HEAVY METAL VALUES IN THE AGE OF “SNOWFLAKES”

How journalists discursively construct controversy and transgression in heavy metal: a critical discourse analysis of metal press stories

University of Groningen
International Master of Journalism
Master’s Thesis
Supervisor: Robert Prey
December 2017
ABSTRACT

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contemporary metal controversies and why we should study them

1.2 The heavy metal press and the gap in Metal literature

1.3 Organisation of this thesis

II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is heavy metal? From its origins in England until its popularisation in the US

2.2 The ramification of heavy metal: the visceral subgenre of thrash metal

2.3 Controversy in heavy metal theory

2.4 Controversy as a moral panic

2.5 Controversies as trigger moments

2.6 Transgression in heavy metal scholarship

2.7 How my thesis will contribute to Metal scholarship

III METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

3.1 Going in depth into CDA: why it fits the study of heavy metal

3.2 The sample and the rationale behind it

3.2.1 Final sample of media stories
4 ANALYSIS OF METAL PRESS’ STORIES

4.1 Phil Anselmo’s gesture
  4.1.1 Metal Injection
  4.1.2 MetalSucks
  4.1.3 Blabbermouth

4.2 Slayer’s Instagram post
  4.2.1 Metal Injection
  4.2.2 MetalSucks
  4.2.3 Blabbermouth

4.3 Final remarks

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 While discursively constructing heavy metal values, the metal press makes a critique of musicians’ attitudes

5.2 The “trigger moment” concept holds true

5.3 The scapegoating of metal musicians is definitely a thing of the past

5.4 Limitations

6 CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

APPENDIX
Abstract

Since its early days in the late 1960s, the musical genre of heavy metal has cultivated an image of the outcast, as if the main objective of metal bands was to shock society, either with their sound or attitudes. Due to this reason, scholars affirm that controversy and transgression are the two fundamental values of heavy metal culture. By employing a critical discourse analysis to six articles from websites Metal Injection, MetalSucks, and Blabbermouth, this thesis shows how metal journalists discursively construct controversy and transgression in their stories. The sample comprises the coverage of two recent incidents: in January 2016, metal musician Phil Anselmo performed a Nazi salute at the end of a concert; one year later, the band Slayer posted on their Instagram account an image of them appearing alongside Donald Trump. The findings suggest that, besides building metal values through their texts, reporters adopt a critical stance in relation to metal musicians’ behaviour. The results also confirm the validity of the “trigger moment” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2013, p.4) concept for studying heavy metal controversies. Given that both episodes prompted public discussions, throughout the study it becomes clear that contemporary metal controversies are connected to relevant social issues of the day.

Keywords: heavy metal; music journalism; controversy; transgression; “trigger moment”
INTRODUCTION
During the Middle Ages in Europe, the religious establishment placed some restrictions on music composers. For the medieval Catholic Church, music was not meant for personal enjoyment. It should be produced with the sole purpose of driving “the masses away from worldly pleasures and towards spiritual contemplation” (Randall 2017, p.98). Therefore, sounds “considered morally corrupting and a threat to the social order” (ibid.) were banned from being executed. Among the forbidden dangers, there was a combination of musical notes called the tritone, or flat fifth. It sounded dissonant and “dis - turbing” (Kahn-Harris 2007, p.10) to the ears of clergymen, who then labelled it the *diabolus in musica*.

Several centuries later, the transgressive sound of “the devil in music” was adopted by heavy metal bands as a defining sonic element of their music. The cluster of groups who sprang up in the post-industrial Britain of the late 1960s, defining the core of heavy metal, adopted the anti-Christ as a symbol to represent the decaying scenario around them. The “evil sounding” (Kahn-Harris 2007, p.10) songs produced by bands such as Black Sabbath and Judas Priest were a metaphor for the frustration endured by the youth of those years with souring high unemployment levels due to the deindustrialization process (Moore, 2009).

To embrace the devil as a mascot was only the beginning. Over its almost 50 years of existence, heavy metal has continuously presented an image of
deviance in relation to social contexts, either in its content (lyrics, record covers) or attitudes taken by band members. For example, in 1981, Ozzy Osbourne, frontman of Black Sabbath, released as a solo artist a song entitled “Suicide Solution” — to the bewilderment of conservative sectors of the American society. Only a few years later, in the early 1990s, musicians in Norway’s burgeoning black metal scene were connected to crimes committed in the name of Satan.

Ozzy Osbourne and the black metal bands were able to stir public controversies due to their (supposed) acts of deviance. A great deal of media coverage followed. As a result, heavy metal was put in the public spotlight.

1.1 Contemporary metal controversies and why we should study them
Recently, two incidents involving well-known thrash metal bands placed attention on heavy metal as a topic of public discussion once again. On the 22nd of January 2016, singer Phil Anselmo, former leader of the American metal act Pantera, performed the Nazi salute (“sieg heil”) after a concert in Los Angeles (see figure 1). At the end of his presentation, he stretched his right arm and shouted “white power” while facing the audience. This moment was captured on video by an attendee, who then posted the footage on YouTube1. A huge controversy followed, with news media reacting vehemently to what most journalists considered an act of racism. Anselmo released an apology, explaining that the “white power” shout was a joke referring to the white wine he was drinking at the backstage.

---

1 This is the link to the YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVaUlXfvOHg
One year later, on the 20th of January 2017, the band Slayer posted on their Instagram account a photo in which their members appear side by side with Donald Trump. The group and the newly elected president are celebrating, in the typical heavy metal hand gesture that mimics the devil's horns. Trump was not actually with the band: he was digitally inserted ("photoshopped") into an old group picture. In the caption, vocalist Tom Araya explains that he uploaded the image because he “thought it was funny”, and he criticizes “snowflakes” for their reaction (see figure 2). In the days after the incident, journalists in the mainstream press, as well as those in heavy metal websites, called out Araya for his attitude. A public outcry had been elicited.
Contentious episodes like Anselmo’s salute and Slayer’s picture are central to metal’s history: controversies are “an integral part of heavy metal culture — almost to the point where it is in the ‘nature’ of heavy metal to be controversial”, affirm Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine (2014, p. 3). In general terms, a controversy is a public reaction generated by a “transgressive” (Kahn-Harris 2007, p.29) episode: a situation in which a metal band aims to shock as if to test the limits of what is acceptable in society.

Of course, what is acceptable is defined in relation to certain social values, which vary from society to society and are relative to a particular moment in time. What was considered transgressive in the past may not be considered transgressive today, and vice versa. For this reason, Robert Walser (1991, p.45)
argues that heavy metal culture creates opportunities for “important debates over social values and policies...”. This brings us to the first reason why contemporary metal controversies are worth studying: they reflect broader social and political changes.

In addition to that, the metal press is an important agent in creating or defining what is controversial: a transgressive act needs to be named as such by the media in order for it to generate a controversy. Otherwise, Slayer's Trump image would probably not have been more than a regular Instagram post, and Anselmo’s gesture would likely have stayed restricted to the attendees of that specific concert. Journalists have a stake in turning a particular event into a public debate.

With such a turbulent history, it is easy to understand why scholars in the Metal Studies field affirm that “controversy” and “transgression” are the central values of heavy metal culture. Therefore, if we pay attention to how contemporary metal episodes are made sense of by the press, we can see the role of journalists in creating and maintaining controversy and transgression. Moreover, we can also ask if the press is questioning such values.

1.2 The heavy metal press and the gap in metal literature

Taking as case studies Anselmo's salute and Slayer's Trump picture, this thesis aims to investigate how controversy and transgression are discursively constructed in stories published by the metal press. In other words: how journalists that report about heavy metal co-construct the fundamental values of metal in their texts. Do they see these events as transgressive and/or controversial? If so, how do these traits appear in the coverage? And are the media making connections between both incidents, or instead reporting on them as isolated facts?

To carry out the study, I formulated three research questions:
**MAIN QUESTION**

- How are metal values of controversy and transgression discursively constructed by the metal press?

**METAL PRESS**

- How were both events covered in *Metal Injection, MetalSucks* and *Blabbermouth*? Do these metal music news outlets connect the episodes or do they portray them as isolated?
- Do *Metal Injection, MetalSucks* and *Blabbermouth* see Anselmo’s gesture and Slayer’s picture as controversial and/or transgressive? If so, how?

I will look at six media stories published in three of the main news outlets catering to the metal community: websites *Metal Injection, MetalSucks* and *Blabbermouth*. Three texts refer to Anselmo’s salute and three to Slayer’s Instagram post. The stories will be analysed using the method of critical discourse analysis, as developed by Van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (1995) and Gee (2014). This means that my thesis employs a functionalist approach to discourse: language is used with a purpose in mind, not only as a way to communicate a message.

When reading what scholars have written about the metal press, one notices that there is a lack of theory on the role of journalists in constructing controversy and transgression. Despite acknowledging the importance of metal news outlets in strengthening the bonds between bands and fans, therefore keeping the metal culture alive (Weinstein, 2000; Laurin, 2013), academics have paid little attention to how exactly metal values are manifest in media texts. This is the gap my study aims to address.
1.3 Organisation of this thesis

This thesis has six chapters. The following chapter is dedicated to a short history of heavy metal and how bands managed to put controversy and transgression on the agenda of metal academics. I will also show how scholars see the metal press. In chapter 3 I will justify why critical discourse analysis is an appropriate method to research heavy metal. Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis: we will see what sort of lexicon and textual features journalists employ in their stories to set up controversy and transgression. What follows is a discussion chapter which describes why contemporary metal controversies can be best comprehended as “trigger moments” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2013, p.4), along with debating why metal reporters write critically about the bands they cover. A conclusion with suggestions for future research closes this study.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW
In this chapter, I will first present a brief history of the formation and popularisation of heavy metal and then will go into a literature review of the values of controversy and transgression.

I start by explaining how the genre began and evolved until the thrash metal movement was formed in the 1980s. My intention here is two-folded. First, as heavy metal became more extreme musically and more graphic thematically over time, it was also much easier for bands to stir up public controversies around their sound and their imagery. As an example, I discuss Slayer and their song “Angel of Death”.

Second, the popularisation of metal was a key factor in order for controversies to arise. A controversy has a public character, meaning that metalheads and the metal press need to react to perceived abnormal attitudes by metal personalities in order for a public debate to be established — a controversy only springs up when a group feels questioned or challenged. Based on further examples, I discuss how academics understand “controversy”.

Subsequently, I demonstrate how “transgression” went from an all-encompassing term employed to define everything metal — the music, the lyrics, the musicians’ onstage performance — to a very precise concept used in
association with extreme forms of heavy metal. At the end of the chapter, I describe how transgression interacts with controversy, making clear why they are essential values of the heavy metal culture.

2.1 What is heavy metal? From its origins in England until its popularisation in the US

Heavy metal originated in the social environment that resulted from the decline of former British industrial cities: Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, and parts of London. The shutting down of coal mines, arms manufacturers, car plants and cotton mills after the Second World War led not only to urban decay but also to thousands of job losses among factory workers. Unemployed and without a future, the blue-collar generation, composed mostly of young white men, was left “broke, with bad luck, nothing to do and ‘nowhere to call’ their own” (Moore 2009, p.151).

Amidst the transition to a service economy, the grim scenario saw the emergence of bands that defined the face and the sound of heavy metal: Black Sabbath (1968, Birmingham), Led Zeppelin (1968, London), Deep Purple (1968, Hertford), Judas Priest (1969, Birmingham), and Iron Maiden (1975, London). This was the 1970s, the decade before Margaret Thatcher took power to implement neo liberal measures in the economy. Ryan Moore (2009) argues that these groups used artistic expression as a means of representing and dealing with the social oppression their generation was going through.

Finding inspiration in Satan and the occult (ie Black Sabbath), or in the Second World War and science fiction (ie Iron Maiden), was a coping mechanism that helped “exploited peoples (...) take power and resist their exploiters” (Moore 2009, p.148). The artwork for Iron Maiden’s debut album, launched in 1980, is representative of the period: on the front cover, the band's mascot, Eddie, is portrayed against the background of a degraded city, whereas on the back sleeve the band members appear in a nondescript urban environment. For
Moore, “the imagery of heavy metal expresses (...) a general sense of confusion about how social power subjugates young people and the working-class” (ibid.).

Musically, the raw surroundings were translated into an aggressive sound, a kind of rock heavier than anything that had come before (Metal Evolution, 2011). Heavy metal’s defining element was “an extremely distorted electric guitar” (Walser 1991, p.68), a powerful noise achieved by the musician’s ability to play power chords on the electric guitar. When executed live, and amplified to loud volumes, the distortion was so powerful that the listener’s body reverberated from the sound. This feature was employed by virtually all metal bands: from early representatives Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin to later acts such as Iron Maiden and Motörhead.

The ten-year arc between the first records of Black Sabbath (“Black Sabbath”, released in 1970), and Iron Maiden (“Iron Maiden”, from 1980), marked an important shift in heavy metal’s sound. Over this period, metal gradually got rid of its influences from blues and psychedelia in favor of a “tough, fast, hard metallic core” (Allmusic, 2017). The more crude version played by Iron Maiden, Diamond Head, Girlschool, Grim Reaper, Motörhead and a renewed Judas Priest was labeled by a rock critic “the New Wave of British Heavy Metal”, or simply NWOBHM (Metal Evolution, 2011). The bands associated with this movement were responsible for the popularisation of heavy metal from the mid-seventies onwards.

In expanding the genre to a broader audience, it is a consensus that Iron Maiden got the leading role. Hailing from England, they first conquered Europe, and then, with the support of a major record company and a charismatic vocalist, crossed the ocean to win America’s fans. Around the mid-eighties, heavy metal had turned into the “dominant genre of American music” (Walser 1991, p.36), with a whole ecosystem around it: specialised magazines, airtime in college radio stations, music festivals and a Grammy category (Weinstein, 2000) for Best Metal Performance.
2.2 The ramification of heavy metal: the visceral subgenre of thrash metal

According to Weinstein (2000, p.45), “the increase in number and variety of heavy metal bands in the early 1980s eventually gave rise to a fragmentation of the genre”. Heavy metal’s newly achieved status of popularity in America influenced fans to form their own bands and experiment with the genre’s limits. New groups from the areas around California and New York — Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth, and Anthrax — founded the subgenre of thrash metal, an extreme form of heavy metal that merged NWOBHM with punk.

This fusion created a very fast music, with instruments being played at breakneck speed: “an increase in tempo” (Weinstein 2000, p.48) was the main difference that set thrash apart from heavy. Songs were straightforward, like a punch in the face: double bass drums, vocalists singing so quickly that the listener could barely understand the lyrics and an absence of melody were the trademarks of the Bay Area sound. Despite this directness, thrash was part of the heavy metal family because it kept the distorted guitar at center stage, besides being musically complex.

