

Chapter 5

Aural Portents: The Anthropocene and Popular Music

Popular music, although theorized in a myriad of ways, can be considered that which is the voice of the popular, the commercial or more grassroots or ‘authentic’ musical expressions. Furthermore, popular music can be conservative and or standardized in terms of marketability (as part of a powerful commercial industry), but also subversive, political, and engage with activist stances, messages, and critiques (Bennett, 2001; Middleton, 2006; Shuker, 2008; Cole, 2018). One form of such critique is in terms of music that addresses environmental challenges. In assessing the extent to which the concept of the Anthropocene has migrated from the disciplines of geology and Earth science, Angus stresses that it has become a far more common and recognizable concept not only in the confines of academic journals, articles, books, and news media reportage, but it is now a prominent concept that is evident in numerous forms of popular culture. As the previous chapters have explored, the Anthropocene has been (and continues to be) articulated in art, novels, film, television, documentary, and eco-celebrity culture, therefore, as Angus states:

There are exhibitions about art in the Anthropocene, conferences about the humanities in the Anthropocene, and novels about love in the Anthropocene. There is even a heavy metal album called *The Anthropocene Extinction* (2015: 1).

Popular music has explored environmentalism and ecological challenges across a range of genres for decades, but there has been a progressive shift towards specific focuses on the concept the Anthropocene, from electro and dance music and goth rock to extreme metal (and *The Anthropocene Extinction* will be discussed later in the chapter) and even a genre dubbed Green Metal. Furthermore, an increasing number of musical artists have spoken out on environmental issues but are also initiating innovative approaches to their environmental impact when on tour and have reimagined how they can perform live music in ways that radically reduce their carbon footprint. As such, this chapter will explore the ecological messaging and environmentally aware practices of musical artists before focusing on how popular music articulates the concept of the Anthropocene, either through songs that represent commentary on differing natal points of the Anthropocene, or artists and bands that explicitly use and explain the concept and the potential impacts of the Age of Humans.

Ecology and Popular Music

As Ijeoma Nwatu argues, given that multiple generations of musicians have matured in an era of climate change, it is ‘no surprise that elements of rising floods, powerful storms and increased heat are making their ways into more and more songs’ (*The Nature Conservancy.com*, 2021). Popular songs about ecological issues from global warming, land and ocean pollution, urban encroachment on nature, pesticide use, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and sea level rise, have a long history, with a prominent example being Marvin Gaye’s ‘Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology),’ a song David Ingram describes as ‘a threnody for the poisoning of the oceans and the land’ (2010: 160). But there have been many others, such as: Joni Mitchell’s ‘Big Yellow Taxi,’ Bo Diddley’s ‘Pollution,’ The Beach Boys’ ‘Don’t Go Near the Water,’ John Martyn’s ‘One World,’ Neil Young’s ‘After the Gold Rush,’ —Paul McCartney’s ‘Despite Repeated Warnings,’ Loudon Wainwright’s ‘Hard Day on the Planet,’ Bruce Coburn’s ‘If a Tree Falls,’ Michael Jackson’s ‘Earth Song,’ Gorillaz’ ‘Plastic Beach,’ or Childish Gambino’s ‘Feels Like Summer.’ Other contemporary pop artists, such as Billie Eilish, have also centrally addressed environmental degradation, such as in the song ‘All the Good Girls Go to Hell,’ with its lyrical reflections on wildfires in California, sea level rises and the progressive loss of greenery on the planet. Furthermore, such expressions of environmental awareness are not confined to rock and pop music, but also world of opera and classical music, as illustrated by mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, orchestra Il Pomo D’Oro, and conductor Maxim Emelyanychev’s *Eden* project (2022) that consists of performances of music by composers such as: Charles Ives, Rachel Portman, Gustav Mahler, Biagio Marini, Josef Mysliveček, Aaron Copland, Giovanni Valentini, Francesco Cavalli, Christoph Willibald Gluck, George Frideric Handel, and Richard Wagner. Of the rationale for the recording, DiDonato states (in the album notes) the music is a ‘call to action to build a paradise for today...Both Nature and Music are showing us the way. Will we answer the call?’ Consequently, the musical themes of environmentalism and consciousness raising is long established, and cuts across diverse musical genres.

