In (Partial) Defence of Offensive Art: Whitehouse as Freirean Codification

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Arguments over the value of "extreme music" (metal, power electronics, noise, etc.) and the use of highly controversial imagery within these genres have existed since its inception. Detractors claim that using extreme imagery such as fascist symbols, pornography, and racially charged photographs inherently promotes the corrosive ideologies behind these images. Some purveyors of extreme music disagree, arguing that musicians use these images to explore humanity's darker elements which, in turn, allows audiences to better understand these problematic aspects of modern society. When played out within underground music communities, these arguments often devolve into name calling and accusations of censorship. However, by addressing extreme music on its own terms and critiquing the effectiveness of these genres, a more nuanced understanding of the issues intrinsically embedded within extreme music emerges. In this article, I employ this approach by exploring the music and imagery of power electronics band Whitehouse and argue that the ambiguous nature of their work partially mirrors the intention behind Paulo Freire's concept of codifications. While this notion provides some defense for extreme music more broadly, the lack of venues that promote communal explorations of these images hinders the genre's ability to achieve its own goals.

Keywords: power electronics; anti-fascist activism; Whitehouse; extreme music; codifications; Freire

Introduction

While members of anti-fascist groups have responded to the use of transgressive content and symbols in fringe heavy metal and experimental music scenes for years, the United States and Canada have seen an increased number of protests and direct actions (or, at the very least, an increased number of news stories about these protests) in the wake of the 2016 U.S. election and the rise in prominence of fascist, right wing organizations like the Alt-Right. These actions have included everything from cancelling concerts (It's Going Down, 2016; Neilstein, 2016), classifying record labels as racist

organizations (Iadorola, 2017), and, in some extreme cases, publishing photographs and the home addresses of people from these groups (Southside Antifa, 2017). In these instances, the protesters accused the artists of propagating neo-Nazi, white supremacist, or more generally fascist ideologies through their music. Not surprisingly, performers have responded to these protests by claiming that neither they nor their music promote these ideologies and the people organizing these actions are misreading their work.

While these artists have, at times, gone to great lengths to explain their choices (Solotroff, 2017), the listener remains caught between the artist's and the protestor's interpretations and must decide on their own who to believe. It leaves audiences and casual observers with the task of pitting one person's word against another, trying to decide the 'real intentions' of the artist and guessing at the effect these genres have on their audiences and the greater population. This debate becomes even murkier when considering the individual identities present within these conversations. Neither Antifa nor extreme music fans exist as a monolith, despite characterizations as such. There even exists a growing population of artists who identify with anarchist and anti-fascist ideologies while creating works in these supposedly fascist genres (Henry, 2016). This fact alone points to a far more complicated set of relationships between audiences, artists, and the works they create than current discourse suggests.

Rather than address these genres, bands, and musicians through the lens of this debate, I will attempt to reframe this discussion through the terms set out by the artists themselves. If these artists do not reference fascist ideologies, employ symbols of oppression, and antagonise the audience through aggressive visual, auditory, and physical practices to promote racist, misogynistic, or fascist movements, then what are they trying to accomplish? And are they successful in their aims? To answer these questions, I will examine various elements of the power electronics genre with specific

attention paid to seminal act Whitehouse. I have chosen power electronics (and, more specifically, the imagery invoked by this music) due to the ambiguous and often contradictory use of problematic lyrics and visual elements employed throughout the genres history, paired with a refusal to explain what their work means (Stevenson, 2016; Wallis, 2016). This leads to what Bailey (2012) describes as 'a markedly sinister, cauterizing offshoot of Industrial music characterised by its apparent glorification of anti-social behaviour, pathology, and the nihilistic fringe elements within post-industrial society, with no shortage or disregard for the society's plethora of sexual inhibitions' (p. 56).

Power electronics, therefore, provides the perfect object of inquiry because of its 'apparent' promotion of destructive ideologies (as opposed to its clear, unabashed, or definitive promotion). Fans of the genre continue to debate this fact, often claiming that 'too often, detractors assume the voice of the "character" [portrayed by the artist] to be the same as the artist' (Stevenson, 2016, p. 177). This unanswered question of what the artist accomplishes and hopes to achieve provides a fertile ground for exploring this corner of the musical underground. Moreover, while Antifa protests have primarily focused on other genres such as neo-folk and black metal, protestors have directed similar actions at power electronics artists specifically (see Anti-antifa, 2008, Not for Profit, 2011; Southside Antifa, 2017) in large part due to a shared approach to fascist symbology. While openly white power and fascist acts do exist, most artists working within extreme music genres firmly reject fascist labels. This shared approach and subsequent rejection allows for a certain transference between genres while simultaneously presenting power electronics as a particularly ripe case study.

