Cigarettes and Hairspray: Ritualisation in the Tokyo Heavy Metal Scene

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For the Completion of MA Asian Studies Programme
Words: 14196

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Elianne Annemaat, Rick Bouwman, Jory Hogeveen, Nick Holleman, Stu Marshall, George Oosthoek, Marc van Peski and Michiel van der Plicht, for the opportunities to do interviews over the few months I spent researching. I would also especially like to thank Rutger van Noordenburg for the valuable introductions that made this research possible.

Chapter 1

Introduction: a question of ritual in heavy metal in Japan

Fig 1: Heavy metal pioneers Loudness performing in Tokyo. ©Red Bull Music Festival Tokyo 2018.

1.1: Scope of the thesis

The Japanese popular music scene has drawn interest ever since it became known internationally as a place where music that does not enjoy a lot of popularity internationally is able to thrive, a phenomenon that came to be known as an artist being "being big in Japan"[1]. The relative success of so many artists, regardless of their style makes for a particularly diverse musical landscape. Within this landscape, there is also ample room for heavier styles of music; rock, punk and the many styles of particularly heavy guitar-based music that fit under the umbrella term "heavy metal"[2]. It is this genre of music that interests me in the Japanese context. Its large number of subgenres, ranging in sound from polished and melodic to raw and hard, spans the spectrum of aural and visual expression, having one thing in common: it is all heavy, a wall of sound consisting of thundering drums, heavy distorted guitars and strong emotionally charged vocals. I have been personally engaged with the style of music for a long time, on the one hand as a fan of the music and concert goer, seeing bands from all over the world in many different subgenres and on the other hand as a musician myself, writing and playing music as a guitarist, having done occasional live

[1] Guy de Launey, "Not So Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14 no. 2 (May 1995): 203.
[2] Rosemary Hill and Karl Spracklen, *Heavy fundametalisms: Music, Metal and Politics*, (Interdisciplinary Press: Oxford, 2010).

performances in a band setting. When I combined my personal love for heavy metal music with my academic interest in Japanese society and religion, I came to know more about the heavy metal scene in Japan. It is within this scene that I start my enquiry into the presence of ritual in musical performances.

When reading Jennifer Matsue's chapter on Japanese religion and popular music[3] I noticed her section on the Tokyo hardcore scene[4] – a place she studied extensively from 1996 to 1999 and again in 2007[5], did not address ritual practices in this scene particularly satisfyingly. Her main claim is that ritual is found in this scene through two Japanese concepts: "*ganbaru* (to do one's best) and *gaman suru* (to persevere)"[6] as two central values in the scene, the latter of which is represented to be originating in *Zen* Buddhism. While the scene could be analysed this way, there is little evidence provided showing this connection, or explicit mention of people in the scene using these terms. Surely performers doing their best on stage is not enough of a substantiation to call what happens in the scene ritualised. With the rich catalogue of academic work describing the relation between ritual, performance and music, I doubt these two Japanese values are the only thing that can be found on ritual in this subculture. I therefore pose the question once again, what ritualised elements can be identified in the Tokyo heavy metal scene? What is the value to both performers and audience members of ritualised elements present in the scene? What new insights into the scene does analysis through a ritual lens give us? Through evaluation of ritual theory, direct accounts and observation of performances, I intend to build on Matsue's work and show more extensively the value of ritual in the Tokyo heavy metal scene.

1.2: Heavy Metal and Japan

Heavy metal music is an interesting genre that is worth touching on briefly on its own. To see how these more extreme forms of music came to be, two earlier music styles are crucial to the existence of heavy metal today: punk rock and classic rock. While both subgenres of popular music of the second half of the 20th century, both have defining characteristics that are better to identify

[3] Jennifer Milioto Matsue, "Japanese religion and popular music," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music*, ed. Christopher Patridge and Marcus Moberg (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 160-74.
[4] Matsue uses the term hardcore scene, I however prefer to use the term heavy metal in this thesis, as it represents a wider range of musical styles and hardcore is essentially a subgenre of heavy metal. As will be clarified later, the Tokyo scene is very diverse, using the term hardcore would needlessly exclude many performers in the scene, sometimes even within one concert.
[5] Jennifer Milioto Matsue, *Making Music in Japan's Underground: The Tokyo Hardcore Scene* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.
[6] Matsue, Japanese religion, 173.

on their own, before discussing the current spectrum of heavy or extreme music.[7] The rebellious punk music of the early 1970s, takes on more aggressive shapes in the genres of hardcore punk and post-punk, while presenting itself as influence on early heavy metal. This style developed as a heavier incarnation of classic rock music of the 1960's and early 1970s. While heavy metal of that era had a strong melodic component, the aggressive shouting of punk found its way into the extreme subgenres of heavy metal like thrash metal and death metal from the late 1980s onwards.

Indeed, the iconic raw and aggressive vocal style often referred to as growling, grunting or screaming, is a signature aesthetic of many bands within heavy metal in its present form. This style of vocalising has called up imagery of monstrosity, and demons in many listeners. Erbe wondered if these sounds can be seen as representations of monstrosity in multiple sense, most notably the bodily monster, something that deviates from the ideal normal of the human body, like bodily deformations and likeness to animals, and the moral monster, referring to moral transgression like incest and necrophilia[8]. The author conducted many interviews with vocalists, in which the themes of "rage, brutality, intensity, aggression, or power"[9] kept coming back, showing that to the initiated, this vocal style more represents an outlet of negative or strong emotions, rather than a reference to monstrosity, putting lyrical themes of certain subgenres aside. Understanding this subverts biased analyses through preconceived associations with an aesthetic that is unfamiliar to many.

When discussing a music style in Japan, it is important to understand what defines this music style as Japanese, compared to another place in the world. Carolyn Stevens discusses just that with Japanese popular music, questioning whether categorising popular music based on nationality provides us with useful distinctions. She tries to find the roots of contemporary Japanese pop music, discussing both western and traditional Japanese influences. She concludes that while defining what makes Japanese music "Japanese", is hard on just musical criteria due to its stylistic hybridity, the idea of "Japanese-ness" arrives out of "prewar and postwar constructions of [Japanese] identity"[10]

Heavy metal in Japan is particular in the way it developed and how it is structured. What is popular and what is not, is governed by slightly different principles than in other countries: there seems to be a bias towards "traditional" heavy metal, referring to the musical style of the 1980s[11]. The Japanese aesthetic is described as including "the power chord introduction, an intense

[7] Noteworthy is that every stage of the development of these styles of music has left its mark and artifacts of these points in the development are still present on the scene. Some bands have made the style of a particular moment in time their own.
[8] Marcus Erbe, "By Demons Be Driven? Scanning "Monstrous" Voices," in *Hardcore, Punk, and Other Junk: Aggressive Sounds in Contemporary Music,* Ed. Eric James Abbey and Colin Helb, (Lenham: Lexington Books, 2014), 57-8.
[9] Erbe, Demons, 62.
[10] Carolyn S. Stevens, *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, Authenticity and Power*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 36.
[11] Kei Kawano and Shuhei Hosokawa, "Thunder in the Far East," in *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger and Paul D Greene, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 248.

riff, stable 4/4 meter, "lyrical" melodic line […] chord progressions based on predictable functional harmony, "weeping" guitar, a superb solo [and] adaptation of orchestral music".[12] Finally, there is a trend of relative popularity of foreign bands, that are better classified as local bands in their country of origin with a following in Japan, than as international artists, which is what the term "big in Japan" that was mentioned earlier refers to[13].

1.3: Researching subculture

This research looks at heavy metal as a subculture in Japan and subculture itself is a fascinating phenomenon. To understand subculture, knowing how it interacts with mainstream culture is crucial. Culture, though famously hard to define, can be quite hegemonic, as it tries to describe the entirety of people's daily lives, their world view and the historical context in a certain area and moment in time; its ubiquity can in a sense be normative in nature. Hebdige argues that very often the notion of culture goes hand in hand with naturalisation, an ideology that things are supposed to be a certain way, informed by common sense[14]. What is hegemonic about it, is the consensus of people on what is, and is not part of this definition of culture, which is linked to value judgment and issues of social order[15]. He begins his book on subculture and the meaning of style with this discussion, and that is a very good place to start, as subculture very often intentionally tries to set itself apart from the dominant culture in a particular place. This goes for any subculture but is especially visible in musical subcultures, that often try to break away from pop music or, as discussed later, other styles within the same genre.

