The Devil's Music

An analysis of why the Swedish metal band Ghost presents itself as a satanic cult

Name: Drs. P.C.J.M. Paulissen
ANR: 132987

Educational institution: Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

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Supervisor: Dr. M.J.M. Hoondert
Second reviewer: Dr. F.G. Bosman
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1. Introduction

About a year ago a fellow academic and very good friend of mine sent me a link to a YouTube video through Facebook. The video was a live taping of a performance by a metal band from Sweden called Ghost. I was immediately intrigued, and after listening to their most recent album in full I was hooked. Not only did Ghost sound like the old hard rock and heavy metal bands from the 1970's that my parents grew up with and which I also enjoy so much, but they were visually impressive as well. The musicians were all dressed in black and wearing horned silver masks, while the singer looked like a member of the clergy. Watching older concerts revealed that the band's frontman has gone through a number of personae, from three different iterations of a dark Pope to a cardinal in black.

Taking into account their stage décor and listening to their lyrics more closely it became apparent Ghost is trying to present itself as a satanic version of the Catholic Church. As a student of ritual, and having a background in religious studies with a hint of Catholic theology, this was very interesting to me, and it has led to the question of why. Why has Ghost chosen this sinister image? Are they just playing with satanic imagery for fun, or is there more to it? Could it be a critique of religion? Or is it a critique of society as a whole? In other words, my question is whether Ghost is trying to say something with their performance; is it just theatre or is there a message? And if so, what is it? Do they succeed in conveying this message?

In the present thesis I shall attempt to answer these queries. More specifically it will be guided by the following research question:

> *What message is the Swedish metal band Ghost trying to convey by presenting itself as a satanic cult?*

In order to answer this question I will draw from a multidisciplinary set of scholarly tools. Since a large section of the enquiry will be focused on the band's engagement with the audience during their performance and seems to borrow heavily from Catholic imagery to do so, the paper will combine ritual studies with religious studies.

The paper will be divided into five sections divided over eight chapters. The introductory section will consist of a quick overview of the origins of metal music and how the genre came to be associated with the satanic, while the theoretical framework will elaborate on the related subjects of performance, ritual, religion and popular music, and religion and metal. The paper

will then continue with a thick description of a Ghost concert I attended in February of 2019 as the basis for an ethnographic study of the dress, make-up and stage décor used by the band. This fourth chapter will also feature a short survey of the online video clips found on the band's official YouTube-channel and how they use the platform to support the imagery of the satanic cult. To place the thick description into its proper context, my personal experiences described therein will be supplemented by articles and interviews with the band.

Next, for the textual-analytical section in chapter five, the paper will shift to an explanation of literary Satanism and the concept album as the backdrop for a non-exhaustive close reading of the lyrics. It will also address how the album covers echo the narrative the band intended to present. For this part of the inquiry I will be using interviews with the band and reviews of their albums to support the close reading. The paper will close with a recollection of discussed subjects and some preliminary findings, followed by a conclusion in which an answer to the research question will be provided and a discussion in which I will offer some suggestions for possible future research into the subject. These three chapters taken together will constitute the fifth and final section of this paper. Both the ethnographic and textual-analytical chapters will also contain an extension of the methodology that pertains to these matters specifically.

2. Historical Background

Without proper context scholars can easily overlook important nuances in their research, and because Ghost takes inspiration from many bands that came before it is important to consider the historical background first. In the case of a satanic metal band this means that the inquiry must be preceded by a quick overview of the origins of metal and how it came to be associated with the satanic. Starting with a brief summary of how guitar players began to use distortion – one of the key musical techniques behind metal music – the chapter will shift to a reconstruction of how the progenitors of metal gave a thematic direction to the genre. The next few paragraphs will bring attention to the wider cultural climate in which metal arose, as well as to how the connection between metal and the satanic became a trope in popular culture. Finally the chapter will revolve around the later development of the genre and how Ghost fits into this.

2.1 Distortion

The sound that comes to mind for most people upon hearing the term 'electric guitar' is not its natural sound, but is instead created by turning up the volume of the amplifier higher than what it can actually handle. This usually leads to little more than heavily distorted and unpleasant noise, hence it is called distortion. It just so happens that for the electric guitar this is actually an improvement, as it causes the instrument to produce a much earthier and grittier tune. Although several blues musicians had started to experiment with distortion in their guitar play as early as the 1940's, often by purposely damaging their amplifiers, the genre of metal per se is considered by many to have originated with two bands that came to the fore in the early '70s: Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath (Polyphonic, 2018a, 2018b).

The use of distortion was first popularised by guitarists like Keith Richards and Jimi Hendrix in the late '60s, but their music is not yet seen as metal (Polyphonic, 2018a). Led Zeppelin turned up the intensity with high-pitched, almost screeching vocals and provided the budding genre a thematic direction. Being a fan of the Lord of the Rings, singer Robert Plant infused his lyrics with scenes and characters from Tolkien's books (Polyphonic, 2018c). But whereas Led Zeppelin made into music epic fantasy in a triumphant way, Black Sabbath – as the name already suggests – tapped into its darker elements and sang about witchcraft and mankind's greatest antagonist: the devil (Polyphonic, 2018b). Moreover, due to an accident suffered prior to joining the band, guitarist Tony Iommi was required to play with custom-made thimbles, which created an even heavier, almost industrial sound (Iommi, 2012).

2.2 War, chaos and Satan

From the moment metal was given its first impetus, the genre was characterised by a broader fascination with some of the darker themes found in many of the world's major religions, most notably the end of the world as it is imagined in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Songs like 'War Pigs' by Black Sabbath in 1970 and 'The Number of the Beast' by Iron Maiden in 1982 are good examples of this, as they both rely heavily on biblical eschatology. Moreover, in 'War Pigs' this apocalyptic darkness is connected to the chaotic nature of war by depicting the devil as the only real winner amid the destruction wrought by armed conflict (Moberg, 2017). Furthermore, while they are not classified as a metal band, the Rolling Stones seemed to echo this sentiment with their 1968 song 'Sympathy for the Devil'. Thus the basis for metal's association with the satanic was laid.

This places early heavy metal firmly in the culture of the time. References to war and chaos in rock music during this period in history did not occur in a vacuum, as the rise of the new genre in the early '70s more or less coincided with mounting opposition against the Vietnam War. Because of new media, footage from the frontlines could easily be broadcast to the public, and this exposed people to the true extent of brutality inflicted upon both sides. Most bands at the time sang about the conflict in political terms and criticised the government, like the Rolling Stones with 'Gimme Shelter' and Creedence Clearwater Revival with 'Fortunate son', both from 1969. It also turned out distortion was especially well-suited to emulate the chaotic nature of war, as exemplified by Jimi Hendrix's rendition of the United States national anthem during the Woodstock festival, again in 1969, and the aforementioned 'War Pigs' (Polyphonic, 2019).

Over time metal has diversified into a plethora of subgenres, such as thrash metal, doom metal, symphonic metal and, most relevant to the present paper, black metal. While references to the satanic in early heavy metal were usually figurative, often written by practicing Christians and sometimes even framed in terms of ultimate victory over the devil, satanic black metal did the opposite. Some prominent figures in the black metal scene are professed members of the Church of Satan, while others claim to be Satanists without any affiliation. The latter are often atheists or at the very least sceptical of religion. In their music Satan is seen as a literal entity and associated with terror and destruction, and in extreme cases they view Christianity as something that must be eradicated. In the past these individuals have sought to distinguish themselves from organised Satanism by using the term 'devil worship ' for their belief system. Between 1992 and

1996 this particular strain was the catalyst to a series of arson attacks in which around fifty church buildings in Norway[1] were destroyed (Introvigne, 2016).

While these self-styled devil worshippers were a small minority, in contemporary popular culture the connection between Satan and heavy metal is an established trope. In the 2006 cult film *Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny* two aspiring metal musicians go on a quest to find the devil's tooth rumoured to be a magic pick and, in the finale, defeat Old Nick in a rock-off contest. Similarly, in the video game *Brütal Legend* (2009) the player assumes the role of a roadie who gets transported to an alternate dimension inspired by metal music and then has to help its denizens defeat a devil-like villain. Even television often evokes this association such as in the popular show *Supernatural* (2005 - present), which tells the story of two brothers that hunt ghosts, monsters and demons. The eighth episode of season two features the boys taking on a demon that has been tempting aspiring blues musicians to sell their souls in exchange for extraordinary musical prowess.

Still, the association of metal with the devil is far from absolute. There are many metal bands that rarely refer to the satanic in their music like Deep Purple and the Scorpions, and even Black Sabbath has songs in their repertoire that don't mention the devil at all. The late hard rock and heavy metal musician Ronnie James Dio was an interesting figure in this regard, because he rose to prominence as the vocalist of Rainbow singing about epic fantasy, then joined Black Sabbath to replace Ozzy Osbourne after the original singer had left, and eventually started his own band named Dio to make music that included references to the satanic. Finally there are also examples of metal inspired by war and chaos in more secular historical terms and seemingly separated from biblical eschatology, such as in the music of power metal band Sabaton and the 1982 song 'Run to the Hills' by Iron Maiden.

