# CLASSROOM: HEAVY METAL CONCERT – AN AREA OF EXCESS OR A PLACE OF LEARNING?

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### Abstract

Heavy metal is by no means a political movement as a whole, but it is certainly a location with alternative and subversive statements. That heavy metal in some cases possesses political potential is illustrated by the band Heaven Shall Burn. Further, the band uses their political messages when performing live so that the stage turns into a classroom (platform) for explicit education. In this paper, the use of this platform and the parallels between the educational concept performed by Heaven Shall Burn and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt are demonstrated – both can be seen in the Age of Enlightenment.

## The political potential of heavy metal

The global phenomenon of heavy metal possesses and features political statements in its expression and content, as several studies illustrate (cf. Epp, Othmer & Masurek, 2011; Foster 2011; Kleiner & Anastasiadis, 2011; Scott, 2013). Kahn-Harris, for example, describes the playful characteristics of how individuals from the black metal scene deal with racist and fascist discourse (cf. Kahn-Harris, 2004). In contrast, Olsen (2013) illustrates how the far right is using black metal in their ideology (National Socialist black metal, NSBM). Further studies reveal a more "leftist" orientation of heavy metal towards politics. During the ongoing Arab spring in Egypt, Hjelm et al. have documented that heavy metal followers are even participants in initiating a process of action or change (cf. Hjelm, Kahn-Harris & Le Vine, 2013, p. 11). Hoad (2014, p. 193) illustrates the use of anti-apartheid messages in the South African metal scene. During the apartheid years, heavy metal served as an important site of anti-government protest. To sum up the issue presented here, I would like to conclude with the words of Kahn-Harris: "Of course, music and the scene can never be detached from flows of power and capital and hence a non-political scene is an impossibility" (2007, p. 155). These explanations clarify that it is hard to speak of heavy metal a) as a compact culture and b) one with a clearly political message. To understand the metal scene as a homogeneous (sub-) culture seems difficult, if not impossible.

The term heavy metal has been used by the general public since its inception in the early 1970s as a broad label to describe a large group of otherwisediverse musical forms. Internally, that diversity has always been acknowledged (cf. Heinisch, 2011, p. 411), so that it is difficult to speak of heavy metal as a political movement *as a whole*. It can certainly be a location for alternative and subversive statements and the circulation of daily or historical themes. Kleiner and Anastasiadis (2011), for example, demonstrate this in their longitudinal analysis that broaches the issue of war in heavy metal in Europe and the United States. They illustrate that heavy metal may indeed be political – mainly through reductive and plain phrases in the lyrics on various issues. Therefore, it has a politicising effect in certain segments but not as a macroculture (cf. ibid., p. 396 ff.).

However, for geographic areas where heavy metal followers also have to deal with incidents, such as censorship and repression in the Middle East, political moments in the music can be found. For the Middle East, Epp et al. document the political potential of heavy metal. In those countries, heavy metal supporters question the power bloc, such as the political system, the religious leaders and in general the patriarchal structures of their societies, with the help of their music. Moreover, the English language used by the bands in the Middle East can already be seen, on a political level, as subversive because it arises from western culture. In these countries, metal – with all its cultural and moral impacts – is viewed by conservative forces as a metaphor for westernization. Just like in Europe or the United States, heavy metal in the Middle East cannot be seen as a political movement as a whole but rather as *a location for subversive statements and articulation* (cf. Epp et al., p. 42).

In dealing with the political potential of a music culture, another problem arises – namely, the definition of the political. What exactly can be described as political and what cannot? Generally, there is no accepted definition of politics. In the definitive book the *Lexikon der Politikwissenschaften* (encyclopedia of political science), for example, one can find different definitions of the term (cf. Nohlen & Schultze 2004, p. 669ff.). Hence, more or less every study is based on a different understanding, which makes it difficult to compare them.

### The political potential of Heaven Shall Burn

To illustrate the political potential in a particular case, I refer to the German band Heaven Shall Burn. Further, the definition of what exactly can be seen as political will harken back to the understanding of Nieland (2009, p. 33). His ideas about politics are divided into three areas: "polity" (norms and institutional structure), "politics" (procedural dimension), and "policy" (content dimension).