Similarly, I have chosen Whitehouse as the focal point of this paper because of their foundational place within the history of the genre as well as their continued

influence in contemporary practice. While the territory covered by power electronics artists still largely resides within the far-right end of the political spectrum, the genre has grown to incorporate a wide variety of political ideologies. This includes the far-left leaning politics held by the genres detractors (Henry, 2016). A broadening of the identities represented within power electronics along with a continued development of the tactics used within the genre has accompanied the expansion of power electronics' ideological space. However, left-leaning artists working within the genre still attempt to "overwhelm the audience in the grim and harsh aspects of reality in order to provoke reflection on that reality, and their role within it" (Henry, 2016, p. 232). As outspoken and influential proponents of this caustic aesthetic approach from the very beginning, Whitehouse emerges as a highly valuable focal point for this type of analysis.

To better explore these works outside of the usual cycle of provocation and censorship, I will investigate Whitehouse's work under the assumption that this musical act did not intentionally promote abuse or oppression. Rather than strictly communicating the alliances of the artist, the provocative aesthetics of power electronics (and extreme music more broadly) could exist as a way of creating a social space in which difficult topics and ideas enter a process of critical reflection and analysis. However, if the social infrastructure within that context does not provide audiences with the means to reflect and analyse this work, then the effort will inevitably fail to achieve these lofty goals and unintentionally fetishise and celebrate problematic ideologies. I will address these concepts by, first, investigating the imagery created by Whitehouse as well as the means through which the band generates this imagery. Next, I will explore this artistic process through various critical theories that illuminate the ways in which this imagery circulates. From there, I will connect Whitehouse's attempt to create works that engender critical discourse to theorists attempting to do similar

work. Specifically, I will focus on educational philosopher Paulo Freire). Finally, I will analyse the creation and deployment of Whitehouse's imagery through this Freirean lens.

Whitehouse and the Creation of Internal Imagery

History and Practice

While more thorough and highly illuminating histories of Whitehouse and power electronics exist elsewhere (see Hegarty, 2007; Taylor, 2016; Bailey, 2012), a brief overview of the band's aesthetic will help situate this discussion. Started in the early 1980s by UK resident William Bennett who engaged a rotating cast of other musicians (Philip Best and Peter Sotos being the two most consistent and prominent members in the group's lifespan), most credit Whitehouse as the founder of the power electronics genre. Historians and journalists grant this status, in part, because the genre's name comes from the liner notes of their album *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Taylor, 2016). From the start, the group set out to intentionally create music that challenged audiences through an almost sadistic approach to composition. Taylor (2016) colourfully describes the group's aesthetic as 'a noise of ear-splittingly high frequencies and… indecipherable screamed vocal tirades… The overall feeling was one of extreme violence and total aggression, reflected in the concentration on serial killers and transgressive human practices, and use of startling imagery' (p. 13-14). This approach also relied heavily on a minimalist aesthetic in which the work barely changed over the course of a given composition. For Whitehouse's detractors, this approach translated into 'art totally devoid of substance and variance' (Bailey, 2012: 57), both in terms of content and sound.

All told, Whitehouse employs several artistic elements (auditory and otherwise) to create a series of images and responses that audiences must grapple with on their own. Integral to this argument, however, is the fact that the band often relies on the audience to mentally generate this imagery through their own engagement in the work. Especially during the end of the band's existence, Whitehouse would often forgo visual imagery altogether (or, at least, imagery that included illustrations or photographs related to the thematic content of the lyrics), decorating their albums with stark text (Gifford, 2001; Gifford & Bennett, 2003). Their live shows also avoided visual translations of the music and largely consisted of the band members either standing behind a collection of synthesisers or physically and verbally antagonizing the audience (see foist, 2016). While this stark approach may have relied on physical violence, it remained separated from the fictional and historical accounts of violence and predation contained within the bands lyrics. In this sense, the images created by Whitehouse do not emerge externally from the audience. Rather, the band relies on an expanded notion of imagery, one that Mitchell (1984) would describe as the interaction between text, the senses, imagination and social reality to create images within the mind of the listener.

