

Metal, The End of the World, and Radical Environmentalism: Ecological Apocalypse in the Lyrics of Earth Crisis

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I was 17 years old when I got my hands on Earth Crisis's EP *Firestorm* (1993). I recognized the music as hardcore, but the powerful distorted guitar riffs, heavy drums and aggressive vocals were reminiscent of extreme metal. Although I instantly fell in love with the music, it was the lyrics that had the strongest impact on me. The impassioned calls for animal liberation, veganism, and ecological justice changed my worldview. A few months after this initial encounter I had become vegetarian, and later still I was both vegan and straight edge. Though I have since 'dropped the edge' I am still a vegetarian and subscribe to many of the issues of animal liberation and ecoethics positions advocated by the band. What I did not pay much attention to back then, however, was the band's heavy use of Christian terminology and imagery, particularly Christian end-times discourse. This is very curious indeed, as the hardcore genre in general, though not necessarily opposed to religion, is still very secular in character. Indeed, in the 1990s straight edge hardcore scene Earth Crisis was one of the few bands that used this sort of language. The focus of this article is precisely this, the use of religious and apocalyptic vocabulary and symbolism by Earth Crisis. I will contextualize the band in the hardcore and straight edge scenes, as well as in the new environmental and animal rights movements from the 1960s onward.

A few words on terms such as 'apocalypse', 'apocalypticism', and 'Armageddon' are in order. Though the word 'apocalypse' strictly speaking refers to Jewish and Christian biblical writings containing prophetic revelation of 'an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom', it has more and more come to be applied as an all-round term for 'a great disaster' (M-W 2010a). As such, it has lost some of its potential positivism (in the destruction of evil and the institution of a divine world order) and simply signifies 'the end of the world' – perhaps a symptom of a secular world? Similarly, the term 'Armageddon', originally referring to the time or place of final fight between the forces of good and evil in the biblical tradition, has come to signify a general 'end of all things'. The same applies to a term such as 'Ragnarök', from Old Norse mythology. Apocalypticism, thus, today often refers to 'a doctrine concerning an imminent end of the world', whereas a classic understanding would add 'and an ensuing general resurrection and final judgment'

(M-W 2010b). In this article the terms are used in something in between their original and general meanings. Overall, *Earth Crisis* does deal with 'the end of all things', though ideas of final judgment are not fully absent, just the notion of a supernatural being acting as judge.

Hard Core and the Straight Edge Movement

I'm a person just like you, but I've got better things to do
than sit around and fuck my head, hang out with the living dead
snort white shit up my nose, pass out at the shows
I don't even think about speed, that's something I just don't need
I've got straight edge (Minor Threat, 'Straight Edge', on EP *Minor Threat* 1981).¹

These words by the Washington DC based band Minor Threat came to function as a manifesto for a new youth movement coming into existence in the early 1980s – the Straight Edge (or sXe) movement. The Minor Threat song 'Out of Step' further clarified the movement's ideology with the line 'I don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck – at least I can fucking think'² (Minor Threat, 'Out of Step', on Album *Out of Step* 1983). The key issue was the perceived overindulgence in alcohol, drugs, and promiscuous sex in the US punk and hardcore scene, which instead of representing true rebellion was perceived as reinforcing societal norms (Haenfler 2006: 7, 37). Straight Edgers would discard the evils of older generations and make true individual freedom possible by abstaining from using drugs and engaging in promiscuous sex, and instead focus on clean-living and 'positivity'. As Ross Haenfler notes: 'Straight edgers claim that resisting social standards and expectations allows them to follow their own, more meaningful, path in life, toward greater self-actualization' (Haenfler 2006: 47). Almost thirty years after Minor Threat's original manifesto, abstaining from drugs, alcohol, and tobacco still constitute the core values and absolute rules in the scene (Haenfler 2006: 10). The 'X'-symbol often used by scene members to identify themselves originates in Washington DC as well. State laws required music venues to let minors in, and in order to prevent them from purchasing alcohol their hands were marked with a large X. Certain youngsters, including ones old enough to drink, adopted the sign as a mark of pride, signalling that they chose not to intoxicate themselves (Haenfler 2006: 7-8, 35).

