

logical studies of suicide, like those conducted by Israel Orbach and Edwin Schneidman, have proposed high levels of dissociative mental states when committing this act.⁷⁸ Speaking about the "Allahu Akbar" chanting before and during combat, Thompson also stated, "It's almost like they are praying that they can do what they need to do."⁷⁹

Although music and chanting play a role in this possible change of mind-set, I suspect that religious beliefs are more influential in the transformative process. Many Muslim suicide bombers and insurgents have been indoctrinated to believe that suicide and death in defense of Islam grants salvation in the afterlife. Thompson noted, "They see fighting as they're going to die, and they're going to go to heaven if they die in combat"; likewise, Shobeat claims, "The perception of death as an alternative and a more attractive state-of-being is the main attraction promoted by religious and educational groups, which act as the facilitators of the jihad agenda."⁸⁰ More so than music, these types of religious beliefs operate as the transformative catalysts for Muslim fighters. Their belief in the promise of religious salvation if they die in defense of Islam seems to be the primary source of psychological alteration. To a certain degree, the religious component of this mental state resembles a non-music-inspired trance. While acts of violence against others are rarely involved in religious trancing, a similarity emerges through the religiously derived alteration of consciousness, involving ecstasy and union with a higher spiritual power. Notice how Shobeat explains some of his feelings when he performed a bombing attack with the words "semi-hypnotic ecstasy, and the self-surrendering sense of merging with a transcendental power." These features parallel many of the emotional states of trancing communities described by Becker. Like the U.S. soldiers, however, the Muslim fighter's "trance" is not an enveloping alternate state of consciousness; they are still aware of their surroundings to the point of being able to commit suicide or wage violence. Although they would not qualify as "deep listeners" because music is not used to enote a psychological change, the Muslim fighters seem to experience some degree of mental transformation, akin to trance, derived from religious beliefs and the desire to create a union with a higher spiritual power.

One might be skeptical about whether Muslim fighters' psychological states constitute a form of trance, or whether soldiers' musical interactions have anything in common with *bebuten* trancing or deep listening. As we have seen, the soldiers themselves were often hesitant to talk about any effect of the music on their psyche beyond pumping them up. Becker, however, points out that American culture is not particularly accepting of trance, and

this should not discourage us from proposing a level of connection. Given soldiers' comments about "becoming inhuman," "having to become what I consider to be a monster," "affect[ing] the kind of person that you are," and Shobeat's comments about "ecstasy" and "merging with a transcendental power," we should not immediately reject that similar or related phenomena are taking place. Many people within Western cultures have experienced an intense emotional response involving music. Whether it be chills, tears, or laughter, the ability of music to operate as an intense emotional trigger seems common. As such, the idea of a psychological transformation resulting from music should not be foreign to most people's experiences; it may only be a matter of the degree to which music is influential.

The idea of the transformative influence of music or religious beliefs among combatants in the Iraq War may be paradoxically encouraging. The self-transformation of combatants suggests that both sides of the conflict must take steps, in some way, to alter their psychological state such that they are capable of killing. Many soldiers viewed the condition of war as unnatural. Indeed, this points to the idea that people of radically different societies and beliefs, like American soldiers and Muslim insurgents, often take measures for self-transformation in order to be capable of committing extremely violent acts. This process suggests that the fundamental psychological condition, regardless of cultural background and perceived enemy, may be one of nonviolence. As Thompson remarked, "It goes against any human nature to kill people."⁸¹

THE BATTLEFIELD PSYCHOLOGY OF TIMBRE

The power of music to inspire can be counterbalanced by its equally intense potential to frustrate and irritate. In psychological tactics, the U.S. military sometimes employs music, typically through loudspeakers, in attempts to impair insurgents' ability to fight, or to break their will if they refuse to answer questions in interrogation. Music plays a role as part of a sonic arsenal that includes any frustrating or irritating sound, like Grisham's tape of babies crying, but metal appears to be used in these situations due to a number of important factors. First, the loudness of the sound, particularly in the enclosed setting of interrogation, contributes to the feelings of irritation. Of course, any sound a person finds frustrating gains potency when played at a higher volume. Most soldiers' accounts of metal in interrogation reveal that the music is, in fact, played at a high volume, but the decibel level does

