

The Biology of Heavy Metal  
Evolutionary Links Between Science and Culture

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## Abstract

The modern landscape of heavy metal can be seen as a splintered and interconnected mass of seemingly disparate styles and sub-styles. Literature that examines the history and culture of this music is increasingly common, but musicological study into the nature of developments within metal music are rare. In this thesis, I define the ways that metal changes and expands over time, using a Darwinian evolutionary framework to explore the variety that is central to metal music today. I devoted particular focus to imagery within this study, and through the analysis of the conventional and outlying themes of 10 distinct subgenres, I identified lines of influence and inspiration between them in order to understand the evolutionary nature of developments within the genre.

In order to effectively determine the conventions that govern the ideas of genre within metal, I chose a very large sample size, consisting of 1000 bands across 10 separate metal subgenres. Through the examination of text (lyrics, titles), images (album covers, video) and personal presentation (dress code, live performance), I define the central themes of each subgenre, and pair these with knowledge of the musical developments within the genre to accurately portray evolutionary changes that pervade metal as a whole. I also question the acceptance of transgressive themes within the genre, and apply anecdotal evidence and research into the standards of other artistic media to provide reasons for the relative artistic freedom of metal musicians. Through this study, I have observed evidence of all three Darwinian evolutionary principles - variety, inheritance and changes in local conditions - in action within the metal genre, which suggests that metal music evolves in a similar way to other large open systems.



## Introduction

I have been an avid listener of metal for most of my life, but my initial experience with the genre was mixed. I was brought up in a highly conservative, Christian household, and my interest in metal music was a continuous point of contention. I was raised to believe in a literal version of Satan, who could influence the lives of people through the media they consumed, which meant that lyrics were of utmost importance in any music I listened to. Therefore, the transgressive and inherently negative lyrics that are present in most of metal were an unacceptable element of the music, and I was discouraged from listening to metal at all. I was taught from a young age that God would ‘convict’ me when I was exposed to entertainment that would go against Christian principles, and this would be a sign that I should not be exposing myself to that entertainment. This conviction could also be prompted by an artist’s personal presentation, and as an example of this, the “Prince of Darkness” persona of Ozzy Osbourne meant that neither the solo music of Osbourne, nor the music of Black Sabbath (1969) was allowed in the house. This extended to many other bands and artists, including Iron Maiden (1975) and Judas Priest (1970).

However, I was repeatedly exposed to metal music through the interests of an older cousin, and despite my ‘convictions’, I was attracted to the music of bands like Slipknot (1995), Korn (1993) and Limp Bizkit (1994). My first introduction to extreme metal also occurred at this young age, as I was shown the cover for *Butchered at Birth* by Cannibal Corpse (1988), which both frightened and intrigued me, although I didn’t *listen* to any music that extreme until my teenage years. Within extreme metal subgenres, there is a prevalence of anti-religious and satanic imagery, and even as I grew older, these themes were particularly taboo. As a result, I struggled to listen to artists that discussed these themes. I felt that the teaching I had received as a child was in constant conflict with my musical interests, and I struggled to reconcile the two. Only a relatively recent critical examination of my faith allowed me to perceive the controlling nature of the religion that I belonged to, so I renounced religion as a way to pursue the art form that I was passionate about.

One aspect of the music that made an impact on me as a child was the distorted vocal style, as I initially struggled to understand how a human voice could make those sounds without the use of effects. Extreme vocal techniques have since been a particular interest of mine, and that interest inspired me to focus on distorted vocals as part of my performance. However, whilst singing was welcomed at home, any attempt to achieve a distorted vocal was discouraged, as it was said to be 'demonic' in sound. In my previous classical vocal tuition, this style has also been discouraged in favour of clean vocals, and my interest in metal as a whole has been criticised throughout my education. The consensus among tutors throughout my college experience was that metal music was less legitimate than other musical genres, and that it was impossible to make a career from a passionate interest in heavy metal, especially in extreme metal.

However, my theoretical interest in metal music only grew throughout my college experience, and became as crucial as my practical interest in the genre. Through this practical and theoretical interest, I was determined to use metal as a vehicle for academic achievement. In my previous listening, I had recognised links between bands and subgenres, and whilst I had not written these in a formal academic setting, I theorised that there were patterns of influence that permeated the entire history of the genre. I also theorised that these developments occurred in cycles, where bands in a single subgenre would grow more extreme over time until they could not be placed in that subgenre any more. At this point, a new subgenre or microgenre would be created. However, I did not have a framework on which to base this observation, so when it came to write my MA dissertation, I received guidance that pointed me toward evolutionary theory, particularly the variety-based evolutionary model of Steven Jay Gould. In my MA dissertation, I analysed various ways that extremity can be expressed within metal music, such as tuning, speed, imagery and virtuosity. Through this study, I found that the originators of metal subgenres had relatively low levels of extremity in these four areas, while subsequent bands often raised the extremity of their music by placing focus on certain aspects of their music. Through the application of this data, I was able to create several graphs that were similar in composition to those of Gould's model of evolution (see Fig.1).

The idea of using evolution as a framework for my study was immediately relatable, and these theories gave context to the ideas that I aimed to present, but I was still initially reserved due to my aforementioned religious upbringing. To readily accept the writings of central evolutionary theorists like Darwin, Gould and Dawkins would be in direct opposition to what I was taught to believe from my earliest memories of childhood. However, the evidence presented in the literature of these writers was impossible to refute, and they perfectly described the way I viewed the developments within metal, albeit with a focus on biology. This framework has allowed me to contextualise my hypothesis, present my ideas through similarly structured arguments, and accurately interpret my ideas of the genre that were previously more abstract.

Through my lifelong passion for the music in question, I have personally developed as a listener, and subsequently grown as both a performer and analyst to gain a deep understanding of the way that metal develops over time. I now understand that whilst the extremes of the metal genre may be outsider art in one of its most divisive forms, and the imagery therein may be unpalatable or uncomfortable to mainstream audiences, it can still be analysed as a system of innovations, mutations and conventions. This system does not only draw parallels to the accepted theories of biological evolution, but can also be emblematic of truly systemic cultural change.

Across its 50-year history, the genre of heavy metal has evolved from the innovations of a single band into the splintered and inter-connected mass of subgenres that we see in modern metal. In this study I interpret the ways in which these developments are made, through the examination of the imagery within the genre and the way that it relates to the music therein. In order to explain the ways that subgenres - and the bands within them - diversify to include higher levels of extremity, both in music and imagery, I will use an evolutionary framework to analyse the inter-subgenre connections, and the ways that artists influence each other to create conventions within a subgenre or microgenre. These subgenres provide a way to categorise bands within the wider metal genre, and whilst this is primarily useful for listeners who have a preference for one subgenre over another, this system of subcategories and distinct stylistic differences allows for a scientific analysis of the conventions of these subgenres and the links between them.

As an avid consumer of metal over a large period of time, I have been able to understand the boundaries that create the distinct subgenres that exist within it. Through the consumption of a large range of metal, I began to see the inter-connected nature of the genre as a system that can be analysed in a similar way to biological evolution, wherein local conditions create variety within species - or subgenres in this case - which then go on to form new subgenres, or more specific examples, which are known as microgenres.

Within the metal genre, there is a tendency toward extremity, and the genre can be summed up as a “progressive quest for ever-heavier music” (Berger, 1999, pg. 58). Even in the earliest examples of the genre, the occult imagery of Black Sabbath was extreme for mainstream audiences at the time, and bands have continued to push the envelope of what is acceptable through the themes in their art. Previous research into metal has suggested that subgenres may exist on a ‘family tree’, where one subgenre *progresses*, into the next subgenre, which usually has a higher level of extremity, as seen in the quote above. However, I argue that this is contrary to the way the genre works, and that the evolution of the metal genre works in a similar way to other large open systems. In *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World* (Wallach, et al., 2011, p. 36), Deena Weinstein states that “newer styles erase neither the styles from which they evolved nor any others, including the original”, and the continued existence of these simpler subgenres and cyclical nature of the developments within metal suggests that the genre may be evolutionary in nature. This cultural evolution can be explained in the same way as Stephen Jay Gould’s evolutionary model:

Progress does not rule (and is not even a primary thrust of) the evolutionary process. For reasons of chemistry and physics, life arises next to the "left wall" of its simplest conceivable and preservable complexity. This style of life (bacterial) has remained most common and most successful. A few creatures occasionally move to the right, thus extending the right tail in the distribution of complexity. Many always move to the left, but they are absorbed within space already occupied. Note that the bacterial mode has never changed in position, but just grown higher.

(Gould, 1994, p. 86)

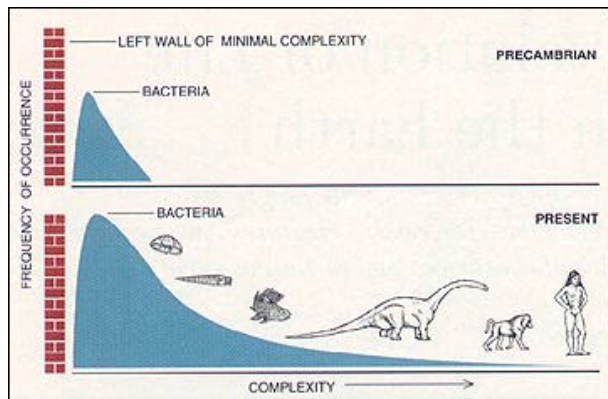


Figure 1: Gould's Diagram of Evolution

In Gould's evolutionary model, the 'left wall' represents the bare minimum conditions that must be fulfilled in order for life to emerge (see Fig.1). Therefore, the earliest forms of life - namely bacteria - were very simple in structure, but through mutations, more complex forms of life arose. The emergence of these mutations is not

preordained though, and their potential usefulness is only apparent when they are examined through the perspective of natural selection. In *On the Origin of Species* (1859, p. 12), Darwin outlines his theory of natural selection:

As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be *naturally selected*.

The potential usefulness of any given mutation can be measured by its effects on the life of the individual, and if the mutation makes the individual more suited to its environment, the individual can survive into sexual maturity, and pass on the genes that affected the initial mutation. It is pertinent to note that Darwin rarely used the term evolution in his work, and preferred the term 'descent with modification'. This phrase may be more suited to the Darwinian definition of 'evolution', and eloquently describes the process of natural selection through the vehicle of heredity. Through the repetition of this process over many years, evolution creates new and varied descendants of earlier species, and the overall variety of life expands.

In reference to Gould's model, the increase in variety means that natural selection may create species of higher complexity than their predecessors. This extends the curve of complexity toward a hypothetical 'right wall', which represents the point of maximal conceivable complexity within a life form. However, as the tail extends toward the right wall, there are a number of variables that allow the least complex species to exist in the largest numbers in this biological set, which I will describe as a modal majority. Throughout my thesis, I will

continue to use the term modal majority to describe the most frequently occurring examples in a given set, such as the extremity of bands within a subgenre, or the spread of extreme themes throughout the entire metal genre. The variables that allow the individuals of least complexity to exist in a modal majority include the continued dominance of simple lifeforms alongside the emergence of more complex species, and the random nature of natural selection, which creates new species that move toward lower levels of complexity, and help to increase the number of species that are adjacent to the left wall.

I theorise that metal music evolves in the same way. As in Gould's biological model, there exists a 'left wall' in metal, which represents the least complex music that can be created and be categorised within the genre. The originators of metal played music that was among the least complex and extreme in the entire genre, so it exists adjacent to the left wall. As new metal musicians emerge, they "transform the musical practices derived from their parent (sub)genres" (Hillier, 2020, pg. 1). This results in "the formation of new musical practices that are characteristic of (a) new subgenre" (Hillier, 2020, pg. 1). This extends the fringes of the extremity in the genre toward a right wall, which represents the highest level of extremity and complexity that can be utilised within metal. Additionally, there also exists a left and right wall within each metal subgenre, and as the originators of the subgenre develop their initial art, the first examples of music within that subgenre invariably appear next to the left wall. As the subgenre ages, music of a higher extremity is created within it, and this music edges closer to the right wall.

In my previous work, *Evolution in Heavy Metal: The Right Wall of Extremity*, I concluded that if a band becomes as extreme as possible, whilst still adhering to the conventions of the subgenre that they belong to, they reach a 'right wall of extremity', wherein they cannot become any more extreme without creating a new, distinct subgenre. In this manner there are transitional bands that have pushed up against this 'right wall', and there are other bands that have been influenced by these transitional bands, and have thus become the innovators of a new subgenre. These innovators therefore exist at the left wall of minimal extremity within this new subgenre which then allows for more extreme bands to arise within it. Over time these bands reach a new 'right wall', and the cycle repeats itself.

In order to confirm that metal music operates in a similar way to biological evolution, the three basic conditions of Darwinian evolution must be present. The first condition of an evolutionary system is that of variation, as the innate ability to vary is central to the gradual change that occurs as a result of the evolutionary process. The second principle is the ability for future generations to inherit these changes, as the inheritance of beneficial mutations allows a subsequent generation to be better suited to their local environment. The third principle of evolution is selection, wherein some forms of a species are measurably more effective within their natural environment than others. In chapters four and five, I establish the links between the mass of subgenres and microgenres in metal, and confirm the cultural parallels of inheritance at work within the genre.

One of the most abstract ways that this inheritance can be seen in action is through the developments in imagery, as I have observed that the foundations for the most popular themes in metal today were all present in the imagery of bands that existed at the inception of the genre. Through the cycle of cultural evolution that is observable in metal, this imagery was repeated by more extreme bands, and in conjunction with the music, imagery helped to create new subgenres at the right wall of extremity. By examining this imagery, I draw lines of influence between interconnected subgenres and trace the inheritance of the imagery based on the ideologies of the musicians and the formation of semiotic conventions within each subgenre.

A potential obstacle to this theory is that there are substantial oppositions to the use of Darwinian evolution to explain cultural phenomena. Both primary objections deal with the role of agency in the formation of cultural 'memes', which is the term used by Dawkins to describe a trend that spreads through culture by imitation. Dawkins (1976, p. 192) further defines the term through a list of memetic examples, consisting of "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or building arches". There is a common argument among cultural academics that the transmission of memes through culture, and therefore the development of culture as a whole, is directed and built on conscious developments. This would seem to refute the existence of random variation, which is one of the underpinning ideas of Darwinian evolution.

However, the viewpoint of the evolutionary analysis is crucial in this instance. Within metal studies, “the problem with lineage-based definitions of bands and subgenres are evident in that they are subjectively based on who is making the definitions and are liable to change with time” (Gracyk, 2016, as cited in Hillier, 2020). Similarly, this issue of perspective can also undermine the impact of random variation in cultural evolution. When viewed retrospectively, the development of culture *can* be seen as a progression of successful developments that are built on the foundation of cultural predecessors, but this perspective does not account for the multitude of failed innovations, as they have often faded into obscurity at the time of analysis. Therefore, while the presence of guided and progressive evolution seems clear in retrospect, cultural developments cannot truly be guided, as their reception within society cannot be predicted. Within the metal genre that my study is based on, any given musician has no way of knowing if their music will be financially or critically successful, or if it will be influential to subsequent artists. While there may be results that are more desirable, the method of variation is essentially trial-and-error, and it is impossible to predict what will be successful in advance. This trial-and-error approach leads directly into random variation, which supports the use of Darwinian evolution as a vehicle for cultural change.

Alongside this issue of retrospective viewpoints, there are also relatively few ways of knowing the exact intentions of a musician when discussing their artistic output. “Meaning need not be consciously and literally encoded by performers to exist and matter” (Hannan, 2017, pg. 11), so the way we assign meaning to any musical text may be inaccurate compared to the intentions of the creator, if there were any explicit intentions to begin with. Therefore, as scholars, we can only relate the artistic output of a creator to that of their predecessors, and see how the initial conventions or innovations impact the evolution of subsequent artists in response.

The other common opposition to evolution within culture applies directly to Darwinian evolution, as there is a prevailing debate that any cultural evolution must be Lamarckian in nature. In Lamarckian evolution, traits that are acquired through the course of an individual’s life are able to be passed on to potential offspring. While this evolutionary theory has been widely debunked in the field of biology since the discovery of genetic inheritance, it seems to



be immediately applicable to cultural evolution. However, the argument of random variation also applies to the refutation of this opposition. In Lamarckian evolution, the underpinning theory of heredity states that physical traits that are developed in the life of a parent are automatically passed on to their offspring. Therefore, if an individual becomes aware of this mechanism, they should - in theory - be able to consciously develop certain characteristics for the express purpose of passing those developments to their young.

In culture, the development of artistic traits for the purpose of transmission is the very definition of education, but there is still an element of random chance. The individual that chooses to develop these traits cannot predict the desires of potential students, so if their traits are undesirable to wider society, they will not be passed on to the next generation, regardless of the extent of their development. Even if a cultural 'parent' is able to educate subsequent generations, the iteration of their idea that is presented by their cultural 'offspring' may be less successful, as human nature dictates that the same idea will be presented differently by separate individuals based on their principles, life experiences and personality.

In contrast to the guided developments of Lamarckian evolution, the developments of culture are random and unpredictable in nature, even in the presence of a desirable goal, so the only measure for cultural success or failure is the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection, whereby artists are deemed successful or unsuccessful by the reactions of their peers. If they are critically and commercially successful, they are more likely to pass on their cultural innovations to subsequent generations of artists, so the three principles of Darwinian evolution are present, and the system can be defined as Darwinian in nature.

Whilst the growth of extremity within the genre may seem self-evident, the definition of extremity in this context must be determined. The term extreme is defined as a point that is furthest away from the centre or the average, so extreme music is that which is furthest removed from either the expectations of popular culture, or the conventions of its genre. Musical extremity can be defined in multiple ways though, as there are various aspects that may be taken to extremes by metal musicians. Extremity can be created by the use of tempos that are either much faster or slower than those dictated by the conventions of the genre, or

by using tunings that are lower than average, which creates a 'heavier' sound. Extremity may also be created through the virtuosity within the musicians' performance, which is usually shown through the use of advanced techniques like sweep picking or polyrhythmic drumming.

In the same way as these technical elements, extremity can also be demonstrated through the use of transgressive imagery, so semiotic extremity can be defined in two ways; as imagery that is farthest away from traditional societal values, or as imagery that is furthest away from the conventions of the subgenre that the artist exists within. Therefore, the most extreme metal imagery often subverts the accepted expectations and moral standards of society. Whilst this is harder to quantify than the technical elements of the genre, the thematic content of a musician's output can be assessed by comparing it to the conventions of their genre/subgenre, and the moral standards of society as a whole (see chapter two).

The structure of my thesis is as follows:

I begin with a literature review which catalogues and evaluates the current literature surrounding metal. I review research that focuses on genre within metal, the imagery that is present within metal, and the cultural impacts of the genre. I seek to place my study within this academic landscape, and clarify the ideas that my research presents.

I then devote chapter two to my research methods, which were both meticulous and wide in scope. I have utilised a very large data set that is uncommon in cultural study, and I seek to justify my choices for the size of my sample data, the way I have presented it, and the conditions for inclusion in my data. I also justify my use of specific microgenres within the central 10 subgenres that I have analysed, and I list each microgenre used in my study.

In chapter three I present a short preliminary analysis, and use a number of subchapters to provide a brief overview of each of the subgenres that I selected, both in terms of their music and imagery. This overview provides a context for the subgenres that I analysed and presents the conventions for these subgenres in order to contextualise the inclusion of bands within them.

In chapter four, I examine each subgenre in turn, focussing on the central themes of each genre individually. It is important to examine each subgenre initially in a vacuum, as it were, as each has distinct central themes. Within each subchapter I discuss the results of my data collection and draw conclusions about the most common themes in each given subgenre, and I also discuss the outlying themes that may be more or less extreme than the subgenre's conventional themes. I examine the microgenres that exist within each subgenre, and discuss the elements that distinguish them, whether it is a musical difference, a thematic difference, or - as in most cases - both. This chapter constitutes a large portion of my thesis, and I present a wealth of information that will help to contextualise the links between subgenres that I present in subsequent chapters.

In chapter five, I examine the ways that subgenres have evolved over time, and the way that new subgenres have been created, in order to determine the catalysts for change in the metal genre. By examining thematic lines of influence throughout multiple subgenres, I also give evidence for my evolutionary framework, and I use multiple detailed case studies to examine particularly important periods in the evolution of metal. These include: the extremity of Venom (1979) as a transitional band from NWoBHM to black metal; the influence of hardcore punk on various subgenres and microgenres within metal; and the diverging strains of death metal that have created dual opposing microgenres within one of the most extreme subgenres.

I then devote chapter six to the opinions of metal listeners, through the use of a questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to ascertain the typical listening habits of metal audiences, and to establish the personal boundaries of those audiences, with regards to the extreme imagery that is a main convention of the metal genre. Through this analysis, I examine the reasons behind the acceptance of transgressive and potentially offensive themes in the genre, and also gain further information about the popularity of certain subgenres over others.

In order to further understand the prevalence of extreme and transgressive themes within the genre, I devote chapter seven to the analysis of metal in relation to other art forms. I

compare the extremity of metal imagery to the extremity seen in film, fine art, and literature, and compare the mainstream responses to thematic extremity across all four art forms. In order to truly understand the transgressive nature of metal imagery, I examine the gore and sexual violence of extreme horror cinema, the impact of religious subversion within fine art and the artistic freedom that is granted to horror authors through the passive acceptance of extreme themes in the medium.

Finally, I use chapter eight to summarise my research, and the information that I have gleaned from the analysis of my primary data, the questioning of metal audiences, and the examinations of other artistic media. I defend my use of evolution as a framework for cultural study, and provide a conclusive overview of the evidence for its application within the development of metal music. To end this thesis, I contextualise my research within the field of metal academia, and provide suggestions of further research based on my work.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

In this chapter, I focus on the existing literature surrounding the heavy metal genre, as well as literature on genre classification and evolutionary theory. Initially, I focus on literature surrounding the history of the genre, followed by the texts on the social and musicological impact of metal music. I then examine the literature that discusses the imagery of the genre, or some elements thereof. Lastly, I review the literature that discusses theories of genre, as well as evolutionary theories. Through this literature review, I contextualise my study within the existing literature concerning the subjects of metal music, genre and cultural evolution, and identify the knowledge that I provide through the course of this thesis.

### History

Existing scholarship tends to split metal analysis into two main types. One of these types analyses the primary musical text, deriving meaning from composition, instrumentation and production, while the other deals with extra-musical characteristics, such as imagery and the culture surrounding the genre (Hillier, 2018, pg. 7). Whilst biographies, autobiographies and sociological analyses are common, analysis on the musicology of the genre are rare. Some examples of historical accounts of the genre are *Louder than Hell: The Definitive Oral History of Heavy Metal* (Wiederhorn; Turman; 2013), *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (Christe, 2010) and the documentaries of Sam Dunn. These documentaries are *Metal: A Headbangers Journey* (2005), and *Metal Evolution* (2011).

Dunn seeks to explore how heavy metal has evolved from its earliest roots in the hard rock bands of the 1960s like Led Zeppelin (1968), Deep Purple (1968) and MC5 (1963), through the early metal of Black Sabbath and Judas Priest and through to various subgenres like NWoBHM, thrash metal and nu-metal. Dunn analyses these subgenres, their influences, their stylistic idiosyncrasies and their time period, and uses them to create his “heavy metal family tree” (*Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, 2005), an expansive selection of 24 subgenres that present the flow of influence over time, and show how subgenres are combined to create new ones. This family tree has become lauded as a definitive view of the progression of the

genre since the release of *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, but in my view, there are multiple inaccuracies.

This is not to say that Dunn's work is inconsequential or unworthy of note though, as his influence on metal studies is undeniable. He has helped to legitimise heavy metal as a genre that is worthy of formal examination, and I found that his family tree was both useful and interesting when I was initially formulating my theories about the genre. The copious interviews and first-hand accounts of the genre's development are also impressive in Dunn's films, as they present a wealth of primary information that was previously lacking. Nevertheless, as my knowledge of the metal genre grew through listening, performance and formal study, the inaccuracies in this diagram became more significant, and they need to be examined in the process of gaining an accurate understanding of the genre.

Firstly, the subgenre that is described as 'pop metal' is simply a continuation of the aforementioned glam metal, but not in a way that categorises these bands as stylistically separate. Although bands like Slade (1966) and Sweet (1968) were not nearly as complex, virtuosic or 'heavy' as later bands like Dokken (1978) or Van Halen (1972), they still had similar stylistic elements and themes in their imagery. Furthermore, placing Mötley Crüe (1981) and Poison (1983) in one subgenre and Ratt (1977) in a separate subgenre only serves to reinforce them as interchangeable.

There are also three other subgenres on this diagram that show bands that are grouped by arbitrary details, rather than their musical style. Firstly, the subgenre that is described as 'Swedish death metal' includes bands that are considered death metal in a more traditional sense, like Grave (1988), Dismember (1988) and Unleashed (1989), but also contains bands from the more specific microgenre of melodic death metal, like At the Gates (1990), In Flames (1990) and Arch Enemy (1995). The melodic approach utilised by the latter three bands has gone on to influence many more bands of a similar ilk that exist even outside of Sweden, including the Finnish band Children of Bodom (1997), which was also labelled incorrectly as thrash metal in this diagram.

The confusion created by Dunn's interpretation of Swedish death metal bands is also exacerbated by his analysis within his article 'Lands of Fire and Ice: An Exploration of Death Metal Scenes', wherein he similarly groups bands by location, rather than musical similarities. While he correctly states that "Sweden is widely recognized...as the "home" of melodic death metal" (Dunn, 2004, pg. 115), he also states that Stockholm bands Dismember and Entombed (1989) are associated with the subgenre of melodic death metal. When these bands are examined in a musicological way, they can be seen to have far more in common with American death metal bands, as opposed to the melodic tendencies of bands from Gothenburg. The differences are reinforced by Hillier (2018, pg. 13) where he states that there is an "invocation of Romanticism and grandeur achieved through the use of classical elements and instrumentation when comparing Melodic Death Metal with Swedish Death Metal", such as Grave or Dismember.

Another subgenre that groups bands solely by time period and location is the 'new wave of American metal'. In contrast to NWoBHM, which included bands grouped by time and location, but also by musical similarities, the 'new wave of American metal' in Dunn's diagram includes Killswitch Engage (1999), Shadows Fall (1995) and Unearth (1998), which are all bands from the metalcore subgenre. Dunn also states that the 'new wave of American metal' era started in the year 2000, but all three of these bands were formed before 2000. The last subgenre that contains categorical inaccuracies is dubbed as 'goth metal', but includes bands from doom metal (Paradise Lost (1988), My Dying Bride (1990) and Type O Negative (1990)), symphonic metal (Therion (1988)) and progressive metal (Opeth (1989)).

The definition of metalcore is another point of contention in this diagram. Every band that has been included in this subgenre have fused heavy metal and hardcore punk in some way, and this *was* described as metalcore in the 1980s. However, in modern times, this fusion of hardcore punk and thrash metal that was popular in the 1980s has become known as crossover thrash metal. The term metalcore is now used to describe a more modern way to fuse the influences of heavy metal and hardcore punk, and this style has its own specific musical syntax.

The modern definition of metalcore typically employs, fast, 16<sup>th</sup> note riffs and mid-to-high-pitched distorted vocals, though not as high as in black metal. Lighter choruses also employ the use of more strummed chords and clean singing, and slowed, heavy breakdowns make use of complex rhythms, but often on a single pitch, such as a low-pitched open string. Bands that Dunn has included in his metalcore category do not include these musical characteristics, so an up-to-date classification must place them in the style of crossover thrash metal, rather than metalcore.

As well as these inaccuracies in categorisation, there are other small individual errors, including the connection line that shows that the only influence on the first-wave black metal bands was hardcore punk. This is inaccurate because Venom are included in this first-wave black metal category, but in essence they played an extreme and complex form of NWoBHM. Therefore, the exclusion of NWoBHM as an influence of black metal is another inaccuracy. Also, if the naming scheme is to be followed logically, the subgenre that directly follows first-wave black metal should be labelled as second-wave black metal, but is instead labelled as Norwegian black metal. Cradle of Filth (1991) are included in this 'Norwegian black metal' category, but are a band from England, which would be fixed by labelling the subgenre 'second-wave black metal'.

As well as the inaccuracies in the subgenre definitions in this diagram, I also disagree with the 'family tree' format of categorisation. As with Gould's definitions in biological evolution, I interpret the evolution present in metal music as a system of variety, rather than progress. When the subgenres are presented in a family tree, this implies that one subgenre 'progresses' into the next, which is not the way that the subgenre evolves. This can be seen in the continued existence of older subgenres; as death metal evolved from thrash metal, thrash metal did not cease to exist.

## Culture and Society

Sociological studies into the culture of heavy metal and its listeners are relatively common, and include books like *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (Weinstein, 2009), which



presents a description and analysis of the genre through the lens of cultural sociology. Weinstein attempts to argue for the artistic and sociological impact of the genre, in clear opposition to the issues that the PMRC and politicians had raised just several years prior to publishing. Another sociological study into the culture surrounding metal music is *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World* (Wallach, et al., 2011), which explores the globalisation of heavy metal, as different geographical locations bring about new influences and evolutions in the music. These include the emergence of melodic death metal in Gothenburg, Sweden; the second-wave black metal bands of Norway or the prolific South American death metal movement. There are also theses on the subject of heavy metal culture, such as *Love's Labours: Extreme Metal Music and its Feeling Community* (Allett, 2010). This thesis argues that the metal genre provides artists an opportunity to connect with the audience, which is then reciprocated by the audience. This allows them to feel that they are part of a larger community, reinforcing their personal sense of 'self'.

In *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, Weinstein also presents her definition for genre in the case of heavy metal. She defines metal as a genre that has fixed conventions within composition, instrumentation and performance, and this can be described as the 'sonic dimension'. Alongside these sonic conventions are those within the 'visual dimension', which includes artwork and logos, and those within the 'verbal dimension', which include titles and lyrics. These three dimensions work alongside each other to make crucial contributions to the definition of the genre (Weinstein, 2009, pg. 6-7). My work does contrast against Weinstein's in its premise though, as she states that heavy metal has "a code, or set of rules", but also that "that code is not systematic" (Weinstein, 2009). In my hypothesis and my earlier work, however, I have surmised that evolution in the extremity of heavy metal *is* largely systematic, and does work in a similar way to other large open systems.

I have previously concluded that even though the agency of musicians is obviously present in the creation of their music, the tendency of musicians in this genre is to evolve the music that currently exists into a region of higher extremity and complexity, which serves to create new subgenres, but remain fundamentally part of heavy metal. There are outside influences, from the punk style heard in grindcore and thrash metal, the hip-hop influence in nu-metal or the folk instrumentation that has been adopted into folk metal, but these have not removed nor

replaced the fundamentals of heavy metal; distorted guitars, atonal or minor chord progressions, complex and aggressive sounding drums, and in many cases distorted vocals.

The culture surrounding black metal music is a growing area of interest for music scholars, and both *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture* (Olson, 2008) and *True Black Metal: Authenticity, Nostalgia, and Transgression in the Black Metal Scene* (Skadiang, 2017) explore the subculture that has grown around a subgenre that is among the most transgressive and challenging within metal as a whole. An element of culture that is particularly important among black metal listeners is the idea of being “true” (stylised as ‘trve’) or “cult” (stylised as ‘kvlt’). These ideals reinforce the inaccessibility of the music, and seek to expose casual listeners as posers who are not knowledgeable or willing enough to appreciate black metal as the art form that ‘trve kvlt’ listeners deem it to be.

These ideas are also related to the concept of subcultural capital, wherein a fan of a certain medium gains status by being particularly knowledgeable or passionate about the subject. In metal as a whole, subcultural capital can be accrued by expressing knowledge of obscure bands, attending a wide range of live shows or attending live shows that were important in the history of a particular band, or correctly placing bands within the spectrum of increasingly narrow microgenres. In black metal, this is even more common, as there are online communities that specifically ban any mention of bands that are too successful, such as Mayhem (1984), Darkthrone (1987) or Burzum (1991) (Skadiang, 2017).

This blacklist creates a community that is off-putting to potential members that have not amassed the necessary subcultural capital, as the bands on it are among the first that a new listener of black metal would encounter. Therefore, if an audience member cannot engage with the community in a meaningful way because of a perceived lack of knowledge, they may be discouraged from engaging at all in the future. This type of boundary policing - or ‘gatekeeping’ - is highly prevalent in the metal community, and a study of this behaviour gives an important foundation for cultural interpretations of anecdotal evidence, especially when studying extreme subgenres that place importance on esoteric knowledge of bands and metal history.

## Musicology

Whilst musicological studies are less common, they are not entirely absent, and they are becoming increasingly common. In *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* (Cope, 2016), Andrew Cope examines the music directly, analysing the syntax and aesthetics that make up the core of Black Sabbath's creative output, and contrasts these with those of Led Zeppelin, a band that were a major influence on early heavy metal. Through this focus, Cope creates an accurate description of the elements that encapsulate the core of the genre, including fundamentals like timbre and harmony. In addition to this, Cope uses further case studies to compare the way in which these elements have been further utilised by more modern bands, such as Machine Head (1991) and Cradle of Filth.

Through his musicological focus it is clear to see that Cope presents a convincing argument for the way in which the fundamental 'sound' of heavy metal, encapsulating timbre, structure and harmony, has lasted from the start of the genre with Black Sabbath to the present day. I added to this in my previous work, where I concluded that whilst this central formula has pervaded the genre since the beginning, it has been made more extreme and more complex through time. In this thesis, I also seek to prove that imagery has been a part of that evolution. Black Sabbath employed imagery that was quite varied, including imagery surrounding the occult, war and horror, and these three themes have all been taken to their extremes within a range of subgenres. The way that lines of influence can be drawn between the imagery of Black Sabbath and the conventional imagery of multiple subgenres has helped to inform the theories of evolution in my study.

Another work that examines the syntax of heavy metal is *Theory and Analysis of Classic Heavy Metal Harmony* (Lilja, 2009). In this thesis, Lilja analyses the harmony and chord structures present within heavy metal, specifically the bands in the pre-metal era of hard rock music, and the NWoBHM bands of the 1970s and early 1980s. This is a work that is written purely through the context of music theory, and seeks to examine the harmonic content that gives the genre its unique sound, in comparison to the direct predecessors of the genre, such as hard rock bands Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin.

These harmonic ideas can also be found prevalently in many modern extreme heavy metal subgenres, with some exceptions, such as the deliberately atonal harmonic choices of death metal band Gorguts (1989). The harmonic content of the bulk of heavy metal can be linked back to these earliest progenitors of the genre, such as the uncommon prevalence of the tritone interval, and the overwhelming popularity of the natural minor and diminished scales. As these links are evident in the harmonic content of classic and modern metal alike, I also found and analysed these links within the imagery of heavy metal over time, and used them to create a large picture of the thematic evolution across the most extreme heavy metal subgenres.

*Genre and Expression in Extreme Metal, ca. 1990-2015* (Smialek, 2016) is a musicological thesis that examines various facets of extreme metal, including the musical syntax and imagery of death metal and black metal. Smialek examines the way in which disorientation for the listener is used as a compositional tool in technical death metal, and how extreme metal vocalists use certain vowel sounds and acoustics to “mimic large beasts in a way that fans find convincing and powerful” (Smialek, 2016). This mix of analyses allows Smialek to put forth a detailed and nuanced account of the genre conventions of some of the heavy metal subgenres that fall under the umbrella term of ‘extreme metal’.

Hillier also provides musicological analysis in his articles *Musical Practices in Early Melodic Death Metal* (Hillier, 2020) and *The Aesthetic-Sonic Shift of Melodic Death Metal* (Hillier, 2018). Whilst these articles have a specific focus, specifically on the microgenre of melodic death metal, the analysis that Hillier provides is transferable to other microgenres, and it is particularly useful in determining the ways that musicians can differentiate themselves from their musical predecessors without entirely foregoing the inspiration from them. The analysis of elements that constitute the melodic death metal microgenre is extensive and thorough, and provides an effective framework for the analysis of other microgenres, especially in relation to their parent subgenres. Within the metal genre, the links between subgenres/microgenres through the medium of inspiration and influence are the foundation of my evolutionary evaluation, so the fact that research has been carried out to prove that these links exist is something that I can build upon within my own research.

Another example of pure musicological study is found in *Discordant Systems: Uses and Meanings of Rhythmic Difficulty in the Music of Meshuggah and Related Extreme and Progressive Metal Bands* (Hannan, 2017), in which Hannan evaluates the use of rhythmic complexity within the progressive metal subgenre, particularly in the music of Meshuggah, in order to establish both the links between rhythmic complexity and heaviness, and the creative reasons behind these unique rhythmic choices.

In order to establish link between complex rhythms and heaviness in metal music, multiple songs are presented as case studies, and are evaluated by the amount of disorientation that can be experienced through the rhythmic experimentation within them, and the way that this increases the perceived heaviness of the song overall. In a similar manner to my own research, meaning is established by comparing the musical stylistic traits of the band in question with the themes that are visible within their imagery. In the case of Meshuggah, the disorientation caused by the uneven rhythmic shifting within their songs is connected to themes of mental struggle and societal turmoil, and this may provide a framework for extracting meaning from the music of metal bands within other subgenres.

Heaviness within metal is a trait that is becoming more widely discussed in scholarly discourse, and papers that are attempting to establish the roots of heaviness within the genre include *Heaviness and the Electric Guitar: Considering the Interaction Between Distortion and Harmonic Structures* (Herbst, 2018), *The Distortion Paradox: Analyzing Contemporary Metal Production* (Mynett, 2016) and *Discordant Systems: Uses and Meanings of Rhythmic Difficulty in the Music of Meshuggah and Related Extreme and Progressive Metal Bands* (Hannan, 2017). Different ideas of heaviness are explored across these texts, but one that reoccurs is the use of distortion in guitar timbres, and how this adds to the harmonic content in order to create a heavier sound overall. As power chords are the most used chords in metal music, and single-note riffs are common, the harmonic content would be fairly simple with a clean sound. However, when distortion is added to the signal, the harmonic content is extended further up and down the frequency spectrum, creating a much more powerful sound (Mynett, 2016). Additionally, Mynett explores the role of distortion within metal vocal performance, and how listeners are hardwired from a young age to find these sounds intense and visceral. Consequently, I can build upon these explorations of heaviness in order to help define

extremity within the genre, as heaviness is a large element of extremity, alongside transgressive themes within imagery, speed and technical virtuosity. Until now, heaviness has been an abstract quality within metal; something that is more easily felt than heard, but through this research, scholars are beginning to explain one of the cornerstones of the genre in a new and scientific way.

## Imagery

As the focus of my study is the imagery of the genre, it was important to gain a detailed view of the literature around this subject. There are books that collect aspects of heavy metal imagery, such as *Lord of the Logos: Designing the Metal Underground* (Szpajdel & Klanten, 2009), which catalogues the band logos designed by Christophe Szpajdel, and *The Art of Metal: Five Decades of Heavy Metal Album Covers, Posters, T-Shirts and More* (Dome & Popoff, 2013), which is a chronological collection of a vast array of heavy metal art.

Among these collections of metal imagery are various books published by Heavy Music Artwork. In their books *Arte Arcana Lucifero* (Heavy Music Artwork, 2019), *Aesthetics of Sickness* (Heavy Music Artwork, 2019) and *Mondo Black* (Heavy Music Artwork, 2020), they chronicle the work of many of the artists that have been responsible for the artwork of important albums throughout the history of metal. In particular, these three books focus on Satanism, gore, and the imagery of black metal respectively.

Another book that provides information on the imagery of the genre is *Grishjärta* (Nattramn, 2011), which is a collection of poems, writings and lyrics written by Nattramn; the lead vocalist of the depressive suicidal black metal (DSBM) band Silencer (1995). Nattramn has also released an electronic album under the project name Diagnose: Lebensgefahr (2004), allegedly as a form of rehabilitation whilst institutionalized for schizophrenia, and the writings in *Grishjärta*, collected between 1996-2011, are from all periods of Nattramn's creative output. If this book is a genuine collection of Nattramn's personal feelings in writing across a wide range of time, it may give evidence of real feelings of depression and isolation in the DSBM subgenre.

I also examined *When Prozac No Longer Helps* (Kvarforth, 2016), which contains all the lyrics of the band Shining (1996), in which Niklas Kvarforth is the vocalist and lyricist. As Shining are a Swedish band, Kvarforth does not attempt to translate his lyrics literally between Swedish and English, but instead strives to convey the emotion and intent behind the original Swedish lyrics. As Kvarforth is very vocal about the ‘message’ of Shining being so genuine and confrontational, these translations provide evidence that the themes of self-destruction, misanthropy and suicide pervade all of Kvarforth’s creative output.

The authenticity in the imagery of DSBM musicians is also reinforced in the documentary *One Man Metal* (2012), in which J.R. Robinson interviews three solo musicians; Scott ‘Malefic’ Connor of Xasthur (1995), Russell ‘Sin Nanna’ Menzies of Striborg (1997) and Jef ‘Wrest’ Whitehead of Leviathan (1998) and Lurker of Chalice (2001). In this documentary, the interviewees were able to talk candidly about their personal struggles and the inspiration for their music’s imagery. All three of these musicians led fairly isolated lives, and in the case of Whitehead, the suicide of his girlfriend was the catalyst for the recording of the self-titled Lurker of Chalice album, and the creation of this album gives an insight into the mindset of the musicians in question.

A thesis that examines the imagery of the metal genre is *Subjectivity in American Popular Metal: Contemporary Gothic, The Body, The Grotesque, and The Child* (Thomas, 2009), which deals solely with the imagery and persona put forth by the artists. Although Thomas’ work is centred around the nu-metal subgenre, which I am not analysing in my thesis, the themes she presents can also be applied to other subgenres. For example, gothic imagery has been an influence on many bands of different subgenres, such as the black metal band Cradle of Filth, doom metal band Type O Negative and many symphonic metal bands like Nightwish (1996), Epica (2003), Therion and Within Temptation (1996). Thomas’ description of the “tradition of the grotesque and the monstrous” (Thomas, 2009) can be applied to the sadistic fantasies presented in the imagery of death metal, and descriptions of ‘the other’ refer to the opposition to normality within oneself. This may echo the personal gratification that musicians receive from the glorification of Satan in the bulk of black metal, which is diametrically opposed to accepted social norms.

Within scholarly discourse pertaining to metal, there are an increasing number of papers and articles that discuss the use of national socialism and white supremacy as themes within black metal music. Texts like *True Black Metal: Authenticity, Nostalgia, and Transgression in the Black Metal Scene* (Skadiang, 2017), *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture* (Olson, 2008) and *Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Extreme Right- Wing Ideologies in Australian Black Metal* (Hillier & Barnes, 2020) explore the effects of national socialist black metal (NSBM) on the wider black metal subgenre, and decry the legitimacy of the movement, while maintaining the view that it should be kept separate from the bulk of black metal. Hillier & Barnes are particularly vehement in their intolerance of the microgenre, summarising that indifference is as dangerous as acceptance when referring to NSBM, and that it is impossible to separate the art from the artist when the artist is promoting white supremacist, anti-Semitic and racist rhetoric.

## Genre

As I have placed bands within specific subgenres for the purposes of analysis, the work of Franco Fabbri was important to my subgenre definitions. When determining the separations between subgenres and analysing the codifications of rules concerning the definitions of these distinct subgenres, the definition of genre and subgenre must be determined. Fabbri defines a musical genre as “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules” (Fabbri, 1982). If a set of musical events fulfil a more specific set of socially accepted rules within the first hypothetical set, this must constitute a genre that is present within the first, but one that is more specific in content and execution, resulting in a subgenre. Fabbri defines multiple types of rules for determining genre, and whether these rules are formal and technical, semiotic, behavioural, social and ideological, or economical and juridical, they can be used to create distinctions between multiple levels of subgenre that fit within each other, i.e., metal → death metal → technical death metal.



With these definitions in mind, it is pertinent to define my usage of these terms for the clarity of the rest of my thesis, as I do not use these terms interchangeably. The term genre only refers to a set of musical events that fulfil the widest set of rules, which most commonly refers to heavy metal as a whole in my study. As these rules provide the basis of my study, it is necessary to briefly describe the musical events that must occur for them to be deemed a part of metal. The core of all metal music throughout the history of the genre is provided by the guitar riff, which is a repeated pattern that is used as both a structural device to denote changes in the song, and also as a basis for other instruments or vocals. This is most often played with a large amount of distortion, which helps to create the dense production that is a hallmark of the genre. The guitar is often accompanied by aggressive drum patterns, which are predominantly played with deliberately high speed and volume on large kits. In extreme metal, double-kick drums have risen to particular prominence, and subgenres like death metal, black metal and grindcore employ fast kick speeds as one of the central musical elements.

The vocals are similarly important in metal, and reach various extremes within all subgenres of metal. Within subgenres like NWoBHM and power metal, these extremes are reached through the use of high pitches that soar over the dense mid-range guitars. In death metal and the various microgenres that it inspired, distorted vocals have been brought to the forefront of musical innovation in the genre, as musicians within deathcore and brutal death metal are pushing distorted vocals to new guttural lows with virtuosic execution. In contrast, distorted vocals within black metal have been brought to new highs, which gives the subgenre a unique demonic quality that reflects the imagery therein.

As well as describing metal as a whole, the term genre is also used to describe a set of musical events that fulfil other wide sets of rules, so I use the term to describe punk, blues, hip-hop, etc. When describing more specific sets of musical events, the term subgenre denotes styles of music that fulfil a more specific set of codified rules, but still fit inside the rules of the wider metal genre. These subgenres include thrash metal, black metal, death metal and power metal. However, eight out of the 10 subgenres I researched had even more specific subgenres within them, so I needed a way to describe them that did not confuse them with the 10 central subgenres.

In *The Microgenre: A Quick Look at Small Culture*, Stevens and O'Donnell state that "microgenre refers to the classification of increasingly niche-marketed worlds in popular music, fiction, television and the internet" (Stevens & O'Donnell, 2020, p. 1). Although the prefix 'micro' may seem unfitting for a style that may include 100's of bands, the term microgenre does adequately describe the higher degree of specificity that is needed for a band to be included in one of these sub-subgenres within my main 10 choices. With this in mind, I have created a tier-based system, wherein the term genre denotes the music that fulfils the broadest set of codified rules, such as heavy metal; the term subgenre denotes music that fulfils a more focused set of rules, such as death metal; and microgenre denotes music that fulfils the most specific set of rules, such as technical death metal.

The distinctions between subgenres and microgenres within metal are inherently important when discussing the genre, as many listeners show loyalty or favouritism toward one or several over the others in the metal spectrum. However, there are broader distinctions that are often made by scholars when discussing metal, and I feel that these are at risk of becoming outdated in modern metal studies. The main distinction made by scholars is the separation of 'heavy metal' and 'extreme metal' (Hillier, 2020, pg. 8). Subgenres like death metal, black metal and grindcore fall under the 'extreme' banner, while NWoBHM and power metal are described simply as 'heavy metal'. I feel that these umbrella terms lack the detail needed to express the increased variety that can be observed in modern metal though, as hybrid microgenres like melodic death metal and symphonic black metal take inspiration from multiple subgenres that exist in heavy metal *and* extreme metal. Therefore, I do not adhere to these umbrella terms in this thesis, and treat each subgenre/microgenre equally and relative to its individual predecessors.

*National Identity in Northern and Eastern European Heavy Metal* (Deeks, 2016) is a thesis that is focused on a criticism of the genre classifications in heavy metal, specifically those that are concerned with themes of national identity in Scandinavia. Deeks posits that the monikers 'Viking metal', 'Pagan metal' and 'battle metal' speak to an experience that is solely Scandinavian, and argues that these are "inaccurate and insufficient, as they not only ignore

the considerable breadth of work being produced, but also focus too heavily on bands from the Nordic region” (Deeks, 2016, p. iv).

Although these descriptive titles do exclude other communities that may create this style of music, these descriptions are accurate in the way that they portray the cultural root of the music, and also correctly reference the communities that still make the large proportion of this music. However, I agree with Deeks’s argument that these genre titles do neglect to describe the musicological nuances of the music in question, so I have not added any of these to my list of 10 genres. Many bands that discuss themes of a Viking or Pagan nature can be included in more musically descriptive subgenres, such as black metal, melodic death metal or folk metal, and bands included in these three separate subgenres include Bathory (1983), Amon Amarth (1992) and Eluveitie (2002) respectively. Sam Dunn similarly concluded that certain terms can be inaccurate when the location of a subgenre’s origins are used in place of a musical descriptor. As “the Gothenburg sound delineates bands with a set of stylistic attributes and not necessarily a shared or common geographic space” (Dunn, 2004, pg. 121), the term ‘melodic death metal’ would be a more appropriate way to refer to bands like At the Gates, In Flames or Dark Tranquility (1991).

In *Considering Genre in Metal Music* (Hillier, 2020), Hillier evaluates the ways that metal can be presented as a spectrum of subgenres that may be best interpreted as spokes on genre ‘web’. His genre distinctions within this article align with my own in the majority of cases, but I feel that the distinction between heavy metal and extreme metal as the two primary components of the wider metal genre is somewhat misleading. As melodic death metal itself shows, there can be interplay between extreme metal (death metal) and heavy metal (NWoBHM) that can affect each other in order to create hybridised microgenres. I feel that a more pertinent distinction to make is that of a core/periphery model (Smialek, 2016), wherein there are certain subgenres that make up the core of the metal genre, such as thrash metal, death metal and doom metal. Surrounding these core subgenres, there are musicians that incorporate elements from outside of metal music, and use them to create music that challenges the boundaries of the genre, without removing themselves entirely from it. These subgenres include folk metal, metalcore and progressive metal, and it is this growth in variety that echoes the evolutionary theories of Gould.

## Evolution

My use of biological evolution as a framework for cultural change also necessitates a review of evolutionary literature. My primary theories come from the work of Charles Darwin and Stephen Jay Gould, particularly his article in *Scientific American*: “The Evolution of Life on Earth” (Gould, 1994). In this article, he explicitly denounces progress as a catalyst for change, and concludes that evolutionary change is only a product of random variance, and that “we must learn to depict the full range of variation, not just our parochial perception of the tiny right tail of most complex creatures” (1994). In *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin posits that “if variations useful to any organic being do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterised will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life; and from the strong principle of inheritance, they will tend to produce offspring similarly characterised”.

A combination of these two ideas has inspired my use of biological evolution as a framework for evolution and variety in the metal genre. In my model, variety occurs from the tendency of metal musicians to iterate and innovate upon the music of their predecessors, and through this innovation, they create new subgenres and microgenres, often with higher levels of extremity. Commercial and critical success can then be used as an analogue for natural selection. In the same way that mutations within biological features are retained by their propensity to be useful in a given environment, innovations within musical creation may be retained by their impact on the audience. If a wide audience does not appreciate and identify with an innovative artist, those innovations will not gain enough popularity to become inspirational for the next generation of musicians. In the same way that biological features must be useful in their environment to be retained, musical innovations must be impactful within the musical environment and zeitgeist to be appreciated and iterated on by subsequent musicians.

However, in *The Panda’s Thumb of Technology* (1991), Gould condemns the use of evolutionary biology as a framework for cultural developments. Gould states that “biological

evolution is a system of constant divergence without subsequent joining of branches”, whilst “in human history, transmission across lineages is, perhaps, the major source of cultural change”. If separate branches of the evolutionary tree cannot converge or influence each other, the combination of subgenres that are used to create microgenres like death-doom and deathcore have no evolutionary equivalent. The visual model that presents biological evolution as a branching tree bears a striking resemblance to the ‘heavy metal family tree’ that Sam Dunn presents in *Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey*. However, in *Uprooting the Tree of Life* (2000), W. Ford Doolittle presents his theories of horizontal gene transfer, which shows the influence of prokaryotes on the evolution of eukaryotes.

This convergence of branches on the evolutionary tree can also be seen in the practice of cross-breeding, as conscious selective breeding can be performed by humans for the express purpose of creating a more desirable species. This purposeful example of hybridisation can be equally observed within the metal genre, as musicians consciously choose aspects of disparate subgenres, and combine to create new microgenres, which are typically more extreme than their predecessors.

The separation of prokaryotes and eukaryotes was commonly acknowledged as the first divergence on the ‘tree of life’, but the influence of prokaryotic bacteria on the cells of eukaryotic organisms shows that branches on the ‘tree of life’ are not entirely separate from one another. In order to account for horizontal gene transfer, Doolittle concludes that “the consensus tree is an overly simplified depiction”, and that in a “truer model...the modern bacterial and archeal domains [would show] a great many additional branch fusions”. These plentiful fusions between branches of the tree of life create an interrelated web that accounts for “the rampant lateral gene transfer of single or multiple genes that has always occurred between unicellular organisms” (Doolittle, 2000), and in a similar way, I have created a diagram that is more akin to an interconnected web of influences than a ‘heavy metal family tree’.

Overall, none of these musical studies have framed musicological analysis as a parallel to other forms of evolution. My ideas around the growth of extremity within heavy metal - particularly its imagery - are unique, as I do not place emphasis on the agency of the artists,

although this obviously exists. Instead, I suggest that heavy metal imagery still follows the same evolutionary patterns as systems where agency is not as present, or is less explicitly visible. These patterns of thematic evolution are a gap in the academic study of heavy metal music, and this is the knowledge I present through my scientific approach to musicological research.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the way I have structured my research, my rationale for the number and selection of subgenres in my study, and the reasons for subgenre distinctions within the landscape of heavy metal. In addition to the justification of the subgenres, I also justify my methods for assessing the suitability of a band for my study, and the exclusion of certain notable bands, including Behemoth (1991), Hellhammer (1982), Judas Priest and Black Sabbath. Finally, I discuss my data presentation, my methods for analysis, and the use of album artwork to reinforce my examination of the imagery under discussion.

When discussing the subject of heavy metal, most literature focuses on the history or cultural impact of the genre. However, as evolution occurs and new subgenres and microgenres are created, the “interactions of musical texts and sounds with extra-musical paratexts...assist scholars in understanding the aesthetic decisions that are made by musicians at the formation point of a new genre” (Hillier, 2018, pg. 23). Therefore, in contrast to the accepted sociological and historical focus, I examined the imagery of 1000 bands across 10 subgenres of metal, analysing the themes they utilised and the relation of these themes to both the musical text and the conventions of their respective subgenre/microgenre.

I grouped bands by their subgenre in order to create sub-samples from which to further select bands from. If I had not utilised these sub-samples, it would have been easy to select an imbalanced proportion of one subgenre over another. As many subgenres have their own conventions, both in terms of formal and ideological rules, disproportionate numbers of bands in each subgenre would have added an amount of bias that would have rendered my analysis useless.

The analysis of 100 bands in each subgenre gave me plentiful data to draw conclusions from, as the wealth of examples allowed me to establish patterns and cross-reference the themes of different subgenres. However, I felt that my previous work had left gaps in the spectrum of extreme metal; most notably the exclusion of grindcore. To combat this issue, I increased the number of subgenres to 10, and used a wider range of subgenres in order to get a more

complete image of the metal genre as a whole. To this end, I removed brutal death metal and technical death metal as distinct subgenres and used them as microgenres in my death metal selection. Therefore, my death metal subgenre breakdown consisted of: 15 technical death metal bands, 15 brutal death metal bands, 10 melodic death metal bands and 50 death metal bands that could not be more specifically categorized. In this way I have also included national socialist black metal (NSBM) and depressive suicidal black metal (DSBM) into my black metal study, deathcore into my metalcore study, and gothic doom, death doom, funeral doom, stoner and sludge bands into my doom metal study.

The 10 subgenres that form the basis of my analysis are as follows: the new wave of British heavy metal (NWoBHM), thrash metal, death metal, black metal, doom metal, power metal, metalcore, folk metal, grindcore and progressive metal. These 10 subgenres gave the widest range of influences, stylistic elements and themes present, so they were the most useful and accurate when analysing the evolution of the genre as a whole, and the catalysts of change therein. There are some notable absences in this study, namely industrial metal and nu-metal, but these subgenres absorbed stylistic elements of metal into established genres, such as electronica/industrial or hip-hop. In other cases, like that of folk metal, stylistic elements of the folk genre have been brought into a heavy metal context, rather than the other way around.

Many bands find it undesirable to be categorized into a single subgenre, but it is possible to group these bands, either by easily observable stylistic elements in their music (e.g., tremolo picking, lower tunings, blastbeats, etc), or by popular opinion. There are inherent difficulties to confining a band to a single genre though, as within metal there is widespread “elitism associated with policing genre labels...given that correctly identifying genre labels for a band is means of establishing subcultural capital” (Hillier, 2020, pg. 15). However, through careful musical analysis and a wealth of genre experience, I have categorized bands accurately by subgenre/microgenre, which gives a solid foundation for conclusions that I may draw.

There are bands like Behemoth, who stylistically fit into both death metal and black metal equally, so I have to excluded them from my study to avoid introducing bias into either subgenre. Such examples are rare, but it is common for a band to belong to one genre, yet



have stylistic traits from another, which gave rise to microgenres like blackened folk metal or death doom. Although these stylistic influences may alter the sound of a band slightly from the norm of their respective subgenre, it is unlikely to change the subgenre they belong to altogether. Månegarm (1995), for instance, have black metal elements in certain songs, but through their instrumentation, vocal style and folk-inspired melodies, they can still be correctly categorised as a folk metal band.

This problem can be largely negated by the approach to band categorisation though. If the analysis is undertaken on a band-by-band basis, the results “can illustrate how permeable genre boundaries in heavy metal are, as there are many bands that fit within multiple subgenres” (Hillier, 2020, pg. 21). However, this “can also be applied in reverse, taking an established genre label as a starting point to illustrate, define, and codify genre characteristics” (Hillier, 2020, pg. 21). In the modern landscape of metal music, this approach can take into account the myriad subgenres and microgenres that are already established. Therefore, a band like Thy Art is Murder could have been perceived as a unusable amalgamation of death metal and metalcore, but by utilising an already established microgenre, the band can be used as a typical example of deathcore. To make the most of this approach, I selected the genres/subgenres/microgenres that I would use first, before selecting suitable bands within them.

