster beats. The reason for this intensification, as the lyrics imply, appears to result from the uncertain consequences of the couple’s breaking free in their “run for love.”<sup>8</sup>

D is an ambivalent sound block. Initiated (01:37/block 4) and ended (03:21/block 8) by the rapper’s whistles, it is a rap tradition that functions as a call. Yet it is always accompanied by the metal female vocalist’s reverberated singing “oh.” Thus, D is less metal-centric, but cannot be really described as rap-centric either. An analogous ambivalence in terms of heaviness can also be detected here. In a sense D is much heavier than the previous sound blocks: it combines a tight rhythmic unit composed of bass drumbeats, prolonged guitar and bass riffs, with the rapping voice and the metal singing. D’s heaviness, however, results not so much from the phonic qualities, but from their simultaneous musical components and highly rhythmic quality, which amplify the rapper’s rhythmic lines. The vocal lineup in D adds to the contrast between A and B but at the same time sets an internal hierarchy of intensity and heaviness. That is to say: the rap heaviness builds on the metal heaviness while the freedom of the “rap king” appears to be inspired by the “metal goddess.”<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, the rapper’s final lines in 10/D “Too late we’re gone / Yeah, we outta here!” become dubious. From the perspective of rap studies, in breaking from earlier, repetitive lyrics, the lines are interpretable as liberating and empowering. Here, however, to interpret them in this way implies a disturbing connotation, namely that rap is “empowered” by metal. The racial and political awkwardness is hard to miss. Yet, what this disturbing connotation implies requires further examination of the other sound blocks.

The tension and hierarchy of heaviness implicit in the verses of A and B, and more evident but ambiguous in the chorus of C and D, again appears in 6/E. Although E could be treated as one sound block as its most dominant element is the virtuosic rapping voice which replaces metal’s traditional guitar solo, here I will divide E into two subsets, with E1 indicating the building up of heaviness and E2 indicating the heaviness with phonic simultaneity. Their vocal lineups and music organizations appear to parallel the contrasts between A and B, on the one hand, and the structure of C and D on the other. Analogous to a combination used in A, E1 is characteristic of a rap solo that makes use of building up of musical heaviness and narrative urgency. Analogous to a strategy used in C and D, E2 is characteristic of a rap solo, with the metal female vocalist’s “oh” forming a rhythmic unit.

The rap solo starts at 02:07; the female vocalist starts singing “oh” at 02:23. Also at 02:23, the rapper delivers the word “muthafuckin,” from the line “Every muthafuckin thing I touch.”

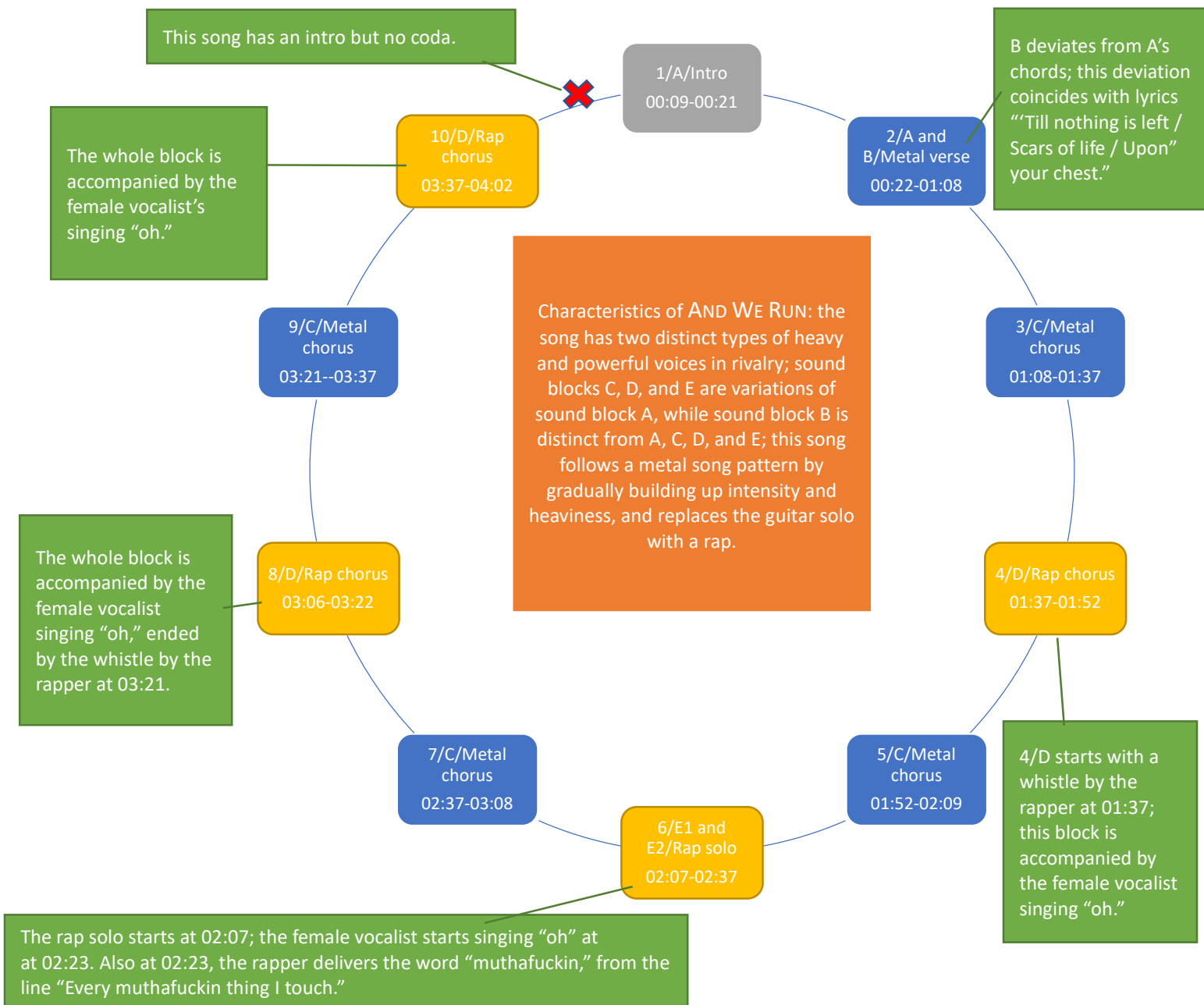
6/E1 and E2/Rap solo  
02:07-02:22, 02:23-02:37

<sup>8</sup> The lines are: “And we run, ‘till we fall apart / And we run, ‘till the heavens above” and “And we run, for this killing love.”

<sup>9</sup> The rapper’s (desire for) freedom can be traced in the lines: “Don’t blink you’ll miss it / Lift up your head / We gotta get gone / Yeah, we outta here!”.

6/E, then, repeats an earlier tension and hierarchy, without offering a solution or even a temporary release. In other words, E replicates and intensifies the disturbing connotation suggested in D. In light of this, E1's and E2's meanings contradict each other. In terms of content, the rap text is clear: "I'm a break these chains" and "You could never wear my crown / Cause it weighs too much." E1's virtuosic lines can be interpreted as empowering and liberating, as a celebration of freedom enjoyed by the "rap king." Yet the listener cannot help wondering what goes wrong in the affectionate rivalry between the rap king and the metal goddess in E2. That is: what happens when the soaring "oh" begins when the rapper states "And I crush / Every muthafuckin thing I touch"? Is this just a coincidence? The song's overall phonic and narrative grouping suggests otherwise, and is also implied by the lines "And it feels marvelous / Just take my hand and run!" ending E2 at 02:35-02:37. This suggests that the female actor, the metal one, is also the agent of freedom.

All in all, the sound blocks and their messages clash with and contradict each other. The tension and hierarchy of heaviness and empowerment, as embodied by the two types of voices in affectionate rivalry, is not resolved. Their continued rivalry rather implies rupture. Let me recap the conflicting messages here by referring to the complete circular graphic of the song:



D, the heaviest sound block in AND WE RUN, is initiated and ended by whistles acknowledging a rap influence to this song. Further, the song lacks a guitar solo, trademark of metal, which is literally replaced by D, a rap solo, commonly used in nu metal and pop songs. As such, AND WE RUN appears to give the credits of heaviness and empowerment to rap. This giving credit, however, is dubious, as the internal hierarchy in D suggests that rap's empowerment is subordinated to metal empowerment, a connotation that, considering the respective racial associations of the two genres, is disturbing. This disturbing connotation becomes ironic in E2. The overlapping of "oh" by the metal goddess and the f-word by the rap king undermines and ruptures the hierarchy in D; or, the two types of voices standing for the two genres' heaviness and empowerment cannot be reduced to a definite hierarchy. Such a self-undermining, or double self-irony, is supported by the fact that the sound blocks are not clear-cut. Very often the

soaring, powerful female vocal and the emphatic, shouting and rapping voice overlap. These constant overlaps, in a simple, repetitive music structure, ultimately make it impossible to determine if a sharp distinction of metal and rap should be taken seriously at all. In fact, neither metal nor rap is truly empowering. This is perhaps why *AND WE RUN* ends directly after 10/D, where the supposedly improvisatory and liberating rap lines have no whistle. In the end, then, the atypical *AND WE RUN* runs away from generic classification, tradition, and a definite interpretation altogether.

As the above analysis suggests, *AND WE RUN* is ambiguous. The song poses problems to metal studies and rap studies that tend to valorize the genres and people surrounding them. Metal studies, as I discussed in Chapter One, imposes noise and identity control, and is aware of, but also incapable of solving metal's multiple ironies such as its simultaneous empowerment and oppression, freedom and control, transgression and mundanity, seriousness and the ridiculous (Walser, *Running with the Devil* 84; Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal* 30, 146-47). As for rap studies, scholars have tended to interpret rap as black marginality, a kind of music that resists or subverts the predominantly white norm in the US. Thematically, by dealing with urban poverty, violence, and discrimination, rap exposes the dark side of postindustrial capitalism. Musically, rap's appropriations and expropriations of various music genres through sampling and accessible sound technologies, even challenge the very notion of music making. Politically, rap's root in black orality empowers black identity.

In this context, the fact that rap has become mainstream is interpreted in various ways. While some scholars consider this assimilation into the mainstream a successful form of black resistance, some others point to the persistent misogyny and fetishism in the commercialization of rap and argue that its transgressions expose the internal contradictions of black identity (Rose 147; Phillipov 61-66; Jagodzinski 77-79, 86-87). Here, the academic discourse about rap, as the above summary shows, is very similar to discourses about metal: from power to empowerment and liberation, to transgression, and to critical reflection on the discipline's scenic participation. In sum, both metal and rap studies have come to recognize the inherent problematics of alternatively construed communities and traditions, which in this case is most obvious in the fervent worship of figures such as metal gods and goddesses and defiant and fetishized rap kings.

And indeed, the music video of *AND WE RUN* portrays the figures of a white metal goddess and a black rap king. Yet, perhaps, it does so again with an ironic twist. The female vocalist is dressed all in white, standing in the sunlight, in front of an almost "heavenly" screen. She is, in sum, represented as a *sacred* metal goddess or an angel, singing in the band's trademark angelic voice. In contrast, the rapper Xzibit is represented as a wired and enslaved human being who, inspired by the angel singing "and we run," breaks out of confinement and darkness.<sup>10</sup> The visual representation of the two vocalists is, obviously, problematic in its recasting of the clichéd white savior narrative often occurring in pop culture, of a white character saving people of color from their plight.<sup>11</sup> Still, even though the female vocalist is spared from the mark of wires, the

<sup>10</sup> Within Temptation has consistently used the *Matrix*-derived figure of a wired and enslaved human since 2011. In the music video, the reference to the *Matrix* is not limited to Xzibit. Except the female vocalist, the band members also have the mark of wires.

<sup>11</sup> One example of the white savior narrative is the 2009 film *The Blind Side*, adapted from the 2006 biography of National Football League player Michael Oher. Despite its commercial success, critics and scholars have criticized

shots at 03:42-03:45 visually align the two vocalists. This visual parallel seems to imply that the “angel” and the “slave” are doubles, and that the metal goddess wearing a lot of fetishes is perhaps even herself a fetish. In other words, they both represent enslaved human subjects with “scars of life” as is proclaimed in the lines “Scars of life / Upon your chest.”



Screenshots of the music video where the two vocalists are paralleled<sup>12</sup>

Not only do the sound blocks clash, the song’s musical, narrative, and visual levels do not work well together either, as a result of several ironic twists. The ultimate problem posed by *AND WE RUN* is how to make sense of it within its racial connotation, when the song constantly defies coherent interpretation and evaluation.

I suggest two interpretations that both involve a form of noise. First and primarily at a theoretical level, *AND WE RUN*, by representing and recasting the *sacred* but also *clichéd* metal goddess and rap king, is intentionally a *cliché* narrative; it is ironic. The song makes fun of metal, rap, and itself. As such, *AND WE RUN* appears to tap into the domain of hybrid music. In *Aesthetic Practices and Politics in Media, Music, and Art* (2011), Rocío G. Davis, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, and Johanna C. Kardux define the identity of hybrid music as “strangely familiar” but “not quite”; what makes hybrid music culturally, socially, and politically relevant is its simultaneous construction and undermining of self-identity (8). Hybrid music offers no solid site for identification, but instead enters into processes where notions of selves and others are constantly questioned and negotiated. In this regard, rather than considering the socio-cultural, scenic and academic contexts of rap and metal, *AND WE RUN* is perhaps better considered from this hybrid perspective as a song questioning musical genres, identities, and beliefs such as love and freedom. At least, the album title *Hydra* implies as much: the song and the album are the many-headed monster that grows more heads if one head is chopped off. Many-faceted, *AND WE RUN* confronts and disorients.

Second, and more at metal’s discursive level, as valid as the song’s critique of the metal tradition may be, its use of ironies is nevertheless characteristic of metal. As I discussed in chapter one through DiBernardo, selective elaborations and the neglect of metal’s ironies can make discourses about metal empowerment themselves ironic forms of noise and identity control. Metal’s ironies, however, can still be harmful. Kahn-Harris, for example, observes that

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the film for focusing on the white adoptive family, and downplaying Oher’s experiences that he recounts in detail in the biography. For a scholarly discussion of the white savior narrative and criticism of the film, see “The White Cinematic Lens: Decoding the Racial Messages in *The Blind Side*” (2015) by Charise Pimentel and Sarah Leah Santillanes.

<sup>12</sup> 23 May 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=awvqli427\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awvqli427_A).

selective elaborations and neglect facilitate the expression of offensive remarks (*Extreme Metal* 151-52). DiBernardo similarly argues that the “happening” of ironies harms people who understand it (200). *AND WE RUN*, in my opinion, is a case in which ironies unsettle those who take them seriously. The song’s self-ironic gesture does not mitigate the emotions aroused by its political awkwardness. Listeners and viewers who detect the racial undertones, for example, are inevitably at a loss of how to come to terms with the song.<sup>13</sup>

It is impossible to attain, and better not to strive for, a consistent interpretation. As a temporary conclusion of my analysis tackling metal’s complexity on multiple levels, I would like to draw attention to the song’s critique of musical identities found in the figures of metal goddess and rap king. Since there is no real empowerment in *AND WE RUN*, the two figures that are normally sites of people’s identifications become instead mere performances. One can think here of Walser’s idea of metal empowerment through the construction of an ideal masculinity by a “makeup” behind which there are no “real men” (*Running with the Devil* 179). That is to say: I propose that metal and rap identities in *AND WE RUN* are better considered *personas* or *masks*, that is, a make-believe behind which there is no real self. In the next section I will explain my reasoning for refraining from a single interpretation, which will also involve a more in-depth analysis of why this song contains several meanings of noise.

ii.

Selective Policies: a Lacking of Guitar and the Importance of Orality

*[N]oises are too significant to be noises. We know they are noises in the first place because they exist where they shouldn't or they don't make sense where they should.*

(Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat* 21)

*Noise is a material aspect of sound. It is discussed as a generalized property of sound (as "noisiness"); as a distinct sonic object within music, speech, or environmental sounds (as "a noise"); or as a totalizing qualifier for emergent styles (e.g., "that hip-hop stuff is all noise"). But its specific qualities are hard to define.*

(Novak, “Noise” 125-26)

*[M]usical identity is . . . always fantastic, idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits.*

(Frith, “Music and Identity” 123)

The song *AND WE RUN* itself, together with the metalhead disputes about it, first of all brings attention to metal’s complexity on a phonic, musical, and discursive level. Second, the combination of metal and rap and the reference to *nu* metal demonstrate how metal is

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Steel Druhm’s sarcastic comment in *Angry Metal Guy*: “Mr. Bit rapping ‘I crush every motherfucking thing I touch’ as Sharon coos and trills angelically in the background is destined to be a musical low point of 2014 and beyond.” It should be noted that this sentence is in brackets, in a style imitating and exaggerating selective ironic tones common in metal journalism and criticism. 5 Feb. 2014, [www.angrymetalguy.com/within-temptation-hydra-review](http://www.angrymetalguy.com/within-temptation-hydra-review).

inherently heterogeneous, and as such irreducible to one metal tradition with a standard guitarocentric identification and white masculine empowerment. Third, the ironies employed by the song, critiquing a metal tradition while positioning itself as metal, exemplify how metal and its discourses form multiple ironies due to the use of many voices and sounds. This multiplicity in turn may connote noise. Or, in my reading, *AND WE RUN*, and the debates it provoked, contains several meanings of noise that can be summarized through Douglas Kahn's and David Novak's observations of how noise can be *used*.

I opened this section with a quote from Kahn who points out that noises appear in the form of the undesirable, things that should not happen and that make no sense. Previously, I traced the combined and significant use of rap and metal voices/sounds (*phónè*) in places where they did not belong, and where they did not make immediate sense as to their position in relation to empowerment. Another quote preceding this section is from Novak who observes that the term noise is deployed in several ways, as a generalized property of sound (as 'noisiness'), as a distinct sonic object (as 'a noise'), or as a totalizing qualifier (e.g., 'that hip-hop stuff is all noise'). In *AND WE RUN* the latter is the case, as is evidenced by the debates surrounding the song. The result of its noisy qualities is that *AND WE RUN* only facilitates temporary meanings and identities, or that it ruptures meanings and identities. As such the song is interpretable but remains indefinable, it is audible but remains irritating. It thus offers an opportunity for critical reflection on the standard identity crystallized in metal music studies as it can be found paradigmatically in Walser's guitarocentric oppression-empowerment dialectic.

In the song, the lack of a guitar solo is telling; even if the distorted, explosive guitar riff in 2/B is to be considered narratively empowering, it is a deviation that is never resolved. In other words, the lack of B's counterpart and a structural coda leads an interpretation of narrative empowerment nowhere. In fact, given the song's theme about the pursuit of freedom and escape from enslavement, Walser's guitarocentric model, when applied to *AND WE RUN*, necessarily arrives at the conclusion that the standard metal identity that privileges the guitar also connotes a form of oppression. It oppresses other musical elements, or other modes of being metal.

Musical identities in general, and metal ones are no exception, are idealized and imaginary constructions as Simon Frith argued in "Music and Identity" (see the quote above). To Frith, musical identity "is always already an ideal, what we like to be, not what we are" (123). Such an identity is thus not stable, nor does it forge homology. It is a process, or a performance to be embodied (108-09, 115-17). Indeed, the rupture of the standard metal identity is an important facet of the song's several ironies. If the *lack* of guitar identification already implies a critique of privileging sound over voice—a privilege that manifests itself in the disproportionate focus on guitar sound in discourses about metal—the song also criticizes an exclusive focus on other catchy components or dimensions of metal. For instance, *AND WE RUN* is primarily vocals-driven, with neat phonic, musical, and narrative groupings tied to two familiar types of voice. Subsequently, the clip portrays the two vocalists as stereotypes; yet it is their simultaneity and confrontation that is precisely not cliché, or complex in its own way.

According to Frith, academic studies on popular music or musical subcultures, in focusing on group identities that are presumed to reflect and represent people's musical identities, compromise music's border-crossing or transgressive potential. Arguing against fixed group

identities on the basis of gender, race, and sexuality, which he disputes as essentialist, Frith considers musical identity as a mobile becoming and a performance: “something we put on or try.” Consequently, although musical identity is necessarily shaped by socio-cultural and political narratives, it also breaks free from them (108, 121-25). Yet in this case, the figures of the metal female goddess and the rap king, when read along Frith’s formulation, are highly theatrical and do not appear to be liberating and freeing in themselves. Note that I am not dealing, here, with anything that could be “wrong” with *AND WE RUN*, but rather with the question of why the song ironizes *any* scholarly formulation of musical identity.

When Frith argues that musical identity is liberating and even transgressive, obviously the question to be asked is: liberating from what and transgressive of what? Arguably, Frith attempts to liberate scholarly theorizations of musical identity from categories that he considers essentialist or susceptible to political imperatives and manipulation. Yet it is noteworthy that Frith’s theoretical operation ends up strikingly resembling Walser’s (partially Adorno-inspired) model of an oppression-empowerment dialectic. Despite his acknowledgement of musical identity as simultaneously individual and collective, Frith nevertheless privileges the individual, since for him socio-cultural groups or collective identities are already political ones and as such they are fundamentally oppressive. Underlying Frith’s individualistic operation is the belief that music, whilst shaped by and implicated in socio-cultural and political dynamics, can nevertheless stand outside of these dynamics. This belief is prevalent in many music-scenic and academic discourses, including metal, but does not map onto *AND WE RUN*.

Kahn-Harris insightfully summarizes how a vicious circle of a selective definition of politics and selective ironies, sustains metal as a whole from falling apart:

The use of the term politics within the scene is restricted to interventions in the public sphere that are consciously intended to have an impact on social institutions. From this perspective, virtually nothing within the scene is political. This definition upholds an “autonomous” view of music, which sees it as ideally removed from social forces. . . . As a result, members may flirt with racism and sexism and make use of forms of capital drawn from fields of power, confident in the knowledge that most challenges can be dismissed as political. (*Extreme Metal* 154-55)

Despite the fact that Frith’s formulation of musical identity concerns popular music in general, the apparent contrast with the final part of what Kahn-Harris is saying is clear. Frith’s so-called freedom of music may also be a way to de-politicize our analysis. Moreover, Frith’s ideas on highly individualistic musical identity are somehow analogous to, or a more radical version of Walser’s formulation of white masculine metal identity; both are distinctly political.

Metal thus embodies and performs, in real life, scholarly formulations of musical identity, and it may do so in a sinister manner. Walser’s and Frith’s formulations of musical identity both appropriate Adorno’s oppression-empowerment dialectic, a model that Lawrence Grossberg criticizes as failing to account for scholars’ participations in flows of power. Grossberg argues that

[C]ultural studies needs to move beyond models of oppression, both the “colonial model” of the oppressor and the oppressed, and the “transgression model” of

oppression and resistance. . . . Both models of oppression are not only inappropriate to contemporary relations of power, they are also incapable of creating alliances. (88)

That is to say: scholarly elaborations of the antagonistic oppression-empowerment model cannot empower and transgress without *replicating* oppositions and oppressions. Without critical self-reflection, these discourses end up enmeshed in ever more radicalized power struggles and are incapable of defining a truly transformative form of political agency. Grossberg's critique no doubt applies to metal music studies that is, according to Walser, in need of scholarly dialogue.

That such a dialogue is needed is apparent in a recurrent issue in the above scholarly and scenic debates: race. Because the issue of race is fundamentally political, musical identities of genres with racial associations are sites of power and knowledge struggles. To disavow, neglect, and de-politicize these struggles is to replicate oppression. Frith's seemingly theoretical maneuver, and especially his discussion about rap identity, serves as a scholarly example. Frith dedicates a quarter of his article to rap, and insists on rap as an "aesthetic experience and performance" irreducible to race. He does so through selective elaborations based on the empowerment-oppression model. Though he acknowledges rap's tie with black orality, writing that "not for nothing is rap a voice-based form with an exceptionally strong sense of presence," he insists that the question of rap identity "concerns not meanings and their interpretations" ("Music and Identity" 115-16). Yet orality in rap, as Rose points out, is always political (151). Frith, in other words, ignores the historical and political components of black orality, in order to sustain his ideas on an ultimately individualistic musical identity. Consciously or not, Frith oppresses black identity, and unsurprisingly, this is a violence that metal too excels at, in the name of radical and, arguably, still predominantly white, individualism.

The ultimate irony of *AND WE RUN*, then, is that the song makes explicit the uncomfortable entanglements of music and politics, but is incapable of providing any solution or conclusion. Let me briefly recap the levels of complexity and irony involved. *AND WE RUN* combines metal and rap, both of which are often understood and position themselves as socio-political noise and the other. The song's so-called empowerment of these two kinds of noise and their othering is a matter of performance, framed in a narrative about pursuit of freedom. This not only has obvious political undertones, but the song also recasts the two vocalists in such an awkward manner that, without resorting to metal's selective definition of politics, a political reading of the song is almost inevitable. Thus *AND WE RUN* embodies and enacts what most metal scholars and metalheads avoid; it unsettles and disorients, but refuses to provide sites of identification for the listener/viewer to come together in one piece again.

Taken as a whole, *AND WE RUN* irritates and annoys, but the source of these frustrations cannot be pinpointed. Precisely because *AND WE RUN* involves so many layers of complexity, irony, and critique, it exposes how, when it comes to metal, musical identity is enmeshed in layers of power and struggles, and as such is a problematic that needs to be questioned. In this context, and similar to Walser's call for cross-disciplinary scholarly dialogue, in *Introduction to Heavy Metal Studies and Popular Culture* (2016), Kahn-Harris formulates "metal beyond metal" as the future aim of metal music studies.

If metal studies scholarship is too oriented toward metal itself, then it can lose contact

with wider trends. . . . Clearly, metal is not entirely *sui generis* and metal studies scholars have to work to remind themselves of this” (2).

Different from the transgression model prevalent in metal music studies, as can be found in the quote from Grossberg, Kahn-Harris’s idea of metal going beyond metal implies a scholarly repositioning of metal, no longer as an autonomous domain that is far removed from a non-metal world, but one that is situated in larger political, socio-cultural contexts. Although *AND WE RUN* is an ironic realization of Frith’s formulation of musical identity, the emotional responses surrounding it do echo Frith’s observation that “there was always something excessive in musical experience, something unreasonable, something that *got away*” (“Music and Identity” 116; original emphasis). In the case of *AND WE RUN*, confronted by unsolvable contradictions and rupturing distinctions of self and other, listeners and viewers need to accept that identities are not unchanging and coherent, but rather that they are personas and masks that can be tried out. That this is not just a game, will be discussed in the next section.

Having explained the political stakes involved in metal identity and metal music studies by tackling metal’s complexity, I would like to move my attention to metal’s relationship to the non-metal world. As indicated in my elaboration of sound blocks, metal’s complexity consists in much more than the use of distorted, amplified *phónè* that are experienced and interpreted according to different contexts and milieus. The conjunction of extreme phonic distortion and “metal moving beyond itself” will be the focus of the next section. I will read one extreme metal song, *NEMESIS*, and discuss how the song, through manipulating and distorting *phónè*, “attacks” notions of selves and others. As will become clear, its status of being indefinable noise has profound metaphysical implications, and requires a different listening attitude.

## 2.

### Noise Beyond Metal: a Radical Listening Attitude

#### i.

#### NEMESIS: Overdriving Discourses on Metal

Despite the fact that there were several bands with extreme female vocalists prior to Arch Enemy, the band is one of the first female-fronted bands to receive critical acclaim from metal journalism and metalheads. In the scene, extreme vocals, affectionately defined as the bestial or the animal, used to be regarded as a male privilege. The howling, growling, screaming, grunting, and barking skills, require sustained energy, and so were supposedly beyond female capabilities. The choice of Arch Enemy’s front woman, Angela Gossow, in this gendered context, was groundbreaking. Her skill and capability to deliver equal or even more powerful extreme vocals than her male counterparts instantaneously demonstrated that extreme vocals are irreducible to gender. Gender, however, is only one distinction that extreme vocals confuse. By means of a voice that hardly *sounds* human, or is scarcely comprehensible in terms of language and speech, and is experienced and felt by the whole body, extreme vocals epitomize Walser’s observation that metal impacts a listener’s sense of time and space and one’s notions of self (*Running with the Devil* 76). An extreme vocal, in other words, affects because it attacks

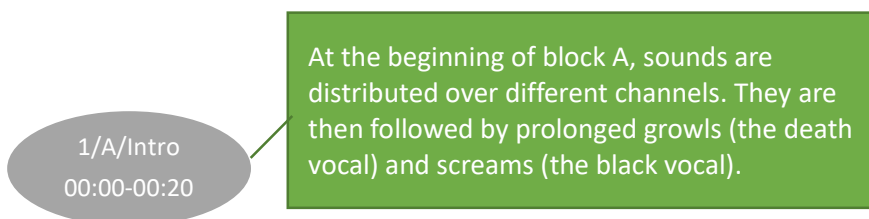
(Wallach, Berger, and Greene 3-4); it strikes people who are unfamiliar with it as a “wall of noise”, or as distorted *phónè*, as if “the doomsday” of Arch Enemy’s album title—*Doomsday Machine* (2005)—already has arrived.

Affective attack, or “assault” in scenic jargon, is one dimension of NEMESIS,<sup>14</sup> and its orchestration of loud and distorted *phónè* also functions as a form of critique. To have a notion of how NEMESIS operates, however, an alternative listening mode is needed. In *Music and Ethics* (2012), Marcel Cobussen and Nanette Nielsen argue for attentive listening as an ethical engagement with music. To listen attentively is to discard prescribed concepts and to have an ear for a moment when music surprises, rather than when it is confirming presuppositions (30-33, 110-13). It requests an openness from the listener, and urges one to think beyond oppositional distinctions like self and other. Drawing my inspiration from Cobussen and Nielsen, I term the alternative listening attitude to metal as a reflexive, and in a sense *radical*, listening. This mode adapts what Phillipov terms a “close and repeated listening,” yet goes against the politics underlying this engagement, the function of which is to assert an insider identity (110). A radical mode of listening helps me to pay attention to the song’s nuanced phonic, musical, and thematic arrangements, and to consider how these arrangements also function at an affective level. Further, it allows me to critically query scenic-scholarly discourses about musical engagements, discourses which NEMESIS refers to and criticizes.

The gist of NEMESIS consists in several pairs of phonic contrasts:

1. two types of extreme vocals, here the death and the black vocals (indicated with 1 and 1’);
2. two types of guitar distortion;
3. two guitar solos;
4. two sound insertions.

These pairs, moreover, are all connected to degrees of linguistic complexity in the verses and chorus, and framed by a narrative about a collective “we nemeses.” The song’s emphasis on affect through pairs of contrasts is made clear at the very beginning, in 1/A.

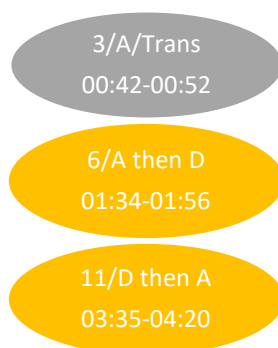


Block 1/ A is characterized by the fast, distorted, and repetitive riff of the electric guitar, the emphatic drum fills (especially 00:06-00:10), and an even more distorted riff (00:13-00:20) by another guitar. Played on a stereo set, these sounds first appear in different channels and then are merged together, followed by the death growl and black scream in both channels. Thus 1/A not only introduces the vocal and distortion pairs, but also sets the intensive or extreme *feel* of

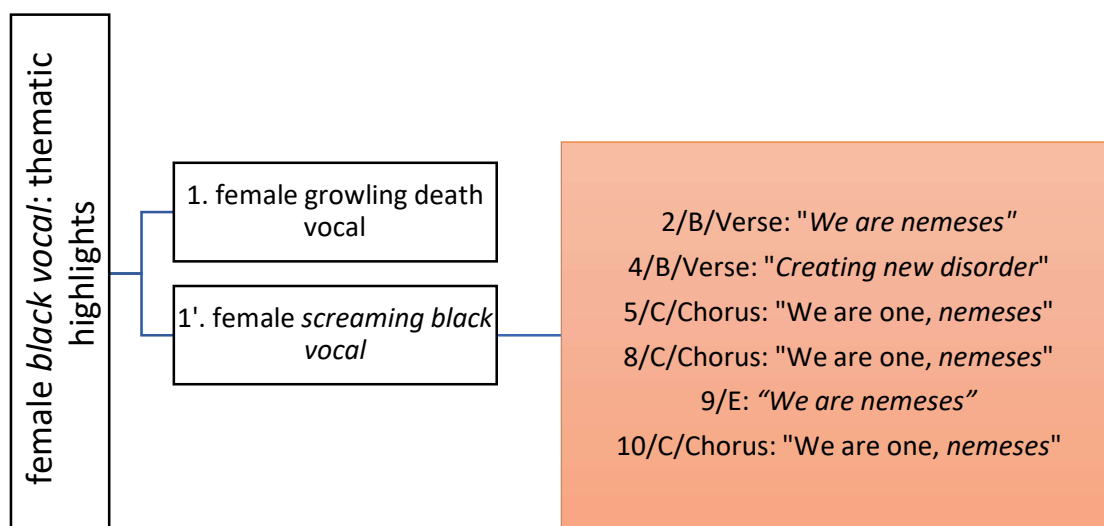
<sup>14</sup> NEMESIS. 25 Sept. 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET7TI\\_PbeFg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET7TI_PbeFg).

the song as a form of “blasting,” as the scenic jargon goes.

This intensive feel of A is later varied in other transitions. In block 3/ A, the extremity is sustained. Block 6 and block 11 complicate the extremity by making use of one more sound block, namely D: a guitar solo that is a trademark of metal. Yet both blocks do so in reversed order: block 6 moves from A to D, and block 11 from D to A.



To understand the meanings of the reversal in 6 and 11 in relation to the song’s affective power through pairs of contrasts, it is necessary to consider the sound blocks preceding D. Before D, the pair of death and black vocals is used for different narratives and other thematic purposes. This vocal-thematic association is detectable in blocks B and C, which are tied to the verses and chorus respectively. A preliminary summary of how the two types of vocal are used can be mapped as follows:



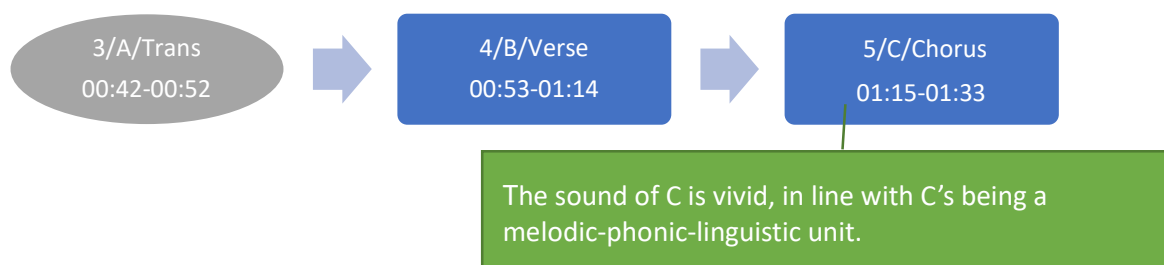
The most dominant vocal type in NEMESIS is the low-pitched growling death vocal that delivers most of the lyrics. The *black vocal*, characteristic of high-pitched *screams*, is reserved for the thematic center of “we the nemeses.” The black vocal in the verses and chorus, moreover, also uses linguistic contrasts. In block B/verse, the black vocal is linguistically explicit, delivering complete lines. In block C/chorus, it is limited to voicing the single word “nemeses.” The vocal

and linguistic contrasts in effect emphasize contrasting musical elements in sound blocks B and C.

The most dominant element of B/verse, is the repetitive, rhythmic riff whose distortion effect can be termed “chunky” or weighty. Since the prolonged ending of the riff accentuates the linguistically explicit black vocal, B/verse can be considered as one rhythmic-phonetic-linguistic unit.



Compared with A and B, block C/chorus is more melodic. This differentiation can also be traced in the distortion effect. While the chunky riff in B taps into the kind of weight of lower notes that were observed by Walser, the melodic guitar lines in C sound “brilliant” or vivid, a quality Walser associates with the transcending power of the guitar. The prolonged vivid guitar lines echo and interact with the prolonged growls of the death vocal delivering the lyrics. Thus block C/chorus can be considered a melodic-phonetic-linguistic unit.

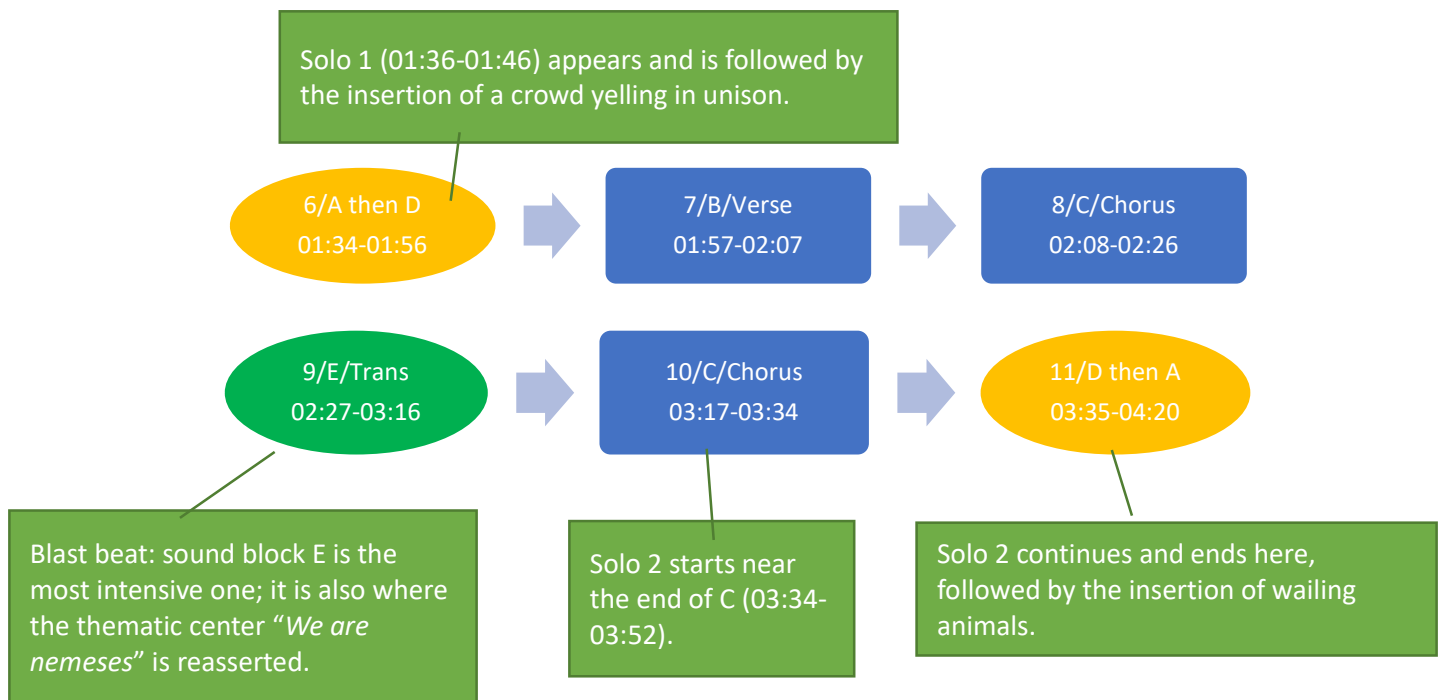


B and C with their emphasis on weightiness or vividness, rhythm or melody, and degrees of linguistic complexity, thus form a meta-pair of contrast that complicates the pairs of guitar distortion and vocal distortion introduced in 1/A. Block B is more rhythmic and is linguistically explicit. Block C, melodic as it sounds, is linguistically inarticulate and repetitive: even the black vocal is reduced to a single word, “*nemeses*.”<sup>15</sup> B and C, through their contrast, appear to suggest that music and lyrics (linguistic articulation) do not go well together. Although both make use of *phônè*, they present two distinct ways to arrive at meaning by way of *phônè*. B and C can be interpreted as embodying a tension between music and language.<sup>16</sup>

This tension is later repeated and reorganized within the other sound blocks. The resulting complication can be visualized as follows:

<sup>15</sup> The line is “We are one, *nemeses*,” by the death vocal and the *black vocal*.

<sup>16</sup> The lines are: “*We are nemeses*” and “*Creating new disorder*,” by the *black vocal*.



As can be observed from the above graphics, B and C are relatively static. In contrast, transitions with insertions of a crowd yelling (block 6) and animals wailing (block 11) are more dynamic, and function to elaborate on B and C. That is also to say that transitions B and C form a meta-unit. This musical elaboration is also detectable in the appearance of two guitar solos in blocks 6 and 11. Block 6 starts with a small part of A (01:34-01:35), then swiftly moves to a guitar solo accompanied by intensive drumbeats, and finally returns to the rhythmic riff used in block B, where the sound effect of a crowd yelling in unison is inserted. Considered in the light of Walser’s formulation of the guitar solo as transcendental, the solo (D) in 6 is intriguing: if it is transcending anything, it is only for a very brief moment, after which it is immediately subordinated back to a stable rhythm that Walser considers a form of control and oppression. In 11, similarly, the solo is accompanied and regulated by the drums, although here the regulation is less intense because the beats of the double bass drum are reduced. After the solo, the riff used in A returns (03:34-03:35). This riff and the accompanying drumbeats function as a kind of coda when the sound effect of animal cries is inserted, accompanied by a rhythmic ram-like sound.

Block 6 and 11 bring attention to the rhythmic dimension of metal. Both 6 and 11 are intense. This feeling of extremity has less to do with the guitar solo, but is rather achieved through the synchronization of distorted guitar and drumbeats. This emphasis is made explicit in block 9/E where blast beats by the drums and a prolonged, distorted guitar note form a phonic unit whose affect is extremely intense. 9/E, moreover, is where the lyrics’ central idea “We are nemeses” is reasserted by *the black vocal* in an emphatic and rhythmic manner. This line sounds like a call for the listener to join the “we.” The call is followed by a combination of a riff and a melodic line (02:37-02:41), introducing elements not previously used in the song,

which are then repeated until 02:56. Block 9/E at 02:37-02:56, in sum, is highly intense and repetitive. In scenic terms, this is dubbed “headbangable,” as a kind of enactment of the call expressed in and by the song. This call and collective enactment, however, is suddenly cut short at 02:57 by the vivid melodic guitar line, stripped of heaviness, used in C. The sequence in 9/E, from extreme intensity to intensity extinguished, and later reignited (in 10/C), once again forms a contrast or even an internal rupture.

Having discussed the sound blocks and explained how they are framed in the song’s simultaneous emphasis on affect and sets of phonic contrast, and how these contrasts suggest an internal rupture, I will now consult the complete graphic to consider the meanings of NEMESIS.



Two observations can be drawn from the above. First, in terms of structural progression, NEMESIS begins with a more dominant sound block B, but ends with sound block C being dominant, while the internally ruptured 9/E appears when B is replaced by C. Second, in terms of the overall structure, although NEMESIS has a complete song circle, opened and closed by sound block A, the structural completeness is forced. The circle can only be “completed” by the reversed parallel in 6 and 11 which function as two inverted poles of one interpretation. I read this as follows: NEMESIS has no single coherent meaning, but rather proposes two opposite meanings within one trajectory of interpretation. This is suggested by the song’s simultaneous emphasis on affect and pairs of phonic contrast.

## ii.

### When Metal Becomes a Zone of Indistinction

NEMESIS’ situation within the highly masculine extreme metal scene and foregrounding of an extreme vocalist whose phonic quality confuses distinctions of gender and impedes articulation of *phônè* as human language and speech (*logos* in the narrow sense), produces two trajectories of interpretation, that stem from two seemingly separate but in fact related contexts in which the song can be located. First, I will read the song as a musical-political critique of gendered musical interpretation in traditional Western musicology (as a type of musical *logos*). Second, by considering the metal tradition and community (metal *logos*) and examining the song’s phonic, structural, narrative, and visual levels collectively, I will consider the scenic-political critique of NEMESIS, a critique that can be considered as a proposal of “metal moving beyond metal,” in how the song not only “does” noise within metal but also offers a broader socio-political form of noise.

The structural progression of NEMESIS strikingly resembles a familiar generic form in the West, though with a twist. Appropriations of classical music have long been part of metal tradition, as Walser points out in the third chapter of *Running with the Devil*, “Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity.” In this light Arch Enemy’s use of the sonata form, is far from surprising, especially if one considers that the band is from the Scandinavian metal scene, and has close cross-band and cross-generic ties with the Finnish power metal band Sonata Arctica (formed at approximately the same period as Arch Enemy); a band that explicitly refers to classical music in its very name.<sup>17</sup>

As the American musicologist Susan McClary has argued, the sonata form itself has gender connotations. In her seminal *Feminine Endings* (1991), McClary criticizes the belief that music is autonomous or innocent, and argues that musical interpretations conducted from the perspective of traditional musicology are “stained with violence, misogyny, and racism” (McClary 4). According to McClary, the construction of gender in traditional musicology takes two trajectories. First, music’s affective power is considered feminine and dangerous, an association one can trace back to the ancient Greeks and of which the half-creature, half-woman Sirens are an example (more on these Sirens in the next chapter). Second, traditional

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<sup>17</sup> For more about the Scandinavian metal scene (aka Gothenburg metal), see Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal* 104-09.

musicology emerging in the 19<sup>th</sup> century used the above association along with numerous binary pairs that existed since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to interpret the majority of the sonata forms. These pairs rendered musical interpretation itself gendered (7-9). Adolf Bernhard Marx, for example, (in)famously wrote in *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1845) that

the first theme is . . . energetically, emphatically, absolutely shaped . . . the dominating and determining feature. On the other hand, the second theme is . . . dependent on and determined by the former—consequently, and according to its nature necessarily, the milder, one more supple than emphatically shaped, as if it were feminine to that preceding masculine. (qtd. in Hepokoski 494)

In the above formulation of the sonata form, the masculine is the dominant element threatened by an elusive feminine that is dependent on the masculine, and the achievement of the sonata form is the masculine conquering its elusive internal threat. This formulation, notably, can also be detected in the construction of metal identity, where Walser's concept of "exscription" of the feminine is one example.

According to McClary, then, the sonata form's composition of two distinct themes confronting one another is one of the most gendered types in music. The first theme, an aggressive and designated "masculine" one, establishes a tonal and thematic identity; the second theme, designated "feminine," introduces new musical material that threatens the masculine theme. The confrontation between the two themes, according to McClary, is a structural necessity for the masculine one to assert itself and to recapitulate the feminine one, thus achieving a conclusion and subordinating that which threatens it (*Feminine Endings* 68-69).

Drawing inspiration from McClary, I read sound blocks B (a rhythmic-phonetic-linguistic unit) and C (a melodic-phonetic-linguistic unit) in NEMESIS as two distinct musical arrangements and themes confronting each other. B is chunky and more rhythmic, with quite aggressive lyrics by the black vocal; it can therefore be supposed to be "masculine."<sup>18</sup> C is vivid and more melodic, and where the black vocal is reduced to one single word, and can be supposed to be "feminine."<sup>19</sup> Clearly, from the perspective of structural progression in NEMESIS, it is the feminine that triumphs. Even if A's opening and concluding of the song is more rhythmic (masculine) than melodic (feminine), the structural completeness is forced, as I argued above. In my reading, then, NEMESIS criticizes traditional musicology that posits the masculine against the feminine, and by implication this means that music as an articulate language is pitted against music as nonsensical singing (McClary 4).

By playing with the politically-charged sonata form, NEMESIS performs a critique of metal *logos*, within which the scenic gender dynamics are merely one obvious issue. Also obvious is the song's simultaneous emphasis on affect and pairs of contrasts, through which the song resists an exclusive focus on the idealization of certain metal elements. Yet the most intriguing part of NEMESIS is the two sound insertions in 6 and 11, the former of a crowd yelling in unison,

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<sup>18</sup> The lines with aggressive tone by the linguistically explicit *black vocal* are: "We walk this earth / With fire in our hands / Eye for an eye/ *We are nemeses*" and "We are a legion / Voice of anarchy / This is revolution / *Creating new disorder*."