not appear to be the principal source of antagonism. If sheer volume had this impact, the military would most likely have begun utilizing loud music during interrogations in earlier conflicts. Certainly, the audio technology available during the Vietnam and Korean Wars and World War II was able to deliver high-intensity sound, so it is unlikely that the overall loudness of the sounds or music, while a factor, is the main influence. Additionally, Grisham stated that interrogators were required to be present in the room and subjected to the same conditions as a detainee, which would seem to rule out playing the music at levels that could cause physical damage to the ear, although it is certainly possible that interrogators did not always follow this guideline.⁸²

Another possibility may be that metal and other genres are considered culturally offensive to insurgents. In *Soundtrack to War*, Gittos interviews members of an Iraqi metal band, Accrassicrauda, who believe that metal music is viewed as "satanic" and "anti-God" by some Iraqis.⁸³ Similarly, Grisham believes that some detainees reacted adversely to metal because they viewed it as "satanic." Thus detainees might consider rap, children's songs, and even music by pop artists like Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera to be the music of the "infidels," since Western popular music is considered culturally offensive and a source of irritation.

Nevertheless, such cultural and religious differences do not appear to be the only reason detainees are affected by Western or American music. Grisham remarks that other pop artists, like Michael Jackson, are very popular in Iraq, and he could not have used his music because it would have been ineffective against insurgents.⁸⁴ Even though the genres selected for interrogation may be culturally offensive to detainees in some instances, the power of music to irritate or frustrate seems to stem from more a mix of complex factors rather than from cultural symbolism. While Western mainstream pop, rap, and children's songs have been employed in these circumstances, metal seems to be the most frequently used genre. If the musical representation of Western culture were the principal source of antagonism, one would expect a greater degree of musical diversity in the music used during interrogation.

The reaction of detainees to metal, as described by interrogators, suggests that the source of irritation derives to a large degree from the timbres of the music. Since most detainees are not sufficiently fluent in English to decipher the lyrics, the text of any song has little impact, negating the potential effects of even extremely chaotic or violent lyrics. On the other hand, many of the musical features of the genre described by Walser, like vocal

timbre, mode and rhythm, melody, guitar solos, and the distorted guitar power chord, contribute to the music's ability to break the will of a detainee.⁸⁵ More than any one of these elements in isolation, the distorted guitar sound and vocal articulation appear to be the most significant in causing the reaction of frustration and irritation. The majority of songs employed in interrogation and loudspeaker tactics contain high levels of guitar distortion, and Whiteley's analysis of this timbre, with its high frequency harmonics, provides insight as to why it might be particularly effective: "Naturally produced sound waves have only a few harmonics, but these (distorted) 'clipped' waves have many, especially at a high level and this is what gives off the piercingly painful effect. Natural guitar sounds at loud volume are not so nearly painful to listen to, and hence far less aggressive."⁸⁶ Whiteley's assessment of guitar distortion suggests that the "painful" aspect of the sound is not due to the volume at which the music is usually played, but stems from the nature of multiple, high-frequency harmonics in the guitar distortion. The combination of the guitar distortion effect and the vocal articulation of metal songs, which consist of pitched screaming or guttural, unpitched yelling, may have a powerful effect on certain listeners.

The imposed irritation does not seem to be culturally specific to Iraqis or persons from the Middle East. The rough, distorted timbres are also largely the reason that metal generates such a strong negative reaction among some Western popular music audiences. James Hetfield, lead singer and guitarist of Metallica, offers an interesting perspective on notions of power in metal and why his band's music may be useful in sensory deprivation: "We've been punishing our parents, wives, and loved ones with this music forever, why should the Iraqis or whoever it is be any different? [laughter]. But I really know the reason. It's the relentlessness of the music. It's completely relentless to break their will. If I listened to a death metal band for twelve hours in a row, I'd go insane, too. I'd tell you anything you wanted to know."⁸⁷ Fast tempo songs demonstrating rapid guitar riffs and "machine gun" double pedal bass drum passages lend the music its unyielding affect and enhance the effectiveness of this sonic harassment technique. However, we have seen that it is precisely the musical manifestations of power within metal, such as timbre and performance, that appeal to soldiers as an inspiration for combat. On one hand, soldiers find the music empowering as they prepare for missions and patrols; on the other, the power element within the metal sound frustrates and irritates insurgents. In this case, the concept of power in metal operates in a context-dependent, multi-faceted, but diametrically opposed way.

