Phónè and the political potential of metal music : a scholarly intervention

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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,"[1] 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

[1] 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.

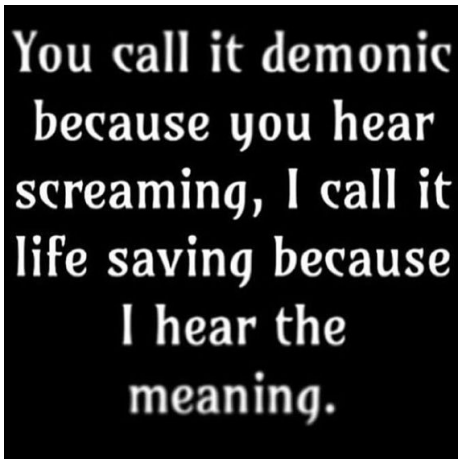
1.
Writing about Metal Music

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[2]

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 20th century, the boundary between music and noise has become difficult to determine. In this context, the prevalent use of the term noise in the 21st 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

[2] *Pinterest*, n.d., 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 21st 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.[3] 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.[4]

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;[5] 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

[3] 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.

[4] 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."

[5] 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."[6]

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.[7] 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)

[6] 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.

[7] 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.

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.[8] 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

[8] 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.[9] 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).[10]

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[9] 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.

[10] 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 19th 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 19th 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 19th 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).[11]

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

[11] 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).[12] 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).[13] 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,[14] 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

[12] 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.

[13] 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.

[14] 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.[15] 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[16]

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.[17]

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

[15] 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.

[16] *Daily Fail Center*, n.d., www.dailyfailcenter.com:8080/342797.

[17] 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.

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,[18] 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.[19] 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.[20]

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

[18] Here, black metal musicians mean musicians of *black color*, not to be confused with musicians of black metal.
[19] 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.
[20] 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.

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, Roccor 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.[21]

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.[22] 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.

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[21] *Pinterest*, n.d., nl.pinterest.com/pin/549791066992626393.

[22] 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.

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.[23]

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

[23] 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.
Phónè: 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 *phónè* 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.[24]

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

[24] 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 awry, 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

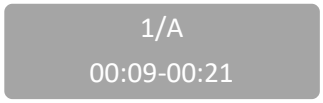
Taking *phónè* as its vantage point, the current project can be termed a phonic approach toward metal. My analysis first of all focuses on how metal manipulates and organizes amplified, distorted *phónè*. I then consider the phonic and musical levels alongside the thematic and visual levels. Here, "themes" 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 20th 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-

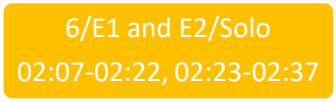
held notes, modal tone scales, and the predominance of timbre (83). Although metal does not contain all details listed by De Leeuw, it is unquestionably characterized by simultaneity and timbre, has several types of distorted *phónè*, several musical activities, and varying levels of loudness and distortion—that 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).



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 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.