<sup>19</sup> The lines with the inarticulate *black vocal* are: "One for all / All for one / We are strong / We are one / One for all / All for one / We are one, *nemeses*."

the latter of animal wails accompanied or menaced by a ram-like sound. Both sound effects appear after guitar solos that are stripped of transcendental or empowering qualities. 6's and 11's sound insertions, guitar solos, and reversed order (6 as A then D, 11 as D then A) taken together, then, tap into the song's narrative about the collective "we nemeses" rebelling against the system, uniting and fighting for freedom. Here, it addresses the theme of transgression commonly found in metal.<sup>20</sup> NEMESIS is about metal as an alternative community for "we metalheads-nemeses", a community that can be read as a socio-cultural other, and by implication a source of noise. More precisely, NEMESIS is about two consequences of the construction of a metal *logos*, the first concerning a unison of people (metalheads), the second concerning the exclusion of the ones who do not identify with metal. In addition to the song's pairs of contrasts, the reversed parallel in 6 and 11, and the internal rupture in 9, this trajectory of interpretation is also implied at the linguistic-thematic level, detectable in the incongruity or even rift between the song title NEMESIS and the use of plural form "nemeses" in lyrics.

And indeed, after the sound insertion of a crowd in 6, NEMESIS devotes 7/B/verse and 8/C/chorus to solve this incongruity by resorting to blood ties:

A malicious fever burns / In our hearts, in our veins / Your blood, My blood / All blood runs the same, the same / One for all / All for one / We are strong / We are one / One for all / All for one / We are one, nemeses.

Yet even though the incongruity is mended at the linguistic-thematic level, at the phonic level, the central lines "we are one, nemeses" and "we are nemeses" sound quite divided and disjointed throughout the song. At least, the combinations of sound insertions and hardly-empowering guitar solos suggest that much. The questions provoked are: does the crowd yelling in unison "we metalheads-nemeses" achieve final vengeance and retribution, destroying the hubris of the system and slaughtering the animals? Or is it possible that "we metalheads-nemeses" are also, somehow, identical to these animals, wailing in pain? And what would that imply?

Unsettling as the questions raised above may be, this is exactly what I contend: NEMESIS, first, emphasizes the affective dimension in metal that confuses several categories of distinction. Second, the song orchestrates metal's distorted and amplified *phónè* in pairs without conforming to the standard empowerment-oppression dialectic. Third, the affective force of the thematic pairs of transgression implies self-reference to metal music. Taken together the three bring attention to the oppressive scenic dimension that is usually selectively neglected in the valorization of metal tradition and community. This becomes clearer when I place my sound block analysis alongside a close and repeated watching of the music video.

The first eye-catching element of the song's music video is the shots of musicians who are, most of the time, out-of-sync, fast-forwarded. Even if there are also synced close ups of instruments playing, these shots are always undermined by other out-of-sync musicians. Even the female vocalist, the supposed visual and phonic focus of the video, does not appear to really be the center of focus, as the camera persistently focuses on her mouth rather than her

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<sup>20</sup> The lines are: "Fight, fighting for freedom / United, we stand, we stand" and "We are enemy / Divided of the system."

face.



Screenshots of superimposition of musical instruments and the wide-open mouth of Angela Gossow in NEMESIS<sup>21</sup>

The superimposed images of out-of-sync musicians and two converging female vocalists in 1/A (00:17-00:20) appear to suggest a “we” coming together. What, however, happens in 02/B/verse (00:38) when the female vocalist becomes “two” in the name of “we”? Indeed, throughout the music video, the synced vocalist can hardly be treated as a visual focus; her disappearance as “nemeses” in 5/C/chorus (01:32-01:34), her becoming three in 7/B/verse (01:57-02:02), her appearance and disappearance with “we are nemeses” in 9/E (02:30-02:36), and her almost split image as “nemeses” in 10/C/chorus (03:33) seem to suggest that the song’s central idea “we are one, nemeses” is never a stable unification. Or it suggests that the united legion of any *we* is a mere visual illusion.



Screenshot of split images of Angela Gossow in NEMESIS<sup>22</sup>

The disjointed phonic and visual levels compromise any stable center of identification, in line with the song’s emphasis on the affective force that resides in pairs. If the listener/viewer manages to locate sources of identification, this is likely achieved through resorting to knowledge derived from the metal scene. Here, NEMESIS mobilizes two common types of engagements with metal that have opposite scenic connotations: attentive listening by the elite insider, and mindless wallowing by the herd. These two types of engagement, as discussed in the previous chapter, are dissociable from metal’s scenic politics and replicate and intensify selective marginalization and exclusion.

Within this context, I propose to read NEMESIS, in dialogue with Giorgio Agamben’s

<sup>21</sup> 25 Sept. 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET7TI\\_PbeFg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET7TI_PbeFg).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

biopolitical reflection on how human beings necessarily have to lose themselves to enter politics or the *polis*. The song presents the metal-community as a community of outsiders that are at the same time split. Structurally this resembles the logic of the notion of a “people” as Agamben discusses it in *Homo Sacer* (1998):

[The People] is what always already *is* and yet must, nevertheless, be realized; it is the pure source of every identity but must, however, continually be redefined and purified through exclusion, language, blood, and land. Or, at the opposite pole, the “people” is what is by essence lacking to itself and that whose realization therefore coincides with its own abolition; it is what must, together with its opposite, negate itself to be. (100; original emphasis)

The People as a collective is imaginary, endlessly articulated and re-articulated, and relies on presumptions of shared language, blood, and land. For people to become People, they have to be included in *logos* (language, speech, discourses), in a *polis* (politics), and in a *bios* (proper life). Yet their entrance into the apparatuses of biopolitics, implies that people must negate, abolish, destroy, even “kill” part of their self-identities. They thus come into existence through the thematic pair of exclusion-inclusion. According to Agamben, such a paradigm of exclusions-inclusions is *the* fundamental metaphysical and political structure, and can be traced back to the ontological relationship between *phónè* and *logos*, where *phónè* is removed again and again (*Homo Sacer* 8; *Language and Death* 37-39). Because their inclusion within the People is also a self-abolishment, people are not the human subject, which Agamben defines as the rational animal who uses language. Instead, people are mere animals without voice. They have no control over their own deaths and voice, but nevertheless continue to speak and die.

NEMESIS uncannily captures this People/people structure that Agamben observes. Some sort of collective appears to be installed with “we metalheads-nemeses,” yet the two sound insertions make audible how *phónè* is removed, but not silenced, in the People/people structure: the crowd-People yelling in unison is also the animal-people that wail and possibly die. Based on this observation, the pairs of contrasts and two types of engagements with metal in NEMESIS can be recapped as two scenarios.

Scenario one: the people “divided of the system” unite as a metal community of “we People metalheads-nemeses,” metaphorically tied by shared blood. For people to be People, however, they also have to renounce part of themselves. Here, this self-negation is the removal of *phónè*, detectable in the tension between music and language (B and C), loss of language as *logos* (the wordless cry in unison in 6), and the regaining of *phónè* in an alternative *logos* (“we are one, nemeses” and “we are nemeses” in 8 and 9).

Scenario two: the people who dwell within “we People metalheads-nemeses,” fail to unite, and end up dividing each other. As people from different milieus do not necessarily understand and experience the alternative *logos* in the same ways, this People collective is cacophonous, full of noise. Analogously, socio-cultural noise and noise within metal can only “hear” one another as *animal* wails, or as *human beings*

*without voices.*

The two scenarios are not mutually exclusive, but coexist, in tension with and in danger of each other, hence my phrasing “people dwelling within People.”

The music video supports this twofold suggestion. One particularly intriguing visual reference is a snake appearing out of nowhere at 02:44, during 9/E. The snake is a common visual trope in metal to denote danger. This danger connotes, as Weinstein and Walser both observe, the feminine (*Heavy Metal* 127-29; *Running with the Devil* 158-60). NEMESIS, however, never explicitly specifies or alludes to the source of danger. Considered with the song’s critique of scenic-scholarly gender politics, it is more likely that no source can be located unless it would be from within a metal self (9/E). I read the snake as an index to the “we People metalheads-nemeses” who are dangerous to the system, but also dangerous to themselves as people. After all, are not the extreme vocals that are dubbed “bestial” also “animal-like”? To combine the two scenarios along the interpretative trajectory of NEMESIS as a metal song about metal music, the retribution against the system (defined by the sequence *logos-polis-bios*) applies equally well to an alternative metal *logos-polis*. The People/people structure implies a “disorder” and “anarchy” as is made explicit by the text.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, there is no unchanging and coherent identity, but a play with bare lives where selves and others cannot be kept apart.

The critique that NEMESIS levels about the scene, or rather about the politics of that scene, is that metal’s alternative community is far from ideal and, instead, full of divisions.<sup>24</sup> Or, it replicates the system it rebels against. The song demonstrates the problematics of transgression that Kahn-Harris observes to be dangerous and Grossberg criticizes as failing to create alliances. From the scenic perspective, then, NEMESIS is one example of reflexivity that mirrors the scenic politics characteristic of selective ironies, which Kahn-Harris phrases as “reflexive anti-reflexivity,” or a form of knowing better but choosing not to know (*Extreme Metal* 142, 145). The song offers a double critique—both scenically and musically. NEMESIS is a metal song that both makes use of and criticizes metal *logos*. As such NEMESIS is metal moving beyond itself, that is to say, a form of political noise that has metaphysical implications within and beyond metal. Notably, NEMESIS builds on pairs of distorted *phónè*, paralleled and reversed at structural, narrative, and visual levels. It works through an affective attack that confuses distinctions of gender and the boundary between self and other. It implies a political critique of the People/people structure, as theorized by Agamben, where the self is inevitably the other. NEMESIS illustrates how *phónè* has always been a site of cultural imagination, provoking scholarly discursive disputes, and simultaneously a metaphysical unease and fascination, as indicated by Agamben’s reflection on the relationship between *phónè* and *logos*.

In the case of NEMESIS, it is the animal wails tapping into the canonical definition of the human as rational animal using language. In the following section, through mapping the metaphysical, ontological, linguistic, and (bio)political paradigms by which *phónè* is caught, I discuss why *phónè* is an abyssal concept denoting the indefinable, an ontological position in which metal music finds itself. I further explain why metal music—restored as a set of relational, indefinable noises—mirrors, in amplified and distorted manners, broader socio-

<sup>23</sup> The lines are: “We are a legion / Voice of anarchy / This is revolution / Creating new disorder.”

<sup>24</sup> See my criticism of scenic-scholarly idealizations of a metal community and tradition in Chapter One.

political issues.

ii.

Call, Yell, and Wail: *Phónè* as Undefinable Threshold

*[Voice guarantees] truth and self-presence, from which springs the familiar idea that the voice expresses self and identity and that agency consists in having a voice.*  
(Weidman, "Voice" 233)

*What is the relationship between voice and language, between phone and logos? . . . the question of the voice was a cardinal philosophical question. . . . Yet philosophy has hardly ever posed the question of the voice as an issue.*  
(Agamben, *Infancy and History* 3-4)

NEMESIS would have been less unsettling without the sound insertion of animal wails. No doubt, the animal is one common trope in metal. This obsession with, and association of the animal to phonic distortion is also not a phenomenon unique to metal. In fact, the animal and *phónè* (as voice and sound) are part of the Western imagination of the human subject, traceable to the Aristotelian definition of the human being as a rational animal that uses language. According to Amanda Weidman, quoted above, voice denotes personal agency, cultural authenticity, and political power; it is what makes human beings more than animals. Crucial as the role of the voice may have been, and although it has fascinated many Western philosophers, as Agamben points out in the quotation above, the issue of *phónè* or voice *as such* is seldom put under scrutiny. In fact, once under scrutiny, *phónè* proves too slippery for a final metaphysical grasp. If *phónè* is crucial for Western metaphysics and the conceptual trio *logos-polis-bios*, its role remains ambiguous, precisely due to its intermingling of sound and voice. This ambiguity is captured by NEMESIS when the crowd (the "we People metalheads-nemeses") is made equivalent to the wailing animal.

The issue at stake is how any metaphysical-political devocalization impacts human subjectivity. Adriana Cavarero and Agamben have both pointed out that *phónè* is essential for metaphysics but also endangers it, in their observing that metaphysics establishes and secures itself through a series of devocalizations or removals of *phónè* (Cavarero 14; Agamben, *Language and Death* 40). The removal of *phónè*, moreover, according to Agamben, is part of the metaphysical politicization of ways of life as *bios* (*Homo Sacer* 8). So what exactly is it about *phónè* that it must be removed and devocalized again and again? To answer this question, I will start from a cross-examination of Agamben's biopolitically-inflected reinterpretations of the conjunctures of human being, *phone* and *logos-polis-bios*. Agamben's analysis starts from a well-known quotation from Aristotle's *Politics*. In *Infancy and History* (1978/1993). This is rendered as follows:<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I indicate their years of publication in Italian to the left in the parentheses; to the right are the years of publication in English.

Nature, as we say, does nothing without some purpose; and for the purpose of making man a political animal she has endowed him alone among the animals with the power of reasoned speech. Speech is something different from voice, which is possessed by other animals also and used by them to *express* pain or pleasure; for the natural powers of some animal do indeed enable them both to feel pleasure and pain and to *communicate* these to each other. Speech on the other hand serves to *indicate* what is useful and what is wrong. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust. And it is the sharing of a common view in these matters that makes a household [*oikia*] or a city [*polis*]. (Aristotle, *Politics* 28-29; qtd. in Agamben *Infancy and History* 7-8; my emphasis)

In the above translation of Aristotle, the human subject is *a political animal with reasoned speech*. Different from the purely *expressive* and *communicative* animal voice, speech is capable of *indicating* the good and the evil, the right and the wrong, the just and the unjust. This *shared* capability enables the human subject to establish household and city state, in sum, human, political communities.

In *Language and Death* (1982/1991), Agamben returns to the same passage in Aristotle, but this time he cites from a slightly different translation (again Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a, 10-18; qtd. in Agamben *Language and Death* 87). In this translation the human subject is an animal using *language* (*logos*). Unlike other animals that use mere voice (*phoné*) to *signify*, the human subject's language *indicates* and makes *moral* judgments of good and bad, right and wrong; these moral judgments facilitate a *partnership* between humans and enable human communities. That is, first human voice and animal voice are distinguished by different linguistic functions, and second, this distinction between human and animal voice is simultaneously moral, legal, and political.

Agamben returns to the same passage once more in *Homo Sacer* (1995/1998) in relation to yet a third translation (once more Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a, 10-18; qtd. in Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 12). In this translation the *proper* human subject is opposed to other living beings because it uses language (*logos*) not only to *indicate*, but also to *manifest moral* judgments that are termed *sensations* of the good and the bad. In the first case, the communal sharing or any partnership bound by moral qualities is a property of the human subject *making* human communities. Yet in the third quote, *logos* as *property* becomes the indicator for the human subject *dwelling* in human communities. In this case the text hints at the distinction between a proper human subject from an improper human-animal simple, that exists but outside of any community, in terms of a threshold existence.

According to Agamben, this threshold existence is an ontological-structural position appearing in various forms:

The living being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the *polis* by letting its own bare life be excluded, as an exception. (*Homo Sacer* 12)

So, apparently, the human political subject only has voice after losing its original voice and after losing a part of itself, while the human-animal ends up in the middle of nowhere. Here, the

paradigm of exclusion-inclusion that is at stake for Agamben, is fundamental for Western metaphysical and political structures—since for him metaphysics or ontology necessarily imply forms of politics (*Homo Sacer* 6-7). In *Use of Bodies* (2016), he offers a condensed explanation of this paradigm, now termed the fundamental ontological-political machine:

The strategy is always the same: something is divided, excluded, and pushed to the bottom, and precisely through this exclusion, it is included as *archè* [origin and command] and foundation. (*Use of Bodies* 264)

Metaphysics establishes and secures itself through exclusions-inclusions, that is, by ways of endlessly dividing and re-articulating poles of dualistic pairs that compose Western thought. While one pole of the pairs is re-articulated and re-assimilated into *logos*, the other pole, due to a lack of articulation, exists ambiguously, on a threshold. According to Agamben, this lack of articulation and distinction energizes the paradigm, and furthermore marks the inarticulate pole that the paradigm cannot do without. Agamben uses the word *archè*, meaning both origin and command, to designate the paradigm's existence that propels circles of exclusions-inclusions or self dis-articulations and re-articulations.<sup>26</sup>

Applied to NEMESIS, the affective but phonically and visually disjointed lyrical call of “we are one, nemeses” and “we are nemeses” can be considered the origin and command of *a song built on pairs*. The almost unnoticeable distinction between the singular “nemesis” of the song title and the plural form of “nemeses” in the lyrics, and the consequent reassertion of nemeses as both a “we” and a “one,” fits into Agamben's conceptualization of *archè*. With the nemesis/nemeses and the one/we itself divided, the call re-articulates as well as dis-articulates. It unites as well as divides. The remarkable thing is that the indistinguishable *nemesis* and *nemeses* leads to sentences that are grammatically incorrect: “we are one nemesis” is incorrect because “we” supposes a plural; yet “we are one nemeses” is also incorrect because “one” supposes the singular. In other words, being “one nemesis”—one singular community—is a paradox that cannot be resolved. Moreover, in NEMESIS, the crowd and the animal as each other's double is analogous to the pair of proper human and improper human-animal (bare life) in Agamben's interpretation of Aristotle's *Politics*.

Such a split, both Agamben and Cavarero observe, repeats itself again and again in the history of devocalization. Still, what is the aspect of *phónè* that is devocalized again and again? Crucial as *phónè* is in Agamben's thought, it does not even have a consistent form. It is presented as *phone* in *Infancy and History* (3-4), as both *phone* and *phoné* in *Language and Death* (55, 87), and as *phonê* in “Vocation and Voice” (95). It seems that Agamben is fascinated by *phónè*, but the latter is circumscribed by his logocentric approach that operates through a logic of articulation.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Here I need to point out that Agamben tends to use terms such as structure, paradigm, apparatus, machine, and *logos* (in both narrow and broad senses, dependent on Agamben's contexts) interchangeably, a problematic most observable in the 2017 complication *Omnibus Homo Sacer*. In my thesis, in general I opt for the term machine for clarity and consistence, and reserve the term *archè* for a more psychoanalytically oriented discussion, in line with Agamben's definition.

<sup>27</sup> Although not directly related to my general argument, it should be noted that Cavarero's “phonocentric” critique is more a reversal of the conceptual hierarchy between *phónè* (in Cavarero's use, *phone*) and *logos* based on the false opposition between logocentrism versus phonocentrism. Cavarero thus ends up replicating the violence she

NEMESIS uncannily captures the conceptual impasse of *logos* at play. In my above reading from the perspective of metal *logos*, there is no one *phónè* that can be defined as the abyss; instead we are confronted with the call, yell, and wail. While the visual representation of the call or *archè* is already highly divided, the yell and wail have no visual signifiers at all. *Phónè* forever slips away from processes of logocentric articulation. Consequently, within the set *logos-polis-bios* it appears as *archè*, which Agamben also terms the eternally pursued but lost metaphysical Voice (*Language and Death* 60-61).

To summarize the above onto-political mapping of *phónè* in NEMESIS, the song brings attention to metal's onto-political ambivalence through its use and manipulation of amplified and distorted *phónè*. Moreover, the song's critique of scenic politics extends to the larger world, engaging in a politics of the indefinable, one that critiques the politics of *logos*. According to Agamben, since *logos* has been so re-and dis-articulated to the extent that it is no longer coherent, contemporary biopolitics has entered a deadlock (*What Is an Apparatus?* 20-21). Because there is no transformative form of human existence, contemporary aphonic bare life has become ghostly, constantly haunted by its own otherness-of-self. NEMESIS, indeed, ends in the self-destruction of metal *logos*, with the invisible, ghostly or rather haunting crowd and animal that serve as each other's doubles.

If I read all this in the light of Attali's observations about the relationship between music and world, metal refracts the world in which it is situated. As the audible but indefinable, metal harbors a potential to counter the politics of *logos*. I must note, though, that such a potential should not be simplified and mistaken as inherently empowering or transgressive, but as malleable in relation to milieus. The importance of situatedness was implicit in my discussion of the discursive complexity of AND WE RUN, as well as in my reading of NEMESIS, in how it is built on pairs and reversals. This situated nature of metal has (bio)political and philosophical implications, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter as a whole has been an attempt to bring attention to metal's larger (bio)political and philosophical relevance and to reposition metal within the larger world in which it is situated. In order to do this, I focused on metal's distorted and amplified *phónè*. Central to this chapter has been the relationship between metal and noise, which I formulated as the indefinable, or only relationally meaningful, yet still clearly audible and affective. Because of the use of distorted *phónè*, metal occupies an ambivalent onto-political position. This position is often experienced and decried as various forms of sonic, musical, discursive, cultural, and socio-political forms of noise, a dynamic captured by the heterogeneous AND WE RUN, for instance. Moreover, through analyzing AND WE RUN as a case study of metal's levels of complexity and multiple ironies, I have demonstrated the disciplinary and political impasse of metal music studies. In the light of metal's manifold complexities, the empowerment-oppression model and a valorized metal identity and tradition inevitably replicate political opposition and oppression.

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criticizes; this is most apparent when she proposes for a sharing of *phónè* between human and animal, but restricts her discussion to animality in human.

While my discussion of AND WE RUN was situated on the disciplinary level of metal music studies, my analysis of NEMESIS incorporated metal's use of *phónè* with the larger cultural narrative about the human subject with voice and *phónè*'s threshold position. By focusing on how NEMESIS builds on pairs of phonic contrasts, I was able to expand the song's critique of metal's scenic politics to a larger domain of biopolitics. NEMESIS is one example of how devocalized *phónè* may return as an indefinable that wreaks havoc within metal *logos* and the set *logos-polis-bios*.

To sum up, my repositioning of metal as the-indefinable-but-audible took account of metal's complexities without being fixated on certain levels or elements. Put in psychoanalytical terms, and central to understanding metal as the indefinable, I will argue in the next chapter that metal connotes a desire-drive that is enacted through *phónè*. This will prove to be pivotal in my exploration of metal music's situated potential.

## Chapter Three

### Layers of Sound in Metal: Metal Music Against the Politics of *Logos*

In the previous chapter I looked at some internal tensions within the metal scene that became apparent through a confrontation with rap, and I brought metal into dialogue with the concept of *phónè*. I did so specifically by considering how metal complicates Agamben's conceptualization of community and voice/sound. Thus I re-evaluated some of metal's dominant identity formations. In the end I explored how metal can be considered a noisy mode of *phónè* that, through its confrontation with Agamben's philosophy, can come to connote broader political messages and critiques.

This chapter now explores metal's political potential further by focusing on the two related trajectories already discussed in relation to NEMESIS, namely of how the human voice embodies cultural identity, authenticity, and political agency, and how alternative subcultural discourses can modify a cultural imagination of the human voice. To study this potential, I compare two versions of the same song: ENJOY THE SILENCE. I will focus on the 1990 pop version by the British electronic band Depeche Mode (*Violator*, 1990) and the 2006 metal version by the Italian alternative metal band Lacuna Coil (*Karmacode*, 2006). As already indicated in the Introduction, the very song's title embodies a paradox: when people sing about enjoying the silence, form (music, singing) and content (text) collide. Yet, obviously, the form also carries content. Both songs' layers of *phónè*, or their phonic complexity, provide me with a chance to examine the *organization* of *phónè*, and the role of sound technology in that organization. Taking the two versions as points of departure for my radical reading, I want to tease out the situated, malleable political potential or "ability" in metal, and reflect on how this potential can be deployed for (bio)political acts.

From a disciplinary perspective, this chapter can be framed as a direct attempt to bring together several clusters of scholarly ideas on *phónè* that all try to tackle the politics of *logos*. I focus on Agamben's reading of the phoneme as profanation and Jacques Lacan's reflection on subject formation through the object voice of desire-drive. As will gradually become clear, my reading of them is of importance for my political engagement with metal.

#### 1.

#### An Onto-Political Battlefield: Tensions between Music and *Logos*

*. . . there is an aspect of passionate ambivalence, of amorous hatred and even masochism in Nietzsche's grudge against the musical-eternal feminine.*

(Jankélévich 7)

*In the case of the Sirens . . . this is a highly particular logos—a poetic, narrative, sung, and musical logos that stands in opposition to the silent logos of philosophy.*

(Cavarero 107)

*Music is inscribed between noise and silence, in the space of social codification it reveals.*  
(Attali 19)

In the first epigraph to this chapter, the French philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélévich observes that, for centuries, dominant parts of Western metaphysics (for which he considers Nietzsche paradigmatic) have treated certain forms of music with hostility. According to Jankélévich there is a (irrational) philosophical grudge against music. The reason, according to him, is that music organizes audible *phónè* in ways that resembles, but do not fully follow the logic of, (ordered) articulation. Moreover, as the second epigraph makes clear, music defies a metaphysical *logos* that prefers silence, as the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero here observes. Music, in sum, is regarded with suspicion by many philosophers because it threatens the logic and order in the trio *logos-polis-bios*. This is implied by the third motto that precedes this section, from the social theorist Jacques Attali, who observes music's two-sidedness in relation to *logos* and order. Music may serve *logos* by its very order (or harmony) and by imposing noise control; but as a form of noise itself it may also rupture the *logos-polis-bios* relation. It can also, directly or indirectly, reinforce silence by means of devocalization. (Bio)politically speaking, music is ambivalent, as was already illustrated by NEMESIS – the song discussed in the previous chapter.

In this chapter I will argue that what resides at the heart of this philosophical grudge is that music is invested in, and makes audible, libidinally charged *phónè* as a threshold phenomenon. This is, for example, brought to the attention by NEMESIS when *phónè* oscillates between a command, people's collective yells, and animal wails. Metaphysics, by its dealing with *phónè* as a threshold phenomenon, inevitably wants to acknowledge *phónè*'s superegoic voice. Consequently, metaphysics and music, although both mediated by *phónè*, imply two distinct libidinal economies, two forms of thought and knowledge, and two modes of subjectivity that function as each other's other. I am referring here to the subtitle of Attali's study *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. According to Attali music has the potential to announce another order—one that does not sit well with the status quo. I re-translate this to the domain of philosophy. When musical *phónè* is irreducible to the logic of existing articulations, the metaphysical self (embodied in *logos*) may encounter its own irrationality (its *alogon*) through music. The relationship between music and *logos* thus poses a (bio)political problem or, psychoanalytically speaking, a complex. In the following, I will analyze Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE<sup>1</sup> that uses layers of *phónè*, and concludes by opposing instrumental sound to words that are sung. This conclusion relates to the song's theme about violence inherent in words, expressed in the opening lines: "Words like violence / Break the silence." Expanding on the theme as an explicit formulation of a politics of *logos*, I argue that this song exemplifies the tense relationship between music and *logos*.

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<sup>1</sup> ENJOY THE SILENCE, by Depeche Mode. 25 Feb. 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY).

i.

Reading ENJOY THE SILENCE against the Grain: a Musical Loss of *Phonè*

Depeche Mode is a pop band that engaged with both analog music technology (through the electric guitar) and digital music technology (through the synthesizers) in the early 1990s, when the latter technology entered the popular domain. The band's name is apt, here: *Dépêche Mode* means "fashion news" or "fashion update." To step by step examine the relationships between music and *logos* that the instruments, music, and lyrics set up, I start with the effects produced by the synthesizer. If in what follows I use the term sound *effect* to designate electrical, mechanical, electronic, digital, and software-based mediations of voices and sounds, the major synthesizer effects can be summarized as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- Effect 1 (00:00-00:16): digitally processed sounds imitating human singing, as introduction and conclusion
- Effect 2 (00:17-00:33): digitally processed sounds imitating human voices
- Effect 3 (00:52-01:09): sounds that supplement effect 2, but have a stronger rhythmic dynamics
- Effect 4 (01:10-01:14): sounds whose quality resembles those of effect 3, but that have shorter temporal spans between the beats and (thus) produce a more energetic feel
- Effect 5 (01:49-02:07): their slightly distorted quality having a marked spatial dimension

As combinations of the major effects reoccur and have a clear structuring function, I treat them as sound blocks supplemented by other, less prominent effects. The following indicates, first, how effects by the synthesizer are grouped as sound blocks. I notate them as A, B, and C, each with respective subsets.<sup>3</sup>

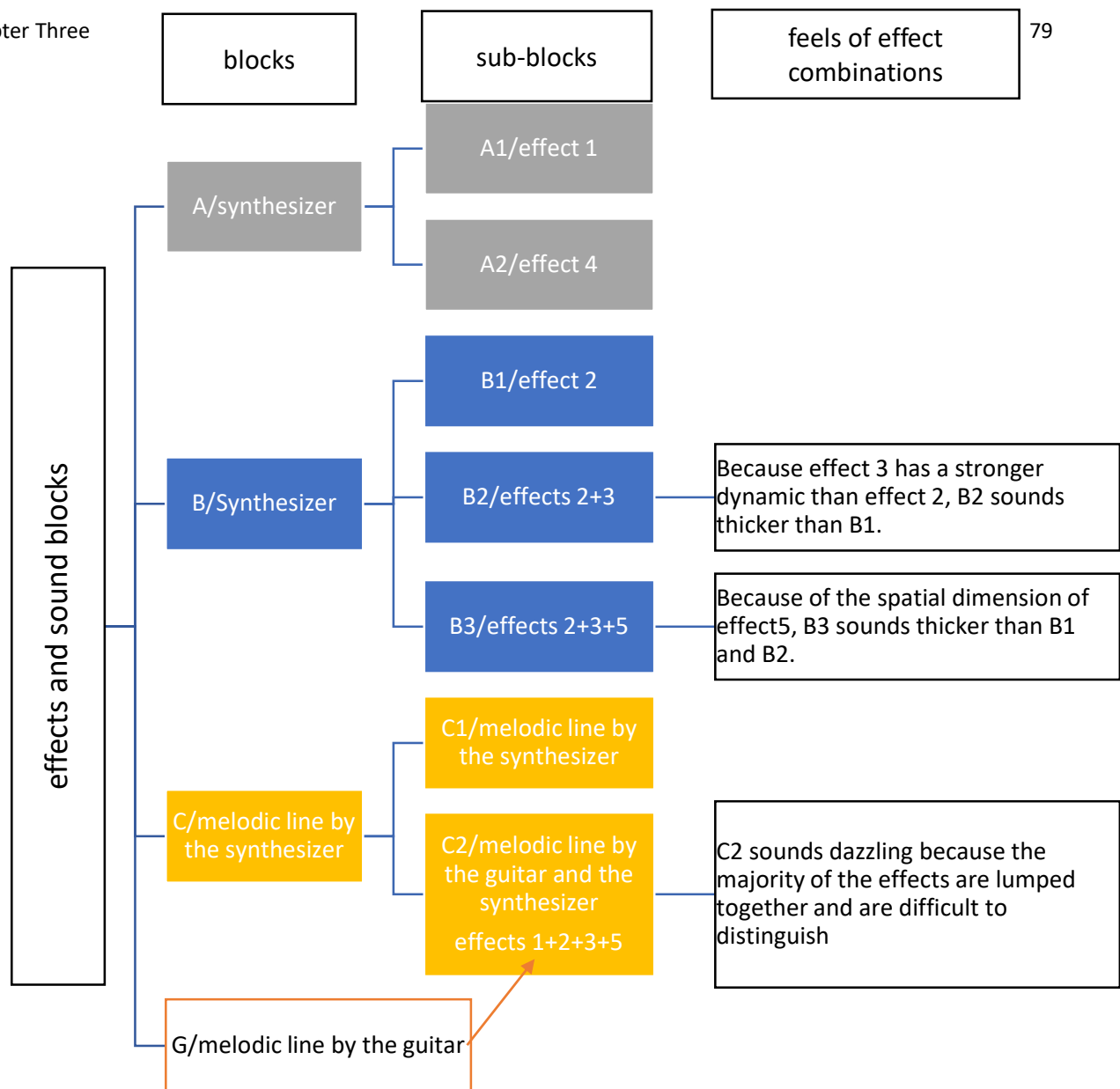
Next, I indicate the dominant features of effect combinations (sub-blocks) as they create certain *feels* (see Chapter One). Below I notate the melodic line by the electric guitar as G.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The times indicate when the sounds are first audible in the track. In synthesizers, effects 1 and 2 are usually listed as "choir." Since the term choir also refers to a group of singers, I opt for effects 1 and 2 to avoid confusion.

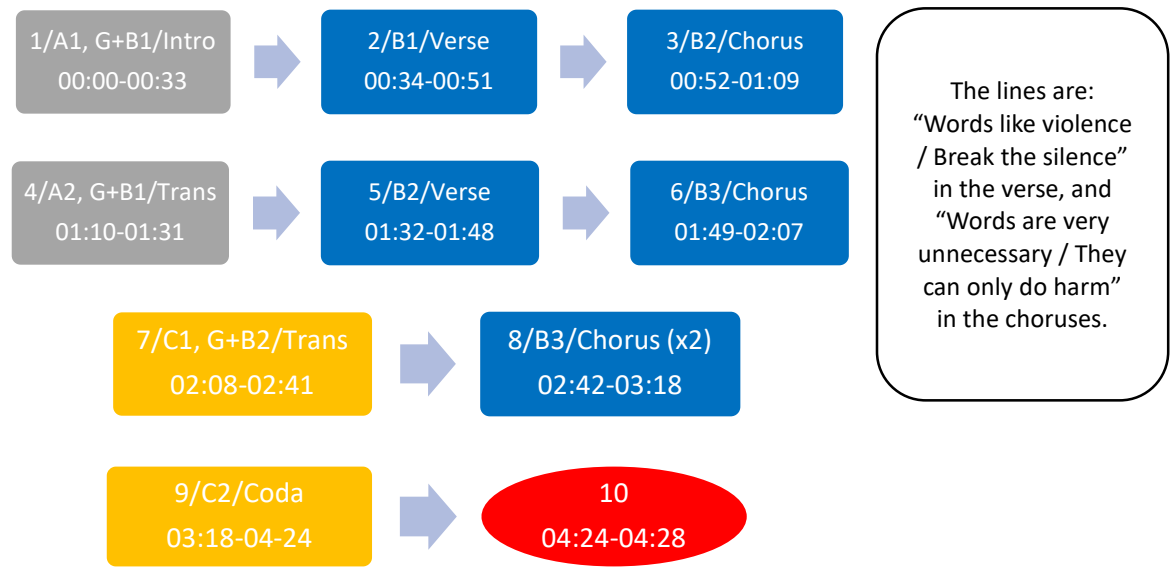
<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that harmonically, rhythmically, and in terms of timbre, C does not radically differ from B. Yet as I will explain, I recognize a contrast between the guitar and the synthesizer. With respect to this, and despite the many similarities between A, B, and C, I am giving C another color—yellow—to emphasize that in C the relationship between the two instruments changes. So, a warning here: my use of yellow may exaggerate the differences between the sound blocks.

<sup>4</sup> Calling it D would have made sense; I opt for G because it immediately makes clear that this is a different sound.



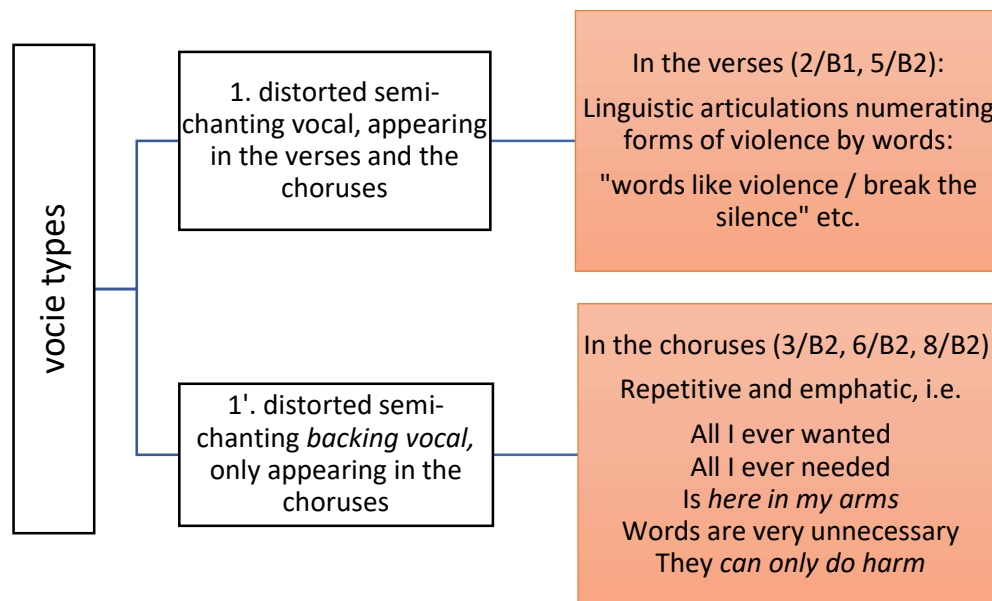
A contrast exists between the synthesizer and the guitar. The guitar part is quite simple, repetitive, and well-organized; the synthesizer builds up a phonic complexity that is different from that of the guitar. The two instruments, I propose, embody a tension between two organizations of *phónè*: there is the synthesizer whose organization of *phónè* is primarily vertical, by means of putting voices and sounds on top of each other and producing layers of *phónè*, and there is the guitar which produces a horizontal, melodic line, which I read as a form of musical *logos*. As we will see, Depeche Mode's *ENJOY THE SILENCE* is comprised of sets of contrasts that center on, but never resolve this tension.

Before I go into details, it is helpful to have an overview of the song structure. To reserve the tension posed by the synthesizer and the guitar within the blocks, I mark blocks containing both of them, as "G+A" or "G+B." Further, I add a few paradigmatic lines from the lyrics.



The above overview brings attention to one more contrast, between the transitions and the verses-choruses. First and quite obvious, the verses and choruses carry words/lyrics, and the transitions have none. Second, compared with the transitions where the contrast between the two instruments is discernible, the verses-choruses are relatively static. From the chart of effects and sound blocks, it is clear that what differentiates subsets of B (in the verses-choruses) is their “thickness” as a result of the fact that effects are layered together.

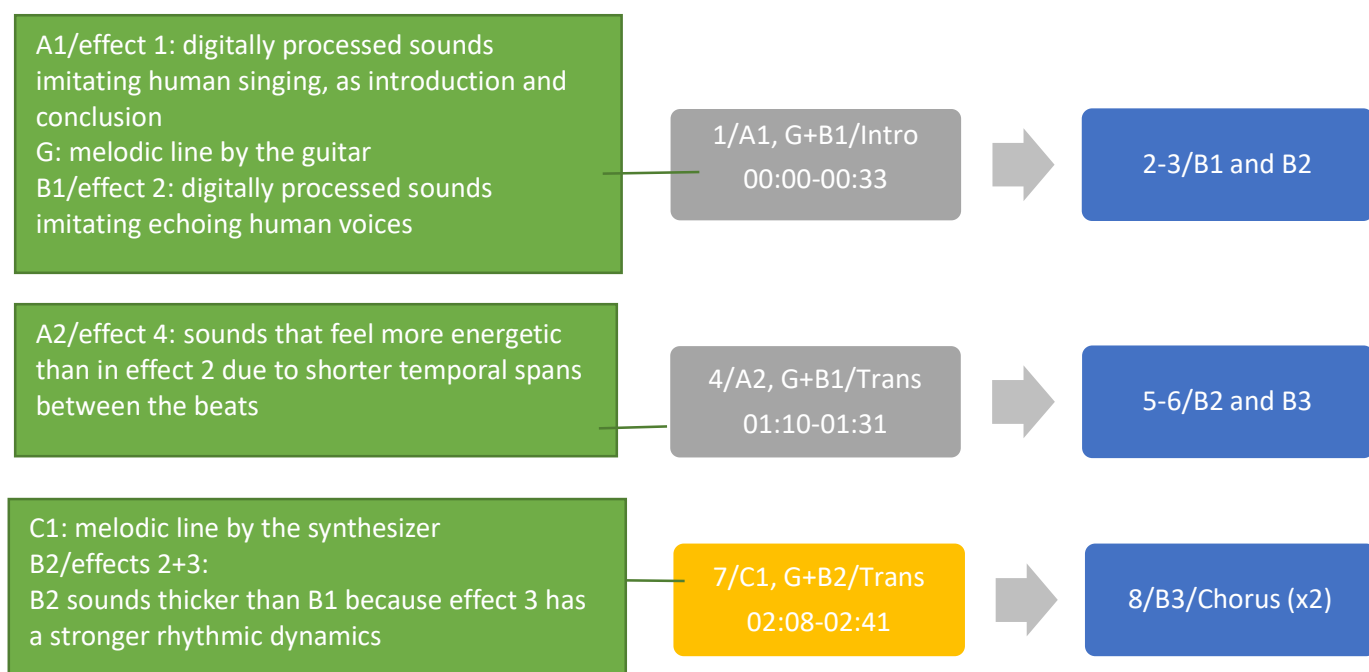
The difference between the verses and the choruses lies in the narrative functions of the voice types, indicated in the diagram below.



The main vocal used in both the verses and the choruses is linguistically comprehensible; it is easy to understand the lyrics. The higher backing vocal, which has a female quality to it, is

only used in the choruses and it is repetitive, having a more emphatic purpose. The foregrounded main vocal and backing vocal, respectively connoting the male and the female, embody a contrast between comprehensible words/lyrics (language as *logos*) and a phonic organization (language as sound). I posit an analogy, here, between this linguistic contrast between meaning and sound on the one hand, and between guitar and synthesizer on the other; as an organized musical line (a type of musical *logos*) versus layers of *phónè*. In both cases, one form of articulation and organization is foregrounded and as a consequence *dominates*. And whereas the two instruments concern a fundamental tension that takes place in *phónè*, the vocal and linguistic rift seems to translate this to the level of words-lyrics.

Having mapped how the verse-chorus pairs relate to the song's theme and the fundamental tension, I will now examine the transitions. Below I recap components of the transitions and indicate their corresponding verse-chorus pairs.



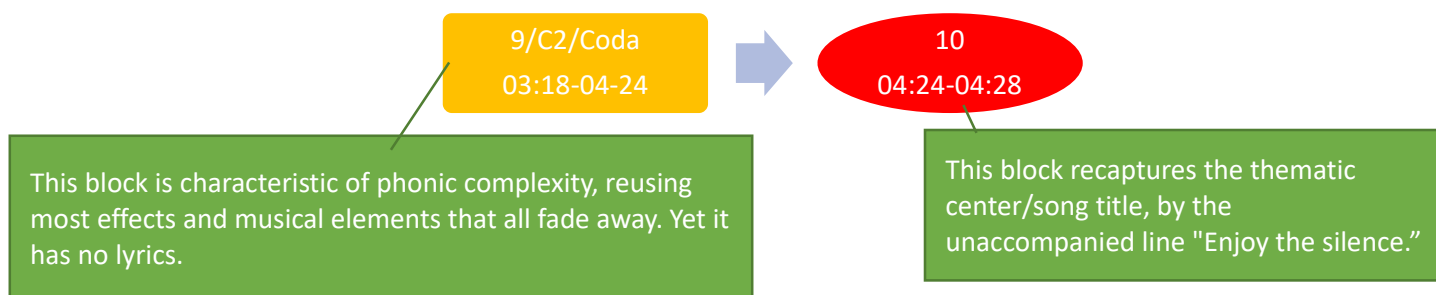
Block 1 introduces the fundamental tension embodied by the synthesizer and the guitar. In block 2 and 3, the tension is translated to the level of language in terms of meanings or language in terms of sound. A similar arrangement takes place in blocks 4 to 6. In block 7, a reversal and reassertion happen. At 02:08-02:24, the synthesizer is playing the melodic line (C1); at 02:25-02:41, the synthesizer (vertically layering effects) and the guitar (producing a horizontal line) are again contrasted (G+B2). This is followed by block 8 which, by repeating the chorus twice, emphasizes the harm done by words/lyrics.

Although the song's trajectory in blocks 1 and 7 appears to reaffirm the contrast between the two instruments, a closer examination reveals something different. Block 7 shows a phonic complexity created by the synthesizer: with the layering of effects, the guitar can hardly dominate. Similarly, in block 8 where the verse-chorus pair is replaced by two choruses, the comprehensible main vocal loses its dominance. Rather than reasserting the guitar, blocks 7 and 8 in fact weaken the guitar and the main vocal. As a result, blocks 1 to 7 build on sets of

contrasts for thematic purpose, but do not solve their underlying tension in block 7 and 8. This strategy of inter-articulations between musical organization and logocentric articulation, is most detectable in blocks 7 and 8 where the dominance of both guitar and main vocal is undermined.

Meanwhile, the lines that explicitly state the central idea of violence-by-words can be taken literally, as voiced words (by the main vocal) that dominate the music. They can equally be read as a reference to music (here the guitar part), in the sense that words are *sounds* that cause pain by breaking a silence.<sup>5</sup>

All this leads to an eventual collapse, where sets of contrasts give in to sounds being lumped together, which is captured by the song's two concluding blocks, 9/C2 and 10.



9/C2 without lyrics is phonically the most complex part of the song. Effects 1, 2, 3, and 5 are reused and mingled together, and create a “dazzling” affect. In 9/C2, moreover, a musical substitution takes place: the melodic line is first played by the synthesizer, then by the guitar, and then by both instruments. Previously, the instruments were contrasted and reversed; now, they coexist in layers of *phônè*. Block 10, then, consists of an unaccompanied sung line; the semi-distorted chanting main vocal delivers the line “Enjoy the silence” that is also the song title and that concludes the song.

The final two blocks thus pose one more contrast: layers of wordless *sound* by both instruments versus a *voiced* command in words. This again translates the fundamental tension to the level of language as words versus language as sound, now in a radical form. After the voiced command “Enjoy the silence,” the song fades into silence. Taken with the longing for silence (as implicated in the opening lines: “Words like violence / Break the silence”), the ending suggests that the song eventually obeys its own law and command. That is to say, by realizing the silence it strives for, Depeche Mode’s ENJOY THE SILENCE nullifies itself. In the following (semi)circular graphic the song’s simultaneous self-fulfillment and self-disruption is indicated by the “X” between the final and radical contrast. In other words, the song does not run full circle; rather, it confronts itself at the end.

<sup>5</sup> The lines are: “Words like violence / Break the silence / Come crashing in / Into my little world / Painful to me / Pierce right through me.”



As should be clear, the paradoxical conclusion of Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE stems from this song's urge to exile its intrinsic tension at the site of *phónè*. The final contrast reasserts language as *logos* instead of a musical *logos* (weakened in block 7), which in my reading brings attention to the complex dynamic between music and *logos*.

In the next section I explain why *phónè* is central to both metaphysical and musical self-identities, and why at the site of *phónè*, metaphysics and music hear each other in terms of their own undesirable others. By paying attention to the early 1990s when uses of sound technology in music, especially digitally processed audio signals, became a political issue, I explain how this song's paradoxical conclusion fundamentally questions the status of the human voice as a stand-in for subjectivity and political agency. I will then explore the issue of sound technology in and through a metal song. The discussion of sound technology is crucial for

metal but has so far received little scholarly attention. Still, it will prove to offer further insight to metal's onto-political ambivalence.

ii.

Metaphysical and Musical (De)-Subjectification in *Phónè*

Although it is impossible to pinpoint one single source for the philosophical grudge against music, Plato, who is still credited for dominant parts of Western metaphysics, was famously distrustful of music. This is evident in the following extract:

Therefore, when someone gives music an opportunity to charm his soul with the flute and to pour those sweet, soft, and plaintive tunes we mentioned through his ear, as through a funnel, when he spends his whole life humming them and delighting in them, then, at first, whatever spirit he has is softened, just as iron is tempered, and from being hard and useless, it is made useful. But if he keeps at it unrelentingly and is beguiled by the music, after a time his spirit is melted and dissolved until it vanishes, and the very sinews of his soul are cut out and he becomes "a feeble warrior." (Plato, *Republic* 1047)

Speaking through the persona of Socrates, Plato criticizes the indulgence in music (for which he considers flute-piping to be exemplary) as excessive, irrational, and weakening, and associates this indulgence with the corporeal and the feminine, as is evidenced in: "to pour those sweet, soft, and plaintive tunes . . . through his ear, as through a funnel."<sup>6</sup> For Plato whose primary occupation is to build an "ideal," good or proper political body (a *polis*), music is dangerous if not strictly directed and limited. Music does not simply in and of itself obey the law (*nomos*) of language, thought, and knowledge (*logos*), though it can still be useful to "mold" good citizens (as is evidenced by "whatever spirit he has is softened, just as iron is tempered, and from being hard and useless, it is made useful"). Plato thus has difficulty deciding whether music should be allowed, and concludes that it only has value as an educational instrument, or as a didactic *technē*, and indeed as an access to a harmonic soul/universe.

