UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

WEITZENHOFFER FAMILY COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

(RE)-PLACING THE MUSIC SALON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC IN MUSICOLOGY

By

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Norman, Oklahoma

2024

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(RE)-PLACING THE MUSIC SALON

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful for the invaluable help, guidance, and advice of Dr. Jake Johnson. Without Dr. Johnson, I never would have discovered my passion for salon culture. Thank you for the many meetings, laughs, and run-ins with AI meeting recording devices. I would also like to thank my mother, who stood by me the entire process, sharing ideas, wisdom, and celebrations as I progressed. I could not have completed this thesis without her help and countless hours of reading, rereading, and reading again. My gratitude also extends to Dr. Vivian Luong and Dr. Maxwell Yamane, who played a crucial role in my education at the University of Oklahoma. Both brilliant professors and mentors have consistently encouraged my creativity, drive, and passion for breaking barriers. Lastly, I would like to thank all my friends and family who supported me during this process. Writing this thesis took a village, and I could not have accomplished it without their encouragement. Thank you for believing in me!

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ABSTRACT

Music salons have been a topic of interest amongst several fields of scholarship, including musicology, for many years. However, as these social gatherings move online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe they are changing. In fact, both their characteristics and our relationships with music salons are changing. Due to these changes, we may not be able to recognize them where they have nestled themselves within the World Wide Web. This thesis aims to redefine our definitions of music salons and music salon culture by studying salons within the last 100 years that we might find "unusual." These uncommon salon scenarios include the Deep Deuce neighborhood of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, during the mid-1900s and the second wave of black metal music in early 1990s Norway. Exploring, becoming comfortable with, and embracing the unusual is a stepping stone in the journey of keeping up with today's online salon culture.

Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear the word "salon"? Do you see a cozy parlor within the home of a family member? An art exhibition with stark walls and pointed spotlights? Does the word conjure an image of high fashion and aristocracy? Gossip? Or perhaps the phrase is directly connected to the light tinkling of piano keys, polite applause, and soft chatter. Maybe you haven't considered salons much at all.

Reflect for a moment: do you think you have been in their orbit before? If you can't come up with an answer, don't be alarmed. You are in the majority. While it is true that salon situations occur quite often, that fact doesn't make them easier to identify. A salon is a gathering that usually takes place within a home and typically includes music, poetry, and artwork. Salons are also spaces of conversation, places where ideas circulate among guests. It is easy to lump these multimedia affairs in with other ordinary gatherings such as parties, and we often do. Many salons, even the gatherings we later discover are of significant importance historically, were written off as simply that. This may be due to several factors: salons come in many different forms, are often undocumented, have a fair bit of gender bias surrounding them, and are far easier to identify in hindsight. However, salons, both in operation and purpose, are much more complex than parties.

Despite these challenges, musicologists and other scholars have found ways of peering into salon culture…as long as they stay in one place.

Salon culture, a term often reserved for the parlors of affluent women in the 17th and 18th centuries, is still with us today but in a very different form—that is to say, I believe salons are moving. They have always moved as fluid an occurrence as they come, drifting from genre to genre, place to place, and decade to decade. Salons have historically been produced by or have found ways to adapt to a world of constraints, and because of this distinctive quality, they appear to be making

their largest migration yet. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the mass exodus from social gatherings to Zoom meetings, I have a hunch that music salons are shifting online and into the world of the internet. During this transformation, I believe that essential aspects of salon culture and salon gatherings are changing or perhaps have already changed. They are no longer operating by all of the rules we expect them to; therefore, our relationship with these salons is changing as well.

Part of this has to do with scholarly habits and inclinations. Musicologists and historians are accustomed to treating unserious, everyday events like house parties as unworthy of their attention. They also tend to write about only what can be observed. Salons are everyday occurrences, and what makes them significant sites of cultural exchange often hides from view. I believe a phenomenological approach is appropriate to explore the conditions that made salon culture powerful in the distant past and still today.

In his book, *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard explains that poetic images cannot be understood through traditional methods like psychology and philosophy. "Only phenomenology—that is to say, consideration of the *onset of the image* in an individual consciousness—can help us to restore the subjectivity of images and to measure their fullness, their strength and their transsubjectivity," he writes.[1] In other words, Bachelard encourages seeing an image as it is rather than using more complex methods to try and explain something familiar to us. Using traditional methods, he warns, results in a collapse of our understanding of the object. The image or object itself, he argues, is pure or presents itself exactly as it is. Phenomenology, or the study of objects as we consciously perceive them, is the method that makes this kind of study possible.

[1] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), xix.

Bachelard attempts to describe objects that we may think require little explanation and does so in an indirect or roundabout way; I find this kind of creativity useful. It is often difficult to think objectively about objects or occurrences in our everyday lives. Musicology, like psychology and philosophy, isn't capable of providing us the space to *experience* salon culture on its own because of its foundation in prizing what can be measured. Through his application of poetic thought and phenomenology, Bachelard can break us free of our need for concrete statistics and facts and move us in a much simpler and perhaps purer direction of understanding on an individual level.

My very approach to this project has been grafted together from a number of historiographical interventions in the past. I believe that getting to the core of what salons are requires stepping outside of traditional salon studies and sometimes musicology entirely due to the complex and elusive nature of salon gatherings and the rather flat way salons are normally described in response. My goal, as it was for Bachelard, is a challenging one: to define a phenomenon out of negative space. To do that, I've fashioned a set of intellectual tools borrowed far and wide, including literary historian Stephen Greenblatt's theory of New Historicism, Michel de Certeau and his examination of perspective, novelist Ralph Ellison and his interest in making the invisible visible, and anthropologist Mary Douglas's attention to concepts of purity. In addition, I am using music historians and other scholars committed to documenting and interpreting salon culture to build upon the foundation they have set.

With this fresh approach, I wonder what we can gain from meeting salon culture where it stands today. How do salons affect us today? How do we engage with them? What are salons doing for us? In order to reach a place where these questions can be asked regarding salon culture, I propose we (re)place them.

I mean this in two ways. First, we need to *replace* our definitions of what a music salon entails by expanding upon recent scholarship on salons through an interdisciplinary focus. Second, I propose we re-place them, pluck them up from where they are imagined to be, and put them where they actually are. This process serves as a bridge between the salons we know and the salons that exist now, a plan put in place to prepare as these events shift to the internet.

Salons: Rooms within our Minds



Figure 1. *Hush!* by James Tissot.

Music salons, both in the popular imagination and among scholars, are very tied to place and very tied to women. Recall Marcel Proust's fictional world within "Swann in Love" and Mme. Verdurin's ridiculous and vapid dinner parties, along with Odette's sly advances towards an unsuspecting Charles. Or consider Clarissa Dalloway's fussy and self-serving plans for her salon in

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. As these examples show, women and their salons are, in the 20th-century mind, the butt of a joke, a stereotype…of course, historically, we have documented the parlors where salons took place in Europe throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, including (and most consequentially, perhaps) in Vienna when a post-Napoleon Europe gathered to redraw the borders of the Western world. These historical cases were, naturally, taken much more seriously. The figure above, a painting titled *Hush!* by the French painter James Tissot[2], has elements of both history and stereotype.

The oil painting, painted in 1874, depicts a historical event, a salon held in the Kensington home of Octavius Coope.[3] While an excellent illustration of a true historical event, the work is also an example of what many might imagine when picturing a salon. Figures of wealth sit and chat below a glittering chandelier, the fixture setting a standard of opulence that the rest of the room ought to follow. With its golds, midnight blacks, pale whites, and hints of light pink, the room conjures up a majesty. This aesthetic is only bolstered by the graceful etchings and patterns of the walls, chairs, and women's evening dresses. The affair is luxurious, with each figure dressed to impress. The men within *Hush!* appear genteel and controlled, with upright postures and similar attire to one another. The women, however, come across far chattier, each of their gowns striking and full of personality.

If a scholar were to examine *Hush!*, they might be interested in any number of these attributes.

Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, in *Impressionists in London: French Artists in Exile* (1870-1904), identifies the young lady depicted in the center of the painting as the famous violinist Wilhemine

[2] James Tissot, "Hush!," 1874, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, England.
[3] Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, "James Tissot, the Englishman," in *The Ey Exhibition. Impressionists in London: French Artists in Exile* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd, 2017), 95.

Neruda.[4] Neruda stands tall and upright, waiting to play as the pianist and his page-turner behind and to the right seem to find their page. Questions begin to orbit this scene. What music is she playing? By which composer? How did this salon or salons like it affect her career? Did these events influence her technique? What connections did she make musically within this salon? While using music salons throughout history as a tool to understand historical figures, scholars have asked these questions many times.

For example, James Van Horn Melton's article "School, Stage, Salon: Musical Cultures in Haydn's Vienna" focuses on a Viennese salon hosted by Charlotte von Greiner and Franz Sales in order to explore a specific period in Joseph Haydn's life.[5] Within the article, Melton concludes that Greiner and Sales' salon, which was highly fashionable at the time, presented Haydn with opportunities he may not have had otherwise. The author also points out a fascinating connection between salons and the "conversational quality" Haydn gave his pieces.[6] This is all the more significant given Haydn's legacy remains so strongly attached to the genre of the string quartet which, along with the symphony, were the two most consequential platforms of German idealism in the 19th century.[7] Although this kind of scholarship seems to focus on the major figures who engaged in salons, another fair takeaway is that salons also influenced the way we teach parts of music history.

Many texts follow a similar format, presenting salons as a lens through which to peer into a person's life. Tia DeNora's chapter, "Beethoven in the Salons," within *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna*, *1792-1803* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and

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[4] Corbeau-Parsons, "James Tissot, the Englishman," 95.
[5] James Van Horn Melton, "School, Stage, Salon: Musical Cultures in Haydn's Vienna," *The Journal of Modern History* 76, No. 2 (June 2004): 251–79.
[6] Melton, "School, Stage, Salon: Musical Cultures in Haydn's Vienna," 277.
[7] Raymond Knapp, *Making Light: Haydn, Musical Camp, and the Long Shadow of German Idealism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 101.

Phyllis Weliver's book *Mary Gladstone and the Victorian Salon: Music, Literature, Liberalism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2019) also focus on a specific figure, citing salons as a source of inspiration, an opportunity to build a career, and overall places of artistic growth and sharing. This research track, aside from its intended purpose, uncovered just how important, influential, and perhaps unusual salon spaces were and continues to be applied to salon studies today. However, trends in scholarship have since shifted from historical figures to topics such as gender dynamics, activist movements, and political upheaval.

With this trend shift in mind, scholars today might also be interested in the women within *Hush!*. The women and their gowns draw the eye in the painting almost immediately. The female guests are also portrayed as full of movement, talking, and shifting, as many of their male counterparts seem stationary in comparison. Many men illustrated here are paying attention to the women as they speak. Like these men, salon scholars also seem to be paying attention.

Many works have been published in the hopes of unraveling the dynamic between women and salons, such as *Women and Musical Salons in the Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022) by Rebecca Cypess and Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges's *Musical Salon Cultures in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019). Between these two books, women were put center stage as the authors discussed ways in which women actively participated in and shaped what we think of as standard or common music salon culture today. The symbiotic relationship of hostesses and music salons is noted brilliantly in both works and is contextualized by literature, art, social history, and more traditional musicological methods.

For example, in her chapter "Musical Salons as Liminal Spaces: Salonnières as Agents of Musical Culture," Cypess claims that the music salon is an example of an institution of 18th-century musical life that has "not survived, or survive only in a highly modified, reified form, and their roles

in eighteenth-century society and musical culture are little understood."[8] Bunzel and Loges may somewhat agree, admitting that salon culture took root in the 17th century but changed massively due to the French Revolution. In opposition to Cypess, however, Bunzel and Loges state that some salon elements mostly remained the same. These included "the salon's delicate balance between entertainment and edification, as well as its intimacy, in that attendees were usually limited to a circle of people who were already acquainted."[9]

In addition, Cypess proposes the idea that salons are spaces of cultural agency due to their semi-public/semi-private nature. This is an important contribution to the discussion surrounding salon culture and a key characteristic of music salon behavior. Bunzel and Loges also see music salons as "a symbol of the 'flourishing female culture." However, the authors are also interested in what they refer to as "male protagonists," or male salon hosts involved with music salon culture in the 19th century.[10]

Some scholars have pursued this track further by publishing works on specific examples of group identity, such as *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) by Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun. The authors explore both the intellectual and cultural contributions of Jewish women as vibrant salonnières, patrons, and active salon participants, underscoring the agency these women possessed.

