

‘A human being this once resembled¹’: bodily transgression in extreme metal music

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Introduction

In the song ‘Exhume to Consume’ the extreme metal music act Carcass remind us of the possibilities of the body. They show us that the corporal is a contested site of opportunity, where bodily representation is multiple, ambivalent and transgressive. The song explores the acts of a seemingly out-of-control and unknown protagonist, disinterring the dead to be eaten and to satiate an irrepressible desire. Here the body is undermined as a traditional object of sacredness, before or even after death, and is presented as nothing more than food to be eagerly consumed. The most base and necessary functions of the human body are explored and revelled in. Those who act out these deeds are aware of their own activities but are also driven by them. They are complicit performers in their own actions and obsessed victims, aware of their own madness:

‘Bereaved relatives are not amused

As on their dear departed I feverishly consume...’

There is a celebration of the body and a grotesque and carnivalesque undermining of the body. Problematic issues of mortality are cheerfully engaged in through focusing upon those issues (here, death and cannibalism) that are a challenge to the integrity of the body. Bodies are mixed and assimilated with other bodies, the living are (willingly) corrupted and polluted by the dead. It is this grotesque body and the actions of that body that are noteworthy here. This paper looks at some of the meanings of the ‘grotesque’ and studies its implications for the representation of the

body within extreme metal music using as a source of textual analysis the extreme metal Grindcore band Carcass.

‘Extreme metal’ as a musical form developed in the 1980s partly from, and as a contrast to, wider Heavy Metal. Stylistic and aesthetically radical influences of Thrash Metal and Punk Rock acted as a catalyst for the extreme metal acts that followed. The musical traits of extreme metal, although not all-encompassing due to the plethora of styles that characterise it, tend to centre on an active rejection of melody. Death Metal, a sub-genre of extreme metal, for example was formed in part due to a rejection of the ‘grandiose’ Heavy Metal that had existed before it that tended to focus upon (musical) theatrics. Instead, Death Metal was stripped down to a level that concentrated on producing harsh music through fast played down-tuned guitars and double-bass drumming – what Walser (1991) refers to as heavy metal ‘fundamentalism’. This created complex riffs and song structures that were given further emphasis by heavily processed and distorted vocals that were screamed or grunted to a point of incomprehension. The comparison of Death Metal with other prominent extreme metal forms highlights both stylistic variations and similarities. Whilst employing similar stylistics to those above, the Black Metal ‘sound’ for example often consists of a thin production with a high-end or ‘tinny’ guitar sound. This is often combined with an incorporation of more atmospheric musical components that include elements of classical music and a prominent use of keyboards. Other variations within the extreme metal scene include ‘Grindcore’ which developed as a sub-genre of Death Metal and consisted of similarly radical tempos but with an even less perceptible sound. Grindcore was more overtly

influenced by Hardcore Punk than other Extreme Metal forms and has traditionally been expressed in very short songs that ranged from a few seconds to a few minutes.

The development of more radical forms of heavy metal began in the late 1980s and was pioneered by a minority of bands in specific localised scenes. The Grindcore genre emerged predominantly in Britain through independent record labels and self-releases and had its roots in anarchist English politics and aspects of Punk protest.

The Grindcore act Carcass established themselves as an important part of this scene and went on to become widely known and respected. Whilst contributing to the development of establishing the Grindcore 'sound', they were also involved in the socio-political aspects of the scene. The band produced musical texts that were involved in what could be understood to be 'body politics'. Coming from a vegetarian/vegan standpoint the band would write songs about what they saw as the problematic act of consuming animal flesh and indeed their songs would often centre around inverting such relationships (Strachan 2004). So, for example, they explore the idea of human bodies being rendered down into glue or mass produced for the consumption by animals. This particular version of Grindcore, pioneered by Carcass, with its focus upon the physicality of the body, generated a new extreme metal subgenre – that of 'Goregrind'. Here, many bands expanding upon the work of Carcass continue to focus upon discourses of the corporal. Indeed, many other Goregrind bands revel in similar Bakhtinian notions of the body, or at least present us with images of the body that offer us wider possibilities of understanding it in popular music. See, for example, the scatologically inclined Impaled with songs such as 'With Shit, I am Adorned', 'From here to Colostomy' and 'Immaculate Defecation', acts such as Cattle Decapitation and their exploration of the relationship between humans

