Gabber: Raising Hell in Technoculture

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Abstract

Gabber is a hardcore electronic dance music genre, typified by extreme speed and overdrive, which developed in the Netherlands, with Rotterdam as its epicentre, during the early 1990s, when house music-inspired dance events dominated. The use of distorted noise and references to popular body horror, such as *Hellraiser,* dominated its scene and it was commented on as "the metal of house music", a statement that this article aims to investigate.

Applying a genealogical discographic approach, the research found that the electronic noise music aesthetic of industrial music was crucial for the formation of the sound of gabber. The hardcore electronic dance music that developed from this, is at once ironically nihilistic, a contrary critique, and a populist safety valve. The digital machine noise of hardcore seems to offer an immersive means to process the experience of (emasculating) fluidity within post-human accelerated *technoculture*, which is propelled by rapid digital capital and information technologies.

Introduction

The discussion of this paper addresses potential connections between gabber and metal music during the early 1990s. Gabber is a hardcore electronic dance music genre, characterised by abrasive saw-tooth shaped synth lines and chords, on-the-beat kick and snare drums, or embellished by accelerated break beats, played at a breakneck speed of between 170 to 200 BPM (beats per minute). Formed within the context of working class and mostly male teenagers in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, where many work within the petro-chemical and maritime cargo transport industries of its expansive international port. Originally, the genre was known as "gabber house", or house music that gabbers (as Dutch participants were called) dance to. In other words, gabber house was understood in the context of house music,

an electronic dance music that originated in Chicago during the 1980s, initially as an electronic reinterpretation of New York's underground disco music, played in a tempo of around 122 to 128 BPM, and first heard in Europe through imported releases by DJ International and Trax Records. During the early 1990s, in the Netherlands most electronic dance music was referred to as "house music", and the idea of a dance club was interchangeable with that of a house music club (Rietveld, 1989). House music draws on African-American music styles, such as funk, soul and gospel, with a Latin inflection that is particularly noticeable in its use of percussive styles. However, gabber's noisy embrace of overdrive, through distortion and acceleration, stripped away those influences. Tempos of 180 bpm and over make funk and Latin-inflected syncopation near impossible, while gospel inspired uplifting chord progressions are missing. Messages of hope and togetherness disappear, making place for (often ironic) messages of an us-against-them, and samples that refer to horror movies. Rather than Chicago's house music scene of mostly African-American and Latino queer and gay dancers, gabber was associated by contrast with a mostly (there exceptions) white heterosexual masculine Dutch crowd that dance to this brutal machine aesthetic with festive self-abandon.

During research by Rietveld at the time, in 1992, Dutch interviewees often referred to gabber as the metal of house music. To explore this idea further, insights from metal studies, including are utilised to gain fresh insights of gabber. Drawing on Unger (2016), Phillippov (2014), and Kahn-Harris (2007), comparative insights are gained that point further to the theoretical work of George Bataille on transgression, excess and nihilism. Closely linked to techno music, immersed dancing to gabber directly responds to the experience of a post-human technoculture (Rietveld, 2004, 2018a), which is based on fast capital enabled by information and communication technologies, (Shaw, 2008; Robins and Webster, 1999). Tomlinson (2007) shows that speed and immediacy are powerful commodities. In effect, a divide has emerged between those in the fast lane and those left behind, which can translate into feelings of rage. Within metal studies, a comparable experience of working class young men is noted during the formation of metal, and its subsequent appeal to office workers, "caught between economic elites and marginalized underclass" (Wallach & Clinton, 2017: 109). Responding to the urge to accelerate, gabber immerses itself in the speed of the (drum-)machine, wrapped in the brutal electronic distorted noise of what eventually became "hardcore" within the realm of electronic dance music.

A theme that weaves itself throughout the discussion here is an uncanny slipperiness of the (nevertheless controversial) political stance of the gabber scene, which ultimately escapes singular interpretation. In his assessment of accelerationism, Noys (2014: 102) refers to the author Lovecraft's monstrously destructive, fast and fluid slave creature Shoggoth *from At the Mountains of Madness*, as a metaphor that may as well be applied to gabber's push towards extreme liminality, and comments that "(t)he horror involves a forgetting of class struggle (even in dubious fictional form) and the abolition of friction in the name of immersion". Its transgressive references kick against holy concerns in a manner that nevertheless seem to be blankly positioned outside easily definable categories, seemingly rendered formless within its celebration of repetitive noise[1]. For Rotterdam's harbour labour force the notion of "working hard, playing hard" was applied with zest[2]. The intense partying by gabbers functions as both an escape from everyday banality of industrial worklife, and a sense of regaining (masculine) power through noise and speed. Ultimately, gabber can be understood and embraced from a range of perspectives. Interpreted as a distilled form of hardcore rage, over three decades it has appealed to both right and left leaning audiences and briefly mainstreamed, mostly humorously, in the Netherlands during the mid-1990s.

Research Context

Research literature on gabber in the Netherlands seems mainly concerned with substance (ab)use during gabber-related dance parties, club nights and raves. By 1997, gabber had become a mainstream dance genre in the Netherlands, with 24% of 14-19-year olds indicating it as "their favorite (sic) pop music" (Ter Bogt and Engels, 2005: 1480). With such a broad fanbase, Verhagen et al (2000: 147) found that the transgressive image of gabber did not necessarily affect the everyday norms of its fans: "Results showed gabbers clearly differed from non-gabbers in their taste for music and clothes but differed less than expected in their ideas about a normal way of life, foreigners, enjoying life, and drugs". Taking a broader perspective, a substantial international research project by Ter Bogt et al (2012) found that the culturally transgressive function of rock, particularly metal, seems to have been superseded by electronic dance music culture; in their words, "Dance Is the New Metal", a

1 For further discussion of noise as excess and Bataille-inspired formlessness, see for example, Crowley & Hegarty (2005), and also Biles (2007).

2 Compare, for example, *Hard Werken* ("working hard"), a Rotterdam-based graphic design magazine published between 1982-94. For further discussion of Rotterdam's hard work mentality, see also Brus and de Vries (2012) and van Bergen (2018).

perhaps surprising insight that seems to undermine the (arguably homophobic and racist) rock phrase that “disco sucks”.