Subcultures very often break away from mainstream culture in more ways than just their namesake concept, be it music, visual art, sexual preference, or any one of the many existing subcultures. In fact, I believe the way they break ideologically and visually is at least as interesting. While on the one hand, musical subcultures can be a way to resist against hegemonic elements of culture, on the other hand, in Japan, where a male societal dominance is still present, musical subcultures can show otherwise less visible artefacts of people's embrace of this dominant system: Overell argues that musical subcultures in Japan like hip-hop, idol music and metal typically focus on stereotypically strong male values, feminisation of female performers, which appeal to the male fantasy[16]. While I do not fully subscribe to her claims of toxic masculinity in Japanese metal, as

[12] Kawano, Thunder in the Far East, 253.
[13] Kawano, Thunder in the Far East, 266-7.
[14] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Methuen: Routledge, 1979), 13-4.
[15] Hebdige, Subculture, 16.
[16] Rosemary Overell, "Gender and Musical subcultures in Japan," in *Routledge companion to gender and Japanese Culture,* ed. Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, Mark Pendleton. London: Routledge. 233-6.

there is also data suggesting the opposite[17], the overall critique is well worth noting, even more reason that studying Japanese musical subcultures is a worthwhile endeavour.

This research is important for two reasons: first, the study of subculture, which is by definition in contrast, or even in debate with dominant culture[18], can tell us a lot about the dynamics of a changing society. This is especially relevant in Japanese society, which faces intergenerational tensions through the hierarchical structure[19], exacerbated by the ageing society; participation in a subculture can help someone (temporarily) escape the constraints and hardships of society and be oneself. Looking at a performance subculture in Japan through the lens of ritual can help understand practices better, their reasons and meaning.

1.4: Chapter Overview

The thesis is split into three chapters: a literature review, and two ethnographic chapters. The literature review, analyses uses of ritual in musical performances. A variety of academic sources on different musical traditions provides a comprehensive overview of how different parts of a musical performance can be ritualised in different musical tradition around the world. This serves as a theoretical basis for the next two chapters. Ethnography is a good fit for this type of research, as it provides "empirical insights into social practices that are normally "hidden" from the public gaze"[20]. For these chapters I performed original research, consisting of both fieldwork and analysis of primary material found online. First and foremost, I conducted interviews with seven Dutch and Australian heavy metal musicians (four guitarists, one drummer and two singers) and one photographer with touring experience in Japan to get an insight into the workings of the Tokyo heavy metal scene. I originally intended to do fieldwork in Tokyo myself, but with the state of affairs in the world regarding international travel under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, this proved not possible. Nevertheless, these interviews provided useful insights through the detailed eyewitness accounts these interlocutors gave me, as performers and audience members. Two of them even had deeper connections with Japanese musicians through their affiliation with Japanese guitar company ESP Guitars[21]. Connections in the Dutch metal industry were of crucial

[17] Matsue, Japan's Underground, 106. "Men and Women similarly enjoyed a level of equality in the scene that was distinct from mainstream society".
[18] Hebdige, Subculture, 17.
[19] 上下関係 *jougekankei*, meaning up-down relations, referring to Japan's hierarchical structure valuing seniority.
[20] Scott Reeves, Ayelet Kuper and Brian David Hodges, "Qualitative research methodologies: ethnography," BMJ 2008;337:a1020. DOI: https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1136/bmj.a1020.
[21] ESP Guitars was founded in 1975 in Tokyo as a custom guitar builder, parts manufacturer and repair shop and has been producing custom guitars and more affordable mass production guitars since. Interestingly it started to get associated mainly with heavy metal through sponsorship of various heavy metal bands, names including

importance in meeting people. By asking around among professional guitarists I know, I came to know a guitarist with a lot of experience in Japan, who introduced me to his band members, colleagues and friends, which I interviewed over several different occasions, either at their house, at concerts or online. While asking questions during the interviews and while processing the answers I was aware and have accounted for any individual biases interlocutors might have, to avoid presenting subjective reality as factual, which is especially important when interlocutors are relatively inexperienced in a particular scene[22]. These interviews make up the brunt of the data for the second chapter, which focuses on the structure of the Tokyo metal scene. In my opinion it is important to look at the scene itself first, to be able to place the research for the third chapter into context easier.

The third chapter focuses on identifying and explaining ritualising elements in live performances in this scene using the analytical framework of Catherine Bell's dimensions of ritual-like behaviour[23]. For this chapter I combined information gathered out of the interviews with primary sources in the form of live recordings of various events found on the internet, mainly on YouTube. Many live houses in Tokyo make recordings of bands and upload short highlight compilations of a band's set on YouTube. Famous death metal festival Asakusa DeathFest even uploads full sets of many bands that play there. By taking a closer look at various performances through audio-visual media, I can substantiate certain phenomena that are described by my interlocutors, resulting in a deeper understanding of the scene and its ritualised practices[24]. Finally, by placing the gathered ethnographic data within theoretical debate of ritual studies, this research can readdress certain claims and contribute to the field.

Metallica, Slayer and Dokken, building custom guitars for these musicians. The often visually striking appearance made them very memorable to fans and amateur musicians alike, cementing ESP Guitars as a central player in the heavy metal world. https://espguitars.jp/instrument/.

[22] Nora Kottman and Cornelia Reiher," 7 How to Interview People: Qualitative Interviews," In Studying Japan: Handbook of Research Designs, Fieldwork and Methods", edited by Nora Kottmann and Cornelia Reiher, 1st edition, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020): 185.

[23] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 138.

[24] "Together, multiple data sources help to build rich descriptions and understandings of the particular material conditions in which people live and work, and to help the researcher maintain an openness to what may be significant to participants."
Theresa Lillis, "Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and "Deep Theorizing": Closing the Gap Between Text and Context in Academic Writing Research," *Written Communication* 25, no. 3 (July 2008): 372.

Chapter 2

Ritual as part of musical performance: a literature review

Fig. 2. Ritualised listening at the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. Picture by ANP KIPPA Ramon van Flymen

The study of ritual in the Tokyo metal scene exists at the crossroads of religious studies, ritual studies and musicology. Because these are such well researched fields, it is important to embed new research within the canon of existing literature. The aim of this chapter is to do precisely that and address what elements of musical performances can have ritual functions and how they appear in different musical traditions in space and time. It familiarises the reader with key concepts for study, which will help understand the context of my research. It provides a solid foundation of ritual and musicological theory, from which deeper analysis of ritual in the Tokyo heavy metal scene is possible. There are two things that I think are important to discuss in detail: first, the different ways the relation between ritual and performance are generally conceptualised, second, how one can think of the roles participants perform in the creation of such a ritualised performance event.

2.1 Ritual as part of musical performance across traditions

Many aspects of a performance can be ritualised. One such thing is the concept of an encore, in which a band finishes their set and goes off stage, only to be called back onto the stage by the audience by one of a few set phrases like “we want more” or “one more song” or simply chanting

the artist's name. From my experience attending concerts for years ranging from western classical music to jazz and heavy metal, it is in fact so common, that if the artist does not return, the audience is surprised and maybe will even feel let down. Webster names the encore as an important part of the ending ritual of a musical performance. It is highly stylised, including in many instances a "false ending" in which an artist announces the last song, to set up leaving the stage later before the encore, all focused on creating a satisfying ending to the experience, showing the relation between the performer and the audience in creating the experience.[25]. Thinking of a concert in this way and understanding encores as a stylised ending helps conceptualise a performance as having a meaningful structure; beginning, build-up, climax and come down. This accentuates the ritual qualities of musical performance and is critical to the meaning of the event for the audience.