and animals with songs such as 'Bovine, Swine and Human-Rinds', 'Lips & Assholes' and 'Chummified' on albums such as 'To Serve Man' and 'Humanure', and the anatomically precise examinations of the patho – Goregrind band The County Medical Examiners (who are, in fact, exactly that) with songs such as 'NH₂(CH₂)₄NH₂&C₅H₁₄N₂ (Putrescine & Cadaverine)' and 'Y-Shaped Thoracoabdominal Incision' from the album 'Forensic Fugues and Medicolegal Medleys'.

This paper looks at some of the meanings of the 'grotesque' and studies its implications for the representation of the body within extreme metal music. This manner of exploration is based upon the work of a number of theorists that have chosen to focus upon performances of transgression both in terms of bodily practices and a wider possibly liberatory space. For example, Bakhtin's (1984) carnival space and grotesque body present striking and diverse approaches of the monstrous that may facilitate a liminal freedom for new representations of the body and, in doing so, invert the symbolic order of everyday understandings of the body and related hierarchies. Bakhtin, who wrote in the early Twentieth Century, explored the medieval carnival as a liberatory space. Central to the ritual of the carnival is its potential to allow a space to escape the control of authority and other powers, if only for specific times during the year, and meant that the hierarchy of rank and the related rules of living were undermined in the bodily paradox, excess and transgression of the grotesque body and performances.

Most writing around the grotesque body, the monstrous and the carnivalesque is grounded in literary theory (Thompson 1972) and consequently its application to the theoretical study of popular music has been particularly uncommon. However, what will hopefully be shown is that such a theoretical framework around understandings

and analyses of representations of the body and the politics of the body can be mapped onto popular music studies. Indeed, it can be argued that to a marked extent all musical production, consumption and understanding is inherently corporal, with the body as central to how we relate to the music we come into contact with. As Frith (1996:141) highlights, ‘grasping music means feeling it ... [and] musical understanding is a bodily as well as mental process’. The description of musical processes is an inevitably physical one. How music is produced, consumed and understood is bound up in the physical actions of the body and ‘the sight of the gestures and movements of the various parts of the body producing the music is fundamentally necessary if it is to be grasped in all its fullness’ (Stravinsky cited in Frith 1996:141). Frith (1996:142) also suggests, in regards to this, those who actually play musical instruments hear the music differently from those who do not because “they listen to it with a felt, physical empathy”. So then we can see the body and music are closely intertwined.

Any reading of a text is ultimately partial and problematic in nature, and the study of popular music is no exception (Frith 1981). Indeed, much analysis of musical texts either offers simplistic readings that are a source of consternation for fans and musicians, such as those traditionally proffered by the PMRC and similar organisations, or present such a theoretically weighty interpretation that they bear little or no relation to fans’ own experiences, as is with the case of much musicological research. In both of these cases textual interpretation is inherently political and must be understood as so. The focus upon lyrics, of which this paper does in part, is a most obvious means of musical textual analysis as the assumption is that semiotics lend themselves most closely to a ‘true’ reading of a given text. As Frith (1996:158) suggests, ‘most people if asked what a song “means” refer to the

words'. However, this is not without its problems. In fact, as McClary and Walser (1990:285) highlight:

It is certain that much rock is not received primarily in terms of text: indeed, the texts of some genres of popular music are not clearly discernable by its fans - those who are most devoted to the music – and the obscurity of the verbal dimension seems even to be part of the attraction. Heavy metal fans, for instance, don't seem to be much concerned with verbal discourse; they go to concerts where lyrics of are almost completely intelligible, and they don't mouth the lyrics along with the songs even if they know them – they are much more likely to mime the guitar solos or make power gestures or yell

So, as stated earlier a bodily interpretation of the music may be just as much pertinent to the pertaining of how fans grasp the music. However, a textual analysis of lyrics, even in regards to the above caveats, is a useful mode of analysis, but must be understood as being problematic.