However, this understanding of the work begs for a more concrete explanation: if Whitehouse wants to generate this type of imagery through non-visual means, how do they achieve this effect? In terms of their overall process, this effect emerges from a minimalistic obsession with the elements of their work that deliver results (defined by Bennett as a type of 'asceticism') (Bailey, 2012). The band crafts every element of their artistic output with the intention of immersing the audience within the imagery they hope to generate and then hold the listener in that image for the entirety of the performance or album. 'It seeks to be a total experience that inflicts itself' on the audience (Hegarty, 2007, p. 122), one that consumes the listener's mental space as they

internally generate (and later grapple with) troubling images from these stimuli. Lyrically, the band meticulously describes acts of oppression and violence from the point of view of the oppressor. In several songs, this involves recreating the actions and motives of serial killers or mass murders, as on 'Ripper Territory' (Bennett, 1981b), while others rely on fictional accounts that place audience members in the position of the victim, such as 'This Is Why You Never Became a Dancer' (Bennett, 2003b). Sonically, Whitehouse aimed to build on this all-encompassing imagery by employing a highly aggressive approach to instrumentation. Going beyond his ascetic philosophy, William Bennett famously described his goal with Whitehouse as finding 'a sound which could bludgeon an audience into submission' (Bennett, 2013). The aesthetics of this music not only aids in generating this imagery, but also promotes a physical and emotional connection to this sound.

The Affective Nature of Whitehouse's Imagery

While Bennett's asceticism may have directed all elements of Whitehouse's artistic work towards one goal (ostensibly, forcing audiences to grapple with the realities of predation and violence), the actual conclusions Bennett expected audiences to reach remain incredibly vague. As noted before, the members of Whitehouse refused to explain the meanings behind their music, a tactic embraced by a number of other power electronics artists as well. In his essay on the music of Genocide Organ, another group from the same era as Whitehouse, Stevenson (2016) notes that

> with potential "meaning" couched in ambiguity, power electronics forces the listener to engage with and interpret the material based on their own perceptions and biases; the questions and interpretations of the listener could be considered to be of far greater importance than the material presented. (p. 177)

Bailey (2012) reaches a similar conclusion, stating that 'the act of listening to Whitehouse… is indeed an active one, not unlike driving by some horrific accident and attempting to create closure on the scenario by projecting a personal "back story" on the accident victims' (p. 59). Within this ambiguity, audiences can find the ultimate aim of William Bennett, Whitehouse, and power electronics more generally: force the audience to develop their own conclusions about those ugly, difficult, and often ignored truths that exist within all aspects of modern society.

By creating works that exist solely to inspire the development of imagery within the listener while simultaneously refusing to attach artistic intent to their performances, Whitehouse challenges audiences to grapple with the intentionality of the world by revealing an omnipresent, unseen, and dark reality. Surprisingly, this approach to artistic creation overlaps with some more critical theories including Sharpe's (2016) approach to anti-racist artistic production. While Sharpe specifically discusses a pervasive sense of anti-blackness in her work, describing Whitehouse's music as an attempt to reveal what this author might describe as 'the weather' of violence and predation seems apt. In describing her understanding of this metaphor, Sharpe notes that 'the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate' (p. 104). To this end, Whitehouse has created a body of work that explores the existence of power (and the abuse thereof) in all aspects of the modern world. From large scale acts of genocide explored in 'Buchenwald' (1981a) and the self-inflicted acts of violence on 'Cut Hands Has the Solution' (2003a) to the art world's complicity in this violence on 'Cruise (Force the Truth)' (2001), the group seems to consciously tackle endless corners within the total climate of violence and power.

However, the similarities between Sharpe and Whitehouse end rather quickly outside this formal analogy. Where Whitehouse seems content to force audiences to

contend with their understanding of the weather, Sharpe (2016) continues on to 'reimagine and transform spaces for and practices of an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of *being* in the wake as consciousness' (p. 131). This focus on the ethical nature of artistic production raises an important question: how does Whitehouse's imagery operate in the world? Where Sharpe strongly considers the effects of this work, the power that revealing and countering the weather may hold, Whitehouse's refusal to disclose the meaning of their music keeps this hidden. While the group's purpose revolved around the production of imagery that forced audiences to contend with a pervasive culture of violence and power, the question remains as to whether the artists achieved this goal (did audiences contend? Or did they just acknowledge?). Additionally, this ambiguity also ignores the unintended consequences of the work. While the intentional effects of the band remain the primary focus of this paper and many other articles have explored power electronics' unintentional consequences in far more detail (see Dietrich, 2016; Grady, 2016; Home, 1996), a brief exploration of these aspects provides insight into Whitehouse's artistic output and the debate surrounding extreme music simultaneously.

