'Scream Bloody Gore' - The Abject Body and Posthuman Possibilities in Death Metal

Catherine Hoad
Media, Music, Communications and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University
Email: catherine.hoad@students.mq.edu.au

Abstract:

The title of this article, taken from Death's 1987 album, is representative of the themes of gore, horror and revulsion that typically permeate death metal. Largely developing in the 1980s, 'death metal' is the name given to a form of 'extreme' metal music characterised by deep growling vocals, heavily distorted guitars and an unbridled absorption in the possibilities for bodily mutilation. However, while death metal is frequently condemned for its misanthropic and nihilistic themes, I suggest that it is those same themes that open up the possibilities of rethinking the passive nature of corporeality and the horror of the transgressive body. For death metal, consciousness is always of the body, rather than separate from it - hence the abject body is not one to be understood as separate and 'Other', but rather a crucial part of human subjectivity. The mind is nothing without the body - to mutilate, desecrate and torture the body is to simultaneously exercise power over the mind. Thus the 'abject' body, within death metal, is never truly separate. Given this, this article will explore how death metal offers a means through which to look beyond traditional consciousness-based perceptions of the human experience, and instead approaches the body as an integrated, yet ultimately organic site. As such, this article will begin to map the manner in which death metal confronts the abject body, holding within it a fascination with death and violence while simultaneously eschewing mind/body dualisms. Death metal, insomuch as it forces us explore both the physical and mental manifestations of our existence as human animals, reminds us that we are always vulnerable to forces that threaten the boundaries of the self.

Introduction

In 1995, Chuck Schuldiner, an animal-lover with a habit of wearing a shirt decorated with kittens during interviews, lamented that he had never really intended to create the genre known as 'Death Metal' (in Morton, 2010). As the founder of the hugely influential band Death, Schuldiner, often referred to as the 'Father of Death Metal', noted that he simply wanted his music to reflect reality (in Petrakis, Zafirakis and Zafirakis, 1998). Authenticity, for Chuck, was crucial - "Reality is far more brutal than any demon... If there's evil, it’s people" (Headbanger's Ball, 1991).

That same year, Bob Dole accused death metal bands of "undermining the national character" by producing "nightmares of depravity" that "[slashed] the social fabric of the nation" and "[threatened] our children" (Dole in Weinraub, 1995:1). Certainly, for many who encounter
it, death metal provokes little aside from incomprehension, disgust and ridicule. Since its earliest years it has been a target for mockery - even as a fan of the genre, I frequently find myself describing death metal as 'the one with the Cookie Monster vocals' - and for condemnation. For an outsider, it is loud, brutish and indecipherable, an assault on civility. Death metal has become synonymous with gruesome violence to the extent where, as Malik notes, soldiers in the War on Terror, when met with the horrifically disfigured corpses of Iraqi soldiers and civilians, frequently utter the call "Fucking straight death metal"(2006:109).

However, while death metal is frequently condemned for its misanthropic and nihilistic themes, I suggest that it is those same themes that open up the possibilities of rethinking the passive nature of corporeality and the horror of the transgressive body. Death metal, I contend, pushes for the rupture of the mind/body dualism, and instead projects an experience of the self as body. The genre's approach to 'human' bodies is both restrictive and liberatory - as this article explores, it affirms the forms of power that would subjugate sexualised and racialised 'Others' while simultaneously eschewing social constructions of gender and race. The abjection of death metal is certainly a "hatred that smiles"(Kristeva, 1982:4) - a cheerfully malevolent reminder that the 'human' is not quite the transcendent position we often believe it to be. In seeking to destabilise an anthropocentric view of human 'specialness', death metal reminds us that as humans, we find our most visible - and visceral - expressions of power in enacting procedures of bodily violence and death. Furthermore, death metal raises some intriguing and complex questions concerning precisely which bodies are admitted to this category of 'human', a position problematised by the dehumanising functions of colonialism. In all, the horror of death metal (much like the horror of the abject) forces us to confront our own physicality and mortality- the experience of which is traumatic, yet potentially liberating. I argue, then, that death metal encourages us to envision ourselves as 'beings towards death', the ultimate reality with which we are all faced. In as much as it craves flesh, blood and bone, death metal seeks to make the abject the subject, turning the body inside out, making the invisible visible, and forcing us to confront our physicality and the threats posed to our bodily boundaries.

