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Article

# 'Feel the Knife Pierce You Intensely': Slayer's 'Angel of Death' – Holocaust Representation or Metal Affects?

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**Abstract:** This article tackles a well-known but little-studied phenomenon: the importance of Holocaust themes to heavy metal. The fascination of metal bands with evil and death has until recently been met outside the scene with such reactions as moral panic, disgust or indifference. In the last ten years, however, scholars in an emerging discourse of Metal Studies have attempted to engage more critically with the social and musical dimensions of metal, in order to contextualise and understand its lyrics and imagery. Although a number of writers have touched upon the recurrence of Holocaust imagery, no one has dealt at any length with extreme metal as a form of Holocaust memory. My article focuses on what might be called the founding text of extreme metal, Slayer's 'Angel of Death', which lived up to the sub-genre's name by pushing both its musical form and its lyrical content beyond previously maintained limits and taboos. It considers the song's mobilisation of affective intensities as involving problematic politics, but also a challenge to conceptions of Holocaust representation. I consider how affects are evoked by 'Angel of Death' through offering readings of the song itself as well as of ways that its reception have been recorded on social media, in concert videos, and reaction videos uploaded to YouTube.

**Keywords:** Holocaust representation; Holocaust memory; heavy metal music; affect; social media; YouTube; concert videos; reaction videos

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'Auschwitz' is the opening word of the opening song of one of the most famous and most highly-rated heavy metal albums of all time: Slayer's *Reign in Blood* (1986, in Appendix A).<sup>1</sup> Holding this status within the enduring and worldwide phenomenon of metal music, this song, 'Angel of Death', is probably one of the best-known representations of the Holocaust in any form. And yet it has received no attention at all by scholars of Holocaust memory and representation.<sup>2</sup> This article will show that ignoring metal's response to the Holocaust is a mistake. Attention needs to be paid to this kind of representation because of its reach, because of the problematic political position-taking or -avoiding that it is bound up with, and because of the complex ways in which it has meaning within and beyond the metal subculture, or scene.<sup>3</sup> I shall concentrate on Slayer's song specifically. Not only does it exemplify the problems and possibilities that often attend metal's engagement with the

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<sup>1</sup> In fact it is simply one of the best-known metal songs. 'Angel of Death' has been selected as archetypal metal music in psychological experiments on humans (Kneer 2016) and dogs (Kogan et al. 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Aside from one published essay by Mark Mengerink (2016), the only work on metal and the Holocaust of which I am aware was a day symposium on Metal, Extreme Music, and the Holocaust that I organized at the University of Leeds in 2016. I began articulating some of the arguments that I make here in a paper at that event.

<sup>3</sup> On the appropriacy of terminology of subcultures and scenes, see (Kahn-Harris 2007; Spracklen 2018).

Holocaust, but it can also be seen as the song that initiated a recurring interest in this subject among extreme metal bands.

After placing it in the context of the evolution of metal as a musical genre in order to show its significance, I will show that 'Angel of Death' challenges both the attempts within Holocaust Studies to theorise an aesthetics of excess and the use of theories of affect in Metal Studies to approach metal's imagery of violence. Instead of following the latter's acceptance of fans' refusal to verbalise their experiences, I shall provide a reading of the song and its reception that sees the affective intensities and bodily responses that it evokes as inherently bound up with attempts to cognize the historical event of the Holocaust. In this evoking of affect and cognition, 'Angel of Death' is, therefore, an example of Holocaust memory that needs to be taken seriously.

### 1. From Sabbath to Slayer

With its roots in the industrial Midlands of the late 1960s and its fascination with evil and death running from those beginnings, heavy metal might be thought highly likely to have been drawn to the theme of industrialised murder. But the conventions that it evolved meant that it took a circuitous route to discussing the Holocaust. The 'heavy' sound of loud, distorted, down-tuned guitars and thunderous drums employed by bands such as Black Sabbath (often said to be inspired by the sounds of factory machinery) was usually matched to more fantastic imagery of devils and witches, drawn from their blues antecedents (Weinstein 2000; Farley 2009; Cope 2010). Even when they tackled contemporary themes, such as the dangers of nuclear war (Taylor 2009), they still treated them in this register.<sup>4</sup> Bands such as Judas Priest moved away from the blues influence, but continued to address 'political' issues through fantasy, although with a more cod-medieval spin. Their song 'Genocide' (1976) lamented an unidentified 'perfect race' all being put to the sword.<sup>5</sup>

Metal evolved in multiple ways, but one path pursued was to seek further extremes, with wilder, rawer playing accompanying more overt declarations of Satanism in Venom's *Welcome to Hell* (1981), and more aggression and use of imagery of violence in thrash metal, the mostly west-coast US phenomenon which accelerated and amplified the metal sound. Exemplary early thrash albums included Metallica's *Kill 'Em All* (1983) and Megadeth's *Killing is My Business ... and Business is Good* (1985). Slayer, another of thrash's 'Big Four' bands, took these lyrical interests furthest of all, with their third album, *Reign in Blood* (1986), forsaking tired Satanist posturing for an interest in actual historical incidences of killing. Its opening song, 'Angel of Death', was explicitly about the Holocaust.

The mid-1980s actually saw a number of other thrash bands releasing songs about the Holocaust: Anthrax, 'The Enemy' (1985), Blessed Death, 'Into the Ovens' (1985), and Flotsam and Jetsam, 'Der Führer' (1986) (the latter two discussed in Mengerink (2016)). But these other bands took a very different approach from Slayer. They provided an overview of the whole historical moment, focusing on the figure of Hitler as the prime instigator of mass murder, and providing a moral framework within which it was judged. Jeff Hanneman, who wrote the music and lyrics for 'Angel of Death', focussed on one place, Auschwitz, and one person, Josef Mengele, describing the suffering of his victims in excruciating detail, shading, perhaps, into disturbing relish. The song is the longest on the album, nearly five minutes, over which the band maintains a furious tempo. It opens with a blizzard of guitar riffs and drumming, and a high-pitched noise that only gradually becomes recognisable as the vocalist Tom Araya screaming. Araya barks out 'Auschwitz' before rattling off polysyllabic lyrics (which, typically for Hanneman, forgo the use of rhyme), blending evocations of mass death, and grotesque details of medical experiments, switching between the point of view of Mengele himself and a third-person describer. The chorus intersperses shouts of the song's title with other epithets applied to Mengele: 'infamous butcher', 'monarch to the kingdom of the dead'. The pace only lets up with a guitar breakdown after the second chorus, soon joined by the drums before Araya embarks

<sup>4</sup> E.g., on Black Sabbath's second album *Paranoid* of 1970, 'War Pigs' (originally titled 'Walpurgis') finds 'generals gathered in their masses/just like witches at black masses', while their warning of nuclear doom 'Electric Funeral' blends science fiction, fantasy and apocalypse.

<sup>5</sup> Iron Maiden's 'Run to the Hills' (*The Number of the Beast*, 1982) is also a song about the destruction of Native American peoples (the lyrics in part seeming to be written to evoke a pidgin/creole English).

upon the final verse. This section ends with the ‘pathetic harmless victims’ abandoned to their deaths, while the ‘rancid angel of death’ flies ‘free’. The tempo markedly accelerates, Kerry King and Hanneman, the two guitarists, exchange a set of brief solos that are more sound effects than tunes, and the drummer Dave Lombardo blasts out a three-second burst of double-bass drumming before Araya declaims the final chorus.