As well as bands that fit exactly in the middle of two subgenres, it was impossible to include both Black Sabbath and Judas Priest in my study. Black Sabbath were arguably the first heavy metal band, and they were the first to fulfil the formal and technical, semiotic, behavioural and ideological rules that apply to the heavy metal genre. As they brought these elements together as a cohesive whole, they created a style that has had far-reaching influences on multiple subgenres, including NWoBHM, doom metal, power metal and thrash metal. As the first recognised band in the genre, there were no established subgenres at the time of their formation, but they remain quintessentially heavy metal. This made them unsuitable for my study, as it was necessary to compare the imagery of each band to the central themes in their subgenre.

In the case of Judas Priest, they are often included in the same discussions as prominent NWoBHM bands, such as Motörhead (1975) and Iron Maiden, but their early material was released in an era before the development and recognition of distinct subgenres. They are credited with the creation and popularisation of formal and behavioural rules of the NWoBHM subgenre, but they released music that included stylistic elements from a wide range of genres and subgenres, including metal, blues and progressive rock, whilst their critically acclaimed album *British Steel* was a landmark within the wider genre of heavy metal, but did not belong to a single subgenre. In light of this evidence, the most suitable category to place Judas Priest in is simply 'heavy metal' without any further specificity, which makes them unsuitable for my study in a similar way to Black Sabbath.

As part of this analysis, it was necessary to cross reference these themes relative to both the time of release, and the subgenre the band belong to. Many themes that caused outrage in the 1980s, such as those of violence, deviant sexuality or Satanism, are now widely accepted as conventions of their respective subgenres, as shown in the music of acts like Abominable Putridity (2003), Infant Annihilator (2012) and Watain (1998) respectively. To fully express this change in acceptability over time, I will give the dates of a band's formation on their first mention, in order to give context to the relative extremity of their imagery.

## Sample Selection

As well as the sample size and manner by which to categorize the large number of bands to be analysed, I had to carefully consider the factors that would make a band relevant to my study. To be included, a band would have to fulfil certain conditions, which are as follows:

The act must be primarily a metal act; if the act in question belonged to another genre, but had some metal elements in a minority of their musical output, or used themes from metal in their aesthetic only, they were omitted from the study (e.g., hip-hop artist Ghostemane).

The band must fit into one of the 10 subgenres I chose; if a band was split between two subgenres, and could not be justifiably categorized into one or the other, the band was omitted from the study, but could be discussed at a later date as an outlier or anomaly (e.g., Behemoth/Possessed (1983)).

The band must have at least one full-length album; if a band had only demos, EPs and compilation releases, they were omitted from the study, no matter how influential (e.g., Hellhammer). As older EPs tend to become rarer over time, in favour of a bands full-length albums, bands that only released demos and EPs were less likely to be useful to my study, on account of misinformation being prevalent with older, less available releases.

All album artwork must be public; my main source of evidence was the album artwork of each band, so without that artwork available, the band was omitted from the study.

Within each subgenre, it was important to include formative bands, important bands, and bands that had released influential albums in their respective subgenre. In order to include these important additions, I used ranking websites, such as ranker.com and thetop10s.com, which are websites that allow the public to vote on their top choices for categories of varied subjects, metal subgenres being one of them. These sites allow the public to upvote and downvote bands depending on their personal preference, and these mass opinions give a democratic view of the importance of certain bands within their respective subgenres. In order to ensure I included the bands that were necessary to my study, I included every band

in the top 100 for each genre, as long as they fit the aforementioned criteria. After using each suitable band within the top 100, I picked bands from the genre at random, as long as they also fit my inclusion criteria.

## Data Presentation and Method of Analysis

It was important to present as much data as possible for each band, but in a manner that was concise and conducive to effective analysis. It would have been counterproductive to bloat my data with irrelevant details, so I included this information for each band:

Band name.

Subgenre; one of the 10 that I had chosen.

Microgenre (if applicable); this was a way to define bands that did not only belong to one of my 10 subgenres, such as death metal, but were more specifically classifiable by their characteristics into a more specific microgenre, like technical death metal.

Year of first release; this was the year of the first release of any kind by the band, whether this was a single, demo, EP or LP.

Themes; these are the themes covered within a band's output, whether in art or lyrics. I have presented the themes that are conventional to the subgenre in plain text, and used italics for themes that are outside the norm.

The typical themes for each subgenre are as follows:

Subgenre	Main Themes
<b>NWoBHM</b>	The Occult, Rock 'n' Roll Lifestyle, Mythology, Horror
<b>Thrash Metal</b>	War, Death, Anti-Religion
<b>Death Metal</b>	Murder, Sexual Violence, Anti-Religion/Satanism
<b>Black Metal</b>	Satanism/Blasphemy, Suicide, Misanthropy
<b>Doom Metal</b>	Negative Emotion, Introspection, Literature
<b>Power Metal</b>	Fantasy/Mythology, War, Brotherhood
<b>Folk Metal</b>	Fantasy/Mythology, History, Nature
<b>Progressive Metal</b>	Introspection, World Issues, Esotericism
<b>Metalcore</b>	Relationships, Personal Struggles, World Issues/Society
<b>Grindcore</b>	Politics/Society, Gore, Dark Humour

Table 1: Central Themes

Accurately establishing the central themes of a given band was of utmost importance in my work, which necessitated a reliable research method. There are multiple facets to the imagery of any given band, which includes artwork, text (lyrics, titles, band name, etc.) and personal presentation. In order to address this multi-faceted image, I have examined and collected the artwork for each band, I have read and analysed the lyrics, and I have looked at live footage and photos to examine their aesthetic. In order to examine these themes in relation to the music of the bands in question, I have also created extensive transcriptions in order to facilitate a formal musical analysis. This can support the categorisation of a certain band within a subgenre, establish a musical theme that can be enhanced by the imagery, or show evolution from musical predecessors.

When examining the artwork, the lack of subtlety within the genre as a whole aided my analysis, as many bands portray the themes of their music literally in their respective artwork. I found that these themes can be expressed in the artwork through the use of detailed scenes, central figures, mascots or symbols. If the artwork was more thematically ambiguous, I examined the composition, media, tone and palette to glean information about the meaning of the imagery, which could then be cross-referenced with text-based research.

When examining the textual themes of a given band, the lyrics were the most extensive and useful artefact. As with the artwork, there was a large portion of bands whose lyrics were literal in tone, but there is a wide use of metaphor in the genre, as musicians may use depictions of fantasy to broach subjects of personal emotion for instance. In order to glean accurate information, I examined the text in tandem with the artwork and personal presentation of the artists in order to effectively identify a small number of central themes. By including this list of themes in my database, I could easily contextualise any band within its subgenre, and draw links between the subgenres, which is central to my evolutionary framework.

I also included the artwork for every full-length album release from every band, as evidence of the themes used in their musical output. I gathered these albums as artefacts for the purpose of analysis, both in the context of their subgenre, but also in cross-reference with other subgenres. I chose to include only the LP artwork for each band, as many bands have

artwork of lower quality or ambition for demo/EP releases. These would be less indicative of their thematic stylings, as well as harder to obtain. The inclusion of live, compilation, or bootleg releases would also have unnecessarily bloated my research, and would be counterproductive to effective analysis, so I have not included these.

When analysing the imagery of these bands, it is important to define the relative extremity of common themes in the genre. By its very definition, imagery is subjective, and a tolerance for extreme imagery varies from person to person. Variables like desensitisation will certainly play a role in an individual's acceptance of extreme themes, but there are certain boundaries of taste and decency that are shared across the range of western society. These boundaries are often undermined by the use of themes like gore, sexual violence and Satanism in metal, so it is imperative to understand which are the most controversial, and therefore extreme. Whilst the subjective nature of thematic interpretation is an element of the human condition that cannot be entirely predicted, there are taboos and subjects of contention that are constant within society and these can help to form a baseline that provides a reference point for the extreme themes within metal. Mainstream audiences may be shocked by the accounts of torture and murder that are so prevalent within death metal, but themes of sexual violence are even more transgressive when examined next to the feminism that is a welcome and accepted value of modern society.

Whilst violent imagery is an accepted element of metal, the sexually violent nature of lyrics within microgenres like brutal death metal and goregrind are objectively more extreme. This growth of extremity is a result of the increase in variety as the genre ages, and by tracing these developments, the ways that imagery grows more extreme over time can be traced. This can be seen within themes of gore, which started with the accounts of war in thrash metal, grew more extreme through depictions of torture and murder in death metal, and then reached further extremes through images of sexual violence, necrophilia and paedophilia in brutal death metal, goregrind and deathcore.

## Chapter 3: Preliminary Genre Definitions

The use of subgenres to distinguish stylistically distinct sets of musical events from one another can be seen within Fabbri's work, where he states that "the notion of set, both for a genre and for its defining apparatus, means that we can speak of sub-sets like "sub-genres" (Fabbri, 1982). In order to define the formal and technical rules that govern these sub-sets within the context of metal, I devote this chapter to a concise description of each of the 10 subgenres in my study, which illustrates the differences between them, and contextualises the thematic analysis of chapter four within a musical foundation. The variety and diversity of sounds and stylistic elements within metal cannot be understated, as Weinstein (2009) describes the genre as "a bricolage, which spans a multitude of differences". The developments that caused these differences can be traced through the history of metal, and in chapters three, four and five, I explore and analyse these developments in relation to my chosen metal subgenres. Through this analysis, I observe the principles of variety and inheritance that are essential for a Darwinian evolutionary system at work within metal.



## New Wave of British Heavy Metal

Acts that were formed between the years of 1970 and 1977 were simply considered 'heavy metal' bands, but in 1977, the new wave of British heavy metal (NWoBHM) emerged as the earliest distinct subgenre of heavy metal, and included many of heavy metal's formative bands. These bands were the first to forego the fuzz-type distortion used by acts like The Jimi Hendrix Experience (1966) and Black Sabbath in favour of the more tube-driven overdrive made possible by amplifiers like the Marshall JCM800. The combination of an innovative guitar distortion and a virtuosic playing style became the foundation of the subgenre, but this new, dense, production brought new difficulties for the vocalists. Therefore, this necessitated singing in a higher register to find frequencies that were not dominated by other instruments, as in Iron Maiden's "Fear of the Dark" (Iron Maiden, 1992) (see Fig.2). These high vocals would become indicative of the NWoBHM going forward, and would bleed through into subgenres like power metal and black metal, although highly distorted in the latter.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal line of Iron Maiden's "Fear of the Dark". It consists of four staves of music, each labeled "Voice" on the left. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 206. The music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The lyrics are: "Fear of the dark... Fear of the dark... I have a con-  
- stant fear that some-things al-ways near Fear of the dark...  
Fear of the dark... I have a pho-  
- bi - a that some - one's al - ways there". The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words split across lines. The score includes bar lines and a double bar line at the end of the fourth staff.

Figure 2: Iron Maiden - "Fear of the Dark" (Vocals - Chorus at 2'20")

Important bands in the NWoBHM subgenre include Iron Maiden, Motörhead and Diamond Head (1976).

## Thrash Metal

As NWoBHM moved forward into the 1980s, “the nascent differences within metal engendered new and widely divergent genres” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, pg. 6), and an increase in extremity resulted in the formation of thrash metal. The double-kick drumming on Motörhead’s “Overkill” (Motörhead, 1979) helped to shape the conventional drumming of thrash metal, as this drumming style became a convention of the genre, and a large portion of extreme metal. The distortion audible on guitar parts was also increased from NWoBHM, allowing fast, palm-muted riffs to become the foundation for the subgenre’s musical syntax, as in Metallica’s (1981) “Battery” (Metallica, 1986) (see Fig.3). This guitar riff shows that inspiration was taken from NWoBHM, as the ‘galloping’ rhythm of an 8<sup>th</sup> note followed by a pair of 16<sup>th</sup> notes was a convention of the NWoBHM band Iron Maiden.

The image displays the main guitar riff for Metallica's "Battery" in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 193 BPM. It consists of two staves: "Electric Guitar" and "E. Gtr.". The Electric Guitar staff shows a sequence of eighth notes followed by pairs of sixteenth notes, with a key signature of one flat and a double bar line. The E. Gtr. staff features a triplet of eighth notes followed by a sequence of eighth notes, with two first and second endings indicated by brackets and numbers 1 and 2.

Figure 3: Metallica - "Battery" (Guitar - Main Riff at 1'06")

The guitar playing was also becoming more virtuosic, and “shred” solos became a convention of thrash metal going forward. Distortion was also becoming utilised on bass guitar parts, most notably in the playing of Metallica’s Cliff Burton on songs like “Anaesthesia (Pulling Teeth)” (Metallica, 1983) and “For Whom the Bell Tolls” (Metallica, 1984). The vocal style also became harsher in this subgenre, and vocalists in bands like Exodus (1979) and Sepultura (1984) became the foundation for the vocal style in subgenres like death metal, grindcore and metalcore.

Important bands in the thrash metal subgenre include Metallica, Slayer (1981) and Testament (1987).

## Death Metal

As the 1980s progressed, thrash metal became more extreme, and transitional bands like Slayer and Sepultura pushed the envelope of how extreme the subgenre could become. This new extremity gave rise to the new subgenre of death metal. Death metal stripped away some of the virtuosity of thrash metal lead playing, but kept the palm muted riffs and double kick drumming that had made thrash metal bands more extreme than their NWoBHM predecessors. Within composition, “death metal...ideas frequently disturb the listener’s sense of tonality” (Berger, 1999, pg. 62). The production became much denser in the low end, owing to both the down-tuning of instruments, and the clarity within chaotic recordings that was made possible by the advent of digital recording. The production of kick drum sounds was particularly important, as these kick patterns often gave context and timing to what would have been essentially a wall of noise without them. This gave rise to the ‘clicky’ kick drum sound that became a notable convention of the death metal subgenre.

The most iconic innovation within this subgenre, however, was the inclusion of guttural vocals, as they may be “the clearest impact of timbre on genre” (Hillier, 2020, pg. 17). Within death metal, the increase in extremity when compared to other established styles like NWoBHM and Thrash is clearly illustrated by the use of this technique. The technique itself can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but results in a distorted vocal style without using effects, and thus is more easily replicated in a live performance environment. The earliest users of this vocal technique often had a high tonality to their voice, such as Chuck Schuldiner of Death (1984), but the vocals of Chris Barnes on the second album by Cannibal Corpse, *Butchered at Birth* (Cannibal Corpse, 1991), set a new benchmark for lower guttural vocals within the subgenre. This has become the most widely used vocal style within death metal, and has also been used widely in other extreme subgenres, such as doom metal, grindcore, and deathcore.

Important bands within the death metal subgenre include Death, Cannibal Corpse and Obituary (1988).

## Black Metal

As thrash metal and death metal rose to prevalence in 1980s America, NWoBHM was influencing another new subgenre of metal in Scandinavia. The music of NWoBHM band Venom had been built upon by bands like Hellhammer and Bathory, and this gave rise to the first wave of black metal. The distorted guitar tone is particularly important and “is thin and brittle when compared to the guitar timbres of other heavy metal subgenres” (Hagen, 2011, pg. 187). As well as the differing tone, the techniques of guitar playing were also different in black metal. The use of ‘tremolo picking’ – consistent fast quaver triplets or semiquavers – was used for both single note passages or power chords, and there was a more widespread use of tritones than in other forms of metal, as in Mayhem’s “Freezing Moon” (Mayhem, 1994) (see Fig.4). The drumming was typically fast in black metal, often utilising traditional blast beat patterns, but interspersed with the much slower drumming of traditional rock beats.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for an electric guitar. The top staff is labeled 'Electric Guitar' and the bottom staff is labeled 'E. Gtr.'. Both staves are in the key of D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. A tempo marking above the first staff indicates a quarter note equals 145 (♩ = 145). The notation consists of two measures of tremolo picking. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (semiquavers) in the first three strings (G, B, D) and a triplet of eighth notes in the last three strings (G, B, D). The second measure contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first three strings (G, B, D) and a triplet of eighth notes in the last three strings (G, B, D). The notation is dense and repetitive, characteristic of a tremolo riff.

Figure 4: Mayhem - "Freezing Moon" (Guitar - Tremolo Riff at 1'45")

The production also focused on a raw sound that contained more treble frequencies than most metal recordings, due to the DIY nature of the recordings in question. The clarity of individual parts and instruments was sacrificed to allow for an atmospheric wall of sound that was meant to be taken as a whole, rather than the combination of disparate elements (Hagen, 2011, pg. 187). The ‘clicky’ kick drum sound of death metal was also absent here, in favour of more full-bodied, bass-driven kick drums. The vocals were distorted in a similar way to death metal, but instead of becoming progressively lower and more guttural, the vocals in black metal were pushed ever higher, especially by vocalists like Pest of Gorgoroth (1992) and Nattfrost of Carpathian Forest (1992). This high, shrieking vocal sound has been pushed to further extremes by vocalists in the DSBM microgenre, and thus the vocals performed by

Natthramn of Silencer sound more akin to primal screams than anything resembling a conscious vocal technique.

Important bands in the black metal subgenre include Mayhem, Burzum and Darkthrone.

## Doom Metal

Bringing influences from the down-paced songs of early Black Sabbath, bands like Pentagram (1971) and Candlemass (1984) began to create a new sound within heavy metal that would become known as doom metal. The most iconic stylistic element of doom metal is the unrelenting slowness of the music, and pairing that slowness with the heavy, dense production and wide use of down tuning creates an oppressive sense of doom that gives the subgenre its name.

Guitars are distorted in doom metal, as in all metal subgenres, but the distortion in this style is closer to the thick, fuzz distortion of Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi, and is therefore distinctly different from the style of death metal or black metal. The vocal style also differs from those subgenres, as many doom metal vocalists tended toward clean sung vocals, which fit more with the grandiose nature of the music. However, this is untrue for death doom, as one of the main stylistic elements to come into this microgenre from death metal is guttural vocals.

Doom metal also has a larger number of microgenres than other subgenres, which may be a result of its broad conventions. Influences from other genres and subgenres like goth rock, hardcore punk and death metal have been added to conventions of the low speeds, low tunings and dense production, and have created a wide sonic spectrum within doom metal.

Important bands within the doom metal subgenre include Pentagram, Candlemass and Cathedral (1989).

## Power Metal

In contrast to the extremity of subgenres like death metal and black metal, power metal bands took influences from other stylistic elements of the earlier NWoBHM subgenre. One of these is the use of high, clean vocals, which has become the standard within the subgenre, and was influenced by vocalists like Rob Halford of Judas Priest and Bruce Dickinson of Iron Maiden. The guitar riffs in power metal often consist of fast passages of palm muted 16<sup>th</sup> notes, interspersed with longer half notes or full notes, which are more frequently used as the basis for choruses, as well as frequent use of guitar harmonies and solos. However, in contrast to the speed of the notes, the chordal harmony often changes slowly, as in DragonForce's (2001) "Through the Fire and the Flames" (DragonForce, 2006) (see Fig.5). The harmony within power metal is also largely devoid of the dissonance and atonality that is associated with the most extreme subgenres in metal. This example is in the key of C minor.

♩ = 200

Electric Guitar

7  
E. Gtr.

10  
E. Gtr.

12  
E. Gtr.

14  
E. Gtr.

Figure 5: DragonForce - "Through the Fire and the Flames" (Guitar - Verse 1 at 0'39")

The drum parts in power metal consist mainly of fast double kicks, but the drummers' hand speeds often remain low. The double kick drumming is not a basis for blastbeats but is instead used to accentuate the speed of the guitar riffs, whilst the snare and cymbals create a slower backbeat. The instrumentation used in power metal is also unusual for the metal genre, as there is wide use of keyboards and synthesisers, sometimes used to accent the guitar parts,

but more frequently used as a separate tool for both harmony and melody. These keyboard synthesisers are also used to control orchestral parts for live performances, as many power metal bands use full orchestration in their recordings. This wide use of larger arrangements, and the similarities to classical music therein, gave rise to the more specific microgenre of symphonic metal.

Important bands within the power metal subgenre include Helloween (1983), Hammerfall (1993) and Blind Guardian (1986).



## Metalcore

Although it takes influences from both thrash metal and punk, metalcore is a subgenre that truly resembles neither, and has a distinct musical syntax. As an earlier combination of hardcore and metal, crossover thrash was often perceived as a microgenre that added hardcore punk elements to thrash metal, or vice versa, but with one style always dominant. In contrast, metalcore represents a hybridisation of metal and hardcore that intricately intertwines elements of both into a unique subgenre (Kennedy, 2018, pg. 56). The guitar parts consist of rhythmic riffs, often on a single note, as shown in “Nothing Left” by As I Lay Dying (2000) (As I Lay Dying, 2007) (see Fig.6), pedal riffs that use the root of the chord as a tonic to alternate with higher notes, as shown in Killswitch Engage’s “Rose of Sharyn” (Killswitch Engage, 2004) (see Fig.7), and riffs of slower chords that provide a foundation for lead guitar sections and choruses. The drums in metalcore are varied, consisting of regularly changing beats that fit closely with the guitar rhythms, and contain intricate double bass patterns. The use of polyrhythms and polymeter have also become more widely used as metalcore bands drew influences from progressive metal.

♩ = 184

Electric Guitar

E. Gtr.

Figure 6: As I Lay Dying - "Nothing Left" (Guitar - Verse 1 at 0'42")

♩ = 182

Electric Guitar

E. Gtr.

Figure 7: Killswitch Engage - "Rose of Sharyn" (Guitar - Verse Break 1 at 0'21")

An arrangement tool that is widely used in the metalcore subgenre is the breakdown, which usually consists of a slower tempo, combined with semi-muted chords to create a much heavier sound than the rest of the song. “While slowness is neither necessary or sufficient for heaviness, given the same riff, a slower version will often feel heavier” (Hannan, 2017, pg. 56). While a breakdown in metalcore does not usually repeat the previous riff in a slower tempo, the slowness combined with other aspects of heaviness like palm muting, more intense drumming and guttural vocals can create a section that is audibly heavier than those previous to it. These breakdowns are often used as the crescendo at the end of a song and have been taken to extremes within the deathcore microgenre by bands like Infant Annihilator and Thy Art Is Murder (2006), as shown in Infant Annihilator’s “Unholy Gravebirth” (Infant Annihilator, 2016) (see Fig.8).

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a Drum Set (Dr.) and Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.) part. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 90. The time signature is 4/4.

- System 1:** The Drum Set part features a consistent eighth-note pattern. The Electric Guitar part plays a series of semi-muted chords, with the first chord being a D major chord (D, F#, A) and the second being a G minor chord (G, Bb, D).
- System 2:** The Drum Set part continues with the eighth-note pattern, including some accents. The Electric Guitar part continues with semi-muted chords, including a D major chord and a G minor chord.
- System 3:** The Drum Set part continues with the eighth-note pattern. The Electric Guitar part continues with semi-muted chords, including a D major chord and a G minor chord.
- System 4:** The Drum Set part continues with the eighth-note pattern, including a triplet of eighth notes. The Electric Guitar part continues with semi-muted chords, including a D major chord and a G minor chord.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Unholy Gravebirth" by the band Infant Annihilator. The score is presented in three systems, each with a drum (Dr.) and electric guitar (E. Gtr.) part. The first system, starting at measure 6, shows a drum part with a complex, syncopated rhythm and a guitar part featuring a dense, tremolo-like pattern of triplets. The second system, starting at measure 7, shows a more melodic drum part with various rhythmic patterns and a guitar part with a similar triplet-based tremolo. The third system, starting at measure 8, continues the guitar's triplet pattern while the drums play a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The guitar part ends with a final chord marked with an 'x'.

Figure 8: *Infant Annihilator - "Unholy Gravebirth" (Guitar, Drums - Breakdown at 3'50")*

The vocalists in the metalcore subgenre utilise both the mid-pitched and guttural distorted vocals of thrash and death metal in the verses and breakdowns of songs, but often use clean vocals as a contrast in the more mellow, emotional choruses. This was used by early metalcore artists to appeal to more mainstream audiences, and allowed bands like Killswitch Engage and Bullet for my Valentine (1998) to gain a level of exposure and commercial success that was considered impossible for bands within more extreme subgenres.

Important bands within the metalcore subgenre include As I Lay Dying, Killswitch Engage and All That Remains (1998).

## Folk Metal

Folk metal originally began as a fusion of NWoBHM or thrash metal, “in which bands (created) new hybrid metal styles through an encounter with ‘local’ musics” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, pg. 14). In the earliest instances of the subgenre, this folk inspiration came from English folk music for Skyclad (1990) and Irish folk music for Cruachan (1992). However, many countries now have their own versions of folk metal, and many different types of folk traditions are now observed within the subgenre. The bulk of folk metal bands today come from Scandinavian countries, so the metal elements of their music come from the popular styles of the region, including melodic death metal and black metal. The guitar parts often take inspiration from either, and use melodic elements in their playing that evoke a folk atmosphere even without the inclusion of folk instruments, as shown in “Blut im Auge” by Equilibrium (2001) (Equilibrium, 2008) (see Fig.9). The instrumentation is another factor that sets apart folk metal from other subgenres, and instruments used include violin, flutes, whistles and jaw harp.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for the guitar intro of "Blut im Auge" by Equilibrium. The first staff is labeled "Electric Guitar" and has a tempo marking "♩ = 120". The second and third staves are labeled "E. Gtr." and have fret numbers "5" and "8" respectively. The music is in 4/4 time and features a melodic line with a folk-like feel.

Figure 9: Equilibrium - "Blut im Auge" (Guitar - Intro at 0'00")

Important bands in the folk metal subgenre include Skyclad, Korpiklaani (2003) and Ensiferum (1995).

## Grindcore

In the mid 1980s, Napalm Death (1981) took influences from both thrash metal and hardcore punk, and single-handedly created the subgenre known as grindcore. Grindcore musicians take stylistic elements from both these subgenres, and the combination is among the most extreme in metal. The guitar parts within the subgenre are played at a frenetic pace, and with high amounts of distortion, creating a wall of noise that is less structured or precise than in other metal subgenres. This is added to by distorting the bass guitars, which adds a rich fuzz to the low end of the recordings, creating a uniform sense of noise across the frequency spectrum. The drums within grindcore also create the same sense of frenetic energy as the guitars, as blastbeats are the most prevalent form of drumming in the subgenre. This style of drumming was made especially popular by Napalm Death and Carcass (1986) (see Fig.10). The vocals in grindcore take influence from both metal and punk, and consist of shouts, shrieks and guttural growls.

Figure 10 consists of four musical staves, each representing a different type of blastbeat. The first staff, labeled 'Traditional Blastbeat', is for a 'Drum Set' in 4/4 time and shows a continuous pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them. The second staff, 'Bomb Blast', is for 'Dr.' in 3/4 time, showing a pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks. The third staff, 'Gravity Blast', is for 'Dr.' in 5/4 time, showing a pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks. The fourth staff, 'Hyper Blast', is for 'Dr.' in 7/4 time, showing a pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks. Each staff is a single line of music with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat.

Figure 10: Blastbeat Examples

The song structures of grindcore are unique in metal, as they are intentionally and consistently short, often less than 2 minutes in length, and in many cases even shorter. This has led to the rise of very long track lists on grindcore albums, such as on the subgenre

standout *Scum* (Napalm Death, 1987), which has 28 songs, but a running time of only 33:04, resulting in an average song length of 1:11.

Important bands in the grindcore subgenre include Napalm Death, Carcass and Terrorizer (1987).

## Progressive Metal

Within metal, the prefix 'progressive' "largely connote(s) the incorporation of elements from outside the genre's normal boundaries" (Kennedy, 2018, Pg. 104). In progressive metal, these elements usually fall into one of two categories. The first includes bands that have been influenced by subgenres like power metal and thrash metal, but have added elements of progressive rock, such as long, meandering song structures, advanced rhythmic techniques (polyrhythm, polymeter) and virtuosic musicianship. The originators of this style of progressive metal are Dream Theater (1988). The second style of progressive metal, which was developed by Meshuggah (1987), applies the same progressive rock elements to metal genres like death metal and, more recently, metalcore. Another characteristic of this second style of progressive metal is the use of very low tunings on extended range instruments. When this down-tuning is coupled with heavy distortion and percussive, palm muted playing, the resulting sound gives the microgenre its onomatopoeic moniker 'djent'. The bass players in the djent microgenre usually play in unison with the guitars, but the distorted tone and highly rhythmic style of the playing has given djent bass its own unique niche in metal performance.

Drumming in progressive metal is often highly technical, as it needs to reinforce the polyrhythms that are important to the subgenre, whilst simultaneously creating a rhythm that the audience can easily relate to. On Meshuggah's "Bleed" (Meshuggah, 2008), for example, drummer Tomas Haake, plays a simple 4/4 backbeat with his hands, hitting the snare on the 3<sup>rd</sup> beat of the bar, but with his feet, he alternates between playing a pattern of two 32<sup>nd</sup> notes and two 16<sup>th</sup> notes, known as a herta, creating a pattern that takes 3 full bars to complete (see Fig.11). This pattern is in unison with the guitar rhythms, and creates a dense polymeter that is hard to decipher on a casual listen. In an extreme case of rhythmic virtuosity, "Scene Seven: I. The Dance of Eternity" (Dream Theater, 1999) has 108 time-signature changes in its 6:14 runtime.

The image shows a musical score for the drum introduction of Meshuggah's song "Bleed". The score is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of 115 BPM. It consists of four staves, each representing a different drum part. The top staff is labeled "Drum Set" and the others are labeled "Dr." with numbers 3, 5, and 7. The notation is highly complex, featuring many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, as well as various rests and accents. The patterns are dense and intricate, characteristic of Meshuggah's progressive metal style.

Figure 11: Meshuggah - "Bleed" (Drums - Intro at 0'00")

“The rhythmic difficulty is part of this push toward a heavy aesthetic - that strong but disorienting grooves have come to reinforce, and to an extent mean, heaviness” (Hannan, 2017, pg. 31). ‘Heaviness’ in metal music is one way of creating extremity, and an increase in heaviness can be indicative of a subgenre or microgenre that is approaching the fringes of the current metal landscape.

The vocals in progressive metal are similarly varied, and many bands utilise both singing and guttural vocals, as well as spoken word and higher distorted screams. However, distorted vocals are more prevalent in the djent microgenre.

Important bands within the progressive metal subgenre include Dream Theater, Meshuggah and Periphery (2005).



## Chapter 4: Analysis

In this chapter I analyse the results of my primary research. I explore and evaluate each of the 10 subgenres individually, examining their central themes in relation to what I expected prior to my research. I also examine the microgenres that belong to each of the 10 subgenres, and relate their stylistic elements to the formal, semiotic and ideological rules of their respective subgenres. The importance of examining each of the 10 subgenres individually and in detail lies in their distinct stylistic differences, which must be clearly and accurately evaluated in order to adequately identify the links between them. The conventional *and* unconventional themes in each subgenre, both formal and semiotic, must be identified, as the accuracy of the web-based model that I have created as part of this research depends on an exhaustive profile of the lines of influence between subgenres and microgenres through the history of metal. Therefore, I use examples of art, lyrics and sheet music to reinforce my conclusions, and in chapter five, I draw these links between the subgenres that will help to solidify the relationships of influence and inspiration between them.

Whilst this chapter is being used to examine each subgenre individually, it is also pertinent to contextualise these themes in the wider scope of heavy metal as a whole. To this end, I have created a table that combines all 10 subgenre tables (see Table 2). I have created this with the intention of determining how the most common themes of each subgenre relate to those within the wider metal genre.

Theme	No. of Occurrences
Society	257
Life	199
Fantasy	140
Mythology	114
Death	100
War	92
Politics	90
History	88
Gore	72
Introspection	71
The Occult	65
Rock 'n' Roll Lifestyle	60
Satanism	58
Negative Emotion	58
Relationships	56
Love	54
Personal Issues	53
Anti-Religion	52
Murder	43
Nature	40
Horror	37
Christianity	36
Sci-Fi	28
Philosophy	25
Emotion	19
Depression	18
Esotericism	18
Humour	17
Misanthropy	17
Sexual Violence	16
Drugs	15
Literature	14
Anti-Christianity	14
Mysticism	13
Blasphemy	12
Anger	11
Suicide	11
Religion	11
Environmentalism	10
Insanity	9
Pathology	8
Storytelling	8
Dark Humour	8
Perversion	7

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Cosmic Horror	7
Space	7
National Socialism	7
Drinking	7
Nihilism	5
Mental Issues	5
Rebellion	4
Violence	4
Heavy Metal	4
Existentialism	3
Despair	3
Sexuality	3
Spirituality	3
Abstract	3
Parody	2
Science	2
Egyptian Mythology	2
Darkness	2
Conspiracies	2
Technology	2
Partying	1
Anti-Fascism	1
Viking Mythology	1
Adversity	1
Suffering	1
Addiction	1
Alternative Spirituality	1
The Apocalypse	1
Self-Mutilation	1
Paganism	1
Cosmology	1
Black Metal Music	1
Fascism	1
Chaos	1
Surrealism	1
Self-Destruction	1
Erotica	1
Psychedelia	1
Pirates	1
Astronomy	1
Racism	1
White Nationalism	1
Paedophilia	1
Positivity	1

Themes	No. of Occurrences
<b>Feminism</b>	1
<b>Video Games</b>	1
<b>Brain Chemistry</b>	1
<b>Japanese Culture</b>	1
<b>Psychology</b>	1

Table 2: Combined Themes

This table shows that realistic imagery is the most common in the metal genre, as shown by the popularity of themes that centre around life experience and social commentary. The most extreme themes in metal were used by a relatively small number of bands, which

reinforces the use of Gould’s model of evolution as a framework for cultural evolution within metal music. Themes that are less extreme make up the modal majority, whilst themes of a higher extremity are less common, but stretch out further and further from the left wall of minimal complexity.

Whilst it is not a universal fact throughout all of metal, there is a correlation between the extremity of the music and the extremity of the imagery. Imagery does not reach a right wall of maximal extremity within a subgenre in the same way that music does, but bands may reach a point where their imagery is too extreme for the time of release.

When discussing the extremity of imagery, there may be some concern surrounding the subjectivity of thematic interpretation: what is extreme to one person is not necessarily extreme to another. However, in order to remove this subjectivity within my study, I am comparing the extremity of each band’s imagery to the subgenre that the band belongs to, and to mainstream society at the time of release. The opinions of mainstream society regarding these transgressive subjects can be seen in the reactions of groups like the PMRC. Within their ‘filthy 15’ list of objectionable songs, the themes that are considered dangerous to the youth of America included sex, violence and the occult. If this group represented the majority of parents within the 1980s, it can be assumed that the moral values of society at this time would be undermined by the use of extreme imagery such as sexual violence and Satanism. As such, it is imperative to note that there are themes within the metal genre that are particularly explicit.

“Wherever it is found and however it is played, metal tends to be dominated by a distinctive commitment to ‘transgressive’ themes and musicality” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, pg. 6). Therefore,

“extreme metal provides the ‘vanguard’, the most systematic examples, of metal’s commitment to transgression” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, pg. 14), and bands therein often discuss subjects that are still taboo in modern society. Some of these themes include depictions of sexual violence, paedophilia, and Satanism, and although many bands emphasize that depictions of illegal acts are entirely fictional, these themes can still be disturbing or triggering. This transgressive imagery is mainly used to shock the listener, but it has also become an accepted convention of extreme subgenres like brutal death metal, deathgrind, and deathcore. The propensity toward extremity within metal also applies to imagery, so the themes that these musicians use to shock their audience have grown far more extreme over time, and even though the most extreme imagery is used by a very small number of bands, it may still be unacceptable to mainstream audiences or casual metal listeners.

## New Wave of British Heavy Metal (1977-1985)

When viewed in retrospect, the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWoBHM) can be classified as the first definitive subgenre to emerge from the broader metal genre. As the musical syntax of this new subgenre was codified by bands like Diamond Head, Marseille (1976) and Motörhead, the conventional imagery of the subgenre was also beginning to materialise.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Life	73
Rock 'n' Roll Lifestyle	52
Fantasy	42
Love	34
The Occult	20
Horror	11
Society	10
War	9
History	5
Politics	2
Blasphemy	2
Sci-Fi	1
Humour	1
Mythology	1
Rebellion	1
Perversion	1
Depression	1
Existentialism	1
Christianity	1

Table 3: NWoBHM Imagery

This data clearly shows that the overarching theme of the NWoBHM subgenre is personal life experiences, and the lifestyle that comes with playing rock 'n' roll or heavy metal music. Bands that utilise life experiences as a basis for their imagery include bands like Saxon (1978), Girlschool (1978) and Tygers of Pan Tang (1978). Of the 100 bands that I researched, nearly 75% referenced life experience in their lyrics, and over half included allusions to a life of excess.

These early bands had only a limited number of thematic influences from earlier bands like Black Sabbath and Judas Priest, so in this

earliest subgenre, life experiences were the only other form of inspiration. In addition, the musical genres that precluded the beginning of heavy metal were blues, punk and hard rock. Within all three of these genres, life experiences constitute a large portion of the primary thematic elements, so this may have also influenced NWoBHM musicians.

Although the use of realistic imagery is widespread in NWoBHM, heavy metal as a genre is different from most popular music, which can be seen in the earliest subgenres, as NWoBHM musicians began to use fantastical, fictional and theological themes as the subgenre matured. Whilst this subgenre focuses on life experience over any other themes, that would prove to

be untrue through the most of the subgenres in the 1980s and 1990s, only coming back to prevalence in the metalcore subgenre of the early 2000s. In this 20-year interim, metal proved to be focused almost exclusively on fictional themes, with the exception of socio-political criticism; a holdover from hardcore punk that was influential on the thrash metal and grindcore subgenres. Metal seems to be used by both musicians and audience as a means of escapism, as a power fantasy, or as a cathartic release of pent-up emotion or aggression. This can be observed in both the ideological and behavioural rules of the metal genre, shown by the misogynistic and sexually violent themes of death metal, and behaviourally in the form of “moshing” by metal concert audiences.

As part of this escapism, many bands that use themes of their life experience in their lyrics utilise different themes in their artwork. Whilst the lyrics of Girlschool centre around their life experience, we can also see themes of fantasy and horror in their album artwork from *Nightmare at Maple Cross* (Girlschool, 1986) and *Take a Bite* (Girlschool, 1988). These themes are prevalent in much of the album art of the subgenre, giving a dark metaphorical image to the negative portrayals of life’s struggles in their lyrics.

The other main themes within the NWoBHM subgenre centre around fantasy, love and the occult. Fantasy is a thematic constant in many heavy metal subgenres, and arguably began with the themes present in the lyrics of Ronnie James Dio as the singer for Rainbow (1975), and even more so in his later solo band, Dio (1982). In NWoBHM, the more fantastical themes were usually present in album art, such as in the art for *Fallen* (Traitor’s Gate, 2018) (see Fig.12). The colour, style and composition seen in the cover of *Fallen* can also be observed in other fantastical covers within NWoBHM, with other examples including Quartz’s (1977) *Stand Up and Fight* (Quartz, 1980), Diamond Head’s *Borrowed Time* (Diamond Head, 1982), Tytan’s (1981) *Rough Justice* (Tytan, 1985) and Samson’s (1977) *Before the Storm* (Samson, 1982).



Figure 12: Traitor's Gate - Fallen

Fantasy sometimes exists in a more historical context within NWoBHM, where images of soldiers from past civilisations are exaggerated to the point of fantasy. The cover of Tytan's *Rough Justice* (Tytan, 1985) depicts a warrior upon a mountain top, but the details in the face of the character and the disproportionate size of his weapon transform this from a historical piece of art, like that of Saxon's *Crusader* (Saxon, 1984), and into a more amplified version that appeals to the escapism of a

power fantasy. This amplification of power and masculinity is also observable in a similar way on the cover of Sparta's (1979) *Welcome to Hell* (Sparta, 2014). In the time since the peak of NWoBHM, further subgenres appeared that furthered this emphasis on power and masculinity through a lens of fantasy, and that convention became a link between the imagery of NWoBHM bands and the imagery of power metal and folk metal going forward.

A theme that was not as accepted into the conventions of more modern subgenres is that of love. As with the hard rock bands that have preceded them, NWoBHM bands used love as a central theme in their artistic output, with just over a third making reference to it in their lyrics and artwork. Love as a theme was not adopted by more modern styles, as even the relationship centric themes of metalcore focused more on unrequited feelings, or the breakdown of relationships. This is in direct contrast to the hyper-sexualised romantic conquests present in NWoBHM lyrics, and the suggestive imagery of albums like Angel

Witch's (1978) *Screamin' n' Bleedin'* (Witch, 1985) (See Fig.13), which was extreme at the time of release.



Figure 13: Angel Witch - *Screamin' n' Bleedin'*

There has been a small permutation of love as a vein throughout metal history, however, as bands became more successful to mainstream audiences. These sporadic uses of love can be seen in the power ballads recorded by thrash metal bands in the 1980s, such as Metallica's "Nothing Else Matters" (Metallica, 1991), and "The Ballad" (Testament, 1989). Other bands throughout metal history have recorded ballads in a similar fashion, with Slipknot's "Snuff" (Slipknot, 2008), Avenged Sevenfold's (1999) "Seize the Day" (Avenged Sevenfold, 2005) and Pantera's (1981) "Cemetery Gates" (Pantera, 1990) being notable examples.

The last of the main themes within NWoBHM is that of the occult, whether this is in subtle allusions to evil or demonic entities, or more blatant blasphemy from bands like Satan (1979), Venom and Sacrilege (1982). Certain symbols became widely used in the subgenre, such as the pentagram, which was used by Venom on the artwork for their notable albums, *Welcome to Hell* (Venom, 1981) and *Black Metal* (Venom, 1982), and even more overtly on Sacrilege's *Sacrosanct* (Sacrilege, 2013) (See Fig.14). The image of the inverted cross was also used on *At War with Satan* (Venom, 1984). Across all of the NWoBHM subgenre, this is the only album cover that includes a blatant inverted cross, although there are allusions to this symbol on the artwork for *Nine Inches of God* (1986) by Deep Switch (1984) and *Curse & Chapter* (Hell,



2013) by Hell (1982). However, in later subgenres that were influenced by NWoBHM, like black metal, the use of these symbols became a widely used semiotic convention.

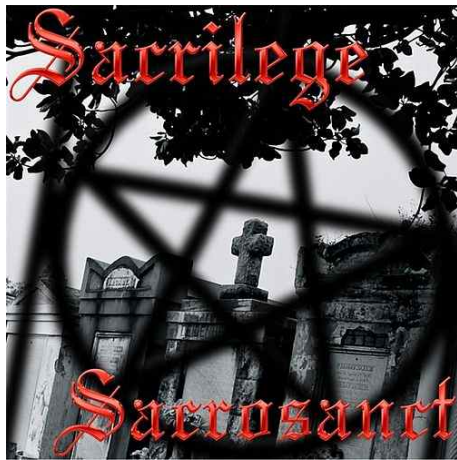


Figure 14: *Sacrilige - Sacrosanct*

Occult allusions were often more subtle in NWoBHM, however, with depictions of the grim reaper being prevalent, as well as inhuman creatures, demons, living skulls or skeletons, and zombies. This also gave rise to the use of mascots that has become another convention of metal as a whole to this day. Some NWoBHM mascots have become the most recognisable and enduring symbols of the wider genre. These include “Eddie”, the zombified mascot of Iron Maiden, who, in various permutations, has been included on every album cover of the band’s career, and the tusked dog that has graced the cover of almost every Motörhead album. Mascots have also become popular within many subgenres of metal, and Megadeth, Disturbed (1996) and Dio have mascots in their artwork that are particularly recognisable.

In addition to the clear thematic conventions of NWoBHM, there are also outliers within the subgenre. Themes of science-fiction, humour, mythology, rebellion, perversion, depression, existentialism and Christianity were only alluded to by a single band each. However, in the case of all these themes aside from Christianity, they were secondary to a more conventional theme. This suggests that these themes are used in order to show the other, more conventional themes through a different context. However, Victory (1982) use Christianity overtly as the main thematic element throughout their music, which is evident in song names like “I Want to Be Holy” (Victory, 1982) and “Taking the Fight (To the Enemy)” (Victory, 1982).

Most subgenres in my study include a small minority of bands that use Christianity as their central theme, although this is more popular in metalcore. However, in contrast to other outlying themes, Christianity seems to be the sole focus of the bands that choose to reference

it, suggesting that these musicians appreciate the style of the music, but wish to distance themselves from the darker themes that are typical within metal as a whole.

There are some notable themes within the NWoBHM subgenre that were vital in the formations of new subgenres going forward, and some that have permeated into the increasingly fragmented nature of more modern metal. As real-life experiences became less popular as subgenres became more extreme, the more fantastical elements of NWoBHM imagery were iterated on over time with more musical stylistic elements, to become conventions of the newer subgenres. The occult themes of bands like Venom, Satan and Hell became more extreme and influenced anti-religious themes within thrash metal, and more overt Satanic themes in both death metal and black metal. The influence of Venom on the development of black metal is particularly noticeable, as the main musical and thematic elements of black metal were all present in their music. The artwork of their album *Black Metal* (Venom, 1982) (see Fig.15) was particularly influential, as the monochromatic colour scheme was unconventional for NWoBHM, but was widely used as black metal reached its zenith. This influence can be seen in the artwork for the self-titled debut (Bathory, 1984) for early black metal band Bathory (see Fig.16)



Figure 15: Venom - *Black Metal*



Figure 16: Bathory - *Bathory*

The blackletter font used for the title of *Black Metal* (Venom, 1982) was also adopted into the semiotic rules of the black metal subgenre, not only in the logo for Bathory, but also in the

album titles for bands like Abigor (1993), Burzum, Countess (1992), Dark Funeral (1993) and Darkthrone.

As well as the artwork present, these influences can also be seen in the lyrical content of more extreme bands in NWoBHM. The imagery that became a precursor for the Satanic lyrical themes, which dominate the black metal subgenre, can be observed in the lyrics of Venom's "Stand Up (and Be Counted)" (Venom, 1984):

We are the tyrants  
Messengers of Satan  
We pledge you all  
Raise your hands  
This is the solstice  
Hail legions arise  
We'll raise the roof  
Snatch the skies

As with the occult themes in NWoBHM, horror themes were also iterated on in later subgenres, and were made more extreme as the music evolved. As NWoBHM influenced thrash metal, these horror themes inspired the themes of death that were utilised in the later style. As thrash metal went on to influence the formation of death metal through transitional bands like Sepultura, the central themes of death became more extreme in the depictions of gore and murder.

Although the real-life experiences present in the themes of NWoBHM were much less used in later subgenres, there was a certain amount used in thrash metal as musicians utilised their socio-political dissatisfaction as a vehicle to explore violent and rebellious ideas within their music. This is evident in the lyrics for Megadeth's "Youthanasia" (Megadeth, 1994):

We are the damned of all the world with sadness in our hearts  
Of the wounded of the wars, we've been hung out to dry  
You didn't want us anyway and now we're making up our minds  
You tell us how to run our lives, we run for youthanasia

This disillusionment felt by the youth of the early thrash metal subgenre echoes a similar sentiment shown in the lyrics of the NWoBHM band Pariah (1988) in their song "Walking Wounded", in which the band comment on the conditions that force refugees to abandon their homes as their lives are threatened (Pariah, 1997):

Forced into evacuation  
To escape these killing fields  
Better to die than face repatriation  
At the hands of the latest tyranny

Although the lyrics in “Youthanasia” (Megadeth, 1994) are written from the perspective of oppressed youth, and “Walking Wounded” (Pariah, 1997) is written from the perspective of persecuted refugees, they explore the same sentiment of control and persecution, and criticise both explicitly. The musicians in both bands express sentiments of anti-authoritarianism, and this rebellious criticism of the widely accepted system in which they live shows connections that branch across the subgenres in relation to imagery, and not only to the musical factors of the former that clearly influence the latter.

## Thrash Metal (1983-2015)

Although the earliest thrash metal bands were influenced by NWoBHM, especially through the use of virtuosic guitar playing and the prevalence of double-kick drumming, innovation came from the band's ability to raise the extremity of the music and the implementation of new imagery in a more modern subgenre.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Death	66
War	49
Society	41
Anti-Religion	26
Politics	18
The Occult	11
Humour	10
Horror	8
Life	8
Rock 'n' Roll Lifestyle	7
Satanism	6
Insanity	5
Fantasy	4
Murder	4
Esotericism	4
Introspection	4
Mythology	4
Violence	4
Depression	3
Gore	3
Christianity	3
Misanthropy	2
Parody	2
Philosophy	2
Perversion	1
Rebellion	1
Science	1
Drugs	1
Partying	1
Heavy Metal	1
Literature	1
Anti-Fascism	1
Environmentalism	1
Sci-Fi	1

Table 4: Thrash Metal Imagery

The overarching theme that pervades the thrash metal subgenre is death, with many bands using themes of war, socio-political commentary and anti-religious sentiment as context for the themes of death in their artwork and lyrics.

Aside from death, which was present in the imagery of two-thirds of the bands I analysed, war was the most common thematic element, present in the imagery of almost half of all the bands I included in my thrash metal study. Themes of war were utilised by formative and notable bands in the genre, such as Metallica, Megadeth and Slayer, and through their utilisation of these themes, they became widely used conventions in the subgenre.

Themes of war were primarily used to comment negatively on the influence of those in power and the horrors of war. This is shown clearly in the lyrics of Slayer's "Angel of Death", which references the

barbaric practices of Josef Mengele, whose nickname gives the song its title (Slayer, 1986):

Forced in  
Like cattle you run  
Stripped of  
Your life's worth  
Human mice, for the Angel of Death  
Four hundred thousand more to die  
Angel of Death  
Monarch to the kingdom of the dead

Another band that uses themes of war across a large portion of their output are Sodom (1981), one of the foremost bands within German thrash metal. Their album *M-16* (Sodom, 2001) centres around the horrors of the Vietnam War, but unlike other works that comment on this war, this album takes no political stance.



Whilst songs like “Marines” (Sodom, 2001) and “Little Boy” (Sodom, 2001) present a wholly negative view of the horrors that soldiers face in combat, and the sacrifices they make in the name of freedom, songs like “Among the Weirdcong” (Sodom, 2001), “Napalm in the Morning” (Sodom, 2001) and the title track “M-16” (Sodom, 2001) recount almost gleeful tales of glory, victory and barbarism.

Figure 17: Sodom - M-16

The figure on the album cover is also indicative of a power fantasy on the part of the musicians, showing a super-soldier of exaggerated proportions wielding the titular M-16 weapon used by the US soldiers in the Vietnam War (see Fig.17). This depiction of the US soldier in a position of power is factually incorrect, as the USA was not successful in their military campaign across Vietnam, but could also be perceived as culturally insensitive, as US soldiers were responsible for atrocities committed on both enemy soldiers and Vietnam civilians.

In contrast, most themes of war in thrash metal *are* often connected to socio-political commentary and criticism of those in power, as shown in the covers of Toxik’s (1985) *Think*

This (Toxik, 1989) (see Fig.18), and Violator's (2002) *Scenarios of Brutality* (Violator, 2013) (see Fig.19):

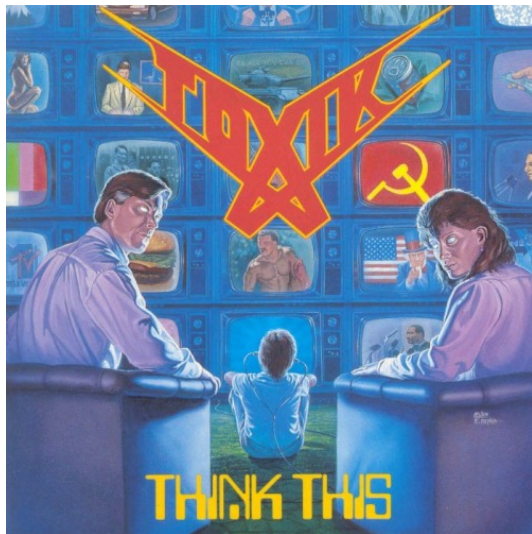


Figure 18: Toxik - Think This



Figure 19: Violator - Scenarios of Brutality

The cover of *Think This* (Toxik, 1989) shows the brainwashing effect of the media on mainstream households, and thus the irresponsibility of the rich and powerful that control them. The themes of war are referenced in the prominent position of the hammer and sickle symbol of communism, and the contrasting image of “Uncle Sam”, calling the young viewer to fight for his country. The cover of *Scenarios of Brutality* (Violator, 2013) takes a more direct approach to this political criticism, showing a military general turning his back on acts of violence, and the fact that guns are being used in the beating of civilians insinuates that the perpetrators are under the command of the general in question. The dual-coloured coat of the general may also suggest that contrasting forces within war are equally reprehensible, and neither side are willing to take responsibility for crimes perpetrated by personnel under their command.

The last central theme in the thrash metal subgenre is that of anti-religion. There are several notable thrash metal bands that utilise anti-religious themes in their imagery, including Testament and, infamously, Slayer. Slayer are the most famous band that criticise Christianity in their artwork and lyrics, and set the standard for blasphemous artwork within thrash metal going forward. The artwork of Kreator's (1984) *Gods of Violence* (Kreator, 2017), Meliah Rage's (1987) *Idol Hands* (Meliah Rage, 2018) and Suicidal Angels' (2001) *Eternal Domination*



(Suicidal Angels, 2007) show this influence, with depictions of Satan in positions of power that could be traced back to the commanding goat-headed figure on the cover of Slayer's influential *Reign in Blood* (Slayer, 1986). This convention of anti-religion within the subgenre has also evolved to more overt satanic themes, seen in the lyrics and artwork of Onslaught (1982), Skeletonwitch (2003) and Infernäl Mäjesty (1986).

The lyrics of "This Evil Embrace" by Skeletonwitch show a clear affinity with figures of evil and a feeling of superiority over those of a Christian faith (Skeletonwitch, 2013):

I am the venomous beast  
Demon walking with earthly feet  
Serpent stronger than your faith  
From flesh you now fall into shade

This sentiment of superiority over religious people and destruction of Christianity are echoed in various songs by these bands, including "Vengeance Will Be Mine" (Skeletonwitch, 2004), "Kingdom of Heaven" (Infernäl Mäjesty, 2017), and "Killing Peace" (Onslaught, 2007). This overt disdain for religion, and Christianity in particular also creates a thematic continuation into the later subgenre of death metal. This anti-religious sentiment was one of the most prevalent themes in the subgenre, and many notable bands adopted anti-religious stances through their artwork and lyrics, including Morbid Angel (1984), Immolation (1988) and Decide (1989), the latter of which used Satanism and blasphemous imagery with a vehemence and extremity that was unprecedented at the time.

As with NWoBHM, there were a number of outlying themes within thrash metal, with 10 themes only being used by a single band each. These outliers included themes of perversion, science-fiction and environmentalism, showing that even though conventional subject matter dominates the imagery of the subgenre, there are bands that choose to comment on these conventional themes through an approach that is different to the norm, or even those that choose to forego the subgenre's semiotic conventions entirely.

An interesting example of a band with more extreme imagery than the norm for the subgenre is Backhoe Butchery (2000), who take the usual theme of death to further extremity with depictions of murder and gore that are usually seen in subgenres like death metal and



grindcore. This link to more extreme subgenres is also evident in the artwork for the band's most recent album *Mailbox Full of Mouse-Traps* (Backhoe Butchery, 2007), which utilises a style of illustration that was used famously by Anal Cunt (1988) in the grindcore subgenre (Cunt, 1999) (see Fig.20). Much of the album artwork present in thrash metal is hand-drawn in style, but is more serious in tone and less primitive in execution. As such, there were no other covers in thrash metal that were comparable to the style of *Mailbox Full of Mouse-Traps* (see Fig.21).



Figure 20: Anal Cunt - It Just Gets Worse

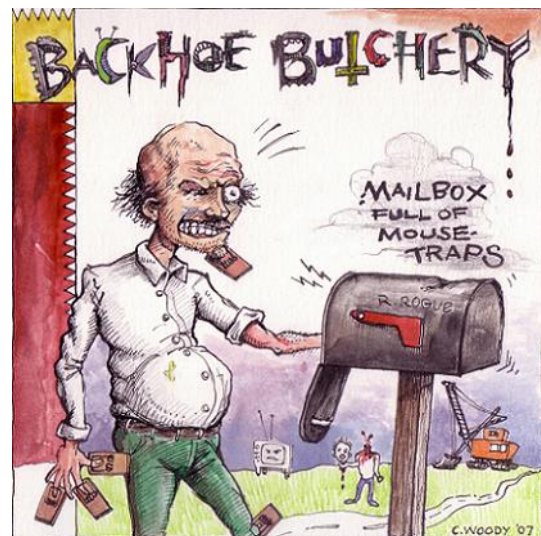


Figure 21: Backhoe Butchery - Mailbox...

As with the artwork, the lyrics of Backhoe Butchery are also more extreme than the thrash metal norm, as shown in their song "Tear Your Head Off" (Backhoe Butchery, 2007):

Bound and gagged in a garbage bag  
 I'll tear your fucking head off  
 Don't you underestimate us  
 We'll tear your fucking head off

It is important to note, however, that Backhoe Butchery are a comparatively modern band, as they released their debut album in 2001. Although their music is similar in style to thrash metal bands that existed during the peak of the subgenre, the more extreme imagery is indicative of this later time period. The more overtly violent and gory themes, which would have been far outside the norm in the 1980s, are not as extreme when compared to the imagery of death metal bands like Cannibal Corpse and Autopsy (1987). This shows that the way we judge imagery must take into account the time of release, as the desensitisation to

extreme thematic elements plays a part in the acceptance of these themes as we move into more modern subgenres.