Beyond industry insights and the measurement of links between music genre, social alienation and substance abuse, such studies do not elaborate sufficiently on the cultural context. Mark van Bergen (2018) redresses this lacuna with a detailed history of the Dutch dance music industry, which includes several sections on gabber. However, here gabber is presented as a version of house music, because the genre developed in the context of an explosive popularity in the Netherlands of this style of electronic dance music. Earlier research on house music by Rietveld (1998) indicates a similar interpretation. However, the research for that study included a series of interviews with local house music producers and DJs during 1992, who described gabber in the context of EBM (electronic body music), hardcore dance music, as well as metal. Also, in his work on a history of electronic dance music, and particularly what he identifies as the “hardcore continuum”, Simon Reynolds (1999), describes his experience of hearing the fast and furious distorted noise of gabber and encountering its embrace of death and anti-Christian imagery at a gabber event in Arnhem, the Netherlands, and briefly uses metal as a point of reference for understanding gabber in terms of metal’s energy, anger and imagery. Furthermore, in an ethnography of hardcore electronic dance music scenes in Berlin, which includes versions of gabber, Ludewig (2019) comments on a similarity with European industrial and American metal music in terms of high energy, the use of hard, loud, distorted noise, and speed, which some of her producer interviewees regard as more relevant to their musical trajectory than African-American house music and techno. Finally, Balli (2019) presents a retrospective argument that gabber has much in common with the early 20th century Italian Futurist ideas about the machine, industrial sound, speed and war.

To further understand the formation of gabber as a discursive musical aesthetic, within and beyond the circumstances of its emergence, the discussion traces aspects of its discographical genealogy. Here, we take our cue from Foucault (1977: 139), who states that genealogy “operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (139) while it “opposes itself to the search for ‘origins’” (140). Rather than taking a one-sided linear approach to musical history, such an approach enables insights into sometimes contradictory, multiple and simultaneous developments. Indeed, the research has taken directions that were initially not anticipated,

steered by a dialogue between our combined music cultural knowledge. As indicate above, Hillegonda Rietveld undertook research into the reception and development of house music in the Netherlands during the formation of gabber around 1992, and has published on electronic dance music since, while Alexei Monroe is a specialist in the formation of industrial music and hardcore.

While delving deeper into gabber's becoming, by following musical traces and documentary sources, the direction of the research for this article turns towards European and European-American forms of industrial music. In turn, this set of connections enables multiple interpretations of gabber over time in various contexts, ranging from teenage working-class escapism to avant-garde noise music, showing that music genre is not a stable category. Although gabber occurred within the context of house music dance party formats, its musical aesthetic resonates with the destructive impulse of industrial music, while its use of transgressive (anti-Christian and popular horror) imagery seems to suggest an (extreme) metal sensibility. Unger (2016: 5) argues that "the symbolic node of extreme metal is the notion of defilement", and thereby enables an exploration of the limits of "evil in popular culture". Although gabber's tantalising play with symbols of transgression is mostly blankly superficial, its references to popular horror and terror did nevertheless caused a brief moral panic amongst the conservative observers, when the musical discourse and its cultural symbolism mainstreamed in the Netherlands during the mid-1990s, as illustrated in a short booklet by Mulder (1993: 44) which argues that "house-parties" prepared its participants for the "anti-Christ".

Gabber brings an extreme hardcore sensibility into the realm of electronic dance music, embracing a relentless from of dance music that seems far from a pleasurable everyday backdrop to an evening out dancing at the club and (at least at the peak moment on the dancefloor), more an experience of *jouissance* (which can be crudely explained as a sense of self-loss) within what may, at times, seem like an exuberant violent death rite in which to unmake the self (see also Rietveld 2004, and 2018a). The "gabber feeling" (Verhagen et al, 2000) or *het gabbergevoel* that is generated enables the dancers to lose themselves to the accelerated breaks and repetitive machine beats, entering into a communally shared rite that, arguably, inoculates against the violence of social alienation within an accelerating world.

Gabbergevoel

The word “gabber” came into existence within a rivalry between the Dutch capital, Amsterdam, and its industrial and economic heartland, the port city of Rotterdam. In an interview with Brus and de Vries (2012), DJ-producer and manager of the gabber record label Rotterdam Records, Paul Elstak, explains that this name arose in response to the genre-defining dance track by his production outfit Euromasters, “*Amsterdam, Waar Lech Dat Dan*” [“Amsterdam—where’s that then?”] (1992, Rotterdam Records). The record sleeve unashamedly shows a comic cartoon of the iconic Rotterdam Euromast (Rotterdam’s iconic viewing tower near the river Maas) urinating on Amsterdam, a carnivalesque act of transgression, which in this case defiles the (cultural) capital of the Netherlands. The image refers to club venue Parkzicht, positioned close to the Euromast in the middle of the central city park of Rotterdam, where DJ Rob (Robert Jansen), whose music selections had “an affinity with the heavier techno from Germany, America, and especially Belgium” (van Bergen 2018: 87), which at the time was referred to as “‘hard’ tracks, not yet hardcore” (van Bergen, 2018: 89). To the mainly working class, down-to-earth Rotterdam crowd, Amsterdam flagship clubs like de RoXY played what gabbers would call “soft” house music, American dance music imports and, later, forms of hard techno and trance. Although Rotterdam was not dominated by gabber house, and other forms of music were entertained (Brus & de Vries, 2012: 228), van Bergen (2018: 87-88) notes that “(m)any of the dance styles that have given the harbor city such international reputation are characteristically raw … Such a sober, hardworking place needs a vigorous outlet, needs to really let off steam”. During a television interview DJ Joost van Bellen of Amsterdam’s club RoXY reacted on the Euromasters’ anti-Amsterdam recording that it was a destruction of house music, created for football hooligans and uneducated people who call each other “gabber” (Brus & de Vries, 2012: 228). The colloquial *Bargoens* term “gabber” is a Dutch way for working class men to call each other one’s friend, or mate. When the English music press first heard the term “gabber”, it was transcribed it as “gabba”, as can be read in the work of, for example, Reynolds (1999), although more recent authors now use the term “gabber” internationally.

The term “gabber” was subsequently adopted and accepted as a badge of honour, confirming a subcultural identity, with the guys recognisable by their pragmatically shaven skinheads, and the girls by their shaved-up ponytails, to avoid sticky hair during their hot dance marathons characterised by a particular dance style. Known as “*hakken*” [“chopping”] the dance is a type of stomp to the 4/4 kick-drum. Every dancer has their style; a more spectacular Rotterdam version is where legs are thrown up, almost like a folkloristic clog

dance but faster and lighter, enabled by Nike Air trainers (as demonstrated in a much-referred-to 1995 VPRO television documentary). In effect, the physical engagement with the music is to further emphasise its pile-driving banging kick drum, as the movement remains on the beat. This is an engaged yet simple way of keeping up with the fast tempo of the tracks, which requires stamina, chemically enhanced by stimulants, including MDMA ("E") and Amphetamines ("speed"). An alternative spelling is "*hakkûh*" to indicate how this is pronounced in Rotterdam (pronounced locally as "*Rottûrdam*"). Although certainly not all the fans dance in this manner (quite a few also just mill about on the dancefloor), it stands out as its idiosyncratic characteristic. In this way, *hakken* has become a term to indicate gabber's high-octane on-the-beat aesthetic. What started out as a down-to-earth banality, gained currency beyond its originating scene to (almost mysteriously) indicate what in the Netherlands was known as a "*gabber gevoel*" ("gabber feeling" — see also Verhagen et al, 2000). This feeling is shared by the participants, who within the energetic barrage of noise find a social space that to them is friendly and "*gezellig*", generating place of belonging: "hakkû for life" (Der Aar, dir., 2013),