Confrontation or Replication

When focusing on the unintended consequences of Whitehouse's work, the question of whether this music reinforced the oppressive nature of reality they presume to explore emerges almost immediately. Ahmed (2007) considers this question from a more universal perspective that uses the notion of whiteness as a starting point:

> we could say that any project that aims to dismantle or challenge the categories that are made invisible through privilege is bound to participate in the object of its critique. We might even expect such projects to fail, and be prepared to witness this failure as productive. And yet, we get stuck in this position, endlessly caught

up in describing what we are doing to whiteness, rather than what whiteness is doing (p. 149-150).

Ahmed goes on to describe whiteness as a phenomenology, claiming that whiteness 'describes not so much white bodies, but the ways in which bodies come to feel at home in spaces by being oriented in this way' (p. 160). Applying this phenomenological understanding to multiple forms of privilege, the question of whether Whitehouse reinforces forms of oppression transforms into understanding which bodies the artist, their records, and the live music environments allow to feel comfortable. Focusing specifically on live shows, Dietrich (2016) would argue that white, male bodies almost exclusively receive this honour. While some power electronics artists (including Dietrich herself) work against this reality, the genre remains a male dominated space. If 'bodies are shaped by [their] contact with objects' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 152) and the object of Whitehouse exists within a highly masculine style of performance rooted in the act of domination they hope to critique, then these sites of encounter unquestionably exist as an expression and expansion of this phenomenology.

Another nuance of this argument shifts the inquiry from understanding how certain bodies exist within this space to questioning how audiences see these bodies. As Hartman & Wilderson (2003) point out, the process of identification with the identities of victims (a perspective that Whitehouse casts onto the listener) erases the identity of those in question. This process of effacement stems from 'the need for the *innocent* black subject to be victimized by a racist state in order to *see* the racism of the racist state' (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003, p. 189). Building from this critique, it follows that Whitehouse erased the identity of those who fell victim to apparatuses of control by obsessively focusing on the apparatus itself. Their music replaced individuals with a flattened archetype that doubly removed the humanity from the victims they reference.

If "whites gain their coherence by knowing what they are not" (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003, p. 187), then Whitehouse exclusively helped fans understand their own position in the world and not what others experience. Moreover, the focus on extreme cases of violence (genocide, serial killers, etc.) pulled needed attention away from more banal and normalised forms of violence.

While I would certainly consider both points valid criticisms of Whitehouse's output, the artists seem to disagree (Bennett, 2013; Bennett, 2015). At the very least, they seem to argue that this interpretation focuses too heavily on the musical object rather than the full experience of interacting with this music. Whitehouse's live performances *do* recreate a phenomenology of whiteness, masculinity, and privilege and their work *does* mask the identities of those victimised. However, if the group hoped to present an object to critique, understand, and explore (in this moment I am extending this object to include not only the music but the physical, aural, and visual experience as a whole), then creating a work that does not replicate these issues diminishes what Whitehouse hoped to accomplish. The text on the cover of their album *Cruise* (Gifford, 2001) hints at this notion: 'The artworld allows for such safe postmodern distancing… You can't appreciate mere questions. Unless, of course, you'd prefer to not acknowledge the responses that those questions produce in public.' The argument put forth by this quote acknowledges that the work created by the group inherently creates problematic images and environments, but that is the point: an object emerges that audiences can then critique, analyse, ignore, or respond to however they see fit. While this may not solve any social issues, a failure to acknowledge this troubling reality seems to represent a far greater problem to Bennett, et al.

A brief documentary featuring Mike Dando of power electronics act Con-Dom provides another example of this approach (Mingchuan, 1995). In the interview, Dando

describes a performance where he physically assaults the audience until one woman finally 'had the guts' to defend herself by fighting back. For Dando, the value of the work exists in this interaction: the performance is 'saying 99% of the population don't stand up for themselves... and 1% maybe do. And that girl is the 1% we should aspire to, not the 99% who were purely apathetic' (Mingchuan, 1995). By placing the audience within this work, allowing them to experience this violence and oppression, the work takes on a whole new meaning that strikes down the distancing that occurs in other artistic works. Audiences do not need to search for the representational figure they can replace as they find themselves within this violent act. Because the audience lived this experience as opposed to witnessing this violence from a distance, they can reinterpret and understand this violence through their own experience on a multitude of levels (emotionally, sonically, spatially, physically, temporally, etc.).