Bilski and Braun draw attention to the role that salons played in the late 18th-century European fight within the Jewish community for autonomy, status, and professional acclaim. As Bilski and Braun state:

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[8] Cypess, *Women and Musical Salons in the Enlightenment*, 25.
[9] Bunzel and Loges, *Musical Salon Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2.
[10] Bunzel and Loges, *Musical Salon Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 5.

> Impervious to the dictates of either the Jewish or the Christian religious communities, these salonieres fall into the category of 'conscious pariahs,' to use Arendt's own ideal type: female powerbrokers within the patriarchy, satirists in the press, family rebels, avant-gardes, unmarried mothers, and lesbians. The public-private space of the salon proved the finest theater for determined and established rebels, be they the hosts or guests.[11]

This focus on a group of women rather than women in general provides the basis for other research on salon groups.

While examining Tissot's oil painting, *Hush!*, scholars might also be interested in the rooms illustrated within the work. Naturally, our focus is on the large room before us where this violin performance is about to take place. However, on the left side of the painting, we can see another room bustling with people, a winding staircase just within our view. The atmosphere of this second room appears different from the first. Guests sit together, seemingly relaxed on the stairs, as others peek through the entryway into the performance room. Examining salons and their physical spaces is a rather new idea and one that I believe holds new ways of researching music salons.

For example, Nicole Vilkner's article, "Re-examining Salon Space: Structuring Audiences and Music at Parisian Receptions," comments on the architectural complexity of Parisian music salons while stressing the importance these physical layouts possess regarding research. Vilkner uses several innovative methods to do this, including studying multiple paintings of salons depicting scenes from the era in question. Through these paintings, Vilkner illustrates that the physical layout of the salon might not be as simple as music scholars originally thought. She proposes that architecture may answer long-posed questions about "audience listening habits" and "aesthetic

[11] Bilski, Botstein, and Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, 21.

characteristics of salon repertory."[12] Vilkner also claims that music salon guests often listened to performances from different rooms. This insight could expand our image of what music salons looked like or, more importantly, what they continue to look like.

My interest in Vilkner's article is not simply due to the consideration of architectural aspects but due to the ability of the author to admit that there are variables of music salons at play that have little to nothing to do with music at all. Vilkner calls attention to salon architecture as if the space itself has an agency of its own. A tiny detail we may have overlooked becomes large and expansive. Both Bachelard and Vilkner convince us of the power, importance, and magic that the spaces in which we inhabit hold.

Another piece of scholarship that has little to do with music but provides valuable insight into the world of music salon culture is Jaida N'Ha Sandra and Jon Spayde's book *Salons: The Joy of Conversation* (Philadelphia: New Society, 2002). The book takes the reader through a brief history of salons, starting from as early as Ancient Greece to the present.

> Salons are gatherings where people talk big talk, talk meant to be listened to and perhaps passionately acted upon. Salons are incubators where ideas are conceived, gestated, and hatched, sometimes slowly and ruminatively, sometimes with dazzling speed. Salons are the frontiers of social and cultural change. Salons are the concert halls where conversation is presented in virtuoso style. They've been flourishing since ancient Greece, and they're going on in America right now. Anyone can start one; all it takes is willingness.[13]

Sandra and Spayde do something marvelous: they dabble in the future. As they say in the opening of their book, "To converse is human. To salon is divine." By instructing in great detail on how one

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[12] Nicole Vilkner, "Re-Examining Salon Space: Structuring Audiences and Music at Parisian Receptions," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 147, No. 1 (March 2022), 223.
[13] Sandra and Spayde, *Salons*, ix.

may craft one's own salon, the authors take a brave step into the unknown and provide a space for our imaginations to soar with possibility. Beyond this, Sandra and Spayde argue that the effect of the salon is a closeness or bonding that manifests itself in many ways, including the passionate action surrounding social, political, and human issues.[14]

Boldly, Sandra and Spayde provide a detailed yet simple definition of a salon and what their purposes are. Additionally, they lead with a hopeful tone, confident in the fact that salons thrived in the past and continue to occur today. This tone lacks the hesitation to establish a concrete definition of salons, a hesitation that seems to plague most salon scholarship. Salons are introduced as complex creatures that are difficult to identify, are often undocumented, and so unsurprisingly, they are largely seen as unimportant. Music salons may be able to be described quite simply by what they *do* and what they *mean to us*.

Salons: The Joy of Conversation promises a lot in its four-page introduction, beginning with the assertion that "salons move beyond statistics and facts towards genuine understanding."[15] It serves as a wonderful preface to salon culture and how we might approach it; however, the authors never return to or expand upon the seeds planted there. My goal in this thesis is to further develop how Sandra and Spayde view the salon by considering previous scholarship and bringing in minds outside of the field. With their perspectives on the human condition, Bachelard, Greenblatt, Ellison, and Douglas, these minds will help us navigate our way out of the "facts" and into a way of knowing that goes far beyond the concrete. Salons themselves operate in this way; therefore, so must we.

[14] Sandra and Spayde, *Salons,* ix.
[15] Sandra and Spayde, *Salons,* xii.

Hints and Flags

The task of (re)placing the music salon is not necessarily a simple one. It takes imaginative work. This approach requires engaging previous scholarship on the subject, creating opportunities to challenge the traditional understanding of music salons among the general population, and a willingness both to discomfit and to be made uncomfortable.

I have created a list of characteristics and behaviors to watch for when combing through gatherings in history. In other words, these are trends that often occur when a salon is taking place. Think of the bullet points listed below as green flags or hints in our efforts to identify salon situations. I specify because this list is by no means a list of criteria. Music salons of all types may or may not exhibit these traits, although, as I will argue, music salons often do. The following are listed in no particular order:

1. **Constraint(s).** The presence of an identifiable pressure or restriction surrounding a musical gathering or group is one of the "tells" that a salon may be taking place. Historically, as scholars such as Rebecca Cypess tell us, salons exist as a kind of social loophole. They find ways of circumventing constraints that would otherwise thwart them. In the Enlightenment, women, who were largely unable to influence social and political spheres outside of their homes, used salons as a means to bend these sexist rules. It is also important to note that constraints can either be *perceived* or real. As long as the need for some loophole is identified, a constraint, in the sense that we are using it, is present.

2. **Salonnière.** These patrons of the arts are often driving forces behind salon gatherings. When studying salon scenarios, this figure often stands out. They are mentioned repeatedly and typically provide the physical spaces for salons to take place. Salonnières are historically female; however, for lack of a better term, I use this title across all genders.

3. **Semi-public/semi-private.** One reason salon spaces are places of agency is because of their ability to allow enough people in while keeping more than enough out. Public and widely advertised events are often unable to function as salon spaces due to the likelihood of constraints finding their way within the atmosphere.

4. **Unique rules.** A noticeable difference in social, gender, and political rules in comparison to the world at large is often a hint that you may be observing a salon. Usually, these shifts are in direct opposition to whatever constraint or constraints exist.

5. **Disappearance.** An interesting pattern emerges when studying the endings of salon gatherings. They tend to evaporate as if nothing had happened when the constraints that made them necessary in the first place are lifted. Like a kind of mysterious superhero, when the need arises, salons are there, and when there is no longer a need, they disappear.

With these characteristics in mind, I have chosen two case studies through which to explore salon culture: the neighborhood of Deep Deuce in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma between 1930 and the late 1950s, and the black metal scene of late 1980s and early 1990s in Norway. There is a lot of distance between these two places. The distance between 19th-century Vienna and the 21st-century World Wide Web is, however, much more substantial than this. I believe the challenges brought forth by both case studies are worthy steppingstones in the process of meeting music salon culture where it stands today.

In Part 1, we walk through downtown Oklahoma City's flourishing African American business district and cultural hub, Deep Deuce. Part 1 explores the possibility of a music salon that surpasses previous definitions of physical space and encompasses an entire neighborhood. Using Michel de Certeau's image of descending to ground level in the city, we look closely at both individuals and buildings that line Deep Deuce's streets to uncover everyday details we have missed.

And through the eyes of Ralph Ellison, we discover the lived experiences of those who made Deep Deuce Oklahoma City's famous jazz district.

Part 2 takes a chilling turn toward 1990s Norway and its underground Black metal scene. It interrogates the scene and puts it under the microscope of the music salon, uncovering a web of deceit, crime, and extreme soundscapes. Using anthropologist Mary Douglas' ideas of purity and "dirt," we unearth what constraints caused such an extreme movement to occur and what happens when a music salon is bound by ideas of violence.

Part 3 introduces one example of an online salon setting, modeling what further pursuit of the subject might look like. Within Part 3, we also use Part 1 and 2 to consider new positions, possibilities, and questions regarding salon culture. Has our perception of salon culture changed? Are salons still operating as we have assumed them to be? How has or will our relationship with salons change as they move online?

Part 1: Deep Deuce

There's nothing that takes you to unexpected places quite like dogs. They tug, pull, and hasten towards smells we can't smell. Sounds we can't hear. They stop to ponder objects we dismiss. They force us to slow down. As a poor graduate student walking dogs to supplement my income, I was towed along on one of these wild canine adventures one golden fall day in 2023. The dogs and I walked in a modern, affluent corner of downtown Oklahoma City. The younger of the two was determined to take a shortcut right through an open lot between apartment complexes. They frolicked through the fresh mud and the damp grass, and I followed. Anxious for dry land, I set my sights on the street and kept walking; however, I was stopped. Both dogs, noses to the ground, stood before a pile of bricks. The bricks, old, worn, and decidedly out of place, leaned against the brightly colored brick of a new apartment complex. At that moment, a sense of mystery hung in the air. I couldn't help but wonder, "What was here before?"

This area of Oklahoma City is known as "Deep Deuce." Most of the district is situated on Second Street, a thoroughfare stretching through OKC's downtown, hence the nickname "deuce," referring to the number two on cards or dice. You might also hear the neighborhood called "The Deuce" and "Deep Second." Today, light blue signs perch on streetlamps in the area, proudly proclaiming, "Deep Deuce, Historic Jazz District." Many who visit the neighborhood accept these signs at face value. The optimistic leasing offices, in particular, play up this "historic" aspect, extolling the "glory days" of the land. But, for those in the know, Deep Deuce was a treasure trove of experiences and memories that went far beyond advertisement.

In *Charlie and The Deuce*, a biography of famous jazz guitarist and Deep Deuce resident Charlie Christian, Anita G. Arnold tells us that anyone who remembers Second Street describes the area similarly. "It always starts with a big smile and the person lights up. It is like a youngster who

knows the answer and is bursting at the seams to tell it." Their responses hold just as much youthful enthusiasm. "Wonderful!" "It was great, I never saw anything like it." "Girl, there were so many people…walking, talking…all day and all night." "The streets and sidewalks were crowded with people." "Deep '2' was something," some said. [16]

From 1919 to the late 1950s, Second Street in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was a flourishing African American business district and cultural hub. The area was lined with Black-owned businesses such as a general store, a drug store, a newspaper office, a theatre, restaurants, doctors' offices, a barbershop, and more. The neighborhood surrounding Second Street was also a place many Black Oklahoman families called home. If you wanted it, The Deuce had it. In fact, according to Arnold, one could stroll down Second Street and pick up a large glass of tea for 3 cents at the Midway Cafe, stroll back up The Deuce, order "the best steak in town" at Ruby's Grill, and cross the street after your stomach settled to dance the night away at Slaughter's Hall.[17] While entirely applicable, the title "business district" is a concise way of saying something like, "It was a town of its own" or "It had everything." And it seems it did have everything—everything and more.