In relation to performance and imagery, thrash was also unique. Its musicians kept an attitude of proximity to their fans: band members dressed like their audience, the venues they played in were small, and the stage paraphernalia was simple. As a result, the metal experience was made even more intense, in relation to the grandiosity of an Iron Maiden performance, for example, who had on stage a giant version of their mascot Eddie to the bemusement of the thousands who filled arenas to watch them. If Iron Maiden were in the sky, Slayer and their thrash metal peers were on earth.

Regarding the symbolism, thrash was graphic and dark. Lyrics, band names and record covers revolved around violence, hatred, death, destruction, disorder, human decay, failed governments, chemical and religious wars. Deena Weinstein (2000, p.42) goes so far as to say that chaos was “the centerpiece of thrash metal in the late 1980s”. If heavy metal was fantastic and metaphorical, thrash was real and literal. Consider the lyrics of Slayer’s “Angel
of Death”, released in 1986, which thematises the actions imposed by the Nazi physician Josef Mengele in prisoners on concentration camps:

Auschwitz, the meaning of pain
The way that I want you to die
Slow death, immense decay
Showers that cleanse you of your life
Forced in
Like cattle
You run
Stripped of
Your life’s worth
Human mice, for the angel of death
Four hundred thousand more to die
Angel of death
Monarch to the kingdom of the dead
Sadistic, surgeon of demise
Sadist of the noblest blood
Destroying, without mercy
To benefit the Aryan race

The band was accused of glorifying Nazism with the vivid descriptions of torture in the lyrics, written by guitarist Jeff Hanneman, who denied the accusations by claiming the music was in fact against Hitler and “just a song” (Monsters of Rock, 1986). The album that contained it, “Reign in Blood” (1986), would originally be released by Columbia Records, but the company dropped the band after considering the verses of “Angel of Death”, and the record cover², offensive. “Reign in Blood” finally came out a few months later via Geffen Records (Epstein, 2016).

This song illustrates how the explicit content of thrash metal seemed tailored to foment public debate. “Angel of Death” was one of metal’s first controversies, and entered the canon as a defining song of the genre: it is

² The album’s front sleeve art was “a Hieronymus Bosch–like tableau that featured demons sporting erections and Pope mitres” (Epstein, 2016).
referenced even in present times. In a recent text for Stereogum website about Nazism and extreme metal, Doug Moore (2017) jests that “the logic goes like this: “Metal is supposed to be evil and shocking. What is evil and shocking? Satan, sure. What else? Nazis! Nazis are EVIL. Therefore, Nazis = metal”.

2.3 Controversy in heavy metal theory

This brings us to “controversy” in Metal Studies. The term has been ascribed to heavy metal since the first texts in the field came out, in the early 1990s. Robert Walser (1991, p.46) argues that metal is “at best (…) controversial”, an opinion shared by Deena Weinstein (2000, p.3)\(^5\). For her, “metal music is a controversial subject that stimulates visceral rather than intellectual reactions in both its partisans and its detractors”: it received attacks from the liberal left and from the conservative right, who linked it to disease, drugs, and violence.

In 1990, an advertisement for a special issue of Newsweek magazine read: “Is being a teenager still something to look forward to? Little kids think teenagers are really cool. But how cool is it to come of age in the age of AIDS, crack and heavy metal?” (Weinstein 2000, p.3). Politicians such as the senator Al Gore also accused the genre of thematising “explicit violence and sex and sado-masochism and the rest” (ibid.). Al Gore was the husband of Tipper Gore, the main face of the Parents’ Music Resource Center (PMRC), a conservative institution that targeted heavy metal.

The PMRC was formed by wives of United States senators in the mid-eighties. They aimed to preserve American family values by denouncing the explicit content of metal songs. The group proposed that parents of teenagers should know of lyrics about sex, violence, suicide, the occult, drugs, and alcohol because there was supposedly a link between such music and

---

\(^5\) Deena Weinstein wrote one of the first studies about heavy metal, “Heavy metal: the music and its culture”, originally published in 1991. The edition I am using is a revised version that appeared in 2000.
an “increase in rape, teenage suicide or teen pregnancies” (Chastagner 1999, p.181) in the United States. Tied to conservative religious groups, from whom they received logistical and financial support, the PMRC was successful in their claim that heavy metal was corrupting the nation’s youth.

A witch hunt climate was established against heavy metal artists. Ozzy Osbourne (of Black Sabbath) and his record company were sued over the lyrics of “Suicide Solution” after a nineteen-year-old took his own life allegedly influenced by the song; Rob Halford (of Judas Priest) was brought to court, over accusations of stimulating the suicide of two teenagers (Weinstein, 2000) with the song “Better by You, Better than Me”, which apparently contained the message “do it!” when played backwards. Finally, record companies were convinced to put a warning label on the front cover of metal albums deemed controversial — the sticker read “Parental Advisory / Explicit Content”.

These events prove how the PMRC was able to turn heavy metal into an evil to be defeated. By doing so, the institution elicited a public concern in the “respectable society” (Weinstein 2000, p.38). This public concern can be defined as a “moral panic”.

### 2.4 Controversy as a moral panic

“Moral panic” was defined in 1972 by sociologist Stanley Cohen:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (p.1)
Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) argue that moral panics are generated by events that, in general, are not concrete, in the sense that they cannot be proved. There is no causal evidence between playing a Judas Priest song backwards and a teenage suicide. Rather, it is the public perception of deviance by outsiders that causes “widespread concern, media attention, and public ‘buzz’” (2009, p.ix). As a consequence, outsiders are turned into scapegoats by society and by the press.

A clear example took place in 1999 when metal singer Marilyn Manson was blamed by the press for the Columbine High School shootings. The first stories about the murder of 12 students and one teacher at the school associated Manson with the crime’s perpetrators, students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, even though there was no connection between his music and the attack. A chain reaction followed, with Manson’s name constantly being mentioned in media articles — he was the public face of evil. After the incident, he retreated for some time from public exposure.

However, there are some problems with defining controversy solely in terms of moral panics. Despite being useful for metal scholars in the past, who employed the concept in connection with the PMRC hearings, it does not seem to fit recent metal controversies such as Anselmo’s Nazi gesture and Slayer’s picture. First, because the musicians’ attitudes did not cause widespread concern (at least not as it was in the eighties with Judas Priest or in the nineties with Marilyn Manson), and second because neither Anselmo nor Tom Araya of Slayer were turned into scapegoats for societal issues. These episodes are more adequately seen through the “trigger moments” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2013, p.4) theory.

### 2.5 Controversies as trigger moments

A recent approach adopted by scholars is to see metal controversies as “trigger moments” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2013, p.4). A trigger moment is when a heavy metal band takes a controversial attitude that ends up
bringing public attention to this music genre and its culture. The authors explain that contemporary controversies over metal, “in post-1980s Western culture” (ibid.), are not generated by bands’ artistic material, such as lyrics, record covers and sound, but by external reasons — for instance, Phil Anselmo’s Nazi salute and Slayer’s Trump picture.

A classic example of “trigger moment” occurred in the early 1990s in the black metal scene, a lesser-known variation of heavy metal played by a small group of bands from Oslo, Norway. From 1991 to 1993, some members of this community were involved in a series of crimes “including arson, grave desecration, burglary, assault, rape and murder” (Phillipov 2013, p.156). One specific felony gained international repercussion: the assassination of Euronymous, guitarist of the band Mayhem, by Varg Vikernes, the founding member of Burzum. The episode, followed by Vikernes’ trial, was covered extensively by the music and by the mainstream press, therefore triggering a public discussion about black metal.

Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and LeVine (2013, p.4) observe that a “trigger moment (...) produces a serious cultural dislocation so that the content of various — usually extreme — subgenres becomes a topic of controversy”. Of course, to kill someone or to set a church on fire are crimes, whereas performing a Nazi salute or digitally inserting a politician into a band picture are not. But the point here is not one of scale. The point is that the black metal crimes, as well as Slayer’s picture and Anselmo’s gesture, put a marginal music style and its universe into the public’s eye. This is why my case studies are best viewed through the lens of the “trigger moment” idea.

To make this argument clearer, let’s keep in mind that this was not how public debates over heavy metal were elicited during the years in which the PMRC was active. In the 1980s, it was metal’s polemic content (lyrics and symbolism) the responsible for causing controversies. For example, when Ozzy Osbourne wrote the lyrics of “Suicide Solution” in 1981, he was subsequently “attacked for promoting and encouraging suicide” (Kahn-Harris 2007, p.35); and when Slayer presented a stylised S in their logo in reference to the Nazi organisation Schutzstaffel, the band was accused of supporting Nazism.
The examples pointed out, whether related to external or internal factors, show us that controversies are always connected to “transgressive” (Kahn-Harris 2007, p.29) episodes, situations in which musicians aim to shock — usually by testing the limits of what is acceptable in a society at a certain moment in time.

2.6 Transgression in heavy metal scholarship

Alongside controversy, “transgression” is cited very often by scholars. Indeed, it is almost impossible to talk about heavy music without referring to it. The first studies applied the word rather loosely, seemingly without the effort to define it more precisely. As such, different situations were deemed “transgressive”. It was only later on that the term gained a focused reading — a moment in which it was fully developed into a concept connected with Metal Studies.

Walser (1991) uses transgression as an umbrella term, a “one-size-fits-all” word employed to describe everything metal. For him, the sound produced by heavy metal bands, namely the power chords and the vocal styles, transgresses musical boundaries (p.27, p.34, p.61, p.102, p.108). He also sees thrash metal as “deliberately transgressive, violent, and noisy” (p.41). In a similar fashion, the author considers metal’s imagery transgressive, such as MC5’s and Steppenwolf’s “explicit political critique” (p.35) present in their lyrics, and Yngwie Malmsteen’s song titles (p.119).

Additionally, when writing about the role that the male gender plays in heavy metal, Walser (1991, p.126) sees the performers’ attitudes of “hypermasculinity or androgyny” as “visual enactments of spectacular transgression”, meaning the extravagant on-stage performance is transgressive (p.128, p.133, and pp.146-152). Next, the scholar calls transgressive an episode in which Ozzy Osbourne of Black Sabbath accidentally “bit the head off a live bat” (p.167) onstage.

Lastly, Walser (1991) sees transgression in metal as a coping mechanism, one that helped the North American youth to form bonds and endure a historical moment marked by rising levels of unemployment and wage depre-
The imagery “of horror, madness, and violence” (p.184) presented by the music genre “is intimately related to the fundamental contradictions of its historical moment” (ibid.). Heavy metal “explores the ‘other’, everything that hegemonic society does not want to acknowledge, the dark side of the daylit, enlightened adult world. By doing so it finds distinction in scandalous transgression and appropriates sources of communal empowerment” (ibid.).

The dark ‘other’ that Walser talks about can also be found in Deena Weinsteins’s (2000) utilisation of transgression. She associates it with “chaos” (p.38), a term designating values followed by metal bands but repressed by the society. Transgressive values include disorder, disharmony, “violence”, “anomaly” and “conflict” (ibid.). As a consequence, “those who transgress” (p.41) the accepted social order by adopting these beliefs will receive the punishment of going to hell. However logical, Weinstein’s sense of transgression is still slightly unfocused. A more direct understanding was presented several years later, by Keith Kahn-Harris (2007).

Kahn-Harris (2007) identifies three types of transgression, all linked to the heavy metal subgenres of thrash and black metal. The first is “sonic transgression” (p.30), according to which bands “attempt to explore the radical potential of metal” (ibid.) by taking it to extremes. For example, Slayer’s music velocity, extremely distorted guitars and screamed vocals result in songs that may sound “unmusical” and “unpleasant” (p.31). The second is “discursive transgression” (p.34), meaning that lyrics, song titles and band names explore dark themes such as Nazism, suicide, war, and violence, therefore transgressing “the boundaries of ‘the acceptable’ in art” (p.36). The third is “bodily transgression” (p.43), represented by high consumption levels of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs by band members, as well as acts of violence among scene peers — for instance, the Norwegian black metal crimes.

The literature review makes clear that transgression is usually associated with bands and musicians: they will do something, be it artistic (exploring new territorial sounds) or not (biting a bat, being under the influence of narcotics) that goes beyond the tolerated social norms of a certain moment in
time. There are two consequences to this way of acting. Their attitudes frame heavy metal as an outcast music genre, an artistic sphere constantly concerned with provoking social limits, testing social boundaries. And a public outcry (a controversy) usually follows, sometimes only inside the metal community, sometimes including the mainstream press and society at large.

2.7 How my thesis will contribute to Metal scholarship

While academic literature associates transgression with musicians, controversy is usually tied to the audience and/or the press. The connection of values to their respective publics is not explicit in academic texts, although it happens almost always. In this equation, metal bands are framed as forward-thinking (transgressors), while the mainstream media occupies the place of the conservative, backwards people creating controversies. Thus, the focus is on musicians, on the one hand, and on the legacy press (and reactionary groups such as the PMRC), on the other.

Given the amount of scholarly material about heavy metal, I was surprised to find that little attention has been paid to how the metal press constructs metal values through their texts. Despite their obvious role in doing so, the construction of controversy and transgression in media discourse is a topic that is underrepresented in academic texts.

Deena Weinstein (2000) points out that metal news outlets strengthen the metal culture, helping to form bonds among scene members. Given that heavy metal was barely covered, or was covered negatively by mainstream music magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, segmented titles sprung up and naturally occupied this space. In the 1980s, British magazines *Kerrang!* and *Metal Hammer* would serve as representatives of the metal community.

In the case of metal, the distinction between mass and specialised media illuminates a cultural conflict in which the mass media struggle to dilute
the distinctive and often confrontational style of the genre, and the specialised media tend to fortify the particularity of the subcultural core audience by defending the traditional standards of the genre. (Weinstein 2000, p.146)

Therefore, there is room for research here, and this is a gap my thesis would like to address. By focusing on three of the most relevant websites covering heavy metal — Metal Injection, MetalSucks and Blabbermouth — I intend to analyse how their coverage of Anselmo’s salute and Slayer’s Trump picture add to the theories of heavy metal values.

In the next chapter I will explain my methodology of research, why it fits into Metal scholarship, and the sample I have chosen to apply a critical discourse analysis to.
3 Methodology and Sample
As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a dichotomy in how heavy metal values are presented in the scholarship: musicians are portrayed as the forward-thinking, *avant-garde* transgressors, and the mainstream media plus the general public are the backward thinking, conservative groups who start a controversy. However, there is little academic material debating the metal press’ stake in constructing controversy and transgression. The gravitational center of Metal Studies has usually floated around the bands, leaving the metal press overlooked.