The grotesque body

It is the body within music and the body as a site of pleasure that resonates with the grotesque, the monstrous and the carnivalesque and which will be elaborated upon now. The most notable theorist who has written on the subject of the grotesque body and carnival is Bakhtin, and in particular his work 'Rabelais and His World' (1984). Here, the carnival and the grotesque body are seen as a liminal space that provides a site for the expression and taking part of the 'popular, festive [and] indestructible' (1984:33). In this theory, the idea of 'transgression' is central to the grotesque body

and is ordered around the constant challenging of boundaries, where the grotesque body is 'blended with the world, with animals, with objects' (1984:27). This transgression is exercised as a challenge to societal boundaries and permits those who participate in such carnivalesque acts to free themselves, if for only a certain amount of time, from hierarchical structures and power relations in a liminal and liberatory space. This space of the carnival is realised through engaging with those issues that are seen as problematic or disturbing in wider society. So, for example, the carnival is a space that in particular celebrates in the undermining of the body and that joyfully plays with issues of mortality and the body's permeability.

What must be noted with any discussion of the grotesque is the extent to which such bodies, described and idealised by Bakhtin, are available. Traditional sources of identity can impact upon the grotesque body. Gender can be seen to be extolled upon it to the extent that the grotesque is fixed with feminine characteristics. Overstating the degree to which the carnival and the grotesque can be understood as sites of transgression and resistance is an obvious danger. Tropes of the grotesque body and the institution of the carnival 'Other' them in contrast to Western high art and classicism and the classic body, and in particular, the grotesque is made feminine and marginal to a masculinised and legitimised power. To unproblematically posit the practice of the carnival as a place which suspends and even inverts corporal hierarchies and rank is not without its risks. The institution of the carnival was not entirely a site of revolt exercised by those marginalised as an act against a dominant power. Indeed, it was just as much a regulating and regulated location that relegated and limited transgressive corporal practices to a marginal site of fleeting liberation. This managing of the monstrous therefore facilitated the maintenance of existing patterns of politics and domination. This perpetuation of power relations was also due

in part to how performance within the carnival was to some extent based upon violation of and violence upon weaker social groups. In this reaffirmation of control Stallybrass and White (1986:53) highlight how such acts represent a displaced abjection, '[which is] the process whereby "low" social groups turn their figurative and actual power, not against those in authority, but against those who are even "lower" (women, Jews, animals)'. So the carnival was complicit in a continuation of those existing in power and a continued subjugation of already oppressed social groups.

The cultural importance of such bodies in relation to body politics have been most marked when exhibited in public spaces. Indeed, as Braidotti (1996:135) highlights, from side-shows to the circus to the motion-picture industry, monstrous and grotesque bodies have been inexorably bound up in the act of public display. The 'unnatural' status of such boundary figures, personified for example in the Frankenstein Monster (Lykke 1996:16), were a problematic site because 'they defy attempts to identify a pure and whole human being' (Meskimmon 1996). It is this defiance that is relevant here. The grotesque body could be seen as an empowering trope because it is not limited by any fixed nature. It is not limited or relegated to a boundary but instead exceeds those boundaries. It is a body constantly in flux and in a state of 'becoming' and it allows those who are willing to involve themselves with such bodies to explore stimulating meanings of the corporal. This is what Braidotti (1996:137) calls 'the infinite powers of the imagination', and what Harraway (1991) suggests is 'the promise of monsters'. These bodies are never finished and always perpetual. The body is presented as imperfect, incomplete and partial. Focus is drawn towards its openings, its orifices, those protuberances such as the belly and the buttocks and the genitals, those parts that are the cause of or the producers of excretions, and rather