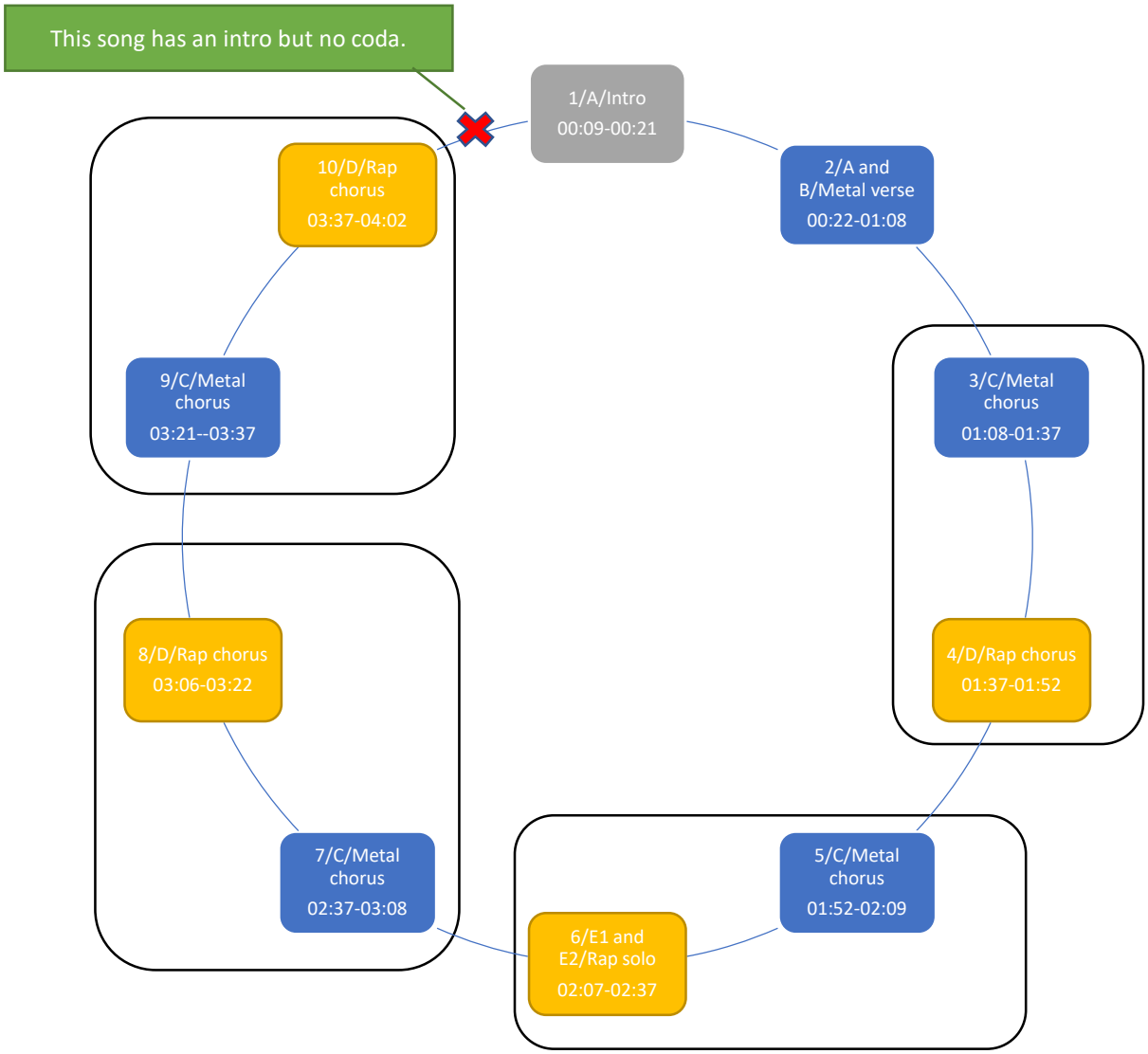
2/A and B
00:22-00:53, 00:54-01:06

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

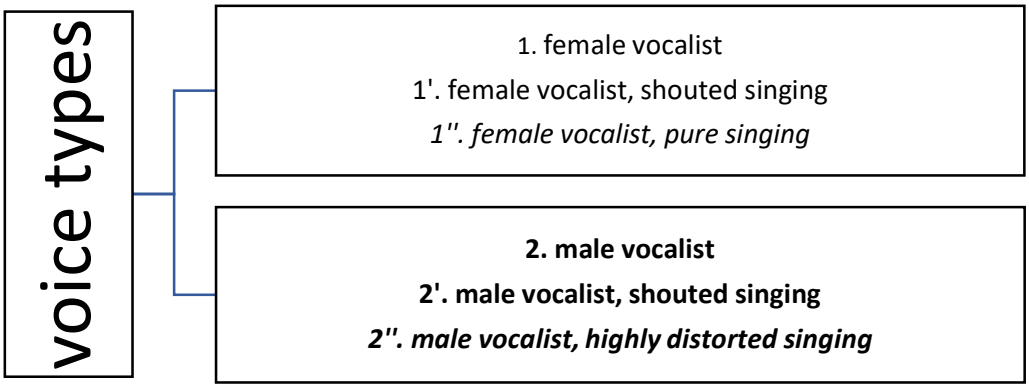
2/A/verse musically builds up tensions that explode in 2/B/verse (for a detailed analysis, see Chapter Two). Together, A's and B's musical organization and the lyrics provide the background story (verse). A, in this case, is about enslavement in fear that leads to the desire to run for freedom, while 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-phonic 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-phonic 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 *phónè* that *attacks*: that makes forms of scenic, social, and political *noise*.