Conceiving 'Death'

The musical style known as 'Death metal' did not begin life as a readily distinct subgenre, but rather developed from the gradual mutation of existing forms of heavy metal music. Emerging primarily from earlier forms of thrash metal in the early 1980s before gaining popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s, death metal has steadily grown into a recognisable genre in its own right, in turn spawning a multitude of subgenres. Though it is typically characterised by blast beats, distorted guitars, tremolo picking and deep, growling vocals - arguably the key point of reference of the genre - death metal has expanded and diversified significantly since its early origins with bands such as Death, Possessed, Morbid Angel, Carcass and Obituary. What is of specific interest, however, is the manner in which death metal approaches the human body, as a site to be both celebrated and traumatised, liberated and conquered. Death metal's fascination with violence and horror, I would argue, is
at least partly born from a desire for transgression. Many fans and musicians, as Kahn-Harris has noted, express a desire to operate on the "edge", ostensibly separate from "civilised", mainstream society (2007:2). The intention to shock is undeniably present within death metal, a genre that, much like heavy metal as a whole, finds distinction in scandalous transgression (Walser, 1993:162). One must note that the horrific gore and violence endemic to death metal is embedded within a much broader history of depictions of horror and madness (Walser, 1993:160). I argue, however, that it is precisely that recognition of the traumatised body as transgressive that allows death metal to offer ways of approaching the abject body, and indeed the rethinking of such bodies as 'Other'.

Death metal is undeniably an unabashedly violent genre. Themes of rape, cannibalism, torture and mutilation are commonplace, as texts from the genre demonstrate. For Kahn-Harris, this obsession with violence may be attributed to a fascination with the human body that all people share to some degree, a fascination that mixes desire and disgust (2007:43). This 'desire' is key to exploring death metal's relationship with the abject - the desire to explore the 'unknown' and forbidden, a desire to lose oneself in violence, and a desire to 'know' death. As Zillman (in Goldstein, 1999:275) has noted, there does seem to be a connection between how acquainted one is with their own mortality and how much they crave images of death and violence via the media. Death metal, then, goes some way to satisfy this appetite for violence through blurring the interior and exterior of the human body. Given this, this article will examine how death metal confronts the body in three key ways - through positing the human as animal, instinctual and inherently violent, secondly, through presenting the abject body as a subject to be mastered, and lastly, through offering alternative ways of thinking about the boundaries of the human body. These three themes both interact and clash with one another. They do not meld fluidly, but rather, I would argue, are united by the manner in which they confront the reality of the human body. Death metal, through its celebration of violence, gore and horror, reminds us that we are always vulnerable to forces that threaten our physical boundaries.

**Confronting the Human Animal**

Half the challenge of death metal, I contend, is deconstructing the 'shock' of the gore and instead examining the manner in which the genre navigates the position of 'human'. Death metal's goal of toppling human 'specialness' needs to be located within a broader history of attempts to define what it is to be 'human'. It is crucial, then, to note that any examination of what constitutes 'the human' largely begins with what the human is not, which more often than not leads to a delineation between the human and the animal (this distinction becomes fragmented in problematic ways when the question of human 'value' is raised, as this article will go on to discuss). Martin Heidegger famously declared that "The human body is something essentially other than an animal organism" (Heidegger in Calarco and Atterton, 2004:19). There develops, then, a crucial gap between the 'human' and the 'animal', which Agamben identifies as the animal caesura - the cessation of a fluid human/animal. For Agamben, then, the meaning of 'life' is ultimately constructed not through definition, but
rather articulation and division (2004:13). Bichat's distinction between "relational" (external) life, and "organic" life (in Agamben, 2004:14) is important here as a means of navigating a mind/body dualism. Similarly, Bichat's proposal - that it is as if two "animals" live together in every higher organism, but do not coincide (in Agamben, 2004:14), is a significant one. For Agamben, this "split between the functions of vegetative life and the functions of relational life" (2004:14) has been incredibly important in modern conceptions of 'life' and the human essence, which is founded on the possibility of dividing and articulating Bichat's two animals.