than having to regulate the physical and social control of these bodily fluids, they are instead revelled in (Reynolds and Press 1995). As Gross (1990:91) suggests, ‘Bodily fluids, waste products, refuse – faeces, spit, sperm, etc. – provoke cultural and individual horror and disgust, symptomatic of our cultural inability to accept the body’s materiality, its limits ...’. It is the liberation from such waste control that may be particularly appealing for those whose bodies and bodily functions are especially controlled. Such bodily rejections and management of waste and dirt are particularly marked in relation to the gendered body. So, they are a consequence for men in societies that espouse such bodily control. As Theweleit (1987) highlights, in his study of the volunteer armies of post World War I Germany, masculine identity was in part shaped by the successful control of bodily waste to the extent that their nation’s success or failure was understood in corporal terms. So, as was expressed at that time ‘The government’s task is to get rid of any “dirt” that settles on the “body of the nation”’ (1987:398, original emphasis). Indeed, such specific male bodies can be still seen in some aspects of extreme metal music. The sub-genre of National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) which is most prolific in scenes based in Eastern Europe and Scandinavian countries is unsurprisingly bound up in representing those male bodies that are rigid and defined. As well as rejecting those bodies that are seen as weak or undesirable, for example those that are Jewish or at least non-white, the body and actions of the body in NSBM is disciplined and strong. Interrelated themes of Blut und Boden (‘blood and soil’), (Welch 1993), and an atavistic fixation upon hierarchical bodies (Moynihan, M. and Soderlind, D. 1998) result in a specific NSBM body that is historically, geographically and ‘racially’ bounded. For women, similar control comes from the abjection of corporal waste such as menstruation. As Kristeva (1982:71) suggests, such waste is a taboo and cultural horror that highlights sexual

difference, not just between men and women, but men and mothers, as ‘menstrual blood ... stands for the danger issuing from within identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and through internalisation, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference’.

The body, in parts

As has been shown so far, any discussion of the grotesque body is a discussion of bodily parts, and it is a partial body that indulges, with orifices and their excretory functions as central to this body’s oppositional and transgressive form. Yet, further analysis of the grotesque highlights that a focus exclusively upon the lower regions may be erroneous, as the grotesque body is also concerned with the upper strata. Of all features of the human body, it is suggested that one aspect plays the most important part in understandings of the grotesque. For Bakhtin, ‘the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth’ (1984:317). It is seen as a feature that dominates all others. Focus is concentrated upon the mouth because it is suggested that it is within it that any limitations within the body and between bodies are overcome. Indeed the most important experiences in the life of the grotesque body are exercised within this area, as ‘Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination ... as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body’ (Bakhtin 1984:317). However, both stratum function and perform in relation to and with dependence upon one another. The body intakes and outputs, it consumes and expels. Both areas of the body are interdependent in a (re)generative, transgressive and never ending process. The act of eating is particularly germane in how the grotesque body challenges the physicality of its traditionally understood confines and the sacredness of its related

functions, such as birth and consumption. The inversion and debasement of what enters and leaves the body can be seen with Bakhtin's (1984) discussion of one particular carnival situation, in particular in regards to the characters of Gargamelle and Gargantua. The description of Gargamelle giving birth to Gargantua embodies what is the grotesque in some striking ways, not mostly because her physical act of giving birth and creating life ends in her death. The scene of this incident, the 'feast of cattle slaughter' where three hundred and sixty-seven thousand and fourteen oxen are slaughtered, takes the form of a festive banquet. Here, after gorging herself with the intestines of the animal, Gargamelle goes into labour suddenly after dropping her right intestine. The confines of her body are compromised as she cannot sustain the vast amount of food that she has consumed, thereby resulting in the grotesque blurring of the inside/outside body with the expulsion of her intestine. As Bakhtin describes:

Bowels, intestines, with their wealth of meaning and connotation are the leading images of the entire episode. In our excerpt these images are introduced as food: *gaudebillaux*, an equivalent of *grasses tripes*, the ox's fatty intestines. But Gargamelle's labor and the falling out of the right intestine link the devoured tripe with those who devour them. The limits between animal flesh and the consuming human flesh are dimmed, very nearly erased. The bodies are interwoven and begin to be fused in one grotesque image of a devoured and devouring world. One dense bodily atmosphere is created, the atmosphere of the great belly. The essential events of our episode take place within its walls: eating, the falling-out of intestines, childbirth (Bakhtin 1984:221-222, original emphasis).

The climax of the scene sees the excreted intestine being mistaken for the body of her new child as the dying Gargamelle gives birth to Gargantua through her ear. The entire scene, excessive and comical, highlights how bodies are enmeshed and combined, simultaneously internal and external, give life and suffer death. In particular here, the act of consumption, especially in relation to the consumption of ox intestines, is principally relevant. The scatological aspect of ingesting tripe is a significant dynamic. Tripe, the bowels and stomach of a cow, even when prepared and cleaned correctly, is thought still to contain a significant amount of waste which is consumed along with the surrounding foodstuff. To eat tripe therefore means to eat excrement. So, to consume it is to undermine the body, it is to consume the expelled, it is to combine bodies, contaminate the human with the animal. All of which is celebrated and exercised by the grotesque body and the carnivalesque.

