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From Thrash to Cash:

Forging and Legitimizing Dutch Metal

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When San Francisco metal-heads Metallica visited Europe to promote their first album *Kill 'Em All* in 1984—predating metal’s defining year 1985—three out of fourteen concerts in their *Seven Dates of Hell* tour were scheduled in the Netherlands. Metallica introduced Dutch audiences to a new, even more extreme, offshoot of heavy metal music: thrash metal. In a recent television documentary on one of these early concerts, Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich said that from the onset, Dutch audiences proved to be very receptive of the band: “Holland was really, I think, the first place where it felt like Metallica connected at a deeper level” (Talma, 2014). Ever since, the Dutch metal scene has had a track record of providing a warm and welcoming stage for foreign and domestic metal acts.

A second key event took place in 2001, when Dutch metal music had its first mainstream success. Symphonic metal band Within Temptation reached number two on the charts with their single “Ice Queen”. During the 2000s, this type of symphonic metal—sometimes referred to as “gothic” or “female-fronted metal”—became internationally associated with the Netherlands. The German metal magazine *Rock Hard*, for example, wrote in 2007: “For some time now, it is quite clear that the Dutch are in the very forefront of melodic-dark-metal fronted by female singers” (Van Olphen, 2011). Moreover, this type of metal has become—next to dance music—an important export product, receiving financial support from the national government.

Twelve years later, the Summa College, a large school system for senior secondary vocational education in the city of Eindhoven, started the world’s first three-year training

degree in metal music production called Metal Factory. Besides teaching instrumental skills, the curriculum offers an all-encompassing metal-industry schooling with courses on how to set up tours, create merchandise, read and write contracts and other aspects of band organization and management. According to its founders, Metal Factory is an indispensable addition to the wide array of music schools, because “metal remains the ‘neglected child’ of music education.” Moreover, there is a demand from the “professional market” for “musicians who control this musical style.” (Summa College, 2013).

By taking these three—seemingly unrelated—key events in the reception and production of metal music as a starting point, we aim to show how the development of Dutch metal ties in with the overall legitimation of the genre. In this respect metal music is of interest as the genre for a long period of time, often gladly, played the role of a foil against legitimate

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culture, even to the point of cultivating bad taste (Weinstein, 1991). Whereas research has addressed the reception of Anglo-American metal in the Netherlands (Lalta, 2004), little is still known about the position of—Dutch and foreign—metal in the Netherlands. To remedy this at least to some extent, we will first offer an overview of how Dutch metal has developed over the course of more than three decades.

The production of Dutch metal music

In December 2014, newspaper *De Volkskrant* reported that “there finally is proof of a lively Dutch metal culture” (Van Gijssel, 2014). Evidence came in the shape of *Dutch Steel*, a three-album compilation set (in the national colors red, white and blue, and limited to 666 copies) that contains songs by largely forgotten heavy metal bands such as Frankenstein, Exciter, Seducer and Aggressor, but also relatively known acts as Picture, Sword and Highway Chile. Music journalist and the album’s compiler Robert Haagsma who had witnessed the rise of metal music in the 1980s, still was surprised that few of the Dutch bands had any commercial success in the Netherlands, let alone abroad. This raises the question how metal music production developed, beyond successful commercial acts such as Within Temptation.

To visualize the development of Dutch metal music, we analyzed all known Dutch metal bands that have been formed since 1970. Probably forming the primary source for knowledge on all existing metal acts, the internet music archive *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The*

Metal Archives contains over 100,000 entries of international metal bands, resulting from the meticulous work of metal fans and musicians worldwide (Mayer and Timberlake, 2014). We analyzed all 2,058 Dutch metal bands listed on the website (as of 15 September 2015).