Music is selected for psychological tactics according to its ability to induce frustration and irritation. Metal songs, like "Bodies" by Drowning Pool, are employed in interrogation, and we have seen how this song has an intricate relationship with the Iraq War. After reaching great popularity in the summer of 2001, "Bodies" was taken off popular radio immediately after 11 September 2001, and then made a resurgence among American soldiers as an inspiration for combat, including the first Grouchy Media music video. In addition, "Bodies" was used during the interrogation of noncompliant detainees as form of irritation and frustration tactics. The use of the song for interrogation seems to have been foreshadowed in the video for the song (video example 29), released in the spring of 2001, which displays scenes implying an interrogation scenario. The video opens with singer Dave Williams whispering the phrase, "Let the bodies hit the floor" into the ear of an older man who sits calmly in a chair. On the fourth repetition, Williams screams, "Floor," and the man cringes as the song begins. Numerous scenes in the video present the man sitting in an armless chair and Williams standing over him, singing and yelling the lyrics at a close distance. While the video implies the setting of a psychiatric hospital, the frightened expression on the man's face and the aggressive postures that Williams assumes as he towers over him give the impression that he is trying to psychologically break down the older man in some way. The man mouths the words "nothing wrong with me" as Williams repeats, "Something's got to give." There certainly appears to be a parallel between the scene depicted in the video and the act of interrogation. This may only be a coincidence, but it adds a further layer to the relationship between "Bodies" and the Iraq War.

While metal appears to be the genre most frequently used in interrogation due to its timbral power and relentlessness, rap, pop, and children's songs have also been employed in psychological tactics. Interrogators believe that some timbres in these songs are especially irritating to listeners who find the sounds unfamiliar. More than rap and pop, children's songs demonstrate a high degree of relentlessness, which probably explains their prevalence over the other two genres. The relentless aspect of children's songs does not derive as much from timbral "painfulness" or aggressive sounds, even though some people may find the vocal and musical timbres in children's songs annoying, but from sheer repetition—aside from how many times interrogators may play the same song again and again.

One of the children's songs used by interrogators is "I Love You," from the television program and videos of Barney, the purple dinosaur. The minute-long song consists of two approximately equal sections differentiated by

a key change. The melody is sung after a short instrumental introduction and repeats with a slight textual variation up a half step in the second section. In addition to the repeated statements of the entire melody, there are smaller-scale, repeated patterns within the melody itself. The motion G-E-G, sung to the words, "I love you," repeats for the second line of the song, "You love me." Including the instrumental introduction, which plays the G-E-G melody twice, this melodic fragment is heard six times in one minute, four as G-E-G and twice as G-E-G in the raised half-step section. If "I Love You" were played repeatedly for an hour, the complete melody would be heard 120 times and the main melodic motive would be heard 360 times. Adding to the repetition, the singing style of the children, presumably Barney's target audience of preschoolers or young children, seems unnaturally uniform and calm. It is hard to imagine a group of four- to six-year-olds singing with such precision, clarity, and restraint, and for me, the vocal performance is unnerveingly artificial. The repetitive timbres of music intended for children make for a powerful source of antagonism—one might recall that these factors caused Buzzell to "cringe" when he remembered listening repeatedly to the Chipmunks Christmas CD in his vehicle. Moreover, one can see the obvious textual contradiction of using "I Love You" in interrogation. Although the detainees may not fully understand the lyrics, playing a song about loving one another, being a family, and giving hugs and kisses is highly ironic within the framework of interrogation.

