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

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Chapter Three

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

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

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

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

1.

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

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

(Jankélévich 7)

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

(Cavarero 107)

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

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

In this chapter I will argue that what resides at the heart of this philosophical grudge is that music is invested in, and makes audible, libidinally charged *phónè* as a threshold phenomenon. This is, for example, brought to the attention by NEMESIS when *phónè* oscillates between a command, people's collective yells, and animal wails. Metaphysics, by its dealing with *phónè* as a threshold phenomenon, inevitably wants to acknowledge *phónè*'s superegoic voice. Consequently, metaphysics and music, although both mediated by *phónè*, imply two distinct libidinal economies, two forms of thought and knowledge, and two modes of subjectivity that function as each other's other. I am referring here to the subtitle of Attali's study *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. According to Attali music has the potential to announce another order—one that does not sit well with the status quo. I re-translate this to the domain of philosophy. When musical *phónè* is irreducible to the logic of existing articulations, the metaphysical self (embodied in *logos*) may encounter its own irrationality (its *alogon*) through music. The relationship between music and *logos* thus poses a (bio)political problem or, psychoanalytically speaking, a complex. In the following, I will analyze Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE¹ that uses layers of *phónè*, and concludes by opposing instrumental sound to words that are sung. This conclusion relates to the song's theme about violence inherent in words, expressed in the opening lines: "Words like violence / Break the silence." Expanding on the theme as an explicit formulation of a politics of *logos*, I argue that this song exemplifies the tense relationship between music and *logos*.

¹ ENJOY THE SILENCE, by Depeche Mode. 25 Feb. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY.

i.

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

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

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

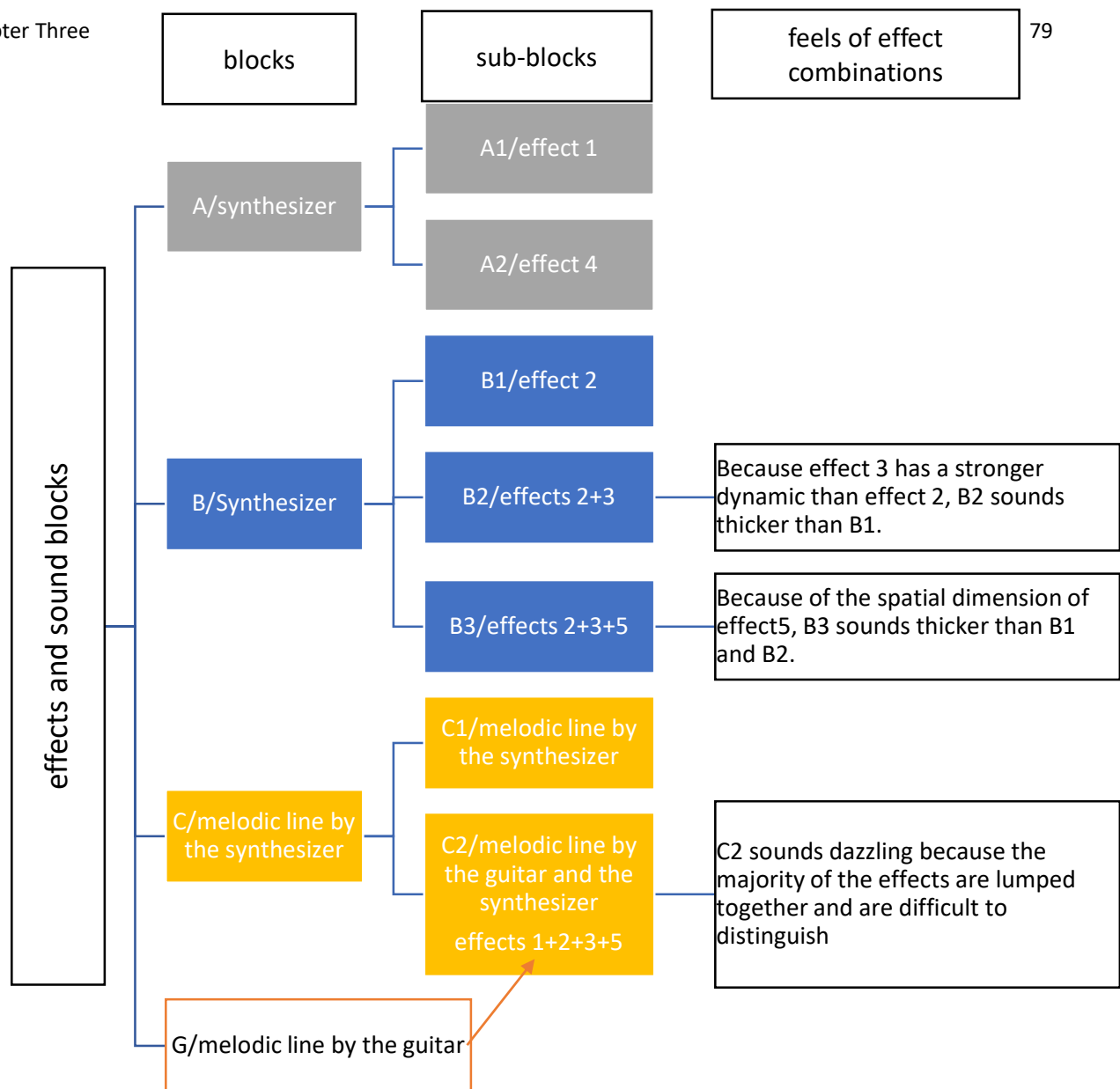
As combinations of the major effects reoccur and have a clear structuring function, I treat them as sound blocks supplemented by other, less prominent effects. The following indicates, first, how effects by the synthesizer are grouped as sound blocks. I notate them as A, B, and C, each with respective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