2.3 'If You Have Ghosts'

Thematically speaking Ghost carries on the tradition of satanic black metal; Satan is presented as a literal entity and as a destructive figure. In terms of musical style, however, they have gone in a different direction and developed their own sound. The band combines different subgenres of metal and often adopts elements from various other musical styles, bringing them in close proximity to nu metal, which combines its characteristic distorted electric guitar riffs with vastly different genres entirely. However, since Ghost relies more on rock, pop and even 'church

[1] Influential proponents of this radical movement like Varg Vikernes and Euronymous were Norwegian.

music' rather than hip-hop, rap and funk, it would not be accurate the classify them as a nu metal band either. Especially on their latest album the influence of 1970's hard rock and '80s pop is almost undeniable, as the band appears to be taking cues from Queen in the songs 'Rats' and 'Faith', as well as not shying away from the synthesizer and even a saxophone solo in the instrumental track 'Miasma'.

Aesthetically the band appears to fall into a specific category of metal bands that borrow heavily from Christian liturgy. The first building blocks of this trend were put in place in the 1980's by Mercyful Fate vocalist King Diamond. As a professed member of the Church of Satan his satanic stage act is more than just spectacle, and he is known for using a microphone shaped like a cross, as well as various patterns of white face paint with black crosses. In more recent years German power metal band Powerwolf rose to fame with something similar; singer Attila Dorn also uses a cross-shaped microphone stand and wears corpse paint under ragged robes. In this case, however, all the other band members are also dressed in this manner and there is a strong emphasis on Catholic imagery. Their album *Blood of the Saints* from 2011, for example, features wolves dressed as bishops on the cover. Polish black metal band Batushka has also taken the clergy to heart by dressing up as Eastern Orthodox hieromonks[2] and singing exclusively in Old Church Slavonic.

Cultural phenomena never exist in a vacuum, and Ghost is no exception. The eccentric Swedes are not only a product of their own time, but also a consequence of past events; they are following in the footsteps of others who came before. This chapter has been a quick overview of the origins of metal music and how it came to be associated with the satanic. Starting with a brief summary of how guitar players began to use distortion, the chapter shifted to a reconstruction of how the progenitors of metal gave a thematic direction to the genre. The next section brought attention to the wider cultural climate in which metal arose, as well as to how the connection between metal and the satanic became a trope in popular culture. Finally the chapter revolved around the later development of the genre and how Ghost fits into this. Armed with this insight into the historical context it now becomes possible to begin the inquiry by sketching a theoretical framework.

[2] A hieromonk is a Christian monk who is also a priest, and the name of the band is a titular equivalent.

3. Theoretical framework

Insight into the historical context is a good start, but it's not enough. Doing sound research also requires taking notice of the appropriate scholarly theories. Before attempting to find out what message Ghost is trying to convey by presenting itself as a satanic cult, a few concepts need clarification. The first item is how to study a performance, which will be explained using a few key notions from the field of performance theory. This is necessary to understand how Ghost conducts itself on stage, as well as how to make sense of it. Secondly, the chapter will draw from a number of views on the relationship between ritual and popular music, which will provide insight into how those in attendance react to such a performance and the reciprocity between the band and the audience.

From there the theoretical framework will zoom out and move on to the broader study of religion and popular music. The next step will be to zoom back in a little and look at how metal and religion relate to one another. These two concepts taken together are relevant to this inquiry because Ghost relies on religious imagery to present itself as a satanic cult. Finally this chapter will also include a short survey of the emergence of established Satanism and how it is related to society in general – both as a fully-fledged and institutionalised religion and as a form of political activism – in order to be able to analyse whether Ghost is trying to say something with their music.

3.1 Performance

Since a large portion of this inquiry will be an ethnographic study of a Ghost concert, attention must be afforded to performance theory as described by Richard Schechner. A division is often made between efficacy – with a goal in mind – and entertainment. Although there is a basic polarity between the two, it is not binary. Instead efficacy and entertainment are each one extreme of a fluid continuum. Whether a performance is labelled a ritual or theatre is dependent on context, such as when it is performed, where and by whom, but the most significant factor is its intended purpose. If a performance is meant to effect change those characteristics that are associated with efficacy are likely to be prominent and if it is meant to give pleasure the performance is probably mainly entertainment (Schechner, 2002).

Another important concept in performance theory is the notion of play. Like ritual, play is seen as an essential part of performance. "In fact," says Richard Schechner (2002), "performance may be defined as ritualized behavior conditioned / permeated by play" (p. 89). While ritual

carries with it a sense of authority, play is more forgiving in exactly those places where it is forceful. In this sense the two complement each other. In practice people often use play to lighten, subvert, or even deny what they are actually trying to say. It would also be prudent to discuss the distinction between make-belief and make believe. Performance in daily life, such as professional and gender roles, creates the social reality they are part of. By contrast, in make believe performances there is no such ambiguity; real and pretend are clearly marked. In the past century, however, this rigid distinction has been challenged first by the avant-garde, then the media, and now the internet (Schechner, 2002).

3.2 "…this chapel of ritual"

The perceived opposites between sacred and secular rituals, where the former are seen as belonging exclusively to the sphere of religion and the latter as remaining completely outside of it, is equally as superfluous as those mentioned above. There is the strong assumption that sacred rituals, as expressions of religious belief systems, involve some form of communication with supernatural forces. Secular ritual, on the other hand, is seen as being utterly devoid of religious significance. However, this division is not rigid, and many if not all secular rituals appropriate elements of sacred ritual. Conversely, some semblance of secular ritual is usually present in religious activities. The fact of the matter is that every ritual is both sacred and secular to a certain degree; just like how any given performance contains characteristics of both efficacy and entertainment, so too does sacred ritual have elements of secular ritual and vice versa (Schechner, 2002).

A final thing to address here is the notion of liminality. Since many rituals are intended to mark the passage from one life stage to the next, there is often a period of time when participants are in between social categories. This is called the liminal stage. In modern society, a number of functions of ritual have been taken over by some forms of entertainment. Victor Turner used the term 'liminoid' to classify this kind of leisure activities. While liminal rituals are transformations because they change people permanently, liminoid rituals are mere transportations because the changes are only temporary. Moreover, entering a space where rituals are performed is in itself a kind of transportation as such places require special behaviour (Schechner, 2002). According to Johan Huizinga similar rules apply to spaces reserved for play. In this sense these places bear a strong resemblance to heterotopia, which is defined by Michel Foucault as a space that can be identified with a real place but is still "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and

speak about" (Foucault, as cited in Hutchings & Giardino, 2016, p. 10).

While a concert is often not seen as ritual in the traditional sense, some key elements do correspond to how Ronald Grimes defined the concept. The fact of the matter is that these ritual dimensions are often overlooked due to many scholars coming from a milieu that lacks ritual awareness. Heleen Kommers seeks to remedy this by drawing from a number of scholars in the field of ritual and popular music studies. Beginning with Grimes she points out the importance of bodily attitude in regard to ritual, which is also one of the crucial aspects of a concert. Actions, such as making gestures and the evocation of certain feelings and sensibilities, are, in her own words, "thick of meaning" (Kommers, 2013, p. 21).

3.3 Religion and popular music

Slightly more broad than ritual and popular music studies there is the field of religion and popular music studies. Following the classic typology put forward by Bruce Forbes there are four approaches to the relationship between religion and popular music. The first is to look at religion in popular culture by finding traces of religious imagery and themes in the music. More or less opposite to this, the popular culture **in** religion approach draws attention to how religious groups adopt elements from popular culture. The third option is to view popular culture **as** religion. Here the underlying assumption is that different forms of popular culture have begun to replace more traditional forms of religion. Viewing the relationship between religion and popular culture in terms of dialogue, finally, focuses on the participation of religious groups in public discussions on the subject of popular culture (Partridge & Moberg, 2017).

Kommers also refers to Robin Sylvan, who says that popular music subcultures are fertile soil for the emergence of religion. On the other hand they are substantially different from religious communities in that they take place mostly within the secular framework of performance and entertainment. However, it is clear that powerful religious experiences arise. A contrasting view comes from Steve Bruce. He argues that religious elements arise in these environments as part of the ongoing process of secularisation. Jan Koenot provides yet another point of view when he posits that Western society has shifted away from logocentrism through what he has called 'musicalisation'; where there was historically a kind of resistance to music from the sphere of religion, nowadays complicated anthropological and theological issues are explored through the medium of song (Kommers, 2013).

From an ethnographer's perspective, finally, M.D. Stringer states that Western notions of

religion have led to a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept. As the centuries-long dominance of the Christian faith began to fade, researchers thought they were discovering new forms of religion. In truth, their bias had in the past obscured the more disordered and immanent religious currents in favour of the coherent and transcendent ones. According to Stringer the new discourse about religiosity simply allowed these already existing forms of religion to become manifest. This reaffirms that when it comes to ethnographic fieldwork – as an embodied way of gathering data – it is important to consider the researcher's cultural baggage alongside methodological considerations aimed at the object of study (Kommers, 2013).

Not only are there various ways to describe how religion and popular culture relate to one another, but there are also different methodological approaches. Gordon Lynch distinguishes three: an author-focused, a text-based and an ethnographic / audience-reception approach. The author-focused perspective takes as its point of departure the idea that music "reflects the background, status, personality, and intentions of its particular author or authors" (Lynch, as cited in Partridge & Moberg, 2017, p. 3). In text-based studies songs are understood as texts, and the focus is on how music is able to convey a range of different meanings and on its many possible interpretations. Here the intentions of the author are less relevant because the emphasis is put on the culturally determined meaning of language (Partridge & Moberg, 2017).

