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

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Chapter Two

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

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

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

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

1.
Noise within Metal

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

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

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

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

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

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

i.
AND WE RUN: Ironic Empowerment

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

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

> Female vocal: in the context of symphonic metal, the soaring female vocal is considered powerful, scenically dubbed "metal goddess."
>
> Rap: typical of rap's highly rhythmic and emphatic way of delivering lyrics, the rapping

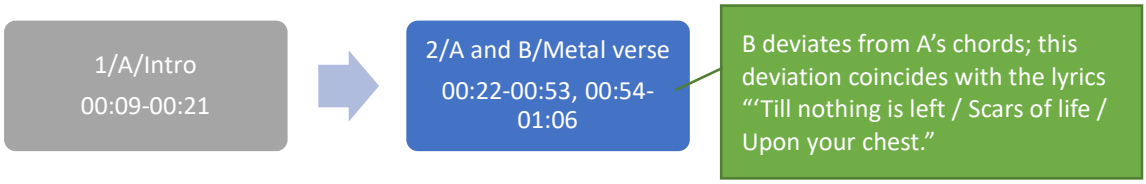
[2] AND WE RUN. 23 May 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=awvqli427_A.
[3] Similar to metal, rap includes diverse subgenres. I use rap in line with Tricia Rose's definition in *Black Noise* (1994): "rap music is a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America" and "rap music is a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music" (2).
[4] *Metallum*, 11 Nov. 2018, www.metal-archives.com/reviews/Within_Temptation/Hydra/393007. For an example of positive evaluation of AND WE RUN despite the song's oddity, see Ag Fox's review in *Metal Strom*,12 Apr. 2014, metalstorm.net/pub/review.php?review_id=12473.
[5] *Nu metal* is a subgenre that incorporates hip hop and rap, and sometimes electronic music. For an example of its controversial status, see the article by iabris "Nu Metal – A Controversial Subject" in *Metal Storm*, 20 Oct. 2006, metalstorm.net/pub/article.php?article_id=140&page=&message_id=.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

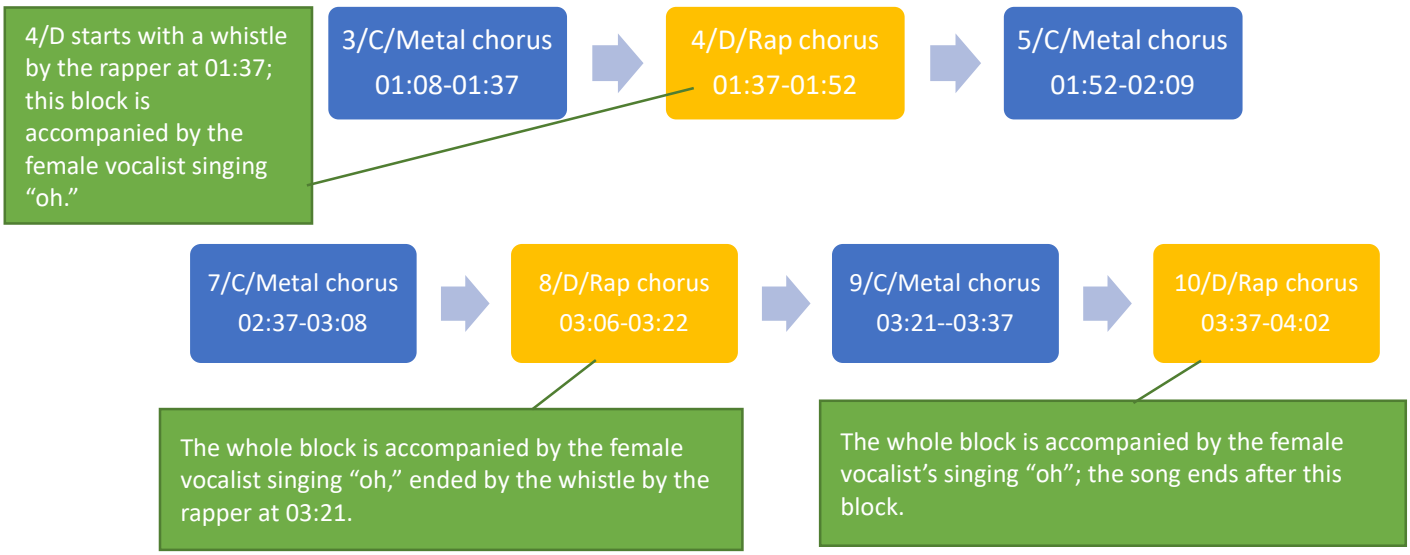
> It burns into your heart / The darkness that you fear / You were never free / And you never realized / And love is a word / You never heard / Your heart ain't cold, 'cause it burns / A desire to leave the mire