In addition to creating music that reflects on environmental issues, musicians have also contributed to various ecologically themed live events, such as the Grateful Dead’s Rainforest Benefit Concert recording in 1988, and events in the late 1980s such as ‘Our Common Future,’ that featured Sting, Joni Mitchell, U2, and Peter Gabriel, to the various artists that performed at the Live Earth festival, such as Foo Fighters, Metallica, Madonna, Genesis, Rihanna, and

Shakira. Furthermore, there are a growing number of ecologically conscious music festivals that are experimenting with more sustainable approaches to the performance of music in addition to raising awareness of ecological threats and encouraging audience activism, such as the Øya festival in Oslo, the Terraforma festival in Italy, the Pohoda festival in Slovakia, the Roskilde Festival in Denmark, or Burning Man in Nevada. However, popular music has, of course, had (and continues to have) its own environmental impact as an industry, as Matt Brennan and Kyle Devine argue:

Regardless of whether a given recording is expensive or cheap or free, the fact of the matter is that all recording formats have associated environmental and human costs. They always have. They always will. And at no point in the history of recording has any format adhered to principles of extraction, energy or exchange that might qualify as fair trade (2020: 49).

The vinyl recordings made between 1900 and 1950 used shellac, a material made from insects that was primarily reaped and treated by workers in colonial India, whereas vinyl records made from 1950 were made from petrochemical plastics extricated from the planet and ‘processed in factory conditions that took their toll on workers and local environments’ (2020: 51). Later formats, such as cassettes and CDs were also made from plastic, and so ultimately derived from oil and the oil industry and the emissions and waste products that are attendant to these industrial processes. Yet, the twenty first century transition to digital/streamed music would suggest that the environmental impact of such materiality is now diminishing, but as with Crawford’s (2021) argument regarding the ‘immateriality’ of AI, while the songs and albums do not have a physical form (as is the case with vinyl records, cassettes, and CDs), they do require hardware to be accessed and consumed, such as mobile phones, which are manufactured using mined minerals and materials, and when they are obsolete and discarded, they will add the growing strata of ‘geology of media’ and potentially become future ‘technofossils’ (Parikka, 2015; Taffel. 2016a), whereby the Anthropocene’s technological leftovers are forming a ‘neo-nature’ (Schwägerl, 2014). Furthermore, while ‘immaterial,’ streamed music still requires an extensive digital storage and transmission infrastructure and networks and crucially: ‘All of this requires energy’ (Brennan and Devine, 2020: 51), and a substantial and continual source of energy. However, there are positive developments to

mitigate these energy impacts of music streaming platforms. For example, in response to the extensive global popularity of Korean K-Pop (represented by artists and bands such as BTS, (G) I-DLE, TOMORROW X TOGETHER, NewJeans, and BLACKPINK), while fan-created groups such as Kpop4planet have pushed measures such as using smaller devices that consume less energy, using digital downloads over repeated streaming of specific music, and petitioning prominent streaming platforms to work towards using 100% renewable energy by 2030 (Yang, 2024). Kpop4planet have also prevailed on companies to minimize their use of packaging, request that artists reduce the carbon impacts of their live shows, and lobby government agencies and corporations to engage in carbon neutrality (Amrith, 2024).

As François Ribac and Paul Harkins argue, the environmental costs of popular music also extend to its live performance as a growing number of artists and bands have begun to rethink the carbon impact of touring, and collectives such as No Music on a Dead Planet raised awareness of environmental dilemmas and threats and to recognize the ecological impact of the recording industry and the need for musicians to act. From this perspective, akin to the production of music, live performances require:

[High] consumption of energy (mostly fossil fuels) for lights, amplifiers and video; extensive transportation for the artists (from the tour-bus to the airplane, including trucks for stage equipment) and the audiences; the use of electronic equipment for huge sets; and the production of waste, along with an astronomical consumption of water, heating, and pesticides used in stadiums (2020: 13).

