



# Metal music in Argentina: debates in place and time about a music scene

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## ABSTRACT

Metal is a music genre that has generated its own scenes in each of the countries in which it circulates. In Latin America, they have a strong interaction with the local culture. This work approaches the Argentinian scene, which is made up in a heterogeneous way through the social relations of its members and its consequences disputes. The article analyzes the tensions that occur in a spatial and temporal way, considering that the scene is organized around a paradigm of authenticity. In addition to exalting the marginal, underground and DIY culture, that paradigm values positively the past (retromania), federalism and heteronormative masculinity. Despite the particularities of the Argentine socio-political context and the metal's characterization as a white, wes-tern and globalized musical genre, there is a strong tendency to construct the scene through values of traditionalism and the patriarchal system. Under these parameters certain productions, media, artists and fans are recognized and consecrated. This proposal is based on empirical work done in the capital city (Autonomous City of Buenos Aires) and the province of Buenos Aires in the period between 2011 and 2017, whose conflictive relationship shows the notion of «double periphery» and works as an example of the Argentine scene on a larger scale.

**Keywords:** metal; Argentine; Music Scene; retromania; federalism; masculinity

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- 1 The aforementioned thesis is titled *La escena metálica bonaerense: estudio en torno a Hermética como centro de significados y disputas* (Calvo, 2019) and was presented to obtain the title of Doctor in Communication at the Faculty of Journalism and Social Communication of the Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

## SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

Metal is a musical genre that emerged in the late 1970s from the Anglo-European and Anglo-American rock traditions. Over the years, it acquired a transnational character (Weinstein, 2011) since, in the context of globalization, it spread across many countries, which formed their own musical scenes with local characteristics. Although for many scholars there is no single history of metal (Janotti Jr., 2004; Varas-Díaz et al., 2020), it is possible to say that it is a music with strong Western features.

In this work, I will refer to the situation of metal in the context of Argentina. To do so, I have used the notion of *musical scene*, which is a useful concept to be able to study musical practices spatially. More specifically, I have drawn on the theoretical tradition of Andy Bennett, who proposed, together with Richard Peterson

(2004) and Ian Rogers (2016), the possibility of examining musical life within and across a range of local, translocal and virtually mediated contexts, i.e., in this conceptualization of musical communities, geographic location is presented as a relevant and dynamic characteristic.

I have also considered the contributions of Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) and Jeremy Wallach and Alejandra Levine (2011), who described certain common characteristics for metal scenes around the world, but I completed this characterization with the contributions of Motti Regev (2013) to address the particularities of the Argentine scene at the local level. On the other hand, by observing unequal positions within the scene, this category was considered at the same time as a *semiosphere* (Lotman, 1996) and as a cultural field (Bourdieu, 2005).

It is necessary to clarify that this article is based on the research results of a doctoral thesis that addressed the scene of the province of Buenos Aires and the capital city of the country between 2011 and 2017 through a multiplicity of elements of diverse materialities, which are part of the cultural practices of production, consumption and circulation of metal. Although the corpus only represents a part of the country's scene, it is possible to access through it several generalities that also occur at the national and local levels.

In order to analyze the diversity of productions, agents, and activities that make up the scene, several methodologies for data recovery were used, which were subsequently analyzed with socio-semiotic tools. In this way, the material considered for the corpus includes: 1) musical and visual productions of some bands; 2) in-person and virtual ethnographic survey of concerts and meetings dedicated to metal held in the Ciudad Autónoma 'autonomous city' of Buenos Aires (hereinafter, CABA) and other smaller cities in the province of Buenos Aires between 2011 and 2017; 3) interviews with musicians, fans, producers, intermediaries and other participants in the scene, which included men and women aged between fifteen and sixty and with various professions and occupations; 4) survey of graphic and audiovisual archives, some of which are available on the web; and 5) netnographic exploration of information published online by fans and their verbal exchanges with musicians and promoters on social media, especially on Facebook and some YouTube channels.

