VOLUME !

Volume !

La revue des musiques populaires

9 : 2 | 2012

Contre-cultures n°2

Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage: American Negativity and Rap/Metal in the Age of Supercapitalism*

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/volume/3326>

DOI: 10.4000/volume.3326

ISSN: 1950-568X

Publisher

Association Mélanie Seteun

Printed version

Date of publication: 15 December 2012

Number of pages: 238-239

ISBN: 978-2-913169-33-3

ISSN: 1634-5495

Electronic reference

Lee Barron, "Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage: American Negativity and Rap/Metal in the Age of Supercapitalism*", *Volume !* [Online], 9 : 2 | 2012, Online since 15 May 2015, connection on 24 August 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/volume/3326> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.3326>

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Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage: American Negativity and Rap/Metal in the Age of Supercapitalism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2008.

ALTHOUGH *GREAT SATAN'S RAGE* begins in territory befitting a narrative concerning heavy metal music - a discussion of Satan as the wrath-filled, revenge-seeking enemy of God in the context of John Milton's 1667 epic poem, *Paradise Lost* - from there it goes on a varied and unexpected journey. With metal and rap music as the reference points, Scott Wilson's book explores major incidents in the post-cold war period that range from the analysis of the USSR and its fall and the Gulf War, to the Columbine shootings, 9/11, and the War on Terror. To contextualising and explaining this procession of late twentieth century historical moments is a cavalcade of philosophers and social and political thinkers as disparate as Allan Bloom, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Francis Fukuyama, Jean-Joseph Goux, G.W.F Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, Jean Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and Alexandre Kojève: all underpinned by the consistent presence of Georges Bataille, the book's philosophic lynchpin.

In terms of a thesis, *Great Satan's Rage* is based upon a concept Wilson calls 'supercapitalism': a mode of American capitalist production that (especially from mid-1980s onwards) has increasingly fused economic production and business with the military and the waging of war. In Wilson's view, there are two primary reasons for this synthesis: 'First, business was conceived as a kind of war, having been successful in winning the cold war and in controlling populations. Second, war became a form of business in the sense that its aim was to create wealth as well as to fight and control populations' (2008: 8). Wilson argues that in response to this symbiotic union (and the rampant consumerism

and waste creation it has unleashed and is predicated upon) two musical forms emerged that reflected this system (and Bataille's ideas of negativity and nihilism): Gangsta rap and Nu metal - both of which seemingly rejected and expressed the supercapitalist system's dominant values. Thus, while Chuck D of Public Enemy fame castigated apathetic hip hop and capitalism, Gangsta rap (exemplified by N.W.A., Ice Cube, and Snoop Doggy Dog) alternatively essayed an urban world blighted by repressive police authority, drug wars, poverty, and gang violence, but distilled into 'the embrace of the ruthless drive for profit' (2008: 68).

Initially the choice of rap and metal may seem to be an unlikely combination given the two musical genres sharp distinctions, but in addition to their shared sense of musical extremity, the connection is established via Wilson's focus upon 'Nu metal' - a subgenre that emerged in the mid-1990s and which saw the crunching distorted power chords long-associated with metal music augmented with rapped vocals, drum machines and samples - the staples of rap and hip hop. What these musical examples signify is that the book acts as a historical philosophical analysis of music rather than as a contemporary survey of the contemporary rap and metal scenes, as the commercial and critical highpoints of both Gangsta rap and Nu metal (the latter represented by bands such as Korn, Limp Bizkit, Static-X, Rage Against the Machine, and Slipknot) are long past (with the exception of Slipknot). Indeed, the book ends with an analysis of terrorist attack on New York's Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001 and its significance for US militarized economic power in the twenty-first century. Thus, chapters swing from dense

discussions of US economic history and contemporary foreign policy to the content analysis of 'Lil Kim lyrics, and the 1990s preponderance of suburban 'Wiggas' – white, middle class devotees of Gangsta rap. A particular highlight in this regard is the linkage of Slipknot's anthem of negativity, 'People = Shit' with both the historical theological vitriol of Martin Luther and as

a symbol of the wastefulness of a rapacious capitalist system.

Given the incessant succession of theorists and differing philosophical ideas that populate the book, some arguments inevitably do not quite work. For instance, as part of the analysis of the US band, Korn, ruminations on the root of their name lead to a discussion of how the band has negatively subverted the wholesome product of corn: a primary product and component of the US economic system. As entertaining as this is (as is the story about the alleged source of the band's name), it is perhaps pushing the supercapitalist/extreme music nexus too far. Also, the chapter on Columbine consists more of an analysis of the murderous actions of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in relation to technology than it does a discussion of metal as there are only slight references to the music (a brief mention of Rammstein and KMPDM is pretty much it, and interestingly, Marilyn Manson is omitted). Furthermore, that the book was published in 2008, a coda that considers whether the rap and metal bands that have superseded Gangsta and Nu metal also constitute cultural signs of supercapitalism might have been useful.

However, *Great Satan's Rage* is a cogently argued and meticulously researched book that authoritatively weaves a dazzling array of ideas and theorists. As such, it makes an important contribution to the study of popular music within a social, political and economic context, and suggests that extreme music still has much to rage against.

Lee BARRON