Extreme Metal and the Grotesque:

Utilization of Pathological Imagery in the Early Album Covers of Carcass (1987-1989)

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship that the representational conventions of the extreme metal subculture have with the grotesque image tradition. This broader question is approached through examining the grotesque in the early album covers of the British extreme metal group Carcass.

In addition to examining the visual motifs, the relationship between the Carcass's album covers and the grotesque is examined from a socio-cultural perspective as well. The socio-cultural processes are examined through theoretical formulations and concepts that are pertinent to liminal cultural phenomena and subcultural activity.

The findings of this thesis indicate that the grotesque is embodied in the album covers of Carcass primarily through the use of unconventional visual motifs, exaggerated and fantastical expression and the representation of taboo themes and image subjects. However, the album covers of Carcass do not fully fit in with the prior conceptualizations regarding the functions that the grotesque has for the extreme metal subculture, as the motives that underpin their representations are in many ways divergent from the conventions of the subculture.

This thesis suggests that the primary functions for the use of the grotesque has for the extreme metal subculture are related to the attainment of symbolic power, which is achieved through unconventional and transgressive representations that subvert the norms of conventional culture. These representational subversions seem to reflect the wider practices and socio-cultural disposition of the extreme metal subculture, although they are often metaphoric, exaggerated or fantastical in their expression.

Asiasanat – Keywords
Extreme metal, metal, punk, Carcass, album cover, album sleeve, subculture, popular culture, music, representation, transgression, grotesque, abject, collage, pathology, violence, gore

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All images used in the thesis are directly related to the study and cited accordingly.

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tutkielma käsittelee äärimetallin alakulttuurin representatiivisten konventioiden ja groteskin kuvaperinteen välisiä yhteyksiä. Tätä laajempaa kysymystä lähestytään tarkastelemalla groteskin ilmentymiä englantilaisen äärimetalliyhtye Carcassin varhaisissa levynkansissa.

Carcassin levynkansien ja groteskin taiteen välisten visuaalisten teemojen yhteyksien lisäksi tutkielmassa tarkastellaan näiden kahden yhteyttä myös sosiokulttuurisesta näkökulmasta käsin. Näitä sosiokulttuurisia prosesseja tarkastellaan hyödyntämällä liminaalisiin kulttuurisiin ilmiöihin ja alakulttuuriseen toimijuuteen liittyviä teoreettisia malleja ja käsitteitä.

Tutkielman tulokset osoittavat että groteski ilmenee Carcassin levynkansissa pääosin epätyypillisten visuaalisten aihioidien, liioitellun ja fantastisen ilmaisun sekä tabuaiheiden representaation kautta. Carcassin levynkansitaiteet eivät kuitenkaan täysin sovi aiempiin käsityksiin siitä, mitä eri funktioita groteskilla ja abjektilla on äärimetallin alakulttuurissa, sillä Carcassin representaatioiden taustalla vaikuttaneet motiivit ovat monella tapaa eroavia alakulttuurin konventioista.

Tutkielma osoittaa että groteskin käytön pääsääntöiset funktiot äärimetallin alakulttuurille liittyvät symboliseen voimaantumiseen, joka saavutetaan epätyypillisten ja transgressiivisten representaatioiden kautta, jotka toimivat vastavoimina konventionaalisen kulttuurin normeille. Nämä representatiivisella tasolla toimivat transgressiot heijastelevat äärimetallin alakulttuurin laajempia käytäntöjä ja sosiokulttuurista dispositiota, joskin ne ovat monesti ilmaisultaan metaforisia, kärjistettyjä tai fantastisia.

Asiasanat – Keywords
Äärimetalli, metalli, punk, Carcass, levynkansi, kansitaide, levynkansitaide, alakulttuuri, populaarikulttuuri, musiikki, representaatio, transgressio, groteski, abjekti, kollaasi, patologia, väkivalta, gore

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Tutkielmassa käytetyt kuvat liittyvät suoraan tutkielmaan ja niihin viitataan sen mukaisesti.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Before delving any further into this thesis, I feel that I should establish that I have a strong personal relation to my research subject that precedes any academic interests. I have been involved in the punk and extreme metal scenes of Finland since my teens, and this involvement has had a significant impact for my personal development and worldview. These subcultures provided me with a strong sense of belonging, and as my involvement in them grew deeper, they also gave me confidence that enabled me to express myself in ways that I had not been able to foresee in my prior involvements with more conventional peer-groups.

However, even though my experience of these subcultures has been ultimately empowering, my relationship with the abrasive representative conventions of the extreme metal subculture has always remained quite ambivalent due to the untamed ways in which traumatic and taboo subjects are represented in its various discourses. This feeling has been heightened by the dissonance that I have noted between the often fundamentally progressive values that many artists and individuals within the subculture hold and the nihilistic representations through which they express themselves.

In the case of the extreme metal group Carcass, the early releases of which I have chosen as my primary research subjects, there is a strong dissonance in the way that the group utilizes extremely violent imagery in its album covers and lyrics, while prompting for soft and liberal values in for example interviews conducted with the group. I find this contradiction very interesting, as it suggests that while this extreme style of representation seems to be very important for the artists as an expressive tool, its functions seem to be much more complex than this, as otherwise the various discourses of the group would be more coherent and consistent.

I am of course not working from the base assumption that when an artist or group uses violent imagery or deals with taboo subjects in their works they would by default be in some way aligning themselves with what they choose to represent. Nevertheless, in the case of the extreme metal subculture, the extensive way in which

representations of violence and all things morbid permeate the various cultural forms and practices of the subculture does suggest that the use of this kind of imagery and themes also has a self-representational dimension.

This self-conscious, all be it in many ways performative alignment with morbidity is a key factor in the manifestation of the aforementioned dissonance between the artists and their cultural products. The aesthetic that extreme metal artists use for their releases is inherently more self-representational than is the case in other forms of art. In popular music, the connection between the artists identities and creative products is often more direct and intimate than in other art forms in which the performative dimension is not as relevant. Thus, in the extreme metal subculture, there is also a stronger link between the abrasive representational conventions and the actual socio-cultural practices of members of the subculture.

As will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3, subcultural activity that manifests itself in unconventional and transgressive ways has often been deemed antisocial or counterproductive both in the popular consciousness as well as in academia. However, this conception is based on a very shallow and even prejudiced view of subcultures. In this thesis I am working under the supposition that the members of the subculture are ultimately seeking for positive outcomes through their cultural activities, even as the cultural forms and practices of extreme metal may initially come across as wholly antisocial or nihilistic.

This approach is loosely based on Pierre Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital and Sarah Thornton's subsequent conceptualization of subcultural capital as an abstract tool through which virtually any kind of participation in the cultural field is transformable into a positive result, which will be examined in more detail in section 2.3.2. This conception of cultural activity underpins much of my work, and I am hence interested in how this positive outcome is achieved when the representative tools that are utilized within the subculture are practically always deemed taboo and unwanted by conventional culture and society, the norms and rules of which always overshadow the extreme metal subculture.

1.1 Research goals and key questions

The most fundamental point of interest of this thesis is in examining how a wholly abject aesthetic, that is in strong contrast to both general conceptions of good taste and conventional modes of representation within the music industry, is used to provide an ultimately positive result for the cultural agents who represent themselves through it. In this study, I will be examining what this kind of aesthetic is used to communicate, and what are the cultural processes through which this kind of unconventional and dissonant form of communication has developed.

However, as this is such a broad and multifaceted question, attempting to give an exhaustive explanation for it would be unrealistic in a thesis of this length. This is why I have chosen to specifically examine how the grotesque, defined as a broad socio-cultural process that manifests itself in its potential to challenge and break down both cultural and social boundaries, is utilized in the early album covers of Carcass. The early releases of Carcass became the focus of this thesis due to their significant status and broad sphere of influence within the extreme metal subculture. The more intricate factors related to this will be discussed in more detail in section 1.4.

I am interested in how the influence of the grotesque image tradition permeates the works of Carcass, and in what ways it becomes visible in the album covers of the group. Subsequently I wish to examine what kinds of broader functions the utilization of such a grotesque aesthetic has for the group as a subcultural agent, and whether there is a more profound link between the abrasive representational conventions of the extreme metal subculture and the grotesque image tradition.

1.2 Scope and positioning of the research

Many of the academic publications that deal with the extreme metal subculture are rooted in the field of sociology, and usually have a rather extensive scope in their approach to the subject. These studies often examine the subculture as a broad socio-cultural entity, in which many of its more intricate details, and especially those related

to the more specific products, artifacts and forms of the subculture are to some extent neglected in favor of providing an all-encompassing overview of it.

In conducting my preliminary work related to this thesis, I found that there is a lack of research in which the actual cultural products of the subculture would be the primary focus. This is a significant reason why in this thesis I have wanted to focus heavily on the actual cultural products of the subculture instead of its more generalized attributes. Admittedly there is a respectable body of work in which the many peculiarities of the extreme metal scene have been examined. However, many of these studies examine the actual cultural products and forms of the subculture in a rather limited and even shallow manner, as their focus is so different.

This lack is not limited to just studies regarding the extreme metal subculture, as for example finding academic studies which would be dedicated to only the examination of the album cover as its own visual format, even without any genre limitations, proved practically impossible. There are of course more popularized works that examine the development of the album cover as its own visual format, such as *The Art of the Album Cover* (2010) by Richard Evans or *A Brief History of Album Covers* (2008) by Jason Draper, but as my main focus is on the aesthetic motifs within the album covers that I have chosen to examine instead of the format itself, I have found that these works are of no real relevance for this thesis.

Practically the only publication that I could find for this thesis that examines the visual representations of extreme metal was *Lucifer Rising* by Gavin Baddeley, which first of all is not an academic study, and second of all has such a heavy focus on Satanism, that the visual analyses found in the book are practically unusable. This is because although Baddeley exhibits extensive knowledge of the subculture, his focus is too one-dimensional and he has no interest in examining the extreme metal subculture from a broader cultural perspective that would incorporate any art historical terminology or knowledge into the work.

This choice of focus is also connected to what I have perceived as a somewhat derogatory attitude within the general public towards the actual cultural products of subcultures, which are often deemed as unskillful, self-consciously shocking or

amateur by nature. I find this view troubling, as even though many extreme metal or punk releases admittedly by no means fulfil what most people would consider as professional standards, this was never their real purpose in the first place. In fact, for many subcultures the primary aim of their activity is to escape the limitations of conventional culture and create an autonomous environment in which the participants can themselves actively define their own standards. Therefore, I feel that the actual cultural products of subcultures such as extreme metal deserve to be treated with the same sincerity as cultural artifacts from other more thoroughly established and widely renowned cultural institutions are.

Additionally, I find this choice of focus meaningful as I believe that the shared values and practices of any culture are ultimately articulated most tangibly in the artifacts produced within it, and they are also the primary vessel through which they spread out and communicate their message to audiences both within and outside the subculture. In the case of extreme metal this may be even more true, as classic extreme metal albums released decades ago are still highly sought after artifacts, and even as new digital platforms are revolutionizing the ways in which music is distributed and consumed, the status of physical album releases in the extreme metal scene has not changed in the same way as has generally happened in the field of popular music.

The relevance of examining the actual products and established cultural forms is also emphasized by Simon Frith in his article *Music and Identity* from 2011, in which he notes that "…music, an aesthetic practice, articulates in itself an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood."[1] Although in his article Frith emphasizes that these qualities through which collective values and ways of being are articulated are at least in the scope of his research manifested especially clearly in music, as it is a performative mode of art, I see no reason that this same general conceptualization could not be applied to other cultural products and forms as well, especially when

[1] Frith 2011, 110-111.

they are in a coherent discursive relation to the wider conventions and practices of a specific cultural unit or group.

1.3 Methodology

As my primary research questions pose various methodological challenges due to their multi-disciplinary and complex nature, I have chosen to utilize methods from numerous fields in a combinatory manner. The process through which this kind of multifaceted analysis is conducted is quite long-lasting and sporadic. Drawing together insights from the abstract area in which the research materials and theories meet is by no means systematic or straightforward, and the process can therefore not be exhaustively articulated.

However, a method that is broadly similar to mine, called the social semiotic approach, is described by Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama in the article *Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach*, featured in the *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, published in 2004. Jewitt and Oyama describe this method as something through which it is possible to examine the scope of expressive possibilities that representative images have, as well as the various possible ways in which these images can be interpreted.[2]

Jewitt and Oyama posit this approach as being based in the structuralist school of semiotics, in which communicative systems are seen as consisting of elements, the use and reception of which is governed by more fundamental structures. Structuralism and its relevance for this thesis will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, but for now the important thing to note about this connection is that in the social semiotic approach, what is important is not only the constituent elements or signs that images consist of, but also the broader socio-cultural structures that delineate their use.[3]

[2] Jewitt & Oyama 2004, 134.
[3] Jewitt & Oyama 2004, 138.

For Jewitt and Oyama, visual analysis is thus in itself not exhaustive enough to uncover all of the connotations of visual representations. In their studies, they have combined their visual analyses with numerous other sources from various academic fields, and only after viewing their findings from this multi-disciplinary perspective attempted to explain what is being communicated and what kinds of processes make this communication work.

I do not follow the model put forward by Jewitt and Oyama in full, and there are some significant differences in the terminology and theoretical background between our approaches. However, what is similar between our approaches is this emphasis on the background factors that influence both the creation and reception of visual representations, which Jewitt and Oyama call metafunctions[4]. For this thesis, however, the use of this term would be counter-productive, as its complexity is not pertinent in regards to my main research questions, and my ways of delineating these wider socio-cultural processes is much vaguer.

For this thesis, the visual analysis that I will be conducting on the album covers of Carcass will be supported by reflecting my findings on the theoretical formulations regarding the grotesque, the abject and subcultural studies, which are all relevant to both my research materials and main research questions. This theoretical framework is by no means all-encompassing, as it excludes many interesting factors of the artworks that could certainly have been examined in a research with a different focus, but for my work, I find that this framework is sufficient for analyzing both the aesthetic motifs as well as some of the more fundamental socio-cultural factors that have influenced the artworks in question.

My visual analysis is quite free in its form, but parts of it are conducted in a manner that shares some characteristics with semiological and iconographic analysis. I will be examining the various elements that the artworks consist of and analyzing their functions through examining the use of similar image subjects in other works, while also searching for other connotative elements and analyzing their relevance for

[4] [4] Jewitt & Oyama 2004, 140.

the general impact and function of the artworks. This kind of visual analysis requires an in-depth examination of the research subjects, in which the various pictorial elements that make up the works, such as use of color, composition, scale, choice of image subjects and technique are all taken into account and critically analyzed.

1.4 Research materials

The early album covers of Carcass were chosen as the primary research subjects not only because a wider sample of subjects would have been counterproductive in regards to the depth of my analysis, but also because the early releases of Carcass are pivotal examples of how the grotesque and the abject have been manifested in the visual representations of extreme metal. Additionally, the early album covers of Carcass make for interesting case examples because of their extremely graphic content, but also because of the way in which the groups liminal positioning on the borderlines of numerous cultural and subcultural boundaries, as well as its willingness to differentiate itself from the extreme metal scene resulted in inventive and unconventional representations.

A substantial number of the discourses regarding the early releases of Carcass took place in the extreme metal fanzines of the late 1980s and early 1990s. These zines are self-published and formally unconventional magazines that included editorials, reviews, gig-reports, interviews and numerous other texts that dealt with the numerous aspects of the extreme metal scene. As the discourses related to the early releases of Carcass are important for attaining a more thorough understanding of the impact that the artworks of these albums had for contemporary audiences, these zine materials are a significant source of information for this thesis.

These zines were very marginal releases, and even the more popular editions were released in only relatively small pressings some thirty years ago. Furthermore, as only a very small number of these zines have later been re-released or gathered into anthologies, as is the case with for example the *Isten* fanzine that is cited numerous times in this thesis, attaining physical copies of the zines is virtually impossible.

However, many of these releases have later been digitalized and uploaded into the internet, with blogs such as *Send Back My Stamps* having created extensive archives of these releases that are much more accessible to the extreme metal enthusiasts of today. And even though I recognize that there is no real substitute for the original physical copies of these releases, I find that for the purposes of my thesis, these digitalized copies are just as applicable.

The situation is practically the same in the case of the album releases that are used in this analysis. For example, in the case of the Carcass LP's and demo tapes, prices of the original pressings of the albums can be extremely high. And as later represses of these releases also often have alternative cover artworks or have been released in an alternative format where the dimensions of the artworks are different, I have found that the digitalized versions of these releases are better suited for my study, as gathering my personal collection would again be very impractical.

Luckily today there are excellent internet databases, such as Discogs[5], my primary source for these materials, into which labels, fans and record collectors gather high-quality digitalized versions of the album covers, along with a vast amount of miscellaneous information on these releases, including release dates, alternative pressings, line-ups of the groups, credits for creators of the artworks, studio technicians, producers and so forth. Although these kinds of sites are open to alterations by the public, the credibility of the material on Discogs lies in the fact that as it is a marketplace where often rare and expensive releases are bought and sold, the information that is posted therein is constantly monitored and moderated by both the site and the public, and the spread of misinformation is dealt with swiftly.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

As the theoretical framework of this thesis is multi-disciplinary and therefore rather complex, the following chapter in which the key theoretical formulations and concepts are examined is perhaps a tad longer than it would have to be in a thesis of this nature.

[5] About Discogs (n.d.). Discogs

In this chapter I will be examining the main concepts that are applied in the analyses throughout the thesis while providing subsequent information regarding their conception, development and applications. The theoretical section consists of the root chapter, in which I examine the more foundational theoretical background that has influenced my work, and the sub-sections in which I will examine theoretical writings regarding the grotesque, abjection and subcultural studies.

From the theoretical section I will move on to examine the early history of Carcass and the influence that the group has had for the extreme metal culture and scene. I will also be examining how the group arrived at utilizing such a prolific visual aesthetic and how it differed from the aesthetic used by many of the contemporaries of the group. After this I will be conducting visual analysis on the groups early releases, including their demo tapes as well as their first two full length LP releases. After the more detailed visual analysis, I will be examining the varying and often even contradictory ways in which the members of the group viewed their artworks and what kind of explanations they gave for their works.

In the second analysis section I will be examining my findings from the visual analysis conducted on the Carcass album covers in a broader context. Here I will also be examining works from both classical western art as well as popular music that have very likely influenced the works of Carcass in one way or another. In the sub-sections of this final chapter I will also be examining what I have found to be the two major ways in which the grotesque manifests itself in the representations of extreme metal. The first of these sub-sections deals with disorderly compositions, which is an important facet of the representational systems of metal, punk, and more classic rock and roll as well.

In the second sub-section I will be examining the use of traumatic imagery in both Carcass' album covers as well as in the extreme metal aesthetic more generally. In this section traumatic imagery is used as an umbrella term for all kinds of morbid, disgusting and violent image subjects. Here I will also be comparing the early releases of Carcass to other extreme metal releases and noting both similarities and differences

between them in order to attain a more critical understanding of how the album covers of Carcass utilize this kind of traumatic imagery.