In this context, the British band Coldplay pledged in 2021 a 12-point plan to lower carbon emissions while touring following lead singer Chris Martin's promise that the band would only tour if they could do so in a sustainable way, factors developed for the 2022 *Music of the Spheres* tour. As such, the band's website has a prominent sustainability section that sets out three core principles of touring: Reduce, to lessen consumption, recycle significantly, and to cut CO₂ emissions; Reinvent, to support innovative green technologies and develop new carbon-reducing touring practices; Restore, to make touring as environmentally beneficial and to draw down more CO₂ than tours produce. As such, Coldplay has been able to announce that they had:

[Reduced] their touring carbon footprint by 59% compared with their previous world tour – via some creative methods that include kinetic dancefloors that allow dancing fans to generate electricity, recyclable LED wristbands and the band travelling by train (Keenan, 2024, the guardian.com).

While air travel is inevitable in a world tour, Coldplay have mitigated this with train travel where possible (countering the use of private jet travel), used power from recycled batteries, ensured that high percentages of tour waste does not end up in landfill sites, many of which are ‘putrescible’ and leak methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (McKibben, 1990: 15), but is recycled or used as compost. Furthermore, for every concert ticket sold, a tree is planted through the reforestation nonprofit organization, One Tree Planted. Therefore, while the performance of live music, especially at the level of globe-spanning arena tours, has a carbon impact, decisive measures to counter these effects are being developed.

Sounds of the Anthropocene

While there are many songs that are statements on climate change, music also more explicitly aligns with the concept and consequences of the Anthropocene (a concept that Ribac and Harkins apply to live performances), either thematically or directly, and from a diverse range of musical genres. For example, from the perspective of the performing arts, the synthesizer musician Bernie Krause has produced soundscapes such as *The Great Animal Orchestra*, that was created by recording animal fauna and wildlife from across the world over the span of decades, enabling people to ‘hear the sound(s) of the Earth’ (Ribac, 2018: 54). Furthermore, given the time span of the recording technique that Krause used to create the recordings:

[Many] of these soundscapes are now the only remaining traces of worlds that have been annihilated by the urbanization of our planet and global warming. Krause’s soundscapes create a soundtrack for the Anthropocene; they allow us to hear what has already disappeared, what will disappear whatever we do and what we must save (Ribac, 2018: 54-55).

In looking again at the differing natal points of the Anthropocene, artists and specific songs have drawn on these historical and ecological periods as the basis of lyrical content and thematic communication. For example, while the world-changing importance of the discovery of fire has been fictionally explored in J.H. Rosny aîné's novel, *Quest for Fire* and Jean-Jacques Annaud's film adaptation of the story, the British heavy metal band Iron Maiden provided their own rendition of the tale in their song 'Quest for Fire' (from the 1983 album *Piece of Mind*) that provides a musical account of the early human struggle to obtain fire from the landscape, not understanding that their quest for fire to own heat and enhance survival was a force that could be created through the use of stick and stone, a technique that would be ultimately understood and ensure humanity's development (and its impact on the natural environment) as it becomes a 'monopolistic tool' of humans (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, 2007: 614). Alternatively, in evoking the violence of the Columbian Exchange, and the advantages of steel weapons over those made of stone, the 'terrorizing effect of horses,' and the epidemics brought by the Conquistadors (Crosby, Jr, 1972: 35), Neil Young's epic 'Cortez the Killer' (from the 1975 album *Zuma*), musically recounts Cortés' conquest of Montezuma's Tenochtitlán and the founding of New Spain. The song conveys the clash of civilizations, the building of the Aztec society and culture and its violent downfall and destructive aftermath. Alternatively, the Anthropoc impact of fossil fuel-driven industry is the subject of Sting's 'We Work the Black Seam' (from the 1985 album *The Dream of the Blue Turtles*) as it details the centrality of coal in the history of humanity, but also the dignity and skills of those who mined coal, and whose practices have been progressively replaced by new energy sources, such as nuclear power, with its dangerous potential and need to bury radioactive waste.

In extending radiative environmental impacts to atomic/nuclear weapons, Bill McKibben states of the Atomic Age:

The invention of nuclear weapons may actually have marked the beginning of the end of nature: we possessed, finally, the capacity to overmaster nature, to leave an indelible imprint everywhere all at once (1990: 61).