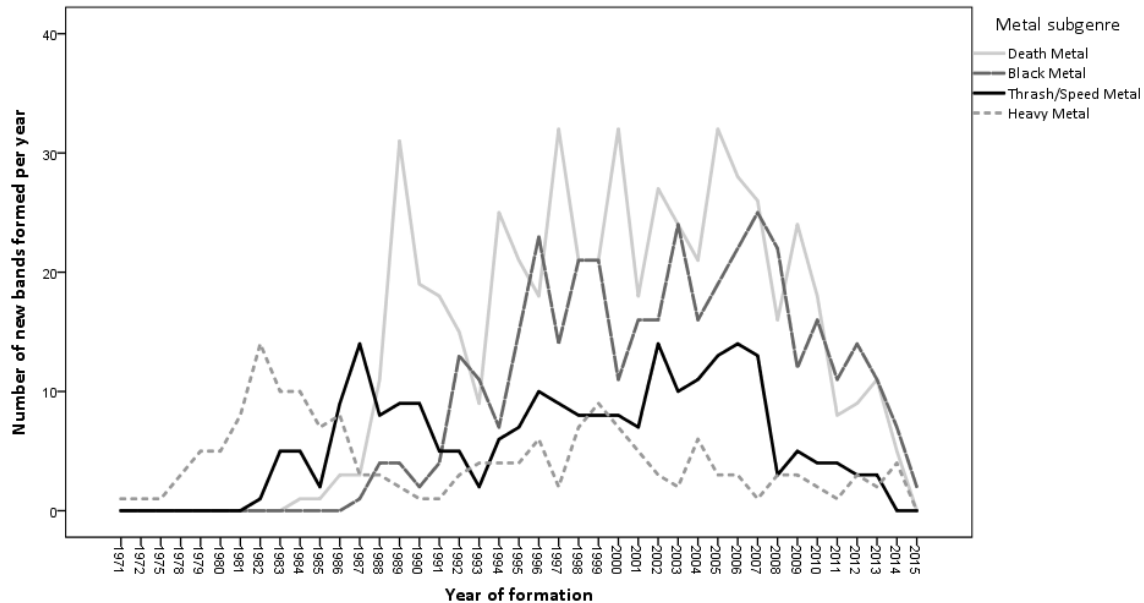


Figure 6.1: Amount of new metal bands formed per year in the Netherlands, 1971-2015

Whereas in the Netherlands, like in other Western countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, metal music was warmly welcomed by its youth—to large concern

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of parents, politicians, professors, police and press—the formation of Dutch bands seemed to lag behind. Looking at the total amount of metal bands that formed between 1971 and 2015 (Table 6.1), we can indeed observe that metal music production was fairly limited until 1988, with a mere 33 new bands emerging that year. This is interesting, since large metal acts such as Black Sabbath (1970, Tiel, at *On the River Waal* festival), Iron Maiden (1980, Leiden, with Kiss), and Metallica (1984, Zwolle, at *Aardschokdag*) found their way to Dutch stages in a relatively early in their careers.

Genre formation and development

As Table 1 shows, “heavy metal” was the first subgenre to be picked up by Dutch artists. Taking into account that, according to most metal scholars and fans, the first heavy metal

album (the self-titled *Black Sabbath*) was released in 1970 (Phillips and Cogan, 2009), it took over ten years for a significant number of Dutch heavy metal bands to be formed. The subgenre reached its peak in 1982, when fourteen new heavy metal bands emerged, among whom the previously mentioned Aggressor and Sword. The next (small) peak indicates the rise of thrash metal, which occurs when heavy metal's popularity decreases halfway the 1980s. Interestingly, this increase takes place in 1986, two years after Metallica did their *Seven Dates of Hell* tour. Noticing that the development of American thrash metal largely took place around the very early 1980s, we can see that—as with the rise of Dutch heavy metal music—the production of Dutch thrash metal occurred relatively late.

Dutch metal's most successful year—at least regarding new band formations—was 1989. In that year we witness the rise of local death metal music, also known as “Nederdeath”, the first and only subgenre to lay claim to authenticity linked to place of origin. As with other music genres with strong conventions, the national or regional origin of metal bands is important in the attribution of authenticity (Wallach, Berger and Greene, 2011). This is particularly the case for the first and second waves of British heavy metal bands, Swedish death metal, Tampa (Florida, United States) death metal and Norwegian black metal (Kuppens and Van der Pol, 2014). The 1989 explosion of Dutch death metal bands, such as Thanatos, Pestilence, Sinister, Gorefest, Altar and Asphyx, all played a fairly comparable style of death metal that surprisingly has loosely been canonized as “Nederdeath”, even though the Dutch style arguably is not very distinct from—in particular—the Tampa, Florida death metal style. As such, rather than an aesthetic label, “Nederdeath” functioned as a category that signaled a certain quality of death metal.

