

3RD ROUNDTABLE

“My heroes, they all died so long ago” Metal & the Politics of Premodern Nostalgia

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1

Ambiguous Ideologies of the Archaic in Black Metal Mysticism

This presentation explores the mythical imaginings of distant pasts in black metal music culture, investigating in particular how depictions of marginal religiosity relate to contemporary contestations of political ideology. Rather than focus on the reception, interpretation or redeployment of particular historical texts, symbols or characters, this research investigates how participants in black metal appeal to (sometimes nebulously) imagined archaic ways of life as part of a radical critique of industrial modernity. Within these imaginings, witchcraft, folk magic, shamanism and paganisms are depicted positively (if, again, vaguely) as religious components of an idealistic past utopia, a vision possibly to be somehow reclaimed. These forms of marginal religiosity are constructed in opposition to portrayals of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which are often held to be representative of or responsible for aspects of contemporary society deemed problematic. These characterisations can sometimes drift towards outright anti-Semitism and white supremacism, especially where other forms of stigmatised knowledge and conspiracism circulate in the underground black metal milieu. Some recent research, both academic and within metal, has investigated these topics in relation to political ideology, tending to focus on explicitly fascist black metal or attempting to definitively determine which symbols are indicative of fascist ‘beliefs’. This research takes seriously the dangerous rise of far-right ideas in and beyond black metal, while investigating the larger and more influential yet also far vaguer realms of supposedly ‘apolitical’ black metal. Drawing on analysis of underground publications (‘zines’), recordings and online discussion, as well as some ethnographic fieldwork at live music events, the research acknowledges the inevitability of ambivalence in such noisy, opaque and oppositional forms of music, discourse and practice, and instead of seeking stable certainties attempts to assess the political impact of ambiguity and responses to ambiguity in black metal’s mystical, ideological imaginings of the archaic.

2

The Repetition of Images in Heroic Literature, Heavy Metal, and Reactionary Political Thought

Recovering the history of some *images* (*i.e.* the image of the barbarian, of the good knight *et al.*) and of the moments of their reception in several Heavy Metal subgenres lyrics, we can identify the existence of a nexus between them, the heroic-aristocratic literature and the reactionary political imagination. All these forces go through the rejection of the bourgeois society in favor of a hierarchical society, the concession of the position of primacy (accompanied by absolute autonomy - a trait reinforced from Romanticism on) in this hierarchical society to the hero and the cosmological foundation of this society. This link happens, in practice, through a series of readings that go from Homer to *Excalibur*, extrapolating the scope of literature as a medium to include cinema, comics and plastic arts and philosophy in a whole tradition which, behind a greater or lesser adequacy to the precepts of the bourgeois society, criticizes it and elaborates its own vision of man and society. Heavy Metal serves in this tradition as a creator of spaces for conviviality and debate, a synthesizer of thoughts and a source of readings. My presentation will deal with both methodological and substantial questions that relate to this subject, from how to argue for the maintenance/change/loss of the meaning of an image to how to build an argument for its maintenance and establishing the main features of some images - images that, in the end of this step of my research, I found to be particularly important for the development of a narrative proper to these Heavy Metal subgenres lyrics. I will deal specifically with a philosophical concept of modernity, associated to the development of the Enlightenment and to the bourgeois sociopolitical dominance, as comprehended by authors as Reinhart Koselleck, Paul Hazard and Carl Schmitt.