Since its inception, Straight Edge has been closely linked to the genre of music called hardcore, though the genre itself is broader than the movement (Haenfler 2006: 9). Hardcore, or hardcore punk, developed out of late 1970s punk music

¹ Lyrics quoted with the kind permission of Dischord records.

² Lyrics quoted with the kind permission of Dischord records.

(Waksman 2009: 9), with pioneering American bands such as the Misfits (first single in 1977, first EP in 1980), Black Flag (first EP in 1978), and Dead Kennedys (first single in 1979, first album in 1980). The North American connection is so strong that some even describe hardcore as Americanized punk. Hardcore is more extreme than the earlier punk on almost all levels: harsher in sound, faster, and often treating more controversial subjects. In terms of image, though, the opposite is true. Where punks adorned themselves in t-shirts with offensive texts or symbols, torn jeans, leather jackets, safety pins, and colourful hairdos often in 'mohawk' or some other radical style, hardcore kids³ commonly favoured a more clean-cut style with shorter hair and more conventional clothing such as jeans and t-shirts (often with band logos) (Haenfler 2006: 9). Especially amongst 'Victory style' (see below) and metalcore fans tattoos and a muscled physique was common. Both hardcore and sXe became global phenomena already by the early to mid 1980s, with a truly global breakthrough in the 1990s, along with the commercialization of hardcore. Local scenes exist in many parts of the world outside the US, such as the Northern Swedish scene of the 1990s centred on the city of Umeå, with local record labels such as Desperate Fight Records and renowned sXe bands such as Refused (first EP in 1993).

Haenfler divides the sXe scene into six different stages, although he points out that such a division can only function as an ideal type (Haenfler 2006: 11-17). The old school stage (1979-1985), represented by bands such as Minor Threat, was followed by the 'youth crew' (1985-1991), 'emo-influenced/politically correct' (1989-1995), 'Victory style' (1991-2001), 'youth crew revival' (1997-2006), and 'metalcore' (1998-2006⁴) stages. It is the 'Victory style'-stage, named after the most important sXe/hardcore record label in the period – Victory Records, which is of particular interest here. Victory Records bands, such as Strife (first Victory Records album in 1994), Snapcase (first Victory Records album in 1994), and Earth Crisis, ushered a heavier sound more influenced by metal than by earlier hardcore. These bands, particularly Earth Crisis, were at the forefront of a hybridization of metal and hardcore commonly termed metalcore (Haenfler 2006: 16; see Waksman 2009: 213). This connection between metal and what is essentially punk rock is in itself nothing new. Throughout the history of both genres there has been cross-fertilization (Waksman 2009: 7). In hardcore we have the above example of metalcore, and in metal subgenres such as thrash and speed metal are highly indebted to punk (Waksman 2009: 13).

In addition to the metal-influenced aural qualities, the Victory era bands also brought a renewed focus on political issues. While vegetarianism had been an ingredient in punk and hardcore for a long time, and an aspect of sXe ideology itself

³ 'Kid' is a common in-scene term for participants in the hardcore scene.

⁴ Note that 2006 is the year of publication for Haenfler's book and does not necessarily signal the end of the metalcore-stage.

from the mid 1980s (Haenfler 2006: 53; Wood 2006: 39-40), the Victory era bands brought issues of veganism and environmentalism to the forefront (Haenfler 2006: 16; see Wood 2006: 41). In some scenes, such as the Umeå one, the animal liberation cause became the primary points of discussion and political action, though clean living and positivity still formed the basis of sXe identity. In essence, it became more or less obligatory for an sXer to be vegetarian, and preferably vegan (Haenfler 2006: 53; Wood 2006: 45-48). At the same time, certain individuals and bands advocated a more 'hardline' or 'militant' approach, including a more active stance in promoting the core sXe values as well as isolated instances of prejudice and even violence towards people who did not abjure these values (See Haenfler 2006: 49-50, 82). In addition, the metalcore of the Victory era bands also brought hardcore, and straight edge, to the mainstream (Haenfler 2006: 170). Major independent metal record labels such as Roadrunner Records and Century Media have signed hardcore bands and many bands have played at large metal festivals such as Ozzfest (Haenfler 2006: 17). A significant role in the commercialization and popularization of certain sXe ideals and approaches was played by the (non-sXe) band Rage Against the Machine, the singer of the which, Zach De La Rocha, had previously been in the sXe band Inside Out (Haenfler 2006: 185).