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

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

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

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



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

[7] "Within Temptation: *Hydra*." *Metal Hammer*, 4 Feb. 2014, www.loudersound.com/reviews/within-temptation-hydra.

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

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

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

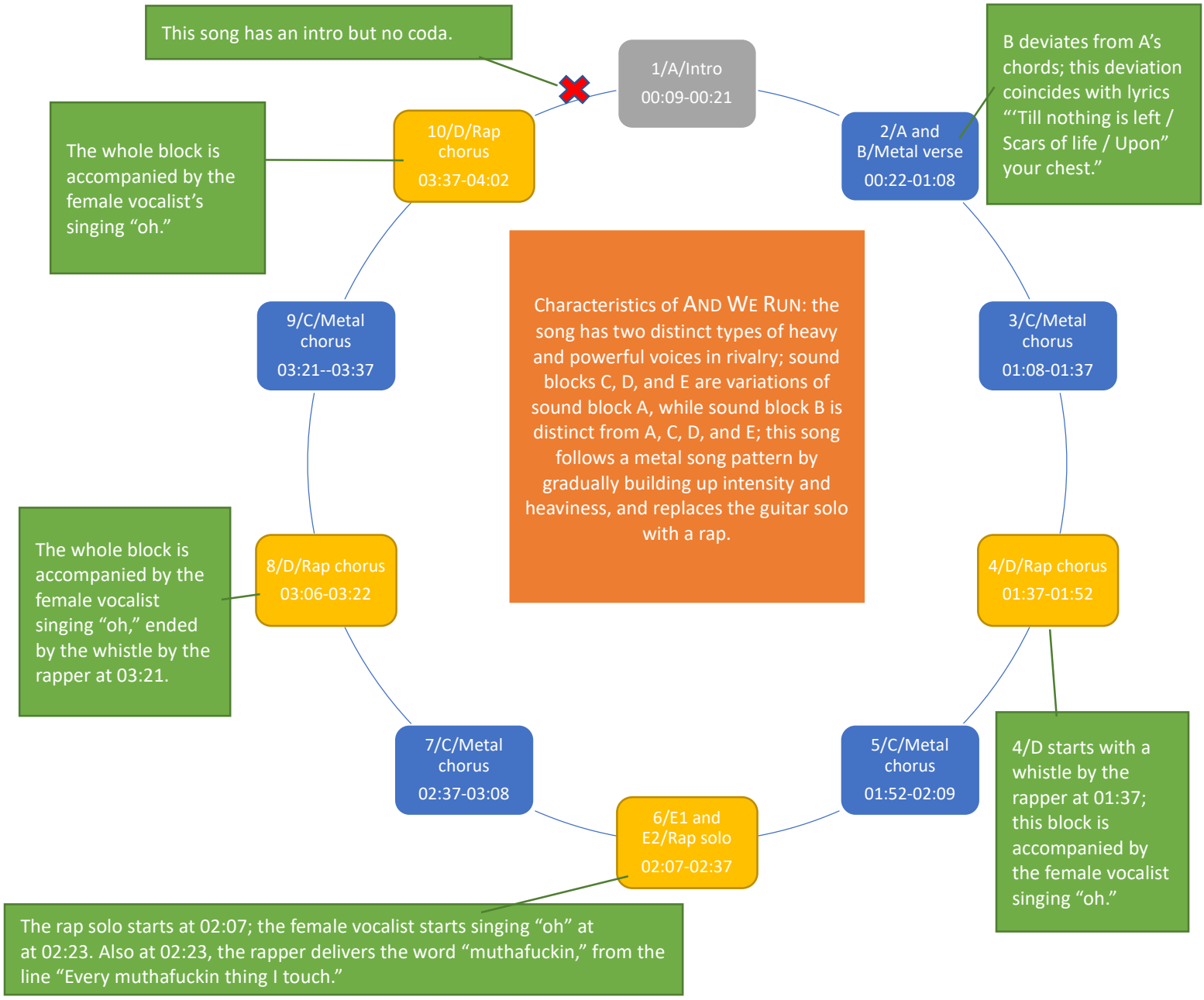
The rap solo starts at 02:07; the female vocalist starts singing "oh" at 02:23. Also at 02:23, the rapper delivers the word "muthafuckin," from the line "Every muthafuckin thing I touch."

