

THE ONES YOU SERVE: BDSM, INDUSTRIAL METAL, AND THE MACHINE

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Abstract

“The Ones You Serve” is an exploration of the connections between industrial heavy metal and BDSM, with a focus on the concepts of consent and submission as cornerstones of both subcultures. BDSM (bondage/dominance/sadism/masochism) is key in the development of industrial metal, used as both a theme and a backdrop by industrial metal performers. In an example of abjection, BDSM in industrial metal delves into the dirt: semen and saliva associated with kinky sex, the fascination with humans submitting themselves to machinery in industrial metal, and willingness to resign and reassign the body in the muscle, genitalia, blood and gore.

The Ones You Serve

The consumption of the corpus, the body, may seem an odd connection to make to heavy metal, a spectacle of performance. Heavy metal fans, however, are well aware of the role that consuming bodies can take in the sounds, lyrics and performances of heavy metal. Extreme metal genres, such as death, grind, and gore metal, often have the breaking down of the body as a theme in horror-based lyrics and videos. Industrial and goth metal share themes about life and death, decay, and bloodletting. Even classic, thrash, and power metal songs concentrate on the body with allusions to the body as machine, the bodies of women as sexual objects, or the body as a site of power. This can be extended to metal performance, where fans consume the spectacle of bodies in performance as musicians, as celebrities, and as objects of desire. The action of listening itself is corporeal, and patently heavy metal activities such as the mosh pit and headbanging are inherently corporeal. As Keith Kahn-Harris explained in his book *Extreme Metal*, drug use, excessive drinking, and sexual appetites are also an inherent part of the corporeality of heavy metal (Kahn-Harris, 43-44). The body, as a site of desires, a physical object moving in space, an interaction between fans, or as the subject of music and sound, is critical to the heavy metal ethos.

In this respect, heavy metal has much in common with the experience of leather, or BDSM, identity. In fact, the body is at the core of the cultures, histories, even languages of BDSM-identified peoples. Just as the history and usage of heavy metal as singular term is historically problematic, leather/BDSM as a singular term is fraught with potential problems. Leather has been used as a fabric for clothing since ancient times, but individuals identifying with/as leather is a post-World War II practice. In the second half of the twentieth century, identifying as leather came to symbolize or identify individuals practicing the erotics of BDSM: bondage and discipline (B/D), dominance and submission (D/s), and sadism and masochism (S/M) (Cutler, 14-15). While leather originally referred to leathermen (gay males who practiced BDSM), in the late 20th century leather and BDSM spread well beyond gay male enclaves into

normative households and popular culture. Its growth precipitated an increase in the number of erotic and sexual practices now considered leather/BDSM. At the same time, identification as leather/BDSM caused a new revolution in both sexual terms and political ones: even Foucault wrote about BDSM as a site of “queer praxis” (Halperin, 85). “True leatherfolk see black leather not as a stylish affectation,” wrote Mark Thompson, “but rather as a still daring symbol of cultural transgression and personal transformation” (Thompson, xx). This cultural transgression became inextricably linked to the development of heavy metal.

These two unique formations, the BDSM body and the heavy metal corporeal ethos, come together in the body of the heavy metal fan. In this instance, however, the body is not theoretical or hypothetical, but rather that actual, lived body that one inhabits. The corporeal ethos of heavy metal requires a sort of grounded corporeality, one based in heavy metal’s affinity for horror, transgression, and biological dissolution. It requires an idea that the human body can be broken down, beaten, shaken, pushed to the brink of all kinds of extremes, and perhaps even beyond. At the same time, the BDSM-identified folks must negotiate their own bodies, consented, subjectified and categorized by themselves and others, as a material body in an interstitial space. “Bodies have a weighty materiality and biology that is undeniable,” explained geographers Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst, “but fleshy bodies always exist within the realms of political, economic, cultural and social relations” (Johnston and Longhurst, 24). Where the two come together is in the dirt, the gore, the consumption of those fleshy bodies that metal fans and performers commit. In an example of what Julia Kristeva termed abjection, BDSM in heavy metal delves into the dirt: semen and saliva associated with kinky sex, the desecrated bodies of extreme heavy metal, the fascinating with humans submitting themselves to machinery in industrial metal, the queer-identified willingness to reassign the body, in the muscle, genitalia, blood and gore. “Dirt,” wrote theorist Elizabeth Grosz, “is that which is not in its proper place, that which upsets or befuddles the other” (Grosz, 192). It is this collection of dangerous deposit that “transgresses the borders of respectability and respectable places,” wrote Johnston and Longhurst (27). Mary Douglas, whose 1966 monograph *Purity and Danger* was the impetus for Kristeva’s work on abjection, saw this “dirt” as key to understanding taboo systems: “Dirt, then, is never an isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system” (Johnson and Longhurst, 27).