Since their foundation in 1996, Heaven Shall Burn have chosen to, in a variety of their lyrics, take an explicitly political position. Here, I specifically mention the song "Combat" from the album *Invictus (Iconoclast III)* (2010) as an example. It puts a critical perspective on war and refers in particular to the problem of child soldiers. Generally, the song focuses on the exploitation and dehumanization of individuals by those in power (rulers). In particular, the song deals with children harmed by a warlord (war).

The lyrics describe how children are taken away from their parents, how they are oppressed and enslaved by the warlord; they are simply snatched away from their childhood. Thus, the differentiation between the rulers or suppressors on the one hand and the people – in particular the children – on the other hand is visible. "Dragged away from home on blood red nights, Slave to a brutal system, forevermore" (Link 1).

This is further twisted in the lyrics that the children are orphans, and the warlord is taking care of them as their legal guardian. Consequently, he has full control over them. Alongside their childhood, the people are further robbed of their complete freedom. Their only existence is to kill and fight for the warlord. Forced by the warlord to execute his command, it is forbidden to express personal wishes. Furthermore, they also receive no affection. "You are an orphan now, Adopted by the beast of war, The end of all your childhood dreams has come, [...], Constrained and forced to kill" (Link 1). The children's hopeless situation is further illustrated by the fact that they do not have anyone to be close to, with whom they could possibly develop a social and emotional relationship. Due to the brutality of the repression, they are on their own. They do not experience and receive any support. Neither do they receive emotional attention, which is obviously extremely important to a child's development. Besides their weaponry, there are no humans with whom they can build a social relationship. "There are no arms to hold you, Yet there are no hands to wipe your tears, [...], A life without a future, you will forget your wishes, And nothing to embrace, but the rifle in your hands" (Link 1).

However, is the critique only limited to the textual level? It is also evident visually in the form of animated images within the song's music video. The dismal and destructive war scenarios, with their mutilated and dead bodies, are assisted by the aspects of the colour tones of black, white and red. In contrast to these scenes, children are shown playing with colourful images. The deprivation of childhood and the enslavement of war are shown as in the following description. At first, playing children are shown in a colourful environment. In another sequence, a passing shadow takes the colour, so that only black and white remains. Last, the playing children transform into already-militaryequipped soldiers, which is evident through the helmets they wear after the shadow has taken away the colours. Further, they are forced by armed men to shoot at something. In addition to the textual level, the brutality of the oppression of the children is visibly illustrated.

In summary, it is recognisable that the band deals critically with war in general. Furthermore, the example illustrates the special matter of child soldiers. Based on what Nieland says, the political examination with its politicised and political potentials, relates to the level of "policy" (content). But what does the band want to achieve with their lyrics and visual images? Do they use them solely for promotional reasons, or do they intend a greater purpose with the (political) content? Indeed, one can question if the political content can already be seen as education. In my opinion in the case of Heaven Shall Burn, both passages can already be seen as a kind of implicit education due to the mere articulation of the issue. In this paper, this hypothesis is strengthened with the help of further examples. Therefore, the educational effect is not only limited to the implicit level (of the lyrics). That the space in which the performance happens also offers some kind of explicit education is illustrated below. Thus, the political content is used for educational processes and educational work.

# The educational potential of Heaven Shall Burn – the concert location: a space for explicit education

To build my arguments as to why the concert location offers a kind of education, I stick to the German band Heaven Shall Burn. The following three examples illustrate that the concert location can be a space of *explicit education*:

1. First, I refer once again to the visual dimension of the song and associated video "Combat" (2010). As illustrated above, the video presents war scenes in which the dehumanization and suppression of children is clearly, recognisably represented. By using the mentioned video as an installation for their live shows, like at the Wacken Open Air Festival 2011, the audience is confronted with its visuals. In contrast to the textual level, the confrontation at a concert

with the visuals is much more straightforward than only hearing the song or browsing it randomly in the World Wide Web. Furthermore, the band occasionally announces the issue of the song at their live concerts. Consequently by using the visual level as well as a straight announcement at concerts, the implicit layer is left behind in favour to a more explicit one.

