

Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies. Edited by Andy R. Brown, Karl Spracklen, Keith Kahn-Harris and Niall W.R. Scott. New York: Routledge, 2016. 370 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-06259-7

Connecting Metal to Culture: Unity in Disparity. Edited by Mika Elovaara and Bryan Bardine. Bristol: Intellect, 2017. 250 pp. ISBN 978-1-783-20700-8
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Although *Global Metal Music and Culture's* subtitle indicates that it will serve as an overview of the key areas of research in contemporary metal studies, while reading the pairs of chapters that bookend this collection one gains the impression that it is intended as a checkpoint in the history of the field, taking stock of its past developments and ruminating on its future. The book opens with an introduction by the editors, which sets up the 'globalist' theme of the collection and discusses the term 'metal studies' in the context of this volume. Unfortunately, the collection fails to live up to its 'globalist' aspirations, with only a handful of chapters – 'The Numbers of the Beast: Surveying Iron Maiden's Global Tribe' by Jean-Philippe Ury-Petes, 'The Social Characteristics of the Contemporary Metalhead: The Hellfest Survey' by Christophe Guibert and Gerôme Guibert, and 'Tunes from the Lad of the Thousand Lakes: Early Years of Internationalization in Finnish Heavy Metal' by Tony-Matti Karjalainen and Eero Sipilä – stepping outside of predominantly English-speaking metal scenes, and these remaining mainly within Europe. Metal scenes in Latin America and in Pacific Rim Countries, to which the editors pay lip-service in the introduction, are sadly lacking from investigation in any of the book's chapters.

Deena Weinstein, whose 1991 book helped to raise metal music as a legitimate area of study, provides her 'Reflections on Metal Studies' in chapter 2. Weinstein surveys the history of metal studies and its development to what she determines to be a current high point, addresses some of the threats to its sustainability, and offers some suggestions. This collection demonstrates one of the threats Weinstein identifies, that the interdisciplinary nature of metal studies often results in work which is too specialised to be accessible to all metal studies scholars; Mark Mynett's use of sonograms in his chapter 'The Distortion Paradox: Analyzing Contemporary Metal Production' and the use of conventional music notation in some chapters could be alienating to some readers. However, I would argue that this diversity of approaches is one of the keys to metal studies' success, and that not all work necessarily must be accessible to all readers.

While this opening pair of chapters largely looks back at metal studies' past, the book's final section, Metal Futures, looks forward to the future of metal itself. First is Tom O'Boyle and Niall W.R. Scott's response to Keith Kahn-Harris's series of seven essays, 'Metal Beyond Metal' (2013–2014); this is followed by Kahn-Harris's reply. Kahn-Harris's concerns – about the over-abundance of metal and decline of older means of metal consumption (e.g. tape trading, homemade 'zines) owing to the rise of the internet and streaming services, and the fragmentation of metal into myriad niche subgenres – are hardly unique, being shared by many of the older generation of metal fans. (The latter concern also echoes Weinstein's about the future of metal studies.) This is alluded to by O'Boyle and Scott: 'At one stage we of a certain age might have been on a speedboat heading toward an unending horizon, but when the fuel runs out and the other side is visible, it is time to face the opposite direction, grab the oars, and row' (p. 341). I agree with O'Boyle and Scott that in order to

progress, 'metal needs, in paying due respect to its origins, to also be in a position where artists are willing to forget' (p. 340), and share their optimism that this will happen.

The 18 chapters (excepting the introductory two) are divided into seven parts, whose headings indicate the diversity of topics covered: Metal Musicology; Metal Music Scenes; Metal Demographics and Identity; Metal Markets and Commerce; Metal and Gender Politics; Metal and Cultural Studies; and Metal Futures. Many of the contributors to the collection are academics in the early stages of their careers, proving that the editors have been faithful to the concept of '*Current Directions*'. Undoubtedly my personal highlight is the trio of chapters in the Metal and Gender Politics section. Focussing on the experiences of women in metal scenes and their complicated relationships with the aggressively 'masculine' – and often misogynist – music they love, these chapters should be required reading for anyone with an interest in gender and identity politics, regardless of their interest in metal music.