Ethnographic research into religion and popular music is more ambiguous, as its use varies greatly between studies; some include a wide variety of ethnographic methods, while others employ just one in particular. Ethnographic research can also appear as or in conjunction with audience-reception approaches that are aimed at exploring the personal experiences of those who participate in popular music culture. Although such approaches offer valuable insights into the subject matter and can provide a better understanding of the lived meanings circulating in the subculture in question, there are a number of challenges and pitfalls as well. Scholars are of course inclined to study something they find interesting, but this also makes it necessary to address any presumptions and personal biases. Since the researcher's point of view can affect the outcome of any inquiry, it is important to remain self-reflexive (Partridge & Moberg, 2017).

Popular music appeals to human emotion, and as such it produces the affective space within which people give meaning to their personal lives. This is why some scholars have suggested that the study of music should be more focused on this emotional aspect, as well as its significance for understanding how social life at the same time produces and is permeated by

cultural constructions of the sacred. Critical musicology is dedicated to finding out the ways in which music interacts with society, but since religion has been a neglected aspect it may be helpful to replace this rather narrowly defined term with the sacred, in the sociological sense as posited by Émile Durkheim: that which holds profound moral authority over people's lives. Moreover, the sacred also has to be understood in relational terms vis-à-vis the profane (Partridge & Moberg, 2017).

3.4 Religion and metal

It was already established in the previous chapter that the genre of heavy metal has drawn from religious themes since its conception in the late 1960's and early '70s. Especially the devil and the end of the world as envisioned by mainly the Judeo-Christian tradition are of particular interest. Although metal music comes in many different shapes, most of the various subgenres are rooted in the same basic aesthetic and narrative dimension. According to Deena Weinstein a rough distinction can be made between the Dionysian and the chaotic strands of metal

> *"…which are, in some respects, both complementary and contradictory. While the Dionysian category primarily includes themes such as ecstasy, sex, intoxication, youthful vitality, male potency and power, the category of the 'chaotic', by contrast, includes themes such as chaos, war, violence, struggle, alienation, madness, evil and death."* (Moberg, 2017, p. 225)

Weinstein also points out that the Bible has provided the genre not only with an aesthetic and narrative dimension, but also with a treasure trove of religious symbolism and terminology to draw from, and many metal bands merge this depository with key elements from the chaotic category (Moberg, 2017).

Scholarly interest in metal's engagement with religion ranges from studies that take it to be little more than theatre and therefore focus primarily on the entertainment qualities to those that interpret it literally and thus overemphasise its efficacy. Some have come to speculate the possibility that metal culture has religious functions in and of itself. Adherents to this functionalist approach to metal as religion argue it provides its devotees with a particular worldview, cultural identity and a sense of belonging to a community. This idea was already put forward by Weinstein when she noted that "from a sociological perspective, the ideal heavy metal concert bears a striking resemblance to the celebrations, festivals, and ceremonies that characterize religions around the world" (Weinstein, as cited in Moberg, 2017, p. 229).

A similar view is held by Sylvan, who describes metal concerts as "the key ritual form

which brings *metalheads* [my italics] together as a community" (Sylvan, as cited in Moberg, 2017, p. 230). However, it is not merely about the music; metal culture is a complete system of meaning and presents a full-fledged worldview to its members. In this sense it is a surrogate for religion, which explains the genre's vitality. Building on the basic assertion that popular music culture provides religious functions at an unconscious level, Sylvan adds that most members of the subculture are unaware of this. Thus the religious dimension is usually – if ever – not at all consciously present in the minds of metalheads. Nevertheless he argues that many of them do have these kinds of spiritual experiences, and that these experiences are very powerful and can be life-changing (Moberg, 2017).

As opposed to such functionalist understandings of religion, the substantive approach to religion in metal is focused primarily on finding out what religion is rather than what it does. In this view it is believed that there is a set of observable, generic – or substantive – characteristics present in any and all forms of religion, and that these can be used to determine if a certain social and cultural system constitutes a religion or not. Thomas Bossius' study of black metal and trance music culture, for example, combines functionalist and substantive understandings of religion with psychological perspectives. The goal of his research is to find out whether young people involved in the Swedish branches of these subcultures are conscious about their mixing of religious and spiritual notions with their musically inspired lifestyles (Moberg, 2012).

In this particular study Bossius also places black metal culture in the context of a wider trend seen across Nordic countries where the socio-cultural climate is "marked by accelerating processes of de-traditionalization, individualization, and privatization of religious/spiritual life and practice" (Bossius, as cited in Moberg, 2012, p. 122). Looking at a number of sources and making use of various text-based and ethnographic approaches he interprets black metal culture as a form of rebellion against contemporary society and an attempt at re-enchantment of everyday life. Still, rather than regarding it as a religion Bossius instead points out that the music is the focal point around which religious and spiritual notions are built. Moreover, he moves beyond the focus on the use of satanic elements, as well as the radical inversion of many traditional Christian themes, and argues that black metal is equally influenced by ancient Norse paganism (Moberg, 2012).

3.5 Satan the rebel

The interpretation of metal culture and its proximity to the satanic as a form of social rebellion

put forward by Bossius is somewhat in line with what Kathleen Lowney concluded from her research on a coven of teenage Satanists. In her study she found that these youngsters use satanic imagery to challenge the dominant culture, but since they lack social power they have to rely on symbolic critique (Lowney, 1995). This also appears to have been the intention of Anton LaVey when he founded the original Church of Satan in 1966 and began preaching indulgence, kindness for those who deserve it and a retributive code of ethics, as opposed to more traditional Christian values like abstinence, unconditional love and pacifism. According to LaVey the ideal Satanist should be individualistic and non-conformist in order to escape the herd mentality and scapegoating he associated with mainstream society (Dyrendal, 2013). However, it must be added that he never believed in Satan as a literal entity nor encouraged people to worship the devil (Harvey, 1995; La Fontaine, 1999).

The religious and political activist movement known as The Satanic Temple founded by Lucien Greaves and Malcolm Jarry in 2013 also uses satanic imagery as a rejection of the dominant discourse. However, the Temple goes beyond the symbolic critique and actively participates in public discussion, chiefly in the shape of lobbying and satire, with the separation of church and state as its goal (Bugbee, 2013). A much stronger anti-establishment sentiment can be seen in the kind of reactive Satanism that in its most extreme form inspires violence and other criminal behavior. Moreover, while these milieus are strongly dominated by young men, census data from New Zealand suggests a growing number of female Satanists (Dyrendal, Lewis & Peterson, 2016). This final statistic can be connected to the 19th century, since at that time the devil was often imagined as encouraging women to rebel against the patriarchy, which Per Faxneld re-interprets as a form of liberation (Faxneld, 2017).

This chapter has tried to shed light on a few concepts that needed clarification before attempting to find out what message Ghost is trying to convey by presenting itself as a satanic cult. The first item was how to study a performance, which was explained using the work of Richard Schechner. Secondly, it drew from a number of views on the relationship between ritual and popular music. From there the chapter zoomed out and moved on to the broader study of religion and popular music. The next step was to zoom back in a little and look at how metal and religion relate to one another. Finally this chapter included a short survey of how Satanism is related to society in general – both as an institutionalised religion and as a form of political

activism. Armed with knowledge of the appropriate academic tools, the inquiry can move on to the ethnographic section

4. 'Devil Church'

"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." – 1 Corinthians 12:27

Equipped with insight into the historical context and knowledge of the appropriate academic tools, it is time to begin the ethnographic study of a Ghost concert. This chapter will be broken up into four parts. The first is an extension of the methodology concerned specifically with ethnography. In the second and third parts I will describe in detail my personal experience of a performance by Ghost and analyse it in light of the mythology[3] the band has created around their music, which will in turn be elucidated through interviews, respectively. From the moment the original dark Pope first appeared on stage back in 2010 it has been an important part of the overall experience, enough so that new initiates are motivated to internalise the Ghost mythos retroactively by watching older concerts and reading about it online, and it has likely contributed to the high level of dedication shown by fans. Finally this chapter will also include a short survey of the online video clips.

4.1 Methodology

In her writings on qualitative research Jennifer Mason lists three interrelated characteristics of ethnography. The first is that there is an effort to engage with the socio-cultural realities of others, be they groups or individuals. Secondly, ethnography involves interpretation; it is sensitive to the particular social contexts in which these realities are produced and flexible enough to adapt to different circumstances. The third step is to use methods that provide an understanding of that context and its complexity, as well as draw attention to detail (Mason, as cited in A. Bennett, 2017, p. 15). According to Andy Bennett this then means that ethnography works in two ways. On the one hand the researcher attempts to gather qualitative data through interviews, and on the other hand this is done by closely observing the social environment in question (A. Bennett, 2017).

With the advent of the internet from the late 1990's onwards came a wide variety of websites dedicated to all kinds of cultural activities, lifestyles and aesthetic styles, and popular music was no exception. In fact, music subcultures gained such a prominent online presence that the idea of a 'virtual music scene' soon took shape. Researchers were inevitably drawn to the internet, as it presented a range of new forms interaction. Consequently, the term 'virtual

[3] A summary can be found here: https://www.loudersound.com/features/the-ghost-family-tree

ethnography' was coined as a method with which to study this social space that is co-produced by people and the technological affordances of the internet. Especially in the study of religion and popular music researchers will stand to benefit from easy access to much larger and, more importantly, trans-local communities than traditional offline ethnography would ever be able to provide (A. Bennett, 2017).