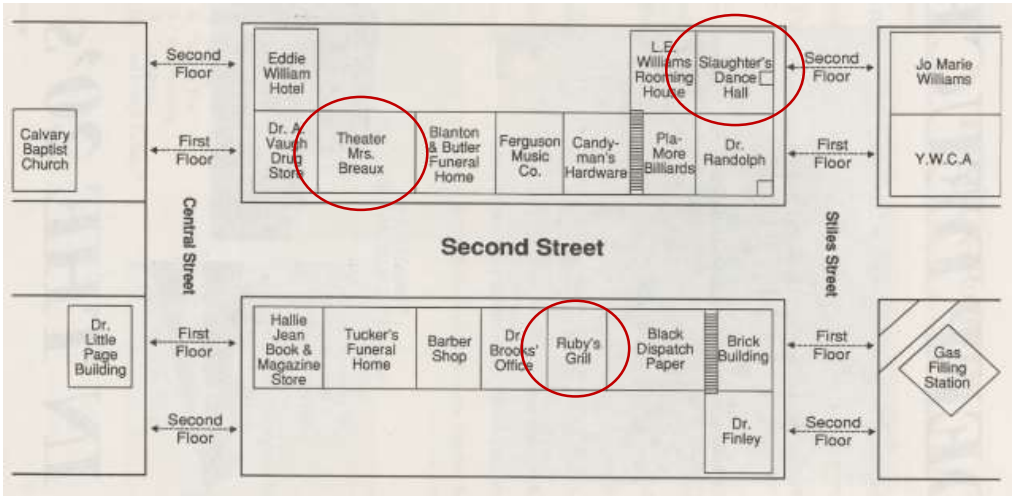

Figure 2. A map of Second Street in Charlie and the Deuce. Each location featured is circled in red.

[16] Anita G. Arnold, *Charlie and the Deuce* (Oklahoma City: Black Liberated Arts Center, 1994).
[17] Arnold, *Charlie and the Deuce.*

Deep Deuce wasn't just a place for African Americans to do business; it was also a space of musical invention. Bands like the Blue Devils and numerous jazz musicians such as singer Jimmy Rushing and guitarist Charlie Christian hail from Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce.[18] The area also drew in performers from out of town, such as Billie Holiday, Jackie Robinson, Nat King Cole, Count Basie, and many more over the years.[19] Ralph Ellison and Deep Deuce resident paints a picture of what musical invention sounded like on Second Street as a child:

> When we were still too young to attend night dances, but yet old enough to gather beneath the corner street lamp on summer evenings, anyone might halt the conversation to exclaim, "Listen, they're raising hell down at Slaughter's Hall," and we'd turn our heads westward to hear Jimmy's voice soar up the hill and down, as pure and as miraculously unhindered by distance and earthbound things as is the body in youthful dreams of flying.[20]

There is something magical about descriptions of Deep Deuce in its heyday. Certainly, the accounts of those who remember it make the district seem extraordinary. These extraordinary places, those shrouded in mysticism only the past creates, are often difficult to analyze historically. Plenty of records exist of the area; however, the experiences of those who walked the streets of Deep Deuce open up that world for us.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau discusses viewing a city from above or below. De Certeau uses the example of looking down on New York City from the World Trade Center, saying that looking at the grid from above makes the city's landscape legible to us.[21] The lines and pathways of the city are clear and easy to distinguish up high. He notes that we like "seeing

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[18] Douglas Henry Daniels, *One O'clock Jump: The Unforgettable History of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 1,3.
[19] "Oklahoma's Jazz and Juke Joint History," TravelOK.com - Oklahoma's Official Travel & Tourism Site.
[20] Ralph Ellison and Robert G. O'Meally, *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 45.
[21] Michel de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 92.

the whole" and that this position gives us a view akin to a god. In comparison, those "ordinary practitioners" who live below are "walkers" and live their lives writing what de Certeau calls "an urban 'text'" that they are unable to read themselves. These people walking below know the city intimately, yet those above might describe their perspective as blind compared to their own.[22]

> It is true that the operations of walking can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths (here well-trodden, there very faint) and their trajectories (going this way and not that). But these thick or thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by. Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The operation of walking, wandering, or "window shopping," that is, the activity of passers-by, is transformed into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map. They allow us to grasp only a relic set in the now of a surface of projection. Itself, visible, it has the effect of making invisible the operation that made it possible. These fixations constitute procedures for forgetting. The trace left behind is substituted for the practice. It exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten.[23]

In other words, de Certeau asserts that mapping the paths people take in a city can only capture the traces or remnants of their movements rather than the actual experience or actions of walking. We can easily map where people have been by using points or lines; however, these patterns are only symbols that fail to convey the lived and dynamic activity of the walk. Maps like these turn the rich, active experience of moving through the city into static, abstract representations. By focusing on these representations, we lose sight of the real, vibrant practice of living in the city.

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[22] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life,* 93.
[23] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 97.

The map makes the action invisible and forgettable, reducing a complex, lived experience to a simple, legible artifact.

I feel that this concept can be applied to musicologists and other scholars interested in studying areas like Deep Deuce. Scholars also see the city from above, a whole picture of the grid that we believe is the most accurate and holds all the answers we could ever need. However, we make this assumption at our peril. Those who navigate the grid below know secrets we cannot hear whispered to one another from our positions in the sky. For example, the pedestrians walking the streets of the past know shortcuts, where to go for what, what time the streets fill and empty, and most importantly, represent lived experiences that we can never touch from above. To gain insight into a neighborhood like Deep Deuce, we must descend from our tower on high and walk the streets.

This approach, descending to the ground and closing the gap between scholarship and everyday life, is one thing I believe is missing in the study of music salons. Salon culture is an experience as much as anything else, and by ignoring this, we miss large sentiments of what salons, especially those involving music, entail. In other words, personal knowledge, in combination with today's scholarship, can be helpful. The stairwell to the street below is long and certainly poses a challenge, but I think the fear of the unknown causes pause the most. What do we do once we're down there? In this case, we look with open minds through someone else's eyes.

The Public Jazz Dance

Ralph Ellison, National Book Award recipient and author of *Invisible Man*, grew up surrounded by music in Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce. Long before he became a writer, young Ellison was a promising musician. As a youngster, Ellison studied classical music, jazz, and played

the trumpet.[24] When interviewed for a periodical, *The Grackle: Improvised Music in Transition*, Ellison was asked when, as a boy, he became aware of improvised music. Ellison stated, "There was so much of it around me that I suppose I was born with a consciousness of it," and that "Territorial orchestras were constantly in and out of Oklahoma City."[25] This immersive experience greatly influenced Ellison and enabled him to write "the most eloquent works ever written about jazz."[26]

While discussing Ellison's "theory of jazz meanings," Robert O'Meally draws attention to seven aspects of the novelist's perspective. His religious family, his upbringing in Deep Deuce and the musical experiences he had there, his preference for big-band jazz, his involvement with the American Communist Party, his commitment to the ongoing struggle for justice and freedom as an African American, his studies of modern criticism, and "his dislike of all schematic intellectual constructs, however comprehensive their data or claims, that failed to allow for the unscheduled entrance of the individual of vision and discipline."[27] This last point is particularly noteworthy, as it seems Ellison may align with de Certeau in terms of research.

Several of these points, including Ellison's upbringing and views on research, are also helpful for our purposes. Ellison, as a writer, someone who understands music intimately, and a man who grew up in Deep Deuce, is capable of providing unique insight into the musical environment within Deep Second. When recalling Deep Second and Jimmy Rushing's role "as official floor manager or master-of-the-dance at Slaughter's Hall, the leader of a public rite," Ellison had this to say:

> Jimmy danced them all, gliding before the crowd over the polished floor, sometimes with a girl, sometimes with a huge megaphone held chest-high before him as he swayed….It was

[24] Ralph Ellison and Robert O'Meally, *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), x.
[25] Ellison and O'Meally, *Living with Music*, 16.
[26] Ellison and O'Meally, *Living with Music*, x.
[27] Ellison and O'Meally, *Living with Music*, xi.

> when Jimmy's voice began to soar with the spirit of the blues that the dancers—and the musicians—achieved that feeling of communion, which was the true meaning of the public jazz dance. The blues, the singer, the band and the dancers formed the vital whole of jazz as an institutional form, and even today neither part is quite complete without the rest.[28]

In a broad sense, Ellison is describing something that is far more involved, participatory, and perhaps even spiritual than that of a concert. His use of the words "communion," "whole," and "complete" hints at a community experience of music. Examining the passage closer, however, I am struck by what he calls the whole event: a "public jazz dance." O'Meally comments on Ellison's "jazz dance," pointing out that Ellison emphasizes "the physical sensation of human bodies moving through softly lit halls and stages—the *places* of jazz."[29] In Ellison's view, the music scene in Deep Deuce seemed very connected to both people and place.

Ellison's choice of phrase here is extraordinary because he's pointing to something that we can't see with records of Deep Deuce. Often, marginalized communities do not have their records archived. Without personal knowledge, we can't observe the atmosphere of a night dance like the one Ellison describes at Slaughter's Hall, and the atmosphere of the environment plays an important role in defining what kind of musical movement is taking place. Ellison could have just as easily said these gatherings were jazz concert-centered or dance-centered. Instead, he described this moment in Slaughter's Hall, one of many moments like it in Deep Deuce, as a community experience. The "public jazz dance" hits at something both accessible and exclusive.

When speaking about music salons, the word "public" doesn't usually come up. However, this word makes sense in the case of Deep Second. The street was a public place, after all, in the

[28] Ellison and O'Meally, *Living with Music*, xxvii.
[29] Ellison and O'Meally, *Living with Music*, xxvii.

sense that the entire community in the surrounding area was welcome to it. But Deep Deuce, Slaughter's Hall, and the "jazz dance" weren't open to everyone. These spaces and experiences were reserved for Blacks only due to segregation laws in Oklahoma at the time. These circumstances are familiar to us. This semi-public/semi-private experience involves talking, dancing, singing, and playing music. However, Deep Deuce introduces an interesting twist. What if a music salon encompassed a neighborhood? What if extending past the limitation of a parlor, theatre, or club, the music salon exists as a community experience within the bounds of an area? After all, events like these weren't limited to Slaughter's Hall. Places that regularly held or even promoted communal music experiences lined the streets of the Deuce. And each of these places was special due to their differing contributions to Deep Deuce's neighborhood salon.

Made to Salon

Only now, after extensive research and with the help of guides such as Ellison, do I realize that the bricks the dogs stopped to smell and the very same that I pondered that fall day are part one of Deep Deuce's original buildings and cultural hubs: Ruby's Grill.



PAGE TWELVE THE BLACK DISPATCH, MAY 13, 1939

Gabbin' Along

By LENARD NATT

Mrs. Ruby Lyons Rates, Too

LUNCEFORD BEGINS TOUR

SPORTS

AUDITORIUMS STAGE SCREEN—MOST ACCURATE, COMPLETE SPORTS SUMMARY

GALENTO WINS!

Ruby's Grill To Have Gala Opening

Southwest's Finest Cafe Is Offered to Public Here In $20,000 Amusement Palace

Chuck Hamilton and His Orchestra to Play for Opening Of Nite Life Spot; Social Clubs and Private Parties to Share New Venture

Entire Building Air-Conditioned

Chuck Hamilton And His Orchestra Oklahoma's Own

Sepia Steppers in "Sing For Your Supper"

AMUSEMENT REPORTER

Southernaires Celebrate 10th Birthday

Dramatic Group In Play at Lincoln Univ.

Count Basie Is Given Title Of Nation's Jitterbug King

Musician Well Known to Music Lovers of Middlewest Invades the East Only Three Years Ago

See WOODSTOCK TYPEWRITERS

OKLA. TYPEWRITER CO.

Get Joyful Relief From BACKACHE

Caused by Sluggish Kidneys

Richardson's

CONOCO

Figure 3. A newspaper clipping from The Black Dispatch May 13th, 1939, announcing the opening of Ruby's Grill.

Ruby's Grill, a two-story building built by Dr. Wyatt H. Slaughter in 1929, was originally an Elks Club. In 1939, the building became Ruby's Grill and operated for six years. The grill was a place for food, dancing, and live blues and jazz. The building had private dining rooms, a sound-proof dance hall, and, perhaps most excitingly at the time, air conditioning throughout the entire building.[30] *The Black Dispatch*, a paper produced in Deep Deuce, tells us that Chuck Hamilton and his orchestra played arrangements by Count Basie and "Duke Ellington's jungle type rhythms" for Ruby's Grill's grand opening.[31] Within the same article, a "Notice to Clubs" appeared that announced Ruby's Grill would be open to all social clubs and private parties for free. Community members were welcome to rent out the space, free of charge, and with wait staff at the ready to hold events. The opening of this grill, which went on to host a slew of famous musicians, and the type of service this venue aimed at providing for the community tells us a lot about how important music events were and how they operated. Ruby's promotion was aimed at creating group experiences, often musical in nature, like the event Ellison described in Slaughter's Hall.