2. Once again at the Wacken Festival 2011, the band spoke out about the subject of gender in society. The singer Marcus Bischoff focuses on gender equality, as the following statement clarifies:

Jetzt ist es Zeit jemand ganz besonderen zu danken die die ganze Zeit hier vorne stehen, auch hier in den Circlepits dabei sind und immer wieder vernachlässigt werden und doch sind sie so wichtig. Und damit meine ich {betont} <u>die Frauen</u> auf Wacken. [...] Wacken seit ihr bereit die Mädels zu ehren? [Now it is time especially to say thank you to the ones who stand all the time in front, who participate in the circle pits and who consistently get neglected and yet they are so important. And with this I mean {demonstrative} <u>the women</u> in Wacken. (...) Are you ready to honour the gals of Wacken?] (Link 2).

Further, Bischoff states that all females who come to the stage will get a free tshirt. Just as in other parts of society, like in leading positions in general, females are underrepresented. This is the case as well in the heavy metal. With this action, the band calls attention to gender inequality in the heavy metal scene as well as in society generally.

3. With the last example, I would like to point to the Veto Tour in 2013 from Heaven Shall Burn. Throughout the entire tour, they had six huge display screens on stage. This is demonstrated in a YouTube video of the concert in Dresden at Alter Schlachthof on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013 (Link 3). Right before the band enters the stage, the audience can see blurry images of a sea and a ship on the screens. Suddenly, faces appear on the screens and eight people introduce themselves by saying their names and where they come from. They always end with the phrase "I'm Sea Shepherd" (Link 3). After the eight of them finish introducing themselves, two of them state the following:

For so many years, I have been really connected to hardcore, metal and punk music scene. And for me and several other people around here, the music scene made us the person that we are today. We all left our homes a long time ago to become crew members of one of the Sea Shepherd ships, taking part in several campaigns to protect marine wildlife, threatened by the cruelty of insanity of the human race. Sea Shepherd is a direct action organization network. Over thirty-five years, it has fought to protect those who can not protect themselves. We will simply start an operation for wildlife which is an attempt in our campaign to protect endangered whales from being illegally slaughtered. Last year, we had our biggest success down in Antarctica. Saving over ninety percent of the whales, these murderers had in their {muffled}. We are hoping that with your help, this year there will be even a bigger success that we can put an end on this unnecessary bloodbath. There are a lot of people just like us aboard the ships, and we are glad that we can still feel this connection to the music scene. Thanks to bands like Heaven Shall Burn and people like you that still believe that music can carry a message about a change. We are days away from once again putting a life on the line. We are days away from once again to hunt for hunters until the slaughter system disappears. So now have a blast with Heaven Shall Burn and support Sea Shepherd. (Link 3).

After the two of them finish their statement, the band starts to play the song Hunters Will Be Hunted from their record *Veto* released in 2013. With this song, the band expresses direct support for the Sea Shepherd crew, as the guitarist Maik Weichert mentions:

Er drückt unseren Support für Sea Shepherd aus und ist auch ein generelles Statement gegen alle komplexgesteuerten Hobbyjäger, welche die Schönheit und Anmut eines Tieres im Vergleich zu ihrer kümmerlichen Existenz nicht ertragen können und deshalb töten müssen. [The song expresses our support for the Sea Shepherd crew and can be seen as a general statement against hunters and their merciless killing] (Link 4). While the band is playing the song, sequences of Sea Shepherd in action appear on the displays.

With these three examples, it becomes obvious that the concert location is not just a place for dancing, drinking and enjoying music. Instead, it provides a space for exchanging ideas and attracting the attention of the audience to specific issues. Consequently, the concert location is also a place in which explicit education and educational processes are possible.

The above examples clarify that the band is not only interested in performing their music on stage. Beyond that, their interest is to spread messages to their audience. Therefore, they use their music and concerts as a kind of educational arena. On the basis of the illustrated examples, one could also draw a comparison to classrooms and ex-cathedra teaching. The assumption that the band likes to spread their messages and ideas is strengthened by an interview in which they express that they like to affect the listener's senses and mental activity. They state that they use their music to inform people and to push social and political transformation (cf. Amnesty International, 2010). This statement reveals that the band is tracking an educational goal with their music and that they further want to encourage critical thinking within society. Furthermore, this statement shows that the band is aware of their status and that they use their influence to reach the audience with their messages.