This emphasis upon the grotesque mouth, and the performative function of the mouth upon the confines of the body, a body that is continually built and created, bears some relevance upon further textual analysis of some aspects of the extreme metal act Carcass. Indeed, to a large extent the work of Carcass not only involves a corporal fascination, but involves a (literal) exploration of the body via consumption, where the role of the mouth is central. There are nauseatingly explicit medical descriptions of bodies being mutilated and eaten, changed, transgressed and made anew via the act of mastication. These ideas are explored in songs with titles such as 'Exhume to Consume', 'Pedigree Butchery' and 'Vomited Anal Tract'. The body is destabilized as an established object of inviolability, whether before or after death, and is presented as nothing more than foodstuff to be enthusiastically eaten, with words such as 'drool', 'slavering' and 'devour' being used. As Bakhtin observed in his

exploration of the grotesque mouth, 'the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world' (1984:317).

Indeed, to elaborate upon one example highlighted, a song such as 'Pedigree Butchery' underlines such notions of the grotesque. Bearing in mind those caveats that have already been discussed in regard to any 'reading' of texts, it is nevertheless a useful point of reference. The song describes the mass production of human bodies for the sole purpose of being consumed:

As salubrious pet food

Human midden is consumed

Not one to mince my words

But how I love to see those siblings churned

In tins they are reared

Ghastly I slake

Bestial appetites I sate

As flesh and steel I mate

To fill the lower species' plate...

There is, as with the demise of Gargamelle, the description of an excessive and grotesque volume of consumption where death is ultimately bound up in such actions.

Bodies are swallowed up by other bodies, gleefully and gluttonously, in bizarre acts with bizarre results. Also again we have the human(e) and the animal(istic),

traditionally separate entities, being combined into a single organic mass. Whether it is human consuming animal in the case of Gargamelle, or animal consuming human

in regard to the Carcass song, 'the grotesque character of the transformation of the human element into an animal one; the combination of human and animal trait is, as

we know, one of the most ancient grotesque forms' (Bakhtin 1984: 316). It is an 'animal and human, master and slave' (Sallybrass and White 1986:56) juxtaposition that is challenged and serves to alter the body. The 'human midden' consumed by a 'lower species', to refer back to the lyrics.

It is worth mentioning here that representation of the grotesque is often done so in combination with devices such as humour, irony and satire. The grotesque body is more often than not a humorous body, but it is a humour that is troubling. This use of humour also adds another dimension – that of 'purpose'. As Thomson (1972:3) suggests, there is often the assumption 'that there is no point to the grotesque, that it is a gratuitous mixing together of incompatible elements for its own sake, or for no other purpose other than to bewilder ...'. Indeed, this particular use of the grotesque can be found in the work of many extreme metal acts who explore the body and the destruction of the body simply for its own sake. Whilst it would be erroneous to relegate such texts in favour of an analysis of others, indeed any extreme metal analysis is rare and therefore valuable in the field of popular music studies, other more pertinent uses of the grotesque in extreme metal are very much in evidence. The insightful employment of the grotesque body is most usually found in literature. The most striking can be found in the Swiftian use of it in A Modest Proposal (Thomson 1972:47). Here, the dry and matter-of-fact proposition about the reduction of the considerable amounts of abandoned and redundant waifs in Ireland by eating them is a most striking satiric device and use of the grotesque, a similar device which can be seen in the work of Carcass. So, the suggestion of mass producing and processing human flesh in the production of dog food, the rendering down of humans into glue, all produce the same desired effect in the reader – that of disgust and delight. The

palpable presentation of human bodies in inhumane situations becomes problematic for us because they are incongruous in their mix of the comic and the horrendous.