While their songs 'Distant Early Warning' and 'The Red Tide' address environmental themes, the Canadian rock band Rush's 'Manhattan Project' (from the 1985 album *Power Windows*) provides a historical narrative of the beginning of the Atomic Age with the invention of nuclear

weapons, their use, and their subsequent effects on the world. In this regard, the song musically tells the story of Los Alamos and the race to develop the first atomic bomb, and, with its reference to Enola Gay, to subsequently use it. 'Manhattan Project,' as the title indicates, is a historical narrative of the radioactive signatures on the planet that are a significant element in the Great Acceleration argument for the beginning of the Anthropocene, a theme continued in the American rock band Filter's 'Cancer' (from the 1999 *Title of Record* album) that powerfully conveys the destructive spread of humanity in terms of numbers and environmental impact and how the ways in which the cities and vast tracts of altered and modified land that have fundamentally transformed the surface of the planet. The song, as the title clearly stresses, likens humanity to a destructive disease that has destructively altered the face of the Earth.

While there are songs that convey distinctive historic moments in the development of the Anthropocene narrative, other popular music artists have directly addressed the concept of the Anthropocene to articulate its nature, and its potential future consequences for the planet. In this context, the gothic rock band Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds' 'Anthropocene' (from the 2016 album *Skeleton Tree*) tells of a world in which the bewildering rise of the Anthropocene has transformed the weather patterns of the planet, where an altered nature adversely affects flora and fauna, and the seas rise. Here, then, the unforeseen Anthropocene has transformed nature and human life, and the song ends with the warning that the fragile Earth must ready itself for the next wave of environmental impacts unleashed by the Age of Humans. Alternatively, the theme of the Anthropocene influences the electronic/industrial sound of Grimes' *Miss Anthropocene* (2020), with songs such as 'Before the fever' evoking apocalyptic theme, and from the folk genre, Nick Mulvey's 'In the Anthropocene' (released in 2019), considers what life means in this human-altered world, and imagines people in the future asking those of the past how they could allow the Anthropocene to emerge and for the degraded seas, soil, and lost coral reefs to be returned. Most importantly, the song acts as a call to action, to use the remaining time to offset environmental ruination. Similarly, the electronica band OMD's 'Anthropocene' (on the 2023-released *Bauhaus Staircase* album), directly explores the theme of human-created environmental change. While OMD (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) dealt with the theme of the atomic age and the proliferation and threat of nuclear weapons on their 1980-released 'Enola Gay,' 'Anthropocene' combines vocals with a synthesized voice-overs that intones population statistics throughout human history and that clearly defines the concept of the Anthropocene and places it in the context of geology, but which identifies it as a new geological epoch and links this explicitly to ecosystems. The song articulates the idea of stratigraphy bearing the mark of humanity and changing the fossil record of the future but

destroying biodiversity in the present. In this sense, the song clearly communicates the central ideas at the heart of the Anthropocene, balancing its roots in geology with disastrous environmental impacts and planetary effects. Accordingly, 'Anthropocene' deftly combines the factual basis of the concept while also speculating on what the future of such a condition may bring. Thus, while the growing human global population is stated throughout the song from the Holocene of ten thousand years ago, beginning with five million, expanding to two hundred million, two billion, and seven billion, but with the song ending with the ominous speculation that one million years in the future the human population will be zero.

Extreme Environment, Extreme Music: Metal and the Anthropocene

In looking at the cumulative effects of mid-twentieth century human created impacts such as carbon emissions, fertilizers use, ocean acidification, amongst other factors (such as radioactive fallout), these are the forces that McNeill argues 'blasted us into the Anthropocene' (2017: 16), a world in which, as Julia Adeney Thomas describes it:

The complex, integrated Earth system has moved away from the relative stability of the Holocene epoch to a less stable, less benign, and still evolving phase with, in many ways, no precedent in Earth's long history. Humans will not find it easy to live in the Anthropocene (2022: 2)

In exploring the concept of the beginnings of 'eco rock' from the late 1980s and into the 1990s, environmentalism 'as a theme in popular music renews sentiments expressed by artists who have frequently not fitted into the mainstream music scene' (Sinclair, Symington, and Winn, 1990: 22), hence the subject has been articulated by punk bands such as Dead Kennedys, in their song 'Moon Over Marin' or Bad Religion's 'Kyoto Now.' However, when considering heavy metal music, with its sound, lyrics and imagery often invoking reflections on chaos, death, war, destruction, and apocalyptic thought (Arnett, 1996; Weinstein, 2000; Partridge, 2012), it is little surprise that environmental threats have been added to such representations. For example, the musically aggressive thrash metal movement of the 1980s also addressed themes of environmental destruction and concerns for the environment, with a prominent