The level of ‘grotesque realism’ (Riches 2016, following Halnon 2006) used here in representing mass death is clearly very different from that used by Judas Priest, but it still draws on the same lyrical conventions.<sup>6</sup> Both songwriters stated that they were taking on a serious, thought-provoking topic (Popoff 2007, pp. 37–38; Witter 1987), and both songs give little place for conventional moral judgement. The violence is still mostly hands-on, with Mengele’s scalpel substituting for the ‘sabres’ of the ‘mercenary battalions’ (‘Genocide’).<sup>7</sup> Even the fantastic imagery is still there, although perhaps vestigially, in the (metaphorical?) descriptions of the Angel of Death’s ‘wings of pain’, and ability to fly free.<sup>8</sup>

Theatrical relish had marked Judas Priest’s performances of ‘Genocide’ too: singer Rob Halford would wield a bullwhip and (before being stopped for health and safety reasons) fire off blanks from a machine gun (Popoff 2007, p. 78). Slayer took this taste for morally questionable spectacle to a more serious extreme, making use of imagery that evoked Nazism. The ‘S’ from the band logo is very similar to the sig runes used for the SS signs (although the same is true of the double S in Kiss), their fans were branded the Slaytanic Wehrmacht, and an eagle symbol that they started to use in the 1990s bore a good deal of resemblance to the Nazi *Reichsadler* (Ferris 2015). Hanneman himself took a personal interest in collecting Nazi memorabilia, and frequently put Nazi-inspired symbols on his guitars and t-shirts, including the SS Totenkopf. In the later 1980s, he played a guitar with a set of name stickers on it that all referred to units of the Waffen-SS.<sup>9</sup>

Combining this song with these images gave Slayer a notoriety from which they have both benefited and suffered, with discussion mostly limited to the question of whether they (or Hanneman specifically) were actual Nazis (e.g., Elliott 1987; Wells 1987). There was little room given to more complex questions of how fascination with historical atrocities, rejection of overt moral judgement, and interest in at least evoking the feeling of ‘evil’ through using its symbols might themselves have political effects.<sup>10</sup> Nor has there been much discussion of what kind of relationship with history such a set of approaches might make possible: Hanneman, and fans following him, simply claimed that they were presenting historical facts (Witter 1987).

But it is important to consider such questions, because the song and band have been so influential. Musically, lyrically, even politically, Slayer’s position has defined much of later metal’s approaches to Nazism and the Holocaust. Rosenberg and Krovatin (2017) claim that they ‘single-handedly created death and black metal’ (p. 107) the two main forms of ‘extreme metal’ (Bogue 2004; Kahn-Harris 2007). Extreme metal songs that directly address the subject often refer back to Slayer.

<sup>6</sup> The importance of Judas Priest for Slayer is evidenced by their covering Priest’s ‘Dissident Aggressor’ on their next album, *South of Heaven* (1988).

<sup>7</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris (2016) has noted the preference of metal to think of killing in hand-to-hand terms.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a bootleg album of live performance by Slayer, entitled *Angel of Death*, used a cover image of a skeletal figure on a winged horse that closely resembles the Angel of Death in the Hammer film *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), an inspiration for Black Sabbath’s Geezer Butler in his lyric-writing.

<sup>9</sup> The guitar was a BC Rich Gunslinger, which Hanneman seems to have used between 1987 and 1988. It was inscribed with the words ‘Das Reich’, ‘Totenkopf’, ‘Wiking’, ‘Prinz Eugen’, and ‘Florian Geyer’ (all names given to Waffen-SS divisions), as well as ‘Reinhard Heydrich’ and ‘Deutschland’ (Waffen-SS regiments). See the photograph taken by David Plastik in 1988 at <https://erockphotos.photoshelter.com/image/I0000xOZBTszcm.c>. A commentary on Hanneman’s guitars, which concentrates on technicalities but attempts to acknowledge the political references, is available at: <https://www.groundguitar.com/jeff-hanneman-gear/>.

<sup>10</sup> One of the better political discussions from the metal press can be found in Rosenberg (2018). Academics working in Metal Studies have been rather more prepared to consider the overlap between the metal scene and far-right politics. See (Hagen 2011; Hochhauser 2011; Kahn-Harris 2011; Olson 2011; Spracklen 2018).

Araya's opening bark of the name Auschwitz is replicated by Matti Kärki of Dismember (Sweden) in their 2000 song 'Thanatology'.<sup>11</sup> Impiety (Singapore) were also interested in Mengele, whom they described as 'no angel nor the devil, but a man committed and possessed by all evil' ('Carbonized,' *Paramount Evil*, 2004). Marduk (Sweden) replicate the terminology from Slayer's 'SS-3' to describe the legend of Reinhard Heydrich placing the Czech crown on his head ('The Hangman of Prague', *Plague Angel*, 2004). And Dutch band Thanatos are probably attempting to out-do Hanneman in their gruesome descriptions of experiments ('The Netherworld', *Justified Genocide*, 2009). Many combined these songs with similarly dubious flirtations with, or at times straightforward endorsements of, far-right political positions.<sup>12</sup>

Is there a way of considering the potential interest of this response to the Holocaust while at the same time acknowledging the political problems that are, if not inherent to, then at least hard to detach from the scene? Can we consider the functioning of this means of representation without simply defending or alternatively denigrating it?

## 2. Impieties and Intensities

Slayer's approach to Holocaust material clearly violates the kinds of approach that Gillian Rose (1996) dubs 'Holocaust piety', or what Pollock and Silverman (2014) term Claude Lanzmann's 'politics of "resistance to representation"' (p. 9; see also Lanzmann [1979] 2007). But there is now a long tradition of considering the use of an aesthetics of excess as opposed to an aesthetics of restraint to figure the Holocaust, which, while not uncritical, does see 'grotesque realism' (Vice 2000, p. 9) as a potentially viable response to the event. The Israeli pulp fiction 'Stalags' (Pinchevski and Brand 2007) of the 1960s, Jean-François Steiner's novel *Treblinka* (Steiner [1966] 1994; see also Moyn 2005), the odd erotics of *The Night Porter* (Sontag 1975; Friedländer [1982] 2000), and even the 'visceral' descriptions of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (Ball 2008) have all attracted scholarly attention. It is not uncommon now to see an approach such as that taken by Aaron Kerner (2011), who considers a whole range of cinematic representations of the Holocaust, including 'Nazi-sploitation' movies,<sup>13</sup> paying more attention to *how* the Holocaust is figured rather than *whether* it can or should be. Matthew Boswell (2012) has even suggested that forms of 'Holocaust impiety' might be important ways for generations that come after, and that often have no connection with, the Holocaust, to engage with it. Boswell reads 'impious' texts as raging against the pastness and mediatedness of the event, and as scorning approaches that take it as a sacred occurrence that cannot be thought about critically. In his reading, the Sex Pistols' song 'Belsen Was a Gas' is an attack on (or even interrogation of) how the Shoah has been represented, rather than an assault on the memory of the event itself. However, surely what makes Sid Vicious's song succeed in its efforts to offend is its deliberate laziness and utter lack of interest in what actually happened. Compared with the punk song's off-hand disclaimer that it is

<sup>11</sup> This song appeared on the album *Hate Campaign*, whose final eponymous track blasphemed against a number of deities while mentioning Satan and Hitler in more studiously ambiguous terms (see Mengerik 2016, p. 180). The band's drummer Fred Estby called this final track the album's 'theme song' (Estby 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Denials of Nazi affiliation are often tied with hard or far right declarations, with only minimal challenges from metal journalists (who are often amateurs producing webzines). In interviews with the Swedish band Marduk (Salmeron 2013) and the Singaporean band Impiety (Stöver n.d.), the interviewers simply accepted declarations of pride in a grandfather fighting in the Wehrmacht, anti-immigration rhetoric, and a bizarre antisemitic and anti-Chinese claim that Chinese Jews were trying to find mass converts in South East Asia. Citing the pride expressed by Impiety's guitarist Zul (XXXUL) that the band was able to win acceptance from German neo-Nazis on a European tour, Jeremy Wallach reads it as a sign of how they can act as ambassadors for Southeast Asian metal (Wallach 2011, p. 101). In this context, that reading seems particularly unfortunate, and is also at odds with the rest of Wallach's nuanced analysis of the complexities of ethnic identity and metal in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. Marduk have also made use of German militaristic/Nazi imagery (*Panzer Division Marduk* 1999) and shown a consistent interest in WWII and its atrocities as a theme (e.g., *Frontschwein* 2015). On accusations that they are political neo-Nazis see (Rosenberg 2018).