The grotesque body is precisely that, grotesque, because it is seen to be a challenge to dominant bodily hierarchies which it gleefully inverts. It is ‘ambivalent and contradictory ... ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of “classic” aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and completed’ (Bakhtin 1984:25). It is this corporal difference, of such classic aesthetics of the statuary within high art and high culture, and the human body represented and exercised in popular and lower festivities, that Bakhtin was eager to explore, and it is the paradoxical relationship of the ‘classical body’ and the ‘grotesque body’ that resonates within representations of the body within popular music. The grotesque body, which is seen to revel in excess, in the hideous, in the most base aspects of the body and its functions, is contrasted with a classical understanding of the body that is ‘elevated, static and monumental’ (Stallybrass and White 1986:21). It is ‘the radiant centre of a transcendent individualism, “put on a pedestal”, raised above the viewer and the commonality and anticipating passive admiration from below. We gaze up at the figure and wonder. We are placed by it as spectators ...’, (Stallybrass and White 1986:21, original emphasis). Such ‘classical’ bodies resonate with the performative body within much popular music, and in relation to the particular discussion here, with those bodies presented within heavy metal music. Whilst this argument will be elaborated upon later, it is worth highlighting here some key related aspects. It can be seen within the aesthetics of classicism in relation to the classical body, and the displayed body within heavy metal, that both tend to present a body that is ‘elevated’ and ‘static’ (to use the words of Stallybrass and White). The body is controlled and disciplined, it is raised above

and separated, both physically and spatially, from an envious and admiring onlooker who is distanced and more specifically situated below this idealised performative body. So, unlike ‘the grotesque body [which] is not separated from the rest of the world [i]t is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits’ (Bakhtin 1984:26), where it never presents an individual body but bodies and body parts which are linked, the classical body stands in resistance presenting an individualist notion of the body, one that is fixed and separate, closed off and different.

The controlled body

It has been argued that explorations of the body within some aspects of extreme metal can offer a new and even liberating space in contrast to traditional representations of a gendered or ‘raced’ body within firstly traditional heavy metal and then further extreme metal (Beckwith 2002). Within the performance of heavy and extreme metal there are close links between the body and musical production.

As stated earlier, the description of musical processes is an inevitably physical one (Frith 1996). The idea of the body, here in its carnivalesque grotesque form, is particularly pertinent with regard to discourses of popular music. Further, as an aspect of popular music, heavy metal and more recently extreme metal is clearly bound up in such bodily processes of understanding. Here, as with popular music in general, the body within heavy metal is linked to display, enjoyment, transgression and identity. It is not necessary or possible here to reiterate already existing discussions around the analysis of heavy metal (see Weinstein 1991, Walser 1993, Arnett 1996), nor is it possible to elaborate upon more recent debates around the developments of extreme metal (Berger 1999, Kahn-Harris 2004), beyond giving the brief description of its musical characteristics, lyrical themes and aesthetics mentioned in the introduction.

What will be examined in particular is how the body has been presented and understood in heavy and extreme metal as both 'classical' and 'grotesque' and how a textual analysis of extreme metal, in particular in relation to the work of the grindcore band Carcass, may highlight how the presence of a carnivalesque and grotesque body may offer a liberatory space that undermines traditional and hierarchical bodies.

As Walser (1993) highlights, in his study of heavy metal there has been a definite emphasis upon virtuoso musicianship within such musical circles. Heavy metal could be characterised by the number of individual 'stars' that performed within it, who tended to be male lead guitarists, whose status is based upon notions of skill. Further, this musical skill, which was prevalent then and is still prominent now within all forms of metal and wider rock music, is inexorably linked with understandings of the body and in particular certain actions and movements of the body. For Walser (1993:108), the gendered body within heavy metal is based upon 'Western constructs of masculinity [that] often include conflicting imperatives regarding assertive, spectacular display, and rigid self control'. There is an 'encoded phallogentric message' (Bayton 1997:43) around such bodily performance, where the electric guitar is seen as an extension of the male body and where it is held low down around the crotch and played in a suitably masturbatory and orgasmic fashion. It is this notion of power and bodily control that created, as Walser (1997:465) suggests, 'a new sort of disciplined practice' and precise technique within heavy metal musicianship that drew on influences from classical music and led to the proliferation of new guitar schools and magazines. Such practices have continued within new and emerging forms of heavy metal, especially those subgenres and acts that base their musical production around similar notions of technique and bodily control.