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

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

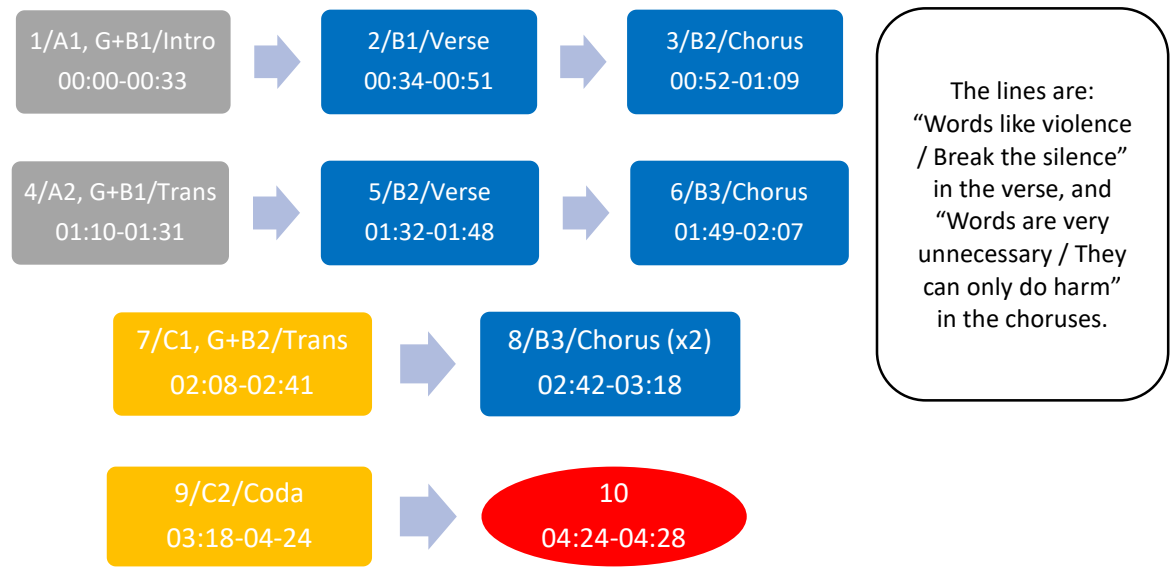
³ It should be noted that harmonically, rhythmically, and in terms of timbre, C does not radically differ from B. Yet as I will explain, I recognize a contrast between the guitar and the synthesizer. With respect to this, and despite the many similarities between A, B, and C, I am giving C another color—yellow—to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

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



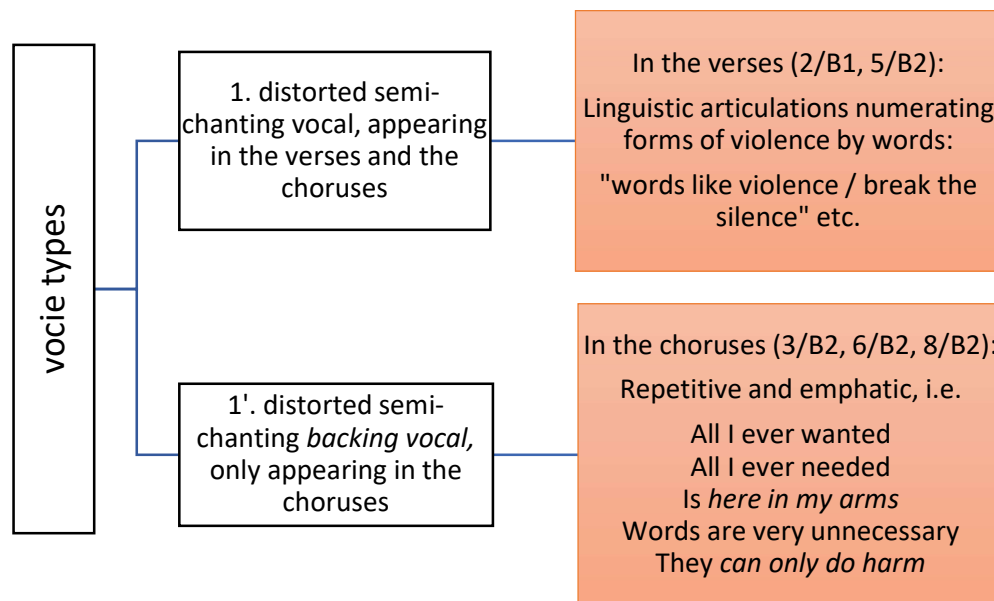
A contrast exists between the synthesizer and the guitar. The guitar part is quite simple, repetitive, and well-organized; the synthesizer builds up a phonic complexity that is different from that of the guitar. The two instruments, I propose, embody a tension between two organizations of *phónè*: there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