<sup>13</sup> One example of the former, *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* inspired a song by the thrash metal band At War (*Ordered to Kill*, 1986).

just repeating what had been heard about the Holocaust ‘the other day’, ‘Angel of Death’ is almost painfully earnest, in both Hanneman’s presentation of it as a ‘history lesson’ and in its lyrics that are constantly trying to bypass mediation and get listeners to feel what happened for themselves.

Whereas Boswell reads punk as offering a critique of Holocaust representation, many metal scholars approach the music by attempting to bypass the question of representation entirely. Although there is very little discussion of Holocaust imagery per se in metal studies, lyrics discussing violence and gore are widespread, and this presents a problem that scholars (often themselves self-avowedly metal fans) have to deal with (Kahn-Harris 2007; Phillipov 2006; Overell 2014). One solution that many of them have found is to discuss the felt experience of metalheads rather than providing readings of lyrics. Drawing on terminology that at least since Lawrence Grossberg (1984) has been used to think through the significance of popular and underground music, they assert that listening to metal is not centred on making meaning from it, but rather involves inter- and intra-corporeal intensities that operate at a non-rational, non-moral level: affects.

Since fans tend to privilege immersive experiences, death metal’s most desired affects necessarily occur in the absence of reflexive or rational thought: in the moments where the intensity of the experience overwhelms all impulses towards moral evaluation. (Phillipov 2006, p. 82)

Scene members [...] state that the process of becoming brutal onstage has little to do with premeditated, cognitised representations of ‘brutal violence’. Instead, it is their embodied [...] ‘intuitive’ [...] experience of affect that indicates their brutality. (Overell 2014, p. 57)

Affect is a term that often seems to be used in a wilfully loose manner: affect theorists often embrace the fact that it has been theorised in very different ways from quite separate traditions (e.g., Thrift 2008, pp. 223–25; Gregg and Seigworth 2010, pp. 6–8). Psychoanalysis, biology and nature philosophy are mixed and matched to gain some purchase on, or indeed produce, the object of enquiry. That object itself is defined by what it is not as often as by what it is: not emotion, not individual, not fully available to conscious enquiry. Thinking with affect is a way of placing less emphasis on individual subjects working to achieve rationally defined goals, and more on how bodies (and other objects) can come together and work on each other, and what possibilities arise from their encounters. Doing so does not necessarily demand that cognition and ethics be entirely sundered from affect, but rather that they be thought in different ways, as bodily, not just mental processes (Massumi 1995, pp. 90–91).

In metal studies, affect has tended to be conceptualised rather simplistically as something separate from judgements of what is or should be.<sup>14</sup> This is probably because of the tendency of fans and bands to invest less in articulated justifications of likes and dislikes, and more in a shared sense of community that is partly based on the lack of a need to explain oneself (Kahn-Harris 2003, 2007). However, this creates a number of problems for a critical consideration of metal. One of these is, in fact, that it only attends to a thin layer of the metal scene. Theorists of metal’s affective intensities often focus on the experience of the mosh pit (Overell 2014; Riches 2016), the part of a gig’s audience that engages in a rule-bound play of there being no rules, grouping in front of the stage to push and bump into each other in a (managed) risk to bodily integrity (Tsitsos 1999; Ambrose 2001; Palmer 2005; Hilbert 2018). But there are many other ways in which metal is experienced, not least in listening to recordings (see also Berger 1999, p. 271). There is a problem here too in the way that they rely on

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<sup>14</sup> The term is used particularly loosely by Overell (2014), who conflates Brian Massumi’s distinct glosses of affect and affection in his translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* as if they were both defining affect. They are also open to the criticisms made by Ruth Leys (2017) in her rather single-minded account of theories of affect which divided them into those that separate emotion and cognition, and those that grant emotion an intentional quality. Leys shows the difficulties of this former approach, both in scientific theories of emotion and in their uses in cultural theory. While some of her criticisms may be reductive, they do apply quite closely to people working in metal studies who have tended to take affect as entirely closed off from the cognitive realm.

fans' own accounts of what they feel and do. Refusal of verbalisation seems to be a strategy that fans use to preserve the experience as they conceive of it, but as Brian Massumi (1995) suggests, that does not mean that thinking, cognition, is not taking place.<sup>15</sup>

These theorists also tend to scant the political valency of affect, which in many of its traditions is used to open up discussion of politics, not close it down. In the main this operates in terms of futurity—the creation of possibilities. But it can also work in one's orientation to the past. In one of the key discussions of affect in *A Thousand Plateaus* (the chapter, or plateau, 'Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible'), Deleuze and Guattari (2004) repeatedly link it to responses to death and suffering: the slaughter or collapse of animals. In their readings of Karl Phillip Moritz (p. 240), Sigmund Freud (pp. 257–58), and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (p. 258), they see these writers' main characters transformed through the ways in which they physically register or incorporate violence inflicted on cattle, horses and rats. Deleuze and Guattari term this 'becoming-animal' (pp. 258–60), a becoming made possible through affect, offering new forms of human existence and escaping the constraints of single subjecthood through multiplicity. Therefore, affect in one of its most-cited definitions is not just a creation of new futures, but a way of making connections with other events, including suffering—ones, Deleuze and Guattari insist, that are not about pity or representation, but about transforming oneself, one's bodily capacity to act and be acted upon by other bodies. The animality here is important (as the term 'becoming-animal' and their emphasis on pack animals to conceptualize multiplicity indicate), but such processes need not be exclusively confined to those occurring across a species barrier;<sup>16</sup> becoming-animal is part of a range of becomings, from -women to -particle (p. 272). It is this conception of affect that I wish to work with in this essay. Deleuze and Guattari adumbrate a way of discussing bodies and their taking on of the suffering of others, which does not simply disavow the physical response or attempt to raise it to a higher, mental level. New concepts and new language are not excluded; rather, they would be but one dimension of the changes in capacity, corporeal and incorporeal, that affect effects.

Gabby Riches (2016) (following Driver 2011) suggests that the politics of grindcore is embodied. Ann Cvetkovich (2003) explicitly suggests that the experience of the mosh pit (albeit an all-female one at a womyn's festival) might relate to a kind of processing of trauma. Considering the place of the Shoah in metal would equally allow a consideration of Holocaust memory in bodily, affective terms. This does chime to a degree with a number of more recent studies that have considered the place of emotions in the Holocaust, including in testimony (Gigliotti 2009, esp. p. 212; Chare and Williams 2016), teaching literature (Berlin 2012), and museums (Cooke and Frieze 2016).<sup>17</sup> It also has a cognate in other theories of affect, trauma, and art, such as Jill Bennett's (2005). However, for Berlin, as for Cooke and Frieze, acknowledging and managing emotions are the chief concerns; Bennett also wants the initial shock caused by the artwork to lead onto thought. Similarly, Kerner and Boswell feel the need to recuperate any feeling or bodily response to Holocaust impiety or filmic exploitation through intellectualised questions of representation. 'Belsen was a Gas', claims Boswell, can be read as 'a song that sets out to address the issue of historical misinformation' (Boswell 2012, p. 107). If the 'body genre' of Holocaust pornography has any value, Kerner argues, it is to 'tell us something about the problems of representing the Holocaust' (Kerner 2011, p. 153).