So, we can see, musical production and the performance of music is bounded up in bodily movement and, in particular, a precise and limiting bodily movement that is as focused, specific and deliberate as the music it produces. This reinforcement of certain corporal limits through a gendered emphasis upon (self) control, both in relation to the performance of the body and the performance of music, can act to relegate those bodies that do not 'fit' such ideas. This idea of bodily and musical control and technique can be seen to be undermined by those extreme metal acts that offer a more radical potential for exploring the body through notions of the grotesque. Referring back to the main source of analysis, one example of this can be seen in the Carcass song 'Carneous Cacophony' (taken from the album, 'Necroticism: Descanting the Insalubrious'), in which the song describes a (ungendered) protagonist crafting music(al instruments) from human bodies in order to create his/her latest masterpiece:

Striking up my discordant underture

A carnal cacophony perversely penned

Transposed ... and decomposed

On strings fashioned from human twine

Lovingly wound and fretted upon my bow

Garishly incarcerated ... the dead resonate

In a final death-throe

Here we again have musical and bodily performance intertwined (quite literally in this case). It is what Frith (1996:141) describes as the "'feeling" in popular music ... [a] feeling [which] describes the way the body feels as it produces sounds'. But it is the sound of the literal body making music, and is done so and explored in such a way that challenges the traditional gendered politics of such performance. What is described above is a purposely bathetic situation where musical virtuosity is still

trying to be achieved but through bizarre, disturbing and ridiculous bodily practices that transgress and undermine a traditional rock performance. Indeed, whilst most of the music produced within the genre of extreme metal can be understood through its relatively focused sound and its expression through a traditional verse-chorus-verse structure, some bands and sub-genres have developed a sound that is characterised by numerous tempo changes and a comparatively austere sound. Focused musical discipline is to some extent relegated in favour of a more tumultuous approach. As stated earlier, much musical textual analysis tends to focus quite obviously upon lyrics when trying to ascertain any type of meaning and understanding. It was also suggested that any such method of analysis is problematic and partial. What will be looked at now is how the aesthetic, and in particular record sleeve artwork, can also imply meaning. How an analysis of the artwork of extreme metal musicians such as 'Carcass' further the suggestion that the grotesque body is present within such a music genre. Indeed, representations of the body within extreme metal artwork are noteworthy for several reasons. As Harrel (1994:96) highlights:

... significant to death metal album art is the fact that the musicians are never pictured on the front cover. If they appear at all in the package, it is usually in smaller black and white photos showing them in street-like settings, not in flashy on-stage antics. This serves to de-emphasize the importance of the musicians – since metal ideology involves a strict avoidance of overt commercialism.

So we can see, in contrast to a traditional rock aesthetic where musicians are posed and distanced, to some extent the body within extreme metal is not separated from its audience but is merged, it is not the body of a musician per se but of a body full stop.

The representation of such a body and musician can be seen in the sleeve artwork of Carcass' album 'Necroticism: Descanting the Insalubrious'. This features black and white photographs laid out on a surgeon's table of the four band members in various states of bodily alteration. So, two of them have their features distorted through the influence of foreign objects, namely what appear to be cellophane and string wrapped around their faces. They reshape their faces so they are human and non-human, active participants in their own corporal transgression and featureless victims. The other two photos show the body between life and death. Their bodies, one wrapped in what appears to be a clear body-bag the other lying submerged in a bath, are beyond their own physical control.

Although obviously 'posed' to some extent, given they can still be understood in artistic terms, the bodies displayed here are not the classical statuesque bodies of the traditional rock world. They are without instrument, phallic or instrumental, they lack self-control, they are imposed upon, altered and multiple, their human features are perverted and they are between life and death. They are all, as Bakhtin (1984:317) suggests, 'a body in the act of becoming ... continually built, created'. They offer to us bodies that are joyfully altered and reshaped, that are grotesque in that they undermine the controlled, finished body of masculine rock music. They are not separated from or have power over us, but instead revel in the multiplicity of the body as an act of liberation.