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



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

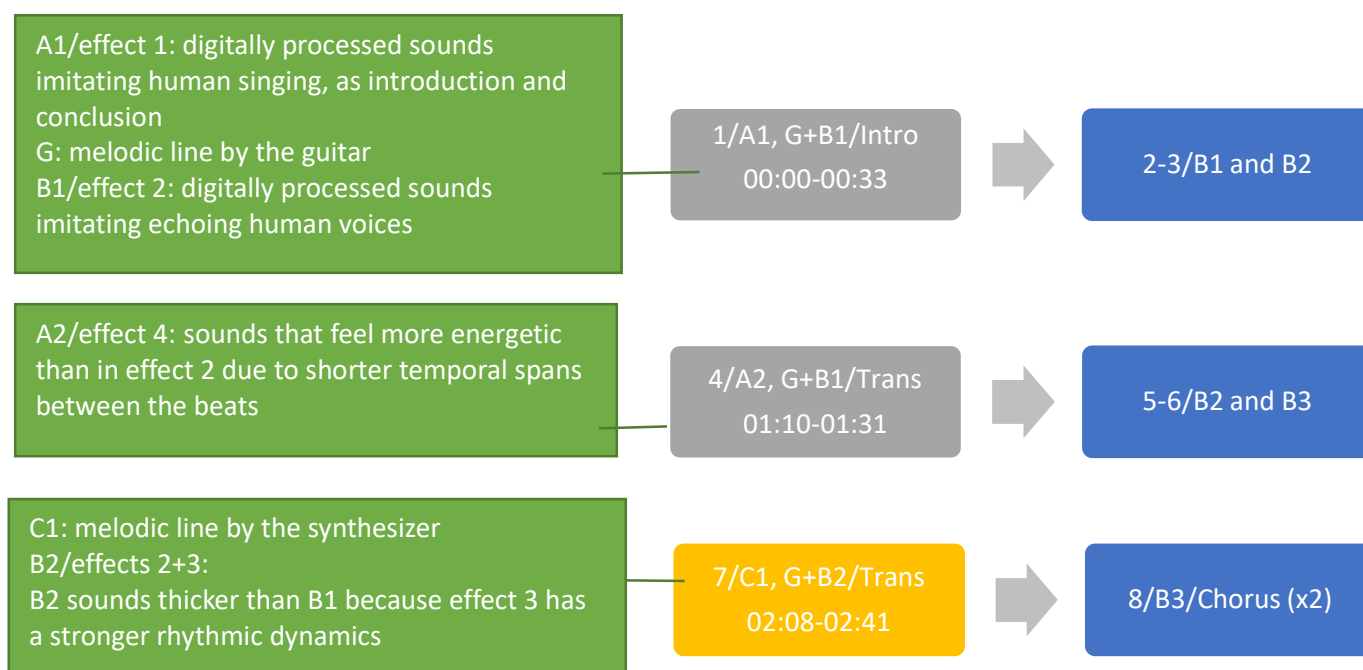
The difference between the verses and the choruses lies in the narrative functions of the voice types, indicated in the diagram below.



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

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

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



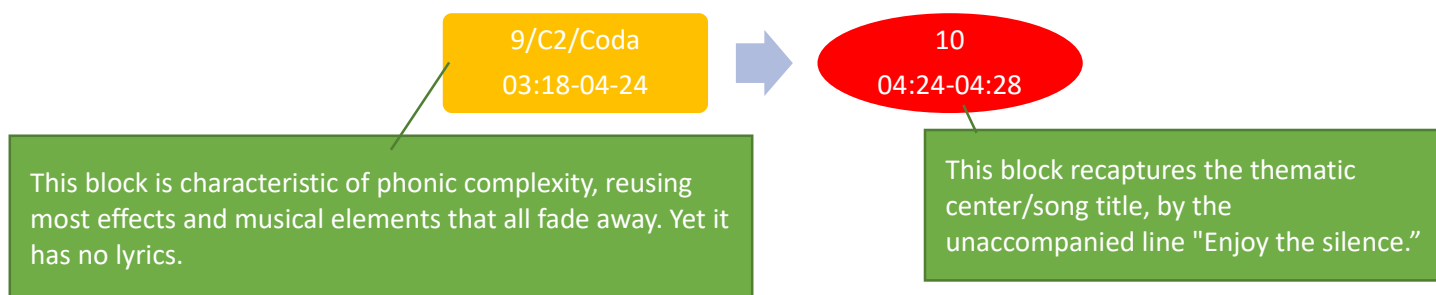
Block 1 introduces the fundamental tension embodied by the synthesizer and the guitar. In block 2 and 3, the tension is translated to the level of language in terms of meanings or language in terms of sound. A similar arrangement takes place in blocks 4 to 6. In block 7, a reversal and reassertion happen.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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

ii.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Examples of the two visual frames in *ENJOY THE SILENCE*¹⁰

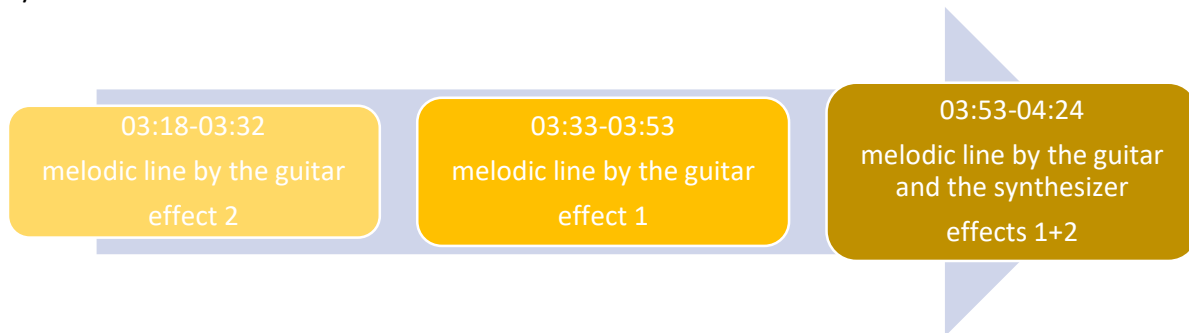
The references to the Romantic musical bare life figure of the authentic, androgynous mad(wo)man in both frames are hard to miss. Yet influential as the Romantic era and its sentiments are, Attali and John Hamilton both observe that the Romantic rebellion in fact assists the set of *logos-polis-bios*.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

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

¹⁰ 25 Feb. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or in tabular form:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or in tabular form:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.