Continuing our walk, across the street and a few doors down is the Aldridge Theatre, owned by Mrs. Zelia Breaux.[32] The building was large, painted bright white, and impossible to miss with its large marquee and bold letters announcing upcoming events. Like many in Oklahoma at the time, the theatre came to show vaudeville movies, put on musicals and plays, and eventually films.[33] However, the Aldridge was also a performance and rehearsal space for bands like the Blue Devils. A young Jimmy Rushing would sneak from his job at the soda counter next door to the theater, spurred on by the thrilling sounds of top-notch jazzers. It was here that the Blue Devils asked him

[30] Steve Lackmeyer, "Oklahoma City Restaurant Urban Roots Has Closed Its Doors in Deep Deuce," *The Oklahoman*, June 9, 2015 ; Roscoe Dunjee, "Ruby's Grill To Have Gala Opening," *The Black Dispatch*, April 13, 1939.
[31] Dunjee, "Ruby's Grill To Have Gala Opening," *The Black Dispatch*.
[32] Arnold, *Charlie and the Deuce*.
[33] Arnold, *Charlie and the Deuce*.

to audition for them and he won the position singing for the group.[34] The Aldridge possessed the ability to be both a grandiose and casual space, allowing for all manner of community activities.

Zelia Breaux was a monumental figure behind musical happenings in Deep Deuce. Not only was Breaux the owner of the Aldridge Theatre, but she was also a band director at Douglas High School and an active patron and teacher of the arts within the Black community in Oklahoma until her death in 1956.[35] In Ralph Ellison's case, Breaux greatly influenced his life, and the writer spoke of her as "a surrogate mother."[36] According to Ellison, she insisted students study classical music by day; however, by night, with the Aldridge Theater, she opened up the world of jazz improvisation by hosting artists such as Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, and finally Jimmy Rushing.

Breaux seemed to be an inspiration to everyone in the Deep Deuce area, especially children. Jimmy Stewart, a social rights leader and another prominent figure who grew up in Deep Second, gave an interview for *The Oklahoman* in 1993, stating that "There were a lot of things to discourage one back then, but there were also reasons to try to do things, and we had blacks who wanted to do things. Mrs. Breaux was an inspiration to all of our young people to want to do something."[37]

Breaux is one of the many community members who made music salon experiences possible in Deep Second. Music salons in Deep Deuce were certainly a community effort. However, due to Breaux's role as a patron of the arts, a music teacher, and the owner of the Aldridge Theatre, a building that often hosted music and social events, I believe it is not a stretch to place her among the ranks of successful and influential salonnières.

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[34] Arnold, *Charlie and the Deuce*.
[35] Arnold, *Charlie and the Deuce* ; Hannah D. Atkins, "Breaux, Zelia Page," Oklahoma Historical Society | OHS, accessed May 19, 2024.
[36] Ellison and O'Meally, *Living with Music*, xvii.
[37] John Perry, "Deep Second Still Lives in Dreams," The Oklahoman, January 8, 1993, https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/1993/01/08/deep-second-still-lives-in-dreams/62471378007/.

Deep Deuce vs. the Deep South

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, a period which is often referred to as the nadir of race relations in the United States, racial violence such as lynchings and Jim Crow laws were commonplace in the South.[38] In one of the last essays written before his death, "Why is the Negro Lynched?" Frederick Douglas shed light on the dire situation African Americans faced in the South, stating that "The great trouble with the Negro in the South is that all presumptions are against him. A white man has but to blacken his face and commit a crime to have some Negro lynched in his stead. An abandoned woman has only to start a cry, true or false, that she has been insulted by a Black man, to have him arrested and summarily murdered by the mob."[39]

In the aftermath of the Civil War, former slaves from the Five Civilized Tribes gathered in what was then called Indian Territory, seeking economic stability and communal safety. These individuals, known as Freedmen, formed over 50 exclusively Black towns and settlements across Indian Territory from 1865 to 1920. The emergence of these all-Black towns is strongly connected to the Trail of Tears. During this period, numerous African Americans who had been enslaved by these tribes also embarked on the forced journey to Indian Territory along with them.[40]

While racial violence still happened in Indian Territory, there was significantly less than that in the Deep South. The all-Black communities founded provided spaces for residents to support and protect each other.[41] In fact, before statehood, Oklahoma was a place where a racial hierarchy standard for other southern parts of the United States had not yet been fully established.[42] For

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[38] "The Great Migration," The Great Migration | DPLA.
[39] Frederick Douglass, "Why Is the Negro Lynched?," The Library of Congress, accessed May 31, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/item/12011531/, 5.
[40] "Oklahoma: Home to More Historically All-Black Towns than Any Other U.S. State," Oklahoma Center for the Humanities, October 22, 2019, https://humanities.utulsa.edu/oklahoma-home-historically-black-towns-u-s-state/.
[41] "Oklahoma: Home to More Historically All-Black Towns than Any Other U.S. State," Oklahoma Center for the Humanities.
[42] Smithsonian Magazine, "The Unrealized Promise of Oklahoma," Smithsonian.com, April 1, 2021.

instance, it was common for Black and white children to attend school together as late as 1900, and Black politicians were able to hold public office.[43] In 1915, African Americans in Oklahoma fought for the right to vote despite considerable opposition and won while African Americans were still disenfranchised in the South.[44] This was a great success for the Black community of Oklahoma. However, with statehood, laws forbidding intermarriage, restrictive housing ordinances, segregated railway cars, and various public facilities, Jim Crow schools came with it.

At the time, and especially in comparison to the South, Indian Territory had developed into a strangely egalitarian landscape. The promise of a better life led many people of color to leave their homes in the South and seek relief in a community within Indian Territory. Amidst this migration, Deep Deuce became one of the few areas where Black families could settle and escape the hardship of the South.

However, Deep Deuce was not the only thriving area in Oklahoma for people of color. The Greenwood district, sometimes called "Black Wall Street," roughly 98 miles away in Tulsa, Oklahoma, had similar financial and cultural success. In fact, it was one of the most commercially successful and affluent places for African Americans in the United States in the early 20th century.[45] But, in 1921, this prosperous era in Greenwood came to a violent end when a local white mob gathered and viciously attacked the area and its occupants.[46] This event is known as the Tulsa Race Massacre and stemmed from an incident in which a 19-year-old Black man Dick Rowland may have stepped on the foot of a white, 17-year-old elevator operator, Sarah Page. This alleged incident spiraled out of control when a local newspaper published a headline that told the public to "Nab

[43] Smithsonian Magazine, "The Unrealized Promise of Oklahoma," Smithsonian.com.
[44] Daniels, *One O'clock Jump,* 6.
[45] "About Us," GCC Main, https://www.greenwoodculturalcenter.org/company.
[46] "About Us," GCC Main.

Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator."[47] Reminiscent of Douglas's statement on the hardships African Americans faced in the South, the resulting mob killed nearly 300 people and destroyed around 5000 homes, leaving residents homeless all within the span of less than 24 hours. With each area being so similar, how could something happen like this in Greenwood but not in Deep Deuce?

In his essay "Culture," Stephen Greenblatt grapples with the term "culture" and its application in literary studies, commenting on how intensely the term has been watered down to the point where its meaning is mostly lost. Greenblatt searches for a method to "get the concept of culture to do more work for us" and finds it in what may appear to be opposing forces: constraint and mobility. He proposes that there is an ensemble of beliefs, things we deem acceptable and unacceptable, that sets boundaries on social behavior. These boundaries give us examples of what is permissible and who must otherwise conform and, most importantly, form culture. In this way, certain behaviors are praised while others are praised. This ensemble of beliefs, Greenblatt says, forms specific genres of text as a result. These texts are a physical example of the push and pull, the ebb and flow of culture itself. They both enforce cultural boundaries and show us what they were when the text was written.[48]

In the case of Deep Deuce, due to segregation and racially motivated constraints, the need for Ellison's "jazz dance" or, in other terms, the music salon arose. However, these constraints were not so significant that this space was crushed. Therein lies the difference between Greenwood and Deep Second. Stephen Greenblatt also states, referring to social behavior limits, that "The limits need not be narrow—in certain Societies, such as that of the United States, they can seem quite vast—but they are not infinite, and the consequences for straying beyond them can be severe."[49]

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[47] "Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 | Tulsa Library, accessed March 13, 2024.
[48] Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Second Edition, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 225.
[49] Greenblatt, "Culture," 225.

The price Greenwood paid for not conforming to white ideals of cultural behavior was destruction and death. On the other hand, Deep Deuce managed to escape this fate, pushed by constraint but not destroyed by its pressure.

Looking Down on a Legacy

Eventually, in a much different manner than Greenwood, Deep Deuce disappeared. The Second Street area still goes under the Deep Deuce moniker, but everything that made the place what it was slowly faded away. By the 1960s, the area was in major decline. In fact, the United States Census Bureau reports that during this period, the population of 1,700 residents dropped by half. While cars and urban sprawl were certainly part of this decline, many also contributed to the disappearance of Deep Deuce to Urban Renewal.[50] In the 1970s, the Urban Renewal initiative collaborated with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation to initiate the development of Interstate 235, which was slated to pass directly through the vicinity of NE 2nd.[51]

Gary Royal, Deep Deuce neighborhood president during the 70s and 80s, had this to say about the project: "Urban Renewal was also known as urban removal. It was about removing as they say for the public good," and that "Hundreds were impacted directly and indirectly. As a community we were impacted. We lost. It's in here, it's in your heart. It's in your soul. It can't be replaced, so there's still a sense of loss." Many of these impacted community members were moved elsewhere, the J.F.K neighborhood, for example. The businesses that previously lined the Deuce were either forced to close or demolished.[52]

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[50] Adam A. Payne and Alyson L. Greiner, "New-build Development and the Gentrification of Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce Neighborhood," *Geographical Review* 109, No. 1 (January 1, 2019), 114
[51] Anjelicia Bruton, "Deep Roots of Deep Deuce: Former Residents Remember Neighborhood They Were Forced to Leave," News9.com, February 26, 2022.
[52] Bruton, "Deep Roots of Deep Deuce:"

Despite this sad reality of gentrification, another story of Deep Deuce's disappearance remains. The constraints that once surrounded the neighborhood, such as Jim Crow laws and the limitations that formed Deep Deuce, were eventually lifted. When the area no longer needed to be segregated, the Deuce lost some of its purpose. This isn't because the heart of what took place on Second Street failed. It's because it worked. The equality that many Deep Deuce residents pushed for and created for themselves finally spread throughout the city. The need for a salon within the Deuce faded. However, instead of the neighborhood evolving and changing its purpose, factors like Urban Renewal forced its disappearance. A 2020 U.S. census reports that the area is now home to 1,000 white people and about 90 Black people.[53] The area is now a white and wealthy enclave of Oklahoma City. The median home price per square foot is $311, while the overall median home price per square foot in Oklahoma City is $166.[54]

Recently, plans were set in motion to build Legends Tower, a 1,907-foot-tall building roughly half a mile from Deep Deuce. At this height, the building would be the tallest building in the U.S. and the fifth tallest building in the world.[55] Looking down from this height, what would Second Street look like? Would the neighborhood seem small and insignificant, a highway cutting at an angle through the area? From that high up, would we perceive the street anymore?

It would be inaccurate to say that the product of Deep Deuce had entirely to do with the presence of music salons, just as claiming that the disappearance of Deep Deuce is a sign that racism ended in Oklahoma. However, I cannot help but believe these music salons were in that process.

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[53] Bruton, "Deep Roots of Deep Deuce: Former Residents Remember Neighborhood They Were Forced to Leave," News9.com.
[54] Deep Deuce, Oklahoma City, OK | realtor.com®, accessed May 28, 2024, https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Deep-Deuce_Oklahoma-City_OK/overview ; Oklahoma City, OK 2023 housing market | realtor.com®, accessed May 28, 2024, https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Oklahoma-City_OK/overview.
[55] Mike Snider and Alexia Aston, "Legends Tower Oklahoma City: Will They Really Build the Tallest Building in the US?," *The Oklahoman*, January 29, 2024, https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2024/01/29/oklahoma-city-skyscraper-project-will-it-really-happen-what-we-know/72393522007/.

How large were their contributions? We'll never know. That's the funny thing about music salons: our best chance of measuring their "success" comes long after they've disappeared, and we have little to no tools with which to work. The reason salons work is the very same: they hide away in obscurity, and their disappearance is a sign of their success. The past is blind, and for now, the present is too.

