

Introduction from the Editors

In the autumn of 2021, a network of researchers interested in metal studies in the Central and Eastern Europe region began to emerge, based on the Czech Metal Studies initiative. The idea was to connect individual researchers in the field of metal (music) studies in the given region and create a platform for international cooperation. At this time, the head of Czech Metal Studies, Miroslav Vrzal, and members of Polish metal studies, led by Jakub Kosek and Karolina Karbownik, began to communicate regarding this idea. Both Czech Metal Studies and Polish Metal Music Studies have existed independently for several years and have already generated five annual Czech and Polish academic conferences on metal in the national languages. At the inception of the network, several researchers from Hungary (especially János Fejes, who has his own metal studies blog) and Germany joined.

In December 2021, Miroslav Vrzal organized the first Metal Studies online workshop in Central and Eastern Europe under the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University (Czechia), where one of the most important figures in metal studies and co-founder of the International Society for Metal Music Studies, Karl Spracklen, was invited as a key speaker. At this workshop, Jakub Kosek also officially announced the intention to publish a special issue of the journal *Studia de Cultura*, focused on Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. In this volume, which is the result of the international collaboration between Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe, you will find nine studies by researchers from Czechia, Poland, and Hungary. The articles are devoted to various topics related to metal and the approaches they represent show the multidisciplinary that is simultaneously inherent in metal (music) studies.

Miroslav Vrzal's article, *Czech Metal Studies: 5 Years of the Study of Metal (and Religion)*, deals with the genealogy, development, and activity of Czech Metal Studies, including a brief description of the origins of Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. The article also describes the effort of Czech Metal Studies to move from its original focus, on the study of religions towards greater interdisciplinarity and internationalization, which also led to the establishment of Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe network. Through close readings, János Fejes' *The Variety of Similarity. Hungarian High Literature, History and Folklore in the Lyrics of Dalriada* provides an analysis of the lyrics of the Hungarian folk metal band Dalriada. It focuses on how the band reinterprets Hungarian history, high literature, and folk traditions throughout its career. The main subject of Jakub Kosek's article is the artistic activity of Acid Drinkers, one of the first thrash metal bands in Poland. Particular attention is paid to the intertextual iconography of Acid Drinkers' album covers, selected protest songs created by the band, and (ironic) interpretative covers, which also constitute an important element in the group's discography.

The next article is a philosophically-tuned article by Vojtěch Volák: *Heaviness: A Key Concept of Metal Music Through the Lens of Deleuzian Philosophy*. It considers definitions of heaviness within metal music studies. He specifically uses the

concepts of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to understand the highly contextual field of musical meaning. Andrzej Juszczyk's article deals with the development of local metal scenes in Africa and Asia in relation to the metal mainstream. The author addresses the problem of western centrism in the current perception of metal music and introduces researchers to the current interests of non-Western music scenes. Juszczyk also proposes a psychosocial look at the functioning of local metal scenes and, at the same time, the global imaginary metal community. Michal Puchovský's *Czech Pagan Metal: A Short Introduction to Major Local Trends* provides a basic overview of Czech pagan metal and its characteristics. Specifically, Puchovský focuses on 3 metal bands: Inferno, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, and Žrec. He shows how paganism is discursively constructed in their music and lyrics and how they approach paganism. Karolina Karbownik tries to verify the thesis that metal culture can be classified as a counterculture. She supports her arguments with research she conducted in Poland in 2018–2020. The main research questions concern controversy in metal music and manifestations of social discord, as well as other issues that could constitute the recognition of metal culture as a counterculture. Based on this research, Karbownik proposes to change the definition of the counterculture to one that is more relevant within the contemporary.

The next article is *A Man Behind Everything? Motivational Sources of Metal Listening Among Female Audiences* by Gabriela Stašová, Jana Nenadalová, and Miroslav Vrzal. The study is an ongoing output from Stašová's qualitative research based on seventeen semi-structured interviews with female participants in the Czech metal subculture. It focuses on female metalheads' understanding of their position within the subculture, their visual appearance, and the reasons behind their inclination to metal. Ondřej Krajtl and Michal Puchovský's *Eso-kitsch in Czech Folk Metal: A Case Study of the Band Odraedir*, explores the possibility of using the term "esoteric kitsch" (eso-kitsch), based on Tomáš Kulka's analytical-aesthetic theory of kitsch, instead of the term "commercial production", through their analysis of the selected case of Czech pagan/folk metal band.

At the end of the current issue of *Studia de Cultura* is a report by Jana Nenadalová and Gabriela Stašová from the international hybrid conference *Metal and Religion* (7–8 September 2022 in Brno, Czechia), where researchers from different parts of Europe, including Finland, England, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, and also from Mexico, Canada or the USA, presented their contributions. The keynotes of the conference were given by Marcus Moberg and Niall Scott. The conference was organized at the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University by Miroslav Vrzal in cooperation with Czech Metal Studies with the goal of making Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe internationally visible.

Jakub Kosek
Miroslav Vrzal