The type of children's music used in psychological tactics sometimes elicits a humorous reaction in American society. In November 2004, for instance, *St. Petersburg Times* reporter Lane DeGregory remarked that the army has been slow to recognize the irritation potential of children's songs:

It shouldn't have taken the Army this long to discover it. Anyone who's had a preschooler knows the pain: sing-songy, cotton-colored puppets crooning over and over again about happy, joyful things. Dancing, smiling puppets. So pleased you tuned in. You can't tune them out. Then your little one joins in, even during commercials. Incessant. Mind-numbing. An agonizing infliction of unbearable assault. Returns were bad enough. Now with videos, the rewinds never stop. Once Barney gets going, there is no escape.⁸⁸

As mentioned, Hetfield initially expressed amusement about metal and his own music: "We've been punishing our parents, wives, and loved ones with this music forever, why should the Iraqis or whoever it is be any different?" Similarly, referring to the famous scene from *One, Two, Three*, Dan Kuehl noted, "I would confess to being a member of al-Qaeda if someone did that

for an hour [made him listen to 'Icy Bisy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka-Dot Blkini']. After ten hours of that, I'd confess to being Osama bin Laden.⁷⁸ I encountered a similar reaction when I presented a paper for an audience of about sixty to seventy people in California and played "I Love You" on repeat for 75 seconds. As the repetition of the song began, a chorus of groans and laughter erupted from the audience.

Why do people tend to react this way? The use of children's songs or other irritating music as an interrogation technique tends to evoke a humorous response in American society because many people can immediately relate to the situation of having to listen to music they do not like. Suzanne Cusick documents a variety of blogosphere exchanges in which people adopt a humorous stance on music in interrogation by relating it to personal experiences.⁸⁰ While interrogation is clearly a different context, most people have occasionally found themselves forced to listen to music they intensely disliked. Whether it was loud party or techno music blasting from a house at 3 AM, the muzak of a doctor or dentist's office, or a heavy metal guitarist practicing for hours in an adjacent apartment, the shared response to being annoyed by music often involves laughter. DeGregory goes so far as to suggest that having to listen to music one finds "unbearable" is an expected component of parenthood. The commonality of such an experience, though, does not fully explain the joking reaction. Just because a large group of people can relate to a particular event does not mean that they will adopt a humorous attitude about it.

One of the underlying sources of humor may be the opposite emotional reactions people have to music. In the cases of metal and rap—two of the most polarized popular music genres—those who love it are often among the most avid fans of any popular music style, and those who hate it can barely tolerate a few minutes of it. The same could be said for children's songs, like "I Love You." Young children seem to thoroughly enjoy the songs, like was a nanny for my nieces, they would sing songs like "I Wanna Be a Dog" or "I Know a Song That Gets on Everybody's Nerves" for what seemed like hours. DeGregory's comments accurately summarize how I felt at the time. The humor arises from the contradiction that one person's musical pleasure is another's intense pain—one listener greatly enjoys the source of another anguished side of listening, unable to stop the music, they seem to respond in a humorous way.

These pleasure/pain reactions highlight the more serious issue of the highly subjective experience of listening to music. As a part of battlefield

psychological tactics, timbre has a powerful influence on listeners, so much so that it has been used in interrogation and even considered to constitute torture. The pleasure/pain dichotomy of musical reception is still largely a mystery within musicology and the cognitive sciences; who can say why someone enjoys a particular genre, song, or sound? Most of us recall grade school teachers scratching their nails across a blackboard to silence a rowdy class. The noise was probably no louder than what a person experiences on a typical day, so why was it disturbing? The fields of cognitive science and psychology do not appear to have examined this type of issue. Most scientific or psychological studies of sound-based irritation still use the subjective method of asking individuals to rate levels of annoyance, on a scale of 1–10, for example. In trying to understand the causes of musical annoyance, Sally Jo Cunningham, J. Stephen Downie, and David Bainbridge propose that "the songs that we dislike depend as much upon ourselves as upon characteristics of the songs."⁹¹ While the scientific "why" of these questions may be difficult to answer because of the subjective nature of musical experience, the consequences of our responses seem much clearer. Sound can have such a strong impact on people that it can psychologically break their will. Music can irritate and frustrate to the point that one's resistance to answer questions is shattered. These issues raise complicated ethical questions about different uses of music. Can music be an instrument of violence? Where is the line between annoyance and true psychological stress? Can timbre be torture? If so, who decides and how? What rights do artists have regarding the uses of the music they write? While these questions begin to be debated, music in psychological tactics shows the extent to which sound can affect the human psyche and behavior. Soldiers' experiences have shown the transformative effect of music in combat preparation, and timbre has the power to bolster confidence and motivate listeners outside of themselves. But paradoxically, the same sounds can irritate, frustrate, and psychologically break people down. It appears that metal, and to a slightly lesser degree rap, have the dubious distinction of being capable of both psychological effects.