Part 2: Black Metal

Deep within the forest, a fire lights the Norwegian summer sky. Curiously, it is not the trees that are quickly and quietly engulfed in flame but a church. With vengeance, the church, once standing tall and severe, crashes to the ground, the dark timber of the structure cracking and turning to hot coals as bits of ash rain down upon a large stone cross. This may read like a section plucked from a particularly on-the-nose fantasy horror novel, but this describes footage taken of the Fantoft Stave Church in Fana, Norway, as it burned to the ground in June of 1992.[56] Scenes like this were not limited to Fana. In fact, the arson of the Fantoft Stave Church was the first of a string of between 45 and 60 arson and arson attempts across Norway between the years 1992 and 1996.[57]

As an unknown force set churches ablaze, the media followed in kind, alight with fear. What holy monument was next? When would the reign of terror end? And most pressing to the Norwegian public, who was responsible for these dark, violent, and evil acts?

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, what is often referred to as the "second wave" of black metal music began its rise in Norway. By the end of the '90s, over a third of the arsons plaguing the country were traced back to the underground black metal scene. Other crimes were also linked to musicians and fans of the genre, including grave desecration and murder. A mysterious music genre, a list of violent criminal activity, and the seemingly random location of Norway leave many questions. A journey into the narrative surrounding these bizarre events is also littered with uncertainty and several roadblocks.

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[56] TorturedShallowGrave, "Black Metal - British TV News Report," YouTube, August 3, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuC5WYsDDZY.
[57] Mike Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003), 79.

There are a handful of individuals, namely musicians, involved with the black metal second wave still alive today. Some of them continue to speak about their experiences during the turbulent black metal underground and most investigations by journalists into the scene rely heavily on such interviews. It is also true that many black metal musicians have criminal cases surrounding their time within the scene. Not only are these musician's accounts sometimes unreliable, but they also have a habit of shifting the narrative to benefit themselves. Many who come forward to give interviews seem concerned about their legacies within the big picture of black metal. This, however, does not mean that their accounts hold no truth. Despite a tendency to bend said truth, these stories serve as a window into personal experience within the scene. In addition, there are some instances where stories match across the board. In addition to the testimonies of black metal participants, musicologists have found other methods to examine extreme metal.

Musicologists have been interested in metal for a long while, with Robert Walser's *Running With the Devil* being one of the first book-length treatments of pop music in musicology. Mostly, musicologists have been interested in examinations of power within metal circles, extremist groups, and gender studies. More recently, Lions of the North by Benjamin R. Teitelbaum was added to the list of books studying the formation and consequences of extreme metal groups. [58] But while this story of black metal and Norwegian arson has been documented by a range of scholars and journalists, I believe that re-framing the story as one concerned with salon culture can lead us to fresh perspectives on what the extreme metal scene was doing.

[58] Robert Walser and Harris M. Berger, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014) ; Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Mayhem Begins

It is widely agreed upon that the scene begins, and I tend to say ends, with a man called Euronymous, or his given name Øystein Aarseth. Euronymous, which means prince of death in Greek, started a group in 1984 that would garner a reputation as one of the most problematic and violent bands in metal history: Mayhem. It was clear from the beginning that Euronymous had great ambitions for the band. "I think we had different goals," Manheim, the band's original drummer said, adding that "my thing was to play. It was fun to create things to record and it was fun that people recognized it, talked about it, wrote about it and liked what we did. I think Øystein had a much bigger ambition." In addition to this, Manheim tells us that "Øystein wasn't that guy who sat at home practicing his guitar, he was creating this 'world network', even at that point."[59]

Euronymous seemed far more interested in forging connections with other musicians and fans than most of his peers. While his friends and bandmates spent their time playing music, Aarseth was corresponding with others interested in black metal. Euronymous invited people from the scene into his rehearsal spaces and traveled to theirs to grow and maintain his "world network." It is within these jam sessions and letters that Euronymous spread the word about Mayhem. This was partly responsible for a sense of growing hype and mystery surrounding the band early on.

Before Mayhem played a single note for fans, the group began to garner a kind of cult following. This was largely due to Euonymus's promises that Mayhem was the most extreme group in the world at the time, along with the help of the media. Necrobutcher, Mayhem's bassist, states that "magazines wrote that this was a fresh breath, some guys doing new shit, coming from Norway."[60] Manheim sheds more light on the matter as well: "Looking back, what we did was brag

[59] Dayal Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult* (Port Townsend, WA: Cult Never Dies, 2013), 130.
[60] Patterson, *Black Metal,* 130.

about how special this was going to be. We had journalists and magazine writers who visited us in the rehearsal, and that confirmed that this was something that was completely different and very *wrong*, and *hard*, and *aggressive*."[61] As rumors began to spread and anticipation built within the metal community, fans waited to hear if Euronymous's promises were true.

By the time Mayhem released its first demo, *Pure Fucking Armageddon,* in 1986, the "hype" had risen to a point of no return. Even though the reception of the demo, due to its lo-fi barbaric quality, was not entirely positive, it still shook up the extreme metal scene. The lack of production made the sound *genuine* to some, the gut turning quality of the music something *real*.[62] The album was gritty, unrelenting, and undeniably different from anything that had come before it. As Euronymous



Figure 4. Mayhem poses for a picture while Dead (center right) and Euronymous (center left) wear corpse paint.

[61] Patterson, *Black Metal,* 130.
[62] Patterson, *Black Metal,* 132.

promised, it pushed the boundaries of the heavy metal sound and cemented a new genre in the icy grounds of Norway.

Extreme Aesthetics

The genre of heavy metal, since its emergence in the early 1970s, has been at the forefront of loud, aggressive, and extreme soundscapes. Each group within this broad genre continues to revolutionize sounds and aesthetics, some pushing the boundaries of metal further than others. In his chapter, "Get Your Double Kicks on Route 666: The Sonic Evolution of Heavy Metal across Five Unholy Decades," Andrew L. Cope identifies heavy metal as having more than 15 subcategories, including nu metal, doom metal, thrash metal, death metal, and finally black metal.[63] Among these, black metal has been arguably the most extreme in sound, aesthetic, and ideology.

Black metal's roots are in 1980s England, with bands such as Venom, Bathory, and Mercyful Fate providing a solid foundation for the genre.[64] Interestingly, what makes black metal distinct, first and foremost, has little to do with sound and much more to do with intention. Many heavy metal groups throughout the last half century have experimented with satanic themes and imagery; however, none have done so quite like those within the black metal umbrella. Instead of merely *incorporating* devilish themes like popular groups such as Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin had done, black metal bands *revolve* around them.[65]

Starting with the second wave in Norway, musicians often cover themselves with "corpse paint," a white layer of makeup with jagged black accents around the eyes and corners of the mouth (see figure 4). In addition to this, satanic imagery such as upside-down crosses or pentagrams can often

[63] Andrew L. Cope, "Get Your Double Kicks on Route 666: The Sonic Evolution of Heavy Metal across Five Unholy Decades," in *The Cambridge Companion to Metal Music*, ed. Jan-Peter Herbst (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 12.
[64] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 10.
[65] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 4, 5.

be found on black metal album covers. These satanic symbols are usually supplemented with depictions of the cold Norwegian landscape.

Visual elements aside, black metal songs are often saturated with lyrics that refer to Satan, violence, gore, and other occult themes. The sound of black metal is characterized by its extreme nature, including shrieking vocals, distorted guitars/tremolo picking, dissonant and intentionally low-quality production techniques, and intense use of double bass pedals. One observer describes the experience of listening to black metal as the sound of a "chainsaw," "blender, and a couple of power drills," and standing "directly behind an F-16."[66]

While other bands in England, such as Venom and Bathory, laid down the foundation for the black metal sound and aesthetic, Norway took the idea and pushed it further. More Satan, more violence, more extreme. By the time Mayhem was in what many consider to be its glory days in 1988 with Pelle Yngve Ohlin or "Dead" on vocals, Jørn Stubberud or "Necrobutcher" on bass, Jan Axel Blomberg or "Hellhammer" on drums, and Øystein Aarseth or "Euronymous" on guitar, Mayhem had solidified its place within the extreme metal world of Scandinavia as the flagship of black metal.[67] The band was the epitome of counterculture. It was unholy, wicked, and, most of all, it was dirty.

The Imperfect Recipe

In her book *Purity and Danger*, anthropologist Mary Douglas re-considers values of hygiene and dirt in various societies, how these terms relate to each other, and our failure to confront these ideas. Within the chapter "Secular Defilement," Douglas experiments with several approaches to

[66] Jasmine Hazel Shadrack, *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss* (London: Emerald Publishing, 2021), 57.
[67] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 33.

tackle the issue of the unclean and what this means to us. First, Douglas comments on the avoidance of illness or germs in general as a practical approach and perhaps the most obvious answer to why people might avoid things they deem dirty. However, she departs from this idea quickly, suggesting that our view of 'dirt' may have little to do with hygiene at all. When separated from pathogenicity and hygiene, our notion of dirt simply becomes "matter out of place." Douglas tells us that "Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[68]

In other words, we see dirt outside every day and think little of it. It's just dirt. However, if we happened upon a pile of dirt in the middle of the floor of our favorite coffee shop, there's a high likelihood we would be disgusted. Why is this? The dirt isn't supposed to be in the coffee shop at all, just like shoes shouldn't be put on top of a table or a plate of food shouldn't be in a bathroom. The dirt in the coffee shop is out of place. In this way, Douglas believes that "dirt" is a kind of disorder that society yearns to balance. "There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder," she says.[69] People decide what is dirty and what is not.

Black metal was certainly matter out of place. Beginning with the name "black metal" itself, a multilayered philosophical undertaking, metal is a term that usually implies purity. "Metal" summons up images of a clean, untarnished, and strong substance. It's shiny, it's clean, and it's often useful to us. What does putting the word "black" in front of metal bring us? The obvious answer is that "black" refers to a dark shade. "Black" could also refer to the opposite of white. Like black magic, "black" could signify something evil or unholy. This connects heavily to satanic themes, which is no surprise considering the content of the genre. The names of bands such as Black Sabbath also come

[68] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 44, 45.
[69] Douglas, *Purity and Danger,* 45.

to mind. However, in opposition to the purity of the term "metal," "black metal" could be an attempt at a representation of tarnished purity. Black metal conjures up something raw, unclean, and dark, a metal corrupted.

Black metal was also out of place in Norway. During the time of the infamous church burnings, the Norwegian public was shocked at the unexpectedness of the crimes. This matter out of place was quickly made the enemy within the country. On the other hand, Norway was due for a wave of grotesque and shocking messages. Horror, in large part, has been absent in Norwegian culture. The country has produced little to no horror shows or films despite its prolific movie industry, and any such media that comes into the country is censored heavily.[70] In their book *Lords of Chaos*, Michael Moynihan and Didrik Soderlind detail a specific instance of this. "In one case, Norwegian National Broadcasting stopped a transmission of the popular children's TV series *Colargol the Singing Bear* on the grounds that the particular episode featured a gun."[71]

Constraints create the need for gatherings that model a new world. In other words, a salon. Like the hole left by an unfinished puzzle, salons nestle themselves amongst tension. Whether perceived or real, those who facilitate the existence of a salon must feel the need to create a space for themselves and like-minded individuals. In the case of Mayhem and the 80s and 90s, there are several culprits: the political climate of Norway, Norwegian ideas of religion and morality, and the demonization of heavy metal. Understanding each of these constraints and how they connect to various members of the black metal scene is integral to understanding the second wave of black metal and its remarkable resemblance to salon culture.

[70] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 41.
[71] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 41.