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

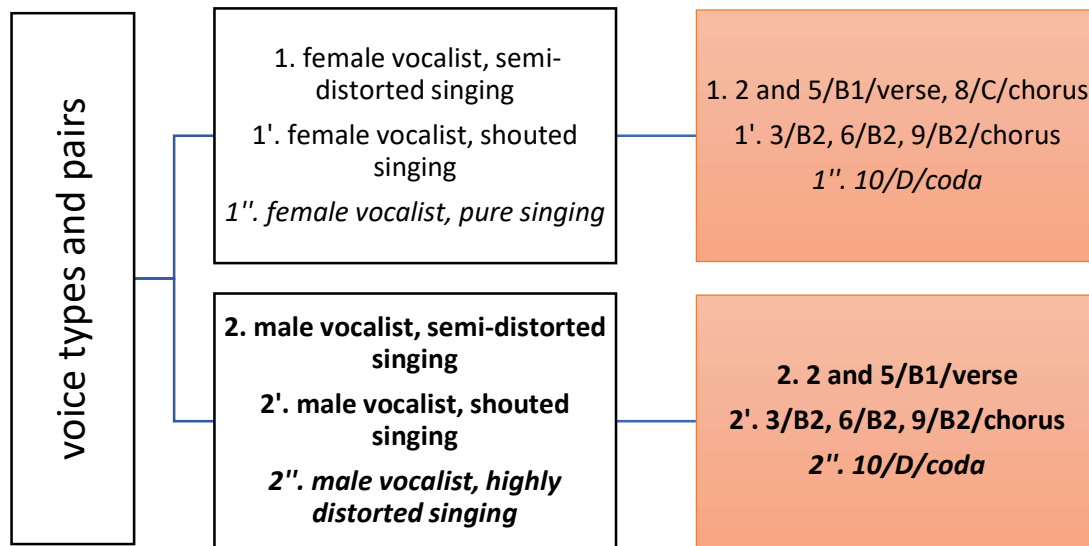
i.

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

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

¹⁴ *ENJOY THE SILENCE*, by Lacuna Coil. 19 July 2006, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA.

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



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

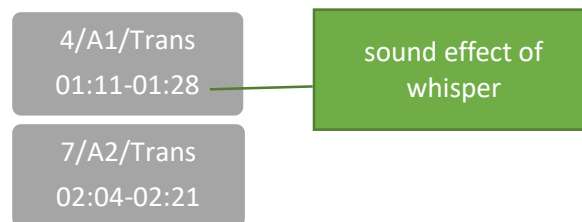
In Lacuna Coil's adaptation, the tension between the voices extends to the song's scenic context, and to scholarly constructed binaries of oppression and empowerment. This interpretative trajectory is supported by the adaptation of the theme of logocentric violence that is applicable to metal *logos*,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

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

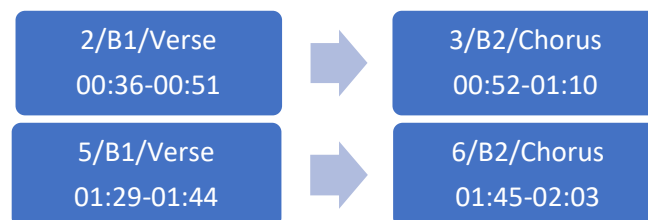
1/A1, A2/Intro
00:00-17, 00:18-
00:35

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

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



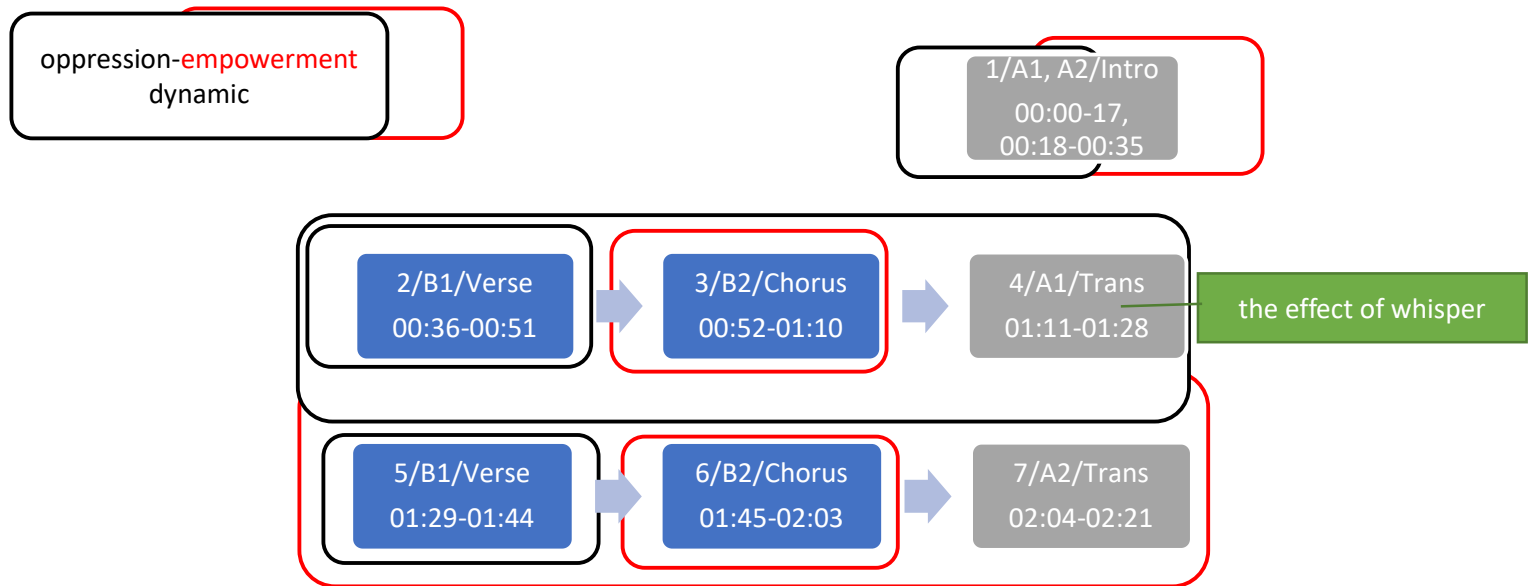
A similar stress on the respective forces takes place in verses/B1 and choruses/B2. The former contain a vocal pair of semi-distorted singing (1 and 2) that implies oppression by *logos*, while the latter contain singing-shouting in unison (1' and 2') which denotes empowerment.



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

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

and empowerment, as is visualized below.