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

[8] The lines are: "And we run, 'till we fall apart / And we run, 'till the heavens above" and "And we run, for this killing love."
[9] The rapper's (desire for) freedom can be traced in the lines: "Don't blink you'll miss it / Lift up your head / We gotta get gone / Yeah, we outta here!".

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Screenshots of the music video where the two vocalists are paralleled[12]

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

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

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

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

[12] 23 May 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=awvqIi427_A.

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

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

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

[*N]oises are too significant to be noises. We know they are noises in the first place because they exist where they shouldn't or they don't make sense where they should.*
(Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat* 21)

Noise is a material aspect of sound. It is discussed as a generalized property of sound (as "noisiness"); as a distinct sonic object within music, speech, or environmental sounds (as "a noise"); or as a totalizing qualifier for emergent styles (e.g., "that hip-hop stuff is all noise"). But its specific qualities are hard to define.
(Novak, "Noise" 125-26)

[M]usical identity is . . . always fantastic, idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits.
(Frith, "Music and Identity" 123)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.
Noise Beyond Metal: a Radical Listening Attitude

i.
NEMESIS: Overdriving Discourses on Metal

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

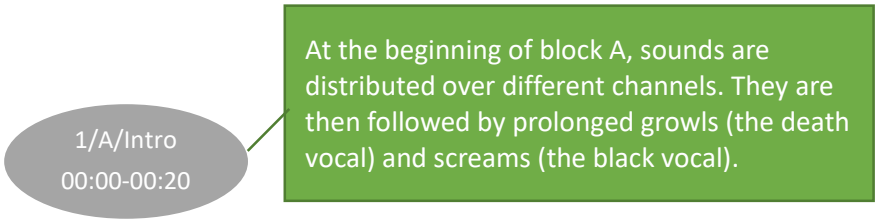
(Wallach, Berger, and Greene 3-4); it strikes people who are unfamiliar with it as a "wall of noise", or as distorted *phónè*, as if "the doomsday" of Arch Enemy's album title—*Doomsday Machine* (2005)—already has arrived.

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

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

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

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

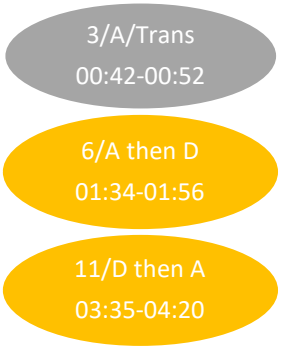


Block 1/ A is characterized by the fast, distorted, and repetitive riff of the electric guitar, the emphatic drum fills (especially 00:06-00:10), and an even more distorted riff (00:13-00:20) by another guitar. Played on a stereo set, these sounds first appear in different channels and then are merged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