These boundaries are still being pushed by even the most modern bands, with Infant Annihilator in particular using paedophilia as a central theme throughout their creative output. This suggests that the tendency of metal bands to grow more extreme over time has not reached an end point of maximum extremity, and that bands could evolve to include even more extreme imagery in the future.

As with NWoBHM, there were also an outlying number of thrash metal bands that used themes of Christianity within their lyrics; Tourniquet (1989), Believer (1986) and Realm (1985). However, all three of these bands also included commentary on society as a whole, which is in contrast with the purely Christian themes that were present in NWoBHM. The formative acts within the subgenre had already developed the thematic conventions of thrash metal, which in turn may have had an influence on the later bands which augmented these conventions with Christian themes. The lyrics of these bands also use language that reflects the wider imagery of thrash metal, and this can be observed in Realm's "Final Solution" (Realm, 1990):

Blackest evil now controls the power thrones of earth  
Metal masters mangle minds of intoxicated youth  
Corrupted senile generals are nuclear obsessed  
Dropping bombs, creating mutants that want to eat your flesh

These lyrics echo the violence and critical sentiments that were present within the artwork of the aforementioned *Scenarios of Brutality* (Violator, 2013). This conventional implementation of imagery may serve to avoid the alienation that other Christian bands may encounter through the interpretation of their lyrics as 'preachy'. However, their Christian undertones are evident in "Knee Deep in Blood", wherein the lyrics question our societal ills by asking "when will we learn, the world must change?" and comment on our inherent violence by stating "blood rains from heaven" and asking "are they tears of God?" (Realm, 1990).

As with many of the subgenres in my study, thrash metal includes a further, more specific microgenre, known as crossover thrash, which is often shortened to crossover. This microgenre is identified by the audible influence of hardcore punk on the style, as the speed and short, aggressive structure of punk was fused with the technicality and precision to create an amalgamation of stylistic elements. The drumming present within crossover thrash utilises both the double-kick drumming that was popular in the wider thrash metal subgenre at the time, but 'D-beat' drumming was also widely used, which is a style of drum beat invented and popularised by the hardcore punk bands Discharge (1977) and The Varukers (1979) (see Fig.22).



Figure 22: D-Beat Example

As the drumming included elements from both thrash metal and hardcore punk, so too did the guitars. On Cro-Mags' (1980) debut LP *The Age of Quarrel* (Cro-Mags, 1986), the guitar tone was more inspired by the guitar tones used in punk, which utilise a distortion that is more 'fuzz' based and less focused than the tighter, high-mid driven tone of thrash metal. However, on their most recent release *In the Beginning* (Cro-Mags, 2020), the guitar tone was drastically different, as the musicians had developed a sound that referenced the tone of thrash metal guitars much more, but still retained some of the looser characteristics of punk guitar. The vocals varied between the aggressive shouts that were popular in hardcore punk and the mildly distorted vocals that were present in the bulk of thrash metal at the time.

The bands within crossover thrash seem to have taken most of their thematic inspiration from the socio-political themes and anarchist tendencies of hardcore punk, and this is clear in the lyrics of "After the Holocaust" by Nuclear Assault (1984) (Nuclear Assault, 1986):

People's lives are ruined  
By man they've never seen  
A choice of death made for man  
By leaders behind the scenes

However, unlike in the bulk of thrash metal, the imagery used in crossover thrash was often humorous in nature, often using overstated themes of a hedonistic lifestyle and juvenile

humour, interspersed with gore, which can be seen on the covers of Municipal Waste's (2001) album, *The Art of Partying* (Municipal Waste, 2007) (see Fig.23).



Figure 23: Municipal Waste - The Art...

This humour can also be used to offset the serious and critical themes of death and war, and to emphasise the themes to the extreme of self-parody. Stormtroopers of Death (1985) used humour in various ways in their debut album *Speak English or Die* (Stormtroopers of Death, 1985). The album title itself was a way to provoke a reaction from mainstream audiences, and the themes within the album of homosexuality, misogyny and racism were specifically used to shock and antagonise.

To this end, the lyrics for "Milk" (Stormtroopers of Death, 1985), which only describe the protagonist's dismay at a lack of milk available for his cereal, work to offset the potentially offensive lyrics of "Fuck the Middle-East" (Stormtroopers of Death, 1985):

BEIRUT, LEBANON-Won't exist once we're done  
LIBYA, IRAN-We'll flush the bastards down the can  
SYRIANS and SHIITES-Crush their faces with our might  
Then Israel and Egypt can live in peace without these dicks

As well as the similar subject material, the musical style of crossover can be seen as an influence on the burgeoning grindcore subgenre, which was also a style that melded the elements of hardcore punk and heavy metal, but in a more extreme way. This extremity stemmed from the influence of early death metal on the genre, but the drumming of Charlie Benante on *Speak English or Die* (Stormtroopers of Death, 1985) could also be seen as a precursor to the blast-beat laden drumming that was popular in grindcore. The song "Milk" (Stormtroopers of Death, 1985) has been lauded as the song with the first blast-beat drum in the metal genre (see Fig.24), and although the pattern had been used in some hardcore punk before, it was not performed in the same context, or at the speed and intensity that is audible on "Milk". As both musical and thematic elements from *Speak English or Die* were highly influential on both grindcore and the wider metal genre, its importance as a landmark release cannot be overstated.

♩ = 112

Drum Set

Electric Guitar

2

Dr.

E. Gtr.

4

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Figure 24: Stormtroopers of Death - "Milk" (Guitar, Drums - Verse at 0'34")

## Death Metal (1987-2011)

As transitional thrash metal bands like Sepultura became both musically and thematically more extreme, the musicians that they inspired created an entirely new subgenre, which came to be known as death metal.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Gore	40
Murder	36
Society	27
Anti-Religion	20
Sexual Violence	13
Philosophy	13
Death	12
Esotericism	11
Sci-Fi	7
Fantasy	7
War	7
Blasphemy	7
Satanism	6
Mythology	5
Pathology	4
The Occult	4
Nihilism	3
Despair	3
Mysticism	3
Cosmic Horror	3
Politics	2
History	2
Insanity	2
Viking Mythology	1
Rebellion	1
Adversity	1
Anger	1
Christianity	1
Suffering	1
Addiction	1
Storytelling	1
Alternative Spirituality	1
Space	1
Introspection	1
Nature	1
Sexuality	1

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Egyptian Mythology	1
Literature	1
Existentialism	1
Perversion	1
Life	1
The Apocalypse	1

Table 5: Death Metal Imagery

The overarching theme in death metal is violence, which is depicted through both first-person accounts of violence and murder, and graphic depictions of gore. As expected, anti-religious themes were also popular within the subgenre, with a fifth of the bands in the subgenre expressing anti-religious themes in their output. An unexpected inclusion in the top three themes is that of societal commentary, as it is not a theme that is often associated with death metal. However, within the 27 bands that referred to society within their imagery, only 3 had it as their main theme.

Social commentary was far more abundant in death metal as a secondary theme to more prevalent subject matter, like the aforementioned gore, murder, or anti-religion. The lyrics of Brutality's (1987)

“Died with Open Eyes”, discuss the horrors of nuclear war, but in a way that allows for depictions of violence (Brutality, 1996):

Died with open eyes  
Like millions of others  
Enshrouded in darkest pain  
All hope lost  
Crime of the century  
Trauma induced terror  
Sub-atomics reflect  
Fusing man and stone

In contrast to this violent depiction of societal ills, the lyrics of Comecon (1989) utilise themes of social criticisms in a way that is not only a vehicle for themes of murder and gore, but a genuine criticism of the world leaders that are responsible for reprehensible acts, as seen more frequently in thrash metal and grindcore. This social criticism of the upper classes can be seen on their song “Community” (Comecon, 1993):

How many poor do we need to prosper  
How much starvation to make GNP rise?  
Why are we sliding into hell when they are pointing at heaven?  
Let Europe recollect what must be done with bourgeois lies

This is a depth of political commentary that is not often seen in the death metal subgenre, even among the bulk of bands that make reference to society in their music. Therefore, the inclusion of societal themes in the subgenre may look widespread, but as these social issues are usually used as a lens through which to project themes of violence and gore, true social commentary is still a tiny minority in death metal as a whole.

In contrast with the uncommon themes of reality that are utilised in the music of Comecon, imagery within the bulk of death metal tends to be more exaggerated and fantastical. In reference to the imagery within death metal, Eric Smialek states that “Even when death metal songs speak of murder, a lyrical theme grounded in real-life events, the violence tends to be so exaggerated that it takes on the surreal character of a horror movie or comic book.” (2016). In death metal specifically, these murderous lyrics are often written in first-person, from the perspective of the murderer in question. In the lyrics of “Stripped, Raped and Strangled” by Cannibal Corpse, the lyrics give an account of the crimes of a serial killer, told from the first-person perspective of the killer in question (Cannibal Corpse, 1994):

It felt so good to kill.  
I took their lives away.  
7 dead, lying rotten.  
Unburied victims.  
Their naked bodies putrefy.

Furthermore, within this song, the lyricist Chris Barnes goes into much more extreme details of the violence committed on one of the victims, and through the course of two verses writes out how the victim, is subdued, tortured, raped and murdered, as well as the actions committed after her murder (Cannibal Corpse, 1994):

Tied her up and taped her mouth shut.  
Couldn't scream, raped violently.  
Rope tight around her throat.  
Her body twitches as she chokes.

Strangulation caused her death.  
Just like all the others.  
Raped before and after death.  
Stripped, naked, tortured.

The sexual violence depicted in this song is still shocking to read now, in an era where even mainstream audiences have been desensitised to violence. However, the album that “Stripped, Raped and Strangled” was included on was released in 1994, and a precedence for extreme violence had already been established within the subgenre. The very first album that was recognised as death metal was Death’s *Scream Bloody Gore* (Death, 1987), and from this very first album, depictions of murder from a first-person perspective were established as a lyrical theme, as the song “Mutilation” clearly shows (Death, 1987):

Massacred, hacked to death, my revenge  
Slicing deep, into your flesh, the pain intense  
Dreams of hate, misery, fill my mind  
Puke in your face in disgust, it's time to die

This thematic convention was cemented at the very inception of the subgenre, and has been used in even the most recent releases. The most modern band I included in my death metal study was the brutal death metal band Visceral Disgorge (2007), who released their debut album in 2011, and on this album, the song “Sedated and Amputated” (Visceral Disgorge, 2011) is written from the perspective of a killer, and is written with the same sexually violent tone of “Stripped, Raped and Strangled”:



Doped up unconscious whore I stole off the street  
Sever her limbs and devour the meat  
I'll make sure this bitch can't escape  
Chained to the wall then beaten and raped

The consistency of this subject matter, and the way it is presented, is one of the most enduring innovations that can be attributed to death metal, but when these innovations were first being accepted by the metal community, there was a huge backlash from mainstream audiences.



Figure 25: Cannibal Corpse - Butchered...

The album cover of Cannibal Corpse's *Butchered at Birth* (Corpse, 1991) (see Fig.25) was the first cover in the subgenre to face criticism for the portrayal of violence and gore included in the art. This resulted in a lack of distribution for the album, as many stores refused to stock it. However, despite the negative reaction for the mainstream, the cover has become hugely influential, and the themes of extreme gore have been iterated on by many bands within the subgenre since.

Gore in general has been a thematic element that can be traced back to *Scream Bloody Gore* (Death, 1987), and has since become one of the landmark themes of the subgenre, appearing in the lyrics and artwork of 40% of death metal bands. Themes of gore have been used to show extremity by many bands within the wider metal genre, which inspired the inclusion of gore in the imagery of grindcore, resulting in the formation of the goregrind microgenre.

The last of the most used themes within the death metal subgenre is that of anti-religion. This was particularly widespread in the early history of death metal, as 19 of the 20 bands that included anti-religion in their themes had their first release before 1995. Although there were bands that released demos and EP's earlier, Morbid Angel were the first to release a full-length LP that included anti-religion and Satanism as the thematic core. Some of the lyrics in this album are also written from a first-person perspective, but instead of writing from the perspective of a murderer, they are written from the perspective of a willing Satanic disciple. This can be seen in the lyrics of "Bleed for the Devil" (Morbid Angel, 1989):

Come to me, lord of filth  
Hear my cries princes of nightmares  
Touch us with your morbid lips  
Let us taste your foulness

The blasphemous nature of this song comes from the prayer-like structure, but this is rarer for themes of anti-religion in death metal. This first-person disciple perspective is not often used, and is instead substituted by accounts of the weakness of God and his followers, and power fantasies that stem from the inversion of Christian values. A notable example of this is the glorification of things that would usually be considered inherently negative, as in the protagonist's desire to taste the "foulness" of the "lord of filth" in the aforementioned "Bleed for the Devil" (Morbid Angel, 1989). This can also be seen in "Desecration (of the Heavenly Graceful)" (1998) by Incantation (1989):

My spell will torture their golden illusions  
Chaos and utter decay are waiting to be released  
From this ancient and blasphemous entity

The glorification of inherently negative qualities creates an inversion of morally accepted principles and serves to make the tone of the lyrics immediately confrontational. This confrontational tone reinforces the vehemence and vitriol present in the lyrics that reference Christ or his followers directly. This derision of Christianity can also be seen in the artwork of bands like Deicide and Grave. The cover of Deicide's *Scars of the Crucifix* (Deicide, 2004) depicts Christ in a position of powerlessness and subservience (see Fig.26), which is echoed on the cover for Grave's *As Rapture Comes* (Grave, 2006) (see Fig.27). *As Rapture Comes* juxtaposes a title that would seem to reference Christ's ultimate victory with a cover that shows him powerless on the cross, at the mercy of demons in a graphic hellscape.



Figure 26: Deicide - Scars of the Crucifix



Figure 27: Grave - As Rapture Comes

As well as these three overarching, conventional themes within the subgenre, there were also outliers. There were many themes that were referenced by only a single band, and these included themes of real life, space and cosmic horror. Soilwork (1996) are particularly interesting, as they were the only band that depicted real life experiences within a subgenre that includes imagery focused on the fictional and extreme. However, as Soilwork evolved over their career, they moved from a melodic death metal style to one that more resembled metalcore, and lyrics that reference real life struggles and societal commentary are much more conventional in that subgenre. As Soilwork had their first release in 1997, it is possible that the earliest metalcore bands, and the hardcore bands that preceded them could have had a thematic influence on their early career, and later evolved to inform the music as well.

As with the previous subgenre of thrash metal, some death metal bands can be more accurately categorised into a more specific microgenre, and the most common of these are technical death metal, brutal death metal and melodic death metal. Aside from these three examples, there were also small numbers of bands that fit into other, less common, microgenres, including progressive death metal and death 'n' roll. However, these included a very small number of bands, so they were adequately represented by their inclusion, whereas it was pertinent to include a larger number of the other three microgenres to give them a fair representation within the wider subgenre. To give them this fair representation, I included 15 technical death metal bands, 15 brutal death metal bands and 10 melodic death bands in my study.

As the name suggests, the characteristic that sets technical death metal apart from the rest of death metal is the virtuosic technicality shown in the music. Whilst much of death metal takes technical proficiency to play, it is often seen as less technical than the faster and more solo-laden music of its predecessor, thrash metal. However, this is untrue for the microgenre of technical death metal, as virtuosic playing and technical skill are the among the most important stylistic elements. This is seen in all instruments, which is clear in the music of Nile (1993), as shown in this excerpt from “Sacrifice unto Sebek” (Nile, 2005) (see Fig.28):

The image displays a musical score for the song "Sacrifice unto Sebek" by Nile. The score is arranged in three systems, each containing three staves: Drum Set, Electric Guitar, and 4-string Bass Guitar. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 140. The time signature is 4/4. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the Electric Guitar and Bass Guitar parts starting with a complex melodic line. The second system features a highly technical drum solo with numerous triplets and sixteenth-note patterns, while the Electric Guitar and Bass Guitar continue with their melodic lines. The third system shows the continuation of the drum solo and the melodic lines of the Electric Guitar and Bass Guitar.

2

6

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

8

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

Figure 28: Nile - "Sacrifice unto Sebek" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Riff After Intro at 0'32")

This excerpt shows the bass and guitar in unison, playing two riffs that involve string skipping, intricate chromatics and quick patterns of 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> notes that give the song its inherent rhythm. The bass playing is of particular importance in technical death metal, and bass players will often play lead sections that would usually be reserved for guitarists in other metal microgenres. This complexity within bass playing can be seen in the bass solo from Beyond Creation's (2005) "Omnipresent Perception" (Beyond Creation, 2011) (see Fig.29). There is also a prevalence of fretless bass in technical death metal, and this has become a conventional part of the microgenre's sound since its inception.

6-string Fretless Bass Guitar

Tempo: ♩ = 137

3

Bass

6

Bass

9

Bass

11

Bass

13

Bass

Figure 29: Beyond Creation - "Omnipresent Perception" (Bass - Solo at 4'17")

The drummer also shows a high degree of technical proficiency in "Sacrifice unto Sebek", as he plays constant 16<sup>th</sup> notes at 140bpm, as well as 16<sup>th</sup> note triplets during fills, sometimes laid over the regular 16<sup>th</sup> notes in a 2/3 polyrhythm. Although 16<sup>th</sup> notes at 140bpm are common among songs that include the use of double kick pedals, Nile drummer George Kolia plays this song with a single pedal. This shows his technical proficiency, and hints at his ability to play at much faster tempos with both feet, as in the intro to Nile's "Cast Down the Heretic" (2005) (see Fig.30). The use of 16<sup>th</sup> notes at 260 bpm in this song shows that the speed of his feet almost doubles when utilising double kick pedals, and in videos he has shown speeds of up to 280bpm.

Figure 30: Nile - "Cast Down the Heretic" (Drums - Intro at 0'00")

In contrast to the extremity shown in the music of technical death metal, the themes used are often less extreme than most of the imagery in the wider death metal subgenre. Gore was only used as a theme by 26% of the technical death metal bands, which is much less than the wider death metal average of 40%. In technical death metal, themes of philosophy, esotericism and science-fiction are more widely used, which can be seen in the lyrics of "The Aura" by Beyond Creation (2011):

Our fragile existence is drowning in immorality  
 Reduced to slavery  
 No one can think of victory

In this song, the lyrics describe the troubles that plague the world, from the perspective of an enslaving force; the titular 'aura'. This aura controls the masses, in order to sow the seeds of chaos, war and classist division into the society. However, this dystopian landscape is not expressed through the glorification of violence shown in the imagery of a subgenre like thrash metal, but the criticisms are presented in a tone that is comparable to a warning or cautionary tale.

As well as in lyrics, the themes of esotericism and science fiction within technical death metal are often seen through the album covers, which are also less explicit than the usual artwork used in most death metal. These can be seen in the artwork of Cynic's (1987) *Traced in Air* (Cynic, 2008) (see Fig.31) and Obscura's (2002) *Omnivium* (Obscura, 2011) (see Fig.32).



Figure 31: Cynic - Traced in Air



Figure 32: Obscura - Omnivium

In contrast to the less extreme themes in technical death metal, the themes used in brutal death metal are set apart by their high degree of transgressive extremity. The imagery used is not the only determining factor, however, as there are multiple musicological differences that set brutal death metal bands apart from their more conventional death metal counterparts. The first of these differences is the prevalence of the ‘slam’ riff, which is a slow-to-mid tempo riff that utilises palm muted power chords to create a section that is much heavier in tone when compared to the rest of the song. These heavy guitars can also be paired with drums that substitute the usual blast beats for much slower beats, although these can increase in complexity through the length of the riff. The first recorded use of a slam riff was in Suffocation’s (1988) “Liege of Inveracity” (Suffocation, 1991) (see Fig.33), which made Suffocation one of the formative bands within the brutal death metal microgenre going forward.

♩ = 170

Drum Set

♩ = 170

Electric Guitar

Bass Guitar

Voice



5

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

Voice

A new race I will now cre-ate As I end their pi-ti-ful lives

2

9

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

Voice

My des-ti-ny has on-ly be-gun

11

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

Voice

To tor-ture fu-ture minds

The image shows a musical score for the song "Liege of Inveracity" by Suffocation, specifically a riff at the 2:50 mark. The score is written for four parts: Drums (Dr.), Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.), Bass, and Voice. The guitar part is the most complex, featuring a fast, intricate riff with many accidentals and a key signature of one flat. The bass line is a simple, rhythmic accompaniment. The drums play a blast beat pattern. The voice staff is empty.

Figure 33: Suffocation - "Liege of Inveracity" (Guitar, Bass, Drums, Vocals - Riff at 2'50")

Other musical traits in brutal death metal include less virtuosic music overall, lower tuned guitars than in the bulk of death metal, and a more aggressive snare sound that cuts through the mix more easily than in other forms of metal music. A notable example of this snare sound can be heard in the blast beat section in the intro of Devourment's (1995) "Festering Vomitous Mass" (Devourment, 1999). However, as clear as these musical differences are, the differences in imagery are still at the forefront of the distinctions between brutal death metal and other forms of death metal. The bands of brutal death metal take the gore and violence that is portrayed in the imagery of the bulk of death metal, and iterate on it further. This has led to the rise of bands that include themes of sexual violence, necrophilia and paedophilia in graphic detail. The album covers in brutal death metal are among the most explicit in the entire metal genre, and whilst they are not drawn with photo-realism in mind, they illustrate the most controversial themes of the microgenre with a very high level of detail, as in Cephalotripsy's *Uterovaginal Insertion of Extirpated Anomalies* (Cephalotripsy, 2007) and Vulvectomy's *Post-Abortion Slut Fuck* (Vulvectomy, 2010) (see Fig.34 & Fig.35).



Figure 34: Cephalotripsy - Uterovaginal Insertion...



Figure 35: Vulvectomy - Post-Abortion Slut Fuck

The last microgenre within the subgenre of death metal was melodic death metal, which started in Sweden, as the country already had a burgeoning death metal scene. Bands from Stockholm, like Grave, Unleashed and Entombed, played in a similar style to American death metal bands (albeit with slight changes in guitar tone and production), but there was a shift to more melodic playing by bands from Gothenburg. This sense of melody may be attributed to local conditions in Sweden, where there is a focus on music tuition in schools that may have given metal musicians access to classical music during their time at school (Hillier, 2018, pg. 12). Bands like At the Gates, In Flames and Dark Tranquillity included lead guitar sections that were inspired by NWoBHM bands and created a new microgenre that has gone on to inspire metalcore. Various musical conventions can be seen in “While We Sleep” (2014) by Insomnium (1997) (see Fig.36), who are a band that have become the new standard for the microgenre.

♩ = 113

Drum Set

Electric Guitar

Electric Guitar

Electric Guitar

Bass Guitar

3

Dr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

5

Dr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

7

Dr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

9

Dr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

11

Dr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

Bass

The image shows a musical score for the instrumental introduction of the song "While We Sleep" by the band Insomnium. The score is presented in two systems, starting at measure 13 and measure 15. Each system consists of four staves: Drums (Dr.), Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.), another Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.), and Bass. The drum part is characterized by a constant 16th-note kick drum pattern, with occasional snare and cymbal hits. The guitar parts feature complex, high-frequency melodic lines, and the bass part provides a steady 16th-note accompaniment.

Figure 36: Insomnium - "While We Sleep" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Intro 0'00")

In this intro, all the instrumental conventions can be seen. The drummer is playing fairly simple beats with his hands, whilst keeping a constant 16<sup>th</sup> note pattern on the kick drums. This constant presence of the kick drum can be seen across a large amount of melodic death metal, even though traditional death metal blast beats are rare. The use of crash cymbal as the main cymbal to build a beat on is also different from most death metal, as a constant wash of high frequencies would negatively impact a mix that is typically denser than the average melodic death metal recording. Therefore, the main cymbal choice in more traditional death metal tends to be hi-hat or ride.

The guitarists are usually separated into rhythm and lead guitar roles, and the rhythm guitarist will often play riffs that are simpler than the norm within death metal, as the rhythm guitars in melodic death metal serve a different function. In more traditional death metal, the rhythm guitars are used to create the main structure of the song, whilst also disorientating the listener with complex timing changes and unusual chromaticism. However, in melodic death metal, the rhythm guitar riffs are used to create a solid foundation for the implementation of lead playing, as these melodic lead guitar parts often give the song its sense of identity. This can be seen in the above excerpt, as the rhythm guitarists repeat a chord structure of D5, F5, A5 and G5. As this progression repeats, it gives a foundation to the lead guitarist, which enables them to play a repeating motif that moves around the chord, and a harmony part comes in later to create a richer sound. This lead harmonisation is also common in melodic death metal, and is one of the stylistic elements that was inspired by NWoBHM.

The vocals used in melodic death metal are not usually as guttural as those in other death metal microgenres, and as the lyrics are more likely to be heard, they are typically less explicit and transgressive than in the death metal subgenre as a whole. This represents a tonal shift in the imagery of the microgenre, and a clear aesthetic chasm between the horror and gore seen in the imagery of most death metal, and the fantasy, mythology and introspective despair that can be seen in melodic death metal (Hillier, 2018, pg. 18). The themes of fantasy and mythology can be seen notably in the lyrics of Amon Amarth, whose entire musical output centres around the tales of Norse mythology. This can be heard in the song “Twilight of the Thunder God” (Amon Amarth, 2008), which tells the tale of Thor’s battle with the Midgard serpent Jormungandr at the end of the world, known as Ragnarök:

Vingthor rise to face the snake with hammer high  
At the edge of the world  
As lightning fills the air  
As Mjöllnir does it's work  
The twifold serpent roars in pain

The use of emotion in the lyrics of other melodic death metal bands like Insomnium and Soilwork may have also gone on to influence the lyrical themes of formative metalcore bands, as their music did, and this line of influence also continued on to inspire further subgenres, like that of modern progressive metal, which in turn takes inspiration from metalcore. These

themes of mythology and melancholic emotion can also be seen in the covers of melodic death metal bands, which are much less centred on themes of murder and gore than in most death metal. This is shown in the covers of Amon Amarth's *Deceiver of the Gods* (Amon Amarth, 2013) (see Fig.37) and Insomnium's *Across the Dark* (Insomnium, 2009) (see Fig.38).



Figure 37: Amon Amarth - *Deceiver of the Gods*

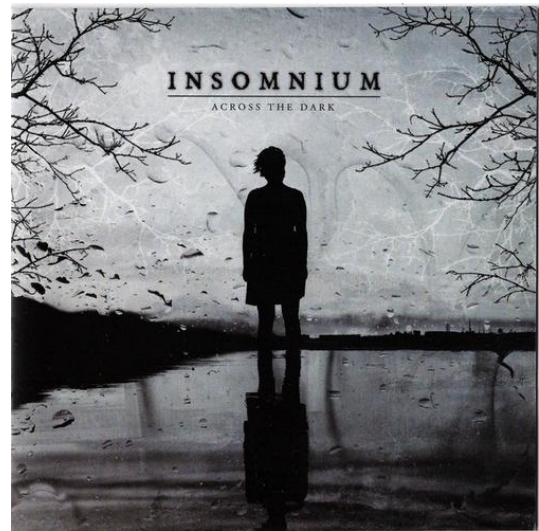


Figure 38: Insomnium - *Across the Dark*

The reduced focus on transgressive themes within melodic death metal does not seem to be a conscious effort to become more marketable though. Through his analysis of the microgenre, Hillier (2018, pg. 24) concluded that the marketability and subsequent success of melodic death metal was simply a result of the merging of two distinct musical ideas, and a genuine interest in both death metal and more melodic styles like NWoBHM was the main driving force of the microgenre's creation. Therefore, the unexpected success can be attributed to the fact that melodic death metal was an evolution of death metal with significantly lower levels of extremity, which reinforces the success of organisms/artists at the left wall, where the listening experience is both less extreme and less challenging.



## Black Metal (1984-2015)

Black metal is a subgenre that evolved over the same time period as death metal, but the national identity of the musicians allowed them to create music that was drastically different, both instrumentally and thematically.

Theme	No. of Occurrences
Satanism	43
Mythology	18
Depression	13
Nature	12
The Occult	11
Misanthropy	11
Anti-Christianity	11
Blasphemy	10
War	9
Suicide	9
Mysticism	8
History	6
National-Socialism	6
Christianity	4
Horror	4
Philosophy	3
Esotericism	3
Sexuality	1
Nihilism	1
Self-Mutilation	1
Paganism	1
Society	1
Rebellion	1
Perversion	1
Cosmology	1
Black Metal Music	1
Death	1
Fascism	1
Literature	1
Chaos	1
Murder	1

Table 6: Black Metal Imagery

“Two ideologies, Satanism and Paganism, form the backbone of much black metal philosophy” (Hagen, 2011, pg. 190), and the theme of Satanism was given particular importance, as it was used as a theme by almost half of all black metal bands. In contrast to this, the second-most used theme in the genre - mythology - was used by less than half of the number of bands that used Satanism as a theme in their imagery. It is also pertinent to note that every band that referenced Satanism in their imagery used it as their main theme, never as a secondary to another. Any theme that was also present in the imagery of a band that referenced Satanism was always the secondary theme.

In *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture*, Benjamin Hedge Olson states that “religious identification with the biblical Satan is the most common form of spiritual expression in black metal” (Olson, 2008). Furthermore, it is important to clarify that Satanism has been the primary thematic

constant throughout the history of the black metal subgenre, from the imagery of its innovators to the imagery of even the most modern bands. Whilst the central elements of black metal music were present in the music of bands like Venom, Hellhammer and Celtic Frost (1984), the first band to combine these in a way that was considered to be truly 'black metal' was Bathory. Bathory covered a large amount of thematic ground in their career, but in the earliest of their output, Satanism was the central theme. These themes can be seen in the lyrics for "In Conspiracy with Satan" (Bathory, 1984):

I have turned my back on Christ  
To hell I have sacrificed  
I have made love to the Pagan Queen  
The gates of hell I have seen

The lyrics in this song thoroughly denounce the Christian God and take an unequivocally confrontational stance that had not been seen in the metal genre prior to the release of *Bathory* (Bathory, 1984). Whilst the lyrics of Venom had referenced and glorified Satanism, their primary function was to shock mainstream audiences by being much more extreme than their NWoBHM counterparts. In contrast to this, there was no knowing wink to the audience in the imagery of Bathory; the lyrics were written to attack Christianity by taking a Satanist stance, although band leader Quarthon later admitted that he was not a Satanist himself. However, more modern bands in the genre, such as Watain, profess to be actual theistic Satanists, and claim that their lyrics are based in a genuine personal ideology. Watain's "Casus Luciferi" describes a hypothetical victory for Satan and his subsequent rise to power, which lyricist Erik Danielsson welcomes as a disciple (Watain, 2003):

For this sunrise shall not wake you by the foul light of Christ,  
but by Satan's fire burning in your eyes  
And the thundering voice of a lion over the plains of man  
shall proclaim the horned phoenix' final rise  
For it is not rain that falls tonight from the black, ominous sky,  
but sulphur tears from the last flock of birds  
And the wind carries the smell of death, from the agony in their hearts,  
as they fly in nameless fear towards...  
Luciferion!

This focus on Satanism can also be seen throughout much of the artwork of black metal, as in the cover of Inquisition's (1990) *Invoking the Majestic Throne of Satan* (Inquisition, 2002) (see Fig.39), which depicts the Baphomet, or Sabbatic Goat, a figure that is now widely used as a

depiction of Satan. This image of a goat-headed devil is seen on multiple black metal album covers, including Dimmu Borgir's (1993) *In Sorte Diaboli* (Borgir, 2007), *Toward the Skullthrone of Satan* (1997) by Enthroned (1993), and *The Truth Shall Set You Free* (2012) by Wolfenhords (2005).



Figure 39: Inquisition - Invoking the Majestic...

There are many symbols used in the imagery of black metal, and most are used either in the glorification of Satanic imagery or to invert traditional symbols of Christianity. These include, but are not limited to, pentagrams, Baphomets, inverted crosses and goats' heads. These are often implemented into band logos, as in the case of Mayhem, Darkthrone and Profanatica (1990). The inversion of Christian imagery is a constant semiotic element in the subgenre, and is used to

undermine the Christian faith by way of blasphemy and mockery. This can be seen in the artwork for Profanatica's *Rotting Incarnation of God* (Profanatica, 2019), which inverts the quintessentially Christian image of the nativity (see Fig.40). This inversion is achieved by having Mary portrayed as a corpse, whilst all the shepherds have been murdered, as have any animals present. Jesus has been mutilated almost beyond recognition; left as a pile of bones and assorted gore atop the manger. The only living beings on this cover are the wise men, although they are all wearing corpse paint, which is a style of makeup that is synonymous with black metal. This may be a way to show that the musicians believe they are wise enough to see through the lies of Christianity, to the death and horror that religion creates.



Figure 40: Profanatica - Rotting Incarnation...

Overall, this opposition to Christianity and the glorification of Satanism that is used to invert the main principles of Christianity creates a thematic thread that is woven through the entire black metal subgenre. In addition to Satanism, there is another theme that black metal musicians use to undermine Christian principles in a way that glorifies the ancestry and heritage of the

musicians and the countries in which they live: Paganism.

Some black metal musicians have stated that their opposition to Christianity comes from the forced conversion of their ancestors in the age of the Vikings, and they have since used themes of Norse mythology and Paganism in order to glorify their heritage and denounce the Christian faith that they believe was only forced on them in the first place. There are also bands that have used themes of nature to pay homage to their country of origin, and to further relate themselves to their heritage, as part of a “romanticized heroic past” (Hagen, 2011, pg. 193).

These themes can also be seen in the music of Bathory, who changed their imagery on their fourth album, preferring themes of Norse mythology over the Satanic themes that they had utilised on their first three albums. The references to Norse mythology were primarily a change of thematic content, but there was also a change in Bathory’s music alongside these thematic changes. There was less use of distorted vocals in favour of folk-inspired vocal melodies, and this was paired with a more polished production, slower tempo and more melodic guitar parts to create what would become known as ‘Viking metal’. However, Viking metal has been used to reference bands that belong to wildly differing metal subgenres, including folk metal, black metal and death metal. As this moniker only groups bands by thematic content, Viking metal is an inaccurate genre description, and therefore does not constitute a distinct subgenre.

The themes of Norse mythology in Bathory’s later output can be seen in the lyrics for “Valhalla” (Bathory, 1990), which references the Norse god Thor:

God of thunder  
Who crack the sky  
Swing your hammer  
Way up high

These themes can also be seen as concepts for full albums, such as *Blood on Ice* (Bathory, 1996), which tells the story of a man chosen by Odin to be the gods’ champion, who has to go through training and trials to face ‘the beast’ and bring the souls trapped in Hel into Valhalla. This has since influenced many black metal bands, who have used mythology as a

thematic constant throughout their creative output, such as Borknagar (1994), Enslaved (1991) and Nagelfar (1993).

The bands that use themes of mythology in their imagery often use images of nature in their album covers, and this has become widespread in the subgenre. This can be seen in the artwork of albums like *True North* (Borknagar, 2019) (see Fig.41) and *The Threnody of Triumph* (2012) (see Fig.42) by Winterfylleth (2007).



Figure 41: Borknagar - True North



Figure 42: Winterfylleth - The Threnody of Triumph

Winterfylleth are notable in the subgenre, as themes of mythology and nature can also be linked to themes of history, as historical tales are used in the place of mythological ones. This primarily Scandinavian convention has been used by Winterfylleth, an English band, to show pride in their home country. However, their imagery does not show England in a position of superiority, as it may if they belonged to the national-socialist black metal (NSBM) microgenre, but simply celebrates the rich cultural heritage and medieval history of the country from a more objective viewpoint.

This interest in nature and history may also provide context for the combination of black metal and folk music that exists in folk metal. Terje “Valfar” Bakken, who was the main composer of Windir (1994), claimed that he felt a similar melancholic atmosphere present in both folk music and black metal, which inspired him to include the accordion parts that were central to Windir’s musical identity (A., 2001).

As well as the two main themes of Satanism and mythology, there were also a number of outliers that used uncommon themes in their imagery. Among these were four bands that focused on themes of Christianity, which is diametrically opposed to the imagery that is intrinsically linked to the subgenre. Horde (1994) in particular take a highly confrontational stance against the typical Satanic themes of black metal, using the familiar blasphemous tone of conventional black metal musicians, but instead attacking the idea of Satan and his worshippers, and glorifying worship of God. This can be seen in the lyrics for “Crush the Bloodied Horns of the Goat” (Horde, 1994):

Crush the bloodied horns  
Grind them into the dust  
Spare nothing from the ferocious  
Anger of the eternal one  
Goat of blasphemy  
Satanic symbology

The lyrics of Drottnar (1997), however, take a different approach to themes of Christianity, using language that evokes a feeling of prayer rather than one of aggression. The lyrics in their music describe scenes of quiet desperation, seeking the aid of God to help them through their own inadequacies. There is also a secondary theme of philosophy in their music, wherein they examine the failings of mankind, and seek repentance on the behalf of all. Both of these themes can be seen in the lyrics for “Wolves and Lambs” (Drottnar, 2012):

We have seen  
The beaten, sacrificed Body  
But we cheer legalism  
With silent applause  
Show mercy with us  
Father  
Because we do not know  
What we do or don't

Alongside the heavily stylised imagery shown in the lyrical content and artwork of black metal albums, personal presentation is also important in the subgenre in a way that is absent in most other forms of metal. A particularly notorious element of the musician's personal image is the use of corpse paint, which is used to make the musician appear dead. This is achieved through the use of a white base and black accents that create depth to certain facial features

(see Fig.43), and the technique has permeated a wide variety of the culture surrounding black metal.



Figure 43: Per 'Dead' Ohlin - Mayhem

The use of corpse paint may be indicative of “the monstrous” (Thomas, 2009) from Sara Ann Thomas’ thesis, *Subjectivity in American Popular Metal: Contemporary Gothic, The Body, The Grotesque, and The Child*. In this thesis, Thomas explains that metal musicians often use similar characteristics as contemporary gothic writers in order to “critique the ‘normal’ world from which they are excluded” and in order to achieve this, they exemplify qualities of “the sick, the polluted and the evil”. Through the use of corpse paint, black metal musicians can present a much more monstrous version of themselves, and therefore, they are less bound by the rules and expectations of wider society. In *One Man Metal*, Jef ‘Wrest’ Whitehead of Leviathan states that corpse paint “takes away the human factor of making the music” (Vice, 2012), and by removing this human element, black metal artists can let the satanic, depressive nature of the music stand upon its own merits.

As with other subgenres, black metal has microgenres that exist within it. The first is depressive suicidal black metal (DSBM) and is differentiated by both musical and thematic differences. The main difference between the music of DSBM and the wider black metal subgenre is instrumentation. DSBM has a much higher number of bands that utilise piano interludes within their songs, which allows for the creation of a melancholy atmosphere that is less impactful when played on guitar. The guitars parts are also different though, as they alternate between arpeggio-driven contemplative instrumental sections and more chordal, often heavier sections that increase the intensity of the music, and therefore show more intensity from the musicians. Vocals are more commonly used in these heavier, chord-based sections, but can often be used as a juxtaposition by using distorted or wailing vocals over the typically calmer arpeggio sections. The dichotomy of these contrasting sections can be seen in this excerpt of Xasthur’s “Screaming at Forgotten Fears” (Xasthur, 2004) (see Fig.44):



The image shows a musical score for an electric guitar. It consists of four staves. The first staff is labeled 'Electric Guitar' and contains a melodic line in a key of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. Above the staff, a tempo marking indicates a quarter note equals 100. The second and third staves are labeled 'E. Gtr.' and contain complex, multi-chordal textures. The fourth staff is also labeled 'E. Gtr.' and continues the complex textures. The score includes various musical notations such as accidentals, stems, and beams.

Figure 44: Xasthur - "Screaming at Forgotten Fears" (Guitar - Verse & Chorus 0'00")

The song structures in DSBM are also atypical for black metal, as the musicians use very few different riffs, but use each for extended periods of time to give a somewhat hypnotic effect. This is punctuated by wailed or screamed vocals, which are more primal and less based in traditional techniques than the distorted vocals within the bulk of black metal. With these unconventional song structures, songs within DSBM tend to be longer than in most black metal, as shown by Xasthur's 15-minute track "Nocturnal Poisoning" (Xasthur, 2002) and Leviathan's "At the Door to the Tenth Sub Level of Suicide" (Leviathan, 2003), which is also 15 minutes long.

As the name suggests, DSBM is set apart from other forms of black metal by more than just musical differences. The changes in imagery are drastic, as the main themes move away from the Satanic and mythological, and bands instead focus on themes of isolation, suicide and misanthropy. The focus on self-destruction can be seen in the aforementioned *Grishjärta* (Nattramn, 2011), in which the DSBM vocalist Nattramn presents a series of poems written during a period in which he was institutionalised. In the poem "Animaliskt avfall", which translates to Animal Waste, he describes his desires to be killed and mutilated. The first line, "I demand a crackdown on Nattramn, NOW!", confirms that the rest of the poem describes his wishes for the destruction of his own body, which is presented in graphic detail. Throughout the course of this poem, he repeatedly disparages himself, which can be seen in the line "carve up my huge abdomen; meaty, florid and unnaturally obese", and this self-



hatred provides a window into the mindset of a person that could create such extreme and depressive music.

Another example of the extreme nature of DSBM can be seen in *One Man Metal* (2012), which shows three musicians that all create DSBM in isolation, not as part of a band or collaborative effort. Scott 'Malefic' Conner of Xasthur summarises his feelings on social interaction when he says "I don't talk to people. When I say I want to be left alone...I mean it". These feelings of isolation that the creators feel in their real lives are echoed through the despair present in their music, which can be seen in the lyrics of Xasthur's "Sigils Made of Flesh and Trees" (2003):

Blood clotted sewage possessed my veins and mind  
Poisonous indulgence  
Suicidal voids filled with fragments of waste showers  
Dreaming a tormented memory to slash my throat

These themes of suicide and isolation can also be seen in the album artwork of DSBM bands. These covers utilise the black metal convention of dark monochrome images, but contain content that glorifies themes of self-destruction and suicide. This can be seen in the covers of Shining's *V: Halmstad (Niklas angående Niklas)* (Shining, 2007) (see Fig.45) and *Zrcadlení melancholie* (2007) by Trist (2003) (see Fig.46).



Figure 45: Shining - V: Halmstad...



Figure 46: Trist - Zrcadlení melancholie

Although similar in tone and content, these covers are shown from different contexts. The confrontational tone of Shining's lyrics describes feelings of depression and suicidal

tendencies, but also contain murderous thoughts, wherein Kvarforth describes his hatred of all life, not only himself. In the English translation of “Längtar bort från mitt hjärta”, from the *V: Halmstad (Niklas angående Niklas)* album, Kvarforth shares these murderous intentions in explicit detail (Shining, 2007):

Unveil everything that gives you joy  
So that I can murder it all  
You misplaced cutting emotional wreck  
I want to kill you  
I will kill you  
I need to destroy you

These emotions can be seen in the cover for *V: Halmstad (Niklas angående Niklas)* (Shining, 2007), which does not show the self-destruction or suicide of Kvarforth, but instead shows the impending suicide of a woman that is in a position of subservience, as shown by camera angle. This hints at the possibility that the subject’s impending suicide may be forced, which may be a metaphor for the way in which Shining encourage suicide in their music and lyrics.

In contrast to this, the cover of *Zrcadlení melancholie* (Trist, 2007) includes graphic mutilation, but it is important to note that the mutilated arm on the cover may belong to the person through whose perspective we are viewing the scene. This is in line with Trist’s lyrics, as the English translation of “Poslední cesta” shows (Trist, 2007):

I scratch my body with a razor  
My blood belongs to the angels...  
I can’t stop  
Just further  
More blood

These lyrics show a more personal view than those of Shining, and the first-person account of the addictive nature of self-mutilation echoes the sentiment shown in the artwork. These varied approaches show the multiple ways that DSBM bands can utilise their themes whilst still remaining musically connected to their microgenre, which is in contrast with the other microgenre within black metal. National socialist black metal (NSBM) differs from DSBM, as it is separated from the wider black metal subgenre by subject matter alone. “National and cultural identities and mythologies are often important for the majority of black metal bands that are not connected to right-wing political movements” (Hagen, 2011, pg. 194), but NSBM

bands take these ideas to particular extremes of racism and national socialism. These themes can be seen in the lyrics of “Finnish Steel Storm” (2007) by Goatmoon (2002):

The shattered star of David will see no light again.  
The time of peace has reached its end,  
The Third Reich rises once again.  
The time of nigger sympathies is over,  
Our legion marches strong.

There are also racist themes in the artwork of NSBM bands, such as the use of blackface in the cover of Peste Noire’s (2001) *Peste Noire - Split - Peste Noire* (Peste Noire, 2018) (see Fig.47), and the use of the swastika and iron cross on the cover of *White Power for White People Fight* (2009) (see Fig.48).

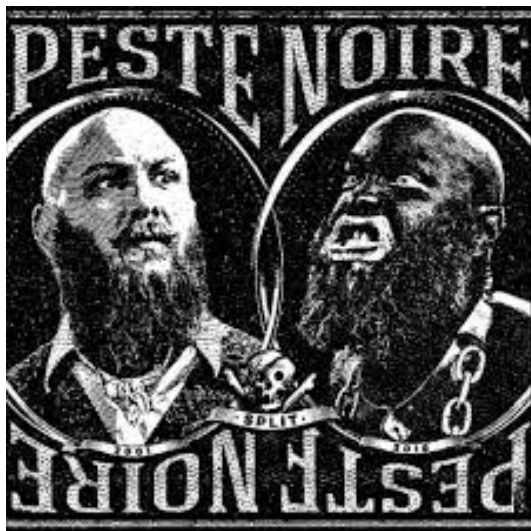


Figure 47: Peste Noire - Peste Noire - Split...



Figure 48: Wolfenhords - White Power for White...

As well as these national socialist themes, there is also wide use of Viking imagery, as Wotanorden (1996) show in their lyrics for “Sky Cloaked Wanderer”, in which they describe Odin as “the Aryan father” (Wotanorden, 2006). These ideas are reinforced in the lyrics for “What Once Was Shall Be Again” they describe the aftermath of Ragnarök, and state that “a new race of Aryan man will be reborn” (Wotanorden, 2016). This focus on Viking themes may take inspiration from the themes that are popular in the wider black metal subgenre, but the fact that these have been iterated on to become a statement of white supremacy shows the ways in which the ideology of the individual musicians can utilise new thematic extremes within a subgenre and create a new microgenre in the process.

## Doom Metal (1982-2018)

Whilst the music of Black Sabbath was profoundly influential on the NWOBHM subgenre, and other subgenres beyond that, the fuzz-based guitar tone and lower tempo riffs also became an inspiration for the later subgenre of doom metal.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Negative Emotion	58
The Occult	18
Introspection	16
Society	11
Drugs	10
Love	9
Fantasy	9
Life	9
Nature	8
Horror	6
Death	6
Religion	5
Esotericism	5
Christianity	5
Storytelling	5
Cosmic Horror	4
Mythology	4
Literature	3
Insanity	2
Humour	2
Anti-Religion	2
Satanism	2
Mysticism	2
Misanthropy	2
Darkness	2
Philosophy	2
Sci-Fi	2
Spirituality	2
Surrealism	1
Politics	1
Conspiracies	1
Suicide	1
Self-Destruction	1
Perversion	1
Gore	1
Erotica	1

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Psychedelia	1
Relationships	1

Table 7: Doom Metal Imagery

The overarching theme of doom metal is that of negative emotion. This encompasses feelings of despair, depression, melancholy and misanthropy. Almost 60% of doom metal bands made reference to negative emotions in their imagery, which is the most popular by a large margin. In comparison, themes of the occult were only used by 18% of the bands in my study, but this was still the second most popular theme.

The dominance of negative emotion as a theme in doom metal may be due to the propensity of the artists in the subgenre to create a feeling of melancholy through the instrumental alone, which is then reinforced by their lyrical themes. These themes can be seen in the lyrics of Candlemass' "Solitude" (1986):

Death is my sanctuary  
I seek it with pleasure  
Please let me die in solitude

The theme of negative emotion can be seen across all of doom metal, from the imagery of the subgenre’s progenitors to the imagery present in all of doom metal’s varied microgenres. In a subgenre that covers a wide range of stylistic elements in its music, imagery that focuses on negative emotion provides a thematic constant for the subgenre to exist around.

The music that is present in doom metal provides an aural foundation for the negative themes that are present within the imagery of the subgenre. The stylistic elements of doom metal - slow tempos, held chords and lumbering drum beats - can all be seen in the intro for “Die Alone” (2011) by A Pale Horse Named Death (2010) (see Fig.49):

The musical score for the intro of "Die Alone" is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Drum Set, Electric Guitar, Electric Guitar, and Bass Guitar. The second system includes staves for Dr., E. Gtr., E. Gtr., and Bass. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 88. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The drum set part features a slow, heavy beat with asterisks above the notes. The electric guitars play held chords and rhythmic patterns, while the bass guitar provides a steady, low-frequency accompaniment.

Figure 49: A Pale Horse Named Death - "Die Alone" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Intro at 0'35")

When this instrumental is paired with lyrics that contain allusions to depression and suicide, the imagery and music become thematically linked and reinforce the feelings that the musicians are attempting to evoke.

The melancholic themes within doom metal can also be seen across the large variety of microgenres that are present within the subgenre. Although there are different themes that are prevalent in each of these microgenres, such as themes of drug use in stoner metal and themes of love in gothic doom, negative emotion is the only theme that is present across the entire scope of doom metal *and* its microgenres.

As the second most used theme in doom metal, imagery that centres around the occult is another element of the subgenre that takes inspiration from the music of Black Sabbath. This can be seen in early and influential bands in the subgenre, including Cathedral, Pentagram and Saint Vitus (1981). This can be seen in the cover of Pentagram's *Relentless* (Pentagram, 1993) (see Fig.50), which depicts the pentagram symbol that gives the band its name, but with the inclusion of a goat's head that references the Sigil of Baphomet; the official symbol of the Church of Satan.



Figure 50: Pentagram - Relentless

Themes of the occult can also be seen in the lyrics of both older and modern bands, such as Cathedral, Pagan Altar (1978) and Demon Lung (2011). In the song “In the Wake of Armadeus” by Pagan Altar, the lyrics focus on Satan’s rise to power, which is brought about by the rituals of a coven of witches (Pagan Altar, 1998):

Circles of witches chanting his name,  
Calling the damned one to rise once again.  
The blood of the sacrifice darkens the floor,  
The gateway is open they've unlocked the door.

These themes are echoed in the lyrics of “Deny the Saviour” by Demon Lung, which uses a first-person perspective to call forth the rise of Satan (Demon Lung, 2015):

I call the lord of earth  
To curse this holy place  
Come forth from the abyss  
Strike down this sacred space

Although the albums that contained these 2 songs were released 17 years apart, the similarities are impossible to ignore. The subject matter, reverential tone, and glorification of evil all exist in both examples, and these similarities exist across a relatively long period of time. This can be used as evidence to show that the most popular themes that are present in the music of bands at the formation a subgenre can create semiotic conventions within it, and that these conventions are iterated on in the music of more modern bands within that subgenre.

As with many other subgenres, there are numerous outlying themes that do not conform to the thematic conventions of doom metal. These include psychedelia, gore, perversion, politics and conspiracies, which were used as themes by only a single band each. One of the most interesting examples of outside themes being used in the subgenre is Count Raven (1989), a band whose imagery accounts for the single use of both politics and conspiracies in doom metal. In their debut full-length album *Storm Warning* (Count Raven, 1990), the band took a notably confrontational approach to their lyrical themes, which can be seen in their

judgement of mainstream rock music on the track “In the Name of Rock ‘n’ Roll” (Count Raven, 1990):

Ugly bastard, you think you look good  
But there are things you never understood  
With lipstick and mascara in your hand  
Bet you're not even sure you're a man

Although these sentiments were accepted in 1990, when the album was released, they would be deemed as closed-minded within a modern society that places a high value on the free expression of personal identity. In addition, they later describe mainstream rock musicians as “the reason why” the “world’s a mess”, which implies that these musicians are on the same level of responsibility as the corrupt politicians that they criticise in songs such as “A Devastating Age” (Count Raven, 1990) and “Social Warfare” (Count Raven, 1990). These become problematic judgements, that are further compounded by the conspiracy theories that are included on the *High on Infinity* (Raven, 1993) album. These theories include freemason involvement in the murder of Mary Kelly, the existence of the ‘metropolitan 400’, and the role of the FBI in the fire that resulted from the Waco siege in 1993.

In “The Madman from Waco”, the band discuss the life of David Koresh, the leader of a religious cult called the Branch Davidians. As the leader of this cult, Koresh was accused of the sexual abuse of a child (Myers, 1995), but Count Raven only described him as a “young man” that started “a revolution” and “got carried away” (Count Raven, 1993). This support ties in with the conservative Christian views presented in the imagery of Count Raven, and as their themes are outliers from the doom metal subgenre, they are also one of the few right-wing bands in the wider metal genre. Most of the bands that reference socio-political themes in their output do so from a liberal stance that criticise the warmongering and religious zealotry of the ruling classes, but the stance of Count Raven is different. Whilst the band criticise the upper class and their actions, they do so from a position of Christian judgment, wherein they attack supposed-religious leaders for their actions, and state that these actions are not befitting of a person who professes to be religious. These themes of ‘incorrect’ Christianity imply a more intense Christian faith, which ties in to their defence of the Branch Davidians and their condemnation of government and abortion.



As with the previous subgenres, there is a minority of bands within doom metal that focus their imagery on Christianity. These include bands from a wide time period, such as Trouble (1979), who released their debut album in 1980, and Pylon (2002), who released their debut in 2004. Trouble used their music as a tool to preach their faith and as a way to condemn the occult themes that were already rife in the metal genre in 1980. This tone is more explicitly religious than other Christian bands that I have discussed, as Trouble create a musical accompaniment to Psalm 9 on their on their song of the same name (Trouble, 1984):

I will praise thee, O Lord  
I will sing praise in thy name  
Don't forget the cry of the humble  
Have mercy on me

These reverential lyrics exist alongside lyrics that warn against the wiles of the devil, as in the songs "The Tempter" (Trouble, 1984) and "Revelation (Life or Death)" (Trouble, 1984). In contrast, Pylon utilise themes of Christianity from the perspective of testimony, as they give accounts of various points in their life where they needed the support of their faith, but still felt their own inadequacies as Christians. This can be most easily observed in "Scarred", in which Pylon describe their failings and following redemption from God, but also make it known that God's grace does not erase their previous struggles, which continue be present in their metaphorical scars (Pylon, 2004):

A cruel time of pain and fears  
Strange nights with drugs and tears  
Took light and God, drowned me in blood

I tried it all to forget you  
I am branded and I am marred  
You'd take my heart, I can't let you  
And all this hurt just doesn't heal - I am scarred

Whilst they also criticise the conventional themes of the doom subgenre, it seems that the Christian themes within the imagery of these bands are used as a way to play a style of music that they enjoy, whilst also using themes that are more fitting for their personal ideologies and principles.

As with eight out of the 10 subgenres in my research, doom metal has various microgenres that can be linked back to the main stylistic elements of the subgenre. These five microgenres are gothic doom, death-doom, funeral doom, sludge and stoner metal.

Gothic doom is a microgenre that incorporates stylistic elements like clean guitar passages and synths from gothic rock bands such as The Cure (1978) and Fields of the Nephilim (1984), into doom metal. The most notable example of this fusion is in the music of Type O Negative, whose music also included the low crooning of vocalist Peter Steele. The imagery of Type O Negative is also in keeping with the themes of gothic rock, utilising themes of love (specifically in the context of Peter Steele's relationships) and darkness, but with a humorous perspective that became a signature of the band. The themes of love that had been lifted from gothic rock were utilised by multiple bands in the gothic doom microgenre, including A Day in Venice (2013), who used love as their sole main theme. This gothic presentation of love can be seen on their track "As the Ship Docks" (A Day in Venice, 2014):

Her eyes meet his wonder  
Nothing matters in his arms  
Her lips are thunder  
A very last goodbye

These lyrics utilise the melancholic and grandiose metaphorical style of gothic rock, which combine with the pseudo-operatic style of the vocal and the mixture of clean and fuzz-laden guitar riffs to create a fusion that is more grandiose than either of the two preceding subgenres. The melancholic and poetic nature of the lyrics can be traced back to genre-originators and direct predecessors of doom metal, Black Sabbath. In the liner notes of their debut album, the following poem was included (Black Sabbath, 1970):

Still falls the rain, the veils of darkness shroud the blackened trees, which contorted by some unseen violence, shed their tired leaves, and bend their boughs towards a grey earth of severed bird wings. among the grasses, poppies bleed before a gesticulating death, and young rabbits, born dead in traps, stand motionless, as though guarding the silence that surrounds and threatens to engulf all those that would listen. Mute birds, tired of repeating yesterday's terrors, huddle together in the recesses of dark corners, heads turned from the dead, black swan that floats upturned in a small pool in the hollow. there emerges from this pool a faint sensual mist, that traces its way upwards to caress the chipped feet of the headless martyr's statue, whose only achievement was to die to soon, and

who couldn't wait to lose. the cataract of darkness form fully, the long black night begins, yet still, by the lake a young girl waits, unseeing she believes herself unseen, she smiles, faintly at the distant tolling bell, and the still falling rain.

This poem evokes similar negative emotions to those present across the gamut of doom metal, but the imagery and melancholic language used are clearly reminiscent of the imagery, both in art and lyric, used specifically in gothic doom.



Figure 51: 7th Moon - Alter Alma



Figure 52: Weeping Silence - Theatre of Life

The gothic influence on this type of metal can also be seen in the artwork of gothic doom bands, as in the album covers for *Alter Alma* (2002) by 7<sup>th</sup> Moon (1996) (see Fig.51), and *Theatre of Life* (2011) by Weeping Silence (1995) (see Fig.52). The images of angels, melancholic women and gothic architecture can be seen in the art of other metal bands that are inspired by gothic imagery, such as Nightwish, who use a similar colour palette and subject in the cover of their album *Oceanborn* (Nightwish, 1998) (see Fig.53).