The Tampa death metal sound originated in the mid-1980s with bands such as Death, Morbid Angel and Cannibal Corpse and was, for a very brief period of time, unexpectedly picked up by major industry labels. This could partly explain the sudden rise of Dutch death metal, which this time does run parallel with the international rise of a metal music subgenre. Related to this was the fact that Roadrunner Records, founded by the Dutch entrepreneur Cees Wessels in 1980, made many – mostly foreign – death metal releases readily available to Dutch audiences. “Nederdeath” band Pestilence was one of the few exceptions to secure their first album release on the Roadrunner label (*Malleus Maleficarum* in 1988). However, upcoming Dutch bands were often represented by other non-Dutch labels such as Century Media or Nuclear Blast Records. Furthermore, as these death metal

bands were riding the wave of the increasingly popular death metal subgenre and achieving notable domestic success, Dutch bands gained popularity as they were habitually booked as support-acts for larger (American) bands that were touring Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

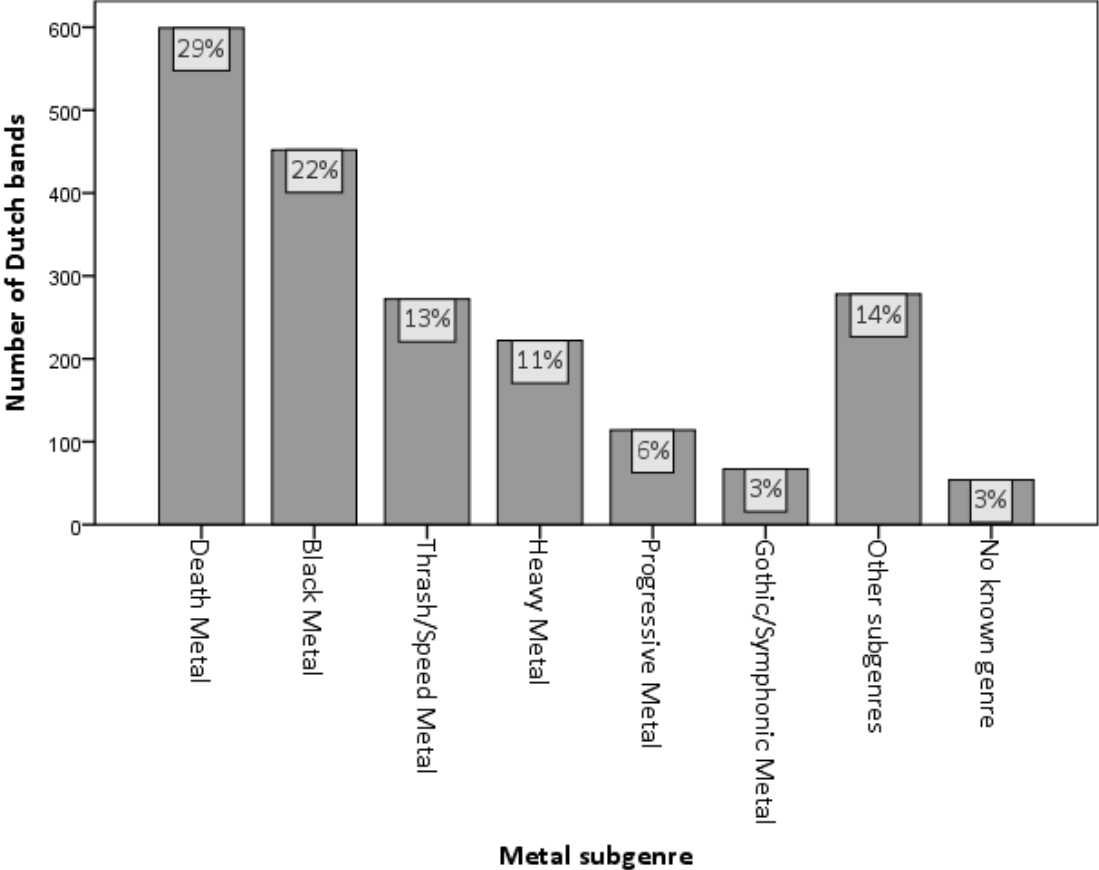


Figure 6.2: Amount of Dutch metal bands per genre

While death metal remains the most popular kind of Dutch metal music from a production perspective (29% of all bands, see Table 2), we witness the rise of black metal in the mid-1990s (Table 1); the third extreme subgenre of metal music which has its roots in Norway and has enjoyed a strict and stable following in the Netherlands ever since (Kuppens and Van der Pol, 2014), with bands such as Cirith Gorgor and Countess. In this case however, no such thing as “Nederblack” developed, a distinctly Dutch version of the Norwegian genre. Around the same time—but too marginal in band count to be visualized in Table 1—the development of symphonic or gothic metal starts. In 1995, North Brabant band The Gathering released their third album *Mandolyn* through the major label Century Media Records, which sold over 130,000 copies in Europe and is considered to be the key album in its genre. This success

would later go mainstream with the release of *Mother Earth* by Within Temptation in 2001, which sold over 400,000 copies in Europe.

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Interestingly, we have not witnessed a similar rise in new bands (totaling a mere 3% of all Dutch metal bands) within this genre—while this is the only subgenre that *did* develop a very strict Dutch sound and identity with exemplar bands such as The Gathering, Within Temptation, Orphanage, Epica, After Forever, ReVamp, Delain and Autumn (Figure 2). In this case, it can be argued that from all the bands that sprouted from the gothic/symphonic subgenre, many became prominent. In the process, metal music escaped the narrow confines of its underground existence. Subgenres that once were the sole province of metal consumers, slowly became accepted by a larger audience. Most bands operating in the more extreme subgenres, however, kept to the “underground” of the Dutch metal scene—an isolation that maybe due to metal’s treasured image of being the main musical opponent of legitimate culture. This raises the question how this development ties in with the overall legitimization of the genre.