Within death metal, however, one is able to witness the eschewal of such divisive narratives, and instead observe the deliberate brutalisation of the human subject through the construction of a human body that is essentially animal. Where Heidegger presents the animal as captivated by its instincts (in Calarco and Atterton. 2004:24), death metal rejects human 'comportment' as a myth, and suggests that the human is ultimately animal. Within this, death metal does not force a revaluation of the animal itself; but rather deliberately panders to a representation of the animal as savage, instinctual and violent. I argue, though, that by positioning humans as instinctual creatures, death metal goes some way, however liminal, to effect a rupture in the human/animal caesura. Death metal rejects visions of human civility - I would contend that this is at least in part due to the Cold War context in which heavy metal itself emerged, where military conflict and its bloody aftermath, though largely external to the superpowers of the Soviet Union and United States, was made increasingly visual through television (at least for a Western audience). As such, whereas Heidegger pressed for a hierarchy that gives precedence to the 'civilised' human, as opposed to the 'instinctual' animal, death metal deliberately confronts notions of human superiority and instead pushes for a vision of the human as essentially violent. A common theme within death metal is the inherent, 'animalistic' violence of the human being, a notion reflected in songs such as Gomory's 'Humanity is Animal' (Destruction & Misery, 2004, Mors Principium Est's 'The Animal Within' (Termination = Liberation, 2007) or Six Feet Under's 'Animal Instinct' (Warpath, 1997). Similarly, the liberatory possibilities of animality are a recurring theme within death metal, and offer an interesting opportunity to examine the flip side of Heidegger's belief in man's capacity for comportment. The 'animal' state, for the band Nile, is an authentic and emancipatory experience. The lyrics of the song 'Worship the Animal', from their 1994 EP of the same name, are as follows:

Tribal indelible ageless
We celebrate our carnal nature
Bloodsmeared and naked, we dance under the horns
Idol of instinct, idol of lust
Dark lord of claw and fang
Unclean we enshrine the beast
With sacrificial altars of flesh and bone
Worship the animal

The suggestion of "our carnal nature" within 'Worship the Animal' is a significant one for mapping the manner in which death metal forces us, as human animals, to confront the
physicality of our existence. In presenting the human as the animal, death metal seeks to challenge the human/animal caesura that Zimmerman has suggested is necessary for the continuation of the "godlike security" (1993:240) of the human position. Death metal, arguably, makes a concerted effort to present the animal as inherently instinctual precisely so that it is able to destabilise the privilege that Heidegger grants to the human. Similarly, this 'carnal nature' allows for a break from the restraints of 'comportment', and is, within death metal, transcendental, unbounded, and, crucially, authentic. Thus, while Heidegger suggests that the animal cannot experience "death as death" (in Calarco and Atterton, 2004:18, my emphasis) and therefore "can only come to an end" (in Calarco and Atterton, 2004:18), death metal, on some level, questions whether humans experience death in the same way. For Kahn-Harris, transgression involves the embrace of carnality, allowing humans to lose themselves in the totality and infinity of death (2007:29). Within death metal, then, the human is able to experience sovereignty over their being, escaping every day utilitarian experiences by embracing the 'natural' animal state.

