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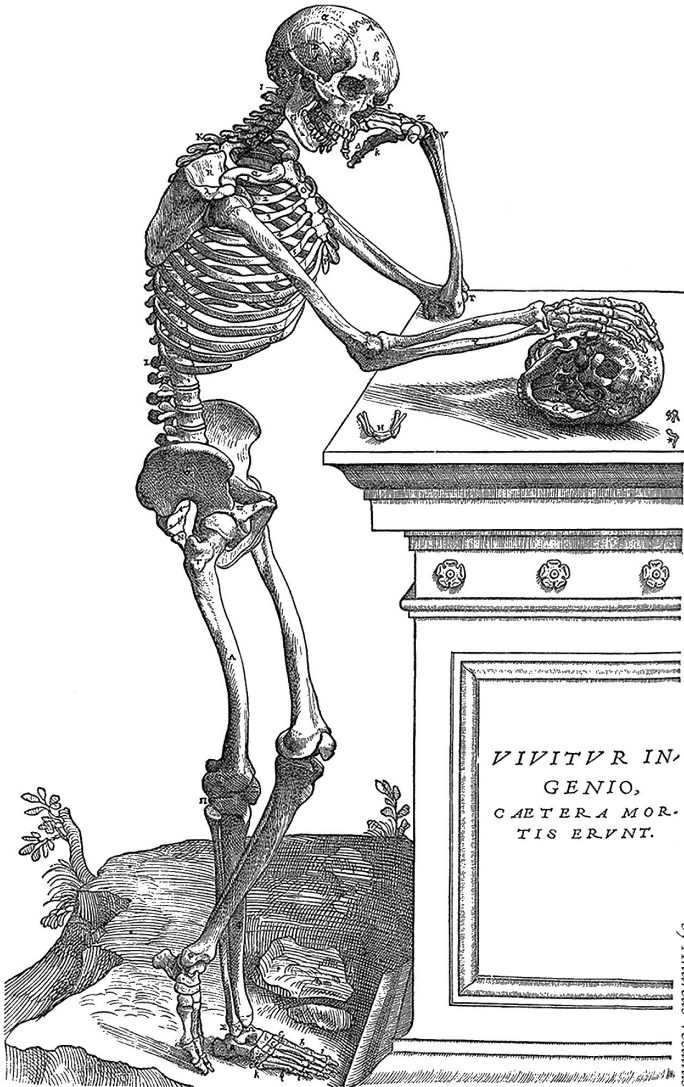
Volume 26, Number 1 & 2

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RELIGION & CULTURE

Volume 26, no. 1



The Journal of Religion and Culture is produced
by the Graduate Students of the Department of Religion at Concordia University.

© 2016 Journal of Religion and Culture,
Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

ISSN 1198-6395
Journal of Religion and Culture Volume 26, no. 1 & 2 (2015/2016)

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Montreal, Quebec
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JRC logo designed: Christopher Burkart
Book design: Joseph E. Brito
Front cover artwork: Noémie Jean-Bourgeault
The type face of this journal is Minion Pro,
designed by Robert Slimbach,
issued as a digital Open Type font
by Adobe Systems, Mountain View California, 2000.



RELIGION & CULTURE

A Canadian Graduate Student Journal

2016 Volume 26, no. 1 & 2

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We would also like to offer our special thanks to:
Lynda Clarke, our very supportive department Chair;
Tina Montandon and Munit Merid, administrators extraordinaire;
The executive staff of the CRSA, for letting us drop by all their wine
and cheese events; all of our referees, readers and everyone else who
gave their time to the publication of this journal.

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share. As such, both of these articles come more like an appendices or last-minute inclusions to attempt to balance out the rest of the volume. Perhaps a tighter focus on explicitly Christian male identities, or incorporating a broader range of papers to include more minority masculinities, would have helped iron out these slight thematic inconsistencies. Regardless, these remarks should in no way detract readers from this volume. Cullum and Lewis have assembled an overall strong and insightful collection of sources which should prove valuable to scholars of masculinity, clerical culture and medievalists alike.

Alexander Nachaj
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***Mortality and Music:
Popular Music and the Awareness of Death***

Christopher H. Partridge. London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 222 p. \$140 CND (Hardcover).

Mortality and Music: Popular Music and the Awareness of Death by Christopher Partridge examines the myriad ways that music has both responded to and formed an awareness of death and dying in the Western world. Partridge, a professor of Religious Studies at Lancaster University, specializes in the study of the occult, countercultures and popular music. The book argues that music's power lies in its ability to create affective spaces of mortality in a society that has largely denied death. The strongest sections of the book examine the musical discourses surrounding violence, suicide, gore and depression— especially amongst subcultures. Partridge's use of wider sociological models argues for the serious implications of music as a meaning-making device is similarly well articulated. Yet Partridge's reliance on sociological models can be problematic. While his overall thesis is clear and convincing, the book suffers from an under appreciation of the parody in music.