The Argentine metal scene is thus defined as a network of people, senses and institutions in which the relational nature of its function is identified not only based on social interaction, but also on intersubjectivity and the exchange of cultural, social and symbolic capital. The purpose of these exchanges is production, development, diffusion, consumption, re-signification and

recreation of metal. One of its main characteristics is the constitutive heterogeneity, present in the diversity of agents that compose it, which belong to different genders, age groups, social sectors and cities of origin, and have diverse occupations and political ideologies (which are sometimes contrary, contradictory and incompatible). This variety preserves unity and coherence through the circulation of some common codes that not only refer to metal as music, but also to a series of cultural values that, through various debates around authenticity, define what *metal* is and what it is not.

The notion of authenticity comes from folklore and erudite music. Later, the concept was transferred to various types of popular music, which developed it as a value, a measure or a classification parameter, considered a positive attribute of both musical works and the agents themselves (Salerno, 2008). Consequently, authenticity differs according to the rules of each musical genre and the subjectivity of whoever perceives it (a musician, an amateur, a journalist, a music critic or a producer, among others).

The authenticity of metal is heir to the tradition of rock, in whose culture "there is an enormous fear of transformation, not because of what it may imply in itself, but because of the way it may be compromised with the commercial apparatus of the music industry" (Ochoa, 2002). Under this perception, dividing borders were drawn, especially between rock and pop. Some artists used this notion to criticize the opposite musical genre and as a form of self-identification. Discussions about the authenticity of artists, their works and fans themselves involve a work of production of meaning by the agents of the scene and are presented as an evaluation of the rules of the genre, which transcend the purely musical. Thus, before considering that something is proper to metal or its culture, certain requirements are considered. The meanings derived from these debates are used by the members of the metal

scenes for the construction of their individual and social identities. On the other hand, the value load of these classifications depends on ethical and moral parameters that generate power disputes within each musical scene.

According to the empirical work carried out, it is possible to postulate that, in the Argentine scene, metal authenticity is built from three fundamental characteristics: it is counter-hegemonic, Argentine (localist or nationalist) and heteromasculine. This paradigm of authenticity functions as the nuclear meaning of the scene, which is celebrated and at the same time discussed. In turn, this centre of meaning is mainly preserved by the consecrated (canonical) musicians, producers and intermediaries and celebrated by the more conservative and orthodox participants.

As a consequence, despite the differences that predominantly coexist peacefully, the agents position themselves unequally and create tensions that are the product of disputes over the search for authenticity, legitimation and consecration as an effect of power. As I have already mentioned, in this article, I will deal with the dialogues and tensions that occur with respect to space and time, so I will dedicate a section to each of these axes. I will conclude the work with a few words by way of closure.

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#### SPATIAL DISPUTES: METAL, LANGUAGE AND FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT

The Argentine metal scene is characterized by being translocal since it is not limited to its geopolitical borders but is in permanent dialogue with other countries and within its cities and provinces. On the other hand, the scene does not develop as an urban cartography of the production, circulation and consumption circuits of the musical genre. On the contrary, it is defined by the social interactions that occur from the exchange of cultural capital

derived from metal (the music itself and also the products and practices linked to it).

In this sense, the Argentine scene seems to transcend spatial definition and emerges from the social and individual activity of its agents: first, when two or more fans meet and interact around metal, whether in the street, at a concert, in a rehearsal room or on the internet; or, second, when a member listens to or plays metal in the privacy of their home. However, the members of the scene are aware of their geographical location, which is presented subjectively through the display of local identity (i.e., identification as natives or Argentine citizens) and their positioning with respect to the logic of the music market.

In order to understand the disputes that occur on a spatial level, it is necessary to mention that metal scenes at a global level have the same logic as the rock music industry. In this way, the consecrating metropolises are European and North American. In this sense, rock (and, within it, metal) is a cultural phenomenon that, in addition to originating in the United States and the United Kingdom, its canonical artists and its commercial successes also belong to those countries (Regev, 2013).

In the case of metal, Kahn-Harris (2007) considers that the organization of the scenes occurs as a decentralized phenomenon. However, those that are part of the so-called Global South do not achieve the same recognition as those in the North. On the other hand, within the Argentine scene itself, the logics of consecration respond to the political and economic inequalities of the country, and, in this way, the centre is CABA as the capital of the country. Therefore, it could be said that, within the metal scenes, it is possible to identify multiple centres that, most of the time, coincide with spaces of political and economic power.