**Disgust and Desire - The Abject Body**

It is this attraction to the carnal state that sets the stage for death metal's fascination with the abject body. The abject, Kahn-Harris suggests, is that which is "formless, disgusting, terrifying and threatening" (2007:29), and therefore has to be removed and destroyed. At the same time, as Stallybrass and White argue, "disgust always bears the imprint of desire" (in Kahn-Harris, 2007:29). Death metal's fascination with violence and bodily revulsion is by no means a new phenomenon - Walser, for example, locates a cultural fascination with danger and terror within Enlightenment notions of horror (1993:160). Edmund Burke's 1757 treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* is an important text here - where Burke believed that the "sublime" had the power to compel and destroy us (1757:sec.7), it is that same preference for the sublime that shapes death metal's own passion for violence and the unknown. Certainly, when considered contextually, death metal's fascination with the abject is at least partly born from a reaction to the heavily commercialised metal music of the 1980s (it is worth noting that Death's *Scream Bloody Gore*, often cited as the first true death metal album, was released in 1987 - the same year that Bon Jovi's *Slippery When Wet* spent eight weeks at number one). It is the simultaneous fear of and passion for death, however that seems to be the primary attraction of death metal. Heavy metal at large, Walser argues, explores the 'other', the "dark side of the daylit, enlightened adult world" (1993:162). Such behaviour allows heavy metal to find distinction in scandalous transgression (Walser, 1993:162), a position that death metal revels in.

While Burke extolled the "beautiful" as that which is well-formed and aesthetically pleasing (1757:sec.10), death metal instead embraces the sublime, finding authenticity through engaging with images of horror, madness and violence. The celebration of the animal within death metal is not only a celebration of carnality and primitive violence, but also a suggestion that the sublime exists *within* the beautiful; that one cannot exist without the other, and
perhaps both exist concurrently. As such, while the animal-human caesura insinuated by Heidegger's work allows for the extension of an "ontological division of the world into 'spirit' and 'matter'" (Keane, 2003:409), death metal instead seeks to configure 'spirit' as something embedded within this 'matter'. What death metal aims to construct then, is a figure founded on the violent incorporation of Bichat's two animals - the relational and the organic - and the pleasure to be had in rendering the relational entirely at the mercy of the organic. Death metal, when imagining the body as a site to be conquered, does not confront pure material, but rather a living being that is able to recognise pain, suffering and humiliation. Thus what we are able to witness here is death metal desiring not only the 'bloody gore', but craving the 'scream' that affirms the power of the protagonist. A notable example of this desire for domination appears in the form of Dismember's 'Bleed For Me' (Like an Ever-Flowing Stream, 1991), a track that is explicitly concerned with the gratification found in causing pain. The pleasure to be garnered through such power is expressed within the lyrics:

Slowly slicing your body  
Wondering what's inside  
A psychopath addicted to flesh  
Now I'm taking your life  
Hacking through your organs  
Constantly watching your eyes  
I gotta see in your mind  
What happens when you die  
Bleed for me  
Let me see you suffer  
Die for me  
I love to hear you scream

Death's song 'Mutilation', from the 1987 album Scream Bloody Gore, operates in a similar vein, offering an insight into the manner in which the body is utilised as material through which to assert control. Mastery of the body - in this sense, mutilating the human body - enables the protagonist to access a level of power within which they render the 'victim' entirely at their mercy. The lyrics - "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" - revel in causing trauma. It is this notion of control - achieved through the subjugation of a weaker, victimised 'Other', that is a crucial theme within death metal. Similarly, this narrative of 'control through pain' sets the stage for death metal's problematic representation of women. While the vast canon of heavy metal music has frequently been charged with accusations of sexism, misogyny and horrific violence towards women (see Yildirim, 2009, Vasan, 2010), heavy metal as a whole rarely makes explicitly violent statements towards women. It is within extreme metal, however - the label used to denote black, death, doom and thrash metal, among many others - that one witnesses particularly violent constructions - and subsequent desecrations - of female bodies. Death
metal holds within it some truly confronting depictions of female bodies, though I must preface this discussion by saying that death metal does not innovate such violence, but merely, as Walser has suggested, replicates existing strategies of control (1993:118). Misogynistic violence within death metal, I would argue, is not broaching any new territory for such violence, but rather relies on a number of existing hegemonic representations.