Figure 53: Nightwish - Oceanborn

These similarities in both subject matter and palette show that the gothic imagery that inspires the themes present in the artwork of musicians can transcend subgenres, as Nightwish belong to the newer subgenre of power metal; more specifically the symphonic metal microgenre. There are also hints that these influences may transcend artistic media, as the artwork for *Theatre of Life* (Weeping Silence, 2011) shows inspiration from the well-known *Favole* series by Victoria Frances.

This gothic imagery is also present across other doom microgenres, including the more aggressive music of death-doom, which takes a large amount of musical inspiration from the death metal subgenre. These death metal influences include the use of double-kick drumming, riffs that reference the aggression of death metal, and - most importantly - distorted vocals. When these elements are added to the more ethereal elements of the doom metal subgenre, such as the inclusion of synthesizers, slower tempos and long, drawn-out song structures, the music that is created is simultaneously more aggressive than doom metal, and more contemplative than death metal. This fusion of subgenres can be heard working effectively on the sole LP release from Disembowelment (1989), *Transcendence into the Peripheral* (Disembowelment, 1993).

The first track on the album, “The Tree of Life and Death” (Disembowelment, 1993), contains a multitude of stylistic traits from both death metal and doom metal, and they are blended in such a way that they create various atmospheres within a single song. The track begins with a typically frantic cacophony of blastbeats and death metal riffs, which echoes the early work of some influential death metal bands. As *Transcendence into the Peripheral* was released in 1993, bands like Morbid Angel and Cannibal Corpse had already set the standard for the death metal of that era, and this can be seen in the stylistic elements that were brought into this intro. However, whilst the style of the composition at the start of the track is typical of death metal, the production choices are more reminiscent of doom metal style. The guitar, whilst heavily distorted, is much darker in tone than those used in death metal, which are much more focused in the upper-mid frequency range. This darker tone is reminiscent of the early

albums of the death metal band Autopsy, who are well known for their influence on the death-doom microgenre.

As *Transcendence into the Peripheral* (Disembowelment, 1993) moves forward from the aggressive opening, more and more doom metal traits begin to emerge, as a drawn out, down-tempo section in “The Tree of Life and Death” demonstrates. These contrasting sections show the breadth of musical diversity that is explored within this microgenre, whilst also staying within the realms of doom metal as a whole. This adherence to doom metal convention can also be seen in the imagery of *Disembowelment*, as the lyrics from the track “Nightside of Eden” show (Disembowelment, 1993):

No one feels the pain  
The pain deep inside that I feel  
No one sheds the tears  
The tears that lay down within me

In contrast to their violent and aggressive band name, the lyrics present in the songs of *Disembowelment* are much more contemplative, introspective and emotional, as they explore feelings of depression and powerlessness. The language used also evokes the gothic descriptions in the music of influential doom metal bands like Cathedral. The lyrics “in flight we persevere into the mists of ivory plains,” and “the bestowing tranquillity of iridescent spectrum,” (Disembowelment, 1993) from the track “Your Prophetic Throne of Ivory” are poetic in a way that is entirely absent in the death metal subgenre, but is more evocative of the gothic thematic tendencies present in the imagery of doom metal bands.

The album artwork of death-doom is also more rooted in the imagery of doom metal than death metal, forgoing the gore and illustrative style of death metal covers in favour of a more understated image that references the despair of the music and lyrics. Early doom bands like Candlemass utilised this minimal style of imagery in the cover of their debut album *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus* (Candlemass, 1986) (see Fig.54), and the influence of this presentation can be seen in the cover of *My Dying Bride's Turn Loose the Swans* (My Dying Bride, 1993) (see Fig.55).

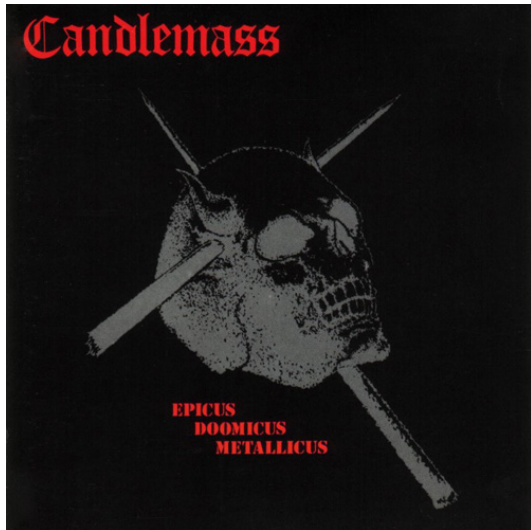


Figure 54: Candlemass - Epicus Doomicus Metallicus



Figure 55: My Dying Bride - Turn Loose the Swans

In both instances, the single image is centred between the band logo and album title, but the image in question is neither graphic nor explicit, which is in contrast to the bulk of metal albums in the era of these two releases. Whilst the content of the two album covers is different, the composition and style show the existence of established conventions within the subgenre.

After death-doom bands had introduced distorted vocals into the doom metal subgenre, funeral doom musicians applied them to doom metal that was inspired by funeral dirge music, creating a dense, melancholy, heavy form of doom metal in the process.

The main element that sets apart funeral doom from the rest of the doom metal subgenre is its unrelenting slowness, although this does not approach the extreme slowness of drone bands like Sunn O))) (1998). Furthermore, there are also no cacophonous sections that act as a payoff to the slow build of a doomier, drawn-out instrumental section, as there are in death-doom. The sense of dread and gradual progression through a funeral doom track is omnipresent in the microgenre, and the music only grows in atmosphere and volume, rather than in speed and intensity. With the pace of funeral doom being so glacial, the songs can also become very long, with many tracks exceeding 10 minutes in length. The imagery of funeral doom is still rooted in the negative emotion present in the themes of most doom metal bands, which can be seen in the lyrics of "Corridors of Desolation" (2007) by Colosseum (2006):

Lying above myself,  
Gazing at my body,  
Ravage of empty self,  
Pale soulless embrace.

However, in the funeral doom microgenre, there is also a predilection toward themes of cosmic horror. Only four bands in all of doom metal made reference to cosmic horror in their imagery, which makes the theme a very small minority in the wider subgenre, but three of these bands belong to the funeral doom microgenre. As the sample size for this microgenre was 10 bands, the use of that theme within the imagery of three of these bands becomes much more noteworthy. In the case of Catacombs (2000) in particular, cosmic horror is the only theme present in their imagery, as the sole LP from the band is a concept album that is centred around HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos; *In the Depths of R'lyeh* (Catacombs, 2006). This singular focus can be seen in the artwork for the album, which depicts an alien scene that is entirely dominated by the imposing figure of Cthulhu (see Fig.56).



Figure 56: Catacombs - *In the Depths...*

As with the death metal elements that have been brought into the doom metal subgenre, there have been other subgenres that have had an influence on microgenres within doom metal. One of these is hardcore punk, which was fused with doom metal by bands like Crowbar (1990), Eyehategod (1988) and High on Fire (1998) to create sludge metal.

The music of sludge combines elements from both doom metal and hardcore punk. These include slow tempos (with occasional breakouts into fast-paced punk sections), shouted or distorted vocals that take inspiration from punk, and slow, heavy, doom metal-esque drumming. The production of sludge mostly fits with the convention of doom metal, but there are some differences, including the prominence of the bass, which is lightly distorted, with a tight low end that echoes the bass production in hardcore punk recordings. Although the drumming in sludge tends to be similar to most other doom metal drumming, d-beats and double kick are present in the faster sections that are more reminiscent of punk. The guitar is also slightly modified, as the fuzz style of distortion is



still present, but in a less intense form, which allows the musicians to create the oppressive atmosphere of doom without sacrificing the aggression needed for more punk-inspired riffs.

The imagery of sludge is in keeping with the negative emotions present across all doom metal, but with a venomous bite of anger that is absent in more traditional doom imagery. The ideologies of hardcore punk, including aggression, malcontent and anger are well-represented in the lyrics of formative sludge bands like Crowbar, as seen on their track “A Breed Apart” (Crowbar, 1991):

Your Ignorance alone is enough to make me hate you  
Pathetic  
Helpless fool  
Your life ain't worth a dime

These transgressive themes are also shown in the artwork for both Acid Bath (1991) albums, as *When the Kite String Pops* (Acid Bath, 1994) includes a painting by the infamous serial killer John Wayne Gacy, and *Paegan Terrorism Tactics* (Acid Bath, 1996) includes a painting by the controversial euthanasia proponent Jack Kevorkian. These album covers are not graphic in the same way as most death metal album covers are, but have an underlying sense of menace, which can be attributed to their respective artists.

This is the only microgenre within doom metal to take influences from hardcore punk, but it is clear to see that the aggression and intensity of the subgenre has left its mark on much of metal, including the formation of multiple subgenres and microgenres, such as metalcore, grindcore, and crossover thrash.

The last microgenre within doom metal is stoner doom, which originally began as a way to categorize doom bands that focused on themes of drug use in their imagery, but has evolved into a musically distinct doom metal microgenre. Whilst the tempo of stoner doom is slow in the same way as much of the music in the doom metal subgenre, the music is heavier and denser than the rest of traditional doom metal. The guitars in particular are much more laden with fuzz effects than formative doom bands like Pentagram and Saint Vitus, and the riffs themselves are played for longer, which gives a more hypnotic element to the composition.



To accentuate this effect, stoner doom songs are often very long, with the most extreme being the title track from *Dopesmoker* (2003) by Sleep (1990), which lasts over 63 minutes.

As referred to in the name of the microgenre, most of the imagery within stoner doom is centred around the glorification of drug use, specifically the use of marijuana, but there were two stoner doom bands in my research - The Sword (2003) and Windhand (2008) - that did not discuss drug use in their lyrics. However, these were both modern bands, and they had to be included in the stoner doom genre by virtue of their adherence to musical conventions of the microgenre that had been codified by bands like Electric Wizard (1993) and Kyuss (1991). Both The Sword and Windhand did adhere to the wider doom metal conventions in their imagery though, by including references to literature and the occult.

These bands *are* outliers within the stoner doom microgenre though, as the other 8 bands use drugs as one of their main themes, even insofar as the naming of the band in cases like Bongripper (2005) and Bongzilla (1995). On their track "Sacred Smoke", Bongzilla describe drug use in a uniquely reverential and ritualistic way, using words like "sacred" and "holy" to speak of marijuana in the same way that a religious person may revere their chosen deity (Bongzilla, 1999):

There they sit at the foot of the mountain  
Taking hits of the sacred smoke  
Fire rips at their lungs  
Holy mountain take us away

In contrast to this glorification, they speak of harder drugs in a derogatory and negative sense, describing "all the junkies with needles in their arms", lying "dead in a heap" (Bongzilla, 1999), which provides evidence of the musician's bias for marijuana, suggesting that their imagery is based on a real appreciation of the drug in question. The musician's reverence for marijuana can also be seen on the cover for *Gateway* (Bongzilla, 2002) (see Fig.57), which depicts a drug-using deity. This echoes the lyrics that equate marijuana as a gateway to God or an entity to be loved.



Figure 57: Bongzilla - Gateway

This reverential tone for marijuana is also echoed in the lyrics for Sleep's "Dopesmoker", which seems to centre around a biblical tale of wandering in the desert, but with a specific focus on the marijuana that becomes the god they worship through the course of the album. This can be seen clearly in a verse that comes later in the song, and describes the act of leaving an earthly plane through the act of smoking (Sleep, 2003):

The molten fire flowed up toward Zion  
Flight of the Nazarene to seek the Cherubim  
Rides out believer with the spliff aflame  
Marijuanaut escapes earth to cultivate

Through all the various microgenres, influences and inspirations present in the expansive subgenre of doom metal, it is clear to see the influence of the early work of Black Sabbath, and through these lines of influence, connections can be drawn through a subgenre that spans almost as much time as the entire metal genre. Through the formation, evolution and fragmentation of subgenres like thrash metal, black metal and metalcore, Black Sabbath's influence is the constant across all doom metal, and this enduring benchmark creates a backdrop for all metal to innovate and combine to create new and ground-breaking iterations of a 50-year-old genre.

## Power Metal (1984-2015)

After the formation of thrash metal in the United States and Germany, there were bands that took the speed and virtuosity of this new style and combined it with the epic atmosphere and rich harmonies of NWoBHM and traditional heavy metal like Judas Priest, Manowar (1980) and Rainbow to create a more positive sounding subgenre. When compared to the other emergent subgenres of the period, like death metal and black metal, it is clear to see the more whimsical nature of power metal in both music and imagery.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
<b>Fantasy</b>	66
<b>Mythology</b>	15
<b>History</b>	15
<b>Life</b>	12
<b>Society</b>	11
<b>Introspection</b>	8
<b>Sci-Fi</b>	8
<b>Love</b>	7
<b>Literature</b>	6
<b>Horror</b>	6
<b>War</b>	6
<b>Religion</b>	5
<b>Christianity</b>	4
<b>Emotion</b>	4
<b>Heavy Metal</b>	3
<b>Humour</b>	3
<b>Philosophy</b>	2
<b>Nature</b>	2
<b>Conspiracies</b>	1
<b>Pirates</b>	1
<b>Astronomy</b>	1
<b>Storytelling</b>	1
<b>Anti-Religion</b>	1
<b>Sexuality</b>	1
<b>Science</b>	1
<b>The Occult</b>	1

Table 8: Power Metal Imagery

As it has been included as a main theme by two thirds of the power metal bands, fantasy is the clear overarching theme for the subgenre. The roots of this are often attributed to the inspiration that power metal bands took from the imagery present in the lyrics written by Ronnie James Dio of Rainbow, Black Sabbath and Dio. Dio was among the first metal lyricists to use themes of fantasy in his lyrics, notably in the lyrics for “Stargazer” (1976):

All eyes see the figure of the wizard  
 As he climbs to the top of the world  
 No sound, as he falls instead of rising  
 Time standing still, then there's blood on the sand  
 Oh I see his face!

Fantasy was present as a theme in power metal from its earliest iterations. Whilst the lyrical themes were more rooted in the emotions and accounts of real-life that

were popular in the music of NWoBHM, the album cover of Helloween’s influential album

*Keeper of the Seven Keys Part I* (Helloween, 1987) (see Fig.58) is much more related to themes of fantasy in terms of both content and style. This illustrative style of album cover has become a convention that can be observed in even the most modern power metal. There are 27 years between the release of *Keeper of the Seven Keys Part I* and *Tales of Ancient Prophecies* (Twilight Force, 2014) (see Fig.59), which is the debut album of one of the most modern power metal bands in my research, Twilight Force (2011), but the covers of both albums are similar in style and palette.



Figure 58: Helloween - Keeper of the Seven Keys...



Figure 59: Twilight Force - Tales of Ancient Prophecies

The similarities between these two covers show a thematic consistency that exists through the entire history of the subgenre, which can be seen across the wide spectrum of power metal bands. Other examples of covers in this style include *The Metal Opera Pt. II* (2002) by Avantasia (2000), *Escape from Twilight* (2007) by Emerald Sun (2000) and *Legendary Tales* (1997) by Rhapsody of Fire (1995). As power metal can be similar in instrumental style to other genres, such as thrash in the case of Iced Earth (1988) or traditional heavy metal in the case of Manilla Road (1977), the imagery becomes an important aspect when considering the categorisation of these bands, and the constant presence of these themes help to reinforce the boundaries between power metal and other similar styles.

Alongside these similarities, there are concrete differences between the subgenres. The differences between thrash metal and power metal are of particular importance because the two subgenres were formed around the same time, and both have a focus on speed and

virtuosity. However, as thrash metal riffs are notable for their rapid harmonic changes that include multiple chord changes per bar, the harmonic changes in power metal riffs are much slower, as the chords change every one or two measures. The chord progressions also create differences between the two subgenres, as there is more wide use of major keys in power metal, which gives a triumphant tone to the music that fits with the fantastical themes. This is in direct contrast to the riffs of thrash metal, which usually utilise modal or minor tonalities.

Whilst these differences are enough to establish power metal as a separate subgenre, more casual listeners could still confuse the two when presented with the instrumental alone. The two subgenres become much easier to categorise when the vocals and imagery are included though, as the vocals are cleaner, higher, and are a vehicle for lyrical themes that are much more rooted in fantasy, as opposed to the politically charged, violent lyrics of thrash metal. When combined with these lyrical themes, the 'swords and sorcery' tone of power metal artwork creates a subgenre that is codifiable, and thus easily distinguishable from other subgenres of the time.

The core theme of fantasy within power metal also allows for depictions of war that are more glorifying in tone, as opposed to the criticism present in the lyrics of chronological peers like thrash metal and grindcore. The left-leaning anti-war sentiment that is present in most heavy metal is rooted in hardcore punk, and the imagery of this subgenre was a direct reaction to the conservative politics of the 1980s, under the rule of Ronald Reagan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. As this anti-establishment, anti-war attitude was a large part of the music that inspired some of the earliest iterations of extreme metal, it has endured as the generally accepted political and social stance across the metal genre's entire spectrum, apart from in small microgenres such as NSBM.

However, as anti-war sentiment is prevalent in subgenres and microgenres that focus on realistic themes in their imagery, themes of fantasy create new standards of what is acceptable and conventional in the imagery of metal. As themes of fantasy are rooted in literature, film and role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons, the conventions of their respective settings inform the themes of fantasy within subgenres like power metal and folk metal. Instances of large-scale battles are one of the central pillars of fantasy literature, and

are present in the works of renowned fantasy writers like JRR Tolkien, George RR Martin and Robert Jordan. These themes are also present across the history of power metal, and have been referenced in songs such as Helloween's "Keeper of the Seven Keys" (Helloween, 1988) and Crystallion's (2003) "Guardians of the Sunrise" (Crystallion, 2006), which are separated by 18 years.

Notably, the imagery of Sabaton (1999) is entirely focused on war, but in a more historical sense, as they make reference to various wars across history, including medieval battles, ancient battles and the two World Wars. The band do not often present these themes with any personal opinion, but in a more factual manner, with no emphasis on which side of the war was right or wrong. They often include accounts of famous individuals, such as Simo Häyhä on "White Death" (Sabaton, 2010), Leslie Allen on "The Ballad of Bull" (Sabaton, 2014) and Witold Pilecki on "Inmate 4859" (Sabaton, 2014).

With these themes of fantasy and war, there are also themes of brotherhood and camaraderie that can be observed in the imagery of power metal. These are often referenced through the other two aforementioned themes, so I did not treat them as a separate theme in my table, but it is important to note the emphasis that is placed on belonging and acceptance in the power metal subgenre. This can be seen in the in the music of Hammerfall, as shown in the lyrics of "Heeding the Call" (Hammerfall, 1998):

Heeding the call, one and for all  
Never surrender, with glory we'll fall  
Brothers unite, let's stand up and fight  
Fulfilling our fate, we are heeding the call

The theme of brotherhood is also present in the live performances of power metal. The atmosphere of a live performance can vary drastically between metal subgenres; black metal performances can be theatrical with the use of corpse-paint, animal carcasses and pseudo-religious imagery that creates an atmosphere of a blasphemous religious ceremony. In contrast to this, death metal concerts are often much less theatrical, featuring less stage design, with more of a focus on the music being presented, without a visual representation. Even in this minimalist setting, the musicians are still in a form of character, as shown by the stage presence of George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher of Cannibal Corpse. In interviews, Fisher

presents himself as a soft-spoken, eloquent musician, but in live setting, he is much more hostile and antagonistic, especially when addressing the audience, as this persona is more suited to the violent and explicit themes present in the lyrics he is singing, as well as the intensity of the music being played. However, power metal performances are usually different from this, and many have a much more positive atmosphere as a whole. There is a focus on camaraderie and shared experience that contrasts with the violent, blasphemous or horror-centric themes showcased at performances from other metal subgenres.

As with the other subgenres, there are themes that are used by power metal bands that are unconventional within the subgenre. In power metal, the themes that were used by a single band each included the occult, anti-religion and astronomy. The use of astronomy as a theme within Dragonland's (1999) *Astronomy* (Dragonland, 2006) is a startling departure from conventional use of fantasy that provided the core of the band's imagery on their first three albums. Dragonland have utilised the fantasy literature of Susan Fletcher's *Dragon Chronicles* to inspire their imagery in the bulk of their output, but the lyrics present in *Astronomy* seem to lack an exterior influence, and are more of an introspective view into the astronomical interests of lyricist Olof Mörck. This change is even more jarring when compared with the next album that they released, *Under the Grey Banner* (Dragonland, 2011). As the sole release from the band since *Astronomy*, it marked a return to imagery that is connected to *The Dragon Chronicles*, which gives *Astronomy* the identity of an anomalous release among both the band's other output, and the power metal genre as a whole.

There are references to Christianity within the imagery of four power metal bands, and Christianity is the central theme of all four bands, which is similar to the Christian bands in other subgenres. Theocracy (2002) use their faith in God as an iteration of the power fantasies that are central to the power metal subgenre, and their track "Ichthus" shows their unwavering faith in the face of persecution (Theocracy, 2003):

Heaven's sons stand as one  
As believers in the blood of Christ  
Even in death we have true life

The theme of brotherhood that is present across the range of power metal is also present in Theocracy's lyrics, but through the lens of shared religious belief, rather than a shared experience, struggle or cultural identity.

In contrast to this, the imagery of Narnia (1996) is much more reverential, and the lyrics can more easily be compared with hymns of praise and worship in mainstream religious music. Whilst the band's artwork is dominated by depictions of Aslan from the eponymous *Chronicles of Narnia* book saga, the lyrics praise God in an overtly reverential way; foregoing metaphorical and symbolic language in favour of direct descriptions of their beliefs and worship of their deity. This similarity to hymns can be seen most vividly in the lyrics for "Heavenly Love", from their debut album *Awakening* (Narnia, 1997):

I can't live without your love  
Lord, you give me all that I need

The reverence for God is not only visible in Narnia's lyrics though, as the band take their name from *The Chronicles of Narnia* saga by CS Lewis, a notable Christian apologist, who wrote the saga as a way to introduce children to themes of Christianity. The figure of Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a metaphorical depiction of Christ, both in temperament and deed, and it seems to be a conscious decision by the band to create album covers in the illustrative style that fits within the conventions of power metal, but with constant reference to the beliefs that inspire their lyrics.

There are more specific styles within the range of power metal, such as the differences between European power metal and American power metal, but as these styles are both presented as power metal, there is only a single notable microgenre. In 1997, both Rhapsody of Fire and Nightwish released albums that combined power metal with classical music and an operatic vocal delivery, and this combination has come to be known as symphonic metal. The imagery within symphonic metal does not vary from the conventions of the wider power metal subgenre, but the differences within instrumentation, song structure and atmosphere provide the evidence that is needed to categorise symphonic metal as a distinct microgenre.



The instrumentation within symphonic metal can vary, but the main orchestral elements used include stringed instruments and select wind instruments, such as flute. These can appear both alongside more traditional metal instruments like guitar and drums, or separately in classical interludes and melodic passages. The orchestral elements are often implemented through the use of synthesizers, but the most financially successful bands can use full orchestras as part of their recording process, as in *Imaginaerum* (Nightwish, 2011), which often resembled a film score in its completed state. The song structures within Nightwish's music are often similarly large in scope, as their 14-minute track "The Poet and the Pendulum" (Nightwish, 2007) contains multiple movements, as opposed to the anthemic verse/chorus structure that is popular within power metal.

Symphonic metal has also inspired musicians within other genres to apply symphonic elements to their music, as shown in the music of Fleshgod Apocalypse (2007), who are described as symphonic death metal, and Dimmu Borgir, who are one of the primary symphonic black metal bands. This far-reaching influence shows musical connections between multiple distinct subgenres, and common tendencies between musicians of differing extreme styles, and these interactions between different metal subgenres create further complexity through time as the web of metal evolves.

## Metalcore (1994-2016)

As thrash metal and hardcore punk were combined to create crossover thrash in the 1980s, hardcore punk was also used to create further musical innovation in the 1990s, with the creation of metalcore. Although the codified conventions of the genre were not brought to fruition until the 2000s, the foundations of what would come to be known as metalcore were certainly visible in the music of mid-1990s bands like Zao (1993) and Hatebreed (1994).

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Life	51
Personal Issues	45
Society	40
Relationships	39
Christianity	12
Death	10
Politics	10
Anger	10
Introspection	9
Emotion	9
Anti-Religion	6
Misanthropy	2
Horror	2
Racism	1
White Nationalism	1
War	1
Rock 'n' Roll Lifestyle	1
Mental Issues	1
Depression	1
Environmentalism	1
Gore	1
Sexual Violence	1
Paedophilia	1
Sci-Fi	1
Positivity	1

Table 9: Metalcore Imagery

Whilst also taking instrumental influences from the melodic death metal and 'groove' metal of the early 1990s, such as At The Gates, Soilwork and Pantera, it seems that the lyrical content of metalcore is rooted in the realism and combative introspection of hardcore punk. As such, just over half of all the bands in this subgenre made reference to real life experience in their imagery, with similarly high numbers referencing personal issues, their view on society, and experiences with personal relationships.

This focus on realism and personal experience is a notable departure from the fictional themes of horror and gore in death metal, or the satanic imagery and theatrical stage wear of black metal. This allowed a new generation of teenage consumers to relate to bands that were discussing similar experiences to their own, and metalcore

became the most popular style of metal for the next decade.

The realism within the imagery of metalcore can be seen from its earliest iterations. The song “Before Dishonor” by Hatebreed appeared on their debut full-length album *Satisfaction is the Death of Desire* (Hatebreed, 1997). This was 3 years before the release of the debut from subgenre innovators Killswitch Engage, and 4 years before the release of *As I Lay Dying’s* debut, a band who truly codified the conventions of the metalcore going forward. However, the main elements of metalcore are still present, including harsh vocals, faster verses (centred around pedal-note riffs) that move into slower, anthemic choruses, and a slower breakdown section that is heavier than the rest of the song. The realistic lyrics were also present, as this song discusses the musician’s need to create their own life path; resisting outside pressure from a society that made them feel oppressed and downtrodden (Hatebreed, 1997):

I'll choose my own destiny  
And I'll never let anyone take away what I hold so true  
I won't live in denial  
And I won't turn the other cheek

This sentiment has been echoed on more recent releases, on songs like “Bow Down” by I Prevail (2013), a track that defiantly defends the band’s creative freedom against the pressures of the controlling music industry (Prevail, 2019):

You will never know, it's the price I pay  
Look into my eyes, we are not the same...  
'Cause I'm in control, and you'll know my name  
'Cause I gave my life, gave it everything

These similar sentiments show the evolution of conventions within the metalcore subgenre, as the defiance shown on “Before Dishonor” (Hatebreed, 1997), the need to have control over one’s life, has evolved into a need to have control over one’s career and creative output. There are also many other personal struggles that have created inspiration for metalcore lyrics including failed relationships (Bullet for my Valentine - “Tears Don’t Fall” [2005]), anger (Chimaira [1998] - “Pure Hatred” [2003]) and mental health (The Amity Affliction [2003] - “All Fucked Up” [2016]).

The most overt way that metalcore musicians present themes of realism and personal experience is through their lyrics, which are often much more audible than those in other metal genres, but the artwork within metalcore is more realistic in style than the artwork in

styles like death metal or power metal. There are still examples of illustrative artwork in metalcore album covers, as in *Threads of Life* (Shadows Fall, 2007) (see Fig.60), but most are more photographic in nature, presenting themes of struggle and depression, as in Asking Alexandria's (2006) *Reckless & Relentless* (2011) (see Fig.61).



Figure 60: Shadows Fall - Threads of Life

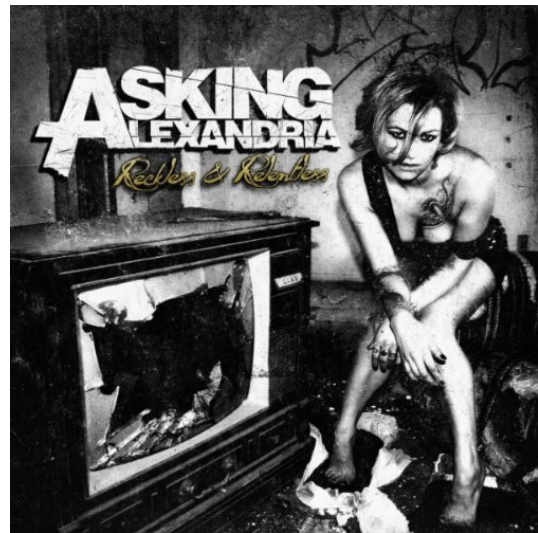


Figure 61: Asking Alexandria - Reckless and Relentless

This realism in artwork reinforces the way in which life experience is described within the lyrics, and bands that bring more of a hardcore punk approach to their music tend to have more realistic covers, whilst bands that have a more metallic approach to their music utilise a more illustrative style to their artwork.

When compared with other subgenres, metalcore musicians place a much larger focus on themes of Christianity, which can be attributed to the main period of metalcore's popularity and the way in which it was distributed. As metalcore moved toward the height of its popularity in the mid-2000s, online marketing and distribution was becoming a viable way for smaller acts to reach a larger audience on platforms like MySpace, and this allowed bands to have a reach outside of their local 'scene'. Before the advent of digital distribution, there were specific geographical locations that were synonymous with a certain subgenre, such as the San Francisco Bay Area for thrash metal, Tampa for death metal, and Gothenburg for melodic death metal. Outside of these localised hotspots, it was much less likely for prospective audiences to hear new music, unless they subscribed to mail-order magazines or took part in

tape-trading, so teenagers growing up in the most religious parts of America would have little access to the extremes of death or black metal.

As digital distribution grew, however, new audiences were exposed to metal music, especially the new styles created by bands like Killswitch Engage and As I Lay Dying. This allowed young musicians with a religious upbringing in 'bible-belt' America to create music that appealed to them, but with a Christian message. These themes were presented very overtly by bands like For Today (2005), on their song "Infantry" (2008):

This world will do anything  
To release its demons (at all costs)  
We'll fight back with all we have  
Making a difference for our God

As well as the lyrical content, Christian metalcore musicians show their religious inspirations through their artwork. One of the more overt examples can be seen on the cover for *Truth and Purpose* (2012) by I, The Breather (2009) (see Fig.62):

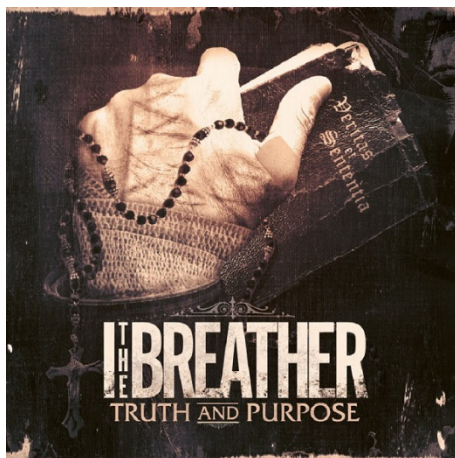


Figure 62: I, The Breather - Truth and Purpose

This cover depicts a book, implied to be a bible, labelled with the Latin translation for truth and purpose, which shows what the bible means to the band themselves. The desperation with which the figure holds onto the book in question, the way in which the book seems to be well-read, and the scarred and injured condition of the hand may represent the lifeline that the bible's truth and purpose gives to the musicians in times of hardship.

This is also reinforced by the inclusion of the rosary, which is positioned in a way that covers the hardship and scars on the hand, taking focus from the suffering to place it onto the grace of God.

Although Christianity is much more thoroughly represented within metalcore than in other subgenres, there are still themes that are outliers within metalcore, such as those of white nationalism, war and environmentalism. The overtly racist themes of 14 Sacred Words (2015) are particularly extreme when compared with the conventional themes of metalcore, as

shown is songs like “I, Racist” (14 Sacred Words, 2017), “A Declaration of War” (14 Sacred Words, 2017) and “The Monster You Made Me” (14 Sacred Words, 2017). The statements of racial hatred and anti-Semitism seem to be made without the theatrical nature of themes like gore and Satanism in other subgenres, and even the name of the band references the 14-word slogan “we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”, which was coined by David Lane, and is now used by white supremacists around the world. The themes of white nationalism and anti-Semitism are in direct contradiction to the thematic conventions of metal music, which tend to be left-leaning in nature, promoting individualism and anti-establishment ideals.

Within the main subgenre of metalcore, there is a further microgenre that takes elements of metalcore, such as breakdowns, double kick drumming and distorted vocals, and combines them with elements from the more extreme style of death metal, or even brutal death metal. These elements are often taken to extremes that are beyond the fringes of most death metal music, and these innovative acts have brought a more modern technical approach to some of the most extreme music in the entire metal genre. These elements include extremes of tempo (both fast and slow), tuning, instrumental virtuosity, vocal delivery and imagery.

The tempos used in deathcore can vary widely, from very slow breakdowns to extremely fast, technical sections, like the intro for Rings of Saturn’s (2009) “Shards of Scorched Flesh”, which is played at 250bpm (Rings of Saturn, 2012) (see Fig.63). Rings of Saturn are also a prominent example of extreme down-tuning in the deathcore microgenre, as the guitarist of Rings of Saturn, Lucas Mann, often plays 8 or 9 string guitars, which are tuned down from standard guitar tuning by an octave or perfect 11<sup>th</sup> respectively. This is fairly common in deathcore music, as Suicide Silence (2002) use drop F tuning on “Witness the Addiction” (Suicide Silence, 2011), and Oceano (2006) use drop E tuning on “Dead Planet” (Oceano, 2015).

♩ = 250

Drum Set

Electric Guitar

2

Dr.

E. Gtr.

3

Dr.

E. Gtr.

4

Dr.

E. Gtr.

5

Dr.

E. Gtr.

6

Dr.

E. Gtr.

Figure 63: Rings of Saturn - "Shards of Scorched Flesh" (Guitar, Drums - Intro at 0'00")

This score also shows the virtuosic focus of deathcore musicians, as many advanced techniques, such as blast beats, sweep picking, and tapping are utilised at very high speeds to

create music with a much higher intensity than the rest of metalcore. There is a specific focus on virtuosic drumming within deathcore, which can be seen on tracks like “Cuntcrusher” (Infant Annihilator, 2012) and “Blasphemian” (Infant Annihilator, 2016). As with the instrumentals, the vocals are similarly extreme in deathcore, utilising a range of distorted styles, including different pitches, intensities, volumes and techniques to create variety within a vocal style that can come with a risk of sounding homogenous and monotone.

As with the instrumentals, deathcore artists take inspiration from death metal when implementing their imagery, which results in similarly extreme material. Common themes include gore, murder and anti-religion, alongside the wider metalcore themes of personal experience. There are bands within deathcore that take imagery to an extreme that is rarely seen even in death metal, apart from in the brutal death metal microgenre, which can be seen explicitly in the lyrics of Infant Annihilator, as in the song “Swinaecologist” (Infant Annihilator, 2019):

Come one, come all  
I am the harvester of used newborns  
Cum in one, cum in them all  
Fucked to death before they crawl

These lyrics are objectively outside of the definitions of acceptability and decency within mainstream society, but the way that Infant Annihilator present themselves in music videos and on social media shows that they utilise these themes in order to be as extreme as possible and aim to shock the audience. However, the artwork presented on their albums *The Elysian Grandeval Galeriarch* (Infant Annihilator, 2016) (see Fig.64) and *The Battle of Yaldabaoth* (Infant Annihilator, 2019) (see Fig.65) does not contain humorous imagery, which may mean that a casual consumer may not realise the tongue-in-cheek nature of the band’s intentions.





Figure 64: Infant Annihilator - The Elysian Grandeval...



Figure 65: Infant Annihilator - The Battle of...

The influence of death metal's anti-religious themes is also apparent in the imagery of deathcore, within the lyrics for songs like "Furnace of Hate" by Thy Art is Murder (2010):

I've chosen not to follow your ways  
 Your disciples will burn and fucking rot  
 Fear not my thoughts but my actions  
 I plan to spill their blood

This song directly addresses God and denounces his influence, which is an inversion of the reverential praise that is used by Christian metalcore bands like the aforementioned For Today and I, The Breather. *The Adversary* (Thy Art is Murder, 2010), which is the album that contains "Furnace of Hate", has cover art that reinforces these anti-religious ideals, as the cover either presents Christ as the titular adversary, suggesting that he is no more than an evil entity disguised as a loving saviour, or presents oneself as an adversary to Christ, mocking his visage with inverted Christian symbols and other Satanic imagery (see Fig.66).



Figure 66: Thy Art is Murder - The Adversary

As a modern interpretation of extremes within metal, deathcore shows what is possible within the genre, adding elements of metalcore like breakdowns and vocal variety that create new fusions and new extremes that have become impossible to include within older subgenres like death metal. New online innovations like YouTube allow young musicians to learn an instrument to a high standard of virtuosity without the assistance of

formal tuition, and affordable recording equipment means that more and more musicians can afford to produce and record their own music, creating a new musical ecosystem of extreme independent music, which may evolve to further extremes in the future.

## Folk Metal (1989-2018)

As the folk-oriented nature of folk metal suggests an interest in tradition and history, it seems that musicians within this subgenre are predisposed to utilise similar themes in their imagery.

Theme	No. of Occurrences
Mythology	65
History	59
Nature	17
Fantasy	12
Drinking	7
War	4
Love	3
Anti-Christianity	3
Introspection	3
Literature	2
Satanism	1
Society	1
Humour	1
Existentialism	1

Table 10: Folk Metal Imagery

Themes of both mythology and history were the most commonly used within the folk metal subgenre, being used by 65% and 59% of the bands in the subgenre respectively. The comparatively low third theme of nature was referenced by 17% of folk metal bands.

The themes of mythology and history are often intertwined within folk metal, as the subgenre is primarily a Scandinavian style. With this northern-European cultural influence, themes of Paganism are at the forefront of the imagery within folk metal, and bands present this Pagan

focus in multiple ways. Some bands discuss themes of Paganism in terms of culture, history or heritage, whilst others focus on the mythology of their respective cultures, such as tales of the Norse gods.

Folk metal was not always a primarily Scandinavian subgenre though, as the innovation of the genre came from the druidic interests of the Newcastle-based band Skyclad. In the early 1990s, former members of NWoBHM bands combined the heavier thrash metal of the time with English folk music, to create a fusion that was unique at the time of release. The imagery of Skyclad was what truly separated them from the masses at the time of their initial developments, utilising themes of Paganism and anti-establishment ideals on their eponymous track "Skyclad" (Skyclad, 1991):

Your mortgage payment rocket,  
Like your blood pressure rising,  
Executive stresses are the dragons you fight.  
In your Armani armour you are practically shining,  
So have no code of honour - you must always be right.

Just give me a simple life - my tastes are not demanding,  
And whatever life may hand me I'll accept it with good grace;  
For I'm just a simple lad with few ideas about my station,  
So ale and song will apt suffice to keep me in my place.

In this song, the musicians of Skyclad reject the stresses of a modern existence, foregoing the pace and pitfalls of mainstream life for the simplicity of the past. This is a theme that has become a convention of the folk metal subgenre, in which musicians focus on the glories of the past by the very nature of the style they compose in. This focus toward the past is visible in the music of even the most modern folk metal bands like Drakkarus (2017), whose songs include "Taken by the Valkyries" (Drakkarus, 2018) and "Tales from the Mead Hall" (Drakkarus, 2018), which directly reference elements of Norse mythology. The existence of these Norse themes in the imagery of an Australian album from 2018 reinforces the dominant conventions of the genre and shows how wide the Scandinavian influences have spread within folk metal. At the inception of the genre, many bands took their folk influences from the traditions of their country of origin, but more and more modern folk metal is dominated by the mythology and history of northern Europe.

There are bands, however, that have resisted the influence of Scandinavian culture when composing folk metal, such as Arandu Arakuaa (2008) from Brazil, who combine common elements of metal music with elements of Brazilian folk music. One notable element that sets the music apart from other metal music is the use of repetition, as the tendencies of the musicians to repeat lines, and even groups of multiple lines, evokes the atmosphere of chanting, which is reinforced by the vocal style employed in the folk-oriented sections of their songs. Other indigenous elements include the use of traditional instruments, such as flutes and maracas, and tribal imagery. This imagery is presented in a variety of ways, including lyrics that are written in Tupi-Guarani and rarely translated, artwork that includes depictions of indigenous cultures (Arandu Arakuaa, 2015) (see Fig.67), and personal presentation that evokes elements of tribal culture.



Figure 67: Arandu Arakuaa - *Wdê Nnâkrda*

The musicians of Arandu Arakuaa present themselves in traditional dress, including body painting and foot-rattles which mirrors the way in which folk metal bands with Scandinavian and Pagan influences often wear armour or tunics as a visual accompaniment to the themes that are present in their music.

The imagery presented within the lyrics of Arandu Arakuaa contain themes of tribal life, folk tales and animals that are central to life within Brazilian tribes. These depictions of native animals are the main focus in the song “Íakaré 'Y-pe” (Arandu Arakuaa, 2013). When translated to English, the lyrics tell the story of a girl who was swimming when she was bitten by an alligator, and the musicians describe the ways in which her tribe try to heal her, including calling on other animals like the frog and the agouti. These efforts are fruitless, however, and the girl dies, after which the tribe sing praises to her.

These tales, whilst different in content than the mythology presented in the imagery of Scandinavian folk metal bands, still reference the folk tales and aural traditions of the musician’s heritage in a similar way. Mythology is one aspect of heritage that is widely used as a basis for the lyrics and artwork present in a band’s imagery. Whilst the subgenre innovators like Skyclad and Cruachan presented a lyrical focus that was rooted in their druidic and Celtic heritage, and outliers like Arandu Arakuaa present their experiences and pride in their homeland, the mythology used within folk metal is overwhelmingly rooted in the Norse pantheon, and tales of gods and Vikings are widespread across the history of the subgenre. This can be seen in the lyrics and artwork of some of the most successful and popular bands within folk metal, such as Ensiferum, Eluveitie and Týr (1998).

Týr reference the threat of Ragnarok in their song of the same name, which is a series of events that serves as the climax of Norse mythology. In the story of Ragnarok, mythological antagonists like the wolf Fenrir and fire-giant Surtur wage war on the gods and fallen Vikings, and this culminates in the death of gods like Odin, Thor and Heimdall. In the song “Ragnarok”,

Týr show the emotion of a Viking on his way to a battle that he knows will claim the lives of his gods (Týr, 2006):

With heavy hearts we head, on towards the end  
I've done all I can, never will I bend  
Battle clad we ride, over barren land  
Nothing matters on the battlefield we stand

These themes are shown throughout the whole history of folk metal, from early bands like Falkenbach (1989), who released their debut LP in 1996, to recent bands like Forsaken Rite (2012), who released their debut LP in 2017. The enduring nature and prevalence of mythological themes within folk metal, as well as the prevalence of Viking tales in other media, suggests that bands in the near future will continue to draw upon these themes as inspiration.

As well as themes of history and mythology, themes of nature are also fairly prevalent in the genre. Korpiklaani are a band that make frequent reference to nature within their lyrics and artwork, particularly in their early releases, such as *Spirit of the Forest* (Korpiklaani, 2003). The band's connection to nature is evident in a track from this album; "With Trees" (Korpiklaani, 2003):

I would rather fly with eagles, to the snow hills  
I would rather run with wolves, between the trees  
I would rather be with trees, than in the middle of noisy streets

The lyrics to this song echo the sentiments that were presented by Skyclad in my earlier example, as the musicians of Korpiklaani state their preference for the peace and beauty of nature over the stresses and noise of city life.

The album artwork of folk metal albums often features nature as a prominent theme, either as the main focus, or as a setting for a scene or protagonist figure. Another subgenre that contains many references to nature in album art is black metal, but the two subgenres present themes of nature in a very different way. These opposing approaches can be seen in the album covers of *Break the Silence* (2019) by Anodhor (2011) (see Fig.68), who are a folk metal band, and *Toward the Depths* (2008) by Woods of Desolation (2005) (see Fig.69), who are a black metal band.





Figure 68: Anodhor - Break the Silence



Figure 69: Woods of Desolation - Toward the Depths

These two albums present images of nature in extremely different ways. The imagery of Anodhor frames nature as a sacred entity to be protected from the evils of man, and in their lyrics, the musicians criticise both modern humanity and Christian religious beliefs for imposing on the freedom of nature and the people who worship it. In contrast to this, Woods of Desolation seem to use the isolation of nature as a natural analogue for the isolation and depression that they feel in their life. The band's geographical location also seems to create an element of metaphorical description within their imagery, as they are based in Wollongong, Australia, which is a temperate, busy, coastal city. Although surrounded by the forests of the Illawarra mountains, the climate of Australia does not allow for the frozen landscapes of Scandinavia that inspired the early European bands of black metal's formative years, so the musicians seek to explore this remotely through their imagery.

There were fewer overall themes within folk metal compared to other subgenres, which implies that folk metal musicians have a much narrower thematic focus, and the imagery is more consistent and conventional than in other subgenres. Although there were fewer outlying themes than in other subgenres, they were still present within folk metal, and included themes of Satanism, humour, existentialism and society, which were represented by a single band each. As Skyclad were the lone band that referenced society as a main theme in their imagery, and they were the first band to fuse metal with folk elements, this theme may have been brought over from the band's roots in thrash metal, in which socio-political

themes were prevalent. As Skyclad were the innovators of the subgenre, their formative years came before the conventions of folk metal were recognised, but their themes of society did not inspire bands in the way that their themes of history and heritage did, which meant that their themes of social commentary did not become part of the subgenre's conventions.

Folk metal is the first subgenre that did not contain any Christian bands, and this may be due to the Pagan nature of the subgenre, which is opposed to Christian ideals. However, these Pagan views are not as incendiary as the views expressed by the Satanist bands of the black metal subgenre. Black metal bands express such an explicit inversion of Christian values that they may provoke religious musicians to make music in a reactionary way to defend their faith. This can be seen in the aggressive religious imagery of the aforementioned Horde, who utilise the conventional language of black metal to attack the typical Satanist themes of the subgenre. The Pagan views that are expressed by bands within folk metal are not as disparaging to Christianity, so whilst the genre conventions may discourage Christian themes, they are not extreme enough to inspire reactionary music. The overwhelmingly Pagan outlook of folk metal bands in general mean that Satanist views are barely represented in the subgenre, and the only band to explicitly express these views are the aforementioned Anodhor.

This is also the only subgenre aside from NWoBHM that did not include any microgenres. There is a wide variety of bands that can be included within the folk metal subgenre, and whilst there are bands that utilise folk instruments in other subgenres, most bands that use folk elements to a significant degree can be placed under the folk metal category. There are various terms and colloquialisms that can be used to describe distinct facets of the folk metal subgenre, such as Pagan folk metal, Viking metal and blackened folk metal, but these are prone to being used ambiguously or arbitrarily. As Deeks posits in *National Identity in Northern and Eastern European Heavy Metal* (2016), "the terms are often applied interchangeably, without precise definition of demarcation and unchallenged". He also states that "none of these terms can portray the variety of content created, and instead fail in attempting to suggest that there is a single defining thematic thread". Similarly, I have found that a band that may be included under one of these various terms may also fit under any



other, so such judgements become inaccurate and only work to confuse the categorisation of bands within the subgenre, while ignoring the individuality of the musicians within it.

Aside from the folk elements that are needed to categorise a band within folk metal, the metal elements may come from a wide range of preceding subgenres, including thrash metal, melodic death metal and black metal, or fusions of multiple styles. This variety within the subgenre means that meaningful subcategories become unlikely to be made, as distinctions between instrumental elements are more dependent on an artist's personal taste and influence, rather than any geographical location or era. This is especially evident in the case of modern folk metal bands, as digital distribution has allowed bands from diverse locations and musical backgrounds to foster an interest in folk music, and apply that interest into their metal music to create their own interpretation of what folk metal means to them.

## Grindcore (1982-2018)

As metal began to be made more extreme throughout the 1980s, the grindcore subgenre was formed from a fusion of hardcore punk and thrash or death metal.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
<b>Society</b>	74
<b>Politics</b>	49
<b>Gore</b>	27
<b>Dark Humour</b>	8
<b>War</b>	7
<b>Environmentalism</b>	7
<b>Death</b>	5
<b>Pathology</b>	4
<b>Drugs</b>	4
<b>Introspection</b>	4
<b>Horror</b>	3
<b>Murder</b>	2
<b>Perversion</b>	2
<b>Anti-Religion</b>	2
<b>Sexual Violence</b>	2
<b>Sci-Fi</b>	2
<b>Nihilism</b>	1
<b>Esotericism</b>	1
<b>Religion</b>	1
<b>National Socialism</b>	1
<b>Suicide</b>	1
<b>Feminism</b>	1
<b>Video Games</b>	1
<b>Life</b>	1

Table 11: Grindcore Imagery

The predominant thematic element in the subgenre is that of socio-political commentary. Almost 75% of the bands in the genre commented on societal issues in their lyrics and artwork, whilst almost half make reference to politics explicitly. This abundance of social commentary is most likely a derivative element of the culture surrounding hardcore punk; a subgenre that grew from a political unrest among the disaffected youth of the late-1970s.

The band that initially brought the socio-political commentary of hardcore punk to the forefront of metal through grindcore were Napalm Death, who used their imagery to express dissatisfaction with many aspects of society. The ruling elite and government have often been the focus of criticism in the lyrics of Napalm Death, as shown in songs like “From Enslavement to Obliteration” (Napalm Death, 1988), “Siege of

The multinational corporations  
 Makes its profit from the starving nations  
 Another product for you to buy  
 You'll keep paying until you die

As well as criticising the leaders of society, the musicians in Napalm Death also state their view on other social issues, including many issues that are typically rooted in conservative politics. These issues include misogyny (“It’s a M.A.N.S. World!” [Napalm Death, 1988]), racism (“Aryanisms” [Napalm Death, 1992]) and nationalism (“I Abstain” [Napalm Death, 1992]), which shows the way in which the left-leaning liberal focus of hardcore punk musicians inspired the early waves of extreme metal music. The musicians of Napalm Death also express their disdain for the music industry at large, even in terms of the wider rock genre, as they feel that publications and critics dictate the taste of the audience (“Cock-Rock Alienation” [Napalm Death, 1988] and “Exile” [Napalm Death, 1992]). These criticisms are reinforced by the artwork present on the band’s albums, as shown on the artwork for the band’s debut LP, *Scum* (Napalm Death, 1987) (see Fig.70).



Figure 70: Napalm Death - *Scum*

The cover for *Scum* (Napalm Death, 1987) reflects the themes and criticisms that are present in the album’s lyrics, with a hierarchal illustration that visually represents the view of the band regarding the most powerful members of society. At the centre of the image, there are children that reference the way in which large businesses take advantage of indigenous populations in the aforementioned “Instinct of Survival” (Napalm Death, 1987), and these children are overshadowed by white businessmen/politicians. However, these men are not at the top of the hierarchy within this artwork, as an ‘angel of death’ is the figure that rules over every other in the image. This may represent a final judgement for anyone, regardless of wealth or power, and the fact that no one can escape the finality of death. As well as this hierarchy, the skulls at the bottom of the cover are also filled with the logos of large corporations, such as Coca-Cola, McDonald’s and BP, which serves to further reinforce the anti-establishment, anti-consumerist view present in the lyrics.

These themes are present in a large portion of the artwork in grindcore, presented through the use of photo collages that give a grittier, more realistic visual style than the illustrations used in death metal or thrash metal. As the imagery of the grindcore subgenre is rooted in

the real-life struggles of society, the visual artwork that portrays these themes shows them in a more overt way. Even the themes of gore present in the genre can be portrayed in a similar visual style, as seen in the cover of Carcass's *Reek of Putrefaction* (Carcass, 1988) (see Fig.71).



Figure 71: Carcass - *Reek of Putrefaction*

The images that make up the collage on this cover are autopsy photos from medical journals, and the realistic nature of the death that is presented on the cover was noticeably explicit for an album that was released three years before Cannibal Corpse's *Butchered at Birth* (Cannibal Corpse, 1991), which has become an unofficial standard for the way that the boundaries of decency can be pushed by imagery within metal. Whilst the content is less graphic than the illustrative artwork used by modern brutal death metal bands, utilising real autopsy photos, including those of dead children, may be more transgressive than what is available in other subgenres.

As is the tendency in metal, however, these images have become more extreme over time, as seen in the covers of albums like *Sarcoidosis* (2007) and *Verrucous Carcinoma* (2015) by Viscera Infest (1999), and *Matando güeros* (1993) by Brujeria (1989).

Overall, themes of gore are important to the development of grindcore, and these themes help to bridge the gap between grindcore and death metal. The two subgenres are often linked, as grindcore bands that utilise more stylistic elements from death metal are referred to as deathgrind, which is a microgenre within grindcore. The fusion of these grindcore and death metal elements can be seen in the track "Birth of Ignorance" (1992) by Brutal Truth (1990) (See Fig.72).

The image displays a musical score for the introduction of the song "Birth of Ignorance" by Brutal Truth. The score is written in 4/4 time and is divided into four systems, numbered 1 through 4. Each system contains two staves: a Drum Set staff and an Electric Guitar staff. The tempo is indicated as quarter note = 100. The guitar part features a repeating minor-second motif (e.g., G#-A, B-C, D-E, F-G, A-B, C-D, E-F, G-A) that is moved around an atonal scale. The drum part features a fast double-kick pattern and a slow ride/snare beat. The score is numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 at the beginning of each system.

Figure 72: Brutal Truth - "Birth of Ignorance" (Guitar, Drums - Intro at 0'39")

The intro to this song is reminiscent of death metal, as it starts with a slow, menacing riff, which is created by the use of a repeating minor-second motif that is moved around an atonal scale. This creates tension that is only released by the return to the root power-chord, after which the pattern repeats. When this is combined with the fast double-kick drum pattern and slow ride/snare beat, the musicians signify that the song is about to be taken into a faster section of higher intensity. In a death metal song, this section would usually utilise a double-time riff on guitar to match the speed of the kick drum, whilst also speeding up the drum beat to some sort of blast-beat, but the musicians of Brutal Truth create a frantic intensity in a different way.

Instead of using double time riffs within the 100bpm tempo, they increase the tempo to 150bpm, creating a jarring change of pace that is outside the conventions of death metal (see Fig.73). Whilst the guitar speeds up, the kick drum pattern slows down, but the drummer's hand speed increases to a blast beat, which creates a drum part that gives the illusion of increased speed and intensity. This increase in speed also results in a less regimented style than the restrained nature of the intro, and creates a chaotic sound that is much more stylistically similar to the conventions of grindcore.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Birth of Ignorance" by Brutal Truth. It is divided into two systems. The first system shows the Drum Set and Electric Guitar parts. The second system shows the Drums and Electric Guitar parts. The tempo is marked as 150 bpm. The guitar part features a complex, fast riff with many accidentals. The drum part features a blast beat pattern with a slower kick drum pattern.

Figure 73: Brutal Truth - "Birth of Ignorance" (Guitar, Drums - Verse at 0'56")

Although the music is a fusion of grindcore and death metal, the imagery of the band firmly places them within the former, as their central themes include socio-political commentary and environmental issues. These links to the conventional themes of grindcore can be seen in the lyrics of "Anti-Homophobe", which is a song that defines Brutal Truth as a band that reinforce the left-wing, liberal views of the grindcore subgenre as a whole (Brutal Truth, 1992):

I may not be gay  
 But I don't care if you are  
 Live your life in peace  
 And fuck them if they laugh

As with most grindcore lyrics, there is no sense of metaphor or symbolism in this statement. This is an overt sentiment of support that is stated with as much conviction as any criticism of government or establishment within the band's career.

Socio-political commentary is a theme that is still used in the deathgrind microgenre by bands like Cephalic Carnage (1992) and Terrorizer, but other bands also utilise imagery that is informed by the conventions of death metal. This imagery is often filled with themes of murder and gore, and can be seen in the output of bands like Cattle Decapitation (1996), Caustic Wound (2018) and The Berserker (1995). Cattle Decapitation are notable for their vegetarian viewpoint, and they make their stance clear in the way that they write their lyrics. As the musicians believe that suffering and death is forced upon animals by humans in real life, they use humans as an analogue for subservient creatures and place the superiority upon animals in their imagery. This can be seen in their lyrics for “To Serve Man” (Cattle Decapitation, 2002):

Millions of humans hung upon hooks  
Suspended in deep freeze  
Sub-zero, sterile environment  
Keeps meat tender and lean

Whilst the songs often use gore as a means of shocking the audience, especially in songs like the notably extreme “Forced Gender Reassignment” (Cattle Decapitation, 2012) and “A Body Farm” (Cattle Decapitation, 2009), the issues that the band are attempting to discuss are still centred on societal criticisms. Within their fusion of the subgenres, Cattle Decapitation are exploring the thematic conventions of grindcore through the gory and violent lyrical conventions of death metal.

As death metal musicians took the imagery of the subgenre to a new level of extremity with the creation of brutal death metal, grindcore bands were also evolving to new extremes, and also began to use the new microgenre to inspire these innovations. The vocal style in brutal death metal, particularly the guttural lows present in the music of bands like Devourment and Dying Fetus (1991), was particularly inspirational to the new wave of extreme deathgrind bands, which came to be known as goregrind. As the music began to include more extreme depictions of gore in both lyrics and artwork, bands began to focus specifically on themes of sexual violence or perversion, and this has since been described as pornogrind.

As these microgenres become more and more specific, however, the margins between the distinct stylistic elements become smaller, which may cause bands to exist in multiple,

ambiguous microgenres. Aside from the NSBM in the black metal subgenre, no microgenres in my study have been separated by imagery alone, but have had observable musical differences that were created by an evolution of the subgenre, innovation by a single band or musician, or a fusion with another subgenre. Therefore, NSBM may have been set apart by the wider metal community in an attempt to distance themselves from the right-wing themes of the microgenre, but the themes of goregrind and pornogrind have been used and accepted in the imagery of death metal subgenre, so this is not the case with these microgenres.