In the case of metal, however, the aim seems to be to stir up passions and encourage feeling with an especial intensity, and the reaction, rather than a jolting away from difficult experiences, often seems to take the form of attraction to them. This means that the bodily responses are dwelt on, or within, by those experiencing them, rather than prompting a need to work through or reflect upon

<sup>15</sup> This is not true of Harris Berger (1999), however, who provides an astute and sympathetic reading of a metal gig (pp. 70–75) as well as a brief discussion of affect in metal that is impressively thoughtful and nuanced (p. 252).

<sup>16</sup> In this context it should also be noted that the lyrics of 'Angel of Death' address its victim-listeners as 'like cattle' and 'human mice'.

<sup>17</sup> While it might be thought that trauma is necessarily an affective state, in fact one of its classic definitions in Holocaust Studies, that provided by Dori Laub, sees it as essentially a cognitive, not an emotional, problem (Laub 1992, pp. 84–85).

them. Affect, as Deleuze and Guattari discuss it, offers a way to consider such responses in their complexity, neither simply taking them as indescribable states nor requiring that they become fully verbally articulated to make any sense. It allows us to see the possibilities in, for example, the ways in which metal permits a coexistence of pain with pleasure, or grief with fascination, and perhaps even awe.

Such mobilization of affects might be condemned as potentially fascistic, or as taking a prurient interest and a sadistic voyeuristic pleasure in other people's suffering, or as avoiding politics in a politically pernicious way. But rather than using affects to attack or to excuse 'Angel of Death', in the rest of this article I will take them as a prompt to consider how the embodied experience of this song functions as a form of Holocaust memory.

I will begin by providing a reading of the song in terms of the ways that it figures bodily experience and evokes bodily responses. I will consider not only the ways the lyrics describe bodies, but also the ways the music might be described in bodily terms, and how listening to it, even listening to the lyrics, might be thought of as a physical process rather than one focused on meaning (although not separate from it). I will then move on to examine ways that listeners' physical experience of the song has been registered in the public sphere.

I will do this by considering two phenomena on YouTube. The first is one that has migrated to this platform: concert videos. Videos of Slayer performances are available on YouTube from 1986 on, although they clearly have more available from later dates.<sup>18</sup> The second is one entirely native to social media such as YouTube: reaction videos—videos in which people record their responses to hearing music or seeing a video, usually for the first time.

In both cases, I am of course only reading what is available to me via the site, and it is important to remember that these videos are not simply records of events. Both types are constructed through choices about what to film and how to edit it (and fan videos too are edited, e.g., Santiago (2011) in Appendix B.1.). Both also feature people who are often self-consciously performing for the camera: the webcam they sit in front of as far as YouTube is concerned, or the one via which they can find themselves put on live display on a stadium screen. As Ruth Leys (2017) points out, however, attempts to record non-performed affective states are nigh on impossible. Both types of video afford opportunities to read physical and gestural responses to the music from people listening to it, including elements that are not completely under these people's control.

This is not to say that all dimensions of affective responses are readily decodable from these videos. Teresa Brennan (2004) notably argues for an approach to affect that resists the audio-visual and thinks it primarily through another sense: smell. But her point is not so much that the visual cannot transmit affect—visual images 'also constitute transmissions breaching the bounds between individual and environment' (Brennan 2004, p. 10)—as that sight is usually thought of as the 'sense that separates' (Brennan 2004, p. 11), thus in terms inimical to the acknowledgement of 'affective contagion'. Discussing affect is a question of being attuned in particular ways to perceptions and bodily dispositions, rather than ruling out particular senses or the media that seem to speak to them. Reaction videos in particular are precisely about the transmission of affect through audio-visual material (even if that transmission is to some extent staged).

While there are other forums in which listeners respond to the music and sometimes describe their bodily and emotional responses to it, the two I have chosen are forms in which these responses are registered visually and aurally, as well as verbally. They also correspond to the two main ways one might think of people listening to this music: listening to a recording (often in a domestic space) and attending a live performance. And finally, these two forms also allow me to trace the history of this song's reception from its earliest live forms to how it is received in the present day.

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<sup>18</sup> I have also taken note of reports from 'inside' this experience (e.g., Riches 2016; Hilbert 2018), but I will primarily consider what there is to be seen, heard and read from videos of them.



### 3. 'Angel of Death': Evoking Affective Intensities

Discussion of the politics of 'Angel of Death' has a strange tendency to focus on individual lines without feeling the need to contextualise them with the rest of the song (e.g., Ferris 2008, p. 120). While this reveals something of how lyrics are listened to in general, it also shows something of how metal lyrics, and this song in particular, operate. There is little sense of a need for coherence or consistency here: the point of view shifts around (Ferris 2008; cf., Kahn-Harris 2007; Phillipov 2012), polysyllabic words (e.g., 'abacinate') are used not so much for precision as to bewilder the listener, and phrases are constructed whose parts seem to have incompatible grammar and connotations.

The rhythmic structure of the first two verses is based around three-stress lines, many with a caesura between the first and second stressed lexical items. This often leaves the opening word of a line hanging in isolation, its relation to what comes later at times uncertain, and at times produces rather unnatural syntax: 'Sadistic, surgeon of demise/Sadist of the noblest blood' (Araya's audible pause after the first word is replicated by the comma in the lyric sheet). While 'surgeon of death' might make more sense than the rather euphemistic 'demise', Hanneman presumably used the less common word to avoid coming too close to the song's title. The near-repetition of 'sadistic' and 'sadist', on the other hand, feels less like a stab at anaphora than evidence of limited vocabulary. And it is hard to tell if the phrase 'noblest blood' is supposed to be sarcastic or some reference to Nazi racial theories.

This is disturbing because there is no sense of consistent evaluation of what is being described. Such use of language might be called slapdash, or evidence of autodidacticism. But it achieves an effect that many metal songs are interested in: putting pressure on vocalist and on listener, straining capacities of understanding, articulation, expression, listening. Metal is attracted to obscurantism and esotericism—incomprehensibility is part of an aesthetic of cognitive and affective overload.

Within that context, lyrics that describe bodies being overwhelmed by unimaginable pain might be said to do more than just being sensationalist and graphic. The listener is directly addressed and told again and again to feel what is being done, but in odd terms. 'Feel the knife pierce you intensely' seems to call for a kind of empathy that is part voyeurism, part narcissism, but at the same time signals its own impossibility: 'intensely' is just trying too hard. The verb that this adverb is modifying is also ambiguous; is it 'feel' or 'pierce'? Even if it is the latter, the fact that it collocates much more readily with the former causes the knife to act like a feeling.

What the listeners are actually feeling (i.e., perceiving) is the music, which is then being interpreted into the experience of being experimented on: 'pumped with fluid', 'pressure in your skull', and 'your mind starts to boil'. The pressure described being applied to the inside of the body is accompanied by music that applies pressure to the outside body as volume and vibration, but also in terms of a sound spectrum that leaves no space unfilled.<sup>19</sup> Elements of the sound could also be described as knifelike: Araya's piercing scream, the slashing, or squealing, guitar solos (which also blur the boundaries between piercer and piercee).