The music Plato allows for, it should be noted, is quite narrow, and is only applicable to music that has words. Referring to the Pythagorean school's music theory, Plato redefines music as a combination of *harmonia*, *rhythmos*, and *logos*, and as regulated relations in a

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<sup>6</sup> The passage quoted here is from *Complete Works* (1997) edited by John M. Cooper. The same passage in different translations or similar passages from *Republic* can be found in the following works, among many others: Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice* (1976), Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* (1991), Adriana Cavarero's *For More than One Voice* (2005), Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), Andrew Bowie's *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (2007), John T. Hamilton's *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (2013), Karmen MacKendrick's *The Matter of Voice* (2016) (p. 119), and, of course, Jacques Attali's *Noise* (1977). For discussions of the metaphysical tradition fixing on *logos* at the expense of *phónè* and music, see Ihde, Cavarero, and MacKendrick; for discourses about music, especially traditional Western musicology, as an accomplice of cultural, socio-political control, see McClary and Attali. For an analysis of the relations between the feminine and music, see Susan Bernstein, "Fear of Music: Nietzsche's Double Vision of the 'Musical Feminine'" in *Nietzsche and the Feminine* (1995), edited by Peter J. Burgard, pp. 104-131.

temporal order that express human reason and the objective order of things (Bowie 51-52).<sup>7</sup> Thus redefined, music needs to be regulated by a politically and morally charged *logos*:

[E]ducation in music and poetry is most important . . . because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite. (Plato, *Republic* 1038)

Again speaking through the persona of Socrates, Plato not only subordinates music to *logos*, as a kind of semi-*logos*, but makes music responsible for the properness or impropriety of the human subject. Following this logic Plato prefers “Apollo and his instruments [lyre] to Marsyas and his [flute]” (*Republic* 1037). In accordance with this, people who indulge in unregulated music do not qualify for proper human life; they are an improper human-animal, analogous to the flute-piping satyr Marsyas who, so Plato argues, deserved to be flayed alive for challenging Apollo’s lyre (*Euthydemus* 722). Apollo, god of music and truth (also a mode of *logos*) stands for “good, proper” music and for all proper human existence included in *logos-polis-bios*. In contrast, in his being a human-animal indulging in “bad, improper” music, Marsyas with his flute, embodies an improper form of existence: excessive and “feminine,” not unlike the half-creature, half-woman Sirens that Cavarero considers an archetypal figure of the musical feminine. Yet different from the Sirens who, with their endangering words, are not threatened with the loss of life, Marsyas physically suffers from logocentric violence in his being flayed alive, not killed and surely not sacrificed. Thus Marsyas is arguable an archetypal figure of bare life.

So, at least since Plato, music is turned into an onto-political problem that inflames metaphysical fears and drives the philosophers’ desire to control it. Music, in its being included in, and simultaneously being excluded from the *logos-polis-bios*, occupies either a phantom-like or a threshold position. This status of music is traceable in my reading of Depeche Mode’s *ENJOY THE SILENCE*, but in order to understand this better I need to go into the relation between subject and voice in more depth first.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject is incomplete in relation to an object that is the cause of the subject’s being split. Consequently, the subject tries to compensate for its incompleteness or lack. At the register of desire and self-satisfaction, this compensation involves the subject’s investing in often random “objects” that can be substituted consequently. In this context Lacan also talks about the object voice of desire.<sup>8</sup> In my analysis this connotes *phónè* as both the object and cause of desire, a site where the subject meets its intrinsic otherness-within-self. To put it simply: a voice is not something the subject *has*, it is also its other. The split allows *logos*’ two types of presence. Cavarero terms them self-assertion and self-negation (Lacan 272; Cavarero 43). By constantly filling in the lack with libidinally invested objects, desire allows the subject to retain a sense of self-consistency and to avoid traumatic de-

<sup>7</sup> Plato’s definition of music is different from common notions of music as McClary summarizes in her Afterword to Attali’s *Noise*: music as sequences of chords that require coherence over time through channeling noise by means of polyphonic coordination (151). Despite the difference between Plato’s notion of music and common ones, it is clear that music has generally been presupposed to sound agreeable, that is, properly ordered.

<sup>8</sup> Lacan does so in a re-interpretation of the Husserlian verbal hallucination, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

subjectification. Central to Lacan's readings of Husserl and Socrates is how the metaphysical self and *logos* consists of a *phónè* that functions in two conflicting but entwining economies, namely desire's self-satisfaction and the drive of self-destruction.

The question I want to raise in relation to metaphysics and music, is what the implication of this double desire-drive enacted in *phónè* is. What does it imply when there is no coherent and stable metaphysical self, but only temporary and hallucinatory selves originating from, and defending themselves against a threshold *phónè* that also denotes a void of negativity, of silence, deafness, death, and irrationality— notions that are all associatively connected?<sup>9</sup> When we expand the defense mechanism to forms of subject formations, any form of regulating *logos* is anxious of the *phónè* that it originates from. Music as an onto-political problem and the complex between music and *logos*, then, fundamentally stems from an anxiety instigated by *phónè*.

Depeche Mode's *ENJOY THE SILENCE* illustrates this in its relation to two historical contexts: the Romantic era and the early 1990s. As for the first, the song's theme is influenced by the Romantic sentiment of rebellion against the dominance of words-*logos*. This sentiment is still commonly found in larger cultural narratives and musical discourses about authentic musical deviance or even madness acting against oppressive norms or mainstream centers. In this context, one can even trace one more bare life figure in music, namely the "composer-genius as androgynous mad(wo)man" (McClary, *Feminine Endings* 98). The figure can be found in the video of the song that consists of two main visual frames: the musicians in front of a black screen, often in homoerotic postures (frame 1), and the destitute looking vocalist wandering in nature, in a king suit, a folding chair in his hands (frame 2).



Examples of the two visual frames in *ENJOY THE SILENCE*<sup>10</sup>

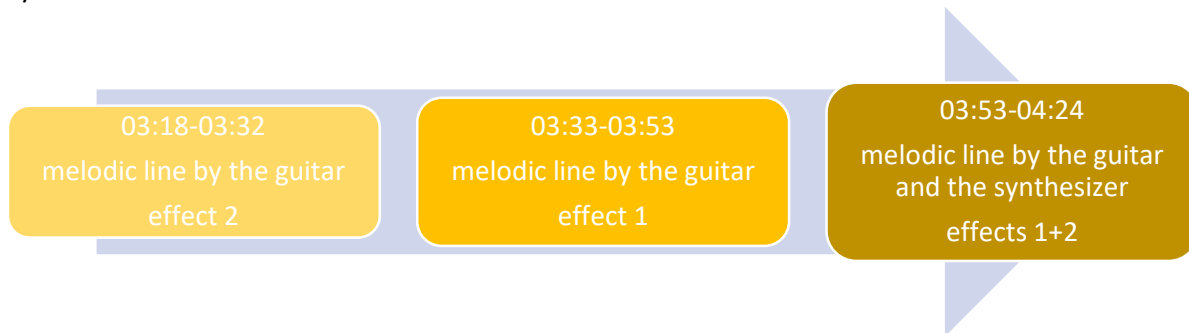
The references to the Romantic musical bare life figure of the authentic, androgynous mad(wo)man in both frames are hard to miss. Yet influential as the Romantic era and its sentiments are, Attali and John Hamilton both observe that the Romantic rebellion in fact assists the set of *logos-polis-bios*. According to Attali, despite rupturing and transgressing the order of representation, the Romantic period is also the period in which musical "noise" starts drifting toward "repetition" in service of noise control (81). Different from McClary, who celebrates the mad(wo)man who is unconscious of her or his transgression (98), John Hamilton

<sup>9</sup> For example, Jacques-Alain Miller and Mladen Dolar both insist that the object voice of drive is a mute void deprived of any sonority, fundamentally silent and negative (Miller 145; Dolar 121).

<sup>10</sup> 25 Feb. 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY).

argues that these figures of abnormality and deviance serve a socio-political construction of normality (Hamilton 6-9).

In the case of Depeche Mode's *ENJOY THE SILENCE*, the eventual self-devocalization and self-violence is symptomatic of how the Romantic notion of musical authenticity is caught in disputes of political nature. These are complicated, moreover, by the role of sound technology, in this case: the synthesizer's uses of the human voice. In their ethnographic investigation of sound technology in music, Roger Wallis and Krister Malm bring attention to the status of the human voice. According to them, among sounds, the human voice is usually one of the first to receive technological adaption (138). In the song, the opening of effect 1 (the human singing at 00:00-00:16) and effect 2 (the rhythmic human echoing at 00:16-00:33 accompanied by the guitar) tap into an anthropocentric cultural imagination of voice as connoting identity and subjectivity. However, in block 9/C2, when effects 1 and 2 are reincorporated as part of a conclusion, the status of the human voice is undermined. Below is a simplified illustration of 9/C2.



The overall strategy of 9 can be summarized as reasserting and then confusing the distinctions and pairs the song builds on. At 03:18-03:53, effect 2 (primarily rhythmic) moves to effect 1 (primarily melodic); the effect is further accompanied by the melodic guitar line. It is this guitar line that, according to my interpretation given above, embodies the musical *logos*. During this part, the human voice and the musical *logos* embodied by the guitar (both primarily melodic) affirm each other. Yet, both are undermined at 03:53-04:24, when the melodic line is played by both the guitar and the synthesizer, and when effect 2 reappears and plays along with effect 1. The implication is that human identity and subjectivity as well as musical authenticity are irreconcilably violated by sound technology. I propose that this undermining, predominantly taking place by means of the synthesizer, can be understood better in the context of the somewhat polarized scholarly reception of sound technology. This brings me to the historical context of the song in the 1990s.

Wallis and Malm observe two scholarly responses to sound technology used in musical practices. On the one hand, it is celebrated as a new measure of individual prowess. On the other hand, a more conservative stance considers sound technology as an abuse of art (135-38). For Wallis and Malm, both stances are problematic as they neglect the socio-cultural contexts within which these uses of technology are situated. The former stance easily gives way to elitism, while the latter presumes an uncritical rejection of sound technology (141, 143-44). Thomas Schumacher similarly observes the two scholarly trajectories. He provocatively argues that "music is constituted by technology through and through": popular music is so imbricated with technology that one cannot talk about musical meaning without taking account its

technological processes. According to Schumacher, the two scholarly stances fall prey to the myth of musical originality, and fail to question the constructedness of heard sounds (175-77, 185-86).

One telling example of a negative scholarly reception of sound technology due to the belief in musical originality is that of Andrew Goodwin, who works in popular music studies. Goodwin puts forward an anthropocentric-authentic reading of Depeche Mode's use of sound technology in *Violator* (the album on which *ENJOY THE SILENCE* can be found). His distinction between sound technology as technical rationalization and as artistic democratization is reminiscent of the oppression-empowerment model, and he criticizes Depeche Mode for compromising artistic creativity and integrity (148, 151-52). Decisive in Goodwin's criticism is that, during the recording of *Violator*, Depeche Mode deployed sampled and synthesized sounds and downplayed the actual drums. This, in Goodwin's reading, risks reducing musicians to an instrumental function (151, 156, 158-59). Likewise, in the domain of metal music studies, Walser observes that the guitars and the synthesizers have several attributes in common, and are especially similar in their capability to sustain *phônè* indefinitely and create phonic distortion. Nevertheless, based on the oppression-empowerment contrast, Walser still distinguishes them as masculine versus feminine, authentic versus pop, or artificial (*Running with the Devil* 72-73, 164).

At stake in both Goodwin's and Walser's divisions and evaluations of sound technology is not only the question of musical authenticity, but also the underlying socio-cultural forces that shape these. According to Simon Frith, for instance, this scholarly polarity incited by sound technology is political in nature. In this context he asks the question whether music using sound technology assists or resists ideological manipulation ("Art vs Technology" 117-19).<sup>11</sup> Goodwin and Walser would simply argue that sound technology assists ideological manipulation. In my reading, the tension and contrast between the synthesizer and the guitar in *ENJOY THE SILENCE*, with the guitar being explicit and articulate and the synthesizer being complex and undermining, offer another way of dealing with the issue. That is to say: I try to read sound technology for its own potential, and outside of the binary form of thinking set up by Goodwin and Walser.

The song's music video taps into this division of "real" music and sound technology. Until 9/C2/coda, the musical parts by the synthesizer and the guitar are respectively tied to frames 1 and 2: the shots of musicians in front of a black screen, often in homoerotic postures, and the shots of a destitute looking vocalist wandering in nature, in a king suit, a folding chair in hand. During 9/C2, however, the visual-musical associations are reversed at 03:18-03:26 and confused at 03:53-04:24. Block 9, in brief, is one zone of phonic, musical, thematic, and visual intermingling.

The music video ends with a shot showing the vocalist sitting on a snowy mountain and gazing at the sun (at 04:24-04:28) when the final line appears. In an earlier shot of the vocalist sitting on a snowy mountain (at 01:00-01:07), a visual-phonic correspondence is at work: he is shown singing the lines "words are very unnecessary / they can only do harm." In the ending

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<sup>11</sup> Although in general I agree with Frith's less biased attitude toward sound technology, his formulation of sound technology as resistance is again highly individualistic and operates on a radicalized version of the oppression-empowerment model. For problematics in Frith's individualist conceptualization of musical identities, see Chapter Two.

shot, however, we hear the line “*enjoy the silence*,” but do not really see the vocalist singing it. Compared with the earlier shot and its visual-phonetic correspondence, the ending line lacks a clear visual signifier. In *Audio-Vision: Sounds on Screen* (1994), Michel Chion terms a voice whose originating source is unseen or untraceable on the screen as the *acousmatic* voice, and observes that it destabilizes boundaries between subject and object, inside and outside (72, 78). Drawing from Chion, consequently, Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar identify the acousmatic voice with the Lacanian object voice. I read the ending line in Depeche Mode’s *ENJOY THE SILENCE* as such an acousmatic voice, where the song’s conflicting and unsolvable tensions erupt. In addition to the shot at 01:00-01:07, other visual-phonetic correspondences also suggest the acousmatic quality. At 01:57-02:00, the music video shows the vocalist singing “words are very unnecessary.” Later, during the lines “words are very unnecessary / they can only do harm” (02:50-02:57), he is shown wandering around instead of singing. Then, at 03:07-03:10, he is again shown singing the line “words are very unnecessary.” I read this as vocalization and devocalization taking turns, a process that is condensed at the end when we hear a voice, but do not see the body out of which it is supposed to come.

All levels and contexts taken together, in my reading, Depeche Mode’s *ENJOY THE SILENCE* enacts a complex attitude toward sound technology that has broader implications. This helps me to deal, in what follows, with metal’s paradoxical reliance on, and distrust of sound technology. For example, a member of the Germany trash metal band Destruction, Marcel Schmier, acknowledges that sound technology is designated a form of cheating in metal scenes, but that many do commonly use it to mediate their music. Observing that these mediations are selectively ignored by members from the metal scene, Schmier offers a penetrating criticism of the intolerance of critique that endangers the musical authenticity of metal gods. It should, however, be noted that Schmier’s lament about a “lost honesty and pride” is equally problematic in the light of the ideology of musical authenticity, and again exemplifies how discourses about metal can be encompass multiple ironies (see Chapter Two).<sup>12</sup>

Underlying the dominant scenic-scholarly discourse on metal identity, is an anthropocentric and authentic conceptualization of sound technology as dishonest and falsifying, as observed by Frith (“Art vs Technology” 108-09). When in Chapters One and Two, I criticized the racial and gender connotations of the scenic-scholarly insider-elite identity, the problematics involved very much mirror the problematics of scholarly receptions to sound technology as observed by Wallis and Malm. This suggests that, as metal music would not have sounded like metal without sound technology, the scenic-scholarly identity politics concerns not only an exclusion of others, but also an externalization of parts of itself that are believed to be liable to manipulation. This, I argue, drives Walser to work with the distinction between a so-called “authentic” electric guitar and a “false” synthesizer.

Though not immediately detectable, Walser’s division of sound technology in metal is symptomatic of the political problem with respect to the human voice that, as Wallis and Malm point out, is one of the sounds to first receive technological adaptation (138). To make clear how, in metal, the question of the status of voice manifests itself in the form of supposedly

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<sup>12</sup> “Destruction Frontman: “Where’s the Honesty and the Pride of Rock and Roll Nowadays?”” *Metal Hammer*, 26 Sept. 2016, [www.blabbermouth.net/news/destruction-frontman-wheres-the-honesty-and-the-pride-of-rock-and-roll-nowadays](http://www.blabbermouth.net/news/destruction-frontman-wheres-the-honesty-and-the-pride-of-rock-and-roll-nowadays).

authentic versus fake musical sounds, I need to first bring attention to one theoretical operation recurrent in scholarly discourses discussed so far: the Adornoian oppression-empowerment dialectic – whether in the domain of metal, in relation to musical identity in general, or connected to sound technology. All these discourses operate by imposing a pair of entities, one of which is predominantly designated oppressive and perceived as a threat to forms of desirable self-identity. In all cases, the solution is to resort to the other supposedly empowering entity that re-consolidates the identities at stake. This dynamic is played out in relation to voice and technology, with technology as the oppressive component and voice as the reassuring, authentic source of empowerment.

With the series of theoretical operations in mind, I recap the pivotal pairs in the scholarly discourses about voice and sound in metal, previously discussed in Chapter One:

- in Weinstein, metal's power concerns an affectionate rivalry between the guitar and the vocal (with oppression being defined in terms of gender);
- in Walser, the power concerns musical sounds versus voices doing the lyrics, the guitar solo versus rhythmic voices and sounds, the first of the pairs designated empowering, the second, oppressive;
- in Kahn-Harris and Phillipov, a wall of noise/voices and sounds (transgression) versus identification (false empowerment).<sup>13</sup>

Or in tabular form:

|                           | Empowerment (connoting authenticity)  | Oppression (conn. falsity)                                |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Weinstein                 | guitar and voice                      | (gender)                                                  |
| Walser                    | - musical sounds<br>- guitar solo     | - voices doing the lyrics<br>- rhythmic voices and sounds |
| Kahn-Harris and Phillipov | transgressive noise/voices and sounds | identification                                            |

In the above discourses about voice and sound in metal, the relationship between two poles is initially more or less equal, then placed in a hierarchical opposition, and then radicalized through a reversal of this hierarchy.

Intriguingly, there is a parallel in the domain of sound technology in metal music:

- in Weinstein, there is a complementary relationship between sound technology and music, applicable to standard (i.e. the guitar) as well as non-standard (i.e. the keyboard) instruments (*Heavy Metal* 23-25);
- in Walser, there is an opposition between the electric guitar and the synthesizer—the former is empowering, the latter connotes falsity;
- in Kahn-Harris and Phillipov, the binary is between an aesthetic of sonic extremity or

<sup>13</sup> Phonologocentrism used in popular music studies means an identification with the singing voice delivering lyrics. See also footnote 13 in Chapter One.

noise (transgression) and an uncontrolled feedback loop or an excessive guitar solo (false empowerment) (Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal* 33-34; Phillipov 105-06).

Or in tabular form:

|                           | Empowerment (connoting authenticity)  | Oppression (conn. falsity)                          |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Weinstein                 | guitar and keyboard                   |                                                     |
| Walser                    | guitar                                | keyboard                                            |
| Kahn-Harris and Phillipov | transgressive noise/voices and sounds | uncontrolled feedback loop or excessive guitar solo |

Common in the above scholarly discursive constructions is a series of inter-articulations of poles in binary pairs. And in the second table, again, the trajectory in discourses moves from cooperation to an opposition and dialectical empowerment, and then a radicalization, here in the form of a combined reversal and dislocation.

If we read the two schemes in consonance, Walser's division and evaluation of the guitar and the keyboard as two distinct forms of sound technology in metal music, resonate with the distinction of sound and voice. This is why I contend that the evaluation of guitar and keyboard also concerns the status of human voice in metal, a status that I put forward, in Chapter One, to be a political issue *per se*. It concerns a blurring as well as a consequent urge to distinguish distorted and amplified sound from distorted and amplified voice, the "human" quality of which is in question. At stake here are two coexisting but conflicting economies and forms of subjectivity in metal, similar to the reversed metaphysical and musical subject formation through *phónè*. The first economy is the insider-elite one around which an alternative metal *logos-polis-bios* is formed. The second is a liminal existence, as defined by media scholar Scott Wilson, the author of *Great Satan's Rage: American Negativity and Rap/Metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (2008) and *Stop Making Sense: Music from the Perspective of the Real* (2015).

Taking a combined Freudian-Lacanian-Agambenian perspective, in an article with the telling title "From Forests Unknown: Eurometal and the Political/Audio Unconscious" (2010), Wilson formulates this liminal existence as follows:

Metal at its most affective occupies the border between music and noise that is constitutive of the formation of any subject of music at any time. The formation of any subject of music necessarily involves a repression (or expulsion) of "noise" the return of which in metal is precisely if indefinably (precisely indefinably) what propels it as a rebellious form. To put it abstractly: if there is a subject of metal, it is an *amusical* subject without formal limits that is produced by the force of dissonance, that is an effect of repetition, that is repressed but returns as repetition in the form of a dissonance. That is: a "new" dissonance that marks the point of innovation, movement, and change. (156; italics of 'amusical' in the original

Wilson rephrases the dynamic of desire-drive during the subject formation as repressions that

lead to repetitions of noise (always defined in relation to something else), or dissonance. This mode of a *metal subject*, the *asubject* of *amusic*, is what I want to call a *phonic existence*. Wilson considers this existence as situated in an ontological-libidinal position of double negation; that is to say, the being of this phonic existence is strictly speaking of a “once, no longer” category which cannot be pinned down. Within the trio *logo-polis-bios*, this being can only be perceived in terms of a convergence and blurring between binary poles, like, for instance, empowerment and oppression.

Considered in this light, the scenic-scholarly insider identity is a (bio-)politically driven defense mechanism against that part of the self that is ambiguous, an amorphous phonic being who is believed to be liable to irrationality. It is a being that is played with in the popular character of the metal god or goddess who, in metal scenes, is the center of identification. Yet it also very much resembles the androgynous musical bare life figure I teased out from the music video of Depeche Mode’s *ENJOY THE SILENCE*. Still, as its status of being the god(dess) cannot be dissociated from forms of music and sound technology, this figure both resembles Marsyas with his flute rebelling against the *logos-polis-bios*, as well as Apollo with his lyre asserting metal *logos*. This is indicated by Wilson’s religiously inflected criticism of scenic-scholarly politics. He conceives of metal’s phonic being as a “blasphemy” that breaches scenic-scholarly knowledge by way of the so-called “divine” solos. As a result of this undermining, the metal musician who plays solos and assumes a status as the “God” is also decentered, and is in fact more of a self-evacuating figure (“From Forests Unknown” 157).

This leads me to two questions, the one following on from the other. First, what is the biopolitical ability contained in metal’s *phónè*? This question forces me to reconsider Agamben’s conceptualization of *phónè*. Agamben works towards a constellation of political-philosophical critiques that all center on *phónè*, and deploys them in a manner similar to the inter-articulations of poles in binary pairs I laid out earlier. This raises a second question: what might the problem lurking in Agamben’s biopolitical critique be that metal music could counteract?

A tentative answer to the questions raised above might be found in Lacuna Coil’s metal adaption of *ENJOY THE SILENCE*,<sup>14</sup> where there are two specific metal figures: god and goddess. In the next section, I trace the phonic being in the metal adaptation and expand on its modes of manifestation. As will become clear, my reading with a focus on what eludes binary pairs will help me to query Agamben’s advocacy for profanation, and to query metal scholars influenced by Agamben who produce knowledge by framing metal politically. In turn, this query will be of pivotal importance to my own politicization of metal.

## 2.

### **Against Violence by Logos: Metal’s Phonic Profanatory Potential**

#### i.

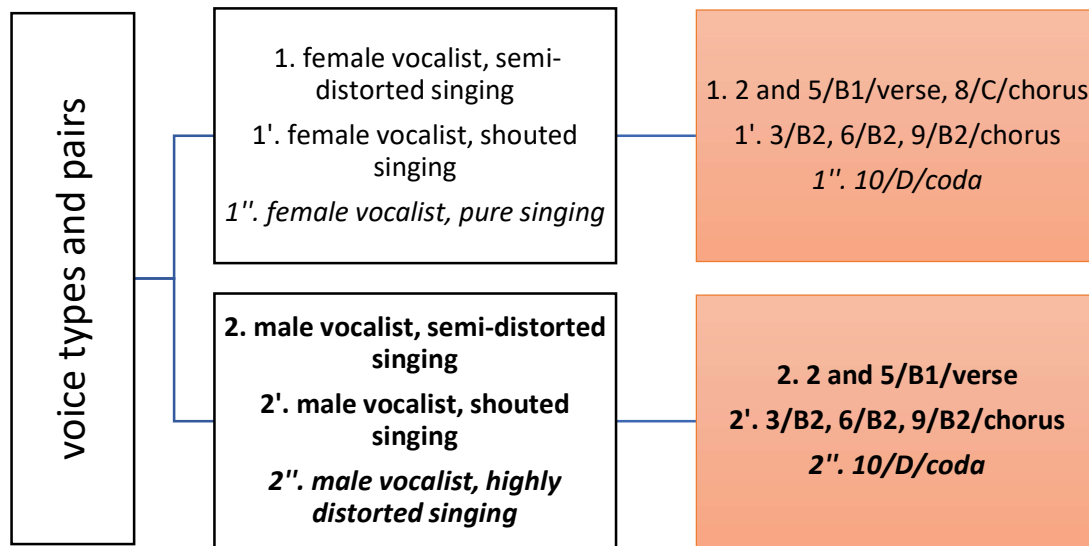
#### **ENJOY THE SILENCE, Part Two: a Musical *Phónè* that Cannot be Silenced**

Lacuna Coil’s metal adaptation can be summarized as a combined musical transposition and a

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<sup>14</sup> *ENJOY THE SILENCE*, by Lacuna Coil. 19 July 2006, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA).

reinterpretation of the theme of violence inherent in *logos*. To consider how Lacuna Coil reorganizes and reinterprets the Depeche Mode version, I start from the most basic level: the layers of *phónè*. In the Depeche Mode version, the phonic complexity is rooted in a tension between the synthesizer and the guitar. In the metal adaption, this is recast in the domain of the human voice, indicated by the vocal lineup of male and female vocalists, and how both make use of three types of singing.



The three vocal pairs and their phonic qualities tap into but emphasize different aspects of the scenic-scholarly discourses about metal identity and empowerment. The combination of loud, shouted singing, common in metal and having positive connotations, appears to imply empowerment. In contrast, the combination of semi-distorted singing, by both the male and the female vocalists, is far less common, and seems to endanger metal's empowerment and implies oppression.

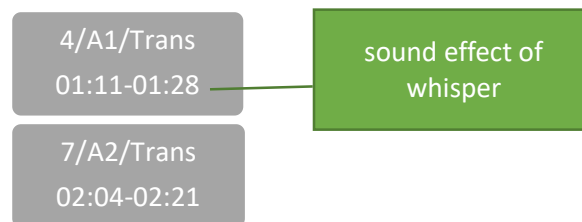
In Lacuna Coil's adaptation, the tension between the voices extends to the song's scenic context, and to scholarly constructed binaries of oppression and empowerment. This interpretative trajectory is supported by the adaptation of the theme of logocentric violence that is applicable to metal *logos*, as well as to its vocal lineup that is reminiscent of the metal god(dess) figure(s). I will argue that the song deals with a form of subjectivity that not only concerns the "humanity" of the voice types, but also the layers of voices and sounds that make up the song. I term the subjectivity at stake as a phonic, "once, no longer" being-in-between, irreducible to binary pairs. To explain the reason why I opt for this reading, I would like to first examine the consecutive sound blocks and map how the song builds on an oppression-empowerment dynamic.

Lacuna Coil's *ENJOY THE SILENCE* opens with two similar musical organizations with distinct *feels* to it, A1 and A2, in block 1.

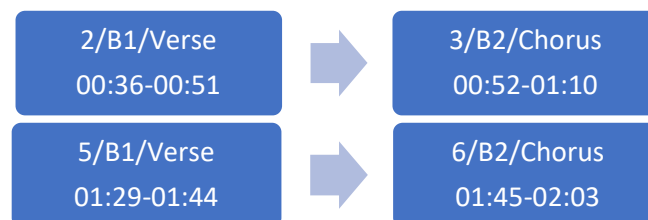
1/A1, A2/Intro  
00:00-17, 00:18-  
00:35

Although both A1 and A2 are most present in their use of vivid, brilliant synthesizer lines, they sound very different. In A1, the synthesizer transposing the guitar line in Depeche Mode's version is accompanied by low guitar notes that connote distortion rather than weightiness. This phonic combination does not balance out the brilliance and weightiness that Walser formulates to be key to metal empowerment. As a consequence, A1, if compared with A2, is unbalanced and can be considered slightly oppressive and menacing. If A2, in contrast, sounds relatively more empowering, this is because A2 is sonically better balanced due to its incorporation of 1) a new and brisker melodic line by the synthesizer, 2) loud and heavy drums, 3) chords instead of single notes on the guitar, and 4) an extremely low, drone-like bass note.

The song, then, introduces a dynamic of oppression and empowerment at the very beginning, and builds on these respective poles. The importance of the dynamic can already be detected in the transitional passages like 4/A1 and 7/A2. In 4/A1, moreover, an effect of a whisper is inserted. Audible but hardly comprehensible, this whisper sounds menacing, and intensifies the oppressive feel of A1.



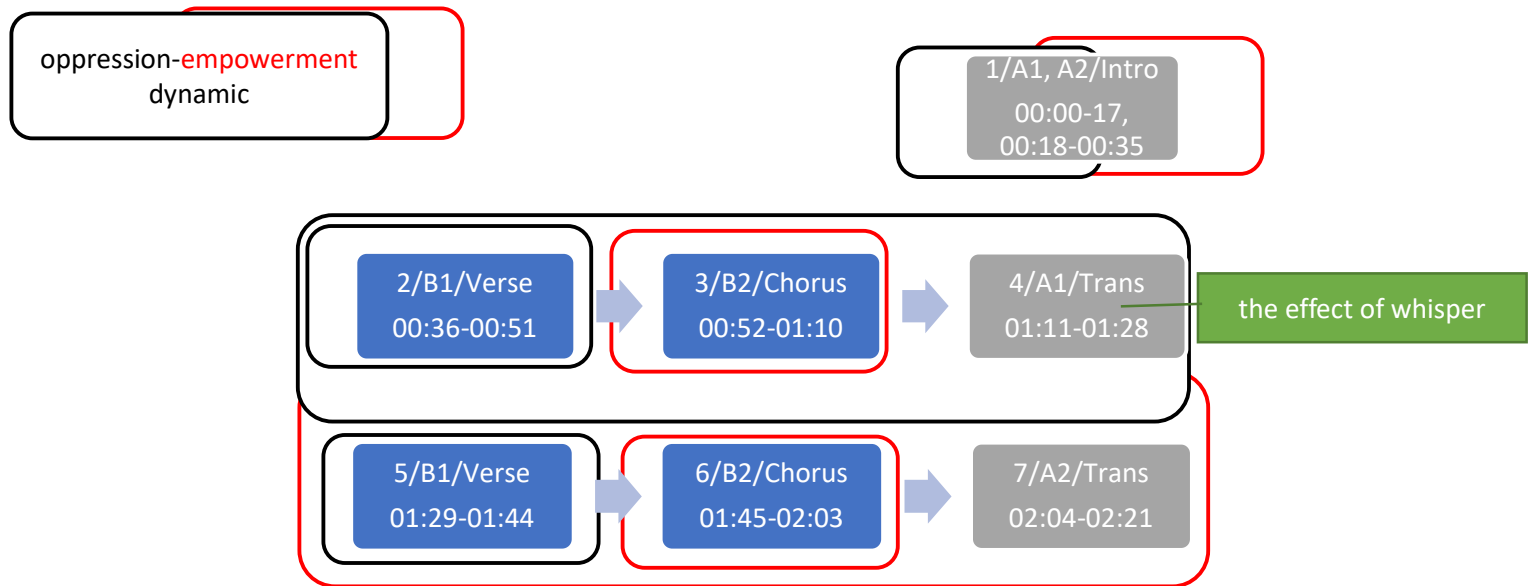
A similar stress on the respective forces takes place in verses/B1 and choruses/B2. The former contain a vocal pair of semi-distorted singing (1 and 2) that implies oppression by *logos*, while the latter contain singing-shouting in unison (1' and 2') which denotes empowerment.



Similar to A1, B1 also emphasizes distortion and refuses to balance out brilliance and weightiness. This can be detected in B1's use of 1) drone-like, but not heavy guitar and bass notes, and 2) cymbals instead of drums. B2, in contrast, sounds heavy and balances between brilliance and weightiness due to the incorporation of 1) the chunky guitar riffs, and 2) the use of both bass drums and cymbals.

Clearly, there is a parallel between the subsets of A and B. Reading this as such, blocks 1 to 7, which span half the length of the song, can be read as a series of enactments of oppression

and empowerment, as is visualized below.



Whereas the first part of the song is simple and repetitive, modifications take place in the second part of the song. Blocks 8 and 9 repeat the chorus twice, followed by the concluding block 10 that is characteristic of phonic complexity.

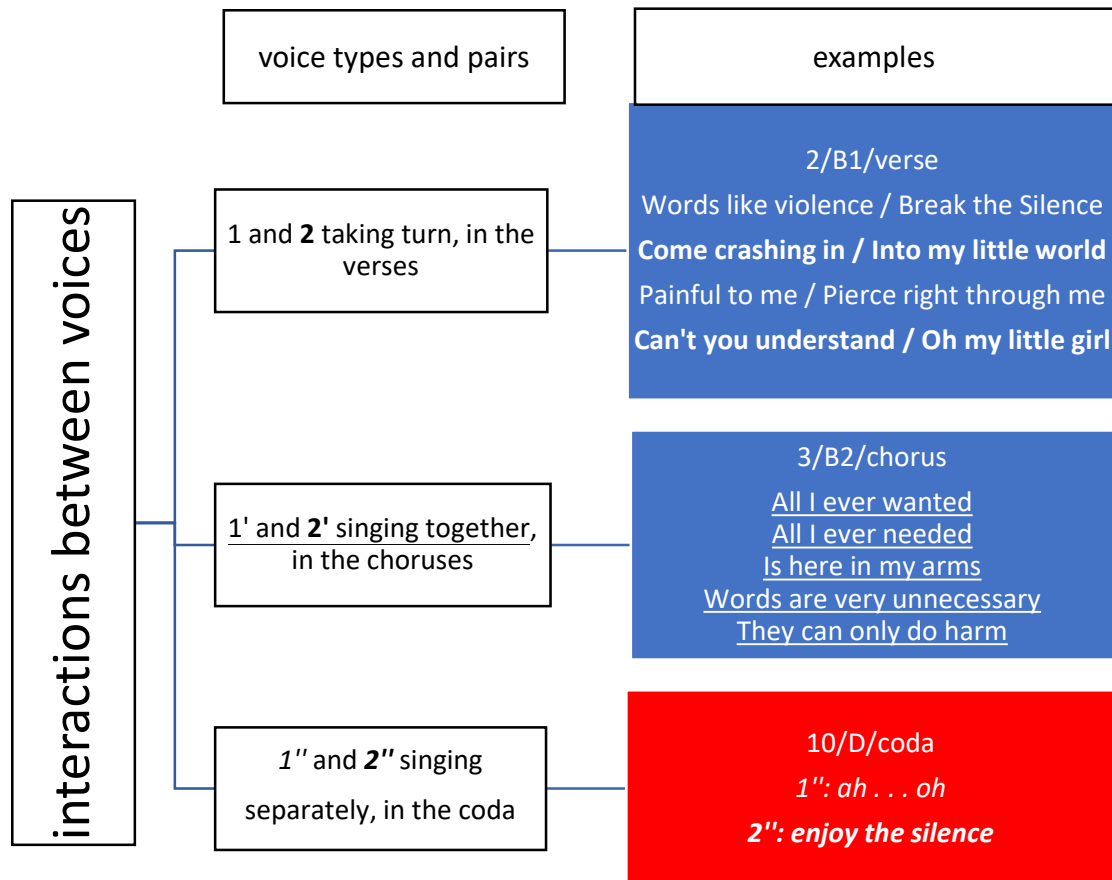


8/C/chorus sounds quite different from 9/B2/chorus, hence my visualization of 8/C in yellow.<sup>15</sup> Most notable, in 8/C, the effect of the whisper is inserted, while bass and drums are suspended. Also, 8/C is the only part of the song that features only one voice type, here the semi-distorted singing by the female vocalist. Finally, prior to 8/C, the vivid synthesizer predominantly emphasizes the melodic dimension of music; during 8/C, however, it shifts to a more rhythmic dimension.

On the one hand, the insertion of the whisper in 8 followed by 9/B2 suggests that the two form an oppression-empowerment pair. On the other hand, components of C indicate that the oppression changes. Taking note of C's partial substitution of its content—the whisper instead of the bass and the drums, one voice type instead of a vocal pair—I read 8/C/chorus and 9/B2/chorus as a blurring between forces of oppression and empowerment. A similar partial substitution happens in the concluding block. 10/D/coda makes use of the musical elements in B2, but brings in a new vocal pair. Different from the other two pairs whose singing styles are

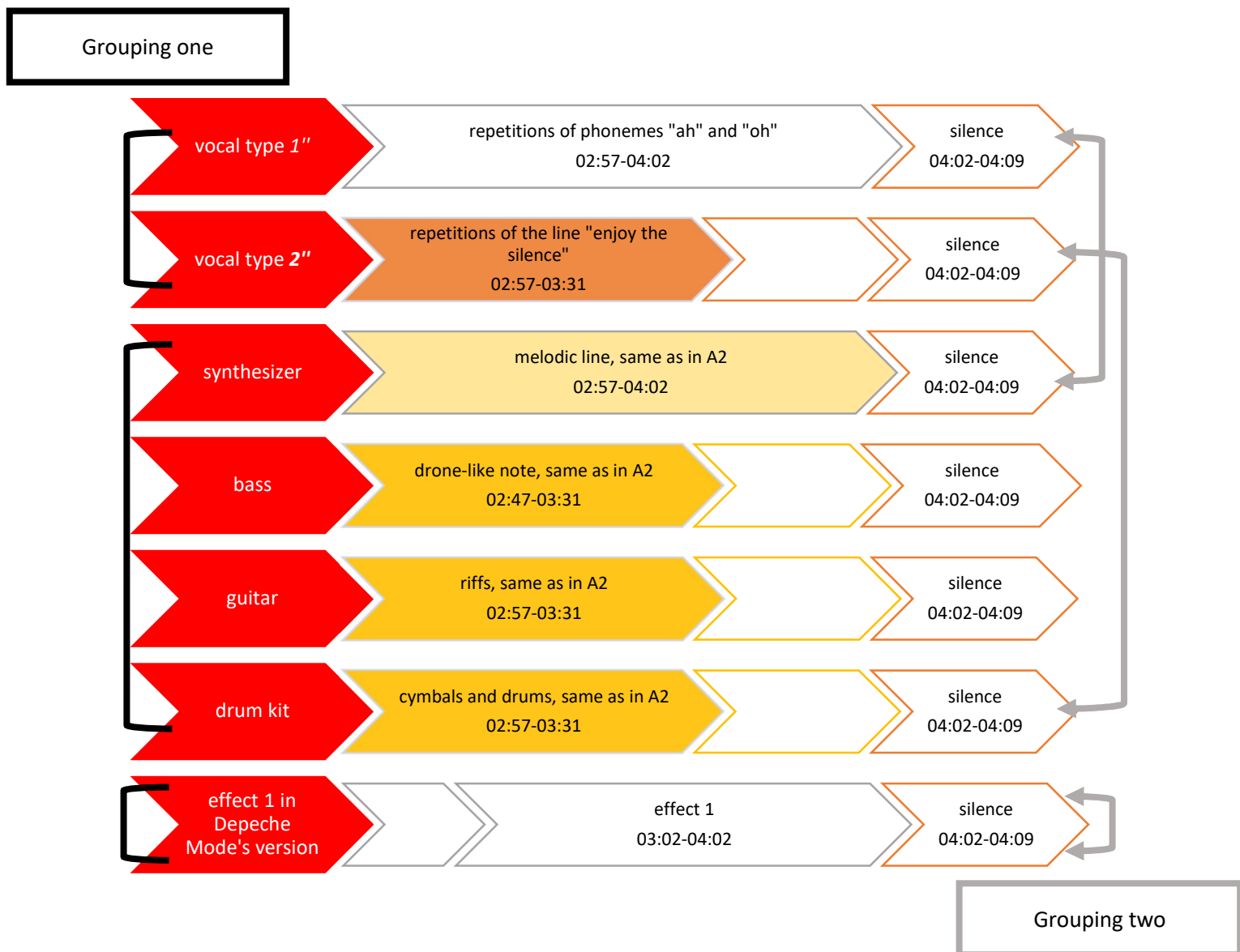
<sup>15</sup> Like the case of A, B, and C in Depeche Mode's version, it should be noted that the yellow exaggerates the differences between sound blocks B and C in the metal adaption: on a harmonic level, they are very similar.

consistent, in 10/D, the female vocalist (1'') adopts a wide range of singing styles to deliver phonemes “ah” and “oh,” whereas the male vocalist (2'') repeats the line “enjoy the silence” in a highly distorted singing style. I read 10/D as yet another element of blurring, enacted by voices and sounds that form several entwining pairs; which I will explain in more detail soon. Below is a summary of the song’s three vocal pairs.



In the verses and choruses, the two voices directly interact; they take turns to elaborate on the theme of the violence or oppression of words as *logos*, and in shouting together they express their desire in an empowering manner. In the concluding Coda, the interaction is much more subtle. Notably, there are two rifts between voices 1'' and 2'', in terms of linguistic articulation and versatility of singing styles. 1'' is inarticulate but less limited in singing styles, while 2'' is articulate but totally repetitive. The two rifts thus indicate two opposite enactments of the oppression-empowerment pair. That is to say, the rifts perform a blurring of the two forces at the level of voice. From 04:02, moreover, there enters a real silence in accordance with the song title and the repetitive line by 2'': “enjoy the silence.”

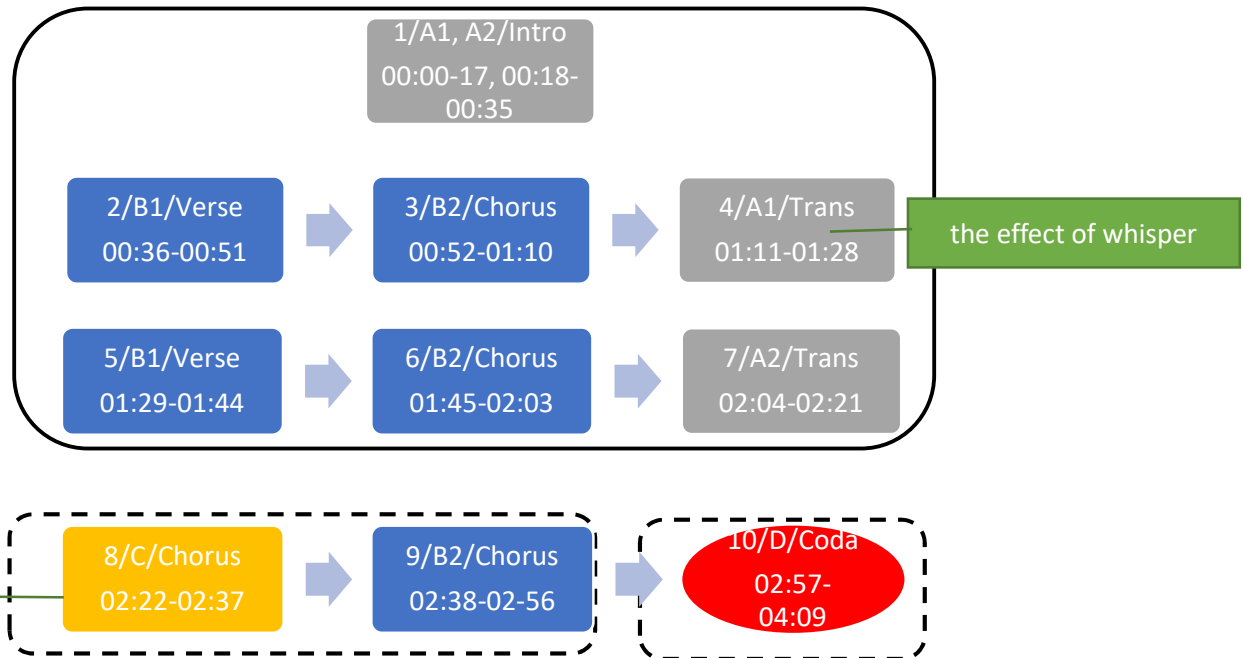
A closer examination of elements in 10/D reveals a similar operation, with voices 1'' and 2'' paralleled by two groupings of sounds. Below I visualize these elements of block 10 in the metal adaptation; I also indicate the two groupings in 10/D in brackets.



On the one hand, we can arrive at an anthropocentric-authentic grouping (on the left, in black) of 1) human voices, 2) musical sounds, and 3) technologically manipulated sounds imitating human voices. Later, I will explain why Lacuna Coil's adaption can be read as a criticism on politics in metal and popular music in general. Before that, I want to draw attention to an alternative grouping (on the right, in grey), of 1) a horizontal articulation of *phónè*, as found in the parallel between voice 1" and the synthesizer, 2) a vertical articulation of *phónè*, as found in voice 2" and the rhythmic elements in A2, 3) a simultaneously horizontal, vertical, and technologically mediated articulation of *phónè*. The resulting, ambiguous, amorphous mode of subjectivity—*a*subject of *amusic* as Wilson would phrase—is what the scenic-scholarly subject would like to guard itself against, or would like to solve through empowerment and transgression. Yet in this adaption no such final solution happens. Tellingly, there is no solo, an arrangement that even in terms of metal adaptations, or tributes as they are scenically called, is unusual. That is to say, this adaption builds on forces of oppression and empowerment in equal terms. Similar to the relationship between voices 1" and 2", which is one of blurring, the two

forms of subjectivity coexist, and neither claim priority.

A recap of the enactments (in a closed circle) and blurring (in dotted circles) of the oppression-empowerment dynamic in Lacuna Coil's *ENJOY THE SILENCE* looks like:



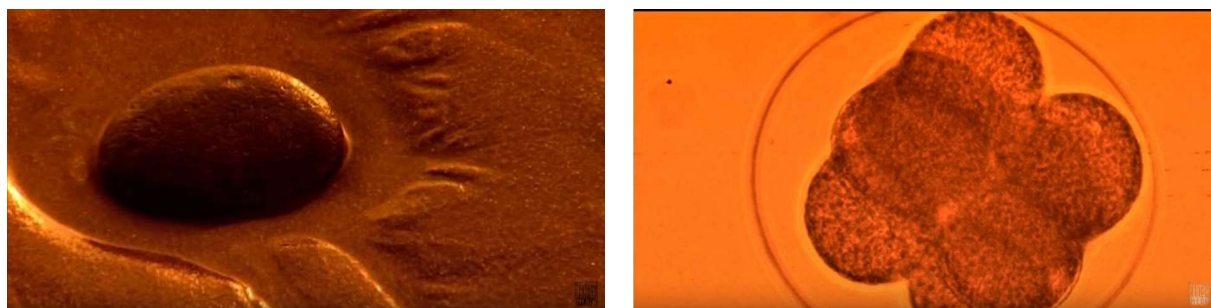
Now, it becomes clear why I suggest that the form of subjectivity at stake in this song is a phonic being-in-between that is irreducible to binary pairs. The song's trajectory is an establishing of two forces, or one two-sided force (subsets of A in block 1), of repetitions of respective poles (subsets of A and B in blocks 2 to 7), and of a modification during which the two start to blur (block 8 makes use of a new sound block, yet block 9 retains B2). This results in an overall blurring, in which no solution to the tension is offered (block 10). Based on the theme, it can be deduced that *logos* is the fundamental, two-sided force. This trajectory is enacted by voices and sounds that come *in pairs*, as in vocal pairs, voice 1 and effect of a whisper in 8/C, and two paralleling groupings in 10/D. I read this as a subject formation in phonic terms. This phonic existence emerges from within, resists, and eludes a binary division by *logos*.

Likewise, the music video represents two visual frames that are first contrasted and then blurred. At 00:00-02:03, the video is in a cool color scheme (frame 1), set in an isolated dark room in the city; at 02:04-02:56, it is in a warm color scheme (frame 2), set in suburban and natural landscape scenes.