Such grotesque, multiple and combined bodies are also present in other Carcass artwork. The covers of their records 'Reek of Putrefaction' and 'Symphonies of Sickness' are made up of a collage of dead human bodies in various physical states. Bodies and body parts are mixed and transposed. They are opened-up to one another, bodies are split open and organs are presented, they are removed and fixed onto other

bodies. They are also blended with images of animal parts that result in the presentation of a heaving organic mass. These are bodies that, as Bakhtin (1984:27) suggests, '[are] blended with the world, with animals, with objects'. The confines between separate bodies are breached and destroyed, they are what constitutes a 'double body':

[they] ignore the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organ. The outward and inward features are often merged into one (Bakhtin 1984:318)

So, corporal taboos are destabilised. The inviolability of the individualised body is challenged. The fixation with 'personal space' removed and replaced with an emphasis upon an undifferentiated mass. This indiscrimination is furthered with the purposely obfuscation of inner and outward characteristics of the body, features mixed between bodies, and among the human and non-human.

Conclusion

What we have then is a theoretical understanding of the body that can be applied to, and offers, a useful exploration of how the corporal is presented in popular music. In particular, what can be seen is that the possibilities of the body are present in some aspects of extreme metal music in the form of the 'grotesque'. Whilst the performance of the body within much extreme metal can be seen to be a reaffirmation of 'classical' understandings, in that they are based around a masculine, disciplined and hierarchical body, other texts within it can offer a more transgressive dimension. We

can see that extreme metal texts are grounded in the corporal and also the perpetual troubling of the body. Whilst the body in popular music has often been based around conventional notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, bodies within extreme metal may offer transitory sites of liberation. In regard to the source of this paper's analysis, we have seen musical texts that undermine traditional body politics in a number of interesting ways. There is a general undermining of the sacredness of the body and a revelling in those issues that have traditionally been problematic or proscribed. So, bodies are ambivalent and uncontrolled, they are not separate entities but mixed with others. We have bodies that celebrate in the most base and necessary of functions (eating, reproduction, defecation), and that are opened and penetrated by the alien and the animal. All these factors act to collapse physical boundaries and offer a way of looking at the body and the ever continuing possibilities of the body.

¹ This extract is taken from the Carcass song 'Corporal Jigsore Quandary', the lyrics to which are shown in the appendix.

Appendix

Corporal Jigsore Quandary.

Excised and anatomised, deviscerated disarray
The torso diverged with pride
Deftly amputated, evulsed limbs now defunct
The trunk imbrued, tatty stumps used as lugs
For a chondrin puzzle so quaint
Head and body decollate
A heaving mass so quiescent ...

Scattered and scrambled, your teasement grows
A bloody caricature to make whole
A squirming grisly jigsaw, detrital fragments fit so snug
That missing piece will leave you stumped
Totally disassembled, nicely sliced and diced
A human being this once resembled
Real cranium teaser, carved from flesh and bone
So mystifying ...

Battered and diffused with placating blows
A human jigsaw to make whole
A sequacious pattern which once fitted so snug
Joining together each dubious lump
Ravaged disassembly, neatly cubed and diced
A cold mannequin once reassembled
Astute brain teaser, incorporate flesh and bone
So mortifying ...

An incessant game - methodically made
With each cumulative piecing – of commensated meat ...

Bi-manual reconstruction, eldritch problem complete
A convened effigy
A pathological toy, each chunk rigorously
Inter mortis locking, as you pathogenically rot
Such a perplexing task
To fit the remains in the casket
Uliginous mess so quiescent ...

(lead: Human Jigsaw)
(lead: A heaving organic puzzle)

An incessant game – methodically made
With each cumulative piece – of commensated meat ...

Discography

Carcass, 'Necroticism: Descanting the Insalubrious', Earache Records, Mosh 42, 1991
Carcass, 'Symphonies of Sickness', Earache Records, Mosh 18, 1989
Carcass, 'Reek of Putrefaction', Earache Records, Mosh 6, 1988
Cattle Decapitation, 'Humanure', Metal Blade, MET14480, 2004
Cattle Decapitation, 'To Serve Man', Metal Blade, MET 14405, 2002
The County Medical Examiners, 'Forensic Fugues and Medicolegal Medleys', Razorback Records, RR14, 2002

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