Legitimation

To what extent and how did metal develop from a new and unaccepted genre into a more valid and accepted musical form among a general public? To answer this question we will look at two types of legitimation. First, economic legitimation refers to a genre’s rise in merit based on commercial criteria, such as sales figures, chart success, or sold-out gigs, moving from a marginal subcultural phenomenon to a profitable industry. Second, artistic legitimation refers to a repositioning of artistic genres “from merely entertainment, commerce, fad, or cultural experimentation or randomness to culture that is legitimately artistic, whether that be popular or high art” (Baumann, 2007: 49). Successful legitimation, economic as well as artistic, depends on (1) opportunity space, (2) resource mobilization, and (3) framing processes.

Opportunity space

The first ingredient needed for legitimation are changes in opportunity space brought about by social factors outside a particular art world (Baumann, 2001: 405). Opportunity space is affected by two interrelated factors. First, “a cultural product's association with a high-status

audience can help to legitimate the product as art” (ibid.). On the one hand, metal has gained economic legitimacy in the form of chart success—particularly in the period 1991–1993 and 2001–2003 (Lalta, 2004). As such, the Netherlands did become a significant market for metal music (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 97). On the other hand, a liking for metal has strong working-class and low education associations in most Western countries, including the Netherlands. Even cultural omnivores are said to like “anything but heavy metal” (Bryson, 1996). Second, “a newly popular substitute or competitor can act as a foil against which a cultural genre’s (artistic) status is enhanced” (Baumann, 2001: 405). As indicated, for a long time metal, keeping within its niche in the “underground”, thrived on its image of “bad” taste as a foil against legitimate culture.

Yet, recent research suggests that the enduring isolation of metal music might slowly be coming to an end. First, a recent study concluded that: “among present-day adolescents in the Netherlands, apparently neither heavy metal nor other loud, guitar-driven music related

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negatively to education. In the 1980s and 1990s, noisy, rebellious rock music attracted college kids both as the music to listen and play, in the process, losing its distinctive ‘drop-out’, lower-class aura” (Ter Bogt et al, 2011: 314). Interestingly, this study also points to a popular substitute of metal as they argue that for more educated adolescents, particular forms of dance music function as a foil against which metal seems comparatively legitimate.