example expressed in Nuclear Assault's 'Inherited Hell,' which is fundamentally about the despoiling of the environment in terms of water and air pollution, biodiversity loss, and deforestation. The song is from the perspective of a future generation that faces the consequences of the irresponsible ecological human acts of the past. and featured on their 1989 album *Handle with Care*, with its cover image of the title imprinted on the Earth. Other examples include Metallica's 'Blackened,' Megadeth's 'Set the World Afire' and 'Dawn Patrol,' Slayer's 'Skeletons of Society,' and Testament's 'Greenhouse Effect,' the latter of which urges a people-driven political resistance against the forces that have allowed environmental destruction. From the late 1980s and beyond, other metal bands would also address environmentalism, and frequently with clear political components to songs, such as the British grindcore band Napalm Death in songs such as 'Unfit Earth,' 'On The Brink of Extinction,' and their 2020-released 'A Bellyful of Salt and Spleen,' which articulates the human costs of migrant sea crossings, while Gojira address environmental issues on songs such as 'Toxic Garbage Island' and 'Amazonia.'

In other instances, the US metal/punk fusion band Earth Crisis released a series of recordings from the early 1990s aligning a metal sound with political movements such as environmentalism and animal rights activism, and in songs such as 'Ecocide,' 'Eden's Demise' and 'Destroy the Machines' the band 'deals with the theme of ecological apocalypse in terms of the fast-approaching total destruction of the ecosphere' (Granholm, 2012: 35). While the theme of the apocalyptic frequently takes on a Christian or occult theme in the more extreme forms of metal music that emerged in the 1990s in the context of processes of social dislocation and industrial uncertainty (Bennett, 2001), extreme bands, especially those defined as Black Metal, a genre that typically draws on Satanic imagery intense and rapid tempos and 'growled, shrieked or shouted vocals' (Till, 2012: 107), have embraced environmentalism, biodiversity destruction and the Anthropocene. For Timothy Morton, referring to the Canadian environmentally themed band Wolves in the Throne Room, there is semantic and conceptual connection between metal music, Black Metal and the forces that represent the Anthropocene:

The term *Heavy Metal* evokes the toxic entities that humans have forged since a decisive moment in what geology now calls the *Anthropocene*: 1945, when a thin layer of radioactive materials was deposited in Earth's crust. The term Black Metal suggests an uncompromising dwelling with the poison and intensity of the nonhumans that now exist: plutonium, uranium, global warming (2013: 25).

In the view of Susanne Pratt (2016), bands like Wolves in the Throne Room represent an offshoot of Black Metal called Eco-Black Metal, creating music that evokes feelings of Glenn Albrecht's concept of 'solastalgia,' in which nostalgia is combined with distress at the loss of ecosystem and give consciousness to the nonhuman in the wake of increased human impacts on the planet (Snaza, 2016; Albrecht et al, 2007). As such, bands such as Gytwaalkt, Resistant Culture, Sarcophago, Illapa, and Volahn evoke issues such as the connection to animal life, spirituality, indigenous languages and social struggles (Ritts and Greening, 2018), while Panopticon focuses on reflections on the grandeur of the unspoiled natural worlds, but also produce songs and music that explores issues such as the human and natural impact of the mining industry in traditional American communities in Appalachia (Lucas, 2019). Alternatively, the band Downfall of Gaia evoke a world in which Lovelock's self-regulating world system fails to overcome the deprivations of humans. Consequently, such bands reflect the distinctive way in which:

By encouraging us to imagine worlds both before and after us, the idea of the Anthropocene offers a bold depiction of an Earth that has no need of humankind, a planet that will one day quite rapidly – in geological terms – scour most of the traces of human existence from its surface (Clark, 2014: 27).