Despite the unequal distribution of recognition within the scene, the agents themselves are aware that their preferred music derives from the aforementioned Anglophone tradition. In this sense, metal develops as a phenomenon of “aesthetic cosmopolitanization” (Regev, 2013), in which artists and mediators of art naturalize a music as a “universal” language, but at the same time position themselves in front of the global and local or national field of production.

The uneven position of the Argentine scene in relation to the global scale does not go unnoticed by the agents, and they discuss it through the paradigm of authenticity, which positively values counter-hegemonic and localist positions. In this way, the members of the scene build their own metal identities through the exaltation of marginality as a character opposed to hegemony. In this process, the Argentine identity is also placed in a peripheral place. Thus, the valuation of metal authenticity as Argentine is observed mainly in the use of language and in the valuation of face-to-face interaction.

For the first case, Deena Weinstein (2011) argues that, in the 1970s, English was the global language of metal, so the bands that were internationally recognized sang in that language. Today, at an international level, a large number of groups sing in their original languages, although another portion decides to continue the development of English to be able to be disseminated outside their countries. In fact, most bands use this language to be able to speak to their audience during live shows outside their countries. In this sense, metal scenes do not escape the linguistic empire of English, as it happens in other areas.

In the ethnographies I conducted in Argentina, I observed the same phenomenon: foreign bands used English to address the audience, who responded with applause, even though not all of them had access to the language. In this sense, language was not a barrier since, despite

not understanding the lyrics of the songs, many fans were followers of the bands only because of musical affinity. On the other hand, language difficulties did not hinder active participation during the concerts: some fans sang the songs by phonetic memory and others hummed the instrumental melodies of the guitar or drums.

In fact, Argentine fans created a particular phenomenon with the American band Megadeth. At the group’s concert in CABA in 1994, the audience began to sing the phrase “Megadeth, Megadeth, aguante Megadeth!” over an instrumental part of the song *Symphony of destruction* (1992). This chant is repeated continuously today and has crossed geographical borders: according to the netnography carried out on YouTube,<sup>1</sup> I observed that this phrase is sung in other countries during the group’s live concerts, despite the fact that the concept *aguante* is part of the Argentine *lunfardo*.

Unlike Chilean thrash metal fans who needed to break the language barrier to connect with the musical style, “which was only possible if you had the right education or if you came from families that had some connection with foreign countries [...]” (Sánchez Mondaca, 2007: 67), in Argentina this did not prevent fans of different social backgrounds from consuming and producing metal in all its variants.

However, in Argentina, despite the fact that, in several public educational institutions, English is a subject and, therefore, the most widespread foreign language, it is still a phenomenon that is identified with the middle and upper classes.

<sup>1</sup> The video was created by a fan who compiles images from concerts and interviews with Dave Mustaine, leader of Megadeth, who explains the global phenomenon of the Argentine chant and the meaning of the expression *aguante*. This concept refers to the idea of resisting in the face of adversity but also to the loyalty and fidelity of football fans to their favourite teams. This is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg0Sh\\_s223U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg0Sh_s223U)

These inequalities lead Argentine metal bands to have different positions: on the one hand, some musicians decide to write the lyrics of their songs in English in order to be able to circulate in scenes outside their own country and, thus, spread their work to distant audiences and get closer to the possibility of editing their material with globally recognized record labels—which are located in the metropolises of the Global North. In this way, Argentine agents find themselves positioned in a peripheral place and must learn a foreign language in order to access better recording conditions.