For the ethnographic section of this inquiry I will be using the characteristics listed by Mason as a guideline. The thick description of a Ghost concert is going to focus primarily on how the band conducts itself on stage, with appropriate attention to minor details, in order to address the socio-cultural reality. Furthermore, as already indicated in the introduction, to place the thick description into its proper context, my personal experiences described therein will be supplemented by articles and interviews with the band. Not only will this address the second characteristic put forward by Mason and provide some deeper insights, it will also draw from virtual ethnography, as these articles and interviews are taken from the internet.

4.2 The Sermon; on the Ghost concert

On February 5th, 2019, my friend and I, together with two others, attended a Ghost concert AFAS Live in Amsterdam. We arrived at the venue at around seven o'clock in the evening. We were early, but that gave my friend the opportunity to get us a few drinks and buy herself some merchandise. The opening act started at around half past seven and was provided by a Swedish doom metal band named Candlemass. Although the choice to feature Candlemass was fitting in terms of the dark atmosphere, the slow and droning pace that comes with the subgenre seemingly failed to excite the crowd, including myself and company. This is of course a matter of personal preference, but in the spirit of full disclosure it is important to mention this, as it resulted in me paying very little attention to their performance.

The concert proper was set to begin at half past eight, and during the break a selection of more or less random hard rock and heavy metal was played over the speakers to get the audience in the mood. About ten minutes before Ghost was supposed to go on stage, however, I suddenly realised the background music had changed. Rather than the familiar sound of distorted electric guitars and drums, the room was now filled with polyphonic music. Upon closer inspection it turned out to be baroque composer Gregorio Allegri's musical setting of 'Miserere mei, Deus', a so-called Penitential Psalm in which King David asks God for forgiveness (Ps. 51). Immediately after, this liturgical piece was offset by a gloomy humming and the eerie singing of children; the

barely one-and-a-half minute long opening track to Ghost's latest album *Prequelle* (2018) called 'Ashes'.

For the duration of this opening track the curtains remained closed, but with the first notes of the following song from the same album they were drawn, thus revealing the raised marble platforms and steps from where the masked musicians known as Nameless Ghouls were playing their instruments. Behind them, tall stained glass windows depicting an old pope-like figure dressed in white and with skull make-up seemed to reach all the way to the ceiling of the venue. Almost instinctively the crowd raised their right arms and made the well-known 'devil horns' with their fingers. With the onset of the vocals, lead singer Cardinal Copia emerged from behind the raised platforms in a black dress suit and a gilded broche in the shape of the letter G stylised to resemble an upside down cross, which is the emblem of the band. Blue light beamed across the concert hall, casting a faint light as from a moonlit sky over the band and the stained glass.

About fifteen minutes into the set the singer, nicknamed Cardi C by both fans and the band themselves, had suddenly disappeared, only to re-emerge during the song 'Con Clavi Con Dio' dressed in black robes and a slightly altered version of the distinct red hats worn by actual cardinals in the Vatican – this one was black and made to look like a bat's wing – as well as carrying a brass thurible. The more subtle blue light was replaced with red, which gave me a sense of foreboding. Cardinal Copia stood almost motionless behind the microphone for the duration of the song, only swaying the incense burner on chains every Catholic knows from Sunday Mass to and fro. Upon catching just a whiff of the aroma it was clear they were using real frankincense. The second part of the song after the solo marked the retirement of the thurible for the evening, but the smell lingered for a while.

Somewhere around the thirty minute mark, the Nameless Ghouls were left alone on stage again to perform the instrumental track 'Miasma'. It was already mentioned that the influence of 1980's pop is undeniable here, but there was something else that struck me at this time during the performance in terms of gender roles. While the male Ghouls were playing the guitar, bass or drums, the two female Ghoulettes played the keyboard and the synthesizer. Towards the end a figure in white papal robes and mitre, likely the very same depicted on the central stained glass window, slowly ascended from behind the stage. As if his wispy grey hair and shuffling gait were not enough to tell this person was supposedly ancient, the oxygen mask over his mouth and

nose, as well as his being supported by two men in black suits, left no room for doubt. Still, none of this seemed to prevent him from taking centre stage and performing the saxophone solo that forms the climax of the song.

Cardi C then returned, this time wearing a white version of the dress suit, a matching black panama hat with white trim, and a silver-handled black cane. He took a moment to address the crowd and tell everyone that "this song that we are about to play for you… the lyrics are very dirty". The song in question was 'Jiggolo Har Meggido' and said lyrics will be discussed later on, but for now it is interesting to note that it was the only song of the evening to be performed acoustically. Throughout the remainder of the concert Cardi C changed outfits a number of times, switching mainly between the initial black dress suit, black robes, and red robes. At one point he wore the black dress suit with a cape that he seemed to have borrowed from Dracula himself. The announcement during the break kept with the religious imagery, starting with the phrase "The clergy advises you..." and ending with "...prepare for the second coming".

There are a few more songs that deserve some attention, such as 'Year Zero'. Without going into too much detail for now, one element is of significance here. The chorus of this song contains the phrase "Hail Satan", and during the first utterance immediately after the bridge the music was cut, which was taken up by the audience as their cue to chant the phrase in unison as pyrotechnics fired jets of flame from behind the stage. For me personally it was a major highlight of the evening, but it also gave the impression that the crowd had reached some kind of spiritual zenith. Ghost ended their show with the song 'Square Hammer' and a previously unseen shade of lighting: a rainbow. Here my friend was quick to point out the possibility of a potential reference to LGBTQ representation. The encore, finally, consisted of the song 'Monstrance Clock' and a summons to "be nice to each other, take care of each other, and don't forget to f*ck each other".

While writing this down, a thought concerning the distinction between entertainment and efficacy occurred to me. The stage décor and the symbolism used throughout the concert – the stained glass windows, the clerical robes, the thurible – appeared to be aimed at trying to emulate a Catholic Mass. The audience's instinctive use of the 'devil horns' gesture, singing along to the lyrics, and the chant of "Hail Satan" without being prompted to do so also hints at some level of efficacy. Recalling that Sylvan saw the metal concert as 'the key ritual form' led me to wonder whether the combination of elements taken form Catholic liturgy and the ritual qualities that appear to be already present in the performance itself might complement each other. In other

words, it seemed that there has at the very least been an attempt at amplifying the efficacy of the performance, which may already rule out the possibility that Ghost portraying itself as a satanic cult is nothing more than play.

4.3 The Clergy; on the Ghost mythos

Cardinal Copia is of course not a real person, but a fictional character, and he is not the first clergyman at the helm. As already pointed out in the introduction to this paper, the singer has portrayed three different versions of a dark Pope in the past. These personae were all named Papa Emeritus – derived from the official title taken by former pontiff Joseph Ratzinger when he retired (Frasetto, 2018) – and each of them bore a Roman numeral. Every one of the Papas was a character on his own, bringing a unique kind of energy to the band: Papa Emeritus I stalked back and forth across the stage with a thurible, Papa Emeritus II stood ominous with his inverted papal staff, and Papa Emeritus III moved around sensually in a tailored suit (Alderslade, 2018). By continuously introducing new characters Ghost appears to be following in the footsteps of other musicians who are known to have kept re-inventing themselves with new personae, such as the late pop star David Bowie.

The identity of the man behind the ghostly mask, however, was a closely kept secret up until 2017, when the Nameless Ghouls came forward to accuse their 'boss' of keeping an unfair share of the earnings for himself and filed a lawsuit against apparent Ghost mastermind Tobias Forge (Hartmann, 2018). From that point onwards Forge was no longer able to stay in the shadows, but he did not fully step into the light either. Instead he acts like a spokesperson for the band, with the credit still going to his alter ego. After the dust from the legal battle had settled and Forge emerged victorious Ghost re-surfaced with a brand new set of Nameless Ghouls and a different clerical figurehead. When asked about the choice to continue with Cardinal Copia and not Papa Emeritus IV, Forge stated: "If we continued from Pope to Pope to Pope, this would be very tedious. […] If I had just done that, Ghost would have gone to autopilot and would have gotten old very quickly" (Forge, as cited in Polcaro, 2018, rockandrollgarage.com).

Ghost is supposedly part of a religious organisation, a mysterious cult that is known only as The Clergy and led by Papa Nihil – the saxophone aficionado depicted on the stained glass at the concert (Alderslade, 2018). The introduction of Cardi C was firmly cemented in the fiction as well. In a rather sinister bit of theatre Papa Emeritus I-III were all murdered[4] and their corpses

[4] The video can be found here: https://loudwire.com/ghost-papa-emeritus-i-ii-iii-dead/

put on display by Papa Nihil (Childers & Hartmann, 2018). Forge later also explained that Cardinal Copia allowed him to expand on the story, because this character has yet to prove himself worthy (Fadroski, 2018). Maintaining distance from his alter ego he notes: “My hope is that he gets to become Papa Emeritus IV. That is the goal. It just takes time and it takes effort. And that is what he's proving now” (Forge, as cited in Appleford, 2019, revolvermag.com). Moreover, while the Papas were each only around for one album plus tour, Forge has announced that Cardi C will be the first character to stick around for a second cycle (Blabbermouth, 2019).

In an interview with BANGERTV Forge talked about the conception of these characters and stated that he wanted something similar to the skeletal Eddie used by Iron Maiden in their artwork. However, rather than being just a mascot, this character was going to have to sing as well. Furthermore he talked about the distinction between the religious Satan and the caricature that is prevalent in pop culture, and that the devil featured in Ghost songs was based more on the latter (BANGERTV – All Metal, 2019). This is already a clue that the satanic shtick needs to be taken with a grain of salt, but there is more. While talking to Metal Injection about the third studio album *Meliora* (2015) a Nameless Ghoul was asked whether Papa Emeritus III clashed with Pope Francis when a Ghost concert in Philadelphia, PA, happened to coincide with a papal visit to the city and in response quipped that the two had settled their differences with a ‘penis-measuring contest’, which the Pope apparently won (Metal Injection, 2015).