But the heavy metal culture is only kept alive as long as its three constituent parts — musicians, audience and press — are functioning. Weinstein (2000, p.8) explains that “artists create and perform the music, audiences appreciate the music and make it the basis of a youth subculture, and mediators bring artists and audience together”. For Hélène Laurin (2013, p.56), the rock press valorises heavy metal whenever it reports on a “sense of rebellion” of bands and musicians. Journalists create a discourse around heavy metal, using language to build up the identity of a “culture shaped for and by outcasts” (ibid.).

In this regard, my thesis adopts a functionalist approach to language (Richardson, 2006), meaning it is employed “not just to say things, but also to do things” (Gee 2014, p.1). The language used by journalists in their stories helps to discursively constitute heavy metal culture more broadly, as well as to construct the values attached to this culture, specifically. Understanding discourse
as a means to an end is one of the reasons to choose critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a suitable method to analyse my sample of metal media stories.

I will now move on to an in-depth discussion of other reasons why CDA fits my research. Subsequently, I will introduce my sample.

3.1 Going in depth into CDA: why it fits the study of heavy metal

Critical discourse analysis is a method “interested and motivated by pressing social issues” (van Dijk 1993, p.252). One can argue that social issues have historically been a concern for heavy metal bands. It was the demise of a post-industrial Britain in the late 1960s that motivated the origin of the genre among blue-collar workers left unemployed. Later on, thrash, “perhaps the most overtly ‘political’ variant of metal” (Brown 2014, p.735), was equally concerned with societal matters: its main representatives would not only mention Nazi concentration camps in songs such as Slayer’s “Angel of Death”, but would also thematise the Cold War of the 1980s in records such as Megadeth’s “Rust in Peace” (1990). Finally, in the 1990s racism would be a topic for Phil Anselmo in some of Pantera’s songs, a subject he would extend well into the 2000s.

As far as metal news media is concerned, one can say that it bears a less straightforward, more indirect relationship with relevant social issues. The metal press do not enter societal debates directly because it’s not their primary scope. Instead, they will use heavy metal to do so. For example, Metal Injection, MetalSucks and Blabbermouth would not feature an article on the rights of homosexuals because it doesn’t fit their editorial focus, but they will critically deal with this issue in their stories when Tom Araya of Slayer makes a homophobic comment in the band’s social networks. In a similar fashion, journalists who cover metal will debate racism if stimulated by a Nazi gesture from one of their idols. Therefore, given that social issues of relevance are present in metal websites’ texts, it is possible to analyse such stories via critical discourse analysis.
Norman Fairclough (1995, p.62) explains that a discursive event — a media story, for example — takes place within a cultural surrounding. It is part of “its more immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within, or the yet wider frame of the society and the culture”. To put it another way: a journalistic story is a product of its *milieu*, while also influencing it. This means that CDA is interested in analysing language (word, sentence or paragraph) not only at its grammar level but in its connections with the social context in which it was produced.

CDA requires circumstantial and background information related to the sample that is under scrutiny: it is an “interpretative and explanatory” (Richardson 2006, p.27) method. As a discourse analyst, Gee (2014, p.25) says, the researcher needs to make inferences about what is not explicitly shown in the data, and “reconstruct the context” as far as possible. In my study, this translates as: 1) explain media texts concerning the heavy metal context in which they were created; 2) explain how metal media stories are textually constituting heavy metal and its values. By doing so, it should be possible to answer my research questions.

### 3.2 The sample and the rationale behind it

Six media stories constitute the sample: three about Anselmo’s gesture, and three about Slayer’s Instagram post. The pieces were published in three of the most relevant websites catering to the metal community: *Metal Injection*, *MetalSucks* and *Blabbermouth*. Analysing three texts per episode will allow me to identify possible similar discursive patterns in the coverage.

To achieve the final sample, I first conducted a research on Google and Reddit forums to find online metal news media. The comprehensive list of outlets consulted was: *Blabbermouth, Decibel Magazine, The Gauntlet, Kerrang!, Loudwire, Metal Hammer, Metal Injection, Metal Underground.com, MetalSucks*,

---

4 An online forum with several topics about heavy metal culture.

www.reddit.com
Noisey, Theprp.com, Terrorizer and Revolver. Some of them are online only outlets; others are online versions of print magazines.

The second step was to narrow down and choose the most relevant metal news media. My criteria included: 1) editorial standards (news values such as timely information, accuracy, relevance, context, well-written texts and organisation of the website as a whole); 2) the resonance of news outlets within metalheads (if fans are actively engaging in conversations in the comments section under all or almost all stories published); and 3) how extensive was the coverage of both incidents. Considering these factors, I ended up with four candidates, all of which met the requirements: Metal Injection, MetalSucks, Blabbermouth, and Theprp.com.

Metal Injection is very prominent in the scene: it has been covering heavy metal since 2004, making it one of the more traditional of the metal news outlets. Additionally, its fan page on Facebook reaches more than 1 million users, and its Twitter account has 180 thousand followers. The same influence can be said of MetalSucks. Publishing information on all subjects related to heavy music, MetalSucks was founded in 2006 and reaches 86 thousand followers on Twitter. Both are based in New York and publish relatively similar stories. The difference between them is that MetalSucks is known for its opinionated pieces, while Metal Injection is more objective and neutral.

Almost all content published by Metal Injection and MetalSucks is original. This is one difference between these two outlets and Blabbermouth, which more often than not functions as a channel to republish press releases and news stories previously reported elsewhere. For instance, Blabbermouth’s stories do not have a byline. However, it is probably the most followed source for heavy metal news in the United States: not only referred to by metalheads on Reddit, but also liked by 700 thousand followers on Facebook and 194 thousand people on Twitter. Its content may not be original, but it surely is reliable and complete: sources are checked and credited, and they publish an average of 20 stories a day. Blabbermouth is based in California, the birthplace of thrash metal and the same region where Slayer is from.
I left *Theprp.com* out of the sample because their stories are usually very small, meaning there’s no development of ideas in the texts. For example, the first reports on Anselmo’s and Slayer’s episodes have only two paragraphs each, reading more like quick updates than full media stories with a narrative arc. In addition to that, *Theprp.com* did not dedicate much editorial coverage to the controversies I am looking at.

### 3.2.1 Final sample of media stories

**PHIL ANSELMO’S NAZI SALUTE**


“Editorial: The Metal Community Must Stop Letting Phil Anselmo Off the Hook for His Racist Remarks”, published in *MetalSucks* on January 28, 2016


**SLAYER’S TRUMP PICTURE**


“Tom Araya Thinks There was a Conspiracy to Delete a Photo of Slayer with Donald Trump”, published in *MetalSucks* on January 25, 2017

“SLAYER Explains Disappearing TRUMP Photo: We Have Never Endorsed Any Political Party Or Any Candidate”, published in *Blabbermouth* on January 25, 2017
ANALYSIS — METAL PRESS STORIES
In this chapter, I analyse metal press’ coverage about Anselmo’s gesture and Slayer’s Instagram post. There are two objectives here. The first is to understand how both events were covered in *Metal Injection, MetalSucks* and *Blabbermouth*, and whether these news outlets portrayed the facts as isolated episodes or as somehow connected. The other goal is to check whether the metal media constructs the incidents as controversial or transgressive, and, if so, how this is manifest in their texts.

I begin by analysing Anselmo’s episode, then move on to Slayer’s. The stories are reproduced in the Appendix, with the paragraphs numbered in red. All the highlights in the excerpts below are mine, and I kept the excerpts exactly as they were published.

### 4.1 Phil Anselmo’s gesture

#### 4.1.1 METAL INJECTION

*Metal Injection* mixes factual reporting with editorial in the coverage of Anselmo’s salute. The journalist Robert Pasbani describes what happened, embeds the video of the incident and reproduces Anselmo’s statement about it. All the elements of a regular news story are present — who, what, where, when,
why and how. However, the text is written in the first person and contains the reporter’s personal opinion about Anselmo. As a result, it does not read as formal and detached as a traditional media story. It strikes a more conversational tone with the reader.

The conversational tone ends up creating a relationship of confidence, of proximity between author and audience (Fairclough, 1995). For example, the first paragraph, reproduced below, seems addressed to a public who knows what’s being talked about: there’s no explanation of what is “Dimebash”, or who/what the expression “later of course” refers to. Dimebash is a music festival, and “later of course” refers to former Pantera guitarist Dimebag Darrel5, honoured by the Dimebash concerts6. Moreover, the idiom “stuff of legend” also presupposes that the reader is acquainted with the canonical status of the bands cited (Foo Fighters, Pantera, Metallica and Slayer) in the heavy metal world.

The Dimebash this past weekend was the stuff of legend. Never again will there be a moment where a members of Foo Fighters, Pantera, Metallica and Slayer all shared the stage to pay tribute to Motorhead, and later of course, Dimebag.

Such informal way of writing has two functions. First, it gives credibility to the text because Pasbani puts himself in the same position of his readers: he is a metalhead. “Achieving authenticity is also partly a matter of positioning the viewer through presupposition as someone who is already familiar with the culture and community depicted”, explains Fairclough (1995, p.107). Second, the reporter assumes the existence of a public with his text. In this example,

---

5 Dimebag Darrel was shot on stage in 2004, while performing with Damageplan, the band he played in after Pantera was dissolved. He died on the scene.

6 In this specific edition of the Dimebash event, the thrash metal band Motörhead was also honoured due to the passing of their vocalist just one month before the festival, in December 2015.
metal fans exist “by virtue of being addressed” (Warner 2002, p.413) by the journalist’s discourse. A public is not only concrete — a gathering of people to watch a heavy metal concert in a specific place — but also imagined, an audience that “comes into being (...) in relation to texts and their circulation” (ibid.).

*Metal Injection’s* story portrays Anselmo’s gesture in a negative way, not unlike a spoiled child who wrecks a party for grownups. In paragraph 2, the writer states that Anselmo “may have ruined” the Dimebash night. The adverb “ruined” was probably taken from another source: the attendee who uploaded on YouTube the video where Anselmo is seen throwing the right arm gesture. Proof of this is that the attendee’s comment is reproduced in its entirety in the story. The excerpt below shows both Pasbani’s paragraph as well as the attendee’s comment. Please read with attention, as I will refer back to this excerpt later on.

The coverage after was, of course, very positive and very warm for all parties involved. But there is one moment at the very end of the night that **may have ruined** this good will. An attendee at the event uploaded a short video showing Phil Anselmo being pulled off stage by drummer Johnny Kelly, but not before he had a chance to give the Nazi salute, a “Sieg Heil” and shout “White Power” at the top of his lungs. The user who uploaded the video had this to say:

“At the end of the performance of ‘Walk’ at Dimebash 2016 and Lucky Strike Live in Hollywood CA Phil Anselmo decided to end the night with a sieg heil and scream white power to the crowd. I originally cut this from my first post of ‘Walk’ but I feel people deserve to see this! A very sad moment and to me **ruined** the night! This is not what Pantera is about!!! Absolutely uncalled for and I can see why Vinny Paul wants nothing to do with this man. Phil Anselmo you are a Racist prick!”

In this excerpt, Anselmo is described as a mean intentioned individual who destroyed an act of charity — the Dimebash event is labelled a “good will” — as well as someone who harmed the bond among metal community mem-
bers. This camaraderie made metalheads reunite to pay tribute to a dead man (Dimebag). Notice too how “of course” also echoes the feeling of friendship, when Pasbani describes that the “coverage after was, of course, very positive and very warm for all parties involved”. It couldn’t have been different, but it was because a figure suddenly comes in from the outside and wrecks everything with “a ‘Sieg Heil’”.

Besides an unfavourable image, the identity set up (Fairclough, 1995) for Anselmo by the reporter is transgressive. For instance, in paragraph 7, we are first told that his behaviour was “inappropriate”. Like a deluded fan, Pasbani wonders “why, if Anselmo was joking, that he couldn’t just apologize for something as inappropriate as this”. After that, the writer characterises the Nazi gesture as something that “certainly crossed a line”. Such expression constructs Anselmo’s reputation as a transgressive figure in a very clear way: to allude overtly to Adolf Hitler’s political regime is a social boundary that supposedly should not be crossed. See below:

It’s hard to understand why, if Anselmo was joking, that he couldn’t just apologize for something as inappropriate as this. It can be pointed out that members of his solo band are of Mexican and Iranian descent, and that the dude was really drunk here. Sure, Anselmo is known for having a “quirky” sense of humor, but this certainly crossed a line. What’s the joke here? It ultimately contradicts statements he made a few months ago, when asked about the confederate flag:

The text moves on to present one more situation in which Anselmo had a controversial attitude. In the last paragraph, a hyperlink takes the reader to footage on YouTube from a Pantera concert in 1995 where one sees the singer giving a racist speech. “If you walk around with a fucking t-shirt on where it says white pride, you would be racist”, he says in the video. “Tonight is a white thing”, he continues, as he is met with cheers from the crowd. Back to the article we are analysing, there’s another hyperlink, this time to an editorial in MetalSucks about
Anselmo’s racist behaviour over time, and how the present Nazi salute may be only the most recent in a series of similar episodes. See the excerpt below:

It’s made even worse by the fact that rumors of Anselmo being racist go back to the early 90s, where bootleg footage of him on stage talking about “white pride” surfaced. MetalSucks has a great editorial on his history of saying things that are clearly racist.

What strikes me here is that the reporter stops short of a discussion about the singer’s past attitudes, and how they may be related to the Nazi gesture. As Fairclough (1995, p.106) explains, absences in a media text are “things which might have been ‘there’, but aren’t”. This speaks of Metal Injection’s story in comparison to other media texts relating to the same episode, such as MetalSucks’, which is centred exactly around Anselmo’s past attitudes and how they are reflected in the present. I would argue that the absence of discussion in Pasbani’s story is due to the reporter’s difficulty in fully acknowledging Anselmo’s responsibility to his attitude. It is not that Pasbani does not input agency to Anselmo, but that such agency is relativized in several occasions throughout the text.

To illustrate what I am saying, let’s go back to the “may have ruined” expression. Notice how the modal “may” acts to diminish the strength of the adverb “ruined”. It’s not that Anselmo did ruin, it’s that he may have done so. The difficulty expressed by the reporter in fully recognising Anselmo’s accountability is made even clearer when reading the comment of the attendee who posted the video on YouTube. The attendee expresses no doubts in his judgement, characterising the Nazi gesture as “a very sad moment and to me ruined the night!”, before ending with the offensive “Phil Anselmo you are a Racist prick!” Keep in mind that this comment was fully reproduced in Metal Injection’s story so that the reader can clearly compare and contrast.