This does not absolve the band and other power electronics of the criticisms waged against them. The challenges posed both indirectly and directly by the authors mentioned throughout this paper remain just as vital. However, this approach seems to once again pull the discourse into a similar cycle of provoke and censor that occurs within overlapping fringe music and political circles. If nothing else, the purpose of this paper is not to criticise or defend Whitehouse from this outside perspective (as others have already taken up this defensive task). Rather, this paper aims to understand what Whitehouse hopes to accomplish on their own terms and then analyse their work from this perspective. The next section explores this approach in greater detail.

The Freirean Image

As discussed in the last section, Bennett and the other members of Whitehouse want to challenge audiences and force them to face the treacherous reality they inhabit. But do audiences take that next step towards critical analysis or do they merely see

disassociated scenes of violence and cruelty served up as fodder for exploitation and fetishisation? While this paper (or any piece of writing) could not possibly begin to describe every possible reaction to Whitehouse, comparing the artistic aims held by the band to others doing conceptually similar work provides one avenue towards this goal. To that end, I propose the work of educational theorist, philosopher, and activist Paulo Freire as an adequate reference point in this discussion. While seemingly worlds apart, Freire's egalitarian approach to dialogue as a means of education (one in which the teacher does not provide the answers, but rather student and teacher develop a rich understanding of the social world through their interactions) holds many similarities to Whitehouse's ambiguous approach to imagery and thematic content. That said, foundational issues within Whitehouse's artistic process also lead to irreconcilable differences between the band and Freire (differences which I discuss below). By working against the intentions of Freire and the other critical scholars cited in this paper new questions about and understandings of Whitehouse and power electronics begin to emerge.

Freirean Practice

While his work has found a place in numerous academic traditions, Freire is best known for challenging the traditional 'banking concept' of schools and arguing for the liberatory potential of education (Freire, 2000). According to the author, 'education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and student' (Freire, 2000, p. 72). Not only does this conceptualization of schools as a liberatory endeavour in and of itself reimagine the practical nature of education, it also questions the various roles and identities (and, subsequently, outcomes) that exist within educational communities. Freire's comprehensive analysis also involved exploring the aesthetic

nature of education, claiming that aesthetics existed as a foundational part of any educational practice (Shor & Freire, 1987). These philosophical foundations in Freire's work point to an opening in the education canon through which artists and audiences can reimagine artistic practices and communities. If education ideally operates as a space for teachers and students to learn from each other through an inherently aesthetic experience, then artistic communities could mirror or, at least, complement educational spaces.

To get educational communities to realise this vision of liberatory education, Freire developed a specific process that allowed for the development of critical consciousnesses through literacy education (Freire, 1973). While his description of this method involved highly detailed instructions, the process largely involved three phases. First, the educator or education team should situate themselves within the community where they will teach. This process should involve living in the community, learning the language of those community members (both formal and informal), and discovering the specific types and forms of oppression that operate within (and act on) this population. Second, this team should prepare a collection of materials to inspire critical analysis and skill development simultaneously. While some of these materials relate specifically to literacy education, such as creating relevant lists of words to study, this process also involves the creation of what Freire calls 'codifications,' or visual 'representation[s] of the typical existential situations of the group with which one is working' (Freire, 1973, p. 45). These codifications act as the foundational objects of the final stage: engaging the community in a dialogue based on a 'relation of empathy between two "poles" who are engaged in a joint search' (Freire, 1973, p. 40). Teaching through this process transforms into a dialogue between community members and educators who discuss connections between the codification and their lived reality, which will 'lead the groups

toward a more critical consciousness at the same time that they begin to learn to read and write' (Freire, 1973, p. 45).