After this chapter, I will move on to the conclusion of this thesis, where I will go over the most important findings of my work once more, while critically examining the pros and cons of my study and contemplating on what kind of future studies could be done on this subject. After this recap of my work, there is the list of figures used, after which I have placed the bibliography, in which I have listed all the sources, both printed and digital, that I have cited within this work.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will be elaborating upon the key concepts and theoretical framework that this thesis is founded upon. As the methodology of this thesis is heavily based on reviewing and reflecting the chosen research materials against the backdrop of various theoretical formulations and concepts that shed light on their forms and functions, the theories discussed in this chapter are of heightened importance. However, before moving on to examine this theoretical framework in more detail, I wish to briefly examine the broader overlapping theoretical movement of structuralism, which has in one way or another influenced the thinking of practically all of those whose works are cited in this thesis, as well as my own conceptualization of human culture as a complex and transitory system of communication.

The theoretical movement of structuralism is generally seen as being rooted in the works of the renowned linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who sought to examine language through more systematic methods, viewing language more as a representative system with its own internal logic than any sort of naturally and imminently emerging form of communication[6]. Andrew Tudor notes that Saussure's conceptualization of the foundational structure of language was significant as it highlights the way in which language is built through social interactions, in which the underlying structure of language supersedes the linguistic sign, which in Saussure's model is more or less arbitrary. This conceptualization of language prompted a shift in linguistics, in which the examination and analysis of more foundational systems of signs and signifiers that govern the development and use of language would become the focus of the field[7].

Broadly speaking, the distinguishing feature of structuralism is its emphasis on the examination of the relationships between the constituent elements of a communicative system, as opposed to examining these elements individually[8]. This emphasis is strongly influenced by Saussure's work, as like in his analysis of language,

[6] Rich 2007, 15
[7] Tudor 1999, 55
[8] Berger 1995, 97

the main point of interest is in the relations and interactions between the various elements that produce meanings, rather than in individual elements, which are only seen as parts of this more complex chain in which these meanings are produced. From a structuralist point of view, human culture is thus a complex system of various signs and other representational elements, the utilization and reception of which are governed by underlying structures that have their own systems of logic[9].

This structuralist approach has been famously applied to the study of broader socio-cultural phenomena, and especially to the study of myths, by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Barthes conceptualized a myth as a "mode of signification", which is built through a specific type of discourse[10], and is thus examinable through an analysis of the relationships between its constituent elements. Lévi-Strauss and Barthes examined these myths as communicative systems, that like other more clearly defined linguistic units are also formed of more fundamental and basic elements[11], in the same way as for example sentences consist of single words, and so forth.

The works of Barthes and Lévi-Strauss show that through structuralist analysis it is possible to analyze broader and more complex socio-cultural institutions, phenomena and practices that at first glance may seem wholly abstract, but which can become more clearly decipherable through examining their underlying structures and the relationships between the constituent elements that create them. This approach which emphasizes the transitory nature of the individual signs that make up our communicative and representative systems is very important for this thesis, as my key research goals are related to the examination of what kind of processes have influenced the development of the often dissonant representational system of extreme metal.

The influence of the structuralists has also been strong for many of the theorists that I cite in this thesis. And even though most of them cannot be definitively be

[9] Berger 1995, 98
[10] Barthes 1978, 109
[11] Berger 1995, 98

considered as belonging to the structuralist movement, their work has certainly been influenced by the general conceptions laid down by the structuralists in a similar way that it has affected my own.

For example, in subcultural studies, the developments of the various modes of subcultural discourses is often examined through a structuralist lens, where the development of subcultural forms and practices are often examined in strong relation to a plethora of social, cultural and economic factors that have influenced them. In the theoretical writings regarding the grotesque and the abject, which will be the topics of the following sections, the various forms that similar kinds of aesthetic and socio-cultural motifs have manifested themselves in are also of key importance, and they are similarly often examined in connection to the wider socio-cultural processes that have influenced their development.

2.1 The grotesque

The grotesque is a key element for my thesis, as the theoretical writings related to it are a valuable tool in the analysis of any abrasive and unconventional visual representations. The concept is especially applicable for representations that in some way challenge or go beyond our conventional representational structures. The concept originates from the field of art history, but due to the broad set of ramifications that it has for various kinds of socio-cultural phenomena, the concept can just as easily be used to examine folk traditions, specific kinds of image subjects or entire artistic movements.

According to contemporary art scholar Frances S. Connelly, who has written several works that examine the grotesque in western art, the grotesque is so broadly applicable because unlike many other concepts employed in the field of art history, it does not refer to any specific set of predefined elements in an artistic work or artifact. Instead, the grotesque is something that is used to describe a certain kind of liminal

and often non-normative disposition that cultural products and movements can have.[12]

To emphasize this transitory and abstract nature that the grotesque has in our culture, Connelly conceptualizes it as more like a cultural process, a certain way of doing things, as opposed to it merely reflecting an execution of any predefined set of formal or stylistic features[13]. Connelly sees the grotesque as being fundamentally a cultural process through which various sign systems as well as thematic and visual categories can be freely mixed together, even if they are by their base definitions somehow contradictory with one another.

Because of this liminal and transitory nature that the grotesque holds, it has a strong potential to break down and expand normative cultural boundaries and destabilize the ways in which we perceive, represent and participate in our cultures[14]. For Connelly, this liminal and boundary breaking potential of the grotesque is rooted in its ability to distort that which is familiar to us, as well as in its capacity to incorporate foreign elements into our existing representational conventions:

> An effective grotesque fixes our attention on an existing boundary, making the contours of the familiar and "normal" visible to us, even as it intermingles with the alien and unexpected. As such, the grotesque turns received ideas, normal expectations and social and artistic conventions against themselves.[15]

Connelly's conceptualization has very likely been influenced by the writings that the renowned scholar of literature Mikhail Bakhtin conducted on the grotesque and the carnivalesque, as the same emphasis regarding the grotesque as a transitory and even contradictory cultural process can be clearly be found in the following excerpt from Bakhtin's work *Rabelais and His World*. Here Bakhtin criticizes prior, more static and one-dimensional conceptions of the grotesque as put forward by the nowadays practically unknown German scholar Ludwig Schneegans, who held that grotesque was inherently satirical or vulgar in its expression:

[12] Connelly 2012, 2.
[13] Connelly 2012, 2
[14] Connelly 2012, 13.
[15] Connelly 2012, 11.

> He could not understand the possibility of combining in one image both the positive and the negative poles. Even less was he able to understand that an object can transgress not only its quantitative but also its qualitative limits, that it can outgrow itself and be fused with other objects. The pregnant and two-bodied images could not be grasped by Schneegans; he did not see that, in the grotesque world of becoming, the limits between objects and phenomena are drawn quite differently than in the static world of art and literature of his time.[16]

Similarly to this, Connelly also describes grotesque images as being in a constant "state of flux", and that they are by their base definition "combinatory and metamorphic"[17]. Additionally, similarly to Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque and especially the carnivalesque being tied to carnality and the lower body[18], Connelly also emphasizes that the grotesque has a strong connection to the human anatomy. For Connelly this connection is especially strong in regards to the feminine body, which he argues is strongly tied with non-normative and liminal representation in western art.

As the grotesque is a cultural process that is distinguished by its transitory and liminal nature, its manifestations are thus strongly dependent on the socio-cultural conditions that influence its emergence. So in a way, the grotesque is in itself formless, and it develops its characteristics in relation to the boundaries of the society and culture that it manifests in. This is why it is practically impossible to define the specific formal characteristics of what can be defined as grotesque in any definitive way. Instead, the concept should rather be applied with a broader scope that takes into account both formal as well as more abstract factors of the artifacts and phenomena that it is applied to.

And while it must be noted that this sort of vague conceptualization of the grotesque is somewhat problematic in its ambiguity, this kind of understanding of the grotesque as a phenomenon that exists in the fringes of socio-cultural boundaries also has its merits. This broader perception enables us to analyze a much wider set of

[16] Bakhtin 1984, 308
[17] Connelly 2012, 2.
[18] Bakhtin 1984, 376, 394

phenomena as a part of the grotesque tradition than would be the case if it were applied as a more definitively delineated concept.

In the following sections I will examine the historical background of the concept of the grotesque as well as its development in art historical discourses. The various subgroupings of the grotesque will also be examined in the following sections, except the abject, which will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2. This is due to the fact that as was mentioned in section 1.4, the multi-disciplinary and complex nature of the abject requires a more thorough overview that do not think would be structurally viable when grouped together into the section which deals with the grotesque.

2.1.1 Origins of the concept

Contemporary theoretical formulations as well as more popularized definitions of the grotesque are quite dissimilar from the rather humble beginnings of the concept, which can be traced back to 15th century Italy. It was there that during excavations of Emperor Nero's Golden Palace archaeologists discovered peculiar ornamental wall paintings, which were held as highly irregular by contemporary viewers. The decorative paintings that adorned the walls of the Palace were free flowing in their form and combined architectural elements and figures consisting of various image subjects into a single composition.[19]

At the time, this kind of combinatory images were highly uncommon, especially in ornamental paintings[20]. As the rooms in which these ornamental paintings were located were below ground level, in what was essentially a grotto, the paintings within it as well as the style in which they were executed quickly became known as 'grottesche', which quite literally translates to 'grotto-like'.

These so-called grottesche paintings became influential in the decorative and graphic arts of the Renaissance period, not only because of their unique formal

[19] Connelly 2012, 3.
[20] Connelly 2012, 3.

qualities but because of the way in which they influenced the way in which creative freedom became more valued in aesthetic thought. In fact, the grottesche paintings became something of a symbol that stood for artistic liberties and the importance of improvisation and creativity without bounds in the aesthetic discourses of the Renaissance era.[21]

Although the grottesche was initially used to refer to a certain style of ornamental painting, the use of the concept expanded quickly. Because of the symbolic value that the grottesche had attained in the aforementioned aesthetic discourses of the renaissance era, its original definition was soon practically forgotten, as the concept gained a multitude of subsequent connotations that were related to more substantial aesthetic questions than the mere designation of a certain kind of ornamental style.

This origin story of the grotesque is enlightening in the sense that it illuminates the key features of the grotesque as being in its ability to surprise and inspire audiences through unconventional representations, as well as in the way it emphasizes the strong relation the grotesque has to creative freedom and unnatural representation. However, Connelly also states that the establishment of such an origin-story for the concept is somewhat arbitrary. Connelly argues that this arbitrariness lies in how the manifestations of the grotesque in art are much more multi-faceted than the mere history of the concept[22]. However, on the other hand it could be seen that even the classic grotesques did in many ways entail the fundamental elements of the later connotations that the concept would entail as well, and that they are a part of the continuum that is established in this origin story.

In the following sections, I will briefly examine the ways in which the grotesque has been applied in the fields art history and aesthetics, as well as the kinds of subgroupings and subsequent concepts that have developed in connection to it. I am examining these subgroupings as they have been put forward by Connelly, whose conceptions of the grotesque gather together theoretical conceptualizations on the

[21] Connelly 2012, 3.
[22] Connelly 2012, 4

subject from both the field of art history as well as literature, and thus perhaps a more contemporary take on the subject.

2.1.2 Applications in art history

As the grotesque developed into an established aesthetic concept from the renaissance era onwards, it came to be applied to a growing number of visual representations and cultural practices that were relevant for the fields of art history, aesthetics and literature. Consequently, the range of its connotations widened through the ongoing aesthetic discourses in different eras, and eventually the subgroups of the arabesque, the carnivalesque and the abject came to be applied alongside what is now regarded as the classical grotesque.

The first known instances of the term 'arabesque' date back to the early 1500s, soon after the concept of the grottesche had made its way into the public consciousness. At first, the arabesque was a term that was used to primarily describe Islamic ornamental art. These ornamental paintings were often abstract and non-figurative, and they would become widely copied and distributed throughout Europe.[23]

The early arabesque paintings were primarily decorative, and according to Connelly, the early arabesques often lacked the playful inventiveness and contemplative nature of the traditional grotesques.[24] This is mostly because unlike was the case with the grotesques, arabesques did not include combinations of image subjects or modes of representation that could be considered unnatural. However, although the early arabesques were not as groundbreaking for the development of new aesthetic ideals or representational forms as the traditional grotesques were, they quickly became a gateway through which wholly new and exotic forms, image

[23] Connelly 2012, 54.
[24] Connelly 2012, 56.

subjects and the combination thereof made their way into the sphere of European high art from far outside its typical sphere of influences.[25]

The concept of the arabesque saw major reinterpretations in the aesthetic and philosophical discussions of the era of Enlightenment. The first of these emerged from the field of social sciences, and posited that the arabesque was a primordial and combinatory form of expression that that had been used already in ancient and so called primitive cultures, that had ties to the very foundational nature of human expression and imagination.[26] The second interpretation, which rose from the field of aesthetics was more traditional, and saw the arabesques as a form of art that enabled unlimited visual experimentation, unbound by any outside connotations or responsibilities.[27]

Unlike the arabesque and the traditional grotesque, which are more strongly connected to actual visual forms, the carnivalesque is a much more elusive socio-cultural phenomenon that can become manifest in practically any human activity. This is because the concept of the carnivalesque defines a phenomenon that occurs very naturally, if not inevitably in human societies, and is therefore able to become manifest in a variety of cultural practices, artifacts and traditions.

To put it simply, the carnivalesque refers to the subversion and transgression of social conventions and hierarchies. As opposed to the traditional grotesques and arabesques, that were often in some way sublime in their inspiration and manifested themselves in abstract representational systems, the carnivalesque is often expressed in vulgar terms, using mockery, satire, provocation and a general disregard for good taste to disrupt the prevailing social and ethical order[28]. Connelly sees the carnivalesque as being heavily connected with the material and bodily realms, as well as raw, vulgar and even mundane phenomena.[29]

[25] Connelly 2012, 57.
[26] Connelly 2012, 61-63.
[27] Connelly 2012, 66.
[28] Connelly 2012, 82
[29] Connelly 2012, 84.

The term itself is derived from the folk tradition of the medieval carnival, which was a festival during which the social norms and hierarchies of medieval society were turned completely upside down in a ritualized setting. During the carnival, the lower classes of society often mocked their superiors and used the ritualized space created by the carnival to transgress social and ethical boundaries which were otherwise considered forbidden or taboo through various performances other cultural processions such as the hurling of insults, mockery and the use of abrasive masking and clothing. During the carnival, the vulgar, banal and corporeal was celebrated while all that was considered sacred, proper and sublime was mocked and tarnished.[30]

Connelly examines the caricature as one of the clearest ways in which the carnivalesque has been approached in the visual arts. The term 'caricature' is a loan word from Italian, meaning quite literally 'to overload', which is fitting, as perhaps the most important feature of caricatural imagery is the exaggeration and saturation of the defining features of their subject matter.

Connelly also points out that caricatural representations are often satirical or scornful in their nature, and that they often use their excessive visual forms as a means to ridicule that which is being represented. However, Connelly also states that excessive and satirical expression is only one dimension of caricatural images, and while the most prolific examples of caricature are often exaggerated in their expression, the term can just as well be used to describe images that are executed in a reductive or minimalistic manner, in which instead of exaggerating them, the defining characteristics of the subjects of the images are simplified.[31]

As can be seen in the examples of the arabesque and the carnivalesque, the ways in which the concept of the grotesque has been applied in art history constitute a rich plethora of cultural practices and representational forms that nevertheless are unified by their liminal and subversive potential, whether it is related to more formal experimentation or socio-cultural transgressiveness.

[30] Connelly 2012, 86.
[31] Connelly 2012, 92.

In the following segment I will be examining the abject. This subgroup of the grotesque is arguably the most pertinent for this thesis, as it is in the abject that the formal experimentation, categorical liminality and socio-cultural transgressiveness are manifested in arguably the most extreme and prolific manner. I will first examine the more fundamental theoretical formulations regarding the abject, that examine its origins from a wider perspective, after which I will move on to explore how the abject is seen to have manifested in the visual arts.

2.2 Abjection

Broadly speaking, the concept of abjection is used to refer to the processes that occur when the various boundaries that delineate the structures through which conventional human life and society are organized are transgressed, stretched to their limit, or in some sense nullified[32], even if for just temporal and unmeasurable instances. It is used to describe various kinds of transgressions that in some way threaten or at the very least distort the basic structures that govern the individual psyche or socio-cultural order. Julia Kristeva, who is arguably the most prolific theorist of abjection, has described it thusly:

> It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.[33]

Beardsworth has summarized Kristeva's definition of abjection as being a state within the process through which human subjectivity is formed, in which the boundaries between the self and otherness are construed. In abjection, the conception of the 'other' is beginning to take shape, but as the boundaries between the self and the other are still in a state of immaturity, the mind is left in a state of instability, in

[32] Kristeva 1982, 4
[33] Kristeva 1982, 4.

which it strives to negotiate the boundaries between its own subjective reality and the outside world.[34]

Kristeva describes this state of instability as being characterized by a simultaneous fascination and repulsion[35]. This contradictory state is, triggered by the subject recognizing the arbitrariness of its own fundamental structure as it comes to contact with something that exists beyond or distorts the elementary boundaries of the subject, is further elaborated upon by Kristeva in her description of the sensation of witnessing a corpse:

> No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit–*cadere*, cadaver. [36]

Abjection is thus simultaneously a passive and ambiguous state as well as an active process of exclusion. In abjection, the subjective self is left into an ambivalent state of desolation as its boundaries are challenged by the emergence of the objective, unfathomable other, such as the decaying corpse as described in the prior excerpt.

However, Beardsworth emphasizes that this otherness is inherent to the process through which the subjective self is able to define itself and its boundaries, and that the ambivalent and transgressive form that the abject assumes in threatening the boundaries of the subject is the catalyst in the process in which the subject is forced to define itself in relation to the objective reality around it.[37] Abjection is thus not an inherently negative force, however upsetting as it may be, as it evokes the sense through which individuals and even entire communities structure their lives and environments into manageable entities.

[34] Beardsworth 2004, 80-81.
[35] Kristeva 1982, 1
[36] Kristeva 1982, 2.
[37] Beardsworth 2004, 82-83.

Kristeva's work on the subject belongs to the field of psychoanalysis and is thus in its entirety a tad bit obscure and too heavily focused on the way in which the phenomenon is based in the human psyche for being wholly applicable to this paper. Additionally, I understand that as Kristeva's works are heavily based on Freudian psychoanalysis, there are parts of it that are nowadays regarded as less than scientific. Nevertheless, I find that her writings on the subject are enlightening when paired with more grounded conceptualizations of the abject from the fields of cultural studies and anthropology.

In the following chapters I will be examining how abjection, seen as a concept which delineates disorder and otherness, manifests itself in human culture at a macro-level, in which the process of abjection is related to the establishment of socio-cultural structures, norms and taboos, as well as its presence in the grotesque strand of western art and culture as a something through which the threatening and the obscure can be effectively represented and examined in various facets of culture.

2.2.1 As disorder and inarticulateness

Kristeva's description of the abject as a boundary breaking process which challenges our sense of order is highly reminiscent of the work that the renowned anthropologist Mary Douglas conducted on the concepts of otherness and impurity in the field of anthropology, some decades prior to Kristeva. In her widely acclaimed work *Purity and Danger*, originally published in 1965, Douglas explores the ways in which the general boundaries of human societies, marked by various norms and taboos, are construed through a socio-cultural process which delineates the pure from the impure, the wanted from the unwanted, and so forth.