Speaking with Revolver Magazine about the origins of the Ghost mythos, Forge recalls how his mother introducing him to church architecture at a young age led to his fascination with religious symbolism. Especially one 16th century church he experienced as ‘creepy’ stuck with him. As to why he eventually turned towards Satan in his adolescence, he cites a strict stepmother and an even stricter religious teacher, who “represented this sanctimonious authority that I hated. And that in combination with the alienation I felt every other weekend going to [*my stepmother's*] home that was also sort of infiltrated by religion definitely made me run headfirst into the arms of the devil” (Forge, as cited in J. Bennett, 2018, revolvermag.com). Last but not least, his older brother Sebastian provided the final building blocks when he gave some of his records to Tobias and brought him into contact with rock music and theatre bands like Kiss and Siouxsie and the Banshees for the first time.

One of the Nameless Ghouls – though it is likely this is Forge himself – spoke with Loudwire about the theatrical qualities of Catholic liturgy and its ability to bring people together:

> *"I think that part of organized religion, as any other institution, they have a niche or a schtick* [*sic*] *that they're using. In the Church's case, it's very much based on a dramaturgy and a rhythm that falls naturally into the solum* [*sic*] *and holy departments in our minds, which is not to be underestimated in any way. The whole idea of people in a room, ideally thinking about the same thing, focusing on the same thing and agreeing silently, to worship and that the spirits in the room are holy and there's someone watching over; it does definitely have an impact. That sort of drama is pretty much exactly what we are trying to mimic."*
>
> (Nameless Ghoul, as cited in Hartmann, 2015, loudwire.com)

From this it becomes clear that the band is very much aware of the efficacious nature of their stage act.

Concerning the reason for trying to emulate a Catholic Mass the Nameless Ghoul stated the following:

> *"In the end, it's still something that is orchestrated by people in order to get other people to do what they want. That is in essence what we do too. We're summoning people into a room and we're orchestrating a ritual in which X amount of people agree upon worshiping us and we in turn tell everyone what to do and how to feel. Everything is orchestrated in ritual in smell and sound and all of that. As I was saying, I would never diminish that in saying it's just motive. In the context of when people agree on things, what is real? It's real at that point."* (Nameless Ghoul, as cited in Hartmann, 2015, loudwire.com)

The main takeaway here is that Ghost appears to be using the efficacy of Catholic liturgy and the ritual qualities of the metal concert to their advantage.

4.4 'Helvetesfönster'

Ghost also has a YouTube channel[5]. Here the band posts not only video clips for the music, but also short films featuring the characters Forge has conjured up. In these three to four minutes long videos, religious imagery and darkness are mixed with light comedy, such as when Papa Nihil answers the phone while he is on the toilet and comments about a fictional horror movie franchise that the fourth instalment was very different from the original trilogy because they had replaced all the actors – a reference to the fact that Forge had to hire new musicians after the lawsuit. While these short films usually end with pertinent information such as tour dates, they also give more depth to the story. For example, the series of 'webisodes' posted alongside the release of *Prequelle* provide some insight into how Cardinal Copia became the singer for the band.

The light-heartedness of these short films shows that Ghost doesn't take its own shtick

[5] The channel can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAOiVaJJlH0Oduv48NN0mMA

too seriously. However, in spite of this looseness Forge sees the videos as an essential part of the mythology, because the medium allows him to focus on the narrative dimension. He has also announced a feature-length Ghost movie is in the works, but it will not be a biography. Instead the film will revolve around the characters from the Ghost mythos. The films are also a way for Forge to fulfil a longstanding ambition: “If it wasn't for the fact that I ended up finally being a musician, the one thing I really, really want to do in my life is cinema” (Forge, as cited in Appleford, 2018, revolvermag.com). The strong emphasis on visual spectacle, both in the live performance and the cinematic material, strengthens the theatrical qualities of the band. This is not uncommon in the music industry, and certainly not in metal, but Forge appears to have taken it to the next level.

5. The Word made metal

> *"On the altar of the Devil up is down, pleasure is pain, darkness is light, slavery is freedom, and madness is sanity."* – Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals* (1972, p. 1)

Equipped with a small number of interesting preliminary findings yielded by the ethnographic study of a Ghost concert and an understanding of the mythology the band has created around their music, it is time to begin the non-exhaustive close reading of the lyrics. The chapter will be broken up into three parts. The first is a short explanation of literary Satanism and the concept album intended to provide some more background for the use of Satan as a literary character and narrative structures in music. In the second part I will analyse some of band's lyrics through the lens of these two notions. For this purpose between four to six songs from each of the four studio albums have been selected for analysis. Hence the second part of this chapter will be made up for distinct headers. Finally this chapter will also include a short survey of the album covers.

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards the figure of Satan became increasingly less prominent in Western philosophy and Christian theology, while in folklore he was seen more as foolish rather than dangerous. Especially with the advent of Enlightenment values like reason and individualism the previously dominant view of the devil as the great antagonist began to change. In this climate some even took the character out of this traditional narrative and inserted him into their own (Dyrendal, Lewis & Peterson, 2016). In the nineteenth century this trend led to the rise of what is now called 'literary' or 'romantic Satanism' in the nineteenth century. The literary Satanists reinterpreted the devil as a force for good and sometimes even depicted him as the hero (Van Luijk, 2016). However, for these individuals Satanism did not carry any religious connotations; it was rather the "strategic use of a symbol and a character as part of artistic and political expression" (Dyrendal, Lewis & Peterson, 2016, p. 31).

At the same musicians were experimenting with distortion in their guitar play, they had also begun to explore the narrative possibilities of their music with the concept album and the rock opera. The concept album is a collection of songs that have more meaning collectively than they do by themselves (Elicker, 2001). Usually these songs share a connection with one single overarching instrumental, compositional or lyrical theme (Shuker, 2012). Similar to the concept album, the rock opera is a collection of rock songs that tell a chronological story. Typically a rock opera is released as a type of concept album and not intended to be acted out, but its lyrics

often feature different characters. Some of the more well-known rock operas have been adapted for the silver screen in the form of rock musicals.

5.1 Opus Eponymous: The satanic Advent

Ghost released its first studio album *Opus Eponymous* in 2010. The word 'opus' is Latin for work or labour, and eponymous refers to something being named after its creator. This is most likely a nod to early hard rock and heavy metal bands that chose to leave their first studio albums untitled, such as *Led Zeppelin* (1969), *Black Sabbath* (1970) and *Iron Maiden* (1980). Although the instrumental opening track 'Deus Culpa' is a one-and-a-half minute piece of organ music, the album as a whole may be the most traditional heavy metal out of the four. The second song is the aforementioned 'Con Clavi Con Dio', which is in fact Italian rather than Latin and can be loosely translated as 'with nails, with God'. Not only does the song appear to be written as a prayer with phrases like "Lucifer; we are here, for your praise" and "Our conjuration sings infernal psalms", it also contains a reference to Trinitarian theology: "Satanas; we are one / Out of three; Trinity".

This devout language continues in the track 'Ritual' with similar phrases like "Tonight we're summoned for a divine cause" and "Recite now from the text, pray for all to die". Once more the bridge is the most interesting part, because it is a satanic version of the Our Father that ends with the word 'amen' backwards. This 'satanification' of Christian doctrine is the most visible in the rough inversion of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed [6]found in the song 'Satan Prayer', and the best way to show this is by putting the lyrics and the original text side-by-side:

Satan Prayer	**Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed**
Believe in one god do we, Satan almighty, the uncreator of heaven and soil and of the invisible and the visible	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
And in his son, begotten of father;	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;

[6] Text by Christian Classics Ethereal Library; available here: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds1.iv.iii.html

by whom all things will be unmade;	by whom all things were made;
who for man and his damnation incarnated, rise up from hell;	who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;
from sitteth on the left hand of his father;	he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
from thence he shall come to judge, out of one substance with Satan;	from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;
whose kingdom shall haveth no end.	whose kingdom shall have no end.
Unholy ghost, overlord and taker of life.	And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.

Apart from the phrase "out of one substance with Satan" being placed after "from thence he shall come to judge" rather than "begotten of father", the inversion follows the exact same structure and is down to the level of detail where Christ sitting on the right hand of his Father becomes the Antichrist sitting on the left.

One more song that should be mentioned here is 'Prime Mover', as it's about the mother of the Antichrist: "Clad in cloak, a secretive nun / bearing the old one's bastard son". In a way this is akin to an inversion of the Annunciation (Mt. 1:18-22; Lk. 1:26-38), because the inclusion of the phrase "Prime mover; maternal slave" in the chorus also strongly implies that conception of the Antichrist was not voluntary while Mary actually agreed to having a child. Moreover, the song includes yet another satanification of Christian doctrine that takes the form of an inverted Trinity: "Sathanas, Antichrist, Spiritus Non Sancti". *Opus* ends with another instrumental track called 'Genesis' that is supposed to represent the birth of the Antichrist (J. Bennett, 2013). In

terms of musical style the album harkens back to the early days of heavy metal, and the resulting relative simplicity supports the devout language of the lyrics, as "the band gets their satanic messages across by roping listeners in with accessible arrangements rather than cheap shock tactics" (Begrand, 2010, popmatters.com).