Moreover, Pasbani uses other elements to paint a more favourable picture of Anselmo. In the same paragraph where he is characterised as “inap-
propriate”, the writer explains that “members of his solo band are of Mexican and Iranian descent, and that the dude was really drunk”, before adding that the singer “is known for having a ‘quirky’ sense of humour”. Look at how this adjective comes in quotation marks in the story, which may indicate that the word is being employed as an euphemism to downplay the seriousness of Anselmo’s gesture — who, after all, has non-white members in his band. Perhaps this multiculturalism is an indication that the white power shout was indeed just a joke caused by drinking too much? I am repeating the excerpt below, with these parts highlighted:

It’s hard to understand why, if Anselmo was joking, that he couldn’t just apologize for something as inappropriate as this. It can be pointed out that members of his solo band are of Mexican and Iranian descent, and that the dude was really drunk here. Sure, Anselmo is known for having a “quirky” sense of humor, but this certainly crossed a line. What’s the joke here? It ultimately contradicts statements he made a few months ago, when asked about the confederate flag:

Finally, the same adjective, “quirky”, comes back at the end of the story. Here, the reporter’s discourse borders a state of denial with regards to Anselmo’s gesture: the journalist knows better because he met Anselmo personally and he doesn’t “think Anselmo is truly racist”. Anselmo may even be “gentle”. But in sequence Pasbani concedes, by recognising that Anselmo’s attitudes over time add up to his dubious reputation:

Ultimately, I don’t think Anselmo is truly racist, having met him, he seems like a kind, gentle, quirky person. But he’s making it very difficult with his actions and later his words for people to grasp that.

To sum up, one gets the impression that Anselmo was almost excused by Metal Injection’s coverage. The text indeed laments the Nazi salute while providing
the reader with a big picture of the singer’s controversial attitudes. But con-
versely, the reporter also makes use of language to minimise the seriousness
of Anselmo's gesture.

4.1.2 METALSUCKS
MetalSucks coverage about Anselmo’s gesture is the most critical text of my
sample related to this episode. It is an editorial and, as expected of this type
of genre, it is very opinionated. It is also the longest, amounting to 19 para-
graphs. The author, Axl Rosenberg, builds two parallel narratives throughout
the story, and both end up meeting at the conclusion. Because of this internal
structure of the text, the reader is fully convinced by the journalist’s solid
argumentation against Phil Anselmo. He is not shown as a transgressive per-
sonality — only as a bigot towards minorities. I will now explain how this
appears in the text.

The first story being told is the development of Anselmo’s racism over
time. The editorial brings a retrospective of other occasions in which the
musician acted in prejudicial ways against black people and Jews, starting in
the mid-1990s and ending with the Nazi salute. The second narrative is a “call
to arms” directed at the metal community: the reporter urges metalheads not
to turn their heads away and to question the intolerant acts of one of their
idols. The point made is that Anselmo’s status as a respected musician who’s
released acclaimed records should not stop fans of thinking critically while
enjoying his art. The headline, reproduced below, summarizes clearly the two
motives of the text:

Editorial: The Metal Community Must Stop Letting Phil Anselmo Off the
Hook for His Racist Remarks

The fact that the text is an editorial paves the way for the reporter to openly
express his goals from the start. We can clearly see how the journalist is using
language to do something, not just to convey a message (Gee, 2014). The head-
line brings the modal “must”, to denote an obligation — “must stop letting Phil Anselmo Off the Hook” -, a sense of duty that will be echoed in the first sentence of the article. It is a short phrase, stating incisively “It’s time for us all to stop taking it easy on Phil Anselmo”. Notice how the reporter refers to metalheads by “us all”, which means that he is including himself in the group as well as using a friendly tone to speak to his comrades. At the same time, the imperative demands action with a vigorous voice — “stop taking it easy”.

In sequence, the story explains the Nazi salute: it briefly describes what it was, embeds the video footage showing it, and reproduces Anselmo’s response. But this structure — text + video + response — functions less like an objective description of what happened, less like a journalistic lead, and more like a choice of elements to enable the reporter to kick off his argumentation against Phil Anselmo. For Norman Fairclough (1995), a media text also speaks through its organisational structure: the elements selected to be featured will be ordered in a specific way with the intention to produce a certain meaning. The scholar argues that “one striking feature of news discourse is the way in which it weaves together representations of the speech and writing of complex ranges of voices into a web which imposes order and interpretation upon them” (p.77).

With this in mind, please read the following excerpt from the MetalSucks editorial. It is Anselmo’s response to the incident, fully reproduced in the editorial, followed by a comment by the reporter:

“Ok folks, I’ll own this one, but dammit, I was joking, and the ‘inside joke of the night’ was because we were drinking fucking white wine, hahaha... Of all fucking things. Some of y’all need to thicken up your skin. There’s plenty of fuckers to pick on with a more realistic agenda. I fucking love everyone, I fucking loathe everyone, and that’s that. No apologies from me. PHA ’16”
Okay. So Anselmo was joking! He’s not a racist! Hell, he said “These days, I wouldn’t want anything to fucking do with” the Confederate flag less than a year ago! So it’s all good... right?
It is easy to perceive the satire — “So Anselmo was joking!”; “He’s not a racist!” — and the pointing out of an apparent contradiction in what the musician said with regards to the Confederate flag. Thus, if Anselmo denies any relation with the flag and the Nazi salute was a joke caused by the consumption of white wine, the journalist concludes satirically: “So it’s all good... right?”. Notice how the story reproduces Anselmo’s statement as one of the first elements in the page so the reporter can construe his argumentation against the musician from this starting point. The journalist will then put in perspective Anselmo’s words, making sense of the Nazi salute episode in the following paragraphs. This is the “web that imposes order and interpretation” explained by Fairclough (1995, p.77).

Satire is just one of the tools Rosenberg employs to convince the reader that Anselmo had an “envious and juvenile” (paragraph 8) behaviour. The reporter also uses idioms and powerful metaphors. In the excerpt below, from paragraph 16, pay attention to the “kidding around” expression, as well as to the phrase “this issue has repeatedly reared its ugly head throughout the course of his career”:

There’s absolutely no evidence to suggest that Anselmo is just kidding around; if anything, the fact that this issue has repeatedly reared its ugly head throughout the course of his career suggests that not only does he believe what he says, but he believes it so strongly that he can’t help but let it out, even when he knows it makes him look bad. That’s why he can condemn the Confederate flag and then six months later give the Nazi salute; he knows he’s supposed to condemn the Confederate flag, but his

---

7 Anselmo has been questioned a few times about the Confederate flag — considered by many as a symbol of white supremacy in southern states of America — because his former band, Pantera, used the flag’s image in merchandise during the 1990s. Pantera’s deceased guitarist, Dimebag Darrel, also sported his musical instrument with an imprint of the flag.
8 The words in italic are italicised in the original.
feelings about various minorities burn like a scalding hot piece of coal in his hand, and he simply must drop it.

Note how Anselmo’s racism is compared to a monster who appears from time to time — “reared its ugly head throughout the course of his career”. In addition to that, note also how Anselmo’s lack of control in hiding his real opinions is “a scalding hot piece of coal in his hand, and he simply must drop it”. In other words, the journalist is telling us that Anselmo is who he is — a racist.

The text uses yet another technique to make the racism argument stronger. Rosenberg finds pieces of evidence in lyrics written by Anselmo as if to prove that, in addition to his racist views personally, the musician also makes prejudicial remarks in his artistic outputs. Paragraph 9 brings a line from a Superjoint Ritual’s9 song, “Stealing a Page or Two from Armed and Radical Pagans”, and embeds the link to a YouTube video for the reader to listen to it. The song was composed in 2003 and contains the following lines: “no more of the coward Muh. ammad” and “taking no pity on the Jewish elitists”. Additionally, paragraph 15 reproduces the verse “you used complexion of my skin for a counter-racist tool”, from a Pantera’s song released in 1994.

The picture is then complete: the reporter highlights the singer’s attitudes as a person as well as a musician. In this regard, MetalSucks in no way constructs Anselmo’s Nazi gesture as transgressive and/or controversial. He didn’t “cross a line”, as Metal Injection had argued. The words used by MetalSucks are clearer: “So the bad news is: yes, Phil Anselmo probably is a racist.” (paragraph 17), and “(...) there’s really nothing defensible about his actions” (paragraph 19).

****

Parallel to painting a negative picture of Anselmo, the reporter’s discourse is also “trying to accomplish” (Gee 2014, p.23) one more objective: asking metal-

---

9 Superjoint Ritual is Phil Anselmo’s current main band.
heads to think about how they behave in response to their idols’ attitudes. The story does not shy away from inputting responsibility to the community: “why does the metal community continue to let behavior like this slide?” (paragraph 11). The answer is less than flattering: “The simple answer is: we’re cowards.” (paragraph 12). In the excerpt reproduced below, pay attention in why metalheads are called “cowards”:

We’re fans of Pantera and Down and, yes, Superjoint Ritual, and we don’t want to have to face the conundrum of whether or not it’s okay to admire someone for his talent while loathing his personal politics. We don’t seem to mind facing that issue when we’re dealing with Varg Vikernes or Dave Mustaine, but somehow, Anselmo has achieved untouchable status. I’m not entirely sure why, but I suspect it has something to do with the fact that Pantera rose to prominence at a time when metal was being pushed back underground as a result of grunge becoming popular: Metallica had released Load and become “Alternica,” Anthrax had transitioned from a thrash band to a rock band, Megadeth awkwardly chased commercial glory, and mainstream outlets like MTV and *Rolling Stone* gave zero shits about bands that were continuing to do interesting, undeniably metal work (e.g., Morbid Angel, At the Gates, etc.). Pantera achieved a level of success whereby they were, for all intents and purposes, the public face of metal — “real” metal — for the better part of a decade. And Dimebag’s tragic death only further solidified their legend (…)

So we look the other way. We remind ourselves of all the times when we’ve made bigoted or racist jokes behind closed doors, and we convince ourselves that it’s no big deal, not worth calling attention to. Anselmo says he’s only joking and we choose to believe him because we want to believe him, because we want to be able to rock out to “5 Minutes Alone”

---

10 The words in italic are italicised in the original.
without considering the meaning of the lyric “you used complexion of my skin for a counter-racist tool.”

The whole point is that Pantera’s importance to heavy metal afforded Anselmo a sort of shield against criticism, however the same does not apply to other metal icons notorious for supporting white supremacist values. Varg Vikernes, from the black metal band Burzum, and Dave Mustaine, from thrash metal band Megadeth, have made racist declarations in the past and indeed have been publicly questioned about it.

Out of the three stories of my sample related to the Nazi gesture, MetalSucks’ editorial is the only one which brings a social critique. It represents the world as an unequal place, where privileged people such as the white and famous Anselmo are let “off the hook” by a complacent community. Showing how inequality works in the heavy metal world is explicit in the reporter’s discourse — it “is ‘there’ in the text”, as Fairclough (1995, p.106) would say. It stands out as a bold choice on the part of MetalSucks, especially when compared to the other pieces I am analysing. For instance, the detailed discussion of Anselmo’s racism brought forth by MetalSucks was not proposed by Metal Injection.

**4.1.3 BLABBERMOUTH**

The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone. (...) According to the objectivity norm, the journalist’s job consists of reporting something called ‘news’ without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way. (Schudson 2001, p.150)

I’d like to introduce Blabbermouth’s story on the Nazi salute with this brief explanation provided by journalism scholar Michael Schudson because this specific story is the most objective and detached of my sample. To begin with, let’s have a closer look at the first paragraph, reproduced below:
Former PANTERA frontman Philip Anselmo has denied being racist after a new video surfaced of him giving the right-arm salute and yelling a white-supremacist slogan at a California concert.

Formally speaking, it is a classic journalistic lead (who, what, when, where and why), and overall the premise of neutrality will guide Blabbermouth’s text from the headline to the last sentence. At face value, the text is a factual news piece. For instance, the reporter is very careful with the word choice: the article does not categorically affirm that the musician performed the Nazi salute and was racist. Instead, the author employs generic expressions that almost shy away of saying exactly what Anselmo did, such as “the right-arm salute” (in the paragraph above). I am highlighting two more examples in the excerpt below: the expressions “what appeared to be” and “that have been perceived as racist”.

Anselmo took part in last Friday’s (January 22) Dimebash event at Lucky Strike Live in Hollywood and ended the show by giving what appeared to be a Nazi salute and screaming the words “white power” to the crowd. This is not the first time Anselmo has made comments from the stage that have been perceived as racist. At a March 1995 PANTERA concert at Montreal’s Verdun Auditorium (…)

Supposedly impartial, such position may serve the purpose of freeing the author of the responsibility in holding Anselmo accountable, in making a moral judgement about his attitude. But, on the other hand, I would argue that the non-partisan approach has a surprising effect: it ends up portraying Anselmo as a racist figure. This happens due to a number of quotes attributed to him throughout the text: out of eleven paragraphs, 4 reproduce Anselmo’s words. The result of dedicating all this editorial space to Anselmo is that the text speaks through his words, and the reader can have a glimpse of who he is. As an example, please read the excerpt below, from paragraph 10:
In an August 2003 interview, Anselmo scoffed at the perception that he is racist. He said: “I’m anything fucking but. I know there’s shitty people and beautiful people on both sides of the spectrum — black and white. And I know for an absolute fucking fact there’s good Middle Eastern people who live here. And I know there’s good Oriental people.”

Fairclough (1995, p.4) explains that any media text is the result of a set of choices: “what to include and what to exclude, and what to ‘foreground’ and what to background”. In Blabbermouth’s case, Anselmo’s representation is upfront: his points of view are quoted several times throughout the story. This direct representation could be thought of as a way of being fair, of giving the source the right to speak, but here they are in favour of inputting agency to Anselmo — he makes himself look like a bigot. To see how this works, please read the following excerpt:

At a March 1995 PANTERA concert at Montreal’s Verdun Auditorium, Anselmo babbled forth in a stream-of-consciousness rant, uttering statements that included “rap music advocates the killing of white people.” The Montreal Gazette reported on the incident, causing an international flurry and resulting in Anselmo releasing an open apology, stating: “I must take responsibility for the harmful words that may have racially offended our audience. First, to the black girl who has seen PANTERA six times, thank you for telling me how upset you were at me; it made a difference and I was very sincere with my apology. Second, I’d once again like to apologize to the security guards at the show. They were classy and professional, and came to talk to me after the show when they really didn’t need to at all. They opened my eyes. And yes, they were black men. I have much respect for them. I extend my apologies and a thank you to them.”

Judging by all Anselmo’s statements that the story presents to the reader, it seems to me that his opinions do come across as prejudicial. When watching
the full Montreal speech on Youtube, we can see that he also said: “If you walk around with a fucking t-shirt on where it says white pride, you would be racist”. He then completes: “Tonight is a white thing”. It is worth mentioning that this speech was apparently a decisive moment in his career because it was referenced to by the three stories of my sample related to the Nazi salute.