The New Ecological/Animal Rights Ethos

In order to understand Earth Crisis a contextualization is needed. I will therefore provide a brief history of the Western environmentalism and animal welfare/rights movements. Particular focus will be given to more radical developments in the English-speaking world.

Classic American environmentalism developed on three different premises: Wildlife management, conservationism, and preservationism (see Brulle 2000: 133-172). Wildlife management has its origin in organizations for Game Protection, such as the New York Sportsmen's Association (1844), which had the aim of protecting the 'gentlemanly activity' of hunting – as opposed to the more 'lowly' activity of hunting in order to gather food (see Gottlieb 2005: 64) – by preventing overhunting of important game animals. A shift towards wildlife management occurred in the 1930s (Brulle 2000: 135-143). Conservationism, quite similarly, builds on a 'utilitarian and technological/managerial perspective regarding nature', based on the idea of man's stewardship of the earth, and contends that 'nature is a resource to be used by society to meet human needs' (Brulle 2000: 145-146). The goal is thus to protect aspects of nature which are of significance for human beings from overuse (Brulle 2000: 146-148; Gottlieb 2005: 55). This idea, along with its reliance on economic interests, has continued in the 1980s and 1990s with the idea of sustainable development (Brulle 2000: 156-158). The movement gained momentum in the late nineteenth century US, e.g. with the passing of the Federal Forest Reserve Act in 1891 and the creation of forest reserves such as Yellowstone Park in the late 1890s (Brulle

2000: 150-151; Gottlieb 2005: 55-57). Finally, the preservation movement focused on the 'spiritual and psychological relationship between humans and the natural environment' and saw nature as having value not only due to its possible economic significance but primarily due to its aesthetic beauty, and 'critical to the spiritual well being of humanity' (Brulle 2000: 161; Gottlieb 2005: 57). An early and important preservationist group, still active in the 2000s, is the Sierra Club founded by John Muir in 1892 (Brulle 2000: 166; Gottlieb 2005: 52, 56).

In the same period developments were also occurring on the animal welfare front, but this time more actively in Britain. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA⁵) was founded in the UK in 1824, with an American equivalent – the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) being formed in 1866 (Bekoff 1988: xvii). From the 1840s, the terms vegetarian and vegetarianism were used as designates for people advocating meatless diets, and the first organized vegetarian association – the Vegetarian Society – was founded in the UK in 1847, and an American equivalent – The American Vegetarian Convention – in 1850 (Beardsworth 2003: 222). Later, the scope of animal welfare was broadened when societies opposed to vivisection were founded in the UK (1875) and the US (1895) (Bekoff 1998: xvii-xviii).

More radical developments occurred on both fronts from the mid 1900s. The issue of environmental health hazards in the urban environment due to environmental degradation had been approached by Alice Hamilton already in the 1910s and 1920s, but it was Rachel Carson who in the 1950s and 1960s voiced the new environmentalist movement concerns. With scientific scrutiny Carson discussed the dangers of pollution, and linked the issues of public health and the environment. Her use of language also signalled a new rhetoric, with descriptions of nature 'under siege' from science and technology and other terms relating to warfare. Other authors in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Paul Goodman, Herbert Marcuse, and Murray Bookchin, also linked human disease with environmental problems – and also connected the latter to structures social injustice. This rhetoric was similar to the new social protest movements of the 1960s, and environmental issues also became linked all the more strongly to issues of societal change and protest against the 'powers that be'. Overall, a view of technological progress as harmful was developing, with terms such as ecocide being used. (Gottlieb 2005: 83-92, 121-134,137-138).

The environmental movement which emerged in the late 1960s differed from the earlier movements in its ecocentric worldview (Gottlieb 2005: 43-44). Taking cue from the new left, social and environmental issues were linked and causes for environmental deterioration sought in consumerism and corporate greed.

⁵ The organization gained the patronage of Queen Victoria in 1840 and was thereafter known as the *Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Towards Animals* (RSPCA).

