

Editorial: Metal and Politics special issue.

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It might not be immediately obvious what the study of politics adds to metal music studies, nor indeed, what metal music studies can add to the study of politics. However, in the following pages we reflect on the opportunity for these wider disciplinary interventions and some of the varied questions that underpin our field. This special issue comes out of the Metal Music Studies conference that was held in Bournemouth in June 2016, which explored some of these broader debates. The field of metal music studies is clearly both proliferating, and in the ascendant, with national and international conferences regularly taking place (for example previous years have seen conferences in Salzburg, Helsinki, Bowling Green, OH) alongside the emergence of this dedicated journal. Scholarship on metal is expanding rapidly, from what were considered its founding texts (Gaines, 1998; Weinstein, 1991; Walser, 1993) and we now see a plethora of studies which bring together and adopt a range of methodological and theoretical approaches (for a brief summary see Savigny and Schaap, 2018, forthcoming) alongside more critically reflective work on the nature of the field itself (see for example Brown, 2011a and this issue; Spracklen et al, 2011; Scott, 2016; Kahn Harris, 2016).

Indeed the history of metal studies as a field in its own right is something that our attention is clearly focused on in Andy Brown's insightful overview of its historical development and place in British academe (in this issue). But before we reflect on the nature of the field itself, we are keen to explore this perhaps strange relationship between metal and politics. And these relations we argue take place not only within the confines of academic writing.

To make this argument, we first begin with a discussion of what we mean by politics. Politics is often taken to mean the workings, institutions and agents of the state. For many the discussion of 'what is politics?' has subsequently meant exploration of either 'arena' approaches to definitions of politics (exploring the site at where politics takes place), or processual definitions where we examine the processes that constitute political behaviour and relations (Leftwich, 2015). The analysis of politics initially drew attention to two key features: the behaviour of politicians (agents) and the institutions of the state that they find themselves in (structures). And so, in the first instance we can see that at a theoretical level politics allows us to discuss the interaction of agents and structures. This interactive debate is well rehearsed in sociology and enables a theoretical reflection on the iterative relationship between structures and agents (Giddens, 1985). Structures both constrain and enable agents, and by understanding this interactive process we can understand the way in which power works within society. So we might be able to understand the extent to which individuals have power in any given system by examining the structural context(s) that they find themselves in. If metal, in both theory and practice, is about transgressing existing relations, then to understand the power structures actors are situated in, enables us how understand how this disruption might take place.

Jessop argued that these structures however, were not an equal playing field. Agents were differentially located in structures, and more or less able to exercise power because of that positioning. Which suggests that we need to understand the actions of agents in relation to

their starting point within the structures they find themselves in. For example, in contemporary Britain, black working class women are less likely to have their interests represented in current political and social structures than white, public school educated men. In metal as a genre, again, we see an over representation of white males (Schaap & Berkers, 2014) and an under representation of black women (Dawes, 2013). In this sense, we might argue, metal simply reinforces and mirrors existing social and political structures of power. But, following in the critical cultural studies tradition, metal music studies also claims to offer alternate spaces and sites; metal is regarded as a place where social and conventional norms can be transgressed and alternate realities rendered visible and viable. In this way the spaces and subcultures of metal point towards some of the paradoxes and dialectics that underpin other cultural structures.

Unpacking these wider theoretical and conceptual debates enables metal studies to offer a more nuanced and reflective assessment of our subject matter. Most specifically, asking political questions allows us to question the nature of power. Power is not simply the province of elite politicians and state institutions but is multi-faceted. While we might often observe power, or the effects of power at elite level, metal as a genre reminds us that it is also possible to claim power at the level of the individual or community. We are reminded not only of the power of collective voices in a range of feminist theorising (e.g. Morgan, 1970; hooks, 1981), but also that the political is something that exists at the personal level. Feminist theorising provides an expansive definition of the political: politics is not just confined to the actors or the institutions of the state; politics is fundamentally about the exercise of power. With this broader definition feminists show how power relations take place in all interactive spaces in every personal relationship. This theorising thus draws our attention to the wide-ranging ways in which power is political, and the ways in which the exercise of power extends far beyond formal state structures. We see how political power is located and embedded in deeper social structures that provide the context of formal state structures: that which is termed patriarchy (e.g. Engels 1884/2010; Millett, 1970; Wolf, 1991; Enloe, 2017), which is also racialised (hooks, 1981), and intersected by race, gender and class (Crenshaw, 1989). Agents are implicated in these structures and, as Butler (1990) observes, the body itself is a site where social and political power relations are inscribed. We not only exist within cultural structures but we replicate them through our bodily performance of heterosexual, gendered, racialised and classed norms; as Foucauldian self-regulating subjects.