Examples of two visual frames in the music video<sup>16</sup>

Starting at 02:57, the camera shifts between the two contrasting frames. At 04:02, when the final, real silence starts, the camera returns to frame 1 where members of Lacuna Coil are shown standing silently in the dark room; at 04:08, the camera further defocuses, and the video fades out to a black screen. At a visual level, the music video reenacts subjectification in pairs. During the 7 seconds of prolonged silence, moreover, two shots of a very similar framing are inserted: an unidentifiable object at 04:03-04:04, and a dividing/merging cell at 04:06-04:07.



Screenshots of the indefinable object and the dividing-merging cell in Lacuna Coil's ENJOY THE SILENCE<sup>17</sup>

Not referred to in the lyrics and appearing in the music video when there is no audible voice or sound in the track, the two shots appears to carry a particular meaning. Although further examination is required to consider what they imply, the band name offers clues for trajectories of investigation. Lacuna Coil suggests a being in the world that “coils,” moving circularly and spirally, a being that can only be perceived as a “linguistic gap” or as “negative music”—a lacuna, within binary pairs. On the one hand, the two shots again stress the indeterminacy of the phonic subject of Lacuna Coil's ENJOY THE SILENCE; on the other, the lack of immediate relation to the lyrics and the fact that the shots appear during moments of silence also indicate that the phonic subject has many coexistent appearances. This is also conveyed in how the song's vocal pairs having at least three kinds of interactions.

Having mapped the manifestations of the subject in the layers of *phónè* and constellations of images in the song, I now move to explicate the forms of *logos* at stake. In this metal adaptation of a popular song, this concerns a politics in metal and in popular music more widely. Central to this politics, as I earlier pointed out, are maneuvers of entities that are supposedly either oppressive or empowering so as to (re)consolidate a human subject. A

<sup>16</sup> 19 July 2006, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

consideration of frames in the music video supports this reading. The set of natural landscape scenes in frame 2 might refer to Depeche Mode's music video with a destitute looking vocalist wandering around in nature; the set of an isolated dark room in frame 1 might refer to the recording studio where musical production and technological mediation/manipulation take place. Common to the two frames is an undermining of the anthropocentric notions of musical authenticity and empowerment— notions shared by metal and popular music studies. Similarly, but addressing metal's scenic-scholar elite-insider identity, Lacuna Coil's adaption refuses to offer a stable site for identification. At the level of *phónè*, we are confronted with a lineup of male and female vocalists delivering several voice types and interacting in several manners, all of them more or less of equal importance; at the level of image, throughout the music video, shots of the two vocalists often blur (an effect created through the use of zooming and jerky cameras). Clearly, the vocalists here are very different from the powerful, almost invincible looking musicians commonly found in metal music videos. Further, among the few shots where the vocalists are not blurred, one of these shots—fleeting at 01:36—comes during the lyrical line "words are trivial." Through this, it is hinted that the female vocalist might be the source of the menacing whisper.



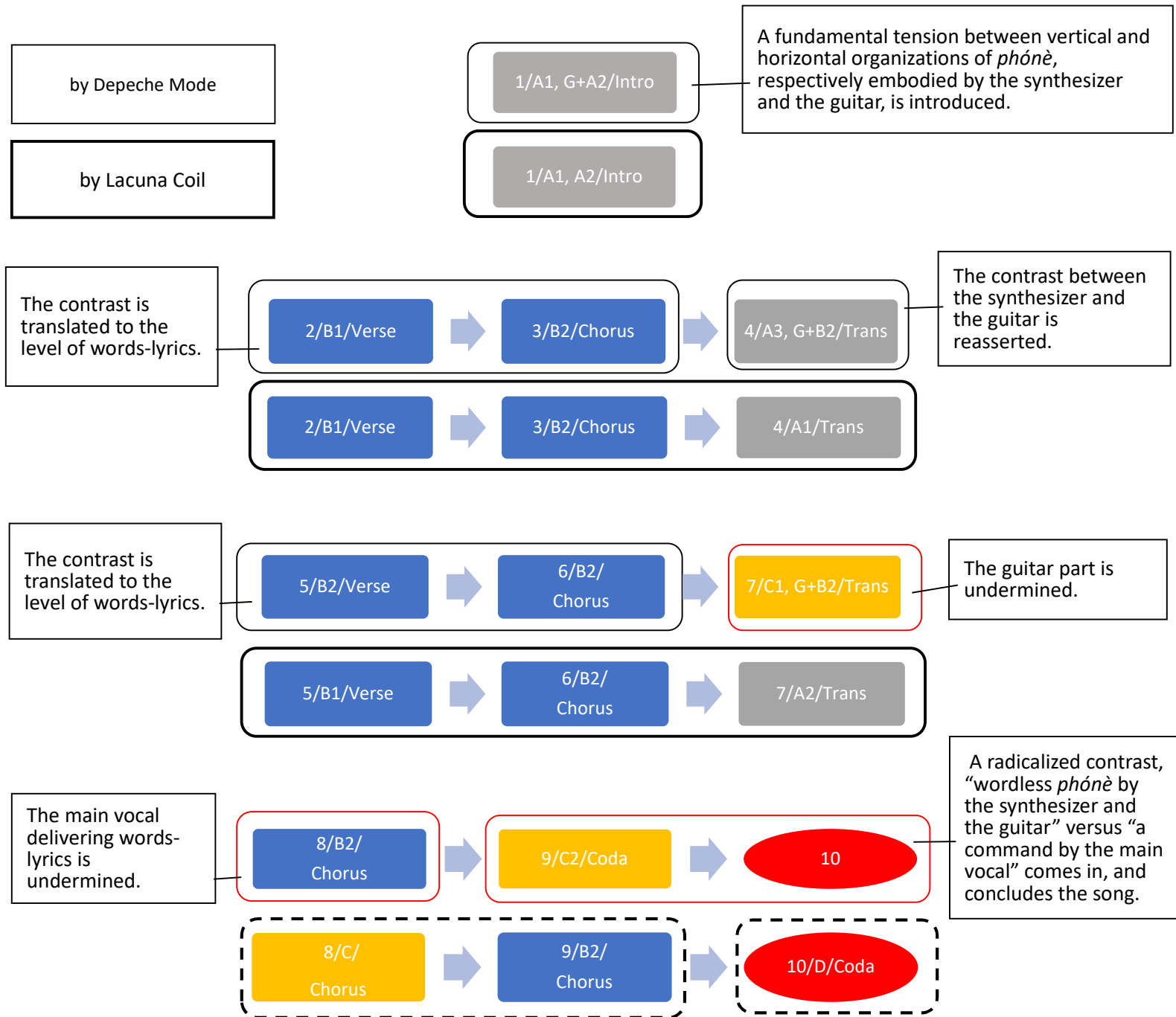
Screenshot where the whisper is seemingly coming from the female vocalist in the music video<sup>18</sup>

The vocalists, I suggest, are best considered as self-undermining metal god(dess) figures, and as yet another manifestation of the ambiguous and amorphous phonic subject that is situated in, but also undermines metal's alternative *logos-polis-bios*.

The phonic undermining of *logos* in Lacuna Coil's adaption of *ENJOY THE SILENCE* is of broader musical, political, and philosophical relevance. To make clear why I propose this reading, I need to briefly bring attention to what differentiates the metal adaption from Depeche Mode's version. Crucial in both versions is how tensions and forces in layers of *phónè* impact the subjectivity of the human subjects who produce, perform, and perceive, or read, the music. Whereas Depeche Mode's version enacts several binary pairs that all concern struggles over uses of *phónè*, Lacuna Coil retains layers of *phónè* that characterize *ENJOY THE SILENCE*, but reorganizes them into phonic pairs that sustain indeterminacy and intrinsic tension. Below is a comparison of the two versions.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



From above, we notice a formal similarity on the one hand, and differences of content on the other hand in the two versions. The metal adaptation's investment in *phónè*, music, and *logos* differs from how Depeche Mode's opposes them in a manner that leads eventually to their collapse. Noting that the voice types all interact in the metal version, I read Lacuna Coil's version as a dialogue, or *dialogos* in Greek. This also implies that the violence inherent in *logos* might be subtly changed due to the modification of the song's most basic component: the layers of *phónè*.

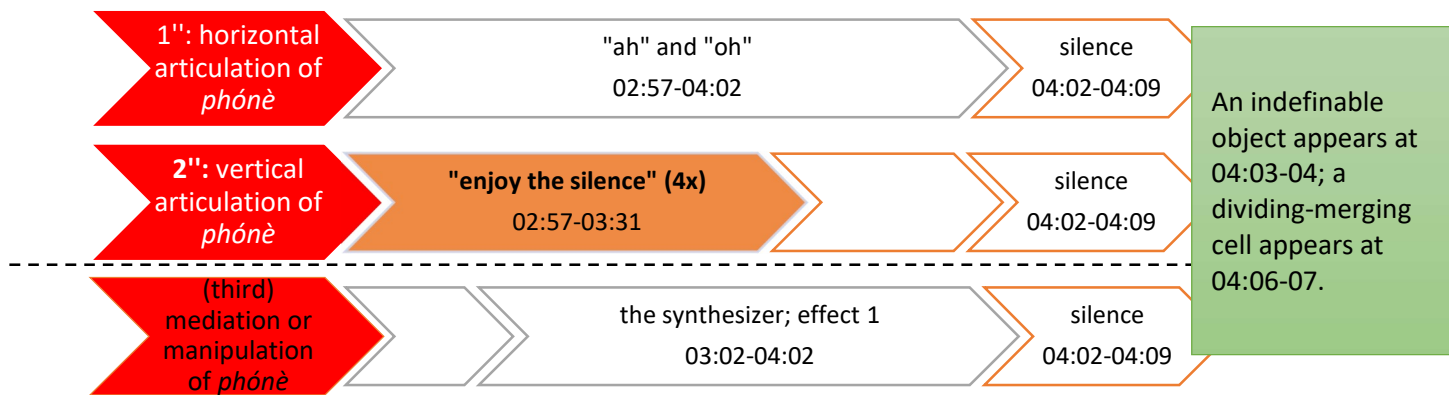
Agamben touches upon such a phonic possibility during his series of formulations of biopolitical profanation. In the next section, I first map Agamben's conceptualizations of profanation. I then attempt to tease out the biopolitical potential of metal music by critically reading Agamben with and through Lacuna Coil's *ENJOY THE SILENCE*.

ii.

The Force of a Phoneme: Against a Dualist Analysis

Common to my readings of both versions of *ENJOY THE SILENCE* is the issue of how people produce, perceive, and derive knowledge from music and *phónè* and how these remain within the politics of *logos*. Whereas I consider Depeche Mode's version an exemplification of how binaries in logocentric inter-articulations contradict and empty one another out, Lacuna Coil's adaption, in my opinion, is a counter example that can be read as a profanation and an auxiliary concept to Agamben's biopolitical critiques.

Let me look in more detail at voices 1'' and 2'' in Lacuna Coil's *ENJOY THE SILENCE*. In this metal version, the theme of which is also about the violence inherent in *logos*, we have a linguistically inarticulate but stylistically versatile singing of the phonemes "ah" and "oh" (1'') and a linguistically articulate but stylistically repetitive singing of "enjoy the silence" (2''). At 02:57-03:31, they parallel and confront each other; at 03:32-04:02, only the singing of the phoneme remains. Below is a modified chart of block 10 that tries to capture this dynamic.



From this chart, it becomes clear that the singing voices in combination with the synthesizer outlast the text of the lyrics. This is made obvious in how the singing of the phoneme lasts 30 seconds longer than the command for silence. Moreover, in the video, during the 7 seconds of silence at the end of the song, a visual *pair* of an indefinable object and a dividing/merging cell which eludes binary knowledge-making appear on screen. How can I make sense of this? I suggest we need to take the phoneme seriously here, in an Agambenian sense.

For Agamben, the dynamic of exclusion-inclusion sustains itself by endlessly distinguishing and articulating what is considered to be proper or not. One possible intervention to this is to make this mechanism inoperative without totally wiping it out. Agamben has theorized on how this kind of intervention might be possible throughout his writings, and eventually named this

action biopolitical profanation. In *Profanations* (2005/2007)<sup>19</sup> Agamben distinguishes between the sacred and the profane. The sacred he defines as things, places, animals, or people removed from common use during the rite, and the profane, as things, places, animals, and people that were *once* sacred, but have been restored to common use (73-74; my emphasis). He then presents religion as analogous to biopolitics, and the sacrificial rite as analogous to the onto-political machine and contends:

[I]n the machine of sacrifice, sacred and profane represent the two poles of a system in which a floating signifier travels from one domain to the other without ceasing to refer to the same object. (78)

Within the rite (the machine of sacrifice), it only takes a single inappropriate use, even a mere touch of the sacred during the rite—which Agamben terms an act of profanation or play—for the sacred to become profane (74-75). As a result, the boundary between the sacred and the profane is never stable. Consequently, according to Agamben, the rite as such harbors a profanatory potential or ability to suspend logocentric violence (76-78).

Considered in light of this sacred/profane fluctuation, Lacuna Coil's adaptation of ENJOY THE SILENCE can be read as a profanatory musical work. Indicative here is that the portrayal of the vocalists, scenically called the metal god and goddess, is atypical for metal music. They elude and unsettle identification, but continue to perform these identities. Yet, the profanatory potential of this metal adaption is even more significant if we consider Agamben's early formulation of profanation in *Infancy and History: the Destruction of Experience* (1978/1993). Here, the pivotal question Agamben raises is whether human experience with language and the world (respectively indicated as "infancy" and "history" in the book title) can be thought of in another way than through devocalization and destruction (8-9). Agamben asks the question in the context of the contemporary form of biopolitics that fixes the human subject into an onto-politically aphonic and threshold position.

Agamben draws on structural linguist Roman Jakobson's observation that the phoneme is a linguistic category that exists solely for its differential value. For Agamben, in *Infancy and History*, the phoneme is exemplary of one's experience with language, and as such puts forward an ontological exposition.

Structured thus on the difference between endosomatic and esosomatic, between nature and culture, language gives resonance to the two systems and enables their communication. It is this position *on the boundary* between two simultaneously continuous and discontinuous dimensions which makes human language able to transcend the purely semiotic sphere and acquire, in Benveniste's words, a "double signification" (58; original emphasis)

Two observations can be drawn from this quote. It demonstrates Agamben's tendency to cluster

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<sup>19</sup> To bring attention to Agamben's conceptual developments in *Infancy and History*, *Language and Death*, and *Profanations*, respectively, I indicate their years of publication in Italian to the left in the parentheses; to the right are the years of publication in English.

scholarly concepts. Here he brings together concepts from Jakobson, structural linguist Émile Benveniste, and structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and reorganizes these into a series of pairs: endosomatic-esosomatic, nature-culture, and semiotic-semantic. He recaps them, then, as dimensions of double signification. Secondly, Agamben posits the phoneme as an *in-between* that *enables* these two-sided significations and articulations. Put alternatively, these two-sided significations and articulations epitomize the fundamental machine of double power. In relation to the machine, the phoneme is structurally ambiguous yet libidinally charged, as the very ambiguity energizes significations and articulations.

Agamben later offers a formulation of profanation through two steps. He elaborates first on material manifestations of an ambiguous but charged existence, and draws an analogy between the phoneme in language acquisition (also indicated by “infancy”) and children playing with toys. He goes on to reinterpret Walter Benjamin’s reflection on the cultural history of toys, in order to define the profane and the sacred. It is stated in *Infancy and History* as follows:

A look at the world of toys shows that children, humanity’s little scrap-dealers, will play with whatever junk comes their way, and that play thereby preserves profane objects and behavior that have ceased to exist. Everything which is old, independent of its sacred origins, is liable to become a toy . . . The toy is what belonged - *once, no longer* - to the realm of the sacred or of the practical-economic. (70-71; original emphasis)

As for profanation, Agamben defines it here in terms of toy and play, object and behavior. The toys children invest in are often random objects with no practical-economic use, or if they have such value, are not played with according to how they would be properly used. The “essence” of the toy is rooted in the play with the toy rather than the toy’s objecthood alone. According to Agamben, this concerns, onto-politically speaking, a *once, no longer* position that he posits to be the profanatory ability.

Indeed, having defined profanation/play in *Infancy and History*, Agamben offers an ontological exposition, the phrasing of which strongly resembles the exposition of *Profanations*:

[W]e can regard ritual and play not as two distinct machines but as a single machine, a single binary system, which is articulated across two categories which cannot be isolated and across whose correlation and difference the very functioning of the system is based. (*Infancy and History*; 74)

The play/profane and ritual/sacred are poles of the fundamental machine, which repetitively articulates and attempts to correct differences emerging from within itself. This implies that, in the domain of language as *logos*, the phoneme—which Agamben presents by quoting Jakobson’s description as “pure and empty, signifying and non-signifying” (qtd. in *Infancy and History* 58)—connotes the profanatory ability. The phoneme undercuts *logos* by creating differences from within inter-articulation(s) and devocalization.

Yet my interest here goes beyond substantiating Agamben’s concept, for I want to read the two versions of ENJOY THE SILENCE against a tendency in Agamben’s dualistic reasoning, a tendency evident in the construction of pairs like exclusion-inclusion, profane-sacred, play-ritual. In the Lacuna Coil version, voices 1” and 2”, it should be remembered, come together *as*

a *vocal pair*, among several other phonic and visual pairs. Emerging through these pairs is a phonic subject that is ambiguous or irreducible to binary division. This subjectivity, which I indicated above as a *third*, is by nature phonic and multivalent. The voice of *archè* (denoting origin and command, see Chapter Two) with its potential of devocalization, and the vocalization captured in the phonemes, so goes my argument and criticism, are two coexistent modalities of a profanatory ability. Agamben remains silent about such modalities; in the following I will step by step unravel why he does so.

iii.

A Demonic *Phónè* Speaking: Loss of Profanatory Potential

Let me return to a quote presented in the previous section. In the following sentence by Agamben, one can detect a dislocation of the profanatory ability:

The toy is what belonged - *once, no longer* - to the realm of the sacred or of the practical-economic. (*Infancy and History* 71; my underlining)

By equating the realm of the sacred with an economy that determines what is proper or not, Agamben also removes the profanatory ability from the “two simultaneously continuous and discontinuous dimensions” or “systems” in which it was earlier posited (58). Moreover, a little later he reinserts it into another pair: playing-Playland. He terms the former pure play, and the latter he describes as rituals that manipulate objects and sacred words, and confine the profanatory ability (70; 86). This distinction is reminiscent of the oppression-empowerment dialectic that connoted falsity (Playland) and authenticity (pure play).<sup>20</sup> Schematically, it comes down to this:

|                           |                             |                                |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| -ability                  | authenticity<br>empowerment | ←————→                         | falsity<br>oppression |
| in language               | Phoneme                     |                                |                       |
| in object and<br>behavior | play                        |                                | ritual                |
| in profanation            | pure playing                | manipulative Play(land)/ritual |                       |

Agamben’s maneuver mirrors metal’s scenic and scholarly discourses about the voice in sound technology and metal music. Both concern themselves with what counts as an authentic human agency in a politics of *logos*; both radicalize a desirable mode of subjectivity by valorizing only one part of *phónè* and devaluing distorted and amplified—mediated or manipulated—voices and sounds (in the case of metal studies). Not unlike metal’s scenic and scholarly politics that

<sup>20</sup> The oppression-empowerment dialectic here is Agamben’s idiosyncratic reinterpretation of Adorno, quite similar to Agamben’s selective reinterpretation of Benjamin. Both conceptual maneuvers are most detectable in the chapter “The Prince and the Frog: the Question of Method in Adorno and Benjamin” in *Infancy and History*.

externalize the phonic subject by marking an outside other, Agamben exiles the dimensions of *phônè* he is anxious of.

Agamben's anxiety about *phônè* can be traced in his criticism on Jacques Derrida. In "The Voice that Keeps Silence," originally a chapter in *Speech and Phenomena* (1967/1973), Derrida conceptualizes the phoneme as an in-between existence in terms of self-presence and self-negation, of sameness and difference (497-500). Yet this in-between (as a third) disappears in *Language and Death: the Place of Negativity* (1982/1991) where Agamben evaluates Derrida by re-reading the latter's idea of *phônè*. Agamben formulates his criticism as follows:<sup>21</sup>

[Derrida] believed he had opened a way to surpassing metaphysics, while in truth he merely brought the fundamental problematic of metaphysics to light. For metaphysics is not simply the primacy of the voice over the gramma. If metaphysics is that reflection that places the voice as origin, it is also true that this voice is, from the beginning, conceived as removed, as Voice. To identify the horizon of metaphysics simply in that supremacy of the *phone* and then to believe in one's power to overcome this horizon through the gramma, is to conceive of metaphysics without its coexistent negativity. Metaphysics is always already grammatology and this is fundamentology in the sense that the gramma (or the Voice) functions as the negative ontological foundation. (39)

As this passage shows, in his critique of Derrida, Agamben falls back on binary hierarchies. This is evidenced in the phrase "the voice as origin . . . is, from the beginning, conceived as removed, as Voice" as well as in Agamben's insistence on locating a "coexistent negativity." Having posited the voice in opposition to the gramma (as Voice), Agamben evaluates Derrida on the basis of an oppression-empowerment model. This is indicated by phrases like "surpass," "supremacy," "power," and "overcome."

In my reading, the above operation in *Language and Death* (1982/1991) parallels the one about profanation/play in *Infancy and History* (1978/1993). Agamben implies that Derridean deconstruction fails to go beyond metaphysics because it is a *false* play or manipulative ritual. Read in the light of Agamben's reference to Socrates' "demonic" voice and his comment on the being or subjectivity of a philosopher in a "demonic scission" (*Language and Death* 91-96), Agamben seems to suggest that Derrida merely mobilizes a demonic voice of destruction. Yet, this criticism translates itself also to Agamben's own investment in *phônè*—in his urge and failure to capture it through gramma (i.e. through articulation).

Here, I trace a resemblance between my reading of Agamben and my reading of Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE. Both hold grudges against *logos*; both reshuffle binary pairs; both end up negating the political-philosophical and musical selves they want to claim. The resemblance, I propose, can be expanded through an attentive examination of the audio-visual arrangement of the ending shot in Depeche Mode's music video (at 04:24-04:28). Earlier, I suggested that the vocalist in the music video is an androgynous musical bare life figure, and that the final line "enjoy the silence" is an acousmatic voice indicative of economies in self-fulfillment and self-

<sup>21</sup> As scholars like Samuel Weber and Virgil Brower have pointed out, a rivalry exists between the two influential and zealous critics of metaphysics (Weber 195-97; Brower 232-34). In my opinion, one provocation for the rivalry is their respective investments in *phônè*.

destruction, in vocalization and devocalization, emptying each other out. In addition to the vocalist and the command, another prominent element is the sun or its light under which the vocalist is seated and upon which (s)he gazes.



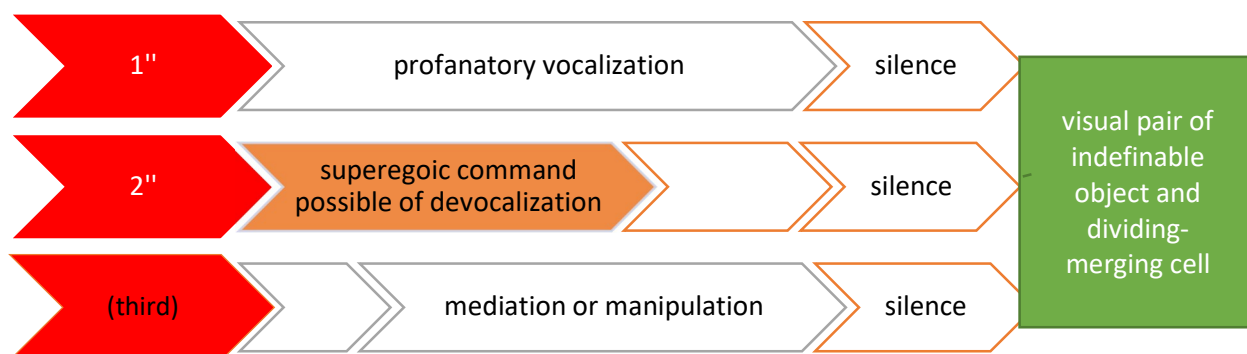
Concluding shot before final blank screen in Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE<sup>22</sup>

After the final line disappears from the track at 04:26 and the music video fades out into black, the most dominant light source comes from the sun. Since, in the dominant parts of Western metaphysics and cultural narratives, the sun is a recurrent trope of *logos*, a radical reading would suggest that the sun exemplifies the ubiquity of logocentric violence. Drawing from Cavarero's observation that *logos*, broadly defined, has at least three coexistent modalities—logocentrism, phonocentrism, and videocentricism (44-46, 222)—I term the sun and associative tropes like light, eyes, and the gaze the videocentric appearance of *logos*.

Taken together, Agamben's thoughts, as expressed and reflected upon above, and my reading of Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE demonstrate how dualistic logocentric inter-articulation(s) permeate aspects of life that can range from subcultural musical practices to knowledge production on an onto-political and epistemological level. In both cases, *phónè* is the site that enables, but remains excessive to, binary divisions. The common problematic in Agamben's thinking and Depeche Mode's song is that they cannot perceive *phónè*'s ambiguity as other than something that must be empowered or oppressed, included or excluded.

In contrast, the potential ambiguity of the phonic ability is brought to attention in the metal adaptation of ENJOY THE SILENCE, where manifestations of previously binary pairs are made multivalent and produce an elusive third that is not limited to audible voices and sounds.

<sup>22</sup> 25 Feb. 2009, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY).



In my analysis, 1'' and 2'' express two conflicting yet entwined investments in and conceptualizations of *phónè*: profanation and making sacred. Between these two the third emerges from the synthesizer. If the two takes toward *phónè* are approached dualistically, the third is either negated as manipulative, or fixed as a form of empowerment. Moreover, as I have mentioned before, the third is not limited to the audible, but also appears in visual forms. The elusive third, in my opinion, is what Agamben persistently elides in his dualistic thinking. This dualism is evident in his often oxymoronic rhetoric, as for example in phrases such as the "unsaid sayability."<sup>23</sup> Yet, the third, whose mediation of perception and thoughts are often believed to be a matter of cheating and manipulation, has always been part of and has even been pivotal to metal. It announces its presence in and through the loud, overdriven/distorted *phónè* that affects by means of attack, overwhelming one's ability to accurately process meanings, and consequently unsettling oppositional distinctions like self and other, subject and object, inside and outside, empowerment and oppression upon which forms of *logos* are grounded. This is why metal provokes strong reactions, and is often received in polarized ways (see Chapter One).

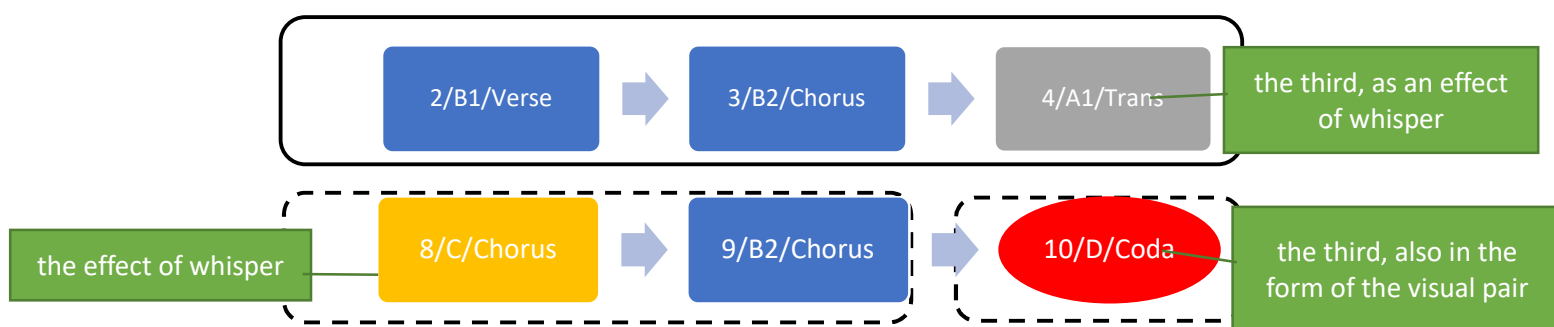
In dealing with the object voice, Lacan also emphasizes this third, though he never fully theorizes this voice in terms of the dynamic of desire-drive. In discussing the Freudian *Fort-Da* game in which his wariness to any dualistic tendency is most pronounced, Lacan's concern with the game is how the subject maintains self-consistency by negotiating desire at an intersubjective level. In this game, the phonemes, the reel, and the string function as object causes that are not exclusive for a singular subject (the child), but also affect others. The negotiation of the object cause is not a subject-to-subject opposition, but rather a triangular relationship in which subject, object cause, and the other all participate/play a role. According to Lacan, the dualistic relationship exhausts desire. This is because both poles of the subject (the child and an other) vacillate between two forms of symbolic death, namely desire's hallucinatory subjectification and drive's de-subjectification. This relationship, for Lacan, is a negative loop that voids itself. In contrast, the triangular formulation energizes desire because it allows desire to take a detour through a relational third (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 239; *Écrits* 76-78). Of importance in Lacan's reading of *fort* and *da* as prototypical object voice, in sum, is that for any machine (in this case: the subjectification of the child) to operate, something not abiding by binary division is needed. For Lacan, desire circulates through random objects, and the object cause exemplifies the third category. To highlight its relational position and function,

<sup>23</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities* 33.

Lacan terms it an *objet petit a*, or, the partial object (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 62-63).<sup>24</sup>

We can tease out three steps if we read Agamben's dualistic way of dealing with profanation/play in the light of Lacan: 1) Agamben divides the partial object cause into two entities: the phoneme and the toy; 2) he retains the concept of economies of desire and drive in the domain of the phoneme, but omits the concept of drive in the domain of toy and play; 3) he reinserts play into an oppression-empowerment model. This is a dualistic approach that persistently brushes away the third that Lacan inserts between desire and drive. Considering Lacan's description of the third as the partial (or Serres' description of it as parasitic, see note 22), a radical critique of Agamben suggests that he duplicates violence in his negation of this third and favors an imagined purity over ambiguity.

After this lengthy theoretical detour, what happens if we take all this back to my reading of Lacuna Coil's version of *ENJOY THE SILENCE*? In addition to my previous discussion of block 10, we can now see that an elusive third modality has one more phonic-visual manifestation in the song—in the form of a whisper:



In the music video the whisper appears by means of a phonic-visual combination, at 01:13-01:27 and 02:22-02:38, in frames 1 and 2. Common in both occurrences is a lack of clarity. Phonically, the whisper is audible but hardly comprehensible; visually, both occurrences are blurred visually and sensorially through the jerky usage of the camera and style of montage. Even if we take the phonic-visual bait at 01:36, which hints that the female vocalist may be the source of the whisper (as I mentioned in my earlier analysis of the music video), and concentrate on her appearances when the whisper can be heard, we are still confronted with images of incomplete entities. In frame 1, in the foreground is a hand holding a microphone, behind which we see a necklace with a lock, and a mouth whose face is not shown; in frame 2, there is a part of a musical instrument behind which is the silhouette of the female vocalist.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Serres, a French philosopher who critiques modes of knowledge production on an ontological level, similarly calls attention to a structurally-ontologically third, which he describes as an indefinable "noise/parasite" (*Parasite* 126-27).



Screenshots at 01:18 (frame 1) and at 02:23 (frame 2) during which the whisper appears in the track<sup>25</sup>

The audio-visual pair of the whisper, in my opinion, could be termed a cluster of partial, and by implication impure, objects, that function similarly to the visual pair of the indefinable object and dividing/merging cell during the 7-second silence. Together, and still in an unclear manner, the two pairs make an amorphous and charged phonic ability visible and audible. In its acousmatic quality, a sense of violence lingers in the whisper. Still, the visual pair that appears during the silence at 04:02-04:09 indicates that the metal version of the song stresses *phônè*'s multivalence rather than a logocentric violence; in this case, *phônè* is what brings together forms of music and *logos*, and their modes of subjectivity.

The metal adaption's investment in *phônè*, music, and *logos* together in the form of dialogue (*dialogos*) is mirrored, or, better, echoed when Serres contends:

[B]y filing down the thorny edges of the sound, we approach each other. Being in tune musically and sonorously, the *accord* is the archaic accord of nuptial agreements [*accordailles*]. Together. A vibration in several voices. Coming together [*jouissance*]. (*Parasite* 134; original emphasis)

To accord is to intersubjectively negotiate audible and multivalent voices and sounds and to engage with others in a sonorous way. Even when only instruments are used, it is an act of "vocalization" through which people recognize each other's existence; it is also a by nature a political act that counters the deadly silence of the politics of *logos*. In its investment in and use of amplified and distorted *phônè*, metal thus carries a profanatory ability that can manifest itself in many ways. The question is: how do we know when metal's manifestations of this ability counter or succumb to biopolitical violence, as in the case of the scenic-scholarly politics I teased out in Chapters One and Two? In the next section, I address this question by examining metal scholarship that draws on Agamben.

#### iv.

#### Repositioning Metal for Political Agency

Lacuna Coil's metal adaptation of ENJOY THE SILENCE demonstrates how the onto-political ambivalence of metal arises from its manipulations of *phônè*. Moreover, by enacting phonic and

<sup>25</sup> 19 July 2006, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA)

visual pairs that are in excess to the double power manifest in metal *logos* and *logos* in the broader, biopolitical sense, the song demonstrates how its very ambivalence is a form of political-philosophical agency.

Scholars who approach metal from philosophical perspectives have observed and attempted to address metal's political-philosophical implications. Philosopher and cultural theorist Niall Scott, for instance, puts forward an Agambenian conceptualization of metal as an ethically and philosophically charged "being in the world." This being, he acknowledges, further structures his moral expectations from metal. In an article entitled "Politics? Nah Fuck Politics Man: What Can We Expect from Metal Gods" he describes it as follows:

Metal in its entirety and in the microcosms of movements within it can be treated as a philosophy in the deeper sense of it being *philosophy*. It presents a way of looking at the world and being in the world; it is a philosophy that is shown, not just argued in language. It generates an expectation of examination, a common factor that has brought us together here. Metal politics, Metal ethics, Metal morality, Metal philosophy, Metal culture - permit the recognition of a way of being- one that is not restricted to the mere verbal expression of an argument. What can we expect from metal? We can begin by exploring the possibility that Metal *is* Argument. (217; original emphasis)

In forever eliding language and knowledge-making, metal carries an argumentative possibility. Implicitly referring to Agamben's notion of the theatrical gesture as a form of ability (in terms of mediality),<sup>26</sup> Scott provocatively describes metal as a collection of "distorted lifestyles, performances gestures, and a diabolic gaze at the world" which, so he argues, judges a "logocentric obsession in philosophy and politics" (214-15, 217). Here I agree with Scott, in considering metal's argumentative possibility as having a profanatory potential. My reading of Scott's reference to Agamben is supported by his philosophical explication of black metal as extending iconoclasm whose sacred place is nowhere; the underlying concept of profanation is difficult to miss ("Black Confessions and Absu-lution" 230).

Yet, as insightful as Scott's concept may be, I also note its problematics. First, there is a rift between his theoretical explication and his textual analysis. Given his advocacy for scholarly engagement with metal as a whole, his brief reference to a lyrical extract with little elaboration is puzzling. In "Politics? Nah Fuck Politics Man," he refers to A LESSON LIVED IS A LESSON LEARNED by Hatebreed<sup>27</sup> but does not close read it (215). In so doing, Scott does not sufficiently engage with the metal work he uses. Commenting on this insufficiency, often found in scholarly works approaching metal philosophically, Kahn-Harris terms the philosophical school toward metal "a rich seam of playful philosophical discourse that is less analytical" (Introduction 2). Second, related to the question of scholarly engagement, there is the disciplinary battlefield between a philosophical school and metal music studies. Scott considers metal music studies to be an accomplice in logocentric obsession, and condemns it for plundering metal with the aim of disciplinary promotion. He briefly refers to Kahn-Harris, and criticizes the concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity for how it leaves no room for reflexive scholarly intervention ("Politics? Nah Fuck

<sup>26</sup> Agamben, *Means without End* 8-19.

<sup>27</sup> From the album *The Rise of Brutality*, 2003.

Politics Man” 213-15). Yet, as valid as Scott’s overall criticism of scenic-scholarly politics may be, his criticism of Kahn-Harris is questionable, for he ignores the fact that Kahn-Harris is no less critical of practices of reflexive anti-reflexivity.

In fact, a closer examination of Scott suggests that he too takes part in metal’s scenic-scholarly politics. In terms of rhetoric, Scott valorizes metal by making metal tropes analogous to metaphysical tropes, particularly those of a videocentric modality. This is evident when he talks about “distorted lifestyles, performances gestures, and a diabolic gaze at the world” (214). In terms of conceptual operations, Scott’s approach is symptomatic of selective reflexivity. Overall, he evades the scenic-scholarly politics he considers oppressive and incompatible with his ethical and philosophical engagement with metal. When he does address such politics, however, he appears to resort to radical empowerment, and replicates oppression at a philosophical level, as the following example shows: as a gesture of scholarly reflexivity, he replaces the term transgression with “aggression”. For him, this term denotes self-implosion in the extremity, yet he insists that metal’s “excess and extreme in emotion and extreme reason” rises above criticism (216). Here, despite the change of term, his reasoning is not different from the scenic-scholarly politics that are oriented toward or fetishize metal’s transgression.

The resemblance between Scott and Agamben is striking. Both surreptitiously replicate the violence they criticize. The externalization of the otherness-in-self I critiqued in Agamben’s treatment of Derrida, is also an issue in Scott’s positioning. He holds a grudge against metal music studies, which he considers as a form of logocentric violence and oppression, yet still replicates this violence. This demonstrates how metal’s amplified and distorted *phónè* gives rise to polarizing, or binary, responses, and how the discourse around metal is a site of power struggles. Or, better, it is a (bio)political battlefield that forms of scholarly knowledge production cannot stand apart from. Working in philosophy as well as popular music studies, Scott Wilson observes, in “BASileus philosoPHO METaloricum,” the wider (bio)political-epistemological stakes of metal scholarship. He delineates these by appropriating languages of black metal theory:

Black metal and academic discourse are no doubt heterogeneous and cannot be conjoined, but in bringing one into proximity with the other it is essential that this clash should result less in the academic illumination of black metal than in the blackening of discourse itself wherein the forces of black metal restore some of the powers and dangers of discourse which the procedures of academic institutions seek to ward off and master by controlling and delimiting them. (35)

Wilson restages the tension between metal music and scholarly discourses by analogizing the former with the generic marker “black,” and the latter with the videocentric modality of *logos*. The marker “black” can be substituted by other markers like darkness, nihilism, and nothingness. It is thus negative in terms of content, which metal scholars aim to “illuminate.” However, such academic illumination and empowerment also impose control and delimit discourses about metal. For Wilson, metal is most forceful when it “blackens,” when it undermines scholarly discourses and exposes the power/danger in these scholarly empowerments and controls, thus restoring the “powers and dangers of discourse.”

I read Wilson’s idea of metal’s blackening as profanation. Due to the proximity and fluidity between the binary poles of the profane and the sacred, metal scholarship is caught between

amplified powers and dangers. This is why, for Wilson, metal scholarship embodies the *a*subject of *a*music in double negation, and constantly endangers its own self-identity and subjectivity.

Yet here as well, as insightful as Wilson's attention to power dynamics involved in metal and its scholarship may be, I also note his heavy reliance on "obvious and playful" (34n1) substitutions of tropes in metal and metaphysics in "BASileus philosoPHO METaloricum." One way or another, this play with words ends in conceptual impasses and rhetorical hyperboles, as a kind of discursive void (34, 42) or "NOTHING" (39). Consider, for example, his statement:

Hideous gnosis, the in-competence of an *a*musical death drive, which loses itself, dissipates itself at the site of nonknowledge marked by the name of death in the crucible of metalorical transformations" (44).

This statement can be interpreted indefinitely due to multiple negations—one bigger negation, hideous gnosis, which in this context is non-knowledge, is elaborated through two clusters of further negation, 1) death drive as in-power and *a*music, 2) nonknowledge (without a hyphen) as symbolic death and as word-play (with "metalorical" referring to metallurgy and metaphor). As a consequence, Wilson leaves little room for the "dialogue" he calls for or starts from (34). So, Scott and Wilson's rhetorical and conceptual maneuvers, considered as a kind of play with verbal distortion and amplification, lead to a dilemma: whether they enact metal's profanatory ability or again succumb to scenic-scholarly politics and violence that, excessive and extreme as it may be, is not significantly different from the fixation on an ideal self that they seek to critique. It is worth recalling that the practice of discursive transgression is a metal tradition that Phillipov and Kahn-Harris both criticize as a performance of radical individualism (see Chapter One).

The problematics in metal scholarship as such give rise to the question: what do we do with the political-philosophical ability in metal music, in relation to its scenic-scholarly politics? I suggest listening to Lacuna Coil's ENJOY THE SILENCE once more. Essential to this song's resistance to binary divisions is not so much negation *per se*, but an indefinable and temporary positivity rising from two *situating, partial* negations. These are consistently deployed throughout the song, as briefly recapped below:

- the phonic subject acts between the oppression-empowerment dualism or the two-sided power struggle/tension;
- the singing of the phonemes "ah" and "oh" acts as a kind of partial vocalization that is between potential empowerment (in its being volatile in styles of singing) and potential oppression (in its being repetitive and, linguistically speaking, not really meaningful);
- the appearance of the visual pair of an indefinable object and a dividing-merging cell goes beyond frames 1 and 2;
- the whisper is staged as two clusters of partial objects, an arrangement that also taps into the figure of the metal god(dess);

- the song as a metal adaptation partially negates Depeche Mode's self-violence as well as a guitarocentric identification, but does not fully negate and thus abolish them.

Without these surroundings and contexts, without this *situatedness*, the ability I am dealing with here would not have offered any transformative agency. It would more likely be perceived in a "larval" or "spectral form" as Agamben describes the deadlock of contemporary biopolitics (*What Is an Apparatus?* 20-21). In my reading, such spectrality eventually consumes Depeche Mode's version. In contrast, forms of ability that have no definite position in *logos-polis-bios* come together in phonic enjoyments in the metal adaptation.

Scott and Wilson later modify their theoretical conceptualizations by addressing the embeddedness of metal's ability and deploy this ability for concrete political reflections and interventions. More along the trajectory of critical reflection, Wilson criticizes the selective ignorance of the scenic-scholarly realm, which only ends up supporting or perpetuating wider political problematics. He makes this clear by bringing attention to forms of "nationalist fetishism" that construct identity through metal ("From Forest Unknown" 150-52). More along the trajectory of political intervention and counteraction, Scott makes a plea for metal's "embedded" and resistant stances against "that which is," whether this concerns the status quo in politics, popular culture, or metal itself, and particularly emphasizes its potential stance against scenic racism and sexism ("Metal as Resistance" 19-22, 27-29). One challenge for metal and its scholarship, Scott acknowledges, is to resist what was once subversive and transgressive, and is now standardized and normative in a different context (20, 33). Similar to Kahn-Harris, who calls for scholars working in metal music studies to move beyond metal itself (see Chapter Two), Scott and Wilson also gradually move beyond metal to embark on (bio)political tasks. Bearing in mind how metal scholars once lost but have now re-grasped metal's possibility to bring about real, societal change, the answer to the question "what do we do with metal's ability," in my opinion, is that we "do not give in to silence." I propose to use metal to gather forces and powers of resistance, to confront dangers, and to ready ourselves to engage in dialogues and arguments, and even enter into battlefields, against oppression.

### Conclusion

Central to this chapter have been three closely related arguments. First, *phónè* is a particularly affective component that is common to forms of identity and subjectivity. Second, *phónè* is grasped through but irreducible to binary divisions. This means that the profanatory phonic ability is always already in existence, and can be grasped and toyed with. Three, metal that manipulates amplified and distorted *phónè* is by nature profanatory, yet metal is also prone to making things sacred, and consequently losing its profanatory ability in so doing. This means that it is necessary to move beyond metal's ideal selves to realize its political potential. Constant self-reflection, self-repositioning, and a certain passion, are required for engagements with metal.

Alternatively, this chapter could also be read as my profanatory attempt to loosen up binary divisions in knowledge making, without negating knowledge production altogether. By

doing so, I would like to open up “common and free” deployments of metal that can be used in political activism and the fight for the freedom of common people. Here my personal political passion comes into play, and specifically my passion to seek a voice for the Taiwanese people of past, present, and future. Such a passion, in fact, already found its place in this chapter, for example in my use of the term spectral. Spectrality is of relevance in the context of Taiwan’s internationally precarious situation, a topic I will discuss in the next, final chapter.

I have gathered the forces of power and danger in metal’s passionate use of *phónè*. Now, I move on to Taiwan, my home where histories, memories, and the Taiwanese people of past, present, and future all whisper to me, and all call for me, in the form of metal.

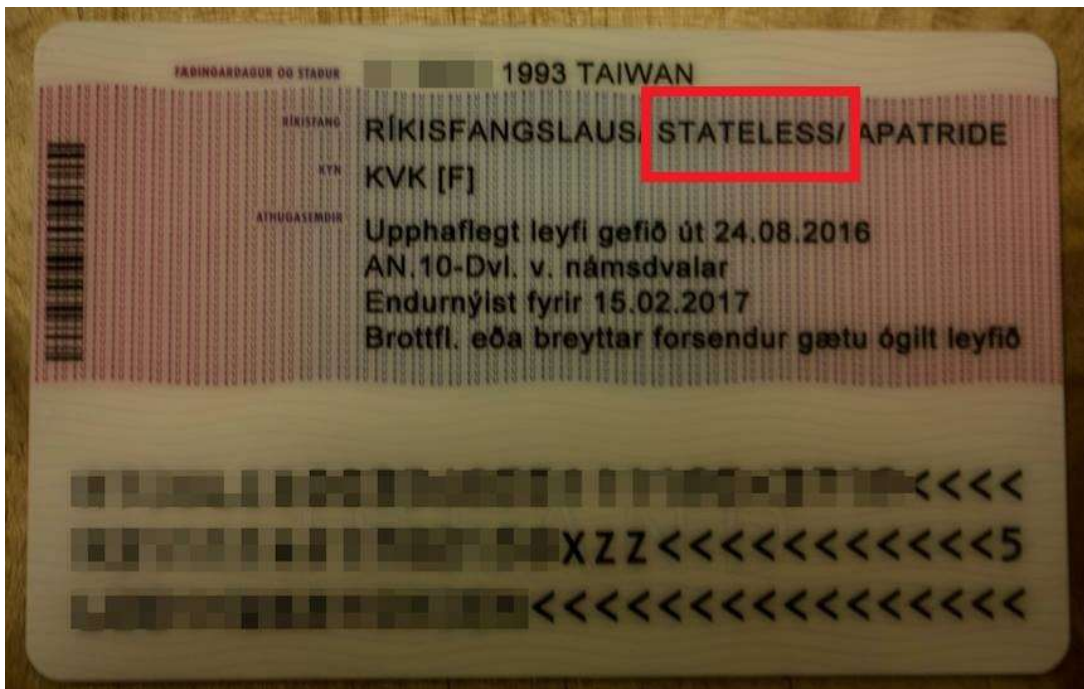
## Chapter Four

### Ghost Island: The Desire for Identity in Taiwanese Metal

In the previous chapters, by engaging with metal music and focusing on *phónè* in metal, I contested metal's scenic-scholarly politics and repositioned metal in relation to wider politics and philosophical critiques of (bio)politics. I further proposed to read metal as a political-philosophical ability and as a form of criticism of philosophical maneuvers that use *phónè* for political purposes. Central to these chapters was how a distorted and amplified *phónè* in metal brings attention to different dimensions of (bio)politics. The previous chapters can thus be considered in terms of my own scholarly political interventions, first on metal's scenic-scholarly level, second on a philosophical and epistemological level, and third, on the implications of these two on a socio-political level.

So far, I have limited my analyses to metal music from the West. In this chapter, I would like to extend my discussion to metal music in Taiwan. The choice of Taiwanese metal, as I explained in my introduction, is based on two considerations. First, I want to address a problematic that arises from *phónè* in metal. Second and more importantly, I want to shed light on the tradition of political activism in Taiwanese metal in the context of the extremity of Taiwan's political situation.

One aspect of this extremity can be traced in what is internationally regarded as Taiwan's precarious situation. See, for instance, the resident permit of a friend of mine who studied in Iceland.