Douglas' writings on the concept of disorder and inarticulateness are particularly pertinent to defining how abjection can be seen as a force that affects human communities on a macro-level as well, and not only on individual subjects. In fact, similarly to how Kristeva describes the ways in which abjection affects the individual subject, Douglas describes the effects of disorder, understood as a kind of

defilement that can result from various kinds of deviations or disregard of established socio-cultural boundaries and ideals[38] as something that is inherent in any ordered socio-cultural structure[39].

Hence as the subject will never be fully realized without in some sense realizing the otherness that threatens its sense of wholeness and self, wider social order can also be fully realized only when there are forces within it that challenge its boundaries. And while this conception may at first glance seem wholly contradictory, Douglas points out that the very basic concept of impurity, which she uses as somewhat synonymous with the concept of disorder, is entirely dependent on deviance from what is thought of as pure, its polar opposite[40]. In this sense a proper conception of order can only be construed by first defining the elements that constitute disorder.

Douglas also emphasizes the ways in which disorder can help sustain order as a force that is due to its uncontrolled nature capable of renewal and reinvention[41]. Douglas notes that in many social systems disorder is in one way or another ritualized, and that for groups and individuals for whom it is possible to go beyond established norms, disorder can even be a source of power[42], as it enables them to utilize means that are off-limits within conventional society and culture.

Douglas uses the concept of inarticulateness in describing the area in which this kind of disorder can manifest itself. She describes inarticulateness as something that lies beyond the rigid confines of established society and culture, or at the very least on the very borders of its structure[43]. According to Douglas, groups and individuals that have crossed the border into the area of inarticulateness are often in some way marginalized within their communities, as there are numerous taboos that are associated to this transgression[44].

[38] Douglas 2005, 93
[39] Douglas 2005, 156
[40] Douglas 2005, 53
[41] Douglas 2005, 156
[42] Douglas 2005, 156
[43] Douglas 2005, 157
[44] Douglas 2005, 157-158

However, Douglas also notes that the ways in which disorder and inarticulateness are defined, as opposed to order and purity, are very much transitory, as these concepts that create shared boundaries and values are construed through various forms of interaction between members of a community, and are therefore in a constant process of reshaping and negotiation[45]. In this sense, disorder and inarticulateness arguably can indeed be seen as forces that have the capacity to drive human communities forward, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, as their continued disruptions of established boundaries can indeed eventually result in expanding them and thus forcing human communities to evolve.

Although Kristeva's definition of abjection is indeed based on the subjective psyche, I see no clear difference, other than that of scale, between this and the process described by Douglas, where larger communities define the limits of themselves, what they are and what they do by actively marginalizing and expulsing that which they consider as foreign or threatening to their sense of order. After all, human communities and cultures are built according to the even more foundational structures of the psyche, so it would only seem natural that certain dichotomous structures and the need to differentiate one's self or one's community from the rest of the world would also effect human activity on a wider scale as well.

2.2.2 As anomalous representation

As abjection is such a foundational facet of the human condition, it is no wonder that it manifests itself widely in various cultural representations as well. In the field of aesthetics, abject representations are often studied under the general framework of the grotesque tradition. Of all the different manifestations of the grotesque, the abject comes closest to the popular conception of the term as a synonym for something that is ugly, deformed, or even in some way traumatic to the viewer. Abject representations are often associated with innately frightening or traumatic image subjects, such as

[45] Douglas 2005, 165

dead bodies, fantastical monsters and deformed beings, but in reality, abjection is not made manifest only through that which is frightening and threatening.

In conjunction with Kristeva's definition of abjection, Connelly notes that the more foundational level of the abject is indeed related to a crisis of identity, which is triggered when we are confronted with something that threatens the boundaries of the structures through which our conceptions of the world are formed[46]. So whereas for example the manifestations of the carnivalesque are much more impersonal and transitory processes, that are always somehow connected to more mundane social institutions and practices[47], utilizing mockery, caricature and satire in its transgressions[48], abjection refers to a crises the root of which is more intimate and perhaps even sublime.

Connelly has noted that in the visual arts, abject imagery invokes a reaction of dread in its audience, that defies our conceptions of our identities and reality, and thus forces us to re-enter the state in which the borders between our subjective egos and the imposing objective world are established. Connelly states that as abject imagery often uses the manipulation or lack of tangible forms and subjects in its visual language, the viewer is forced to struggle with the task of categorizing, representing or in some way explaining that which he can clearly see but not comprehend. As the viewer is unable to incorporate the absurd and troubling imagery into his subjectively structured conception of reality, he is thrown into the realm of abjection, in which he must once more struggle to maintain his subject in the face of this threatening otherness.[49]

According to Connelly, the representations of the abject are exceptionally strongly bound to the feminine, both physically and conceptually. Connelly sees this as a part of a wider tradition in western culture, in which the feminine has been considered as in one way or another 'less' or 'other' than the masculine, which

[46] Connelly 2012, 115
[47] Connelly 2012, 86
[48] Connelly 2012, 92
[49] Connelly 2012, 116.

immediately positions the feminine spirit and physicality into the margins of cultural representation, and therefore abjection.[50]

Connelly views the works of Hieronymous Bosch as especially important and influential manifestations of abjection in the canon of western visual art. Connelly emphasizes how the works of Bosch explore abjection not only in its subject matter, but also in its formal and compositional qualities:

> The power of Bosch's work did not come solely from his inspired visual inventions, but was matched by a new interpretation of evil. No longer was it personified by a single demonic figure; Bosch created a pervasive and oppressive atmosphere of evil, a spatial as well as figural embodiment of it.[51]

Connelly also notes that the manner in which Bosch depicted his religious and often apocalyptic scenes was also deeply pessimistic, offering no hope of salvation or redemption for the unlucky figures who inhabit his hellish paintings. This pessimism lived on in the art of the post-reformation Baroque period, where the visual arts became more focused on physicality and suffering instead of representing ascension or sublimity.[52]

Connelly notes that in this period, visual representations of the abject became increasingly connected to the lower levels of both society and the human anatomy, as can be found in for example the anatomical works of Andreas Vesalius[53]. Connelly finds an exemplary realization of this trend in Rembrandt's 1656 painting The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Jan Deijiman, which meticulously depicts the dissection of a convicted criminal. Connelly argues that in this instance both the visual representation of the subject matter, with its emphasis on the primitive physicality of death, as well as the choice to depict a criminal, an ostracized and undesirable member of society, manifest abjection in the ways in which the cadaver, a boundary creature both in its

[50] Connelly 2012, 116-117.
[51] Connelly 2012, 121.
[52] Connelly 2012, 122.
[53] Connelly 2012, 126

physical and societal being, is simultaneously presented in its full horror to the viewer while it is being used as a scientific vessel by the anatomists of the image.[54]

So whereas for example the arabesque strand of the grotesque is often viewed solely through its experimentational nature and playfulness regarding visual forms[55] and the carnivalesque through its anarchic and often absurd nature[56], abjection is most often connected with the depiction of either corporeal, monstrous or traumatic image subjects, or visual forms which wholly subvert our established representational systems.

2.3 Subcultural theory

The term subculture is frequently used throughout this paper, and the recognition of the subject matter of this research as being particularly subcultural by nature is important. This is because having a specifically subcultural disposition in their activities is something that is recognized by the artists whose works are being studied themselves, but also because there are numerous socio-cultural factors and processes that influence the emergence and subsequent activities of subcultural entities that should not be ignored in a study that is concerned with the intricacies of the cultural forms and produce of subcultures.

Interestingly the concept of subculture itself has been one of the most frequent points of questioning that I have had to discuss when speaking of my research subject, which is understandable, as the term is used to refer to such a wide variety of cultural entities that often have very little in common with one another, other than their general subcultural disposition of course. The specific connotations of the term are further distorted by its popularized use in contemporary cultural discourse, in which it is often used to refer to only a rather small cluster of more rigidly established and widely known subcultures that have been especially influential to popular culture, such as punk, metal, goth, hip-hop etc., when in fact a huge array of different socio-

[54] Connelly 2012, 127-128.
[55] Connelly 2012, 57
[56] Connelly 2012, 112

cultural groups, ranging from religious or political communities to groups of people organized around internet message forums can be classified as subcultures.

With this in mind, it probably comes as no surprise that the definition of subculture is not, and never has been absolutely clear or exhaustive, even in academia. Jenks notes that the concept has a long history within the field of social studies[57], and its usage seems to have always been more or less dependent on changing trends in academic research[58]. Sharing this view, Williams also begins his definition of the concept of subculture by stating that one's understanding of the term is highly dependent on the texts that one happens to come by regarding the subject[59].

So rather than being any kinds of definitive handbooks on the subject, many works regarding subcultural theory, including those of the aforementioned writers, are more like historical examinations regarding the usage of the term. However, while its more specific connotations seem to vary from study to study, there are certain similarities in most of the uses of the concept that enable its use as an analytic tool in socio-cultural research. However, as Jenks also points out, the use of the concept can easily become problematic, as it can sometimes be used by scholars more or less arbitrarily, for example to simply highlight non-normative or transgressive cultural practices, without a real will to examine said phenomena through a subcultural framework, in which the socio-cultural factors that are generally thought to affect subcultures would be taken into account[60].

So instead of attempting to provide an all-encompassing and exhaustive overview or definition of the term or the theoretical discourse that is related to it, which of course would in any case be practically impossible as its use has indeed been so varied and as its history is itself the subject of critical sociological scrutiny, in the following sections I will establish a more utilitarian conceptualization of the term in a

[57] Jenks 2005, 6
[58] Jenks 2005, 4-6
[59] Williams 2011, 5
[60] Jenks 2005, 9

way that is pertinent to this particular research, while clarifying its importance as an analytic tool in regards to the subject matter of this paper.

2.3.1 Developments in subcultural studies

While Williams points out that there had been sociological research that in some way resembles contemporary subcultural studies already in the 1800s[61], both himself and Jenks emphasize that subcultural studies truly began to emerge as its own academic field only after the Second World War[62]. However, studies of subcultures in the early post-war period did not draw from any established conceptual or theoretical consensus, and it is generally thought that our contemporary approach to subcultural studies began to take form only in the 1970s through the collective work of the CCCS (The University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies). [63]

Williams argues that conceptualizations of subcultures before the 1970s were often rooted in what he calls a sort of "sociological gaze", in which the cultures of marginalized parts of the population were studied as being in at least some sense dysfunctional segments of society[64]. This conception was heavily reliant on what Williams refers to as a demographic definition of subculture, where it is assumed that subcultures are formed of groups of individuals who share a number of specific social, cultural and economic traits and traits[65], which in most cases are in some way negative or noticeably distinctive from societal norms.

This view is founded on the problematic presupposition that the formation of subcultures is a more or less deterministic process, in which the individual has little to no power over his own cultural disposition. According to this conceptualization, subcultures are more a result of with people's failure to conform to the standards of conventional society than a result of their own will to create and participate in a

[61] Williams 2011, 5
[62] Jenks 2005, 7
[63] Williams 2011, 6.
[64] Williams 2011, 5
[65] Williams 2011, 7

culture that is more representative of their individuality or socio-cultural disposition, which is a simplified and exclusive view to say the least.

However, as Williams points out, already in the 1950s scholars such as Albert Cohen carried out studies where it was found that even though demographic factors may influence the emergence of a subculture, a subculture is truly formed only when individuals with similar predispositions interact with one another in a specific setting and thus form a subculture through their own activity. This is what Williams refers to as the behavioral definition of subculture.[66] Nevertheless, it should be noted that even Cohen's work was conducted on juvenile delinquents, and although Cohen did understand the emergence of subcultures as being related to broader socio-cultural structures that affect individuals, his use of classifications such as "delinquent subculture" as well as his will to solve the problem of "social control of juvenile delinquency" do make it rather clear that the linkage between social dysfunction and subcultural activity is inherent in Cohen's works as well[67].

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the CCCS, established in 1964, became a pivotal force for the development of subcultural studies especially in the 1970s, a period in which the school was under the directorship of renowned cultural scholar Stuart Hall[68]. The work of the CCCS drew much inspiration from the writings of Gramsci on the concept of hegemony[69], which established a base for the tension between subcultures and its dominant or 'parent-culture', as well as Marxist materialism, which as Jenks points out emphasized the active agency of working-class cultures[70], a notion which would later come to be foundational for the modern view of subcultures as being "cultures of choice".

Both Jenks and Williams also emphasize the relevance of the works of the CCCS in the way in which they highlighted the generally youthful and rebellious natures of modern subcultures, as well as how they theorized them as being manifestations of

[66] Williams 2001, 7
[67] Cohen 1955, 18-19
[68] Jenks 2005, 111
[69] Jenks 2005, 110-111
[70] Jenks 2005 109

ideological struggles within society, rather than mere symptoms of social imbalances[71,72]. Additionally, the CCCS held that the specific meanings of subcultural styles, activities and products could be deciphered through the use of semiotic methods[73], a point which is pertinent to this research paper as well.

CCCS's reconceptualizations of subcultures as active and participatory cultures which are rooted in broader socio-cultural structures with their own power struggles and hierarchies was indeed an important turn, not only because it emphasized the way in which subcultures are formed through the active engagement of the members of subcultures, but also because it moved away from seeing anomalous cultural activity as inherently dysfunctional[74], rather seeing them as a part of a broader power struggle against the hegemony of the dominant culture[75].

While the works of the CCCS are indeed frequently referred to in numerous works that deal with subcultural theory and while it does indeed seem that the CCCS is to thank for in many ways reconceptualizing subcultures, it should be noted that its works have also been the subject of many criticisms. For example, Jenks notes that the works of the CCCS were more or less limited to study the "pastime and possession" of mostly white male youth[76], which is of course in both demographic as well as behavioral terms a rather limited perspective, as subcultural activity is by no means limited to only certain parts of the population and participation in subcultures is more like a way of life than a pastime.

Jenks also points out that the body of work produced by the CCCS is by no means a cohesive whole and that the school was eventually closed down as a part of a wider restructuring in 2002[77], which are fair points given the status that many writers give the works of the CCCS, but for the purposes of this paper, which is not as much concerned with the intricacies of social sciences as it is with the usage of subculture as

[71] Williams 2011, 6, 14
[72] Jenks 2005, 5
[73] Williams 2011, 14
[74] Williams 2011, 5
[75] Jenks 2005, 117
[76] Jenks 2005, 5
[77] Jenks 2005, 111-112

an analytic tool in the deciphering of specific cultural products, the general framework as established by the CCCS, as well as numerous subsequent writers who drew heavily from its works arguably provide an ample background for the conceptual formulations that will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

2.3.2 Defining subculture

A general outline for the definition of subculture as it will be used in this study can be found in Gelder's article from 2005, which is also referred to in Williams' introduction to the concept. According to this definition, subcultures are groups of people "that are in some way represented as non-normative or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it"[78]. And while Williams points out that this definition also deems subcultures as, if not dysfunctional, then at least in some sense deviant[79], as is highlighted by Gelder's use of the words "non-normative" and "marginal", I do not find this problematic, as for instance the subculture of extreme metal, which is my primary research focus, is most certainly built around non-normative and marginal representations.

In fact, I personally think that the notions of marginality and non-normativity are exactly what make the concept of subculture a usable analytic tool, as I do not hold the states of being non-normative or marginal as being in any way negative by default, as marginality is by no means synonymous with alienation, in the same way as "non-normative" does most certainly not automatically connotate something as being abrasive. For me, marginality and non-normativity are the exact reasons that make the study of subcultures interesting, as in their deviance from conventional culture they may enlighten us to the vast plethora of meanings and forms that cultural activity can hold for individuals in an environment that is largely dictated by the hegemonous system of western mass-culture.

[78] Gelder 2005, 1
[79] Williams 2011, 5

It can even be argued that subcultures are inherently marginal to some extent, in a similar way that any imaginable human community is necessarily hierarchical at least to some extent, as is explained in the introductory chapter to the notable CCCS publication Resistance Through Rituals:

> Groups which exist within the same society and share some of the same material and historical conditions no doubt also understand, and to a certain extent share each others' 'culture'. But just as different groups and classes are unequally ranked in relation to one another, in terms of their productive relations, wealth and power, so cultures are differently ranked, and stand in opposition to one another, in relations of domination and subordination, along the scale of 'cultural power'.[80]

In this description, which shares Johnson's interpretation of Bourdieu's view on the unequal distribution of different forms of symbolic power and capital in human societies[81], the marginality of subcultures is not seen as exclusion or wholesale alienation, but rather as a result of a hierarchical structure that is arguably inherent in practically all human communities. It is also understood that subcultures always exist within the general confines of the dominant culture, in as much as they only create their own alternative spaces within it, rather than existing outside of it entirely. What this excerpt also effectively highlights is the fact that the formation of subcultures is indeed related to a lack of access to, or participation in the hegemonous 'dominant culture', as is elaborated upon later in the same article:

> Sub-cultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But, since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the 'parent' culture.[82]

Williams recognizes the same phenomenon, and notes that subcultural activity begins when individuals or groups are in some way limited to participate in the "mainstream structures of opportunity", and must seek out alternative methods to

[80] Clarke et al. 1976, 11.
[81] Johnson 1993, 7
[82] Clarke et al. 1976, 13-14.

strengthen their sense of belonging and cultural identity[83]. These ”alternative methods” are where the notion of cultural capital come into play in subcultural theory, as they refer to the ways in which subcultural agents transform their various activities into abstract forms of capital that strengthen their disposition in the world in which they live. Sarah Thornton, who initially coined the term ‘subcultural capital’ describes this element in relation to the more generalized term of cultural capital as described by Bourdieu thusly:

> Subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. In many ways it affects the standing of the young like its adult equivalent. Subcultural capital can be *objectified* or *embodied*. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections (full of well-chosen, limited edition ‘white label’ twelve-inches and the like). Just as cultural capital is personified in ‘good’ manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being ‘in the know’, using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles.[84]

Thornton’s description is somewhat mundane and risks reducing subcultural activity to a performance of predetermined rituals and consumption habits, but her classification of subcultural activity as something capable of producing objectifiable and embodiable capital is of key importance, as it supports the position that is assumed in this paper, which is that subcultural activity creates its own cultural environment and ‘marketplace’, in which cultural products and activities, the values of which are defined and negotiated within the subculture, are produced, distributed, consumed and performed in a way that allows the members of the subculture to ascertain real, substantial gains from their participation in this field.

The distinction between cultural and subcultural capital also emphasizes the prior notion of subcultures as being marginal and non-normative, as they can be recognized as having their own capital which retains its full value only within the confines of the subculture. However, although this distinction is meaningful in the aforementioned sense, it should be noted that subcultural capital is, at least in my

[83] Williams 2011, 11
[84] Thornton 1996, 11-12

view, transformable into cultural capital that is recognized outside of the subculture as well, since as discussed earlier, subcultures are built upon the foundational structure of the dominant parent-culture, no matter how deviant the subculture in question may be. Therefore the basic elements are similar enough to have meaning both within the subculture and between the subculture and the parent-culture, even if all of the specific connotations of the culture are not wholly transformable.