The moments where bodily movement becomes more viable are those where the intensity of the music actually lets up for a while: it is the breakdown (where the guitar slows and the drums stop playing) that D. X. Ferris describes as the '*must-mosh-now*' section (Ferris 2008, pp. 116–17). In fact, the most excruciating detail is included in the lengthy third verse, which maintains the lower tempo of the breakdown, and in which the use of sixteenth-note picking between power chords lessens. This slower pace and sense of more auditory space makes this part 'moshable'. The lyrics too fit more closely to the musical structure of these lines. The music both applies force to bodies, and lets up to allow them to respond in moshing, as a kind of resistance to, as well as, perhaps, affirmation of the lyrics that are being heard.

Together, music and lyrics propose to listeners an experience that seems wilfully incoherent, one which plays out at a level that avoids any consistent moral judgement, but also have the 'affective' qualities identified by Brian Massumi (1995) of a 'crossing of semantic wires' in which 'sadness is

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of affect and music primarily in terms of vibration, see (Henriques 2010).

pleasant' (p. 85): the music is listened to for some kind of pleasure, but it is conceptualised as a form of torture.

#### 4. 'Thanks Assholes'/'I Got Your Bro': Concert Videos<sup>20</sup>

With so much left for listeners to feel and deal with for themselves, 'Angel of Death' is clearly able to take on quite different meanings in different contexts. An examination of how it features in concert videos of Slayer's performances shows this to be the case, with notable shifts occurring over time. What starts in the late 1980s as one song among many soon becomes central to Slayer's identity, the song with which they usually finish the set (Ferris 2008, p. 119).<sup>21</sup>

Recorded in 1986 (Ritz), Araya is clearly acting out the lyrics, but the response from the audience is not necessarily receptive. In 1988 (Felt Forum 1988), cushions ripped from the theatre's seats fly around in the air, while Araya pleads with the crowd to calm down, and ends his performance with 'thanks, assholes'. Hanneman is wearing his Totenkopf t-shirt and plays a guitar emblazoned with the names of SS units, but none of this imagery is given any prominence or seems to elicit any audience response. Hanneman and King look like men at work, not axe heroes. They stay mostly to one side. Bodily responses are not easy to make out beyond a steady stream of stage divers, and the occasional foot in the air indicating someone crowdsurfing. In the 1996 performance at Ozzfest, the only footage of fan behaviour is clearly one chosen by the camera operator, of a woman sitting on someone's shoulders with a pair of hands reaching up and (perhaps playing at) trying to undress her. The fact that such behaviour is almost a cliché of concert footage shows the extent to which sexual assault is a normalised feature of gigs (Hill 2018). It is also evidence of how the communal experience of being fans is marked by often painful gender and power dynamics. It is important to bear this in mind in viewing later videos, in which the sense of community might come across as more positive.

As the song settles into being at the end of each set, it serves as a climax to the gig, celebrating the fan community, their co-presence at a concert. Araya's performance comes at the end of the set, but also at the end of many hundreds of performances of this song live,<sup>22</sup> and it is responsive to this environment. He does not put on the same kinds of melodramatics that he does in the initial recording. He is enjoying himself, and he asks fans if they are enjoying themselves too (Sofia 2010). He exchanges knowing looks with fans in the audience. He leaves spaces in his singing, which seems to suggest that he is expecting the fans to fill them in. The song Angel of Death becomes a celebration

<sup>20</sup> The selection of concert videos that I discuss here is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. I searched 'slayer angel of death live' on YouTube and started to check each result for relevance. I stopped after reaching 150, with no end in sight. A Google search of the terms "'slayer angel of death live" site: youtube.com' (i.e., instances of the exact phrase limited to the site of YouTube) yielded 'about 4690 results'—many more than the estimated 1814 live performances of this song (there are of course many duplicate recordings). My sample is intended to cover each of the decades from the 1980s to the present day, with about two from each decade. It includes three of Slayer's own concert videos released on VHS and DVD, 'bootleg' recordings from earlier decades, and their more recent equivalent: fans' recordings on their smartphones. I alighted on those videos that seemed to show more of the audience's behaviour, as far as was possible. Technological changes (and different performance venues—stadiums and daytime festivals) mean that later videos tend to do this more; indeed, the most recent is from a YouTube user who specifically records the moshpit rather than the activity on stage. Readings of these videos are therefore sketching out ways that it is possible for fans to respond to this music and cannot be making any claim to completeness or even representativeness.

<sup>21</sup> Out of the 21 live set lists that D. X. Ferris provides for Slayer after the recording of *Reign in Blood*, 16 (more than three quarters) place Angel Death either at the very end of the set or as the last song before the encore. (Ferris 2015, pp. 134–35, 144, 145, 156, 164–165, 174, 177, 177–178, 185, 200, 209, 215, 224, 226–228, 231, 261–262 (at the end); pp. 105–06, 122, 173, 189, 214 (elsewhere)).

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.setlist.fm/stats/slayer-63d68e3b.html> (accessed 21 August 2019) estimates that Slayer have played 'Angel of Death' 1814 times. Only Raining Blood has been played more (1846). The song also has a presence in the wider culture, indicated by its sampling on label-mates Public Enemy's radical critique of media-cum-misogynistic moan 'She Watch Channel Zero' (*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, 1988), or used to symbolise an eccentric boss having a mid-life crisis in the film *Sex Tape* (dir. Jake Kasdan, 2014).

of the band and their fans' togetherness. Fans show their appreciation for the band's skill. Hands punch the air. Shouts of appreciation or of self-assertion occur at points in the song that are available for them to do so particularly at the breakdown. And they are rather more self-conscious (at least as they can be seen on camera): aware, for example, of their being filmed, and themselves filming the performance. In these stadium events, viewing the crowd would suggest that the mosh pit involves a relatively small number of the people actually attending the gig. Their cultural significance should not be scanted, and their activities may well be part of what makes the gig for others (e.g., the circle pit of fans also setting off flares in **Santiago (2011)**), but moshing is clearly not what most of the audience are doing. In performances after Jeff Hanneman's death in 2013, the song also becomes a tribute to the man who wrote it, performed in front of a backdrop with Hanneman's name, seemingly equating him with the Angel of Death (see **Wacken 2014**).<sup>23</sup> Mourning a lost band member is also, of course, a form of community-building.

I want to focus on a recent video taken in 2019 (**Download 2019**), which is from and of the moshpit, because it shows all of these meanings in play and concentrates on audience behaviour. The video-er captures one image of the stage before he turns the camera on the people around him, and occasionally himself. A carnivalesque atmosphere is indicated by the bright pink inflatable flamingo worn on the head of one of the moshers. They respond to 'Angel of Death' with familiarity and enthusiasm, shouting out the lyrics for almost the entirety of the first two verses, including the opening scream. Words at the ends of lines are enunciated with particular vigour. The video-er occasionally turns the camera on himself, especially when the word is 'death' or 'die', which he shouts out as he punches the air (0:57; 3:09). At other points, other fans scream the word 'die' from the lyrics into the camera (0:52; 1:20). By the third verse, fans only have the lyrical knowledge, or perhaps the breath, to echo 'the Holocaust' (2:34), and 'flying free' (3:14).