Resolutions were sought in value- and lifestyle-transformations which would change humanity's relation to nature as well as each other, and environmentalism was linked to personal liberation (Gottlieb 2005: 138-139, 142, 156). With the decline of the new left in the early 1970s the new environmentalism also found resonance in the so called counterculture, along with increasing criticism of 'old school' environmentalism due to its increasingly close ties to conservative forces of industry and government (Gottlieb 2005: 140-146, 150; see also 216). With ecological disasters increasingly being seen on the global level came more dystopian and pessimistic projections of end-of-the-world-scenarios through ecological catastrophes (Gottlieb 2005: 156).

On the philosophical level several a profound shift towards ecocentric perspectives occurred in the 1970s. In a seminal paper from 1973 Arne Naess' (1912-200?) distinguished between shallow ecology – an anthropocentric approach which focused on the use of natural resources for humanity – and deep ecology. A practical approach to environmentalism where the global natural environment is put at the forefront, with humanity as part of nature rather than a separated element of it, was advocated (Cooper 2000)⁶. Another viewpoint of considerable impact is James Lovelock's so-called Gaia-hypothesis; the metaphoric description of the earth in its totality, with all its combined life, as a single living organism (Allaby 2000). Similar developments occurred in the animal rights movement in Oxford, with psychologist Richard D. Ryder coining the term *speciesism* to denote the discrimination of non-human beings based on their species (Ryder 1996: 168). Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975), where speciesism is claimed as the foundation of human mistreatment of animals and vegetarianism is advocated (see Singer 1991: 151-176), popularized the term and approach. He also identifies vegetarianism as the most important act in the pursuit of animal liberation. The modern animal rights movement differs greatly from the earlier animal welfare groups in rejecting most or all uses of animals for the benefit of humankind, including the use of animals in medical experimentation and the eating of meat and other animal products.

All these developments gave the impulse for direct action and grassroots politics, active involvement by ordinary citizens was favoured (Gottlieb 2005: 219, 227). Groups such as Greenpeace (1971), and even more notably Earth First! (1980), shifted the focus away from national concerns and instead dealt with local issues on a transnational arena, while all the way being action oriented in sometimes illegal ways (Gottlieb 2005: 252-259). Along with Earth First! Groups such as Earth Liberation Front were influenced by Deep Ecology and 'ecotage' tactics – in essence

⁶ Aldo Leopold foreshadowed the new environmental movement and deep ecology already in 1940, when he proposed that wilderness had an importance in itself, beyond humanity, and significance of seeing it as an organism. In the late 1940s ideas of 'co-operating with nature' and the global nature of the ecological problem developed (Gottlieb 2005: 69-72).

sabotage – were deemed acceptable, or even preferable. A rhetoric of ‘warfare’ and ‘ecocide’ was also used (Gottlieb 2005: 258). Similarly, radical animal rights groups such as the Hunt Saboteurs Association (1963, see HSA 2010) and the Animal Liberation Front (1976, see ALF 2010) advocated illegal means to prevent the abuse of animals.

Earth Crisis and Ecological Apocalypse

Earth Crisis was started as a concept by lead singer Karl Buechner in 1989⁷ and founded as an actual band in 1991 (Rafi 2009) or 1992 (St. John n.d.), in Syracuse, NY. The members on the first release by the band, the EP *All Out War* released in 1993 by Conviction Records (re-issued by Victory Records in 1995), were, in addition to Buechner, Scott Crouse and Ben Read on guitar, Ian Edwards on bass, and Michael Riccardi on drums. Even on this early recording the metal influences of the band were obvious, although the production values were lower than on mainstream metal albums and the hardcore elements were considerably more prominent than on later recordings. The metal sound further developed on the second EP, *Firestorm* (1993, Victory Records), and had come into full bloom in the two full albums *Destroy the Machines* (1995, Victory Records) and *Gomorrah's Season Ends* (1996, Victory Records). As for the band members, Dennis Merick replaced Riccardi on drums on *Firestorm*, Kris Wiechmann replaced Read on guitar on *Destroy the Machines*, and bass player Ian Edwards brother Erick replaced Wiechmann for the band's album on major record label Roadrunner Records, *Breed the Killers* (1998). For most of its career Earth Crisis albums were released by the Chicago-based major independent label Victory Records, with the band forming one of the label's top acts. The band broke-up after the 2000 album *Slither*, but reformed for a limited number of shows in 2007 and released a new album in 2009 – *To the Death* – on the major metal label Century Media.