The emphasis on the function of subcultures as a platform for accumulating alternative cultural capital, or "alternative, though "dysfunctional" means of success", as Williams calls it in his reference to the formulations of American subcultural studies from the beginning half of the century[85], is also compatible with, albeit not inherent in Gelder's general outline of the concept that was introduced in the beginning of this chapter. While Williams once again notes the possible negative linkage with 'dysfunction' in this framing of subcultures, I once again argue that alternative is not synonymous with dysfunctional, and that the way in which subcultural agents engage in seeking out alternatives and reinventing culture should be celebrated, not seen as any sort of failure or compensation for something else.

And while I understand how this formulation in which I combine numerous conceptions and aspects that have arisen in subcultural theory may be seen as a simplification or some sort of a theoretical shortcut from the perspective of social sciences, I argue that as my primary research focus is not on the social formation of subcultures as social units, but rather on the plethora of meanings that arise from the cultural forms and processes that have developed within a specific subculture, I argue that the whole complexity of the sociological debate concerning the definitions of subcultures is not as relevant for my research, and that my unorthodox and admittedly purposeful framing of the concept of subculture is justified.

[85] Williams 2011, 11

2.3.3 The extreme metal subculture

Extreme metal is an umbrella concept that is used to refer to a wide range of musical subcultures that have all descended from the wider parent-culture of heavy metal. Many of the subgroupings that fall under the extreme metal umbrella are in some, often ideological ways, contradictory with one another, and there are also various differences in their representational and musical conventions. However, as the more fundamental aspects related to the cultural activities, products and performances of these subgroupings are so similar with one another, the use of such an umbrella concept is justified, at least when applied in a detached and scholarly setting, in which more specific classifications of the subculture would be besides the point.

Keith Kahn-Harris formulated this umbrella concept from the widespread use of the term "extreme" within the more peripheral and abrasive subgroupings of metal culture as "…a term of approbation and a vague way of delineating death metal, black metal, grindcore and other metal genres as special."[86] The details of what is meant by "special" remain unclear in this case, but the way in which the term extreme is used seems to be an attempt to emphasize the zealous, non-normative and often abrasive nature of these musical cultures, as well as their generally transgressive disposition.

As the preceding excerpt from Kahn-Harris shows, grindcore, death metal and black metal are indeed held as perhaps the most prolific examples of extreme metal genres. However, as Kahn-Harris pointed out, the concept can be used for describing other more abrasive and marginal scenes and genres as well, such as goregrind, crust punk, doom metal or sludge, to name a few. However, as was stated before, the usage of the concept is not limited to refer to certain musical genres, but is used above all to denote a more serious and dedicated involvement in the more abrasive practices of the metal culture.

Extreme metal cultures typically have an extremely marginal status within the broader cultural field, with there being only a handful of instances in which musical groups or individuals from the extreme metal subculture rise to either fame or infamy.

[86] Kahn-Harris 2007, 29.

In some cases this renown has been earned through the prolific music of the group's, which has been the case with for example the grindcore group Napalm Death, or other sorts of scandals not related directly to the music of the subculture, as was the case with many of the groups in the Norwegian black metal scene of the 1990s.

However, instances such as these are highly anomalous, as the vast majority of activity and produce of the subculture is extremely obscure and underground, operating only at a grass roots level. It is important to note that even as certain groups attain a higher status even outside of the extreme metal subculture, the basic nature of the subculture is not changed by these anomalous instances.

The subgroupings of the extreme metal subculture organize in small yet closely knit scenes, the members of which often share a certain ideological socio-cultural foundation. Generally speaking, the extreme metal subculture is distinguished by its engagement in various forms of cultural, social or ethical transgressions in its various discourses and cultural practices[87], which will be examined later in this section.

For Kahn-Harris, this transgressive nature of the extreme metal subculture is perhaps its most defining feature. Kahn-Harris views this transgressive disposition as being connected to a much wider set of socio-cultural factors than are most commonly considered to influence popular music cultures. Kahn-Harris sees the transgressive practices of extreme metal as belonging to the same kind of socio-cultural processes that articulate the values and define the boundaries of human societies as Douglas has described in her aforementioned work *Purity and Danger*, while also noting that these transgressive practices share many similarities to the cultural process of abjection as defined by Julia Kristeva.[88]

Kahn-Harris explores various contemporary definitions of the concept of transgression in his work that yield interesting results when applied to the extreme metal subculture. Drawing from Victor Turner's studies on the subject, he confers that its transgressive practices can be viewed as a method through which one can

[87] Kahn-Harris 2012, 30
[88] Kahn-Harris 2012, 29.

temporarily, and often only symbolically, transcend the grasp of authority and other higher powers. Following Georges Bataille's definition, Kahn-Harris also emphasizes the ways in which transgressive practices can be used as a way to deepen the experience of the mortal and primitive dimensions of human existence through transcending conventional norms and considerations, and even individual identity.[89]

Following these formulations, it becomes apparent that most of the transgressive practices of the extreme metal subculture are symbolic in their nature and can often be seen as attempts to strengthen one's status or sense of belonging in society and culture. These definitions are also in line with the findings of Williams in his more generalized study of the functions and practices of contemporary subcultures, which according to him are often related to the attempts of groups of individuals who are somehow lacking in socio-cultural resources to attain similar resources and active agency that is available to those in the sphere of mainstream culture by alternative, often subversive or transgressive means.[90]

In the case of extreme metal, the attainment of these socio-cultural resources is achieved almost entirely through transgressive practices. There is a certain irony in this, as in this model, the members of the subculture are in a sense alienating themselves from conventional culture in order to gain more power within it. However, even in defining itself in complete opposition to the mainstream, the extreme metal subculture has been able to find its place at the fringes of conventional society. In this peripheral area, the subculture is not wholly welcomed, but not actively persecuted to the point that its continued existence would be at risk either.

For Kahn-Harris, however, the dominant transgressive practices of the extreme metal subculture are mainly concerned with the rupturing of social and cultural boundaries, and rather paradoxically, in a very similar manner as is with the process of negation, the attainment of a sense of self-control and power through embracing that which is formless, threatening and delinquent in its nature. Kahn-Harris has

[89] Kahn-Harris 2012, 29.
[90] Williams 2011, 7.

explored these transgressive practices within the extreme metal subculture and has divided them into three main categories: sonic, discursive and bodily transgression.[91]

Sonic transgression refers to the various ways in which extreme metal artists challenge and break the boundaries established by more conventional western musical genres[92], which is often achieved by the use of unconventional song structures, tempos and production techniques, such as the excessive use of distortion. The discursive dimension of transgression entails practically all non-musical forms of discourse that are produced and enacted by the subculture, such as printed lyrics and song titles, fanzines, album covers, band names, logos as well as various every day discussions between the members of the subculture, which are often non-normative in their means of production and abrasive in their tone[93]. Bodily transgression refers to other more imminent and mundane acts that have some sort of significance within the scene, such as substance abuse or moshing[94].

[91] Kahn-Harris 2012, 30.
[92] Kahn-Harris 2012, 30
[93] Kahn-Harris 2012, 34
[94] Kahn-Harris 2012, 43-45

3. CARCASS (1987-1989)

Carcass was founded in 1985 in Liverpool, U.K., by bassist Jeff Walker, guitarist Bill Steer and drummer Ken Owen, who had met while studying at the same school in their late teens[95]. At the time of the group's foundation, Steer and Walker were already involved in the U.K. underground music scene. Walker had previously played in the anarcho-punk band Electro Hippies; an experience that he later described as a rather unpleasant and creatively unfulfilling one[96], while Bill Steer had played in the hardcore punk band Disattack, which released a single demo tape in 1986. For Ken Owen, however, Carcass was the first musical project of any real significance.

The group initially recruited the somewhat mysterious figure, known only by his first name Sanjiv as a vocalist on their first demo, but Sanjiv's presence in the band was short lived, and the vocal duties were quickly divided amongst Walker, Steer and Owen[9798]. The core concept of the group was to make fast and chaotic death metal music that would draw its imagery and lyrical themes from pathological sources and portray death and violence from a more realistic perspective than had been assumed before in death metal music[99].

The group remained as a trio until the end of the 1980s. During this time Carcass recorded and released two demos, titled *Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment* (1987) and *Symphonies of Sickness*, two LP's titled *The Reek of Putrefaction* (1988) and *Symphonies of Sickness* (1989), as well as a live-studio session with the legendary underground music benefactor, BBC radio personality and producer John Peel (1989), along with some miscellaneous live recordings and studio tracks for various underground metal compilations.

John Peel may in fact have had a more important influence on the success of Carcass than is generally thought of, as in 1988, he picked *The Reek of Putrefaction* LP

[95] Mattila & Sarna 2014, 86.
[96] Slayer #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps!
[97] Mudrian & Peel 2006, 153-154.
[98] Carcass (08.08.2017). Metal Archives
[99] Uni-Force #7 (16.03.2011). Send Back My Stamps!

as his personal favorite album of the year[100], resulting in increased interest towards the group. However, despite Peel's praise, the first LP was generally met with mixed reactions, with half of its audience being completely in awe of it and the rest completely disregarding its merit. The members of Carcass were themselves not at all satisfied with the album, as becomes apparent in their interview with the Slayer zine in 1989:

> Slayer zine: How does it feel to have an album out which you are not totally pleased with then people keel raving about it?
>
> Jeff Walker: Well let's get this right, it is not a case of not being totally pleased with it – it's a case of being completely dissatisfied with it! I think it is as much to do with it's age as the poor production, vocals, ropey playing – let's just put it like this, if we recorded the same material now everything would be 100% better as it was our first time playing all of the songs in the complete form (for meanyhow), as some of them were written literally the week before recording.[101]

It is rather ironic that the muddy and unconventional production, as well as the "ropey playing" of the first LP, that the band itself was so unsatisfied with, were in fact the very reasons that the album became such a legendary release, as in its unconventionality it was in many ways rather groundbreaking. In fact, the *Reek of Putrefaction* LP was so influential to the conception of the 'goregrind' subgenre of extreme metal, that it inspired numerous artists and releases that were almost entirely engrossed in replicating every aspect of the release, such as Xysma from Finland, General Surgery from Sweden or Dead Infection from Poland, to only name a few.

Even though it has been three decades since *The Reek of Putrefaction* was originally released, these kinds of pastiche-releases are still being released today, with groups such as Auritripsy, Deterioration and Parfumerie mimicking either the visual aesthetic or the auditory elements of the first Carcass LP. The second LP *Symphonies of Sickness* was a similarly influential release as it practically replicated the aesthetic of the first LP, but on this release the production as well as the musicianship of the band

[100] Chainsaw Abortions fanzine 1990, Interview with Carcass.
[101] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps!

had developed in a way that had prompted a shift in the group's style towards a more technically ambitious variety of death metal.

In 1990, Michael Amott, who at the time played guitar for the Swedish death metal group Carnage, was recruited as a second guitarist for the group's third LP *Necroticism – Descanting the Insalubrious* in 1991[102]. This change in the group's line-up coincided with a development in Carcass' musical style, which shifted from what was initially an extremely coarse, distinctively muddy, chaotic sound, towards a more melodic and technically ambitious variety of death metal.

From the third LP onwards Carcass' shift in style alienated a part of its original core audience, as the new material was much more technical and melodic, which many within the extreme metal scene saw as being synonymous with it becoming more commercial and less intense, as is apparent in this excerpt from an interview conducted between the *Thrashikus* zine and Jeff Walker:

> Thrashikus zine: What made you decide to play more death metal instead of grind on the new album?
>
> Jeff Walker: I'm sorry but we play more heavy metal rather than DM on the new album. When we started we were more DM than we are now.
>
> Thrashikus zine: Do you agree that it's a little bit more commercial?
>
> Jeff Walker: It depends on what you think commercial is, I mean, it sounds better than our first 2 records, maybe it sounds more, but we've never wimped out. We still have the same pitch, we still have aggressive vocals. Our latest Lp is the heaviest sound and the best sound. No, it's not commercial, we just understand what makes good music, and we're prepared to play it. We know what it takes to sound extreme. We want to make good quality music, we're not interested in making noise or whatever, other bands can do that.[103]

The way in which Walker speaks of the LP as having "the heaviest and best sound" that Carcass had achieved up to that point is actually a recurring statement that members of the band made frequently in their early interviews, practically every

[102] Metal Archives (08.08.2017). Carcass.
[103] Thrashikus #5 (CA, USA) 1992 (25.12.2010). Send Back My Stamps! *Wording and emphasis retained from the original.*

time that they released a new album. It seems that Carcass was constantly looking to develop their sound into new directions and that the group became frustrated with stylistic limitations very quickly.

Although the variety of the group's musical output caters to audiences that are somewhat segregated from one another, even within the extreme metal culture, Carcass's renown has not been significantly hindered by its later stylistic developments, and even those who dislike the groups later works don't usually regard Carcass as being a "poser" band or as having sold out, as often happens in similar cases. If anything, the group's aspiration towards dissimilitude and musical progression is arguably one of the main reasons that Carcass was able to develop its style into such an original direction and retain its relevance for the extreme metal culture.

However, as the most substantial legacy of the group is arguably its role in the foundation of the goregrind subgenre, the groundwork for which was laid down in the first two LP releases of Carcass, and the artworks of which had a huge cultural impact for the extreme metal scene, the latter part of its discography is excluded from this paper, despite its musical merits. In the following chapters I will examine how the ways in which pathological imagery and themes were utilized in these releases, focusing especially on how pathology and the abject were manifested in the visual dimension of these releases.

3.1 Utilization of pathological imagery

In their early releases, Carcass successfully strayed from the typical ways in which abject themes had been treated in extreme metal, that according to Kahn-Harris had developed throughout the 1980s to portray mostly violent masculine narratives that were often infused with strong elements of fantasy[104]. Carcass sought to portray the abject in more objective and gender-neutral manner that would focus less on the

[104] Kahn-Harris (2012). 34-35.

fantastical and subjective narrative and representational elements, in order to portray sickness, violence and decay in a more realistic and detached and objective manner.

This is also noted by Kahn-Harris, as he compares the lyrics of Carcass and the death metal group Cannibal Corpse to compare and elaborate upon what he sees as being the two major traits of extreme metal discourses, which are an "obsession with fantasies of control", represented by the subjective and masculine narratives of Cannibal Corpse, and an "unflinchingly explicit way in which violence is described", which is manifested in the more ungendered, detached and objective works of Carcass[105].

While I agree with Kahn-Harris's general observation about Carcass having a more objective approach to the abject, I must point out that in many of the lyrics of the first two Carcass albums there are numerous examples of clear protagonist driven violent narration. There are numerous lyrics that describe cannibalistic acts and numerous other lyrics in which the approach to the narrative of the lyrics is subjective and exhibit active agency, rather than being wholly descriptive and disengaged. Additionally, Kahn-Harris seems to have ignored the strong presence of humor in the lyrics, which is enacted both by the use of hyperbole as well as comically inappropriate rhyming patterns that are more carnivalistic in their tone than somber, detached and wholly abject.

Whereas many contemporaries of Carcass relied heavily on the 'synthetic' visual methods of painting, drawing, graphics or staged photography for their concept artworks and album sleeve designs, Carcass used actual stock photos retrieved from medical books and other similar sources to create grotesque pathological collages of real-life gore. The record covers were heavily censored in many commercial outlets and they provoked a strong response within the extreme metal scene as well, as can be seen in this excerpt from Slayer zine:

> What can a man say about this band? Well, I can say that CARCASS is the ultimate sickening, gory Death Metal band around!!!! And everyone seems to be talking about the cover of their

[105] Kahn-Harris (2012). 35

> "Reek of Putrefaction" lp!! This is really brilliant stuff!! Finally someone put out a lp with some real life gore! (TASTY!!!!) And honestly, I really don't see why people is offended by this… This is real! And you shouldn't be afraid of reality, right? (Or something like that….) And they got great gore lyrix to back up their cover with! This is really complicated gore lyrix!!!! While the production on this lp might not be the best, the music certainly is…… It's really easy to get into this gory kinda Death Metal! They have very, very low tuned guitars to get a heavier and much more brutal sound! And the vocals sounds like three mutilated demons or so….." [106]

As is clear from the preceding excerpt, the fact that the source material for the early Carcass albums was genuine was very significant for its contemporary audiences. However, it must be pointed out that Carcass was by no means the first band to use gore and transgressive imagery in its album covers and lyrics. If anything, abject imagery and lyrical subject matter had become almost pastiche in metal and punk music by 1987 when the band's first LP released, as the artworks of underground releases had explored themes of horror and used gory imagery in their artworks for years, although in most cases these themes had indeed been approached through a more fantastical lens, with photographic material being rarely utilized in album covers to any meaningful degree.

Additionally it must be noted that the use of photographic collage and mixed technique in album covers was not a new innovation either, as had become a rather common practice in the U.K. punk and hardcore scene of the 1980s. For example the anarcho-punk Crass had used such techniques in their album covers in as early as 1979 with their LP *The Feeding of the Five Thousand*[107], and the usage of graphic photographic footage from wars and other atrocious incidents had been made famous by the pioneering hardcore band Discharge, especially in the groups LPs *Why* (1981) and *Hear Nothing Hear Nothing Say Nothing* (1982), the artworks of which became emblematic of the hardcore punk aesthetic in their distinctive and abrasive use of the collage technique[108].

[106] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from the original.*
[107] Figure 1
[108] Figure 2

However, although the early Carcass releases were perhaps not technically innovative in their general theme or execution, they most certainly stood out within the extreme metal scene in their original and extremely graphic and intensive approach to pathology and the abject, as well as in their rather unique way of combining a technique most commonly used in the punk scene to explore themes most often dealt with in metal. In the following sections, I will examine the album covers of the early Carcass releases in more detail, in order to establish a more thorough foundation upon which to build a more thorough analysis of these works.

3.1.1 The demo releases (1987-1988)

Carcass released two demo tapes. The first demo, titled *Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment* (1987), preceded the release of the *Reek of Putrefaction* LP, and the second demo, titled *Symphonies of Sickness* (1988) was released to support the subsequent LP of the same name. Both demo tapes heavily reflected the LP releases that were to follow, and unlike many extreme metal groups, such as Blood or Agathocles, who produced a much larger number of self-produced demo tapes, and for whom the relevance of these releases was perhaps of more significance, for Carcass these releases seem to have been above all precursors of the subsequent studio LP's.

Both of Carcass' demo releases feature abject and pathological imagery in their artwork, but despite sharing the same general image subject, the overall aesthetic of the demo releases is very different to that of the LP's. The artwork on both of the demo tapes is much more crude and aesthetically less ambitious, and although the musical material is practically same as it would be on the LP's, except for the much lower production values of course, the general impact of the demo releases is very different due to their somewhat generic visual outlook.[109][110] However, this dissimilarity between the aesthetic of the demo tapes and the LP releases seems much more logical

[109] Figure 4
[110] Figure 5

when one considers the defining characteristics of the demo tape format in more detail.

The early extreme metal scene relied heavily on the practice of 'tape trading' in its distribution of music. As initially there was practically no established economic infrastructure to support the number of emerging artists, many groups decided to make do without the aid of record labels and other established distribution networks and began to create their own market, in which groups and fans alike could share self-dubbed tapes with one another at a low cost and relative ease. As a result, tape trading became a hugely popular practice, as it allowed the groups to trade with each other as well as their fans at very low costs and establish connections with the international scene.[111]

These demo tapes developed their own aesthetic and sound, and due to their coarse production values and often rather unpredictable contents, as well as the handcrafted and above all authentic feel that many of them had, many demo releases are to this day held in high regard, often seen as important artifacts of the underground scene that in some way epitomize the core spirit of the scene and its music. Some are drawn to these releases because they prefer their unpolished soundscapes and rehearsal performances that are more reminiscent of the live sound of the groups, while others are enthralled by their rarity as well as the fact that many of these releases were hand-crafted by the bands themselves[112].