Resident permit of a Taiwanese listed as stateless, authorized use by Wen-Chien Lee (李宛蒨)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For details, see "Student Rails Against 'Stateless' ID." *Taipei Times*, 20 Nov. 2016,

A Taiwanese citizen is here listed as “stateless”. One may conclude that, despite being an independent political body, Taiwan is not recognized as an official state. Consequently, Taiwan dwells in the international world of states as a destitute being, constantly being rejected, isolated, and devocalized by an international community. On a state level, but also on an individual and a collective level, Taiwan is living a kind of bare life, as Agamben would put it.<sup>2</sup> The voiceless status of Taiwan in the international realm, moreover, cannot be dissociated from the country’s many contested histories and memories.<sup>3</sup> Even internally, the “voice of Taiwan” has been passionately disputed and contested by Taiwanese actors themselves, all searching for their voices and striving to be heard. Such an internationally voiceless and internally noisy situation is aptly captured by Taiwan’s nickname, the “ghost island (鬼島).” Not surprisingly, spectrality is a recurrent theme in Taiwanese metal.

This chapter centers around the question of *phónè*, understood as the indistinguishable pair of voice/sound, in relation to Taiwan, by analyzing seven Taiwanese songs. From the position of a cultural “insider,” the cultural capital and privileges of which I am not always comfortable with, I start by explaining some roles played by voices/sounds in subject formations of Taiwanese identities by considering its soundscapes. I then pay attention to how certain voices, sounds, and images in Taiwanese metal function to construct a collective identity of the people of Taiwan (who will later also be termed “folk”). Finally, I reflect on, and reassess Taiwanese metal by considering its political activism and political problematics in unison.

Alternatively put, this chapter is my own homecoming journey and political act of voicing (a part of) Taiwan, as a Taiwanese. By writing about Taiwanese metal, I also write about the memories and histories of Taiwan, and bring my scholarly expertise together with a partially autobiographical one.

## 1. Soundscapes

*It is necessary to listen to and confront the place where we live.  
It is necessary to sort out the voice of our everyday environment.*

. . .

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www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2016/11/20/2003659621. and “Taiwanese Woman Settles for being Classified as ‘Stateless’ over ‘Chinese’ on Iceland Residence Permit.” *shanghaiist*, 22 Nov. 2016, shanghaiist.com/2016/11/22/taiwanese\_stateless\_iceland.php.

<sup>2</sup> The official name of Taiwan is “Republic of China,” shortened as ROC, easily confused with the official name of China, “People’s Republic of China,” shorted as PRC. The ROC was officially acknowledged as the one and only Republic of China from 1912 to 1949, but became a separate entity after its government had fled to Taiwan. Since its joining the UN in 1971 (and Taiwan’s drop out from the UN), China has repressed uses of the name Taiwan, one example being that Taiwan can only attend international gatherings as “Chinese Taipei.”

<sup>3</sup> The major powers ruling Taiwan since the 17<sup>th</sup> century are: the Dutch colony of southern Taiwan (1624-1662) and the Spanish occupation of the northern part (1626-1642), the Kingdom of Tungning (1662-1683), the Qing dynasty (1683-1895), the Japanese rule (1895-1945), and the ROC since 1945.

*Sound all have a hidden latent strength of the flow, it activates space and events, and forms an essential part of a personal inner life of emotions, and the world of thinking and consciousness of the basic components.*

*Resistance forgotten—through listening, evoking memories of the debris and restructuring it again.*

*Profound mediocrity—Listen to the place where the life of ordinary life soundscape, layering another future archeology.*

(Wu)<sup>4</sup>

Moving back and forth between Taiwan and the Netherlands, every time I return to one of them I am always brought into a state of shock, whether by the noisy and lively soundscapes of Taiwan or the peaceful and murmuring soundscapes of the Netherlands. But I always get used to the profound mundanity of each place by closing my ears to undesirable forms of *phónè* – until the next state of shock attacks me. Quite often, just to keep my ears attuned to the vibrancy/density of noise the Netherlands lacks, I randomly click through the online *Taiwan Sound Map Project*. In cities and major towns, there are typical urban noises such as the horns of cars, scooters, and buses, as well as temple gatherings, shouts in traditional markets, and kids playing in school. I move the mouse to the central and mountainous areas and hear natural sounds such as insects and birds singing, the rustling of the trees, the murmurs of the streams and mountain springs, and the wind, interspersed, now and then, with cars passing by. I move again to the coastal areas and hear sounds of the sea, sometimes tranquil sometimes turbulent, at times disrupted by boat horns. I click on the islands and hear slight differences in people's accents.

In these soundscapes, I hear different kinds of music and people, laughing, talking, and chatting in different dialects and languages that are often mixed up. Or, in my room at my home in Taichung, the main city in central Taiwan, I hear most of the above voices and sounds together. At night, I hear the humming pumps, the choirs of washing machines, the chanting of mantras, neighbors washing dishes and playing mahjong (麻將); in the early morning, I hear roosters crowing, birds chirping, cars and scooters passing, neighbors cooking, talking, and chatting. These voices and sounds, mundane and noisy as they sometimes are, assure me that *I am home*, surrounded by everyday activities of people and things.

According to Amanda Weidman, the metaphysical and linguistic traditions in the West have bequeathed an imagination of voice as standing for individuality, agency, authority, power, presence, and truth (232-33). In Taiwan, the imagination of voice/sound 聲音 (pronounced *siann-im* in Taiwanese, *sheng-yin* in Mandarin), or more commonly as 聲 (*siann*) in Taiwanese, is more complex.<sup>5</sup> Voice is not the privileged possession of human beings. The environment that contains all beings also speaks through soundscapes. People's voices, consequently, are *modulated* by and *interact* with soundscapes. This modulation can be rephrased by way of a few

<sup>4</sup> Wu Tsan-Cheng. About. *Taiwan Sound Map Project*, n.d., [www.soundandtaiwan.com/soundmap/about.html](http://www.soundandtaiwan.com/soundmap/about.html).

<sup>5</sup> The spelling systems used in this chapter are simplified (without indications of tones) Tongyong Pinyin and Taiwanese Romanization System. Tongyong Pinyin is based on Taiwanized Mandarin. I use this system to indicate how phrases are pronounced in Mandarin used in Taiwan. This is not to be confused with Taiwanese, which is a sinophonic dialectic, spelled according to the Taiwanese Romanization System. When I transcribe spellings, I also specify which language is spelled: for example, 閃靈 *siam-ling* in Taiwanese, *shan-ling* in Mandarin.

Taiwanese phrases. People and the environment make voice and sound, 出聲 (*tshut-siann*), making their presence and concurrence known, 聲援 (*siann-uan*), in many manners. It can be a simple response made as an echo 應聲 (*in-siann*), in a coarse manner 梢聲 (*sau-siann*), or in a sharp way 含瘁聲 (*ham-he-siann*). Together, voices, sounds, and soundscapes form a kind of sonorous cosmos where beings of past, present, and future coexist as one whole sound block. This co-presence in a sonorous term is aptly captured by the musically-inflected phrase 尾聲 (*bue-siann*) which, on the one hand, designates the endings of activity and conversation, and on the other, what these endings mean and imply but do not make explicit.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, when I refer to voice and sound as *siann*, I use the shorthand term “voice.” Voice in the Taiwanese context should be understood as collective and reciprocal. The holistic understanding of voice in the Taiwanese context is brought to attention in a quote by Wu Tsan-Cheng (吳燦政), the sound artist and coordinator of the 台灣聲音地圖 or the *Taiwan Sound Map Project*. Wu describes environmental sound as a kind of voice, and reflects on the perceptual and emotional implications of this. Voices, sounds, and soundscapes contribute to the subject formation of the Taiwanese people; taken together, they form a dynamic field that, according to Wu, shapes people’s ways of acting and thinking in a powerful, but not immediately obvious manner.

Sound [sic] all have a hidden latent strength. . . . it activates space and events, and forms an essential part of a personal inner life of emotions, and the world of thinking and consciousness. . . .<sup>7</sup>

This sonorous but not always perceptible subject formation, Wu points out, is often in tension. This tension is between forgetting and remembering, which, he implies, are two basic components of consciousness. Listening to soundscapes is an act of resistance, an excavation of memories and a refusal to forget them. Yet, Wu adds, this act does not totally exclude forgetting, since excavation is also a filtering and selection of certain voices and sounds, a dynamic he describes as *mediocre*. By this he means that the moderate quality of “mediocrity” results from acts of balancing to achieve a middle course. Both mediocrity and balancing are indicated by the following characters: 中庸 (*jhong-yuan* in Mandarin). These characters convey a negotiation between two forces, in Wu’s reflection, between remembering and forgetting, between foregrounded memories, and histories and background undertones. When I listen to soundscapes, I pick up some voices and sounds I once ignored, and recollect and restructure them as part of my memory and consciousness. Yet, at the same time, I also neglect other voices and sounds that nevertheless modulate me. Not yet restructured, sometimes not fully comprehensible, but nevertheless experienced, these voices and sounds dwell in and around me, as a kind of unconsciousness.

To expand my above reflection about soundscapes and the tension between forgetting and remembering, I will read two songs with religious themes in this section: THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN or 眾神護臺灣 from the album with the same title: 眾神護臺灣 or *The Gods Bless Taiwan* (2010) by the Taiwanese rock band Chairman (董事長樂團); and a song called FUNERAL 上山

<sup>6</sup> 尾聲 in *Dictionary of Common Taiwanese Phrases*, Ministry of Education, Taiwan, twblg.dict.edu.tw.

<sup>7</sup> Wu Tsan-Cheng. About. *Taiwan Sound Map Project*, n.d., [www.soundandtaiwan.com/soundmap/about.html](http://www.soundandtaiwan.com/soundmap/about.html).

(*GIGO*, 2014) by the Taiwanese metalcore band Flesh Juicer (血肉果汁機). As this section will gradually reveal, my choice of these two songs is intended to highlight how soundscapes can contribute to shape Taiwanese identities and subjectivities. I furthermore pay special attention to a certain sound shared by the two songs, and consider their phonic unconsciousness.

i.

THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN and the Representational Soundscape of Taiwan

THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN is a song celebrating Taiwanese traditional activities, especially those of religions.<sup>8</sup> What is of interest about the song is how the band Chairman samples and organizes music in events like temple gatherings (廟會), marches to celebrate gods (出巡), and Taiwanese folk opera performances (歌仔戲). The sampling is done in such a way that this song itself can also be considered a gathering.<sup>9</sup> Opening with music of a temple gathering and concluding with music of god marches, THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN suggests a journey that, however precarious, is blessed by the gods and will eventually end well.

Below I visualize the sound blocks in which this song can be divided. Here, a clarification is needed. Despite of slight variations in the percussion, the transitions are very similar, and can all be put in grey. I nevertheless opt to highlight block 7 in red, as two elements indicate that this part bears a particular meaning. First, at 02:33-02:46, there appears a musical and narrative shift; it suggests that the song moves from a temple gathering to a gods march. Second, at 03:02-03:16, a certain phonic quality undermines THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN.

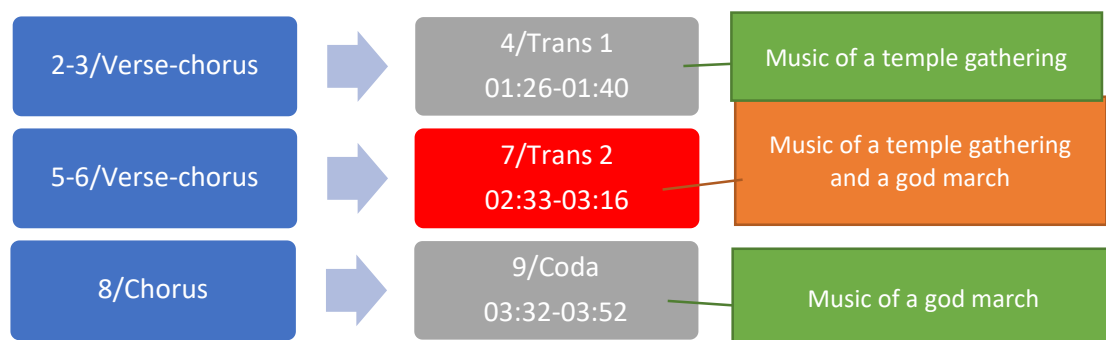


<sup>8</sup> THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN. 27 Apr. 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJvOmRcw79o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJvOmRcw79o). A clarification in case of confusion: the official English title uses “Gods” in line with the polytheist religious tradition in Taiwan; some unofficial *YouTube* videos use the term “God,” possibly resulting from the polytheist traditions in which all gods share the same divinity, or due to an unfamiliarity with the connotation of God in the West.

For a scholarly overview of religious culture and practices in Taiwan, see *Religion and the Formation of Taiwanese Identities* (2003) edited by Paul Katz and Harvey Rubenstein, and *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (2009) by Cheng-Tian Kuo. For an example of the sonorous cosmology of all beings, see Mei-lin Lee and Te-hsiung Sun, “The Family and Demography in Contemporary Taiwan” (1995); for a case study of temple gatherings, see Vicky Wen-qi Yao (姚文琦), “台灣廟會活動的閒暇向度及其宗教意涵 The Leisure Dimension of Temple Festival Activities in Taiwan and Its Religious Meaning” (2010); see also Chia-lin Chang (張家麟), “台灣民間信仰的宗教靈療方法及其信仰基礎 Religious Therapy and Its Faith Base of Taiwan’s Folk Belief” (2009). It must be noted that these scholarly works only cover some branches of folk religions in Taiwan. Readers interested in Taiwanese folk religions in general can refer to [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_Taiwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Taiwan).

The English lyrics in this chapter are my translations. The original Taiwanese lyrics and official English lyrics, if provided by the bands, can be found in the Appendix. It should also be noted that the Taiwanese lyrics in the Appendix are transcribed in traditional Chinese characters due to the lack of a standard Taiwanese writing system.

<sup>9</sup> Song graphics in this chapter are modified to highlight my respective focuses. Temple gatherings designate various ceremonies, usually related to birthdays of the gods, taking place in temples, while god marches designate processions that can be months long, during which the believers carry the gods in sedan chairs and travel between towns and cities. Taiwanese folk opera designates several styles of folk performances. During the temple gatherings, folk operas are performed outside the temples for people’s entertainment.



The song is also famous for its visual remediation. The music video abounds with images and footages of religious activities revering/celebrating several gods, modern urban scenes, and scenes of nature. It taps into the sonorous cosmology that is central to the religious diversity and tolerance in Taiwanese society, and advocates traditional values to enable the Taiwanese to find a middle course, and to find a balance between the traditional and the modern, the natural and the cultural.

In their album concept that can be found on *YouTube*, Chairman makes their appreciation of traditional Taiwanese activities clear, and further elaborates on how these are brought together by religions:

In Taiwan, a temple is the center of people's belief as compared to the church in western world. . . . Chairman thinks these traditional activities are valuable to Taiwan people so it samples in its album a few of Taiwanese local opera music, which can best represent Taiwanese traditional culture.<sup>10</sup>

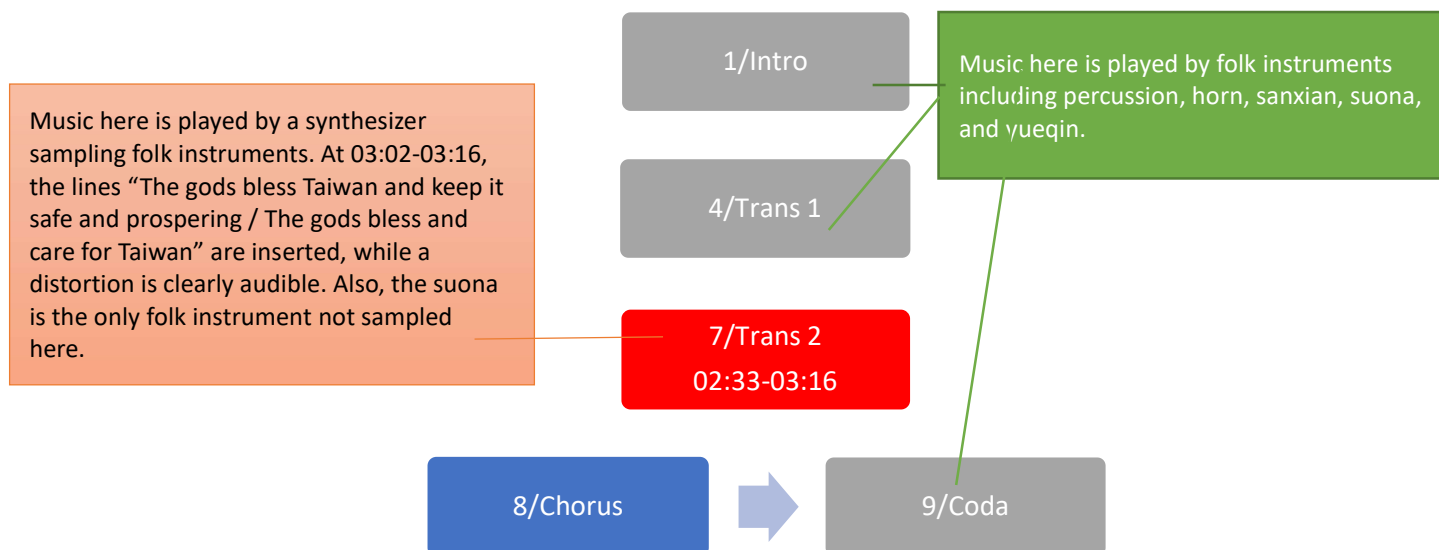
At least two dissonances emerge from this statement. First, the analogy between the temple and the Western church simplifies the internal complexities of both. Second, the band's claim to represent a singular Taiwanese traditional culture is problematic. Although *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* is generally well received and triumphed at the Golden Melody Awards (金曲獎) in 2011, critics did not fail to note the troublesome musical, cultural, ethnic, and political associations. Lin Shan-wei (林勝韋), a music critic and journalist, for example, suggests that Chairman's self-proclamation as indie rock music which represents Taiwan "tries too hard to represent" and the song at best represents what is politically correct, or at worst is a total misrepresentation of Taiwanese traditions.<sup>11</sup> Given the complex and painful histories and memories of Taiwan, the musical, cultural, ethnic, and political associations of the song are indeed inadequate in terms of representation. For instance, Taiwanese who do not identify with the blend of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism do not necessarily feel blessed by the benevolent gods. The cultural hegemony at stake, here, can be traced in the song itself. Therefore, I would like to draw attention to what I consider to be a self-undermining phonic moment.

The audible distortion effect at 03:02-03:16, when a journey for the Taiwanese people has

<sup>10</sup> "Album Concept." 27 Apr. 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJvOmRcw79o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJvOmRcw79o).

<sup>11</sup> "What the Fuck is about Indie Music?: Observing Localizations in Jeannie Hsieh and Chairman." 29 Aug. 2014, [www.thinkingtaiwan.com/content/3044](http://www.thinkingtaiwan.com/content/3044).

begun, is such a precarious moment. In the Taiwanese context, this kind of distortion may remind listeners of the once pervasive wiretapping during the dictatorship.



Since the whole song is composed of a verse-chorus-transition pattern, structurally speaking block 7 can likewise be played the same as block 4/transition 1. The replacement of folk instruments through sampling and the line insertion in block 7/transition 2 function to catch the listener’s ears and to bring attention to the last block 8/chorus in which the lyrics are: “We stand here in our name / The gods bless and care for Taiwan. Ha!” The chorus thus asserts the name of Taiwan and a collective identity.

Narratively speaking, celebratory as block 7/transition 2 is, a distortion resulting from remixing sampled folk sounds also exposes the problem that arises from Chairman’s zeal to represent Taiwan. Through its techniques of “selective using” and “re-using” of certain sounds, sampling connotes a precarious representation that requires linguistic and discursive justification, as was indicated in the album concept. This representation works under the precondition that the sampled sounds are framed as authentic. In the song, this presupposition is undermined by 7/transition 2, which, as just stated, connotes political manipulation. These sounds are then re-framed in 8/chorus as authentic again.

Yet even though THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN reasserts itself in this re-framing, phonic residues remain that Taiwanese familiar with religious activities cannot miss: a particular type of music that, strictly speaking, is hybrid in nature. It is characterized by religious chants intermingled with electronic pop music, played on folk instruments, through poor quality loudspeakers, performed in religious rituals, danced along to by pole-dancers, and sung along with people using karaoke devices. Such practices of electronic religious music were once denigrated, in textbooks written under the supervision of Taiwan’s former ruling party KMT, as vulgar violations that would enrage the gods.<sup>12</sup> The association between the vulgar electronic religious

<sup>12</sup> The full name of the KMT party is Kuomintang of China, also known as the Nationalist Party of China. After fleeing to Taiwan in 1945, this right-wing party ruled Taiwan for decades until it lost the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2016.

music and the distortion effect by the sampler in this song is hard to escape. Indeed, Lin draws an analogy, here, between Chairman and Jeannie Hsieh (謝金燕), the icon of unashamedly vulgar Taiwanese electronic music. This is why, to Lin, Chairman misrepresents Taiwan.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand reaffirming Taiwanese identity through language, while on the other distorting it through sound, *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* works as a form of self-undermining.

There is also a sinister undertone, however, lurking in the religious soundscape itself. This is aptly captured by and played with in the next song I will read: *FUNERAL*. In this context, I will pay special attention to the sound of the suona (嗩吶),<sup>14</sup> a high pitched wind instrument, used in both *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *FUNERAL*.



Image of a suona<sup>15</sup>

ii.

*FUNERAL* – Perverting the Religious Soundscape

Compared with the simplicity of *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*, *FUNERAL*<sup>16</sup> is one phonic, musical, linguistic, thematic, and visual complex that proposes great difficulties for a clear-cut phonic analysis. The song title tells enough: *FUNERAL* is a funeral ceremony to be listened to and obeyed by the ones participating in it, including the listener. To unpack this song, I modified my analytical method. First, I consider how voice types contribute to the song's perversion (to which I will come back below). Second, I examine sound blocks. To better explain the functions of voice types as well as to highlight the song's ritualistic dimension, I add qualifiers to these blocks, such as "ceremonial procedures/sub-ceremonies." Finally, I explicate my analysis by considering the music video, especially the parts with explicit religious and socio-political references.

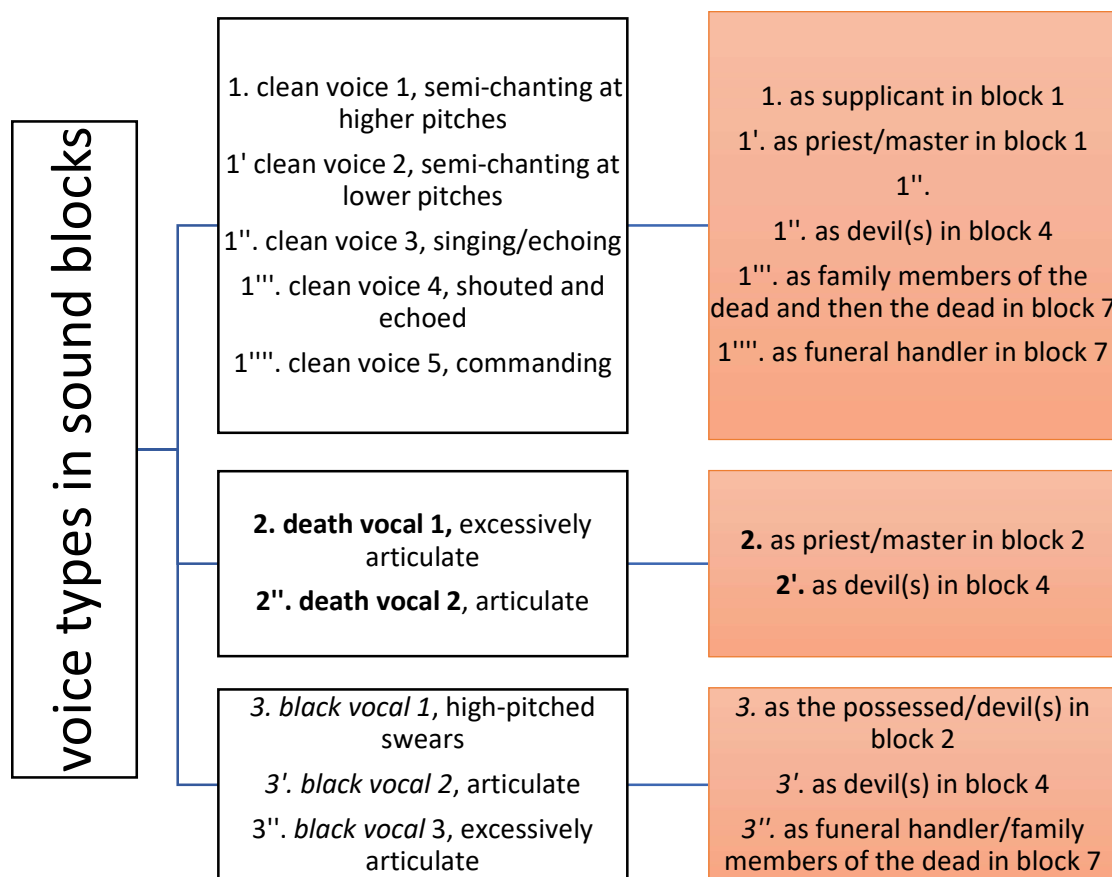
<sup>13</sup> For the vulgarization of religious music, see Jeannie Hsieh's "adaption" of 大悲咒 *Nīlakaṇṭha Dhāraṇī* or *GREAT COMPASSION MANTRA*, 24 June 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWmhN6A5M64](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWmhN6A5M64). *Electric-Techno Neon Gods* (電音三太子) is an example of radicalization of the vulgar dimension of religions in Taiwan. Chairman's live performance in the closing ceremony of the 29<sup>th</sup> Summer Universiade 2017 in Taipei, indeed, resembles *Electric-Techno Neon Gods*. For a performance of *Electric-Techno Neon Gods*, see 8 Mar. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qanZ\\_rfz4bM..](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qanZ_rfz4bM..) For Chairman's performance, see 30 Aug. 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEjRIM5-77M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEjRIM5-77M).

<sup>14</sup> 台灣音樂百科辭書 *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music* (2008), 嗩吶 "Suona," 407.

<sup>15</sup> *Rodo*, 14 Sept. 2006, [reader.rodo.com/pk4993/archives/2145986.html](http://reader.rodo.com/pk4993/archives/2145986.html).

<sup>16</sup> *FUNERAL*. 8 June 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN7yhDI1cuk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN7yhDI1cuk). I try to preserve the vulgar and often cursing and swearing Taiwanese in my translation. I also preserve the English words in the lyrics.

The gist of FUNERAL lies in its use of a dazzling amount of voice types that all speak and participate in the FUNERAL ceremony. Below I first list the voice types and their beginning personas.

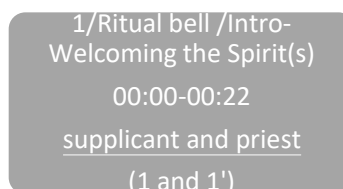


Before I move on to the sound blocks and explain the above "voice/persona map," two general tips for the analyst/listener:

- During the song, these voices and personas form several pairs that interact and substitute each other.
- The extremity and perversion of FUNERAL lies not so much in its heavy and intense singing, but rather in how the thematic connotations of a funeral, parallels vocal interactions and substitutions.

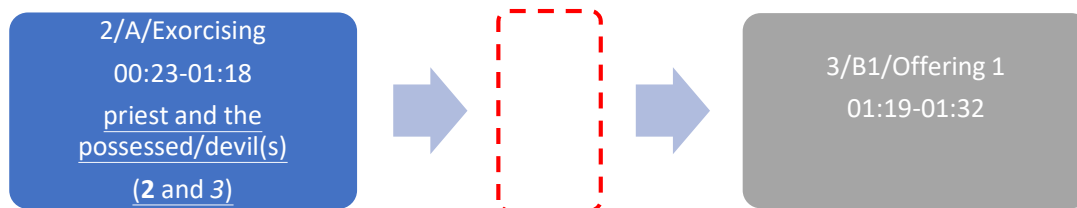
In the following discussion, I notate these pairs and explain their interactions block by block. Opened by drumbeats sounding like a march, block 1 introduces a sense of urgency. As indicated by a single sound of the traditional religious bell this musical introduction also functions to open a religious ceremony, commonly known as welcoming the spirit(s) (恭迎) in

Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> The reason why a ceremony is urgently needed is explained by the conversation between a suppliant and a priest. In scheme:



The semi-chanting at higher pitches (1) sounds a bit hysterical. This chants states that a friend has lost his or her mind, and asks the “Master” for help. In contrast, the Master, semi-chanting in lower pitches (1’), sounds calm. Resolutely, the Master proclaims and launches an exorcising ritual (作法).<sup>18</sup>

2/A, as the priest proclaims, contains the exorcising act (作法). The priest, now using an emphatic death vocal (2) orders the devil(s) to leave in excessively articulate but filthy language. In return, the devil(s) echo the priest, and defiantly swear “shit” in a high-pitched black vocal (3). Notably, in 2/A, all the priest does is curse in the name of the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝), and as such he is not much different from the swearing devil(s). Unsurprisingly, then, starting at 01:05, something goes awry. The death vocal (2) declares itself to be a “demonic alien monster,” with the “super power” of both mind-reading and soul-grabbing.<sup>19</sup> Here the devil(s) have taken over this voice. This suggests that they have possessed the priest. Schematically it looks like this (and note that there is a red rectangular to which I will return):



For those familiar with the rituals, block 3/B1 must connote the offerings (獻禮), and in conformity with this, the sounds are more balanced, similar to the musical arrangement previously associated with the priest/Master. Yet if B1 sounds less heavy, after an intensive but topsy turvy exorcising ritual, this may also suggest that 3/B1 functions as the first ceremonial

<sup>17</sup> For terms, backgrounds, and explanations of religious ceremonies in Taiwan, readers are highly recommended to consult “Taiwanese Culture (1/03)” on 西方與東方的巧遇 *Taiwan Style*, 25 Feb. 2017, acidophilus.blogspot.com/2017/02/taiwanese-culture-1-of.html. Even when the funeral is not listed here, its generally practiced procedures (sub-ceremonies) can be found in descriptions of these ceremonies, especially the one about Ghost Festival 中元節. It should be noted that this festival is often untranslatable, as Times Three (the blogger) explains in footnotes 9 and 10: “This section is even worse than that bit about the ‘Lords of the Three Realms.’ Rather than drowning in a sea of Taoist terminology, I’ve left some of this vague” and “There is really no good way to translate this term [搶孤] in English.”

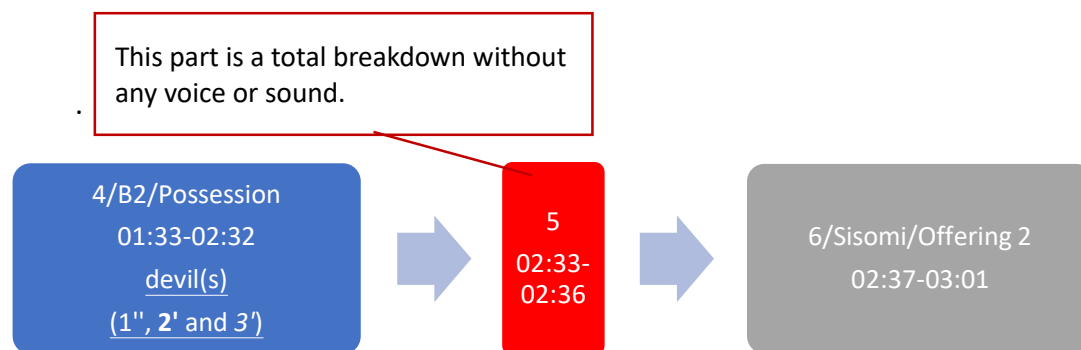
<sup>18</sup> This proclamation is: “你朋友中邪 現在來還不遲 先來 佈陣 準備 做法 Your friend is possessed. Not too late. Come, lineup, prepare, and exorcize!”

<sup>19</sup> The lines are: “外星魔仔 妖力超強 還有絕招 super power / 一下要讀你的心 一下控制你的魂 I’m the demonic alien monster with super power / I read your mind and take your soul.”

offering and a repose for devil(s).

Continuing the prolonged, distorted guitar note at the end of 3/B1 (01:32-01:34), when the devil(s) has taken over the death vocal, 4/B2 can be considered a possession. This reading is supported by an examination of the death and black vocals, now both articulate and of equal importance. At 01:33-01:47, one devil, in the death vocal (2'), declares that it intends to take revenge, and emphasizes that there is no escaping from its vengeance. Chiming in, another devil screams "no escaping" in black vocal (3'). At 01:48-02:32, this devil (3') screams the Taoist invocation "hail heaven and hell" (天靈靈地靈靈), audibly paralleled or also chimed by the guitar. What follows this invocation, however, is pretty sinister. This devil offers a discount on funerals, an offer that is described as "perfect," by the singing clean voice 3 (1').

Then there is a total musical breakdown at 02:33-02:36, a complete silence. This was, in hindsight, already preempted in the transition from 01:18-01:19. Yet here it is radical. I read this in the following way: from rituals or sub-ceremonies of exorcizing and possession, the song has become a funeral *itself*. This is confirmed when the peaceful "sisomi," commonly heard funeral music in Taiwan, starts at 02:37-03:01.<sup>20</sup> In scheme:



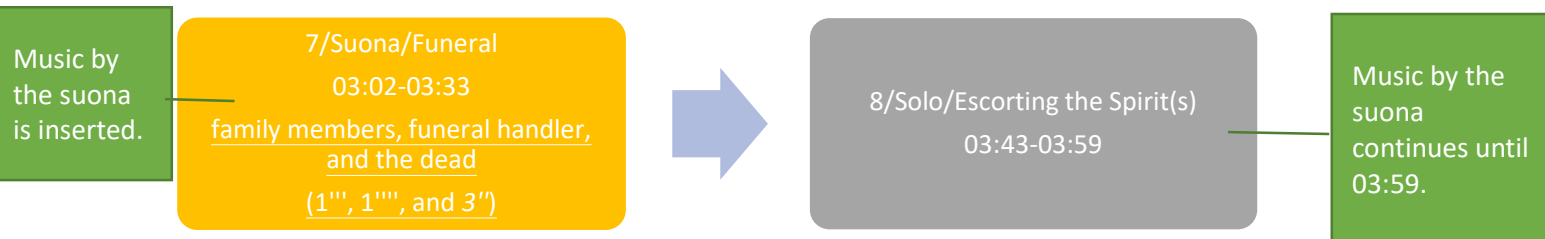
With the high-pitched suona at 03:03, also a familiar funeral dirge in Taiwan, block 7 starts the climax of the song and funeral *per se*. In line with its ceremonial significance, block 7 is the most intense, and vocally the most complex. In an excessively articulate ritualistic language, a funeral handler screams (3') and commands the family members of the dead to "cry out." This command is immediately obeyed, collectively "cried out" at 03:16. Although after the collective cry, the main voice type is still the black vocal in the line "remember to call from hell," the speakers now appear to be family members.<sup>21</sup> The vocal substitution, from the handler to family members, is followed by more substitutions that can only be termed a collective possession, with many voices speaking indistinctly in shouting and echoing clean voices 4 (1'). Take, for example, the line "dress warm." In everyday conversation, this phrase expresses affection and care; in the context of a funeral, however, it makes little sense, and is instead deeply unsettling. Following this phrase, there is another everyday reminder: "Let me know whatever you want," only that in a funeral this is addressed to the dead to ask if the offering is satisfactory. Perhaps,

<sup>20</sup> Sisomi means the combinations of notes of C, G, E. It is a Taiwanese pidgin referring to westernized music, often negatively connotated.

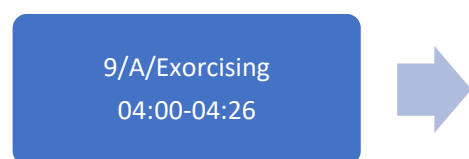
<sup>21</sup> "獻花 獻果 / 請家屬來三磕首 哭 / 一人一束花 每朵帶思念 / 回去要記得打電話 Serve the flowers and fruits! / Family members come to knock your heads and cry out! / A funeral wreath memorizing the dead / Remember to call from hell."

the resulting collective perversion is why the funeral handler commands “sisomi, play the music” (1'''), to escort the spirit(s) of the dead (恭送).<sup>22</sup>

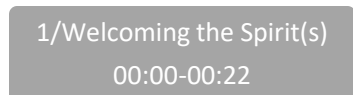
In block 8 during which the suona continues the funeral music, the guitar solo begins. This association between metal “empowerment” and funeral music is in fact already implied in 7; starting at 03:18, shortly after the collective cry out, there is a clear phonic resemblance between the distorted guitar and the high-pitched suona. The guitar solo, then, becomes yet another form of funeral music for the dead. By now, it is very clear that FUNERAL is about playing with and acting out how funeral ceremonies can be practiced in malicious manners.<sup>23</sup> In scheme:



With the suona fading out at 03:59, the funeral *per se* (blocks 7 and 8) has ended. Still, this FUNERAL, this series of exorcising-possession-funeral, is far from ending. My reading is supported here by two considerations. First, at the level of the sound blocks as sub-ceremonies, block 9 returns to A, which was used in 2/exorcising, and especially the music from 04:00-04:26, which is the same as in 00:23-00:36, but double in length. Second, FUNERAL starts with a marching rhythm and 1/Taoist bell and this marching rhythm comes back at the end. In terms of a religious soundscape, this is almost like an allusion to the music of god marches (9/coda) in THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN.

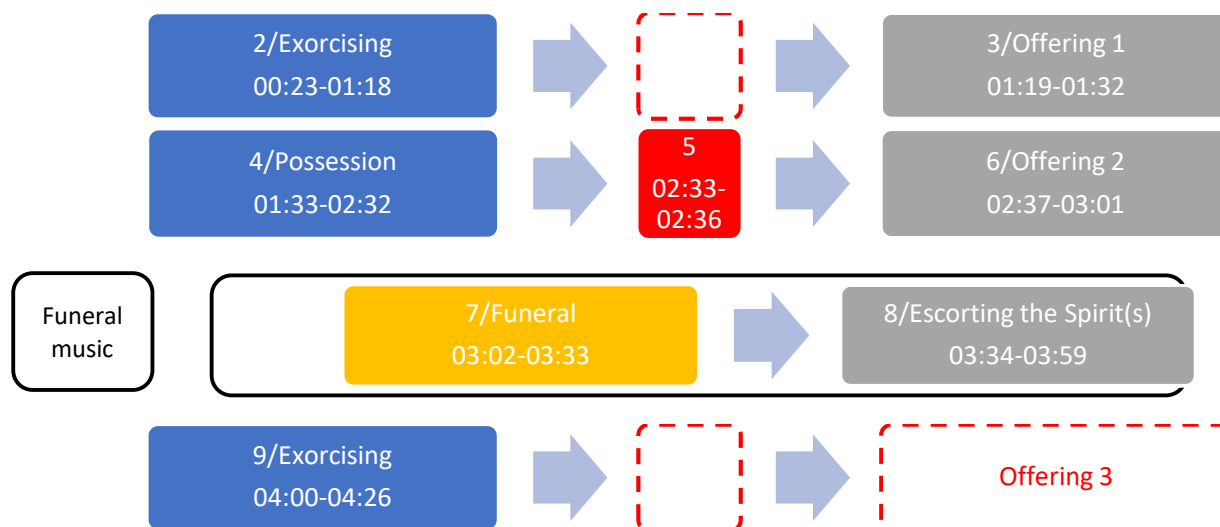


Thematically speaking, those familiar with Taoist rituals and ceremonies can immediately notice that the third offering is missing and grasp that this FUNERAL must go on, that it must, in a sense, march forward, until the minimum amount of offering is met. This is why below I present the song’s “flow chart,” with a red box that makes clear that FUNERAL has not properly ended in light of funeral conventions.



<sup>22</sup> “晚上的風吹來冷吱吱 / 厚的外套別忘記 / 想要什麼就說別客氣 / Sisomi 奏樂 It’s so chilly at midnight / Dress warm / Let me know whatever you want / Sisomi, play the music!”

<sup>23</sup> This is aptly captured and portrayed in black humor in the critically-acclaimed Taiwanese film 父後七日 *Seven Days in Heaven* (2010).



FUNERAL, then, is a vicious spiral that moves from exorcising to possession to a funeral without a proper ending, and perhaps will go on and on. What propels this spiral are the numerous voices and personas, all speaking, interacting and substituting, or better: exorcising and possessing each other. This interpretation is supported by the music video, especially its portrayal of the vocalist who is supposed to be the center for the viewer's identification. During 2/exorcising, for instance, his dress references a *Matrix*-resident and his gestures echo a *Godzilla* action, whereas the lyrics tell us that he is an alien-demon-monster. What we see is how he is destroying buildings of civilization, but his gesture of chasing away demons resembles an exorcising act of a Taoist priest. The tall building that is being destroyed in the music video is the Shin Kong Life Tower (新光人壽保險摩天大樓), the headquarters of the Japanese Shin Kong Corporation with its departments of Life Insurance, Financial Holding, and also with the Mitsukoshi Department Store owned by that Corporation. I read this as a critique of corporate capitalism. The pig mask the singer consequently puts on in block 3/offering 1 and block 4/possession is a common sight in extreme metal. Yet, the references to pork as a common offering and the Taiwanese sacrificial "pig god" (豬公) are impossible to miss.<sup>24</sup> The corruption of religious rituals by capitalist elements is also evident in block 4's highly headbangable music, which is set in a visual frame that combines disco and a sci-fi background, and the band members performing and dancing along like typical Taiwanese ecstatic evil spirits (群魔亂舞). Finally, during block 7/funeral the vocalist and other band members appear as funeral handlers.

<sup>24</sup> For information about sacrificial rituals of pig god in Taiwan, see 13 Feb. 2016, [news.ltn.com.tw/news/life/breakingnews/1601338](http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/life/breakingnews/1601338).



Screenshot of the band members dressing as funeral handlers, with a background of white stripes, funeral lotus, and hands of the gods<sup>25</sup>

Here, the vocalist is not only a funeral handler whose command brings in further forms of demonic possession, but he is also a performance conductor—an all-in-one Master, that is also, according to the lyrics an alien-demon-monster with superpowers. This is indicated in the music video at 04:01-04:14, showing the vocalist wildly gesturing in rotating and the zooming in and out of the camera shots. A little later he is revealed to be a deadly ghost, with shining demonic eyes, at 04:17-04:26. I read the subordination of the Western guitar to the traditional suona in blocks 6, 7, and 8 as meaningful. Reading the Western guitar as an allegory of Western capitalism, I consider this subordination a form of critique.

While *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* is generally accepted as a song embodying the representational soundscape of Taiwan, *FUNERAL* is the perverse side of what that soundscape celebrates. Above I stated that a “sonorous cosmology is central to religious diversity and tolerance in Taiwan, and advocates traditional values enabling the Taiwanese to find a middle course, balancing between the traditional and the modern.” In my reading of *FUNERAL*, its perversity suggests that the encouraging of tolerance, or the notion of the middle course and balance, may end up in complying with politico-economic exploitation. Even in *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*, as I pointed out earlier, there are phonic moments when what is forgotten in the representational soundscape emerges and is remembered as vulgar. In *FUNERAL*, what is ignored and forgotten, or what is left out in the name of balance, returns as chants, cries, shouts, and screams. These voices all take part in, but are also trapped in vicious circles of exorcising-possession-funeral, of life-and-death. They connote the larval and spectral, to use Agamben’s description of the human subject trapped in the deadlock of contemporary biopolitics. The powers of life and death return in the white banners, pulled out by the hands of the gods in the music video, that play with a well-known Taiwanese proverb. Whereas the proverb as commonly known goes “life and death are destined; prosperity belongs to decisions of gods” (生死有命富貴在天), the banners in the above image twists this into: “Life and death are

<sup>25</sup> 8 June 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN7yhDI1cuk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rN7yhDI1cuk).

destined; only gods know why we live and die” (生死有命命有生死).

iii.

Voices Unprofanable

The two songs provoke me to again bring metal into a, this time critical, dialogue with philosophy. In my reading the songs highlight an internal rupture of the sacred-religious that Agamben neglects or even oppresses. To make my argument clear I will first consider the internal rupture at stake in the Taiwanese context by focusing on some intersections between the two songs. These will then help me to critically examine Agamben's strategic definition of the sacred and his advocacy of profanation.

To really understand *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *FUNERAL* some clarifications about Taiwanese religious traditions are needed. In line with the traditional cosmology of all beings, in the Taiwanese polytheist context, there is no strict division between not-human entities, but more a spectrum of often overlapping and shifting spirits of all sorts. This fluid spectrum of spirits is central to both songs. *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* invokes four deities in a row in the opening verse.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, but more maliciously, *FUNERAL* invokes and substitutes several devils-dead-gods that all end up in an indistinctive mingling of entities. On the one hand, this cosmology of beings and spirits of all sorts allows for a freer, or even improper, use of religious elements. It is in this context that the perversion of *FUNERAL* is not so much disrupting as playful, channeling violence so that the Taiwanese can continue their cycle(s) of life and death. On the other hand, even with this general religious freedom, there are certain elements that cannot be used without disturbing people.

One element of this kind marks the first intersection between the two songs—the suona, the folk musical instrument used in almost all religious rituals in Taiwan, is famous and notorious for the way its high-pitched loudness stands out from other sounds. In *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*, the suona is the only folk instrument not sampled in block 7 and thus spared from the danger of vulgarization. In *FUNERAL*, the funeral music played by the suona is the most dominant sound in blocks 7 and 8 and, in a sense, “possesses” the metal guitar. What is so special about the suona is that its religious/funeral music can be dramatized and perverted, but not violated in vulgarization. Similar to the Jewish shofar in which Mladen Dolar hears the voice of the Father-God and the cry of the dying primal father (53-54), there exists a phonic unconsciousness in the sound of the suona that cannot be heard without remembering violence. The sonorous cosmology of all beings entails that the high-pitched suona stands for all beings that may be dead but are still there, or *here*, existing, speaking together, in incomprehensible manners.

The second intersection of the two songs is the 18<sup>th</sup> Jade Emperor, Guan Yu 關羽, a figure that consecrates beings of all sorts and who wields power doubly in being both good and bad. This figure, so go the tales, was a general serving a warlord who was beheaded in a malicious way and only buried properly later. He then became the red-faced underworld god. Even

<sup>26</sup> The deities are Buddha 佛祖, Mazu 媽祖, Guan Yu 關羽, and Tudigong 土地公. In the Taiwanese context, a Buddha designates both deities in general as well as the Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhism. Mazu is the goddess of the sea and the merciful guardian of sailors, Tudigong is a low-ranked Lord of the soil and ground, and the protector of communities.

nowadays, Guan Yu is also worshipped as the god of justice and retribution in Taiwan. Guan Yu exists as a devil, an underworld god, but also as a celestial god, and embodies both the just and the ferocious, benevolence and the horrifying aspects of sovereignty. Guan Yu's fierce loyalty (義氣) can be invoked to create a bond between the Taiwanese (THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN) but also to chase away devils (FUNERAL). However, he cannot be used for vulgar religious activities and entertainment. This is especially so in the Taiwanese political context when Guan Yu is mobilized as a symbol for patriotism, but also stood for, and still stands for, all the Taiwanese that were persecuted and slaughtered during the dictatorship.

The sound of the suona is the musical equivalent of the latter, of the Taiwanese speaking through the mouth of Guan Yu to demand justice and retribution. This is not only a haunting, frightening, phonic unconsciousness. It also highlights two important points. Though Guan Yu was killed *improperly*, he became an underworld god and celestial being nonetheless. Second, people whose bare life was taken, need not be dead. This helps me to now read Agamben critically, whose advocacy of profanation as a (bio)political task was central to the previous chapter.

For Agamben, the sacrificial rite that was once exemplary of profanation has been dismantled by a machine of the unprofanable, since the political and capitalist secularization of Christianity has separated everything to the extent that acts of profanation are either neutralized or nullified, and have become no more than episodic spectacles. The (bio)political task in the domain of religion, Agamben then argues, is the profanation of the unprofanable (*Profanations* 81-87, 91-92). Provocative as this argument may be, it raises the question of how the unprofanable can be profaned. As Agamben suggests but never specifies, the unprofanable is the bare life that can be killed but not sacrificed. Put straightforwardly, for improper bare life to be profaned, it first needs to become "proper," that is, to be somehow restored to the realm of the sacred. The implication is that, one way or another, this life will be killed, at least symbolically, if not physically.