So what does this have to do with metal? The ways in which the term politics has been broadened out to encompass theorising of power relations beyond the role of the state and elected officials enables us to reflect on the nature of power itself. And so by asking questions about politics we are able to ask: Who benefits from the way things are? Whose interests are served? Asking these questions of a highly visible but often unexplored space such as metal, and within an emergent scholarship, enables us to then reflect on what an analysis of metal can tell us about the ways in which society works.

This special issue builds on a tradition within metal studies that is asking those questions about the wider inequalities that characterise contemporary structures of power (for example, Kahn Harris, 2007; Vasan, 2011; Schaap and Berkes, 2014; Schaap, 2015; Clifford Napeoleone, 2015; Hill, 2016; Scott, 2016b). The following papers apply and explore various

ideological models that construct and inform the power dynamics of metal music. For example, both Hill and Shadrack point us in the direction of the ways in which gendered power structures are played out in the metal context. While their analyses are of the genre, they also speak to a wider series of analyses of structural inequalities which disproportionately disadvantage the diversity of women within contemporary Western society. Coggins' work speaks to the historic 'fear' of women within this patriarchal context and explores the ways in which these fears are mythologised and pathologized through metal. Elliot's focus on religion and its iconography reminds us that such ideologies also function as a regulatory political power structure. Hay reminds us that media play a key role in disseminating dominant ideas, and in perhaps in Foucauldian terms we are reminded of the regulatory discursive power of popular culture and the ways in which it is mediated.

These papers add to the literature on metal as a mechanism to expose underlying power structures, even if the subject matter actually seems to reinforce these religious, heteronormative, gendered and raced structures. But they also remind us that metal as a genre and as a site of analysis opens up a space where change and difference can be possible; in this sense, metal both as culture and as a tool of cultural analysis can provide a site of transgression (e.g. Spracklen et al, 2011). What the study of metal offers then is perhaps a more nuanced account of the ways in which we might understand how metal as a genre or a field of study works, that also enables us to think more widely about the lessons that we can apply socially and more broadly. As Hill and Spracklen (2010) have previously argued, we need to ask two key questions: not only 'What we can understand *about* metal [but also] what we can learn *from* metal'. Drawing on Roy and Dowd's (2010) sociological approach to the study of music, when thinking about metal politically, we might want to ask the following questions: What is metal? How do individuals and groups use metal? How is metal produced and consumed? And what does metal tell us more widely about the ways in which power works in society? In this sense, the articles that follow provide us with case studies that enable us to draw wider reflections upon the wider regulatory structures which comprise our society, and through these studies we are reminded that these structures are iterative, and nuanced, and as such, available for challenge and change.

In our opening piece, 'Metal and Sexism', Rosemary Hill draws on interviews with female fans to explore women's experiences as fans of metal and rock music. While academic accounts often depict metal as sexist, hypermasculinist, and exclusionary, Hill's interviewees instead felt the genre to be less sexist than 'the mainstream'. In her article, Hill explores the contradiction that often emerges between academic accounts and fan accounts of sexism in metal. She argues that this disconnect is due to the subtle ways in which sexism manifests and also down to a mythical sense of 'equality' that exists within metal culture. Her work effectively draws attention to the ways in which female fans often deflect sexism as a joke or justify their exclusion from the mosh pit, arguing that these are examples of Savigny and Sleight's (2015) argument of empowered choice: where a postfeminist discourse of empowerment is used to explain choices that result in the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo. But at the same time Hill reminds us of the importance of listening to the experiences of female fans and their own weighting of these against their (much more negative) experiences at more mainstream music venues and events. Hill's conclusion exposes the myths that metal employs in order to appear a more equal community, while stressing that it has not yet fully achieved this goal.