This perspective also evokes the Gaia/living planet thesis of James Lovelock, in which an abused and transforming Earth has the potential to become 'our greatest enemy' (2021: 5), an ethos potently expressed in the music of Botanist, a project best typified by the 2016 EP recording *Green Metal*, and the articulated in album recordings such as *Doom in Bloom* (2012), *Mandragora* (2013), *Flora* (2014), *Ecosystem* (2019), *Photosynthesis* (2020), and *Selenotrope* (2023). As Olivia R. Lucas argues, Botanist, fronted by 'Otrebor,' a musician whose persona is that of an individual possessed by the spirit called 'The Botanist,' is an ecocritical Black metal band that adds the traditional instrument of the hammered dulcimer to the metal sound. In terms of lyrical approach:

Botanist's music...marries a form of posthumanist environmentalism with black metal's predilection for the arcane, resulting in an output that is bizarre in its unrelenting focus on plants and uncomfortable in its easy dismissal of humanity's perception of its own significance (2019: 485).

From the perspective of Edward O. Wilson's conception of humanity having assumed the 'role of planetary killer' (in Chakrabarty, 2009: 210), *Botanist* aligns with the plant life to counter this destructive force and presents the austere view that the hope for the Earth's survival is the end of civilization because 'The Botanist sees humanity as flora's nemesis' (Lucas, 2019: 487). On the one hand, this idea evokes Jane Bennett's concept of 'vibrant matter,' that is based on the need for humans to experience 'a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around...human bodies' (2010: ix). But on the other hand, *Botanist* presents a vision that Lucas links to Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, in which, in the context of a planetary interconnected organism, humans are ultimately 'inessential for the Earth's survival and could be eliminated without much harm to their ecosystems (2019: 493-494).

If, as the philosopher Sverre Raffnsøe stresses, the Anthropocene sees humanity stepping over the threshold into a new and unknown space' (2016: 6), extreme metal tells distinctive stories to explore what such a space, and what the consequences for humans, and all lifeforms, may be. For Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt, the Anthropocene means that humans now 'live at the cusp of an extinction event' (2017: G4), and the band Cattle Decapitation centrally confront, this condition, explicitly naming the Anthropocene as driving force of planetary degradation and potential annihilation. As Erik van Ooijen states, the American deathgrind band Cattle Decapitation (formed in 1996) are characterized by fast-tempos, intense guitar riffs and the vocals of Travis Ryan (the band's primary lyricist) that continually alternate between guttural growls and high-pitched shrieks, communicate a consistent thematic core based on images of 'meat, violence, and ecological disaster' (2015: 73) on recordings such as *Ten Torments of the Damned* (1997), *To Serve Man* (2002), *Humanure* (2004), *Karma. Bloody. Karma* (2006), *The Harvest Floor* (2009), and *Monolith of Inhumanity* (2012). On these recordings, the relations between humans and animals are consistently the subject of species inversion, as the songs frequently see the world from the perspective of animals routinely preyed upon for food, underscoring the band's protests of 'the mistreatment and consumption of animals [and] the abuse of the environment' (Radovanović, 2021: 45). As such:

[Before] we can even imagine a standpoint of total Gaia or the myriad standpoints of multiplicities, we, as humans, must acknowledge our own monstrosity as seen from the subaltern point of view (van Ooijen 2015: 79).

However, the issue of environmental degradation in the form of the effects created by the ‘Age of Humanity’ is the theme explored in an inter-related trilogy of recordings: *The Anthropocene Extinction* (2015), *Death Atlas* (2019), and *Terrasite* (2023) that all represent the apocalyptic potentials of the Anthropocene. Citing *The Anthropocene Extinction* in the book *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction*, Ellis notes that the recording features ‘artwork of apocalyptic post-industrial landscapes strewn with human corpses spewing plastic debris’ (2018: 142), with shorelines covered with discarded plastic bottles, a visual theme continued in the liner notes with images of each member of the band photographed in a similar state. In appraising the album, Tom Morgan argues it thematically captures the conditions of the modern age:

The planet is getting hotter. Carbon emissions and other heat-trapping gasses blanket the Earth’s atmosphere, causing heat waves, extreme weather and rising sea levels. Driving this is the compulsive growth of capitalist economics, which has led to rampant deforestation and pandemic-causing habitat encroachment. Ocean acidification has increased 26 percent since pre-industrial revolution levels. The natural rate that biological species go extinct has risen 1,000 percent in that time. These are just some of the destructive effects of what has been called the “Anthropocene” era...The Anthropocene Extinction operates as a sort of atrocity exhibition (2022, treblezine.com).