Symptomatic of his tendency to seek out a pure ground or origin, Agamben traces the Christian divine-human division back to the ancient Roman division of the sacred versus the profane. He acknowledges that the term *sacred* was used by the Romans to designate two conflicting components. In the domain of gods, *sacred* designated the celestial as opposed to the religious-underworld gods. In the domain of the human, *sacred* designated the augustus consecrated to the gods, and not the cursed excluded from the community. Agamben subsumes the religious under the sacred. He defines the sacred as "sacred or religious . . . things that in some way belonged to the gods." And he defines the profane as "once sacred or religious . . . returned to the use and property of men." He then goes on to establish a Roman-Christian celestial-sacred-divine ground upon which his biopolitical critique is built (73-79). Only based on this celestial-sacred-divine ground can the obscure argument "profanation of the unprofanable" start to make sense.

This does not work in the Taiwanese case, or in relation to Taiwanese metal. To be sure, profanation has often been related to metal in general. For instance, commenting on the themes of the occult and of Satanism, Kahn-Harris, points out that metal's pursuit of transgression is religiously connoted, and often functions like rituals for people to leash out anti-Christian sentiments as a form of profanation (*Extreme Metal* 35-37). If there were to be such a thing as profanation of the unprofanable it would be the legendary Norwegian black

metal violence that Phillipov dealt with in “Extreme Music for Extreme People.”<sup>27</sup> The church burnings and murders can be read as a perverse realization of a profanation of the unprofanable. Yet in the case of both THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN and FUNERAL, the songs remain informed by traditional Taiwanese religions where the very distinction between proper and improper, or between life and death do not exist as such. Put differently: the unprofanable is a common experience for the Taiwanese, as a result of which profanity loses its political edge.

My interest in the two religiously themed songs and my discussion about the phonic unconsciousness of the suona is not intended to demonstrate the obvious fact that metal music is a means through which religions take part in politics. My intention is rather to highlight that beings, memories, and histories speak to Taiwanese audiences through soundscapes, and that soundscapes, in harboring a phonic unconsciousness, are politico-ethically charged. This phonic unconsciousness will be the focus of the next section. Having temporarily “grounded” myself by listening to the familiar, representational, sacred-religious soundscape of Taiwan, I will now move to the voices and sounds from “the underground.”

## 2.

### Metal and Historical Dissonances

*Music . . . lays down the tracks of an audio unconsciousness that, while it connects at certain points with the unconsciousness supposed to be structured like a language, operates differently.*  
(Wilson, “From Forest Unknown” 152)

In the previous section, I explained the role soundscapes play in rethinking Taiwanese metal. I also brought attention to the phonic unconsciousness carried in and through the sound of the suona, and explained how Taiwanese music evokes this unconsciousness for quite different purposes. In addition to the suona, Taiwanese metal also uses other voices and sounds to deal with traumatic histories and memories and to alternatively construe forms of Taiwanese identity. In this section, I want to approach some other examples of phonic unconsciousness by examining two songs: JUST NOT MEANT TO BE 還君明珠 (花殤 *Elegy for the Blossoms*, 2015) by the Taiwanese folk metal band Crescent Lament (恆月三途) and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT 破夜斬 (武德 *Bú-Tik*, 2013) by the Taiwanese symphonic/black/death/folk metal band Chthonic (閃靈). By focusing on the folk sounds used in the two songs, I will consider how a certain phonic unconsciousness is appropriated by the two bands for different purposes. I will elaborate how this phonic unconsciousness supports or undermines the bands’ attempts to give voice to Taiwan’s troubled past.

### i.

#### Scarred Histories and Memories in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE

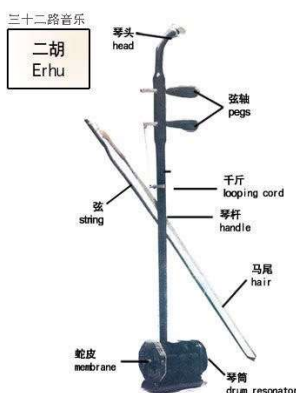
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<sup>27</sup> My sincerest gratitude to Yasco Horsman for pointing out the distinction between the celestial gods and the underworld gods and the link between the religious and the Norwegian black metal scenes.

JUST NOT MEANT TO BE<sup>28</sup> tells a love story in a turbulent time. Since this story is a meta-narrative frame tying together levels of voices and sounds, the lyrics, and the music video, I quote it in full as given by the band:

In 1942, A-hiong encountered a young entrepreneur, Bîng-hong. During the troubled times, the two, who had strong feelings for each other, considered each other as the soul mate. Leaving for Japan for business in 1943, Bîng-hong bade a tearful farewell to A-hiong, promising he would return in a year to marry her. However, as the war situation deteriorated for Japan, and with the dominant presence of US submarines in waters between Taiwan and Japan, attacking vessels, Bîng-hong had no choice but to stay in Japan a little longer. Without knowing when would see her loved one return, amid rapid changes in the political situation, A-hiong accepted the arrangements by the madam to marry to a rich man as his concubine in 1946. On the eve of the wedding, Bîng-hong suddenly appeared, explaining to her that, he was trapped in Japan, and was only able to return to Taiwan after the war. However, the reunion was too late for A-hiong, holding Bîng-hong's hands, A-hiong lamented that she had nothing left for him but tears, and prayers that they may find each other again in the next life.<sup>29</sup>

The story does not end well, with the protagonists eventually engulfed by the torrents of history. In a sense, the story is melodramatic and cliché, similar to those told by the elderly to a younger Taiwanese generation. Cliché as this story is, however, JUST NOT MEANT TO BE also gives voice to troubled histories and memories of Taiwan. These memories, or scars, are vocalised through the insertion of the musical instruments erhu (二胡) and pipa (琵琶), both of which evoke a phonic unconsciousness that is shared by many Taiwanese people.



<sup>28</sup> JUST NOT MEANT TO BE. 25 Aug. 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMJXlit\\_JKl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMJXlit_JKl).

The original lyrics are characteristic of a Geisha (known in Taiwan as Getoa) singing style full of metaphoric and metonymic images and less concerned with a plot or one subject. My translation attempts to preserve the images and does not follow all grammatical rules. The official English lyrics, a "translation" re-telling the story, can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Image of an erhu<sup>30</sup>Image of a pipa<sup>31</sup>

Commonly heard, listened to, learned, and played, the erhu and pipa are generally accepted as instruments that stand for Taiwan. In addition to these folk instruments, the insertion of the piano and the dialogue between the female protagonist and her lover are also of special interest. The piano was introduced to Taiwan by the Catholic and Christian missionaries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was only during the Japanese colonial period (when practices of Western music were already established in Japan) that it became common. The pipa is an ancient instrument traceable to approximately 220 BC and is played in Eastern Asia, including China and Japan. The history of the erhu is more ambiguous. Introduced to China between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries from what is nowadays central Asia, this two-stringed instrument is especially popular in southern China, but when and how it was introduced to Taiwan remains a mystery.<sup>32</sup> Through the instruments, the song expresses a historical complex. To unpack this complex, I will proceed in the following ways: I first examine how these sounds (from the erhu, the pipa, and the piano) unite the song. I then discuss their phonic unconsciousness by examining the sound blocks. Finally, I pay attention to the music video.

Although JUST NOT MEANT TO BE sounds simple and gives an impression of being “cut, copied, and pasted together,” in comparison to the other songs discussed in this chapter, this song is the one most resistant to analysis. Before I move on to details, it is helpful to have an overview of the song’s structure. Below, I divide the song into two cycles.

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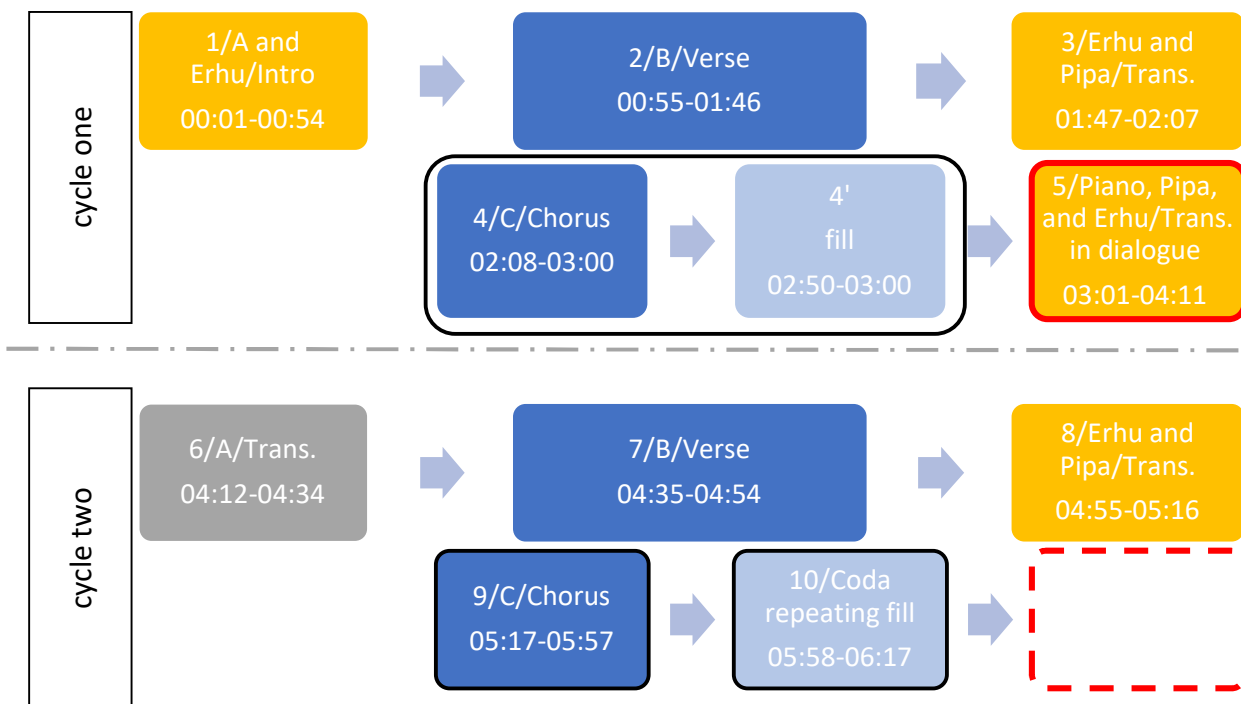
<sup>30</sup> *Yueqi baike*, 25 Aug. 2014, [yueqi.baike.com/article-290502.html](http://yueqi.baike.com/article-290502.html).

<sup>31</sup> 台灣 *Word*, 10 Sept. 2013, [www.twword.com/wiki/%E3%80%8A%E7%90%B5%E7%90%B6%E6%9B%B2%E3%80%8B](http://www.twword.com/wiki/%E3%80%8A%E7%90%B5%E7%90%B6%E6%9B%B2%E3%80%8B).

<sup>32</sup> 台灣音樂百科辭書 *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music* (2008), 琵琶 “Pipa” 363-67, 二絃 “Erxian” (aka erhu), 225; 鋼琴教育 “Gangqin Jiayu” (“Education of Piano”) 554-56.

For cross-developments between the pipa, the yueqin (in *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*), and the sanxian 三弦 (in *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN*) in the Tang dynasty, see 為傳統獻聲：臺灣傳統樂器 *Traditional Musical Instruments In Taiwan* (2001) by Chui-kuan Lu (呂鍾寬), 93-94. For the relationship between the erhu/erxian, the sanxian, and the huqin 胡琴 (an archetypal stringed instrument from which the erhu and the sanxian develop) in the Song and Yuan dynasties, see Lu 94-96. For a resource in English, see the *Britannica Academic*, especially the sections on foreign influence in the Han and Tang dynasties (applicable to the pipa and the yueqin), and the popularization of folk theaters in the Song and Yuan dynasties (applicable to the erhu), [academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Chinese-music/399706](http://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Chinese-music/399706). Note that the histories and origins of folk instruments like the erhu and the yueqin are still under debate.

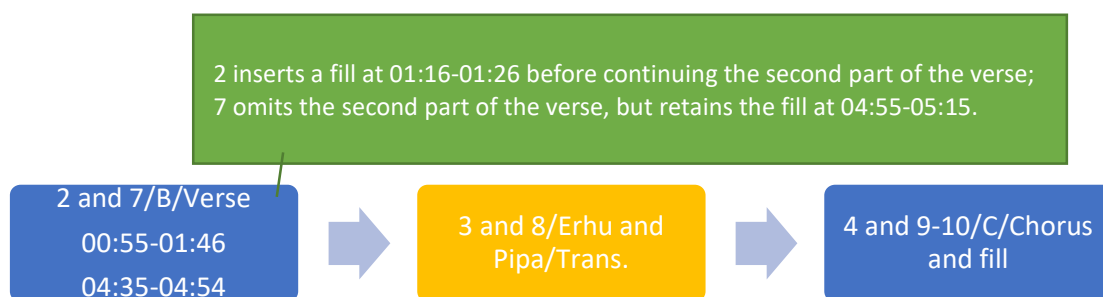
For the establishment of practices of Western music in Japan since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, see “State Ceremony and Music in Meiji-era Japan” (2013) by Yasuko Tsukahara. For the introduction of the piano in Taiwan, see Chapter Seven in 台灣西方文明初體驗 *Taiwan’s Encounter with the West* (2005) by Rou-jin Chen (陳柔縉).



Two general observations can be derived from the above. First, the song's structure is simple but atypically repetitive but incomplete. In addition to its lack of a guitar solo, its atypicality also comes from block 5, an unusual transitional block in which a dialogue between the female narrator and her lover (A-hiong and Bîng-hong in the above quoted story) takes place. The incompleteness is detectable in block 10, which concludes the song by repeating a structurally ambiguous fill (in cycle one, indicated as 4' and marked in the color of light blue); in other words, 10 (also in the color of light blue) can also be considered as a part of 9/chorus, as such implying that cycle two is missing a final block or element. Second, the transitional blocks where the folk instruments are used are almost half the length of the primary blocks; compared to the static meta-oriented primary blocks, these transitional blocks sound more dynamic. That is to say, the gist and center of *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* lies in how the erhu and the pipa deliver wordless messages in these transitional blocks, and these messages are elaborated by other elements and on other levels.

1/A and Erhu/Intro  
00:01-00:54 -- 00:33-00:54

The opening of *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* already gives a clue to the phonic unconsciousness harbored in and through the sound of the erhu. The erhu is here associated with metal heaviness. Block 1 first introduces the chunky A characteristic of prolonged and distorted riffs, accentuated by prolonged erhu notes at 00:33-00:54. Though not heavy in terms of sound quality, the erhu denotes an emotional heaviness. Despite slight differences, both cycles can be summed as repetitions of a metal-erhu pattern.

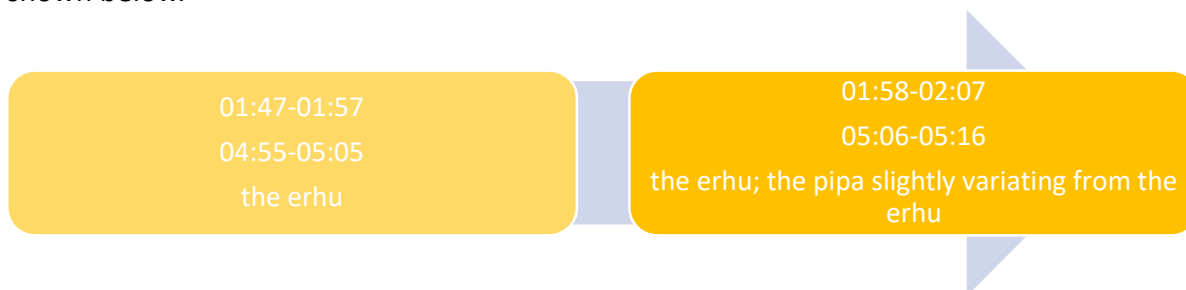


Central to the repetitions of this pattern is also the accentuation of voices, wordless messages, and sounds. The fills at 01:16-01:26 and 04:55-05:15, for example, consist of synchronized chunky riffs, cymbals, and bassdrum beats. In C, following the erhu in 3 and 8/transitions, the metal elements are subordinated to the female vocal, their distortion often paralleling the singing voice. I read the erhu's emotional heaviness in relation to the female narrator of this song/story. The instrument speaks for her, expressing her wordless inner voice. This reading is supported by 5/transition where the dialogue is followed by an erhu solo, instead of a guitar solo. I unpack block 5 as follows:

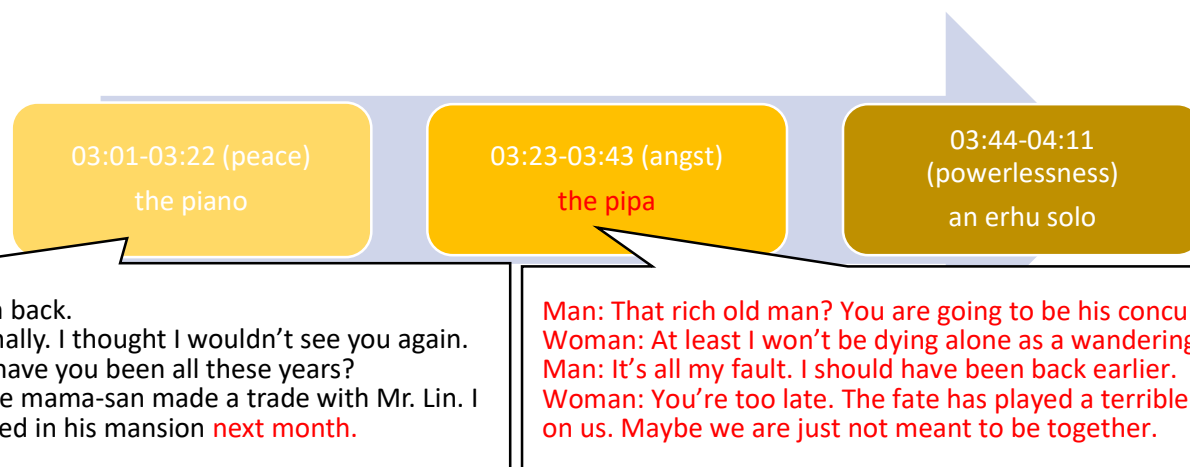


Notably, after the 30 seconds-long erhu solo in block 5, the storytelling in cycle two is fractured—part of the verse in 7 is omitted, and the song concludes with a fill in block 10. This is a form of repetitive, but incoherent and incomplete, storytelling, as though the story is too heavy to be fully recounted. Whereas in metal a solo is usually considered empowering, the effect of the erhu solo here is quite the opposite. The female narrator has no power to stand against larger political and historical tides, such as the offensives between the US and Japan in the song's story. The phonic unconsciousness of the erhu, thus, indexes heaviness as powerlessness.

Let me now consider the phonic unconsciousness of the pipa by examining the two ways the pipa is used. Notably, in both blocks 3 and 8, the pipa is subordinated to the erhu, as is shown below.



The pipa echoes the erhu by repeating and slightly varying the erhu's melodic lines. I read this echoing in the context of the sonorous cosmos of beings, which would be a common reading in Taiwan. The two instruments together connote a collective inner voice, wordless, but not alone. In the light of the song's story, the erhu and the pipa are the "voice" for the protagonists who have no control over their fates. Indeed, in this song, the pipa is also used for the song's dramatic build up, such as in 5/transition that accompanies the dialogue. Below I add the dialogue and dramatic functions of the piano, the pipa, and the erhu in block 5.



While the tranquil piano suggests that the female narrator does enjoy a moment of peacefulness, even happiness, in finally being reunited with her lover, this moment is all too brief. When she informs her lover that she has settled for becoming a concubine, the pipa appears, much more distorted than in transitions 3 and 8, and is echoed by a distorted guitar. The distorted pipa is associated with how the fates of the protagonists—and by implication, the Taiwanese—are distorted because of larger political tides. This reading is supported by the phrase "wandering ghost," which is an intertextual reference to the lonely pipa-playing female figures in several Chinese literary and musical works, earlier referred to in 2/verse at 01:26-01:47 through the line "playing pipa alone in coldness." The erhu and the pipa, then, evoke a phonic unconsciousness that indexes a collective powerlessness, as all are subjected to external, oppressive powers. The phonic unconsciousness of the erhu and the pipa tap into the destitute existence of the Taiwanese, individual as well as collective, their beings fractured and incomplete.

Arguably, Crescent Lament's choice to subordinate metal elements to the erhu and the pipa carries a wordless message. For many Taiwanese people who grow up used to these folk voices and sounds, as well as these kinds of stories, *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* cannot be listened to without a sense of ambivalence and pressing anxiety. What do the young Taiwanese do with these stories, traumatic histories and memories that were once unspeakable in public due to the KMT's anti-Japanese propaganda? They consider these stories as somewhat (melo)dramatic, incoherent, and incomplete. Yet they may be confronted with an even more pressing doubt, concerning other stories that are omitted and forgotten. How do they know if they can ever

remember them? There is no answer to these doubts, just like these stories have no conclusive endings, but are repeated again and again in history, lived and experienced by the Taiwanese of past and present, as if being a Taiwanese is also a “terrible joke by fate.”

This attitude toward Taiwan’s scarred histories and memories is reflected in the song’s linguistic and cultural hybridity. *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* is sung in mixed Mandarin and Taiwanese, imitating the singing style of a Japanese Geisha, and the lyrics are a mixture of classical Chinese literature (especially Sung Ci [宋詞]) and Japanese Haiku. The music video abounds in references to Japanese cultures. It also comments on the tormented existence of living this hybridity by using shots where musicians constantly split and reconfigure, as shown below.



An example of constantly splitting and reconfiguring musicians, and a visual reference to Japanese culture, also legible as a journey searching for identity<sup>33</sup>

Aside from the realistic representation of the female protagonist, the music video is composed of four visual frames. The sequence of these frames has a particular meaning. In the first frame, the illustrated background and reference to the ukiyo-e *The Wave* suggests that the song is also a sea journey that, as made clear by the second frame shown above, is a journey about split identity. The third frame, with a near blank background except for a few decorative leaves, appears ambivalent towards this split and confused hybrid identity. In contrast, the final frame, which starts with the erhu solo, is unmistakably emotionally heavy. Set in darkness, close shots of the musicians only reveal their performing bodies; similarly, the face of the female vocalist who is the female protagonist is only vaguely recognizable, and does not appear to be a stable center of identification. The music video, in brief, is an exploration of hybrid identity, involving torment and blankness, and ending in darkness. The final, closing shot is of the female protagonist standing by the sea, gradually fading away into a black screen—washed away by torrents of history.

<sup>33</sup> 25 Aug. 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMJXlit\\_JKl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMJXlit_JKl).



Ending shot of JUST NOT MEANT TO BE<sup>34</sup>

The weight of scarred memories and histories combined with a continued struggle for an identity shows itself in the music video's visual incongruity. The female vocalist is in a kimono and the black metal style keyboardist is headbanging in corpse paint. Also, there is the industrial metal style guitarist, the bassist (in mask), and the erhu player. As there is no answer to the questions they raise, the band makes fun of itself—in by no means light-hearted melodramatization. If history's weight is unbearable—a terrible joke by fate—one can only respond with jokes. Yet, underlying this dry laughter and bad humor is a dim hope that, by continuing the journey and the story, we might still be able to rewrite the ending.

## ii.

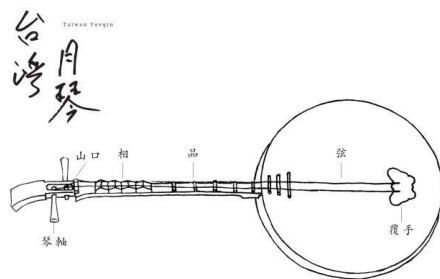
### A Blood Sacrifice in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT

The phonic unconsciousness played out by the erhu and pipa in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE, as discussed above, gives voices to the manifold scarred histories and memories of Taiwan in an ambivalent manner. If, as I suggested, these folk sounds stand for the emotional heaviness that come with traumatic events and the powerlessness of the Taiwanese, the phonic unconsciousness is given a dramatic twist in Chthonic's SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT<sup>35</sup> which uses the erhu and the yueqin (月琴) and, moreover, refers to a non-existent piano.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT. 10 June 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3siP7Ta4ivY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3siP7Ta4ivY).

<sup>36</sup> The yueqin is a stringed instrument, most commonly with four strings, that differs from the pipa. *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music*, 月琴 "Yueqin" 470. The yueqin used in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is two-stringed.

Image of a yueqin<sup>37</sup>Image of a Taiwanese two-stringed yueqin<sup>38</sup>

Similar to JUST NOT MEANT TO BE telling a story, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT retells the background event of a failed assassination which is repeated and fulfilled by the band members in the song's music video. Here I also quote the background event as given by the band:

On April 24, 1970, a member of the World United Formosans for Independence Peter Huang (黃文雄) attempted to assassinate Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國), who was the Vice Premier of the Republic of China at the time in front of the Plaza Hotel in New York. The attempt ended in failure, however, when pushed to the ground by security personnel, Huang shouted "let me stand up like a Taiwanese!"<sup>39</sup>

Shot in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT comparing the KMT party (left) with the Nazis (right)<sup>40</sup>

Although what caught the public's attention was the comparison of the KMT party with the Nazis in the music video (as per the image above), I am more interested in how the song weaves together the erhu, the yueqin, and metal elements and voices, in a manner very different from JUST NOT MEANT TO BE. This difference is evident in the song's structure, simplified below, which

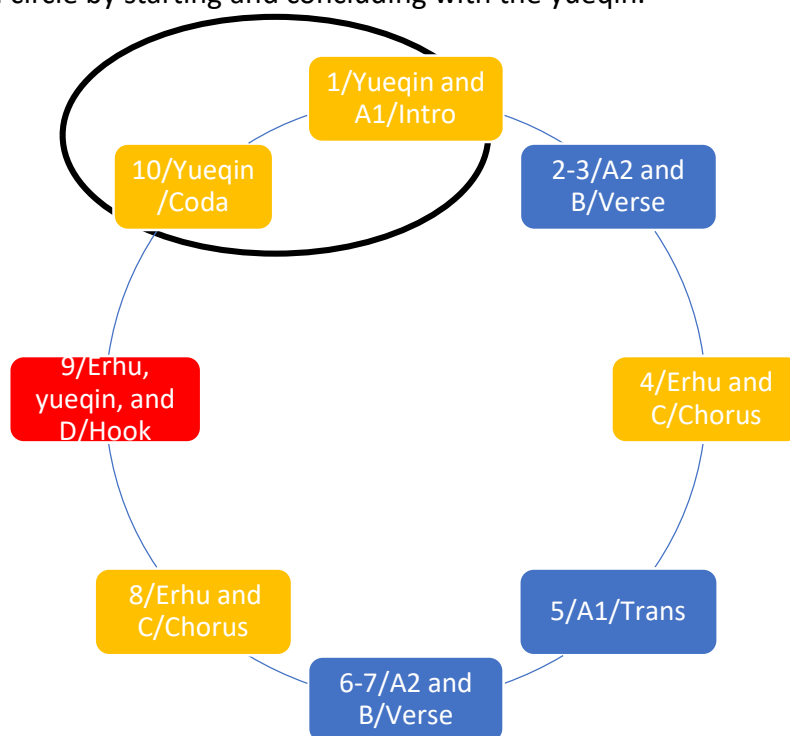
<sup>37</sup> *Music Chinese*, 17 Nov. 2009, [music.chinesecio.com/article/2009-11/17/content\\_84860.htm](http://music.chinesecio.com/article/2009-11/17/content_84860.htm).

<sup>38</sup> *CMC music*, n.d., [www.cmcmusic.com.tw/%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E6%9C%88%E7%90%B4](http://www.cmcmusic.com.tw/%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E6%9C%88%E7%90%B4).

<sup>39</sup> "Inspiration of the Song." 10 June 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYsu5-TJQ8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYsu5-TJQ8). The official English lyrics, included in the Appendix, focus on the rhythmic dimension of the Taiwanese language. In terms of phrasing and tone, the English lyrics are also much more moderate than the Taiwanese. My translation of the lyrics attempts to preserve the cultural connotations of the classical Taiwanese used.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

completes a circle by starting and concluding with the yueqin.



The repetition of the transition-verse-chorus pattern in *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT* is simple, but also atypical in its use of a hook in which both the erhu and the yueqin take part. Whilst *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* subordinates metal to folk sounds, *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*'s folk and metal elements are of more or less equally importance. The interest of the song lies in how the erhu, the yueqin, and the metal vocals echo each other and deliver a message that does not seem to guarantee comprehension. In the following analysis, I first examine the sound blocks by focusing on the intersections between folk and metal elements. I bring attention to one more unexpected phonic unconsciousness in this catchy song, and examine the song's spectacular music video.

Four descending notes repeated by the yueqin at 00:03-00:06

1/Yueqin and A1/Intro  
00:03-00:06, 00:07-00:33

5/A1/Trans  
01:49-02:18

The four descending notes previous by the yueqin are now played by the guitar at 01:49-01:52.

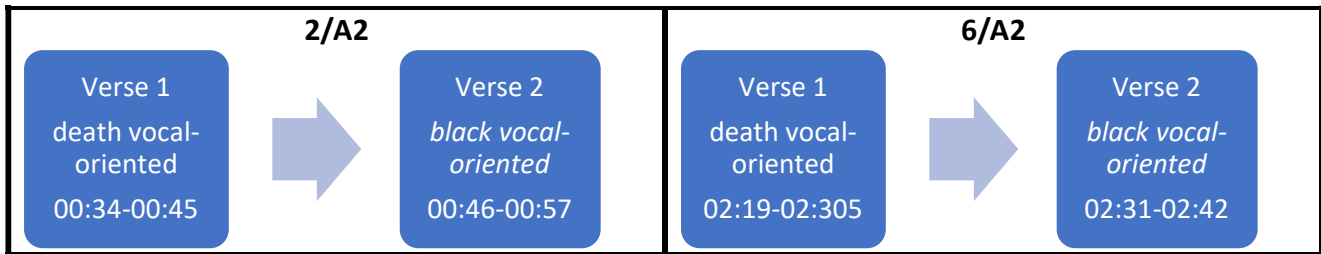
*black vocal*

*Prolonged scream in 1 / Blood feud in 5  
Moon shadowed by the dark clouds, endless darkness*

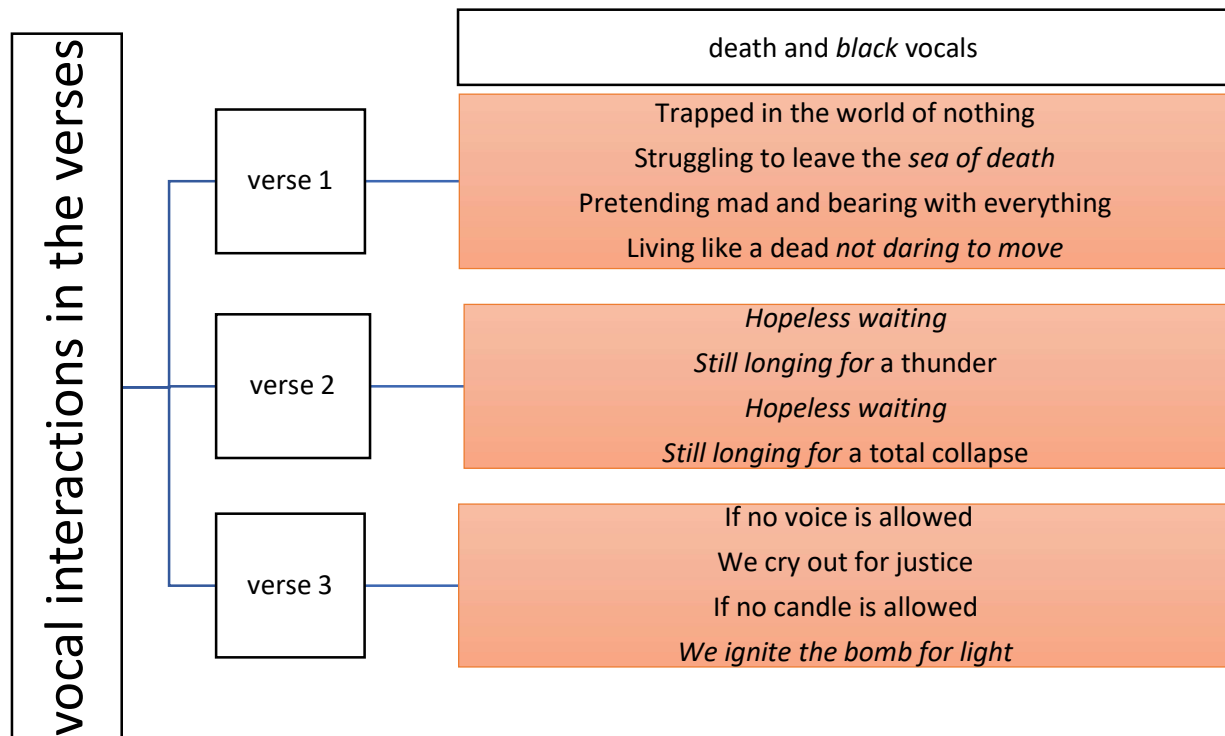
Opened by fast, highly distorted, and repetitive descending notes played on the yueqin at 00:03-00:09, block 1 immediately introduces a tension. Similar to the phonic distortion of the

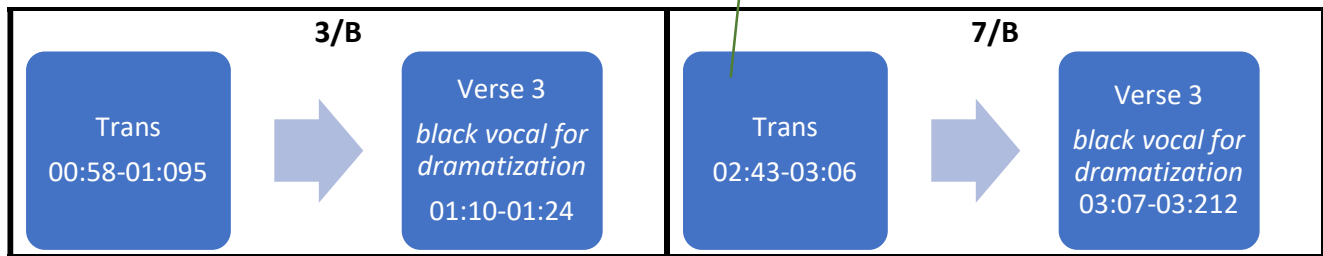
yueqin, A1 is characterized by an extremely distorted black vocal. Starting at 00:22, one scream lasts for 6 seconds, and is followed by another one about “endless darkness.” 1/introduction, in sum, sets up a semi-frantic atmosphere which this song is supposed to resolve. This organization is repeated in 5/transition where a distorted guitar replaces the yueqin and repeats the four descending notes, followed by a prolonged black vocal screaming about a “blood feud.”

Though the verses do not make use of the erhu and the pipa, these relatively short blocks are of narrative importance. I examine some important features in A2 and B and discuss these elements along with the vocals and the lyrics.

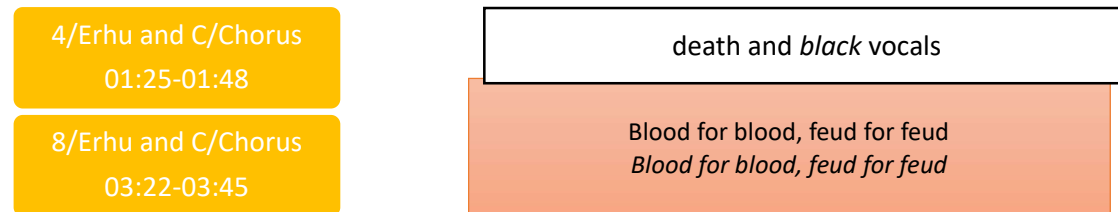


Though there are slight differences in terms of riffs and drumbeats, overall A2 does not differ significantly from A1, and functions as a continuation and elaboration of A1’s semi-frantic atmosphere. The most ear-catching element of A2 is an intensification of the vocal distortion, moving from the death vocal-oriented verse 1 about being trapped in death and not daring to move, to the black vocal-oriented verse 2 screaming about desperation.





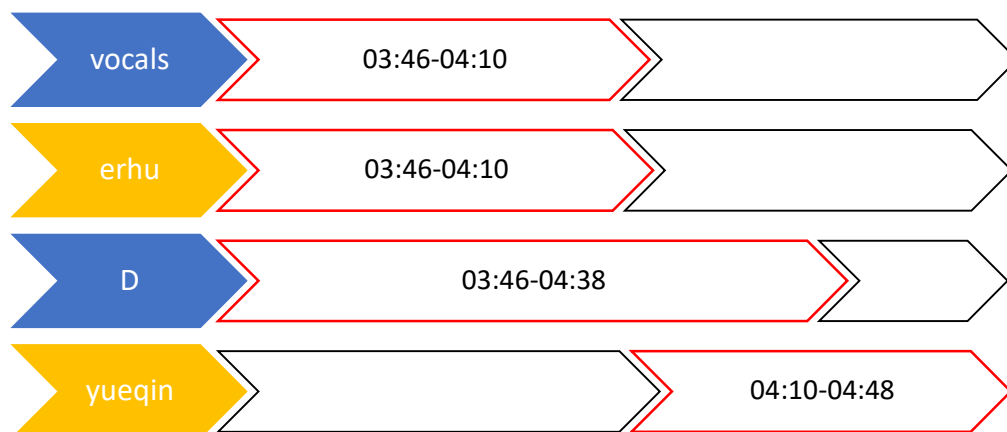
With a prominent role for the cymbals, B intensifies the song's semi-frantic atmosphere, which is continued in verse 3. Here, the death vocal grows about how justice can only be claimed amid political oppression and devocalization; the black vocal, moreover, takes a dramatic turn by expressing a destructive urge to ignite the bomb for light when even the flickers of a candle are not allowed. Considered along with the destructive tone in blocks 3 and 7, the guitar solo in 7 can also be read as destructive, denoting a mental distortion.



Of all sound blocks, C is the most rhythmic and emphatic-sounding one, something most evident when both vocals deliver and repeat “blood for blood, feud for feud.” The erhu, the only source of melody during this part, repeats a melodic line, and also sounds emphatic. As a chorus usually contains the main idea of a song, the combination of the emphatic erhu and the vocals suggests that this song is about blood feud in Taiwan.

Immediately following C, 9/D is the heaviest sound block with the textual hook “Let me stand up like a Taiwanese / Only justice will bring you peace,” in English. This part seems to suggest that only with justice can the blood feud can be solved. At 03:46-04:10 when the erhu is played, the metal vocals take turns, repeating and emphasizing the necessity of justice and peace for Taiwan. Starting at 4:10, during the final repetition of “peace” in a prolonged scream, the yueqin reappears. No longer distorted, the yueqin now plays a longer line, instead of repeating four notes of the introduction. After D disappears at 04:38, the yueqin is the only voice left in the song. Now sounding tranquil, the yueqin functions to conclude the song and resolve its semi-frantic atmosphere.

Below I visualize how the erhu, the yueqin, and the metal vocals—the central elements of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT—take turns during the hook and the coda.



The background context of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is the dictatorship period when “no voice [was] allowed,” as the song makes explicit. Both the cries of the death vocal and the screams of the black vocal share a phonic quality that renders them linguistically almost incomprehensible. I read the extreme vocals as connoting the extremity of political oppression and devocalization in that period. This also explains why the hook is in English, even in the Taiwanese version. Obviously this helps to appeal to the non-Taiwanese speaking listener, but more important here is the historical resonance. As a foreign tongue not always understood, English often eluded censorship in the time of the dictatorship. By combining a non-distorted erhu and the distorted vocals, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT intends to give voice to the Taiwanese who, not so long ago, were trapped in oppression. Yet their despair and anger is still of concern in the contemporary Taiwanese context. I read the erhu and the metal vocals that deliver the English lyrics as parallel elements; that is, the erhu is also the voice of the Taiwanese people.

So, what about the use of the yueqin in terms of a period when no voice was allowed? Surely, without the distorted, repetitive descending yueqin notes creating the song’s semi-frantic atmosphere, and without the final resolution of the tranquil yueqin line, this song would have sounded different, and the message about the blood feud and pursuit of justice in Taiwan, would have worked differently, affectively speaking. That is to say, the yueqin carries a wordless affective undertone. To consider how the yueqin contributes to this song by voicing something, I briefly recap the parts of the song where the erhu and the yueqin appear.

- 1/introduction: four distorted notes by the yueqin, repeated four times
- 4/chorus: a melodic line by the erhu, repeated four times, corresponding to “blood feud” by the metal vocals, also repeated four times<sup>41</sup>
- 5/transition: notes of the yueqin replaced by a distorted guitar, repeated four times
- 8/chorus: a melodic line by the erhu, repeated four times, corresponding to “blood feud” by the metal vocals, also repeated four times
- 9/hook: a melodic line by the erhu, repeated four times, corresponding to “let me

<sup>41</sup> A brief explanation for the non-Taiwanese speakers is needed here. A literal translation of the Taiwanese lyrics 清算血債 清算仇冤 would be “account for (清算) blood (血債) / account for (清算) feud (仇冤),” the two lines varying from the Taiwanese term 血債仇冤, “blood feud.” I translate this part as “blood for blood / feud for feud,” similar to the English phrase “an eye for an eye,” to bring attention to the underlying logic of retaliation. In 4 and 8/choruses, “blood for blood / feud for feud,” delivered twice, is equal to “blood feud” repeated four times.



屎).” The final “peace” that helps the no longer distorted yueqin to move away from the repetitions of four-death, is, in my reading, a “pacification,” a blood sacrifice whose logic of justice is retaliation, “blood for blood.” This logic is implied in the song’s Taiwanese and English titles, 破夜斬 (破 as to break, 夜 as night or darkness, 斬 as a cut or beheading) and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT. I read the classical Taiwanese in the former as “an act of beheading that breaks endless darkness,” and the later, as “supreme pain repaid to the tyrant who caused pain.”

Those who consider this interpretation far-fetched, might be persuaded by what happens in the spectacular music video. In this, the band members slaughter people associated with the KMT. Following my earlier teasing out of the perverse acoustic undertones, I want to focus now on some visual ones. Similar to their denoting different manners of vocalization in the song, whether worded or wordless, in the music video the erhu and the yueqin denote different modes of existence. As important as the yueqin is on an affective level, in the music video it is nowhere to be found. Simultaneously wordless and visually absent, I read the role of the yueqin allegorically, as an acousmatic voice standing for the Taiwanese dead and gone. In comparison, the position of the erhu is more ambivalent. In the music video at 00:40-00:43, Freddy Lim is portrayed as playing the erhu, but is interrupted when the KMT officers appear.



Shots at 00:43 and 00:44 from perspectives of an KMT officer and Freddy Lim, suggesting that his erhu-playing is interrupted by the KMT<sup>43</sup>

In this part of the music video, the erhu is visually present but sonically absent. This connects the erhu to those Taiwanese people who were voiceless though visible: not yet dead, but “living like the dead.” The visual and phonic incongruity at 00:40-00:43 can be further compared with shots when the erhu is really heard, in 4 and 8/choruses and 9/hook, which show a group of dancers, an arrangement highly unusual in metal music videos. First appearing as marching robotically and saluting the KMT in 3/verse 3, the dancers start dancing wildly in accordance with repetitions of the erhu part and “blood feud” in 4/chorus. Similar but increasingly dramatic arrangements are then reprised in 8/chorus and 9/hook, interspersed with shots of members of Chthonic slaughtering people associated with the KMT and shots of dancers increasingly losing control. I read this as a symbolic representation of the Taiwanese who struggle with traumatic memories and histories, to the extent that they are caught up in a collective madness and even possession. The latter, religious connotation becomes most clear when the yueqin—no longer

<sup>43</sup> 10 June 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYsu5-TJQ8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYsu5-TJQ8).

distorted, but still without a visual signifier—becomes audible. The literally twisting dancers along with the yueqin have become 群魔亂舞, evil spirits of all sorts dancing in revelry. This is a visual trope that also appears in FUNERAL, although here the trope should be understood as both the dead and alive dancing and reveling in blood sacrifice and vengeance.<sup>44</sup>

The just but also ferocious ending of the music video of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is foreshadowed in a fleeting visual substitution at 01:22-01:27. Intriguingly, the distorted, climbing yueqin notes linking 3/verse 3 and 4/chorus are visually misrepresented here as a keyboard at 01:25. This empty visual reference for an already acousmatic voice is as much a possession as the one enacted through the bodies of the Taiwanese dancing. The alternation between madness and possession is later reprised and dramatized, starting from the guitar solo extinguishing candles at 02:43-02:45, and followed by a blood sacrifice where people associated with the KMT are slaughtered. In 10/coda, with only the yueqin left, the camera turns to the band members who finally appear pacified, and ends with an overhead shot of the dancers crawling onto the corpses and eventually dying themselves. The ritual has come to a temporary conclusion, though, alas, by the end all that remains are dead Taiwanese people. This is the perverse, yet not untrue, undertone of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT: that the Taiwanese dead and alive, past and present, with or without words and voices, are all haunting ghosts in one way or another.

In the case at hand, this is an intentionally performed perversion. The band members playing devils is not unlike how the members of Fresh Juicer dressed as pig gods and funeral handlers. The band name is similarly suggestive. While the English band name Chthonic literally means the non-profanable underworld gods, the Taiwanese band name 閃靈 (*siam-ling* in Taiwanese) refers to the classic thriller *The Shining* (1980), commonly known as 閃靈 (*siam-ling* in Taiwanese, *shan-ling* in Mandarin). It is no coincidence that *The Shining* is a film about being possessed. Chthonic embodies and enacts the possession of former human beings of all sorts, who are all demanding justice. This is also collectively acted out in live gigs when audiences throw hell money (冥紙) around. Burnt as an offering, hell money functions to satisfy the dead. The improper use of hell money leads to a curse that indiscriminately afflicts people. By throwing hell money around without properly burning it, the Taiwanese fans also play as devils and act as though they are possessed.

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<sup>44</sup> The style of dance in 8/chorus and 9/hook is known as 鬼舞, ghost dance.



Chthonic live in *Defending the Country and Pacifying the Dead*, 26 December 2015<sup>45</sup>

Whether defined by some as perverse, shocking, or abnormal,<sup>46</sup> in the Taiwanese context I read the blood sacrifice in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT and the hell money spectacle in live gigs of Chthonic as *exorcizing rituals*. Freddy Lim has the nickname Ghost king (鬼王); as if he is an incarnation of Guan Yu, the Jade Emperor, who can be invoked to chase away devils.

### iii.

#### Chthonic's Discourse on Taiwanese Folk

JUST NOT MEANT TO BE and SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT highlight how soundscapes and the notion of a sonorous cosmos impact on the Taiwanese, and exemplify how a phonic unconsciousness can be reorganized and mobilized for politically-inflected reflections on, imaginings of, and constructions of what it means to be Taiwanese. By choosing to distort folk sounds or not, both Crescent Lament and Chthonic attempt to deal with the troubled memories and histories of Taiwan, thus performing a profound hauntology of the so-called ghost island (鬼島), (*kui-to* in Taiwanese, *guei-dao* in Mandarin). At stake in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE is how to reconcile oneself with the consequences of silence and amnesia in the past, how to come to terms with Taiwan as

<sup>45</sup> "Chthonic Controversy: Hell Moneys Everywhere." *Liberty Times Net*, 27 Dec. 2015, news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/1552773.. In this link, it was stated that the picture with hell money was taken from Freddy Lim's *Facebook*, not by the photographer 胡舜翔 of *Liberty Times Net*. This picture has been removed from Freddy Lim's *Facebook* page.

<sup>46</sup> See my Introduction for more information about responses to, or discursive attacks on Freddy Lim during the parliament election between late 2015 and early 2016, as someone being mentally abnormal.

an incomplete, split, and hybrid entity, so that this search for an identity can continue. At stake in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is the necessity to address the silence and amnesia that sustained an atrocity of a not-so-distant past, so that it will not happen again. Both reflections, however, are not without problematical implications. While the mindset advocated in JUST NOT MEANT TO BE can easily slide back into silence and amnesia while addressing these very issues, the mindset advocated in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT can spark further divisions between and hostilities among Taiwanese people.

