4. Heavy Metal
Lecture Outline

• Background
• Early and Proto-Metal, the Roots of Heavy Metal
• Metal Subgenres Galore!
• **There are more here than we will cover, but now you can more easily explore them on your own!**
General Metal Characteristics

• Loud volume, aggressive
  – Riff-based, power chords, heavily distorted guitars
• Intense vocals
• Basic instrumentation: Guitar(s), bass, drum
  – Extra-large drum kits
• Form
  – Lots of instrumental sections
  – Avoiding conventional harmony
  – Long songs, often sectional
• Dark lyrics, fantasy, occult; some serious themes too
• Virtuosity
Early and Proto-Metal

• During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the distinction between metal and other kinds of heavy rock was unclear
• Negative critical reception
• Hard rock, minus blues influences = heavy metal
• Rather than identifying “metal” bands and non-metal bands, we’ll look at the evolution of particular style traits that were clearly influential on metal
Cream

• A key ancestor of heavy metal for several reasons

Ex: Cream – “Crossroads” (1968)

• Heavy blues rock

• Riff-based, distortion/volume, emphasizes guitar

• Power trio (term could include singer and 3 instruments)

• “Motor rhythm” – rapid, constant

• Although Cream was an important step towards heavy metal, they are almost never called a metal band. Why not?
  – What is missing? Or what is there that shouldn’t be?
Although they are never considered a heavy metal band, this is the heaviest Beatles song (influenced by The Who):

Ex: The Beatles – “Helter Skelter” (1968)

• Overall heavy sound
• Distorted guitars
• Repeated bass patterns and riffs in general
• A bent note suggests a Phrygian scale
Led Zeppelin

• One of the earliest bands who were sometimes called metal


• Power trio with overdubs
• Riff based; more than one riff per song
• Distortion, guitar god
• Sectional form
• “Round the Kit” drumming style
• Vocal sound and lyrics

• How is this closer to what might be called a metal style?
Deep Purple

- Another influence on early heavy metal

Ex: Deep Purple – “Highway Star” (1971)

- Harmonized guitar and organ (also in prog rock)

- Motor rhythm, palm muted guitars

- More complex
  - Lots of sections to the song

- Classical in Heavy Metal is a new dimension
Black Sabbath

• Just about universally regarded as founding the heavy metal style

Ex: Black Sabbath – “Iron Man” (1971)

• Power trio instrumentation (plus vocals)
• Riff based; guitar and bass doubled, also vocals on riff (sounds heavier)
• Minor key pentatonic scale (blues roots)
• Lyrics: sci-fi and fantasy, comic book-like, entertaining
• Vocals: simple melodies, distinctive sound
• Rhythm: 4-on-the-floor, slow
• Sectional form

What makes this an example of early heavy metal?
• What does it have that the previous recordings didn’t? What does it leave out?
• Important metal imagery as well as sounds
• Stage costumes: black, crosses, long hair

• Lyrical themes: stories; mythical vocabulary like epic poetry (“plot destruction”)
• Lester Bangs: “the only truly Catholic band”
  – Dwelling/obsessing on evil and salvation; feeling of fear

• Metal can be read as psychedelic music, but the bad trip side
  – Stoner rock, downer rock
  – The music is often slow and gloomy (like downer drugs)
  – Fans stereotyped as stupid kids
A line from the Blues to Heavy Metal

• In general the African American roots of rock are largely erased
  – Especially after the blues influence becomes less prominent
• But there are some elements of metal that come from the blues:
  – Half spoken/half sung vocals sung in higher register
  – Power chords and endlessly repeating riffs
  – Heavy distortion

• Also, the early heavy metal groups started out as blues groups
Some Metal Subgenres and Topics to Discuss:

- Glam Metal
- NWOBHM
- Pop Metal
- Black Metal
- Thrash
- Transgression and the PMRC
- Death Metal
- Doom Metal
- Goth Metal

- In 80s and 90s Lectures: Mainstream metal, Industrial, Nu Metal
Glam Metal: KISS

- All 4 members as characters with makeup and costumes
  - Extreme marketing: comics, lunchboxes, condoms, action figures
- Stylistically more blues-rock
  - Definitely not “art” rock like other glam artists

Video Ex: Kiss

- “God of Thunder” (live, 1977)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjN7K3BBi2E
New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM)

- Clear origin: May 1979, “Sounds” magazine
- Working class subculture that became global in a few years
- Less blues influenced (i.e. Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath)
- Overlap between NWOBHM and punk
  - Indie labels very important for both
  - Both have working class origins
  - Quick tempos
Judas Priest

- Start of post-blues boom in UK

Ex: Judas Priest – “Exciter” (1978)

- Drum fills, harmonized guitar solos, fast, hyper feeling (in front of beat)
- Piercing guitar tone, more sustain and gain
  Less dynamic range means less bluesy sound
- Very structured: no jam sections
- Operatically controlled vocals
Judas Priest (cont.)