The musical similarities between deathgrind, goregrind and pornogrind are negligible, as they all take varying amounts of influence from the death metal subgenre, and apply it to grindcore music. If the imagery is the only distinguishing factor between these categories, then these three microgenres should show a gradient of extremity, going from the least extreme gore seen in deathgrind, to the most depraved acts of sexual violence that are present in the imagery of pornogrind.



Figure 74: Cattle Decapitation - *To Serve Man*

The cover of Cattle Decapitation's *To Serve Man* (Cattle Decapitation, 2002) (see Fig.74) is a reinforcement for the lyrics within the album, as the lines on the central figure's body draw parallels with the way in which animals are dissected for the meat industry. The setting is clearly some sort of abattoir, but the fact that the figure is disembowelling himself also references the socio-political commentary of the album. The themes of

gore are used to shock, but are also used as a way of commenting on the horrors perpetrated by the human species, and the way that we destroy ourselves.

Overall, the imagery of this deathgrind band is no more extreme than the bulk of death metal, and the themes present in the lyrics and artwork are a clear combination of grindcore and death metal.



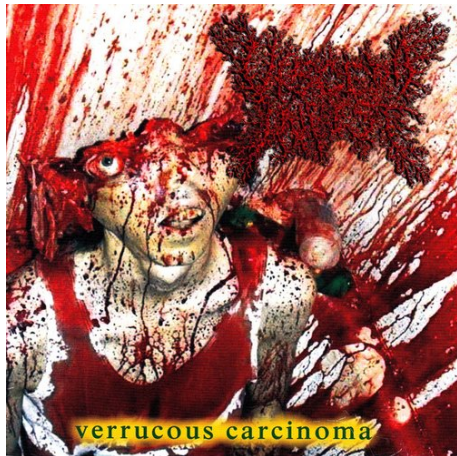


Figure 75: Viscera Infest - Verrucous Carcinoma

When compared with the cover of *To Serve Man*, the cover of Viscera Infest's *Verrucous Carcinoma* (Viscera Infest, 2015) (see Fig.75) is noticeably more explicit, both in the content portrayed and the pseudo-photographic nature of the image. The themes of Viscera Infest centre around pathological gore, and whilst there are no official lyrics, titles like "Ureterodialysis" (Viscera Infest, 2015) and "Glomer Rulonephritis" (Viscera Infest, 2007) combine with the covers of their albums to create a uniform theme across the band's entire body of work.

As a theme within grindcore, the roots of pathological gore can be seen in the early output of Carcass, but this type of gore can also be seen in the brutal death metal microgenre. Songs like "Gangrenous Testicular Deformity" (Vulvectomy, 2010) and "Abdominal Ectopic Pregnancy" (Vulvectomy, 2013) by the brutal death metal band Vulvectomy (2007) reference those seen in the goregrind microgenre, so the more extreme nature of brutal death metal imagery is reflected in the more extreme imagery of goregrind, in comparison to deathgrind. This seems to clarify the categorisation of grindcore microgenres, but the inclusion of porngrind further confuses the issue.



Figure 76: Gut - Odour of Torture

The imagery of porngrind bands centres around depictions of sex and perversity by definition, but often contains explicit themes of sexual violence. This can be seen in the cover of Gut's (1991) *Odour of Torture* (Gut, 1995) (see Fig.76), which depicts a woman inserting needles into her breast. Although there are no official lyrics for Gut, the song titles reinforce the sexually violent content of the artwork, including titles like "She Died with Her Legs Spread" (Gut, 1995) and "Confessions of a Necrophile" (Gut, 1995).

Whilst the imagery of pornogrind bands specifically reference themes of perversity with an often-singular focus, these themes are not absent in the goregrind subgenre, as seen in the imagery of Jig-Ai (2005). Whilst Jig-Ai are often categorised as goregrind, their album artwork and titles frequently reference 'Ero guro', a Japanese art style that fuses elements of eroticism and nudity with gore and disfigurement. The same can be said for the imagery of Cephalic Carnage, a deathgrind band who mainly discuss themes of society and drugs in their imagery. However, in the video for their song "Ohrwurm" (Cephalic Carnage, 2010), there are multiple depictions of nudity, graphic gore, and genital mutilation. This is all shown in explicit detail, which makes it more extreme than many of the album covers of goregrind and pornogrind bands. The variety of extremity within the imagery of Cephalic Carnage, and the fact that Jig-Ai are not included as part of the pornogrind microgenre suggests that the way music audiences and journalists categorise and sub-categorise bands may not be wholly accurate when examined in an academic setting.

As well as the potential ambiguity of the imagery in question, the music of these microgenres is often interchangeable. Deathgrind, goregrind and pornogrind bands all contain varying amounts of death metal elements in their music, but there are some deathgrind bands that are more extreme in their instrumental elements than goregrind or pornogrind bands, but less extreme in their imagery. This is in direct contrast to the brutal death metal microgenre, which uses lower tempos and 'slam' riffs to create music that is noticeably more extreme than the bulk of death metal, which matches the increase in thematic extremity. In order to minimise confusion and inaccuracy surrounding these bands, these bands are described by their distinct microgenre in my database appendix, but they are all grouped under the deathgrind microgenre in my analysis.

As with the other subgenres, grindcore imagery contains outlying themes, and although some are rooted within the left-wing political ideologies of the subgenre, such as themes of feminism and anti-religion, there are themes that directly contradict the semiotic conventions of grindcore. One band that vehemently contrasts against the left-wing socio-political stance of the subgenre is Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra (2012); a national socialist, white supremacist band from Finland. Whilst the lyrics of formative grindcore bands like Napalm Death and Terrorizer openly criticise mainstream society for its oppression and conservatism,

the imagery of Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra suggests that the band feel that society is too liberal and accepting of multiculturalism and immigration.



Figure 77: A.S.O. - *Fuck the European Union*

On the cover of the band's only LP, *Fuck the European Union* (Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra, 2014) (see Fig.77), the band combine the flag of the EU with the hammer and sickle symbol that is commonly associated with communism. As far-right political supporters and neo-Nazis use communism as a way to attack left-wing liberals, the national socialist members of this band have used the fusion of the two symbols to draw parallels between the EU and communist parties.

Although there are no official lyrics, the band's hatred of the EU and belief in white supremacy is also clear in their song titles, including songs like "Abolish the J€wropean Union" (Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra, 2014) and "Forced Immigration is the Destruction of the White Race" (Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra, 2014). The band also proudly declare themselves as neo-Nazis with songs like "The Fourth Reich" (Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra, 2014) and "Justice for Rudolf Hess" (Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra, 2014), who was the Deputy Führer to Adolph Hitler.

Whilst Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra adhere to the conventions of grindcore in their music, the right-wing ideology at the heart of the band's imagery is in direct contrast to the conventions of both grindcore and the overall metal genre. As grindcore takes inspiration from the left-wing politics of hardcore punk overall, the existence of a national socialist, far-right band within the subgenre gives evidence of the far-reaching influence of the music. This shows that bands can invert the central themes of a subgenre whilst abiding by the musical conventions, so that they are categorically included within it musically. As a result, their music can be used as a means of transmitting their opposing personalised ideologies.

## Progressive Metal (1983-2014)

As the NWoBHM was an established subgenre, and thrash metal was beginning to solidify its conventions, musicians added elements of progressive rock to create the new subgenre of progressive metal. Although progressive metal is now used more widely to describe the modern down-tuned percussive style of bands that have been inspired by Meshuggah, the entire range of progressive metal shows similar thematic constants.

Themes	No. of Occurrences
Life	44
Society	41
Introspection	30
Relationships	16
Personal Issues	8
Politics	8
Christianity	6
Emotion	6
Fantasy	6
Sci-Fi	6
Space	6
Esotericism	5
Mental Issues	4
Abstract	3
Love	3
Philosophy	3
Mythology	2
Technology	2
Anti-Religion	1
Brain Chemistry	1
Egyptian Mythology	1
Environmentalism	1
History	1
Horror	1
Japanese Culture	1
Psychology	1
Spirituality	1
Storytelling	1

Table 12: Progressive Metal Imagery

Although the musical elements within progressive metal are the most varied in the entire metal genre, the imagery within the subgenre is notably uniform. The four most-used themes are real-life, society, introspection and relationships, and the lesser used themes still include many topics that reside under the umbrella of realism, including politics, mental issues, environmentalism and psychology. This shows that progressive metal musicians have a more realistic focus than many other subgenres, and this may be down to the influence of genres that came before them.

NWoBHM was the subgenre that inspired the first wave of progressive metal in the mid-1980s, and themes of realism were used by an overwhelmingly large proportion of the bands in that subgenre. As early progressive metal takes influence from the musical elements of NWoBHM, such as high vocals and dual guitar harmonies, it is feasible that

the *thematic* conventions of the subgenre also inspired the originators of progressive metal.

This focus on real life themes can be seen in the imagery of the earliest bands in the subgenre, such as Queensrÿche (1982), who utilise themes of government control on their debut album, *The Warning* (Queensrÿche, 1984). On the song “NM 156”, the musicians lament the fusion of man and machine within a hypothetical technological society, and comment on the way in which we could be controlled by future technologies (Queensrÿche, 1984):

One world government has outlawed war among nations,  
Now social control requires population termination.

Although this was not a statement about the way in which the government controls the population at the time of the album’s release, the musicians were still discussing their fears for the future, and their feelings about how advancing technological progress could lead the downfall of free will and conscience as society grows more modernised.

Meshuggah were a band that started by playing a technical form of thrash metal in the late 1980s, but began to fuse progressive elements into their innovative style, which gave them a sound that was completely unique at the time. The combination of very high-gain, down-tuned guitars, and an aggressive, percussive picking technique created a unique guitar sound that came to be known by the onomatopoeic name ‘djent’. This tone is used to play a modern form of progressive metal that includes advanced polymeter, polyrhythm and syncopation to create rhythmically complex riffs, and is reinforced by suitably virtuosic drumming. Modern bands in online communities have been inspired by Meshuggah’s innovation, and bands like Periphery, Tesseract (2003) and Vildhjarta (2005) have seen significant success, which has made djent a viable progressive metal microgenre.

As with the subgenre’s originators like Queensrÿche and Dream Theater, more modern djent bands have also used real life issues as a central theme in their imagery. This can be seen in the lyrics of Hactivist (2011); whose very name is a reference to ‘hactivism’; a portmanteau of ‘hacking’ and ‘activism’ that describes the ways that computers can be used to bring about social change. Their lyrics also reinforce these themes which can be seen on their song “Elevate” (Hactivist, 2016):

Spend money on wars, watch bullets get showered  
But things ain't gonna change in a matter of hours  
Until we turn up at the White House, whole crowds of us  
These suits and ties couldn't walk in our trousers

Social change is a common theme in the lyrics of Hacktivist, and whilst this could be a product of their working-class English background, there are also conventional precedents for these lyrics in the subgenres that inspire Hacktivist's music. As NWoBHM was the popular subgenre of the time, and therefore inspired early progressive metal, modern djent takes influences from popular current subgenres, such as metalcore, and fuses them with the intricacies of Meshuggah's rhythmic style. The imagery of metalcore is similarly rooted within realistic subjects, which may have played a part in the socio-political themes of Hacktivist's lyrics, and the imagery of the djent microgenre as a whole.

Although there is a difference between the music of early progressive metal and modern progressive metal, not all of the modern bands within the subgenre are categorized within the djent microgenre. There are bands that use the typical elements that would be considered a part of djent, but there are also modern bands that utilise progressive elements in a similar way to classic progressive metal bands like Fates Warning (1984) and Dream Theater. The distinction comes through the approach of the bands in question. As earlier progressive metal bands were more rooted in the traditional metal subgenres of NWoBHM and thrash metal, their approach still included the aggression that was inherent to that style of metal. However, more modern artists have a range of influences to draw from in their music, and the approach taken to the metal side of the subgenre can be wildly varying.

Bands like Born of Osiris (2003) apply elements from melodic death metal and fuse them with progressive elements, whilst other bands take elements of modern progressive rock/fusion like Chon (2008) and Owane, and add it into their metal music. This can be seen in the music of The HAARP Machine (2007), who utilise the technicality and distorted guitar sound of metal, but create a rare sense of serenity through the use of major keys and light, airy melodies. An example of this is in the second riff from the piece "Shedding" (The HAARP Machine, 2018) (see Fig.78), which is played in the key of A Major.



Figure 78: The HAARP Machine - "Shedding" (Guitar - Riff 2 at 0'44")

Although there is a wealth of music that is instrumental within this modern wave of the progressive metal subgenre, there are still thematic conventions within the artwork of these bands, and this often contrasts the themes we have seen in the metal genre as a whole. With the exception of Meshuggah's *ObZen* (Meshuggah, 2008), and some releases by Nemertines (2011), there is virtually no references to gore in the album covers of progressive metal. Instead, many albums are much more positive in content and tone, and the palette used is richer and brighter than what is often seen in metal.



Figure 79: Iron Maiden - The Number of the Beast



Figure 80: Animals as Leaders - The Joy of Motion

The cover of Iron Maiden's album *The Number of the Beast* (Iron Maiden, 1982) (see Fig.79) is considered a classic in the metal genre, and it contains many hallmarks of the genre's thematic conventions. There are references to the occult, including one of the earliest depictions of Satan in the metal genre, as well as the mascot 'Eddie'. The palette and style are also conventional for the genre, using a physical illustration by artist Derrek Riggs to create an intricate work that clearly inspired cover artists going forward. In contrast to this, the cover of *The Joy of Motion* (2014) (see Fig.80) by Animals as Leaders (2007) is a conventionally



modern progressive metal cover that utilises a lower-contrast, simpler palette. The image is fairly abstract in concept, but it also gives an atmosphere of calm that is unusual in metal artwork. Covers like this are fairly common in progressive metal, and there is also a particular focus on astronomical themes, which can be seen in artwork by bands like Accretion Disk (2013), Appearance of Nothing (2004), Dream Theater, Gojira (2001), Gru (2009), Monuments (2007) and Widek (2010).

Although realism and personal struggles are clearly the most popular themes within progressive metal, the sheer variety of bands that make up this eclectic style means that there are multiple outlying bands with imagery that defies the subgenre's conventions. These include Egyptian mythology, horror and Japanese popular culture. The utilisation of horror imagery is far outside the norm of modern progressive metal, which has a much more positive tone when compared with the rest of metal. However, these themes of horror can be seen explicitly in the music of Nemertines. Whilst Nemertines primarily release instrumental music, the samples and electronic elements of the music work in a similar way to cinematic horror soundtracks to create a feeling of tension and unease. This can be seen in the piano intro to "Bitter Tears" (Nemertines, 2018) (see Fig.81).

The musical score for the piano intro of "Bitter Tears" is written in F# minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 130. The score is divided into three staves:

- Staff 1 (Piano):** Measures 1-6. The melody starts on a half note F#4, followed by quarter notes G#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5, E5, F#5, G#5, A5, B5, C#6, D6, E6, F#6, G#6, A6, B6, C#7, D7, E7, F#7, G#7, A7, B7, C#8, D8, E8, F#8, G#8, A8, B8, C#9, D9, E9, F#9, G#9, A9, B9, C#10, D10, E10, F#10, G#10, A10, B10, C#11, D11, E11, F#11, G#11, A11, B11, C#12, D12, E12, F#12, G#12, A12, B12, C#13, D13, E13, F#13, G#13, A13, B13, C#14, D14, E14, F#14, G#14, A14, B14, C#15, D15, E15, F#15, G#15, A15, B15, C#16, D16, E16, F#16, G#16, A16, B16, C#17, D17, E17, F#17, G#17, A17, B17, C#18, D18, E18, F#18, G#18, A18, B18, C#19, D19, E19, F#19, G#19, A19, B19, C#20, D20, E20, F#20, G#20, A20, B20, C#21, D21, E21, F#21, G#21, A21, B21, C#22, D22, E22, F#22, G#22, A22, B22, C#23, D23, E23, F#23, G#23, A23, B23, C#24, D24, E24, F#24, G#24, A24, B24, C#25, D25, E25, F#25, G#25, A25, B25, C#26, D26, E26, F#26, G#26, A26, B26, C#27, D27, E27, F#27, G#27, A27, B27, C#28, D28, E28, F#28, G#28, A28, B28, C#29, D29, E29, F#29, G#29, A29, B29, C#30, D30, E30, F#30, G#30, A30, B30, C#31, D31, E31, F#31, G#31, A31, B31, C#32, D32, E32, F#32, G#32, A32, B32, C#33, D33, E33, F#33, G#33, A33, B33, C#34, D34, E34, F#34, G#34, A34, B34, C#35, D35, E35, F#35, G#35, A35, B35, C#36, D36, E36, F#36, G#36, A36, B36, C#37, D37, E37, F#37, G#37, A37, B37, C#38, D38, E38, F#38, G#38, A38, B38, C#39, D39, E39, F#39, G#39, A39, B39, C#40, D40, E40, F#40, G#40, A40, B40, C#41, D41, E41, F#41, G#41, A41, B41, C#42, D42, E42, F#42, G#42, A42, B42, C#43, D43, E43, F#43, G#43, A43, B43, C#44, D44, E44, F#44, G#44, A44, B44, C#45, D45, E45, F#45, G#45, A45, B45, C#46, D46, E46, F#46, G#46, A46, B46, C#47, D47, E47, F#47, G#47, A47, B47, C#48, D48, E48, F#48, G#48, A48, B48, C#49, D49, E49, F#49, G#49, A49, B49, C#50, D50, E50, F#50, G#50, A50, B50, C#51, D51, E51, F#51, G#51, A51, B51, C#52, D52, E52, F#52, G#52, A52, B52, C#53, D53, E53, F#53, G#53, A53, B53, C#54, D54, E54, F#54, G#54, A54, B54, C#55, D55, E55, F#55, G#55, A55, B55, C#56, D56, E56, F#56, G#56, A56, B56, C#57, D57, E57, F#57, G#57, A57, B57, C#58, D58, E58, F#58, G#58, A58, B58, C#59, D59, E59, F#59, G#59, A59, B59, C#60, D60, E60, F#60, G#60, A60, B60, C#61, D61, E61, F#61, G#61, A61, B61, C#62, D62, E62, F#62, G#62, A62, B62, C#63, D63, E63, F#63, G#63, A63, B63, C#64, D64, E64, F#64, G#64, A64, B64, C#65, D65, E65, F#65, G#65, A65, B65, C#66, D66, E66, F#66, G#66, A66, B66, C#67, D67, E67, F#67, G#67, A67, B67, C#68, D68, E68, F#68, G#68, A68, B68, C#69, D69, E69, F#69, G#69, A69, B69, C#70, D70, E70, F#70, G#70, A70, B70, C#71, D71, E71, F#71, G#71, A71, B71, C#72, D72, E72, F#72, G#72, A72, B72, C#73, D73, E73, F#73, G#73, A73, B73, C#74, D74, E74, F#74, G#74, A74, B74, C#75, D75, E75, F#75, G#75, A75, B75, C#76, D76, E76, F#76, G#76, A76, B76, C#77, D77, E77, F#77, G#77, A77, B77, C#78, D78, E78, F#78, G#78, A78, B78, C#79, D79, E79, F#79, G#79, A79, B79, C#80, D80, E80, F#80, G#80, A80, B80, C#81, D81, E81, F#81, G#81, A81, B81, C#82, D82, E82, F#82, G#82, A82, B82, C#83, D83, E83, F#83, G#83, A83, B83, C#84, D84, E84, F#84, G#84, A84, B84, C#85, D85, E85, F#85, G#85, A85, B85, C#86, D86, E86, F#86, G#86, A86, B86, C#87, D87, E87, F#87, G#87, A87, B87, C#88, D88, E88, F#88, G#88, A88, B88, C#89, D89, E89, F#89, G#89, A89, B89, C#90, D90, E90, F#90, G#90, A90, B90, C#91, D91, E91, F#91, G#91, A91, B91, C#92, D92, E92, F#92, G#92, A92, B92, C#93, D93, E93, F#93, G#93, A93, B93, C#94, D94, E94, F#94, G#94, A94, B94, C#95, D95, E95, F#95, G#95, A95, B95, C#96, D96, E96, F#96, G#96, A96, B96, C#97, D97, E97, F#97, G#97, A97, B97, C#98, D98, E98, F#98, G#98, A98, B98, C#99, D99, E99, F#99, G#99, A99, B99, C#100, D100, E100, F#100, G#100, A100, B100, C#101, D101, E101, F#101, G#101, A101, B101, C#102, D102, E102, F#102, G#102, A102, B102, C#103, D103, E103, F#103, G#103, A103, B103, C#104, D104, E104, F#104, G#104, A104, B104, C#105, D105, E105, F#105, G#105, A105, B105, C#106, D106, E106, F#106, G#106, A106, B106, C#107, D107, E107, F#107, G#107, A107, B107, C#108, D108, E108, F#108, G#108, A108, B108, C#109, D109, E109, F#109, G#109, A109, B109, C#110, D110, E110, F#110, G#110, A110, B110, C#111, D111, E111, F#111, G#111, A111, B111, C#112, D112, E112, F#112, G#112, A112, B112, C#113, D113, E113, F#113, G#113, A113, B113, C#114, D114, E114, F#114, G#114, A114, B114, C#115, D115, E115, F#115, G#115, A115, B115, C#116, D116, E116, F#116, G#116, A116, B116, C#117, D117, E117, F#117, G#117, A117, B117, C#118, D118, E118, F#118, G#118, A118, B118, C#119, D119, E119, F#119, G#119, A119, B119, C#120, D120, E120, F#120, G#120, A120, B120, C#121, D121, E121, F#121, G#121, A121, B121, C#122, D122, E122, F#122, G#122, A122, B122, C#123, D123, E123, F#123, G#123, A123, B123, C#124, D124, E124, F#124, G#124, A124, B124, C#125, D125, E125, F#125, G#125, A125, B125, C#126, D126, E126, F#126, G#126, A126, B126, C#127, D127, E127, F#127, G#127, A127, B127, C#128, D128, E128, F#128, G#128, A128, B128, C#129, D129, E129, F#129, G#129, A129, B129, C#130, D130, E130, F#130, G#130, A130, B130, C#131, D131, E131, F#131, G#131, A131, B131, C#132, D132, E132, F#132, G#132, A132, B132, C#133, D133, E133, F#133, G#133, A133, B133, C#134, D134, E134, F#134, G#134, A134, B134, C#135, D135, E135, F#135, G#135, A135, B135, C#136, D136, E136, F#136, G#136, A136, B136, C#137, D137, E137, F#137, G#137, A137, B137, C#138, D138, E138, F#138, G#138, A138, B138, C#139, D139, E139, F#139, G#139, A139, B139, C#140, D140, E140, F#140, G#140, A140, B140, C#141, D141, E141, F#141, G#141, A141, B141, C#142, D142, E142, F#142, G#142, A142, B142, C#143, D143, E143, F#143, G#143, A143, B143, C#144, D144, E144, F#144, G#144, A144, B144, C#145, D145, E145, F#145, G#145, A145, B145, C#146, D146, E146, F#146, G#146, A146, B146, C#147, D147, E147, F#147, G#147, A147, B147, C#148, D148, E148, F#148, G#148, A148, B148, C#149, D149, E149, F#149, G#149, A149, B149, C#150, D150, E150, F#150, G#150, A150, B150, C#151, D151, E151, F#151, G#151, A151, B151, C#152, D152, E152, F#152, G#152, A152, B152, C#153, D153, E153, F#153, G#153, A153, B153, C#154, D154, E154, F#154, G#154, A154, B154, C#155, D155, E155, F#155, G#155, A155, B155, C#156, D156, E156, F#156, G#156, A156, B156, C#157, D157, E157, F#157, G#157, A157, B157, C#158, D158, E158, F#158, G#158, A158, B158, C#159, D159, E159, F#159, G#159, A159, B159, C#160, D160, E160, F#160, G#160, A160, B160, C#161, D161, E161, F#161, G#161, A161, B161, C#162, D162, E162, F#162, G#162, A162, B162, C#163, D163, E163, F#163, G#163, A163, B163, C#164, D164, E164, F#164, G#164, A164, B164, C#165, D165, E165, F#165, G#165, A165, B165, C#166, D166, E166, F#166, G#166, A166, B166, C#167, D167, E167, F#167, G#167, A167, B167, C#168, D168, E168, F#168, G#168, A168, B168, C#169, D169, E169, F#169, G#169, A169, B169, C#170, D170, E170, F#170, G#170, A170, B170, C#171, D171, E171, F#171, G#171, A171, B171, C#172, D172, E172, F#172, G#172, A172, B172, C#173, D173, E173, F#173, G#173, A173, B173, C#174, D174, E174, F#174, G#174, A174, B174, C#175, D175, E175, F#175, G#175, A175, B175, C#176, D176, E176, F#176, G#176, A176, B176, C#177, D177, E177, F#177, G#177, A177, B177, C#178, D178, E178, F#178, G#178, A178, B178, C#179, D179, E179, F#179, G#179, A179, B179, C#180, D180, E180, F#180, G#180, A180, B180, C#181, D181, E181, F#181, G#181, A181, B181, C#182, D182, E182, F#182, G#182, A182, B182, C#183, D183, E183, F#183, G#183, A183, B183, C#184, D184, E184, F#184, G#184, A184, B184, C#185, D185, E185, F#185, G#185, A185, B185, C#186, D186, E186, F#186, G#186, A186, B186, C#187, D187, E187, F#187, G#187, A187, B187, C#188, D188, E188, F#188, G#188, A188, B188, C#189, D189, E189, F#189, G#189, A189, B189, C#190, D190, E190, F#190, G#190, A190, B190, C#191, D191, E191, F#191, G#191, A191, B191, C#192, D192, E192, F#192, G#192, A192, B192, C#193, D193, E193, F#193, G#193, A193, B193, C#194, D194, E194, F#194, G#194, A194, B194, C#195, D195, E195, F#195, G#195, A195, B195, C#196, D196, E196, F#196, G#196, A196, B196, C#197, D197, E197, F#197, G#197, A197, B197, C#198, D198, E198, F#198, G#198, A198, B198, C#199, D199, E199, F#199, G#199, A199, B199, C#200, D200, E200, F#200, G#200, A200, B200, C#201, D201, E201, F#201, G#201, A201, B201, C#202, D202, E202, F#202, G#202, A202, B202, C#203, D203, E203, F#203, G#203, A203, B203, C#204, D204, E204, F#204, G#204, A204, B204, C#205, D205, E205, F#205, G#205, A205, B205, C#206, D206, E206, F#206, G#206, A206, B206, C#207, D207, E207, F#207, G#207, A207, B207, C#208, D208, E208, F#208, G#208, A208, B208, C#209, D209, E209, F#209, G#209, A209, B209, C#210, D210, E210, F#210, G#210, A210, B210, C#211, D211, E211, F#211, G#211, A211, B211, C#212, D212, E212, F#212, G#212, A212, B212, C#213, D213, E213, F#213, G#213, A213, B213, C#214, D214, E214, F#214, G#214, A214, B214, C#215, D215, E215, F#215, G#215, A215, B215, C#216, D216, E216, F#216, G#216, A216, B216, C#217, D217, E217, F#217, G#217, A217, B217, C#218, D218, E218, F#218, G#218, A218, B218, C#219, D219, E219, F#219, G#219, A219, B219, C#220, D220, E220, F#220, G#220, A220, B220, C#221, D221, E221, F#221, G#221, A221, B221, C#222, D222, E222, F#222, G#222, A222, B222, C#223, D223, E223, F#223, G#223, A223, B223, C#224, D224, E224, F#224, G#224, A224, B224, C#225, D225, E225, F#225, G#225, A225, B225, C#226, D226, E226, F#226, G#226, A226, B226, C#227, D227, E227, F#227, G#227, A227, B227, C#228, D228, E228, F#228, G#228, A228, B228, C#229, D229, E229, F#229, G#229, A229, B229, C#230, D230, E230, F#230, G#230, A230, B230, C#231, D231, E231, F#231, G#231, A231, B231, C#232, D232, E232, F#232, G#232, A232, B232, C#233, D233, E233, F#233, G#233, A233, B233, C#234, D234, E234, F#234, G#234, A234, B234, C#235, D235, E235, F#235, G#235, A235, B235, C#236, D236, E236, F#236, G#236, A236, B236, C#237, D237, E237, F#237, G#237, A237, B237, C#238, D238, E238, F#238, G#238, A238, B238, C#239, D239, E239, F#239, G#239, A239, B239, C#240, D240, E240, 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G#262, A262, B262, C#263, D263, E263, F#263, G#263, A263, B263, C#264, D264, E264, F#264, G#264, A264, B264, C#265, D265, E265, F#265, G#265, A265, B265, C#266, D266, E266, F#266, G#266, A266, B266, C#267, D267, E267, F#267, G#267, A267, B267, C#268, D268, E268, F#268, G#268, A268, B268, C#269, D269, E269, F#269, G#269, A269, B269, C#270, D270, E270, F#270, G#270, A270, B270, C#271, D271, E271, F#271, G#271, A271, B271, C#272, D272, E272, F#272, G#272, A272, B272, C#273, D273, E273, F#273, G#273, A273, B273, C#274, D274, E274, F#274, G#274, A274, B274, C#275, D275, E275, F#275, G#275, A275, B275, C#276, D276, E276, F#276, G#276, A276, B276, C#277, D277, E277, F#277, G#277, A277, B277, C#278, D278, E278, F#278, G#278, A278, B278, C#279, D279, E279, F#279, G#279, A279, B279, C#280, D280, E280, F#280, G#280, A280, B280, C#281, D281, E281, F#281, G#281, A281, B281, C#282, D282, E282, F#282, G#282, A282, B282, C#283, D283, E283, F#283, G#283, A283, B283, C#284, D284, E284, F#284, G#284, A284, B284, C#285, D285, E285, F#285, G#285, A285, B285, C#286, D286, E286, F#286, G#286, A286, B286, C#287, D287, E287, F#287, G#287, A287, B287, C#288, D288, E288, F#288, G#288, A288, B288, C#289, D289, E289, F#289, G#289, A289, B289, C#290, D290, E290, F#290, G#290, A290, B290, C#291, D291, E291, F#291, G#291, A291, B291, C#292, D292, E292, F#292, G#292, A292, B292, C#293, D293, E293, F#293, G#293, A293, B293, C#294, D294, E294, F#294, G#294, A294, B294, C#295, D295, E295, F#295, G#295, A295, B295, C#296, D296, E296, F#296, G#296, A296, B296, C#297, D297, E297, F#297, G#297, A297, B297, C#298, D298, E298, F#298, G#298, A298, B298, C#299, D299, E299, F#299, G#299, A299, B299, C#300, D300, E300, F#300, G#300, A300, B300, C#301, D301, E301, F#301, G#301, A301, B301, C#302, D302, E302, F#302, G#302, A302, B302, C#303, D303, E303, F#303, G#303, A303, B303, C#304, D304, E304, F#304, G#304, A304, B304, C#305, D305, E305, F#305, G#305, A305, B305, C#306, D306, E306, F#306, G#306, A306, B306, C#307, D307, E307, F#307, G#307, A307, B307, C#308, D308, E308, F#308, G#308, A308, B308, C#309, D309, E309, F#309, G#309, A309, B309, C#310, D310, E310, F#310, G#310, A310, B310, C#311, D311, E311, F#311, G#311, A311, B311, C#312, D312, E312, F#312, G#312, A312, B312, C#313, D313, E313, F#313, G#313, A313, B313, C#314, D314, E314, F#314, G#314, A314, B314, C#315, D315, E315, F#315, G#315, A315, B315, C#316, D316, E316, F#316, G#316, A316, B316, C#317, D317, E317, F#317, G#317, A317, B317, C#318, D318, E318, F#318, G#318, A318, B318, C#319, D319, E319, F#319, G#319, A319, B319, C#320, D320, E320, F#320, G#320, A320, B320, C#321, D321, E321, F#321, G#321, A321, B321, C#322, D322, E322, F#322, G#322, A322, B322, C#323, D323, E323, F#323, G#323, A323, B323, C#324, D324, E324, F#324, G#324, A324, B324, C#325, D325, E325, F#325, G#325, A325, B325, C#326, D326, E326, F#326, G#326, A326, B326, C#327, D327, E327, F#327, G#327, A327, B327, C#328, D328, E328, F#328, G#328, A328, B328, C#329, D329, E329, F#329, G#329, A329, B329, C#330, D330, E330, F#330, G#330, A330, B330, C#331, D331, E331, F#331, G#331, A331, B331, C#332, D332, E332, F#332, G#332, A332, B332, C#333, D333, E333, F#3



end of a depressive melody, but that sense of hope is immediately extinguished by the return of the original melody, as it is accompanied by a guitar part that is both harmonically dissonant and rhythmically disorienting.

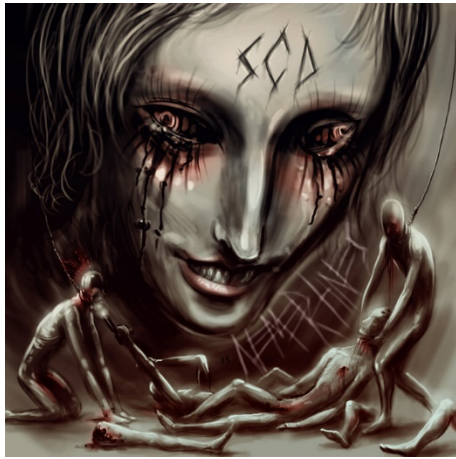


Figure 82: Nemertines - SCD

The sense of lost hope that permeates Nemertines' music can also be seen in the album art of the band, which was the most extreme artwork in the progressive metal subgenre. The cover for *SCD* (Nemertines, 2012) (see Fig.82) included the most graphic depiction of gore in a subgenre which barely includes any, and whilst the imagery is tame in comparison to the artwork present in subgenres like death metal and grindcore, it is still comparatively shocking within progressive metal.

Whilst the music and imagery of Nemertines is an extreme example, the wide variety within both the music and imagery of a single subgenre is a testament to the splintered nature of the metal genre as a whole. Throughout the history of metal, subgenres have influenced each other, and evolution within them has led to the creation of new subgenres and microgenres. The expansion of the genre from the origin of a single band creates a web of influence that stretches further as modern technology allows anyone to hear a wide range of music and gain inspiration from a wealth of sources. As modern progressive metal is among the most cutting-edge music in the entirety of metal, the eclectic mix of styles and influences contains more variety than any other subgenre and showcases what the newest innovations can produce within the genre.

## Chapter 5: Inter-Subgenre Relationships

In chapter four, I briefly discussed the ways that subgenres have inspired each other throughout the history of the metal genre, and these inspirations can be either musical, thematic, or sometimes both. As I have previously stated, metal artists tend to create music of a higher level of extremity than their influences, and this has led to the creation of new subgenres and microgenres. In this chapter, I aim to codify the ways that metal music and imagery evolve over time and establish concrete lines of influence that will bring clarity to the tangled web of splintered subgenres and microgenres that make up the spectrum of heavy metal in modern times.

To this end, I begin with an account of the earliest innovations in the genre, particularly those of Black Sabbath and Judas Priest, and I evaluate the ways that their music has endured to inspire musicians throughout the development of metal. I also examine the first distinguishable subgenre, NWoBHM, establish the ways that the musicians therein created extremity in their art, and suggest how they inspired subsequent musicians to do the same in the thrash metal and black metal subgenres. The next subchapter is devoted to the subgenre of hardcore punk, and how it has inspired higher levels of aggression and social commentary within the metal genre. This allows me to draw conclusions about the role of outside influences within metal, and explain how their amalgamation can bring new levels of extremity into the genre.

I then evaluate death metal, which may be the most important subgenre in the development of extreme metal. I initially discuss the innovations that allowed death metal to rise from within the thrash metal subgenre, and explore the abundance of transitional bands that exist between the two. I also examine the high levels of variety within death metal by analysing the parallel developments of both technical and brutal death metal, which clearly illustrates the importance of variation over progress; a central facet of Gould's evolutionary theory. I then analyse the conventions of melodic death metal to establish the variety that can be created by geographical differences, and use these findings to explore the concept of local conditions, as they relate to evolution. Finally, I explore how higher levels of extremity

can be created through the hybridisation of multiple subgenres, and then combine each of the links that I have evaluated in order to create a diagram that adequately expresses the variation and perpetual expansion of the metal genre over time.

## Black Sabbath - The Roots of a Genre

When examining the history of metal music in a chronological manner, the origin of the genre must be established. The origin of the entire metal genre is often attributed to the singular innovations of Black Sabbath, who created the most basic blueprint for the genre with their self-titled debut album in 1970. However, in order to understand the importance of Black Sabbath's early musical output, the musical landscape of this era must be evaluated. Furthermore, the music of Black Sabbath must be deemed truly innovative in order to categorise the musicians as the creators of a new genre.

Black Sabbath formed in 1968, and their earliest iterations shed some light on the band's influences. The original name for the band was "The Polka Tulk Blues Band" (Osbourne & Ayres, 2010), and alongside the four musicians that would go on to become Black Sabbath, the band included a slide-guitar player and a saxophonist. This blues-inspired sound was in line with the music of the time, as British musicians were inspired by both American blues and rock 'n' roll. The fusion of these styles resulted in the creation of British blues, and bands like Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones (1962) and Cream (1966) gained huge commercial successes playing this form of music. Whilst this was clearly an influence on the earliest iterations of Black Sabbath, the band would go on to play music that was much darker in tone and thematic content than their predecessors, which was partially informed by the band's interests in horror cinema and the occult.

The first track released by Black Sabbath was also titled "Black Sabbath", and included multiple elements that came together to form the core of the metal genre. The harmony of the opening riff utilises the diminished 5<sup>th</sup>, which is often added to the pentatonic scale to give blues its characteristic sound (Black Sabbath, 1970) (see Fig.83). However, instead of

using this as a passing note to reach a chord tone of either the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale, Tony Iommi rests on this note, emphasising the tritone.



Figure 83: Black Sabbath - "Black Sabbath" (Guitar - Intro at 0'38")

This emphasis of the tritone as a melodic device lies far outside the conventions present within the popular music of the time, but the dissonance created by the use of the tritone in "Black Sabbath" (Black Sabbath, 1970) became notably important in heavy metal harmony as the genre aged. Reginald Smith Brindle defined the dissonant nature of the tritone when he stated that "any tendency for a tonality to emerge may be avoided by introducing a note three whole tones distant from the key note of that tonality" (Brindle, 1966). Although the presence of the tritone would usually confuse the sense of a tonal centre in a riff that only uses the first and fifth degrees of the scale, the strength of the initial G5 'power chord' on the first beat of the bar establishes G as the root, whilst the bridge riff creates the sense of a minor tonality (see Fig.84). Usage of the minor scale is now popular in most subgenres of metal.



Figure 84: Black Sabbath - "Black Sabbath" (Guitar - Bridge at 4'35")

In addition to the harmony used in the song, the way that the guitar is implemented is also an early example of metal guitar technique, as the guitar is played solely through the use of power chords and lines of single, picked notes. There are no large open, strummed chords in this song, which sets it apart from the popular music of the late 1960s, and power chords have become the standard for rhythm guitar playing across the entire metal genre. The distortion present on metal guitar recordings also works well with power chords, as the high amount of distortion used may create a muddy wall of sound when all 6 strings are strummed together. Melodies and lead guitar lines can often help to determine the key of a song, and many more metal songs are written atonally, so the power chords do not need to provide insight into the song's harmony. Instead, these riffs create a repeating base that gives a song its structure, whilst also laying a foundation for the rest of the instruments.

The riff-based nature of the music is also an element that is still intrinsic to the nature of metal in modern times. Repeating guitar riffs give songs structure in all subgenres of metal, and the riff can often help to identify what subgenre of metal a song belongs to. Even in music that is rhythmically virtuosic, riffs help to give form to the chaos; creating a sense of timing and a pulse that listeners can relate to. In Periphery’s “Absolomb” (2016) (see Fig.85), the introductory bass riff is played solo, before the other instruments are gradually added.

♩ = 180

Figure 85: Periphery - "Absolomb" (Bass - Intro at 0'00")

When the clean guitar is added into the song, the initial rhythm is constant and cooperates well with the bass riff, but as the song moves into the verse, the sense of rhythm has the potential to be confusing. The guitarist is playing mostly dotted-quarter notes interspersed with other irregular rhythms, which does not repeat in the same way as riffs traditionally do. To combat this, the bass continually plays the same consistent riff throughout this verse section, which works as a point of reference for the listener; allowing the clean guitar to work as an ambient counterpoint to the clean vocals.

As repeating riffs have fulfilled a similar function throughout the 50-year history of the metal genre, it is clear that the elements of Black Sabbath’s music created the musical conventions that bands within the genre still adhere to in modern music. This is also true for other elements, such as the aforementioned harmony, the use of distorted guitars, and the imagery. It seems that the “elements codified early on in the development of heavy metal...are perhaps the elements of the genre that have persisted into its contemporary expressions” (Hillier, 2020), and although the differences between interlinked subgenres/microgenres can be inherently difficult to describe due to the relative similarities

when compared with genres outside metal, the basic codified conventions of the genre now have a 50-year history, and thus the central definitions of metal are unlikely to be changed outright.

The imagery of Black Sabbath covers a wide range of topics, including themes of horror, societal issues and fantasy, which have also been used as the main themes of the metal genre for the entirety of its history. When the themes of each subgenre are tallied together, the most prevalent theme is that of societal commentary, which was referenced by 257 of the 1000 bands I studied. Socio-political commentary can be seen in many songs by Black Sabbath, such as “Children of the Grave” (Black Sabbath, 1971) and “The Mob Rules” (Black Sabbath, 1981), but their most famous instance of social criticism may be on “War Pigs” (Black Sabbath, 1970):

Politicians hide themselves away  
They only started the war  
Why should they go out to fight?  
They leave that role to the poor

This social commentary can be seen as prominent themes within the subgenres of thrash metal, metalcore and grindcore, and whilst these subgenres all have ties to the politically-charged subgenre of hardcore punk, the foundations of these themes in metal were laid by the earliest originators of the genre. The way that these themes are presented by Black Sabbath also show that the musicians were dissatisfied with the options that were available to young men in their home city of Birmingham at that time.

In Sam Dunn’s *Metal Evolution* (2011) documentary, Bill Ward of Black Sabbath described Birmingham as “dismal; rain swept, factories and belching smoke” and quantified the limited options of the city’s youth by saying that “you could go into the factories, you could go to prison, or you could be a gangster”. In this same documentary, Geezer Butler - who was the bass player in Black Sabbath - said that “Birmingham had taken a massive hammering during World War II”, and that “there were still a lot of bombed-out buildings around”. The musicians may have seen the way that their city was ignored by politicians who did not consider the damaging effects of the wars that they entered, and these life experiences were then utilised as themes in their music.

These themes of life experiences can also be seen through metal's history, especially in the NWoBHM subgenre, which was directly influenced by the music of Black Sabbath. This was the most used theme in NWoBHM; being used by almost three-quarters of the bands I examined in this subgenre. As well as both being influenced by Black Sabbath, themes of social commentary and life experience are linked under the umbrella of realism, which contrasts the fantasy and horror themes that are also prevalent within the genre. Therefore, thematic elements within NWoBHM may have also influenced the themes that were popular in thrash metal, in the same way that the musical elements inspired the newer subgenre. Thrash metal was one of the first subgenres that noticeably increased the extremity of metal music, and it has been the catalyst for the creation of multiple other extreme genres, such as death metal and grindcore. At the inception of the subgenre, "most of the thrash musicians in San Francisco were working class", and "their attraction to metal music can be heard as embodying aspirations of social equality on individualist terms (Fellezs, 2016, pg. 93). The similar backgrounds of Black Sabbath members may have been easily relatable to aspiring thrash musicians, and facilitated their iterations on the themes that Black Sabbath established. If the themes of Black Sabbath can be found in the imagery of thrash metal bands, it is reasonable to assume that these themes will still exist in more extreme forms in modern metal music.

Death metal is one example of the ways that themes of horror in Black Sabbath's music have permeated a large portion of the metal genre and shows the way that iterations of a theme tend to become more extreme over time. The horror themes in Black Sabbath's music are well documented, and can be seen in the lyrics of "Black Sabbath" (Black Sabbath, 1970):

Big black shape with eyes of fire  
Telling people their desire  
Satan's sitting there, he's smiling  
Watch those flames get higher and higher  
Oh no, no, please God help me!

These themes of horror were used by the band as a way to include their occult interests into their music. In a 2001 interview with the band, *Guitar World Magazine* explained the way in which the lyrics for "Black Sabbath" had been written, as bass-player Geezer Butler had a

vision of a hooded, black figure at the foot of his bed after reading a 16<sup>th</sup> century book of black-magic (Epstein, 2011).

This horror imagery was a clear inspiration for some bands within NWoBHM, as in the case of Iron Maiden, who are the most commercially successful band in the subgenre. Themes of the occult were widely used in their imagery, which can be seen in the title track for their 1982 album *The Number of the Beast* (Iron Maiden, 1982):

Torches blazed and sacred chants were praised  
As they start to cry, hands held to the sky  
In the night, the fires are burning bright  
The ritual has begun, Satan's work is done

However, this song was not written with the same tone of fear and warning as "Black Sabbath" (Black Sabbath, 1970). In "The Number of the Beast" (Iron Maiden, 1982), the lyrics are written from the perspective of someone witnessing a Satanic ritual, but whilst the initial tone of the lyrics is cautiously fearful, the protagonist gradually begins to become entranced by the ritual in question. The song ends with the protagonist joining the "chanting hordes", with a final victorious verse from the perspective of Satan.

These lyrics were fairly extreme by the standards of the year in which they were released, but other NWoBHM bands had begun to increase the extremity of their imagery even further. On their self-titled demo, Hell used a reverential tone when discussing Satan in their song "Blasphemy and the Master" (Hell, 1982):

Satan, I bow to the Devil  
Satan, I crawl to the Devil

Whilst this may not be as blasphemous and explicitly anti-Christian as the imagery of black metal, the same themes are present, which shows how Black Sabbath's imagery has been iterated on through time to inspire the creation of new subgenres with progressively higher levels of extremity.

As with the occult side of horror themes within metal, themes of death, murder and gore may also stem from Black Sabbath's influence. As Iron Maiden had iterated on the occult themes



of Black Sabbath's imagery, they had also innovated new graphic themes of horror, which can be seen on the cover of their album *Killers* (Iron Maiden, 1981) (see Fig.86)

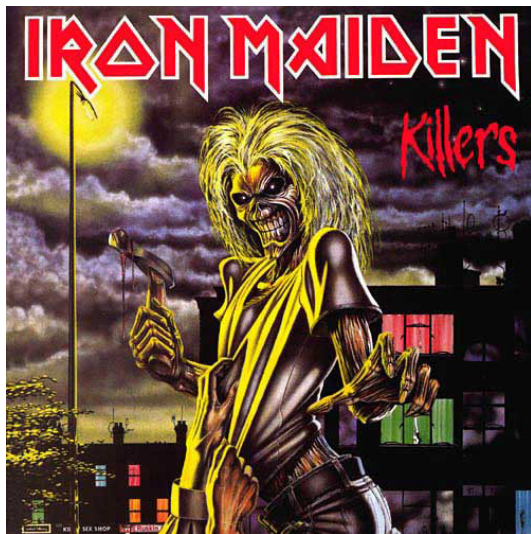


Figure 86: Iron Maiden - Killers



Figure 87: Cannibal Corpse - Eaten Back to Life

The cover is similar to others in Iron Maiden's catalogue, but it is more suggestive of graphic violence. Whilst the prominent figure is the usual figure of the band's mascot 'Eddie', the hand grabbing at his shirt from below the frame of the image insinuates the existence of more violent content outside that frame, which is reinforced by the way that the axe is already bloodied. In a relatively short period of only nine years, bands had iterated on the music and imagery of NWoBHM to create thrash metal and death metal. Whilst the earliest death metal releases, like Death's *Scream Bloody Gore* (Death, 1987) and Morbid Angel's *Altars of Madness* (Morbid Angel, 1989), had horror-themed covers, the cover of *Eaten Back to Life* (Cannibal Corpse, 1990) (see Fig.87) was particularly extreme for the time of release.

In a similar way to *Killers* (Iron Maiden, 1981), the image revolves around a zombie-like central figure, but whilst *Killers* leaves most of the gore to the imagination of the audience, the cover of *Eaten Back to Life* (Cannibal Corpse, 1990) shows as much gore as possible, even in the background of the image. Although the central character is wreaking graphic violence on his own body, the mutilated remains in the background suggest that murder was his focus before the acts of self-disembowelment. The similarities between the two images show lines of influence that exist through the theme of horror, and modern bands have taken these classic

death metal covers and used them as inspiration for their own horror-themed artwork, which has led to the rise of very graphic covers in the brutal death metal microgenre.

As well as Black Sabbath, members of the metal community argue that there are other bands that created the metal genre, with particular focus on Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple. Whilst I agree that these two bands may have been precursors to the innovations of Black Sabbath, neither band created music that could be described as heavy metal. Led Zeppelin had their roots in blues music, as guitarist Jimmy Page was a former member of The Yardbirds (1963), who were a prominent band within the British blues scene. The music of Led Zeppelin was highly experimental, as Page tended to use various alternate tunings and techniques that were uncommon in rock music at that time, including his famous use of a cello bow to play his guitar on “Dazed and Confused” (Led Zeppelin, 1969). However, the main structures and harmonies of Led Zeppelin’s music were still rooted in the blues, and did not discard the traditional harmonic content in the same way that Tony Iommi did when writing “Black Sabbath” (Black Sabbath, 1970).

Deep Purple have much more in common with the burgeoning heavy metal movement on their album *Deep Purple in Rock* (Deep Purple, 1970), but this album was only released after the release of *Black Sabbath* (Black Sabbath, 1970), which was “the first complete heavy metal work by the first heavy metal artists” (Christe, 2004, pg. 4). Deep Purple’s earlier work was rooted in the psychedelia of 1960s rock and included a large amount of classical influence from the organ playing and compositions of Jon Lord. Lord’s unwavering use of the Hammond organ also worked to set the band apart from their heavy metal peers, as bands at that time were not utilising organ in their music, and it has not been a staple of the metal genre throughout its broad range. Even bands that used keyboards in their music in the early 1970s were using newer synthesizers by brands like Moog, but Lord did not modernise in the same way as his contemporaries. This gave Deep Purple a singular sound that was separate from the music of Black Sabbath and other keyboard-inclusive bands like Genesis (1967) and Rainbow.

Overall, it would be impossible to theorise whether heavy metal would exist in the same way as it does today without the innovations of Black Sabbath. Each element that is central to the

metal genre, such as instrumentation, tone, harmony, imagery and presentation were all present from Black Sabbath's earliest albums, and the band 'brought and embodied a revolutionary new beginning" for metal music (Christe, 2010, pg. 10). Even if another innovative act had created music in a similar way, the results may have been very different, and the landscape of splintered microgenres and intertwined influences that we see in modern metal would be very different if not for the music of Black Sabbath. Although Black Sabbath had created the broadest conventions of the metal genre, there were more innovations to come, and Judas Priest were poised to create and codify new conventions within the metal genre that still stand today.

## Judas Priest - Defining the Style

“After the arrival of Judas Priest, heavy metal constituted a full-fledged movement”, that “would take on the characteristics of an avalanche, surging onward with increasing power and momentum” (Christe, 2010, pg. 22). Even though they were not the originators of heavy metal, Judas Priest were influential to the music, imagery and personal style of many pivotal acts going forward, which has made them highly respected within the genre. However, the first Judas Priest album was not a metal album, but had much more in common with hard rock. This can be seen in the album’s title track “Rocka Rolla” (Judas Priest, 1974) (see Fig.88).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Rocka Rolla" by Judas Priest. The first system includes staves for Drum Set, Electric Guitar, Electric Guitar, and Bass Guitar. The second system includes staves for Dr., E. Gtr., E. Gtr., and Bass. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 120$ . The time signature is 4/4. The notation shows a complex drum pattern, a melodic electric guitar line, and a steady bass line.

The musical score for Judas Priest's "Rocka Rolla" (Verse at 0'15") consists of four staves. The top staff is for Drums (Dr.), showing a simple 8th-note pattern on the high hat with accents on beats 1 and 3. The second staff is for Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.), showing chords. The third staff is for Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.), showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The bottom staff is for Bass, showing a steady eighth-note line.

Figure 88: Judas Priest - "Rocka Rolla" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Verse at 0'15")

The rock style of early Judas Priest can be seen clearly in this excerpt from the verse of "Rocka Rolla" (Priest, 1974). Although there are two guitars playing separate parts - which would be a hallmark of Judas Priest as their music progressed - the parts themselves are much more rooted in typical rock chord progressions. One guitar is used to outline the harmony that accompanies the singer, whilst the other guitar is used to reinforce the bass part. The bass guitar in this section plays a part that is also reminiscent of traditional rock, playing straight 8<sup>th</sup> notes on the root note of the key. The only small deviation from this comes in the form of half-bar fills that return to the root, whilst the last bar of this excerpt includes a different fill. This variant of the fill leads to the E minor chord that is introduced in the second half of the verse.

The drums are similarly simple throughout the entirety of this track, and they do not vary at all in this excerpt. The drummer is playing straight 8<sup>th</sup> notes on the high hat, whilst accenting beats 1 and 3 with the kick drum, and beats 2 and 4 with the snare drum. This is the simplest version of a rock drum beat, and is notably simple when compared with the drumming of Black Sabbath's Bill Ward, who had shown virtuosity on the song "War Pigs" (Black Sabbath, 1970) (see Fig.89), which had been released prior to "Rocka Rolla" (Judas Priest, 1974).

Figure 89: Black Sabbath - "War Pigs" (Drums - Solo at 1'45")

When comparing "War Pigs" (Black Sabbath, 1970), which was released in 1970, with "Rocka Rolla" (Judas Priest, 1974), which was released in 1974, it is clear to see that the drumming in the former is far more technical than the latter. This provides further evidence to show that the first Judas Priest album cannot be considered metal, but the aforementioned dual-guitar setup was a precursor to the innovations that the band would later create.

The use of two guitarists in the same band was unusual in music in the early 1970s. Many bands had a single guitarist that outlined the harmony or riffs, whilst the bass player reinforced those elements. The bass players in this era also worked to provide a foundation when the guitarists played melodies or lead section, but because they had two guitarists, Judas Priest had a number of options when arranging songs. When one guitarist was playing a lead section, another could play a foundation riff in unison with the bass player, which would keep a sense of 'heaviness' consistent throughout the song. This can be seen in the solo section in "The Ripper" (Judas Priest, 1976) (see Fig.90).

Figure 90: Judas Priest - "The Ripper" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Solo at 1'18")

In addition to this, the bass player could take on the more traditional role of providing a foundation for lead playing, whilst the guitarists both played lead sections in harmony with each other. This became a large part of the music of Judas Priest, and can be seen on songs like "Freewheel Burning" (Judas Priest, 1980) (see Fig.91)

The image displays a musical score for the song "Freewheel Burning" by Judas Priest. It features three systems of music, each with three staves: two for Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.) and one for Bass Guitar. The first system begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 125 in 4/4 time. The second system starts at measure 3 and includes triplet markings (indicated by a '3' and a bracket) over the guitar parts. The third system starts at measure 6 and ends with a double bar line. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note pattern throughout.

Figure 91: Judas Priest - "Freewheel Burning" (Guitar, Bass - Solo at 2'48")

Both of these approaches to the use of dual guitars have been highly influential on the metal genre as a whole, and notable bands from various subgenres have utilised two guitarists, such as Metallica, Cannibal Corpse, Killswitch Engage and Amon Amarth. As shown by these four bands, the use of dual-guitars in metal does not only transcend subgenres and microgenres, but also eras, as Metallica released their first demo in 1981, and Killswitch Engage released their debut in 1999. Whilst most bands use two guitarists in individual rhythm and lead roles, other bands have experimented with the interplay between guitarists that can comfortably play either style, as with Muhammed Suiçmez and Christian Münzner of Necrophagist (1992), who were both very accomplished lead players. As with many aspects of metal, the roles of guitarists have evolved over time, and the intricate nature of compositions by bands like Iron Maiden and Periphery have necessitated the use of three permanent guitarists.



As well as the innovations that Judas Priest pioneered within the sphere of guitar playing, the vocals of singer Rob Halford have been highly influential within the metal genre, especially in the subgenres of NWoBHM and power metal. The use of two guitarists created one of the intrinsic sounds of metal music, but there were also problems that arose with this choice of instrumentation. The use of distortion on guitars is one of the universal conventions across the entire spectrum of heavy metal, and a band that does not use guitar distortion cannot be considered metal at all. With two guitars playing distorted riffs, and mixes becoming inherently denser as a result, the space within the frequency spectrum for the singer's voice became much smaller. One of the ways that Halford would combat this was through the use of higher vocals, which were famously used on the critically acclaimed Judas Priest track "Painkiller" (Judas Priest, 1990) (see Fig.92).



Figure 92: Judas Priest - "Painkiller" (Vocals - Chorus at 1'13")

The influence of Halford's style on the wider metal genre can be seen in the vocals of multiple singers, including Bruce Dickinson of Iron Maiden, ZP Theart of DragonForce and Cam Pipes of 3 Inches of Blood (1999). The latter has taken this style of vocal to an extreme, which can be seen in the 3 Inches of Blood track "Deadly Sinners" (3 Inches of Blood, 2004) (see Fig. 93).