5.2 Infestissumam: The arrival of the Antichrist

Ghost B.C.[7] released its second studio album *Infestussumam* in 2013. With it they continued the story where they had left off in the first, with the birth of the Antichrist (J. Bennett, 2013). The name is derived from the Latin word 'infestissimus', which is the superlative of hostile, and it can therefore be translated as 'the most hostile one' in reference to the Antichrist. However, the suffix '-am' is feminine, so perhaps the name also implies that Ghost subscribes to the idea the Antichrist is a woman. The eponymous opening track begins with Gregorian chanting, morphs into polyphonic music, and is then joined by drums and electric guitar riffs before seamlessly transitioning into the next track. The second song is 'Per Aspera Ad Inferi', which is broken[8] Latin for 'through hardships, to hell' – a twist on the still widely used saying 'Per aspera ad astra', meaning 'through hardships, to the stars' – and represents futility.

The track 'Jigolo Har Megiddo' is perhaps the central piece of this album, as it embodies both of its central themes; sexual desire and the Antichrist. A gigolo is a male prostitute, and Har Megiddo is the Hebrew name for the location of the final battle against Satan (Rev. 16:16). The title of the song can therefore be translated as 'man whore of Megiddo', which effectively rules out a female Antichrist. On the other hand, it's also possible Ghost wants to present an image of the character as gender fluid, as there is evidence that some early Christian artworks depicted Jesus as androgynous as well (Mathews, 1999). The main sentiment of this track is summarised in the second verse: "I am the son of one below, the progeny of beast of woe / And I am the son who comes into the daughters of men / Destroying all and make them want it again". This implies that the Antichrist has come to destroy the world by encouraging people to give in to their carnal lust. It is also a reference to the giants born from 'the sons of God' who "came in unto the daughters of men" (Gen. 6:4).

The phrase "I offer everything they seek" furthermore suggests that people in fact want to give in, while "However fair and pure, you crave the wand" insinuates that even the most devout

[7] For legal reasons the band changed its name in the United States to Ghost B.C. between 2013 and 2015.
[8] The correct grammatical form would be 'inferos', assuming it is in the plural like the original phrase.

cannot withstand his charisma. Moreover, the 'I-perspective' of the song makes it seem like the Antichrist is speaking directly to the listener. Related to the satanifcation of Christian doctrine seen on the first album, the second contains inversions of the life of Jesus. In this particular song the Antichrist quotes from the Gospel of John with the phrase "I am the way" taken from "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). *Infestissumam* also contains the track 'Year Zero' that was mentioned briefly in the thick description, which is one of if not the most blatantly satanic song in the Ghost discography. It begins with the Gregorian chanting of names taken from the Old Testament that over the ages have come to be associated with the devil.

The lyrics underscore the futility of human life: "Since dawn of time the fate of man has been that of lice / Equal as parasites and moving without eyes". Another central thought in this track is the coming kingdom of Satan. The first clue lies in the phrases "Crestfallen kings and queens comforting in their fate" and "As new dawn rises you shallt recognise / Now, behold the Lord of Flies", as they show that the authority of world leaders traditionally sanctioned by God will become void when Satan establishes his kingdom of darkness. This is epitomised in the chorus with "Hail Satan, Archangelo / Hail Satan, welcome Year Zero". Finally the song hides two Bible references in the bridge, as "He will tremble the nations, kingdoms to fall one by one" and "He will ascend to the heavens, above the stars of God" are taken from a description of Lucifer the fallen morning star (Is. 14:12-13, 16).

The inversion of the life of Jesus continues in the song 'Body and Blood'. The title and its repetition in the chorus refer to the last supper: "His body and blood, sharing in common, his body and blood". The phrase "So eat Nazarene, and you kiss the obscene anointed feet" comes from the story of the woman who poured expensive perfume on Christ's feet. Both events are featured in all four canonical gospels, but the latter also shows that Ghost sees it as something unsanitary. This is echoed in the bridge: "Receive, consume / Digest, defecate". Named after the gilded boxes that contain the communion wafers, the closing track 'Monstrance Clock' contains a sexual innuendo in the chorus, as the phrase "Come together, together as on / Come together, for Lucifer's son" is a euphemism for the female orgasm. The song – and the album with it – ends with a combination of church organs and repetitions of the chorus in polyphony. The final "for Lucifer's son" is, however, replaced with "forever as one".

As for the sexual innuendo, one of the Nameless Ghouls has stated that the album is about "how mankind – predominantly men – what they have deemed to be the presence of the

Devil, throughout history and even nowadays. And that's why the record is so fueled [*sic*] with sexual themes and females… the Inquisition was basically men accusing women of being the Devil just because they had a hard-on for them" (Nameless Ghoul, as cited in Stosuy, 2013, pitchfork.com). A similarity with the first album is that the musical style again supports the language of the lyrics. According to Graham Hartmann of Loudwire Magazine the opening track "transports the listener into a black mass, as Ghost, along with a breathtaking [*sic*] choir, begin the Satanic rite with an unnerving beauty", and the closer "serves as yet another compositional benchmark […] re-introducing the choir during the conclusion of 'Monstrance Clock' as the evil mass concludes with the birth of Lucifer's son" (Hartmann, 2013, loudwire.com).

5.3 Meliora: The kingdom of Satan

Ghost released its third studio album *Meliora* in 2015. The word 'melior' is Latin for better, but according to a Nameless Ghoul it is supposed to be translated as 'for the pursuit of something better' or 'all things better' and refers to society's obsession with constantly trying to make small improvements (Blabbermouth, 2019). Although the album as a whole is a little more difficult to interpret than the previous two, it can be assumed that Ghost again picks up the story where they had left off; the establishment of the kingdom of Satan. The band also tried taking the satanic cult out of the classical gothic setting: "The whole album was written and intended to be very futuristic, very metropolitan and urban. Just a post from the classic goth thing […] We were trying to take this thing to a very clean, indoors, 67th floor in a very high building, in a very big city" (Nameless Ghoul, as cited in Hartmann, 2015, loudwire.com).

The opening track is called 'Spirit' and has two possible meanings. In the context of the song itself it likely refers to distilled alcoholic beverages, and specifically absinthe: "Your green muse; the apparatus for soul mobility". On the other hand the chorus can be understood as word play, because "Spirit / Absinthe" sounds a lot like "Spirit; absent". This means the song could also be about the absence of a spiritual being or even the Holy Spirit of God as a result of people having given themselves over to the Antichrist in the previous album. Moreover, it mentions the seven seals and trumpets that will usher in the end of the world (Rev. 6:1-17, 8:1-5). This clearly apocalyptic imagery is continued in the track 'He is' with the phrase "We're standing here by the abyss, and the world is in flames", while the chorus introduces another theme: "He is; he's the shining and the light, without whom I cannot see / And he is; insurrection, he is spite, he's the force that made me be". Counterintuitively to the absence of a spirit, this song seems to be about

being completely dependent on a higher power, most likely the devil.

The tracks ‘Mummy Dust’ and ‘Majesty’ have a similar atmosphere to them. The former is about how the Antichrist tempts humanity with pleasure and riches to make people submit to him: “I was carried on a wolf’s back to corrupt humanity / I will pummel it with opulence, with corpulence and greed”. The latter of these two songs appears to take place later in time, with Satan now ruling over the earth and mankind corrupted: “A higher power underground, from seraph skies and now to chaos bound / He’s sitting sacred and profound, in midst of sinners looking up to kiss his crown / Pathetic humans in despair; defaced, deflowered, now to death devout / A fallen angel in his lair, in midst of sinners kneeling down before his clout”. While it is clear the devil sees the masses as insignificant, the chorus shows that people are still completely dependent on him: “Old One, Master; all beauty lies within – you”.

The album ends with the track ‘Deus in Absentia’, which confirms once more that this is the end of the world, and that there is no way out: “The world is on fire and you are here to stay and burn with me”. The song also has a sense of disappointment or disillusionment to it, with the bridge containing the phrase “All of your imaginations are now running down your face”. In the context of the album this likely refers to a person losing his faith; now that it turns out God has abandoned him, his hope of salvation disappears, and all he can do now is watch with tears in his eyes as the world burns around him. Like the closer on the previous album, the track ends with a choir, but this time the harmony is filled with dread, and the repeated “Deus” is a desperate cry for God to save them. When they finally realise He is not there, their only choice is to admit that they are alone: “Deus in Absentia, in Absentia / Deus in Absentia”.

According to a Nameless Ghoul this is exactly what the band had in mind from the beginning; while *Opus* and *Infestissumam* were about the arrival of the Antichrist and Satan establishing his kingdom of darkness respectively, the third album “is more about the absent God and how mankind reacts to a deity absence. Where in this case, the Church of Ghost is the only holy institution in this world” (Nameless Ghoul, as cited in Hartmann, 2015, loudwire.com). In his review of the album Andy O’Connor notes that with it Ghost has achieved “their fullest realization of “*seductive Satanism*” [my italics] so far.” As to the music, however, he is less enthusiastic: “There's that whole thing about catching more flies with honey than vinegar, but vinegar is a crucial ingredient […] Ghost don't deserve outright scorn that hellishly opinionated metal fans can dish and dish, and *Meliora* is a step in the right direction, but their pandering can

only go so far, and even then, it might be misguided" (O'Connor, 2015, pitchfork.com).