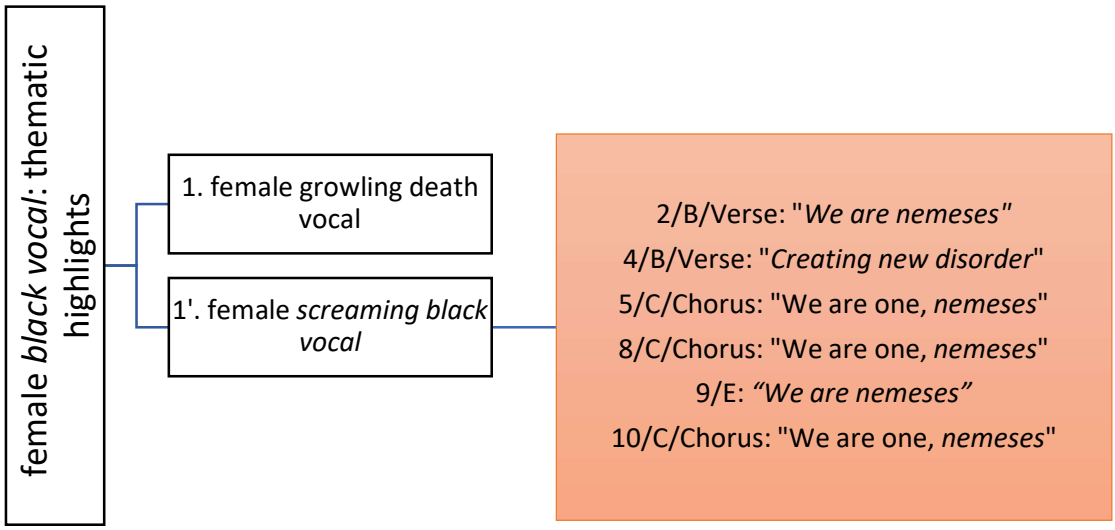
[14] NEMESIS. 25 Sept. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET7TI_PbeFg.

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

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



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

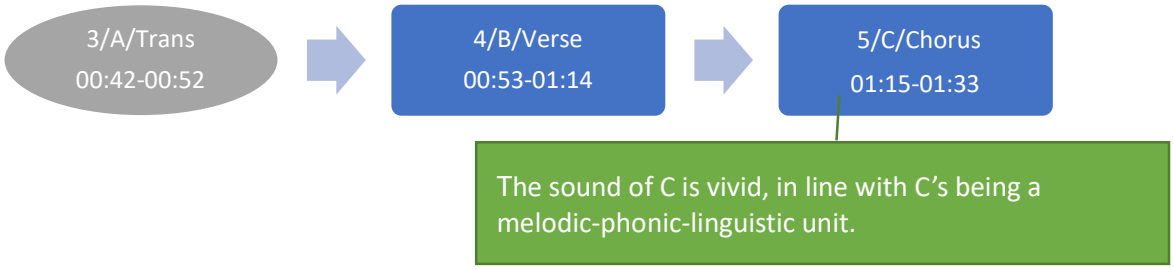


The most dominant vocal type in NEMESIS is the low-pitched growling death vocal that delivers most of the lyrics. The *black vocal,* characteristic of high-pitched *screams*, is reserved for the thematic center of “we the nemeses.” The black vocal in the verses and chorus, moreover, also uses linguistic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