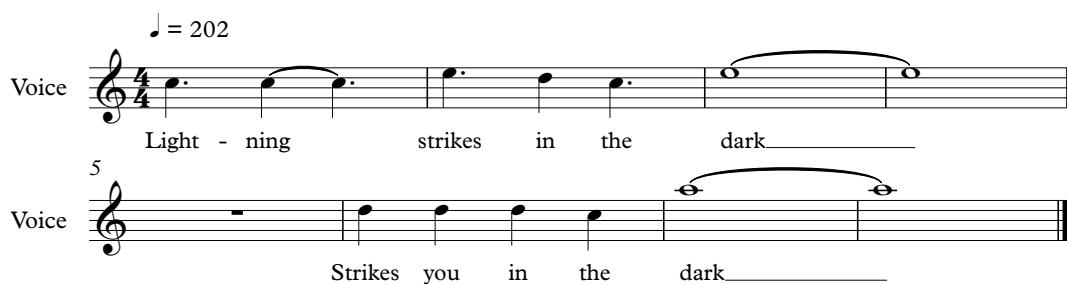


Figure 93: 3 Inches of Blood - Deadly Sinners (Vocals - Bridge at 1'53")

As Judas Priest provided a large amount of inspiration for the burgeoning NWoBHM subgenre, lines of influence can be drawn between Judas Priest and power metal, via both the NWoBHM and thrash metal subgenres. In *Metal Evolution* (2011), Joacim Cans of Hammerfall said that "Judas Priest is...the definition of metal", whilst Oscar Dronjak, the guitarist of Hammerfall stated that "the combination of Halford's singing and Downing and Tipton's guitars" was what

made him “hooked on them”. This direct link between Judas Priest and members of a prominent band within the power metal subgenre shows that influences may transcend multiple subgenres. Although thrash metal music did not commonly use high vocals in the same way as Judas Priest and NWoBHM musicians did, the NWoBHM vocal influence carried through into power metal; showing that musicians do not only take influence from the subgenre that *directly* precedes them.

As well as musical influences, Judas Priest helped to create thematic conventions within metal, both in imagery and in personal presentation. In *The Encyclopedia of Heavy Metal*, Daniel Bukszpan (2003) stated that “Judas Priest also has the unique distinction of helping to shape heavy metal fashion, thanks to...lead singer Rob Halford.” Bukszpan also explains where Halford got his inspiration for his stylistic choices, stating that “[Halford] publicly announced his homosexuality in 1997, revealing that he got his leather-and-chains look from the gay bar scene.” Although this is where Halford got the ideas for the look, he also felt that the leather, chains and motorcycles were well-suited to the aggression and intensity of the music. In an interview with the New York Daily News (Farber, 2004) he stated that “It was all about finding an image that identified with the power of the music. You couldn’t put on a tutu and play Judas Priest songs”.

Whilst the latter part of the statement is clearly hyperbolic, the fact remains that Halford thought that the music required a matching image, and the leather and chains that he wore onstage had a profound effect on the metal community. Leather jackets have become a central part of the fashion of heavy metal, and the influence of Judas Priest’s personal fashion can be seen throughout the metal genre. This was taken to an extreme in early black metal, where musicians used a similar leather-and-chains aesthetic, but in a much more exaggerated way (see Fig.94).



Figure 94: Thomas 'Pest' Kronenes (Gorgoroth)

This image shows Thomas Kronenes (AKA Pest) of Gorgoroth, who is wearing the conventional spikes and bullet belts that became a convention of the black metal subgenre. Judas Priest influenced the use of leather in the imagery of NWoBHM, which was widely accepted by bands like Saxon, as shown in the lyrics for their song “Denim and Leather” (Saxon, 1981):

Denim and Leather  
Brought us all together

Even in the NWoBHM subgenre, this aesthetic was taken to a level that was much more extreme than Judas Priest, especially by Venom, who would in turn become an influence on early black metal. As NWoBHM influenced thrash metal, this leather-and-chains aesthetic can also be seen in the presentation of various thrash metal bands. While aesthetic may easily delineate metal from other genres, the intra-genre distinctions may be more subtle. However, differences can be observed. “In this sense, aesthetic elements may *indicate* genre without *defining* it” (Hillier, 2020, pg. 19), but when added to musicological analysis, these indications are still important.

Judas Priest did not only impact the aesthetic of metal fashions, but also influenced the way that bands present their illustrative imagery. The cover for their second album, *Sad Wings of Destiny* (Judas Priest, 1976) (see Fig.95), was the first example of an illustrative cover that I could find in the genre, and this is still an art style that is prevalent in modern metal.



Figure 95: Judas Priest - Sad Wings of Destiny

Prior to *Sad Wings of Destiny* (Judas Priest, 1976), the only reference point for thematic content in metal was the imagery of Black Sabbath. Whilst the lyrics showed clear themes of the occult and social commentary, the artwork of the band’s early albums was more restrained. Although the artwork for the self-titled debut evokes an atmosphere of dread, this is still executed by the use of a photograph. Prior to the release of *Sad Wings of*

*Destiny*, Black Sabbath released six albums, and five of those used photography for the cover. The only cover that was illustrated was for *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (Black Sabbath, 1973), and although it portrays themes of life and death, and of the occult, the style differs from *Sad Wings of Destiny* in many ways.

The cover of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (Black Sabbath, 1973) shows a man being greeted by demons on his death-bed, which is thematically consistent with a wide range of metal imagery. However, the palette is drastically different from what is now conventional in the genre, utilising a small range of colour to create a cover that is not monochrome, but is also not as intricately shaded as modern illustrative covers. The border around the central image and the symmetrical nature of some elements within this cover also create a different aesthetic, which is closer to a sticker or logo than a full-cover piece of art.

In contrast to this, the cover of *Sad Wings of Destiny* (Judas Priest, 1976) is more intricate and more varied in palette than *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (Black Sabbath, 1973), whilst still adhering to the occult themes through the depiction of a fallen angel. Throughout the history of heavy metal, the influence of this style of illustration can be seen, in covers like Slayer's *Reign in Blood* (Slayer, 1986) (see Fig.96), and Incantation's *Diabolical Conquest* (Incantation, 1998) (see Fig.97).



Figure 96: Slayer - Reign in Blood



Figure 97: Incantation - Diabolical Conquest

The increase in extremity can be seen across these three covers, as all include pseudo-religious imagery, whilst growing progressively more explicit over time. As Judas Priest were essentially a proto-NWoBHM band, the lines of influence between them and bands within the thrash metal subgenre are clear. The way that Slayer iterate on the themes of the occult that are central to the *Sad Wings of Destiny* (Judas Priest, 1976) artwork shows the ways that the extremity of the genre can spread over time, and bands find new ways to innovate and grow progressively more complex. In turn, thrash metal also influences death metal, and whilst it is brighter in palette, the cover of *Diabolical Conquest* (Incantation, 1998) shows similar themes to the artwork of *Reign in Blood* (Slayer, 1986).

Again, this cover is more extreme than the previous example, and whilst the tendency toward extremity exists in each subgenre, this artwork shows that the entire metal genre has grown in extremity over time. Whilst the modal majority of bands are playing music that is conventional to the genre, but not at the cutting edge of extremity, bands appear over time that push the envelope of acceptable themes. Although this does not 'progress' the genre to new standards, the emergence of these bands creates a larger and larger extension to the extreme right when compared to the conventional majority.

## NWoBHM and the Gateway to Extremity

The tendency toward extremity in metal can be traced back to the earliest distinct subgenre in its history: NWoBHM. The roots of the subgenre can be seen in the music of bands like Marseille, Diamond Head and Iron Maiden, but there were bands that pushed the extremity of the music much further than these originators. The most extreme bands that formed within the subgenre were undoubtedly Hell, Satan and Venom, and the latter was particularly important to the formation of black metal, which still remains one of the most thematically extreme subgenres within the wide range of metal music. The potent influence of the band has created confusion about the way that Venom should be categorised though, with fans and journalists categorising them as a thrash metal, black metal or extreme metal band. However, the era of their formation, their nationality, and their early similarities to bands like Iron Maiden and Motörhead shows that they can be reliably categorised as a NWoBHM band.

In order to evaluate the ways that a band has inspired the output of future musicians, it is imperative to gain an understanding of the innovations that set them apart from their peers. Although they were among the originators of NWoBHM, Iron Maiden also set the standard for the sound of the subgenre. Therefore, comparing the music of the two bands gives an insight into the relative extremity of Venom. “Phantom of the Opera” (Iron Maiden, 1980) (see Fig.98) is a song from Iron Maiden’s self-titled debut LP, and is an early example of the band’s signature style.

The musical score for "Phantom of the Opera" by Iron Maiden is presented in 4/4 time with a tempo of 172 BPM. The score is divided into three parts: Drum Set, Electric Guitar, and Bass Guitar. The Drum Set part shows a simple pattern of quarter notes. The Electric Guitar part features a complex rhythm with triplets and a final triplet of eighth notes. The Bass Guitar part follows a similar pattern with triplets and a final triplet of eighth notes.

Drum Set

Electric Guitar

Bass Guitar

Figure 98: Iron Maiden - "Phantom of the Opera" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Verse at 0'57")

This excerpt from "Phantom of the Opera" (Iron Maiden, 1980) shows various elements that became common in the compositions of Iron Maiden. These include an emphasis on triplet rhythms, fast single note passages, and intricate drum parts and bass lines. The song is fairly

virtuosic in its implementation of melodic bass parts, and this became a hallmark of the band throughout their career. However, this song lacks the low-end power that became synonymous with more extreme subgenres. Whilst in the key of E minor, the root note for most of the riffs in the song is not the open E string. In this song, the root note is the E that is played on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string, which is unusual in more modern metal, as the root of most riffs is usually situated within the lowest octave of the instrument. The higher tonality that results from this gives the song a melodic feel that is absent in the music of Venom.

In the Venom song “Welcome to Hell” (Venom, 1981) (see Fig.99), from the debut album of the same name, the main riff is much more recognisable from the perspective of modern metal.

The image displays a musical score for the main riff of the song "Welcome to Hell" by Venom. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a Drum Set staff, an Electric Guitar staff, and a Bass Guitar staff. The second system includes a Dr. (Drum) staff, an E. Gtr. (Electric Guitar) staff, and a Bass staff. The music is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 165 BPM. The key signature is C# major (three sharps). The riff features a driving drum pattern, a guitar part with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass line that is primarily eighth notes. The score is marked with a '3' above the first measure of the second system, indicating a triplet.

Figure 99: Venom - "Welcome to Hell" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Main Riff at 0'12")

This song is played in C# standard tuning, so the root F# note is played as an open 5<sup>th</sup> string. This lower tuning still creates a sense of heaviness, as most NWoBHM bands played in standard tuning, and the lowest note on a standard tuned guitar is only a single tone lower than the root of this song. The lower tuning also allows the musicians to create a sense of increased heaviness by modulating down a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> for the pre-chorus of the song, which centres around a root note of C#. As the song moves into the chorus, the root chord moves



up a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> to D. This is unusual in NWoBHM, but is used prolifically in black metal, which shows a line of influence between the music of Venom and the early black metal genre.

Although the music was much heavier than the conventional sound of NWoBHM, this riff was still rooted in traditional NWoBHM rhythms. The use of two 8<sup>th</sup> notes on the root, followed by a single higher pitched 8<sup>th</sup> note is a widely used standard for riffs, and can be seen in the intro on Iron Maiden’s track “2 Minutes to Midnight” (Iron Maiden, 1984). However, on subsequent albums, Venom’s music became much more extreme. This new extremity can be seen on the title track for their second album, “Black Metal” (Venom, 1982) (see Fig.100).

The image displays a musical score for the verse of the song "Black Metal" by Venom. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a Drum Set part (top staff) and Electric Guitar and Bass Guitar parts (middle and bottom staves). The second system includes a Dr. (Drum) part (top staff) and Electric Guitar and Bass parts (middle and bottom staves). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 165. The music is in 4/4 time. The guitar and bass parts feature a fast, repetitive riff of eighth notes, with the guitar part including triplets in the second system. The drum parts consist of a steady eighth-note pattern.

Figure 100: Venom - "Black Metal" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Verse at 0'22")

Although “Black Metal” (Venom, 1982) is played at the same tempo as “Welcome to Hell” (Venom, 1981), the most common subdivisions in the riff are 16<sup>th</sup> notes, which effectively doubles the perceived speed of the song. The use of fast single-note sections also resembles tremolo picking, which is one of the central picking techniques used within black metal. Whilst this technique is often attributed to Øystein ‘Euronymous’ Aarseth of Mayhem and Snorre Ruch of Thorns (1990), the picking style of Venom in songs like “Black Metal” may have been a precursor to the use of the technique in the black metal subgenre.

The drum patterns in “Black Metal” (Venom, 1982) are also notable, as they are identical to the typical ‘skank’ drum beats that were used in thrash metal, which is another example of the ways that thrash metal musicians were inspired by NWoBHM music. The combination of this type of beat and the double-kick drumming of Motörhead’s Phil Taylor provided the foundation for thrash metal drumming, and bands subsequently iterated on these techniques. The evolution of thrash metal drumming resulted in the creation of the blast beat, which saw extensive use in the extreme subgenres of grindcore and death metal. As well as the musical evolutions, the imagery of Venom also evolved over time, and eventually provided a standard for extreme metal to build on

Even in their earliest output, themes of the occult were the most prominent theme in Venom’s imagery, in a way that had not been seen in metal before. Whilst Black Sabbath had utilised themes of the occult in *their* imagery, it rarely glorified any evil entity, but was often presented through the lens of horror or cautionary tales. The imagery of NWoBHM bands like Angel Witch and Witchfynde (1973) also referenced themes of the occult, but this was more overt in their artwork, and was much more understated in their lyrics. However, the themes of Venom explicitly glorified Satan in both lyrics and artwork, which was notably extreme when compared to the conventions of the NWoBHM subgenre and the time of release.



Figure 101: Venom - Welcome to Hell

The cover of *Welcome to Hell* (Venom, 1981) (see Fig.101) did not include the ambiguous references to the occult and pseudo-religious imagery that was included in the aforementioned *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (Black Sabbath, 1973) or *Sad Wings of Destiny* (Judas Priest, 1976) but was dominated by a ‘Sigil of Baphomet’. Although the inclusion of a bolder goat head was a slight deviation from the official Church of Satan symbol, the reference was still obvious, and the lyrics of songs like “Sons of Satan” (Venom, 1981) and “In League with Satan” (Venom, 1981) reinforced these themes.

However, these themes were not the sole focus of the musicians on this debut. Other songs, such as “Poison” (Venom, 1981), “Angel Dust” (Venom, 1981) and “Live Like an Angel (Die Like a Devil)” (Venom, 1981) reference themes of a rock ‘n’ roll life of excess. This shows that the conventions of the NWoBHM subgenre had an influence on the early output of the band, and allows an accurate subgenre categorisation. As their career progressed, though, the band’s imagery was refined, and themes of Satanism became central within their output. On their album *Black Metal* (Venom, 1982), the lyrics include overt themes of Satanism, as seen on the song “Sacrifice” (Venom, 1982):

Goat of Mendes lifts his head  
Summons up the living dead  
Virgin flesh lies tied and bound  
Hail Satanas

The lyrics in this song are more explicitly satanic than any that were present in the metal genre up to this point, but the influence of these themes can be seen throughout the black metal subgenre. The use of the Latin name for Satan, ‘Satanas’, resembles the way that black metal musicians use Latin to invert religious themes within their titles and lyrics. The word Satanas was used in the title of Mayhem’s genre-defining debut album *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* (Mayhem, 1994), although it was spelt incorrectly in this case. The use of Latin became a convention of the black metal genre, and can be seen in the titles of songs like “Domine in Virtute tua Laetabitur Rex” (Gorgoroth, 2003) and “Vobiscum Satanas” (Dark Funeral, 1998).

The reverential tone of the lyrics on “Sacrifice” (Venom, 1982) is also reminiscent of the way that lyrics are constructed in black metal. In the lyrics for “The Return of Darkness and Evil”, Thomas “Quorthon” Forsberg of Bathory uses a similar tone to portray a reverence for Satan (Bathory, 1985):

Thunder and lightning the ancient prediction  
The bells chime for Satan's return...

These examples, both technical and semiotic, show direct influences between the music and imagery of Venom and early black metal artists. The music of Venom was among the most extreme within NWoBHM, and any further growth in extremity would have pushed them into a new subgenre. This is reinforced by the new subgenres that were created by bands that

were directly influenced by them. As Venom pushed against the right wall of extremity within their subgenre, their influence spread to new bands, who created new subgenres. As these bands were the progenitors of their respective subgenres, the evolutionary model that I have based my research on suggests that they should have existed in an area of minimal extremity within them.

This can be seen in both thrash metal and black metal, as the originators of both subgenres, Metallica and Bathory, were heavily influenced by Venom, but were among the least extreme bands in their respective subgenres. In a video interview, Lars Ulrich of Metallica said that “Venom was quite a big influence on...things like “Whiplash”, for instance” (A Metalhead’s Journey, 2021), which is clearly audible on the main riffs in “Black Metal” (Venom, 1982) and “Whiplash” (Metallica, 1983), as they were both dominated by palm-muted 16<sup>th</sup> notes. In contrast to this, Forsberg of Bathory was notably resistant to claims that Venom influenced his music. With a retrospective viewpoint, however, Forsberg was regularly unreliable in interviews, even giving inconsistent answers to questions of his real name, which was in doubt until after his death.

Contrary to Forsberg’s protestations, Jonas Åkerlund, who was the drummer for Bathory in their formative years, said that the band got its name from the Venom song “Countess Bathory” (Venom, 1982). There are also titles, imagery, and aesthetic elements that are shared between the two bands, which extend beyond reasonable claims of coincidence. Both bands have songs named “Sacrifice” and “Raise the Dead”, but there are also titles that are similar. Venom’s song “In League with Satan” (Venom, 1981) is similar to Bathory’s “In Conspiracy with Satan” (Bathory, 1984), and the Venom song, “Lady Lust” (Venom, 1984) includes the lyrics “lady lust, oh what a bitch”, whilst Bathory’s “Bestial Lust (Bitch)” (Bathory, 1985) contains the lyrics “bestial lust, c’mon bitch”. The aesthetic similarities were also notable, which can be seen in photos of both bands (see Fig.102 & 103).



Figure 102: Venom



Figure 103: Thomas 'Quarthon' Forsberg

These two photos bear a striking resemblance, both in the attire and the physical presence of the band members, and through the musical, thematic and aesthetic similarities, it is clear to see that the creative output of Bathory *was* influenced by Venom. As black metal aged, Bathory became the standard for musical extremity, and bands like Mayhem, Emperor (1991) and Gorgoroth took these elements to new extremes in their music.

This reinforces my evaluation of Venom as the transitional band between NWoBHM and early thrash and black metal. The bands that they directly influenced were the creators of new subgenres, but are among the least extreme within them, which follows my evolutionary model. As these newer subgenres aged, new bands iterated on the innovations of Metallica and Bathory and reached a right wall of extremity within those subgenres, which resulted in the existence of more transitional bands and the creation of further subgenres and microgenres.

This evolutionary development mirrors the ideas of Andrew Cope in *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* (2016). In this book, he states that “the progress of heavy metal as a genre is marked by both stability and the process of mutation where the core elements remain but are influenced by technical innovation. Therefore, the essential characteristic features remain intact and identifiable as heavy metal whilst at the same time the genre expands” (Cope, 2016). While I have surmised that there are various catalysts for change in

the metal genre, of which technology is only an example, Cope's ideas of gradual expansion through the amalgamation of core conventions and outside influences are emblematic of an evolutionary system. However, the use of the term progress in this instance is potentially problematic, as the ideas of progress and expansion through variety are opposed to each other within Gould's evolutionary model. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I examine more transitional moments in detail in order to create an accurate web of influences that depicts the splintered genre of heavy metal as a product of variety, rather than progress.

## The Penetrative Influence of Hardcore Punk

Although both black metal and thrash metal musicians were influenced by NWOBHM bands like Venom and Motörhead in the early 1980s, there was another influence on these subgenres. Hardcore punk was among the most extreme music that existed outside of metal in the late 1970s, as the formation of Black Flag (1976) had created a new movement within punk, and spawned a slew of similar bands. Among these were bands like the Minutemen (1980), Circle Jerks (1979), Bad Religion (1980) and Suicidal Tendencies (1981).

Hardcore punk has been uncommonly influential in heavy metal, as it has inspired musicians across many subgenres, and over a large span of time. The aggression of the music and the anti-establishment ideology that informed the imagery was easily integrated into the metal genre, and this helped to create both subgenres and microgenres within metal, like grindcore, crossover thrash, metalcore and sludge. In order to analyse the impact of hardcore punk on the metal genre, the conventions and innovations of hardcore need to be established.

As punk was gaining popularity in the 1970s, and bands like The Ramones (1974), The Sex Pistols (1975) and The Clash (1976) were becoming more mainstream, music executives sought to take advantage of the movement by releasing music known as 'new wave'. This style was created to be a more palatable version of punk. In response to this, a reactionary style was created by youths in and around the LA area of California. In *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* (2010), Steven Blush states that "hardcore extended, mimicked or reacted to punk; it appropriated some aspects yet discarded others", and that "it reaffirmed punk attitude, and rejected new wave". The anger toward the music industry, and the anti-establishment feelings towards new-wave were overt in the imagery of the subgenre, and this also extended to the extremity of the music. This extremity was applied to all musical elements of the subgenre, but the speed, intensity of the guitar parts, and the virtuosity of the drum parts were particularly innovative.

The drum parts were noticeably influential on extreme metal, as an early example of blast-beats can be heard on "Asocial Attack" (Asocial, 1984) by the Swedish hardcore band Asocial (1984). These influences were used by crossover thrash bands in the 1980s like the

aforementioned Stormtroopers of Death, which then provided a foundation for subgenres like death metal and grindcore. The distortion that was applied to guitar parts in hardcore punk was also highly influential, as many NWoBHM bands at the time were using an overdriven form of distortion that was made popular by the use of the Marshall JCM800 amplifier. However, in order to create more aggression in their music, hardcore punk bands used higher levels of gain on their amplifiers, as well as distortion pedals like the Ibanez Tube Screamer. This was then used by thrash metal and grindcore bands to replicate this aggression in *their* music, although the tone was made to sound more precise by the prevalence of palm-mute riffs in thrash metal.

The vocals of hardcore singers were also much more extreme than most metal bands at the time of the subgenre's original surge of popularity. Whilst most of the NWoBHM subgenre was dominated by high-pitched, clean vocals, hardcore vocalists utilised less melody in their singing techniques, and typically shouted or screamed their lyrics. In contrast to the bulk of NWoBHM bands, hardcore bands often employed a single guitarist, so the singers did not have to compete with dense mid-range information in a mix. This meant that hardcore vocals were often pitched in a similar way to speech, which was easily replicated by the audience in a live environment. This inspired the 'mob vocals' that would then be replicated on studio recordings.

The dichotomy that is present between the speed and intensity of hardcore punk and the slow, lumbering atmosphere of doom metal has made the innovations of sludge musicians particularly notable. The music of Crowbar is similar to punk in guitar tone, vocal style and imagery, but is slowed down to a similar speed to traditional doom metal, with riffs that are inspired by Black Sabbath. This can be heard on their song "The Lasting Dose" (Crowbar, 2001) (see Fig.104).



The image shows a musical score for the verse of Crowbar's "The Lasting Dose". It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a Drum Set staff with a tempo marking of ♩ = 110, an Electric Guitar staff in the key of B minor (two sharps), and a Bass Guitar staff. The second system includes a Dr. (Drum) staff with a triplet marking above the first measure, an E. Gtr. (Electric Guitar) staff, and a Bass staff. The music is in 4/4 time and features a heavy, slow riff with chromaticism in the guitar and bass lines.

Figure 104: Crowbar - "The Lasting Dose" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Verse at 0'36")

Whilst this track is clearly much slower than hardcore punk, a similar tone is audible in the guitar. This distinguishes the music of Crowbar from the rest of doom metal, as bands within the wider doom metal subgenre use a guitar tone that is similar to the fuzz of Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi. However, the way that the riffs are constructed helps to bridge the gap between doom metal and hardcore punk, as they are similar in content to Black Sabbath riffs. The riff in this excerpt is mostly played in the key of B minor, but also introduces some chromaticism in the form of a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> chord and major 7<sup>th</sup> chord, which increases the sense of heaviness, and is reminiscent of the chromatic approach shown in Black Sabbath songs like "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath" (1973) (see Fig.105).

The image shows a musical score for the guitar part of Black Sabbath's "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath". It features a single staff for Electric Guitar in the key of B minor (two sharps) with a tempo marking of ♩ = 140. The music is in 4/4 time and consists of a heavy, slow riff with chromaticism, characterized by a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> chord and a major 7<sup>th</sup> chord.

Figure 105: Black Sabbath - "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath" (Guitar - Verse 3 at 3'18")

The vocals also help to bridge the void between doom metal and hardcore punk, as they are distorted in a similar way to hardcore, but not in a way that removes all melody from the song. Kirk Windstein, the vocalist of Crowbar, sings low melodies with a distortion that creates

a dense atmosphere that is akin to more traditional doom metal, but with an aggression that is influenced by hardcore punk.

The imagery within sludge also shows a convergence of themes from doom metal and hardcore punk, as it contains themes of negative emotions, such as grief and depression. This can be seen in the lyrics for “Waiting in Silence” by Crowbar (1991):

I'm trapped in darkness  
Life is no more  
Unending pain and agony

Sludge bands do not always present these negative emotions from an introspective viewpoint though, as there are accounts of outward feelings of anger that directly mirror the vitriol within the imagery of hardcore punk. This can be seen in the lyrics of “The Blue” by Acid Bath (1994):

I know you, you're nothing,  
You're so small,  
You're fucking nothing,  
Nothing at all.

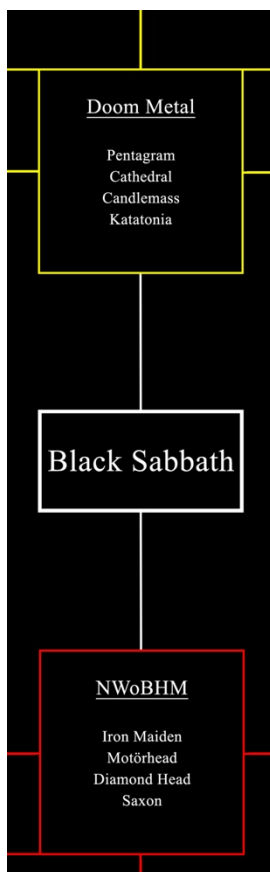


Figure 106: Initial Branches

In my web-based model of the variation and evolution within metal, the centre of the web revolves around Black Sabbath, as they are the singular originators of the genre (see Fig.106). As they directly influenced the first two distinct subgenres to emerge, I have placed these subgenres on either side of Black Sabbath to illustrate the diverging influences of the band. The lines that extend from doom metal show the five microgenres that belong within it, whilst the lines that extend from NWoBHM show the influence of the subgenre on power metal, thrash metal, black metal and progressive metal.

As this web extends further outward, the lines of influence are drawn between subgenres and microgenres, but I have also illustrated the outside influences that have affected the formation of various subgenres within metal. Hardcore punk is entirely unique within these outside influences, as it has influenced multiple different styles over a

large span of time. The other outside influences, which are folk music and goth rock, only influenced a single subgenre or microgenre each, which are folk metal and gothic doom respectively.

The way that hardcore punk has influenced such a wide range of styles within metal shows that metal musicians do not only use their antecedents within the metal genre to create higher forms of extremity. As well as the influence of previous artists and subgenres, metal musicians also take exterior influences to create higher forms of extremity in their creative output, and if this is true for musical influences, it may give an insight into the reasons behind the most explicit imagery in extreme metal.

If outside influences can be used to allow a subgenre to grow in extremity when compared with its antecedents, then transgressive imagery can provide a definitive way for musicians to achieve this. In the same way that thrash metal or doom metal musicians take influences from hardcore punk to create subgenres and microgenres like sludge, grindcore or crossover thrash, metal musicians may take imagery from sources like horror films, biological studies or textbooks, or real-life crime. This is confirmed by Alex Webster of Cannibal Corpse in an interview with Sam Dunn (2017), as Webster states that the band was originally inspired by a shared interest “in horror movies, and...death metal”. The way that these themes are combined to create higher levels of extremity in their music provides a clear indication of the ways that metal develops over time, and the examination of extremity in modern culture could reveal the potential of metal musicians to create levels of even higher extremity in the future.

## The Emergence of Death Metal from Thrash Metal

Whilst metal in general has always been extreme when compared to mainstream music, and NWoBHM was instrumental in providing a foundation for future extremity, the first subgenre that can be considered truly extreme is thrash metal. The speed, aggression and vehement social commentary in the imagery of the subgenre allowed the musicians to create music that was much more extreme than any that had come before. Thrash metal was also highly influential in the wider metal genre, as it provided a foundation for the creation of six separate subgenres: grindcore, metalcore, folk metal, power metal, progressive metal and death metal. “Thrash’s sonic articulation...became the sound of 21<sup>st</sup> Century metal, particularly in terms of drumming styles and the highly compressed ‘crunch’ distortion timbre of the rhythm guitar” (Fellezs, 2016, pg. 90).

When examining the genre from a retrospective viewpoint, death metal stands out as the subgenre that defines extremity within heavy metal as a whole. Therefore, the formation of this subgenre from the foundation of thrash metal is an important transitional point within the history of metal, and it can provide evidence for the way that imagery evolves through the transition from one subgenre to the next.

The formation of thrash metal is well documented, and as the formative bands are accepted as Metallica, Megadeth, Anthrax (1981) and Slayer, they constitute the iconic ‘Big 4’. However, Slayer were much more extreme than their peers, which can be seen in the speed and composition of some of their iconic tracks. The ferocity of Slayer’s music can be seen in “Raining Blood”, which contains an extremely fast riff in the first verse (Slayer, 1986) (see Fig.107).

The image displays a musical score for the first verse of the song "Raining Blood" by the band Slayer. The score is written for three instruments: Drum Set, Electric Guitar, and Electric Bass. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 214. The time signature is 4/4. The Drum Set part features a complex, high-speed pattern with many sixteenth notes and rests. The Electric Guitar part consists of a fast, repetitive riff with various accidentals (sharps, naturals, flats, and double sharps). The Electric Bass part provides a simple, driving bass line with eighth notes and rests.

The image displays a musical score for the verse of Slayer's "Raining Blood". It consists of two systems of staves. The first system is labeled '2' and the second '3'. Each system includes three staves: Drums (Dr.), Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.), and Electric Bass (E. Bass). The guitar part is highly complex and fast, featuring a dense sequence of notes with numerous sharps and flats. The bass part is simpler, following a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with rests. The drum part is also complex, with many accents and a fast, driving rhythm.

Figure 107: Slayer - "Raining Blood" (Guitar, Bass, Drums - Verse at 1'08")

This example shows the sheer speed that the musicians in Slayer included in their music, which is even higher than most death metal music. However, death metal bands did utilise high speed sections that brought a feeling of ferocity and chaos, and this brought a release to the tension that was built throughout slower sections. This dichotomy of slow building tension and aggressive release also works in tandem with the imagery of death metal. The slower sections are often paired with subtler dark desires and descriptions of murderous intentions by the lyricists, whilst the faster sections are accompanied with lyrics that are far more violent and depict acts that are fuelled by rage.

The tuning of this excerpt is also indicative of the ways that down-tuning would rise to prominence in extreme subgenres. Even in thrash metal, which was extreme at the time of release, many bands still used standard E tuning, including Metallica, Anthrax and Exodus. As the genre developed throughout the 1980s, some bands down-tuned their guitars to E flat standard, and subsequent death metal bands took this to a further extreme. Death used D standard tuning throughout their career, whilst other bands have tuned progressively lower. Cannibal Corpse used E flat standard on their early albums, but slowly grew to use lower tunings, which now include tunings as low as G sharp standard. This necessitates the use of baritone guitars, which have scale lengths that are longer than typical guitars. Down-tuning

has been taken to an extreme within the music of modern death metal bands, especially in the music of bands like Archspire (2009), who use 8-string guitars tuned to drop E.

In a similar way as other subgenres within metal, a single band codified the conventions of the subgenre with their debut album, and in death metal, this album was *Scream Bloody Gore* (Death, 1987). There is dispute among metal listeners that Possessed's *Seven Churches* (Possessed, 1985) was the true origin of the subgenre, but when the two albums are examined side-by-side, there are far more links to thrash metal in the music of Possessed than in the music of Death. One of the clearest differences between the albums can be heard in the vocals. Although the vocals in both albums are distorted, they are distorted in different ways, and abide by the conventions of different subgenres.

The vocals of Jeff Becerra from Possessed are more akin to the distortion that is audible in the vocals of Exodus or Sepultura, and the sound is more reminiscent of a snarl or shout than a fully distorted scream. However, the vocals of Chuck Schuldiner of Death are similar to the conventions of death metal, as they are distorted in a more compressed way. This vocal technique allows the vocalist to remove some elements of strain from the vocal performance, and this creates a less erratic sound that provides a constant element for the other instruments in the song to revolve around.

Whilst the vocals are one of the main differences between the two albums, the overall sound is affected by the production of the records, and this highlights the differences between the two. The production of *Seven Churches* (Possessed, 1985) is noticeably rawer in execution, which gives it an extreme, lo-fi atmosphere that is more reminiscent of the albums of bands like Venom and Exodus. The guitar tone on the album is aggressive and sounds similar to the hardcore-infused thrash metal of the mid-1980s, and the drums include a bass-heavy kick drum that invokes the full bottom end of thrash recordings. In contrast, the overall production of *Scream Bloody Gore* (Death, 1987) is much more reminiscent of subsequent death metal recordings. The guitars are higher in gain than the guitars on *Seven Churches*, but this gain is presented in a more controlled way. A combination of rhythmically tight playing and a compressed, percussive tone enables the listener to perceive the nuanced intricacies of the guitar playing. The drums are similarly well produced, and include a prominent attack on the

kick drum, and whilst it is not quite as 'clicky' as the kicks on modern death metal releases, it is still much more precise than the kick drum sound on *Seven Churches*.

These differences combine to show that the two albums definitively belong to two different subgenres, but it is clear to hear that the elements within *Seven Churches* (Possessed, 1985) would go on to influence conventions within death metal. This establishes Possessed as a transitional band between the subgenres of thrash metal and death metal, alongside bands like Sepultura and Slayer. The existence of these transitional bands shows that the developments that create new subgenres or conventions in the metal genre happen over time, and these developments can be described as evolutionary rather than revolutionary. When compared to their predecessors, bands like Black Sabbath, Venom or Meshuggah may seem to take huge strides into higher levels of complexity and extremity, but these innovations usually have precedents of lower extremity in the music of previous bands or subgenres. These transitional bands also aid in the creation of an accurate evolutionary model for the genre, as their existence within specific time periods provides definitive links between separate subgenres.

The imagery of Possessed, Sepultura and Slayer is notably uniform, and this provides information into the extremity of imagery within this period of transitional innovation. All three of these bands include explicit anti-religious themes within their imagery, which can be seen in songs like "Morbid Visions" by Sepultura (1986):

The roman empire has crucified the messiah  
The bestial power has sacrificed your gods

This song vehemently denounces the Christian faith, and the musicians vow that they will "show the devoted the truth, the painful truth". In this example, the truth that Sepultura refer to is the true weakness of Christ that they will expose to the most devoted religious followers. This is echoed in the sentiments shown on Slayer's "Hell Awaits", which describes a satanic victory over the armies of heaven (Slayer, 1985):

Angels fighting aimlessly  
Still dying by the sword  
Our legions killing all in sight  
To get the one called Lord

This song is also written from a first-person perspective, which may have informed the stylistic choices of death metal musicians when constructing their lyrics. This suggests that the atmosphere of power that is created when utilising themes of dominance and victory may be a driving force behind the questionable subject matter that is intrinsic to heavy metal. Therefore, the rebellion against established religions may give a sense of power that is similar to the physical dominance shown in the gore-centric lyrics of death metal. The brazenly anti-religious themes of Possessed are visible in their logo, lyrics and artwork, and this was a clear influence on the anti-religious and satanic imagery of death metal bands like Morbid Angel and Deicide.

Both thrash metal and death metal have had far-reaching influences on other subgenres and microgenres, which can be seen in the large number of subgenres that evolved from the foundation of extremity that thrash metal musicians provided. Similarly, as death metal grew more popular over time, a wealth of variety formed within the subgenre. The free choice of musicians to challenge established genre conventions allows for continued variety and evolution in the genre, which in turn results in the continued growth and longevity of the genre (Kennedy, 2018, pg. 53).

Within death metal, some musicians chose to accentuate a single element that made the subgenre extreme, and this allowed for the creation of microgenres like technical death metal and brutal death metal. Others chose to graft the inherent extremity of death metal onto other subgenres to create hybridised microgenres like deathcore and death-doom. Through this permeation of the entire genre, death metal has become one of the main ways that extremity can be heightened within other heavy metal subgenres, and in my next subchapter, I discuss the ways that this has impacted the evolution of the genre as a whole.



## Variation Within Death Metal - Divergence of the Extreme

Within the death metal subgenre, there has been a wealth of variety that has spawned multiple microgenres. I have focussed on technical death metal, brutal death metal and melodic death metal in my study, as these are the most prolific, but there are many others that are less thoroughly represented. These include death 'n' roll, progressive death metal and symphonic death metal, but the three that I have chosen to focus on are notable for the musicians' interpretation of the typical death metal conventions. In this subchapter, I explore the divergence between the technicality and brutality of death metal to create opposing microgenres, which gives insight into the most extreme fringes of the metal genre as a whole. I also examine the specific way that European death metal bands evolved to bring melodic ideas into a highly extreme subgenre, and highlight the ways that this created a new and accessible form of extreme music that has spawned some of the genres most successful artists.

As the conventions of death metal had been codified in the late 1980s, artists began to iterate on the central elements of the subgenre in the early-mid 1990s which led to the creation of various microgenres. The technicality shown by bands like Cynic were indicative of the innovations that would be made in the technicality of death metal, but the first truly virtuosic example of what would come to be known as technical death metal was shown on the title track of Gorguts' second LP, *Obscura* (1998) (see Fig.108).

The image shows a musical score for the introduction of the song "Obscura" by the band Gorguts. The score is arranged in five systems. The first system includes a Drum Set part and two Electric Guitar parts. The second system includes a Dr. (Drum) part and two E. Gtr. (Electric Guitar) parts. The music is in 23/8 time and has a tempo of 111. The drum parts feature complex rhythms with various subdivisions and rests. The guitar parts feature intricate melodic lines with diamond-shaped and cross-shaped note heads, indicating specific techniques like pitchbending and percussive hitting.

Figure 108: Gorguts - "Obscura" (Guitar, Drums - Intro at 0'00")

This excerpt from the intro of "Obscura" shows the various ways that extremity within technicality can be shown within death metal. The first point of focus is the time signature, which is 23/8 in this riff. This is grouped into two groups of six eighth notes that begin and end each bar, and a group of 11 eighth notes in the centre of each bar that works to disorient the listener with irregular rhythms and piercing atonal stabs that juxtapose with the lower tuning in the main body of the riff. The diamond-shaped note heads in the first guitar part are used to symbolise the pitchless squeal that is created by pushing the string into the pickup. I have used the open F note to show which string is used for this effect, which is the fifth string in this case, as Gorguts are tuned to C standard. The cross-shaped note heads in the second guitar part also symbolise an unconventional technique within metal guitar, as this represents the guitarist percussively hitting the side of his picking hand on the strings to create a similar sound to a muted strum. The way that the two guitarists use these techniques in tandem create a sound that was unprecedented within death metal.

The drums are also similarly virtuosic, as the drummer utilises an abundance of different subdivisions within a short space of time, thus creating a stop-start feel within the song that causes further disorientation for the listener. The use of demisemiquavers within the

blastbeats in this drum part effectively doubles the tempo for short bursts, as metal listeners are used to hearing blastbeats that are based on patterns of 16<sup>th</sup> notes. These short bursts of blastbeats also utilise different cymbals, as hi-hats are used in the first bar, and the ride cymbal is used in the second bar. This rhythmic variation is made even more disorienting for the listener through the use of 16<sup>th</sup> note triplets played on the kick drum at the end of every bar. The tonal variety that comes from playing different sections of the kit in quick succession combines with the mix of subdivisions and techniques to create a dense drum part that compliments the intricacies of the guitar riff. This level of virtuosity in this drum part is a predecessor for the drumming of technical death metal drummers like George Kolias and Hannes Grossman, and has also influenced virtuosic drumming in the deathcore microgenre, such as that of Infant Annihilator's Aaron Kitcher.

However, as the music grew in technicality, the transgressive imagery that is a central thematic convention within death metal was made less extreme within the bulk of technical death metal. There are still some artists that use themes of violence and gore in their imagery, such as Necrophagist, whose propensity for typical death metal lyrics can be seen in their song "Fermented Offal Discharge" (Necrophagist, 1999):

The open casket reveals the rot  
Into weak stomach I slide my hands  
Intensifying fumes I like to snort

These lyrics can most easily be compared to the lyrics of formative death metal bands like Cannibal Corpse and Autopsy, due to the graphic content and first-person perspective, but these themes are overshadowed by esoteric themes of science fiction, philosophy and mythology in the bulk of technical death metal. The most common way for a technical death metal band to present their imagery is by using esoteric themes, and contextualising them in a violent way that is informed by established death metal conventions. This mixture of themes and presentation can be seen in the imagery of Nile, who exclusively utilise themes of Egyptian mythology in their imagery. This is often presented through violent language, and a first-person perspective, which links the band to their death metal predecessors. This fusion of style and subject can be seen in "Ramses Bringer of War" (Nile, 1998):

Raging like Menthu, like Baal in his hour  
Lo, the mighty Sekhmet is with me  
I enter in among them even as a hawk striketh  
I slay, I hew to pieces and cast to the ground

This song presents a first-person depiction of the might of Rameses, an Egyptian Pharaoh, and his dominion over the Hittites in battle. However, this is not presented in an objective way, like the historical accounts in the music of a band like Sabaton. Instead, the violence that is a convention of the wider death metal subgenre provides a way for the musicians to present themes of power and dominance over the historical enemies of the protagonist. The feelings of power that this physical violence evokes in this historical context is reminiscent of the physical power that death metal musicians portray in their first-hand accounts of murder and torture. In the opposite way to the imagery within technical death metal, brutal death metal bands take these transgressive power fantasies to an extreme within their microgenre.

As well as the extremity shown in the imagery of the microgenre, brutal death metal musicians show extremity within their instrumental song writing. In contrast with the virtuosity shown in technical death metal, brutal death metal musicians utilise slow tempos and simple rhythms to accentuate the 'heaviness' present in their music. This can be seen in "Intracranial Parasite" by Abominable Putridity (2007) (see Fig.109).

The image displays a musical score for the introduction of the song "Intracranial Parasite" by Abominable Putridity. The score is arranged in two systems, each featuring a Drum Set and an Electric Guitar. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 135. The time signature is 3/4. The first system starts at measure 4, and the second system starts at measure 6. The drum parts consist of a steady, heavy beat with occasional accents. The electric guitar parts feature a series of power chords and a triplet in the final measure of the second system.

Figure 109: Abominable Putridity - "Intracranial Parasite" (Guitar, Drums - Intro at 0'43")

This excerpt shows a typical brutal death metal riff, as it is played in a low tuning and at a relatively slow tempo. Brutal death metal musicians combine these elements with an extremely high gain, compressed guitar tone and the use of heavy palm muting to create a thick sound that sets the microgenre apart from the rest of death metal. These aspects are taken to extremes in the prevalent 'slam' riffs that help to give the microgenre its identity.

The aspects of death metal that are accentuated within brutal death metal present an antithesis to the approach of technical death metal musicians, and these diverging styles showcase the variety that can be achieved within a style that is often criticised for its homogeneity. It is also imperative to note that these opposing microgenres were established at a similar time, and have developed in parallel with each other. As technical death metal musicians have made their music progressively more virtuosic, brutal death metal musicians have made their music progressively heavier and more thematically extreme.

Whilst riff construction, production and vocal techniques all set brutal death metal apart from the rest of death metal, examination of the transgressive nature of the imagery is the easiest way to achieve this. Whilst death metal musicians use themes of torture, murder and sexual violence as common themes in their lyrics, brutal death metal bands iterate on these themes to explore the most explicit and graphic ways to present them. This can be seen in the music of bands like Devourment and Amputated (2002), and the lyrics of Devourment's "Masturbating at the Slab" (2005) present these themes in a way that is far more extreme than those in death metal as a whole:

From the grave to the morgue, the voices are still calling me  
I stalk the dead of night for young females to bleed on me  
Decimating, mutilating, masturbating while I kill  
At the slabs dead whores rot to fill with my insane infection

When these opposing microgenres are analysed in tandem, the way that they contrast one another showcases the evolutionary change within the death metal genre as a whole. Musicians have chosen specific elements of death metal to accentuate and thus create higher extremity within their creative output, which resulted in a subgenre that was too varied to be defined under a single name. Though they are both considered death metal, a technical band like Necrophagist and a brutal band like Abominable Putridity are too different to be

considered as a part of the same subgenre, which led to the creation of precise microgenres that helped to describe the specific form of the death metal that was being played.

However, as the technical and brutal death metal microgenres were established, the general subgenre of death metal was not rendered obsolete. Bands that can be categorised within a specific microgenre still exist within a minority, and most death metal bands still create music that cannot be further categorised beyond the broader subgenre of death metal. This shows that the increase in extremity on the fringes of the subgenre do not create progress in death metal as a whole, but instead create variation that extends toward the right wall of extremity. Whilst some bands approach the right wall of extremity and spill over into a new subgenre, the modal majority of bands within the subgenre still exist nearer to the left wall of minimal complexity, which mirrors the way that variations in species' complexity exists in Gould's evolutionary model.

This is reinforced further by the evolution that occurs within the most extreme microgenres. Suffocation was the first band to codify the conventions of brutal death metal, but they are not particularly extreme when compared with relatively modern bands like Cephalotripsy (2003) and Visceral Disgorge. If the originators of an extreme microgenre are still among the least extreme bands within it, the same evolutionary development reoccurs within that microgenre. This cycle of evolution reoccurs over and over within the metal genre as a whole, and is the main mechanism for the spread of extremity within the genre. This resembles the way that variation occurs within biological evolution, and shows that despite the agency of musicians regarding their musical output, an evolutionary system still accurately describes the way that artists create their art.

As Darwin concluded that changes within species occur in response to local conditions, the geographical location of bands influences their creative decisions. This can be seen with the melodic approach to death metal that was made by Swedish bands in the city of Gothenburg. As death metal was growing in popularity across America, the influence of the subgenre was felt as far away as Scandinavia. The subgenre was particularly popular in Sweden, which inspired the formation of bands like Grave, Entombed and Dismember in Stockholm. As these bands belonged to the first wave of Swedish death metal bands, they were very similar in

sound to American bands, aside from the tonal differences that came with the use of the Boss HM-2 distortion pedal. This similarity can be heard in Entombed's "Wolverine Blues" (1993) (see Fig.110), which uses the first four notes of the B diminished scale to create the main riff of the song. This scale was widely used by American death metal bands, and is still one of the most popular scales in the subgenre.

The musical score for Entombed's "Wolverine Blues" (Verse at 0'30'') is presented in four staves. The top staff is for the Drum Set, showing a consistent pattern of snare and kick drums. The second staff is for the Electric Guitar, featuring a complex, fast riff in the key of B diminished (B, A, G, F, E, D, C, B). The third staff is for the Dr. (Drum), showing a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is for the E. Gtr. (Electric Guitar), which is a duplicate of the Electric Guitar part. The tempo is marked as 150 BPM.

Figure 110: Entombed - "Wolverine Blues" (Guitar, Drums - Verse at 0'30")

As Swedish bands grew more popular among death metal listeners, the influence of their music spread around Sweden, particularly to the city of Gothenburg. However, the bands in Gothenburg were not only influenced by the American style of death metal, as Scandinavia was producing various subgenres of metal at this time. The influence of NWoBHM bands still existed in Sweden, and other melodic subgenres like black metal and folk metal were beginning to emerge. This wealth of melodic inspiration led to a fusion in the music of bands from Gothenburg, and the combination of death metal conventions and melodic inspiration created a style that was too different to simply be described as death metal. This led to the creation of melodic death metal. The first bands to play this style of death metal were At The Gates, Arch Enemy, In Flames and Dark Tranquillity, but *Slaughter of the Soul* (At The Gates, 1995) marks the true beginning of the melodic death metal microgenre.

The image displays a musical score for the bridge section of "Slaughter of the Soul" by At The Gates. The score is written for Drum Set and two Electric Guitars. The tempo is marked as 160 BPM. The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex interplay of triplets and consistent rhythms across the instruments. The drum part consists of a steady eighth-note pattern on the kick drum and a simple backbeat on the snare and crash. The guitar parts feature a mix of eighth-note triplets and quarter notes, creating a dense and rhythmic texture.

Figure 111: At The Gates - "Slaughter of the Soul" (Guitar, Drums - Bridge at 1'09")

This excerpt from the title track of *Slaughter of the Soul* (At The Gates, 1995) (see Fig.111) shows the ways that the musicians from At The Gates employed melody in their song writing. The riff utilises a minor scale, which is much more conducive to the creation of recognisable melodies than the diminished scale, and the interplay between the guitar parts works in a similar way to the rhythm/lead roles of guitarists in subgenres like NWOBHM and folk metal. The drumming in this section also provides a foundation for the way that drums would be played by subsequent melodic death metal bands. In this section, the drummer is playing consistent notes on the kick drum, whilst playing a simple backbeat on the crash and snare. This is similar to the way that drums were implemented in "While We Sleep" (Insomnium,



2014) (see Fig.36), which shows that the originators of the microgenre have an influence that can still be heard in the music of its modern bands. As the thematic extremity of death metal was reduced by melodic death metal musicians, the timbral intensity also decreased. This allowed the music to become more audible, and therefore accessible, which may have contributed to the microgenre's lasting success (Hillier, 2018, pg. 16).

The local history of Sweden, and Scandinavia in general, can also be seen in the way that imagery is implemented differently within melodic death metal, when compared to its parent subgenre. Amon Amarth are a band that formed in the mid-1990s, and whilst they were musically influenced by the originators of the microgenre, their imagery was inspired by the history of their home country. Therefore, the bands exclusively discuss themes of Viking mythology in their lyrics, and their artwork contains depictions of figures and scenes from that mythology. As well as the history of their home country, the musicians of Amon Amarth may have been influenced by bands from other subgenres, such as the black metal band Bathory, who had used Viking mythology as a central theme from their fourth album onward.

The ways that Amon Amarth utilised themes from their musical predecessors and their geographical location shows the multi-faceted ways that variation within the metal genre can occur. If local conditions provide the catalyst for the changes that are central to biological evolution, then the local environment and current musical landscape provide the catalyst for equivalent changes within metal music. Within culture, local conditions can refer to the physical location that an artist resides in, and the culture and traditions that are central to life there, or it can refer to the artistic innovations that are taking place within their personal view. This may be the music that is being created around them in a physically close proximity, or the music that they are exposed to through analogue mediums, like tape trading in the 1980s and 1990s, or digital mediums like Bandcamp and Spotify in the modern age.

The plethora of music that is now available on digital platforms can influence a wide range of musicians across the world, and that influence may have changed the definition of 'local' conditions. In the 1980's, the lack of digital distribution allowed small scenes to form that would have great impact on the metal genre, such as the San Francisco Bay Area scene, which

would allow thrash, punk, crossover and rock bands to meet, exchange ideas and proliferate through a relatively small area (Fellezs, 2016, pg. 95).

If a portion of the local conditions for change within metal is the existing music that an artist consumes, the potential for diverse 'local' conditions is larger than it has ever been. This may explain the fragmented nature of metal in the modern age, and the diverse range of influences that are audible within the most cutting-edge subgenres, such as modern progressive metal.

## Amalgamations of Extremity - Hybrid Microgenres

Death metal is a subgenre that has existed for over 30 years, but bands within the subgenre and its microgenres are still pushing the boundaries of extremity within the metal genre as a whole. In this subchapter, I discuss the ways that death metal has become the standard for extremity within metal, and examine how elements of death metal can be used to inspire higher levels of extremity within subgenres that are not explicitly connected to it. I use sections from my 'web of metal' diagram to show the numerous and varied microgenres that have been created through the amalgamation of death metal and other subgenres, and examine the conventions of these microgenres to establish common ways that death metal influences other music.

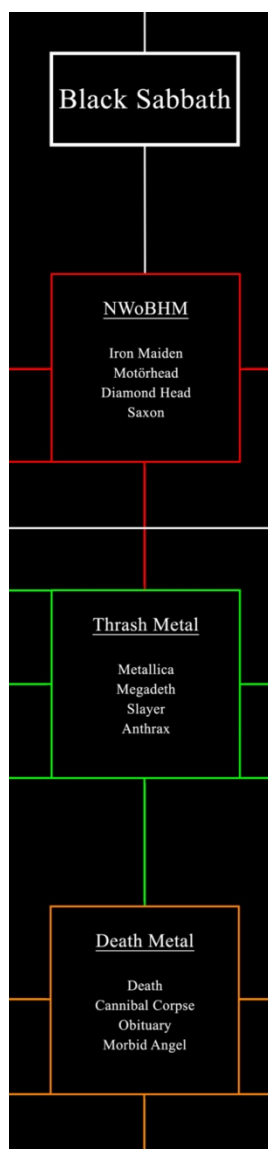


Figure 112: Centre Column

My 'metal web' diagram shows the 10 subgenres that I have studied, the microgenres that exist within them, and the way that they influence each other. The centre column of my diagram (see Fig.112) shows the way that the music of Black Sabbath inspired the creation of the NWoBHM subgenre, and the way that bands iterated on NWoBHM music to create higher levels of extremity. This increase in extremity allowed for the subsequent creation of thrash metal and death metal. The innovations that occurred within metal in the 1980s were numerous, and within that single decade there was a major paradigm shift within the genre. At the start of the 1980s, NWoBHM was the most popular style within metal, and thrash was just starting to emerge as a separate subgenre through early demos from bands like Metallica and Slayer.

However, as the 1980s came to an end, notable albums had been released by some of the original innovators of death metal, including Death's *Scream Bloody Gore* (Death, 1987), Morbid Angel's *Altars of Madness* (Morbid Angel, 1989) and Obituary's *Slowly We Rot* (Obituary, 1989). There is a vast chasm that exists between the relatively low extremity of music that was released at the start of the decade and the

highly extreme music from the end of the decade, but this pace of innovation and variation has not continued into the present day. Although death metal was an established subgenre at the end of the 1980s, there are no new subgenres that have been singularly influenced by death metal. Death metal has been the most extreme subgenre on this section of my web diagram for 30 years, and although musicians within technical and brutal death metal have iterated on specific subgenre conventions, there has not been a musician that has created music that innovates to such an extreme that they are categorized as the originators of an entirely new subgenre.

The fact that death metal has been among the most extreme subgenres in metal for 30 years provides evidence that it could be considered as a standard for extremity within the entire genre, but there *are* still subgenres in other areas of my metal web that are similarly extreme and long lasting. The only way to establish death metal as the standard for extremity is to examine the effect that the subgenre has had on other areas of the genre's spectrum. Among the subgenres that I have studied, death metal has inspired the creation of more hybrid microgenres than any other subgenre, as musicians in metalcore, doom metal and grindcore have used death metal elements and created the microgenres of deathcore, death-doom and deathgrind respectively. The other subgenres that exist on the most extreme fringes of metal are progressive metal, black metal and grindcore, but none of them can be described as the true standard for extremity.

Despite the virtuosity within it, progressive metal does not contain the transgressive themes of the other three subgenres, and the musicians therein are more open to mainstream influences, which means that the subgenre cannot be considered a standard for extremity within metal. Similarly, grindcore has an abundance of extreme elements, including speed, vocal style and imagery, but a large part of the extremity within the subgenre is inspired by hardcore punk, which means that the genre is less bound by the conventions of metal than the others in this shortlist. In addition, grindcore has not influenced any other subgenres to create hybridised microgenres, thus it cannot be considered a standard.

The two remaining subgenres are similar in many ways, including their use of transgressive imagery, their innovations in production, and their influential vocal styles. However, black

metal has influenced musicians from fewer separate subgenres than death metal, and therefore there are fewer microgenres that were partially created from the use of black metal elements. Blackened folk metal is technically a microgenre, but as black metal was a subgenre that inspired folk metal from its outset alongside thrash metal, blackened folk metal simply exists as a way to categorise the specific style of metal that a given band applies folk music to. As a vast array of metal subgenres can apply folk elements to their established conventions in order to create folk metal, black metal does not create a notable difference when compared to any other form of the subgenre. When examining blackened death metal, it is unclear whether bands apply death metal elements to a foundation of black metal or apply black metal elements to a foundation of death metal, so I will omit this as a microgenre for both subgenres. As both blackened folk metal and blackened death metal have been excluded, the only hybridised microgenre that takes inspiration from black metal is blackened thrash metal, which is also relatively rare within thrash metal as a whole.

In contrast to this, death metal has been used by musicians across the spectrum to create higher levels of extremity within their subgenre, and this has resulted in the creation of three hybridised microgenres. Therefore, the long history of death metal and its wide-ranging influence as a method of adding extremity to existing subgenres provides enough evidence for me to consider it as the definitive standard for extremity within metal overall. The extremity of death metal and the level of exposure and appreciation that it has within the metal community means that bands within completely separate subgenres recognise the ways that elements of death metal can create higher levels of extremity within their own music. If a propensity to listen to death metal is one of the local conditions for the creation of an artist's music, then the change that results from that condition is the potential to form a new hybrid microgenre that arises from the combination of multiple influences.