The music calls forth different movements in the crowd. The breakdown is the point where they move in time to the music, whereas the solos evoke the most chaotic motion. It is hard to tell from the camera movement how much is intentional movement and how much from the jostling of bodies against each other, but different people do have different styles of moving. Most come across to me as having a carefulness, perhaps even self-conscious embarrassment, to what they are doing, at least to begin with. One shaven-headed man wearing a black T-shirt with gothic lettering on it rushes in and out of the camera's purview, crossing through other groupings of people who stay more closely together. While most of the moshers bump into each other with a degree of caution, pushing each other with forearms held quite close to their upper bodies, this man swings his arms full-length from the shoulder, or grabs and pushes people with his hands. Another mosher squares off with him, perhaps to try to mitigate his behaviour, or perhaps to respond to and participate in his greater aggression (1:46–1:59). It is hard to tell if this man's style of moshing is accepted, or has pushed the bounds of what is acceptable (cf., Ambrose 2001; Palmer 2005). Towards the very end, the video-er is knocked over, with several hands grabbing him to help him up (4:43–4:50), and a voice saying 'I got you bro' (4:47). As the music stops two moshers embrace, while another shouts out 'that's going to be the sickest video' (4:56).

Harris Berger's reading of a mosh-pit in Akron Ohio sees the same kind of variation between the more playful kinds of moshers and the more aggressive ones, arguing that violence and the representation of violence go hand-in-hand in moshers' bodily movements and gestures (pp. 70–75). The fans' response to and recreation of the lyrics adds another dimension of violence: a bodily (performed) response to death, and at some level to mass death, that, in its most obvious aspect, appears affirmative, even celebratory. But I think it is too easy to read it simply that way. The pose of not judging (or entering the headspace of not judging) is often part of a metal identity, and acknowledgement of difficult realities often takes the form of appearing to revel in them.

<sup>23</sup> Thanks to Liu Shu for originally making this point to me. The 'tribute' backdrop to was a pastiche of the Heineken label which reads: 'The Original Quality/*Angel of Death*/Trade Mark/*Hanneman/1964–2013/Still Reigning/Brewed with Natural Ingredients*' (Stegall 2013). Words in italics were considerably larger than the others, which were lifted verbatim from the original label.

In that sense, this practice is a form of Holocaust memory. The Holocaust is explicitly evoked as moshers shout out 'Auschwitz', '400,000 more to die', 'Holocaust'. As with any other form of Holocaust memory, it draws its meaning from and provides meaning to its context: this is the last song from Slayer's last ever concert in the UK. Mixed with a kind of joyousness, then, is valediction, as well as a sense of community and mutual care. It is a celebration of togetherness, of insidership, but also an acknowledgement of things coming to an end: Slayer ceasing to tour as well as Jeff Hanneman's death. Mortality, comradeship, distinguishing between outsiders and insiders are put into play while using signifiers of the Holocaust. But is this simply use? These meanings, of death, of suffering, of mourning, will be bound up with what they take the Holocaust to be. Affirming a 'metal' identity is in part about acknowledging the bad things in the world and in oneself—not to disavow them, but not simply to identify with them either. Holocaust imagery is part of the images of atrocity used to keep the rest of the world out, but that process of group formation might also be seen as a response to a world of horrors that includes the Holocaust.

### 5. 'Why You Want Me to Die?': Reaction Videos

The 'moshvid' of 2019 is a response to and use of mobile technology and social media to create concert footage in a way previously not possible or perhaps even thinkable: focusing on the work that fans' bodies do with music and making it available for consumption online (cf., Peters and Seier 2009; Colburn 2015; Trainer 2015). This sharing of fan experience does have roots in earlier practices such as fanzines and, characteristic of metal in particular, distros, tape-swapping and letter-writing (Kahn-Harris 2007). However, social media has offered ways for that experience to be shared that are particularly invested in forms of affective contagion. As has been pointed out (e.g., Bishop 2018), social media companies thrive on and promote the creation of affective intensities between their consumers and performers. Consumers seem to be drawn to precisely this kind of content, of which a case in point is the reaction video.

Reaction videos have quite a long history on YouTube, but they have crystallised in their conventions over the past decade, most notoriously in the reaction videos to the gross-out porn trailer *2 Girls 1 Cup* (2007) (a video that is apparently now only available via its reaction videos) (Anderson 2011; Garber 2016). While visceral reactions such as these often seem to be prized, what happens in most current examples is not necessarily as extreme as the ones recorded at that earlier point (Warren-Crow 2016; Swan 2018). 'Reactors' watch or listen to something (usually for the first time), showing in their faces and gestures, as well as their verbal comments, what effect the item is having upon them. Successful reactors are able to monetize their videos (cf., Postigo 2016). Reactions to metal seem to have seen a recent flowering. One way this seems to function is as a way for YouTube performer and viewer to both capture something of what metal is supposed to do: to take one by surprise, to overwhelm. The video performers clearly act something of this out. Facial expressions are very important in the performance of the video. Some discussion of the reactions and the reactor's thoughts on the song can also be provided, depending upon the personality and persona of the performer. Comments to the videos are almost all positive, and they seem usually to be written by metal fans, who welcome the reactors to the experience of metal.

As of 5 August 2019, there were nineteen 'reaction' videos on YouTube to 'Angel of Death' with more than 1000 recorded views each. Reactors could either be alone or watching in pairs.<sup>24</sup> They could also take different approaches to researching the song: some came to it cold, others had done some internet research into it. In general, the reactors responded to both lyrics and music, often acting out shock at the words (e.g., India Reacts, Sol.).

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<sup>24</sup> In total there were 23 reactors: 19 were American, 2 Swedish, and 2 Indian. 12 were people of colour and 11 white. The racial codings and dynamics here are important: the use of 'African American' and 'black' in video titles suggests that viewers will be interested in these reactions in particular, perhaps because they are taken to mean 'metal neophyte'.

They also provide verbal descriptions of how they are responding to the music, making direct reference to physical and emotional changes they undergo but also improvising wordplay or elaborate metaphors to report on their affective states. For example:

I got chills and goosebumps ... You can't be slaying me like this (PinkMetalHead, 5:20–5:27)

This is so much being thrown at me at the same time, it's like a fire hose that shoots fire instead of water all hitting me at the same time (Justin Walker, 4:11–4:20)

This was dope but scary but still amazing but weird, this was like a lot a lot a lot of feelings at the same time but I enjoyed it I really enjoyed it (Leje Henok, 3:58–4:10)

No Life Shaq (see Coffeen 2019) provides an extensive repertoire of expressions, gestures, and comments on 'Angel of Death'. He grimaces in mock pain at the opening scream and almost immediately stops the song, breaking his own rules that he should subject himself to the entire track without pausing. 'You cannot sit through this madness', he exclaims. 'It just feel like a train finna come' (2:15–2:28).<sup>25</sup> He resumes, winces, gestures upwards with right arm in a 'I give up' way, laughs, shakes head, and says 'that's tough!' (his catchphrase). He starts to nod his head in time with the music, but stops when he hears 'the way that I want you to die' and looks at camera, eyes half closed, then turns to the door behind him and back to act out a double take (3:08–3:12). 'Did he just say he want me to die?' The next few lines he repeats phrases in seeming disbelief, for instance repeating 400,000 from '400,000 more to die', licking his lips and laughing at how extreme this is. He starts to nod his head in time to the music again, a look of concentration or perhaps pain on his face, and then to rocking back and forth with his whole body to the beat. Shaq pauses again just before the breakdown to say: 'I'm still offended ... he said he wanted us to die ... 400,000 ... that's tough ... why you want me to die?' (4:25–4:47). In the breakdown itself, he oohs and aahs while moving to the beat, the grimace on his face probably one of appreciation. He gestures with his arm in time, sings along: 'ah, I like that' (5:21). When Araya resumes his vocals, the look of pain/concentration returns. The statement 'I'm scared of these dudes bruh' (5:58) falls at a suitable interval after 'the Holocaust' to suggest that it was prompted by it. The song's descriptions of torture are paused for Shaq to confess: 'I feel like I'm sinning listening to this music right here man' (6:40–6:42). The solos cause him to fall back in his seat, his arms flung above his head: 'What happened?' At Lombardo's intense blast of double-bass drumming Shaq stops the music again, stands up and staggers to the back of the room proclaiming 'I know y'all mad that I paused it right there, but bruh I am overwhelmed' (8:48–8:51). He plays the rest to the end, and says: 'Yo Slay—I can't with Slayer man, I can't with Slayer. Slayer, y'all too rough man, y'all too rough, you gotta be easy with the ladies man', and laughs. 'No all jokes aside man, bruh, Slayer is insane' (9:35–9:50).