As the album title indicates, *The Anthropocene Extinction* fundamentally addresses and critically explores the concept of the Anthropocene, evident in the first track ‘Manufactured Extinct,’ in which a pristine Earth is undermined by human population growth that progressively and relentlessly destroys biodiversity, while ‘The Prophets of Loss’ speaks of the destruction of a ‘finite ecosystem.’ The issue of loss is central to ‘Mammals in Babylon,’ with its refrain of ‘Eden’ being lost during population explosions and industrial waste, a sentiment captured in the instrumental track ‘The Burden of Seven Billion,’ all of which is creating an Anthropocene world that is captured by the song ‘Not Suitable for Life.’ Additionally, the songs ‘Ave Exitum’ and ‘Pacific Grim’ represent aural and thematic critiques of the destructive and devastating impacts of industrial food production and deep-sea fishing on biodiversity and the balance of the natural world.

While Cattle Decapitation’s next album, *Death Atlas* (2019), represents a conceptual progression into the apocalyptic, representing the end of the Earth in pestilence and fire (as evidenced by the songs ‘One Step Closer To The End Of The World,’ ‘Bring Back the Plague,’

and 'Time's Cruel Curtain'), but the album nevertheless retains a connection to the Anthropocene, with the scene set with the first track, 'Anthropogenic: End of Transmission,' and The Great Dying Part 1 and 2 that consists of digitized and distorted voices against a minimalist electronic background, explaining the nature and the impact of the Anthropocene and the Sixth Mass Extinction as a result of climate change, global warming, sea level rises, and higher atmospheric methane levels, describing it as the geologically-defined Anthropocene in which these effects are escalating. Finally, *Terrasite* (released in 2023), while conjuring a fantastical Anthropocene posthuman future in which a new species, the Terrasite, an insect/human hybrid, has emerged from the ashes of a destroyed earth, but the fantastical theme and imagery of the cockroach-like 'terrasite' is a metaphor for the perspective that humans, as lead singer Travis Ryan states 'are a world-devouring species' (Pizzola, 2023, *newnoisemagazine.com*), hence the album powerfully conveys humanity's 'adverse interactions with the planet, its resources, its organisms' (Helyes, 2024, *Metalhammer.com*). However, the recording also deals with the emotional impact of the Anthropocene in songs such as 'Solastalgia,' a direct reference to Glenn Albrecht's concept of the threats to physical health and wellbeing 'caused mainly by living in ecosystems that have been contaminated by pollutants and toxins' (Albrecht, 2007: 95) in a world that is transforming into an increasingly hostile environment in the face of environmental disasters and creating chronic anxiety. As such:

Given the fast-paced reality of...climate change, this form of anxiety will gradually afflict a larger number of people, thus generating growing distress and a new range of mental, emotional, and spiritual health problems (Ferrarello, 2023: 153).

In the song, solastalgia is the result of loss of the 'old world' that creates only feelings of despair and the loss of hope. As Albrecht argues, directly linking solastalgia to the Anthropocene, this condition this now being compounded by further 'negative Earth emotions...such as ecoanxiety, meteoranxiety, ecoparalysis, global dread, tierratrauma [the experience of abrupt harrowing environmental change], and terrafurie [anger that those responsible for environmental degradation]' (2020: 19). Hence, The Anthropocene Extinction explores potential scenario for humanity posed by the Anthropocene in the song 'And the World Will Go on Without You,' in that life will go on, but not human life in a hostile Anthropocene environment. So, according with the perception of Roy Scranton that 'the brief explosion of human life will turn out to have been as transient as an algae bloom' (2015: 116). And so,

extreme metal bands like Botanist and Cattle Decapitation, albeit in differing ways, do not reflect the ‘Good Anthropocene’ perspective and the “Apocalypse No” position that eschews the view that humans are nature’s ‘enemy’ and reflects a belief ‘in people and a long-term future on earth’ (Schwägerl, 2014: 77-78), but forcefully argue that the Earth that is buckling under the weight of what Cattle Decapitation call the ‘Carbon Stampede.’

The Anthropocene or the Call of the Chthulucene

In considering changing cultural perceptions of global destruction and the apocalyptic, Rupert Till argues that:

In the apocalypses of traditional cultures, it was only supernatural beings that could destroy the world or cause famines, diseases, fires or floods. Human technology has made it possible for people to cause even greater destruction, and nuclear weapons, selfish individualism, runaway consumption, chemical warfare and ecological disaster are perhaps the apocalyptic demons of today...It is no surprise, then, that contemporary culture returns again and again to stories of the end of the world (2012: 93).