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

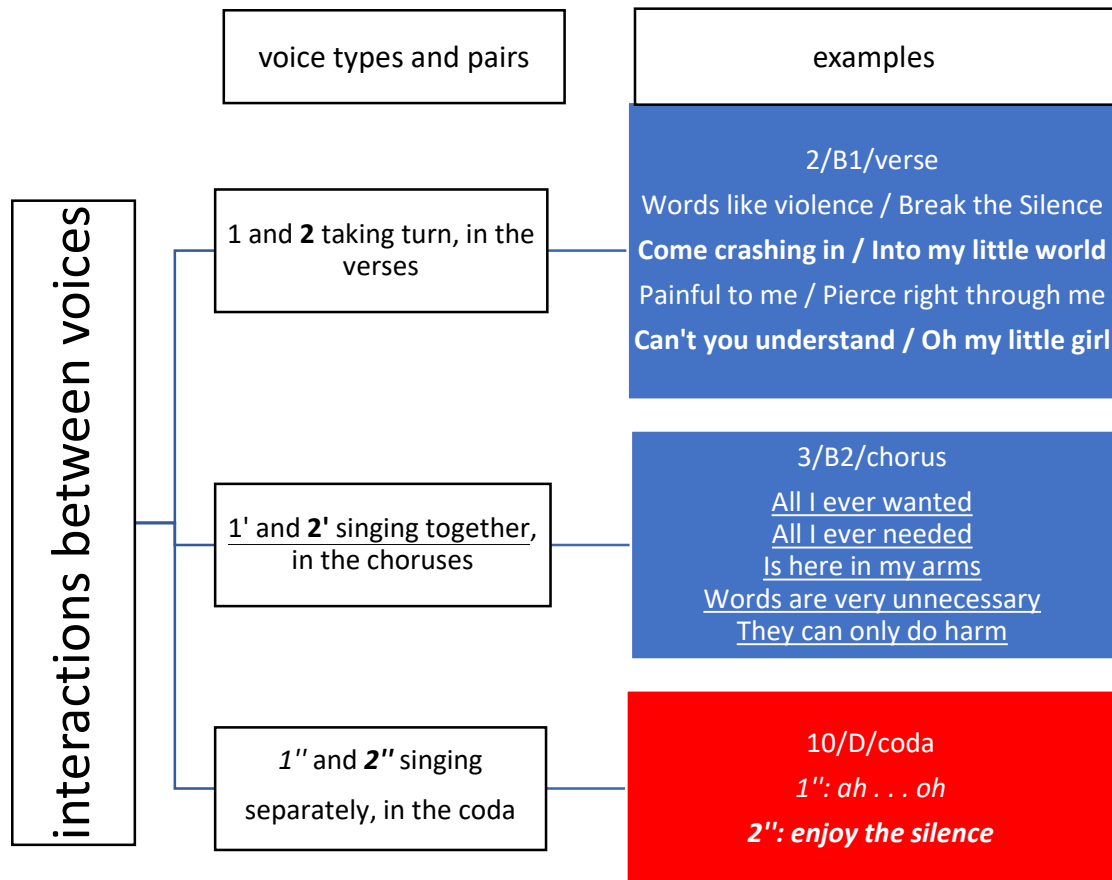


8/C/chorus sounds quite different from 9/B2/chorus, hence my visualization of 8/C in yellow.¹⁵ Most notable, in 8/C, the effect of the whisper is inserted, while bass and drums are suspended. Also, 8/C is the only part of the song that features only one voice type, here the semi-distorted singing by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

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

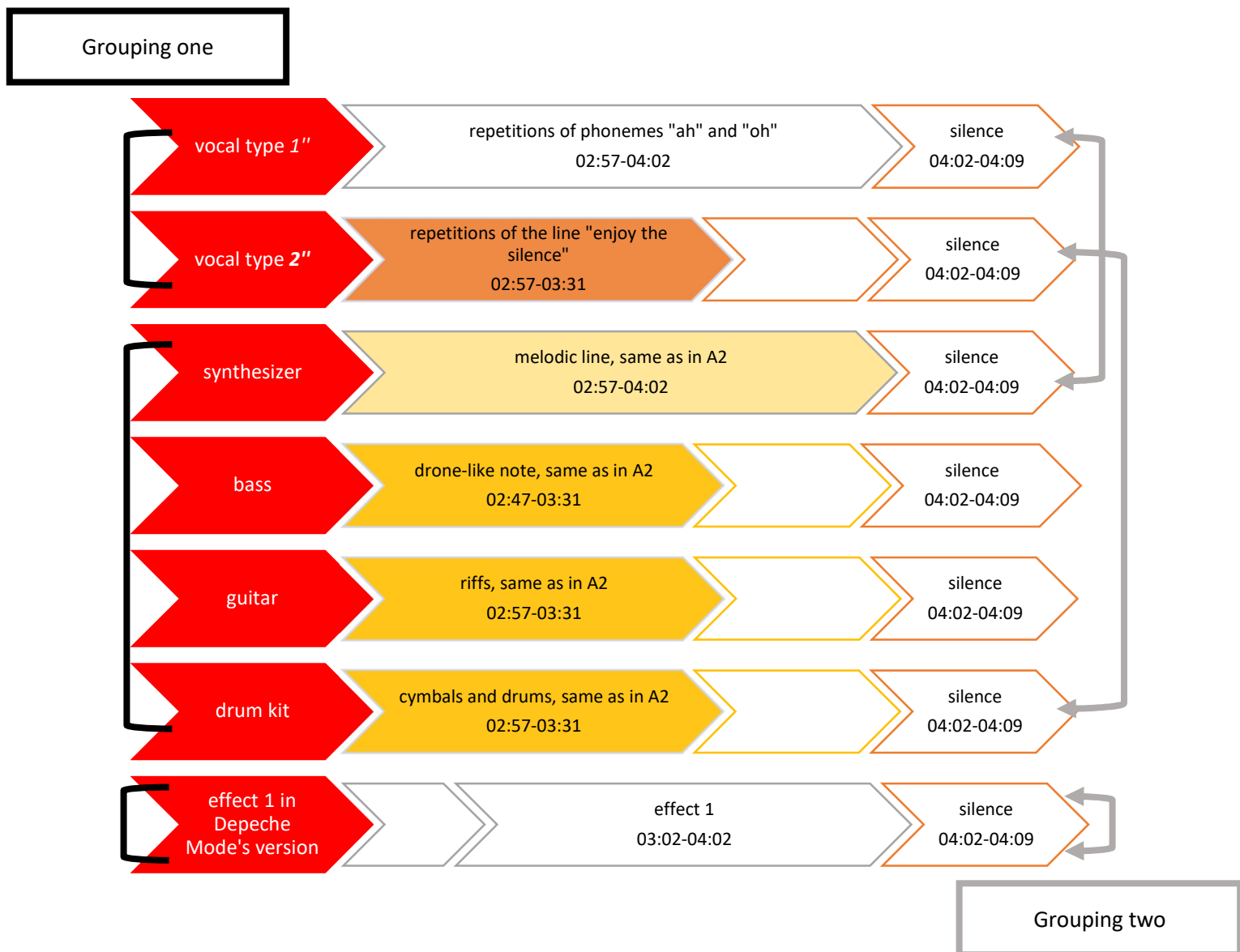
¹⁵ Like the case of A, B, and C in Depeche Mode's version, it should be noted that the yellow exaggerates the differences between sound blocks B and C in the metal adaption: on a harmonic level, they are very similar.