Religion and music have long been connected all over the world, featuring heavily in the many ceremonies of religious traditions of the world[26]. Examples include the singing of psalms in Christian masses or the drums and rhythmical singing in rituals found in many places across Africa and the America's. More relevant to the case of Japan, chanting in the rituals of Shinto and Buddhism, ranging from small gatherings at a local shrine on the corner of the street, to the great Shingon fire ritual. Even in popular music there is plenty of space for religious music, drawing on every major religion and more, all over the world[27]. Integrating religion as an important part of musical performance and experience is not an uncommon, nor a new occurrence. Palo, the music of Vudú, a religious tradition indigenous to the Dominican Republic, moved into Dominican Dance clubs and bars in New York, where they are experienced by a new audience of mainly young second generation immigrants[28]. Here this religious tradition meets new influences through its setting and audience, creating new ways for people to experience both religion and music. This shows that definitions of what is and is not religion and ritual are not fixed, but dynamic and can easily change and adapt to new contexts. Tallaj speaks of "lived religion"[29], to refer to this idea of fluid religious practice and experience.

The role of music in religion establishes a clear connection between ritual and music. However, in these cases ritual enters the musical performance in the form of an explicitly religious experience. I am more interested in uses of ritual that exceed the boundaries of the religious context.

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[25] Anna Webster, ""One More Tune!" The Encore Ritual in Live Music Events." *Popular Music and Society* 35, no. 1 (2012): 98-100.
[26] John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, (London: Routledge, 2011).
Chihiro Inose, "Medieval Buddhism and Music: Musical Notation and the Recordability of the Voice." *Studies in Japanese Literature and Culture* 3 (March 2020): 113–125.
[27] Patridge, Christopher and Marcus Moberg, ed, *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), xiv.
[28] Angelina M. Tallaj, "Religion on the Dance Floor: Afro-Dominican Music and Ritual from Altars to Clubs." *Civilisations* 67 (August 2018): 96.
[29] Tallaj, Religion on the Dance Floor, 98.

I like Richard Jankowsky's definition stating that ritual is "an activity involving others that uses symbolic communication and performance to create an immersive experience deliberately located apart from the "everyday" world"[30], showing that religiosity is not a prerequisite. In fact, Bell described that ritualisation, aside from a central concept in religious studies, has also come to be an often-used analytical framework in the analysis of society and social phenomena, as well as cultural dynamics[31]. Therefore, characterising actions within secular musical performances as ritualised, can yield useful insights into the social functions and cultural place of such performances.

A place in which people very explicitly wrote about the relation between ritual and music, is in ancient Chinese ritual theory, where it is entirely natural for music and ritual to go together, as they together create a balance between enjoyment and familiarity on the one hand and meaning and creation of order on the other[32]. Ritual and music are conceptualised as creating harmony between heaven and earth, or between yin and yang. "Ritual is differentiation, Music is uniting."[33] What this means, is that ritual is the structuring of things to be appropriate, and music is the harmony that brings people together, which is clearly visible in heavy metal performances in Tokyo as well.

In Sborgi Lawson's case study, ritual and musical performance are seen as a tool for the state to organise a society, pointing to the varied purposes ritual can have. Sborgi Lawson uses ancient Chinese theory to comment on the ritual function of a musical performance at the opening of the 2008 summer Olympics. The author describes the function that ritualisation can have in performances. She argues that the processes of performativity and ritualisation work in two directions: not only can utterances in a ritual context be used to perform an action, ritualised actions can also be used to make a statement[34]. This is a very useful idea when analysing ritualised actions in Japanese heavy metal as well, as it shows the performative effect of ritualised actions, as will be discussed in later chapters.

It is said that "ritual as a whole, as a performative event within the context of a life in community […] has the power to influence and transform participants and audience alike"[35]. Wong uses Naomi Cummings idea that music has two sides, "an outer face that resides in the tonality and timbre of the music that is entirely the artist's style, and an inner face that has to do

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[30] Richard Jankowsky, "Music and Ritual," in *Critical Themes in World Music: A Reader for Excursions in World Music*, ed. Timothy Rommen (New York: Routledge, 2021), 19.
[31] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[32] Francesca R Sborgi Lawson, "Music in Ritual and Ritual in Music: A Virtual Viewer's Perceptions about Liminality, Functionality, and Mediatization in the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games," *Asian Music* 42, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2011): 6.
[33] Scott Cook, ""Yue Ji" yue ji -- Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary," *Asian Music* 26, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1995): 51.
Crossley, Nick. 2019. *Connecting sounds: The Social Life of Music*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
[34] Sborgi Lawson, Music in Ritual, 10.
[35] Peter Yih-Jiun Wong, "The Music of Ritual Practice: An interpretation," *Sophia* 51, no. 2 (July 2012): 248.

with an awareness of the interpretation of music as signs"[36]. The point here is that the value of a performance to an audience is not just an appreciation of musicianship and virtuosic playing of instruments, but also "the ability to recognise and interpret those subtle signs through a shared tradition"[37]. Throughout the next chapters the importance of engaging with shared musical and cultural traditions as part of the Japanese heavy metal subculture will become evident.

2.2: Different roles within establishing a musical performance

In present day musicologists also extensively study the social nature of music. One way is by framing music as a social interaction. This interaction typically happens between two parties, the performer and the listener and without one or the other, music would not exist[38]. While the presence of a performer is readily evident, the presence of a listener is just as essential: how music is perceived is clearly influenced by factors outside the direct control of the performer, who is really just one source of sound and therefore only a part of the musical experience. Everything from how the sound reaches the ears of the listener, to the cultural background or association of individual listeners, all have their impact on how the music in question is perceived. The ritualisation of listening itself is a relevant concept. Taking the example of the western classical concert, the event honours "upper-middle-class and elite values and heritage and […] [c]oncertgoers take part in contemplative listening characterised by a deeply ritualised silence"[39]. This is a case where the roles of performer and listener are clearly defined and largely one-directional in nature; from the performers on stage to each individual sitting quietly listening in the room.

Since ritual is primarily concerned with production of meaning for and by participants, it is important to know who does what, to know what it means to whom. But sometimes the roles of performer and listener are not as clearly defined as in the previous example of classical concerts. On the one hand, the performer can also take on the role of listener. Collectively performed improvisational music is a continuous process of playing and listening to the other, by which the music comes to be. A clear example of this is the "call and response" type improvisation often seen in jazz music, in which one performer plays a phrase, to which another responds by playing a similar or contrasting phrase, creating a musical conversation that is experienced by both the performers as a group, as well as the audience. Crossley references the concept of mutual tuning in, when talking about the interactions of performers in music, which I think is a very useful concept to

[36] Wong, Music of Ritual Practice, 251.
[37] Wong, Music of Ritual Practice, 252.
[38] Nick Crossley, *Connecting the Sounds: The Social Life of Music*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 11.
[39] Jankowsky, Music and Ritual, 26.

understand how musicians interact with each other, the audience and the tradition and/or education they came from in the process of creating music on a stage[40].

One can say that the audience also fulfils a performing role in the music creation process. Bobby Mcferrin is famous for involving the audience very explicitly in the music making process, by giving sections of the audience different musical phrases to repeat, improvising over the top, creating an organic flowing musical experience that involves everybody present. While this is very explicit, in my opinion sounds created by an audience can have a substantial influence on the perception of music in general. In fact, John Cage wrote his 1952 composition *4'33"*, a piece consisting of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, bringing to the forefront ambient and accidental sounds, to show his ideas that silence does not exist and that all sounds are music, as well as engage with concepts of framing in art and listening as a social phenomenon[41]. While this is an extreme example of the role of ambient sounds in music, something similar can be found in other musical performances. Sometimes when an artist performs a famous song, the audience joins in to for example sing the chorus with the artist. The artist might ask the audience to do this, by pointing their microphone to the audience, signalling that it is their turn to sing. Another example more specific to metal music, is holding up one's hand, extending the index and little finger in a shape reminiscent of (and thought of as) the devil's horns, either in response to the performer or as expression of liking the music. When audiences do this, they unify themselves, engaging not only with the performer and fellow audience members, but also with the subcultural tradition of doing so at metal concerts, consciously or not. Additionally, both the cheering of the audience after a climactic moment or after a song is finished, or the collective hush of an audience at an especially intimate moment in the music, really adds another dimension of meaning to the music, enjoyed both by the audience and performers that are present at the event, as well as listeners of a live recording on CD, DVD or YouTube for example.