Perhaps the most defining feature of the artworks of the Carcass demo tapes is their extremely grainy surface texture, which effectively reflects both the low production values of the music as well as the obscure nature of the demo tape format. This graininess, which is an extremely common feature in self-produced extreme metal and punk releases, is produced by the extremely simple technique of excessive xeroxing, where the assembled cover artwork is put through a photocopier numerous times to create a more unified outlook by degrading the sharpness and contrast of the original artwork.

[111] Kahn-Harris 2012, 78
[112] Kahn-Harris 2012, 63

In the Carcass demo tapes the cover artworks have been assembled as collages that are very reminiscent of numerous hardcore and crust punk releases. The cover image in both of the demos consists of a single disfigured human head, above which the band's logo is placed. In the *Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment* demo, the J-fold of the tape cover contains additional information of the release, written with a typewriter and assembled in a fitting collage style, similar to the way in which numerous underground zines were made at the time, while in the Symphonies of Sickness demo the fold contains nothing but some grinning faces, drawn in a cartoonish and caricatural manner.

While the themes of pathology, disfigurement and bodily degradation are present in the demo releases as well, especially in the song titles and lyrics, which at least in the Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment demo were included on a separate insert[113], the crude and minimalistic aesthetic of the demo releases does not treat the abject and pathology in the same manner as it would be in the artworks of the later studio releases. Instead, the demo releases seem to be merely executing a visual style that had become in many ways invariable and consistent in the extreme metal scene.

Arguably the most foundational reason for the development and standardization of this crude aesthetic was the lack of resources. As demo tapes were self-produced, the resources reserved for creating the artworks was more limited than in major releases supported by record labels, and groups were imaginably often in a rush to release their demos as soon as possible, in order to distribute their music to the rest of the scene.

However, the crude aesthetic of the demo releases can also be seen as a result of a conscious aesthetic choice, as groups may well have been willing to opt for a mode of representation that reflected their marginal status as artists more efficiently, an effect which was easily achieved through a raw and viscerally do-it-yourself kind of aesthetic.

[113] Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment (n.d.). Discogs

In any case, as the aesthetic of extreme metal demo tapes had indeed become more or less standardized by the late 1980s, the expectation horizon that audiences had for these kinds of releases had adjusted accordingly. As a result, groups could make demo releases with relative ease and still be able to fulfill the aesthetic criteria of the scene. In fact, successfully replicating this aesthetic can be seen as a sort of rite of passage, as through using this standardized form of visual communication, groups could easily establish their disposition as belonging to a certain facet of the extreme metal community.

In this sense, the quite generic aesthetic of the Carcass demo releases is much more understandable. As the group was still in a very early stage of its career, it is imaginable that the will to use a simpler aesthetic that is more easily recognized and understood by the rest of the extreme metal community would be much stronger. Additionally, the demo releases of Carcass successfully combined high contrasted and grainy photographic material, which at the time was perhaps an even more common visual style used in the hardcore and grindcore scenes, with pathological imagery, which on the other hand connected the group to the death metal scene as well.

3.1.2 The Reek of Putrefaction (1988)

The front cover of the 'Reek of Putrefaction' LP[114] is a photo collage which consists of a saturated swarm of dismembered limbs, decapitated heads and mutilated bodies that have been arranged in a way that creates a seemingly endless whirlpool of gore. The creation of the artwork is generally attributed to Jeff Walker[115][116], but some interviews with the band would suggest that at least the initial idea of creating the collage, as well as gathering the materials used in it was a group effort, as is suggested in an interview with the Finnish fanzine 'Isten', where Bill Steer describes the motivations and creation process of the cover of the first LP thusly:

[114] Figure 6.
[115] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps!
[116] Chainsaw Abortions #2 (NY, USA) 1990 (30.10.2011). Send Back My Stamps!

> "Well, quite simply we just got them from medical books. When we realized that we could, make an LP we thought that we wouldn't like to have the usual cliché cover with band logo, photos etc. on it, but something different, something which would effect on people and with the really over-the-top lyrics like we have, we thought it would be nice to have this kind of cover. So we went to the local library in Liverpool and there in medical and surgeological section was some really massive books with big colour pictures and they, you know, had a really massive impact on us and we were so impressed by them that we thought that other people should also see 'em."[117]

The collage is assembled in numerous layers, which creates the illusion of a boundless dimension into the work, with its constituent elements having been placed on top of each other in a cumulative and chaotic fashion. This effect is heightened by the treatment of colors in the image, which are saturated to the point that their borders become blurred, and the various shades of red and yellow that dominate the collage effectively blend into each other. This strange harmony in color is occasionally broken by the odd element presented in either much darker or paler shades, most noticeably in the bottom left and top right corners of the image.

At the center of the composition, there emerges a disproportionately large and distorted human face, made up of an impossible combination of mutilated facial features, obviously strewn together from different sources. These have been forcefully combined into a horrific monstrosity, the bloody skin of which resembles that of processed meat produce more than anything that one would like to think of as human. The figure is regurgitating a bundle of human feet while staring directly at the viewer with an oddly expressionless pair of eyes.

The relatively small brain of this central figure has broken out of its skull and has turned itself a whole 90 degrees, so that its interhemispheric fissure is pointing straight at the viewer, like a giant eye emerging from the morbid mass of gore that envelopes the entire picture plane. The small size of the brain, paired with its location in the composition, functions as a focal visual element, which simultaneously serves as a centerpiece that draws the viewers gaze to a fixed point in the otherwise utterly chaotic collage, while simultaneously distorting the perspective of the image, due to

[117] Mattila & Sarna 2014, 86.

its completely disproportionate size and angle, compared to the rest of the central figure.

The collage is controlled by a black border on every side of the image, which trims most of the collage into a more distinctly contained setting. However, on each side of the image, there is at least one pictorial element that breaks this boundary, the most notable of which can be found at the top and bottom edges of the image. On the bottom, the tips of two feet can be seen protruding into the image from outside of the picture plane. On the top, the same protrusion is enacted by two sets of hands, the tips of which are facing the bottom of the image, as well as a disfigured leg, which is shown as if it were standing on top of the collage.

On the right hand side of the image, a hand reaches into the collage from outside of the borders of the image, with its palm opened face up towards the viewer. On the top right corner, some sort of dark, pointed instrument is jammed into the eye socket of a decapitated head that is in the midst of the collage, and on the bottom right corner, three fingers are grasping a small knife, also represented as laying on top of the rest of the collage. The latter two do not protrude the entirety of the picture plane, but are restricted into the collage by the aforementioned borders. On the left side of the image, there are no similar protrusions of the picture plane, except for the two decapitated heads that slightly transcend the limits of the borders that restrict the collage.

The most frequently used element of the collage is the human head, of which there are 19 distinct instances in the collage. Most of these are presented as having been decapitated, with the head being shown as attached to a torso in only a handful of these instances. Two of these heads are shown in the act of regurgitation, one in the upper right corner, spewing out an unidentifiable excrement, and the central figure, which is regurgitating a bundle of human legs. The majority of these faces are relatively expressionless and have their eyes and mouth closed or only slightly open, with only a few noticeable exceptions, such as the pale blue head in the lower left corner, the black head in the upper right corner, as well as the large central figure.

The collage is built almost entirely upon the theme of dismemberment, and in fact, there is only one image in the collage that shows the human body in its entirety, with no limbs being either missing or significantly disfigured. This image, found in the bottom left corner of the collage, is the corpse of a baby, turned face down, thus effectively making it seem as it were lying on top of the gore. On the right side of the image, there is also a figure which is shown almost in its entirety, genitalia and all, yet this figure is so deformed and in all likeliness composed from various sources, that it cannot be considered as a single 'body' as such, but rather another example of extreme mutilation.

Excluding the images of heads that are featured in the collage, and which make up the most prominent image subject of the work, the lower parts of the human body are a close second. The instances where feet are included in the collage are much more strongly emphasized than those in which hands are presented, as they are either located in a more central location within the composition or alternatively they are made more visible by their larger size or more saturated treatment of color.

It is rather interesting how the human torso is de-emphasized in the collage, with the large figure on the right being practically the only instance where it is made visible, and even in this case the figure's stomach has been cut open, shifting the focus into the guts within. It is as if the image regards the torso as a meaningless part of the body that is somehow not related to whatever message it is attempting to portray.

Most elements of the collage are practically ungendered, and with the exception of one image of a lower body in which the male genitalia is prominent, as well as a few carcasses, or parts thereof, of what are obviously young children, the defining characteristics and identities of the individuals whose images the collage is made of, are obscured. According to an interview conducted with Jeff Walker by the Norwegian metal zine 'Slayer', regarding among other things the group's early album covers, this was in fact a conscious decision on part of the band:

> Although we're not trying to put meaning to what the band does I think the cover of the album is harmless because at face value it is a true representation of death, in that is a graphic image which doesn't attribute things which aren't there to the 'people' whose photographs were used. The collage

takes away the personalities of the 'people', as the true identity is lost - it just becoming a morbid mass of warped meat.[118]

From this, it would seem that for Walker, the emphasis on the artwork was in the grand concept of death and carnality in itself, not in its individual occurrences. This interpretation is supported by the use of the collage technique, which as Walker himself put it, transforms the images of the dead, who once were humans with conceivable and relatable identities, into "a morbid mass of warped meat", in which the individual identity is lost in the grotesque whirlpool of mutilation and decomposition.

Another aspect which is quite unique about the collage, is that although it is wholly concerned with the depiction of death, carnality and decomposition, the causes behind this horrid gore are entirely obscured. In fact, there is practically no visually presented agency in the picture, and its constituent elements are only held together by the super-imposed collage composition. This is, however, apparently a similarly intentional solution, which applies to the albums' lyrics as well. Kahn-Harris has also noted the lack of narrative agency in Carcass' early works, and sees this as somewhat anomalous in the extreme metal scene, where violent narratives were often portrayed from a much more subjective point of view[119], and by using much less technical and excessively graphic vocabulary than was the case with Carcass.

The back cover of the album is extremely similar to the front, having been executed with the same technique, using the same source material, treatment of color and composition. However, in the back cover the point of view is much closer to the picture plane and the composition is made slightly more dynamic by the lack of a clear focal element that would draw the viewers eye to a certain point as efficiently as in the front cover. The image is obscured further by the tracklist and other textual information related to the release that have been laid on top of the collage with no clear borders to separate the text from the collage.[120]

[118] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*
[119] Kahn-Harris 2012, 34-35.
[120] Figure 7.

In addition to having a more dynamic composition, the back cover exhibits more dew and a heightened emphasis on bodily fluids, excrement and the overall tactility of the gore, as it features pictorial elements in which the textures of the images are much more strongly emphasized than in the front cover, the overall surface of which is much more matte and less detailed. As the front cover features no textual information or band logo, all such information is featured on the back cover. The fonts used are unconventional, thorny and colorful, as is typical in extreme metal releases, and thus also complementary to the chaotic composition.

The album also includes a two sided insert, which includes the group's contact information and lyrics of the songs. These inserts have also been created by using the collage technique, but unlike the front and back covers of the album, the inserts have been printed in black and white and they have been produced in a much more coarse style, thus making them much more reminiscent of the punk and hardcore aesthetic. This punk influenced aesthetic is especially apparent in the insert that contains the lyrics of the album, as its composition and textural features are very similar to the Discharge influenced hardcore and crust punk aesthetic, with its understated yet gruesome composition[121]. While they are in many ways complementary to the general visual aesthetic and theme of the front and back cover artworks, the inserts provide some effective contrast with the extremely colorful artwork of the outer sleeves of the album, and add some depth to the pathological themes by the inclusion of alternative source materials used in the collages.

The material that has been used in the making of the collages in the inserts have been collected from different sources than that on the outer sleeves of the album. On the side of the insert which contains the contact information of the group, the collage consists mainly of clippings from newspapers. Most of the material consists of long passages from articles regarding grisly killings, diseases and accidents, which are paired with smaller clippings from newspaper headlines, which are strewn across the collage and combined together in an improvisational manner, creating illogical and

[121] Figure 8

syntactically nonsensical combinations, such as 'obscene sick joke terror' or 'sickness music for death'.[122]

Aside from the text-based material, which makes up most of the composition, there are several gory photographs and illustrations featured in the collage as well. The photographs used, unlike those in the cover artwork, where all of the material originates from more or less similar pathological literature, seem to be gathered from a variety of sources, such as newspapers and criminological literature. The illustrations on the other hand are very typical gory images, which are a common sight in any number of death metal releases, and in fact, on the top left corner there is one image that seems to have been featured in the band's prior Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment demo tape and reused on the artwork of the LP.

3.1.3 Symphonies of Sickness (1989)

For their second LP, Carcass had decided to stick with the pathological theme that they had established in their first album, but because their label Earache Records was under pressure to censor the artworks of the album, following the extreme reactions that the Reek of Putrefaction LP had provoked, the group was forced to make compromises regarding the cover art. It was initially agreed that the gory collage that Jeff Walker had designed for the albums outer sleeves would be featured in the gatefold or inserts of the release, and the front and back covers would include more abstract imagery. Bill Steer explains the decision for the alternative cover art when asked whether this choice was influenced by negative feedback or criticism that the band had received in regards to their first LP thusly in his interview with the fanzine Senil Nekrofil:

> "No, the bad remarks that our first sleeve received had nothing to do with putting the second lp graphics on the inner gatefold. Besides, we had far more people saying they loved the sleeve than those claiming to hate it. I mean, it's hardly as we were going to get people saying "I hated your first sleeve, but now that the gore is on the inside, I love it!"… right?! The gatefold sleeve was an old idea of mine which we had to use once it became clear that the distributors (&label)

[122] Figure 9.

were panicking over the graphics that Jeff did. So, in the end, it was agreed that we should have a sparse abstract outer gatefold (with the "matt" finish), then an incredibly detailed mass of gruesome imagery in the inner gatefold (with "gloss" finish).[123]

However, there are various pressings made by Earache that feature different cover artworks. Although the original MOSH 18 LP release from 1989 with gatefold covers includes artworks exactly as described in the previous interview excerpt[124], a non-gatefold version was released simultaneously with the same label identifier which features only the abstracted black and white artwork[125], while the MOSH 18 CD pressing features half of the gore collage on the front and the abstracted black and white artwork on the back cover[126].

The abstracted black and white cover art is executed with the same kind of xeroxing technique as was the case with the covers of the demo releases, except in this case the overall finish is more detailed and sharp, even though in this case the improved quality reveals nothing more than the background noise and grainy texture that defines the general outlook of the artwork. The quality of the original photograph used in the cover has been degraded to the point that its original features are practically unrecognizable, but in its usage of the established technique of degradation through photocopying, it rather interestingly immediately fulfils the viewers expectation horizon regarding the record, and the more detailed aspects of the image can be brushed off due to the way in which the use of such bad quality and abstracted imagery is in itself an example of rather abrasive visuality.[127]

However, the cover art is a sort of an easter egg, or a hidden image, not only due to the fact that its textural quality is so extreme, but because has in fact been turned upside down, as was revealed in an Q&A between a fan and the Earache Records label[128]. In fact, the same image can be found in the inner sleeves of the Wake

[123] Senil Nekrofil #2 (17.04.2018). Send Back My Stamps!
[124] Symphonies of Sickness (LP, Album, Gat). (n.d.). Discogs.
[125] Symphonies of Sickness (LP, Album). (n.d.). Discogs.
[126] Symphonies of Sickness (CD, Album) (n.d.). Discogs.
[127] Figure 10
[128] Origin of Carcass' 'Symphonies' Sleeve?. (19.11.2008). Ask Earache.

Up and Smell the Carcass compilation CD release[129], where the photograph is shown with less manipulation of its textures and without having been cropped.

According to the aforementioned Q&A, the image is of a real-life murder victim, presumed female, whose head has been split open, and is lying on the ground[130]. Interestingly the use of this image in the cover art, or at least the way in which it was used in the inner artworks of the compilation CD is somewhat contradictory with Carcass' tendency to completely detach the violent imagery that they used from their original contexts. Of course, in the case of Symphonies of Sickness artwork the image is excessively abstracted, but it still represents a departure from the purely pathological image subject that had been used in the previous LP, excluding the criminological materials that were included in the inner sleeves and inserts of the release.

The back cover of the original censored release is even more minimal than the front, with the name of the group, as well as album and song titles having been placed right in the middle of the cover in an orderly and even understated fashion[131]. According to the Earache Q&A cited before, this minimalism of the aesthetic, as well as the black and white color scheme, were chosen to "resemble a funeral service condolences card", while the choice of the calligraphic font was a reference to the word "symphonies" in the album title, which holds within it a certain megalomaniac yet morbid satire. In addition to this textual information, the record label information and barcode have been placed on the bottom of the back cover and on the top left there is a quote from an unknown and anonymous source, printed in a very small, almost unnoticeable font, which reads thusly:

> "The dead people secrete a liquid underneath your eyelids, top and bottom, they communicate through this liquid as I have found out when a baby is baptized, they put it in then and later in life people on top do it, who I cannot say. The only remedy I can recommend is letting the wind swirl into your lids, or swirl them in the dark..."

[129] Figure 11
[130] Origin of Carcass' 'Symphonies' Sleeve?". (19.11.2008). Ask Earache.
[131] Figure 12

This nonsensical and rambling excerpt is a rather interesting addition to the otherwise minimalistic and coherently composed back cover, as its morbid subject matter, paired with its extremely chaotic style, is in a sense much more representative of the overall aesthetic that the group itself had wanted to use for the album, before they had to compromise due to economic pressure imposed upon them by their record label. Additionally, the fact that the quote is anonymous and as there is no information regarding even the original source of the text, this excerpt also plays into the detached and abstracted, yet extremely visceral treatment of the abject that the group was known for in its early works.

In the original gatefold LP version, the gore collage created by Jeff Walker is spread across the entire inner gatefold of the album, with lyrics of the songs having been placed on top of the collage in a neon blue font in a manner that makes them incredibly difficult to read without excessive concentration[132][133]. On the other hand, this is a rather interesting choice, as this forces the viewer to simultaneously focus his or her eyes on the finer details of the gore, making the already extremely graphic lyrics even more visceral and intense.

Although the artwork was originally intended to be used as the front and back covers of the album respectively, the gatefold pressing reveals that the collage was originally made as one composite piece, with no defining border between the two halves of the image. And although there are certain parts of the composition that seem to more or less end at the middle point where the two halves meet, there are other elements that flow from one half to the other without interruption.

Although the collage was crafted as a single piece, both halves of it are composed around a strong central figure, which in both halves is a disfigured human head, as was the case in the the *Reek of Putrefaction* LP as well. Despite the fact that the original intention was to use the two halves of the collage as independent images, separated by the spine of the LP sleeve, it must be said that viewing the collage on the gatefold as a whole piece is an even more striking experience, as the highly detailed

[132] Figure 13
[133] Figure 14

and once again extremely colorful and saturated collage is animated even further by the tension that is achieved by the simultaneous displaying of two centerpieces that are more or less equal in terms of the composition of the image.