In order to evaluate the ways that bands incorporate death metal elements into their subgenre, the specific elements that are chosen must be examined. As one of the most consistent and recognisable hallmarks of the death metal subgenre, distorted vocals are the first element that can be seen in all three hybrid microgenres. In metalcore and grindcore, the distortion present in the vocals is inspired by the distortion present in the vocals of hardcore punk musicians, which is more akin to shouting. However, the distortion present on

death metal vocals is much more saturated and compressed, and whilst the overall distortion renders the sound mostly pitchless, the technique produces a sound that is perceived as lower in pitch. This low, saturated distortion is audible in both deathcore and deathgrind, and it is one of the ways that the microgenres can be easily categorised. This vocal style is also notably present in death-doom, as they are an even more extreme departure from the conventions of doom metal. Vocalists in the subgenre typically utilise clean vocals that are similar to the vocals of Black Sabbath's Ozzy Osbourne, whilst some doom metal vocalists utilise an operatic vocal style, such as Messiah Marcolin of Candlemass.

However, the vocals are not the only element that differentiates these microgenres from their parent subgenres, which can be seen in the virtuosic drums that are implemented within deathcore. In the subgenre of metalcore, the drums are less virtuosic, and lack the constant aggression that is a result of the wide use of blastbeats in death metal. Whilst double-kick drumming is used, it is most often used to accentuate rhythmic guitar sections, as in "The End of Heartache" by Killswitch Engage (2004) (see Fig.113).

The image displays a musical score for the verse of "The End of Heartache" by Killswitch Engage. It consists of six staves arranged in three pairs. The top pair shows the "Drum Set" and "Electric Guitar" parts. The middle pair shows the "Dr." (drums) and "E. Gtr." (electric guitar) parts. The bottom pair shows the "Dr." and "E. Gtr." parts. The score is in 4/4 time and features a tempo marking of ♩ = 123. The guitar parts are characterized by a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, often with double-kick drumming. The drum parts feature a complex, syncopated rhythm with frequent double-kick patterns. The score is marked with measure numbers 4, 7, and 10.

Figure 113: Killswitch Engage - "The End of Heartache" (Guitar, Drums - Verse 0'15")

In the most rhythmic parts of this riff, the kick drum plays exactly the same rhythm as the guitar, which creates the percussive verse-riff sound that is a convention of the metalcore subgenre. However, the drum part from "Demolisher" by deathcore band Slaughter to Prevail

(2014) shows a composition that is much more influenced by death metal (Slaughter to Prevail, 2020) (see Fig.114).

The image displays a musical score for the song "Demolisher" by Slaughter to Prevail. It consists of four staves: Drum Set, Electric Guitar, Dr. (Drum), and E. Gtr. (Electric Guitar). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 200. The time signature is 4/4. The Drum Set staff shows a constant blast beat pattern. The Electric Guitar staff features a riff of open 8th notes and higher-pitched single 16th notes. The Dr. staff shows a triplet of eighth notes. The E. Gtr. staff shows a complex riff with various intervals and accidentals.

Figure 114: Slaughter to Prevail - "Demolisher" (Guitar, Drums - Verse 0'09")

Whilst the guitar riff in this verse creates a sense of rhythm between open 8<sup>th</sup> notes and higher-pitched single 16<sup>th</sup> notes, drummer Evgeny Novikov does not reinforce the rhythm in the same way that metalcore drummers do. In contrast to the metalcore convention, Novikov plays a constant blast beat throughout this entire riff, which is reminiscent of the compositions of drummers like Paul Mazurkiewicz of Cannibal Corpse and George Kolias of Nile.

The drums within the bulk of grindcore already widely utilise blast beats, so there is no perceptible death metal influence in the drums within that subgenre, but the drums within doom metal and death metal are completely different, which creates an observable difference in the drums of death-doom. In Disembowelment's "The Tree of Life and Death" (Disembowelment, 1993), which I analysed in chapter four, the death metal and doom metal elements are played in separate sections to create contrast within the atmosphere of the song as a whole. In this instance, the production is an amalgamation of the two subgenres, and this gives a sense of cohesion to a track that could easily be too disparate otherwise. However, other bands utilise death metal and doom elements together to create cohesion between widely different subgenres. This can be seen in "For You" by My Dying Bride (1996) (see Fig.115).

The musical score for the intro of "For You" by My Dying Bride is presented in two systems. The first system includes a Drum Set staff and two Electric Guitar staves. The tempo is marked as 130 bpm. The guitar parts consist of a melodic line with eighth notes and a bass line that features a prominent A5 chord in bar 3. The second system includes a Drums staff and two Electric Guitar staves, continuing the melodic and bass lines from the first system.

Figure 115: My Dying Bride - "For You" (Guitar, Drums - Intro at 0'00")

In this excerpt from the intro of the song, the melodic death metal convention of lead guitar and simple rhythm guitar can be seen, but the use of the A5 chord in bar 3 creates a sense of chromaticism within the C# dorian mode that this riff uses. This creates a tension within the harmony that is reminiscent of traditional death metal. However, the drums in this section play a simple back beat that is more in line with the conventions of doom metal, and this is played at 130bpm, which is much slower than the typical tempos of death metal. The instrumentation in this song is also a notable departure from the conventions of death metal, as both violin and organ are used.

There are also My Dying Bride songs that use death metal elements in a different way, such as "Catherine Blake" (My Dying Bride, 2004) (see Fig.116). The excerpt that I have chosen centres around a riff that is similar in rhythm to the intro of "For You" (My Dying Bride, 1996), but this riff is contextualised in a different way. As the higher notes of the riff in "For You" descended down the scale, the higher notes in "Catherine Blake" are more chromatic, utilising a repeating minor 3<sup>rd</sup> motif that is first played in C#, and then played in C, G# and G. The repeated use of a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> interval is reminiscent of the diminished scale runs that are played in death metal guitar parts, and this brings a death metal influence to a riff that would



otherwise be more conventionally melodic. Although the guitar parts are reminiscent of death metal riffs, it is the drums in this excerpt that are a true hybrid of death and doom metal, which is in direct contrast to the drums in "For You". The constant stream of semiquaver triplets that give a foundation to a simpler hand pattern resembles the drum parts of melodic death metal, but the use of triplets gives a swing feel to the hi-hat rhythm that is unconventional for death metal.

The musical score for the bridge of "Catherine Blake" is presented in four systems, each containing a Drum Set and Electric Guitar part. The tempo is marked as 112. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is characterized by a dense, rhythmic pattern of semiquaver triplets. The drum part features a complex hand pattern with a constant stream of triplets, while the guitar part provides a melodic foundation with similar triplet patterns. The score includes first and second endings, with the first ending leading back to the beginning of the system and the second ending concluding the bridge. The tempo marking is  $\text{♩} = 112$ .

Figure 116: My Dying Bride - "Catherine Blake" (Guitar, Drums - Bridge at 2'21")

Throughout all of the subgenres that incorporate death metal elements to create hybrid microgenres, similar methods of amalgamation can be seen. The elements that can be considered extreme in the parent subgenres, such as slow tempos in doom metal, breakdowns in metalcore, or speed in grindcore, are not replaced by their parallel conventions within death metal. Death-doom bands do not raise their tempos, because they would simply be replacing one aspect of extremity with one from a different subgenre. Instead, death-doom bands preserve their conventionally low tempos, but add extremity to elements of their music that would be less extreme within the conventions of doom metal. The clearest way to observe this is through the use of distorted vocals, which are much more extreme in death-doom than the clean vocals that are the accepted norm within doom metal.

As this focus on vocal extremity can be seen within all three hybrid microgenres, it seems that a consensus has been reached by musicians, whether that was intentional or unintentional. As changes in biological evolution are preserved, according to their usefulness, through the process of natural selection, it is the most useful mutations that can then be considered successful. These changes can then be passed to the next generation, and influence the features and behaviours of that generation. The innovations present in metal music work in the same way, but the metric for successful innovations is not usefulness, but profitability and influence. The most successful innovations inspire the widest range of subsequent artists, and through this process, we can see that the innovations of death metal musicians, specifically vocal innovations, are some of the most successful in the entire metal genre. Whilst distorted vocals have been used in almost all metal subgenres, the guttural style of death metal vocals has been especially influential across the spectrum of modern metal.

The innovation of distorted vocal techniques was developed in parallel with the metal genre as a whole, and has matured through the innovations of multiple subgenres. Until recently, it seemed that the developments of death metal vocalists were a logical conclusion to the extremity of the technique, as the vocals of brutal death metal bands seemed to reach the physical limits of the human voice. Nevertheless, innovation within distorted vocal techniques has been rekindled in modern deathcore, as vocalists like Alex Terrible of Slaughter to Prevail, Dickie Allen of Infant Annihilator and Phil Bozeman of Whitechapel (2006) are using unprecedented levels of technical ability in their vocal performance. The fact that these new

innovations are being developed in deathcore is particularly notable, as it is the most modern of the three hybrid microgenres, which reinforces the evolutionary pattern through which change occurs in metal music.

The influence of two separate subgenres have been brought together to create a microgenre that is arguably more extreme than either, and the conventional elements of both, such as the use of breakdowns and guttural vocals, have been taken to new levels of extremity that has not been seen in the parent subgenres. Through the influence of death metal and other complimentary subgenres, bands have “developed out of a state of stylistic flux” and created “discrete (microgenres) with codified practices” (Hillier, 2020). Therefore, although the lack of new subgenres since the creation of death metal may suggest that evolution is slowing within the metal genre, the creation of extreme microgenres through the hybridisation of multiple subgenres shows that the variety of metal is still extending outwards, and that the spectrum of the genre will continue to grow over time.

## Spinning the Web - The Evolutionary Structure of Metal

When creating the diagram for my evolutionary model of developments in metal, a web-based format was the most suitable for the data that I was presenting. In this subchapter, I explain my evolutionary model and the connections between subgenres that are represented within it. I also summarise how I have interpreted the ways that metal has evolved and developed extremes throughout its history, and I examine the influence of imagery through the formation of new subgenres and microgenres in order to establish correlations between formal conventions and semiotic conventions within the variety of metal that exists in the present day.

Although the 'family tree' model by Sam Dunn is still the most established form of tracking the wealth of subgenres and microgenres in metal, a web-based model is not unheard of. In his article *Considering Genre in Metal Music*, (Hillier, 2020) created a web diagram that summarised his understanding of stylistic variation within the metal genre. However, there are inherent differences to my own that must be addressed. The first is the starting point from which we both develop our webs. When creating my diagram, I used Black Sabbath as the genesis of the genre, and branched out from them by analysing the ways that extremity within metal increased in proportion to overall variety.

In contrast, Hillier's web is built upon the distinction between 'heavy metal' and 'extreme metal', and the branches only exist in relation to those two distinct groups. While this initial web does not show intra-genre relationships between metal subgenres, two further diagrams show these links in detail, but these detailed diagrams resemble the classic 'family tree' model, rather than a web of interlinked elements. A reason for these differences between the two approaches may be the desired outcome of our separate taxonomies. Whilst I seek to show evolutionary links between the subgenres and microgenres of metal as a system of random variation and natural selection, Hillier seeks to define a cohesive approach to the spectrum of subjective labels within metal, in order to facilitate the increased levels of scholarly discussion on the subject of metal music. Therefore, my diagram includes some similar elements as Hillier's, but as I illustrate throughout this subchapter, there are key differences that help to establish key evolutionary links within the genre.

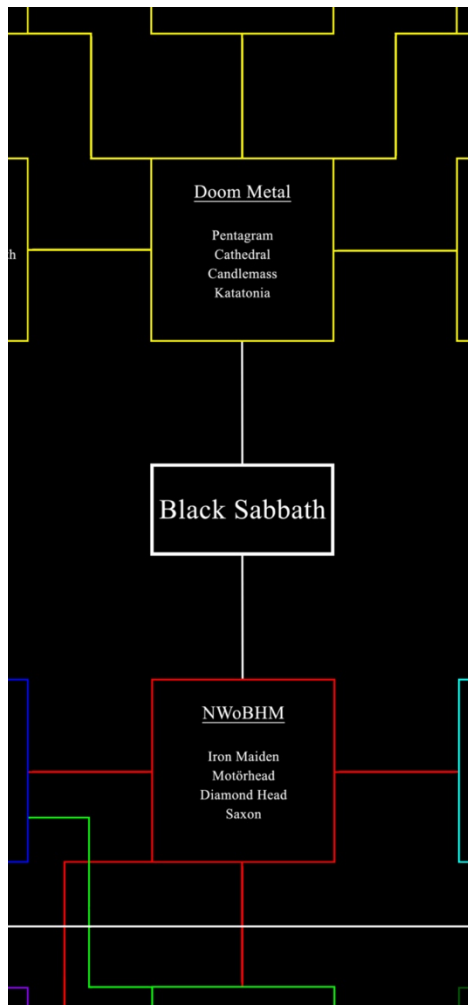


Figure 117: Diagram Centre

Within my web-based model, the centre of the web must undoubtedly be Black Sabbath (see Fig.117). They are the established originators of the metal genre, and the bands that existed within the earliest definable subgenres were directly influenced by their music. Elements of their music still permeate the metal genre across the wealth of subgenres and a wide variety of stylistically distinct microgenres, but I have used the subgenres of NWoBHM and doom metal to show their immediate influence in metal's early history.

Instead of placing the two subgenres adjacent to each other in the style of a 'family-tree', I have extended them above and below to illustrate that the new levels of complexity are not a form of progress, but are simply an extension of variety within the genre. This theory forms the essence of my diagram, and to illustrate this, I have treated each subgenre equally by spacing them

an equal distance away from the subgenre that directly influenced them. I have also treated microgenres in the same way, by giving multiple microgenres equal spacing from their parent subgenre, in order to remove bias from my model.

As well as the equidistant spacing of the subgenres as they extend out from the centre of my web, I have consciously created a diagram that shows the spread of extremity within the genre. This has been achieved by placing each subgenre or microgenre further from the centre as it grows in extremity and complexity over its predecessors. As a result of this consideration, the subgenres and microgenres that exist on the fringes of my diagram are the most extreme in metal overall, and the subgenres that are closer to the centre are less extreme in comparison.

I have also extended NWoBHM and doom metal in opposing directions from the initial innovations of Black Sabbath because musicians within them took inspiration from different elements of Black Sabbath's music to create their own. Whilst doom metal musicians took the low speeds and dark atmospherics of Black Sabbath's eponymous song, and created thematic conventions that mirrored the occult and melancholic themes of their early output, NWoBHM musicians emphasised different elements. Early NWoBHM bands took thematic cues from the realistic societal critique of Black Sabbath songs like "War Pigs" (Black Sabbath, 1970) and "Children of the Grave" (Black Sabbath, 1971), and applied it to music that was inspired by Black Sabbath, but through the lens of Judas Priest. Whilst riff construction and song structure were still inspired by Black Sabbath directly, the production and use of dual-guitars was a direct influence of Judas Priest's innovations.

The duality of NWoBHM and doom metal also extends to their respective semiotic conventions, which both take separate thematic ideas from Black Sabbath in a similar way to their instrumental conventions. Whilst doom metal musicians iterate on the occult and negative emotional themes of Black Sabbath's early recordings like "Black Sabbath" (Black Sabbath, 1970) and "Behind the Wall of Sleep" (Black Sabbath, 1970), NWoBHM bands took inspiration from Black Sabbath's themes of social commentary. This dichotomy of thematic content within parallel subgenres reinforces the formal and technical differences, and creates two opposing interpretations of Black Sabbath's music, which allow me to place these subgenres at opposing positions in my diagram. This opposition does not reference any real rivalry or animosity between bands in these subgenres, but solely references the opposing musical styles, and the initial width of variety that was already present in the early history of heavy metal.

The distinct focus of doom metal musicians and NWoBHM musicians have continued throughout the development of the metal genre, and both subgenres have had a wide-ranging influence. There has been no direct descendent subgenre from doom metal, but it has more microgenres than any other subgenre, and these have taken doom metal to new extremes in various ways (see Fig.118).

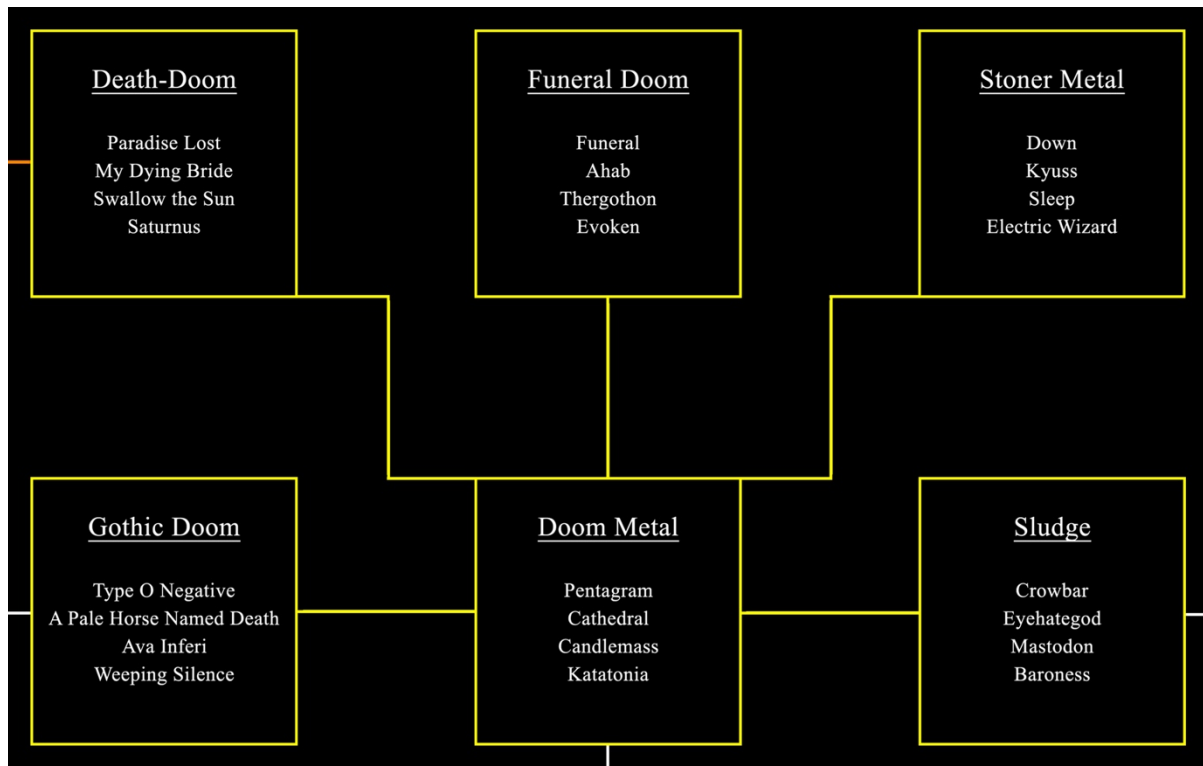


Figure 118: Doom Metal and its Microgenres

There are outside sources of influence for some doom metal microgenres, such as the influence of hardcore punk on sludge, and the influence of goth rock on gothic doom, but the most extreme microgenre that was created from doom with minimal outside influence is funeral doom. The wide use of distorted vocals provide evidence that some funeral doom musicians took inspiration from death-doom, but funeral doom is mostly created by slowing doom metal even further than the conventions of the subgenre dictate, which creates a dirge-like sound that gives the microgenre its name. The innovations of this microgenre have been taken to further extremes, and through a combination of funeral doom and noise music, drone metal was created.

However, it is hard to define drone metal as metal in a traditional sense, as the extreme slowness removes the ability to perceive individual riffs. Riffs are the basis for metal music, and the inclusion of guitar riffs is one of the few universal metal conventions. Without discernible guitar riffs, a band would be unlikely to be classed as a metal band at all, and as such, the use of riffs is one of the few factors that link the seemingly disparate subgenres within the wider metal genre (Mynett, 2016, pg. 69-70). There *are* some traditional metal

elements used in drone metal, such as distorted guitar, and heavy drums (despite their sporadic nature), but the music itself seems more akin to drone and noise music. This shows that the microgenres of doom metal have taken the extreme conventions of the subgenre to their logical conclusion, in a similar way to the aforementioned death metal microgenres, and that further extreme iterations would take a band outside the realms of metal altogether. This seems to suggest that the possibility for innovation has ended within doom metal, but as we saw in the deathcore application of death metal vocals, further innovation could still be possible, although it has not happened thus far.

The extreme slowness and down-tuning that are present in doom metal have contributed to an overwhelming focus on 'heaviness' within the subgenre, but heaviness through composition and production has a physical limit, as heaviness within a recording can take away from the intelligibility therein. To account for this potential limitation, "metal music's subgenres can shape heaviness by different means, which again creates options for genre development" (Herbst, 2018, pg. 108). This development could hypothetically occur through the fusion of doom metal with other subgenres, as with the creation of death-doom, but these innovations are entirely hypothetical at this point. However, in contrast to the lack of subgenres that have spawned from the conventions of doom metal, NWoBHM became a launching platform for a plethora of extreme subgenres that would define the metal genre as it aged.

Whilst doom metal did not leave much room for further innovation with its extreme implementation of slow tempos and saturated production, NWoBHM was a subgenre that had huge potential for further innovations, and this helped to create the subgenres of power metal, black metal and thrash metal. Power metal is essentially a modern interpretation of the conventions of NWoBHM, but each convention is made more extreme through the influence of thrash metal. These include high tempos, vocal virtuosity and technical guitar ability, but power metal has stayed as a fairly self-contained subgenre, aside from the creation of symphonic metal. However, the other subgenres that were created from NWoBHM are both notable for their impact on the entire metal genre. Black metal is still considered among the most extreme subgenres in metal, and thrash metal is the direct predecessor to six of the ten subgenres that I studied (see Fig.119) The impact of thrash metal can still be felt in modern



metal, as the influence of the drums, guitar tones and vocal styles are still prevalent in the most cutting-edge subgenres of metalcore and progressive metal.

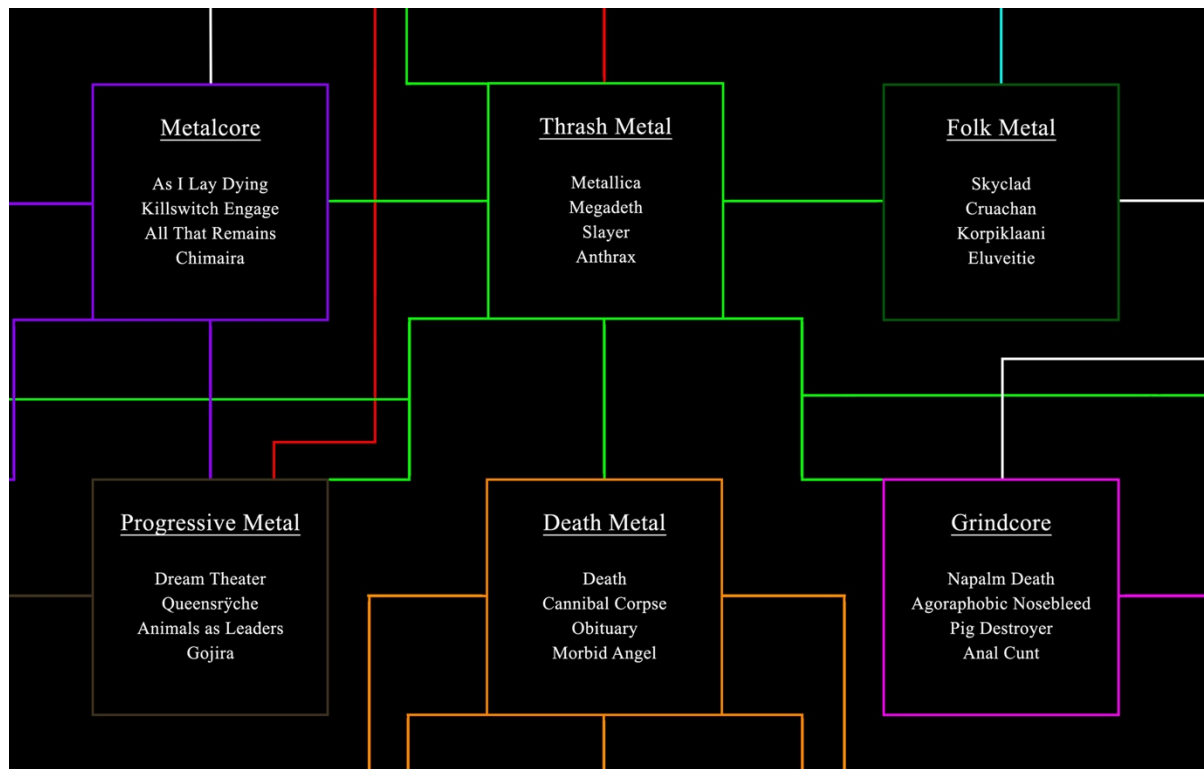


Figure 119: Thrash Metal and Subsequent Subgenres

Most of the initial creation of established metal subgenres occurred in the 1980s, including five of the six subgenres that were directly inspired by thrash metal, but thrash was the most popular of these subgenres throughout the decade. This can be seen in the album sales of formative thrash bands like Metallica, Megadeth and Slayer, who sold far more albums than bands from more extreme genres like death metal and grindcore. The fact that the subgenre of thrash metal is both the least extreme and most successful in this section of my diagram reinforces my use of Gould's model of variation to contextualise my theory.

In Gould's model, the modal majority of life exists adjacent to the left wall of minimal complexity, and in this section of my diagram, thrash is the least extreme subgenre, but also the most popular. This makes thrash the most successful subgenre in this section, and therefore the genre occupies the same space on a hypothetical cultural graph as bacterial life does on Gould's biological graph. As time moves forward, the subsequent subgenres are created through relatively extreme innovation by new artists, and this creates a longer tail toward the right wall of extremity. Whilst this tail grows, and bands at the cutting-edge of the

genre push the envelope of what is possible within metal, thrash metal bands continue to form in large numbers, which increases the numbers of bands at the left wall of minimal extremity, and this means that thrash metal maintains the modal majority.

As each subgenre ages, bands appear that push the subgenre further, to the creation of microgenres, and these are always more extreme or complex than the parent subgenre. As with Gould's model, if a new band play music that is less extreme than their predecessors, they move into a space that is already occupied by the least extreme bands in the genre, and they add to the number of bands in the established modal majority. Therefore, if bands are to establish new subgenres or microgenres, they must play music that is a more extreme iteration of the music that inspires them, or a fusion of extreme elements from multiple distinct subgenres, which also creates higher levels of extremity. I have illustrated this by placing each microgenre further away from the centre than their parent subgenre, which shows that they are closer to extreme fringes of the genre than most of the less extreme bands that make up the subgenres in the central cluster of my diagram.

As well as the rise in musical extremity, there is also a rise in thematic extremity as subgenres and microgenres approach the edge of the diagram. This can be seen most clearly in the cluster of subgenres that evolved from thrash metal, as four of the six subgenres used themes that were more extreme than the preceding subgenre, but had related imagery. Death metal artists increased the extremity of the violent and anti-religious themes of bands like Slayer and Exodus, whilst progressive metal and grindcore iterated on the themes of social commentary that was prevalent in thrash in the 1980s. Metalcore bands also iterated on these social themes, but interpreted them in a way that focussed on their personal struggles and lack of acceptance within the society that they lived in. These were made more extreme by the anger and vehemence that was added into the lyrics of metalcore artists, and although the cover art was less extreme than the art of thrash metal albums, the musical innovations and lyrical themes create an increase in extremity overall.

The only outliers in the increase of thematic extremity are folk metal and power metal, as the earliest folk metal artists utilised the same social themes as thrash metal bands, but this did not become the most common thematic convention of the genre. There are far more bands

that focus on fantasy and mythology in the folk metal subgenre, but this can be attributed to the outside influence of traditional folk music, which is intrinsically connected to the history of its geographical origin. Although both grindcore and metalcore artists take elements of the exterior influence of hardcore punk, the similarities of thematic content between thrash metal and hardcore punk combine to create a concordant influence. This means that any subgenre that arises from a combination of influences from thrash and hardcore punk is likely to have thematic conventions that focus on socio-political commentary.

However, the differences in themes between thrash metal and traditional folk music creates a potential discord in the themes of bands that are a hybrid of the two subgenres. Therefore, it seems that the folk metal artist's interests in folk music extend to imagery, as the themes of folk music are used far more than the themes of thrash metal. The influence of black metal on the folk metal subgenre does create some thematic concordance though, as there is an abundance of black metal bands that utilise themes of paganism and mythology through the perspective of pride for the history of their home countries. This concordant influence between the imagery of black metal and folk music reinforces the themes of mythology and history within folk metal, and it is these themes that have become the conventions of the subgenre throughout its history. This can be observed further by the dominance of Norse mythology within the imagery of folk metal, which aligns with the black metal influence that pervaded the genre from Scandinavian bands, who were particularly successful in folk metal's formative years. The fantasy lyrics that are most prevalent in power metal are directly inspired by early metal bands within the NWoBHM subgenre, and therefore the imagery is also less extreme than that of thrash metal.

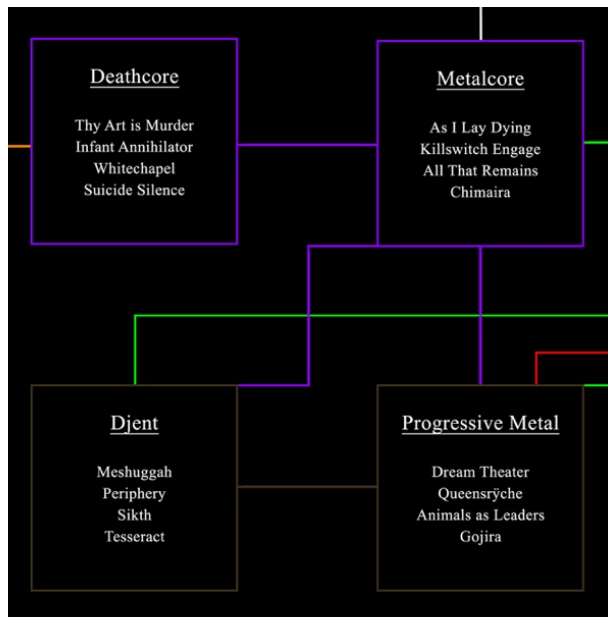


Figure 120: Influences of Metalcore

As I stated in a previous subchapter, the influence of hardcore punk is especially prominent within the subgenres that were also inspired by thrash metal. Whilst the impact is particularly obvious in grindcore and crossover thrash, the branching influence of metalcore has brought elements of hardcore punk into further subgenres and microgenres. Since the early 2000s, metalcore has been one of the most popular metal subgenres among audiences, and the success of metalcore artists has

inspired further hybridisation, which has resulted in the creation of modern progressive metal, deathcore and djent (see Fig.120).

A number of central conventions from metalcore, such as breakdowns, rhythmic riffs and a mix of clean and distorted vocals are now utilised in all three of these examples. As with the other developments within metal, these new iterations show an increase in extremity. Deathcore provides an increase in extremity by utilising lower tunings and more transgressive subject matter, whilst progressive metal and djent show large increases in virtuosity through technical rhythmic experimentation and technical ability on their instruments. Imagery has also grown more extreme in many cases, although this is not always the case. The hybridised creation of deathcore has allowed for a large leap in the thematic extremity of the microgenre over its parent subgenre, which can be seen in the inclusion of explicit accounts of murder, gore, and anti-religious imagery.

However, the bulk of djent does not include increased levels of semiotic extremity, although this may be attributed to the propensity for instrumental music in the genre. Many prominent djent projects, such as Animals as Leaders, Widek, Cloudkicker (2005) and Intervals (2011) all create instrumental music, as the liberal application of rhythmic diversity and technical flair may not provide an appropriate foundation for vocals. As there are no lyrical themes, the cover art on instrumental djent albums also tends to lean more toward abstract art. This is

used to accompany the mood and tone of the music, which is in contrast to the role of the album artwork in traditional metal subgenres, where it was used as a visual representation of the lyrical content.

The djent bands that utilise vocals in their music *do* show influences from their predecessors within their lyrical themes though, and the most common of these can be seen in the social criticism of bands like Meshuggah and Hacktivist. The use of socio-political themes makes the link between thrash metal and djent particularly evident, as the musicians of Meshuggah started their careers by playing a technical form of thrash metal. As they continued to employ rhythmic experimentation and extended range instruments into their music, it became more extreme, and could no longer be considered thrash metal. The ways that Meshuggah increased their extremity were unprecedented in the metal genre, which necessitated the use of a new microgenre to adequately describe them. Whilst Meshuggah did not coin the term 'djent' the onomatopoeic term was created by fans of the band and musicians who were influenced by Meshuggah, in order to describe their playing style.

The thematic links to thrash metal still exist through Meshuggah's imagery, and although djent is a microgenre of progressive metal, Meshuggah's thrash metal origins still affect the creation of new djent bands, and the socio-political imagery that they utilise. However, in contrast to formulation of other microgenres, the socio-political imagery that is used in djent did not grow in violence and extremity over that used in thrash metal, as it did in the creation of grindcore, for example, but often became less violent in its presentation. This is one of the rare occurrences where the semiotic conventions do not grow in extremity in conjunction with the extremes of the music, but this is still accounted for in Gould's evolutionary model. When discussing evolution as a vehicle of variety, and not progress, the change is not always predictable, and developments may not always increase the level of complexity within an organism. As some organisms grow in complexity and therefore move toward the right wall of maximal complexity, "many always move to the left, but they are absorbed within space already occupied" (Gould, 1994). This leftward movement toward minimal complexity allows the modal majority that exists adjacent to that left wall to continue growing, and continue to exist as a majority.

The movement toward lower extremity is rare in metal, but does occasionally occur. Although the tendency of metal is to grow in extremity, the influence of outside sources can cause a reduction in extremity, which can be seen in the hybrid subgenre of folk metal. Whilst the use of folk instrumentation and traditional melodic application creates a large enough difference to necessitate the creation of a new subgenre, this subgenre was no more extreme than thrash metal before the introduction of black metal influences. In addition, neither the music nor themes of modern folk metal are as extreme as black metal, which leads to a loss of extremity over the subgenres predecessors as a whole. However, since Gould has established that evolution is simply the vehicle by which change occurs and variety expands, and not a vehicle for progress within a system, it is logical to expect some change to occur that creates music of a lower extremity. Therefore, the outside influence of folk music works as a catalyst for change within the established subgenre of thrash metal, and the result is a new subgenre that may not be more extreme, but is simply a new variety of metal. However, whilst is not as extreme as thrash or black metal, the increased complexity that occurs as a result of the added instrumentation and exterior influences allows me to place folk metal closer to the fringes of my web than its preceding subgenres.

Throughout the history of heavy metal, both the tendency of metal musicians to create music that is more extreme than that of their predecessors *and* the evolution of the genre through the influence of exterior sources have worked in tandem to create a large range of diversity within the genre. As new innovations occur and new subgenres and microgenres are created, the relative extremity of those innovations is of little consequence, but the evolution of the genre creates consistent expansion and increased variety within it, and this has expanded the definitions of what metal is, and what it can become in the future. Through this web (see Fig.121), I have illustrated the expansive nature of the genre and shown how variation can be created within it through the influence of predecessors within the genre, hybridisation between disparate subgenres, and the innovative addition of elements from outside sources.



## Chapter 6: Anecdotal Evidence – Evaluation of Subjective Questionnaire

Whilst I have mainly focussed on the analysis of recordings and artwork to draw my conclusions about the evolution of the metal genre, I also felt that it was imperative to understand the ways that other metal consumers feel about the transgressive themes of the genre. In this chapter, I provide a rationale for the inclusion of this questionnaire and the questions that I included within it, evaluate the answers I received, and explore how the transgressive themes of the genre affect its listeners. I also determine whether they place particular importance on the lyrics in question, and if they do, I examine their opinions on the nature of the imagery, whether they are affected by it, and whether they deem it to be appropriate or acceptable. This examination of various demographics allows me to observe the fanatical listening habits of metal audiences and the varying nature of their moral boundaries, and I present my hypothesis concerning their overwhelming acceptance of extreme and transgressive themes within the genre.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, I created a google document that acted as an open questionnaire to anyone who followed a given link. In order to draw from a wide sample range, I uploaded this link to a variety of social media communities, with a small explanation of the purposes of the research. Throughout the process, I never asked for any personal information, as I felt that an anonymous questionnaire would remove any bias from this research. At the end of the collection period, I had around 180 responses, but I chose to exclude any that were not pertinent to my study. This included any that had included more than three answers to the question of their preferred subgenre/s, any that had failed to provide an answer to any of the questions, and any that had provided answers that were clearly meant to negatively affect the results of my study. Due to the open nature of my questionnaire, this type of response was quite common, and as such, had to be excluded for my research to be of any use. After the responses were evaluated, I had 57 usable questionnaires and through the use of tables and graphs, conclusions can be effectively drawn from the participant's answers.



Although I collected a large amount of primary data in order to draw conclusions on how innovation and reiteration form a catalyst for both variety and extremity in the genre, I have done so in an objective manner that does not seek to judge the potentially offensive imagery present within it. However, it is clear to see that the themes present within the music of artists in the most extreme subgenres could be severely triggering to listeners. Although this thematic extremity gives the genre some of its unique identity, the use of themes that explicitly glorify Satanism, murder and sexual violence would be categorically unacceptable in other artistic mediums. Even in other media where transgressive themes may be explored, such as fine art and film, depictions of the acts that are described in microgenres like brutal death metal and deathgrind would be critically and commercially disparaged. Whilst metal music is not as commercially successful as other genres, there is still an audience that is both passionate about the music and accepting of the extreme imagery that metal musicians employ. To further understand the ways that audiences justify the imagery of metal music, I developed a questionnaire to establish the listening patterns of consumers, and possible triggers that may stop them from enjoying certain metal subgenres.

Whilst this questionnaire is less scientific than the comprehensive primary study that this thesis is based on, the personal opinions of metal listeners may provide an insight into the real-world impact of the genre that may be overlooked otherwise. My methods for this section are not as rigorous as those of my primary database, and the sample size is also much smaller, but I have curated this questionnaire in a way that has allowed people to express their opinions on the transgressive nature of metal, and to express where their boundaries lie in relation to their acceptance of these themes. However, I am aware that the possibility of social-desirability bias is also an issue that may arise within the answers to this questionnaire, as participants may be less likely to self-report behaviour that can be viewed as undesirable within society, such as enjoying certain transgressive themes within metal music. In order to minimise this, I left the later questions open-ended, as this would not pressure the participants into answering in a way that felt guided or forced.

Within this questionnaire, I initially determined the demographic that the listeners belonged to, by determining their age range, gender, and whether they were musicians themselves. I determined the level of extremity within their general metal listening by asking which

subgenres they preferred, what was their favourite band, and among the bands that they enjoy, which did they consider to be the most extreme. To assess the style of imagery that they preferred, I also asked which was their favourite album art, as the illustrative and intricate cover artwork is an important and enjoyable facet of the genre for many consumers. It is common for vocals in the most extreme subgenres and microgenres to be unintelligible, so I asked if participants would search for lyrics that they didn't understand. This question provided a basis for the amount of interest the average metal listener has in relation to the themes of the music that they prefer. With the final two questions in my questionnaire, I aimed to establish the boundaries of a range of metal listeners, by first asking if there were any bands that had imagery that offended them, and then asking if any thematic content had stopped them listening to a band that they usually would have.

As an avid metal listener, I enjoy music from all subgenres and microgenres, excluding NSBM, as I find that the genuine racist ideologies expressed by the musicians in that microgenre stop me from enjoying the music. As NSBM is separated from its parent subgenre by imagery alone, there are a myriad of other black metal bands that play similar music without the fascist undertones, and I would much prefer to devote my time to listening to them. However, aside from national-socialist themes, there are no themes that I have observed in a band that has stopped me listening to their music. In my earlier life, my strictly Christian upbringing caused feelings of guilt when I listened to music with anti-religious themes, but as I have renounced religious teachings in recent years, I no longer make this distinction. I also cover a wide range of imagery in my personal musical projects, including mythology, depression, anti-religion, gore and sexual violence, which may give me a higher-than-average acceptance of the more transgressive themes in the genre. This questionnaire helps me to establish the boundaries of a range of metal listeners, and examine whether the transgressive nature of metal imagery is truly accepted, or just ignored by the audience.

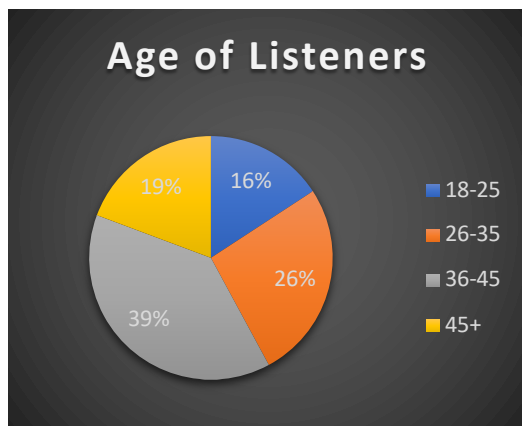


Figure 122: Age of Listeners

there is a much higher proportion of male listeners over female listeners (see Fig.123)

The age of the listeners was split fairly evenly (see Fig.122), but there was a larger proportion of listeners in the 36-45 range. One reason for this may be that listeners in this age range saw metal at the height of its commercial success during their formative years, and those early experiences have informed their tastes into later life. However, the split between gender is much more uneven, as

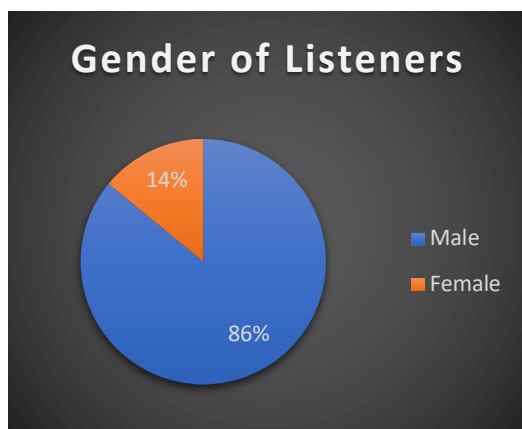


Figure 123: Gender of Listeners

between the music and the relatability of it from a female perspective. As well as the high proportion of male experiences that are portrayed in the genre, women have been depicted as purely sexual objects in subgenres like glam metal, as the conventional imagery of this subgenre focusses on male promiscuity.

Although this trend is gradually changing, the male-dominated nature of metal culture is well documented, and the music itself does not help to alleviate this issue. The themes of the genre are suited to a uniquely male experience, and the power fantasies present in the lyrics of NWoBHM and power metal do not adequately represent a female perspective, which may create a schism

As metal music evolved and extreme subgenres and microgenres were created, the role of women did not improve in metal imagery, as death metal musicians only portrayed women as unwilling victims of various atrocities, including prolific depictions of sexual violence. This misogyny has only been heightened within extreme microgenres like brutal death metal and deathgrind, and the porngrind label has been applied to music that focusses entirely on accounts of perversion and sexual depravity, usually at the expense of women. When combined with the prevalence of male representation, the disparaging manner that women

are depicted within metal imagery may cause potential female listeners to be discouraged from ingrating into the culture surrounding the genre.

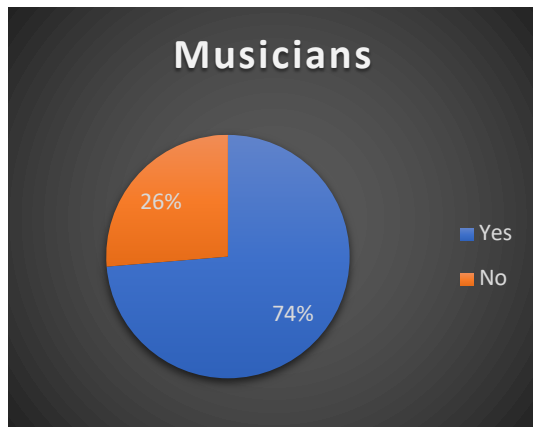


Figure 124: Proportion of Musicians Among Metal Listeners

Another interesting demographic in the responses to my questionnaire was the number of listeners that were musicians themselves (see Fig.124). Almost 75% of the listeners that responded to this questionnaire were musicians, which suggests that metal attracts a disproportionately high number of listeners that also play the style they listen to. In *Discordant Systems*, (Hannan, 2017, pg. 9) states that learning to play songs that they

enjoy is “an important way that may fans interact with the music”. This may also be related to some of the criticisms that are rallied against the metal genre, and especially to some of the more extreme subgenres. The conventions that pervade the entire metal genre, such as distorted guitar riffs, unrelenting drums and distorted vocals may dissuade mainstream audiences. Although there are some uses of disorientating, uncomfortable sounds in the most cutting-edge pop music, such as the chorus synth in “xanny” (2019) by Billie Eilish (2015), most pop music prioritises melodies and timbres that are pleasant to listen to. The deliberate use of distortion and volume in metal is in direct contrast with these mainstream sensibilities, and the inaccessibility of the music belies the technical ability required to play it.

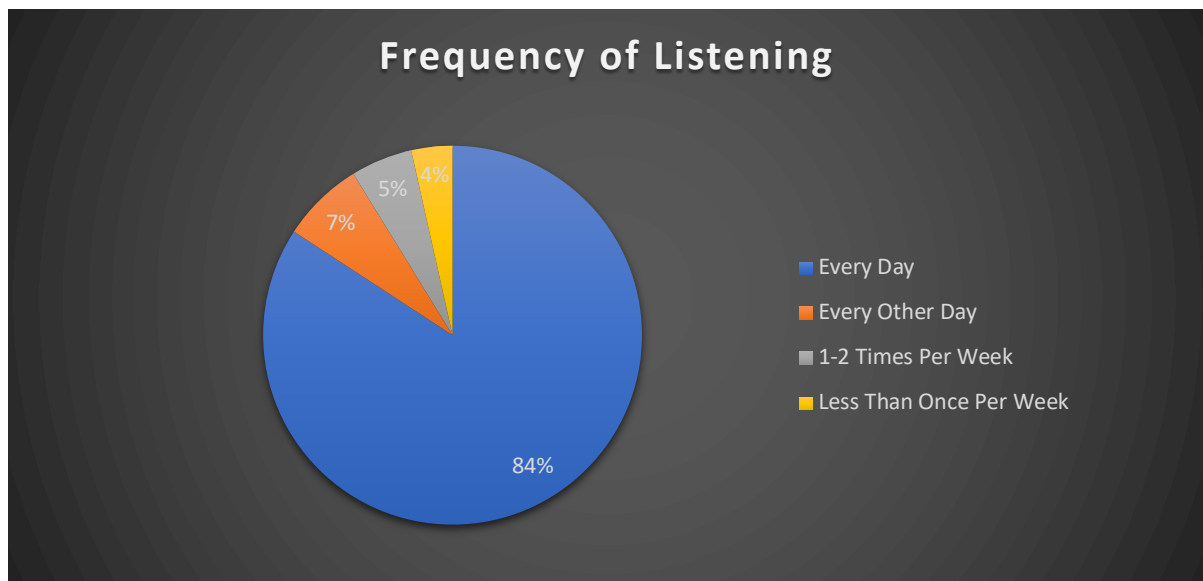


Figure 125: Frequency of Listening

However, when audiences embrace the conventions of metal to the point where they become a regular listener, the results of this questionnaire show that their listening habits become almost obsessive (see Fig.125). 48 of the 57 participants in this questionnaire said that they listened to metal every day, whilst only 2 failed to listen to the genre at least once per week. These listening habits allow metal audiences to form strong bonds with the artists that they prefer, and the loyalty of listeners is the highest of any genre. This was confirmed by a study by the music streaming service 'Spotify', which compared the listening habits of multiple audiences by monitoring the repeated streams of notable bands in each genre (Alper, 2015). The results of this study showed that proportions of listeners that repeatedly streamed tracks by popular metal acts like Metallica and Slayer were proportionally huge in comparison to the repeated streams of the equivalent artists in genres like pop, hip-hop and country. The extensive listening habits of the majority of participants in this study allows me to draw conclusions about the opinions of metal audiences, and where their boundaries lie in relation to the most extreme themes within the genre.

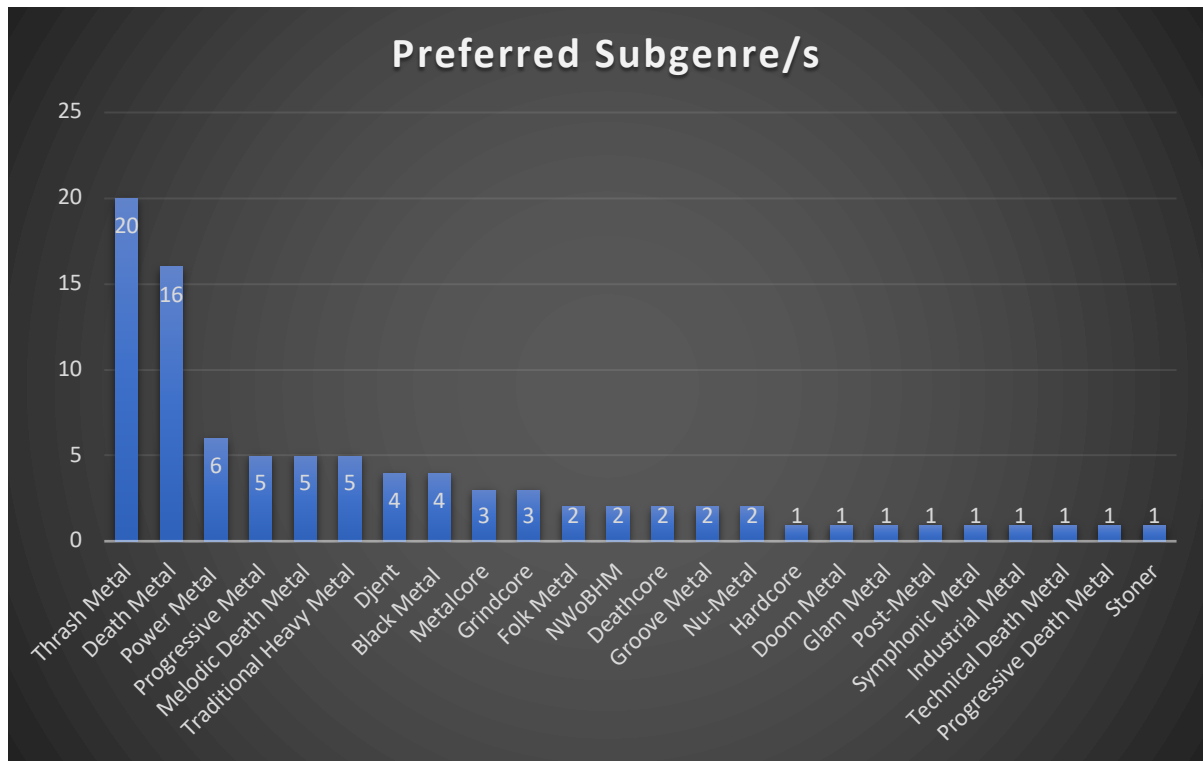


Figure 126: Preferred Subgenres of Metal Listeners

In order to establish a base level of their listening habits, I asked the participants of my study for their preferred subgenres/microgenres and their favourite band. In addition to this, I asked for the band that they considered most extreme within those that they personally listened to. This allowed me to establish the highest level of extremity within the personal listening habits of each participant, which would later be augmented by their answers to questions that examined their acceptance of extreme imagery. When asked for their preferred subgenres or microgenres, there was a large range of different answers, but thrash metal and death metal were the most popular by a large margin (see Fig.126). Older subgenres were much more popular overall, and microgenres that are at the cutting-edge of modern metal, such as deathcore and djent, were barely represented.

This result reinforces the evolutionary model that I have employed in my research, as the majority of participants favoured subgenres that can be considered less extreme. One outlier from this, however, is the popularity of death metal, which is commonly included under the larger label of 'extreme metal'. However, death metal has since become the standard of extreme metal, and other microgenres have been created that are far more extreme than death metal, such as brutal death metal and deathgrind. When examined in relation to these

modern innovative microgenres, death metal seems much less extreme in comparison, and if the metal genre is examined as a whole, death metal seems to grow closer to the modal majority of metal at the left wall of minimal complexity as the most extreme fringes of modern metal extend toward the right wall of maximal complexity. As the music of Black Sabbath and early NWoBHM is considered much less extreme than it was at the time of release, death metal has aged in a similar way, and audiences can become similarly desensitised to its extreme thematic content.

This may explain why such extreme themes are seemingly accepted within the metal community, as heavy metal is ever-evolving and bands at the fringes of the genre consistently create music that is comparatively far more extreme than the death metal of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This desensitisation can be seen in the answers to my questions relating to lyrics within metal music, as I asked the participants whether they focus on lyrical content when listening to metal music (see Fig.127).

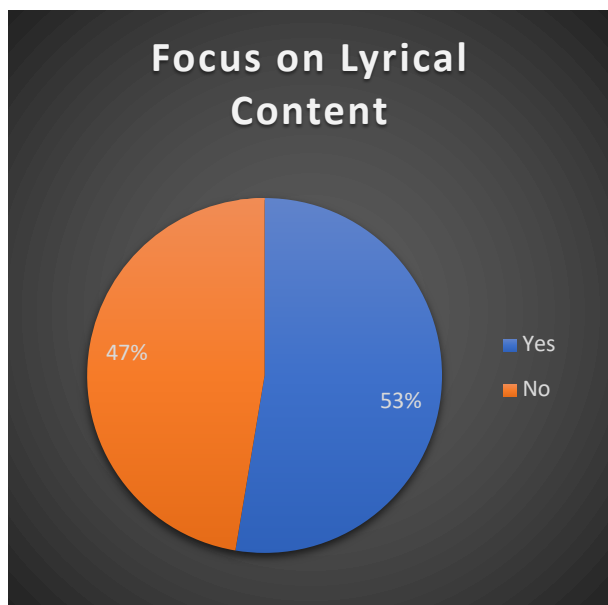


Figure 127: Focus on Lyrical Content

Among the 57 participants in this questionnaire, only just over half said that they focussed on lyrical content when listening to heavy metal. This means that the potential for listeners to find unacceptable themes within the music are also halved, as the other half are either unaware of the severity of the imagery or apathetic about its contents. Although a certain amount of the imagery is visually represented in the album artwork, there are often far more explicit

depictions within the lyrics. An example of this is the imagery of Cannibal Corpse, whose artwork for *Tomb of the Mutilated* (Cannibal Corpse, 1992) is conventional for the subgenre in its use of zombies. However, the artwork does not prepare the listener for the themes of paedophilia that are portrayed in "Necropedophile" (Cannibal Corpse, 1992) or the infanticidal imagery of "Split Wide Open" (Cannibal Corpse, 1992). When the comparatively tame artwork is combined with the unintelligible nature of the vocal delivery, the most

extreme themes become easier for the audience to ignore. Therefore, it may be inaccurate to assume that all – or even most – listeners derive pleasure from the themes of extreme metal, and it may be more accurate to suggest that listeners enjoy the musical aspects of the genre whilst appreciating that the conventions of the genre necessitate the use of transgressive imagery.

The mix of possible apathy toward the subject matter and the desensitisation of audiences over time may explain why the transgressive themes of extreme metal are accepted by audiences, but there are still themes that are treated with a similar derision among metal audiences as they would receive in mainstream culture. The NSBM microgenre is unique within metal, as it distinguished from its parent subgenre by thematic content alone. The main differences between deathgrind, goregrind and pornogrind are based around the imagery, but there were some musical differences in the past. However, these have become homogenised to the point that the three microgenres are interchangeable, as technical and semiotic conventions overlap across them. This means that they can no longer be separated by subject matter, which leaves NSBM as a unique anomaly in the metal genre.

Categorisations of subgenre and microgenre in metal are not usually created by the musicians themselves, but terms are coined by fans and journalists to give some sense of identity to artists within a highly varied genre. As listeners may prefer certain subgenres over others, the categorisation of bands can be useful, but the categorisation of NSBM seems to have a different purpose. The metal genre as a whole is politically left-leaning, and prioritises freedom of thought and expression through both art and lyrics. In an article for the online subsidiary of *Metal Hammer Magazine*, Matt Mills (2019) states that “heavy metal’s very origins are that of a band overcoming elitist, class-based political manoeuvring intended to keep them suppressed”, and that “heavy metal has always raged against social injustice”. Throughout the abundant socio-political commentary within varied subgenres and microgenres, similar sentiments prevail, and bands often express anti-war, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian ideals. In contrast to these viewpoints, NSBM musicians attempt to promote ideologies of racism, white-supremacy and anti-Semitism. For some bands, this may be an extension of anti-Christian themes that are a central convention of black metal, but other bands promote a vehement hatred of anyone outside their own culture. By creating a



new microgenre for the sole purpose of compartmentalising national-socialist beliefs, it seems that the majority of metal artists and consumers are attempting to separate themselves from musicians that strongly oppose conventional metal ideologies (Hillier & Barnes, 2020, pg. 49).