To conclude the analysis, I would like to focus on the picture reproduced by Blabbermouth’s article. When we look at the story online, one of the first elements we see is a photograph of Anselmo with his right arm stretched, taken from the video of the incident posted on YouTube. The image is placed after the headline, but before the beginning of the text. It seems that it is there as a way to complement Anselmo’s words reproduced in the story: the reader has a visual information of his attitude from the start, and the confirmation comes with the musician’s statements a few sentences in.

Writing about the role of photographs in the press, Roland Barthes (1977, p.16) argued that the interpretation of a picture is given by the media story in which it is embedded:

(...) the structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text — title, caption or article — accompanying every press photograph. The totality of the information is thus carried by two different structures (one of which is linguistic).

This seems to be the case here because Blabbermouth’s story is built upon explaining the shot to the reader.

4.2 Slayer’s Instagram post
I now turn to Slayer’s Instagram post.

Let’s recap briefly the episode. On the Inauguration Day of Donald Trump as president of the United States, the 20th of January 2017, Slayer posted on their Instagram feed a picture showing the band members side by
side with the elected candidate. It was not a real picture — Trump was digitally inserted into the image. The post was then deleted and re-uploaded a few days later. The caption explained this fact, and called “snowflakes” the band’s fans who did not approve Trump’s presidency. Additionally, the vocalist Tom Araya entered into an argument with a gay fan in the comments section of the post: the musician called the fan a “fruit”.

Before continuing, please have a look again at the picture and its caption, reproduced in the Introduction of this thesis.

4.2.1 METAL INJECTION

The Metal Injection story was written by the same journalist who reported on Anselmo, Robert Pasbani. Probably because of this, the tone of the writing is as informal as Anselmo’s piece, almost as if the reporter was having a conversation with the audience. It is a fairly short article in which the author does not position himself as an authority, as someone who knows better, but rather as an angry fan deceived by his icon’s attitude. Overall, Tom Araya is represented as a ridiculous figure for having posted the image with Donald Trump on the band’s Instagram. But Araya is also depicted as discordant, in the sense of being at odds with the rest of the band — and this is how his image as transgressive is discursively constructed.

I would like to start by describing the ironic point of view held by the author in his writing. To comprehend why he employs it and how it works to make fun of Araya, please first read the excerpt below:

Anyway, Tom Araya posted a poorly Photoshopped photo of Slayer “hanging out” with Donald Trump (which you can see above) to Slayer’s official Instagram. Then, according to Tom, the photo mysteriously disappeared and he wants answers.

As we know, Tom Araya posted a picture of Slayer with Donald Trump on the band’s Instagram on Inauguration Day. The image was subsequently deleted
by someone, but we don’t know who. A few days later, on January the 24th, Tom Araya re-uploaded the picture, adding a caption explaining that the image had previously been deleted and that he wanted to know why. Now let’s get back to the text we are analysing, to see the author’s irony in action. Pay attention to the expression “overarching conspiracy”, below:

Also, did Tom take a moment to consider that instead of some overarching conspiracy, the person who deleted the photo could’ve been somebody from the Slayer camp themselves? I’m guessing Tom isn’t the only one with access to the Instagram account.

This tone is employed by the writer to make fun of Araya because the musician appeared to be bewildered by the image’s disappearance from the Instagram feed. When Araya posted it again, he wondered in the caption: “... woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post ... can someone please explain why...?” The journalist also mocks Tom Araya’s poor English: “Tom really likes ellipses, when a simple period would do just fine. But grammar aside (...),” the reporter says in paragraph 4. Why is the reporter using this tone? I would argue that his objective is to make evident to the reader how daring Araya’s attitude of publishing the picture — and then re-uploading it — was.

The journalist’s reasoning becomes stronger with the use of another discourse technique in the text: sentences in the active voice. Norman Fairclough (1995) explains that using the active voice is a way of showing who the actor of certain action was — there is no eliciting of responsibility, as in passive voice sentences. In other words, Tom Araya had a “causal relationship” (Faircough 1995, p.110) to what happened. For example, look at the verbs “to want” and “to insult” in the story’s headline:

Tom Araya Wants ‘Snowflake’ SLAYER Fans to Respect The President, Insults Gay Fan
However, showing contempt does not prevent the reporter from constructing Araya’s identity as a transgressor in parallel. The journalist does so in three different ways. First, by allocating the blame for the polemic image solely on Tom Araya, not the whole band. The reader is informed that Araya’s crime was to upload a post “that could be seen as divisive up on their page” (paragraph 6). The Trump picture and its caption could cost the band some fans, who might have felt harmed by their content. Read the excerpt below:

I can imagine Kerry, or perhaps somebody from the band’s management thinking it would be best not to have a post that could be seen as divisive up on their page to alienate a portion of the fan base.

Second, the story mentions past disagreements between Araya and the guitarist Kerry King (Kerry, in the excerpt above). They not only had divergent opinions about Donald Trump, but they also got into a quarrel generated by internal struggles within the band. Such differences underlined by the reporter are not directly related to the Instagram post episode, but the text brings them up as if they are proof of a transgressive behaviour in Araya’s personality over the years. Therefore, Araya’s current attitudes should not come as a surprise. To illustrate what I am saying, please read the excerpt below:

It was only last summer when Slayer guitarist Kerry King called Trump “a sideshow,” adding “He’s the biggest liar I’ve ever seen in politics,” he says with a laugh. “I mean, most of them are liars, but he just outright in-your-face lies.” To be fair, the two Slayer icons have disagreed in the past, with Araya even questioning his future in Slayer. Or maybe we’re just reading too much into this.

Finally, the story sets up a transgressive identity to Tom Araya by saying that he “made a terribly insensitive gay joke” (paragraph 8) when talking to a gay fan in the comments of the Instagram post. It was transgressive because Araya crossed a border he should not have. The story then reproduces the
comments of the Instagram post. In these comments, the user @slayerband-official — supposedly Tom Araya posting with the band’s account — made the following remark: “Mike pence turning fruits into vegetables 😂😂” 11.

Tom Araya was obviously not talking about food. “Fruits” refer to homosexuals in a disrespectful tone, and turning them “into vegetables” is an allusion to vice-president Mike Pence’s alleged support of anti-gay treatment — ’conversion therapy’ — “the practice of trying to change someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity” (Stack, 2016). The journalist responds to this once again with sarcasm, mixing his voice with Araya’s. Read below:

Don’t worry though, Araya didn’t mean any of it. He was just doing all of this to piss you off. Araya later commented: “thanks ... to everybody that has commented thanks for insight... this is how fake news gets started, not once did I say that I supported trump... and assuming I speak for the band you are mistaking .. the picture did exactly what I thought it would do... piss some of you off.”

To sum up, Metal Injection portrays Tom Araya as having offensive attitudes towards the bands’ fans, first by posting the picture with Trump and then by calling a gay fan “fruit”. Given the fact that Tom Araya is seen as isolated from the rest of the band, he also receives the attribute of being “divisive”, and here lies the discursive construction of a heavy metal value. This word, used in paragraph 6, alludes to a supposed margin, a limit that should not be crossed: in this case, annoying the bands’ fans with contentious posts on social networks.

4.2.2 METALSUCKS

MetalSucks covered Slayers’ Donald Trump image in a very critical way. Out of my sample related to the episode, this story presents the most solid argumentation against Tom Araya. It seems that the objective here is to explicitly

11 The laughing-face emojis are part of the caption.
construe the singer’s image as a conservative persona while hinting that the band is the opposite — “the most rebellious and angry metal band ever” (paragraph 6). As a result, heavy metal values are associated with the band, excluding the singer — Slayer as an entity is heavy metal, Tom Araya is not. I will now show how this is constructed in the text.

Let’s begin with the identity assigned (Fairlcough 1995) to Tom Araya: “a tired, old man trying to protect his wealthy interests”, as we are told in paragraph 8. To reach this conclusion, the journalist gathers facts from Araya’s present and past. First, the reporter explains that Araya: a) used the word “snowflakes” in the caption to the Instagram’s image; b) referred to gay people as “fruits” in the comments section of the Instagram post. Second, the text cites a brief quote from a speech given by the musician in 2016, in which he declared his support for gun ownership in America.

Regarding the term “snowflakes”, the text calls Araya’s usage of the word “disturbing” (paragraph 2), “sinister” (paragraph 2) and “alarming” (paragraph 4). Please read it in the excerpt below, which contains two paragraphs from the story as well as Araya’s caption on Instagram:

(...). Araya posted another message the next day that seemed to imply something more sinister was afoot. And that’s where things get a bit disturbing. Take a look:

“Believe it or not this picture was posted by me Tom Araya on 1/20 cause I thought it was funny ... I was amazed at the comments about the picture some positive some negative more amazing was in 2 hours there was 10,000 likes ... But i never would have guessed that there where so many snowflakes commenting their distaste for the new president. Like him or not he is the president ... woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post ... can some one please explain why...?”

What's most alarming here is (…) his use of the word “snowflake,” a term that’s been adopted by the alt-right to pejoratively refer to liberals who are offended by all the very offensive things our new president does and says.
Subsequently, the story reproduces a quote from Araya’s speech in favour of gun ownership. By including this statement, the journalist is employing intertextuality: “texts transform and embed other texts which are in chain relationships with them” (Fairclough 1995, p.75), thus providing context and background information to the reader. The aim here is to make the text’s argument stronger: this declaration would be one more proof of the right-leaning points of view of the musician. The speech in question was given at a Slayer concert in Switzerland, in June 2016, a moment when public discussions of private firearm ownership were raised due to the shootings at the Orlando gay club Pulse. Read below what Tom Araya said:

“Where you are in the world, you need to protect yourselves. Not from each other, but from invaders. And you know what I’m talking about, right? You should be aware of your invaders — people that come here to do you harm. It’s not right. You should be able to protect and defend your country. That’s the way it should be everywhere.”

Araya’s gun discourse is then characterised as “out of touch with reality” in paragraph 6. In the same paragraph, Tom Araya is situated in opposition to his band: he is in “a place of comfort and detachment”, and his band is “the most rebellious and angry metal band ever”. Read it below:

How sad that the frontman of Slayer — fucking SLAYER!, the most rebellious and angry metal band ever — has gotten to such a place of comfort and detachment that he’s as out of touch with reality as he’s making himself appear (...).

12 The shooting occurred in June 2016, when 49 people were killed by Omar Mateen at the LGBT nightclub Pulse. It was one of the worst mass killings in American history.
After criticizing the snowflakes term and the gun control episode, the text moves on to the situation in which Tom Araya called a gay fan a “fruit”. This is the third argument against him: besides naming fans who do not agree with him “snowflakes” and being in favour of gun ownership, the musician is still capable of offending gay metalheads. In the journalist’s view, this is “worse” (paragraph 7) than what had happened before. Please read below:

But it gets worse: in the comments of the re-posted photo, someone writing under the band’s official account (presumably Araya) refers to gay people as “fruits” and how Vice President Mike Pence feels about them, presumably a reference to his advocacy for “conversion therapy” as governor of Indiana:"

It is worth noting that, while there’s an array of arguments carefully elaborated to explicitly discredit Tom Araya, there’s only one to credit the band: “fucking SLAYER!, the most rebellious and angry metal band ever” (paragraph 6). There’s no further development on this sentence, meaning that the reader is not informed why exactly they are characterised like this. The author presupposes that this information is common-sense, shared by all metalheads. “A text’s presuppositions are important in the way in which it positions its readers or viewers or listeners: how a text positions you is very much a matter of the common-sense assumptions it attributes to you”, explains Fairclough (1995, p.107).

The opposition Tom Araya / Slayer is further built upon at the end of the story when band members are portrayed as more intelligent for having initially deleted the picture. Read it below:

Araya comes off as a tired, old man trying to protect his wealthy interests and his rights to use his dick-extension toys, and worse, homophobic. Which is probably why someone else in the Slayer camp decided to delete his initial post: they knew it’d cause a shitstorm, and they thought better of it.
By defining the band as outcasts and Tom Araya as a backward thinking, privileged man, the text does not assign any transgressive behaviour to him, or any heavy metal value, for that matter. This compliment goes to Slayer as a whole.

4.2.3 BLABBERMOUTH

Blabbermouth has a different approach in comparison to Metal Injection and MetalSucks: it focuses on the statement released by Slayer after the repercussion achieved by the Instagram post. Once the polemic was set, the band issued an official explanation to the press, distancing themselves from the Trump image. In the statement, reproduced in Blabbermouth’s story, Slayer said: “As was verified by Tom, this was his post, is not something the band would have posted if asked, and does not belong on a SLAYER social page.” In addition to that, Blabbermouth’s story also gives editorial space to political opinions of Slayer’s band members. The text reproduces quotes by guitarists Kerry King and Gary Holt, in which they voice their views opposing Donald Trump.

The main goal of Blabbermouth seems to be to juxtapose Tom Araya and the rest of the band: first, by reproducing the official statement (paragraph 2); second, by publishing the political views of the two guitarists (paragraphs 6, 7, and 8). By the end of the article, the reader is able to perceive the differences between Araya and the other members: the singer’s attitudes and political stances are more conservative, while the others’ are more liberal. An indication of the text’s aim is clear in the headline, reproduced below:

SLAYER Explains Disappearing TRUMP Photo: We Have Never Endorsed Any Political Party Or Any Candidate

In paragraphs 6, 7, and 8, we are then informed in rather long statements of what Kerry King and Gary Holt think of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. I won’t repeat these paragraphs here because their content is not of interest to my discussion. The point I want to make is that by reproducing these quotes in the story, alongside the band’s official statement, Blabbermouth ends up turning the spotlight
away from the original controversy. Consciously or not, the story minimizes the repercussion of the Instagram post, avoiding to make a discussion about it.

The lack of discussion is also clear in how the story employs the term “controversy”. Before explaining how this works, please first read the excerpt below:

SLAYER has issued a statement in response to the controversy that arose when a photoshopped picture of Donald Trump and the members of the band appeared on their Instagram account. SLAYER frontman Tom Araya posted the image and later criticized fans who objected to the photo, saying that he “thought it was funny” and that anyone who disagrees should keep quiet. “I never would have guessed that there where so many snowflakes commenting their distaste for the new president,” he wrote. “Like him or not he is the president.”