However, the two halves of the collage do have significant differences between them. The left hand side, which was intended for the back cover, is much more reminiscent of the front cover of the Reek of Putrefaction LP, especially in its circular composition and seemingly boundless depth. In this half, the human head is also prominently featured, as was the case in the cover art of the previous LP, and the bounds of the picture plane are protruded by two feet which enter the image from the bottom, again, just like was the case in the *Reek of Putrefaction* LP.

Additionally, the central figure is once again presented in the act of regurgitation, as are numerous of the other human faces in the image, especially on the upper part of the composition. In this collage, however, the lower parts of the body are featured even less than on the *Reek of Putrefaction* LP, and despite the heads and very few minor details in which for example the torso is shown, the rest of the collage seems to be composed from various unidentifiable sections of skin, the tissue of which has suffered some sort of trauma or which has otherwise been tainted, or of internal organs, of which we can only see the general slimy texture.

On the right hand side of the collage, the general composition remains circular and the overall design is fundamentally similar to that of the left half of the image, but there are some new pictorial elements featured in this part of the collage that bring a renewed depth to the otherwise familiar motif. The choice to add new visual features to this half of the collage was in all probability due to the fact that this half of the collage was planned by the group to be used as the front cover of the album, as was done in for example the 2002 CD reissue of the album[134]. While the group was obviously willing to continue to use the aesthetic that they had established in their debut LP, and thus create a sort of unified aesthetic for their full length studio albums,

[134] Symphonies of Sickness (CD, Album, RE). (n.d.). Discogs.

it seems that they still weren't willing to just replicate the first album cover over and over again, but rather create variations on the same general theme.

Here perhaps the most noticeable features are the massive slabs of meat that surround the central figure. Additionally, right above the center, there is a large carcass of a cow, hanging upside down, behind which there are a pair of human feet, also hanging in the air, as if the body was hung from above. In the background of these hanging carcasses there is a glowing white area, on the left side of which there is some sort of valve, which paired together with the hanging carcasses and slabs of meat on the foreground would seem to represent the inner spaces of a slaughterhouse. Additionally, a less visible yet strong connotation to the theme of the meat industry can be found in the bottom left corner of the image, where a fork and a spoon can be seen protruding the picture plane from below.

Although Carcass was never an explicitly socio-political band, and stuck by the more abstracted and detached treatment of abjection in their lyrics and visuality, Bill Steer recognizes the influence that the hardcore punk scene of the 1980s had to the groups socio-political consciousness[135], and the inclusion of this allusion to the slaughterhouse is very likely to be related to the fact that everyone in the group was either vegan or vegetarian, as is highlighted in this interview conducted between the group and the American fanzine *Maximum Rock'n'Roll*:

> We have our own reasons for doing what we do. There's little personal things in the lyrics – references to vegetarianism, or things like that, but a lot of people don't pick up upon them, maybe 25% do. We don't care either way as long as people find them entertaining, that's all. It seems like right now the whole world knows we're vegetarian so they know how we feel about that stuff."[136]

So even though it seems that the group indeed had at least some sort of will to address the issue of animal rights in their art, their dedication to a detached and abstracted style of representation did not allow for a more explicit way of communicating these issues. Instead, in the collage, death, mutilation, meat and

[135] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps!
[136] "Carcass Interview Scan MRR #97 June 1991". (14.04.2012). Wajlemac.

excrement are all grouped together in a mass of gore where any individual visual element effectively loses at least a part of its connotative potential, as they only function as parts of a whole that embraces the fundamentally chaotic and carnal nature of existence.

3.2 Conflicting interpretations

As the album sleeve designs of the first two Carcass full length albums received plenty of attention when they were initially released, the members of the group were explicitly questioned about the cover artworks in numerous interviews. The members themselves offer a variety of different interpretations and explanations for the artworks, but they all retain a high degree of ambiguity regarding the ideologies and intentions that influenced their conception.

In fact, the members of the group quite often simply tried to avoid getting into a more detailed discussion regarding the artworks, as is the case in for example an interview conducted with the Swedish extreme metal zine Senil Nekrofil, when a question regarding the "message" that the cover art of the Reek of Putrefaction album is supposed convey is quite bluntly brushed off by stating that there simply is no underlying message to be found. The statement goes on to explain how the band is trying to avoid "preaching" about anything. However, the excerpt ends with a rather contradictory claim that there nevertheless is more to the artwork than the objective and purely aesthetic value of the pathological imagery:

> "For a start, there is no "message". We should have to be quite pretentious to declare that we're preaching something. I do understand what you mean though, and you are probably right. Maybe there are people out there who assume that we just use hideous pictures to seem "outrageous" – but with the second lp they'd have to be pretty thick not to realise that there's more to it than that.[137]

The issue of artistic ambiguity arises once again in an interview with the punk and hardcore zine 'Maximum Rock and Roll', cited earlier in the previous section,

[137] Senil Nekrofil #2 (17.04.2018). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*

which was conducted during the American tour of Carcass in 1991, two years after the Symphonies of Sickness LP had first been released. The artistic intentions behind the artworks come into discussion when guitarist and vocalist Bill Steer is asked whether there is a link between the gory aesthetic and lyrical content of the first two albums and the ideologies of veganism and vegetarianism:

> "Honestly I don't really get into making statements. I appreciate the bands who do that, and do it well. My thing is that most bands don't do it well because there's such a fine line between preaching and making some kind of point. I think that with Carcass the whole point is that in a way it's utterly trivial, everything is completely meaningless. Some of the best art is like that. It would be wrong to force some kind of meaning on it. When really we don't want to be that condescending to our crowd. We just want to do what we do. They can interpret in any way they like. We have our own reasons for doing what we do."[138]

In another interview given to the Norwegian death metal zine Slayer in 1987, just after the Reek of Putrefaction had been released, the artwork becomes the subject of discussion when Bill Steer is questioned about the feelings that the group has regarding the fact that several distributors and music stores had banned the album from their stores, leading the question of censorship to become relevant for the group and their label:

> "Our LP has been banned from H.M.V. & Virgin stores. Oh what a shame – now all the BROS fans can't find our record. I'm so upset! Seriously, what does bother us is when people who dislike our lp cover try to turn the whole subject into some kinda moral issue. They have this traditional notion of what is offensive and obviously they're too narrow minded to accept our album sleeve. All I can say is that we don't expect everyone to love the photos we used, but they shouldn't try to tell us what we can & can't do on our lp covers – we haven't harmed anyone. In fact I think we have exposed people to pictures that we need to see – yes, some of them are are disturbing at first, but that's life.[139]

What is interesting in this excerpt is the fact that Steer seems to be quite disappointed and upset in the censorship of the album, while simultaneously expressing his disinterestedness in the effects that it has on the group. However, what

[138] "Carcass Interview Scan MRR #97 June 1991". (14.04.2012). Wajlemac. *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*

[139] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*

stands out most is perhaps his disappointment in the fact that the album was censored only due to its graphic visual style, and that the censors in some way misinterpreted the deeper connotations of the album, which on the other hand Steer does not explain in any more depth. In the same issue of Slayer there is another interview with the bands bassist and vocalist Jeff Walker, who also gets sidetracked into discussing the album art, first when he is asked about death threats that the group had allegedly received:

> "I haven't really received any weird mail, just off gore hounds really, nothing to worry about, although I'd hate us to attract a cult following of weridos busy sharpening their knives as that's not reall what the band is about. We're just trying to bring this taboo stuff to a larger audience which will hopefully sweep away all these "you got to be a psychotic to be interested in that" garbage, or the "you're sick" syndrome, mind you maybe I'm trying to be all too profound here."[140]

As was the case in the previous interview excerpt with Steer, Walker seems to be rather concerned with people misunderstanding the cover art as celebrating violence in some way. However, like Steer, Walker does not provide any significant alternative explanations for the artworks either, other than explaining how he wants to "bring this taboo stuff to a larger audience", which would connotate a will to broaden and break down conventional views on death and carnality, which he sees as having been labeled as taboos. Later when Walker is asked about his personal feelings and thoughts concerning the concept of death in relation to the human experience the topic of the album art arises once again:

> "Looking at death from a totally removed aspect, all it concists of is the corruption of meat, the fact that we as humanc place sentimentality and personality to this 'meat' is what makes this process tragic. Although we're not trying to put meaning to what the band does I think the cover of the album is harmless because at face value it is a true representation of death, in that is a graphic image of which doesn't attribute things which aren't there to the 'people' whose photograpsh were used. The collage takes away the personalities of the 'people' as the etrue identity is lost – it just becoming a morbid mass of warped meat.[141]

[140] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*
[141] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*

In this excerpt Walker is speaking of carnality as something that is superior and more foundational to life than the mental processes that us humans have ascribed to them, which is indeed effectively communicated in the artworks of the first two LP's, in which the individual subjects that the collages are made of are practically eradicated in order to present the totality of death and the decomposition of the material body. Finally, Walker elaborates upon the bands ethical standpoint regarding the usage of abject and graphic content in their lyrics and artworks when he is asked about whether the band has ever had to censor itself:

> "I suppose the obvious things we wouldn't do is try and portray racism or sexism (or meat eating, animal anyway, it's okay to eat corpses, fetuses, and humans). We'd obviously avoid portraying a situation where someone is deliberately 'victimised' for their human characteristics, for example we wouldn't write a song about slaughtering spastics just to get a cheap laugh etc. Having said this, when we did the sleev we avoided using the victims of rape/murders and sex killings for obvious, (to us anyway), reasons![142]

This last point that Walker makes about using real-life gore 'responsibly' is a rather interesting one, as many if not most later goregrind bands, all heavily influenced by Carcass, did not approach the subject from such an explicitly 'moral' angle, but rather started to take the shock value of pathological and criminological imagery to its extreme, with groups returning to a more subjective mode of narration in their treatment of the abject and violent themes. Additionally, groups such as The Meat Shits and 'Anal Cunt' from the United States or Gut from Germany started to bring back elements of specifically masculine violence back to the visual and lyrical content of the genre, in which sexual aggression, pornographic imagery and as Walker put it, "slaughtering spastics just to get a cheap laugh" became common themes of the genre once again.

The fact that Carcass had such a contradictory legacy, with numerous groups and even entire subgenres of extreme metal, such as gore and pornogrind, having been strongly influenced by both the distinct style of music of the group as well as the way in which it employed pathological imagery in its album covers, is rather ironic,

[142] Slayer Zine #7 (05.08.2011). Send Back My Stamps! *Grammar and punctuation retained from original.*

as despite the ambiguity with which Carcass explained their artistic intentions, they were nevertheless rather outspoken in their willingness to avoid utilizing abjection as an arbitrary or exploitative representational tool. However, as their manner of representation was so abstract and ambiguous, it is on the other hand no wonder that subsequent groups would be tempted to utilize the general aesthetic and pathological themes to fulfil their individual creative visions.

However, as is apparent from the interview excerpts presented earlier, Carcass was indeed not willing to submit to the conventional extreme metal style of narration and aesthetic. The influence from the U.K. punk and hardcore scene and the pronouncedly ethical stance that the group took in their approach to their gruesome subject matter was surely a significant influence to the development of their unique aesthetic, but a part of the reason may well have had to do with a will to differentiate from the mass of extreme metal groups that were emerging in the late 1980s. In fact, members of Carcass often emphasize how they wanted to distance themselves from the generic conception of 'death metal', as is explained by Steer in the same interview with Isten fanzine, cited earlier in section 3.3, when asked about how he would classify Carcass' music:

> I don't know, eh, we don't have any classification for it. I think we don't need any classification, we're not hardcore or metal, we just do what we do. I think that we have got most influence from death metal, but we don't want to take any mark unto us.[143]

The will to differentiate the band from the rest of the scene is especially apparent in interviews that have been given after the release of the 'Symphonies of Sickness' LP in 1989, when the band started to move away from the initial goregrind sound into more experimental and musically ambitious territory. It was at this time that the band started to express views in which they described the death metal scene as more or less stagnant, and that the whole term had become redundant[144][145].

[143] Mattila & Sarna 2014, 86.
[144] "Carcass Interview Scan MRR #97 June 1991". (14.04.2012). Wajlemac.
[145] Subcide Zine #1 (06.08.2010). Send Back My Stamps!

It is difficult to say why Carcass began to seek independence from the scene which had supported the group in its early years and from within which the group had managed to form a cult following. It is possible that the censorship and outside pressure that affected had the second LP had influenced the band to an extent that they wanted to avoid their extreme reputation influencing their future creative endeavors, but it is also just as likely that they just wanted to move to a new direction with their music and aesthetic and wanted to communicate this will explicitly so as not to disappoint any old fans.

However, judging from the ambiguity of the statements that the group gave regarding their earlier works, as well as the annoyance that the members of Carcass exhibited at the risk of being misunderstood or mislabeled, it is equally possible that the function that the utilization of the extremely graphic aesthetic that drew from pathological imagery had served for the group in its earlier stages had in a sense run its course, and the band felt that this mode of representation was no longer serving any specific purpose. In the following chapter, these initial functions of the gruesome aesthetic will be examined in more detail, as neither the purely visual analysis of the artworks or the examination of the groups own views on their releases are enough to provide a sufficient explanation for the actual functions that these grotesque visual products served for the group.

4. GROTESQUE REPRESENTATIONS IN EXTREME METAL

The early album covers of Carcass are in many ways tied into the grotesque image tradition in western art. For example, their relentless fascination with anatomy and pathology are highly reminiscent of the works of the Flemish anatomist and visual artist Andrea Vesalius, whose book *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* and the illustrations within it are among the most visceral, and in a strange way sentimental representations of the corporeal realm, that underlies human existence. Broadly similar examples can be found in many woodcut prints from medieval art, especially in biblical illustrations, and for example Gustave Dorés illustrations made for Dante's *Inferno* have a similarly bleak way of representing death and turmoil.

Additionally, the chaotic compositions and vivid attention to detail of the gore collages of Carcass hold a strong similarity to more traditional grotesque compositions, and especially to certain works of Hieronymous Bosch, for example to the last section of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych, where human suffering is depicted in a similar chaotic yet immensely detailed manner. A similar example can also be found in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Triumph of Death*, which is perhaps less graphic in its details, but just as horrific in its restless and anarchic composition. I also see similarities between the expression in Carcass' album covers and William Blake's nightmarish biblical paintings, in which the strong use of red is a very important element in creating the hellish atmosphere of the works.

However, as has been addressed before, Carcass' treatment of the grotesque and the abject is also strongly rooted in the canon that had been established earlier in the extreme metal culture, which of course again is strongly rooted to the wider image tradition of grotesque representation and non-normative socio-cultural practices in post-WW2 youth cultures. As Carcass' works are strongly tied to this canon, the examination of its roots is important to attain a better understanding of the functions that the utilization of the grotesque and abjection had for the group.

4.1 Developments in the use of the grotesque in metal culture

The usage of abject and grotesque themes in rock and heavy metal is rooted in psychedelic rock and the hippie counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s, where psychedelia, abstraction and a plethora of obscure themes were infused into the music of the movement to communicate its rebellious and non-normative disposition[146]. As these themes became rooted into the music and lyrics of the culture, it soon became an integral part of its visual representations as well.

Psychedelic and progressive rock groups often explored mystic and even occult themes in their releases, which in many cases resulted in the use of a grotesque visual sign system that enabled the effective representation of boundary phenomena and alternative worldviews. The depiction of psychedelia and altered states of mind, otherworldly creatures, fantasy worlds and other mystical experiences resulted in an aesthetic, in which the use of heavily saturated colors, fragmented compositions, esoteric and occult symbols as well as fantastical landscapes and grotesque creatures became increasingly common themes in the album covers of psychedelic and progressive rock groups, which would influence the subsequent metal culture.

Although in psychedelic rock the transgressiveness of the visual representations were more vague in the sense that in most cases they didn't include images or other messages that would explicitly criticize or attack conventional society and culture, some groups began using occult themes in their albums as a manifestation of their non-normative mindset. Arguably the most widely known manifestations of the occult in rock and metal music can be found from the works of Black Sabbath, which was and still remains a highly influential group in the metal culture, a more explicit early example of using satanic and occult themes in popular music can be found in the *Witchcraft Destroys Minds and Reaps Souls* LP (1968) by the American experimental rock/folk group 'Coven', in which the group explicitly represents themselves as Satanists, thus placing them in stark contrast with the Christian moral consensus of conventional society.

[146] Whiteley 1992, 2-3

In the early 1980's the abject and the diabolical became a more important part of heavy metal music, as bands such as Venom, Hellhammer and Bathory started to explore these themes in more depth. The darker sides of life and the subconscious began to be given much more attention, and they quickly became an integral part of heavy metal culture, even though these earlier examples often fused these more serious themes with a strong dose of hypermasculine energy and even humor. Occultist themes, violent narratives and sacrilegious imagery were exceptionally common in these releases.[147] Album covers often featured pictures of the members of the band, usually dressed in leather and spikes, striking aggressive poses, giving them a more brutal, barbaric and fantastic appearance, and most importantly denoting the importance of a strong performative element through which the unconventional cultural disposition of these groups was established.

Although these darker themes became embedded as integral parts of the metal music culture, even in instances where groups used grotesque and abject representations to communicate messages that were meant to be ultimately empowering in their nature, a significant part of the extreme metal scene knowingly wished to stay as a socio-culturally disinterested and voluntarily isolated subculture. David Masper and Max Ribaric, authors of the extensive study on the nationalist socialist black metal culture titled *Wolves Among Sheep* (2015) have described the isolationist and abrasive aesthetic and ideological disposition of metal music thusly:

> Independent of its inspirations, whether they are a certain old-fashioned esoterism used as a purely aesthetic tool, or overused visual and moral clichés of gothic/fantasy literature, or imagery taken from b-movies and comic books, or the debauched trinity of *Sex Drugs & Rock and Roll*, metal has almost always steered clear of current events, favoring an alternate and self-referential reality in opposition to the harsher and more solid one in which the restless punk generation, and then the hardcore scene, dwelled.[148]

This is a rather poignant statement, and it should be noted that while the ideological and socio-cultural transgressions of many metal artists are by no means as explicit or extreme as in the case of the NSBM subculture, which is the main focus of

[147] Baddeley 2002, 114-115.
[148] Maspero & Ribaric 2015, 23.

Maspero and Ribaric's study, metal music is indeed inherently deviant to some extent, and the empowerment that it provides is often achieved through some forms of chaotic and transgressive practices. And when examining the representations of extreme metal, the "alternate and self-referential reality" that Maspero and Ribaric describe is of utmost importance, as this will to establish one's own alternative reality is precisely what leads to the development of grotesque and abject forms in the representations of extreme metal, which themselves are a transgression of conventional socio-cultural norms.

4.2 Disorderly compositions as socio-cultural subversion

As was discussed in the previous section, the use of unconventional compositions and a more fragmented representational system were among the most notable ways through which more abrasive musical groups began to initially differentiate themselves and express their unconventional socio-cultural dispositions in their releases. As the field of popular music developed throughout the late 20th century, fragmenting into countless subgenres and scenes, various musical cultures began to develop their own systems of representation in order to further differentiate themselves from the rest and emphasize their own particular identities.