Second, as a result of upward social mobility, adolescents of the 1970s and 1980s have taken particular forms of metal—often major bands such as Iron Maiden, Ozzy Osbourne and Metallica—with them while ascending the social ladder and becoming “wistful emigrants” (Weinstein, 1991: 111) who have shed their long hair and patched-up leather jackets, but are still listening the music. Dutch metal e-zine *Lords of Metal* devoted a section on these famous headbangers, including an Eight O’Clock News presenter, several well-known authors, members of parliament from a wide range of political denominations, (Olympic) athletes and entrepreneurs. While the presence of famous metal fans indicates some form of legitimation, the opening statement of each interview suggests metal still has a low-status stigma—duly reified by the editors: “Metal is mindless noise for the less fortunate; a simplistic outlet for upset and troubled youth, construction workers on probation and other losers with a underdeveloped music taste. Most of all, it is a phase you will get over. [...] Although this disdain towards metal music has become slightly more nuanced over the last decades, mainstream music fans still do not take someone who loves a big shot decibels seriously” (Blankenstein, 2009).

Resource mobilization

The second ingredient for successful legitimation depends on the power—from within the Dutch metal scene—to successfully mobilize resources and the benefits they bring (Baumann, 2007). Resources can be tangible or intangible, that is, they can take the form of (a) labor (e.g. opportunities to play at venues or festivals), (b) media attention, (c) income (e.g., government support), and (d) prestige (e.g., inclusion in educational programs).

a. Metal-oriented venues and festivals

In order to attract international bands as well as to provide a stage for Dutch metal bands, venues and festivals are key resources. About sixty percent of Dutch pop venues were founded between 1970 and 1990. While there have hardly been venues focusing solely on metal music, we can identify several metal-oriented venues, such as Baroeg in Rotterdam (1981), Bolwerk in Sneek (1975), Dynamo and Effenaar in Eindhoven (1981 and 1971) and Scum in Katwijk (1982). These small to medium size venues function as local youth centers, particularly since they are often located in smaller municipalities or suburban and provincial areas, and hence tend to program local artists as well as (inter)nationally touring bands. While predominantly focusing on metal, these venues often claim to maintain a larger “subcultural” (Baroeg) or “youth-oriented” (Scum) focus than they are commonly known for. In the 1980s and 1990s these venues provided memorable stages for by now well-known bands doing their international tours such as Slayer, Sepultura and Cradle of Filth, but also Dutch bands such as Within Temptation. Providing a steady quantity of local and

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foreign bands, these youth venues functioned as physical platforms where fans, aspiring artists and musicians could interact on a frequent basis, which helped to add a distinctly physical dimension to metal music’s aesthetic community (Frith, 1981).

In addition, the Netherlands offered a plurality of metal music festivals since the early 1980s. The best known early metal festival, *Aardschokdag*, was organized by the makers of hard rock and metal-magazine *Aardschok*. The first edition was organized in 1982 in De Effenaar in Eindhoven with Dutch heavy metal band Picture as a headliner. Although the Netherlands did not host the first hard rock and metal festival in the world, *Dynamo Open Air* was by far the largest of its sort in the 1990s. Starting on the parking lot behind the Dynamo venue—again in Eindhoven, *Dynamo Open Air* grew from 5,000 visitors in 1986 to a massive over 110,000 attendees in 1995—being the largest paid music festival in Europe that year.

Even during its peak years, when foreign bands such as Machine Head, Fear Factory, Slayer, Venom and Nailbomb were headlining, the line-up always included several Dutch bands such as Gorefest, Sleeze Beez, Urban Dance Squad or 35007. However, the festival collapsed under its own weight, partly resulting from local authorities underestimating the amount of visitors which resulted in long traffic jams. Moreover, large sponsors were lacking as brands were reluctant to commit themselves to metal, hesitant to be associated with “long haired, asocial scum” (Vanes, n.d.). This response superbly reveals how metal music, even at its peak in 1995, was very high on internal legitimation—as there existed a very clear and visible scene-identity—but still lacked external legitimation from mainstream society. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that most metal bands—unless commercially acclaimed, like Rammstein—do not make it to the line-up of large popular music festivals such as *Pinkpop* or *Lowlands*, in contrast to their indie-rock and pop counterparts.