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



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

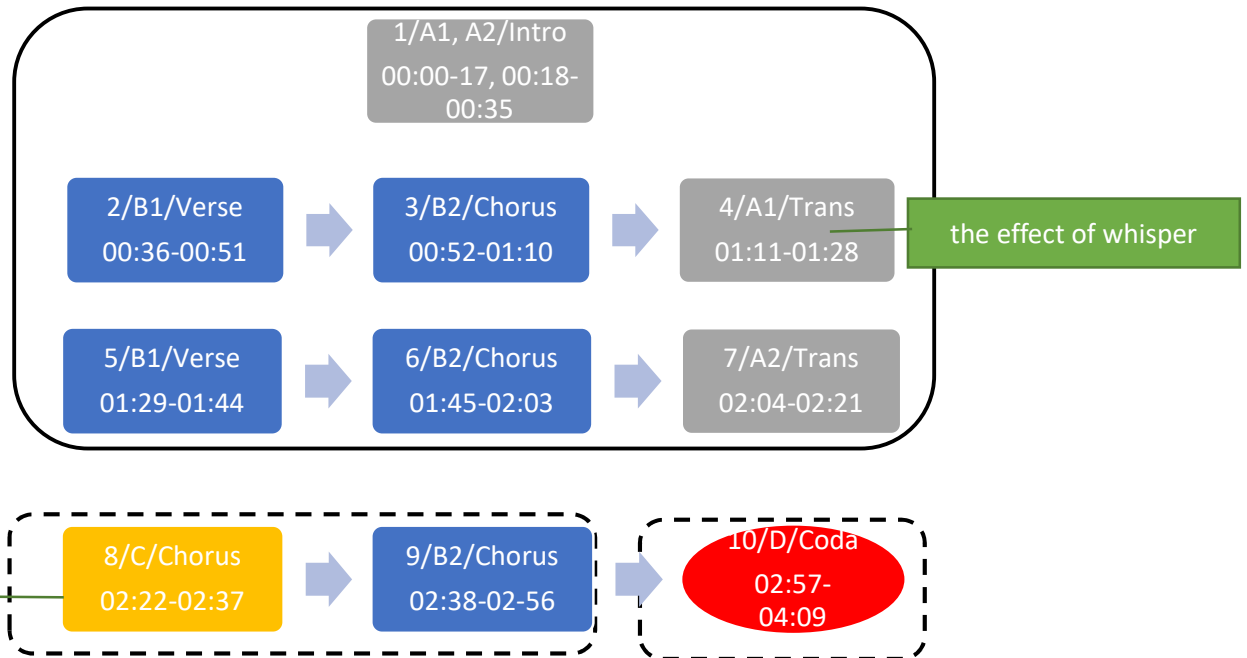
A closer examination of elements in 10/D reveals a similar operation, with voices 1'' and 2'' paralleled by two groupings of sounds. Below I visualize these elements of block 10 in the metal adaptation; I also indicate the two groupings in 10/D in brackets.



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

forms of subjectivity coexist, and neither claim priority.

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



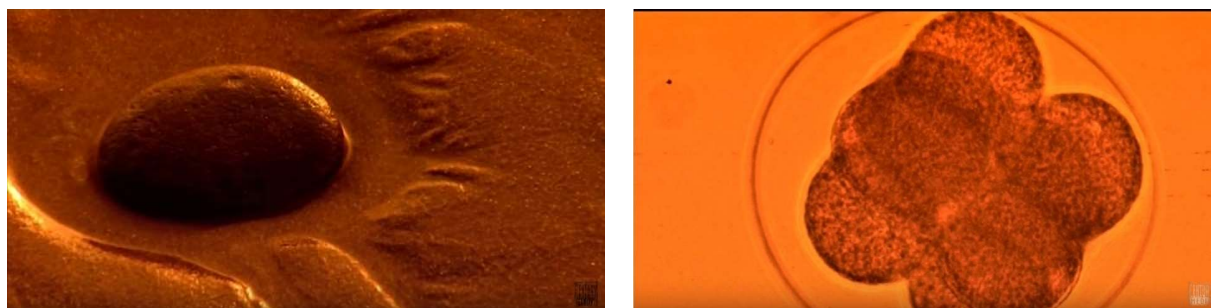
Now, it becomes clear why I suggest that the form of subjectivity at stake in this song is a phonic being-in-between that is irreducible to binary pairs. The song's trajectory is an establishing of two forces, or one two-sided force (subsets of A in block 1), of repetitions of respective poles (subsets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