For Lewis and Maslin, the Anthropocene is a potent form of a contemporary end-of-human-civilization scenario, and it is one that synthesizes science, politics, philosophy, and religion and weds it ‘to our deepest fears and utopian visions of what humanity, and the planet we live on, might become (2018: 7). At one level, bands like Botanist and Cattle Decapitation conjure visions of the runaway human impacts of the degradation of biodiversity. Yet, such music and lyrical sentiments also resonate with the need for what Jane Bennett calls ‘assemblages,’ which are ‘living, throbbing confederations’ (2010: 23) in their recognition of the value (and fate) of the non-human in the Anthropocene that act as a counter to the belief that humans are exceptional in relation to the animal world and to more fully recognize the vitality of the non-human. As Bennett argues:

Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies (2010: ix).

While Cattle Decapitation frequently reverse this scenario and imagine scenes in which the tables are turned on humans (with album covers such as *Karma. Bloody. Karma.* showing a multiple-armed cow deity wielding the blades and implements of the butcher, the result of which is captured on the cover of *Humanure*, in which it is cattle that consume humans, while *The Harvest Floor* depicts lines of people being herded into an abattoir), and their music represents a potent critique of the human actions that have created the Anthropocene, and potently evoke the Anthropocene as the Necrocene, a capitalism-driven extinction-creating force that affects humans, biodiversity, and the Earth itself through ruthless processes of extraction (McBrien, 2016). Yet, Cattle Decapitation (as does Botanist) also capture a keen essence of Haraway's (2015) more positive concept of the Chthulucene, that sees the world in terms of tentacular connections between species:

These times called the Anthropocene are times of multispecies, including human, urgency: of great mass death and extinction; of onrushing disasters, whose unpredictable specificities are foolishly taken as unknowability itself; of refusing to know and to cultivate the capacity of response-ability; of refusing to be present in and to onrushing catastrophe in time; of unprecedented looking away (2016: 35).

However, recordings like *The Anthropocene Extinction* do represent an important cultural example of not looking away from the ways in which the planet is being transformed, and biodiversity is both threatened, industrially exploited, and destroyed. So, while humans are mercilessly and pessimistically held to account in such extreme metal music, there is a strong sentiment of stressing the vital need for connectivity with other species, and to forge alliances with both extended kin and 'critters' and to tell 'multispecies stories' (Haraway, 2016: 55), and such music does indeed constitute potent, if pessimistic, narratives of 'critter' recognition, but in the context of portentous commentaries on a bleak Anthropoc future. Yet, the focus on the animal world aligns Cattle Decapitation with yet another mode of nomenclature for the Anthropocene, Jamie Lorimer's concept of the Cosmocene, in which humans realize that they are inextricably connected to the natural world and have to take responsibility for supporting the planet, with the result that the Anthropocene becomes 'a staging point, the threshold at which the planet tipped out of the Holocene before embarking upon a Post-Natural epoch of multispecies flourishing' (2015: 4). The alternative is, as Julia Adeney Thomas, Mark Williams and Jan Zalasiewicz argue, would be the 'unmitigated Anthropocene,' a world in which only

‘the darkest literary, artistic and religious imaginings can summon up the potential human suffering in such radically different and highly degraded conditions’ (2020: 171).

Therefore, while literature, film, and various forms of media significantly examine and explore the manifold threats, risks and effects of the Anthropocene, popular music has not only engaged with environmental threat, but also explicitly the concept of the Anthropocene, and extreme metal music in particular captures the nature of the potential ‘unmitigated’ Anthropocene and the ecological degradations that it may bring, or as many stress, *will* bring. And so, while Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds, Grimes, Nick Mulvey, and OMD have created powerful representations of climate change and the impact of humanity on the planet in relation to its cataclysmic impacts on biodiversity, and specifically name the Anthropocene, extreme heavy metal music presents perhaps one of the most confrontational, unflinching, and compelling repositories of stories that captures the essence of the Anthropocene. Therefore, like Haraway’s conception of science fiction, create visions of ‘worlds here, and yet to come’ (2016: 31) and warn of the possible future Anthropocene extinction for much of the life on planet Earth.