At the opposite pole, there are musicians who consciously decide to write their songs in the language spoken in Argentina: Spanish. Although it is a colonial language, over time it was adopted as their own, as happened in other Latin American countries. However, bands that choose to write in this language do so using dialectal idioms and expressions in the lunfardo slang, which not only accentuate the Argentine character but also the popular one. Several examples of this line are presented in some of Ricardo Iorio's bands (Hermética, Almafuerte and Iorio), which have a strongly nationalist imprint. Although I also observed the same position in some fans: e.g. the description of the Facebook fanpage *Metal argentino (lo nuestro en idioma original)*<sup>2</sup> states “Difundir lo nuestro es crecer”, which is why only information about bands considered to belong to the national identity circulates there. However, nowadays, the participants in the scene have a better access to the productions of bands that do not compose their songs in Spanish thanks to the internet, which allows them to access translations of the songs' lyrics. In fact, on YouTube, it is possible to find a large number of subtitled videos, both official video clips and videos edited at home

by fans. Therefore, it is not strictly necessary to know the language of the musical groups to be able to delve into the meaning of their songs.

On the other hand, the rejection of the English language is also part of the tradition of Argentine rock in the context of the Malvinas war in 1982 (Pujol, 2013). At that time, the de facto government prohibited the circulation of music in English, so that only songs in Spanish could be played on the radio. This benefited the diffusion of Argentine rock, which had been censored in previous years by the same dictatorial government for ideological reasons. Despite being against the dictatorship, a large part of the Argentine rock scene adopted Anglophobia, and some fans began to give greater value to the musicians who sang in Spanish.

This produced a double game: in the field of rock, English was not only identified with cultural imperialism, but also with a good of the middle and upper classes. Following the same line, metal fans performed the same operation and used Spanish to demand the independence of their colonized country and resist the neoliberal measures that impoverished them. In this sense, the fans described by Deena Weinstein (2000) as “proud pariahs” were also such in Argentina since they adopted that identity by redefining the marginal features according to their local context.

The second case of analysis regarding spatial tensions occurs through face-to-face interaction. Unlike scenes of other musical genres, metal still values live performance in a positive way despite also having recording media. This corresponds to the importance of live performance within rock culture (Auslander, 1999). Thus, the concert becomes a fundamental practice for agents of the metal scenes, in which not only direct contact between the public and the artists occurs but also functions as a meeting space between all the agents of the scene (Weinstein, 2000). The

2 This fanpage is available at [www.facebook.com/pg/Metal-Argentino-lo-nuestro-en-idioma-original-114621378589382/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Metal-Argentino-lo-nuestro-en-idioma-original-114621378589382/about/?ref=page_internal)



centrality of this event generates a variety of tensions and disputes that occur geographically.

Firstly, there is the movement of globally established bands as visitors to the Argentine scene. This is presented as a suitable place for both mainstream and underground bands of international circulation to develop their concert tours. In this sense, Argentina has places suitable for holding concerts with a large audience (especially football stadiums) and an audience willing to attend.

This predisposition is not synonymous with full possibilities to attend the concert, and this is where tensions arise. Most of these concerts are held in the capital due to the better economic possibilities of this city compared to the rest of the country. In the capital, it is possible to find some privileges in terms of buildings that facilitate the organization of large-scale concerts: in addition to having a greater number and better quality of theatres and football stadiums, there are also airports that allow the arrival of artists from remote countries. In addition to this, by concentrating a greater number of inhabitants than the rest of the country, it has a large audience willing to attend.

In contrast, fans from cities in the interior of the country require extra efforts compared to those living in the capital: they have to pay high transportation costs (whether by bus, private car or group minibus tours) and often also risk their jobs, as they have to ask for special permission to be absent, leave early or arrive late in order to be able to attend concerts. This is because festival schedules do not usually coincide with those corresponding to transport or the number of hours of travel, and they are often held on weekdays.

Despite these complications, fans are willing to attend these concerts. During the conversations held in the ethnography, I learned that these

efforts were justified with emotional arguments, e.g. that perhaps this was the only opportunity they had in their lives to see a certain band live. At the same time, I observed that a recurring topic of conversation was the speculation about the possibilities of some specific bands touring Latin America, which increased the chances of performing in Argentina. For these reasons, instead of watching a concert recorded on a DVD or on a web platform, many Argentine fans have preferred to risk their material conditions in exchange for access to face-to-face contact with their favourite bands.