Norway's political landscape was a contributor to the "squeeze" that created a black metal second wave in the youth of the country. During World War II, Vidkun Quisling, who was Prime Minister at the time, collaborated with the Nazi forces during the occupation of Norway, leading to the betrayal of his own country. This disloyalty created a fear of right-wing political parties and aims in the country.[72] As a result, such groups are heavily monitored, disbanded, or forced underground.[73]

Protestantism, Norway's official religion, also has a large influence on the country's culture. In fact, the fusion of church and state in Norway has evolved to the point where they are perceived as a single entity.[74] In his chapter, "The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave: A Space for Performative Politics," Kevin Hoffin proposes the idea that the church burnings committed by various members of the black metal scene are directly connected to this joining of church and state:

> Consequently, the churches become a symbol of the Government's intrusion. Any protest against the Church is likely to be as equally scathing on the Government too. The atavistic nature of the attacks on the churches in the 1990's can be interpreted as the arsonists using mankind's oldest and most feared weapon on both Christianity and Government. The wooden stave churches burned in symbolic blazes of disquiet, and although the Government treated the incidents as connected arson attacks by Satanists, it is undoubtedly the apolitical nature of the event that hid an overtly political protest, due to the intrinsic links between church and state.[75]

Hoffin also argues that atavism, or in this case, "a term to describe a preference for ancient methods and ways of life over those of contemporary Norwegian society," can also be examined

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[72] "The Rise of the Populist Right in Norway," Boston Review, November 14, 2022, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/sindre-bangstad-norway-populist-right/.
[73] Eleanor Peters and Kevin Hoffin, "The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave: A Space for Performative Politics," in *Music in Crime, Resistance, and Identity* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 32.
[74] Peters and Hoffin, "The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave," 32.
[75] Peters and Hoffin, "The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave," 32.

from the perspective of anti-globalization.[76] Norway became one of the most common places for refugees to seek asylum due to the country's economic strength and relaxed asylum policies after World War II. Due to this influx of asylum seekers, anti-immigrant political parties began cropping up in Norway starting in the 1980s and lasting until the 2000s. However, in his book *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism*, musicologist Benjamin D. Teitelbaum explains that nationalist organizations in Norway relied on much more than "rising resentment" towards immigrants. "Like many of their counterparts throughout Europe and North America," he notes, "Nordic activists propelled the dramatic expansion of radical nationalism by importing British skinheadism." Interestingly, skinheadism was tied to the hardcore music scene at the time. In fact, music was the method used to marry skinhead subculture and neo-Nazi activism in Nordic countries, including Norway.[77]

The central figures within the Black Metal "inner circle" were insistent on portraying themselves as agents of malevolence. In order to accomplish this, some decided to adopt elements of Nazism for dramatic effect, their primary objective remaining to project an aura of evil.[78] However, individuals such as Varg Vikernes, a brief member of Mayhem and leader of the black metal band Burzum, did adopt Nazi ideas with open arms. A fan of former Prime Minister Vidkun Quisling, Vikernes often includes National Socialist ideology in his music and merges Nazi symbols, such as the swastika, with images of his band.[79]

In Norway, to be seen as dangerous, evil, or impure is a constraint in itself. Those who felt they could not express themselves or their views, whether it be discontent with the government, anger at the church, or National Socialist sentiments, found ways of doing so in the black metal

[76] Peters and Hoffin, "The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave," 27, 32.
[77] Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North,* 17.
[78] Peters and Hoffin, "The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave," 33.
[79] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 170, 174.

underground. This involvement with the genre and the group as a whole is taboo. In fact, the music itself and the proclamation of Satan is of a "dirt" of its own.

The Devil is in the Details

Black metal's draw toward the devil was an intentional association that many other genres have accidentally or unwillingly conjured in previous decades. Blues, swing, and, most notably, jazz have all had the misfortune of bearing the "devil music" title. With this moniker in mind, specific groups or individual musicians have been singled out throughout history. For example, Robert Johnson, a well-known talent in the blues scene of the early 20th century, was said to have sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads in the Mississippi Delta in exchange for virtuosity.[80] Of course, this is a myth; a myth that spread across the United States by white blues fans' racially charged willingness to connect black artists to the occult.[81] In his book *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*, Elijah Wald comments on the sensationalism surrounding Johnson. "There has probably been more romantic foolishness written about blues in general, and Robert Johnson in particular, than any other genre or performer of the twentieth century," he writes.[82] We still see the ripples of this today. In American pop culture, which derives so much of its energy from black culture, twin narratives have arisen: On one hand, in the eyes of some, black musicians could not achieve virtuosity without help from a supernatural force, like the devil in this case. On the other hand, making a deal with the devil is seen as handing over a piece of your soul in order to become a better musician. In other words, suffering for your art. This second narrative is still very common among musicians today. Suffering brings authenticity.

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[80] Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: Amistad, 2012), 18.
[81] Wald, *Escaping the Delta,* 266.
[82] Wald, *Escaping the Delta, 3.*

I believe that black metal musicians from the second wave both believed that they were suffering under constraints and also yearned for the aesthetic of suffering in order to make their music sound more authentic. Vegard "Ihsahn" Tveitan, frontman of the black metal band Emperor since 1991, comments on this yearning for authenticity in the Norwegian metal scene. "I think the church burnings were an exaggerated expression of authenticity. No one took [us] seriously for dressing up like we did: teenagers in leather and spikes. But, suddenly, it was for real. We were deeply into all of it and, the worse, the better. It became this kind of cult thing; everything that opposes you just strengthens your position."[83]

Rock' n' Roll seemed to pick up the moniker of "devilish" and even obscene in the 1950s and 60s, with parents concerned with the power it held over the youth of the United States. In his book, *The Fifties*, David Halberstam describes the situation as a young generation of Americans "breaking away from the habits of its parents and defining itself by its music. There was nothing the parents could do: This new generation was armed with both money and the new inexpensive appliances with which to listen to it."[84] From Rock 'n' Roll's roots in African American music to its explicit lyrics, the elder generation thought that the genre was the beginning of a moral decline.[85] This rising anxiety was the stirring of something greater coming in the late 1970s and 80s: the satanic panic. In the late 1970s, there was a widespread moral panic in the United States. Due to this panic, evangelical groups who wanted to control the political, religious, and social order believed that Satanists, or those who worshipped the devil, were threatening the United States's moral fabric and needed to be eradicated. However, this panic was not limited to religious circles. The growing anxiety within the country extended to political groups as well at a time when Ronald Regan became

[83] Matt Mills, "'Aggression, but Also Fragility': How Norwegian Black Metal Grew Up," *The Guardian*, September 2, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/sep/02/how-black-metal-grew-up-norway-ulver-enslaved-emperor-ihsahn.
[84] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Random House, 1993), 473.
[85] Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 473.

president. The panic also coincided with many societal shifts surrounding gender, race, and attitudes toward sex, drugs, and alcohol. These changes fueled conservative concerns.[86]

A moral, political, and yet another generational war against music and culture began with beliefs ranging from Role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons leading to drug use, suicide, and Satanism to the heavily metal genre being the musical epicenter of devilish cults and human sacrifices.[87] The need to uproot and cleanse the so-called hidden spaces within America was largely spurred on by religious groups. Satan being their natural enemy, these groups and churches waged war against any and all places where the devil might have been hiding.

As it happens, there is a great deal of religiosity tied in with our sense of authenticity and devilish music. Perhaps surprisingly, this concept is tied up in metal music as well. In his book *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music*, religion scholar Robin Sylvan argues that metal, despite its satanic façade, is really a spiritual nesting ground for those who feel disillusioned by organized religion. Sylvan draws strong parallels between heavy metal listening experiences and religious experiences by discussing the aggressive feeling of the music. Heavy metal fan Lance Ozanix describes his experience:

> I found a release when I went to concerts. You know, I went in there angry. I did my moshing. I did my stage-diving. I did my screaming. I did my metal signs. I did my headbanging. I did everything to let out whatever was bothering me that day. When I walked out of that club, and I was straight, I felt great.[88]

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[86] Joshua Hanna, "For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge: The Satanic Panic in the United States, 1968- 2000" (dissertation, 2021).
[87] David Waldron, "Role-Playing Games and the Christian Right: Community Formation in Response to a Moral Panic," *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 9, No. 1 (March 2005): 3–3.
[88] Robin Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 164.

Within the heavy metal concert experience can be found a sense of relief, an outlet to channel one's aggression and anger. As Sylvan says, "the result is that it feels good." Within another account documented by Sylvan, a metalhead tells us when speaking on the heavy metal concert experience changing his life that "if I had kept going the way I was, I would either go and kill people or I would kill myself or both, at that point, because I was so angry," adding later that, "I found a love…[in heavy metal] It made me a stronger person. It made the depression go away… I would have to say it's a positive religion, what I believe in…I live a pretty positive life."[89]

Suddenly, our definition of "Satanic" isn't so clear anymore. Is it evil? Is it the biblical Devil? Is it a form of protest? My interest is not in the fact that the metal scene has been labeled as devilish but rather in what musicians and fans within the genre did in response. The majority of metal and heavy metal groups seem to embrace the label of "devil music" in one way or another. For example, Black Sabbath, who heavily influenced the formation of black metal, experimented with satanic imagery very openly. Ozzy Osbourne, the lead singer of the group, was quoted saying: "For us, the whole hippy thing was bullshit. The only flower you saw in Aston was on a gravestone. So we thought, let's scare the whole fucking planet with music."[90]

In the case of Euronymous, Mayhem, and the underground Norwegian black metal scene at large, they did far more than adopt the symbol of the devil; they embraced crime and religious violence with it, and in doing so, they scared us all.

Underground Black Metal: The Salon Without Walls

The second wave of black metal formed because of an increased desire to up the ante and push the boundaries of the soundscape, pressure to embody the satanic imagery more than bands in

[89] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit*, 167.
[90] Andrew L. Cope, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

the past, and in response to the political, cultural, and religious landscape of Norway. Within this push for a more extreme genre, Euronymous, along with his band Mayhem, emerged as a leader.

We could classify Euonymus's role within the underground black metal scene as many things. A mentor, a figurehead, and possibly even a cult leader. I tend to believe that Euronymous was all of these things to an extent; however, there is one label that encompasses Aarseth's involvement within the extreme music scene perfectly: salonnière.

Salonnière is a French term used to describe women of the 17th and 18th centuries who patronized the arts, usually out of their homes, and created salon spaces. Despite the fact that the term is gendered and somewhat geographically specific (to say nothing of the aversion Aarseth himself would most likely have to it), the title applies to Euronymous' role within the Norwegian second wave.

Throughout the late 1980s and early 90s, Euronymous provided spaces for black metal musicians and fans to gather. In the early days of Mayhem, he and his bandmates gathered in his home. Shortly thereafter, the band moved into an old lodge in the middle of a forest, immersing themselves in music with rehearsals and jam sessions. The most notable meeting place for black metal fanatics, however, was Euronymous' record shop. Opened in 1991, the "Helvete" (or "Hell" in Norwegian) played a monumental role in the black metal community.[91] Beyond giving musicians and fans a place to buy, sell, and trade music, the shop provided a reliable and permanent location to meet, rehearse, and sometimes even live. Euronymous, despite being a black metal purist, kept many metal albums in stock. He also provided opportunities for other black metal bands and solo artists

[91] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 38.

to print and sell their music at the shop. Teens would come flooding in to listen, buy, and try to wiggle their way into Euronymous's inner circle.

The record shop was modest in size and unassuming from the street. However, once inside, one was transported into a world of darkness. Literally. It was very dimly lit in the record shop, and the place was covered with weapons such as spears, swords, and shields. In fact, at one point, Euronymous considered having shoppers and guests hold lit torches to browse the many records. This idea was scrapped. "It was more run by idealism rather than good business sense," said Tomas "Samoth" Haugen of Emperor when recalling the Helvete.[92] The shop was an environment meant to promote an aesthetic. Just as lavish chandeliers, light piano, and expensive hors d'oeuvres set the scene for many music salons in Vienna, spiked clubs, blaring guitar riffs, and the moldy decay of the Helvete helped set the scene for black metal.