Around the time of the break-up of Earth Crisis Buechner and Ian and Erick Edwards formed the band Freya, and released their first full-length recording – *As the Last Light Drains* – on Victory Records in 2003. Former Earth Crisis drummer Dennis Merrick joined for the 2007 album *Lift the Curse*, but by the latest record, the 2010 album *All Hail the End*, Buechner remained the only member also playing in Earth Crisis. Freya is a sXe hardcore band like Earth Crisis, but was conceived more as an artistic expression than a political instrument (**REF**). There are, however, some interesting religious references employed by the band, including the name of the band itself, which of course refers to the Old Norse goddess of fertility.

Earth Crisis was immensely influential in the new developments in sXe hardcore in the 1990s. In terms of music, the band was key in developing and popularizing the hybridization of hardcore and punk. The latest record by the band

⁷ <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/...> Accessed 5 July 2010.

is in many ways a pure metal album, almost indistinguishable from the music of a death/thrash metal band such as Slayer – the latest album of which is even recommended to customers who buy the Earth Crisis album on the online store Amazon. Lyrically, while not being the first vegan sXe band, Earth Crisis became the foremost champion of animal liberation and environmental causes in the scene, as well as known for its ‘hardline’ or ‘militant’ approaches (Wood 2006: 51). While some Earth Crisis lyrics seemingly advocate violence, such as the killing of vivisectionists in the song ‘Wrath of Sanity’ (on the album *Destroy the Machines*, 1995), those scholars who have written most extensively on the sXe hardcore scene are unanimous in their opinion that these lyrics should not be taken literally but instead viewed as ‘creative expressions’ (Ross 2006: 51) or ‘outlets for anger’ (Haenfler 2006: 89).

The lyrics of Earth Crisis can be divided into two major thematic categories: the imminence of ecological apocalypse, and liberation (or salvation) through personal strength, integrity, and morality. It is the first of these themes which is of greater relevance in the context of this article, and it will therefore be treated in more detail. Both themes do, however, contain certain religious or spiritual dimensions. The extensive use of religious vocabulary and imagery by both Earth Crisis and Freya is particularly interesting as religion is not a prominent theme otherwise in the sXe scene⁸. As Ross Haenfler notes: ‘the group advocates no form of religion and most adherents are deeply suspicious or critical of organized faiths’ (Haenfler 2006: 45). This critical stance applies to Earth Crisis as well, who have a Christianity-critical message in its song ‘Unseen Holocaust’ on the album *Firestorm* (1993). The Christianity-based apocalyptic motifs used by the band can therefore not directly be attributed to any strong religious convictions of its members.

Ecological apocalypse, end of times, breakdown of morality

The central ingredient of the theme of ecological apocalypse is, quite naturally, the fast approaching total destruction of the ecosphere and all life in it. This destruction is often treated with terms that allude to murder. For example, the 1993 EP *All Out War* contains a song titled ‘Ecocide’, a word also used in the new environmentalist movement. The song paints a vivid picture of the world dying in fire and screams of pain with nothing but a scarred, lifeless planet remaining. Furthermore, corporate greed is suggested as the reason for this imminent destruction, and destruction as being near unstoppable due to greed silencing all protests that might have prevented it. Similarly, the song ‘Eden’s Demise’ from the EP *Firestorm* (Earth Crisis 1993b) describes the end of times in manmade ecological disasters. Here, as well, the earth is

⁸ It should be noted though that there are religious sXers (see Haenfler 2006: 73). The most notable example would be ‘Krishnacore’ bands such as 108 and Shelter. Robert T. Wood, however, notes that starting in the early 1990s there were starting to be more ‘themes and images that many would describe as Satanic in nature’, starting with mainly ‘Christian images of the apocalypse’ (Wood 2006: 58).

anthropomorphised as it is described as being tortured. The humans engaging in this destructive activity are likened to fascists, as well as demons, and the solution provided is in line with the modern animal rights movement, namely turning to veganism.