On the topic of recordings, the combination of acoustics and number of people present can tell a listener al lot about the ambience and even historical context of a particular performance. On Judas Priest's *Unleashed in the East* one can hear the excited cheering of the people at the Kosei Nenkin Hall in Tokyo, while on *The Cannonball Adderley Quintet at the Lighthouse* one hears the classy atmosphere of The Lighthouse Cafe at the sunny Hermosa Beach, California. In both cases, the sounds of the audience can tell the listener a lot about its cultural and historical setting. This is true for physical events as well; the role of elements other than the performers themselves and the sounds they create, like audience and ambience, should therefore be taken into consideration as meaningful components of a performance or ritual.

[40] Crossley, Connecting the sounds, 20.
[41] Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

By reviewing academic sources on ritual and music, this review established a connection between ritual and music and show ritualisation across the world and genres. Ritual can distinguish performances from daily life, structure a performance in a way that feels meaningful to the participants and be a signifier of tradition, giving the sense to be part of a larger shared culture. As will become clear in the next chapters, the creation of meaning and engagement with musical tradition are crucial to all participants in the Japanese scene as well.

Chapter 3

The structure of the Tokyo heavy metal scene: an ethnographic approach

Figure 3: Pestilence performing at Asakusa Deathfest. Photo by Marc van Peski, used with permission.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each discussing one element of the metal scene in Tokyo that I argue is characteristic to this scene. To learn about how the Tokyo heavy metal scene functions, I interviewed musicians that have experience touring the world, including Japan. Through performing and going along with people in the Japanese music industry, they learnt what it means to be a metal musician in Japan, both for them as a foreign band, touring a foreign country, and for domestic bands, performing in their own country. Moreover, by interacting with the audiences at live performances during and after shows, they came to understand what the subculture is all about, what it means to be a "metalhead" in Japan. It covers the structure and values of the scene, giving a complete overview of the context of this research. In the musical landscape of Japan, there is quite a lot of space for rock music and related heavier types of music, the vast number of bands in Japan that have sounds somewhere on this spectrum are indicative of this[42]. I use the word metal as umbrella term to describe the heaviest music on the spectrum, which describes everything from the angry shouts of hardcore punk to the symphonic melodies of power metal, to the brutal carnage of black and death metal[43]. As the next section will note, this variety is an integral part of the scene.

[42] Stevens, Japanese Popular Music, 58-9.
[43] Eric James Abbey and Colin Help, *Hardcore, Punk and Other Junk: Aggressive Sounds in Contemporary Music*, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014).

3.1: The structure of live performances

The first part, which I believe to be quite integral to the functioning of heavy metal in Japan, is the way live performances are organised. I interviewed Rutger van Noordenburg (40 years old), Dutch guitarist for metal bands Pestilence, Shinigami and Bleeding Gods, with which he has toured the world, including Japan. He has a lot of experience in the Japanese scene both as a performer and as a member of the audience during his regular stays in Japan over the last 14 years[44]. He described the system that governs life performances. In many places around the world, live venues have a resident booker, that contacts performers to ask them to play in their venue, or at their festival, providing everything the band and the audience would need, from backstage facilities to drinks in-house. In most Japanese live houses (excluding the very big stages) it works the other way around: bands can book a spot on a performance night[45]. In essence, the venue markets itself to bands, their website providing in depth information about the interior, complete with pictures of every corner without people in it, a list of all the backline equipment and a contact form for bands to apply for a spot, including a pricing list for renting the hall for an evening[46].

To make the cost of renting a place more manageable, often 6 or 7 groups play on one night, the first two bands only playing for 10 minutes, slowly increasing in length with every passing band, until the headliner, which plays a full set. Incidentally, the number of bands also has consequences for the time schedule, as the first band often starts around 18:00, meaning that several the audience members would be in suit, still wearing their working clothes, as the early starting time would leave them no time to go home first. It comes as no surprise then, that the (often more popular) headliner act pays for the brunt of it, allowing smaller bands the opportunity to expose themselves to the public for a reasonable price. This also means that on one particular night, there is the potential for quite a variety of bands from different styles. Consequently, live houses usually do not have one signature style and similarly, concert goers usually do not have one venue that they consider their home base. I argue this is one of the reasons for the relative diversity within the metal scene, as fans are regularly exposed to performances in many different styles.

[44] I conducted an interview with him in his home and built up a friendship with him, going to live performances of his and chatting about topics of shared interest on various occasions. He has played a pivotal role in my research, as he was able to introduce me to many of his bandmates and colleagues, all of whom also have experiences with Japanese musicians, bands and touring in Japan. Throughout the thesis interlocutor's real names have been used with explicit approval of the person in question.
[45] David Novak, *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 33-34.
[46] https://club-science.com. I show this as a representative example of one of the many live houses in Tokyo.

3.2: Identity of a metalhead

Metal as a subculture is in constant opposition with mainstream culture. The subculture is defined by its strong call of individual expression and a sonic and visual profile that stands out as being on the extreme end of a spectrum of expression[47]. Although heavy metal is a subculture that internationally is expressed quite overtly, through things like clothing, body modification or make up, this is comparatively rare in Japan: these obvious forms of expression are in stark contrast to the image of Japan's collectivist society[48], where standing out is not always seen as a virtue of free expression, rather, something that had better be avoided as not to be excluded from a group as a result of being different. This is reflected in the literature, as it is seen that there is a trend of increasing individualism, while traditional collectivism remains in place, leading to strained interpersonal relationships for those that choose to act out more individualistic expression[49].

This friction between mainstream and subculture has a big influence on what it means to be a metalhead. When I asked my interlocutors what it means for them to be a metalhead, I received some similar responses, indicating it as an integral part of their being. One said, "It is being a part of a club you haven't chosen to be in. No-one wakes up one day thinking, "you know what, I like the look of that, I'm going to do that"". Another told me, "it is something that's inside me, it is something you are. If I didn't have it, I simply wouldn't exist. I play everything from classical to noise, but if I'm somewhere on earth and I hear the sounds of a distorted guitar, everything inside me turns on"[50]. Some describe that during their day job, they might wear a suit, but would feel most comfortable wearing something like a band shirt. Getting off from work and putting on casual clothes feels like a relief for many people, but perhaps even more so for people in a subculture like this, as what they feel comfortable in, is that much further removed from that what is required at formal settings like someone's job. Because this on its own describes the attitudes of Dutch metalheads, I asked them if they perceived the same with Japanese metalheads they interacted with, either as fans of theirs, colleagues or as peers in the audience; all indicated not to perceive much of

[47] Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger and Paul D Greene, "Affective Overdrive, Scene Dynamics, and Identity in the Global Metal Scene," in *Heavy Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger and Paul D Greene, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 14.
[48] Takeshi Hamamura, "Are Cultures Becoming Individualistic? A Cross-Temporal Comparison of Individualism–Collectivism in the United States and Japan," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 1 (2012): 16-7.
[49] Yuji Ogihara, "Temporal Changes in Individualism and Their Ramification in Japan: Rising Individualism and Conflicts with Persisting Collectivism," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8: 695. (2017): 9, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00695.
[50] Both are metal guitarists in their forties. They are metalheads in heart and soul, wearing their identity on their sleeve, often literally.

a difference, pointing to certain transnational qualities heavy metal has[51]. I therefore argue that these ideas surrounding identity and love for the music are a poignant description of the feeling of many individuals in this subculture around the world and in general terms the feelings of any avid follower of a certain subculture.