• Hybrid visual identity: leather, chrome, spandex
• Dichotomy: working class fans love effeminate bands
  – Big hair, makeup, leather/spandex
• Visual comparison with The Village People
Motörhead

- Image: biker look, satanic imagery, bullets

Ex: Motörhead
   – “Ace of Spades” (1980)

- **Metal**: heavy, “devil” mentioned, noisy sound (full, cymbals, distortion), treble tone, jarring

- **Non-metal**: Call and response, no palm muting, backbeat (punk), fast, no virtuosity, less precise
Iron Maiden

• Some critics wanted to link them with punk

Ex: Iron Maiden
  – “The Number of the Beast” (1982)

• Opens with spoken passage
  – Quote from Book of Revelations

• Operatic vocals, mythical lyrics (“666”)

• Sectional form

• Palm muted guitar
“Eddie”

- Iron Maiden’s “mascot”
- Appears on all their album covers, merchandise, etc.
- Playing with demonic imagery, but not really Satan
- ‘Cartoonification’ of metal imagery – totally stuck
Pop Metal: Van Halen

Ex: Van Halen – “Eruption” and “You Really Got Me” (1978)

• Tapping, squealing guitar
  – Metal virtuoso, new kind of guitar hero

• Pop, but with lots of distortion; harmonized back-up vocals in chorus

• California metal: cocky, hyper, athletic; showbiz

• Superstrat: “Frankenstein,” made from parts of several guitars
  – Specialized heavy metal guitars common since then
Black Metal

• Probably the rawest and most abrasive of metal subgenres
• Wall of noise:
  – Hypnotic and droning drum patterns (constant blast beats)
  – Tremolo picked guitar, usually very distorted
  – Fast tempos
  – Lo-fi sound quality
• Lyrics: often Satanic themes and imagery
• In some ways, this music is avant-garde
  – How?
Venom

• Key early Black metal group
  – Source of subgenre name
  – Seemingly more serious


• “Semi-melodic barking”
  – Nothing like operatic style of Halford or Plant

• Punk drumming – simple, but very fast backbeat

• Guitar: very distorted, treble,
  – Tinny, hard to distinguish notes

• Imagery: explicit Satanism (Demonic stage names, album covers)
Bathory

- Swedish black metal

Ex: Bathory – “Born For Burning” (1985)
- Super loud, over-distorted
- No melodic range to vocals
- Song dedicated to a “witch from 16\textsuperscript{th} C. Holland”
  - lyrics about her witchiness
- Purposely obscure
  - Builds up mythology; rarely if ever played live
Norwegian Black Metal

- Extreme Satanism, but used to counter Christianity
- Church burnings, resentment of Christianity
  - 50 burnings between 1992-98
- Band suicide, murder, etc.

Video Ex:

*Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey*

“Religious Satanism” section

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usYvHrHkssU
Thrash

• Thrash influenced by NWOBHM
• Fast, aggressive, low register riffs
• Shred lead guitar:

Video Ex: Buckethead Shred
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PsxU6G0rew

• Large-scale forms, becoming more progressive
• Same underground culture as hip hop (and same time, early 80s)
• Main thrash era: 1983-1985

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSkJ9YA7MKo
Thrash and Dancing

• Violent audience and moshing was with new Thrash (which was American for the most part)
  – Ritualized aggression between audience members
  – Similar to slam dancing from punk

• Some bands wrote songs specifically for moshing

Video Ex: *Get Thrashed*, “Head Banging”

“Moshing” (Documentary film, 2006)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_TBvw2PWwg
Anthrax

• Usually pop song format with shredding

Video Ex: Anthrax
– “Madhouse” (Music video, 1986)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGHsxMqpL0c

• Set in a “madhouse,” but the people are just thrash fans

• Flying V guitars (Jackson)
  – “Superstrat” characteristics built-in
  – Locking tremolo, thin neck, flat fret board
  – Looks aggressive, like a battle axe
Ex: Slayer – “Angel of Death” (1986)

- Rick Rubin, producer
- Sonic chaos
- FAST, super shred, pounding drums, palm muting
- More sectional; tempo changes, but not sloppy
  - Draws on prog rock a bit, but not complex harmonies
- Lyrics: Joseph Mengele, a Nazi doctor in the Holocaust
  - Practiced surgery with no anesthesia
Megadeth

• “Vic Rattlehead” is their mascot
• Sci-fi album covers, social commentary
  – Represents what they are against, as opposed to Eddie
    who represents the band

Ex: Megadeth – “Peace Sells” (1986)

• Slower, pop structure, doomy
• Urban contemporary, more punk-like
• Anti-corporate, anti-globalization, etc.
Metallica

• Today one of the more mainstream metal acts
Ex: Metallica – “Battery” (1986)

• Prog rock influences: sectional form, changing rhythms
  – Classical scales and harmonies

• Lyrics: Darker themes (war killers), not as comic book-ish
Transgression

- Transgression is the crossing of boundaries (moral, social, etc.)