b. Media attention

Due to the participatory culture common in metal music (Schaap and Berkers, 2014), Dutch venues and festivals served as breeding grounds for zines, DIY-media productions, music contests (e.g. *Metal Battle*) and tape-trading networks which greatly helped to increase internal artistic legitimation in the shape of local scene-formation. As in many other countries, Dutch metal media platforms helped tie together metal fans and position the “underground” as oppositional to the mainstream music industry. *Aardschok* in particular served as a steady and popular source of information on the genre since 1980, when it was started as a zine by high school classmates “Metal” Mike van Rijswijk and Stefan Rooyackers. Although remaining the to-go source for everything on heavy metal music, the legitimation of metal music stayed largely internal since media attention was made by and directed to metal fans only. Hence, while magazines, local venues and large festivals helped to achieve more internal legitimation, external legitimation due to media attention remained largely unachieved. This conclusion is supported by the press coverage of metal in the leading music magazine *Oor*, which increased from about 8% in 1988 to 15% in 2004 (Lalta, 2004). While the attention almost doubled, this rise is rather limited compared to the dramatic rise in (Dutch) metal bands in the late 1990s as shown in Figure 1.

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Interestingly, already in the late 1970s and the early 1980s—when heavy metal was just entering the Netherlands, Dutch radio was enriched with two heavy music-oriented public shows: Alfred Lagarde’s *Betonuur* (1976–1982) and Hanneke Kappen’s *Stampij* (1981–

1982). At the end of the 1980s, a last how was added called VARA's *Vuurwerk* (1987–1992) which was hosted by the well-known Dutch radio DJs Rolf Kroes and Henk Westbroek. As these programs were aired on public radio stations and hence for all radio-owners to hear, they helped to spread the sound of early hard rock and heavy metal to a great extent and could be a reason for the external legitimation of metal music, particularly in its early forms. Nevertheless, these public platforms were not revived after the early 1990s and hence no air-time was given to later, more extreme metal variations as thrash-, death- and black metal, that did gain air-play in countries such as the United Kingdom, especially because of John Peel, and the United States, through university radio.

c. Government support

Government support—spending public money on music—is an important (artistic) legitimating instrument. Whereas cultural policy traditionally focused on the “high” arts—relegating popular music to youth and welfare policy, popular music gained momentum in the 1980s, slowly becoming part of national—and local—cultural policy (Nuchelmans, 2002). One of the reasons for this change is the increasing size of the field of pop music (e.g., a steady rise in pop concert visits), that is, the rise in economic legitimacy. While no national policy has been devoted to metal music in particular, two types of pop subsidies have significantly affected metal music.

First, most subsidies have been indirect subsidies, supporting venues and festivals. This is not only important for Dutch metal bands by offering a place to play and sometimes to practice, but also for foreign metal bands by providing an infrastructure to showcase their music. A recent study shows that pop music venues depend for 21–24% of their budget on subsidies (Vreeke and Van Dalen, 2008). The metal oriented venues we discussed above all received some form of local government support. However, many of them also experience problems of keeping the subsidies, which might be related to the fact that the metal constituency is not well represented in politics.

Second, pop artists in general and metal musicians in particular have not been funded directly *as artists*. However, in the wake of the increasing export value of Dutch popular music—from 35,9 million euro in 2006 to 158,8 million euro in 2013, several funding schemes focused on music as an export product, particularly MusicXport. Interestingly, this subsidy program was founded by three Ministries—Education, Culture and Science, Economic Affairs, and Foreign Affairs—to stimulate the export and marketing abroad of Dutch popular music. One example included an experiment at the *M'era Luna Gothic* festival

in Germany, where visitors could download clips and ringtones of The Gathering and Epica on their mobile telephones. As metal music was explicitly mentioned—alongside dance—as a successful export genre, many of the supported bands in the mid-2000s were metal bands, particularly gothic acts as Within Temptation and After Forever. The former won the Buma Export Award—given to the artist who has sold the most records abroad—in four consecutive years (2003–2006). While the overall economic contribution of metal