In the first of these, Jamie E. Patterson examines how women in North Carolina use tropes from death metal to empower themselves and form a gender(less) identity inspired by the corporeal themes of their favoured genre. (Gabby Riches touches on similar themes in her excellent chapter on British grindcore.) Sonia Vasan then explores the ways in which female fans of death metal reconcile their personal values with the misogynist imagery used by some groups, such as engaging in 'loss aversion' and 'cost reduction' techniques. Finally, Rosemary Lucy Hill re-evaluates the qualities in metal that are traditionally labelled 'masculine', and examines whether feminists who listen to 'masculine' metal and hard rock are suffering from 'false consciousness'. As the editors mention in their introduction (p. 15), female scholars such as Donna Gaines and Deena Weinstein have been at the centre of metal studies since its beginnings, despite the marginalisation of women in the genre itself. As women and gender-non-conforming people become more visible in the metal scene, their experiences are being pushed to their forefront of metal studies by scholars such as those mentioned above.

The foreword to *Connecting Metal to Culture* by Alex Skolnick, guitarist for thrash metal band Testament, namechecks both Deena Weinstein – who with Robert Walser are described as the Black Sabbath and Judas Priest of metal studies – and Keith Kahn-Harris – metal studies' Metallica, according to Skolnick. It says a lot, therefore, about the relative status of each publication that the aforementioned scholars are featured in the *other* book reviewed in this article. It is also relevant to note that the two editors of *Connecting Metal to Culture* are first-time editors of a publication of this nature, thus their names do not carry the same cachet as do those of the editors of *Global Metal Music and Culture*. The introduction has a somewhat self-congratulatory tone regarding the rise of metal studies and the status of metal within society, and seems intended to position the authors as fans first and scholars second, highlighting the longevity of their fandom and closing the chapter with a lyric from a song by Saxon. Despite a clear attempt – indicated by the title – to draw a link between metal culture and wider society, the book seems intended more to draw metalheads into academia than to connect with anyone without a vested interest in metal or metal studies.

Again, it is an examination of gender in metal that provides my personal highlight, in this case chapter 3, 'Metal as a Vehicle for Critical Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean: Challenging Traditional Female Gender Roles through Music' by

Nelson Varas-Díaz, Sigrid Mendoza, Eliot Rivera and Osvaldo Gonzalez. Focussing on three Puerto Rican metal bands that feature one or more female members, Varas-Díaz *et al.* examine three different approaches to subverting, or in some cases confirming, gender roles using metal music and culture as a vehicle. Another personal favourite is Chapter 5, 'The Horror and the Allure: Metal, Power, Gothic Literature, and Multisubjectivity', by Jeremy Wallach (himself the co-editor of an excellent collection of essays on metal music and culture, *Metal Rules the Globe*; Wallach *et al.* 2011) and Esther Clinton, which provides a fresh take on a theme (that of 'power') that has been examined in metal studies since Robert Walser's foundational text, *Running with the Devil* (1993), while challenging preconceived notions of metal's core demographic. 'If, as is often assumed, Metal is only about fulfilling adolescent power fantasies, its appeal would be mainstream, not subcultural' (p. 101), Wallach and Clinton argue. They examine the complicated depictions of power performed in classic metal tracks by Iron Maiden and Anthrax, and compare this with the multisubjective approach of Charlotte Dacre's gothic novel *Zofloya* (1806).