Some of the bodily reactions to the music are almost exactly the same as those to the lyrics: shaking his head and laughing (to the intensity of the music 2:57; to the lyrics '400,000 more to die' 3:46); staring at the camera (after reading the title 1:09; to the opening riffs 1:59; to the lyrics 'the way that I want you to die' 3:07); falling back in his chair, mouth agape (the second playing of 'the way that I want you to die' 3:29; the guitar solos 7:40). Equivalences between the music and lyrics are therefore drawn in the way that he physically registers them. In No Life Shaq's case, the lyrical points that seem to mark him most are ones where death and die are included: 'Angel of Death', 'slow death', 'the way that I want you to die' '400,000 more to die' (very similar points to where the moshers in **Download (2019)** also participate in the song)—he physically reacts or performs a reaction, stops the video, or repeats the words.

Here lies a difference between what Kerner (2011) (following much film theory) sees as being in play in the 'body genres' of cinema and the embodied reaction to music. The experience of seeing torture on screen is usually considered as positioning the viewer in line with the torturer, in a distanced position of masculine dominance. No Life Shaq feels himself being contaminated by the song's evil, but also figures himself as penetrated by the music—and, as his gestures and expressions

<sup>25</sup> 'Finna' = 'fixing to' = 'going to'.

show, by the lyrical content too—as he ‘lose[s] [his] virginity to Slayer’ (4:54). Death is registered as something that is targeted at him, as well as all the song’s other listeners; he appears to talk of ‘400,000 of us’ (4:42).<sup>26</sup>

At no point in this reaction does Shaq engage with the fact that this song is ‘about’ the Holocaust. The most that he seems to suggest that the band have put into it are ‘pure emotions’ (6:58). But his reactions do involve an attempt to cognize, and to feel, mass death. His repeated disbelief and bewilderment about the figure of ‘400,000 more to die’ is, at the most basic level, a reaction to genocide. His experience of the music leads him not to turn it into a spectacle of atrocity, but rather something that might be inflicted on him, something he can share with his community of listeners.

Along with No Life Shaq, Alex Hefner is one of the most successful YouTubers who have reacted to ‘Angel of Death’ (Rozycki 2018). In comparison to Shaq’s more spontaneous-looking approach, he has clearly researched the background of the song, both its content and the controversies about the band, and provides an introduction in his video (0:20–0:55). As he plays it, he reacts physically and verbally to the more extreme parts of the song, exclaiming ‘What? Oh fuck!’ to the opening scream as well as evincing a puzzled look of intense concentration on his face (1:57). At the solos, he lifts his arm to the camera to show that the hairs are standing on end (5:51). But he also reacts to the lyrics, even stopping the track at one point to say that the Holocaust was ‘something incredibly unbearable and unfathomable ... whenever you hear descriptive things that were going on, it makes me sick ...’ (4:30–4:40). His summary at the end is worth quoting at length:

Okay so this is a perfect song that is easy to see the same type of effect while listening to metal music. Let me explain a bit further. I think that a lot of metal music has the same effect where it’s like the music is really cool and you get into this groove and you’re able just to headbang because the music is really good but the lyrical content of the song is so fucked or so depressing or so intense that it makes you feel like you’re going along with it by headbanging. It’s a really really weird sensation. Nonetheless, I think that this is an awesome song, probably one of my favourites by Slayer, just because it’s such an intense historical song that has—that packs—such a hard punch. (6:55–7:29)

What Hefner is describing here is not some dichotomy between a body that ‘goes along’ with the music and a mind that is horrified by the lyrics. All of his description works at a bodily level: the content is ‘intense’ (and as he says earlier in the video, disgusting), and even the contradiction is experienced in what he ‘feels’, and as a ‘weird sensation’. Particularly notable is that the song’s ‘intensity’ seems to be playing the role of a positive and a negative: the same as being ‘fucked’ or ‘depressing’ in the lyrical content, but also what makes it an ‘awesome song’. Intensity also appears both as an aesthetic quality and as what puts Hefner in touch with history. That is certainly not the critical historical sensibility expected by an academic historian, but it does seem to be a sense of the past pressing with some urgency upon the present.

The fact that Hefner verbalises his reaction makes it easier to explicate in this written medium, but Shaq too plays out through a repertoire of gesture and expression the sense that intensity is painful and pleasurable, and that this is being achieved both through music and lyrics. That contradiction is shared by other reactors, such as one who says that it ‘feels weird to be rocking out to a—lyrics that are so profound you know’ (React 4 You, 5:14–5:21).

These are not straightforwardly uncognized visceral reactions that bypass subjectivity. They are performed, described, meditated upon—all with an audience in mind, one that is looking for freshness and intensity. What comes out of these moments is inevitably varied. For some people, the pleasure and disgust simply coexist in parallel: physically they perform excitement at the music, which they then punctuate by stopping the track to say that they are disgusted by the historical facts (e.g., Jordan Talks, 2:39–2:58; 4:30–4:51). Others (Alex Hefner, React 4 You) are more explicit about their conflicted relationship. But all of the reactions documented on YouTube are contradictory. This

<sup>26</sup> The political context in the US of Black Lives Matter might prompt a reading of this moment in racialized terms that apply directly to him as an African American, but the community (or market) that he is trying to build with (mostly white) fans probably works to exclude explicit discussion along such lines.

itself is an interesting fact. The fact that the reactors are prepared to acknowledge or at least enact the contradictions in their responses already goes beyond what a more unthinking assessment of metal and the Holocaust might be, that metal's interest in the Holocaust is simply to wallow in its horror. The horror is there, the excruciating detail is certainly there, but the responses of the reactors are not simply to ignore them or to subsume them in their pleasure, but to embody the difficulty of thinking and feeling both of those things together.

## 6. Conclusions

'Angel of Death' clearly has significance in Holocaust consciousness that needs to be thought through. This article has suggested that in order to assess that significance, it is necessary to consider the affective intensities that it evokes, and their place in the affective regimes in operation in the metal scene. As my readings of both the concert and reaction videos show, the dangerous politics that the band drew upon to create affective intensity do not necessarily play out in the responses of the listeners. But the listeners' responses also show that there is a politics in play, and a possibility of articulating and discussing those politics, as well as of embodying them.