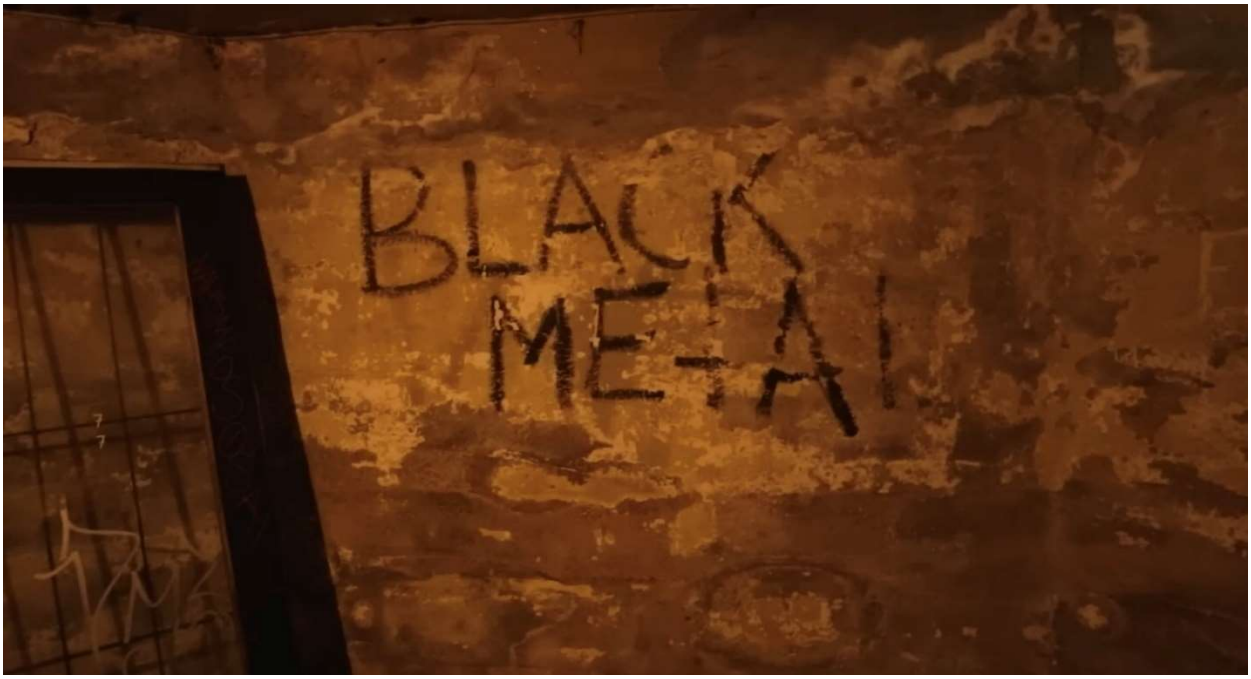

Figure 5. The words "Black Metal" written on a basement wall of the Helvete record shop. Screen capture taken from BorisT. On YouTube.

[92] Patterson, *Black Metal*, 153.

Haugen also explains that the shop "became a good meeting ground for people who shared interest in this music and the lifestyle that came with it back then."[93] Here, Haugen implies that a particular "lifestyle" came in a package with the black metal scene. This lifestyle, as we have discussed, consists of aesthetics and ideologies strictly followed under the watchful eye of Euronymous.

When viewing the scene from a salon culture perspective, Aarseth managed to cultivate a salon contained within four elements: aesthetic, physical place, violence, and music. Unlike other traditional salon spaces, the underground black metal scene was encompassed by invisible boundaries. With each physical space Euronymous provided the black metal scene, he added one more element to an immersive environment. Each physical space chosen by the guitarist brought members into an isolated, oppressive, and all-encompassing world. Aarseth, as any salonnière does, set out with the intention to create a space that prioritizes his interests. In other words, just as Manheim described when speaking on Euronymous's goals for Mayhem early on, Aarseth created a network to live out his vision of black metal.

In addition to the act of providing a salon space, Euronymous was a patron of heavy metal music and expression. Through the opportunities provided by the Helvete, Aarseth (Euronymous) bought, sold, traded, and collaborated. In fact, he was a large force of promotion in the underground black metal scene in general. Interestingly, in the beginning, Euronymous did not want black metal to be accessible to the public. Euronymous believed that only certain people, whom he often called "true fans," should have access to black metal music and culture. He was opposed to anyone who wasn't completely committed to the lifestyle entering what he considered to be their collective domain. This is unusual in a sense when speaking about music salons and their hosts.

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[93] Patterson, *Black Metal*, 154.

As we have seen in the past in situations like Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce and the musical movement there, it is usually the hope that ideas discussed behind closed doors will become acceptable in the general social sphere. This was either for social justice reasons or simply for the convenience of those involved.

Euronymous, while a staunch patron of metal music, did not want black metal to become popular. The guest list for this particular salon is short, and the requirements are immense. This concept of purity in art is nothing new.

In Walter Benjamin's article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," there is a question of whether or not mass-produced art loses value in the act of production. In order to answer this question, Benjamin weighs the pros and cons of original art and art that has been mass-produced. Benjamin proposes that "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[94]

Benjamin says that original art, or art that has not been mass-produced is special because of the environment around it. This environment, in a sense, remains intact. For instance, the Mona Lisa living out its existence in the Louvre seems correct, the piece is serving something like its original purpose. However, when a reproduction of the Mona Lisa is placed in the basement of a suburban home in America or the powder room of a restaurant, it seems out of place. Its environment has been lost along with its uniqueness.

[94] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, May 4, 2018, 217–20, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429498909-39, 3.

Many of those in the black metal sphere seemed to be searching for this uniqueness. They wanted something raw, "true", and real. This craving for authenticity, however, did not stop the very human and unavoidable urge in the music business forever: money.

Rightfully so, Benjamin also states that, on the flip side of authenticity, there lies a power in copies. Through technical reproduction, the replica can be placed in circumstances that would be unattainable for the original. This, of course, goes beyond a restaurant bathroom. In some cases, art will only be discovered in the form of a reproduction.

Aarseth seemed to recognize this in the early 1990s at some point, most likely valuing monetary gain a bit more than previously after being the sole operator of a record store. When asked if he agreed that black metal should be underground and avoid both making money and using large labels, Aarseth had this to say:

> I disagree about black metal staying underground only. I thought so before, but I have changed my mind. The idea about underground, selling little and only to "true" people, not earning money, not thinking that you are bigger than your fans and so on, everything comes from Hardcore. And how the hell can we know who are "true" and who are not, as most of the people who call themselves true are just normal idiots.[95]

Until this point, Aarseth had never seemed to mind deciding who was "true" and who was not. In fact, he continues to dictate the black metal scene in a similar way here. I find it highly unlikely, despite his claims that the underground ideology came from "Hardcore" artists. Aarseth seemed to be after a bit of money and notoriety. Most relevant in terms of salon culture,

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[95] Mythic Imagination, "One of the Final Interviews with Euronymous 1993 from Kill Yourself! MAG," Black Metal Chronology, August 2, 2017, https://blackdeathmetalhistory.wordpress.com/2017/08/02/one-of-the-final-interviews-with-euronymous-1993-from-kill-yourself-mag/?fbclid=IwAR02dk9ovP6QSfk8KbFdIYFAzttyfJqhdv7J3PznzCVNRTiCv4zWlVgzE5M_aem_AVVCRg7sEbI2kCr8tV8h8tjh9iDCik7pOLSrRH5YgOfuFmsuFHKvj1czHrV4de8CMSBnDakVCuA64Pn8I5S5QtnB.

Euronymous also seems to be after control of the environment he created and might even be hoping to add to the guest list.

In the very same answer, Aarseth notes that other original black metal bands such as Venom, who he greatly admired, "never had to be in underground to be accepted," and asked why black metal bands should be held to a different standard now.

> The underground is both a means for the hardcore people to put us down and control us (at least it was before, they have mostly disappeared now but their ideas still linger on), and a bad excuse for bad bands to be equal with great bands. Those who scream most about being in "underground" is also often those who make so bad music that they don't have a chance to get big themselves.[96]

However, that didn't stop people from trying to be added to such a list. The secrecy of it all really was an issue when it came to sales. Many artists wanted exposure and opportunity to widen their audiences. Euronymous seemed to both assist and impede this endeavor.

Euronymous gathered people together and forged connections. These connections were not just between himself and other fans and musicians but between other members of the scene independently as well. In fact, a small but mighty group centered around Euronymous and Helvete called the "Black Circle" emerged.

Bard Eithun or "Faust," the drummer for the black metal band Emperor, described the Black Circle as "just a name that was invented for the people who hung around the shop—the people in these bands and some others too. People kept asking who were the members of this Black Circle, but it didn't really have members." Faust also goes on to say that, despite the lack of

[96] Mythic Imagination, "One of the Final Interviews with Euronymous 1993 from Kill Yourself! MAG," Black Metal Chronology.

organized membership, individuals within the Black Circle knew "who was able to do what" and invited them to the Helvete.[97] Faust declines to elaborate. However, it seems that members of the circle helped one another musically or with production. Rather than a cult-like group, as the name "Black Circle" might suggest, the group was a collection of like-minded people who gathered to chat and play or listen to music in a very specific environment.

"Come on Leipzig!": What Happens When the Image Flops?

On November 26, 1990, Mayhem performed live at the Eiskeller club in Leipzig, Germany. The band's lineup at the time was Necrobutcher (bass), Hellhammer (drums), Euronymous (guitar), and Dead (vocals). This live performance was recorded and released in 1993 as a CD titled "Mayhem: Live in Leipzig."[98] This CD is rather special among heavy metal fans and collectors because it is one of few recordings available that include what most consider Mayhem's "golden lineup."[99]

The most famous member and the member the album's aesthetic revolves around is Pelle Ohlin or "Dead." The CD's cover features a black and white image of Dead as he leans forward out of the darkness, candelabra in hand, corpse paint decorating his face, and what appears to be blood streaming from his nose. Upon opening the CD case, the front slip opens to reveal two more images of Dead. On the left is a close-up image of the singer accompanied by the words, "Jag är inte en människa. Det här är bara en dröm, och snart vaknar jag. Det var för kallt och blodet levrades hela tiden." This Swedish excerpt is taken from Ohlin's suicide note and translates in English to, "I am not a human being. This is just a dream, and soon I will wake up. It was too cold and the blood is

[97] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos,* 67.
[98] Bree Halmstad, Hesher Keenan, and Smitty Neal, "Looking Back at Mayhem's Historic Leipzig Gig," MetalSucks, November 21, 2022, https://www.metalsucks.net/2022/11/21/looking-back-at-mayhems-historic-leipzig-gig/.
[99] Halmstad, Keenan, and Neal, "Looking Back at Mayhem's Historic Leipzig Gig."

coagulating all the time." The other side of the slip, on the right, shows a picture of Dead on stage holding a microphone stand as he looks at a crowd beyond the frame. In front of him sits a pig's severed head impaled on a stake. Below the photo, a caption reads, "Died by his own hands, April 1991."[100]

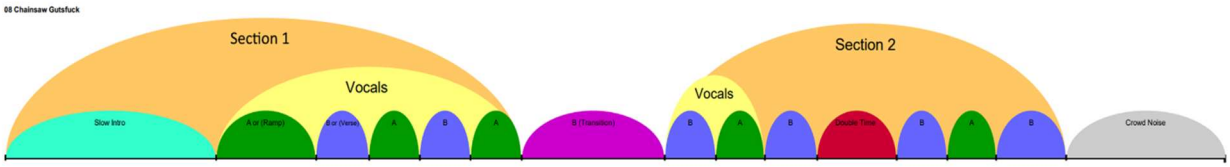

Figure 6. A visual representation of "Chainsaw Gutsfuck" and its sections. This graph was made using Variations Audio Timeliner.

Track 8, or "Chainsaw Gutsfuck," begins with a stray pluck of an unamplified bass. The dissonant notes resonate through the club, only to be drowned out by the amplified sounds of the opening chords. It is a slow beginning (see figure ?, labeled as "Introduction" in cyan); the notes E, D#, and C# are repeated over and over again in the bass and then the guitar as well, with a few sparse rhythmic patterns from the drums. After the introduction section, a new motif emerges (see figure ? labeled "A" in dark green).

The motif is centered around D# and E and moves upwards in half steps. The sound produced is very similar to "revving up," almost as if Euronymous pulls at the strings of his guitar as he would a string to start a chainsaw. After a few bars of this, the motif continues and the band settles into a slow headbanging groove. As soon as this section ends and what could be considered the main melody of the song begins, so do Dead's vocals (see figure ? labeled as "B" in blue). This

[100] Mayhem, *Live in Leipzig*, CD.

melody also follows a chromatic pattern that includes the notes C#, D, A, G#, E, and finally D#. Over the sound of the guitar, Dead's characteristic raspy voice can be heard screaming explicitly violent lyrics that describe the dismembering a woman with a chainsaw. The song switches back and forth between motifs A and B for most of the song. Near the end of the song, there is a section in double time. However, this is the only section that stands out.