Notice how controversy is used with its dictionary meaning, *en passant*, with no further elaboration around it. It is not connected to heavy metal in any special way, it is something that just happened. As a result, there’s barely any construction of heavy metal values in the story. In the excerpt above, note also how *Blabbermouth* does not problematise Araya’s behaviour, opting instead just to inform the reader of what he did in very neutral terms. More evidence of this neutral, objective tone of the article is found in paragraph 5 — “appeared to make”. See below:

Araya later appeared to make a homophobic joke while replying to fans in the post’s comments section. “Mike Pence turning fruits into vegetables,” he wrote with laughing emojis.

Again, I’d argue that this detachment is a way to not problematize the conundrum caused by the Trump picture. In this aspect, *Blabbermouth* differs from *Metal Injection* and *MetalSucks*, both of which go to the core of the problem. But the image of Tom Araya showed by *Blabbermouth* to the reader is the same
one showed by *Metal Injection* and *MetalSucks*: the frontman is different, divergent from the rest of the group.

### 4.3 Final remarks

The media analysis makes evident that each news outlet employs its own writing style, therefore setting up heavy metal identities for the bands they cover. Overall, *MetalSucks* is the most critical and politically minded, thus more resistant in assuming that metal is necessarily transgressive and outcast. *Metal Injection* is relatively less judgemental and in consequence more accepting of the idea that a metal musician is a rebellious persona. Lastly, *Blabbermouth* is the more neutral of the three, a characteristic that ends up translated into a coverage devoid of explicit moral judgements on the part of the journalist — but this does not mean a complete lack of criticism.

I will discuss these topics in the next chapter, as well as the fact that both controversies I am analysing were not connected in the texts. Even though Slayer’s picture coverage happened one year after Anselmo’s Nazi salute, there was no mention of the right arm gesture in Slayer’s stories. The absence of reference is surprising because such episodes are arguably highly relevant moments for heavy metal culture in the last few years. Proof of this is the large number of stories dedicated to both incidents in the metal press, as well as the fact that they were also covered by legacy media outlets. This means that Anselmo’s salute and Slayer’s picture were exposed to a much broader audience, in addition to the metalhead community, therefore putting heavy metal in the public spotlight.
As we saw in the previous chapter, news websites that cover heavy metal use language to set an identity for the genre. Words, expressions, intertextuality and even text structure are employed in ways that may reinforce metal’s values of controversy and transgression. If we were to draw a scale to measure the level of metal values attributed by each website to the episodes I am studying, we would see that the three news outlets reported about both situations differently. *Metal Injection* would come first, with the highest ratio of textual indications showing that they report on metal personalities as transgressive characters; *Blabbermouth* would come second, with some textual indications of controversy in their stories; and *MetalSucks* would come last, with barely any sign pointing towards controversy and/or transgression in their coverage.

Let’s take the Anselmo incident, to begin with. The singer was explicitly seen as transgressive only by *Metal Injection*: the reporter says the musician “certainly crossed a line” and describes his behaviour as “inappropriate”. *Blabbermouth*, on the other hand, saw him only superficially as a controversial figure: despite calling a “controversy” the Nazi salute video, most of the story is occupied by quotes of Anselmo taken from different situations in which he clearly demonstrates intolerant points of view. *Blabbermouth* uses intertextuality mostly to show Anselmo as a bigot. Finally, *MetalSucks* did not acknowledge any heavy metal attitude in his Sieg Heil: what hap-
pened was not a transgression of any sorts, it was purely and simply an act of intolerance (“yes, Phil Anselmo probably is a racist”).

Now let’s move on to Slayer’s Trump picture. In terms of how it was covered, the landscape is relatively similar to Anselmo’s episode. *Metal Injection* saw Tom Araya as a “divisive” figure who stood apart from the rest of the band: his transgression was to upload an image that may have offended some fans. Conversely, *Blabbermouth* does cite the word “controversy”, but it is employed as a regular term, with its dictionary meaning, so to speak, and as a consequence it is only slightly connected to heavy metal. Lastly, *MetalSucks* is the most critical out of the three: the story constructs a very conservative image of Tom Araya — “a tired, old man trying to protect his wealthy interests” — while attributing transgression to the rest of the band — “fucking SLAYER!, the most rebellious and angry metal band ever”.

The incidents were portrayed as isolated, which seems to be a missed opportunity on the part of news outlets to take an in-depth reflection on contemporary heavy metal controversies. There are many points in common between the episodes that could have been explored in the stories: both are respected musicians who have contributed to the development and popularization of heavy metal; both controversies touched upon social issues of relevance such as racism, the rise of right-wing agendas and homophobia; both musicians explained they were joking; both episodes generated broad media coverage; and both caused public outcry in social networks.

But the construction of metal values in different ways by each news outlet as well as the facts being reported as one-off events is only part of what my findings show — and perhaps the least interesting bit of the results. There are three further outcomes that are worth a discussion. I will now turn to them.
5.1 While discursively constructing heavy metal values, the metal press makes a critique of musicians' attitudes

The analysis also revealed that some of my sample’s stories are very critical towards Anselmo and Slayer. This means that these texts build controversy and transgression while acknowledging the seriousness of what the musicians did. The critical eye is most evident in the *MetalSucks* editorials: *MetalSucks* does not accept the “I was just doing all of this to piss you off” excuse — as provided by Tom Araya — nor Anselmo’s justification that his salute was a joke caused by the consumption of white wine. Instead, the reporter: a) calls out Anselmo for being disrespectful and asks metalheads to “stop letting Phil Anselmo off the hook for his racist remarks”; and b) writes in a tone that portrays Araya as a small-minded, homophobic conservative.

The heavy criticism revealed by my analysis was a surprising outcome. The stories I looked at subjected metal personalities’ behaviour to a greater degree of scrutiny than I predicted. Conversely, the construction of heavy metal values through media discourse occurred to a lesser extent than I expected at the outset of this study. This finding means that while there’s still a need for controversy and transgression to be reinforced at some level by the metal press, it happens side by side with social critique. *Metal Injection*, *Blabbermouth* and *MetalSucks* use a lexicon frequently attributed to heavy metal (“divisive”, “controversial”, “rebellious” and so on), and in this sense the genre’s DNA has a continuity and a history; but these websites do so while speaking truth to famous musicians.

Academic texts usually see the metal press as a field of protection, a symbolic site where metal culture is reinforced rather than weakened — this is why I expected the construction of metal values to be greater than it turned out to be. For instance, Deena Weinstein (2000, p.176) points out the role of the metal media in “freezing the signifiers” of metal: print media, specifically, “tend to reinforce rather than to dilute the particu-
larities of subcultures; that is, they project and objectify the subculture’s standards”. Laurin (2013) talks about the important role of rock writers when they buy into — and reproduce — the outcast image of metal musicians: according to her, writing about a music genre is a way of defining its identity. However, besides acting as guardians of certain values cherished by metalheads, what we’ve seen is that metal media’s texts bring an awareness of the current sociopolitical context.

In a recent article for Stereogum website, metal music critic Doug Moore (2017) argued that “(...) metal bands that flirt with Nazism or fascism have found themselves facing rather more scrutiny in recent years than they did previously (...)". In his view, metal groups, such as Slayer and several death metal bands, that deal with potentially polemic topics, are now in the spotlight as a consequence of the changing political climate around the world. Moore cites the rise of conservative agendas, of which Donald Trump’s election is an example. In such a political landscape, to insert the Republican in a band photo — as Slayer did — is complicated because this action seems to go against metal values — metal is supposed to be deviant in relation to social norms, not to support those in power.

For my study, this indicates that the association of a heavy metal band with a(n) (extremely) conservative politician will definitely elicit backlash from specialised media. MetalSucks said it was “ alarming” to call fans who oppose Trump’s presidency “snowflakes”; and Metal Injection argued that the homophobic comment made by Tom Araya against a gay metalhead in the Instagram’s comments section was “terribly insensitive”. “Racist authoritarianism is no longer a historical specter; it’s a real and ascendant movement that directly threatens the lives and freedoms of millions all over the world”, continues Moore (2017).

Moore’s argument can be better comprehended if we go back to the MetalSucks editorial referring to the Nazi salute. The text proposes that the status achieved in the music industry during the 1990s by Phil Anselmo afforded him a sort of protection against scrutiny. MetalSucks’s reporter
points out that Pantera was the most important heavy metal group of those years and, due to this reason, journalists failed to properly challenge Anselmo for his intolerant words. Given that Anselmo was famous and defended heavy metal in a period when the genre faced the competition of grunge, he could give racist speeches such as the one in Montreal, in 1995, and still pass relatively unscathed. Additionally, it is worth remembering that the political context during that decade was different. Trump was not president and the views he promotes were not in the mainstream, a fact that may have contributed to Anselmo not being heavily criticised. As a consequence, a full public controversy did not arise around the musician’s speech.

5.2 The “trigger moment” concept holds true

The metal media reaction to the Trump picture and to the Nazi gesture indicates that the “trigger moment” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2013, p.4) theory is accurate. This concept affirms that public debates over heavy metal are currently generated by factors not directly related to the genre’s content (lyrics, sound) and aesthetics (record covers). Rather, it’s supposedly outrageous attitudes and confrontational behaviour from band members that will put heavy metal in the public forum. News outlets are the public sphere where this debate will take place, with discussions occupying editorial space in the music press and in legacy media.

For instance, Slayer’s latest lyrics, regardless of how graphic they are, will not provoke the amount of criticism that “Angel of Death” generated in the late 1980s — in fact, they will get no attention, let alone a controversy. But Tom Araya inserting the Republican president into a

---

13 A music genre that mixed punk with heavy metal, grunge was popular in the first half of the 1990s. It originated in Seattle. Its main representatives were groups Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains and Soundgarden.
group picture and offending a gay fan on Instagram will prompt a series of stories and editorials. Some of these stories may reference “Angel of Death” as a reminder that the band has a controversial history, but this consideration with the group’s content was caused by a non-content-related reason in the first place, namely the Instagram post.

In a similar fashion, Anselmo’s Nazi salute was such a turning point in the singer’s career that he still has to talk at length about it in interviews for the metal press, almost two years after it happened. What he did will not be brushed aside by music journalists. As was the case with Slayer, some articles mention Anselmo’s past lyrics as a proof that he has always been a racist person. In my sample, the MetalSucks editorial digs deep into his past to find lines in songs that can be read as prejudicial. His gesture (not related to heavy metal) generated a public interest in heavy metal, and then reporters look for evidence to reinforce their claims in Anselmo’s artistic outputs.

The amount of media coverage related to the episodes I analysed is an indication of the musicians’ influence in triggering a public conversation, which is no small achievement. Debates like these show us that a controversy has necessarily a public character: only one or two fans being hurt by Anselmo’s gesture or Slayer’s post doesn’t suffice; the media needs to react to such (abnormal) attitudes. Besides specialised heavy metal websites, news outlets that reach a much broader audience covered the episodes. Slayer’s Trump post was featured on The Washington Times, Newsweek, The Independent (UK), Rolling Stone.com, Spin, NME, Billboard, Vice, Pitchfork and Stereogum. Anselmo’s gesture received stories in the BBC UK online and in an editorial in The Guardian.

A controversy only arises when a group feels that their values are being questioned or challenged, meaning that a social boundary is being exposed. Controversial situations are evidence “that there are limits to how much diversity can be tolerated in a society”, explain Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009, p.29). Usually, the challenging factor that will
elicit a controversy is a transgression of any sort — and what could be more metal than “pissing people off”, as Tom Araya said? As argued by Keith Kahn-Harris (2007, p.29), “transgression (...) implies a sense of testing and crossing boundaries and limits”. In addition to that, one notices that a controversy is frequently established around relevant social issues of the moment — this was precisely what occurred with Anselmo and Slayer.

Coincidentally, while writing this chapter, yet another trigger moment occurred, and we should discuss it because it shows the connection among heavy metal, controversy and current social problems. (The always present) Marilyn Manson pointed a fake gun — an assault rifle which also functioned as a microphone holder — at the audience during a concert in San Bernardino, California, in November. The episode is bewildering because the city suffered two mass shootings in its recent history: one in December 2015, when 14 people were killed and 22 were injured; and another in 2017, which left three people dead. It is even worse if we consider that Manson’s “performance” took place just after a third mass shooting, “hours after a gunman killed 27 people at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas” (Rosenberg, 2017).

Manson’s fake microphone created a public discussion, specially because it occurred amidst a debate around gun access in the United States, elicited by recent mass shooting in the country. His attitude was interesting enough for the metal press to report on it. “I think Manson was just looking to make headlines and incite strong reactions — which, again, has always been his bread and butter”, said Axl Rosenberg (2017) in MetalSucks. Metal Injection, on the other hand, praised the singer: “In an era where there are so many edge-lords, doing controversial things for no reason other than to be controversial, it’s nice to see Manson at least had good intent behind his publicity stunt” (Pasbani, 2017).

In a statement following the incident, Marilyn Manson said:
In an era where mass shootings have become a nearly daily occurrence, this was an act of theater in an attempt to make a statement about how easily accessible semi-automatic weapons are and how seeing them has become normalized. My art has always been a reaction to popular culture and my way to make people think about the horrible things that happen in this world. My performance was not meant to be disrespectful or show any insensitivity.

Marilyn Manson apparently had the intention of causing a public reaction with his stage prop, and in this sense he was successful. We should also underline that the media did not blame him for the shootings that plagued San Bernardino, opting instead to establish a debate, citing pros and cons of what he did. This is a different public reaction in relation to what happened in the 1990s, when the singer was seen as guilty following the Columbine High School crimes. I will develop this idea below, the third topic of my discussion.

5.3 The scapegoating of metal musicians is definitely a thing of the past

In the theory chapter I explained how controversies over heavy metal could be understood as examples of “moral panic” (Cohen 1972, p.1) situations. Musicians would be blamed for social issues not directly related to their artistic outputs, resulting in a band being considered an evil to be defeated. As an example, I cited the scapegoating of singer Marilyn Manson in the late 1990s: he was heavily criticised by the mainstream media and by religious groups due to the fact that the killers responsible for the shootings at Columbine High School were supposedly fans of Manson.

The logic that connects the songs of Marilyn Manson and high school students who committed a mass murder seems absurd in hindsight, but it made sense in the America of twenty years ago, a moment in which
“some towns threatened to pass legislation banning him from performing on state property” (Petridis, 2017). The fact is that scapegoating had two effects: it provided the relief that part of society needed in order to not deal with serious social problems, such as the easy access to guns in America; and it damaged musicians’ careers. Manson retreated from public exposure for a period, and in a recent interview for The Guardian he confirmed that “the Columbine era destroyed my entire career at the time” (ibid.).

The controversies I analysed definitely do not fit as ‘moral panic’ examples. My findings revealed that the social hysteria Manson was able to elicit back then could not be reproduced in the current social context. Proof of this is that the stories in my sample did not use metal musicians as scapegoats: neither Phil Anselmo took the blame for society’s racism issues, nor was Tom Araya all of a sudden the man responsible for society’s homophobic problems. On the contrary, the harsh criticisms they received from Metal Injection and MetalSucks mean that they are part of the situation.