With their messages and statements, they like to initiate and activate a reflective educational process within the individual. Especially in the last example, this is obvious by directly addressing the audience on several levels. The activists of Sea Shepherd build a direct connection to the audience by saying that they are connected to the hardcore, metal and punk scenes. The activists also state there are more people like them on the ships who have their roots in the mentioned music scenes. With this announcement, they put themselves on the same level as the audience and use the music as a kind of connector.

Furthermore, they emphasize that the music they listen to (hardcore, punk and metal) has a great influence on their identity. It shapes them to the person that they are today – fighting for the oppressed. In other words, hardcore, punk and metal is not only a kind of music but a lifestyle as well. It raises their voice for the voiceless and for those who cannot protect themselves. Consequently, the music and the direct action belong together; it cannot be seen as something disconnected. In addition, the crew of Sea Shepherd invites the audience to join them in the battle against injustice. This can happen both in passive and active ways by joining the Sea Shepherd crew on one of their ships. There they can hang out with like-minded people who are also into hardcore, punk and metal music. If one reads between the lines, the band tries to point out the issue of cruel and unnecessary killing. They want to raise their audience's awareness on the issue by pushing them to think more critically. In addition, they give Sea Shepherd a platform to reach more people to express their goals.

Of course, the individual can ignore these details and expounded statements. However, this can happen in school as well because educational processes are always dependent on the individual. Ultimately, only the individual can decide and evaluate if something has an educational effect. In this case, Luhmann speaks of a technology deficit (cf. Luhmann & Schorr, 1982; Luhmann, 2002, p. 157). Nevertheless, it is conceivable that fans listening to the music come across the message the band is trying to spread. Hence, the band can initiate educational processes not only on an implicit level with their lyrics but also on a much more explicit level with the help of the examples illustrated here. At or after a concert, one can question and can be surprised about why the band uses such details and statements. By confronting the individual with new and maybe shocking information, the band can activate and initiate a learning process. The message of the band can move the individual in a cogitative process by reflecting on the ideas behind, for example, why the band is using such details, why they do such announcements, what they like to show and express with them, and why it is so important for them to show those images or address the topic.

### Education as interdependency of "I and heavy metal"

Just as with the term political, one may also face problems defining the word education. Hence the question will arise, what exactly can be understood as education? If one takes a look at the definition of what education means exactly, it would be problematic because there is no common definition of education. For example in the book *Grundbegriffe, Theorien und Methoden der Erziehungswissenschaft* (Koller, 2009), several definitions and understandings of the term can be found. Due to the definitional problem, one can question if it is therefore at all possible to speak from education in the outlined explanations? That it is justified to speak of education in the case of Heaven Shall Burn will be demonstrated with the help of the Humboldtian understanding of education. Furthermore, with a theoretical framework of education, it is easier to identify if heavy metal or music in general possesses educational content or not.

The above exposed examples and their educational potential can be considered in light of the new humanism mainly shaped by the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt. His educational concept can definitely be seen in the tradition of the Age of Enlightenment, because he does not limit the individual's development to requirements from the outside world. Likewise, Heaven Shall Burn only makes an offer to their audience and do not expect them to support Sea Shepherd. In the end, they leave the decision to the individual. Humboldt sees education as the highest expansion of human strength. Each individual should try to develop themselves as thoroughly as possible. Thereby, strength is not only limited to the mind but also includes fantasy, imagination, senses, etcetera. Further, Humboldt considers education more as a development from the inside than as an effect from the outside. Nevertheless, this does not mean that education functions as a solipsistic reference to the individual itself. Education - in the sense of the development of the highest expansion of human strength - is not possible in reference to only the individual. It is only possible when the individual operates with an element which is located externally. Humboldt names this element "world", and the relation between the individual and the world is described as "interdependency". Hence, the concept of education broaches the issue of the interdependency of "I and world".