“The Ones You Serve” will provide an exploration of the cross-pollination of industrial heavy metal and BDSM, with a focus on the concepts of abjection and submission as cornerstones of both subcultures. As this paper will show, the machine of industrial metal is a human machine where bodies are the fuel for mechanisms in the production of sexual and cultural identities. Leather and BDSM erotics and sexual style were key in the development of industrial metal. Led by bands such as Ministry, Rammstein and Nine Inch Nails, industrial metal delved deeply into BDSM imagery, scenes and play, and stylistic cues. Using the concept of the machine, a central theme in both industrial heavy metal and BDSM sociocultural erotics, this paper allow readers to explore and understand the concept of the machine as a shared theme that reveals both industrial metal and BDSM as sites of identity formation. This overlap of marginalized subcultural assemblages, the industrial metal assemblage and the leather/BDSM assemblage, represents an interstitial space of appropriation between the two.

The development of both heavy metal music and industrial EBM music are oddly corollary. Metal music has its foundations in the factory cities and towns of western Europe and America, a sound based on the noise of heavy machinery at work. Though the exact first heavy metal recording is a subject for debate, there is little doubt that heavy metal was a reaction to blues and psychedelic rock music in the 1960s. Industrial music was also born in industrial cities in Europe and America, based on the sounds of industry in the late 1970s and its increasing emphasis on technological and computerized labor. In addition, industrial music grew largely as a reaction to punk as part of a late 20th century art rock phenomenon. The two genres, however, had different ideas of control. Heavy metal was largely focused on power and control in the hands of the individual, through the virtuosity of performers or through the physical spectacle of fans. Industrial metal, however, was focused on the idea of the human body as machine like. As S. Alexander Reed explained in his book *Assimilate*, industrial music sought to understand the self-aware submission of humans to machines (Reed, 135). Led by bands such as Throbbing Gristle, Clock DVA and Einstürzende Neubauten, industrial music looked to transhumanist improvement through technology as a site of human assimilation. Eschewing the physical control of heavy metal, industrial music sought to understand submission. The two genres came together with the advent of industrial metal, a subgenre led by performers such as Ministry, Rammstein, and Nine Inch Nails. With industrial metal, the two studies of control collided: the physicality and erotic display of heavy metal, forced into submission. In industrial metal, physical bodies became the self-aware supplicants to the omnipresent machine.

The idea of a self-aware submission, one who consents to domination, is also a theme central to BDSM culture. In fact, self-awareness, negotiation and consent are the very cornerstones of BDSM sexuality. As BDSM educators Harrington and Williams explained:

What sets BDSM apart from other forms of sexual interaction is its focus on negotiation and consent. A lot of what we do can look pretty scary, but behind the whips and chains is a mutual desire for pleasure and fulfillment. We get to that fulfillment by plumbing the depths of our desires, coming to terms with our longings, and navigating our way to our fantasies. (Harrington and Williams, 194)

Chief among these self-aware negotiations is the negotiation of the submissive, or “sub,” in a BDSM relationships where dominance and power exchange are the goal. Submissives are self-aware, willing participants in BDSM relationships. At the same time, through the use of safewords and other negotiations of consent, submissives control the sexual encounter itself. Through their self-aware acquiescence, subs make BDSM possible. When the importance of submissive consent is extended to industrial metal, the importance of the abject body comes into view. Without the submission, of both listeners and performers, the sounds itself would not be possible. The humans feed the industrial machine, and do so with complete awareness. It was this shared principle of negotiated, self-aware consent that fomented the link between industrial metal and BDSM.