A (self-)destructive sense of irony weaves its way through gabber's formation, utilising audio samples and visual imagery form horror movies and toying with Christian and other conventional values, whether related to social identity or with their own sustainability. There seems to be a macho, yet almost masochistic competition between gabber's fans about who can handle the most pain generated by the electronic noise assaults and the celebration of terror at breakneck speeds. By investigating the musical formation of gabber, via EBM and industrial music, we find that the electronic noise music aesthetic of these genres are important in understanding gabber's hardcore techno sound. Within this wider realm, an aggressive electronic dance sound developed; for example, produced as far back as 1989, the German recording "We Have Arrived" by Mescalinum United (Marc Trauner) and commercially released in 1990 on Planet Core Productions, already carried all the musical hallmarks of the gabber sound with its pile-pounding kick-drum, albeit at a relatively slower tempo of 136 BPM. Perhaps it is no surprise that this aggressive electronic sound appealed in Rotterdam, a thriving industrial harbour city that was still rebuilding itself decades after its partial destruction during WWII.

During the early 1990s, the development of gabber music culture may partly have been enabled by a police leniency towards "house parties", as electronic dance music events were

called in the Netherlands. Crucially, positioned in the middle of a central park in Rotterdam, the venue Parkzicht attracted a mainly working-class audience to its regular hardcore dance nights, with DJ Rob (Janssen) since its opening in 1989. The gabber night *Nightmare in the Park* took place in December 1992, using the disfigured burned face of its murderous ghost character, Freddy Krueger of 1984 horror movie *A Nightmare on Elm Street* for its marketing. Following the success of this event, it moved to a much larger venue, the Energiehal; *Nightmare in Rotterdam* became a recurring rave between 1993 and 1995. t After quite some touring years of absence, in 2004 the event returned to Rotterdam's huge sports arena Ahoy. Also in 1992, at the peak of gabber's development, *Eurorave* was held on the Maasvlakte, against a backdrop of Europoort's huge petrochemical industrial estates across the river, attracting a mix of 20,000 gabber, rave and techno dancers under the umbrella term of "hardcore"(see Phase One Productions, 1992); of significance to a Rotterdam-focussed gabber feeling, in one *Eurorave* video clip, DJ Mac de Hey plays accelerated techno while a crowd chants "Feyenoord, Feyenoord" with reference to one of Rotterdam's internationally successful football team (Unknown, 2016).

Like industrial music, gabber's aesthetic engages with an accelerating digital world and a fear of one's human form and traditional social identity being left behind. In the context of an encroaching technoculture during the early 1990s, Dery (1996: 80) proposed cyberpunk music as "tech-rock", citing Paul Moore (of cyberpunk/electronic/techno/noise fanzine *Technology Works*) that, "'cyberpunk' best describes the folk music of cyberculture". If anything, with its crude samples and sonic palette, responding to accelerated capitalism and digital technology with the aid of a drum machine's tempo controller, gabber is folk music par excellence for a data-overloaded technoculture. Working class, pragmatic, and "angry as hell", Rotterdam's gabbers forged their own electronic folk music culture in the face of horrified onlookers, wearing their insults as a badge of honour. From this, a recuperation started with the mainstreaming of the genre in the Netherlands during the mid 1990s, making fun of gabbers in 1996 with pop songs like "Gabbertje" (a diminutive), followed by other carnivalesque songs, normalising gabber to children's party music by the end of the 1990s. Here, however, we wish to trace the genealogy of gabber's hardcore noise aesthetic via industrial music and EBM to understand how this musical form, extreme in its energy and excitement, embraced this noisy sound of warfare sound complete with horror and acceleration, as party music of preference. Whatever its original intentions, though, "The street finds its own uses for things" (Gibson, 1986, 199).

Nothing Short of a Total War: The Industrial Precedent

Industrial music emerged as a markedly dystopian form of (un)popular music in the dystopian conditions of early-mid 1970s Britain. It attempted to analyse and to feed on contemporary issues such as urban terrorism, as can be heard in Cabaret Voltaire's 1978 "Baader-Meinhof" (Factory Records) para-militarism, and Throbbing Gristle's "Weapon Training" (1979, Industrial Records). As well as archetypal horrors such as Nazism in Throbbing Gristle's "Zyklon B Zombie" (1978, Industrial Records). These catastrophist soundtracks were produced at a time when Britain was in the midst of an acute social crisis: a time of power cuts, mass street demonstrations and planned military coups. Besides the immediate crisis, there were the nuclear tensions of the Cold War and the groups' paranoiac apprehension of the nascent surveillance state. Cabaret Voltaire (CV) influenced by DaDa, an art movement in response to the insanity of WWI, and both groups were influenced by the cut-up techniques of William Burroughs. CV were working-class autodidacts but Throbbing Gristle (TG) emerged out of the ashes of a controversial but institutionally supported performance art group, COUM Transmissions. Following a 1976 event at London's ICA which featured TG's first live performance, the group were infamously described by a Conservative M.P. as "wreckers of civilisation." (Ford, 1999).

An important antecedent for industrial was Brecht's concept of *verfremdungseffekt* ("alienation effect"). However, TG and many successor groups rejected Brechtian social realism or much sense of social responsibility. They saw themselves as waging an information war against industrial society and its corporate and political masters, attempting to jam the system by transmitting its dark underside back to itself in extreme and brutally honest form. As the TG album and poster slogan put it, it was "Nothing Short of a Total War" (Industrial Records, 1977) and their tactics shocked even punks and radical artists. It is for such reasons that this most ambivalent of genres remains a reluctantly acknowledged "vanishing mediator" and background radiation that spurred many mutations of electronic music since its ground zero in the 1970s. As yet, there is no *Journal of Industrial Studies* however, and it is yet to gain recognition as a specific academic field of study.