While neither Death nor Dismember directly identify the victim within both 'Mutilation' and 'Bleed For Me', it should be noted that misogyny and pornographic gore form common themes within death metal. Cannibal Corpse, that most notorious of death metal bands, sees within the body an opportunity for control and total dominance over a female Other. Song titles such as 'Meat Hook Sodomy', 'She Was Asking For It', 'Fucked With a Knife', 'Addicted to Vaginal Skin' and 'Stripped, Raped and Strangled' serve as a concise demonstration of the manner in which the female victim is ultimately encapsulated by her corporeality, and its specifically sexual nature. Many Cannibal Corpse songs contain lyrics describing morbid urges to sexually exploit and violently slaughter others - particularly, as Purcell notes, the weak (2003:44). These songs are especially confronting precisely because, as Purcell suggests, they relate such tales of horror from the perspective of the perpetrator (2003:44). The song 'Fucked With A Knife', from the 1994 album The Bleeding, dwells on the ability of the protagonist to control and conquer a subject female Other - "Tied tight to the bed, legs spread open, bruised flesh, lacerations, skin stained with blood, I'm the only one you love". What is crucial within this song, as Kahn-Harris notes, is that the protagonist's ability to cause physical harm is compounded by his ability to control the perspective through which the assault is seen (Kahn-Harris in Cloonan and Garofalo, 2003:82). That the victim is forcibly told "I'm the only one you love" makes the scene all the more distressing - to dictate emotions through bodily violence is perhaps the most terrifying form of control for the victim, yet simultaneously the most gratifying for the perpetrator.

Contemplating the psychological state of the person suffering this torture, as 'Fucked With a Knife' demonstrates, is a key theme within much death metal. Another Cannibal Corpse song, the charmingly titled 'I Cum Blood' from 1992's Tomb of the Mutilated, demonstrates the manner in which the eponymous protagonist longs not for a pure flesh victim, but rather one that necessitates the incorporation of Bichat's two animals. The protagonist within 'I Cum Blood' initially engages in the sexual abuse of a female corpse - "Eyes glassy and vacant/body dug up to play with". Here he confronts a literal "slab of meat", as Paul (in Purcell, 2003:182) would have it, a rotting human corpse devoid of sentience. This, however, is an incomplete experience for the protagonist, who is unable to exercise true power so long as the body he interacts with is deprived of consciousness. Instead, he fantasises about the capacity to desecrate a 'live' body - "I need a live woman/to fill with my fluid/A delicate girl, to mutilate, fuck and kill". Certainly death metal takes unbridled joy in unveiling the 'meat closet' of the human body, though there is even more joy to be had in causing pain. Cannibal Corpse, if anything, revels in what Terranova calls the "bodily cage" (2000:271), content to espouse these projections of gore, mutilation, torture and violence as a means of exercising control over a subordinate 'Other'. For as long as the victim is implicated within the bodily holding cell, the protagonist can exercise dominance and control through these acts of
horrific, and frequently confronting, violence.

**Death Metal and the Other**

Cannibal Corpse's approach to the female body reveals the ease with which this "radical transgressive project" (Phillipov, 2006:77) can transform into something much more sinister. Rather than liberating the female body from the burden of a socially constructed femininity, Cannibal Corpse instead condemns her to it - their music "affirms both gendered bodies and the violent forms of power through which gender is strongly affirmed" (Kahn-Harris, 2003:87). The manner in which some death metal artists have approached racialised 'Others' is indicative of a similarly restrictive approach to certain 'types' of bodies. The American band Arghoslent, for example, have a catalogue largely built on the rendering of non-white, non-Christian individuals as inferior. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Holocaust are common themes within Arghoslent's music, which casts 'Others' as subordinate players in the quest for power. Arghoslent frequently celebrates the literal enslavement of such bodies - 'Quelling the Simian Urge' asserts that, "Foundations of empire are laid/On sweating backs of nigger slaves" (*Incorrigible Bigotry*, 2002). The subjugation of these "slaves" is predicated upon a caesura quite similar to the one explored by Agamben, which denies agency to the colonised and instead configures such groups as a threat to ontological hygiene - "a blatant disgrace to the majestic pool of pristine genes" ('Fall of the Melanic Breeds', *Galloping Through the Battle Ruins*, 1998). Furthermore, Arghoslent's catalogue reveals some challenging correlations of racialised 'Others' with the animal, exposing a somewhat problematic appropriation of Heidegger's animal-human distinction. 'Flogging the Cargo', for example, maps this divide in a particularly degrading manner - "Exotic filthy mongrel dogs, fettered to failure by a flawed genome" (*Incorrigible Bigotry*, 2002).