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might not be as high as dance music or André Rieu, entering a foreign market also increases social capital, such as relations, networks and status.

d. Education

A final key provider of resources are educational institutions. Through their curricula, schools can preserve and disseminate knowledge of cultural content, while simultaneously bestowing artistic legitimacy on that content by its very inclusion. In 1999, the first programs teaching how to become a professional pop musician started in Tilburg (*Rockacademie*) and at the Rotterdam Conservatory. In the following years, the number of pop education programs increased from two to nineteen in 2012. Van 't Veld (2012) gives several reasons for this success. First, the *Rockacademie* received 250 applications for only 40 spots, indicating a demand for such programs. Second, the success of former students generated symbolic capital for these educational programs. Following the expansion of pop music programs in education, Summa College started the world's first three-year vocational training degree in heavy metal music production called Metal Factory. According its founders, Metal Factory is an indispensable addition to the wide array of conservatories and music schools in the Netherlands, because “metal remains the ‘neglected child’ of music education” (Summa College, 2013). Moreover, the program arguably ties together the lost metal-heads spread over auditioning shows and other music schools. The staff consists, amongst others, of Floor Jansen (Nightwish), Stef Broks (Textures), Ruud Jolie (Within Temptation) and Johan van Stratum (Stream of Passion), many of whom were also supported by the abovementioned music export programs.

Framing processes

Legitimation needs argumentation, a story. While some heavy metal scholars have linked metal music to classical virtuosity (Walser, 1993), we found little evidence of metal being legitimated based on its aesthetic qualities. First, metal acts were funded or supported as

economically viable export products, not because of its intrinsic qualities. Its goal was to increase the international status and market share of Dutch pop music, measured in number of live performances, media attention, record sales and copyright revenues (Keuning, 2005). In order to receive support an artist had to be ‘internationally viable’ in terms of professionalism, international experience and networks, and positive reception among international decision makers, such as critics and industry professionals. Second, Metal Factory is also legitimated—to a large extent—on economic grounds, or as the school’s website states: “After graduation you can start as an entrepreneur within the metal music industry.” Moreover, in an interview, two founders of the program argue that: “There is definitely a clear demand from the professional market for such musicians. Indeed, cash flows within the metal scene are highly relevant for both the domestic and international music industry.” While the reactions within the Dutch press were rather serious, several journalists could not resist making jokes about such an initiative—“will students learn how to use the umlaut correctly?” (NRC, 2013) or “will students learn to play guitar by using their teeth?” (Pisart, 2013)—confirming metal’s continuing outsider status.

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Conclusion

Our historical analysis of Dutch metal and its legitimation revealed that the production of Dutch metal music is typified by a relatively slow start, as compared to productive countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. Death metal, one of the more extreme variations of the rapidly developing metal genre, was the first subgenre that matured in synchronization with the international evolution of the ‘sound’ and ever since has been the most popular subgenre among Dutch bands. Furthermore, with the rise of “Nederdeath” as a distinct label for good-quality death metal as internal legitimation, this subgenre was also the first to gain a national association with the Netherlands. This did not occur for the second most popular subgenre: black metal. Interestingly, gothic, symphonic or ‘female-fronted’ metal accounts for only three per cent of all Dutch metal bands, while this is the only subgenre that is commonly viewed as distinctly Dutch in development, sound and identity, with bands such as The Gathering and Within Temptation that to this date are internationally renowned exemplars in the global metal scene.

Though we found some recent signs of artistic legitimation, metal in the Netherlands was and still is primarily legitimated economically. Often when a cultural genre misses out on

artistic legitimacy, it is because of its commercial success. In metal, however, the lack of artistic legitimacy rather seems due to its transgressive character—sonically, its still widespread stereotypical association with low-status groups and often implied negative psychological effects. Moreover, genre conventions have traditionally been strong in metal as its outsider status and aesthetics are important to its appeal. It is interesting to note that in most cases when a cultural genre sells, it will need no explicit economic legitimation. In the Netherlands, however, this is clearly not the case with metal.

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