This is evident in the heated debates around Chthonic's discourse on Taiwanese folk. So let me first deal with this, by focusing on the re-articulations involved in Chthonic's valorization of the erhu. I then excavate what I call a "structural rupture" by drawing inspirations from scholarly works on nationalistic construction in metal. Finally, I will reflect on the intentional perversion in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT.

Among the several folk instruments used by Chthonic, the yueqin and the erhu are used in the most consistent ways. Phonically distorted and associated with guitar distortion, the yueqin appeals to the Taiwanese attracted to metal and is generally quite capable of incorporating metal in the Taiwanese context, as observed by Li Shuo (李碩) (151). The association with the distorted guitar, however, may also explain why the yueqin is quite often visually "misrepresented," for example, as a keyboard in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT, and as a zhang (箏) in TAKAO (discussed in the next section). The yueqin stands for metal as a marginal musical genre in Taiwan. This marginality is highlighted in Wu Jian-lian's (吳建樑) cross-examination of the news coverage of Chthonic winning the Golden Melody Award in 2003. The majority of news agencies described Chthonic's music as noise, and commented negatively on the band's winning the award. Even among the few agencies that called it music, there was a sense of confusion about how the band could have won the award (10-13). This reception and overall bewilderment, as Wu points out, related to the cultural-socio hegemony of a Han Taiwanese-Chinese sentiment represented by the award at that time (5-6, 12-13). In this context, Chthonic winning the award indicated that the band enjoyed certain socio-cultural privileges, but remained marginal and deviant due to its political stance. As for this political stance, during the acceptance speech, Freddy Lim (in)famously called Taiwan the mother nation.<sup>47</sup>

Different from the yueqin, the sound of the erhu is seldom distorted, and always has clear visual signifiers. According to Freddy Lim during an interview with Chu Meng-tze (朱夢慈), the band chose to incorporate the erhu because of its plaintive timbre. On the one hand, it distinguishes Chthonic's music from other metal music; on the other, it transmits an emotion that Taiwanese people easily relate to (Chu 18-19). The erhu not only appeals to Taiwanese people in general, but, as Hsu Chien-Jung (許建榮) and Wang Wei-shuo (王維碩) observe, it is an integral part of the band's retelling of stories of the repressed Taiwanese. This retelling also glorifies a subaltern identity because the erhu has become a symbol associated with a particular ethnographic population of Taiwan. That is to say, the erhu as used by Chthonic valorizes a certain identity of Taiwan that Hsu and Wang criticize as problematic for any Han Taiwanese nationalism (Hsu 95-97; Wang 63-64, 67-69). In turn, this Taiwanese folk identity construed through a series of linguistic, musical, and historical re-articulations plays a pivotal role in the band's advocacy for Taiwanese independence.

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<sup>47</sup> For the consequent controversy and omission of this speech in broadcast, see Hsu 93.

To be sure, this appropriation and re-articulation of folk elements for political ideologies is not an isolated phenomenon, and one that is increasingly common in metal. In his article “*Remain True to the Earth!*: Remarks on the Politics of Black Metal,” Benjamin Noys argues that metal borders on a void due to its onto-political ambivalence. Metal can only retain a consistency through constant discursive dis- and re-articulations that appeal to imaginary, narrowly or even singularly defined collectives which share a “ground,” the “land,” thus forming a “folk” (115). For Noys, this explains why certain genres of metal easily give way to the extreme right, to Nazism, fascism, or ultra-nationalism (105). Although Noys emphasizes right-wing political extremity, this kind of discursive construction also takes place in the left wing. In his article “From Forest Unknown: Eurometal and the Political/Audio Unconsciousness,” Scott Wilson cautions against the surging left-wing nationalism and racism in European metal, and describes this as a form of nationalistic fetishism. What can propel such fetishization are images and sounds that affectively work with a political unconscious. Yet the danger of this mechanism is that specific images and sounds do not always meet or “sync with” what they are idealized for, and can crumble at any moment (150-52).

Chthonic’s construction of a Taiwanese folk identity where the erhu plays an important role can be understood as a left-leaning Han-Taiwanese nationalistic form of fetishization. Yet the erhu as Chthonic has “generally” used it, does not totally discredit the band’s political engagement and intervention. The case of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT, however, is a structural rupture from their previous use of the instrument. In this song, the erhu both re-articulates and dis-articulates the identity it glorifies. To explain how this rupture happens, I focus on the song’s logic of justice in retaliation, the “blood for blood” theme, during which the erhu is audibly dominant. I read this logic along with Lacan’s reflection on subject formation through the object voice.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Lacan refrains from fully theorizing the object voice because he intuits a void of negativity happening in it. At stake in this void, I also pointed out, is a loop between hallucinatory subjectification (or fetishization) and de-subjectification, which Lacan considers as two forms of symbolic death. In SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT whose logic is “blood for blood” incited by a negativity of “endless darkness,” the loop manifests itself as negativity substituting negativity. This is most obvious in the song’s use of the incomprehensible metal vocals paralleled by the erhu as a “cry for justice” and “peace,” in response to devocalization. Taken as whole, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT is a void of negativity where darkness, irrationality, and death all converge, which is evidenced in the lines of verse 1:

Trapped in the world of nothing  
Struggling to leave the sea of death  
Pretending mad and bearing with everything  
Living like a dead not daring to move

Put extremely, according to this particular background, the logic of the song can be translated into “death for death.” In the Taiwanese context where the unprofanable is common, distinguishing symbolic deaths from physical ones makes little sense.

Thus, the *si*-death that Taiwanese people hear from nowhere and everywhere, is issued together by the yueqin, the erhu, and the distorted guitar. Though different in terms of targets

of critique, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT and FUNERAL are very much alike in terms of their hauntology and spectrality, 鬼哭神號, with devils/demons shrieking and gods/spirits howling, trapped in shitty (si) life-death circles, roaming the ground of the ghost island.

### 3.

#### Metal and Political Discontents

舌燦蓮花 *Speaking tongue with lotus*

筆下生花 *Writing as if blossoming*

I opened this chapter with the claim that metal in Taiwan is politically activist in nature, and launched my exploration of soundscapes of Taiwan to argue for this claim. As is clear by now, by weaving together folk music, manifold traumatized histories and memories, and the sonorous cosmos of all beings, Taiwanese metal actively takes part in a politics that responds to Taiwan's internationally voiceless and domestically noisy situation. It has also become clear that, although Taiwanese metal songs share a sentiment to account for past injustices, the individual strategies of activism may vary, and there are moments when these strategies are so drastic that it is questionable if some people hear anything other than noise.

Admittedly, in the previous section I was carried away by my urge to speak in and function as a voice for Taiwan. Struggling to write down and explain how voices, sounds and soundscapes modulate, shape, and accompany me, in a foreign language I do not always feel at home in, I do not stand aside from forms of forgetting and remembering, from forms of silence and amnesia. I pushed aside many other beings that constitute Taiwan, in being led by my own passionate political aspiration. Pushed aside and repressed by me, they nevertheless return again and again, *blossoming* in my *tongue-tied writing*.

Scholarly speaking, my language is metaphorical, here—perhaps too metaphorical. Yet flowers and blossoms are powerful tropes in the Taiwanese context that function both as metonymies and metaphors. As metonymies they are contiguous with the Taiwanese society; as metaphors they may represent several things, among which the cycle of blossoming and decay that concerns the Taiwanese history and people. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that flowers or blossom often play a role in Taiwanese metal. This is, however, remarkable in the wider context of metal music. Most metal elsewhere does not tend to include these kinds of tropes. In THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN, for instance, there are close-up shots of flowers at 01:48-01:56; in FUNERAL there is the funeral lotus at 02:40-03:02, burnt as offerings. In JUST NOT MEANT TO BE there is the opening line 曉風殘月黃花堆—“dawning breeze, crescent moon, withering flowers,” imagery and personification conveying an aura of desolation—in an album named 花殤, *Elegy for the Blossoms*. And even if no particular flowers appear, their form is present, for instance at the end of SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT. At least for me, the piles of bodies look like either a bloody flower, like a funeral lotus, or like hell money that is meant to be burnt. In all cases flower images dwell in soundscapes as part of a collective (un)consciousness that always already manifests itself in several modalities.

Observing the recurrence of the motifs “rain,” “night,” and “flower” in Taiwanese music,

Zheng Shu-zhen (鄭淑珍) argues that these are important parts of an imagery conveying collective memories of Taiwan. The flower, according to Zheng, connotes specific forms of torment for the Taiwanese, especially those of females during the Japanese colonial period and the KMT dictatorship (6: 1-8).<sup>48</sup> Alongside the sounds of the erhu and the yueqin, we have another form of voicing here. The flower, such will be my argument, is not just an image: it speaks, though it is not always heard. For me, at least, the omni-presence of the flower gestures to a simultaneous forgetting and remembering that, in the first instance, I failed to restructure. This is why, in this section, I would like to expand soundscapes to the visual dimension and consider how this flower is made use of in two metal songs. I first examine the flower as enacting a historical complex in Chthonic's TAKAO 皇軍 (高砂軍 *Takasago Army*, 2011), and then move on to the paired blossoming of a flower and justice in FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? 正義的花? (若是一蕊號做正義的花 *If There is a Flower Called Justice*, 2013) by the Taiwanese metalcore band Burning Island (火燒島). Finally, I will reflect on the basis of the flower's "voice," on what it means and takes to be Taiwanese—a shared concern of the songs in this chapter—and I explain the socio-cultural and political hegemony involved in Taiwanese metal.

## i.

## Cherry Blossoms and Identity Complex in TAKAO

Among the many songs of Chthonic, TAKAO<sup>49</sup> is no doubt one of the most popular, so popular that one can sing its acoustic version in KTV (a Karaoke Box).

|       |    |         |      |                          |
|-------|----|---------|------|--------------------------|
| 72970 | 台語 | 事到如今    | 喬幼   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 72971 | 台語 | 思念的夢    | 喬幼   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 72972 | 台語 | 皇軍(民謠版) | 閃靈樂團 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 72973 | 台語 | 博仔聲     | 林孟宗  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 72974 | 台語 | 無名英雄    | 曾瑋中  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

A KTV song list including the folk version of TAKAO<sup>50</sup>

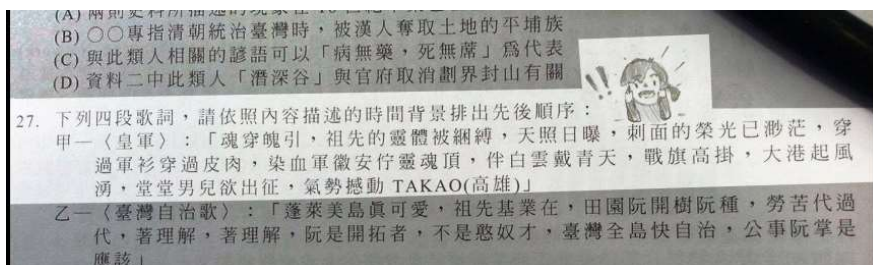
TAKAO is not only popular in Taiwan. The song's historical narrative has become canonical and is included in Taiwanese textbooks, even appearing in a mock college entrance exam.

<sup>48</sup> "Rain," "Night," and "Flower" in *Taiwanese Songs*. 2010. National Kaohsiung Normal University. MA thesis. See especially Zheng's discussion about the classic Taiwanese song TORMENT OF A FLOWER/RAINY NIGHT FLOWER 雨夜花 (1934), which *Elegy for the Blossoms* refers to in the opening track. It should also be noted that an imagery of rain and night appears in SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT as thunder (霆雷響) and endless darkness/night (茫茫的暗暝)

For TORMENT OF A FLOWER/RAINY NIGHT FLOWER (雨夜花), see 27 May 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0v9jLI2jE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0v9jLI2jE); for Crescent Lament's musical reference, see 9 Sept. 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9I2cMxMF58](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9I2cMxMF58).

<sup>49</sup> TAKAO. 17 June 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc). Again, the official English lyrics focus on the rhythmic dimension of Taiwanese and are thematically more moderate. My translation attempts to preserve the cultural connotations of the classical Taiwanese used. The official version can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>50</sup> 2 Feb. 2015, [blog.xuite.net/pensively2002/music/303284292-%E3%80%8E%E9%8C%A2%E6%AB%83KTV%E3%80%8F104%E5%B9%B4%E6%9C%88%E4%BB%BD%E6%96%B0K%E6%AD%8C%E5%96%AE](http://blog.xuite.net/pensively2002/music/303284292-%E3%80%8E%E9%8C%A2%E6%AB%83KTV%E3%80%8F104%E5%B9%B4%E6%9C%88%E4%BB%BD%E6%96%B0K%E6%AD%8C%E5%96%AE).



Lyrics of TAKAO in mock exam, with the student's kuso illustration<sup>51</sup>

Popular and canonical as it may be, TAKAO is also one of Chthonic's most controversial songs. Some, for instance, consider the song as appropriating the history of the indigenous Taiwanese, whereas others accuse Chthonic of glorifying Japanese militarism. To explain why the Taiwanese response to TAKAO was so polarized, I first briefly explain the background story of the song. I then consider the song's overall arrangement and its message. Finally, I will focus on the chorus and its visual correspondence of cherry blossoms, and show why this phonic, visual, and narrative arrangement is a profound historical complex that the Taiwanese people have yet to tackle.

TAKAO recounts a history about the Takasago Volunteers (高砂義勇隊), who were indigenous Taiwanese tribes fighting for Japan during WWII when Taiwan was a Japanese colony. Seeing off her lover at the port of Takao (nowadays called 高雄, Kaohsiung), the narrator of TAKAO laments about how the sun, thereby indicating Japan, is so blinding that the indigenous Taiwanese are losing their identities. This identity crisis is indicated in the music video where the narrator has a tattooed face according to indigenous custom, but is dressed in a Japanese kimono. She constantly stares at the camera from in front of a black screen, in a manner of silent accusation.



<sup>51</sup> 4 Nov. 2016, [www.facebook.com/chthonictw/posts/10154048373437503:0](https://www.facebook.com/chthonictw/posts/10154048373437503:0). Kuso means crap in Japanese; in Taiwan kuso is a common practice of parody, twisting cultural hegemony into bad humor. The visual incongruity in the music video of JUST NOT MEANT TO BE also has this kuso dimension.

Shot of the female narrator with the tattooed face and in a Japanese kimono in TAKAO<sup>52</sup>

TAKAO also incorporates the yueqin and the erhu. While the yueqin is distorted and visually portrayed as a zhang (箏), the erhu is played in a regular way by Freddy Lim.



Image of a zhang<sup>53</sup>

Incorporated in 1/introduction and 3/transition, the yueqin functions primarily to build up intensity, an emotional heaviness. Different from the yueqin, which is only used in the transitional passages, the erhu, again signifying a Taiwanese identity, often accompanies the vocals delivering the lyrics and elaborates on this emotional heaviness. The narrative-thematic emphasis on a Taiwanese collective is evident in block 6.



In this block, at 02:37-02:59, the guitar solo is replaced by an erhu solo. At 03:00-03:22, the erhu continues to play, during which the narrator becomes the lover of the female protagonist, as is made clear in the lines "Farewell in the harbor / You sob when seeing off my ship / Please wait for my glorious return / And continue our unfinished dream." Addressing and re-assuring his lover, the second narrator acknowledges the emotional heaviness weighing on the Taiwanese people, but expresses his hope for a future he might have control over. This change of narrator is also a shift of viewpoint with respect to the song's emotional heaviness. That is to say, at 03:00-03:22 the song presents a particular kind of dialogue between the erhu, the female narrator, and her lover as an alternative narrator. This dialogue simultaneously happens on musical, vocal, and thematic levels. This arrangement is a common practice in Taiwanese music, especially in Taiwanese folk opera where the erhu often functions as a voice interacting with the folk opera singers.

<sup>52</sup> 17 June 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc). The song's emphasis on the Taiwanese conflicting identities can also be detected in the visual parallels between paper plane, toy gun, bamboo copter, and the Japanese fighter aircraft.

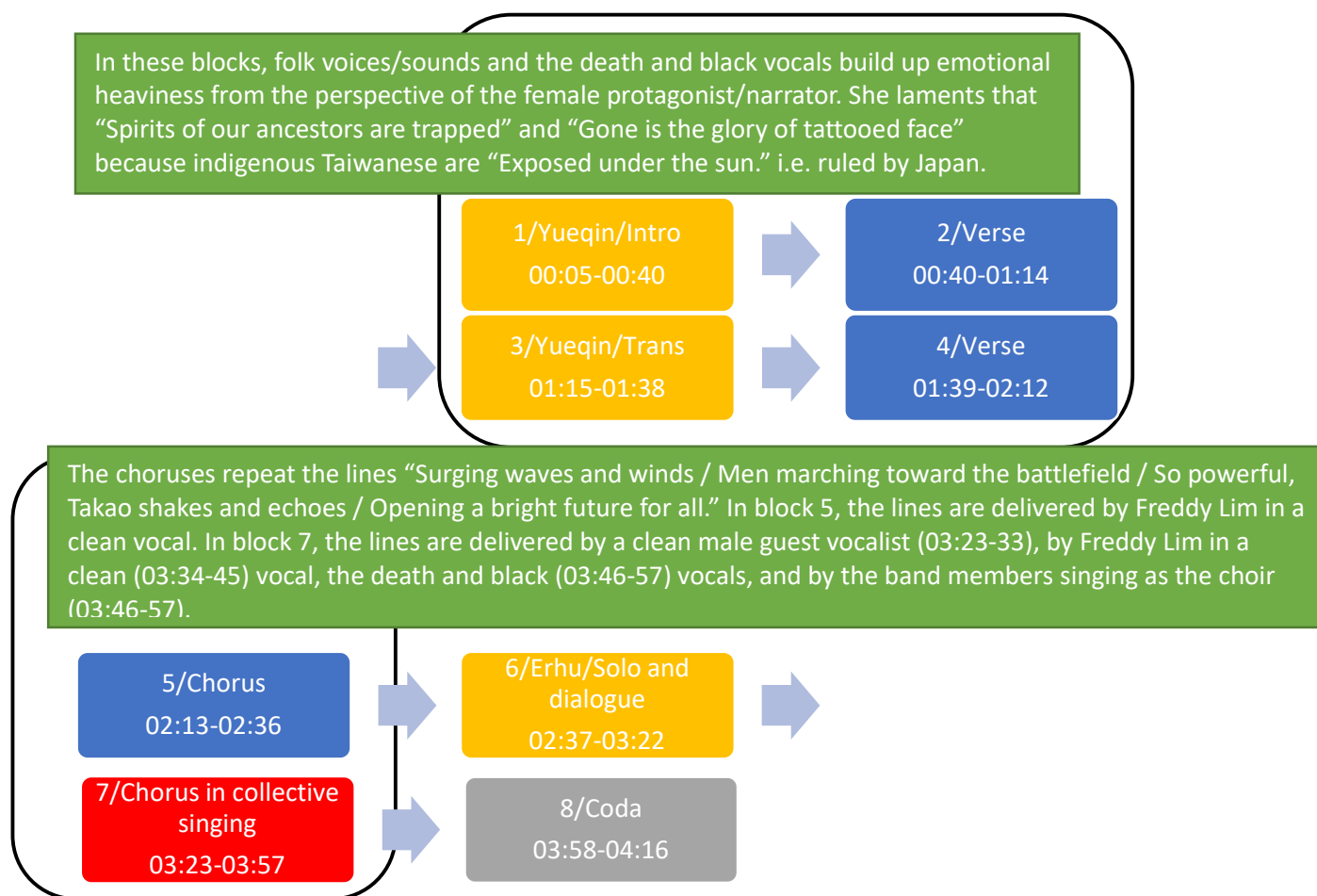
<sup>53</sup> *Tainan University of Technology*, n.d., [club.tut.edu.tw/c06/main5.htm](http://club.tut.edu.tw/c06/main5.htm).

Damon I-Kai Liu (劉逸凱) and Wang both bring attention to this kind of simultaneous musical, vocal, narrative, and thematic arrangements. Liu phrases it as a combination of conversation and contraposition. Reading the conversation and contraposition along with the band's lyrics in classical Taiwanese, Liu suggests that this arrangement functions as dialogues between the Taiwanese (96-98). Similarly, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of literary narrative, Wang reads this as a polyphonic arrangement through which Taiwanese of diverse backgrounds negotiate. Wang further observes the band's decreasing use of this arrangement since the 2005 album 賽德克巴萊 *Seediq Bale*, and criticizes Chthonic for downplaying dialogue in favor of the aggrandization of oppression (64-67). In the following, I call the combination of conversation and polyphony a dialectical dialogue, to highlight the shifts of viewpoint taking place. In the light of Wang's criticism, but differing from him, I consider the diminishment of dialogue as mirroring the history of the Seediq tribes who nearly became extinct after their rebellion against the Japanese rule.<sup>54</sup> In this context, the use of a dialectical dialogue in TAKAO in the 2011 album *Takasago Army* appears to carry a particular meaning. To make the significance of this dialectical dialogue clear, I examine block 7, the song's climax, and explain the relationship between blocks 6 and 7.

The core of TAKAO lies in how the emotional heaviness is built up and elaborated from two perspectives in blocks 1 to 6, and finally released through collective singing together in 7/chorus, before the song concludes. Below I map the general song structure, and notate the vocal arrangements and lyrics that are of particular importance.

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<sup>54</sup> The rebellion, called 霧社事件, is the theme of the critically acclaimed two-part film 賽德克巴萊 *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* (2011) by Wei Te-sheng (魏德聖). The cherry blossom is a central visual motif in the second part of the film. About the rebellion, see "Musha Incident." [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musha\\_Incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musha_Incident). About the film, see [www.imdb.com/title/tt2007993](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2007993), and [www.imdb.com/title/tt4164468/?ref\\_=tt\\_rec\\_tt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4164468/?ref_=tt_rec_tt).



Block 7 is not only the song’s climax in terms of its vocal complexity, but, more importantly, also in terms of empowerment. This empowerment comes through the choir’s singing together, the lines of which are in Taiwanese even in the song’s English version. Arguably, what makes the Taiwanese people “so powerful [that] Takao shakes and echoes” is not so much the erhu’s plaintive solo at 02:37-02:59, but the dialectical dialogue at 03:00-03:22. I read the erhu playing in this part as the Taiwanese responding to and empowering each other in relation to their earlier powerlessness. In my opinion, this is why the lines in this part remain in Taiwanese in the English version. The message of the song is that despite the loss of identities (through the references to ancestors and tattoo), despite the struggles and difficulties (through references to sea journey and battlefield), Taiwanese people do not give in or give up, and move on to “continue [an] unfulfilled dream” and to “open for a bright future for all,” that is, for Taiwan as one collective community.

TAKAO taken as a whole is consistent with the band’s discursive valorization of the erhu and their glorification of the repressed Taiwanese folk. Though different in terms of tone, TAKAO is quite similar to JUST NOT MEANT TO BE. Both songs draw an analogy between sea journeys, fates, and struggles experienced by the Taiwanese; both invoke scarred memories and histories of

Taiwan carried through, voiced by the erhu; both tell stories from the perspectives of female narrators who also converse with their fellow Taiwanese people.

Although TAKAO does not refer to flowers in the lyrics, in the music video, precisely during 7/chorus, the cherry blossom is the predominant visual signifier, and is associated with the female narrator, now an elderly woman, who finally smiles.



Shots of cherry blossom and the female narrator smiling to the blossom at 03:29-03:32.

The blossom shots, considered alongside the singing, hint at the possibility that the cherry blossom is to be read as the band's attempt to give voice to the minorities among the Taiwanese, as exemplified by the song's female indigenous narrator. This empowerment of minorities by way of the Taiwanese as one collective community, however, is also troubling and contradictory.

First, given the decades-long exploitation and repression that the indigenous Taiwanese populations have suffered, TAKAO has been understood by some as replicating Han socio-cultural hegemony. Indicatively, the acoustic version of TAKAO (失竊千年 *Timeless Sentences*, 2014) dispenses with lines referring to indigenous ancestors and tattoos. Second, as novelist and cultural critic Zhu You-zun (朱宥勳) points out, even when the internal complexity of Taiwan is accepted, the song's empowerment of the Taiwanese people ruled by Japan does not go well with the band's anti-KMT stance and view of the party as yet another colonizer. With respect to this, Zhu provocatively asks how the Taiwanese are supposed to feel about TAKAO, with so many conflicting identities and subjectivities reemerging, in a sense "blooming" at the same time, and concludes that this song manifests a historical complex that Chthonic have not yet managed to tackle.<sup>55</sup>

The historical complex explains why in the music video the very blossoms that bring a smile to the female narrator also cut and scar the members of Chthonic, as is shown by the stills below.

<sup>55</sup> 你說「解殖」，那你喜歡閃靈的〈皇軍〉嗎？“Decolonization? How About TAKAO?” 16 Feb. 2015, [opinion.udn.com/opinion/story/7344/712228](http://opinion.udn.com/opinion/story/7344/712228).

For the acoustic version of TAKAO, see 24 Nov. 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXSKtLvK-Vw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXSKtLvK-Vw).



Shots of cherry blossom cutting the band members at 03:39-03:57.<sup>56</sup>

Taken together, the blossom, the female protagonist, and the band's performing the music and singing together, imply a simultaneous empowerment and continued trauma of the collective Taiwanese community. Not unlike the female narrator who embodies two conflicting identities, with her tattoo and kimono respectively representing indigenous Taiwan and Japan, Taiwanese people nowadays, even when empowered and able to move on, still experience the traumas that run through generations. In *TAKAO*, the inaudibly speaking or singing flower is remembered in a bittersweet manner; it modulates, empowers, colors, and scars the Taiwanese.

Despite its problematics, *TAKAO*'s sustained ambiguity around identity is a likely reason for its popularity and canonical status in Taiwan. For the many Taiwanese who grew up listening to the reminiscences of the elderly, some identifying as Japanese, some Taiwanese, some Chinese, and quite often mixed to the point of being incoherent, *TAKAO* cannot be listened to without ambivalence and anxiety. This is similar to the Taiwanese reactions to *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE*. One reason of said incoherence is the policy of Japanization (皇民化) during WWII and KMT's anti-Japan propaganda since the take-over of Taiwan after WWII. As a result of this policy, many Taiwanese people growing up in the late phase of the Japanese colonial rule self-identified as Japanese, and were often targeted by the KMT. It should also be noted that whether during the Japanese colonial period or the KMT occupation, the indigenous Taiwanese populations were treated as inferior and constantly subjected to repression, exploitation, and even massacre.<sup>57</sup> Bearing scars and marching toward battlefields, like the ending shot of *TAKAO* illustrates, the Taiwanese nevertheless move on. Yet, how exactly, and where to?

<sup>56</sup> 17 June 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-OMly-fc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-OMly-fc).

<sup>57</sup> See "Japanization" and "Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples" for general information: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanization); [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese\\_indigenous\\_peoples](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese_indigenous_peoples).



Ending shot of TAKAO portraying a Taiwanese bearing a Taiwan-shaped scar about to join battles<sup>58</sup>

As the image makes clear, there is yet another repetition at stake. The figure on the forehead of the young man is not just an icon for Taiwan, it is also an opening through which a spirit-like beam projects itself, as if the young man is possessed by some sort of spirit.

ii.

Blossoming of a Flower in FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?

The cherry blossom brings in an imagistic-phonetic unconsciousness, as simply one flower embodying a voice that is contiguous to the ground and soil of Taiwan, a place I call home. What does this flower and what do my fellow Taiwanese people whisper to me? To get a better grasp on this, I want to approach the blossoming of a flower in FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?<sup>59</sup> by Burning Island, a song that is narrated from the perspective of this flower. In the following, I focus on the phonetic unconsciousness involved by examining the song's overall arrangement. I also draw attention to its resonances with songs I previously discussed. I then consider the imagistic modality by examining the music video.

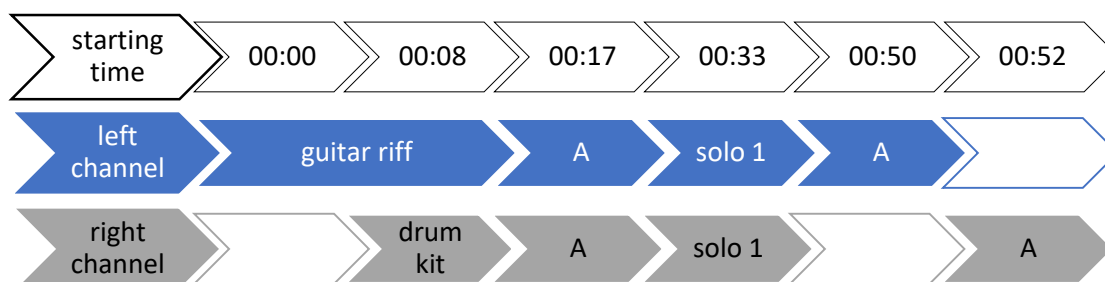
The first aspect of FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? that catches the attention is its opening, which distributes and emphasizes musical elements across different channels, and further includes an atypical solo 1; atypical in that, according to metal conventions, it comes "too early."

1/A/Intro  
00:00-00:53

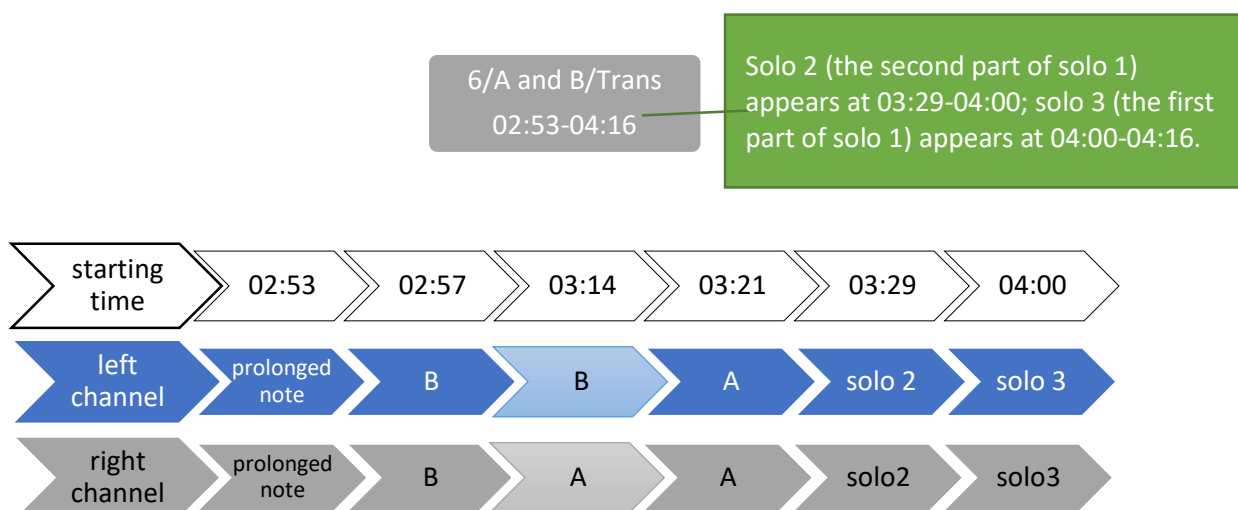
Solo 1 appears at 00:33-00:49.

<sup>58</sup> 17 June 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3t-0Mly-fc).

<sup>59</sup> FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? 14 Mar. 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gul5fH\\_SKA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gul5fH_SKA).



Due to the maneuver of sound outputs at 00:00-00:17 and 00:50-00:53, 1/A is highly affective, and can be experienced as a bit disorienting, especially when played loud on a stereo set. A similar but simpler maneuver later appears in the also atypical block 6 with solos 2 and 3.



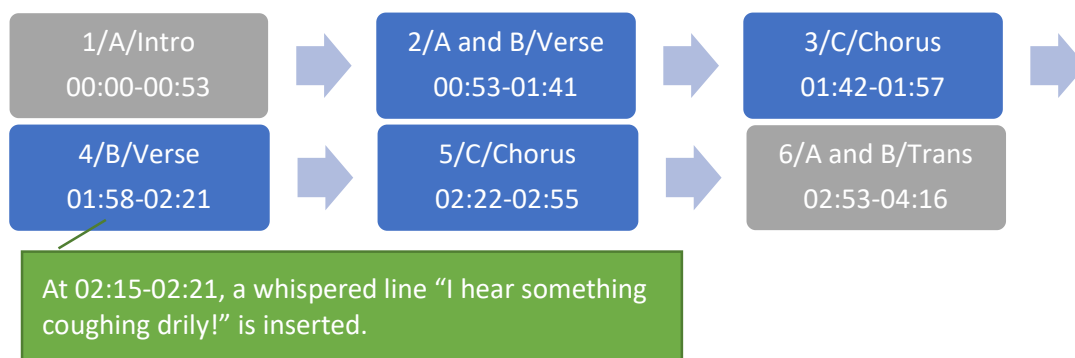
A close listening reveals that solo 2 is a variation and expansion of the second part of solo 1 (starting at 00:44), and that solo 3 is a variation of the first part of solo 1. From the above two flow charts it can be detected further that phonic and musical arrangements in blocks 1 and 6, both transitional passages, parallel each other, although some components at 00:33-00:53 and at 03:29-04:00 are varied. The two blocks, then, simultaneously function on phonic, musical, and structural levels. This is similar to how JUST NOT MEANT TO BE builds on folk elements in the transitions, and so the question is whether they also are meaningful on a thematic narrative level.

The song's narrative has three voice types (the death vocal, the echoed death vocal, and the black vocal) speaking from the perspective of the flower that I read as the Taiwanese, longing for "justice and light." A flower might be longing for light, but it is distinctly the Taiwanese who are longing for justice. This is suggested, for instance, in a chorus text such as:

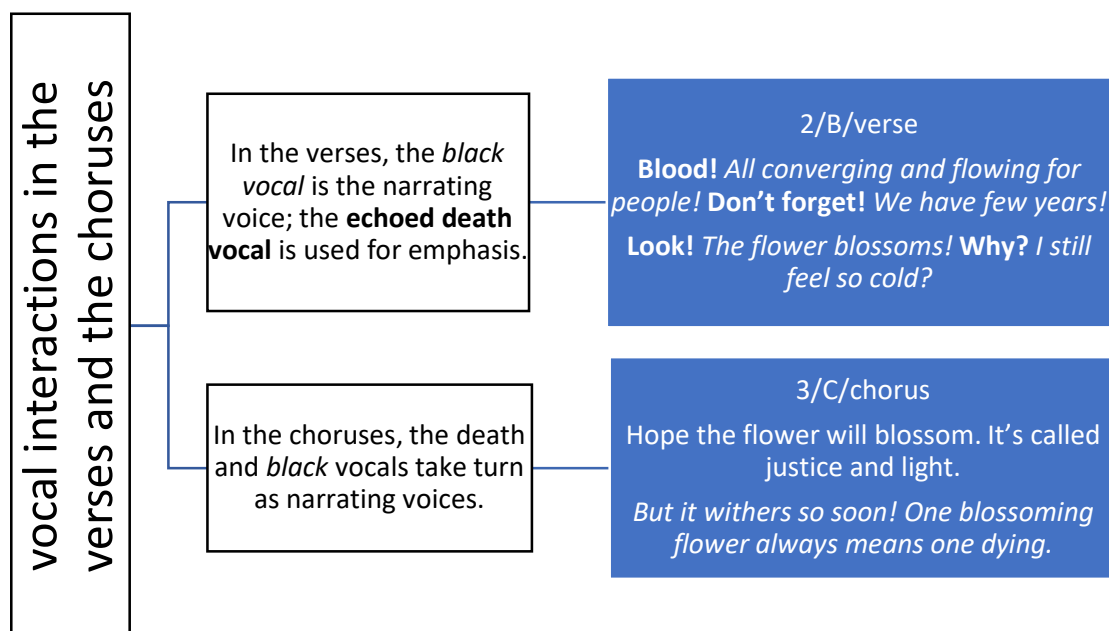
Hope the flower will blossom  
It's called justice and light

But it withers so soon!  
One blossoming flower always means one dying

The above quote gives me reason to suggest that the flower is a metaphor for Taiwanese identity here, which I will notate as flower/Taiwanese. In this context, in *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*, the voices not only take turn in terms of speaking and singing, but also in terms of viewpoints on the flower's existence: between blossom and withering, life and death, hope and doubt, eternity and evanescence. The song is distinctly allegorical in that this is not just a personified speaking and singing flower, but also a collective of people in dialogue and dialectically related, similar to the passage at 03:00-03:23 in *TAKAO* (where the erhu's voice functioned as a Taiwanese answering fellow Taiwanese people). Yet different from *TAKAO*, here the dialogues take place in sound blocks that form units at a structural and narrative level. Before I further discuss the theme of Taiwanese-in-collective-dialogue, I would like to bring attention to the song's two largest units/dialogues, namely the transition-verse-chorus (A, B, and C) that exist next to D/hook.



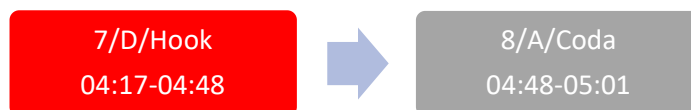
The song's structure that alters the verse-chorus-transition sequence is similar to solos 2 and 3 varying from and expanding on solo 1. A closer listening reveals that A, B, and C all engage with the same group of notes, but sound different. Among the three, A sounds steady; B sounds ruptured because of longer suspensions between riff-pickings; C is more melodic due to the use of prolonged notes. These distinctive feels “modulate” interactions between the three voices engaging in a collective dialogue. In the following chart I summarize the ways voice types interact in this song and I provide some paradigmatic lines as examples.



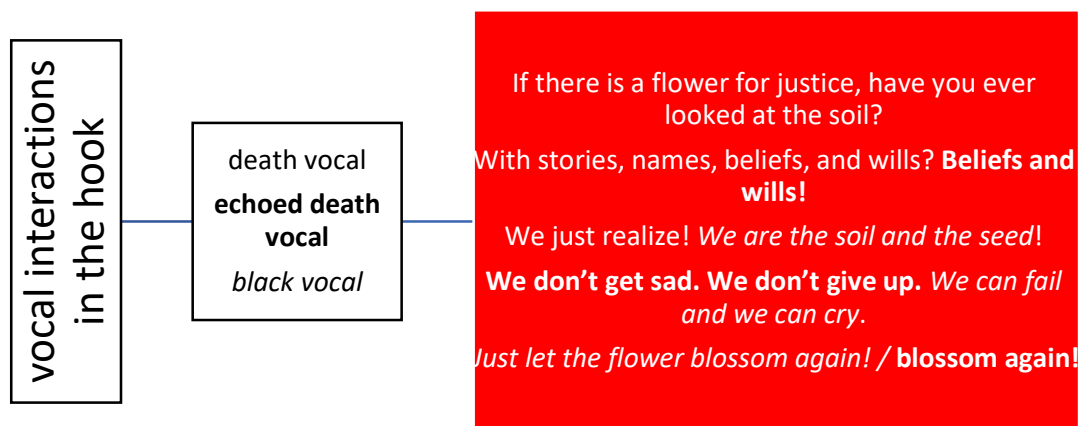
In the verses accompanied by B, with its ruptured sounds, there is a contrast between the two voice types. The tone of the linguistically articulate, narrating black vocal is straightforward. Due to the use of a question (“Why?”), the tone of the collective speaking in the echoed death vocal sounds uncertain. In 2 and 4/B/verse the collective dialectical dialogue is enacted through two voices. In 4/B/verse, this dialogue is followed by a whisper “I hear something coughing drily!” at 02:16-02:18. This whisper is not immediately audible, due to its relatively low volume and accompanying drone-sounding notes. However, if played loudly, especially on a stereo set, it is felt by the body and is highly affective. I consider this whisper a background undertone, the source of which is beings of all sorts in the sonorous cosmos.

In the chorus, both the death and black vocals are linguistically articulate and phonically smoother or less ruptured, in line with the accompanying part C that sounds melodic, and appears to suggest that the Taiwanese are in control of language and voice. Yet, having voice and language does not ease the sense of uncertainty created in B/verse. While the first part of the chorus is optimistic in tone, the second part takes a pessimistic turn. The collective dialogue in C/chorus is thus enacted in the domain of language (*logos* in the narrow sense) that does not appear to blossom as “justice and light” (*logos* in the broad sense). I read the song’s trajectory from blocks 1 to 6, especially at 00:00-03:28, as working through a dynamic of inclusion-exclusion or empowerment-oppression in relation to *logos*: from wordless phonic manipulation, to worded voices/sounds, to a voice supposedly standing for identity, subjectivity, and political agency, to plummeting back to wordless phonic manipulation after hearing beings of all sorts speak (see the above song structure and flow charts, especially 6/A and B).

This resulting collective devocalization raises a question with respect to the nature of solos 2 and 3 (03:29-04:16) reversing solo 1 that I qualified as “too early.” This question about the solos leads me to the rest of the song consisting of 7/D/hook and 8/A/coda.



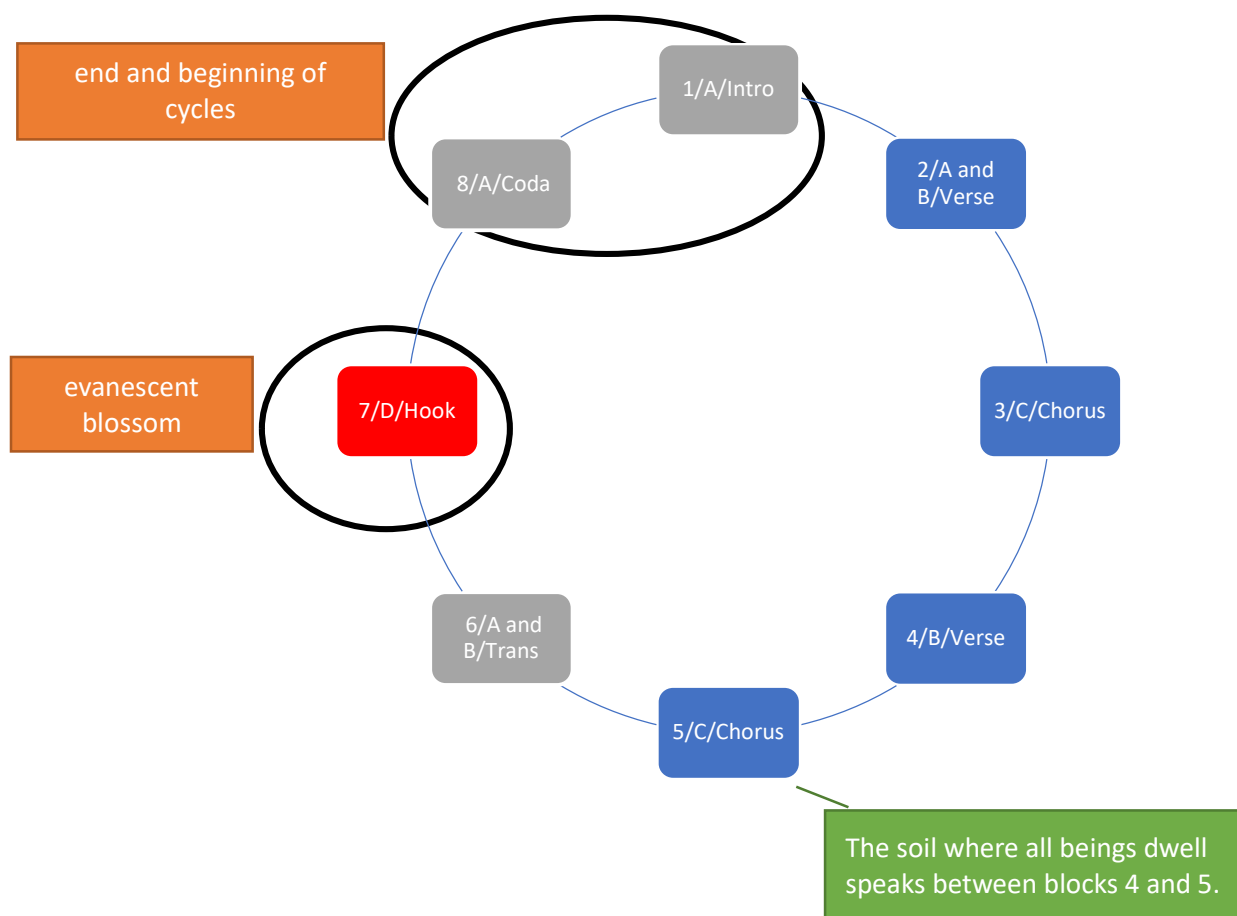
Earlier, I termed 7/D/hook the other structural-narrative unit. D engages with a new group of notes previously not used in A, B, and C, and it is the only part not varied and repeated. It is also the hook to be imprinted in the listener's mind and soul. Vocally, the three voice types all speak in articulate manners, their tone now resolute and hopeful.



If we listen closely to the dialogue accompanied by D, a sound block that feels increasingly urgent due to a brisk riff combined with an increasing use of cymbals, we may notice that the tone of the two main narrating voices (the death vocal and the black vocal) is indeed urgent, realizing that it is the ground, “soil and seed” from which any flower takes root and sprouts. This realization enables the flower/Taiwanese (the echoed death vocal) to assert “beliefs and wills” and to further move on in a linguistically articulate manner: “we don’t get sad / we don’t give up.” As a synecdoche, the Taiwanese as one collective then sing together the final line and call out: “blossom.” 7/D/hook as such appears quite hopeful, suggesting that the Taiwanese finally have a voice, language, and justice.

Solely considering the trajectory from blocks 1 to 7, solos 2 and 3 can be read as empowering. Yet the song’s ending in 8/A undermines this hopeful reading. Even when we dispense with phonic manipulation, A at 04:49-04:56 (8/coda) is the same as A at 00:09-00:16. Given the enactment of the empowerment-oppression dialectic in blocks 1 to 6 that succumbed back to devocalization, solos 2 and 3 might as well be read as the pole of empowerment whose oppressive pole is foreshadowed in 8/A/coda. This possibility cannot be ruled out. After all, FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? suggests a self-referential song that both thematizes and iconically repeats a flower cycle of blossoming and withering, that is, a dialectical dialogue whose self-presence and fulfillment always already imply self-negation and destruction (as was the case with ENJOY THE SILENCE in Chapter Three).

Visualized the song looks like this, then:



Any listener, reader, or viewer might be gripped by uncertainty as well. The question is whether the collective dialectical dialogue blossoms as communication, or whether it is more a matter of voices and sounds that come together in indistinction, which would be similar to what happened in *FUNERAL* and *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*. Anyone might have a bad feeling upon hearing the whispered “I hear something coughing drily,” a sentence expressed shortly after “root” and “soil” are mentioned for the first time.<sup>60</sup> The ground or land the flower/Taiwanese appeals to might not be as benign as expected. It might rather concern a ghost island or an island on fire, revolting against political oppression, something that is indicated by the band’s name. Burning Island refers to a failed rebellion of political prisoners, known as the Burning Island Incident (火燒島事件) which, for the Taiwanese, has become a symbol of the political persecution and censorship in the last phase of the Martial Law.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> The lines in full are: “Listen! I hear something coughing drily! / Listen! Is it from the root? / Listen! I hear something coughing drily! / Listen! Is it from the soil? / I hear something coughing drily!”

<sup>61</sup> This incident consists of two rebellions: the first one took place on November 29, 1987, in Taitung; the second one on December 1, 1987, on Green Island. Due to the blockage of information, records remain incomplete. As a result, this incident symbolizes the political oppression during the last phase of the Martial Law. Chthonic, for example, addresses this incident in the song 火燒島 SET FIRE TO THE ISLAND in *Bú-Tik* (2013). For an investigation of international and domestic political dynamics culminating to the incident, see the documentary 遺忘與記憶：台灣白色恐怖受難者與家屬口述影像紀錄 *Forgetting and Memories: Recounts of White Terror in Taiwan* (2011) by Sieh Guang Cheng (謝光誠).

If one watches the video, it does not take long to realize that *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?* contains another intentional perversion. The video is composed of close-up shots of an illustration, part of which is used as the album art. Prior to solos 2 and 3 the video focuses on two images, of radioactive waste and of a gun lying on blood-stained ground, referencing respectively to Orchid Island (蘭嶼) where radioactive waste is dumped, and to Green Island (綠島) where political prisoners were kept. Obviously, both references intend to bring attention to the political oppression of the Taiwanese. During solo 3, a skull-like face uncannily emerges from the land. During 7/D/hook, the camera first turns to a human head on the ground, its mouth wide open, then slowly spans above and gradually reveals a flower blossoming from the head and a devil roaming the ground. In the end, this soil and the island appealed to are simultaneously haunted and haunting, as is indicated by the ending, panoramic shot of *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*



Ending shot of *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?* whose visual focuses are the bloody flower and the skull<sup>62</sup>

While the last shot of the music video stresses the hauntology and spectrality of Taiwan, the album art of *If There is a Flower Called Justice* stresses what it takes for justice to be achieved, by associating the bloody flower, the head with a wide open mouth, and the character 花 (*hue* in Taiwanese, *hua* in Mandarin), which means flower.