To expound on the case of Japanese metal fans; in addition to certain clothing or the showing of tattoos for example not being appropriate in various situations anywhere in the world, my interlocutors describe that there seems to be even less space for this in Japanese everyday life. This leads to subcultural activities being significantly removed from everyday life, and vice versa, those who choose to live their life as open members of such a subculture to have difficulty or even no desire to participate in the regular patterns of life in the Japanese society[52]. Generally, visual expression of style is reversible, or at least coverable. Getting a colour in one's hair, or having a tattoo is therefore a huge deal. Tattoos in particular of course, considering Japan's cultural association with them. An interesting example of covert expression of subculture is through Facebook, as that is a relatively unpopular social media platform. Those who do use it however can post pictures of a small tattoo they have, to show their metal friends, a phenomenon described to me by an interlocutor.

However, when at events like live performances, the Japanese metal fans are described by my western interlocutors as very loyal, "pure" and engaged, contrasting starkly with their everyday lives. There is more data that suggests Japanese people "are excellent at shifting between multiple identities, in essence role-playing the appropriate character in the appropriate situation"[53]. Perhaps it is their perceived disability to express their identity on a day-to-day basis, that drives them to express it with that much more intensity, when the time does come to go to a concert for example. Such events could function as a sort of breathing space, to be oneself for a while, before going back to normal life.

Finally, besides elements that set Japanese metal fans apart from other those in other places, there are also things that are perceived to be universal and transcending the boundaries of country's borders. There is the sentiment among people in this subculture that heavy metal is something akin to a universal language, which is reflected in academic literature[54]. Stu Marshall, Australian guitarist for Death Dealer, who toured the world and Japan especially as part of power metal band Dungeon from 2001 until their breakup in 2005, said, "It doesn't matter what minority you are, if you turn up to a concert wearing an Iron Maiden t-shirt, people don't give a fuck what your

[51] Deena Weinstein, "The Globalisation of Metal," in *Heavy Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger and Paul D Greene, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 45.
[52] John Skutlin, "Goth in Japan: finding identity in a spectacular subculture," *Asian Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2016): 46-7.
[53] Matsue, Making Music in Japan's Underground, 45.
[54] Weinstein, the Globalisation of Metal, 56.

background is"[55]. He experienced this sentiment all over the world, from North and South America to Europe and Japan as well. In that sense, the heavy metal subculture can be seen as having a certain transnational aspect; even though there are local influences on how music experienced and expressed, there are some core values and ideas that are seen in heavy metal scenes all over the world. Marshall expressed that he felt this overarching acceptance of everyone under the banner of heavy metal is quite unique compared to other genres. Whether or not this is as unique as believed or not, is not necessarily relevant, as I believe it matters more what their perception of themselves is. Being a metalhead in Japan therefore might not always carry the same visual expression as in other places in the world, but dedication to the music is no different.

3.3: Idolisation of bands

Something that all my interlocutors noted, has to do with the attitude of fans towards performers in the scene during interactions. Members of the audience seem to place performers on a pedestal, and regard them as something higher than themselves. Part of this is also physical, the performer is on stage; one interlocutor noted that breaking this physical barrier by jumping off stage and singing in the audience led to considerable confusion on the part of the audience members. Michiel van der Plicht, who has been the drummer for Dutch metal bands God Dethroned, Pestilence and Carach Angren, sat in as the drummer for German metal band Dew Scented on their Japanese tour in 2014. He described interactions with fans as generally very enthusiastic or ecstatic even at times.[56] Interactions with such ecstatic fans, of which there were apparently comparatively many, roughly followed one of two patterns: one is so excited that they keep talking, asking for autograph after autograph, asking performers to sign everything from CDs to clothing and even their bodies, while the other is so nervous and overcome with amazement that they barely dare to speak. Stu Marshall noted a similar sentiment of being treated like a god, both on and off stage. This is akin to idolisation that is seen in other music genres in Japan and Korea, like J-pop and K-pop. It is not unimaginable to liken metal performers to idols, as idol music can simply defined as any music that is performed by a celebrity-like musical performer across many different genres[57]. The immense popularity of metal idol group BABYMETAL can only serve as a clear demonstration

[55] I had the opportunity to conduct the interview over a video call one night, due to the time difference between the Netherlands and Australia.
[56] I conducted this interview at Michiel's office and drum recording studio. He is a full-time musician, who has played on over 50 albums. During his time in God Dethroned he was often responsible for the business side and logistics that go into arranging and performing concerts, so the interview proved an interesting experience giving me valuable insight in not just the Japanese scene, but also the logistics of being an internationally touring band.
[57] Mathew Richardson, "Marketing Affect in Japanese Idol Music" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2016): 20.

of this[58].That is not to say the metal bands discussed here are considered by anyone to be idols, but certain parallels are visible.

A different issue that shows similarities between idols and bands in the metal scene, is the image of band members' bachelor status. In idol culture it is commonplace to find dating bans that, if broken (that is discovered by the public), can have dire consequences for the idol in question and the group as well[59]. In reality, often idols do date, but have to keep it strictly out of the public's eye. The reason for this dating ban is that (female) idols should "never disabuse their legions of male fans that they might one day stand a chance with their fantasy woman"[60]. In other words, the attraction through the image of availability is a clearly marketable factor in the idol music business.

Similar things are seen in the metal scene. Van Noordenburg described his experiences at live shows of befriended Japanese bands and told me that generally Japanese band members must uphold an image of being single, even if many of them are actually married. They must be available to the audience so the audience can feel like they can give them all their attention. Not being available would result in the fans potentially giving the band less attention, not just at the concert but at home when listening to or thinking about the band. At a concert of Unveil Raze, a band from Nagoya, the partner at the time of one of the guitarists told van Noordenburg that she could not come too near or display affection towards her partner at the venue, which could lead to that her getting threatened by fans to stay away from their favourite performer[61]. This is of course not always the case; there are notable exceptions to this trend. For example, the bassist of Outrage, a band that together with Loudness were the pioneers of Japanese heavy metal from the 80s, who took his wife everywhere they went and happily introduced her to friends and fans.

Altogether, the structuring of live performances around bands booking venues, transnational sentiments within the scene and idolisation of performers are three critical features of the Tokyo heavy metal scene that have important implications for the way people experience music, performance and subculture. The interviews performed for this thesis were critical in coming to these conclusions, as they yielded valuable data and were tremendously helpful in the research of ritualised practices in the scene, which is what the next chapter focuses on.

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[58] Lorraine Plourde, "Babymetal and the Ambivalence of Cuteness," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 3 (2018): 293.

[59] Richardson, Marketing Affect, 159.

[60] Yuka Kiuchi, "Idols You Can Meet: AKB48 and a New Trend in Japan's Music Industry," *Journal of Popular Culture* 50, no. 1 (February 2017): 41.

[61] The band, the guitarist's partner and Van Noordenburg are mutual friends, as she runs a tattoo shop in Nagoya, that Van Noordenburg and his friends and bandmates visited regularly during their stays.

Chapter 4

Discussion: ritualised elements in heavy metal performances

Figure 4: Cigarettes and hairspray backstage. Japanese metal band Phantom Excaliver is preparing for a show backstage. Still taken from the official live clip of the song "青春爆走物語": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XDgPVWfVt4&t=75s

This chapter will attempt to identify ritualistic elements of live performances in the metal scene in Tokyo. Identifying the presence of ritualised elements within live performances using Bell's dimensions of ritual as a theoretical framework can yield some interesting insights into Japanese subculture, and even ritual theory. The four dimensions I focus on are traditionalism, disciplined invariance, sacral symbolism and performance. I show their presence in live footage and images from various small live houses in Tokyo and point out ritualised elements that are seen, using relevant literature and the experiences of interlocutors to attest and elucidate these claims. The accounts of my interlocutors were particularly useful in the process of this research, as it helped me identify people and places to investigate further. Through the interviews I got to know places like Asakusa Deathfest in Tokyo and people like the band Unveil Raze, who were discussed before as a befriended band of some of my interlocutors. In closing, I engage closer with Bell's final dimension, performance, evaluate her analysis and reconsider it in the light of my data. The first element primarily has to do with the creation of the appropriate setting.