Secondly, the importance of this live contact is also given by Argentine bands that try to perform in concerts outside the country, which also has its difficulties. First, because only a small number of bands from South and Central America have become globally popular and most countries in these regions lack capital on the international scene, which makes them relatively invisible in global terms (Kahn-Harris, 2007). This in itself poses an unequal position for Argentine bands with respect to those with global circulation despite the fact that, within the very local scene, they have achieved the status of consecrated bands.

An example of the multiple levels of recognition can be seen in the Wacken Metal Battle competition, which has been held in CABA since 2016 and in which a band is selected to perform at the most important festival in the global metal field: the Wacken Open Air, held in Germany. The winning group participates in this festival on a secondary stage and, in turn, competes with groups from forty other countries that also held their own competitions. One of the prizes is the possibility of recording with international record labels.

As a result, this competition reflects a clear polycentrism and its competitive nature literally represents the struggle for legitimacy: while, for



a large number of musicians from countries with peripheral metal scenes (such as Argentina), the marginal trait persists in the fact that the achievement is to appear on a minor stage, the main figures continue to be those consecrated in the global field, which are promoted by the record labels and the media that dominate the global metal scene and are located in the Anglophone metropolises of the Global North.

Thirdly, disputes occur between fans from the capital city and those from the interior of the country. This is mainly due to the fact that the capital functions as a centre of consecration. In this way, those who access this circuit have better production conditions and greater possibilities of dissemination on a national scale. Therefore, in general, bands and musicians from the interior tend to be relegated to underground production. In this sense, multiple layers of marginality are observed: on the one hand, the metal music industry develops independently of mainstream and hegemonic music. However, some artists manage to dominate the metal scene and others develop in even more underground conditions.

In this way, it can be observed that the Argentine metal scene is made up of a multiplicity of scenes, in which the one from the capital refers to itself as Argentine, while the scenes of the different locations identify themselves as local and zonal. The agents of these places are analytically located in a “double periphery” (Castelnuovo and Guinzburg, 1979) since the CABA is the centre of the Argentine scene but, at the same time, Argentina is part of the periphery with respect to the global circulation of metal.

In both positions, it is necessary to clarify that “the periphery does not reproduce the centre in a mimetic form and has elements that distinguish it in its particularity” (Pasolini, 2013: 190), at the same time that “the capitals play the role of

the place where the real things seem to happen: production centres, poles of attraction, nodes of diffusion and spaces to conquer” (p. 188). The aspiration of truthfulness and authenticity makes the CABA a centre of legitimation.

As a consequence of this unequal distribution, the members of the Argentine scene are shown as proud pariahs, i.e. they flaunt their place of origin as a mark of marginality. This works as a kind of “localist exaltation” (Pasolini, 2013) that celebrates survival in the face of the difficulties that come with not being from the centre but from the interior and the periphery. I will now analyse the ways in which these inequalities appear in time.

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#### TEMPORAL DISPUTES: METAL, RETROMANIA AND PATRIARCHY

As I mentioned before, the members of the Argentine metal scene find themselves in unequal positions: located in central and peripheral spaces and developing power disputes for recognition and consecration. In this section, I will explain the ways in which these struggles are organized according to temporal considerations, which also arise from the agents’ own subjectivity regarding evaluations of authenticity. In general, the highest degrees of legitimacy are given to the agents and practices of the past. As a consequence, the evaluation of the past is organized, on the one hand, through operations of retromania and, on the other, through the consideration of heteropatriarchal parameters.

According to Simon Reynolds (2012), retromania originates at the intersection between personal memory and mass culture, because it arises as a special sensitivity towards the past that seeks to build various practices of memory conservation and celebration of the past time of musical scenes.

In the Argentine metal scene, one of the ways in which the operation of retro is presented is through the reunion of bands that were successful in the nineties. For example, this happened with Malón in 2011, who performed a concert at the Microestadio Malvinas Argentinas in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, and this show was later released in DVD under the title *El regreso más esperado* (2012). Some bands also performed concerts inviting former members with the intention of paying tribute to a particular album. Among them, we can mention Rata Blanca, who in 2013 celebrated their twenty-five years of career together with the members of their first formation in addition to those who made up the band on a stable basis at that time.