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



Examples of two visual frames in the music video¹⁶

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



Screenshots of the indefinable object and the dividing-merging cell in Lacuna Coil's ENJOY THE SILENCE¹⁷

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

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

¹⁶ 19 July 2006, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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

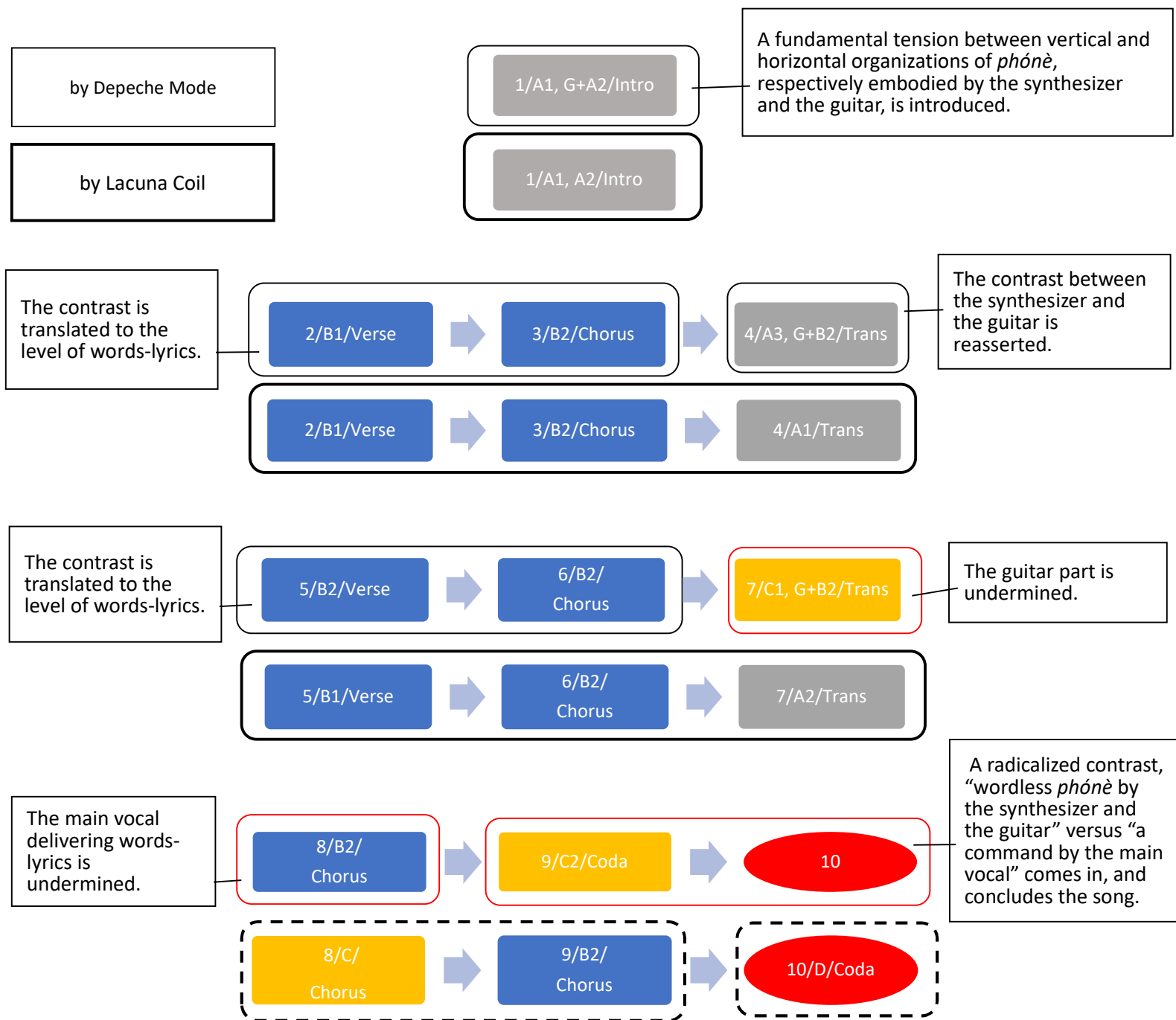


Screenshot where the whisper is seemingly coming from the female vocalist in the music video¹⁸

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

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

¹⁸ Ibid.



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

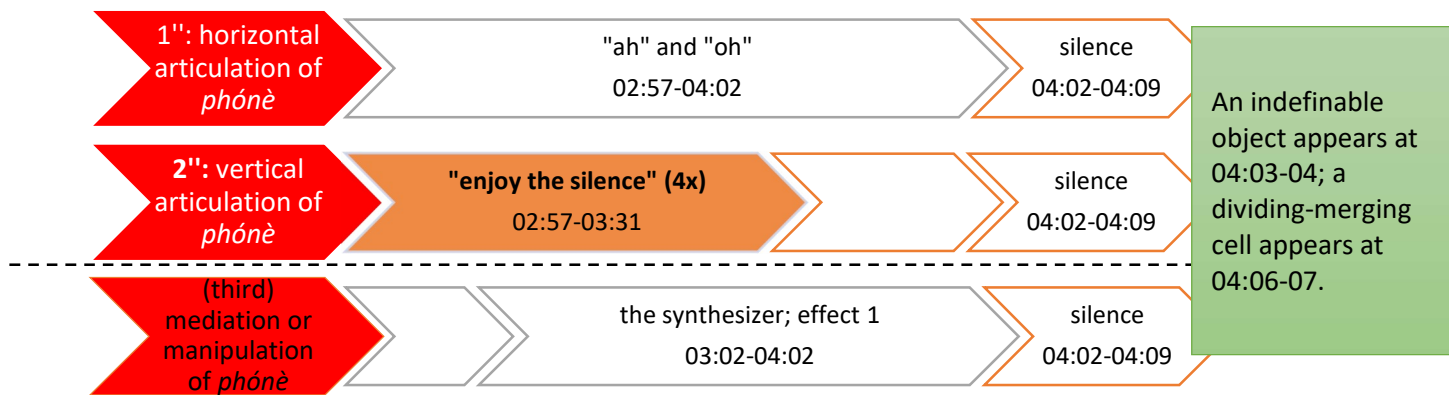
Agamben touches upon such a phonic possibility during his series of formulations of biopolitical profanation. In the next section, I first map Agamben's conceptualizations of profanation. I then attempt to tease out the biopolitical potential of metal music by critically reading Agamben with and through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

ii.