4.1 The live house as a ritual site

As discussed previously, the practice of ritual essentially revolves around demarcating certain actions as special, as opposed to mundane. An evident way to do this, is by physically demarcating a certain space as ritual, away from ordinary life. This happens in a very overt way in the metal scene in Tokyo. Live houses are often hidden from the streets, tucked away in basements or even on a higher floor in buildings. The first step into the ritual realm, is therefore a physical one. When going to famous live house Cyclone in Shibuya, one gets a sense of moving into a different world. Going down the stairs, it looks as if one is going into one of the many basements along the streets in Shibuya, but one quickly notices the presence of band stickers and concert posters[62].

This is critically important for setting the atmosphere for an evening of heavy metal music, it is not at all inappropriate to recognise live houses as a ritual space.

A lot has been written about the ritual function of transition spaces, for instance, there is a comparison to be made with another ritual space: the tea garden. In the tea ritual guests move through various spaces separated by gates, to prepare them mentally and physically for the ritual. First, guests go through the outer garden, which features a lot of plants and flowers, after which they move through the inner garden, which is a lot more subdued and abstract, to finally arrive in the tea hut, which is located in the inner garden[63]. The parallels between tea gardens and live houses in Tokyo are quite clear: the staircase can be thought of as the outer garden, being a liminal space between the outside world (the mundane), and the concert hall (the ritual). The entrance hall is like the inner garden, representing the ritual world, a highly stylised place, filled with meaning, while the concert hall is like the tea hut, the enclosed space in which the ritual actually takes place. I therefore argue that the physical space of performance is of ritual significance in the Tokyo heavy metal scene, which is used potently to create special meaning and sense of intimacy and safety that is I think is important to the enjoyment of participating in such an event.

4.2 Traditionalism: Ritualising visual aesthetics

The next ritualised aspect is found in the visual aesthetic and presentation of performers. The clothing a performer wears is of importance in any musical stage performance, from classical music to pop music[64]. Bell notes the importance of clothing as a form of traditionalism in many

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[62] Winston Sterzel, "The Japanese UNDERGROUND Scene FEW people see!," Serpentza, uploaded 27 June 2018, educational video, 1:47-4:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFSPabK1NLk.
[63] Dorinne Kondo, "The way of Tea: A Symbols Analysis," *Man* 20, no. 2 (1985): 290.
[64] Noola K Griffiths, "'Posh music should equal posh dress': an investigation into the concert dress and physical appearance of female soloists," *Psychology of Music* 38 no. 2 (February 2010): 171.
Janice Miller, *Fashion and music*, (Oxford: Berg, 2011).

ritual-like events[65], this section discusses how visual aesthetics and clothing perform this role within the scene in Tokyo. According to my interlocutors, performers in this scene take a live show very seriously, and one way this is visible is in the way they prepare visually. The importance of visual aesthetics in Japan can be seen when looking historically at the subgenre of visual *kei* (ヴィジュアル系), a subgenre of heavy rock music that developed in the 1980s in Japan[66], which left its traces in the musical landscape of Japan today. This style is characterised by flamboyant and androgynous aesthetics. "While it is ostensibly a music-based scene, visual *kei* is difficult to define in terms of musical style. This is at least partially because visual *kei* did not develop around a particular locus of music, but rather around one of performance and aesthetic"[67]. It seems that through the influence of visual *kei*, visual elements in music presentation have become a crucial part of the contemporary heavy metal scene.

In the Japanese metal scene, visual aesthetics play an important role in the marketing and live performances of metal bands, from the small bands playing places one of the many underground live houses to the most famous celebrity-like artists playing Club Citta and Tokyo Dome. Interlocutors described the great care taken by performers to look a certain premeditated way to present themselves exactly as they envisioned. Relevant here is that even though internationally, metal performers can often have the image of roughness, messy long hair, wearing on stage whatever clothes they happened to be wearing that day. That type of roughness is very rare in the Japanese scene: in case the aesthetic is used, every spike of hair can be assumed to be put there on purpose. The backstage room of live houses is therefore sometimes half-jokingly described as one large cloud of cigarette smoke and hairspray by some of my interlocutors, when performing together with Japanese bands. When Dutch metal band Shinigami performed together with Unveil Raze, they saw their Japanese colleagues spend considerable time backstage looking at themselves in the mirror, posing, flexing their muscles and checking their hair[68]. I believe these experiences to be somewhat representative of the attention to visuals in the scene and rather than dismiss this as vanity on the part of the Japanese performers, I argue devoting this much time to a non-musical element of a mainly musical performance demonstrates a ritualised seriousness of Japanese band members.

A case study on rock festival goers found that "during the festival, consumers momentarily abandon their usual identity. […] people leave their identity by a visual transformation that

[65] Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, 146-7.
[66] Ken McLeod, "Visual Kei: Hybridity and Gender in Japanese Popular Culture," *Young* 21, no. 4 (2013): 309.
[67] Adrianne Renee Johnson, "*Jos*ō or "gender free"? Playfully queer "lives" in visual *kei*,*" Asian Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (2020): 122.
[68] This came up during various interviews I conducted with the members of Shinigami.

happens through clothing"[69]. While this need for visual transformation is not as ubiquitous among Japanese concert goers, this is quite true for many performers. In part through their meticulous visual transformation, performers take on a different identity, which they present to the audience and is a critical part of shaping their experience. "Clothes are seen as facilitators of immersion in the experience"[70]. Therefore, visual aesthetics are an essential ritualised component of a concert night that can tie all other elements of a performance together, as will become clear in the next paragraphs.

I present two distinct aesthetics here, both with their own goal. The first is what I describe as thematic cosplay and the second is a more 'traditional' heavy metal band look. In the first case, a good example is female symphonic metal singer Mai Yajima. Her music consists of heavy guitar and synthesiser-based metal, with clean, melodic vocals. Thematically, her songs employ gothic or vampire inspired imagery. This is found in the lyrics, album and promotional artwork and live performances[71]. During a performance she wears elaborate costumes, in accordance with the thematic material. The costumes functioning to tie the lyrical themes, marketed aesthetic and stage theatrics together into one cohesive performance. Interesting to note is that the rest of the band wears much simpler clothing, including a mask to conceal their individual characteristics, making them blend into the background[72]. It is common practice in Japan for large musical acts that have one or a few members that are considered to be the most important – like a solo artist, idol or band where the core members do not play every instrument, for the backup band to be in the background, at the very back of the stage out of the spotlights (literally in this case) or tucked away in an orchestra pit.[73]

Heavy metal is a very band-centric genre, and a performance would probably not work so well if part of the band was not visible on stage, so the division between main performer and backing band seems to be made using clothing and concealment of identity. The most well-known example of this trend is likely BABYMETAL, in which the three idol girls that make up the marketed product of BABYMETAL wear their signature black and red costumes, and the backing band wear long white robes and white mask-like makeup[74]. The difference in clothing reinforces the

[69] Damien Chaney, ""Look! I'm Not the Same Person!" The Role of Clothing in Consumers Escapism," presented at Association for Consumer Research North American Conference 2014, Baltimore: 3-4.
[70] Chaney, Not the same person, 3.
[71] Album titles like "BLOODTHIRSTY" (2017) and "Hell on Earth" (2020) are exemplar of the general thematic tendencies, dealing with dark themes like death, suffering and the afterlife.
[72] Two of her performances in Tokyo, one at Shinjuku CLUB SCIENCE (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIwZunEIDRU), and one at Shimokitazawa Shangri La (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiklgD6Lyuc) as a reference.
[73] Illustrative examples of this include live performances of pioneers in the Japanese rock scene The Alfee, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTRrUEP2oUI) or singer Kana Hanazawa, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lph9ubW6hw8).
[74] Plourde, Babymetal, 294.

focus on the main performers by directing the attention of the audience and is conducive to an idolising experience of focussed attention to a single or few entities. This is clearly a ritualised aspect of the performance, as intentional design of the stage becomes an essential carrier of meaning. Without its guiding presence it simply would not have the same impact.