Another example of retromania occurs with tribute bands, i.e., those musical groups that do not have a repertoire of their own authorship and are formed exclusively to pay tribute to another group and perform their songs. The existence of these bands shows which are the representative and valued groups by the members of the scene. In the case of Argentina, the most celebrated group is Hermética, which has at least seven bands dedicated exclusively to performing its songs. In this process, they not only try to imitate it musically (especially in copying the vocal style of the singer, Claudio O'Connor), but also in the choice of names based on the titles of their songs and albums. They also make logos imitating the typography used by the original group and use the same colour palette (the light blue and white of the Argentine flag).

The audience generally reports a positive reception of these bands, which is mostly observed in concerts. For example, in a recital called «Homenaje a Hermética», held in 2016 in the town of José C. Paz, four groups participated, and they only performed covers of the original group. The venue was packed with attendees,

who demonstrated their enjoyment of the concert, as if Hermética were really performing.

Although the festival was held underground, the organizers of the event admitted in an interview that they had chosen to pay tribute to the band because it ensured a large audience, which allowed them to obtain greater economic profits. This strategy is part of what James Lull (1987) describes as the “imitation tradition” within the patterns of control that act as forces of conventionality within popular music. In this way, many new artists imitate the sounds and lyrical content of the previous groups that were successful, and established bands take up the formulas of their own productions that served as a hook to attract the public and the market.

Another way of celebrating the pioneer members is through tributes made visually and verbally on T-shirts, tattoos, street murals and the use of titles and lyrics of their songs to name meetings and written publications. A particular case is that of Riff's lead guitarist, Norberto Pappo Napolitano, of whom there are several sculptures and monuments in different Argentine cities.

Temporal disputes also occur in the age composition of the members of the scene, and parameters of heteropatriarchy influence this process. In general, metal scenes are characterized by a generation gap that allows them to be coherent over time (Wallach and Levine, 2013). In this way, older agents remain while younger members enter, not only as fans but also as part of the production sectors (musicians and mediators).

In the Argentine scene, I was able to observe this age variety mainly during concerts. In some of them, there were parents and mothers with their children (in many cases, boys), dressed in metallic T-shirts. This was more common at concerts by foreign bands held in stadiums and

open-air parks and at shows by the most well-known Argentine groups on the scene, which allowed the entry of minors.

Because the Argentine scene has a strong presence of adult participants, it is possible to define it as multigenerational, just as Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (2012) characterize the popular music scenes that emerged at the end of the 20th century and, at that time, were classified as youth cultures. These authors consider that the persistence of these musical practices in adult life does not mean a rejection of the responsibilities of this stage (such as family and work). On the contrary, the hobby coexists with adult commitments and reflects a form of cultural empowerment that demands distinction in contemporary daily life. This can be seen in the self-consideration of the young public as the children of the older one.

The younger generation is also a segment of the audience that some bands try to reach out to in order to integrate them into the scene. One example was seen at the Monsters of Rock festival in 2015 with the band Heavysaurios,<sup>3</sup> which writes power metal songs but with child-themed lyrics and its members dressed as cartoon dinosaurs with the look of metal musicians. At this festival, this group performed on a separate stage during the day, which contrasted with the stripper show —often called an “adult show”—, which took place at night at the other end of the venue.

Another example is the aforementioned Iorio. At Almafuerte’s and his solo group’s concerts, I observed a large number of children and teenagers coming with their parents. I noticed the same thing at Malón and Rata Blanca concerts, but Iorio’s case is unusual because

the band’s commercial items usually include small-sized T-shirts with their logo and phrases from the musician that reflect on childhood and the learning of positive moral values, such as “Things are learned as a kid”.<sup>4</sup>

But, in addition to the public, generational diversity can also be observed in the production. In this regard, the oldest agents have become the scene’s most renowned. Indeed, the most renowned musicians, producers and journalists began their activity in the eighties. The public’s appreciation of them is not only a consequence of the quality of their productions but also of the experience accumulated from their persistence in the scene over the years.