The Force of a Phoneme: Against a Dualist Analysis

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii.

A Demonic *Phónè* Speaking: Loss of Profanatory Potential

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



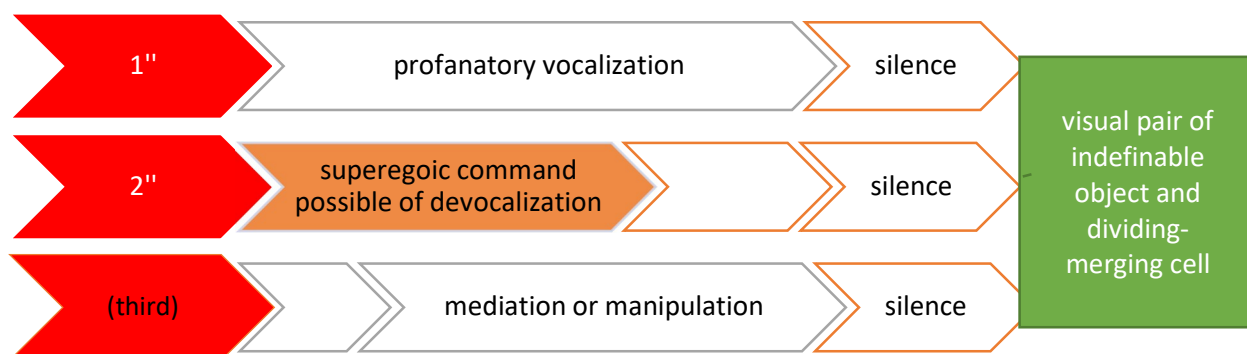
Concluding shot before final blank screen in Depeche Mode's ENJOY THE SILENCE²²

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

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

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

²² 25 Feb. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGSKrC7dGcY.



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

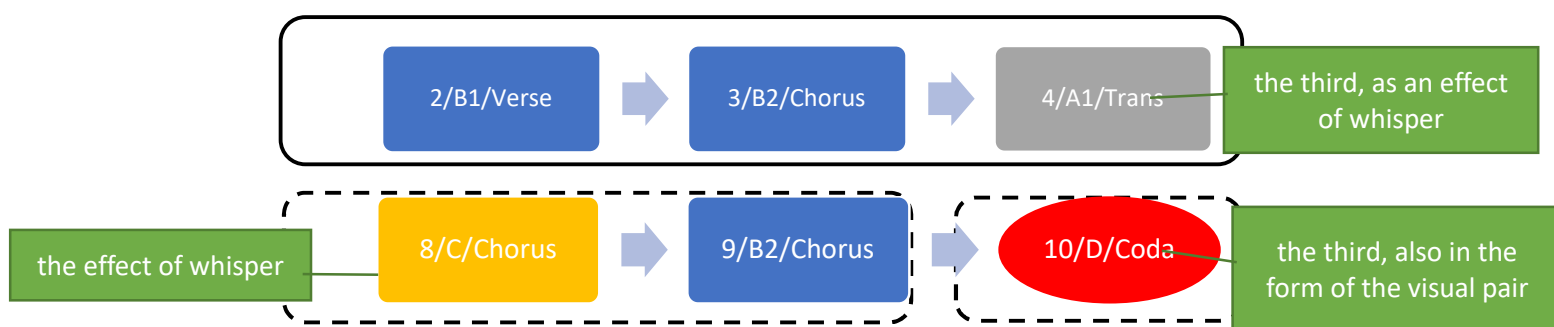
In dealing with the object voice, Lacan also emphasizes this third, though he never fully theorizes this voice in terms of the dynamic of desire-drive. In discussing the Freudian *Fort-Da* game in which his wariness to any dualistic tendency is most pronounced, Lacan's concern with the game is how the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

²³ Agamben, *Potentialities* 33.

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

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

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



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

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



Screenshots at 01:18 (frame 1) and at 02:23 (frame 2) during which the whisper appears in the track²⁵

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

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

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

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

iv.

Repositioning Metal for Political Agency

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

²⁵ 19 July 2006, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx58hXh4pVA

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

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

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

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

Yet, as insightful as Scott's concept may be, I also note its problematics. First, there is a rift between his theoretical explication and his textual analysis. Given his advocacy for scholarly engagement with metal as a whole, his brief reference to a lyrical extract with little elaboration is puzzling. In "Politics? Nah Fuck Politics Man," he refers to A LESSON LIVED IS A LESSON LEARNED by Hatebreed²⁷ but does not close read it (215). In so doing, Scott does not sufficiently engage with the metal work he uses. Commenting on this insufficiency, often found in scholarly works approaching metal philosophically, Kahn-Harris terms the philosophical school toward metal "a rich seam of playful philosophical discourse that is less analytical" (Introduction 2). Second, related to the question of scholarly engagement, there is the disciplinary battlefield between a philosophical school and metal music studies. Scott considers metal music studies to be an accomplice in logocentric obsession, and condemns it for plundering metal with the aim of disciplinary promotion. He briefly refers to Kahn-Harris, and criticizes the concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity for how it leaves no room for reflexive scholarly intervention ("Politics? Nah Fuck

²⁶ Agamben, *Means without End* 8-19.

²⁷ From the album *The Rise of Brutality*, 2003.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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