While heavy metal made little impact in BDSM communities and scenes, industrial metal found an immediate home in leather and BDSM culture. In her essay on the famous BDSM club The Catacombs, Gayle Rubin discussed the importance of the soundtrack to BDSM sexuality (Rubin). When industrial

metal and its BDSM imagery flowed from Chicago's Wax Trax! Records in the late 1980s, its sounds were quickly adopted by a BDSM culture already dependent on music. In the first issue of *Brat Attack*, a 'zine for S/M lesbian women published in San Francisco in the 1990s, writers published a "Kinky Music Hall of Fame" featuring songs recommended for BDSM scenes. No longer the disco soundtrack of the 1970s, this list features two industrial metal songs: "Head Like A Hole" and "Pretty Hate Machine," both by Nine Inch Nails ("Kinky Music"). Presentation notes titled "Music in Your Toybag" cite Metallica's *Black Album* and the heavily industrial metal soundtrack to the film *The Matrix* as preferred music for triggering "tempos of whipping, spanking, etc. lyrics talk for top/dom (mouthing along)" (Jeremy). A 1998 pamphlet entitled "Music in the Scene" is an A to Z listing of music appropriate to BDSM play, and among the industrial and industrial-esque selections are all three Nine Inch Nails albums, and two Marilyn Manson albums, and the germinal industrial metal band Front Line Assembly. Though there are many more examples of the connection between BDSM and industrial metal, perhaps the best examples lie in the work of two important industrial metal performers: Rammstein and Trent Reznor.

Rammstein was founded in Berlin in 1994, and combined industrial sounds with heavy metal riffs and German classical music. Their album covers and stage show have led to constant questioning about the band members and their sexuality, including assertions that they might be closeted gay Nazis (Berelian, 299). As part of their stage show since 1997, Rammstein's lead singer Till Lindemann rides a gigantic phallus during the song "Buch Dich," spurting milk all over the crowd (Berelian, 299). During their 2012 tour of the United States, Rammstein entered the arena on via a raised catwalk, with Lindemann leading four band members in on leashes and Sam Brown harnesses. The lyrics for "Buch Dich," from their album *Sennsucht*, translated as "Bend Over," paint a S&M scene of a submissive disappointing their master: "Bend over, I command you/turn your visage away from me" (Rammstein, 1998). For Christmas 2009, Rammstein issued a special box set that contained one CD, a pair of handcuffs, a bottle of lubricant and silicon dildoes modeled from each of the six band members. Earlier that year, the band's newest release "Ich tu dir weh" was banned in Germany because it spread BDSM to minors. The video showed band guitarist Richard Kruspe with a naked woman in an S&M mask over his knee, preparing to strike her, to the lyrics "It does you good/Hear how it screams" (Rammstein, 2009). Rammstein was also banned in Russia and Belarus in 2012 for promoting homosexuality and pedophilia, and for spanking each other on stage. The lyrics indicate how important abject images of body waste, a subject at the very core of the concept, are to industrial metal. This corporeal consumption in lyrics lends itself to connection with BDSM by normalizing the abject.

The penultimate example of human consumption in industrial metal lyrics is in the song "Mein Teil" by Rammstein. "Mein Teil," which translates literally to "my fate" or "my piece," is actually a slang term for "my penis." The song was written about the sensational murder case of Armin Meiwes, a German man convicted of murder and cannibalism in 2006. Meiwes' trial revealed a particularly abject and hidden sexual proclivity: vorarephilia, or eroticism and sexual release based on something being consumed. For Meiwes, the object to be consumed was another human being. Karley Adney's masterful paper on Meiwes provides the best overview of the Meiwes case and its abject features. Meiwes was a quiet man, cuckolded and isolated by his mother, found himself unable to function after her death (Adney, 134-137). Meiwes' story then takes on aspects of Hitchcock's *Psycho* or Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*,