In the case of extreme metal for example, the use of abject and traumatic image subjects became an important part of the representational system of the subculture, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section. However, the groundwork that previous musical cultures had established in their visual representations, such as the use of unconventional compositions and the inclusion of fantastic elements into album covers, as was done by the psychedelic rock scene of the 1960s and 1970s, remained influential for these subsequent cultures as well.

In the case of Carcass, for example, this influence can be seen in the strong use of heavily saturated colors and the utterly chaotic compositions in the group's album covers. And although the early album covers of Carcass are generally known for their extremely graphic image subjects, the compositional aspects of these artworks are

equally important in regards to their visual impact. This becomes especially clear when one compares the LP releases of Carcass to its demo releases. The image subject in both of them is practically the same, but as the composition and use of color is much more limited and conventional in the artworks of the demo tapes, the overall impact of the works is very different. In the LP covers the free-flowing and abstracted compositions are in themselves manifesting the grotesque as they transgress conventional modes of representation, and in their extreme exaggeration and hyperbole they are to some extent even carnivalistic in their nature, as in their relentless and uninvolved treatment of their abject subject matter, they are communicating a sort of mockery of carnality and earthly suffering.

In his study on the cultural functions and meanings of readymades and collage art in contemporary western culture, Banash draws strong parallels between the emergence of these two art forms and the way in which mass production and consumerism have come to influence our daily lives and culture. Banash observes that various mass-produced commodities have gained significant symbolic power in the process through which groups and individuals express their socio-cultural identities. Banash stresses that these commodities are not limited only to fashion products or other items which are more clearly designed to function as visual signs of one's social identity or class, but that this same identification process is often achieved through the accumulation of other more practical items as well, such as electronic accessories or luxury household appliances.[149]

Banash notes that this process, in which originally practical and mundane objects have attained symbolic and expressive functions, our daily realities have become increasingly branded and commodified, in the sense that almost any aspect of our lives, however trivial or mundane they may initially seem, can be used to symbolically connotate wider conceptions of identity, class and what can be regarded as somehow constituting a desirable order of human life:

> Even words themselves have become things, under the signs of brands and labels, packaging and marketing: just so many objects that make up the commodity horizon of our everyday lives. Unlike

[149] Banash 2013, 34

> Marx with his endless examples of unnamed, unbranded commodities (one ton of iron, ten shirts, a bushel of corn), commodities are now veritable words: soap has become *sunlight* and *dawn*, while toothbrushes *reach* and toothpastes *gleam*.[150]

Banash uses Heidi Cody's 1998 work *American Haiku – The Mountain* as an example of readymade art that poignantly underlines this commodification of everyday life. Banash sees the power of Cody's work in the manner in which she explores this process as something that can, and to some extent already has, lead to reduce human cultural activity to passive consumption and the uninvolved utilization of objects and phenomena that have already been embedded with meanings by the market forces that produce the items and infrastructure, that through our consumption provide the structure of our daily reality[151].

In this sense, collage and readymade art is always a commentary on the human condition under contemporary capitalism, in which our role is that of the passive consumer, and our task is the attainment of various symbol-laden produce that the market supplies us with, rather than the active creation of our own realities and sign systems. This definition adheres to Bigsby's view of early Dadaist art, in which some of the first truly influential readymades and collages were produced, as being an artistic movement that was inherently critical of practically all social and cultural institutions[152].

Banash stresses that in taking commodified items out of their original context and utilizing them to form new fragmented combinations in a freeform manner, the readymade and collage are forms of art which actively subvert, resist and redefine our commodified reality[153]. Thereby the collage and the ready-made can effectively be used as tools through which cultural agents can explore and redefine their cultural identity, even when they have only limited means or access within the cultural field.

[150] Banash 2013, 35.
[151] Banash 2013, 38
[152] Bigsby 1972, 12
[153] Banash 2013, 41.

For Banash, the power of the readymade and collage are in their emphasis of fragmentation.[154] Both art forms stress forced combinations of contradictory materials and forms, and in this aesthetic 'violence' they are able to communicate the fragmentation and alienation of our culture, while simultaneously prompting an active agency within the chaos through which one can seek to form new and original meanings in a culture in which cultural products are often handed down to us by virtually foreign institutions in a pre-defined and closed format.

So although the commodification of our culture is, to a large extent, a process which pacifies and streamlines the ways in which we participate in and contribute to our shared cultural fields, it also gives room to appropriate and redefine its commodified and pre-defined products and symbols. In Carcass' collages, this process in which signs and symbols are appropriated for new and unconventional uses by marginal cultural agents is also a key factor for the aesthetic impact of the artworks.

It may initially seem that the early album covers of Carcass rely solely on their shock value, which is purported by their chaotic compositions, bright color schemes and extremely graphic image subjects, which undoubtably are all important elements in them. However, the choice of material and the method by which the artworks have been created are arguably just as important in regards to the cultural impact of these works as their more superficial formal qualities.

The effective utilization of the collage technique is in fact arguably the key factor that initially set Carcass' artworks apart from its contemporaries. Numerous other groups used thematically very similar themes in their album covers, but did so through more conventional methods, in which the collage format was employed perhaps more for its ease-of-use as well as its abrasive visual outlook than its capacity to appropriate and redefine visual materials.

Of course, it must once again be pointed out that Carcass was not the only group in the extreme metal or punk scenes that used collages in their album covers, and as was discussed in section 3.1, the use of photocollages was in fact a rather

[154] Banash 2013, 41-42.

common choice for hardcore punk and extreme metal albums. However, there are significant differences in the functions that the choice of the technique serves for these releases. For example, while there are numerous stylistic similarities between the first two Carcass LP's and the first two LP's by Napalm Death, titled *Scum* (1987) and *From Enslavement to Obliteration* (1988), the visual impacts of these works are very different, as their utilizations of the collage technique differ in several fundamental ways.

The collages in the album covers of Napalm Death are much more strongly tied to the aesthetic of the punk and hardcore scene, and much like in the collages that for example Discharge used in its album covers, these artworks are more distinctly socio-politically charged and the visual materials that have been used in their creation are more or less unified by this explicitly ideological disposition. The artwork of the Scum LP was in fact also created by Jeff Walker[155], and while there are certain stylistic similarities between the artwork of the *Scum* LP and the later Carcass LP's, for example in the excessive and repetitive use of skulls that establishes the foreground of the Scum LP, Walker's style in the artwork made for Napalm Death is much more reserved, with the general composition being coherently tied together by a strong central figure, and with all of the pictorial elements having been organized in a more or less harmonious composition[156].

The cover artwork of the *Scum* LP utilizes the collage technique effectively, in combining numerous image subjects from a variety of sources and blending in different techniques into a single composition, with some of the image material having been simply photocopied and others having been drawn and post-processed in other ways. Despite this, the explicitly ideological nature of the artwork limits its broader transgressive potential to some extent.

The anti-capitalist connotations of the cover are so explicit, with all of the pictorial elements supporting the anti-corporate stance of the group, that the work becomes rather one-dimensional and closed to any alternative interpretations. Additionally, the way in which the image subjects, theme and execution of the artwork

[155] Scum (LP, Album, Lim). Discogs.
[156] Figure 15

is so strongly tied to the hardcore and punk aesthetic, in its strong contrasts, utilization of anti-corporate imagery and industrial landscapes, this utilization of the collage technique is not as much about breaking free of a representational system as it is of replicating another, even if the representational system that it is replicating is in itself socio-politically transgressive, just in a different manner.

The collages that Carcass used in its album covers are in this sense more independent and innovative in their use of the collage technique, as they lack any specific message or range of connotations that would tie them to a predefined tradition of representation, even as they were of course heavily influenced by the plethora of works released before them, both in the extreme metal and hardcore punk scenes. Besides the connotative and narrative ambiguity of the artworks of Carcass, what also separated them from many of their contemporaries was the irregular sources from which the group drew its image materials.

What becomes clear from numerous reviews and interviews of Carcass conducted in the late 1980s is the fact that the perceived authenticity of their early album covers was an extremely important factor as to why they were able to provoke such a strong response in their audiences. The fact that Carcass had utilized actual pathological imagery, taken from academic and medical sources, was perceived as highly irregular and something that Carcass' audience became extremely excited of. The same can be said of the lyrics of Carcass, which also used technical vocabulary, taken from medical textbooks, which is understandable to the general public only with the help of a medical dictionary.

The use of these specific materials is significant in regards to the general impact of Carcass' works, as in employing such technical vocabulary and imagery from sources that are practically off-limits for the general public, Carcass is seizing cultural assets that they as cultural agents are excluded from in their daily realities, while actively repurposing those assets to suit the group's own intents and purposes. By forcing these new representative tools into its repertoire, Carcass is transgressing conventional boundaries regarding what a subcultural agent such as itself can represent and by which means it can do so. For although the examination and use of

technical materials regarding the field of pathology is of course not forbidden, it is generally expected that they should be used only for professional purposes, and when such a marginal cultural agent as Carcass uses these kinds of materials to portray its abject visions, they are crossing the boundaries imposed upon them in the collective consciousness and thus broadening the entire scope of representation within the extreme metal scene.

4.3 Representation of violence and symbolic empowerment

As was discussed earlier in section 3.1, the manner in which Carcass utilized pathological and abject imagery in its early album covers was somewhat divergent from the representational conventions of the extreme metal culture. Carcass' approach to employing traumatic image subjects in its artworks was more detached and objective than that of many other extreme metal groups of the late 1980s. The difference is especially apparent in the lack of any explicit connotative or narrative elements in the album covers of Carcass, which would delineate an explicit narrative or ideological functions.

Of course, it must be noted that extreme metal groups before Carcass had used a broadly similar visual theme in their artworks, in which gory imagery was utilized as the primary visual motif of the album covers. An additional similarity that such releases had to those of Carcass was that the traumatic imagery was also presented in a manner in which the range of any specific connotations or narrative functions was much more limited.

Such a case can be found in for example the *Obsessed by Cruelty* LP (1986) by Sodom. In this album cover the key figure is a battered skull, held in the air by a monstrous pair of hands, which is excreting a large amount of blood and pus that spells out the name of the album onto the foreground of the image[157]. Although in this artwork the skull and the blood that it excretes are the main pictorial elements and the primary focus of the image is in the sheer corporeality of the gore, the expressive style

[157] Figure 16.

in which the cover has been painted, along with its dramatic black background bring an almost ritualistic narrative element into the image. This is further emphasized by the way in which the hands that hold the skull have been garbed in white robes, which only emphasizes the fantastical atmosphere of the image.

A similar example of a viscerally gory album cover in which there is only a minimal amount of narrative elements can be found in the *Severed Survival* LP (1989) by Autopsy. This artwork depicts a scene of gruesome torture, where a human body is being torn apart by a set of hooks and claws that protrude the picture plane from both left and right[158]. The suffering of the human figure is shown in great detail, both in its agonized facial expression as well as the graphic way in which the hooks bore into its torso.

The horror of the scene is only emphasized by the strong contrasts between the soft and reddish flesh tones, the metallic blues of the instruments of torture and the entirely black background of the image. As a final grisly detail, the logo of the band, which frames the image on the top, is depicted as having been made of various bones which still have slabs of flesh around them, which are punctured by spikes and other pieces of metal.

These album covers are highly similar to the artworks of Carcass in their image subjects, as morbid carnality and bodily mutilation is the primary focus in both of them. However, in the case of both Sodom and Autopsy, the album covers are nevertheless conveying more traditional compositions and scenes with clear central figures, or protagonists if you will, and despite it being only vague and minimal, a distinct narrative setting as well.

Whereas Carcass' collages are abstracted to the point that any kind of traditional narrative or representational system can not properly function, the artworks of Autopsy and Sodom are much more strongly tied to more conventional ways in which the abject is represented in our culture. The setting is fantastical, there

[158] Figure 17.

are central figures that exhibit narrative agency, and the composition and use of color are much more traditional.

However, even though this kind of treatment of the abject in extreme metal is in many ways similar to the ways in which it becomes manifest in more conventional forms of western art and culture, the representation of violence, bodily decay and the absurdity of the human condition arguably serves a wider set of functions for the extreme metal culture. The development of this multiplicity of functions is largely due to the fact that as abjection quickly became such a fundamental and implicit part of the representational system of the subculture, its utilization became a widely utilized aesthetic motif by which groups would delineate themselves as belonging to the extreme metal culture.

Abject imagery is therefore an inherent part of the visual vocabulary of extreme metal, and its effective use can even be considered as a sort of rite of passage within the scene. This is because the use of traumatic image materials is in itself an act of cultural transgression, and while its use in may yield groups respect and acceptance within the extreme metal community, by using such transgressive materials in a self-representational manner, its use may well simultaneously result in marginalization and disapproval from people outside of the subculture. Therefore utilizing this abject realm of representation is an active transgression and a conscious crossing of socio-cultural boundaries.

For example, while the aforementioned album covers of Sodom and Autopsy may have many similarities with scenes from popular horror movies, their function as record covers is very different. Using these kinds of representations in the format of the record cover, they start to function in a more self-representational dimension, instead of being wholly autonomous representations that do not reflect upon the individuals who created them as much, as is the case in for example the film industry.

In the case of Autopsy, this self-representational side of the aesthetic is especially apparent already in their logo, which was discussed earlier in this section. Incorporating such abject elements into the logo, which is arguably one of the groups most clear self-representational visual tools, the group is consciously representing

itself as a transgressive cultural entity, and thus consciously positing itself in opposition to conventional culture.

As I noted already in the introduction of this thesis, the self-representational function of extreme metal albums is arguably higher than in many other cultural institutions and communities, as in the extreme metal scene the creative process is more independent, and groups are often actively taking part in the various transgressive practices of the scene. These transgressive practices, which include a certain nihilistic attitude, a morbid curiosity for the darker sides of life and a will to break free of the moral conventions of conventional society and culture, are subsequently manifested in the cultural products of the subculture.

However, this is kind of antonymous disposition and self-representational practice is not limited to only the extreme metal subculture. Fore example, in his study of zine culture, Stephen Duncombe has noted that subcultural agents often willingly adopt what he calls a negative identity. In this process of negation, subcultural agents are knowingly setting themselves apart from the mainstream by adopting an antonymous stance to conventional socio-cultural norms and values[159]. Duncombe notes that this negation is especially important in terms of attaining subcultural 'authenticity', which often requires unconventional and even transgressive practices and representational conventions[160].

In adopting such an antonymous stance to conventional culture, which requires the active transgression of socio-cultural norms and boundaries, extreme metal groups are breaking free of the confounds of conventional culture and society and entering what Douglas has conceptualized as the area of inarticulateness, which was discussed earlier in section 2.2.1. In the extreme metal culture this is in many cases achieved also through the use of traumatic and abject imagery in visual representations.

Douglas notes that agents who enter this area are simultaneously gaining symbolic power and new ways through which they can further transgress established

[159] Duncombe 1997, 40-42
[160] Duncombe 1997, 40

cultural forms and conventions by accessing the disorderly forces that exist in this taboo area. However, these agents are simultaneously risking themselves becoming tainted by these unwelcomed forces, and thus becoming shunned by the rest of the community[161].

Douglas' description of the potential power of disorderly cultural activity is complementary to the view of grotesque art as something that gains its expressive power from subverting both representative and social conventions, and thus attaining potential to renew and broaden culture. In abject art and other instances where the engagement with taboo subject matter is more explicit, this same effect is only heightened.

This kind of transgression of normative representational practices can be understood as being a practice which yields symbolic power for the subcultural agents as what was described in section 2.3.2 by Thronton and Williams as subcultural capital. The reason that this capital is specifically subcultural is that its value is recognized only by other members of the subculture. As was described above, the utilization of this kind of transgressive representational forms can indeed provide negative results within the realm of conventional culture, and it is therefore not recognized in the same way as it is in the communicative system within the subculture.

Abject representations are thus understood differently within the extreme metal subculture, and their symbolic value is evaluated differently within this context. However, the wider range of functions that this kind of utilization of taboo subjects in self-representational cultural practices can not be fully understood without first examining the reasons that lead cultural agents to delve into this disorderly realm of the abject.

In her study of the grotesque art of the Romantics that followed the cholera epidemic of 1832, Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer examines the manner in which the crisis of the epidemic became reflected into the art of the Romantics through the

[161] Douglas 2005, 156

development of a repulsive and abject aesthetic[162]. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer emphasizes that the utilization of abjection in the representational system of the Romantics was strongly linked to the horrific effects of the epidemic and the ramifications that it had for the social order of that time:

> Like the cholera's broadly devastating effect on both the individual and the civil body, for example, grotesque abjection in the arts aimed to abolish the normative by inverting it or replacing it with marginalized and suppressed liminal notions, including the horrific and the uncanny. This defiant plunge into the lower depths of the (human) and aesthetic imaginary, a regression, so to speak, to be a precivilized barbaric condition, proved unexpectedly fertile. For grotesque horror became both end and regenerative beginning all at once. Its defiant elevation of the banished to the status of the culturally sanctioned shook, aired and purged the slate clean of preexisting musty formulas to make way for modernist innovation[163]

Athanassoglou-Kallmyer emphasizes that the move into the abject realm of representation was first and foremost a response by the artists to the changes in the reality that surrounded them. In order to express their experiences, breaking representational and social boundaries was necessary for the artists, as conventional modes of representation were no longer representative of the world that the artists had to face in their daily lives.[164]

Kahn-Harris examines the function of violence, occultism and other taboo themes for the representational system of the extreme metal culture through a very similar lens. In this view, the power that the unconventional and uncontrolled utilization of taboo subjects and obscure representations can hold[165], citing a previous work conducted on the treatment of abject themes in extreme metal by Robert Walser in 1993:

> In their free appropriation of symbols of power, and in their material enactments of control, of hanging on in the face of frightening complexity … heavy metal bands suggest to many that

[162] Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2003, 99
[163] Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2003, 99.
[164] Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2003, 120.
[165] Kahn-Harris 2012, 34

> survival in the modern world is possible, that disruptions, no matter how unsettling, can be ridden out and endured.[166]

Kahn-Harris continues to elaborate on Walser's work, noting that the extreme metal culture's visceral treatment of dark themes and abjection is at its core a reflection of wider socio-cultural and economic problems that the artists themselves face and observe in contemporary society[167]. To elaborate upon this point, Kahn-Harris also cites the work of Harry Berger, who has also conceptualized the use of the abject in extreme metal as a way through which the artists can both communicate the problems and hardships that they face, while empowering themselves against them. In Berger's view, this is true even in cases where the style in which the abject and traumatic subject matter are represented is more fantastical, overblown and less intimate[168].

In the case of punk, hardcore and more socio-politically charged extreme metal subgenres, this connection that abject representations have for real-life problems is more explicitly communicated. This is the case in for example the early LP's of Discharge or Napalm Death, where the gruesome imagery is directly related to contemporary crises and grievances.

However, in most extreme metal releases this connection is more obscured, as is the case with the aforementioned LP's by Sodom and Autopsy. In these album covers, it would seem that the use of violent and traumatic imagery has more to do with the process of negation as described by Duncombe earlier in this section. The groups are building their own identities by contrasting themselves with conventional culture as much as possible by using fantastical violent imagery to metaphorically represent themselves as being beyond the confounds of conventional culture, not being afraid of the disorder and darkness that lies beyond them.