5.4 Prequelle: The great plague

Ghost released its fourth studio album *Prequelle* in 2018. The name is likely derived from the term 'prequel' used in storytelling for something that is made after but takes place before other events. The word 'Quelle' on its own, however, is German for 'source', which may signify a return to one's roots. Although the album marks a shift in the Ghost mythos, the fact that this coincided with the aftermath of the legal battle that forced Forge to rebuild his band is purely coincidental. The choice to interrupt the succession of Papas with Cardinal Copia was already foreshadowed in the 'Square Hammer' video clip, as "there is a red cardinal bird, and that was the idea since a few years back. I wanted to make a plague record, and since the plague record was going to be in some way or form about mortality/survival, it was also going to have a theme of master and apprentice" (Forge, as cited in Kaufman, consequenceofsound.net).

As mentioned, the opening track of this plague record is called 'Ashes' and features the eerie singing of children. More specifically it's a rendition of 'Ring a Ring o'Roses', which is a nursery rhyme that is said to have originated during the Black Death[9] or shortly thereafter. The second song is the rather catchy 'Rats'. This is of course a reference to the rodents that carried the bubonic plague with them, but there is also a figurative meaning, as Ghost likens the disease to faith itself: "Beliefs contagious, spreading disease". It also appears that the song describes divine punishment after the humanity gave itself over to Satan in the previous album: "Into your sanctum, you let them in / Now all your loved ones and all your kin will suffer punishments beneath the wrath of God". Another possible interpretation is that Ghost used rats as a metaphor for autocratic political leaders (J. Bennett, 2018).

The songs 'Dance Macabre' and 'Pro Memoria' deal with the plague through its eventual conclusion, namely death. The former appears to tell the story of someone who knows he or she is going to die and wants to spend the last moments on this earth with their lover: "Something within your eyes said it could be the last time, 'fore it's over". Moreover, although the chorus technically goes "Just wanna be / Wanna bewitch you in the moonlight", it could be another case of word play, as it sounds a lot like "…be with you". The latter of these two tracks is about death in more direct terms, as the chorus consists of the phrase "Don't you forget about dying / Don't you forget about your friend Death / Don't you forget that you will die". The song also contains

[9] Folklorists reject this interpretation for several reasons, most notably the many lyrical variations.

a reference to the Catholic interpretation of the afterlife: “Ain’t that right Swede Saint Peter?”

The next song is called ‘Witch Image’ and juxtaposes the inevitability of death with debauchery, as the phrase “While you sleep in the earthly delight” in the chorus is immediately followed by “Someone’s flesh is rotting tonight”. It also shows that death is always close: “I am riding in the shadows behind you on a pale white horse”. The ‘pale white horse’ is a reference to Death as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse from the Book of Revelation because it’s described as his steed (Rev. 6-8). What these three tracks have in common is that they all seem to favour the idea of ‘carpe diem’ over the ‘memento mori’ that was prevalent in society when the Black Death ravaged Europe. What is also striking about this album is that Satan has taken a backseat. In fact, he is barely mentioned at all; the name Lucifer occurs twice, in the song ‘Pro Memoria’, and ‘Witch Image’ contains an allusion to the devil with a slightly altered version of the saying ‘Between the devil and the deep blue sea’.

While the album has a medieval setting, it also relates to modern times. Especially the deaths of several music icons in recent years have had a profound effect on Forge: “This is a record themed with death and the impending end […] and in recent years we have seen the passing of many of our elder idols. Ronnie James Dio was one, but I think that, especially when Lemmy passed away, and Bowie and Prince so close to that, it affected me a lot. It feels like our parents are passing” (Forge, as cited in Munro, 2018, loudersound.com). Despite the serious nature of the overarching lyrical theme, the music itself is energetic and uplifting. Cody Davis of Metal Injection describes *Prequelle* as “glimmering and somewhat sinister arena rock” and although it “has its misses, there is more good than bad with this album – and those good moments are excellent and damn catchy” (Davis, 2018, metalinjection.net).

5.5 ‘Idolatrine’

Ghost also afforded attention to their album covers. All but the first are made by the same artist named Zbigniew Bielak and many, including the EP’s and some singles, are references to old films. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to go into a lot of detail[10] here, but for now it is interesting to note that the artwork broadly echoes the overall narrative. While the cover of *Opus* features a somewhat cartoonish undead clergyman striking a menacing pose above a single church building, telling the beholder they are about to listen to a thematically dark but musically light-hearted band with religious undertones, the artwork for *Infestissumam* shows a pontiff in

[10] An in-depth analysis can be found here: http://www.heavyblogisheavy.com/2019/01/17/a-gift-to-artwork-ghost/

black taking over the Eternal City and nursing the baby Antichrist in St. Peter's Square to signal the growing power of Ghost. Moreover, the highly stylised red sun behind him symbolises Lucifer – the morning star (Doroc, 2019).

On the cover of *Meliora* the dark Pope has become the city itself, the centre of a soulless industrial complex, and the tiny insignificant people are all flocking to him (Doroc, 2019). The artwork for *Prequelle* is so intricate it may take hours to see everything it has to offer, and, like the album itself, marks a new dawn for Ghost. It's rather reminiscent of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by the Dutch medieval painter Hieronymus Bosch in that there are people and creatures everywhere. One glance already transports the listener to plague-stricken 14th century Europe before ever putting on the record. Moreover, it depicts a sickly cardinal whose likeness is based on a portrait of Pope Innocent X by Diego Velázquez dated at around 1650. There is a lot more to say about these album covers, and it may be worth further analysis. However, the point of this interjection was merely to show that the artwork is part of the story as well.

6. Analysis

Despite the fact that Ghost presents itself as a satanic cult, their Satanism has to be taken with a grain of salt. An initial piece of evidence for this can be found in the interview with BANGERTV where Forge talked about the distinction between the religious Satan and the caricature that is prevalent in pop culture, and that the devil featured in Ghost songs was based more on the latter. This is part of what Schechner meant when he said that the distinction between religious and secular ritual is not rigid; although it appears that Ghost is referring to a concept that strictly belongs to Christian theology, the reality is that there is a secular version of the devil that exists alongside the religious figure, but this secular version still carries strong traces of its religious origin. This can also be seen in games like the *Darksiders* and *Diablo* series, and television shows such as *Supernatural* (2005 – present) and *Lucifer* (2016 – present).

Returning briefly to my earlier remarks about the possibility that the emulation of a Catholic Mass amplifies the efficacy of the concert, in his conversation with Loudwire one of the Nameless Ghouls appears to suggest this was exactly what Ghost was intended for. From his remarks on the theatrical qualities of Catholic liturgy and its ability to bring people together it became clear that the band is very much aware of the efficacious nature of their stage act. In the same interview the Nameless Ghoul expressed the view that the efficacy of Catholic liturgy – and indeed all forms of organised religion – manifests itself as a means to control people, and this makes sense when placed in the context of how Forge experienced Christianity in his youth. Especially his resentment towards his former schoolteacher, who represented for him a 'sanctimonious authority', and to a lesser degree his stepmother are likely to have had a strong hand in this.

The main takeaway from his remarks on the reason for trying to emulate a Catholic Mass is that Ghost appears to be using the efficacy of Catholic liturgy and the ritual qualities of the metal concert to their advantage. On the other hand, there is also an element of play. This already comes to the fore in the fact that Forge has explicitly pointed out the music refers to the secular pop culture version of the devil rather than the strictly religious concept of Satan as mankind's main antagonist, but there are more clues. To most people the lewd remark about how Papa Emeritus and the Pope settled their differences will come across as disrespectful, and it probably is, but it also reaffirms the idea that Ghost doesn't take the fact they are seen as being at odds with traditional Christian values too seriously. Not only does this present another clue that the

satanic aspect should be taken with a grain of salt, but this looseness is also one of the main characteristics of play as defined by Schechner.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from the quote taken from Loudwire is that Ghost is playing with the tension between make-belief and make believe. In the last two sentences, the Nameless Ghoul not only muses on the idea that something is real when people agree it is, but he also proves that Ghost is again well aware of what they are doing. The statement made earlier that Forge acts as a spokesperson for the band and talks about his characters as if he has no say in what happens to them despite the fact that he created them – thus maintaining distance from his alter ego – becomes relevant here, as real and pretend are clearly marked. He is not really the clerical figurehead of the band; it's just a character he plays. Put differently, make-belief and make believe are completely separated. However, at the same time Forge seems to be wilfully and purposefully obfuscating this boundary by not stating explicitly that he is Cardinal Copia but pretending he is a different person. The ambiguity of whether older interviews with one of the Nameless Ghouls were in fact with Forge in disguise or not also fits into this.

Here the interrelatedness of these concepts taken from performance studies comes to the fore, as the looseness seen in the Ghost mythos that can be linked to the notion of play is founded upon the tension between religious and secular ritual on the one hand and the tension between make-belief and make believe on the other. While the devil featured in Ghost songs is based more on the caricature that is prevalent in pop culture, this secular version still carries strong traces of its religious origin, and he is presented as a quasi-religious symbol for a secularised worldview. Together with the deference towards the Pope this has already been shown to suggest the tongue-in-cheek nature of the satanic aspect, so the distinction between religious and secular ritual is a crucial ingredient for the stage act. Furthermore, the way in which Forge maintains distance from his characters creates ambiguity as to what is real and what is not. This makes the tension between make-belief and make believe another integral part of the performance.