but no longer fiction. Meiwes entered a chat room for vorarephilia enthusiasts and posted an ad for a young man so that he could “slaughter you and eat your delicious meat” (Adney, 138). Bernd Jurgen Brandes answered the ad, and the two met at Meiwes’ home. The two had sex, and then after some discussion Meiwes agreed to cut off Brandes’ penis. Meiwes ate the penis as Brandes exsanguinated, then ate some of Brandes’ remains before storing the rest in his freezer (Adney, 139-140). Meiwes is often referred to in the press as the Master Butcher, and today remains in prison. Several films and television documentaries, books and essays, songs and novels were written after Meiwes’ trial and imprisonment. By far the most famous, and perhaps the most controversial, was the song “Mein Teil” by Rammstein.

As Adney wrote in her paper, Rammstein’s members were immediately fascinated by Meiwes’ story. Rammstein was already well known for lyrical content that dealt with sadism, masochism, and other sexual behaviors that might be marked as deviant. The song, released in 2004, features the chorus “you are what you eat” (Rammstein, 2004). The video, which was immediately banned in several countries and relegated to late night rotation on MTV, is filled with abject imagery. The video shows the band standing ankle-deep in sewage, the filth splashed on their legs and clothing. A man appears in tattered clothes and rotting teeth, spitting and screaming as he writhes on the floor. Till Lindemann, the band’s lead singer, is shown sometimes with rotting teeth and a leather collar on his neck, sometimes with a woman in angel’s wings performing oral sex. One band member, dressed as an older woman a hat and gloves, occasionally appears on the scene to look disapprovingly on the scene. Another man, coated in white and wrapped only in a diaper, rocks on the floor in the rigid pose of a dead body. The penultimate moment of the video is when band member Richard Kruspe meets his own double, and vacillates between fighting the double and intimately relating to the double, including licking the double’s tongue (Rammstein, 2012). “The performances by both Landers and Kruspe,” wrote Adney, “capitalize on the *mental torment of anyone wrestling with their identity*” [emphasis added] (Adney, 143). The connections between the song “Mein Teil” and the industrial metal’s connections to BDSM and the consumption of a submissive are numerous. It draws on the story of a man who was certainly non-normative in terms of his erotic and sexual desires, fitting easily into the category of extreme kink. As Adney explained, the song also feeds on hegemonic stereotypes of gay men: standing in excrement, dressed as women, half-naked, with domineering mothers and deviant appetites (Adney, 143). In addition, the song and the video deal with transgressions of gender, sexuality, expression and desire, deviance and normalcy, and the very definition of abjection. Keith Kahn-Harris wrote: “While the inescapable *telos* of the most transgressive practices in the oblivion of death is not what most scene members want, it retains an overwhelming allure” (Kahn-Harris, 49). In “Mein Teil,” heavy metal lyrics tap into the 21st century debates about gender, sexuality and the corporeal. In fact, it provides an abject avenue through which BDSM imagery and subcultural cues can find a home for deviance in industrial metal’s embracing of abjection and bodily transgression.

Another of the continued importance of BDSM in industrial metal lies in the work of Trent Reznor. Reznor is the only original member of Nine Inch Nails, which he founded in San Francisco in 1988. He is also surrounded by rumors about his own identity, a topic about which he remains silent. Nine Inch Nails (NIN) is considered a cornerstone of industrial metal, combining screaming vocals with industrial noise, and lyrics focused on despair, resignation and