Imagery and vocabulary of this sort is common in many Earth Crisis songs. On 'Forced March', on *Destroy the Machines* (1995), a critique of modern society and its pace, with lines such as 'Humanity devours itself' and of 'this path' leading to an end. The song 'Destroy the Machines' on the same album promotes 'ecotage' to 'destroy the machines that kill the forests, that disfigure the earth'. 'Counter-aggression', biomes 'under man's attack'. 'Ecodefense'. 'Inherit the Wasteland' (*Destroy the Machines*) tells the same story: 'path of annihilation', 'spilled oils contaminates the sea', 'poisons fill the atmosphere', 'toxins infect the ground', 'deforestation scars the earth', 'the rainforests burn' and 'countless animals die', until 'there will be nothing left to save'. The song ends with repetitions of 'time is running out'. The second song of *Gomorrhah's Season Ends* predicts similar doomsday scenarios, though this time through nuclear weapons. The *Breed the Killers* opening song, 'End Begins', also presents a doomsday scenario, this time with direct reference to 'the inverse of morality' and the question 'Is the stage set for the demonic tyrant's rise?'. Other popular references to Christian apocalypse occur, such as linking Rome and Babylon. See also the song 'One Against All' on the same album, with reference to 'World War four' and warheads detonating, and destruction by 'high-tech barbarians'. The song 'Ecocide' compares corporations and their greed to 'a plague of locusts'. The song 'Death Rate Solution' refers to the coming 'Age of Aquarius' and wonders if there will still be time to correct humanity's environmental mistakes, though predictions of 'germ warfare', 'death camps', and 'mass annihilation' are made, with reference again to 'Morality dismantled'.

Morality and Righteous Vengeance

References to 'sin' and 'evil bastards' in the song 'No Allegiance' on the EP *All Out War* (1993a), about 'sell-outs'.

In the song 'Firestorm' on the EP *Firestorm* (1993b), about drugs and drug dealers 'A firestorm to purify the bane that society drowns in' as well as referring to dealers as 'demons'.

A song called 'Unseen Holocaust' on the album *Firestorm*, openly critical towards Christianity and treatment of indigenous cultures. References to 'demons', 'destruction of paradise'. Demons are also otherwise common in Earth Crisis lyrics. On the album *Gomorrhah's Season Ends* (1996) they appear in 'Names Carved into

Granite' and 'Forgiveness denied', on *Breed the Killers* (1998) in the songs 'End Begins' and 'Breed the Killer', and on the album *Slither* (2000) in the songs 'Provoke', 'Nemesis', 'Biomachines', and 'Mechanism'.

'Wrath of Sanity' (*Destroy the Machines*), about vivisectionists describe them as 'demons feeding off of innocents' pain' warned to 'reconcile your sins or your blood will have to run', although later on this is said to be too late: 'A bullet for every demon. Only your blood can cleanse you of your sin'. All this is done on a 'night of justice', by a 'knight of justice' on a 'liberation's crusade'.

The song 'Fortress' on *Destroy the Machines* combines themes of self liberation through sXe discipline and the moral degradation of the world: 'Encircled, Sodom's children on every side'. Their values and world is also described as 'profane', presumably in contrast to the true spiritual reality of the sXer.

If you refuse to change, then you're guilty and must be destroyed.

...

You're a demon with blood on your hands... I can't stand by and let the innocent die... your end is justified ('Stand By', on the EP *All Out War*, Earth Crisis 1993a)

Personal strength, spirituality, liberation

The weakness that you can't control brings animals death and pain.

The struggle I have overcome is the dark pit where you have chosen to remain. (All Out War on the EP *All Out War*, Earth Crisis 1993a).

In 'Forged in the Flames' on the EP *Firestorm*, 'The weakness that surrounds is the evil that I forsake. Never have I taken in vain the sacred vessel of my soul. I am the master of my faith, my destiny I control ... Ascension from evil with a heart that's true and strong ... the light of truth is my only guide. A knight unyielding. To the X I'm crucified.'

'Born from Pain', *Destroy the Machines* (1995), refers to strength through straight edge discipline, 'beyond that of my flesh', being one's own 'salvation' and from 'inferno into paradise'.

'The Discipline' (*Destroy the Machines*) 'amidst the ruins I survive' 'saved by myself' 'alone I climb the staircase to edification'.

Discussion

As already mentioned, the engagement with Christian themes to the considerable degree Earth Crisis does is, while not exactly unique, still very notable. As also established, 'spiritual' themes of self-empowerment, self-sufficiency, purity, and spiritual strength are a formational element of sXe hardcore. Here Earth Crisis is no different. However, an answer still needs to be provided as to the why of the Christian themes. I will attempt to provide a number of possible explanations here.