Mortality and Music is divided into five chapters. Chapter one outlines the shifts in attitudes towards death with a focus on the modern denial

of mortality. In the postmodern world, coming to terms with death, be it through funeral rites or music, allows us to enter into a discourse of resistance (20). Chapter two looks at music through death, transgression and the Sacred. Music exposes the listener to mortality by pushing the limits of acceptable use because, "the articulation of death and decay in popular music is rooted in transgression" (38). Chapter three deals with gothic culture and the creation of aural and material uncanny spaces. Gothic culture creates affective spaces in which mortality is confronted, albeit at a distance. Chapter four tackles morbidity, violence and suicide through discourses brought about by anomie, anger and angst. Chapter five details the myth of the dead celebrity, and the action of transfiguration post mortem.

The discourses surrounding death in popular music can have positive possibilities according to *Mortality and Music*. Contrary to claims made by parental advisory groups, music with violent content can act as a "strategy for alleviating the impact of the awareness of death" (6). Here Partridge is responding to criticisms leveled against forms of heavy metal music; namely that it has been the cause of societal violence and teenage self-harm. Instead, Partridge writes that many punk, hardcore and metal subcultures move beyond the solitary act of listening towards the cathartic ritualized violence of the live concert (123). Live music and the collective act of moshing erases the sense of meaningless and finality in the intensity of the moment. The feeling of collective effervescence created through the live performance acts to release feelings of anomie and keeps actual violence or self-harm in check (123). Furthermore, Partridge looks to George Bataille's inner experience theory to argue that listening to music allows the listener to lose him or herself, transcending an awareness of their mortality and thus alleviating feelings of anomie (134). Partridge writes that although music can be a conduit for healthy confrontations with mortality, most discourses occur at a real distance from the actual experiences of death, grief and bereavement (52).

Partridge connects his book's thesis to wider sociological theories. This includes Bataille's inner experience theory that explores the potential for music to transcend fears of mortality. In chapter four's focus on transgression, Durkheim's theory of sacred and profane frames the discussion on the desire of subcultures and musicians to push back against what is held as sacred (40). Yet *Mortality and Music's* strongest asset is at times problematic. For example, his use of Victor Turner's *communitas* as

a framework to understand subcultures seems to extend beyond Turner's original point (45). Liminality for Turner eventually dissolves, and the individual is reincorporated into the community at large (see Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine Pub, 1969 pp 132). Liminality is too intense for the individual as it is often a complete break from structure and community (Turner, 94). Partridge may have a point that subcultures are liminal periods for young individuals before moving on and integrating into society. Yet this assumes that subcultures only attract youth who will all eventually move away from these subcultures, and that subcultures are generally as isolated from society as were Turner's subjects. While Partridge notes that death's meaning changes as youth transition to adulthood (45) there is no defined binary of subculture and society; in fact individuals may oscillate between both worlds for most of their lives.

Finally, *Mortality and Music* consistently connects its discussion and themes to music, especially in the form of lyrics. Examining lyrics from musicians who are working through loss and grief is useful and necessary to understand mortality in popular music. While violent lyrics can act as reminders of death (*memento mori*), the listener may in fact dissociate them from actual experiences of death and dying (126). Yet one begins to wonder if Partridge is attributing too much meaning to lyrics that appear simply as parody. Lyrics concerning gore, dismemberment and Satan are surely transgressive. But parody itself can be transgressive. That is to say, one might have a hard time conceiving of a meaningful conversation about mortality that includes the song "Vomited Anal Tract", for example, or in discussing bands that are not to be taken seriously like The Groovie Ghoulies (Other notable songs by this band include: "Running with bigfoot", "Till death do us party" & "Bye bye brain". This is not to take away from the affective spaces their lyrics may create. It is simply to question the use of these examples when trying to argue for meaningful discourses about death and dying.). Partridge does note in chapter four that not all lyrics should be taken seriously, but this blind spot for the not-so-serious detracts from his major points.

Mortality and Music is a detailed overview of death and dying in popular music and culture. Partridge convincingly argues that music creates affective spaces in which the listener can meaningfully contemplate mortality. The reader will finish this book with a greater appreciation of music and subcultures that at a distance appear violent and disconnected from society. Partridge, through the use of sociological models and case studies,

makes the case that violence and concern for mortality can create positive possibilities for the listener and fan. Yet this book's use of sociological and anthropological models is at times problematic for its broad scope. Finally, while Partridge provides many examples to argue for the meaningful place of gothic, violent and transgressive music in discourses of mortality, the book has a blind spot for parody that detracts from its overall point.

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