Hill's article perfectly sets the stage for Jasmine Shadrack's moving article 'Mater Omnium and the Cosmic Womb of the Abyss', based on her conference keynote address. In this piece, Shadrack uses interpretative performance ethnography to explore the space occupied by woman in black metal (Masciandaro, 2010), applying Julia Kristeva's theories to her own experiences in the avant garde black metal band Denigrata. She reflects on her performance as guitarist and front woman Denigrata Herself and that of the band's female keyboardist and vocalist Manea. The article closely considers the presence of the abject, the deject, the corpse and jouissance in their lived experience on stage. Shadrack identifies with woman-as-nomad (Winterson, 2013): an abject position within a subject (black metal) that does not want her there. She argues that while the matrifocal structure of Denigrata confronts rejection and sexism, her live gig experience remains negative and is best represented by the Kristevan corpse. Nonetheless, the tensions of the experience produce the 'beautiful object' of Denigrata's music, art objects and performance: creating a 'radical alterity for black metal'.

The next two articles perform impressive close readings of themes and motifs particular to metal, focusing on the presence of demonic or anti-religious ideas and the figure of the witchfinder. In 'A Matter of Life and Death: Iron Maiden's Religio-Political Critique', Peter Elliott analyses the lyrics and music of this 2006 album. Elliott firstly surveys critics who claim that metal is 'replete' with religious terminology, imagery and symbolism, alongside the objections made about it by religious groups. The main body of his analysis then demonstrates the ways in which Iron Maiden's album highlights the political and social havoc wrought by religion and challenges some of its underlying beliefs. By considering the interactions of elements such as the melodies, rhythms, chord progressions, and vocal range, Elliott offers a detailed and thoughtful discussion of this album as religio-political critique.

The following article, 'Witchfinders and the Magical Power of Ambiguity at Stake in Doom Metal', considers the fascination that the figure of the witchfinder holds for the genre of Doom Metal. Owen Coggins examines the treatment of the witchfinder in four case studies: Coven's 'Coven in Charing Cross' (1969); Witchfinder General's 'Witchfinder General' (1982); Cathedral's 'Hopkins, Witchfinder General' (1995); and Electric Wizard's 'I, the Witchfinder' (2000). He argues that despite the central position of the witchfinder character in these songs, witchcraft itself is sustained as a powerful disruptive force. It subverts symbolic control by destabilising identities, transforming subject positions, offering vocals that escape linguistic structures, and undermining the sense of a linear narrative through cyclical song elements such as the slow repetitions and chaotic noise of doom metal sound. Coggins proposes that the enduring appeal of witchcraft themes in metal and their particular affinity with doom metal is due to this ambiguity.

Next, Alexander Hay's article 'Phew – What a Blizzard! Black Metal And The UK Popular Press' hones in on the political potential of metal and its depiction in the press. Hay begins by establishing the popularity and treatment of horror and the occult in these tabloids, before closely analysing the newspaper coverage of these themes between 1990 and 1995: the peak time of the second wave of Norwegian metal. His findings initially seem counterintuitive: for rather than honing in on the salacious material provided by black metal

of this period, the British tabloid articles that mentioned Norway at this time refer only to football, Vikings, whaling and the monarchy. Hay's reflections on these findings suggest that while the British tabloids' ignoring of black metal is one of the great ironies of journalism, it is also understandable given the strange dynamics of these publications, which epitomise conservative ideals and embody stasis above all else.

Finally, in 'A Manifesto for Metal Studies', Andy Brown turns towards the historical development of academic scholarship to reflect on the development of metal studies as a field. Brown's exploration of the interdisciplinary struggles that have taken place within academia informs his suggested manifesto for a politics of metal music studies. He argues that the Academy's experiences of conflict and contestation, debate, self-reflection and self-analysis can help define many of the key issues that face metal studies at this crucial juncture in its development. Drawing particularly from cultural studies, fan studies and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Brown discusses questions of ownership, legitimation, theorisation and power. He suggests that a self-reflective and reflexive metal studies field must include awareness of the intersections of academia and fandom and that metal scholars must practice self-analysis of their position with respect of class, politics, fandom and the global scene.

Taken as a whole, these articles critically interrogate many assumptions made about metal music. They draw attention to its gendered qualities and expose the myths that are mobilised in its defence. In particular they explore assumptions made about metal's 'common' features and 'natural' qualities, including allegations about its innate political nature, dark and demonic themes, use of stereotypes such as witchfinders, and depictions in the press. They all emphasise the importance of self-reflection and awareness of subject position when analysing metal music and experience, alongside critiquing the systems of ideas which regulate our society, suggesting that the political potential of metal and its scholarship is vast.

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