This happens, first, because, for metal fans, reaching adulthood means acquiring knowledge (not only related to the technical aspects of the activity itself, but also with regard to personal experiences), and this element is highly appreciated within the scene. On the other hand, the members who joined in the eighties are also valued for having been part of the *myth of origin*, which is why they are indirectly considered as the *founders*.

In addition to this, in my fieldwork, I could notice that a great number of new bands are valued because they resemble and respect the conventions of the musical groups of the *old school*,<sup>5</sup> i.e., they have a sound similar to the

3 This band is the Argentine version of the Finnish group Hevisaurus under exclusive license from Sony Music Finland to Fa Sostenido SA.

4 Ricardo Iorio, besides being the most representative musician in the history of Argentine metal according to members of the scene, is an artist who, in interviews with the media, has made statements reflecting on various ethical and political issues. According to his perspective, adults who do not act morally (for example, preferring crime over the culture of work) do so because they did not have a good educational foundation during their childhood.

5 According to Simon Reynolds (2012: 256), “The expression old skool comes from hip hop, but has spread in pop culture to encapsulate notions of origins and roots. It is a term used by the epigones, the patriots of the scene, who believe that the present is less distinguished than the illustrious past” (emphasis in the original).

musical genre in its beginnings, when it had not yet produced hybridizations with other musical styles, nor had been intervened with new technologies. This supposed purity is valued by the most fundamentalist members of the scene, who occupy the orthodox sector of the field in Bourdieuan terms.

Thus, it is possible to affirm that the Argentine scene develops metal as a culturally conservative music (Weinstein, 2000). This characteristic constitutes one of the central meanings of the ethics of authenticity of the *romantic* type, according to the classification of Keir Keightley (2006), which is characterized by privileging tradition and continuity over changes.<sup>6</sup> This characterization can be analysed from the perspectives of traditionalism and heteropatriarchy.

Firstly, traditionalism has developed as a fundamentalist ideological tendency that opposed modernity and considered tradition as the *true* thing. In this sense,

Tradition is defined as immobility, ignorance, prejudice, superstition, reproduction of value systems, languages, mentalities and attitudes from the distant past. This universe, which would be regulated by unalterable rules and practices, would not have been governed by reason, but by feelings, prejudices, the irrational, magic... Tradition would be like the pre-history of peoples and societies. (Cancino, 2003)

Thus, in the analysed case, traditionalism is presented as the positioning of the agents in relation to the historical dynamics of the scene and, at the same time, this position coincides

with the localist assessment as a form of spatial legitimacy.

Secondly, conservatism develops a type of morality that adjusts to heteropatriarchal parameters since it grants power to the oldest members and feminizes those agents and musical practices that are innovative and even transgressive of the genre itself. This is observed in many fans interviewed who claimed to have known metal through older relatives, who, for the most part, were men (fathers, uncles, brothers and godfathers). This differs from the characterization made by Robert Walser (2014) about metal in the eighties as an expression of “Oedipal rebellion”, just like the rock and roll phenomenon, i.e., for this author, both musical expressions were facing the dominant patriarchal tradition in a similar way to countercultures and their opposition to parental culture and the adult world.

In the Argentine metal scene, the opposite occurs: audiences, producers and the media tend to value musicians from the *old school* and *cult bands* (who are in adulthood) and to be reticent about new trends. For example, in the editorial of the fanzine *Metálica* (one of the oldest in the scene), the slogan “No new commercial trends are included” appears, which clearly shows a rejection of musical innovations.

The same was confirmed in some conversations held during the ethnographic work in which the oldest members of the scene (between forty and sixty years old) showed their preference for the first metal bands and some even considered that metal had been ruined with the birth of new styles such as *ñu metal*.<sup>7</sup> These more contemporary substyles are consumed mainly by members under thirty years old, who, despite this, also recognize the older bands as

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to the observation of an external reviewer, I can draw a parallel here with the work of Eduardo Leste Moyano on the Madrid neobakala scene, in which he also explores identity, memory and nostalgia in adult electronic music fans. It remains a pending task for future works to explore these similarities in greater depth in seemingly distant scenes.