power exchange. NIN's 1992 album *Broken* featured the song "Happiness is Slavery," the video for which was banned upon its release. "Happiness is Slavery" is a title taken from the preface of the bondage novel *Story of O*, and the video featuring S&M performance artist Bob Flanagan showed Flanagan submitting to domination by a machine. Reznor's lyrics were strictly S&M: "Slave screams he hears but doesn't want to listen/Slave screams he's being beat into submission" (Reznor, 1992). In the video, Reznor sits locked in a small cage. In a separate room Flanagan enters, lights a candle, and ceremoniously strips, folds his clothes, and washes himself before lying in the machine. The machine then engages in a variety of S&M practices, including piercing, cock and ball torture, and cutting. At the end Flanagan is ground by the machine and used to feed the garden below. Once Flanagan is gone, Reznor walks in, lights and candle, and prepares to begin the ceremony again (Reznor, 1992). Here the industrial machine is not only the soundtrack, it is the sexual process itself. Even from its title, "Happiness Is Slavery" embraces the concept of the self-aware metalhead submitting to the inevitable machine. Reznor was again censored with the release of NIN's best known song, "Closer." Titled "Closer to God" when it was released as a single, the song is about sexual obsession. The video for "Closer" is shot on grainy film, recalling underground pornography or homemade films. Reznor appears several times: hanging from shackles in an S&M hood, seated against a wall with a ball gag in his mouth, all in a medical scene surrounded by diagrams of genitalia and various animals suspended or preserved in the scene. Reznor's lyrics: "You let me violate you, you let me desecrate you/You let me penetrate you, you let me complicate you" (Reznor, 1994).

Perhaps the greatest example of the queerscape crossing of masculinized heavy metal and BDSM sexuality is in Trent Reznor's work as a producer. Reznor has produced albums for NIN and Marilyn Manson, among others, but his most important queerscape project is a single album by the band 2wo. 2wo was founded by Rob Halford after he publicly came out in 1998, and after he left Judas Priest to strike out on his own. 2wo was a major departure from Priest's driving heavy metal. Instead, on the album titled *Voyeurs*, Halford moved into the industrial metal of NIN and Rammstein with an album that was entirely about BDSM. Song titles on *Voyeurs* included "I Am A Pig," "Leave Me Alone," and "Gimp." The only single from the 2wo album was "I Am A Pig." The video opened in what appears to be a basement sex club with various scenes of bondage, cross-dressing and drag, leathersex and stripping. The song features Halford's soaring voice, and the last shot is Halford himself: head shaved, goatee blackened, wrapped in furs and looking toward the sky. The liner notes feature the same image of Halford, this time with a subway car in the background, and when folded out the liner notes include several scenes of bondage and domination through the windows of the passing train car (2wo, 1998). This album was nothing like Judas Priest, and did not resemble Halford's later work with other bands. Was this album Halford's coming out as a BDSM leatherman? In his interview for *Behind the Music*, Halford spoke about using the whip on stage.

If I'd be on stage and I'd see someone getting into the whip. . . you like this do you? Some more [motions whipping]. . . You start wailing on their ass. . . Its amazing how people will, you know. . .[chuckles]. . . get into a good thrashing [clears throat and looks serious]. We all need a good thrashing now and again. (Behind the Music).

In the lyrics for 2wo's "I Am A Pig," Halford makes a potential allusion to his years in Judas Priest: "Don't be stupid everybody knows/I was only straightening my clothes" (2wo, 1998).

The use of BDSM imagery, concepts and cultural cues in industrial metal is more than just a marketing ploy. It is, in fact, a vehicle for the exploration of abjection and corporeality in metal music on a different level. In her germinal essay "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway suggested that understanding the relationship between humans and machines could be the greatest political act of our modern age by "challenging the informatics of domination in order to act potently" (Haraway, 316). BDSM in industrial metal challenges the vision of domination in heavy metal by focusing on the submissive, self-aware human as willful supplicant to the industrial machine. This new focus, in many ways, is the ultimate goal of heavy metal itself: to understand the relationship of humans to the industrial and technological hegemony that led to the creation of heavy metal. It seems that only through wallowing in the abjectness of the gears and wheels, by submitting to the machinery itself, does heavy metal find its ultimate expression. "By refusing bodily order and behavioral rationality," wrote S. Alexander Reed, "abjection is a model for rejecting the fact that any experience of worldly meaning begins with an act of differentiating" (Reed, 178). In the end, the BDSM cultural cues used in industrial metal strongly underscore we are all just ground food for the worms, and have already consented.

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