Since certain rituals mark the transition from one life stage to the next and Sylvan saw the metal concert as the key ritual form it is possible to view a Ghost performance through the scope of liminality as well. While the band tries to emulate a Catholic Mass in order to engage with the audience more effectively, the effected changes are only temporary. Recalling that liminal rituals are transformations because they change people permanently, it can therefore be argued that a Ghost concert is a liminoid ritual instead. Moreover, entering a church building or a concert

venue – although the former is a space where rituals are performed and the latter is reserved for play – is in itself a kind of transportation, as both are spaces that require special behaviour. In this sense either place can be labelled as a heterotopia. Despite the use of these concepts taken from performance studies, it is difficult to say whether there is a lasting effect.

If the metal concert is indeed, as Sylvan argued, the key ritual form, it might be the case that it goes double for the Ghost concert. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine whether the elements taken from Catholic liturgy and the ritual qualities that appear to be already present in the performance itself amplify each other, there are some clues that seem to suggest such a complementary relationship. The first concerns the characters featured in the Ghost mythos; Cardinal Copia and the Papas before him were conjured up by Forge specifically to engage with the audience. Another sign can be seen in the audience's instinctive use of the 'devil horns' gesture, singing along to the lyrics, and the chant of "Hail Satan" without being prompted to do so. Moreover, the stage décor and props are taken straight from Catholicism and the music is infused with references to Christian thought, but at the same time these symbols and images are repurposed to fit a secularised worldview, which comes to the fore in the lyrics. This also shows that even though the Satanism needs to be taken with a grain of salt, there is also a reason behind it.

Another factor that may contribute to how Ghost are able to connect with their audience is that despite the dark subject matter, the music is generally accessible to a wider audience than some of the more extreme subgenres of contemporary metal. At the same time, however, many fans of metal are drawn specifically to these extreme forms because they are outside of the mainstream. This is also what O'Connor was referring to in his review of *Meliora* when he made his remark on catching more flies with honey than vinegar, but added that vinegar is a crucial ingredient. For metal this may indeed be true; because of their distinct musical style it is not entirely accurate to label Ghost as exclusively a metal band. When it comes to the perception of Satan in modern popular culture, on the other hand, the choice for a more accessible kind of metal makes a lot of sense. Shows like *Supernatural* and *Lucifer* present the devil as a generally calm, snarky, and smooth-talking figure, which does not concur with the aggressive drums and harsh vocals that are common in extreme metal.

So, with this in mind, a Ghost concert becomes a kind of Black Mass during which representatives of The Clergy preach their satanic gospel with accessible music. But what are

they preaching exactly? *Opus* immediately set the tone for a truly satanic theatre band, and as a whole the album evokes imagery of a faith community. This is done mainly through what I have in this thesis described as the satanification of Christian doctrine; by replacing God and Jesus with Satan and the Antichrist the band is able to write songs that resemble prayer. However, the imagery used for *Opus* is not to be confused with the real-life Church of Satan because Ghost presents a view of the devil as a literal entity and LaVey never did. The so-called satanification of Christian doctrine also fits with the radical inversion of traditional Christian themes described by Bossius in his study of black metal.

Infestissumam contains a great deal of sexual innuendo, and according to a Nameless Ghoul this has to do with the fact that women in the past have supposedly often been accused of being the devil because men were lusting after them. This can easily be construed as a critique of historical and contemporary misogynistic attitudes against women, but the potential involuntary conception of the Antichrist described in the first album causes some level of dissonance. Nor is it the case that the critique already started there; it is akin to an inversion of the Annunciation but Mary agreed to it, so it is a moot point. Overall the satanification of Christian doctrine takes the form of a mirror to the life of Jesus. It is also interesting to note that *Infestisummam* contains a large number of Bible references, while *Opus* relies heavily on post-conciliar doctrine that was established in the centuries after Christ instead. This means that there is a kind of temporal inversion between the two albums as well.

Meliora may be more difficult to interpret than its predecessors, but what is certain is that the album ends on the darkest note imaginable. Yet in small measure it might also be a critique of organised religion, since at the end of the world its promises of salvation prove hollow. As it turns out God is not going to save anyone, not even those who remained faithful, and now there is nothing else left for humanity but to throw itself at the mercy of the devil. More exactly, the only place people can still turn to in this world is Ghost. *Prequelle* uses imagery of the plague, death and destruction to remind people that life is short and encourage them to enjoy it while it lasts. While the album is still apocalyptic, the kind of apocalypse has changed, and the satanic elements have been moved to the background in favour of death itself. Thematically, there has been a shift from the coming of the Antichrist and the kingdom of Satan to death, pestilence and the wrath of God.

From all this it becomes clear that Ghost has done its homework when it comes to the

lyrics, and that the band straddles the line between what Weinstein called the Dionysian and chaotic strains of metal; while *Opus* and *Meliora* are closest to the chaotic because of their sense of dread and sense of abandonment respectively, the sexually explicit nature of *Infestissumam* and the 'carpe diem' of *Prequelle* put these two records in the corner of the Dionysian. But although each of the four studio albums leans more towards one than the other, the division is somewhat fluid, as the song 'Spirit' from *Meliora* is about intoxication and thus more Dionysian and 'Rats' from *Prequelle* is about plague-bearing rodents, which makes it more chaotic. From interviews it became clear that Ghost has a few things to say with their music; not only is there a strong narrative element present, but it is also intended as a critique of some elements of society that are often associated with organised religion.

7. Conclusion

In the analysis above a number of interesting findings came to the fore. The first is that Ghost is a highly theatrical band that seems to be using the efficacy of Catholic liturgy and the ritual qualities of the metal concert to their advantage, and when seen through the lens of performance studies it appears the specific elements they deemed helpful more or less correspond to various concepts used in this academic discipline. It may even be the case that they amplify each other, but this goes beyond the scope of the present paper. However, what is certain is that the band uses these concepts to engage with the audience. Most notable here are the distinction between religious and secular ritual, play, and make-belief versus make believe. Moreover, since Sylvan saw the metal concert as the key ritual form it is possible to view a Ghost performance through the scope of liminality as well.

Thematically speaking, the band continues the tradition of satanic black metal – although their latest album barely mentions the devil at all – but in terms of musical style they have gone in a different direction and developed their own sound. Ghost straddles the line between the Dionysian and chaotic strains of metal, and although the division is not rigid, each of the four studio albums leans more towards one than the other. The lyrics themselves are for the most part characterised by what in this paper has been called the satanification of Christian doctrine, which is related to the radical inversion of Christian themes described by Bossius in his study of black metal. Aesthetically the band appears to fall into a specific category of metal that borrows heavily from Christian liturgy.

The question returns, then, what message is Ghost trying to convey by presenting itself as a satanic cult? Based on the findings of this inquiry it can be concluded that the band tries to use the theatrical qualities of Catholic liturgy and its ability to bring people together, which they say manifests itself as a means to control people, to engage with the audience more effectively. In practice this takes the form of five distinct trends, three of which are related to performance. The first is the emulation of a Catholic Mass as a stage act. Secondly, the Ghost concert, both aesthetically and thematically speaking, is marked by a tension between religious and secular ritual. The third trend has to do with how Forge obfuscates the boundaries between the performance and what is outside of it, which more or less corresponds to notions of play, make-belief and make believe. Somewhat connected to this is the choice for a more accessible type of metal music.

The final trend is what has in this thesis been called the satanification of Christian doctrine in the lyrics, which is to a certain extend also intended as a critique of some elements of society that are often associated with organised religion. Each of these narrative concept albums tells a story, and it appears that safe for *Opus* each of them focuses on one specific issue. In the case of *Infestissumam* this critique is directed at historic and contemporary misogynistic attitudes towards women that Ghost blames on religion, on *Meliora* it's aimed at society's obsession with constantly trying to make small improvements and religion's seemingly hollow promise of salvation, and *Prequelle* reminds people that life is short and encourages them to enjoy it while it lasts, as opposed to the focus on the afterlife found in religion. This critique is more or less in line with the teachings of the Church of Satan, as LaVey favoured indulgence over abstinence and stated that the ideal Satanist should be individualistic and non-conformist in order to escape the herd mentality and scapegoating he associated with mainstream society, and to a lesser degree with the views of the Satanic Temple.

To put everything in more technical terms, Ghost constructs a critique of society through play in both performance and lyrics, and by emulating a Catholic Mass they are able to achieve efficacy through entertainment. However, while a Ghost concert is heterotopic in that attending it equals transportation to a ritual / play-hybrid space, the effected changes are seemingly only temporary. Moreover, this critique only becomes apparent retro-actively upon reading interviews with the band, and therefore appears to be too subtle for people to notice outright. It might even be the case that the theatrical qualities of the performance drown out the underlying message rather than supporting it. Still, the question that guided this thesis was not whether the message is conveyed successfully, but what it consisted of, and the answer appears to be that by presenting itself as a satanic cult Ghost attempts to convey a critique of both religion and society through play, with an emphasis on the latter. Religion does have a role, but the critique is aimed specifically at those elements of society that are generally associated with organised religion.

8. Discussion

While this study has yielded a satisfactory answer to the research question it also produced two new questions. The first is whether the efficacy of Catholic liturgy and the ritual qualities of the metal concert amplify each other. While this possibility has been mentioned numerous times throughout the inquiry it was never fully investigated. Doing so would also require research into other metal bands that borrow heavily from Catholic liturgy. The second question is why Ghost appears to be unable to convey their message successfully. One possible reason for this is that it only becomes apparent upon interviews with the band and therefore appears to be too subtle for people to notice outright. It can also be the case that the theatrics are in fact drowning out the message. While the analysis of the lyrics in this paper has only made use of author-focused and text-based methods, future research into these topics should also include ethnographic / audience reception approaches.

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