- Common areas of transgression:
  - Eroticism (esp. homoerotic, pedophilia, bestiality, rape)
  - Death, morbidity, undead
  - Blasphemy: anything against religion
  - Radical politics: anarchism, neo-Nazism, extreme sides

- What does it mean to be “extreme”?
  - Extreme cannot last because things get pushed further, become more extreme with time
  - Boundaries change, people adjust

- Use of humour
Parent’s Music Resource Centre (PMRC)

• Goal of denouncing obscenities and violence in rock music
• An agenda of blame: they claimed these kinds of lyrics were at least partly responsible for many societal problems
  – Including rape, teen suicide and teen pregnancies
  – Simplistic cause-effect relationship between artistic themes and behaviors of listeners (“I see, I do”)
• Reactionary approach
• Censorship?

Video Ex: A Headbanger’s Journey (2005)
– “Censorship” section with Dee Snider

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QqplPfYTE8
Moral or Ethical Responsibility of Artists

• Is there such a thing? Responsible to whom? Why?
• How could a sense of responsibility change art, one way or the other?

• Metal presents itself as abject
  – Doesn’t claim to be acceptable, mainstream or normal

• Avant-garde art
  – Resisting beauty; ugly, different; resists what is good, hegemonic
  – But everything is pleasing/beautiful to someone
Death Metal

• Starts in Florida, late 1980s (a few years after Black metal)
• Deep, harsh vocals; growling
• Heavily distorted guitars, tremolo picking, shredding
• Blast beat drumming (rapid alternation of kick and snare)
  – Double kick drum common
• Complex song structures
• Minimalism
• Often one dimensional
• Images: more gore (see next slide)
Death Metal imagery: Gone too far?

Cannibal Corpse – *Butchered at Birth* (1991) cover art
Death

• *Scream Bloody Gore* (1987) often seen as first death metal album

Ex: Death

  – “Scream Bloody Gore” (1987)

• Very fast drums
• Unclear lyrics, screams
• Loose sound, simple riffs
Cannibal Corpse

Ex: Cannibal Corpse
– “A Skull Full of Maggots” (1990)
  • Super fast, more syncopation in parts
  • Cookie Monster vocals

Video Ex: Cannibal Corpse – “Unleashing the Bloodthirsty” (live, 2001)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L30KMKOVro
  • Not much movement onstage, hair twirling
Similarities Between Heavy Metal and Bebop

• Both are outsider music
• Challenging appearances
• Aggressive, confrontational sound
• Technical skill
• Borrowings from classical music
• Largely misunderstood
Grindcore

- Punk/metal hybrid (Grind + Core)
- Growling/shrieking vocals, often indecipherable
- Distorted down-tuned guitars, overdriven bass
- FAST; blast beats

- More punk or metal? Often included in both histories
- Often has to do with how bands self-identify, networks, fans, actual sound too; where it’s categorized in record stores; what critics say

• Cookie Monster vocals, painful tones, palm muted riffs, extreme speed, very short songs (punk)

• Death metal vocals and tones

• Lyrics: https://genius.com/Napalm-death-instinct-of-survival-lyrics

• Political references like punk
Doom Metal

• Distorted or clean vocals
• Very slow

Ex: Saint Vitus – “Born Too Late” (1986)

• “Iron Man”-like intro, vocals like Ozzy too
  – Black Sabbath sound, revival not new styles

• Self-conscious lyrics:
  “People think I’m dumb... music too slow” etc.
Goth Metal

- Symphonic elements: form
- Melodic vocals with heavy sounds
- Odd to isolate one subgenre as “gothic” when they all are to some extent


- Choir sounds, clear guitars, bass, drums, synth, violin
- Aristocratic image: upper class, kings, queens, lords
  - Fits in with glamour: pretty, groomed-look, like teen vampires
Parody

Video Ex: *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984)

- About a 1982 tour, parodies documentaries and metal culture
- What metal existed in 1982 that is being parodied?
  - Hair metal theatrics
  - Prog-rock keyboards
  - Skulls, death references
  - No thrash or early Black
- ST are out of date, so this is a theatrical device, not up on the latest styles

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9F5fhJQo34
Metalocalypse (2006-2013)

- TV series, 4 seasons, Cartoon network,
- Parody of metal circa 2006 (vs. ST 1982)
  - Black, Death, Thrash
  - Satanism, medieval iconography
  - Making everything metal
  - Blood and gore

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5_Yd3b_Fhg