Casting 'Others' as animals, Césaire argued, was a common practice amongst colonisers as a means of dehumanising colonised populations, and thus displacing guilt (1972:5). This dehumanising function is troubling, just as the tiered approach to humanity that Arghoslent adopt is a particularly crude method of mapping human 'value'. Arghoslent's characterisation of non-white, non-Christian individuals as inherently inferior is complicated largely because it is founded on essentialist notions of certain bodies being physically 'impure', a concept that has been taken up by eugenicists throughout history - with profoundly tragic results. Certainly, as Arghoslent's catalogue indicates, death metal has its racist elements. These are hugely problematic, though not widespread throughout the genre. The bodily violence of death metal, however, could potentially be viewed as a move towards deconstructing the 'essentialism' that has long plagued discourses of race and 'Other' bodies. The goregrind subgenre, though frequently cringe-worthy in its celebration of spectacularly gruesome imagery, offers the possibility of moving beyond the discourses of Otherness that have been applied to dehumanised bodies, and instead exposing all bodies as explicitly human. Dead Infection's lyrics are devoid of racial signifiers but rather approach "the abyss of the abdomen" ('Pathological View on the Alimentary Canal', *Surgical Disembowelment*, 1993) - an abdomen that, once split open, is indistinguishable from those other human meat closets. The notion of an 'essence' is largely disrupted by such a brutalised approach to the internal
territory of the body, which seeks to dissolve socially constructed labels and instead navigate the human body as an organic site. Certainly this approach is not without its flaws, but does offer an interesting method for confronting the physicality of the human body - as Dead Infection intone, "In the bloody mood identity dies" ('Torsions', *Surgical Disembowelment*, 1993).

**Postulating Posthumanism**

The wider implications of this embrace of gore, then, can be found in the way that death metal presents the notion of 'opening up' the body as a possibility of the posthuman. As such, while Dismember, Death and Cannibal Corpse present fantasies of mastering and dominating the subject, bands such as Dead Infection and British act Carcass revel in what Kahn-Harris identifies as "fantasies of losing oneself in the abject" (in Cloonan and Garofolo, 2003:86). Carcass' lyrics are best described by Press and Reynolds as "carnographic" (1995:95), and unashamedly so. For Carcass, the human body - crucially, its manifold of mutilatory possibilities - is endlessly fascinating, a "theatre for disgusting and perverse entertainment" (Purcell, 2003:44). Carcass' lyrics are deliberately repulsive, and frequently humourously so, as their song 'Slash Dementia' (*Symphonies of Sickness*, 1989) illustrates:

> I rip open pectoral cavities to devour my still-steaming grub  
> Drinking adeps and effluence, smearing myself in congealing blood  
> I tear at sautéed crackling to guzzle on fetid swag  
> Butchered remains are carved and collected in a doggy-bag