Despite the title of the previous collection, *Connecting Metal to Culture* proves to be the more committed to a globalist perspective of metal studies, with Elovaara's chapter, 'Thor and Trolls, Flutes and Fiddles: "Folk" in Metal', the aforementioned chapter by Varas-Díaz *et al.* and André Epp's on 'Diversity in Metal Politics' standing out in this regard. Particularly impressive is the commitment to metal scenes in majority non-white societies, something which is sorely lacking from *Global Metal Music and Culture*.

The chapters are all very readable, for the most part dispensing with insider jargon or impenetrably academic language. Although the titles of both collections contain the word 'culture', *Connecting Metal to Culture* is narrower in its focus on the cultural studies angle on metal studies, which its editors state as an aim in the introduction (p. 6). However, the narrower focus may make the collection more limited in scope, particularly in its final two pedagogical chapters. I was frustrated by Paul Petrovic's chapter, 'Beyond "Forms of Aggression": Teaching Extreme Metal in the Composition Classroom', wishing that he had given some of his students' responses instead of only describing the content of his course.

There are some curious editing decisions in *Connecting Metal to Culture*. Most irksome of these is the insistence on capitalising the first letters of genre terms, i.e. Death Metal, Power Metal, etc. (although non-metal genres such as grunge and punk are not capitalised, which for the sake of consistency is even more off-putting). Secondly, the sometimes amateurish photos – many taken by Elovaara at various live events – that illustrate the chapters are often incongruous with the content of the accompanying text. For instance, why is there a photo of Bullet For My Valentine in the middle of Wallach and Clinton's chapter when that band is mentioned nowhere in the book, let alone in the chapter? Furthermore, these images are the only visual accompaniment to the text. Several of *Global Metal Music and Culture's* chapters make use of a range of visual illustrations, including maps, sonograms and conventional music notation, as I have mentioned before. While this might seem a superficial observation, it gives an indication of *Global Metal Music and Culture's* thoroughness and diversity, in contrast to *Connecting Metal to Culture's* occasionally journalistic tone.

The diversity of approaches and the high quality of the writing in *Global Metal Music and Culture* make this the more essential of the two volumes, and the more

accessible to those without a direct interest in the field of metal studies. *Connecting Metal to Culture* is less consistent in quality and fails to provide enough material for readers without a direct interest in metal studies. However, the chapters mentioned above certainly make *Connecting Metal to Culture* worth a look for metal studies scholars.

Joe Turner

Oxford Brookes University
joe.turner-2016@brookes.ac.uk

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***Gender and Rock*. By Mary Celeste Kearney. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 363 pp. ISBN 9780190688660
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This textbook draws together a wide range of scholarship to offer a substantial overview and analysis of rock and gender. The book takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on musicology, popular music criticism, cultural studies, media studies, literary analysis, performance studies, sociology, and feminist and queer scholarship. The introduction also outlines underpinning critical principles, pointing out, for example, the male dominance of rock and the social constructedness of rock patriarchy, the continuing prevalence of binary gender politics in rock culture, and the importance of an intersectional approach. While acknowledging their significance and impact, Kearney notes the 'women-centric' approach of previous feminist rock music studies by, for example, Mavis Bayton, Sheila Whiteley and Marion Leonard, as well as the relative scarcity of works that interrogate masculinity, such as those by Robert Walser, Matthew Bannister and Freya Jarman-Ivens. This book does not take such a gender-specific approach, but instead takes account of 'the wide variety of gender discourses circulating in this culture' (p. xix), to consider how rock both affirms and subverts gender norms. Kearney's discussion, not only of women, men, masculinities and femininities, but also of transgender, gender fluid and queer identities, recognises the fact that 'gender is always constructed relationally' and gender identities 'always operate interdependently across and through rock culture' (p. xx). Along with Kearney's attention to the roles and representations of race in rock history and culture, this is an aspect of the book that ensures its significant contribution to the body of works concerned with music and gender.

Another key strength of the book is its structure, organised into five parts, each of which is divided further into chapters. First, a useful foundational section outlines approaches to studying rock culture before focusing on gender studies in relation to