The traditional metal band aesthetic is conducive of a fundamentally different experience. It is one that is more similar to the internationally conventional heavy metal concert. The image comes from mainly American bands from the late 80s onwards playing in thrash and death metal subgenres, bands like the big four of thrash metal (Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth and Anthrax) or the pioneers of death metal Cannibal Corpse and Death. These genres were in part a reaction to the extreme flamboyance of glam metal in the early 80s, something that was stereotypically associated with spandex, big hair and flashy guitar solos. Instead, the bands in these subgenres had a much soberer aesthetic, both in terms of visuals and sound. On the one hand flamboyant stage wear was replaced with jeans and black t-shirts with band logos, and melodic songs featuring synthesisers and high-pitched vocals were replaced with crushingly heavy guitar riffs, hard and fast drumming and the signature shouting and growling vocals[75]. Rooted in this style, there is the desire to be real. Dressing like they did was part of being real, as opposed to dressing like a "poser". In an interview about then deceased singer and guitarist of the band Death, Chuck Shuldiner, guitarist for Cannibal Corpse, Pat O'Brien, described Chuck as a very real person. "He was definitely not a poser. I mean he would go up on stage wearing sandals"[76]. It is therefore clear that the way one dresses is not just superficial and carries great meaning to the people inside heavy metal subculture.

I argue this is the image many bands in the scene in Tokyo try to emulate. Typically, the bands using this style are in the heavier subgenres. A lot of bands from Asakusa Deathfest 2018 have been recorded and put on YouTube. It is a festival that takes place every year in Tokyo, having a selection of the heaviest local and international bands on the bill. For instance, the bands NECROPHILE and INTESTINE BAALISM are Japanese death grind bands, stylistically coherent with many international bands[77]. Superficially there does not seem to be much that differentiates these local bands from an international band like Pestilence, that performed at the same event the next year. One fundamental difference however is that in their daily lives, members of Japanese bands generally do not wear this kind of clothing, even outside of work, while those in Pestilence

[75] For a 1993 concert in Moscow, Cannibal Corpse released a live tape called "Cannibal Corpse Eats Moscow Alive". Included in this release is the full concert and interluding tour footage, showing the band as they travel around the city and prepare for their gig. It is a clear demonstration of what the visual aesthetic of heavy metal was at that time. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VPlzvEP1DQ.

[76] Cannibal Corpse - Pat plays a tribute to chuck Schuldiner https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDSjTwusH5I 1:40-1:53.

[77] NECROPHILE @ Asakusa Deathfest 2018 (Tokyo) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1drGwgfJ9nI INTESTINE BAALISM @ Asakusa Deathfest 2018 (Tokyo) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhrZ8PfQEUM.

can and do[78] (something more akin to the before described situation of death metal bands of the late 1980s and early 1990s).

The fact that Japanese bands choose to wear this type of clothing on stage, while not actually wearing it in their daily life, (something that is paradoxically at odds with the original intention of the clothing style) makes it a conscious action, clearly meant to call up the image that is associated with this style. As noted in the review, engaging with a shared (in this case inherited) cultural traditional is a prominent function of ritual and it is what is happening in the Tokyo scene. In both cases discussed here, the clothing worn by performers accomplish something meaningful. They complete a musical performance by tying in the themes of the music and cultural associations into one coherent whole. Like the clothing the Buddhist priests wear during a Buddhist ritual reflects the traditions of the particular sect and completes the setting and atmosphere appropriate for the occasion, the clothing worn by performers at metal performances in Tokyo functions in a similar way.

4.3 Ritual invariance

The next ritual aspect often seen in metal performances in Tokyo is what is referred by Bell as disciplined invariance[79]. The relevance of this ritual dimension is such that it shows these acts on stage are done consciously, are meant to be part of the performance and are more than just incidental occurrences.

The first aspect is the rehearsed performance of songs, which is evidently present in any musical performance, as without rehearsing there can hardly be a concert performance of earlier recorded material. To say this in itself is explicitly ritualised, is of course superfluous, not everything that is practiced or rehearsed beforehand is ritualising. However, in metal concerts it is common for band members to engage in theatrics like head banging, making grimaced faces and waving at the audience in attempts to excite them. Seeing Shinigami perform the same song once in soundcheck, and once during a performance, made this abundantly clear. This happens in performances of all sizes in many different places. Many times, bands will practice playing while head banging specifically, just because playing accurately while doing so is a separate skill that needs to be trained. Things like synchronised head banging to the rhythm of a song are not uncommon in metal, there is obviously high levels of coordination and practice involved in doing this successfully. There will therefore often be some degree of rehearsing as part of stage theatrics.

[78] This became clear to me after interviewing two of the band members in private settings.
[79] Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, 150.

Another ritualised part of a performance happens in between songs. As intermezzo between songs, or at the end of the set, sometimes the singer, or another member of the band would engage with the audience by telling them a story. Several of my interviewees spoke about seeing this happen. Marc van Peski, who accompanied Pestilence and Bleeding gods as a photographer during their Japanese tour in 2018 and 2019, was one of them[80]. During these tours, they were accompanied by several local bands. Marc recalled being quite surprised to hear those bands take a considerable amount of time out of their sets to tell the audience a story, to which the audience intently listened, and laughed from time to time. He summed it up quite nicely when he said "I don't understand Japanese, but you do notice that the things they tell are the same every time. it is I think a bit of a stage act, also the way they move, it always kind of reminds me of the 80s". This is where the invariance component is clearly visible.

Another interesting example of invariance is performed by the audience as choreographed or coordinated participation. Watching a live recording of Unveil Raze filmed from the audience, I noticed the front row (consisting exclusively of female fans) engaging in synchronised head banging, varying in accordance with sections of the song[81]. During most of the song audience member were pumping their fists to the rhythm of the music, while switching to head banging for the most intense parts and holding up their open hand during melodic parts. What surprised me most about it was the timing and precision at which these changes happened. It is clearly premeditated and coordinated, an evident example of disciplined invariance in a heavy metal performance. The way these choreographs come to be remain as of now a mystery to me, something that could perhaps be studied in the future.

The importance of invariance is delivering on the expectations the audience has of the performer and the event, as well as the expectations the performer has of the audience.
Marc's mention of the heavy metal scene in the 1980s is unsurprising, as in the heydays of glam metal in Los Angeles in the late 1980s, these types of stage acts were very common. It comes as no surprise perhaps that this performance element is present in the scene, considering the similarities and influences of 1980s heavy metal on the Japanese scene that were mentioned before in the previous chapter.

[80] I conducted this interview at his home. An avid guitar collector himself gave us an initial topic to talk about, which made the atmosphere friendly and open from the start. What made this interview unique compared to the others, is that Marc was not there as a musician, but as a photographer, which gave him insight into things that performers might not be immediately aware of.
[81] Live recording of Unveil Raze performing their hit song "Red Jade". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7k-yW8RUe4.

4.4: Reconsidering Bell

Let us turn once again to Bell and her theory on ritual. Evaluating her final dimension "performance" is a good way to tie together this chapter and see the place of ritual in musical performance and vice versa. Bell describes performance as a dimension and talks at length about ritual qualities of theatre performance. Her main point is that a theatre performance is a multi-sensory experience that can be framed as something distinct through the construction of a condensed totality using symbolism[82]. While this is certainly interesting, she does not discuss musical performance at all. In my opinion there are considerable differences between theatre and musical performance in terms of meaning, application, and the interaction of participants that it deserves to be recognised on its own. While this chapter showed how the application of this framework to heavy metal performances in Tokyo has in reaching a deeper understanding of meaning in the scene, this section discusses where her discussion of the performance dimension is adequate in describing ritualised actions in musical performance, and where more nuance is required. Rather than a refutation of her work, I seek to broaden its application and call attention to ritualisation as important process within subcultures.