While there is an almost gleeful revulsion to be had in the absurdity of Carcass' music, the experience that Carcass aims to create is primarily visceral. As Bogue suggests, beyond transgression, reportage and critique, the most fundamental motive in death metal lyrics and imagery is to evoke an experience of the body (2004b:105). However, while Bogue points to a "libidinal dissolution of the self and of the organism as an integrated system" (2004b:105), I would contend that death metal instead pushes for an experience of the self as a body. Bogue argues that death metal deals with a Deleuzian "body without organs" (2004b:105) - that is, a body that is immediately social (2004a:97), or, conversely, organs without a body. I would like, though, if I may be so bold, to bastardise Deleuze and Guattari's concept, and suggest that death metal confronts, crucially, a body with organs. Where the lyrics of Death, Dismember and Cannibal Corpse are concerned with a first person narrative of power and pleasure, Carcass instead immerse the listener within the gore, potentially granting them sovereignty over their own body - which is, crucially, a body with organs. Carcass is fascinated by physical decomposition as a site for imagining new experiences of the body and of the self; lyrics often ask the listener to picture his or her own body in various stages of decay and disintegration (Phillipov, 2006:76). It is here then, I contend, that death metal offers up its own posthuman figure - not one that emerges as the nexus of a belief in artificially enhanced human evolution, but one that pushes for a simple re-thinking of the boundaries we place on our existing, organic bodies. Where Sirius argues that "we are less and less creatures of flesh, bone and blood pushing boulders uphill; we are more and more
creatures of mind-zapping bits and bytes moving at the speed of light" (in Terranova, 2000:271), death metal suggests that the same emancipatory possibilities can be achieved through something as simple as blurring the lines between mind and body, and re-claiming the abject as the subject.

It is worth revisiting here Zillman's suggestion that the desire for images of death and violence via media is related to the extent to which one is acquainted with one's own mortality (in Goldstein, 1999:275). Death metal, on some level, operates as a deliberate attempt to shake its audience out of complacency - just as cinema, for Bataille, should powerfully evoke bodily sensations in its spectators (in Gargett, 2001:1), death metal pushes for a similarly visceral experience. It is a concerted effort to subvert the stability of a psychological identity, and instead unveil what Gargett refers to as the "hidden disgust" (2001:1) of the human body. Horror as a cultural form, Purcell suggests, emerges as a response to challenges to dualism, where the mind is configured as an extension of the body, and man is just a physical entity - a very fragile and destructible one at that (Purcell, 2003:182). Paul believes that such "grossness" (in Purcell, 2003:182) in horror comes as a result of these blurred boundaries between the psyche and the soma. Such ideas, Purcell notes, pose considerable threats to the notion of human dignity (2003:182), a concept that death metal revels in. Paul creates a deliberately traumatising vision here - "Cut us open and we all look like the meat counter in a supermarket... We are all just slabs of meat" (in Purcell, 2003:182). This terror is confronted head-on by bands such as Dead Infection and Carcass, who can be seen as celebrating that same gore as a marker of humanity. Death metal reminds us that we are all the same - we are all vulnerable to the same forces, when we are torn open we all display the same 'meat cabinet' of organs, blood and tissue.

The experience of "becoming Other" (Bogue, 2004a:97) within Carcass' music, then, is less bound up with notions of the abject as something separate, but as something that is of us. Where Cannibal Corpse and Arghoslent deterritorialise the body through dominance and desecration, Carcass seeks to reterritorialise it. As such, where Sirius presents a vision of the 'human' as an essence that explicitly transcends Terranova's "bodily cage" (2001:271), death metal instead locates 'humanity' as intrinsically embedded in physicality. Carcass' music pushes for a posthuman that is represented through re-imagining the boundaries of the human, turning the insides out, making the invisible visible, and, crucially, confronting the 'horror' of the transgressive body, and recalibrating it as fascination. To make gore pleasant to look at, as Purcell (2003:173) suggests, is the ultimate taboo, yet death metal openly ascribes to it. It is a deliberately anti-social act, but I would suggest that by celebrating the body with organs - particularly as the organs are made explicitly visible - Carcass is attempting to subvert the taboo. Transgression both dissolves and affirms being - as Foucault reminds us, it sets limits even as it challenges others (in Kahn-Harris, 2007:29). As such, while Cannibal Corpse's transgression affirms those boundaries of masculine dominance and the enslaved female body, Carcass breaches them, and in doing so arguably effects a re-claiming of the body, in all its bloody, fleshy horror.