The recording "War" by controversial Slovene industrial group Laibach ostensibly seems distant from gabber but was remixed by British hardcore/gabber producer Ultraviolence in 1995, Mute Records. There seemed to be a convincing match between Laibach's

paramilitaristic aesthetic and the cartoonish, bellicose style of Ultraviolence. Laibach is associated with one of industrial's key techniques, as codified by Slavoj Žižek (2009: 96): "over-identification". An example of their "new originals" (cover versions that alienate the source songs to reveal new meanings and implications) is their version of Queen's "One Vision" (1987, Mute Records) attempted to amplify through repetition, the mass-mobilising, totalitarian potential of popular music. Nevertheless, honing in on targets such as fascism, militarism or the apocalypse, which are key industrial themes, entails risks. In particular, the critical, interrogative potential is not perceived by the audience and negation is taken as affirmation. In situations of failed over-identification (where an artist attempts the operation unsuccessfully or the audience misconstrues their intentions), what takes place is *ultra*-identification. The critical element is either removed or dysfunctional and a move takes place from ambivalent negation to total affirmation. Unlike Laibach and many industrial groups, gabber made little attempt at subversive over-identification, and instead has been identified by some as ultra-identification, by transmitting transgressive imagery of war, horror and violence as a pure shock tactic. Beyond the ironic, antisocial spirit associated with Rotterdam Gabber, there was no intellectual agenda. However, there have been instances of anti-Jewish taunts (historically aimed at Amsterdam football fans) by Rotterdam's Fyenoord FC fans, a small but vocal fraction of which is known for its extreme-right sympathies.

Gabber also focused on "The Power of Darkness" (the title of a key 1995 track by Hamburg gabber/speedcore unit Nordcore G.M.B.H., (Nordcore Records) but was absolutely uninterested in critical or social respectability. In spirit, gabber seems to have ultra-identified with industrial's desire for alienation and confrontation, and engaged directly, if not always un-ironically, with industrial's dark themes. Where some industrial producers flirted with apocalypse or outright sonic terrorism, gabber built on the thematic and sonic precedents of industrial and went ever further, without engaging with industrial's conceptual/intellectual milieu. In this sense it was closest to so-called "Power Electronics" groups such as Whitehouse and Ramleh, which took industrial's taboo-breaking drive to ever more extreme lengths from the early 1980s onwards (Taylor, 2016). Like such acts, if gabber producers commented on their work at all, they emphasised the values of shock tactics and showed little interest in justifying their acts morally or conceptually. Sonically, gabber bore some of industrial and EBM's sonic DNA, as well as some overlap in its producers and listeners. For industrial listeners who felt betrayed by the genre's previously taboo embrace of guitars and rock n' roll aesthetics at the start of the 1990s (Monroe, 1999), some gabber and the harder

forms of techno guaranteed a re-galvanising sonic shock (albeit without industrial's conceptual and political frameworks).

From Electronic Body Music to Electronic Bloody Music

During the 1990s, some producers of industrial and especially its dancefloor-oriented counterpart, EBM would make a similar (and retrospectively unsurprising) transition to gabber. EBM is relevant here due to its move away from the relatively slower and more ominous soundscapes and slower tempos originally associated with industrial. It built on the regimented beats of industrial tracks such as Throbbing Gristle's 'Discipline' and accelerated into a new type of dance music that brought with it industrial's apocalyptic and confrontational symbolisms.

German Martin Damm (a.k.a. The Speed Freak and numerous other aliases) first produced EBM and like other producers was influenced by it (Discogs, 2019). In 1994 Damm's work caught the attention of Dutch gabber labels Mokum and Shockwave and his work as The Speed Freak in turn influenced fresh waves of producers, while he continued to release new music and mixes. Before emerging as the influential and hugely successful gabber compilers and producers Technohead Lee Newman and Michael Wells) had been active during the 1980s as Greater than One (GTO), producing sample-laden dancefloor tracks at the interface of industrial and EBM for the Chicago label Wax Trax. This label brought Belgian EBM originators Front 242 to American audiences, including DJs and producers in Detroit, such as DJ Jeff Mills (a.k.a The Wizard and member of short-lived industrial group Final Cut). In a 2011 interview, Mills spoke of his work in the industrial group Final Cut and the influence of EBM: "This was a time in Detroit when the lines between industrial dance and techno were blurred. Many people were listening to things they weren't supposed to. We got together and formed a band called Final Cut. We were inspired by bands like Consolidated, Nitzer Ebb, Front 242, Ministry, Greater Than One, etc. The Detroit techno scene was rising and we wanted to create a unit that was the medium between the two styles. To create something new." (Unknown author, 2011).

A key precedent for gabber's combination of para-militaristic imagery and electronic dance beats was the work of the Belgian group Front 242. From their EBM genre defining 1984 album "No Comment" (Another Side) onwards they deployed a stark commando aesthetic, which influences both the darker strands of Belgian New Beat and gabber. In his detailed

study of the formation of Detroit techno, Sicko (1999, 140-1) was clear about Front 242's influence on techno and its successors, describing their work as being "as stark and foreboding as dance music could be, but briefly warmed up for a more techno-crossover sound with 1988's *Front by Front* and the 1989 EP *Never Stop.*" Within a few years, the coldness and rigidity associated with EBM surfaced in the nightmarish and overtly apocalyptic sounds of gabber, which the majority of EBM listeners weren't able to embrace.

Front 242's British EBM counterparts Nitzer Ebb, who from 1984 to 1989 deployed equally stark para-military and pseudo-totalitarian imagery, also influenced the development of gabber, as heard on The Lost Generation's "Where's The Youth?" (1994, Sub Terranean). The phrase was taken from Nitzer Ebb's relentlessly linear EBM anthem "Murderous" (Power of Voice Communications, 1986). The Lost Generation isolated the phrase and turned this into a despairing question that soundtracks a tantalising slow and sinister first section of the track before the pounding gabber beats kick in, augmented by the phrase.
Nitzer Ebb's influence was significantly felt during the formative stages of gabber. According to Sicko (1999), in 1992 the Detroit-based duo Cybersonik (Richie Hawtin and John Aquaviva of Plus 8 Records), who had been surprised to receive an offer from Wax Trax (Sicko, 1999, 132) were invited to perform at the already-notorious Rotterdam club Parkzicht. Their primitive 1990 hard techno track "Thrash" (Plus 8 Records, 1992) sampled Nitzer Ebb's EBM anthem "Join in the Chant" (1987, Mute Records) and this provoked the Rotterdam fans in the crowd to "join in" with an anti-semitic chant used to antagonise Amsterdam fans. While the appalled Detroit duo pulled back from the sonic brink on their return home, moving into a less hardcore and more abstract territory, producers in Rotterdam and a growing network of allies in Hamburg, Berlin and beyond, embraced a strategy of total sonic escalation that would soon make early gabber sound relatively tame and slow.

A 1992 industrial album by American provocateur and alt-right-lauded producer Boyd Rice (a.k.a NON) provides an uncanny (and unfortunate) parallel to gabber's embrace of the dark side, built on his previous flirtations with fascism and entered overtly martial territory. Titles such as "Scorched Earth" (NON, 2002a) could easily have featured on gabber releases. Its most infamous track, "Total War" (NON, 2002b) was a slow, percussive martial anthem based on Goebbels' 1943 total war speech.Yet in the ever-escalating sonic arms race of the time, NON's material appears weak, if not laughably camp in the face of the accelerated martial industrialism of gabber. Despite thematic similarities and the suspicions of an

appalled public and other dance producers, gabber never took the NON path of explicitly fascistic affirmation.[3] NON and other martial industrial producers were not sampled in gabber and there is no significant overlap in listenership, despite comparable sonic qualities. Gabber populism may have had roots in football hooliganism but despite appearances it took a different path.