Indeed, there is no reason to blame metal artists as if they were the only responsible actors for everything that is unfair in society. In an editorial about the Nazi salute controversy, Dom Lawson (2016) wrote in The Guardian: “if metal does have a racism problem, it is surely little more than an indication that society as a whole has a racism problem and metal is by no means immune”. With regards to Slayer’s controversy, Newseek magazine noted ironically that the band is somehow part of the mainstream: “while their music might not be Trump’s style, their language and worldview has some overlap. In his inaugural speech, Trump used the phrase ‘American carnage.’ As it happens, in 2010 Slayer played on the American Carnage Tour with Megadeth and Anthrax” (Veix, 2017).
5.4 Limitations

To end this chapter, I would like to point out some limitations of my thesis.

The first topic of discussion — that the metal media is critical in relation to the subjects they cover — is an important finding brought by my analysis of three of the most relevant metal news media currently in activity in one of the main markets in the world for heavy metal. Nonetheless, we should consider it with reservations. My sample is small — only six media stories — and this is a limitation. Probably, a larger amount of stories could show if the insight is actually a trend or not. Moreover, my sample is limited to the news organisations based in the United States, but heavy metal culture is a global phenomenon, so a comparative study with media outlets from different countries could yield to interesting results.

Second, I affirmed that I support the trigger moment concept. However, recently a few cases occurred in which metal bands had concerts canceled over allegations that their lyrics and iconography were contentious. Swedish death metal band Marduk was scheduled to play at the Oakland Metro Opera House in February, but according to Metal Injection (2017) the show was suspended by the local police. Officers stated that “there are groups that believe Marduk profits off of glorifying Nazi imagery and songs about Nazi SS officers and anti-semitism”. A few months later, Brazilian media outlet UOL (2017) reported that the band Krisiun was arrested at the Bangladesh airport when arriving at the country for a concert because they were supposed “satanists”.

In both cases the bands’ supposed subversive content is at stake, not their attitudes. This kind of social reaction to perceived transgressive metal content is an analog situation to what took place in the 1980s, during the PMRC years. At that moment, this conservative group tried to censor metal bands based on similar allegations: the example of Ozzy Osbourne and his “Suicide Solution” song come to mind. Perhaps Marduk and Krisiun’s incidents are an overreaction on the part of society, given
that both groups have already been active, with the same kind of content, for decades. The overreaction may (or may not) be due to the current political climate. The point is that, if metal groups keep on being harassed by their allegedly controversial ideas, a review of the trigger moment theory might be necessary.
CONCLUSION
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Based on two recent controversial episodes — Phil Anselmo’s Nazi salute and Slayer’s Donald Trump Instagram post — my thesis demonstrated how the metal press constructs an identity for heavy metal. By employing different discursive techniques, Metal Injection, MetalSucks and Blabbermouth situate themselves in a sort of tradition of writing about metal as a transgressive and controversial culture. For example, with the use of intertextuality as well as terms such as “rebellious”, “angry”, “divisive”, “controversial” and the like.

Transgression and controversy are, according to Metal Studies, the fundamental values of heavy metal: if the music is not referred to in terms of how radical and outcast it is, then what is being talked about it is not heavy metal. This idea derives from the fact that, throughout heavy metal’s fifty years of existence, bands have more often than not tried to shock and disturb the establishment. The weapons against traditional values were both metal’s content (lyrics, record covers, sound) as well as confrontational attitudes taken by group members, such as the crimes that marked Norwegian’s black metal scene.

Besides revealing how the metal press discursively constructs controversy and transgression, my analysis of media stories brought up a surprising outcome: contemporary metal news outlets are critical of the controversies generated by the bands they report about. This means that there is an “extra-musical” awareness on the part of journalists, who use their stories as a space to reflect on metal musicians’ personalities, not only on their artistic
outputs. My sample’s texts were, in general, informed by the social context in which they were written, and disapproving of attitudes taken by metal artists.

Norman Fairclough (1995, p.103) proposes that “media texts do not merely ‘mirror realities’ as is sometime naïvely assumed; they constitute versions of reality”. If we transport this affirmation to heavy metal, what we see is the development of a press that, while reinforcing the genre’s stereotypes, also contribute to its critique. The “real” self revealed by Slayer’s Tom Araya and Phil Anselmo will not pass unnoticed, and eventually may taint their artistic work.

This thesis also contributed to heavy metal scholarship by showing that metal artists will not elicit a public hysteria anymore, as used to be the case in the 1980s and in a few situations during the 1990s. Regardless of the shock value of a specific attitude taken by a band member, it is possible to affirm that the “moral panics” (Cohen 1972, p.1) way of reading heavy metal controversies is a thing of the past. Currently, it is more accurate to study polemic episodes using the “trigger moments” (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2013, p.4) theory.

This idea proposes that artistic outputs of metal groups, such as lyrics and record covers, are not capable of generating public debates anymore. What triggers a conversation are (disrespectful) attitudes committed by artists. This was exactly what occurred in my sample. Metal media as well as the legacy press reacted with a series of stories and editorials about the Nazi salute and Donald Trump’s picture. Anselmo’s and Slayer’s actions could have stayed within the limits of the metal community, but instead they reached a much larger audience due to the coverage they received.

The broad coverage brought heavy metal to the public’s attention once again, proving that a subculture made for and by metalheads is actually an artistic manifestation inserted into a complex social context, able to reflect relevant issues of the day — racism, homophobia and the rise of conservative agendas. Maybe Slayer and Phil Anselmo would not have been subjected to a great deal of judgement by journalists if Donald Trump had not been
elected and the conservative views he proposes were not a major topic of social discussion nowadays. Nonetheless, it is impressive to see the extent of the polemic that metal musicians are still able to elicit.

In the introduction to this study, I explained how, during the Middle Ages, church authorities would censor musicians who played the tritone, a combination of notes considered a disturbance to the social order of the period. Called the *diabolus in musica*, this specific noise was adopted by heavy metal bands several centuries later, and used frequently in their songs. But perhaps more than a discordant-sounding combination of strings to be executed in the electric guitar, what metal artists really inherited from those centuries was the spirit of transgression.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
PRIMARY SOURCES


Rosenberg, A. (2016). Editorial: The Metal Community Must Stop Letting Phil Anselmo Off the Hook for His Racist Remarks | MetalSucks. [online] MetalSucks. Available at: http://www.metalsucks.net/2016/01/28/editorial-the-metal-
community must stop letting phil anselmo off the hook for his racist remarks/ [Accessed 9 Nov. 2017].

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This thesis would not have been possible without Robert Prey’s support. He first pointed out to me that it was possible to study heavy metal, something that I would never have thought of. After that, he was present throughout the writing process with valuable comments and feedback. Thank you very much, Robert.

I would also like to thank my parents, who gave me my first metal records when I was ten years old. They would visit record stores with a list provided by me containing names of bands that I wanted to listen to. Pantera was on that list because I used to watch their videos on MTV, and I thought they were amazing. Sepultura was on that list too.

In only a few years I saw myself going to my first Sepultura concert in Brazil. I was 14 at that moment, and it was life-changing. Fast forward two decades and I still find myself going to Sepultura shows. But the context is different now: I see my favourite Brazilian band in Holland, in the midst of writing a Master’s thesis about heavy metal. With 34, my passion for extremely distorted guitars and the aggressive sound of a metal concert is still as strong as it was 20 years ago.

This means that I should also show my gratitude to Slayer, and all the amazing metal bands out there for providing my life’s soundtrack. You rock!👊 металл!

Finally, I created a Spotify playlist containing songs of all the bands I mention in this thesis. Prepare your earplugs: it’s very loud! http://spoti.fi/2B7hiSL
Video of Phil Anselmo Giving Nazi Salute & Shouting “White Power” At Dimebash Surfaces; Claims It Was A Joke

POSTED BY ROBERT PISKET ON JANUARY 28, 2016 AT 05:51 AM FOLLOW ON TWITTER | FOLLOW ON INSTAGRAM

SHARE ON FACEBOOK
SHARE ON TWITTER
E-MAIL

UPDATE: Anselmo has since posted an apology video for his actions. Watch the video here.

The Dimebash this past weekend was the stuff of legend. Never again will there be a moment where a members of Foo Fighters, Pantera, Metallica and Slayer all shared the stage to pay tribute to Motorhead, and later of course, Dimebag.
The coverage after was, of course, very positive and very warm for all parties involved. But there is one moment at the very end of the night that may have ruined this good will. An attendee at the event uploaded a short video showing Phil Anselmo being pulled off stage by drummer Johnny Kelly, but not before he had a chance to give the Nazi salute, a "Sieg Heil" and shout "White Power" at the top of his lungs. The user who uploaded the video had this to say:

"At the end of the performance of 'Walk' at Dimebash 2016 and Lucky Strike Live in Hollywood CA Phil Anselmo decided to end the night with a sieg heil and scream white power to the crowd. I originally cut this from my first post of 'Walk' but I feel people deserve to see this! A very sad moment and to me ruined the night! This is not what Pantera is about!!! Absolutely uncalled for and I can see why Vinny Paul wants nothing to do with this man. Phil Anselmo you are a Racist prick!"

Here is the video:

Anselmo has seen the video and, under the account of his label, Housecore Records, responded to the video with the following comment:

"Ok folks, I'll own this one, but dammit, I was joking, and the 'inside joke of the night' was because we were drinking fucking white wine, hahaha... Of all fucking things. Some of y'all need to thicken up your skin. There's plenty of fuckers to pick on with a more realistic agenda. I fucking love everyone, I fucking loathe everyone, and that's that. No apologies from me."
It's hard to understand why, if Anselmo was joking, that he couldn’t just apologize for something as inappropriate as this. It can be pointed out that members of his solo band are of Mexican and Iranian descent, and that the dude was really drunk here. Sure, Anselmo is known for having a "quirky" sense of humor, but this certainly crossed a line. What's the joke here? It ultimately contradicts statements he made a few months ago, when asked about the confederate flag:

Right now in my life as a grown up man and a soon to be 47 year old in 5 days... that any type of propagating hate toward any race or any group of people is not my bag at all.

It's made even worse by the fact that rumors of Anselmo being racist go back to the early 90s, where bootleg footage of him on stage talking about "white pride" surfaced. MetalSucks has a great editorial on his history of saying things that are clearly racist. Ultimately, I don’t think Anselmo is truly racist, having met him, he seems like a kind, gentle, quirky person. But he's making it very difficult with his actions and later his words for people to grasp that.

[via Lambgoat]
Editorial: The Metal Community Must Stop Letting Phil Anselmo Off the Hook for His Racist Remarks

JANUARY 23TH, 2016 AT 11:30AM  BY AXL ROSENBERG  f  

It’s time for us all to stop taking it easy on Phil Anselmo.

Yesterday, a YouTube user named Chris R. posted the below video footage online. It was filmed at this year’s edition of Dimebash, which took place this past Friday night, January 22 in Los Angeles. Chris admitted that he “originally cut this” part of the footage, but ultimately decided to post it because “people deserve to see this.”

Anselmo subsequently responded thusly:

Housecore Records  16 hours ago
Ok folks, I’ll own this one, but dammit I was joking, and the "inside joke of the night" was because we were drinking fucking white wine, hahaha...
Of all fucking things.
Some of y’all need to thicken up your skin.
There’s plenty of fuckers to pick on with a more realistic agenda.
I fucking love everyone, I fucking loathe everyone, and that’s that.
No apologies from me.
PHA '15
Okay. So Anselmo was joking! He’s not a racist! Hell, he said “These days, I wouldn’t want anything to fucking do with” the Confederate flag less than a year ago! So it’s all good… right?

Well, not really. Because let’s be real: this is not the first time Anselmo has pulled a stunt like this.

For example: the following speech from a show in 1995, in which the singer claims not to be racist before making a series of racist remarks (“Tonight is a white thing”). It’s incredibly disturbing, not just because of the sentiment, but because there’s a certain sick, backwards logic to Anselmo’s remarks; it’s easy to see how a kid who looks up to Anselmo, or an adult who just isn’t very good at thinking for himself, might hear this and think it makes sense. What’s wrong with whites taking pride their own cultural heritage, right?

What Anselmo’s specious argument neglects is the social and historical context of a phrase like “white pride.” It’s ignorant to think that minorities don’t have an experience that is unique within America and the rest of the world (thus the phrase “it’s a black thing”). White America can never truly know what it’s like to be black; Anselmo is reacting to modern cultural acknowledgement of this fact in a manner which, when you get right down to it, is envious and juvenile.

Anselmo was twenty-seven when he made those remarks, but it’s hard to dismiss them as a youthful indiscretion. In 2003, when he was thirty-five, one of Anselmo’s other projects, Superjoint Ritual, made an album called A Lethal Dose of American Hatred, that album features a song called “Stealing a Page or Two from Armed and Radical Pagans,” and that song contains some charming lyrics about having “no more of the coward Muḥammad” and “taking no pity on the Jewish elitists.”
So has Anselmo just been “joking” for 20+ years? Has he pulled off some sort of decades-long, Andy Kaufman-esque troll/performance art piece? Seems unlikely, doesn’t it?

So why does the metal community continue to let behavior like this slide?

The simple answer is: we’re cowards.

We’re fans of Pantera and Down and, yes, Superjoint Ritual, and we don’t want to have to face the conundrum of whether or not it’s okay to admire someone for his talent while loathing his personal politics. We don’t seem to mind facing that issue when we’re dealing with Varg Vikernes or Dave Mustaine, but somehow, Anselmo has achieved untouchable status. I’m not entirely sure why, but I suspect it has something to do with the fact that Pantera rose to prominence at a time when metal was being pushed back underground as a result of grunge becoming popular: Metallica had released Load and become “Alternica,” Anthrax had transitioned from a thrash band to a rock band, Megadeth awkwardly chased commercial glory, and mainstream outlets like MTV and Rolling Stone gave zero shits about bands that were continuing to do interesting, undeniably metal work (e.g., Morbid Angel, At the Gates, etc.). Pantera achieved a level of success whereby they were, for all intents and purposes, the public face of metal — “real” metal — for the better part of a decade. And Dimebag’s tragic death only further solidified their legend — everyone now looks at the past through rose-colored glasses and no one remembers how disappointed everyone was in the band’s final album, Reinventing the Steel. I think this instilled in many of us a kind of blind devotion, which, in turn, has allowed Anselmo’s behavior to avoid scrutiny from media outlets (MetalSucks included) and become metal’s worst kept secret.