*
Ultimately, what one can witness within death metal is the deliberate attempt to destabilise the 'godlike security' of the human position. The animal, for Heidegger, was intrinsically different from the human because it could not experience death as death, but simply come to an end (in Calarco and Atterton, 2004:18). Death metal, though, questions whether humans do not encounter death in the same way. Confronting morality is traumatising, yet potentially liberating - as Bataille reminds us, in violence, the poles of life and death, being and nothingness are one, "dissolved like subject and object in the insensible totality of things" (in Gargett, 2001:2). Through constructing the human as animal, mastering the 'abject' as a form of procuring pleasure and power, and offering alternative ways of thinking about the boundaries of the human body, death metal confronts the reality of the body, and indeed the physicality of the 'human'. In affecting a return to carnality and an acceptance of our corporeality, death metal, on one level, seeks to reclaim the body. What is also crucial, though, is the manner in which death metal reminds us of how readily humans use bodies against one another, as sites of torture, subordination, and ultimately death. Death metal, then, represents an effort to force humans to confront their mortality, and consequently come to terms with themselves as 'beings towards death'.

‘Death' is the unavoidable truth of the very aptly named death metal. Chuck Schuldiner, the father of death metal, succumbed to cancer when he was 34 years old. "Reality", Chuck noted, "is what we all have to deal with" (in Vain, 1993). Perhaps, then, what the abject body is offering us is not something to be removed or destroyed from the space of the 'orderly', but rather the reality of what it means to be human. Death metal confronts the body with organs - organs that, as it gleefully demonstrates, are always vulnerable. The violence of death metal, then, is not wholly phantasmic, but rather a critique of the horrific violence that humans are capable of enacting against one another. For all the narratives of human 'specialness', of an essentially civilised, advanced human nature, death metal instead reflects a human that is savage, violent, and finds pleasure in the desecration of and dominance over other bodies. It is worth remembering here what is perhaps the most pertinent of all Chuck Schuldiner's lyrics - "Beware the sharp-edged weapon called human being"(Death, 'Bite the Pain', The Sound of Perseverance, 1998).

Reference List


Bogue, R.,


Burke, E.,1757, A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (With Several Other Additions, reprinted in Harvard Classics ,1914,24(2), this
version online at http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/, last visited 29.02.2012


Kahn-Harris, K.,


Malik, S., April 2006, 'Fucking Straight Death Metal', *Journal of Visual Culture, 5*(1), 107-112.


Schuldiner, C., October 1991, interviewed for *Headbanger's Ball* (MTV London Studios: MTV). The original interview, aired in November 1991, can be found online at
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuX2cPOQ5qY, last visited 29.02.2012

Schuldiner, C., 1993, interview from *666: At Calling Death*, Dir. Matt Vain (Germany: Arturo Harding Videocommunications)


**Discography:**

**Arghoslent**

a) 1998, 'Fall of the Melanic Breeds', *Galloping Through the Battle Ruins*, Wood-Nymph

b) 2002, 'Flogging the Cargo', 'Quelling the Simian Surge', *Incorrigible Bigotry*, DrakkarProductions

**Cannibal Corpse**

a) 1991, 'Meat Hook Sodomy', *Butchered at Birth*, Metal Blade Records

b) 1992, 'Addicted to Vaginal Skin', 'I Cum Blood', *Tomb of the Mutilated*, Metal Records

c) 1994, 'She Was Asking For It', 'Fucked With a Knife', 'Stripped, Raped and Strangled', *The Bleeding*, Metal Blade Records

**Carcass**, 1989, 'Slash Dementia', *Symphonies of Sickness*, Earache Records

**Dead Infection**, 1993, 'Pathological View on the Alimentary Canal', 'Torsions', *Surgical Disembowelment*, Morbid Records

**Death**
a) 1987, 'Mutilation', *Scream Bloody Gore*, Combat Records

b) 1998, 'Bite The Pain', *The Sound of Perseverance*, Nuclear Blast Records


Nile, 1994, 'Worship the Animal' *Worship the Animal*, independently released