The scorched-earth sonic aesthetic that gabber's hyper-martial beats aimed to clear were internal and mental rather than physical and directly political. Gabber's cleared territories were inwardly directed. While Boyd Rice seemed to be advocating the Italian Futurist agenda of "war as the world's only hygiene" as Marinetti phrased it in 1911(1972 :106*)* gabber producers and listeners arguably practiced sonic warfare as the world's only *mental* hygiene. For example, Gabbers speak about clearing their minds from the everyday by way of escape (Van Der Aar, 2013). The target that many listeners and producers were temporarily aiming for was to "Destruct Your Brain", the title of a track by Vague Entity (2006, Braindestruction Recordz), and figuratively die during the night as can be heard on various hardcore tracks, including Repix' 2015 "Die Hardcore" (Partyraiser Records).

Reynolds (1996) describes how French theorist Paul Virilio's work was appropriated by "Alien Underground, a London-based hardcore zine that monitors this international ultra-core network", to describe and interpret gabber and related musical forms in the 1990s. However, a later concept from Virilio's book, *The Information Bomb* (2000) is especially relevant here. In hindsight, gabber's stripped-down quest for mental scorched earth seems not just nihilistic but prophetic of an era in which a "digital detox" seems both utopian and dystopian. This dual potential is expressive of what Reynolds (1999, 10) terms "the utopian/dystopian dialectic running through Ecstasy culture." The desire for blankness may have been an early warning and early attempt to escape our present information overload and the contradictions of daily life. Gabber's sonic bomb effectively cleared mental space through an overload of distorted electronic noise and post-human machine generated speed, producing euphoria and a cleansing blankness.

3 An unexpected gabber connection to martial industrial aesthetics can be noticed in an album of "chiptune" (early computer game sound-emulating) versions of Death in June's music (a notorious British "neofolk" group) by Hamburg producer Taciturne, known for uncompromising releases on Hamburg's Fischkopf label, released (Advertance Editions 2002).

Nevertheless, unlike in some strains of "martial industrial" the aggression and militaristic imagery were aimed at carving out a blank space rather than advocating or romanticising the conquest of ideological or physical territory. Such militarised mode of entertainment, already prefigured in EBM aesthetics, emerged at a time when the "military industrial complex" was morphing into a more consumer-friendly "military entertainment complex", which has become an increasingly powerful cultural force (Lenoir and Lowood, 2002). Computer games, rock and even hip-hop have been conscripted into conditioning, training and attracting recruits even before they have enlisted. Intertwined within this shifting complex, and produced electronically on similar hardware to that used for video game play and hip-hop production, electronic body music morphed, in effect, into electronic bloody music.

Hellscape as Homeland

Whilst it might be necessary to use para-militarised aesthetics and sonic regimentation to reach the objective, the destination is neither peace nor conquest. Reynolds (1996) argued that "For the modern militarised libido, the equivalent of serene post-coital tristesse is the aftermath: post-apocalyptic wastelands, razed cities, dead suns, the empty horizon, entropy-as-nirvana." Yet this overlooked the compulsive character of gabber and the need for repetition and re-escalation, as encapsulated in the 1995 track "After All Wars" by Jack Lucifer, (Kotzaak Unlimited). Here, the threat and promise of gabber was "After War, War." Any desolate sonic scene of devastation is only a marshalling area in which the forces regroup before the next assault. The track starts almost inaudibly but is quickly blasted by waves of pounding bass and cold, martial synth chords, eventually augmented by metal-like guttural screams. The effect is to (re)-insert the listener into a furious sonic conflict zone.

In order to defend this genre's territory from commercial exploitation, ever more powerful sonic weapons had to be deployed. Gabber and its mutations into sub-sub-genres, such as speedcore and terrorcore, makes a case study in itself in the sheer speed of stylistic mutation in that era; commercialisation and dilution of each emergent genre took place at such a rapid pace that in order to stay one step ahead and maintain "underground" credibility, producers had to move ever faster (Monroe, 1999: 153-55). The problem here was not just a technical arms race but also that the apocalyptic imagination needs ever-stronger sonic and stylistic shocks in order to re-create the temporary feeling of home and to ward off post-combat fatigue. The wasteland becomes home territory.

Just as industrial listeners might feel most at home (least alienated) in the most extreme moments of their form, according to Reynolds (1996), gabber offered its listeners a blank, seemingly militarised space in which speed and force overcomes day-to-day alienation. While the majority of gabber listeners would have been unaware of TG's "The World is a War Film" (1980, Industrial Records), this track anticipated such a blankly militarised world they wished to spend as much time as possible. The dream was not to march into others' territory but to constantly repeat and intensify the pleasures of relentlessly "Marching into Madness", as Marc Trauer named his 1993 Cypher recording (Cold Rush Records).

As gabber spread and mutated, it was adopted by artists and theorists self-consciously seeking to implement anarchist theorist Hakim Bey's 1985 concept of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone", a zone of temporary freedom carved out within, and using the tools of, otherwise-hegemonic society. At the same time as Bey's concept emerged, Laibach and other industrial groups created "Temporary Hegemonic Zones" in which it was possible to perceive normally-hidden power mechanisms and to potentially turn these against themselves. (Monroe, 2009, pp.135-138). Arguably, gabber seemed to reach for a permanent hegemonic zone, albeit one inhabited by similar spectres to that which animated and haunted the temporary hegemonic zones of industrial. If the TAZ concept inspired hardcore rave formations such as Spiral Tribe to use high-velocity sounds to achieve a temporarily utopian space (Robb, 2002), many gabber producers strove to create zones in which there was no escape from the "return of the repressive", which both industrial and gabber were able to achieve.