The process of codifying, decodifying, and recodifying the world sits at the heart of both education and liberation. According to Freire (2000), this 'requires moving from the abstract to the concrete… from the part to the whole and then returning to the parts' (p. 105) and recognizing oneself and others within that decoded and fully graspable reality. To reach this critical consciousness through de/recodification, however, the original codifications need to hold specific intrinsic qualities that allow for the transition between concrete object and abstract or existential reality in a way that truly represents the world in which communities exist. To that end, 'these codifications must necessarily represent the situations familiar to the individuals whose thematics are being examined, so they can easily recognise the situations (and thus their own relation to them)' (Freire, 2000, p. 114). Simultaneously,

> an equally fundamental requirement for the preparation of the codifications is that their thematic nucleus be neither overly explicit nor overly enigmatic. The former may degenerate into mere propaganda, with no real decoding to be done beyond stating the obviously predetermined content. The latter runs the risk of appearing to be a puzzle or a guessing game (Freire, 2000, p. 114-115).

In other words, these codifications should not have answers embedded in them. Rather, they describe and illustrate a familiar world through a blend of abstract and representational elements that subjects decodify through a dialogue with other subjects.

Under this educational philosophy, the role of the teacher undergoes a massive transformation. Teachers should not serve as the experts and keepers of knowledge. Rather, they exist as one catalytic member of a democratic community based on a practice of dialogue. With this reimagining in mind, Freire asserted that the field of education did not have an exclusive claim over the teacher. Instead, the teacher exists at

the intersection of education, politics, and art: 'These three dimensions are always together, simultaneous moments of theory and practice, art and politics, the act of knowing at once creating and recreating objects while it forms the students who are knowing' (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 31). Codifying, decodifying, and recodifying the world exists as an artistic endeavour as much as it is an educational one. The process of teaching therefore rests not only on the relationship between the teacher and the student, but the creation of new works that can provide material to discuss, analyse, and exist as a place for building new knowledges.

By placing the teacher at the intersection of education, politics, and art, Freire not only frees the educator to explore artistic expression and political activism but allows artists and political activists to assume this newly liberated role. These three areas do not exist in a hierarchy. Instead, they exist on an equal playing field with all three serving as legitimate starting points towards developing critical consciousnesses. In the author's own words, 'the classroom is a stage for performance as much as it is a moment of education' (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 28). The conflation of these roles also allows for a Freirean analysis of artistic works. While not every piece fits into this understanding of creative output, many artists create works with the same desired outcomes and through the same process as Freire. The creation of artistic works could therefore replace the creation of codifications and the distribution of these works acts as the educational and political component.

Power Electronics as Freirean Image

Without discussing their successes or failures for now, the process through which Whitehouse created and deployed imagery mirrored Freire's notion of codifications (with some insurmountable diversions I will discuss later) in a number of ways. Most importantly, Whitehouse communicated a particular (and potentially exaggerated)

understanding of reality without embedding solutions within their work, aligning with Freire's call for balance between the explicit and enigmatic. The group never tried to provide answers, but rather to codify the world so audiences could unpack their own interpretations of existential situations grounded in concrete reality. Second, Whitehouse's refusal to disclose the meanings behind their songs plays into Freire's reimagining of the 'banking concept' of education. While the specific intentions of Bennet and other members may have differed, this policy of withholding an 'official interpretation' removed the ability of the artist to instruct audiences how to feel or think. Rather, audiences constructed their own interpretation through the experience of witnessing or hearing these performances, allowing for a dialogical (or, at the very least, dialectic) approach to understanding the world. The understandings, interpretations, and contexts of the audience hold just as much importance in power electronics as that of the artist (Stevenson, 2016). This breakdown between the artist/audience hierarchy potentially holds the same power as that of Freire's dialogic approach, since the goal of education is not for teacher/experts to teach students but for the critical consciousness of all participants to grow.

However, the analogy formed between Whitehouse's musical output and Freirean codification remains limited due to multiple insurmountable differences existing between the two. Beyond understanding Whitehouse, these differences point to the problematic limits of this paper's analysis. While artists such as Boal (1979) have specifically developed artistic processes rooted in Freire's educational theories, it would remain problematic to assume that Bennett, et al did as well. Instead, this music exists entirely within a different context, for a different set of ends, and presents a different use of codifications. Still, by using Freirean codifications as a lens to view Whitehouse's artistic output, valuable questions about Bennett's output and the power

electronics genre as a whole begin to emerge regardless of this unorthodox use of Freire's philosophy.