In the case of Carcass, the relation that the artworks have to reality is even more obscure. This is not only because of the extremely abstracted nature of its album covers, but rather interestingly, because of the somewhat contradictory collection of

[166] Walser 1993, 159.
[167] Kahn-Harris 2012, 34
[168] Kahn-Harris 2012, 34-35

vague connotations that the imagery that the group used has to the outside world. For example, as was discussed before in section 3.2, the group posited that there are connotations to animal rights, existential musings regarding conventional conceptions of death and carnality, as well as material that in a vague manner examines violent crime in contemporary society.

If these connotations were taken at face value, it would be arguable that the violent representations of Carcass would have a similar function as was described by Walser earlier in this section, where the representation of violence would be reactionary to contemporary causes of anxiety, such as the saturation of violence in media or the exploitation of animals. However, the abstract mode of representation that Carcass used, as well as the ambiguity that one can read from their own writings on their album covers do not support a conclusion that would delineate any of these themes as being in my view fundamental to the true meanings of the group's early album covers.

In fact, when approached from a wider perspective, this very ambiguity can prove to be a foundational aspect regarding the cultural relevance of the artworks. The group's unwillingness to provide any sort of definitive explanations regarding their album covers, paired with the manner in which they expressed their disappointment towards what they conceived as stagnation in both the punk and metal communities would suggest that for Carcass, the main purpose of their creative activities was to seek out new and unique modes of representation, that would not be confined to any established canon. In their early works this was achieved through experimental compositions as well as the excessive use of traumatic image subjects, which was executed to a degree that was considered to be rather shocking and prolific, even within the extreme metal community.

While Carcass utilized numerous representational tools from the conventions of the extreme metal subculture, the group was simultaneously seeking out ways to break free of these same conventions. Carcass achieved this by actively renewing its express its individual cultural disposition. In this sense the grotesque and liminal nature of Carcass' artworks is even more apparent, as its willingness to constantly

renew the already subversive representational system of extreme metal is very similar to Bakhtin's description of the grotesque and the carnivalesque as something that must always actively deconstruct convention in favor of endless renewal and rebirth[169].

[169] Bakhtin 1984, 410

5. CONCLUSION

There seems to be a connection between the grotesque image tradition and the representational conventions of the extreme metal culture. This connection is strongly apparent already in the similarities that many of the visual representations of the extreme metal subculture have with the more superficial visual elements of grotesque art, such as the use of irregular and profuse compositions, wild color schemes, metamorphic and combinatory image subjects, exaggerated and fantastical expression, and graphic depictions of violent, sacrilegious, or otherwise offensive and taboo themes.

However, it should be noted that these modes of representation are by no means unique to the extreme metal subculture. The visual aesthetic of extreme metal has been strongly influenced by other musical subcultures that came before it, which have similar visual motifs in their repertoire that also have strong correlations with the grotesque image tradition.

The extreme metal subculture also correlates strongly with the broader socio-cultural processes that underpin the grotesque and abject as well. The manner in which the representations of the extreme metal subculture subvert convention in favor of a more autonomous mode of representation that reflects reality as it is experienced by the artists more directly and intimately is similar to how unconventional yet often groundbreaking visual themes have developed in grotesque art.

This also supports the function originally suggested by Walser, according to which abjection is utilized in extreme metal as a tool to express anxieties related to real-life issues and grievances. This view is subsequently supported by Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's conceptualization of the background processes that influence grotesque and abject art. However, while this view is in my opinion very reasonable and clear in its rationale, in the case of my main research subjects there were no substantial findings that would support this to be among the primary functions, even though admittedly some of the extreme releases examined in this thesis do exhibit such an inclination.

The relentless fascination that the extreme metal subculture has with representations of morbidity and all things taboo also bodes well with the how grotesque and especially abject art has been conceptualized as a force that can break and expand both representational as well as ethical socio-cultural norms and boundaries. However, as was noted in the previous chapter, as this kind of abjection is such a fundamental facet in the extreme metal subculture, the range of functions that abjection has is rather wide and multi-faceted. The more specific meanings that are ascribed to the utilization of abject themes differs significantly between the various subgroupings of extreme metal, and I do not wish to make any claims related to this that are not supported by my analysis.

What can be posited already on the basis of this thesis is that abjection is utilized in the extreme metal scene to differentiate it from other cultures in a manner that simultaneously invigorates its status. Through associating itself so strongly with the abject, the subculture is gaining symbolic power by transgressing beyond the confounds of convention. This symbolic power, conceptualized also as subcultural capital, is nevertheless gained at the risk of becoming alienated from conventional culture, as this power is gained by delving into the realm of taboo, which can be deemed problematic even at a representational level.

While these functions are all to some extent fulfilled in the early album covers of Carcass, the manner in which they become manifest in them is somewhat anomalous. For Carcass, the utilization of the abject was more independent from the representational conventions of extreme metal, which becomes apparent in the prolific aesthetic that the group created in its early album covers as well as the explicit way in which it expressed its unwillingness to stay within the confines of the extreme metal subculture.

For Carcass, the conventional representational system of extreme metal did thus not serve as the same kind of cloistered creative sphere where even more abrasive and obscure modes of expression would be understood and appreciated, as it was and still is for many extreme metal groups. Although Carcass effectively utilized many percepts of the established extreme metal aesthetic in its representations, it was

simultaneously attempting to challenge the very system under which it operated. Carcass was therefore an especially liminal agent, as its cultural activity permeated the boundaries of various cultural spheres without ever truly settling in a single clearly delineated cultural setting or mode of representation.

While I am in many ways satisfied with my findings, I feel that my thesis has barely scratched the surface of the plethora of meanings that can be found in the junctures between the grotesque and the extreme metal subculture. In fact, I think that the very examination of a contemporary subculture through the lens of the grotesque is among the most important aspects of this thesis, as so many similarities between their features and processes could be found even in a brief examination such as this.

Many of the writings that examine the grotesque in visual culture are primarily concerned with classical art. However, from my point of view, the grotesque permeates contemporary culture and especially popular culture in an almost unprecedented scope. This is especially true of subcultures, which are almost by definition unconventional, liminal and abrasive in their cultural forms and practices, all of which are also fundamental attributes of the grotesque. And while I understand that similar kinds of phenomena are examined in the study of contemporary culture, I find that the various ways in which the conceptions of the grotesque and the abject correlate with theoretical formulations that have originated in fields other than art history could prove enlightening for the examination of the fragmented field of contemporary subcultures.

One aspect that I find lacking in my own work is the way in which the more intricate characteristics of the album cover as its own constituent visual format for the most part ignored. These aspects are something that should certainly be taken into account in future studies conducted on the visual representations of musical releases, as while art historical theories, methods and concepts can be extremely enlightening for certain types of analysis, in some cases they can make us ignorant of the specific features of research materials. For example, album covers have ultimately developed as a commercial visual medium that is meant to be mass-produced for a specific set of

purposes, all of which can not be entirely explained from a purely art historical point of view.

The analyses conducted in this thesis were admittedly somewhat hindered by a certain loss of focus regarding the way in which the research subject and the primary research questions were outlined, and in future studies I would most certainly delineate certain factors more carefully. While in this thesis extreme metal was applicable as a delineating concept, as I was only examining the broader functions that the grotesque and the abject had within the subculture through examining rationally chosen case examples, I believe that future studies could benefit from a clearer demarcation regarding what kind of a cultural unit or area the research subjects belong to, and what are their defining characteristics. This is important as for example in the extreme metal scene, the ideological connotations that certain symbols or other visual motifs have can differ significantly, and in such cases these aspects must be acknowledged accordingly.

In my own view the greatest contribution of this thesis is simply that it is bringing more marginal cultural agents and their products to the fore in an academic setting. Contemporary subcultures are a significant force in our society and their contributions to our culture are manifold. Through giving subcultural activity more attention, I believe there is much to learn about the significance of independent and liminal cultural activity. Our cultural environment is on the one hand rigidly regulated through a consumer-based system, but constantly revolutionized by an ever evolving and engaging communication network in which individuals are empowered with new medias through which to seek out alternative modes of cultural agency. The current state of western culture, in which many face social alienation while possessing a significant set of both cultural and economic resources is virtually a breeding ground for subcultural activity. Understanding the meanings that liminal cultural activity has is extremely important. As was shown in this thesis, the application of art historical concepts such as the grotesque and the abject are well applicable to the study of abrasive and unconventional culture.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Front cover of the Feeding of the 5000 LP by Crass.

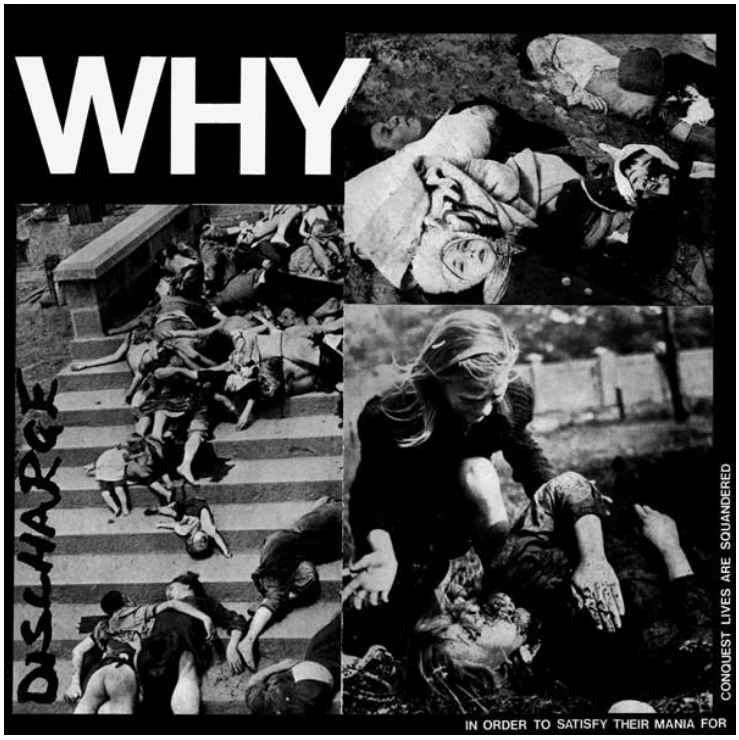

Figure 2. Front cover of the Why LP by Discharge.

© 1981 Clay Records and Discharge

Figure 3. Front over of the Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing LP by Discharge.

© 1982 Clay Records and Discharge.

Figure 4. Cover artwork of the Flesh Ripping Sonic Torment demo tape.

Figure 5. Cover artwork of the Symphonies of Sickness demo tape.

Figure 6. Front cover of the Reek of Putrefaction LP.

© 1988 Earache Records and Carcass.

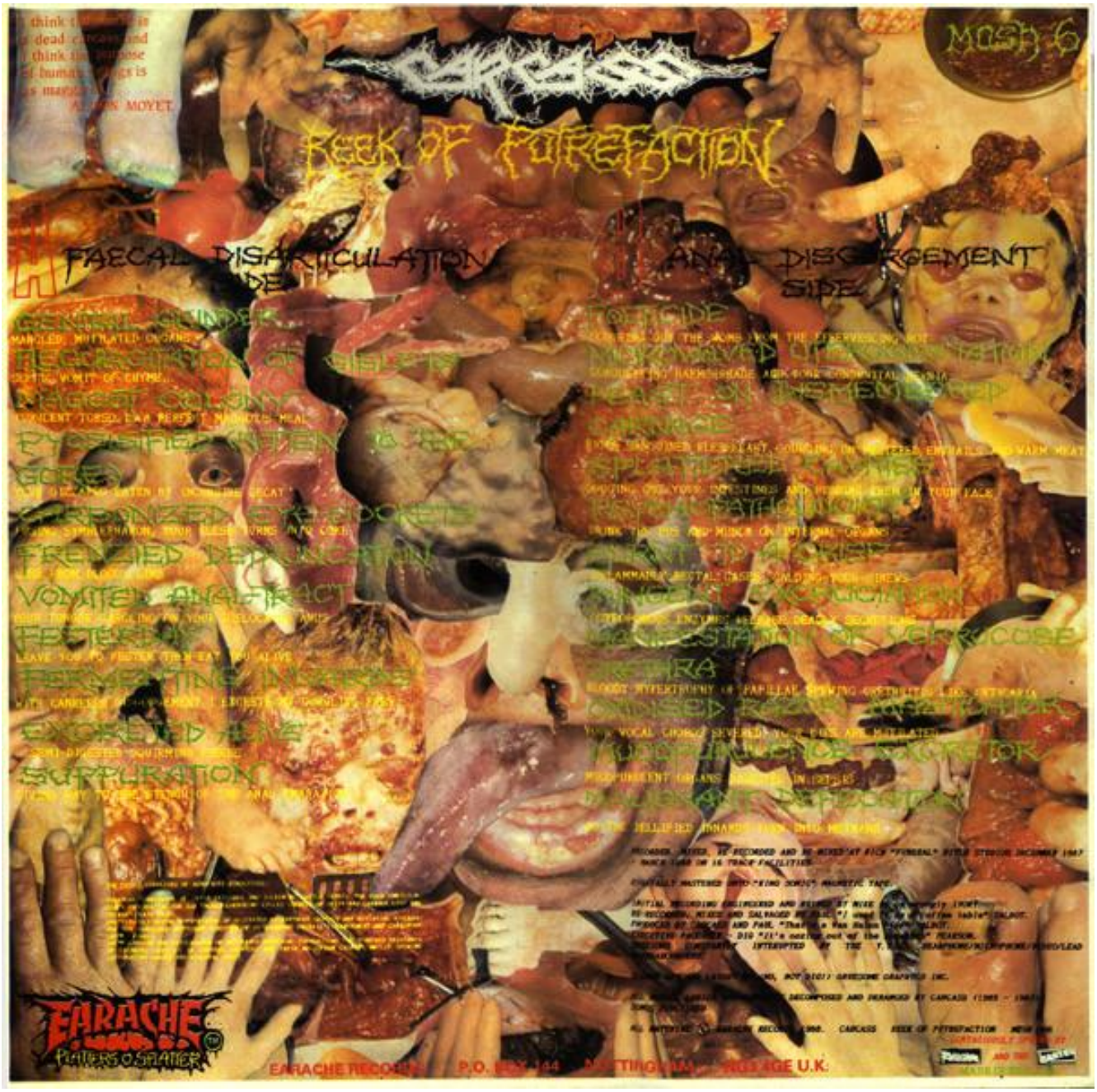

Figure 7. Back cover of the Reek of Putrefaction LP.

Figure 8. Insert #1 of the Reek of Putrefaction LP.

© 1988 Earache Records and Carcass.

Figure 9. Insert #2 of the Reek of Putrefaction LP.

Figure 10. Front cover of the Symphonies of Sickness LP.

Figure 11. Insert from the Wake Up and Smell the Carcass compilation CD.

Figure 12. Back cover of the Symphonies of Sickness LP.

Figure #13: Left side of the Symphonies of Sickness LP gatefold.

Figure #14: Right side of the Symphonies of Sickness LP gatefold.

Figure 15 Front cover of the Scum LP.

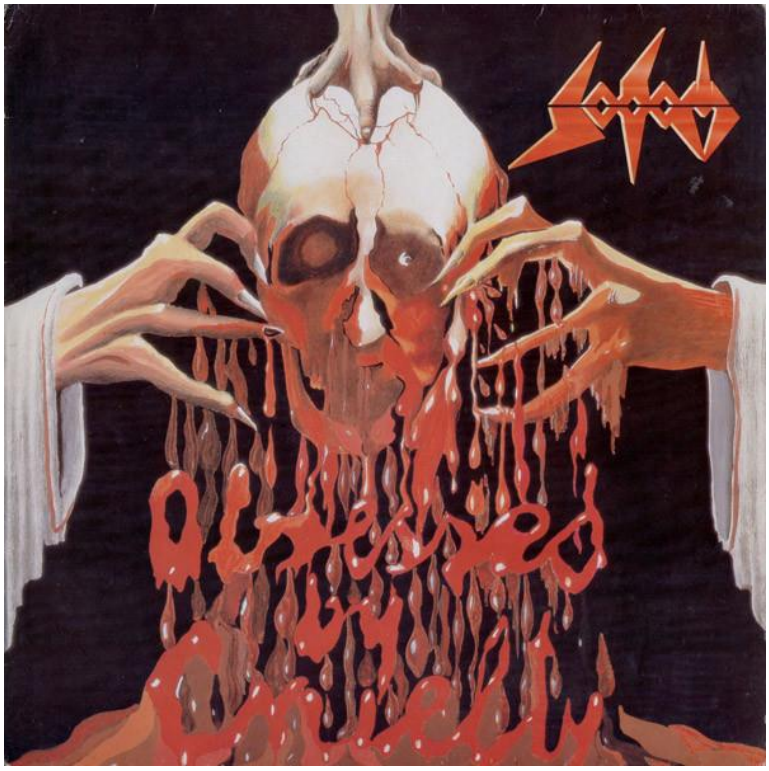

Figure 16. Front cover of the Obsessed by Cruelty LP.

© 1986 Steamhammer Records and Sodom.

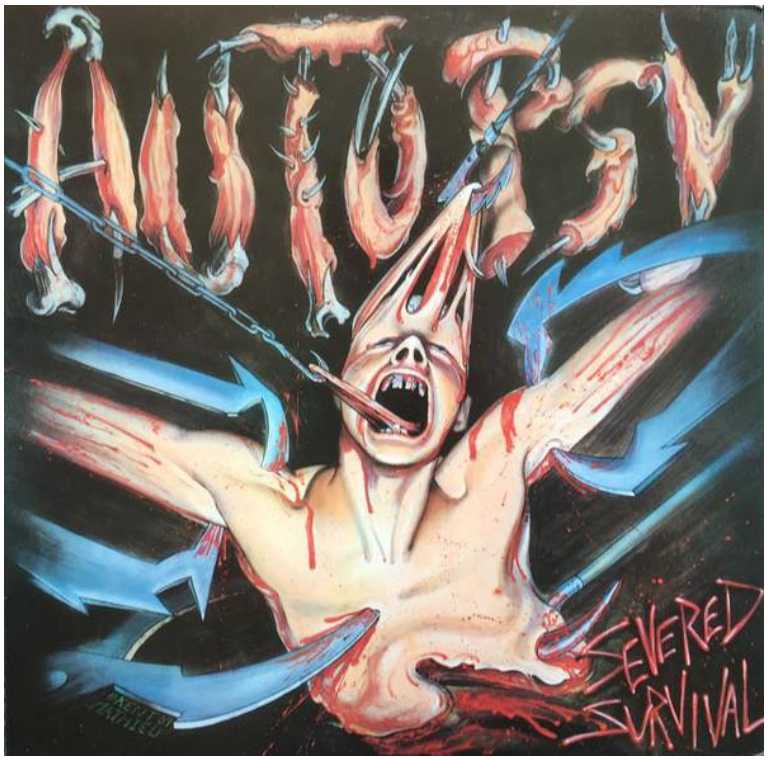

Figure 17. Front cover of the Severed Survival LP.

© 1989 Peaceville Records and Autopsy.

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