If war, de-industrialisation, social violence and terror were normally the object of critique that artists tried to escape, industrial and gabber producers often used them as an accelerant for their incendiary sounds and visions. Phillippov (2014: 56) refers to Weinstein's argument that heavy metal music is "a space where youth seek to escape politics" (italics in original) yet she also points put that it was, once, also a reaction to civil rights movements, whereby "metal functions as a kind of 'nostalgia for centricity' for white, heterosexual, blue-collar young men", resulting in an "apathetic hedonism that sometimes borders on regressive bigotry". While in first-wave hooligan and darkly hedonistic forms of gabber there was little trace of ambivalence or critical intent, they can still be seen as critical transmissions from such temporary hegemonic zones and as the form accelerated into the 1990s, these critical potentials would eventually become flipped and self-consciously politicised in the hands of

more radical underground producers, as addressed later in this article. In the case of teenage gabbers, however, its blank use of transgressive signification may well be a refusal to achieve reflexivity, in an attempt to escape the rationality of modernity into a preferred dream-experience. Perhaps here a comparison may be drawn with extreme metal, in which Kahn-Harris (2007) identifies what he calls "reflexive anti-reflexivity" amongst its fans, who refuse to comment on problematic imagery and word play. An example is the use of the sample "No Woman Allowed" in the same-titled 1992 track by the macho-named trio Sperminator (Rotterdam Records), thereby emphasising a "technomasculinity" that can simultaneously be identified in the related world of video games (Kocurek, 2015: 191). Yet this act of apathetic hedonism and regressive bigotry is simultaneously shrugged off within a new audience context in an act of over-identification. Emptied out of its meaning, yet nevertheless transgressive to the outside world, "No Woman Allowed" was not long after re-appropriated, as witnessed in 1994 at London's queer Soho club *Fist*, where "leather dykes"[4] happily danced to this track. Clearly, politics are inescapably everywhere. Yet when on a path of escape, hakking (*"hakken" or "hakkuh"*) energetically to a trance-inducing assault of repetitive sledgehammer beats and accelerated breakbeats, pleasure is derived from laughing at the abysmal[5].

Even without the rise of more avant-garde and conceptual variants, industrial connections kept manifesting as gabber developed. In 1995, British hardcore and gabber producer Ultraviolence (Johnathan Casey) was asked to remix Laibach's "War" (a techno-choral version of the Edwin Starr protest song). The mixes featured the "Hitman" mercenary character, who confesses openly that since he was a child he has longed for war and to bomb civilians. Here the critical intent of Laibach's industrial techniques is subject to ultra-identification which returns Laibach to darker territory (1995, Mute Records). In 1996, in his (even) more populist persona of Johnny Violent, Casey followed Laibach's 1984 use of Gustav Holst's *Mars, Bringer of War* on the track "US Intervention" (1996, Earache Records). The same album, *Shocker* closed with what then seemed like the ultimate statement of speed-machismo, "Burn Out", which climaxed with a single short click, intended to

4 "Leather dykes": during the 1990s this identifier was used to indicate self-defined lesbians with a penchant for a motorcycle and SM-inspired dress-style.

5 Almost as if reaching beyond the grotesque in metal. Could such instances be understood as acts of European privileged hopelessness in contrast to house music, which initially endeavoured to generate hope for marginalised sexual minorities within Black and Latin minorities in the USA?

represent 1 million BPM (1996, Earache Records). The emergence of this nightmarish form of electronic dance music culture was just one of numerous signs that not far beneath the surface of the new, allegedly post-historical era, all was not well. Gabber, hardcore, and contemporaneous developments in industrial, manifested in the geopolitical aftermath of the "end of history" asfirst proclaimed in 1989 by Francis Fukuyama (2012) when the cold war officially came to an end, when it seemed that ideological class struggle has given way to liberal democracy. Gabber's emphasis on marching into madness and blankness could be seen as both the Rotterdam working class version of the "end of history", as well as its repudiation.

Destruct to Reconstruct

Industrial is characterised by a machine aesthetic that foregrounds the noise of technology. Gabber, in turn, overdrives the volume of its already shrieking and punching sound palette to extremes, producing an immersive experience of excess, for its participants to submit to a sonic storm of speed, horror and self-abandonment. Although industrial music emerged as a noise-led music in the Punk era , the genre gained its four-to-the floor beats during the 1980s with the adoption of drum machines, creating a danceable frame for industrial noise music that is very similar to a disco rhythm (Reed, 2013). In this way, there is an overlap into the realm of techno, which is further confirmed in the German development of techno (Sextro and Wick, Dir., 2008). Nearly 50 years after the war that destroyed Rotterdam, by the early 1990s a reborn city appeared, which felt itself to be bigger and bolder. In this sense, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Belgian hardcore techno recording "Dominator" by Human Resource (1991, R&S Records) offered a special appeal within that city. A fan of this recording, Paul Elstak set up gabber label Rotterdam Records to put the city on the map, in recognition as a city that produces worthwhile electronic dance music. As he explains, the drum sounds in such gabber productions are mostly generated by overdriving, thus distorting, the kick-drum and rim shot on the Roland TR-909 Rhythm Composer, a drum machine that can also be heard in Chicago house music and Detroit techno. Gabber's characteristic swirling "hoover" synth noise (which can be created with a Roland Alpha Juno synthesizer, for example) seemed inspired by "Mentasm" (1991, R&S Records) by Second Phase (Joey Beltram and Edmundo Perez); however, the gabber version of this sound is more piercing in a low-res manner, as though deriving from an 8-bit game computer. Pragmatic and self-made(unlike in metal) virtuosity is low on the list of priorities for gabber.

Noise is tricky to theorise; regarded as an unwelcome interference as well as a transgressive "anti-music," a negative description would reconfirm its opposite, what "proper" music should be about within a binary set of values, and thereby fails to deliver a new way of hearing. Extreme noise initiates a balancing act between repulsion and sublime. As Attali (1985: 20) argues, noise "destroys orders to structure a new order". Simultaneously, an attempt is made to not only be noisy but to go faster, to accelerate, take more pills, and evade sleep – to embrace speed on an amphetamine buzz instead. Not depending on a human drummer, the drum machine clock can be set faster and faster, to 170 BPM, 200 BPM, and beyond, towards speedcore, a subgenre that turns music into an ultra-violent drone as the pulse accelerates to a speed of 1000 BPM, as though it taunts the listener: can you handle the stress, this endurance?

For the gabber scene in the Netherlands, from the early days of the 1990s onwards, hardcore was perceived by its participants as an escape. On the surface, everyday reality was not particularly bleak, because the country offered a relatively good standard of living, enabling young teenagers to attend events, buy the clothes and (for some) afford the stimulating drugs associated with raves ("house parties") and dance clubs. Nevertheless, if one looks at the initial gabber fanbase , which was predominantly working class, there certainly were reasons to move very fast, to get away from it all. Particularly in a club like the Demi Sec Discotheque by the old harbour of Spijkenisse, a suburb close to Rotterdam's expansive seaport and toxic petrochemical industry, where DJ Gijs mixed noisy techno and obscene gabber at its infamous hardcore nights. Here, transgression opened the door to a raving third space, where everyday values were shredded inside the *hakkuh* "washing machine".