<sup>62</sup> 14 Mar. 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gul5fH\\_SKA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gul5fH_SKA).



Album art of *If There is a Flower Called Justice* portraying a flower blossoming from a Taiwanese who also roams the soil as a devil<sup>63</sup>

A bloody flower blossoms as the tongue of the head of a dead Taiwanese person with his or her mouth wide open. The implication is that the Taiwanese, speaking but not heard, vocalizing but voiceless, roam the ground like devils who have suffered violent deaths and not been properly buried. The message of FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? and its album *If There is a Flower Called Justice* is that for justice to blossom, in whatever evanescent manner, it takes a bloody price, and that this is a never-ending pursuit. The flower's cycle(s) of blossoming and withering guarantees the eternal return of the repressed and oppressed Taiwanese.

For any scholar studying Taiwanese metal, a vexing question is how to do justice to this wide-open mouth, the tongue, and the bloody flower growing from it—a flower/Taiwanese in torment, struggling to speak out.<sup>64</sup>

### iii.

#### Political Activism and Some Problematics of Taiwanese Metal

TAKAO and FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? demonstrate how the sonorous cosmos of all beings allows

<sup>63</sup> 1 June 2015, [streetvoice.com/BurningIslandTW/songs/album/97262661/](http://streetvoice.com/BurningIslandTW/songs/album/97262661/).

<sup>64</sup> Here I am referring to the classic Taiwanese song *TORMENT OF A FLOWER*, see footnote 48.

Taiwanese music to alternatively envision voices, sounds, and images, and to variously explore the identities and subjectivities of Taiwan. By making use of the phonic-imagistic unconsciousness carried by a flower that continues to speak and bloom, both songs reflect on what it means and takes to be Taiwanese. This is a shared concern in all six Taiwanese songs discussed in this chapter. Both arrive at quite similar conclusions despite differences in tones: Taiwanese people do not give up the desire to stand and speak as Taiwanese. Internationally speaking, this desire concerns the injustice that in many international gatherings, the use of the very terms “Taiwan” and “Taiwanese” is not allowed. Domestically speaking, it concerns struggles between the Taiwanese people who seek a voice and justice for Taiwan.

In the Taiwanese context of double oppression—of international voicelessness and internal traumatization—poles of double power always go hand in hand, cutting both ways, as is captured in *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*. The torment emerges from the necessity to act as a voice for Taiwan and the awareness of how this very act oppresses fellow Taiwanese people. This has appeared, again and again, as shown in this chapter, through manners of dramatization, extremity, and perversion. In *THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN* and *FUNERAL*, songs that deal with religions orienting people’s ways of life, this torment appears in the latter’s acting out of an all-encompassing (bio)political manipulation. In *JUST NOT MEANT TO BE* and *TAKAO*, songs that deal in part with the Japanese rule, this torment is expressed as ambivalence and anxiety. In *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT* and *FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?*, songs that deal with extreme violence in a not-so-distant past, extreme reminders are needed to prevent the Taiwanese from falling back to forgetting and from repetitions of tragedy.

Having explained what propels the extremity in Taiwanese metal, I will now clarify the socio-cultural and political hegemony involved in the Taiwanese metal scene. As for cultural hegemony, it should be recalled that the issue of languages is a recurring one in the works of Chthonic. The issue also shows itself, however, in the Taiwanese and English album titles of *政治* (politics) and *Battlefields of Asura* that I discussed in the Introduction. In this chapter, the issue can be detected in both *SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT* and *TAKAO*. Both are much more moderate in their tone and lyrics in the English versions, but also preserve messages in English in the Taiwanese (*SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT*) or Taiwanese in the English (*TAKAO*). The ability to use English (or other dominant, non-sinophonic languages) is a form of cultural capital not accessible to all, and is arguably a privilege for some Taiwanese, especially males and usually of Han ethnicity, from the middle and upper classes who have benefitted from industrialization (Li 94). This cultural-economic background enables members of these classes to re-interpret the metal subculture in a Taiwanese context. That said, the political aspects of the “origin” of metal in Taiwan is that it was introduced by US soldiers deployed in Taiwan, along with rock and punk, as a cluster of musical genres that the KMT dared not ban.<sup>65</sup> Although metal, rock, and punk all contributed to the rapid democratization since the late 1990s, rock and punk suffered from mainstream popularization. Taiwanese metal, on the other hand, holds on to an idealized elite

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<sup>65</sup> Li focuses extensively on dynamics involved in metal’s development in Taiwan, see especially chapter four 挖掘一段若隱若現的歷史：甚麼是重金屬樂？“An Obscure History: What is Metal Anyway?” Wang also notes the ambiguous boundary between rock, punk, indie, and metal in Taiwan, and points out that these genres appeal to the urban middle class. For a scholarly overview of the roles of socio-cultural, ethnic, and political dynamics in Taiwan’s democratization, readers are recommended to consult *The ‘Republic of China’ and the Politics of Taiwanization: the Changing Identity of Taiwan in Postwar East Asia* (2014) by Wakabayashi Masahiro.

identity, its deviance and marginality targeting larger politics, norms, and the mainstream as a whole.

This is why Li, Wang, and Chu variously criticized metal for its intellectual elitism (Li 95), cultural elitism (Chu 125), and Han nationalism (Wang 88). Commenting on a dispute over the term Taiwanese metal as “Taiwanese/localized metal” or the “larger metal tradition in Taiwan,” Li points out that this seemingly straightforward local versus global argument in fact encapsulates layers of power struggles in Taiwanese metal (151-53). In my opinion, the very reoccurrence of this dispute indicates that it is by nature symptomatic, stemming from scenic members’ anxieties about how their political acts always cut both ways. Put differently, this black-and-white dispute is a defense mechanism through which members express their anxiety and maintain distance from their irrationality.

With the above dynamics in mind, it is not surprising that a common but not always benign Taiwanese practice in the scene is a form of double-edged “bad humor,” that manifests itself by playing with language or playing as the devils. Take, for example, two related, once prevalent slang words: gay-假, that I came across, and homo-猴魔, that Li came across in his interviews with scenic members. Both words have a distinctive political and patriarchal bent. In Taiwanese, fake 假 is pronounced similar to gay in English; it refers to members who pretend to be interested in politics, often used in interchange with the phrase Li observed: 迷弟 or 迷妹, meaning juniors (弟 or 妹) who are fans/lost (迷) (128). Homo-猴魔, then, is a reference to the monkey king/devil in the classic *Journey to the West*,<sup>66</sup> which is pronounced in Mandarin similar to homo (shortened from homosexual); it refers to elite members who sincerely or authentically engage with politics (Li 127). In both cases, the diminishment of masculinity and human subjectivity reverses the commonly-heard political rhetoric in Taiwan that political oppression is castration, but retains the rhetoric’s power to hurt. Queer myself, I found that bad humor of this kind exemplifies metal’s politics of exclusion-inclusion and selective irony (also see Chapter One).

Yet, I am not jettisoning Taiwanese metal. No doubt, despite the political complexity, Taiwanese metal’s actively engagement with politics replicates metal’s overall problematics. On the other hand, the acute awareness of one’s potential role as an accomplice to oppression and violence—captured by the slogan “everything is political and no one stands outside politics”—means that the majority of Taiwanese metal members are willing to address, discuss, and rectify issues often shunned in the larger metal community. This willingness to engage in often uncomfortable dialogues is the political ability of Taiwanese metal.

#### 4.

#### Resonances—Personal and Political

I am nearing the end of this homecoming chapter that is underpinned by my passionate political engagement with Taiwan and Taiwanese metal. Before I conclude, however, I want to linger a while and briefly recap the Taiwanese songs I have discussed. Although they may be dissonant

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<sup>66</sup> For political-religious propaganda and homoeroticism in *Journey to the West*, see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journey\\_to\\_the\\_West](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journey_to_the_West).

in the sense that, one way or another, the songs always end in perversion and hauntology, they still resonate with each other, in that they all mirror, echo, and give voices to the memories, histories, and worlds of the Taiwanese. After all, are these songs not part of the Taiwanese soundscapes and the sonorous cosmos where all beings of past, present, and future coexist harmonically (although not necessarily harmoniously)?

To a certain degree, my earlier hearing of the songs as cries and screams by human and non-human beings of all sorts, in vengeance and pain, involves myself playing the devil. Driven by my anxiety to voice a Taiwan that I remember as the ghost island, I give in to my desire, and would like to set the evanescence of Taiwan and Taiwanese metal on fire. I would like to reconceptualize, or better, re-remember one more modality of Taiwan, as “the desert island,” in drawing inspiration from Tom Conley’s reading of Gilles Deleuze’s early essay “The Desert Island.”

The desert island . . . becomes the emblematic place where there can be perceived originary myths and the concurrent forces that generate them. Once it is thought of in this way the desert island becomes the vital space of creative difference and repetition. (217)

Although Conley has Deleuze in mind when he maps the desert island, I suggest that Taiwan can also be understood as a desert island. According to Conley, the desert island is not necessarily deserted, but is prone to desert itself by failing to re-energize its originary myth, thus losing and destroying it (215-17). I consider the originary myth in a Taiwanese context as the sonorous cosmos mediated by the soundscapes, and the concurrent forces as the Taiwanese people exploring forms of identity and subjectivity. During explorations, the Taiwanese unconsciousness and its political abilities might be lost. Nevertheless, these do not disappear, but are always here and there, energizing re-articulations, noisy but also lively. This is the vitality of the Taiwan I call home.

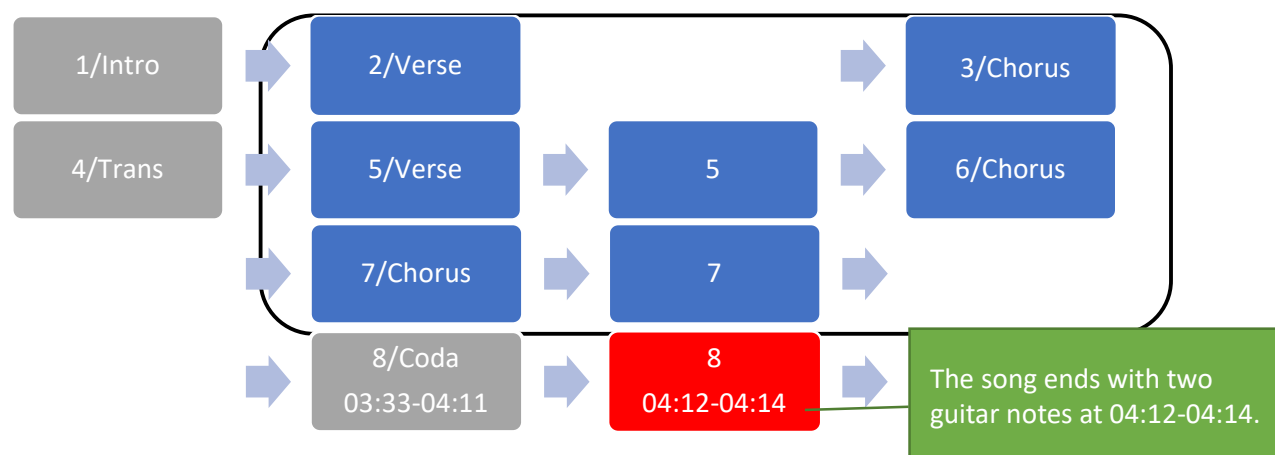
#### i.

#### ISLAND’S SUNRISE and a Collective “Oh”

Just as I opened this chapter with a religious soundscape, I would like to conclude by returning to the soundscapes of Taiwan, having reconceptualized the spectrality of these as vitality. I have in mind one particular song/soundscape that carries an individual as well as collective sediment: a series of remembrances since the early 2010s and an irrevocable awakening in the Sunflower Movement (太陽花學運) in 2014, during which Taiwanese often sung together ISLAND’S SUNRISE 島嶼天光 by the Taiwanese rock band Fire EX. (滅火器 Fire Extinguisher).<sup>67</sup> The structure of the song can be visualized as follows:

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<sup>67</sup> ISLAND’S SUNRISE. 28 Mar. 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOgNLY8nDxQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOgNLY8nDxQ). The Sunflower Movement took place between 18 March and 10 April, 2014, against improper procedures of passing the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (服貿協議). For more information, see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunflower\\_Student\\_Movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunflower_Student_Movement).



As a protest song composed for the Sunflower Movement, ISLAND'S SUNRISE is simple but subtle. The song builds on and slightly varies the verse-chorus format (in the black circle above) to elaborate on, and emphasize the theme of the Taiwanese people in pursuit of democracy and justice.<sup>68</sup> The central force of ISLAND'S SUNRISE, moreover, lies in its collective singing as a form of empowerment. In block 5, it is a band member *echoing* with the vocalist ("Can't even recall how many days have passed, *but please don't worry*" and "We are *braver than ever before*"); in 6 with the lines "Dawn is near / Let us sing it out loud" members of Fire EX. sing together, and are joined by crowds in 7 repeating the same lines; in 8, Taiwanese voices collectively reassert their resolution, "Today is the day / For brave Taiwanese." Though its narrative is hopeful and encouraging, as a whole ISLAND'S SUNRISE is a highly ambivalent dialectical dialogue. In 8, following the reassertion, the collective singing continues and repeats the phoneme "oh" for 30 seconds (03:33-04:04), and the song is concluded by two guitar notes at 04:12-04:14. The song is thus a collective vocalization of *phónè*, voicing and resonating with the profound sense of uncertainty felt by the Taiwanese; uncertainty if sunrise and justice will shine upon this island today or tomorrow.

Several forms of textual, musical and visual unconsciousness and references that reoccur throughout this chapter converge in ISLAND'S SUNRISE. There is a flower, in cycle(s) ("Because we know the flower blossoms after winter" cf. FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?); there are unfulfilled dreams ("There are people who are determined to protect our dreams." Cf. TAKAO); there is dawn and sunrise breaking endless darkness and bringing justice, so that the Taiwanese who are on a sea journey can go home ("Once the sun reaches the mountain / Then it's time to go home," cf. FLOWER FOR JUSTICE?, SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT and JUST NOT MEANT TO BE); and there is fire, resonating in my own unconscious short-circuits, but also in the band names Burning Island and Fire Ex., and referenced in the music video of FUNERAL.

In terms of spectrality or vitality, the Sunflower Movement did not end well. It was one of those moments during which state violence returned undisguised, after the lift of the Martial

<sup>68</sup> Some exemplary lines: "Dawn is near / Let us sing it out loud / Until the rays of hope / Shine upon everyone on this island." The lyrics referred here is the Taiwanese version used during the movement. The official English lyrics can be found in the Appendix.

Law. Since then, thematically speaking, devils could be heard everywhere because there was an angry fire (火) (*hue* in Taiwanese) in people, including me, who do not want to remember the movement's ending in painful cries and blood-stained truncheons, suffered and wielded by fellow Taiwanese people. The phoneme-singing and the sunflower infiltrate into me and bloom in me as a bloody (*hueh*) flower (*hue*) in torment and vengeance as well as in hope.



Photo of sunflowers in cheval de fries during the movement<sup>69</sup>

### Do You Hear the People Sing?

Having been through possession, acting out, and re-remembering Taiwan, I now reach the destination of my journey and my passionate political engagement. In this chapter, I showed how voices, sounds, and soundscapes profoundly impact Taiwanese ways of life. I also explained how Taiwanese metal engages with politics by appropriating soundscapes, quite often in intentionally extreme manners, in line with the extremity of the Taiwanese context. The tradition of political activism in Taiwanese metal is not unproblematic. Nevertheless, as I endeavored to explain, in echoing and mirroring, as well as sharing the memories, histories, and worlds of the Taiwanese, Taiwanese metal also assists people to move on and try to prevent repetitions of tragedy. To rephrase it through my own reflection, I consider Taiwanese metal to be an angry fire, energizing and vitalizing flower-life cycle(s). Taken together, the songs discussed in this chapter, and by implication, myself as Taiwanese, are still on a long journey, in search of identity, subjectivity, and a voice, though not necessarily blessed by the gods.

Anxious but determined, uncertain but still hopeful, I am now humming along with my

<sup>69</sup> 27 Mar. 2014, [www.taiwanus.net/news/news/2014/201403270126461656.htm](http://www.taiwanus.net/news/news/2014/201403270126461656.htm).

home soundscapes that have always been with me, wherever I am. I move on, knowing that even amid darkness, there are sparks of light, flowers blossoming, and my fellow people singing together.



People singing ISLAND'S SUNRISE together on 30 March 2014<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 30 Mar. 2014, [photo.chinatimes.com/20140330002990-260803](http://photo.chinatimes.com/20140330002990-260803). The photo is now removed from the internet; October 2019.

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## Appendix

## THE GODS BLESS TAIWAN 眾神護臺灣

佛祖的慈悲 媽祖的保佑  
乎我來熟識你 是天公的好意啊

關公的義氣 土地公笑咪咪  
咱來變知己 是絕對無心機

眾神護臺灣 眾神保平安  
眾神護臺灣 用心看臺灣

善有善啊報 惡有惡果  
汝若對我好 啊事事攏輕可

咱來作陣行 行出好名聲  
無分汝甲我 全世界攏知影

眾神護臺灣 眾神保平安  
眾神護臺灣 用心看臺灣

雙腳站佇這 這是咱的名  
眾神護臺灣 用心愛臺灣

眾神護臺灣 眾神保平安  
眾神護臺灣 用心看臺灣

雙腳站佇這 這是咱的名  
眾神護臺灣 用心愛臺灣

With Buddha's compassions and Mazu's blessings  
The gods intend us to be friends

With Guan Yu's fierce loyalty and Tudigong's  
cheerfulness  
There is no calculation and manipulation between  
us

The gods bless Taiwan and keep it safe and  
prospering  
The gods bless and care for Taiwan. Ha!

Reap goodness and evilness you sow  
Be kind and trust me, I am your solid back

We march hand in hand to make our name  
We are known all over the world in one name

The gods bless Taiwan and keep it safe and  
prospering  
The gods bless and care for Taiwan

We stand here in our name  
The gods bless and care for Taiwan. Ha!

The gods bless Taiwan and keep it safe and  
prospering  
The gods bless and care for Taiwan

We stand here in our name  
The gods bless and care for Taiwan. Ha!

## FUNERAL 上山

師父師父 我朋友印堂發黑 眼睛翻白 整個人恍  
神 還會對空氣說話  
你朋友中邪 現在來還不遲 先來 佈陣 準備 做  
法

你給你爸跪下 五個大人沒你辦法 前面那尊認  
識嗎 跟你介紹 玉皇大帝  
右手的清香 來拿去 左手的法寶 來撒去  
太歲頭上動土 你下去地獄在解釋

Master! My friend is dying and losing sense, in  
ghostly face and with hallucination  
Hail the sky and the earth!  
Your friend is possessed. Not too late. Come,  
lineup, prepare, and exorcize!

Kneel the fuck down! Five guys can't handle you,  
but that's alright. See that statue? I tell you that's  
the Jade Emperor!

喔 秋喔 那要怎樣 踹我膝蓋 找死嗎  
 說那廢話 我沒有在信的啦 這種爛文明 你爸我  
 看不起  
 看你像屎我就看你像屎 都 shit  
 你們就趕快拜拜 保佑平安 都 shit  
 地球人 不成材啦 都 shit  
 你頭殼壞去還想收服我 都 shit  
 不可能  
 外星魔仔 妖力超強 還有絕招 super power  
 一下要讀你的心 一下控制你的魂  
 哇咧 這痛苦 大家就要忍耐喔  
 師父現在馬上帶你們脫離苦海

喔 沒效喔 你做的都沒效啦 你爸不痛不癢完全  
 沒有感覺  
 他們殺我兄弟 又破壞月球  
 算帳算到底 你爸看你們像屎  
 一個都別想逃

喔 氣魄啊 廢話 不爽 出來啦  
 天靈靈 地靈靈 祝福大家賺大錢 就算身分不一  
 樣 也有優待幫你超渡  
 這個服務 有滿意嗎 我打一百分  
 別怕 我們會辦一個超風光的追思會  
 一切完畢 請眾聖神仙佛坐迴向 保平安

獻花 獻果  
 請家屬來三磕首 哭  
 一人一束花 每朵帶思念  
 回去要記得打電話  
 晚上的風吹來冷吱吱  
 厚的外套別忘記  
 想要什麼就說別客氣  
 Sisomi 奏樂

### JUST NOT MEANT TO BE 還君明珠

曉風殘月黃花堆 淚濕衣衫望君歸  
 歸期遲遲似無情 初蕊哪堪秋風折  
 沾樹無停燕倦飛 琵琶獨彈孤衾寒

Take the incense in right hand and the weapon in  
 the left. Keep pretending, you idiot!  
 Dare to fuck up with me? No time for explanation,  
 go to hell

Oh, so assured? So what? Kick me to death? You  
 wanna die?  
 Stop bullshitting. I don't buy a word. Fuck  
 civilization!  
 I see nothing but you crap! Shit!  
 Just worship and kneel down to beg for mercy, shit!  
 The mankind is all crap, shit!  
 You wanna exorcize me? Shit!  
 Impossible!  
 I'm the demonic alien monster with super power.  
 I read your mind and take your soul  
 Wow! Indeed terrible. Guys let's bear with this  
 Me the master will save you all!

Oh, so pointless and senseless. I don't give a fuck  
 They kill my fellows and destroy the moon  
 I'm gonna get you pay  
 No escaping!

Oh, the guts! Spit out whatever shit  
 Hail the sky and the earth! Bless all with prosperity!  
 You get discount for the funeral even you're  
 nobody  
 Satisfied? Perfect for me  
 No worry. We'll get a spectacular funeral  
 When it's all over, the gods will pay for your debts  
 and you're safe and blessed

Serve the flowers and fruits!  
 Family members come to knock your heads and cry  
 out!  
 Remember to send a funeral wreath to memorize  
 the dead.  
 Remember to call from hell.  
 It's chilly at midnight.  
 Remember to dress warm  
 Let me known whatever you want  
 Sisomi, play the music!

春柳原是軟腰肢 風吹無奈隨風去

悲 與君再逢已百年 知音難揣 良木亦難覓  
哀別離 淚眼相對嘆無語 只盼 魂夢與君同

男：我…。我轉來了

女：你轉來的 遮爾晚

男：這幾年 你過了如何

女：媽媽做主 後個月 林桑會來娶我入門

男：林桑？你、你去做人細姨？

女：好贏過做無主孤魂

男：（嘆）是我 轉來的 傷過晚啊

女：是太晚 咱 有緣無份

沾樹無停燕倦飛 琵琶獨彈孤衾寒  
春柳原是軟腰肢 風吹無奈隨風去

悲 與君再逢已百年 知音難揣 良木亦難覓  
哀別離 淚眼相對嘆無語 只盼 魂夢與君同

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | JUST NOT MEANT TO BE, official English lyrics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Dawning breeze, crescent moon, withering flowers<br/>Tears soaked cloths in the long waiting<br/>So belated is the return that it is ruthless<br/>How can the flowers stand against the cruel wind<br/>of autumn<br/>Even swallows stop by the trees<br/>Playing pipa alone in the coldness<br/>Delicate willow blown by the wind</p> <p>Sadness<br/>Hundreds of passing years before the reunion<br/>No friend, no wood to adhere to<br/>The sad goodbye<br/>Tearful but speechless, only longing for a reunion in<br/>next life</p> <p>Man: I, I am back.<br/>Woman: Finally. I thought I wouldn't see you again.<br/>Man: How have you been all these years?<br/>Woman: The mama-san made a trade with Mr. Lin.<br/>I will be settled in his mansion next month.<br/>Man: That rich old man? You are going to be his<br/>concubine?<br/>Woman: At least I won't be dying alone as a<br/>wandering ghost.<br/>Man: It's all my fault. I should have been back<br/>earlier.</p> | <p>Nothing stays alive even my fading hope<br/>My world stopped turning long ago<br/>Winter means nothing but a past ghost</p> <p>The first thunder awakes torrential rainfall<br/>It floods everything including my fading hope<br/>My clock stopped ticking long ago<br/>Spring means nothing but another fraud</p> <p>So many winters have passed<br/>I'm still stuck in the past<br/>Sketch your face from memory<br/>Pray the drawing to become reality<br/>How many springs have passed?<br/>I can't even remember<br/>The cruel fate gives us a harsh test<br/>Will you return to me before it's too late?</p> <p>Man: I, I am back.<br/>Woman: Finally. I thought I wouldn't see you again.<br/>Man: How have you been all these years?<br/>Woman: The mama-san made a trade with Mr. Lin.<br/>I will be settled in his mansion next month.<br/>Man: That rich old man? You are going to be his<br/>concubine?<br/>Woman: At least I won't be dying alone as a<br/>wandering ghost.<br/>Man: It's all my fault. I should have been back<br/>earlier.</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Woman: You're too late. The fate has played a terrible joke on us. Maybe we are just not meant to be together.</p> <p>Even swallows stop by the trees<br/>Playing pipa alone in the coldness<br/>Delicate willow is blown by the wind</p> <p>Sadness<br/>Hundreds of passing years before the reunion<br/>No friend, no wood to adhere to<br/>The sad goodbye<br/>Tearful but speechless, only longing for a reunion in next life</p> | <p>Woman: You're too late. The fate has played a terrible joke on us. Maybe we are just not meant to be together.</p> <p>The first thunder awakes torrential rainfall<br/>It floods everything including my fading hope<br/>My clock stopped ticking long ago<br/>Spring means nothing but another fraud</p> <p>So many winters have passed<br/>I'm still stuck in the past<br/>Sketch your face from memory<br/>Pray the drawing to become reality<br/>How many springs have passed?<br/>I can't even remember<br/>The cruel fate gives us a harsh test<br/>Will you return to me before it's too late?</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT 破夜斬

烏雲罩月 茫茫的暗暝

困佇這咧無聲無說的世界  
泗袂出這片翕死人的死海  
敢是五感失常資信全無接受  
也是心肺失能空氣攏無吸收

等無彼咧人  
等無一聲霆雷響  
等無彼咧人  
等無一改暢心情

若連聲音攏毋准發  
咱用銃聲來揣正義  
若連蠟燭攏毋准點  
咱點炸彈來揣光明

清算血債 清算仇冤  
清算血債 清算仇冤  
血債仇冤

烏雲罩月 茫茫的暗暝

攏佇這咧袂振袂動的世界  
泗袂出這片翕死人的死海  
敢是頭眩腦頓啥麼攏要吞忍  
也是血路袂順跤手攏毋敢伸

等無彼咧人  
等無一聲霆雷響  
等無彼咧人

等無一氣拚崩盤

若連聲音攏毋准發  
咱用銃聲來揣正義  
若連蠟燭攏毋准點  
咱點炸彈來揣光明

清算血債 清算仇冤  
清算血債 清算仇冤

Let me stand up like a Taiwanese  
Only justice will bring you peace  
Let me stand up like a Taiwanese  
Only justice will bring you peace  
Let me stand up like a Taiwanese  
Only justice will bring you peace  
Let me stand up like a Taiwanese  
Only justice will bring you peace

|                                                                                                                                                                | <b>SUPREME PAIN FOR THE TYRANT, official English lyrics</b>                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moon shadowed by the clouds, endless darkness                                                                                                                  | Endless nightfall, swallow the sun                                                                                                                                                              |
| Trapped in the voiceless and speechless world<br>Drowning in the sea of death<br>Losing all senses and knowing nothing<br>Even not knowing how to breathe      | Void of silence, choking on the past's blood<br>Drowning in deception, taken by the black flood<br>Sea is rising, never feel or see again<br>Hypnotizing visage preaching of supreme pain       |
| Hopeless waiting<br>Still longing for a thunder<br>Hopeless waiting<br>Still longing for a change to live again                                                | Searching for a sign<br>Guide my hands unto your will<br>Let me be the one<br>Watch the blood of martyrs spill                                                                                  |
| If no voice is allowed<br>We cry out for justice<br>If no candle is allowed<br>We ignite the bomb for light                                                    | Light that flickers in the dark<br>Forge the way through blackest night<br>Strangled silence makes its mark<br>Pierce the heart of tyrant's sight                                               |
| Blood for blood, feud for feud<br>Blood for blood, feud for feud                                                                                               | With these hands I wash the blood clean<br>Watch it flow past visions obscene                                                                                                                   |
| Blood feud                                                                                                                                                     | Visions obscene                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Moon shadowed by the clouds, endless darkness                                                                                                                  | Endless nightfall, swallow the sun                                                                                                                                                              |
| Trapped in the world of nothing<br>Struggling to leave the sea of death<br>Pretending mad and bearing with everything<br>Living like a dead not daring to move | Veil of madness, prison of the mind's eye<br>Falling in the vortex, stifling the last sigh<br>Poisoned cortex dooming flesh to weakened form<br>Bones are breaking, shattered by the last storm |
| Hopeless waiting<br>Still longing for a thunder                                                                                                                | Searching for a sign<br>Guide my hands unto your will                                                                                                                                           |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <p>Hopeless waiting<br/>Still longing for a change to live again</p> <p>If no voice is allowed<br/>We cry out for justice<br/>If no candle is allowed<br/>We ignite the bomb for light</p> <p>Blood for blood, feud for feud<br/>Blood for blood, feud for feud</p> <p>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace</p> | <p>Let me be the one<br/>Stand above the one I kill</p> <p>Light that flickers in the dark<br/>Forge the way through blackest night<br/>Strangled silence makes its mark<br/>Pierce the heart of tyrant's sight</p> <p>With these hands I wash the blood clean<br/>Watch it flow past visions obscene</p> <p>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace<br/>Let me stand up like a Taiwanese<br/>Only justice will bring you peace</p> |
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### TAKAO 皇軍

海鷗展翅高迴遠飛  
直直召喚阮綴伊遠洋  
赤日一逝一逝的光芒  
放送出 男兒志氣萬丈

穿過軍衫 穿過皮肉  
染血軍徽安佇靈魂頂  
伴白雲 戴青天  
戰旗佇腦海中高掛

祖先的靈體被網縛  
刺面的榮光已渺茫

海鷗展翅高迴遠飛  
直直召喚阮綴伊遠洋  
赤日一逝一逝的光芒  
放送出 男兒志氣萬丈

魂穿魄引 祖先的靈體被網縛  
天照日曝 刺面的榮光已渺茫

穿過軍衫 穿過皮肉  
染血軍徽安佇靈魂頂  
伴白雲 戴青天  
戰旗高掛

大港起風湧  
堂堂男兒欲出征

氣勢撼動高雄  
齊開向你我前程  
大港起風湧  
堂堂男兒欲出征  
氣勢撼動高雄  
齊開向你我前程

妳佇港邊相送  
淚眼咧看阮的船影  
請等待我凱旋轉來  
繼續咱未圓的夢

大港起風湧  
堂堂男兒欲出征  
氣勢撼動高雄  
齊開向你我前程  
大港起風湧  
堂堂男兒欲出征  
氣勢撼動高雄  
齊開向你我前程  
大港起風湧  
堂堂男兒欲出征  
氣勢撼動高雄  
齊開向你我前程

|                                                                                                                                                                                 | TAKAO, official English lyrics                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Seagull flying away<br>As if calling you across the sea<br>The fading red sun still shines<br>For the brave men marching toward battlefield                                     | Vultures fly, circling the dark skies<br>Plucking carrion from the ground<br>Blood red sun, territory incise<br>Marching forward without sound     |
| Piercing through the military uniform and flesh<br>The blooded military badge pacifies the deceased<br>In the white cloud and blue sky<br>The war flag still hanging in my mind | Carved into flesh, written in blood<br>Symbols burned so deeply in the mind<br>Gathering clouds, threatening skies<br>The sun's rays left me blind |
| Spirits of our ancestors are trapped<br>Gone is the glory of tattooed face                                                                                                      | Ghosts of the past bound and tied<br>Honor's scars fade, glory dies                                                                                |
| Seagull flying away<br>As if calling you across the sea<br>The fading red sun still shines<br>For the brave men marching toward battle                                          | Vultures fly, circling the dark skies<br>Plucking carrion from the ground<br>Blood red sun, territory incise<br>Marching forward without sound     |
| Spirits of our ancestors are trapped, despite of<br>attempts of invocations<br>Gone is the glory of tattooed face, exposed under<br>the sun                                     | Deep within you, souls of the past bound and tied<br>Bright sun burning, the lines melt as glory dies                                              |
| Piercing through the military uniform and flesh<br>The blooded military badge pacifies the deceased                                                                             | Carved into flesh, written in blood<br>Symbols burned so deeply in the mind                                                                        |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p>Surging waves and winds<br/>Men marching toward the battlefield<br/>So powerful, Takao shakes and echoes<br/>Opening a bright future for all<br/>Surging waves and winds<br/>Men marching toward the battlefield<br/>So powerful, Takao shakes and echoes<br/>Opening a bright future for all</p> <p>Farewell at the port<br/>Your tears merge with sailing the boat<br/>Please wait for me back in glory<br/>And let's realize the unfulfilled future</p> <p>Surging waves and winds<br/>Men marching toward the battlefield<br/>So powerful, Takao shakes and echoes<br/>Opening a bright future for all<br/>Surging waves and winds<br/>Men marching toward the battlefield<br/>So powerful, Takao shakes and echoes<br/>Opening a bright future for all<br/>Surging waves and winds<br/>Men marching toward the battlefield<br/>So powerful, Takao shakes and echoes<br/>Opening a bright future for all</p> | <p>Gathering clouds, threatening skies<br/>The sun's rays left me blind</p> <p>大港起風湧<br/>堂堂男兒欲出征<br/>氣勢撼動高雄<br/>齊開向你我前程<br/>大港起風湧<br/>堂堂男兒欲出征<br/>氣勢撼動高雄<br/>齊開向你我前程</p> <p>妳佇港邊相送<br/>淚眼咧看阮的船影<br/>請等待我凱旋轉來<br/>繼續咱未圓的夢</p> <p>大港起風湧<br/>堂堂男兒欲出征<br/>氣勢撼動高雄<br/>齊開向你我前程<br/>大港起風湧<br/>堂堂男兒欲出征<br/>氣勢撼動高雄<br/>齊開向你我前程<br/>大港起風湧<br/>堂堂男兒欲出征<br/>氣勢撼動高雄<br/>齊開向你我前程</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### FLOWER FOR JUSTICE? 正義的花?

你講春天若到花就會芳 阮就惦惦啊等待 憨憨  
啊向望  
照理講春天若到花也豔紅 是毋是代表阮早渡過  
這個寒冬?

血 伊作伙流歸世人 袂記 有幾個春夏秋冬  
看 花好像開了為 啥我 猶原感覺畏寒?

希望這會應開出花蕊 這蕊花號作正義和光明  
毋過花開慢花謝這麼快 一蕊開就有一片凋零

聽 我聽見乾澀的聲 聽 好像在根的彼縫  
聽 我聽見乾澀的聲 聽 好像是花的土壤

You said that the flower will blossom in spring, so  
we wait and wait  
The flower should be colorfully red in spring, so we  
have been through this winter?

Blood! All converging and flowing for people! Don't  
forget! We have few years!  
Look! The flower blossoms! Why? I still feel so  
cold?

Hope the flower will blossom. It's called justice and  
light.  
But it withers so soon! One blossoming flower  
always means one dying.

Listen! I hear something coughing drily!  
Listen! Is it from the roots?  
Listen! I hear something coughing drily!

聽 我聽見乾澀的聲 聽 好像在根的彼縫  
 聽 我聽見乾澀的聲 聽 好像是花的土壤

我聽見乾澀的聲

希望這會應開出花蕊 這蕊花號作正義和光明  
 毋過花開慢花謝這麼快 一蕊開就有一片凋零  
 希望這會應開出花蕊 這蕊花號作正義和光明  
 毋過花開慢花謝這麼快 一蕊開就有一片凋零

若有一蕊正義的花 你有沒有看過伊的土壤？  
 有故事 名字 理想和意志 這陣才發現 原來 阮  
 是土壤也是籽  
 咱毋通哀悲 也袂當無奈 咱會當失敗 也會流目  
 屎  
 這蕊花乎伊攔再開一次

Listen! Is it from the soil?

I hear something coughing drily

Hope the flower will blossom. It's called justice and light.  
 But it withers so soon! One blossoming flower  
 always means one dying.  
 Hope the flower will blossom. It's called justice and light.  
 But it withers so soon! One blossoming flower  
 always means one dying.

If there is a flower for justice, have you ever looked  
 at the soil?  
 With stories, names, beliefs, and wills? Beliefs and  
 wills!  
 We just realize! We are the soil and the seed!  
 We don't get sad. We don't give up. We can fail and  
 we can cry.  
 Just let the flower blossom again!

### ISLAND'S SUNRISE 島嶼天光

親愛的媽媽/請你毋通擔心我  
 原諒我/行袂開跔我欲去對抗袂當原諒的人  
 歹勢啦/愛人啊  
 袂當陪你看電影  
 原諒我/行袂開跔  
 我欲去對抗欺負咱的人

天色漸漸光  
 遮有一陣人  
 為了守護咱的夢  
 成做更加勇敢的人  
 天色漸漸光  
 已經不再驚惶  
 現在就是彼一工  
 換阮做守護恁的人

已經袂記 / 是第幾工 / 請毋通煩惱我  
 因為阮知道 / 無行過寒冬 / 袂有花開的一工  
 天色漸漸光  
 天色漸漸光  
 已經是更加勇敢的人

天色漸漸光  
 咱就大聲來唱這首歌

一直到希望的光線  
照光島嶼每一個人  
天色漸漸光  
咱就大聲來唱著歌  
日頭一（足百）上山  
就會使轉去啦

天色漸漸光  
咱就大聲來唱這首歌  
一直到希望的光線  
照光島嶼每一個人  
天色漸漸光  
咱就大聲來唱著歌  
日頭一（足百）上山  
就會使轉去啦

現在是彼一工  
勇敢的台灣人

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | ISLAND'S SUNRISE, official English lyrics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Dear Mom, please don't worry<br/>Forgive me for not being able to leave<br/>I must fight the unforgivable ones<br/>Sorry, my lover<br/>I can't go to the movie with you<br/>Forgive me for not being able to leave<br/>I must fight the ones who oppress us</p> <p>Dawn is near<br/>There are people here<br/>Who are determined to protect our dreams<br/>And determined to be stronger and braver than ever<br/>Dawn is near<br/>No more fears<br/>Today is the day<br/>That we will protect you</p> <p>Can't even recall how many days have past, but<br/>please don't worry<br/>Because we know that spring will not blossom until<br/>winter leaves<br/>Dawn is near<br/>Dawn is near<br/>We are braver than ever before</p> <p>Dawn is near<br/>Let us sing it out loud<br/>Until the ray of hope<br/>Shines upon everyone on this island</p> | <p>Colors grow, colors creep<br/>My tinted flesh outline your feet<br/>Your vast limbs, tightly we knit<br/>Your face is cast with my breath, my heat<br/>The hunters start to seize<br/>We're lost at sea, adrift like leaves<br/>Have our hollers reached your heels?<br/>We hope our whispers slightly touched your crown.</p> <p>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Horizon lined with a hopeful crowd<br/>A voice echoes, beckons<br/>Wave by the wings below the sun<br/>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Flags raise high wall breaks down<br/>Link my spirit to your heart<br/>Together we stand up proud</p> <p>Set sail, don't fear, sky crystal and clear<br/>The heavy fog may slow me down<br/>Hold that fire high above the wild<br/>Fight for the glorious day to come<br/>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>With pounding hearts we are marking this (the)<br/>start</p> <p>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Express your dream grow with our song<br/>Teardrops fall in river, they spread and sparkle<br/>along</p> |

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| <p>Dawn is near<br/>Let us sing it out loud<br/>Once the sun reaches the mountain<br/>Then it's time to go home</p> <p>Dawn is near<br/>Let us sing it out loud<br/>Until the ray of hope<br/>Shines upon everyone on this island<br/>Dawn is near<br/>Let us sing it out loud<br/>Once the sun reaches the mountain<br/>Then it's time to go home</p> <p>Today is the day<br/>For the brave Taiwanese</p> | <p>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Express your dream grow with our song<br/>Dear, that day will come<br/>With this brilliant and fearless throng</p> <p>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Express your dream grow with our song<br/>Teardrops fall in river, they spread and sparkle<br/>along<br/>Darkness breaks apart (At the crack of dawn)<br/>Express your dream grow with our song<br/>Dear, that day will come<br/>With this brilliant and fearless throng</p> <p>Dear, that day will come<br/>With this brilliant and fearless throng</p> |
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## Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift bestudeert de mogelijke politieke invloed van metalmuziek vanuit het perspectief van *phónè* in metal, waarbij *phónè* verwijst naar zowel stem als geluid. In dit werk beargumenteer ik dat metal, met haar luide, vervormde *phónè* vormen van politiek tegen kan gaan. Hiermee bedoel ik dat metal en *phónè* de mogelijkheid of de potentie hebben om op te komen tegen de politiek geladen scheiding van de betekenisvolle collectieve stem van het volk door louter geluid. In dit proefschrift zal ik deze macht van metalmuziek onderzoeken op vier niveaus die ik bespreek in vier hoofdstukken.

In hoofdstuk één onderzoek ik het verband tussen de *phónè* van metal en vormen van wetenschappelijke sub-culturele politiek. Ik zal toonaangevende wetenschappelijke interpretaties van metal als emanciperende kracht beschouwen en uitleggen hoe dit soort studies deze kant van metal blootleggen door middel van selectieve interpretatie van een enkele stem of een los geluid. De onderzoekssubjecten van dergelijke interpretaties zijn overwegend wit, mannelijk, en heteronormatief. Als gevolg hiervan worden leden van de metalgemeenschap die niet aan dit plaatje voldoen gemarginaliseerd. Om deze problematiek het hoofd te bieden zal ik mijn eigen analytische methodologie introduceren. Deze benadering houdt rekening met de verscheidenheid aan stemmen en geluiden in metal alsmede met de verschillende niveaus waarop de muziek, afzonderlijke instrumenten, tekst, en, indien van toepassing, visuele aspecten, kunnen fungeren. Een dergelijke analyse is geschoold in de wetenschappelijke discoursen rondom metal, als die uit de metal scene. Deze studie zal bijdragen aan een geavanceerdere analyse van metalnummers; tevens zal zij mij helpen bij het onderzoeken van het politieke potentieel van metal in zowel subculturen als in het wetenschapsdomein.

In hoofdstuk twee bestudeer ik wat metal en haar *phónè* ons kunnen leren over de machtsverhoudingen in het dagelijks leven, vooral als het gaat om problematiek omtrent ras en gender. Ik begin met een analyse van het controversiële metalnummer “And We Run” (2014) van *Within Temptation*. De controversiële status van dit nummer komt voort uit haar combinatie van metal en rap—genres die beide op hun eigen manier worden geassocieerd met het sociaal-politieke ‘lawaaï’ van anderen. Ik onderzoek hoe dit nummer de interne tegenstellingen van de subculturele politiek van metal blootlegt. Deze analyse zal duidelijk maken hoe deze tegenstellingen verband houden met rassenproblematiek. Vervolgens zal ik de kritiek van de Italiaanse filosoof Giorgio Agamben op de moderne politicisering van de menselijke stem volgen in mijn analyse van het canonieke metalnummer “Nemesis” (2015) van *Arch Enemy*, waarin een specifieke rol is weggelegd voor de menselijke stem. Dit nummer creëert en verwoest gelijktijdig menselijk collectivisme, niet alleen in termen van metal, maar ook met betrekking tot gender. Deze twee nummers tonen de politieke relevantie van metal; deze relevantie bestaat zowel binnen als buiten het genre. Daarnaast vormen deze twee nummers de aanleiding tot het onderzoeken van het politieke handelingsvermogen van metal.

Hoofdstuk drie behandelt de minder zichtbare aspecten van machtsverhoudingen; aspecten die zich voordoen op het niveau van *phónè* en de aandacht vestigen op de luide en vervormde *phónè* van metal. Om dit fenomeen te analyseren zal ik een tweedelige aanpak hanteren. Ik zal twee versies van het nummer “Enjoy the silence” analyseren, dat zowel een metal- als een non-metal versie heeft. De niet-metal versie dateert uit 1990 en werd uitgevoerd

door *Depeche Mode*; de metal-versie dateert uit 2006 en werd uitgevoerd door *Lacuna Coil*. De titel van het nummer wijst naar de paradox van het genieten van stilte terwijl mensen vocaliseren en zingen. Vervolgens ga ik in mijn lezingen in op zowel Agambens reflecties op de metafysische Stem als de theorie van de Franse filosoof Jacques Lacan over de rol van *phônè* (als de objectstem) in de vorming van het metafysisch subject. Deze tweedelige muzikaal-filosofische benadering helpt mij om aan te tonen dat *phônè* in metal subculturele, sociaal-politieke en filosofische driften modificeert; hierdoor kan metal haar eigen stem differentiëren terwijl zij het geluid van anderen buitensluit. Na het behandelen van het politieke potentieel en het handelingsvermogen van metal bestudeer ik vervolgens hun verwezenlijking van deze eigenschappen in één specifieke context.

In hoofdstuk vier onderzoek ik politiek activisme in Taiwanese metal, en specifiek metal als reactie op de precaire politieke status van Taiwan. In termen van internationale politiek is het Taiwanese volk stemloos, aangezien Taiwan niet erkend wordt als een officiële staat en voortdurend wordt onderworpen aan marginalisering en onderdrukking. Vanuit een sociaal-cultureel oogpunt is Taiwan een lawaaierig land met een volk dat nog steeds worstelt met een roerig verleden terwijl het zoekt naar een eigen stem en identiteit. In dit hoofdstuk staan drie gerelateerde argumenten centraal. Ten eerste zal ik een holistisch en ethisch geladen begrip van stemmen, geluiden en *soundscapes* (uitgesproken als *siann* in het Taiwanees) ontwikkelen dat vorm geeft aan de identiteit van het Taiwanese volk, zowel individueel als collectief. Ten tweede stel ik dat de essentie van Taiwanees metal-activisme bestaat uit een toe-eigening van *siann*, vooral die van traditionele Taiwanese instrumenten, in overeenstemming met de vraag wat het betekent om Taiwanees te zijn. Tenslotte richt ik me op hoe mobilisaties van *phônè* of *siann* problematische situaties en onderdrukking kunnen reproduceren.

Taiwanese metal onderscheidt zich mijns inziens door de bereidheid van haar leden om problemen aan de kaak te stellen en te rectificeren, wat verschilt van de neiging van de metal-scene om deze te ontwijken. Vanuit het perspectief van een sociaal-culturele *insider* die zich scherp bewust is van de interne en externe krachten waarin ik verstrikt ben verweef ik deze argumenten met een cluster van Taiwanese metalnummers: “The Gods Bless Taiwan” (2010) van *Chairman*, “Funeral” (2006) van *Flesh Juicer*, “Just Not Meant to Be” (2015) van *Crescent Lament*, “Supreme Pain for the Tyrant” en “Takao” (2011 en 2013, resp.) van *Chthonic*, “Flower for Justice?” (2013) van *Burning Island*, en “Island’s Sunrise” (2014) van *Fire EX*.

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt dus manifestaties van metals politieke potentieel in de context van metalmuziek, de sociaal-politieke contexten waarin metal zich bevindt, de filosofische onderbouwingen van deze twee en de casus van Taiwanese metal. Mijn studietraject is tevens een vorm van politiek engagement voor mij als wetenschapper en als Taiwanees persoon via *phônè* in metal. Aan de basis van dit proefschrift als geheel ligt mijn overtuiging dat in *phônè* politieke dialogen voortkomen uit onenigheden, waar mensen, als de politieke dieren die ze zijn, hun menselijkheid testen, onderzoeken en definiëren.

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I dedicate the thesis to my source of strength, my father and my brother.

### **Curriculum Vitae**

Kai-wen Chiu was born in Taichung, Taiwan, in 1984. Chiu received a master's degree in English language and literature in 2011, from National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU). After graduation, they attended the doctoral program of Department of English, NTNU, while working as a journalist and university lecturer. Chiu was granted a PhD position at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS) in 2014, and moved their study to the Netherlands in 2015. At present, Chiu is working on a nonfictional novel about new religious movements in Taiwan.