A first possible explanation comes from research on popular culture and religion provided by Lynn Schofield Clark. In her *From Angels to Aliens* (Clark 2003) Clark proposes that 'the dark side of evangelicalism' has had a major influence on popular culture, particularly in America where 'writings of American Protestantism gave a very real specific frame of reference to the topics of evil, hell, the rapture, and, more generally, the realm beyond this world' (Clark 2003: 25). This, in turn, was effected by "increasingly sophisticated understanding of the media, placed its concerns in the public imagination' and thus (American) evangelicalism itself is a major player in bringing the supernatural to the fore in popular culture, and the popular imagination (Clark 2003: 25). 'Thus, evangelicalism has inadvertently provided a framework for thinking about and representing evil in popular culture' (Clark 2003: 26). In fact, the evangelical definitions of 'end-times' and 'evil' provides something of a taken-for-granted framework for treatment of the themes in popular culture (Clark 2003: 28). According to Clark (2003: 28), evangelical definitions of evil began to gain credence in the 1970s and 1980s (the same way is more or less held by Partridge 2005: 283 – **Stephen O'Leary!**) – in part due to increased political presence, although Christian end-time narratives certainly had been a major part of everyday life in Europe since the middle ages. In the evangelical narratives of the end-times (and evil generally) the focus is commonly on *battle* and *war* against evil (Clark 2003: 28), as well as a self-understanding of being surrounded or *besieged* by the forces of evil (Clark 2003: 32).

Clark's claim that 'Evangelicalism's emergence as a cultural force has, to an unprecedented degree, placed the concept of the battle between good and evil on the public agenda' (Clark 2003: 39) may be somewhat exaggerated. Narratives of opposing forces, 'good and evil' go at least as far back as Christianity/Judaism. Certainly, the Homeric epics have their fair share of good vs. Evil-narratives (although things such as absolute evil and absolute good would seem to be a more Christian theme). Still, Clark's explanations do have currency when discussing American popular culture from the 1970s onwards, and beyond the US when we are dealing with American influences on popular culture elsewhere. Much more detailed

examination of changes in narrative structure would be needed in order to examine the potential impact of American evangelicalism.

When Clark writes that evangelicalism provides “‘publically available stock of symbols and narratives” that are incorporated into the entertainment media’ (Clark 2003: 25) she comes close to what Christopher Partridge writes on ‘occulture’ and Christian apocalypticism (see Partridge 2005: 279-295). In his two-volume *The Re-Enchantment of the West* Partridge argues that we have been witnessing a shift away from a Christian culture to a ‘spiritual/mythic/paranormal background knowledge that informs the plausibility structures of Westerners’ (Partridge 2004: 187), which can be termed ‘occulture’. ‘Occulture’ then functions as a sort of ‘reservoir’, containing elements from ‘those often *hidden, rejected and oppositional* beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism’ (Partridge 2004: 68) as well as from ‘world religions’, unorthodox science and a wide range of other stuff, from which material can be drawn in creating narratives, world-views, beliefs, practices etc. Partridge’s approach is extremely helpful in shifting the focus away from ‘self-contained grand traditions’ such as ‘Christianity’ and ‘Hinduism’, and instead focusing on how elements of these are fused together in ways which cross religious institution-borders (cf. Gordon Lynch’s notion of ‘progressive spirituality’ as another way of conceptualizing such ‘cross-border’ religiosity, Lynch 2007).

I have my reservations on whether we have an ‘occulture’ taking over from ‘Christian culture’. This is primarily on the grounds that this idea plays quite strongly into the notion of Christianity as some sort of monolithic ‘tradition’ (for a critique of the notion of ‘tradition’ in this way in religious studies, see von Stuckrad 2003). In my opinion people identifying as Christians, while holding unorthodox or even conflicting views, should still be called Christian on the basis of their self-identity. Thus, there need not be any discrepancy between ‘occulture’ and Christianity (as what could be termed esoteric elements – often deemed heretic by Church authorities – have been part of Christianity since the very early days). Quite simply, a distinction needs to be drawn between Christian institutions and official theological positions, and Christianity as a whole. However, the concept of occulture is extremely helpful in thinking about contemporary religiosity, and particularly on the role of popular culture herein.