In the 2013 VPRO documentary (Van Der Aar dir.), interviewees reminisce about the 1992-95 *Nightmare in Rotterdam* gabber dance events at Rotterdam's Energiehal as being experienced as a "dream", despite the menacing title of the dance night. Gabber is often characterised by horror imagery and sound bites. For example, Freddy Krueger's burned face and metal claw hand from the movie *Nightmare on Elmstreet* (Careven, dir., 1984) are used for the marketing of Nightmare events. Another example is the ubiquitous appearance of the pale pinned face from the *Hellraiser* movie franchise (see Barker dir., 1987 and Hickox dir., 1992) for the Hellraiser raves between 1992-99, also appearing on multiple music compilations, including a 1993 Parkzicht mixtape. Between 1996-97, the Amsterdam-based

gabber label, Hellraiser Records brought out several releases. The soundtrack of the film was regularly sampled l, including components from *Hellraiser 3: Hell on Earth* (Hickox dir., 1992) on "Razors Through Flesh" by Ace One (1996, Polydor Records). The use of such flesh shredding body horror, seems to suggest a need to shed the flesh, the body, in a digital whirlwind, heralding an encroaching technoculture, wrapped within an exciting (yet bloodless) rite of passage: the participants are in effect tested not only to withstand the noise and the speed, but also the pain, the terror, the nightmare.

Beyond Rotterdam a tentative crossover emerged between faster Gabber variants such as speedcore and speed metal. Metal riffs had begun to be sampled on Gabber and hardcore tracks from a relatively early stage but later in the 1990s more adventurous DJs began to drop metal tracks in their sets. Black British DJ and producer Loftgroover was a champion of this combination. For example, in a 1996 set in Stoke on Trent (Loftgroover 1996) he mixed recordings by Anthrax, Nirvana and industrial metal group Ministry. At times he used slow metal riffs to provide an interlude to give dancers some brief respite while other metal tracks were sped up to mimic the ludicrous "helium vocals" often heard in gabber and hardcore. In 1998 he documented this style on the mix compilation *Speedcore* (Loftgroover 1998). This featured original Rotterdam producers Euromasters and Paul Elstak in the same context as death metal group Morbid Angel.[6]

The idea of a nightmare additionally generates excitement, fuelled by a tinge of fear, while the almost impossible speed of the music ramps up (amplifies) the energy of the experience for its participants. Like a sensationalist fairground-ride, gabber events effectively offer the illicit thrill of entering an unknowable void. The resultant adrenaline rush may produce a raw sense of excited pleasure, enhanced by the entactogenic and empathogen dance drug MDMA (E or ecstasy), as well as other stimulants, such as cocaine and, especially, amphetamines (speed), pushing the body beyond its natural limits. Such drug use became a mythologised exaggeration during the moral panic that surrounded gabber in the Netherlands, as other types of house music and techno events thrived on their mix of chemical enhancement without as much media attention. As Thornton has shown in her 1995 study on club cultures, media-amplified moral panic effectively produces subcultural capital that in turn attracts new young

6 Morbid Angel's choice of Laibach as remixers on a 1994 release on Earache Records demonstrated another connection between industrial and metal. (Morbid Angel, 1994)

participants. The illicit promise to enter into an illicit cyborgian hell rite added to the attraction. Despite the full-on sonic assault, gabber events in the Netherlands were generally perceived by its teenage (as well as its now ageing) participants as a lot of convivial ("*gezellig*") subcultural fun. Various television documentaries show interviews with the participants who found a sense of togetherness and community within the scene (see for example, Van Der Aar dir., 2013) .

After the nightmarish assault, from destruction comes reconstruction. During the same period as gabber's formation, Walser (1993) wrote about metal, arguing that a chasm appeared between fast financial capital and a slowing economy, producing a gap between ambition and reality within the contradictions of subordination. In this context, horror can be understood as a way to channel the resultant sense of rage, its supernatural fantasy worlds countering enlightement's rationality. With reference to the work of Bataille in his work on extreme metal, Kahn-Harris (2007: 158) further argues that, "(t)transgression is one way of surviving the fraught experience of modernity [...] While modernity disempowers individuals with alienating systems and structures, transgression allows individuals to feel utterly in control". Foucault's notion of "limit experiences" are of importance here, peak moments that test boundaries of existence (Alexander, 2013: 120-121). Baudrillard (1993: 106-107) points out that crossing through can be beneficial for renewal, as "negativity engenders crisis and critique, [whereas] hyperbolic positivity for its part engenders catastrophe": "Evil" can both destabilise and energise (new) knowledge. In this way, the controversial noise of gabber has subsequently been reinterpreted within progressive circles.

Beyond the beyond

By the mid 1990s gabber was a viral network spreading across the continent and into America. In the process it mutated and accelerated further. As this happened gabber found itself appropriated for political and even intellectual uses far from the original Rotterdam young working class party aesthetic. The reason for this was partially the speed with which electronic genres, sub-genres and even counter-sub-genres proliferated (Monroe, 1999). Growing gabber and hardcore audiences provoked blatant commercialisation and, in the Netherlands, mass consumption. Rotterdam had contributed sufficient ammunition, including The Sound of Rotterdam EP, with tracks like "The Final Experiment", which its producers, the members of Holy Noise, felt required an alias, The Rotterdam Hardest (1992, Rotterdam

Records). Yet, in order to remain at the cutting edge and in order to (re)create a shock effect, ever more destructive sonic weaponry was needed.

In 1993, an edition of the commercial compilation series *Thunderdome* was titled "F***k Mellow, This is Hardcore" (1993, Arcade). By 1994, in a reaction to the darker side of gabber, including its references to horror and neo-nazi sentiments, gabber pioneer Paul Elstak decided to move towards a less dark sound, happy hardcore, particularly popular in Scotland (Reynolds, 1999), and engaged in the organisation of child-friendly gabber parties. However, this poppy party version of hardcore opened the door towards a popularisation. Gabber suffered from a charicaturisation as recordings were made radio friendly with memorable melodies, such as Gabbertje's 1996 "Hakkuhbar". In reaction, Rotterdam Terror Corps released "No Happy Shit" on Elstak's label Rotterdam Records (1996). According to gabber pioneer Paul Elstak, "there were so many loopy gabber things that it was no longer cool to be gabber. The radio gave up on it, and I threw myself wholeheartedly back into hardcore" (van Bergen, 2018: 149). As novelty hits emerged that thrived on caricatures of the gabber dress style, the hardcore scene was pushed underground, becoming less visually recognisable. As a result, participants in the gabber subculture felt the need to reclaim the form's uncompromising raw potentials in its hardcore sound. Yet, this also enhanced an unwelcome attitude into the hardcore realm. Already in 1995, Neophyte recorded the masculinist slogan "Happy is for Homo's" ("Happy is for Gays"), a track title that by 1996 was changed to "Happy is for Hobo's" under the alias of Bodylotion and released on a compilation Masters of Hardcore (ID&T, 1996), which incidentally also included Elstak's return to hardcore, "The Power Of The Dark Side (Gabba Mix)". By 1998, there was fighting at the annual Thunderdome dance event in Leeuwarden, the North of the Netherlands, when neo-nazis were expelled; the event was suspended for a year as a consequence as this was not welcomed by the scene (van Bergen, 2018: 150).