None of the responses demonstrates that any great historical insight on the Holocaust is being achieved. But that is not what any artistic response to the Holocaust is aiming at. Instead, listeners do take on the question of how one responds to human suffering on a massive scale: how one acknowledges, its reality, how one positions oneself in relation to it, how one deals with not understanding the event's enormity, while at the same time acknowledging the desire, the need, to understand, or to empathise. Metal offers them some resources to do this: an acknowledgement of darker human desires, a refusal to draw easy moral lessons, a musical experience that figures them as both receivers and transmitters of violence, and a sense of community which seems to be able to incorporate both expressions of aggression and mutual obligation. That does not leave their understandings beyond challenge, but it does make them worthy of some respect.

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## Appendix A.

### *Discography*

- Anthrax. 1985. *Spreading the Disease*. Music for Nations.  
 At War. 1986. *Ordered to Kill*. New Renaissance Records.  
 Black Sabbath. 1970. *Paranoid*. Vertigo.  
 Blessed Death. 1985. *Kill or Be Killed*. Megaforce Records.  
 Dismember. 2000. *Hate Campaign*. Nuclear Blast.  
 Flotsam and Jetsam. 1986. *Doomsday for the Deceiver*. Metal Blade Records.  
 Impiety. 2004. *Paramount Evil*. Agonia.  
 Iron Maiden. 1982. *The Number of the Beast*. EMI.  
 Judas Priest. 1976. *Sad Wings of Destiny*. Gull.  
 Marduk. 1999. *Panzer Division Marduk*. Osmose Productions.  
 Marduk. 2004. *Plague Angel*. Blooddawn Productions.  
 Marduk. 2015. *Frontschwein*. Century Media Records.  
 Megadeth. 1985. *Killing is My Business ... and Business is Good*. Combat Records.  
 Metallica. 1983. *Kill 'Em All*. Megaforce Records.  
 Public Enemy. 1988. *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. Def Jam Recordings.  
 Slayer. 1986. *Reign in Blood*. Def Jam Recordings.  
 Slayer, 1988. *South of Heaven*. Def Jam Recordings.

Thanatos. 2009. *Justified Genocide*. Deity Down Records.

Venom. 1981. *Welcome to Hell*. Neat Records.

## Appendix B.

### Appendix B.1. YouTube Concert Videos

Original line-up: Tom Araya, vocals and bass; Jeff Hanneman, guitar; Kerry King, guitar; Dave Lombardo, drums. Changes to that line-up noted below.

Ritz 1986 7 December 1986, The Ritz, New York Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bsJbCPYq5w> Slayer—Raining Blood & Angel of Death (Live in Ritz, 1986) | EXTREME AUDIO UPGRADE 31 Jan 2013.

Felt Forum 1988 31 August 1988, Felt Forum, New York City Available online: Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9fZFDaWnHk> Slayer—1988.08.31 New York City—31 May 2015

Live Intrusion 1995 12 March 1995, Mesa Amphitheatre, Mesa, AZ Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeoO-1Jx1BY> Slayer—Angel of Death (Live Intrusion 1995) 24 Nov 2015 [1995 VHS Video *Live Intrusion*]

Ozzfest 1996 18 July 1996, King Norris Riverport Amphitheater, Maryland Heights, MO Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myP9VX\\_WMHY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myP9VX_WMHY) Ozzfest 1996—Slayer—Angel Of Death 13 July 2007

Warfield 2001 7 December 2001 Warfield Theatre, San Francisco Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKlw2GXbu5A> Slayer—Angel of Death (War at the Warfield) 9 Aug 2010 [2003 DVD *War at the Warfield*] [Drums: Paul Bostaph].

Sofia 2010 22 June 2010, Sonisphere Festival, Vasil Levski National Stadium, Sofia, Bulgaria Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEDwrmZJHO4> [2010 DVD *Big Four Live in Sofia*] ['Angel of Death' starts at 1:00:21] The Big 4—Slayer Full Concert 10 Oct 2011 [Guitar: Gary Holt].

Santiago 2011 2 June 2011, Movistar Arena, Santiago, Chile Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34\\_XoG5r9eM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34_XoG5r9eM) Slayer—Angel of Death [Chile 2011] Multicam Best Crowd Ever! 17 June 2013 [Guitar: Gary Holt; Drums: Paul Bostaph]

Wacken 2014 1 July 2014, Wacken Open Air Festival, Wacken, Germany Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzcYrPAsJvA> Slayer—Live at Wacken 2014 (Full show HQ) [Angel of Death starts at 1:00:41] 14 Sept 2015 [Guitar: Gary Holt; Drums: Paul Bostaph]

Download 2019 16 June 2019, Download Festival, Donington Park Derby, UK Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT3g1b\\_zygE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT3g1b_zygE) Slayer—Angel of Death LIVE at Download Festival 2019 [Moshvid] 29 June 2019 [Guitar: Gary Holt; Drums: Paul Bostaph].

Details of concerts supplemented by information from concertarchives.org and setlist.fm.

### Appendix B.2. YouTube Reaction Videos

A&P-REACTS, Slayer—Angel of Death (Lyric Video) [Reaction/Review]. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vSeLwzvsKs> (accessed on 8 February 2018).

Alex Hefner, Hip-Hop Head REACTS to SLAYER: "Angel of Death". Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKDge9ZIHnU> (accessed on 3 July 2019).

Difference of Opinion, REACTION!!! "Angel of Death" by Slayer...Request by Jorge Lara. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MNk31XYh98> (accessed on 21 January 2018).

DKRACK, Slayer—Angel of Death!!! REACTION!!! Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrGDsVnzVxA&t=41s> (accessed on 21 March 2019).

Enoma, SLAYER Angel of Death Reaction. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMxVcj5fHLk&t=489s> (accessed on 14 July 2019).

Hectic, 🎸 Slayer—Angel Of Death Live 🎸 (Hip Hop Fan Reacts). Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx7aJYuDN-w&t=565s> (accessed on 31 March 2018).

India Reacts, Slayer—Angel of Death REACTION. Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09Wzx\\_r-gNA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09Wzx_r-gNA) (accessed on 22 July 2019).

Jordan Talks, SLAYER Angel of Death Reaction | Slayer Reaction. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpiezlgfjwA> (accessed on 16 April 2018).



- Justin Walker, UNITY “Rock Reaction” Slayer “Angel of Death. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w54cmGjHXQo&t=645s> (accessed on 11 October 2018).
- JUSTiN's WORLD, BLACK AMERICAN FIRST TIME HEARING | SLAYER—ANGEL OF DEATH!!!! Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYqHJerZcKQ>
- Leje Henok, Angel of Death—Slayer (HipHop fan reacts). Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ5NYJMGZMw> (accessed on 27 May 2018).
- MetalBreakdown, Angel of Death (Slayer)—Review/Reaction. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgpkO0ayT0w> (accessed on 20 January 2017).
- No Life Shaq, PROFESSOR REACTS to SLAYER “Angel of Death”. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFUIYkitPy0> (accessed on 11 June 2019).
- PinkMetalHead, Slayer- Angel of Death REACTION!!! 🔥🔥🔥 HOT FIRE. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4U6pvGocQ5A&t=530s> (accessed on 20 February 2018).
- React 4 You, Slayer—Angel of Death reaction. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIazZ55Hrko> (accessed on 29 September 2018).
- Saroj Kmr. Hyoju, Angel of Death—Slayer (In Car REACTION/REVIEW/JAM!!!). Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c\\_UUQPj9wKY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_UUQPj9wKY) (accessed on 4 May 2018).
- Sol., Slayer—Angel of Death | REACTION!!! Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIW4s23R\\_I4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIW4s23R_I4) (accessed on 15 February 2018).
- The Nobodies, NOBODIES REACTION!!! Angel of Death, Slayer. Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF\\_Lr6IJJEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF_Lr6IJJEA) (accessed on 10 November 2017).
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