Partridge effectively shows how Christian terminology and narrative concerning end-times is extensively used in the west, also in domains which are not Christian or even overtly religious (Partridge 2005: 279). While other sources for end-times narratives exist in occulture, such as Hindu ones, the structure of these narratives in the West are still ‘very clearly Christian’ (Partridge 2005: 280). Particularly relevant for this article is the claim that apocalypticism has been an important feature in environmentalist movements (among others) (Partridge 2005:

280; 311), and the notion that narratives of violence lie at the core of much end-times thinking which in themselves encourage 'strong good-evil dualisms and combat mythologies' (Partridge 2005: 299). The Christian evangelical/fundamentalist position also commonly places oneself (or one's group) in the realm of the righteous, existing surrounded and against the 'evil majority' (Partridge 2005: 299).

Partridge (2005: 287) presents a tripartite 'common structure' of apocalypticism: 1) a unity and structure in the view of history which is viewed as a divinely predetermined totality; 2) a pessimistic view of the present combined with a conviction of an imminent crisis; 3) proximate judgment of evil and triumph of good.

A simpler, and perhaps therefore better, explanation lies in looking at the ways in which genre conventions play a role in the lyrics of Earth Crisis. Although the band is commonly identified as a hardcore band, the main musical inspiration lies in metal – something which is acknowledged by band members (REF). In an effort to make a distinction between pop and rock music sociologist Simon Frith (2001:94-96) discusses the latter's focus on the quest for authenticity and artistic seriousness, in opposition to the perceived pursuit of mass commercial profits and lack of significant artistic aspirations of the former. In a similar vein, Keir Keightley (2001:109) sees rock as being based on a 'rejection of those aspects of mass-distributed music which are believed to be soft, safe or trivial'. The above does not suggest a distinction based on musical style and genre, but rather highlights internal discursive strategies inherent in rock music and identifies the foundation of it in a discursive construction of authenticity, uniqueness, and artistic merit. Metal⁹, or Heavy Metal, as a specific form of rock music is equally dependent on these discursive formations. Metal itself, conceived in the late 1960s/early 1970s, drew on countercultural rebellion but included far grimmer outlooks on life than the hippie 'love and peace'-message (Moberg 2008: 85; 2009b: 109). Particularly in so-called Thrash Metal (exemplified aptly by a pioneering band such as Megadeth), which itself was highly influenced by punk rock, themes of apocalypse and environmental disaster abound (e.g. Megadeth's 'Rust in Peace... Polaris' on the album *Rust in Peace* (Megadeth 1990), 'Symphony of Destruction' on the album *Countdown to Extinction* (Megadeth 1992), etc.). We need to remember the discursive trait of rebellion (see Moberg 2009b: 124)

⁹ Metal can be further divided into a varying number of sub-genres such as Metalcore, Speed, Death, Black, Thrash, and Glam Metal (and many more). In particular when it comes to Extreme Metal borders between genres are far from clear, and there is much debate among fans and musicians alike regarding the correct genre-attribution of specific bands. This has all to do with internal scenic division and identity (see Bossius 2003:87-88). These intricacies of subgenre are evident in the confusion surrounding the correct genre-attribution of the British band Venom, which arose in the 'New Wave of British Heavy Metal' and has variously been described as a Trash Metal, Death Metal, and a pioneering Black Metal band.

and the quest for authenticity inherent in rock music (Frith 2001:94-96; Keighley 2001: 109) in general, and in Metal in particular. Musically, Extreme Metal as a whole was at least partly inspired by what was experienced as a 'selling out' by more mainstream Metal acts (Kahn-Harris 2007: 2). Thus, the Earth Crisis heavy use of Christian imagery and apocalyptic motifs fits perfectly with the common metal (extreme metal, and particularly Thrash Metal) convention of using confrontational themes and apocalyptic themes, and terms such as evil, demons etc.

Subcultural capital, a term coined by Sarah Thornton (1995), refers to the ways in which members in a particular musical scene (for a treatment of the term scene as an analytical concept, see Kahn-Harris 2007: 13-15) or 'subculture' gain status in this scene by playing on the internal rules and trends of the scene. In his work on extreme metal Keith Kahn-Harris (2007: 121) writes that '[s]ubcultural capital is both endowed by others as prestige and power and claimed by scene members for themselves in the ways they perform their identities'.

Conclusion

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