With his concept "world", Humboldt not only recognizes other human beings but also (cultural) objects created by humankind (cf. Koller, 2009, p. 74ff.). To be more specific and sticking to the mentioned examples, education and educational processes in the concert location can be seen as an interdependency of I and heavy metal. Since heavy metal is only a part or a detail of the world, it is much more appropriate to name only the special section instead of the whole unit. Thus, heavy metal does not represent the whole. Furthermore, Humboldt speaks of the highest expansion of the human strength in a unified whole. But in this case, it is only reduced to the interaction of a special section of the world. So it is wiser to name it directly instead of generalizing it. Moreover, special sections can also be banned or tried to be banned by people who have the power to do so. However in general, the whole world cannot be banned and its access cannot be cut off entirely. Consequently, one can limit the access only to special segments of the world. For example, some rulers try to ban heavy metal in the Middle East using repression and censorship (cf. Epp, 2011). In doing so, they try to cut the ingress to the heavy metal sector. They want to maintain control of widespread ideas. As illustrated by the case of Heaven Shall Burn, this would mean that they want to maintain control of what is being articulated on stage and in the lyrics. Those in power have no further interest if people start thinking in a critical way that is initiated by another force. Therefore, they have no interest in alternative education arenas, such as what Heaven Shall Burn has to offer. With their strategies, rulers try to restrict the interdependency of I and heavy metal. A classic example of such a process of keeping away information and knowledge occurs in North Korea.

In general, Humboldt ascribes languages a significant relevancy related to the interdependency of I and world. For him, languages are educating organs of thoughts with which ideas can be generated. Accordingly, every language has a special view of the world with its own phonetic system, vocabulary and grammar, which also influences the cosmos of thinking and sentiments, like the language of heavy metal. The diversity of languages causes the assumption that a multiplicity of worldviews exists. For Humboldt, the miscellaneous languages enrich the interdependency of I and world. They widen the horizon so that the previous worldview can be broadened. Learning new languages implicates for Humboldt a way to understand different worldviews. He does not only think in national languages like French Arabic, Turkish or Chinese. In fact, he has a broad understanding of languages so that the term language also includes individual- or group-specific manners of speaking, like those used in subcultures (cf. Koller, 2009, p. 84ff.). Consequently, music can be seen as a kind of a language like Hargreaves et al. articulate.

Music is a fundamental channel of communication: it provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings even though their spoken languages may be mutually incomprehensible. It can also provide a lifeline to human interaction for those whose special needs make other means of communication difficult. (Hargreaves, Miell & MacDonald, 2002, p. 1)

This includes as well heavy metal. For example in his musicological approach, Elflein conceives metal as a self-developing musical language and as a form of expression (cf. Elflein, 2010, p. 45ff.). Additionally, this comprehension of education does not limit language teaching just to foreign languages. Every dialogue with other humans in which one tries to understand the worldview of the counterpart can be seen as an educational process because one's worldview is being expanded or challenged (cf. Koller, 2009, p. 86f.). These three issue

examples illustrate that Heaven Shall Burn's stage interaction with the audience is a kind of dialogue. Furthermore, these examples clarify that the political content is used as well for educational issues. Consequently, the difference between the political and the educational blurs.

Apparently, heavy metal can be seen in this case as critical education because the band addresses topics that are not in focus and broached in the mainstream public or media – especially the topic of Sea Shepherd. Consequently, heavy metal music is not limited to entertaining the audience, but rather it has the potential to influence ways of life and world-views (cf. Varas-Diaz, Rivera-Segarra, Mendoza & González-Sepúlveda, 2014, p. 254). If one understands heavy metal as critical education, one would not be surprised if some forces try to ban or censor the music. For example in the Middle East where heavy metal bands use their lyrics to criticize the political system, religious leaders and the patriarchal structures of their societies generally, it is clear that the rulers try to decrease, restrict and/or ban the interaction within the scene and with the public. Consequently, they try to eliminate the educational arenas that heavy metal can provide (cf. Epp et al. 2011, p. 38ff.).

#### **Referred internet links**

Link 1 = http://www.magistrix.de/lyrics/Heaven%20Shall%20Burn/Combat-1078319.html [19.10.2014].

Link 2 = https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DXyn2l7asI [19.10.2014]

Link 3 = https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U1q5Y6tDxQ [19.10.2014] Link 4 = http://www.metal-hammer.de/video-

audio/premieren/article403523/jaegerjagd-seht-das-neue-heaven-shall-burn-video-hunters-will-be-hunted.html [19.10.2014]

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