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

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

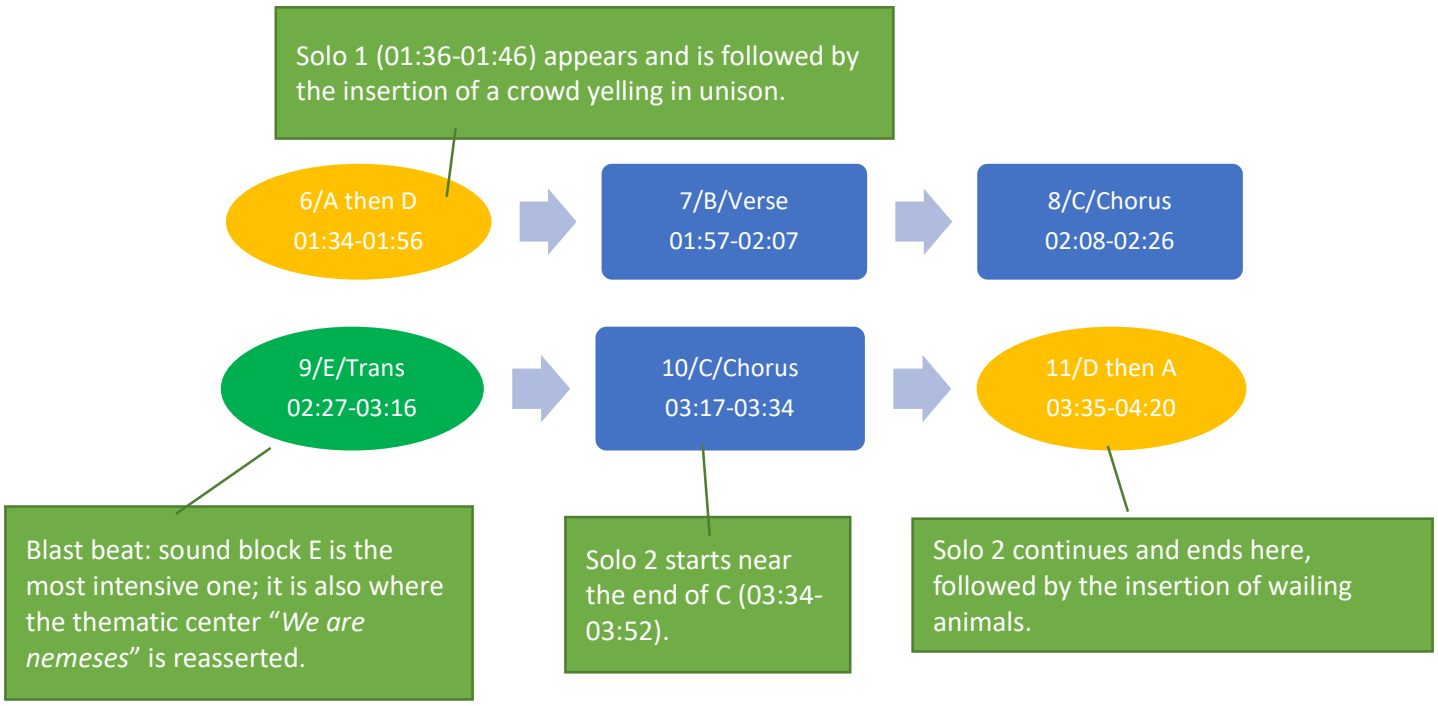
Compared with A and B, block C/chorus is more melodic. This differentiation can also be traced in the distortion effect. While the chunky riff in B taps into the kind of weight of lower notes that were observed by Walser, the melodic guitar lines in C sound "brilliant" or vivid, a quality Walser associates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



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

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

[15] The line is "We are one, *nemeses*," by the death vocal and the *black vocal*.
[16] The lines are: "*We are nemeses*" and "*Creating new disorder*," by the *black vocal*.



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

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

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

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

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

ii.
When Metal Becomes a Zone of Indistinction

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

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

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

[17] For more about the Scandinavian metal scene (aka Gothenburg metal), see Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal* 104-09.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

face.

Screenshots of superimposition of musical instruments and the wide-open mouth of Angela Gossow in NEMESIS[21]

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

Screenshot of split images of Angela Gossow in NEMESIS[22]

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

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

[21] 25 Sept. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET7TI_PbeFg.
[22] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

without voices.

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

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

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

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

[23] The lines are: "We are a legion / Voice of anarchy / This is revolution / Creating new disorder."
[24] See my criticism of scenic-scholarly idealizations of a metal community and tradition in Chapter One.

political issues.

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

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

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

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

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

[25] I indicate their years of publication in Italian to the left in the parentheses; to the right are the years of publication in English.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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