In my opinion musical and theatre performances have one crucial difference; the person speaking on a theatre stage is clearly a character whereas the musical performer is still himself. While there are of course examples in metal (particularly black metal) where the performers do in fact play a character on stage, they are few and far between. Particularly in the thrash and death metal subgenres where, as discussed before, there is an ideology of being your true self, this is almost unheard of, which multiple interlocutors confirmed. The line can start to blur however when one takes the concept of a stage persona into consideration. George Oosthoek, vocalist of thrash death metal band Shinigami described that performing is like an outlet for him, where he projects and amplifies certain things in himself to create the best experience for the audience possible[83]. Oosthoek is famous for his vigorous dancing and facial expressions while performing, something says he just enjoys doing and can bring out on stage to great effect. Nick Holleman, vocalist for the band Powerized, goes even a bit further in this: like Oosthoek he said he magnifies something within himself to create an atmosphere that fits the performance at that moment, even taking on a bit of a character for certain parts if the whole performance needs it[84]. He described how songs are

[82] Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, 160-1.
[83] I first met Oosthoek at a live performance of Shinigami, where I had the chance to interview multiple members of the band. A few days after I visited him once more to have a more in-depth conversation without the pressure and time constraints of a live performance.
[84] I interviewed Holleman on two separate occasions, once as part of my initial fieldwork and once more over the phone for some additional questions.

often written with a certain feeling in mind, by channelling these emotions as it were, he can give everything the role needs at that moment, without losing sight of himself.

A stage persona of a musical performer is therefore usually rooted safely within the performer, which is fundamentally different in characters in a theatre show. With Powerized Holleman aims to integrate theatrical elements to create a holistic performance, to draw the audience in by creating distance and taking away any relatability to the audience members' experiences. He said, "If people hear you tune your guitar or something, that makes it relatable, like "oh that could have been me" but in watching a complete show, people immediately get a sense of it being unreachable, which turns it into an experience". This demonstrates that varying degrees of theatrical acting can be used effectively to shape the experience of the audience according to what is fitting to the occasion and scene. While this kind of theatrics is not as common in his home country, Holleman expressed the idea that these theatrics are relatively common in the Tokyo scene, which this chapter helps to substantiate: As mentioned, there is ample room for the non-musical aspects of a performance, some of which can be viewed within this discussion of ritualising performance.

It presents some unique opportunities and challenges to the performer. As discussed in last chapter, heavy metal is a genre that draws heavily on tradition as a subculture for its identity. I argue the use of theatrics allows the performer to draw from this tradition using symbols, signs and conventions as part of stage theatrics. The things described here point to something that is not entirely covered by Bell's "performance" dimension. Whereas a theatre actor can communicate symbols by suspending disbelief entirely, the musical performer can walk the line between symbols and reality, by using the signs and symbols that connect their performance to the tradition, while still clearly being themselves. Musical performance in this scene has the unique ability to vary formalism and symbolism through the fluid entity of the stage persona. I argue this is an interesting addition to Bell's definition of ritual-like behaviour and important to be aware of in the study of musical subcultures.

In short, live houses in Tokyo can be seen as ritual sites, being both physically and figuratively removed from everyday life and upon entering, one moves from the mundane world to the ritual world. Next, the way artists use their physical appearance on stage through clothing can be a potent way to unify musical, thematic and cultural elements into one coherent performance. Third, both the performer and the audience regularly engage in rehearsed and coordinated behaviour, structuring the performance and delivering on expectations of all parties. These three ritualised elements can be interpreted as communicating certain signs, in both directions between performer and audience members among each-other. Their presence shows the symbolic significance visiting a heavy metal performance has to the people in Tokyo. Lastly, contrasting Bell's description of the theatre performance and musical performance of heavy metal in Tokyo I argue a theatre actor

usually speaks through the character, completely inside the world of symbols, while a musician is always rooted in himself, allowing him to move between the real and symbolic world. I think this is a relevant nuance to Bell's framework, which when employed can provide interesting new insights about the ritual nature of heavy metal music in Japan and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Heavy metal performance through the ritualised lens

This thesis has studied Japanese heavy metal and analysed the place of ritual and ritualised action within the scene in Tokyo. I argued that analysing behaviour and phenomena within the scene from a perspective of ritual theory can lead to a deeper understanding of the scene, performers and audience members, as well as the meaning they derive from participation. My primary research builds on existing ideas and theoretical models to reach, a deeper understanding of heavy metal as a subculture in Japanese society. Returning to Matsue's work, from which my research departed, for a moment, I proposed to look beyond the two Japanese concepts of *ganbaru* and *gaman suru* as expressions of ritual within the scene in Tokyo. Rather, physical location and setting, conscious stylistic and aesthetic choices and rehearsed performance elements are clearly ritualised components of a live performance. They create distance from regular life; the place, the aesthetic, the actions, all in stark contrast to everyday existence to create a valuable subcultural experience for all participants.

The first chapter established a link to scholarship on ritual and music and showed the place ritualised action can have in different performance traditions. In the canon of ethnomusicology, the heavy metal subculture, especially in Japan is still quite understudied and through studying the literature on ritual, I came to believe taking the ritual perspective would be a fruitful way to investigate this subculture in Japan more. The second chapter explained the structure of the Tokyo heavy metal scene based on direct accounts of Dutch and Australian metal musicians with touring experience in Japan which I interviewed. The way heavy metal is enjoyed in Japan is influenced in part by the great diversity of bands that play on one night, and the idolising tendencies of Japanese fans. Furthermore, a collectivist makes individual expression (which is a key value in the subculture) a bit harder, which could exacerbate ritualising behaviours due to greater distance from everyday life. For the last chapter I looked at these ritualised performance elements in more detail using Bell's ritual framework, for which the aforementioned interviews were tremendously helpful.

Heavy metal is a genre that places great value in its traditions, and through ritualised symbolic actions and symbols, musicians and listeners can engage with these traditions and expressions of values. Use of the devil horns symbol or dressing in metal fashion allows people to come together in this subcultural experience and express their individuality as part of this group. In this way, ritualisation can be seen as a mediator in the dynamics between mainstream and subculture. By putting on a black band shirt and banging their head at a live show, people make a

conscious decision to stray from mainstream culture, which as many of my interlocutors describe could serve as a sort of outlet or breathing space.

While the things I argue here are not particularly new or revolutionary in terms of understanding ritual, it is my aim to use the ritual studies approach to bring light the dynamics between sub and mainstream culture, traditions and meaning that remain invisible if ritualisation is not accounted for. In other words, the point is not that Japanese heavy metal has something new to say to ritual studies, but that ritual studies can help us understand Japanese heavy metal more. For instance, the cloud of cigarette smoke and hairspray Shinigami noticed in the backstage area together with Unveil Raze is only understood as a meaningful performance element from the perspective of ritualisation.

This thesis is by no means a definitive exploration of heavy metal in Tokyo but has proven to be a first step for me into a place where a lot still is to be studied and fully understood. The research has its shortcomings as well; most notably that it is not performed in Japan or with Japanese interlocutors and has a relatively small sample size. Chances are that discussing all of this with a larger group of Japanese interlocutors will produce very different kinds of insight. The next logical step for me would be to spend more time in Japan myself, studying the scene up close to reach deeper understandings and come to more meaningful conclusions. One more dynamic that could be studied from a ritual perspective is the relation between men and women. As alluded to in the introduction, much of the heavy metal scene is centred around strong male values and the idolisation of bandmembers can result in some interesting gendered dynamics in all directions. Studying gendered relations in Japanese metal from a ritual perspective could yield valuable insights on this subculture.

After my initial fieldwork and research was finished, I visited a number of live shows by some of my interlocutors and while speaking again about their experiences in Japan, they assured me the best way to learn about the scene is to just to play there yourself to really feel the force of metal in Japan.

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