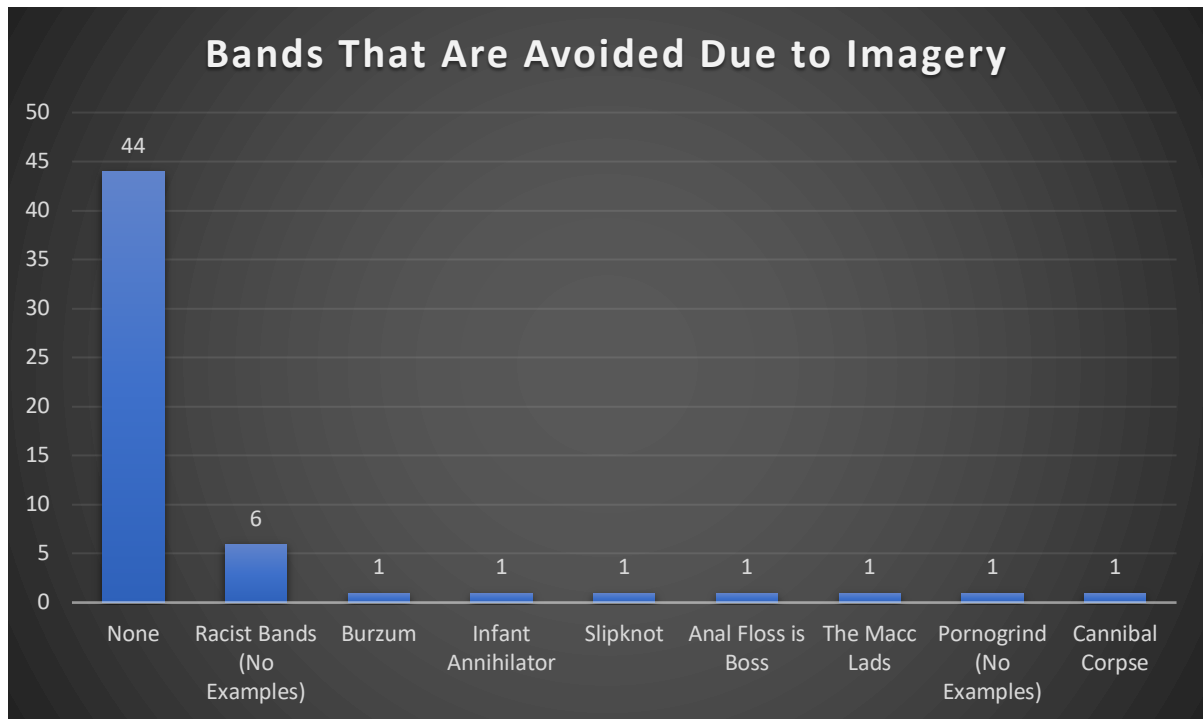


Figure 128: Bands That Are Avoided Due to Imagery

The unacceptable nature of racist ideals is also reinforced by the participants in my questionnaire, as it was one of the only themes that was directly referenced when I asked listeners if there were any bands that they avoided listening to (see Fig.128). Although the vast majority of listeners said that there were no bands with imagery that dissuaded them from listening, this may be through lack of awareness of the admittedly niche NSBM microgenre. However, among people who did avoid certain bands based on thematic content, bands with racist themes were the most widely represented. Anal Floss is Boss (2007), Infant Annihilator and The Macc Lads (1981) all release music that has the express purpose of offending listeners, so the only bands that are unintentionally off-putting to listeners are Slipknot, Cannibal Corpse and Burzum.

The music of Burzum is particularly interesting in this instance, as it is the solo black metal/ambient synth project of Varg Vikernes. Within the black metal subgenre, “Vikernes,

who was a protégé of [Mayhem guitarist] Aarseth, became the scenes other focal persona largely through his extreme actions, which culminated in several church arsons and Aarseth's murder" (Hagen, 2011, pg. 183). Alongside his notoriety, Vikernes has expressed support of Nazism in the past, but has since renounced any Nazi ideology in favour of a neo-Pagan outlook that he has described as 'Odalism'. However, despite Vikernes' rejection of Nazi ideologies, he is still included among discussions and criticisms of NSBM musicians, so it is reasonable to assume that the participant that gave Burzum as an answer to this question did so as a comment on his past national-socialist beliefs. If Burzum is added to the generalised answer of racist bands, those bands make up more than half of all bands that people avoid listening to through imagery alone.

Whilst the answers of seven participants seem like a small fraction of the range of metal audiences, the lack of acceptance of national-socialist themes is huge when compared to other recognisable themes. This shows that the conventions of the genre still dictate what is acceptable within it, and that not everything is permissible under the banner of 'transgressive' imagery within metal. In contrast to my conclusions, Allet (2010) states that "the adoption of a laissez-faire approach means that racist and sexist discourse is accepted by those in the Extreme Metal scene, it is not subject to challenge, is condoned and encouraged and thus continues to exist." In terms of sexist language, I agree with Allet's statement, as the focus on general and sexual violence toward women is a central and accepted part of the gore-centric imagery of subgenres and microgenres like death metal and deathgrind. However, in reference to racism, my findings mostly contrast with Allet's statements.

The creation of a microgenre for the sole purposes of separating those with racist ideologies (NSBM) shows that the majority of metal musicians do not accept these ideals, and do not wish to be associated with those who portray them in a positive light. This is not to say that racist, national socialist and white supremacist fans are entirely absent from the genre though. Across my time as a fan of metal music, I have encountered them on a semi-regular basis, especially on online forums where there is a certain degree of anonymity. These are especially prevalent in black metal forums, where small contingents of NSBM enthusiasts can be found. While there are undoubtedly some of these that defend a controversial microgenre in order to provoke others, and yet more that support the band's racist ideologies, many fans

that come to the defence of NSBM bands say that they remove the art from the artist, and that they enjoy the music on its own merits, rather than judging it by the messages within it. In *Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, Hillier & Barnes (2020) provide a definitive argument against this standpoint, as this paper illustrates that “the ideological convictions of black metal musicians are intrinsic elements of the genre’s artistic expression” and that “the music of these bands is deeply problematic and cannot be removed from their artistic expression.”

Overall, the answers to these questions provide two conclusions. The first is that the modal majority of bands that exist within the least extreme subgenres of metal are most successful in terms of number of listeners. This helps to verify Gould’s model of evolution, as the least complex organisms are the most successful, as are the least complex artists. The second is that the themes of metal, whilst extreme among mainstream society, are both accepted and preserved through the consistent and loyal listening habits of metal audiences. As the listeners were often exposed to these extreme themes in their formative years, the blind acceptance or desensitisation toward them creates an environment wherein listeners do not rally against the current paradigm of the genre. However, when that paradigm is challenged through the implementation of new themes that oppose the accepted semiotic conventions, listeners will often choose to ignore it completely, or may create a categorisation that separates it from the artists that are deemed ‘acceptable’. It is clear to see that metal audiences are passionate about the music that they love, but modern standards may begin to change the genre in spite of their resistance. As the accepted themes among metal audiences can draw shock and disgust among those in the mainstream, it remains to be seen whether the standards of modern society will be thrust upon metal musicians, and how that will affect the genre as it evolves in the future.

## Chapter 7: Extreme Imagery in Other Media

Music is not the only media through which artists can explore extreme and transgressive themes. Imagery that focusses on violence and gore can be seen in various multimedia, including films, literature, fine art and video games, but throughout all other media, there are few examples that are more extreme than the imagery of fringe metal microgenres like brutal death metal and deathcore. In this chapter, I explore the extremes of different forms of media and examine how creators within them express transgressive themes through their own artistic lens. I also examine the mainstream reaction to their extreme nature, and recap the censorship battles that create parallels between metal music and other media. The artistic mediums of film and fine art are much more prone to public scrutiny than those of literature and music, and I examine how the artistic expectations and gradual deliverance of imagery within the latter two mediums allow them more freedom in regards to the creation of extreme art.

### Film

The most prevalent use of transgressive themes across all multimedia exists in film, where horror is a genre that is visible in the mainstream and is both critically and commercially successful. From the very beginning of film, themes of horror have been prevalent; the earliest surviving motion picture is the *Roundhay Garden Scene*, which was filmed in 1888, whilst the first film to show elements of horror was *Le Manoir du Diable* by Georges Méliès, which was released in 1896. As stated by Jane Harkness (2020), *Le Manoir du Diable* “wasn’t necessarily intended to terrify audiences. Méliès crafted this film to amuse viewers as well as spook them.” However, the inclusion of characters such as the Devil, ghosts and skeletons was a precursor to themes that still exist in horror film in the present day. The transformation of a human to a bat may also have preceded the transformations in early films that depicted vampires. As the film industry began to grow in terms of commercial success, the light-hearted comedy elements of early films like *Le Manoir du Diable* were erased, and horror films became more serious.

Films like *Nosferatu* (1922), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *Freaks* (1932), became notorious at the time of their release for their horror content, but both *Nosferatu* and *Frankenstein* received commercial and critical acclaim. However, in a similar manner to the mainstream reaction to metal music in the 1980s, audiences were repulsed by the imagery of *Freaks*, which resulted in a commercial failure. The test-screenings of the film were particularly unfavourable, and the art director of *Freaks*, Merrill Pye, reported that “halfway through the preview, a lot of people got up and ran out. They didn’t walk out. They ran out” (Matthews, 2009). The disastrous previews led to extensive cuts, which brought the film down from a length of 90 minutes to 64 minutes, and the original cut has since been lost. This response did not only occur in early cinema though, as many modern films have previews at film festivals, and there have been accounts of similar reactions from the screenings of modern horror films.

As *Freaks* (1932) was considered too extreme for mainstream audiences at the time of release, films that have similar reactions in modern day cinema have also been criticised for their extreme horror elements. Director Lars von Trier has been a notable recipient of such criticisms, as his film *Antichrist* (2009) contained depictions of sexual violence that were too graphic for audiences. Similarly, one of his more recent films, *The House That Jack Built* (2018), presented a nihilistic and depressive account of murder from the killer’s perspective, which prompted over 100 audience members to walk out of the theatre during a screening at the Cannes Film Festival. The audience members that remained until the end of the screening gave von Trier high praise for the film, with a standing ovation that lasted 10 minutes, which reinforces the subjective nature of transgressive imagery within art.

Although the content in heavy metal lyrics and horror film scenes may be similar in content, there is a profound difference in the way that they are presented. In mainstream cinema, the use of explicit imagery must have a reason, which can even be seen in extreme examples like *A Serbian Film* (2010), which is a reactionary statement toward the authoritarian system of cinematic censorship in Serbia. In contrast to this, the lyrics of death metal bands provide no context for the depictions of gore and mutilation, and films that provide a similarly small amount of context or reason for the violence within them are usually labelled as ‘extreme horror’. There are a variety of notable modern horror films that have been labelled in this way, and whilst they gain little mainstream attention, they become notorious among a niche

fanbase for their challenging and disturbing content. Films that have achieved this status include the *August Underground* trilogy, which consists of three found-footage faux snuff films that follow a serial killer through his everyday life, and Lucifer Valentine's *Vomit Gore* series, which focuses on the surreal hallucinations of a drug-addicted, bulimic prostitute.

Although this may imply that these films have a semblance of plot, it is only the minimal backdrop to extended and repetitive sequences of violence, gore and exploitation that are at the core of these films. As the purpose of these films is to shock and disturb their viewers, there is no sense of a traditional plot, narrative, or character development, which would dilute the final product. However, whilst these films are the visual equivalent of the imagery presented in death metal, the responses from equivalent critics are profoundly different. On the review aggregate website *rottentomatoes.com*, *August Underground's Mordum* (2003), which is considered as the most extreme film in the *August Underground* series, has zero critic reviews. To put this in perspective, a mainstream release like *Avengers Endgame* (2019) has over 500 critic reviews. Similarly, the first film in the *Vomit Gore* trilogy, *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls* (2006), only has a single critic review from Zoe Rose Smith (2019), in which she described the film as "a nasty, disgusting, almost pointless film that [she] wouldn't recommend watching" and gave it a score of 1 out of 5.

Whilst these films are either ignored or critically panned outside of a very select niche audience, the equivalent within music can be critically and commercially lauded, even as the musicians explore similar themes as the aforementioned filmmakers. An example of this difference in critical reception can be seen in the critical reception of the latest Cannibal Corpse album, *Violence Unimagined* (Cannibal Corpse, 2021).



Figure 129: Cannibal Corpse - Violence...

Although there is a more widespread ‘censored’ cover for this album, which depicts a close-up of the central figures face in profile, the uncensored version of this cover is among the most extreme in the band’s career (see Fig.129). The use of dismemberment, decapitation, evisceration and filial cannibalism set this cover apart from the other recent covers in the band’s catalogue, which have typically been less graphic in comparison to their earlier work. The two music videos from this album have been similarly explicit, as the video for “Inhumane Harvest” (Cannibal Corpse, 2021) shows the violence and exploitation of the illegal organ trade, but with a lingering focus on the dissection of a conscious, living captive. The violence in the video for “Necrogenic Resurrection” (Cannibal Corpse, 2021) is similarly explicit, as this video follows the murder and subsequent resurrection of a twisted priest, who then goes on to murder various victims. The density of the violence in this video is particularly noticeable, as seven graphic, gory murders occur within its 3:33 runtime. However, in spite of the wanton violence that is equally spread throughout all of the imagery surrounding this album, the critical response has been unanimously positive. Sean McLennan (2021) of New Noise Magazine describes the album as “instrumentally unstoppable and visually indescribable” and states that “Violence Unimagined sees Cannibal Corpse entering the post-pandemic world as the colossal conquerors of death metal”.

This overwhelming praise for an album that depicts such gratuitous violence is in direct contrast to cinematic offerings that explore the same themes, so it seems that the historic expectation around the media provides context for the imagery within it, which is reflected in the respective reactions. As long as film has existed, the use of character arcs, discernible plot points and a strong narrative have been praised as indicators of quality in the genre, and these values can be seen in the winners of best picture at film awards. Films that win best picture usually belong to the biographical or drama genres, and the only horror film to win best picture at the academy awards is *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Therefore, films that are to be considered ‘mainstream’ abide by these rules, and films that subvert the expectations of form and content are often labelled as ‘art’ films. However, the

aforementioned extreme horror films cannot be described as art films, as they are not trying to express an idea or alternative worldview, but are only created to depict the most extreme acts of depravity that exist in film.

When a filmmaker combines the subversion of typical film elements with content that may even disturb established horror audiences, the resulting film usually becomes too inaccessible to create a large impact within the film industry, and becomes critically and commercially unsuccessful outside of a small, niche audience. After the formation of the metal genre, the musical and thematic conventions were quickly established, and as a result, the use of extreme imagery became quickly accepted among metal audiences. Whilst the PMRC showed fervent opposition to the imagery of heavy metal in the 1980s, the resultant action was less effective than they anticipated. They attempted to censor music by establishing a ratings system that was similar of film ratings boards, but this was denied in a senate hearing, in favour of a 'Parental Advisory: Explicit Content' sticker that record labels could elect to place on their albums if they included themes of sex, drugs, violence or bad language. Although this labelling system allowed parents to immediately see that an album may be unsuitable for their child, there were two results of this decision that went against the desires of the PMRC.

The first was that this advisory made albums that carried it much more desirable among the youth of the day, as Jon Wiederhorn (2002) reported in MTV news that "ever since "explicit lyrics" warning stickers were introduced in 1985, artists have been only too happy to have their albums labelled, figuring kids who want graphic material will see the sticker as incentive to buy the disc." This form of labelling also allowed the music industry to effectively police itself. Even in the present day, the only restrictions on music are the use of the 'parental advisory' sticker, and the need to edit out explicit language if the song is being played on public radio or television. As metal music is not a mainstream genre, radio and television airplay is limited, and as the audience have come to expect and accept extreme themes, the use of 'parental advisory' stickers on albums is of minimal concern. There is a lack of criticism from metal audiences surrounding the use of extreme imagery in the genre, and the record labels have no culpability as long as they provide a 'parental advisory' sticker on the cover of the album, so metal artists have complete freedom of artistic expression that extends to thematic content. The historical values of cinema, and the widespread use of ratings boards,



means that filmmakers do not have these same artistic freedoms, which creates inequality in the artistic freedom of music and film, and this may explain the apparent acceptance of far more extreme themes in metal music.

## Fine Art

Although transgressive themes are widely represented in fine art, creators seek to undermine different sensibilities than those that are subverted by filmmakers. Whereas the most common way for filmmakers to create transgressive art is via the use of gratuitous imagery and explicitly violent content, the context for fine art is not always as clear, and can be more open to interpretation. For instance, Andres Serrano's *Immersion (Piss Christ)* (Serrano, 1987) is a photograph that depicts a crucifix submerged in a jar of the artist's urine. At the time of the original exhibition, the artist was widely criticised, as the piece was deemed 'blasphemous. However, Serrano is a self-confessed Catholic, and in an interview with Vice magazine in 2017, he stated that he "had no idea Piss Christ would get the attention it did, since [he] meant neither blasphemy nor offense by it" (Nunes, 2017). This response shows the ambiguous nature of fine art, as many people interpreted the work as blasphemous, whilst art critic and Catholic nun Wendy Beckett had a contrasting interpretation. In an interview in 1998, she stated that "she reads it as an admonitory work that attempts to say "this is what we are doing to Christ" (Hartley, 1998).

The use of religious subversion is generally much more prevalent in fine art than in film. The use of art to depict religious teachings dates back hundreds of years, and classical artists were not free from religious scrutiny upon the completion of a piece. In 1602, Caravaggio was commissioned by Contarelli Chapel in Rome to paint the last of a trilogy of paintings depicting Saint Matthew, as Matthew was the patron Saint of the chapel in question. However, Caravaggio's first attempt at the painting was rejected by the chapel, as they felt that the depiction of Saint Matthew had too much dirt on his limbs, and did not portray the holy, resplendent version of a Saint that they were hoping for. Caravaggio was aiming to portray the biblical rendition of the disciples of Christ, who were ordinary men who were chosen by Jesus to serve him, but this portrayal did not adhere to the religious standards of the time, as saints were the recipients of particular reverence. The position of the angel in the painting was also a point of contention, as the angel seems to be literally guiding Saint Matthew's hand, which was deemed to be erotic in tone. In the revised version of the painting, the angel was positioned in flight above the figure of Saint Matthew, so Saint Matthew was in physical control of himself, and was only under spiritual guidance from the angel.

As these religious works were condemned in their time of release because of their alternate interpretation of religious ideals, metal musicians that seek to comment on the ills of religion and present alternative worldviews are similarly condemned by exterior commentators. The church no longer dictates the political and artistic conventions of the mainstream population, but political conservatism still has religious undertones, which were present in the aforementioned PMRC battles of the 1980s. Whilst themes of sex were the main focus of scrutiny by the PMRC, they still included songs that included themes of the occult within the 'filthy fifteen', which was a list of songs that the PMRC believed to be the largest threat to traditional American values, and the impressionable youth of the time. As the metal genre evolved, the occult themes that were found in NWoBHM were iterated on by subsequent bands, and musicians in the subgenre of black metal used themes of Satanism as their central thematic convention.

As black metal gained notoriety through the actions of the musicians, including criminal activity like church burning, grave desecration, and murder, reactions from the mainstream media and religious groups also began to grow. A notable example of the mainstream reactions to the actions of metal artists occurred in 2007, when Adam 'Nergal' Darski of Behemoth received a bible backstage at a concert he was performing. As an unplanned, anti-religious statement, Darski tore pages out of the bible, "called it deceitful and described the Roman Catholic church as "a criminal sect" (Szymanowski & Lowe, 2012). However, as this occurred in Poland, where religious laws are some of the strictest of any in the world, this was seen as a religious crime, and Darski was charged with the criminal act of 'offending religious feeling'.

This crime is similar to the controversy surrounding Gorgoroth's 'Black Mass' concert in 2004, which contained various acts that may be considered as blasphemy, such as the use of impaled lamb heads, satanic symbology, and portrayals of pseudo-crucifixion, where four nude models were tied to crosses for the entirety of the show. This concert also took place in Poland, which meant that the members of Gorgoroth were also in breach of the same blasphemy laws as Darski, although they were acquitted on account of their lack of knowledge surrounding those laws. "A genre that incessantly explores the dark side of humanity will

always already be provocative to some sections of society, particularly in more conservative religious cultures” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, pg. 15), but the wider public were not as affected by these musical events, as metal music is not as visible to the mainstream as fine art. This may be due to the prevalence of free access to view art, and the propensity of artists that have been used as consultants or designers in film, but also because metal is still seen as a largely inaccessible form of outsider art.

A notable example of a relatively extreme artist becoming visible in the mainstream is that of H. R. Giger, whose popularity grew exponentially after he won an Academy Award for creature design on the critically acclaimed horror film, *Alien* (1979). The creature in the film was based on his painting *Necronom IV* (Giger, 1976) (see Fig.130), and he was brought into the film team to design a creature in different stages of a single life cycle, based on that earlier work.

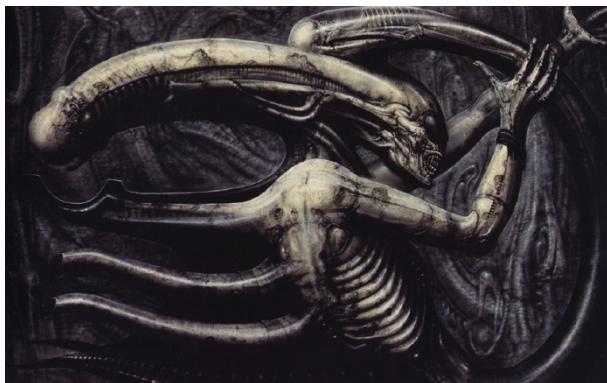


Figure 130: H.R. Giger - *Necronom IV*

The artistic vision of H. R. Giger was unique at the time of his initial creation, and he coined the term ‘biomechanical’ to describe the fusion of organic matter and machinery that was the most prominent theme in his paintings. The term biomechanical is now used across a wide range of multimedia, such as fine art, sculpture and tattoos, which

shows the impact that sudden visibility can have on the popularity of an artist. The content and themes of Giger’s work could be judged as something that would be transgressive, or unappealing to wider audiences, as there is a high proportion of his work that contains sexual content that may have been controversial in 1977, when his first book of paintings was released. The sexual content includes depictions of paraphilia, homoeroticism, and, within the context of *Alien* (1979), rape, which are all themes that were considered taboo in the late 1970s. However, the success of *Alien* as a solo film, and later as a franchise made the themes of Giger’s work both visible and accepted by the mainstream.

The way that Giger's work suddenly became accepted and artistically viable also provides some context for the way that extreme themes are accepted within metal music, as metal music made forays into the mainstream throughout the 1980s. As *Alien* (1979) was commercially and critically successful, that success modified the moral standards of the day, and allowed Giger to be a commercially successful artist, despite the extremity of his art. This can also be seen in the cultural effects of metal music, as the mainstream appeal of bands like Metallica and Iron Maiden in the 1980s normalized the use of violent themes in music. Although the PMRC attempted to hinder the success of metal musicians by encouraging conservative parents to closely monitor and control the listening habits of their children, the 1980s were the most commercially successful period in the history of metal. As with Giger's work, the commercial success of metal musicians at that time began to change the moral standards of mainstream culture, and helped to prepare audiences for a new wave of extremity that would come from the birth of death metal, black metal and grindcore.

Artistic traditions that dictate the aesthetic and conceptual conventions of the medium have roots that are much older than those of metal music, and these conventions are harder to bend or break, as audiences expect the aesthetic nature of fine art to abide by these conventions. As I concluded in the previous subchapter that centred on film, the expectations of audiences in different media provides some boundaries for the art in question, and art that crosses those boundaries can be viewed as problematic within the medium. As these boundaries are dictated by the tastes of the audience, the ability for the art to change those tastes is possible, but limited. These tastes are reinforced by mainstream art over time, so they become less flexible, and more ingrained in society, which gives artists less creative freedom if they wish to be commercially successful.

In this sense, the relative youth of the metal genre is an advantage for musicians, as the consistent evolution within the genre allows a larger amount of freedom for thematic experimentation, with very little negative reactions. As metal musicians have established their art as a legitimate musical genre, it has become accepted among listeners, critics and scholars that "metal musicians, regardless of the type of metal music they perform, indulge in the forbidden" (Fellezs, 2016, pg. 98). This allows metal musicians the freedom to approach themes that may be considered taboo in mainstream society, and the propensity for shock

value within the medium means that this approach is far more likely to be lauded than reprimanded. Additionally, “from its earliest days...metal has used controversy as a tool not merely of identity, but also of marketing” (Hjelm, et al., 2011, pg. 10), using the infamous nature of its transgressive themes to ultimately sell more records.

Overall, fine art pushes the limit of what can be deemed beautiful, by presenting potentially ugly concepts in an aesthetically beautiful way. Conversely, the lyrics and artwork of metal music do not attempt to beautify the concepts within, but candidly present realistic, fantastical and horrific themes in a potentially graphic and disturbing manner. As these depictions of potentially brutal scenarios are widely accepted by metal listeners, and desensitisation mitigates negative reactions to the growth of extremity within the genre, metal musicians are in a relatively unique position of artistic freedom with regards to both music and imagery. However, this is not the only medium where thematically extremity is both widely accepted and commercially viable, as the medium of literature demonstrates.

## Literature

Whilst literature is closest in form to lyrics, the two are not always similar. The length of a song is not comparable to the length of a novel, or even a short story, so the lyrics of a song must reach the focal point of its themes in a much more immediate way than in conventional literature. Although concept albums bridge this gap to a certain extent through the use of a consistent narrative throughout an entire album, the length of an album still does not allow for the same thematic development as a novel. Nevertheless, the same themes can be seen in metal lyrics and horror literature, and in a notable departure from the other multi-media that I have discussed, horror literature can have critical and commercial viability in the same way as extreme metal, whilst similar themes would be unacceptable in film and fine art.

The main distinguishing factor between cinema/fine art and literature/metal music is that the first two media forms are inherently visual, whilst the latter two are reliant on the audience's ability to visualise the actions that occur in the text. Both book covers and album covers give a visual representation of the content inside, but neither can illustrate the full range of extremity with a single image. The visual nature of cinema and fine art may affect the boundaries that society places on them, as the images within them are instantly seen, and once a consumer has been exposed to those images, they cannot be consciously eradicated from their memory. If the description of an act in a book is becoming too extreme for a reader, then that reader can choose to put the book down without ever seeing the action that would be unacceptable to them, as description is an inherently gradual process. In a similar way, the lyrics of a song cannot all be heard or read in a single instant, which gives a listener chance to turn off the song, or stop reading the lyrics.

The visual media of cinema and fine art do not allow for this self-censorship, which may account for the harsher formal censorship that they inspire. This is particularly true for fine art, where the entire concept of a piece is seen in an instant, and the exposition of that idea cannot be reversed. This immediacy creates a prospective problem for art curators, as they cannot accurately judge the moral boundaries of every member of the public that could view the art in their gallery, so they may be forced to display art that adheres to the values of mainstream society. If a creator produces art that is particularly transgressive or incendiary,

the gallery that displays it may be criticised for their willingness to expose patrons to it. This can be seen in the vandalism of the aforementioned *Immersion: Piss Christ* (Serrano, 1987), which was defaced by Christian protestors when it was displayed in 1989.

A similar problem of immediacy is potentially problematic in the medium of cinema, as any image that appears on screen is seen by the audience immediately, in the same way as in fine art. Whilst some filmmakers purposefully take advantage of this fact to construct disturbing imagery that will create a lasting impact on the audience, this can also lead to problems for mainstream filmmakers. An abundance of negative imagery may produce a film that is too extreme for mainstream audiences, and this could potentially create a negative impact on critical and commercial success. There are instances where the infamy of a film starts a cultural movement, and the challenging nature of the material may cause the ticket sales to rise, as audience members challenge themselves by viewing a notorious film. If the imagery becomes too challenging though, this effect has less impact, as more people will decide that they are unable to view the material without attempting to. Therefore, the balancing act that horror film creators must adhere to creates intrinsic limits on their creativity, which is a system of control that is not applied to metal musicians.

Both aspects of this cultural impact can be seen in the *Human Centipede* franchise, as the central theme of coprophagia is a taboo that transgresses the boundaries of decency and taste in mainstream society. The first film dealt with the subject matter in a way that was less graphic than film audiences expected, as the coprophagia in the film was portrayed entirely by the reactions of the victims. The combination of a distasteful premise and execution that was more cerebral than graphic allowed the film to gain a cult following, and whilst the box office sales were fairly low, the home media releases allowed the creator to experience a commercial success. However, it seems that the first film (*The Human Centipede: First Sequence*, 2009) was made as a vague introduction to allow audiences a chance to adjust to the premise, whilst the sequels increased the extremity of the content exponentially. The second film in the series, *Full Sequence* (2011), was extreme in its use of violent imagery, which also contained a plethora of sexually violent and deviant scenes.



In a similar way, director Tom Six used more allusions to sexual violence in the final film in the trilogy, *Final Sequence* (2015), as a way to purposefully offend mainstream audiences. Whilst *Full Sequence* (2011) created a transgressive viewing experience by assaulting the viewer with graphic violence and gore, including scenes of rape, coprophagia and infanticide, the transgressive content in *Final Sequence* was presented differently. Whilst there is no scarcity of on-screen violence in the film, most of the extremity comes from the behaviour of the central antagonist, William 'Bill' Boss, whose cannibalistic, misogynistic and racist speech and actions dominate the film overall. In response to the sudden and excessive growth in extremity between the first film and the sequels, the box office sales plummeted, and the franchise as a whole was negatively affected by the critical and commercial failure of *Full Sequence* and *Final Sequence*.

In contrast, the potential problems that can arise from the immediacy of visual media like fine art and cinema do not apply to media where the information is presented in a more gradual way. In literature especially, the information is only presented to the reader at their personal reading speed, and if they encounter material that pushes their personal boundaries, they can immediately stop reading, which negates the possibility of exposing readers to material that is too extreme for their tastes. This allows authors a large amount of artistic freedom, which can also be seen in the extreme subgenres and microgenres of metal. Death metal lyrics are often unintelligible, so the lyrics are more likely to be read than heard. In these cases, metal lyrics work in a similar way to literature, as they are revealed to the listener gradually, and the listener can terminate the experience at any point. As this boundary of self-censorship protects authors and musicians from the same scrutiny as fine artists and filmmakers, the resultant artistic freedom has created an abundance of extreme art in both literature and music.

The schism of culpability between literature and film can be seen in the controversy surrounding the cinematic adaptation of Steven King's *It* (King, 1986). In the novel, there is a notorious scene where each of the male members of the main narrative group has intercourse with the only female member. This is framed as a ritual, for the purposes of allowing the characters to navigate a warren of sewer pipes that they are lost in, but it is still potentially problematic, as the entire group of characters are between 12 and 13. However, whilst there

was some initial criticism of King's portrayal of children engaging in sexual activity, the scene has since been lauded as a central scene in the book that effectively consolidates the book's themes. As the central themes in the book are the end of childhood innocence, and the discovery of the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood, this single scene represents that entire journey in an uncomfortable and jarring way, which in turn allows readers to viscerally experience that change.

This defence was not acceptable for cinema, and in both cinematic adaptations of *It* (King, 1986), the scene has been excluded. This shows the distinct line of acceptability between visual media and written/aural media. In our current society, musicians and authors are not expected to adhere to the same standards of artistic responsibility of fine artists and filmmakers, which allows for greater artistic freedom overall. Therefore, the themes that are present and successful in both literature and music are far more extreme than those in film and fine art. A change within this artistic schism could only arise from a revolution in the standards of acceptability for mainstream audiences, which is unlikely to happen in the current culture of censorship and audience sensitivity. It is more likely that metal music may begin to adhere to the current standards of society, but if metal musicians can preserve the status of the music as an art form that is not beholden to the rules of mainstream society, metal music may continue to be one of the most thematically extreme mediums in all of art.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I reiterate the aims of my study, present my argument for the use of evolution as a framework for the development of metal music, and summarise the results of my primary research in a way that provides supporting evidence for my hypothesis. I also restate my views on the overall extremity of the genre, and utilise the results of my questionnaires, as well as studies into other multimedia, in order to explain the use of transgressive and inflammatory themes within the genre. To end my thesis, I contextualise my research within the wider forum of academic studies in metal, and I suggest further research that could expand my ideas in the future.

The original hypothesis for my research was rooted in my passion for the genre, and my observations of the connections between the seemingly disparate subgenres and microgenres therein. From a suggested investigation into evolutionary theory, I gained a new perspective on metal music, and saw the potential for a revolutionary evaluation of the history of the genre. In the earliest iterations of this study, the agency of musicians within their creative process presented a problem when I sought to combine the realms of evolutionary theory and human culture. This seemingly irreconcilable difference between the two systems was the main problem in the early period of my research, but in the course of this study, I have gained a deeper understanding of both evolution and metal music. Through this understanding, I have established the evolutionary parallels that unite the two systems, and explained the ways that metal has developed over time into the splintered and tangled web of influences and inspirations that we see today.

The evolutionary theory mainly consists of a very basic principle. As species breed, mutations occur within their genes in response to local conditions. If the mutation is useful within those local conditions, the individual is a more successful example of the species, and will likely pass those genes on to biologically strong offspring. Through many repetitions of this cycle, the species may change to the point where an individual is born that cannot be classified within that species, and a new species is created. However, this process does not constitute progress as the species evolves, but simply creates a larger variety of connected species. Evolution

does not always create species of increasing complexity, and more often removes complexity in order to create more efficient species. This allows simple life forms to far outnumber complex species in every measurable way. Although this process seems like it creates mutually exclusive species that do not interact after their initial formation, the process of horizontal gene transfer and hybridisation in biology allows organisms to affect species that are on separate branches of the evolutionary 'tree'. Therefore, it has been suggested that this model may be outdated within evolutionary study, and that a web of interconnected spokes may be more accurate.

All aspects of these processes have a cultural equivalent in the metal genre, and through the examinations of the processes that affect the creation and development of the music, evolution can be observed in action within metal. Throughout all art forms, it is very rare for innovative art to be created in a vacuum. As Fabbri states, "a new genre is not born in an empty space but in a musical system that is already structured" (Fabbri, 1982). Therefore, the current cultural landscape at the time of creation can be observed as the local conditions for any given artist, in the same way that environmental factors constitute the local conditions needed for biological mutation. Whilst artists have agency to create art in whichever way they choose, the tendency of humans to create art based on the influences of our predecessors means that artistic choices are not random, but are informed decisions that can be traced within an evolutionary system. The random variation within this evolutionary system comes from the inability to predict the commercial and critical success of any given innovation. Even within the realms of directed education, there can be no way of knowing whether the education will aid the artist in their artistic endeavours.

The biological traits of a species can be used as an analogue for the conventions that any given band follows within their subgenre, so if a metal subgenre or microgenre is used as an analogue for a species, then the bands within that sub/microgenre can be seen as the individual organisms within that species. Therefore, musical innovations that musicians create within the conventions of their subgenre can be seen in the same way as biological mutations in the individuals of a species. Within any given sub/microgenre, there is a theoretical range of extremity and complexity that can be accessed by musicians within that subgenre, from a left wall of minimal extremity, to a right wall of maximum extremity.

However, if music is created that is not within those limits, then the band in question moves to another established sub/microgenre that is more or less extreme than the first. If there is not another established sub/microgenre though, a new one is created to describe the music of the innovative artist. In this way, Metallica created thrash metal as they emerged from the influences of NWoBHM, and Death created death metal as they innovated on their conventions of thrash metal, and made it far more extreme.

In biological evolution, successful mutations are passed on through reproduction, but the mutations of an individual within the species may not be successful, and the individual becomes less suited to its environment. In this case, the individual will not pass on its genes, and the mutation does not become an established trait of the species. As with this process of natural selection, the success of a musical innovation is dependent on its suitability within the current cultural environment. If the innovations are not suited to the current cultural climate, the critical and commercial response will be negative, and those innovations will not be successful enough to inspire subsequent artists. If the innovations *are* well received by critics and audiences, the band can be deemed successful, and will often inspire future musicians.

Whilst the metal genre has a tendency toward higher levels of extremity, it is only bands on the fringes of the genre that truly exemplify extremity within metal, and similarly to biological evolution, most bands exist adjacent to the left wall of minimal complexity within their subgenre. As a result of this, the spread of extremity within each genre is skewed to the right, which echoes Gould's diagram of complexity in life forms. When combined with this skew, the continued existence and popularity of older, established subgenres and bands shows that the extremity of metal is not progressing as a whole, which is identical to Gould's evolutionary theory. Instead of progress, the growth of extremity within metal music contributes to an expansion of variety within the genre, and the continued variation therein is responsible for the wealth of splintered sub/microgenres than can be observed in modern metal. As with biological evolution, these splintered sub/microgenres can and do interact with each other, and help to form the basis of hybrid microgenres like deathgrind and deathcore. This interconnected variety of musicians and styles helped to inform the web-based diagram that I created.

Overall, the conditions that provide the basis for the continued creation of metal music, the cycle of iteration and reiteration that injects variety into the genre, the trial-and-error nature of musical innovations, and the interconnected nature of the abundant subgenres and microgenres that make heavy metal so unique prove that the genre exists as an open, evolutionary system.

Additionally, no examination of the extremity of heavy metal music and imagery would be complete without adequate commentary on the extreme themes of the genre. In comparison to other music, other art mediums, or the standards of mainstream society as a whole, the topics that metal musicians discuss in their music are objectively extreme. Whether bands tackle themes of violence and gore, the evils of religion, or national-socialist ideals, the topics discussed could be offensive or triggering to uninitiated listeners. However, the positive or negative implications of the genre's imagery are rarely discussed within the metal community, and the themes therein are accepted among average metal listeners. Through my research into the habits of metal listeners and the acceptance of extreme themes within music and other artistic mediums, I have concluded that these reasons are multifaceted.

At the formation of the genre, the music that was created by originators like Black Sabbath was critically disparaged, and music critic Robert Christgau described it as "the worst of the counterculture on a plastic platter--bullshit necromancy, drug-impaired reaction time, long solos, everything" (1981). However, the mainstream criticism allowed the disillusioned youth of working-class England a way to relate to the new style. Throughout its history, metal musicians have embraced and maintained their underground roots, and through this anti-mainstream approach, they have largely avoided the mainstream censorship issues of most other artists since their victory over the PMRC in the 1980s.

As mainstream audiences, critics and censors are largely unaware of the extreme nature of metal imagery, the accepting nature of metal audiences also gives musicians creative freedom to explore extreme themes within their music. In their answers to my questionnaire, most listeners stated that they enjoyed a wide variety of subgenres and microgenres, and that they are either uninterested or unaffected by the subject matter presented in the lyrics and visuals of metal music. The only theme that was criticised by a notable number of participants was

that of National Socialism, which is due to the serious and uncompromising manner in which these ideas are presented. For bands that explore other contentious themes in metal music, there is an understanding between the musicians and audiences, which reassures audience members that the extreme thoughts and actions depicted in the imagery are entirely fictional. Even among the bands that reinforce the truth of their thematic content, the ideas that are presented are often relatable to audiences, so themes of anti-religion and anti-authoritarianism appeal to many metal listeners.

The reactions of mainstream audiences and metal audiences alike allow metal musicians an almost unconditional freedom of expression in both music and lyrics, and this has allowed artists across a range of sub/microgenres to create decidedly extreme conventions in regard to their imagery. If these circumstances stay consistent, the extremity of imagery in heavy metal is unlikely to change, regardless of whether the themes should be deemed acceptable or not.

As the central problem when reconciling the seemingly disparate theories of evolution and cultural development is that of artist agency, evolutionary theory is not often accepted within cultural studies, as the agency of artists is an undeniable fact. I have not denied that the agency of musicians exists, but by contextualising the choices of artists in relation to their predecessors, local environment, and the conventions of their sub/microgenre, I feel that I have adequately explained the role of agency within evolutionary theory. I hope that in the future, evolutionary theory will become more accepted as a method for analysing trends and developments within cultural academia. It would also be interesting to see if the model can be applied to other music genres and art forms, in order to see whether *their* developments can also be described as evolutionary.

Throughout this research, I have also championed the use of empirical data and large sample sizes to draw conclusions about the nature of a system, and I would like to see a similar approach taken in future research, as I feel that this form of analysis is lacking within cultural study. I did not seek to provide another retelling of the history of metal with this research, but instead I sought to establish the evolutionary connections that govern the genre's development, through the establishment of formal, technical and thematic conventions, and

how these conventions inform the creative endeavours of subsequent artists. Through musicological study and the collection of 1000's of images for the purposes of research, I have provided conclusive evidence for my ideas on the nature of metal evolution, and I hope to inspire the use of formal musicological analysis within the academic study of metal. As an extension of this, I also hope to legitimise heavy metal as a subject worthy of thorough academic research, as I feel that further academic study of the genre will allow researchers to glean a wealth of information about extremity within art.



## Appendix A - Band/Subgenre Lists

### New Wave of British Heavy Metal

After Dark	Denigh	Lyadrive	Saxon
Alcatrazz	Desolation Angels	Maineeaxe	Seducer
Angel Witch	Diamond Head	Marseille	Seventh Son
Aragorn	Elixir	Megaton	Sparta
Atomkraft	Ethel the Frog	Metal Mirror	Spartan Warrior
Avenger	Excalibur	Millennium	Split Beaver
Badge	Explorer	More	Stormtrooper
Battleaxe	Ezy Meat	Motörhead	Syar
Bitches Sin	Gaskin	Mythra	Tank
Black Rose	Girlschool	Overdrive	The Handsome Beasts
Blackmayne	Glasgow	Oxym	Thunderstick
Blade Runner	Grim Reaper	Persian Risk	Tokyo Blade
Blitzkrieg	Hammer	Phasslayne	Traitor's Gate
Buffalo	Hell	Quartz	Tredegar
Chariot	Hellanbach	Raven	Trespass
Chasar	Heritage	Ritual	Tygers of Pan Tang
Chateaux	High Treason	Rock Goddess	Tytan
Chinawite	Incubus	Rogue Male	Venom
Clientelle	Iron Maiden	Sacrilege	Victory
Cobra	Jaguar	Salem	Voltz
Dark Heart	Jameson Raid	Samson	Warrior
Dark Star	JJ's Powerhouse	Samurai	Weapon UK
Dealer	Karrier	Satan (AKA Blind Fury/Pariah)	Wildfire
Deep Machine	Legend	Satanic Rites	Witchfynde
Deep Switch	Limelight	Savage	Wolf

## Thrash Metal

Abadden	Deathrow	M.O.D. (Method of Destruction)	Slayer
Acid Reign	Defiance	Mantic Ritual	Sodom
Agnostic Front	Destruction	Megadeth	Stone
Airdash	Devastation	Mekong Delta	Suicidal Angels
Annihilator	Epidemic	Meliah Rage	Suicidal Tendencies
Anthrax	Evildead	Merciless Death	Tankard
Artillery	Evile	Metallica	Tantara
Asmodia	Exarsis	Morbid Saint	Terrifier
Assassin	Executer	Mortal Sin	Testament
Atrophy	Exhorder	Municipal Waste	The Accüsed
Audiopain	Exmortus	MX	Tourniquet
Austrian Death Machine	Exodus	Nasty Savage	Toxic Holocaust
Backhoe Butchery	Exumer	Necronomicon	Toxik
Believer	Flotsam and Jetsam	Nuclear Assault	Vendetta
Blood Tsunami	Forbidden	Onslaught	Vio-lence
Carnivore	Fueled by Fire	Overkill	Violator
Coroner	Havok	Paradox	Violent Force
Corrupt	Hirax	Realm	Virus
Cro-Mags	Holy Moses	S.O.D. (Stormtroopers of Death)	Voivod
Cryptic Slaughter	Infernäl Mäjesty	Sabbat	Warbringer
Cyclone Temple	Intruder	Sacred Reich	Wargasm
D.R.I. (Dirty Rotten Imbeciles)	Korzus	Sacrifice	Whiplash
Dark Angel	Kreator	Sadus	Witchery (Peru)
DBC	Lazarus A.D.	Sepultura	Xentrix
Death Angel	Lost Society	Skeletonwitch	Znöwhite

## Death Metal

Abdicate	Crimson Thorn	Hate Eternal	Noneuclid
Abominable Putridity	Cryptopsy	Immolation	Obituary
Aborted	Cynic	Immortalis	Obscura
Amon Amarth	Dark Tranquility	In Flames	Origin
Amputated	Death	Incantation	Pathology
Arch Enemy	Debauchery	Incubator	Psychroptic
Asphyx	Decapitated	Ingested	Pungent Stench
At The Gates	Deicide	Insomnium	Revocation
Atheist	Desecrator	Kalmah	Ripping Corpse
Autopsy	Devourment	Kataklysm	Sadist
Baphomet (AKA Banished)	Disastrous Murmur	Katalepsy	Sinister
Be'lakor	Disgorge (USA)	Killing Addiction	Six Feet Under
Benediction	Disincarnate	Kraanium	Skinless
Beyond Creation	Dismember	Loudblast	Soilwork
Blood	Dying Fetus	Malevolent Creation	Spawn of Possession
Bloodbath	Entombed	Mangled Torsos	Suffocation
Bolt Thrower	Fleshcrawl	Massacre	Thanatos
Brain Drill	Fleshgod Apocalypse	Messiah	Torchure
Brutality	General Surgery	Monastyr	Torture Killer
Cancer	Golem	Monstrosity	Unleashed
Cannibal Corpse	Gorefest	Morbid Angel	Vader
Carnage (Sweden)	Gorerotted	Morgoth	Visceral Disgorge
Cephalotripsy	Gorguts	Necrophagist	Vital Remains
Children of Bodom	Gorod	Nile	Vulvectomy
Comecon	Grave	Nocturnus	Wombbath

## Black Metal

1349	Darkened Nocturne Slaughtercult	Infernal War	Ragnarok
1833 AD	Darkthrone	Inquisition	Sargeist
Abbath	Deathspell Omega	Judas Iscariot	Satanic Warmaster
Abigail Williams	Demony	Kampf	Satyricon
Abigor	Den Saakaldte	Khold	Shining
Abyssos	Dimmu Borgir	Koldbrann	Silencer
Adversus Semita	Disiplin	Krallice	Summoning
Amduatum	Drottnar	Leviathan	Taake
Anaal Nathrakh	Drudkh	Lord Belial	Thy Light
Ancient	Emperor	Make A Change...Kill Yourself	Totselfhatred
Antaeus	Enslaved	Marduk	Trist
Antestor	Enthroned	Mayhem	Tsjuder
Appalachian Winter	Forgotten Woods	Mgła	Urgehal
Averse Sefira	Funeral Mist	Myrkur	Von
Bathory	Gaahlskagg	Nagelfar	War
Beastcraft	Gehenna	Naglfar	Watain
Blasphemy	Goatmoon	Nargaroth	Windir
Borknagar	God Seed	Negură Bunget	Winterfylleth
Burzum	Gorgoroth	Nocturnal Depression	Wolfenhords
Carach Angren	Hecate Enthroned	Old Man's Child	Wolves in the Throne Room
Carpathian Forest	Horde	Ondskapt	Woods of Desolation
Carpticon	Horna	Ov Hell	Wotanorden
Countess	Immortal	Pantheon	Xasthur
Crimson Moonlight	Impaled Nazarene	Peste Noire	Zimorog
Dark Funeral	Infernal	Profanatica	M8/18TX

## Doom Metal

13 Bells of Doom	Daylight Dies	Khemmis	Saturnus
7th Moon	Demon Lung	Kyuss	Skepticism
A Day in Venice	Disembowelment	Las Cruces	Sleep
A Pale Horse Named Death	Divine Lust	Lord Vigo	Solitude Aeturnus
A Sickness Unto Death	Down	Lycus	Spirit Caravan
Acid Bath	Draconian	Magma Rise	Swallow the Sun
Agalloch	Earthbound Machine	Malincolia	The Age of Innocence
Ahab	Electric Wizard	Mastodon	The Foreshadowing
Ava Inferi	Esoteric	Mournful Congregation	The Obsessed
Avatarium	Evoken	My Dying Bride	The Sword
Baroness	Eyehategod	My Silent Wake	The Wounded Kings
Bathsheba	Faces of Bayon	Novembers Doom	Thergothon
Bongripper	Forest of Shadows	Nupraptor	Trees of Eternity
Bongzilla	Forsaken	Obsidian Sea	Triptykon
Buzzov•en	Funeral	October Tide	Trouble
Candlemass	Gallow God	Orange Goblin	Type O Negative
Carcolh	Giant Squid	Pagan Altar	Uaral
Catacombs	Grief	Pale Divine	Virgin Black
Cathedral	High on Fire	Pallbearer	Weedeater
Cirith Ungol	Holy Grove	Paradise Lost	Weeping Silence
Colosseum	Hooded Menace	Pentagram	Windhand
Count Raven	Ikarian	Place of Skulls	Winter
Crowbar	Imago Mortis	Pylon	Witchcraft
Cult of Luna	Iron Monkey	Reverend Bizarre	Witchfinder General
Dark Matter	Katatonia	Saint Vitus	Woods of Ypres

## Power Metal

3 Inches of Blood	Dreamtale	Johnny Lokke	Saidian
Agent Steel	Edenbridge	Kamelot	Salamandra
Alestorm	Edguy	Kiuas	ShadowKeep
Altaria	Emerald Sun	Kotipelto	Sinbreed
Ancient Bards	Evertale	Labÿrinth	Sonata Arctica
Angel Dust	Fairyland	Lost Horizon	Stormwarrior
Arion	Firewind	Luca Turilli	Stratovarius
Avantasia	Freedom Call	Magic Kingdom	Symphony X
Axenstar	Galloglass	Manilla Road	The Storyteller
Bejelit	Galneryus	Masterplan	Theocracy
Blind Guardian	Gamma Ray	Narnia	Thunderstone
Bloodbound	Gloryhammer	Neonfly	Thy Majesty
Cain's Offering	Hammerfall	Nightwish	Time Requiem
Celesty	Heavenly	Nocturnal Rites	Timeless Miracle
Civil War	Heed	Nocturne Moonrise	Twilight Force
Control Denied	Helloween	Orden Ogan	Twilightning
Crystallion	Helstar	Pathfinder	Vandroya
Dark Moor	Hibria	Persuader	Versailles
Darksun	Highland Glory	Power Quest	Visigoth
Demons & Wizards	Holy Knights	Powerwolf	Visions of Atlantis
Dionysus	HolyHell	Primal Fear	Wardrum
DivineFire	I Am I	Pyramaze	Warmen
DragonForce	Iced Earth	ReinXeed (AKA Majestica)	White Skull
Dragonland	InnerSiege	Rhapsody of Fire	Wisdom
Dreamaker	Iron Saviour	Sabatón	Within Silence

## Metalcore

13 Lashes	Blood Has Been Shed	I, The Breather	Tasters
14 Sacred Words	Bullet for my Valentine	Ice Nine Kills	Texas in July
36 Crazyfists	Caliban	Impending Doom	The Amity Affliction
7th Sanctum	Capture the Crown	In Hearts Wake	The Color Morale
Adept	Carnifex	Infant Annihilator	The Devil Wears Prada
Aftercoma	Casketnail	Killswitch Engage	The Empire Shall Fall
All Shall Perish	Catherine	Light the Torch (AKA Devil You Know)	The Ghost Inside
All That Remains	Chelsea Grin	Like Moths To Flames	The Plot In You
Alodex	Chimaira	Memphis May Fire	The Word Alive
Angelreich	Confide	Misery Signals	This or the Apocalypse
Antagonist	Crown the Empire	More Than A Thousand	Thy Art is Murder
Any Given Day	Dar Sangre	Motionless in White	Times of Grace
Architects	Darkest Hour	Norma Jean	Trivium
Arcite	Dead by April	Northlane	Unearth
As Blood Runs Black	dEMOTIONAL	Oceano	Upon This Dawning
As I Lay Dying	Despised Icon	Oceans Ate Alaska	Veil of Maya
Asking Alexandria	Despite My Deepest Fear	Oh, Sleeper	Volumes
Atreyu	Emmure	Parkway Drive	Wage War
August Burns Red	Fit for an Autopsy	Poison the Well	War of Ages
Axewound	For Today	Rings of Saturn	We Came As Romans
Bad Omens	Glass Cloud	Rise to Remain	While She Sleeps
Beartooth	God Forbid	Shadows Fall	Whitechapel
Beauty of Decay	Hatebreed	Sleeping Giant	Winds of Plague
Bleeding Through	I Killed the Prom Queen	Sonic Syndicate	Woe, Is Me
Blessthefall	I Prevail	Suicide Silence	Zao

## Folk Metal

Ad Plenitatem Lunae	Celtibeerian	Empylver	Hibernia
Adorned Brood	Cernunnos	Ensiferum	Korpiklaani
Aktarum	Ch'aska	Ephyra	Lou Quinse
Altú Páigánach	Chur	Equilibrium	Månegarm
An Theos	Cronica	Equinox	Menhir
Anadora	Cruachan	Eye of Odin	Metsatöll
Ancestral Volkhves	Cumulo Nimbus	F.R.A.M.	Mithotyn
Andraste	Dalriada	Falkenbach	Moonsorrow
Anodhor	Damokles	Fängörn	Myrkgrav
Arafel	Der Galgen	Fenrir	Rabenwolf
Arandu Arakuaa	Devil's'musement	Finntroll	Skiltron
Atorc	Diabula Rasa	Finsterforst	Skyclad
Auringon Hauta	Distorium	Folkstone	Skyforger
Balt Hüttar	Dolmen	Forsaken Rite	Svartsot
Bansidh	Drakkarus	Furor Gallico	Thyrfinng
Battle Tales	Draupnir	GjeldRune	Trollfest
Baumbart	Dreamfall	Gotland	Tuatha de Danann
Belfast	Dyrnwyn	Grimm	Turisas
Blodiga Skald	Eichenschild	Grimner	Týr
Brezno	Einherjer	Grito de Guerra	Vallorch
Bucium	Eldelvar	Gwaremm Korriged	Wintersun
Bucovina	Elforg	Haegen	Wolfarian
Cantus Levitas	Eluveitie	Hagbard	Wolfchant
Castleway	Elvarhøi	Hantaoma	Žrec
Ceiba	Elvenking	Heidevolk	Аркона



## Grindcore

324	Blunt Knife Idol	Deadly Weapon	Jig-Ai
Aborted Earth	Bodies Lay Broken	Death After Death	Kandar
Advisory	Brob	Death of Authority	Lifewrecker
Agathocles	Brujeria	Desalmado	Lock Up
Agoraphobic Nosebleed	Brutal Truth	Die Choking	Mangnani
AK//47	Brutality Reigns Supreme	Disassociate	Maruta
Anaaliklaani	Budd Dwyer	Discordance Axis	Nails
Anal Cunt	Cachorro da Duença	Disordered	Napalm Death
Anarchus	Captain Cleanoff	Disturbance Project	Narcosis
Anthropic	Carcass	Dobytčí mor	Nasum
Antigama	Cattle Decapitation	Endless Demise	Ogrux
ASRA	Caustic Wound	Entropy	Phobia
Assück	Cephalic Carnage	Exit-13	Pig Destroyer
Atentado	Chepanq	Expurgo	Rebirth of Pain
Aural Butchery	Chronic Tomb	Extreme Noise Terror	Regurgitate
Auschwitz Symphony Orchestra	Cloud Rat	False Flag Attack	Repulsion
Avulsion	Coit	Fuck the Facts	Rotten Sound
Baixo Calão	Compassion Fatigue	Full of Hell	Sanity's Dawn
Benümb	Complete Failure	Gestapolis	Self Hate
Besta	Compulsion to Kill	Gridlink	Shit Life
Birdflesh	Cosmic Vortex	Gut	Social Chaos
Bite Wound	Creative Waste	Hacksaw	Terrorizer
Blister Unit	Cumbomb	Insect Warfare	The Berzerker
Blockheads	D.E.R.	Insistent	Viscera Infest
Bloody Mortir	Dead in the Dirt	Jesus Ain't in Poland	Wormrot

## Progressive Metal

11th Dimension	Angertea	Ever Forthright	SEES
7 Months	Animals As Leaders	Fates Warning	Shattered Skies
7th Overture	Anomaly	Fellsilent	Shokran
A Thousand Shields	Anthriel	Frederik Thordendal's Special Defects	Sikth
A.I.(d)	Anthropia	Gojira	Sithu Aye
Absent Distance	Anticlockwise	Gru	Skyharbor
Accretion Disk	Anup Sastry	Hacktivist	Stealing Axion
Aeon Zen	Aode	Hacride	Tesseract
Affector	Appearance of Nothing	Heart of a Coward	Textures
After the Burial	Arabesque	Intervals	The Afterimage
Age of Nemesis	Being	Means End	The Algorithm
Agnosia	Benea Reach	Merrow	The Arusha Accord
Agora	Born of Osiris	Meshuggah	The Contortionist
Akeldama	Chimp Spanner	Mnemic	The HAARP Machine
Alarion	Cilice	Modern Day Babylon	The Korea
Aliases	Circle of Contempt	Monuments	The Ocean
All That I Bleed	Circles	Nemertines	The Safety Fire
Althea	Cloudkicker	No Consequence	Threat Signal
Alttar	Cyclamen	Of Man Not of Machine	Tool
Anarkía	David Maxim Micic	Periphery	Twelve Foot Ninja
Andeavor	Destiny Potato	Pomegranate Tiger	Uneven Structure
Andragonia	Dream Theater	Queensrÿche	Vildhjarta
Andromeda	Drewsif Stalin's Musical Endeavours	Red Seas Fire	Wide Eyes
Andy Gillion	Entities	Reflections	Widek
Angel Vivaldi	Erra	RXYZYXR	Xerath

## Appendix B - Anecdotal Questionnaire

I consent to the researcher using my answers on this questionnaire as part of the data collection for his thesis, and I consent to have my answers included in the thesis:

Yes  No

I consent to the possibility of a follow-up interview with the researcher, although I can withdraw without explanation at any time: Yes  No

---

Subject No: .....

Age Group: <18  18 – 25  26 – 35  35 – 45  45+

Gender: Male  Female  Other  Prefer Not To Say

Are you a musician? Yes  No

How often do you listen to Heavy Metal music?

Every Day  Every Other Day  1 – 2 times per week

Less Than Once Per Week

What is your preferred sub-genre of Heavy Metal?

.....

What is the name of your favourite band?

.....

Within the bands that you personally enjoy, which one would you consider most extreme?  
(Exclude bands that you know of but don't listen to)

.....

Do you focus on lyrical content when listening to Heavy Metal?

.....

Do you look up lyrics if the vocal style is unintelligible?

.....

What is your favourite album artwork?

.....

Are there any bands whose lyrics offend you?

.....

Are there any bands that you avoid listening to because of graphic content? If so, name them.

.....

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