<sup>7</sup> A similar analysis was carried out by Stephen Castillo Bernal (2016) in the Mexican metal scene.

the genuine ones. The ideology of the *older* fans can be considered as a search for legitimacy since the diversification of the musical style, although becoming enriched with it, also threatens to diminish its authenticity, a feature that is part of its idiosyncrasy (Galicía Poblet, 2015). On the other hand, the musicians of the first generations of metal during the period studied are in adulthood. Unlike rebellion as it happened in the eighties, respect for them makes the members of the scene grant adulthood power and authority. These members are referred to by fans as *fathers* and, in the Argentine scene, Ricardo Iorio is named *patriarch* by a large number of audience members. So here we see a clear patriarchal operation.

In addition to this, the evolution of metal through instrumental innovations or the massification of musical production is condemned by a large number of agents, who criticize this process through feminization operations. In this sense, although it occurs indirectly, fans tend to show that, in their opinion, the changes attack the masculinity that dominates the musical genre (Martínez García, 2003). This *anti-feminine* attitude is inherited from the Anglo-American tradition of cock-rock, which constructs authenticity through a binary scheme of opposition with respect to pop (Frith and McRobbie, 1978). As expressed by Fernán del Val (2014):

Pop, from a rock perspective, is usually understood as music for women, or for teenage girls, while rock is music for men and adults. An example of this is that rock is usually described in masculinized terms: strong, vigorous, powerful..., while many of the adjectives used to designate pop (or denigrate certain rock groups) have to do with characteristics that are culturally associated with femininity: soft, beautiful, weak, soft... (Del Val, 2014: 92).

This masculinizing tradition of rock has developed into a global feature. In Argentina, in the early

1970s, “Playing «like girls» was as insulting as «playing for girls»: rock was supposed to connect one to a fraternity of boys.” (Manzano, 2011: 39) For rockers of this era, femininity was “often degraded as synonymous with superficiality and objectification.” (Manzano, 2011: 55) In fact, rock on a global level had restricted everything that was related to women in order to preserve its authenticity (Hill, 2013).

In this way, within metal, femininity was linked to mainstream music and masculinity to the underground (Kahn-Harris, 2007) because the paradigm of authenticity was not only constructed through the heteronormative binary, but also through the positive valuation of masculinity as synonymous with power (Weinstein, 2009). Even the queer analysis carried out by Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone (2015) shows that the rejection of camp or effeminacy has also occurred among gay fans. Thus, although it occurs through the representation of alternative masculinities, this gender construction has been legitimized as more authentic (Arenilla Meléndez, 2020; Calvo, 2020).

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## FINAL WORDS

Throughout this work, I have characterized the Argentine metal scene as a space constructed through the social interactions of its members and the disputes that arise between them from debates about authenticity. This paradigm, despite functioning as the core meaning that unites the constitutive diversity of the scene, is also presented through a series of evaluation parameters with which the legitimization, recognition and consecration of the musical works and the agents that make up the scene are disputed, i.e., the authenticity of metal functions as a predominant way of constructing *metal* identities, about which there are both adhesions and disagreements.



These disputes and debates about authenticity lead to the members of the scene finding themselves in unequal positions, which are presented with respect to space and time. On both levels, dynamics that generate differences develop: on the one hand, it is possible to see several centres of legitimation, which hegemonize the scene and position the scenes of remote and small countries and cities at a lower level. On the other hand, it is observed that the agents are part of different age groups, and the recognition is greater towards the agents who are older and more permanent. In addition to this, the disputes arise from the subjectivity of the agents with respect to both levels. In this way, a positive assessment of the marginal geographic location and of masculinity as a legitimate form of identity is produced.

To conclude, it is possible to say that this article, in addition to generating a contribution with respect to the theories of musical scenes, also attempts to account for the fact that, for the social and cultural study of music, it is necessary to revalue the situated research, which takes into account the historical and geopolitical context of the musical practices studied in order to address the particularities of each case. Likewise, the agency of the members of the scene studied has also been valued, because it is formed through their communicative activity. Therefore, the study of music has been approached through musical and extramusical cultural practices that, at the same time, imply the subjective agency of the participants analysed.

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