Things get even stickier if you work in the industry; everyone is either a friend of Anselmo’s or a friend of a friend’s of Anselmo (again, guilty), people wanna tour with him or somehow otherwise benefit from his notoriety, and no one wants to piss off his fans, many of whom are loyal to a fault (see above) and won’t stand for any criticism of any kind being leveled at their favorite frontman (reprisals for calling out Mustaine are relatively few — we’re gonna get far more hate mail for daring to question Anselmo’s world views, I assure you).
So we look the other way. We remind ourselves of all the times when we’ve made bigoted or racist jokes behind closed doors, and we convince ourselves that it’s no big deal, not worth calling attention to. Anselmo says he’s only joking and we choose to believe him because we want to believe him, because we want to be able to rock out to “5 Minutes Alone” without considering the meaning of the lyric “you used complexion of my skin for a counter-racist tool.”

But it’s nonsense. There’s absolutely no evidence to suggest that Anselmo is just kidding around; if anything, the fact that this issue has repeatedly reared its ugly head throughout the course of his career suggests that not only does he believe what he says, but he believes it so strongly that he can’t help but let it out, even when he knows it makes him look bad. That’s why he can condemn the Confederate flag and then six months later give the Nazi salute; he knows he’s supposed to condemn the Confederate flag, but his feelings about various minorities burn like a scalding hot piece of coal in his hand, and he simply must drop it. It’s Mel Gibson Syndrome: the guy works in an industry surrounded by Jews and African Americans, but get enough drinks him, and he almost involuntarily starts to drop racist and anti-semitic epithets.

So the bad news is: yes, Phil Anselmo probably is a racist.

The good news is: that really doesn’t mean you have to burn all your Anselmo albums. You do have the ability to not think about these issues while enjoying his music. That’s your choice.

But we should all stop defending Anselmo. Because there’s really nothing defensible about his actions.

TAGS: DOWN, PANTERA, PHIL ANSELMO, SUPERJOINT RITUAL
PHILIP ANSELMO Denies Being Racist After ‘White Power’ Shoutout At ‘Dimebash’ Event

Former PANTERA frontman Philip Anselmo has denied being racist after a new video surfaced of him giving the white power salute and yelling a white-supremacist slogan at a California concert.

Anselmo took part in last Friday’s (January 22) Dimebash event at Lucky Strike Live in Hollywood and ended the show by giving what appeared to be a Nazi salute and screaming the words “white power” to the crowd.

A YouTube user by the name of Chris R posted a clip of Anselmo’s end-of-concert gesture (see below) and added the following note below the video: “I originally cut this from my first post of ‘Walk’ but I feel people deserve to see this! A very sad moment and to me ruined the night! This is not what PANTERA is about! I absolutely uncalled for and I can see why Vinny Paul [sic] wants nothing to do with this man. Phil Anselmo you are a Racist prick!”

After the clip started making the rounds earlier today, Anselmo himself responded to the controversy by adding the following comment below the video in question (posted from Anselmo’s Housecore Records YouTube account): “Ok folks, I’ll own this one, but damnit, I was jokin’ and the ‘inside joke of the night’ was because we were drinking fucking white wine, hahahaha... Of all fucking things.”

He added: “Some of y’all need to thicken up your skin. There’s plenty of fuckers to pick on with a more realistic agenda.

“I fucking love everyone, I fucking lost you everyone, and that’s that.

“No apologies from me.

“PA ‘16”

This is not the first time Anselmo has made comments from the stage that have been perceived as racist. At a March 1995 PANTERA concert at Montreal’s Verdun Auditorium, Anselmo bashed forth in a stream-of-consciousness rant, uttering statements that included “rap music advocates the killing of white people.” The Montreal Gazette reported on the incident, causing an international flurry and resulting in Anselmo releasing an open apology, stating: “I must take responsibility for the harmful words that may have racially offended our audience. First, to the black girl who has seen PANTERA six times, thank you for telling me how upset you were at me; it made a difference and I was very sincere with my apology. Second, I’d once again like to apologize to the security guards at the show. They were classless and professional; and came to talk to me after the show when they really didn’t need to at all. They opened my eyes. And yes, they were black men. I have much respect for them. I extend my apologies and a thank you to them.”
In an August 2003 interview, Anselmo scoffed at the perception that he is racist. He said: "I'm anything fucking but. I know there's shitty people and beautiful people on both sides of the spectrum — black and white. And I know for an absolute fucking fact there's good Middle Eastern people who live here. And I know there's good Oriental people. But if I'm writing a song and it has to touch on the negatives of certain issues, I'm not gonna beat around the fucking bush and fence-ride — especially with SUPERJOINT [Anselmo's then-band]. Before, with PANTERA, I had to be slightly careful. Now I don't. And I can see from the enthusiasm in the audiences that we're on our way to something extremely relevant — something on top of anywhere anybody thinks we might go."
Tom Araya Wants “Snowflake” SLAYER Fans To Respect The President, Insults Gay Fan

POSTED BY ROBERT FARRANT ON JANUARY 25, 2017 AT 11:54 PM FOLLOW ON TWITTER | FOLLOW ON INSTAGRAM
Look, I know some of you might be getting a little fed up about political posts, but I’ll keep personal politics out of this one, because it’s just so ridiculous I had to bring it to your attention. Feel free to skip past this post, here’s a link to only posts containing music and video.

Anyway, Tom Araya posted a poorly Photoshopped photo of Slayer “hanging out” with Donald Trump (which you can see above) to Slayer’s official Instagram. Then, according to Tom, the photo mysteriously disappeared and he wants answers. Yesterday, he reposted the photo with the following caption:

Believe it or not this picture was posted by me Tom Araya on 1/20 cause I thought it was funny ... I was amazed at the comments about the picture some positive some negative more amazing was in 2 hours there was 10,000 likes ... But i never would have guessed that there where so many snowflakes commenting their distaste for the new president. Like him or not he is the president ... woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post ... can some one please explain why...?

Tom really likes ellipses, when a simple period would do just fine. But grammar aside, Tom later jumped into the comments after some distaste was expressed for the photo stating “Tom here... some of you get it and obviously some of you don’t. As I stated in the post I thought the picture was funny.”

What is there to get? What is the joke?

Also, did Tom take a moment to consider that instead of some overarching conspiracy, the person who deleted the photo could’ve been somebody from the Slayer camp themselves? I’m guessing Tom isn’t the only one with access to the Instagram account. It was only last summer when Slayer guitarist Kerry King called Trump “a sideshow,” adding “He’s the biggest liar I’ve ever seen in politics,” he says with a laugh. "I mean, most of them are liars, but he just outright in-your-face lies." I can imagine Kerry, or perhaps somebody from the band’s management thinking it would be best not to have a post that could be seen as divisive up on their page to alienate a portion of the fan base.

To be fair, the two Slayer icons have disagreed in the past, with Araya even questioning his future in Slayer. Or maybe we’re just reading too much into this.
Unfortunately, things got even grosser in the comments. Pitchfork points out Araya made a terribly insensitive gay joke about Vice President Mike Pence's history of supporting gay conversion therapy, a method that has proven to be inhumane and ineffective:

Like, not even getting into the "snowflakes" and "fruits" shit, which is indefensibly gross. [pic.twitter.com/s2cyYGtHPU](https://twitter.com/)

— Michael Nelson (@nelsonicboom) [January 25, 2017](https://twitter.com/)

Pitchfork notes the user Tom is replying to, @20gar77 replied: “I happen to be gay @slayerbandofficial so fuck you and your fruits to vegetables comment. Go crawl up Pence's arse.”

Don't worry though, Araya didn't mean any of it. He was just doing all of this to piss you off. Araya later commented: “thanks [...] to everybody that has commented thanks for insight... this is how fake news gets started, not once did I say that I supported trump... and assuming I speak for the band you are mistaken ... the picture did exactly what I thought it would do... piss some of you off.”

Oh, I see.

**Update:** Slayer have released a statement distancing themselves from Tom Araya's actions.

[via ThePRP](https://theprp.com/)

[95]
Tom Araya Thinks There was a Conspiracy to Delete a Photo of Slayer with Donald Trump

A few days ago, Slayer’s Tom Araya — or “Tim” Araya, as Rachel Maddow would say — posted an old photo of Slayer with Donald Trump Photoshopped in. It was mildly amusing, if silly.

But then the photo got deleted while Araya slept overnight. While it’s likely that several other people have access to Slayer’s Instagram account — other members of the band, people at their label (Nuclear Blast), their manager, etc. — Araya posted another message the next day that seemed to imply something more sinister was afoot. And that’s where things get a bit disturbing. Take a look:

“Believe it or not this picture was posted by me TomAraya on 1/20 cause I thought it was funny … I was amazed at the comments about the picture some positive some negative more amazing was in 2 hours there was 10,000 likes … But i never would have guessed that there where so many snowflakes commenting their distaste for the new president. Like him or not he is the president … woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post … can some one please explain why…”
What’s most alarming here is not that Araya thinks there’s some kind of conspiracy—that’s ridiculous, but ultimately harmless—but his use of the word “snowflake,” a term that’s been adopted by the alt-right to pejoratively refer to liberals who are offended by all the very offensive things our new president does and says. While I can’t recall Araya coming out in support of Trump, this isn’t the first time he’s let his conservative-leaning ideals show; last year he spoke about his support for private gun ownership in the U.S., stating:

*Where you are in the world, you need to protect yourselves. Not from each other, but from invaders. And you know what I’m talking about, right? You should be aware of your invaders — people that come here to do you harm. It’s not right. You should be able to protect and defend your country. That’s the way it should be everywhere. ‘Cause when you don’t have anything to protect yourself or your fellow countrymen, what happens? People fucking die. They do! Don’t they? Yeah. Did you see it going on?*“

Which is upsetting on a lot of levels. How sad that the frontman of Slayer — fucking SLAYER! — the most rebellious and angry metal band ever — has gotten to such a place of comfort and detachment that he’s as out of touch with reality as he’s making himself appear with both of the above quotes.

But it gets worse: in the comments of the re-posted photo, someone writing under the band’s official account (presumably Araya) refers to gay people as “fruits” and how Vice President Mike Pence feels about them, presumably a reference to his advocacy for “conversion therapy” as governor of Indiana:
Believe it or not this picture was posted by me Tom Araya on 1/20 cause I thought it was funny ... I was amazed at the comments about the picture some positive some negative more amazing was in 2 hours there was 10,000 likes ... But I never would have guessed that there where so many snowflakes commenting their distaste for the new president. Like him or not he is the president ... woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post ... can some one please explain why...?

View all 1,394 comments

Mike pence turning fruits into vegetables 😂😂😂

Urban dictionary—Snowflake An overly sensitive person, incapable of dealing with any opinions that differ from their own. These people can often be seen congregating in "safe zones" on college [...]

Araya comes off as a tired, old man trying to protect his wealthy interests and his rights to use his dick-extension toys, and worse, homophobic. Which is probably why someone else in the Slayer camp decided to delete his initial post: they knew it'd cause a shitstorm, and they thought better of it.

Anyway, here's the re-posted photo of Slayer and Trump in question:
Believe it or not this picture was posted by me Tom Araya on 1/20 cause I thought it was funny ... I was amazed at the comments about the picture some positive some negative more amazing was in 2 hours there was 10,000 likes ... But I never would have guessed that there where so many snowflakes commenting their distaste for the new president. Like him or not he is the president ... woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post ... can some one please explain why...?

JANUARY 24

[via ThePRP]

TAGS: SLAYER, TOM ARAYA
SLAYER has issued a statement in response to the controversy that arose when a photoshopped picture of Donald Trump and the members of the band appeared on their Instagram account.

SLAYER frontman Tom Araya posted the image and later criticized fans who objected to the photo, saying that he “thought it was funny” and that anyone who disagrees should keep quiet.

“I never would have guessed that there would be so many snowflakes commenting their distress for the new president,” he wrote. “Like him or not he is the president.”

“As was verified by Tom, this was his post, is not something the band would have posted if asked, and does not belong on a SLAYER social page,” the band’s representative told Rolling Stone in a statement. “We all have our personal opinions, some of which we have voiced in the past, but SLAYER has never endorsed any political party or any candidate, and the band intends to keep it that way.”

The same image first appeared on the official SLAYER Instagram account on inauguration day, but was mysteriously removed before being reposted on Tuesday.

“Believe it or not, this picture was posted by me Tom Araya on 1/20 ‘cause I thought it was funny,” the SLAYER frontman wrote yesterday. “I was amazed at the comments about the picture some positive some negative more amazing was in two hours there was 10,000 likes … But I never would have guessed that there were so many snowflakes commenting their distress for the new president. Like him or not he is the president … Woke up the next morning and found someone had deleted the post … Can someone please explain why…?”

Araya later appeared to make a homophobic joke while replying to fans in the post’s comments section. “Mike Pence turning fruits into vegetables,” he wrote with laughing emojis. He added: “Thanks … to everybody that has commented thanks for insight… this is how fake news gets started, not once did I say that I supported Trump… and assuming I speak for the band you are mistaken [sic] … the picture did exactly what I thought it would do… piss some of you off.”

SLAYER’s Kerry King last year told Rolling Stone that Hillary Clinton was “the safe, correct choice” for president of the United States. He explained at the time: “Trump is just a sideshow. I’m not even going to apologize to all the Trump followers. I think the reason he’s so popular is because he’s like the politics version of WWE. He’s sensational like wrestling and that’s why made America loves him, he’s the biggest liar I’ve ever seen in politics. I mean, most of them are liars, but he just outright in-your-face lies.”
King's words were echoed by his SLAYER bandmate Gary Holt who described Donald Trump as a "serial liar" who refused to disavow former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke. He said: "People might think some of the things he says, but you can't have a president calling Rosie O'Donnell a 'fat bitch.' [Laughs] It's, like, dude, do you even hear yourself? He won't even concern David Duke's support. He pretended he doesn't know who he is. I'm a fucking headbanger who's done more drugs before getting sober than most people have ever seen on TV, and I've been drinking since I was 17, although in recent years much less, and I know who the fuck he is. Donald Trump is running for president and he [doesn't] know who the former grandmaster of the KKK is. That was your moment, Donald Trump, to say... you know, to condemn the man, basically, but you pretended you were just ignorant of who he was, 'cause you don't wanna f**k with that vote. There are some fucking hillbillies out there who you want voting for you."

Holt went on to say that he is "in many ways a Republican" but that he hasn't been able to find "a candidate up there who wasn't weighted around on a leash by the Christian evangelicals, because they're the death of the conservative movement anyway. And if they just stay out of women's wombs and just actually concentrate on running a country and not being beholden to those people, I would vote Republicans in a sec." SLAYER will hit the road in South America and Europe this spring before returning for more dates in the U.S. this summer.