Regarding these differences, Whitehouse undermined the liberatory potential of their music by relying solely on their own perspectives. Rooting codifications within the social understandings and realities of oppressed populations represents a key component of developing codifications within Freire's dialogic method (Freire, 1973, 2000). By only presenting understandings of power filtered through Bennett and the other members, this eliminates the voices of the oppressed from the outset. The liberation of the oppressed other, within a Freirean model of emancipation, cannot occur if the other does not have a voice throughout the liberation process. However, this critique proves somewhat problematic since the artists probably did not intend their work to act as a means towards the liberation of oppressed people and knowledges. Following a similar line of thought from earlier, Whitehouse's members also might argue for this exclusive use of dominant viewpoints because it creates a flawed experience that demands critique. While others may argue that this approach results from a certain aesthetic laziness, it again points to the limits of the analogy within this paper while raising questions about Whitehouse's intent.

Another key component within the Freirean model is also missing: the community through which dialogue occurs. If a critical consciousness emerges from an open and democratic dialogue, who do people talk to at Whitehouse's shows? Here, the artists seem to rely on a transformation of space similar to that described by Rancière (2009). For the philosopher, the political capacity of artistic work does not reside in the content of the piece. Rather, it exists in 'the type of space and time that [the artwork] institutes and the manner in which it frames this time and people in space' (p. 23). Connecting back to the understanding of Whitehouse's performances as a work that

needs to be viewed beyond the usual boundaries of a music performance, power electronics seems to align itself with Rancière's (2009) notion that art manages to reconfigure 'the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what has not been' (p. 25). In the act of listening to Whitehouse or any other power electronics group, the audience had a new object with which to discuss those darker moments of reality that had gone undiscussed. Community can arise from this connection.

Building on this understanding of aesthetics and education, Rancière and Freire not only raise questions of how community and artistic work intersect but how to define community itself. Through their writings, both authors seem to imply the vitality of a cross-cultural and broad definition: Ranciere's (2009) hope of introducing new subjects and making the invisible visible cannot occur within homogenous or closed groups and Freire (2000) repeatedly discusses the necessity of both oppressor and oppressed working together towards emancipation. Applying this understanding to the power electronics scene, the community of people working through the challenges posed by the artists needs to incorporate more than just performers and fans. While people within the power electronics scene often find online spaces to discuss albums and performances, this community remains highly insular and unwilling to reach out to or hear critical voices (Whelan, 2010). This approach unfortunately leads to a reinforcement of previously held worldviews rather then a critical analysis of the challenging subject matter presented through the music. For this genre to achieve the lofty success described in this paper, the community that forms around these artistic practices needs to include artists, fans (from all parts of the political spectrum), promoters, label organizers, hard line critics, protestors, outside observers, and the host of other individuals that identify with and move between multiple groups.

While Rancière provides a theoretical mechanism through which Whitehouse's work may flourish, it also raises a question of infrastructure: where and how do people listen to this music and what sort of community does this moment of interaction encourage? In considering their recorded music, the technological limitations of stereos and headphones ensure that fans will probably listen in near isolation. Rather than sparking conversation, it leads to what Whelan (2010) describes as a process of reinforcement where both people 'in the know' and people without a contextual understanding of the genre use this work as evidence of what they already believe. Similarly, live performances also fail to provide an adequate medium for dialogue to occur. As Wilson (2016) describes, power electronics performances have traditionally occurred in settings similar to rock and metal concerts with an associated set of behaviours coming from the audience (moshing, drinking, etc.). While neither of these scenarios make dialogue impossible (the internet could engender a conversation about this work between multiple people, concert goers could discuss the work after they had sobered up), the emergence of a nuanced analysis or critical reflection from a broad coalition of viewpoints seems highly unlikely in both cases. Even if community emerged, Ahmed (2007) would argue that the recreation of whiteness and masculinity in a phenomenological sense will continue to reinforce the white male dominated nature of the genre. Without this crucial component, the work continues to fall short of its potentially Freirean aspirations.