Track 8, "Chainsaw Gutsfuck," is a fascinating moment in the CD because it features around 40 seconds of atmospheric sounds from the Eiskeller club. Shockingly, when Mayhem ends the song, there is no clapping of appreciation to be heard. A few yells and a whistle are the only audible responses from the crowd as the band presumably stands on stage. After about 10 seconds of this near silence, strikes against the base pedal can be heard as if to break the stillness of the room. The entire moment is a painfully awkward listen. The crowd seems dead. Necrobutcher, in an interview years later, comments on the crowd's reaction to their performance:

> I made my way over to the mic pretty often during the Leipzig gig to scream unpleasantries at the audience. They sucked the energy from me. They just stood there with no reaction. I



Figure 7. Mayhem performs at the Eiskeller club in Leipzig, Germany. Photo displayed in the article "Looking Back at Mayhem's Historic Leipzig Gig" by MetalSucks.

needed more feedback to get going. In pure desperation, I yelled, "Come on, Leipzig!" There was still no response.[101]

In fact, Necrobutcher tried several times throughout the performance to invigorate the audience. Some of these attempts are included in the CD. The infamous "Come on Leipzig!" from Necrobutcher can be heard at the end of "Necrolust" and the words, "Are you dead?" can be discerned at the beginning of "Carnage."

At this moment, Mayhem seems to have lost all of its power. The crowd does not seem to be playing into the atmosphere of the group at all; therefore, the aesthetic falls flat. I can only imagine how the rest of the band, especially Euronymous, reacted to this. This moment in Leipzig is an interesting one because it takes Mayhem out of their environment in Norway and places them somewhere else. Might there be something to this diminishing of power? Is the importance of place, in this case, Norway, more important than the band may have thought?

Bitter Endings

Euronymous's story ended abruptly in August of 1993 when he was stabbed to death inside his apartment building by former friend Varg Vikernes. The relationship between Euronymous and Vikernes turned sour due to several factors. First, Euronymous was forced to close the Helvete record shop a few months before his murder due to media pressure and his parents insistence. Second, Euronymous owed Varg a significant sum of money. Third, Vikernes thought that Euronymous's actions, including the closing of his shop, did not match up with the evil image Euronymous promoted.[102] Others, however, believe that Vikernes killed Euronymous due to a power struggle. According to Bard Eithun or "Faust," a member of the black metal band Emperor, "Vikernes was

[101] Halmstad, Keenan, and Neal, "Looking Back at Mayhem's Historic Leipzig Gig."
[102] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 120.

very much into making war with Oystein. He didn't like him anymore because obviously Oystein got more attention in the underground scene than Vikernes, and he couldn't handle it."[103]

However, Euronymous wasn't the only casualty in the underground black metal scene. In August of 1992, Faust murdered Magne Andreassen after he, according to Faust, propositioned him sexually while walking home at night. A murder for which he has no remorse.

A year earlier, Per Yngve "Pelle" Ohlin, or "Dead," Mayhem's vocalist, killed himself in a house where most of the band members were living at the time. Capitalizing on this, Euronymous spoke about the suicide in a letter:

> I found him and it looked fucking grim, the upper half of his head was all over the room, and the lower part of the brain had fallen out of the rest of the head and down on the bed. I of course grabbed my camera immediately and made some photos; we'll use them in the next mayhem LP. I and Hellhammer were so lucky that we found two big pieces of his skull and we have hung them on necklaces as a memory.[104]

This is an example of just how far some within the black metal scene went to keep up with the dark and evil aesthetic. This may be the end of the list when it comes to death; however, countless crimes, such as cemetery and grave desecrations, church desecrations, and church burnings, are also connected to the scene.

Recently, on April 9, 2024, the basement of the former Helvete record shop (now Neseblod Records) caught on fire. Hauntingly, this fire occurred the day after the anniversary of Dead's suicide. The cause of the fire, as well as the extent of the damage to the basement, remains

[103] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 122.
[104] Moynihan and Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 60.

unknown.[105] Hopefully, this is the last mysterious fire that floats ominously around the legacy of the Norwegian black metal scene.

[105] Jillian Drachman, "Historic Neseblod Records, Formerly Helvete, Damaged by Fire," Metal Insider | Get Inside the Industry, April 11, 2024, https://metalinsider.net/news/historic-neseblod-records-formerly-euronymous-helvete-damaged-by-fire.

Part 3: Conclusion

In March 2020, a sense of impending doom hung heavy over my life. Spring break, which was supposed to be a respite from the rigors of music school and a chance to prepare for my junior horn recital, approached. When it came, I didn't feel the usual sense of relief but a creeping unease as COVID-19, then still a mysterious threat, loomed overhead. Eventually, spring break stretched into an endless summer, and the world seemed to grind to a halt.

As an extrovert and a naturally social person, I felt the suffocating pressure of isolation right away. In an instant, my once bustling life was reduced to the confines of my home, and the silence there was deafening. I wondered daily when I would see my friends and family again safely. I missed them dearly. So, in the face of an increasingly hostile outside world, I turned inward, seeking solace in the digital realm.

Soon after beginning my online journey, a long-distance friend introduced me to an app called Discord. Initially, I resisted, clinging to familiar platforms like Skype out of habit. However, as I grew accustomed to its interface, I discovered just how many doors the app opened socially.

Discord is a communication service capable of voice, text, and audio that is usually used by gamers or friends to connect with each other. Similar to texting, Discord gives you the ability to chat directly with friends. But unlike text messaging, you can also call in a group using audio and video. These chats can take place in the "messages" tab, where you are also able to add multiple people to a group; however, they can also happen in a "server." Servers are invite-only spaces for friends or communities to meet and (in contrast to chats in the "messages" tab) aren't limited to a single chatroom. Within a server, you may create as many text and voice channels as you want. In most servers I have been a member of or created myself, there is a "general" channel for simple chitchat. In addition to this, there are usually separate text channels for various video games, movies, shows,

and music. These channels can also be divided into "categories" for convenience. With this myriad of possibilities, Discord servers can become quite intricate.

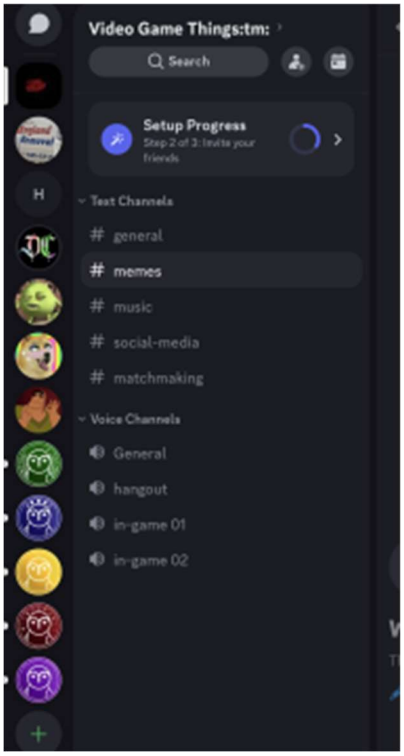

Figure 8. An example of what a Discord server might look like.

Online chatrooms and what some scholars refer to as "online third places," or online social spaces that are separate from environments like home or work, are not new topics of research.[106] This attention to loneliness and loss of in person third spaces is usually marked as beginning with Robert Putnam's 2001 book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.[107] However, many works on similar topics such as the impact of online spaces have been published since then,

[106] Teck Hong Tan and Izian Idris, "Assessing the Significance of First Place and Online Third Places in Supporting Malaysian Seniors' Well-Being during the Pandemic," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10, No. 1 (2023), 2.
[107] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies have become quite specific in nature. For example, in 2023, "Assessing the Significance of First Place and Online Third Places in Supporting Malaysian Seniors' Well-Being during the Pandemic" by Teck Hong Tan and Izian Idris studied the impact of the pandemic on senior citizens and the benefits and drawbacks of third places, both online and in person.[108] However, despite the focus on pandemic-related research and online environments, online third places haven't often been linked to salon culture.

An exception to this is a chapter titled "Online Salons" in Jaida N'Ha Sandra and Jon Spayde's *Salons: The Joy of Conversation.* The authors introduce online salons as a solution to many things that might be stopping one from attending an in-person salon, such as a disability, living in a remote place, being unable to leave your home, a busy schedule, or just plain shyness. However, Sandra and Spayde also give credit where credit is due to online meeting places, reminding us that "An online salon is not simply a disembodied version or a parody of a 'real' salon." The online salon experience is unique, with challenges, triumphs, and rules of its own.[109]

On one hand, the authors define the atmosphere of salons as "organized conversation between people who interact regularly" but that members are truly "bound together not so much by a shared interest in a particular topic as by a shared interest in the art of conversation itself."[110] On the other hand, the chapter "Online Salons" describes virtual groups as "more fragile" than in-person groups due to their dependence on the quality of conversation. In this case, online salons seem to be breaking the mold. Usually, the quality of conversation *depends* on shared interests in online salon settings. Discord servers that I have been involved with have broken apart, lost

[108] Hong Tan and Idris, "Assessing the Significance of First Place and Online Third Places in Supporting Malaysian Seniors' Well-Being during the Pandemic," 1, 2.
[109] Sandra and Spayde, *Salons*, 164.
[110] Sandra and Spayde, *Salons*, 163.

membership, or disbanded entirely due to conflicting interests. Here's a scenario: I join a server filled with my friends, and I am enjoying horror-themed video games at the time. Although my friends also enjoy discussing horror games, after a few months, their interests shift to anime. Due to this, the text chats reserved for horror gaming become less and less active and new chats related to anime become busier.

In "Re-examining Salon Space: Structuring Audiences and Music at Parisian Receptions," Nicole Vilkner states that Parisian music salons included multiple performance spaces and that guests would often listen to performances in adjoining rooms in addition to their own. Expanding on this further, Vilkner points out that "spatial divisions" or "architectural borders of a room often differentiated between conversations and activities," and "It resulted in groupings of guests that stratified the social experiences, often by gender."[111] This historical context provides an insightful lens through which to examine multiroom experiences within Discord servers.

COVID-19 stopped us from meeting each other in our houses, but Discord gave it back in a different form. The servers that my friends and I were members of became virtual houses to us all. Just like houses, these Discord servers had "rooms" that served specific purposes in our lives and our interactions with each other. We moved rooms according to what interested us at that moment and what conversations we wanted to have. And in contrast to physical spaces, Discord allowed us to be in more than one room at once. This kind of fluidity of time and space allowed for seemingly endless conversation.

As I continue to be active in spaces like online Discord servers today, many questions come to mind. Do some online third places qualify as a salon at all? In not, what do we call them? If so, how have they changed? In what ways are online salons different from modern in-person versions?

[111] Vilkner, "Re-Examining Salon Space," 229.

How do our relationships with these salons change when they move online? Has salon culture been strengthened or weakened by online advantages such as opportunities for never-ending conversation?

Continuous Salons, Continuous Questions

On the surface, the neighborhood of Deep Deuce in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and Norway's underground black metal scene of the early 1990s seem to possess no similarities. There are differences in time, climate, race, and culture, to name a few. However, both of these case studies present music salons to us in very "unusual" ways. Specifically, each involves the breaking down of music salon preconceptions involving place and space.

In the case of Deep Deuce, constraints such as segregation and Jim Crow Laws create a public space that has all the exclusivity of a private environment. Within this environment, the joy, creativity, and commitment of the Black community in Oklahoma City produce moments of music that encompass the entire neighborhood. This phenomenon in Deep Deuce was one of a kind, a means for social connectivity, growth, and change that can never be repeated in exactly that way.

The underground black metal scene in Norway, led by Euronymous and his band Mayhem, became a collective that lived within ideology rather than a building or neighborhood. Fear, anger, and desperation to be heard formed a circle of violent musical expression and, eventually, crime. The walls of this particular music salon were the churches they burned in protest, and they made themselves at home amongst the flames.

Salons have been with us in many different forms, some easily spotted and others difficult to distinguish. I have made a point to highlight the "unusual" in the hope that we might be aware of music salons, in their many forms, as we move away from physical spaces and onto the internet.

However, despite my efforts in this thesis, the music salon doesn't always need to be analyzed and picked apart. In fact, if we use this model all the time, the music salon seems to lose some of its magic and, therefore, its power. Music salons, as part of their charm as much as their power, are meant to be mysterious.

With this in mind, why don't we give them their autonomy? I believe we gain a lot by simply noticing salons because, much like fickle housecats, music salons want to be appreciated but not admired *too* closely. Noticing a salon, however, does require a certain level of knowledge. We must know how they might present themselves, and we surely have to know a bit of what they're capable of.

If salon culture can be seen in places like Deep Deuce and Norway, where will we spot them next?

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