The geographical dispersal and the escalation that often followed is apparent in the evolution of the *Terrordrome* compilations. While the first four volumes were compiled by the increasingly corporate Mokum label, from Volume 5 they were selected by Hamburg's Nordcore G.M.B.H. crew, from another strongly proletarian port city that experienced apocalyptic wartime destruction. The new German scene made early Rotterdam gabber seem tame by in comparison. Tracks on the compilations accelerated as high as 330 BPM, breaking existing speed limits and challenging the genre's scene makers. Sonically the tracks were

more “industrial” in their use of rigid regimentation, harshness and coldness. First wave gabber's brutality was often balanced by the use of MCs and humorous samples. The newcomers left little space (or time) for humour, hesitation or deviation. Producers pursued a strategy of excess and escalation, pursuing ever faster tempos and ever more brutal machinic textures in an attempt to stay ahead of the pack and put distance between themselves and the increasing popularity of the form.

Yet even this material was seen as overly commercial and viewed with suspicion by critical scene members. A puritanically underground and even fundamentalist spirit became apparent in circles such as those around *Praxis* and the *Datacide* journal. The over-exploitation of extreme imagery provoked a fundamentalist apocalypticism designed to return the faithful to what could be called the promised underground land. One group key to this were listeners and producers who had emerged from industrial backgrounds. TG had sought to wage “information warfare” and attempted de-programming by confronting popular culture with its own repressed potential. Now, some gabber and speedcore producers mounted a similar campaign. This entailed augmenting and “making strange” populist gabber formats with drones, cold textures and often an intensified sense of doom. Here there is a parallel with more extreme forms of metal that brought in new sonic textures and tempos to disrupt and reclaim metal for the dark side, whether the furious noise of Cannibal Corpse, tight performances of Sepultura, or ritualistic imagery of Beherit. Vanguardism and hyper-politicisation were added to gabber’s existing tendencies towards constant total mobilisation and paranoiac-apocalyptic imagination. As the scene spread to squat spaces, links were forged with autonomist movements, members of which saw the brutality of the new form as a further weapon to be deployed in the total struggle against mainstream society and politics. The (only partially and briefly fulfilled) hope was that its extremity would prove more resistant to commercialisation and appropriation than punk and hardcore rock.

Terrorist and urban guerilla references began to appear. More populist forms of hardcore had already deployed references to Uzis and other weapons to lend credibility to a gangster aesthetic. The more politicised producers referred to weaponry in the style first associated with 1970s terror groups and saw gabber as the pursuit of revolutionary urban warfare by other means. This was a way to close off the music to mass listeners and to apolitical or nascently right-wing “hooligan” elements attracted to the scene. This anti-fascist ethos remains clearly apparent in the institution of Berlin's annual “Fuckparade”. While it began as

a response to the mass, commercial scale of the “Loveparade” event, it has developed its own identity with a clear radical left orientation. (Von Thülen, 2019)

Labels, such as Praxis, which during the 1990s ran the Dead by Dawn dance nights (Transpontine, 2007) from an anarchist centre in Brixton, London (UK) appointed themselves ideological guardians of the scene and claimed ownership of its most radical forms (hear their 1997 compilation, *Death by Dawn*). The Praxis journal *Datacide* attempted to police the form and blend it with polemical analyses of surveillance, corporate power and other radical issues. Its reviews read like the verdicts of revolutionary courts-martial and it sought to correct ideological and stylistic deviations far beyond gabber. The ethos was more Meinhof and Mao than Marinetti, and there was a conscious drive to bring listeners of gabber and related genres into the orbit of its apocalyptic anarchist worldview and mould them into new, gabber-fuelled militants. The agenda was permanent sonic revolution, although within the strictly regimented limits of the genre.

The new intellectual, politicised presence noted by Reynolds (1996) may well have met with indifference or amusement among the massed ranks of Rotterdam gabbers. Yet although marginal, the radical labels and thinkers experimenting with the form had a disproportionate effect on its development. While it didn't label itself as an avant-garde, it consciously assumed a vanguardist role. Its strategy of conceptual, tonal and intellectual acceleration forced others to escalate its form further. The trajectory of gabber through its first decade was marked not just by para-militarised aesthetics and sonic escalation, but by active ideological and semiotic warfare and arms races among its various factions.

Hardcore Forever?

Returning to the issue that started this article, is it possible to understand gabber as the metal of house music? The answer depends on whether one is strict regarding music genre development, or whether one understands this notion in terms of sensibilities and socio-cultural context. Despite the context of the popularity of house music within which gabber emerged during the early 1990s in the Netherlands, our findings show that gabber’s sonic qualities are genealogically more related to European industrial music than to African-American house music. Offering a minimalism that desires a direct injection of digital energy, gabber particularly differs from metal by a lack of ambition for complex virtuosity; what could be more simple, and effective, than a recording like “Poing” by Rotterdam

Termination Source (1992, Rotterdam Records), with its unmistakable "poing" sound, repeated on the beat, simultaneously deranged yet precise. The low level of information in gabber recordings is compensated by the ability to accelerate, heralding the arrival of (irrational) post-human subjectivity.

Like metal fans, during the 1990s young gabbers participated in a sonically brutal form of escapism, rather than in self-conscious dialectical positioning. However, rendered intellectually inert within the eye of a storm of information overload, as a mostly instrumental machine generated electronic music, gabber simultaneously seems to attempt in an escape from embodied ethnic and gendered identity issues, in which it ultimately does not succeed. Through references in the titles, samples and topics of the recordings and dance events, gabber displays a need to find a way for participants to regain their footing in an increasingly fluid electronic world where it is no longer certain what it means to be human, especially a man, in a traditional sense. Rage against an emasculating machine (what difference does one's gender make when working a computer?) simultaneously provides an ecstatic experience of *jouissance,* of unmaking, and thereby a desire to carve control within the territory of electronica (see also Rietveld, 2004), as well as through noise and speed. Hardcore is not only a powerful cleansing force but it also speaks of a (often masculine) desire to feel solid once more. In this way, gabber exists at a crossroads where sensibilities of techno and metal, rave and rage, meet.

Note

This article started life in 2018 as "Gabber Overdrive – Noise, Horror, and Acceleration" by Hillegonda Rietveld for the Turmoil issue of CTM Magazine in Berlin. A premise of Gabber's crossover between techno and metal was presented at the 2018 IASPM UK & Ireland conference, which also brought together metal music studies and *Dancecult* scholars. It became clear that industrial music was an important link in this case. As a result of joint conversations on the topic, industrial music and hardcore expert Alexei Monroe joined the gabber research project to co-author the current, much extended, article.

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