Conclusion

It should come as no surprise that Whitehouse's creative output has always been considered both controversial and problematic: a cursory glance at any of their lyric sheets would lead to this prediction. While I certainly believe that listeners should remain critical of Whitehouse (and power electronics as a whole), I also feel that the

approach promoted through current debates fails to address the stance taken by artists and fans. This misunderstanding sits at the root of the current discourse surrounding multiple genres within the extreme music umbrella: critics claim that these artists propagate oppressive ideologies while fans claim that these protestors just do not understand this music. Undoubtedly, this line of critique still holds value (I did my best to outline some approaches to this work in this article) and diehard fans absolutely need to understand these alternate viewpoints. Still, labelling the artists as Nazis and doxing them also seems to discourage potentially valuable and unavoidably difficult conversations generated by challenging artistic works. At the very least, it seems to miss the point. In Bennett's (2015) own words, 'it's almost inevitable that anyone working with actual real content gets to suffer being called a racist or a fascist.' If all artists that delve into this content automatically trigger a degrading label, then these challenging works may inevitably end altogether. While some may counter Bennett's assertion by claiming that a blunt and purposefully ambiguous use of this content triggers this response while more nuanced approaches avoid these labels, it still raises the question of how artists should wade into this troublesome territory.

In response, this article approaches Whitehouse (and power electronics more broadly) on its own terms. However, even under these conditions the work proves problematic. If the artists honestly intend on providing works that allow audiences to develop a more nuanced understanding of the modern condition, this music lacks the means for a critical consciousness to emerge since a dialogue does not occur in the moment of contact with the work (or anytime thereafter). Rather than achieving these lofty goals, this musical form seems equivalent to a process of fetishisation which reinforces the gaze (Lacan, 1981) as opposed to challenging it in any significant way. The limitations of reading power electronics through the lens of Freirean codification (a

line of thinking that purposefully acts against the intentions of both) discussed in this paper also point to insurmountable issues with Whitehouse's artistic process. Any emancipatory potential ends with the exclusion of the voices of the victims described through the artist's work. This again reinforces Ahmed's (2007) claim that artistic choices rooted in whiteness and masculinity could discourage those excluded voices from engaging in this work, reinforcing the echo chamber this music creates.

However, this argument can also lead to a separate and more generous conclusion. Although Whitehouse does provide a foundational approach to the genre that demands nuanced and continued critique, power electronics has continued to evolve over its thirty-year lifespan. Especially within the past decade, the genre has grown to incorporate a host of voices that did not enter into (or were barely heard during) the early years of the genre. Power electronics projects that feature female artists, such as Pharmakon (Bychawski, 2017) and Puce Mary (Maleney, 2015), and artists of colour, such as Koufar (L., Weatherford, & DeRaadt, 2016) have increasingly taken on more prominence both in and outside of the scene without abandoning the genre's approach to challenging, provocative, and violent imagery. Koufar and Interracial Sex have especially relied on Whitehouse-esque aesthetic tactics, using white power symbology and terminology within their work despite identifying as people of colour themselves (Chami, 2015; P_E, 2013). While this may not fully address Ahmed's (2007) critiques about white masculine spaces (since these artists still create caustic and divisive works) or Freire's (2000) call for communal approaches to generating codifications, it still implies that a broader population of voices holds a growing place within the power electronics scene and the evolving history of the genre.

Although the changing identity of the current scene does not totally resolve the issue of whose voices enter into the creation of power electronics compositions and in

what capacity, it allows for some resolution before considering the other large issue raised by this paper: the lack of dialogue between artists, audiences, critics, and onlookers. Specifically, if the major obstacle keeping this work from promoting the dialogue needed to develop an increasingly critical consciousness is a proper venue (which, as this article notes, remains up for debate), then all engaged parties should look to create better spaces for the deployment of challenging work in the underground music scene and beyond. To accomplish this goal, however, two things need to happen. First, detractors and proponents need to approach this music openly, a challenge that both sides seem hesitant to accept (Whelan, 2010). Second, power electronics needs to exist within spaces that actually encourage cross-cultural dialogue. By engaging in this music with an open-minded community in a space that allows for the decodifying of artistic works and the recodifying of the world, power electronics and other extreme music genres may eventually stand on their own. They can achieve a more liberatory end or, at the very least, fail on their own terms.

Regardless of the outcome, this task of analysing the spaces within which music exists also accomplishes the goals of certain Antifa protestors and other critics with far more efficiency and clarity than calling out individuals on their ambiguous and problematic symbology. Rather than attacking these artists, a critical analysis of these spaces addresses problematic power structures as opposed to the representation and reference to those structures in fringe genres, which seems like a far more potent task for activists who seek to build a critical consciousness in their own way. Hopefully, those engaging these spaces (power electronics fans, critics, and anyone else) can take that first step towards accepting critical and differing viewpoints and build the types of dialogical practice that engender liberation as the genre continues to evolve.

Acknowledgements

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