The psychological power of music is not always employed in ways that appear harmful or divisive; in fact, there have been propaganda efforts in the Iraq War in which the United States has used music as a cultural "bridge builder."⁹² Radio Sawa ("together" or "togetherness"), which the U.S. government created in March 2002, broadcasts news and popular music, both Western and indigenous, throughout the Middle East, including Jordan and the West Bank, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Egypt, and Morocco. Its target audience is 15- to 29-year-olds. According to Kuehl, the purpose of Radio

Sawa is "to try to create a base psychological perspective that brings sides of the population together because they listen to the same music. Kids who listen to the same music, then maybe twenty years from now, when the twenty-year-old is a forty-year-old policy maker, it will start paying off some dividends and building some bridges between us."⁹³ Certainly, as we saw in World War II, the effectiveness of radio propaganda is always debatable. Botelho points out that most Iraqis are distrustful of media efforts involving the United States: "Part of the problem is that we still write the material and Iraqis are distrustful of that. So if we have a hand in it, then they are distrustful. And if someone has distrust about something, then you can't really win them over."⁹⁴ While it remains to be seen how well Radio Sawa may bridge cultural gaps, the station appears to be very popular. According to a document released by the U.S. General Accounting Office in April 2004, *US International Broadcasting*, Radio Sawa is the top international broadcaster in six Middle Eastern countries, and attracts approximately 38 percent of the general population and 49 percent of its intended audience.⁹⁵

4TH25 AND (ANTI-) GANGSTA RAP

Chapter 5 outlined the diversity of music soldiers write and record in Iraq. From acoustic guitar-based folk songs to gore metal, this music reveals a wide variety of styles and lyrical themes. The unifying thread within the great range of soldiers' creativity is that the music represents a form of soldier expression about their wartime experiences. Describing the songs of soldiers in the Vietnam War, Lydia Fish writes, "These songs served as a strategy for survival, as a means of unit bonding and definition, as entertainment, and as a way of expressing emotion," and the same can be said for most soldiers in Iraq.⁹⁶ The music operates as an expressive outlet for their feelings about war. While soldiers write original music in many different styles, much of my research has focused on 4th25 and the album *Live from Iraq*. Keeping with my analysis of metal and rap in this section, I examine the aesthetic position of 4th25, and specifically the ideas of the group's leader, Neal Saunders, in relation to gangsta rap ideology.

As a form of soldier expression, rap may appear to be a recent phenomenon, but it fits naturally within the history of soldier-produced art. The emphasis on texts that lies at the heart of the rap genre creates a link to earlier forms of soldier writing. Many rap scholars view the lyrics as a style of African American urban poetry, and this poetic aspect forges a connection

tion with much of the poetry written by soldiers in earlier conflicts. World War I, for example, was well known for trench poetry written by soldiers. According to Stuart Lee, "The First World War provides one of the seminal moments of the twentieth-century in which literate soldiers, plunged into inhuman conditions, reacted to their surrounding in poems reflecting Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.'"⁹⁷ In many of these poems, soldiers describe their life in the trench warfare of World War I.

Rap is well suited to continue this tradition. In addition to being a genre driven by texts, rap parallels trench poetry in its affinity for rhymed verse and reality-based lyrical themes. The reality rap subgenre focuses on the difficult aspects of human existence, often within violent surroundings. This topical focus is analogous to the rhetorical position of much trench poetry, in which World War I soldiers describe the frequently violent reality of life in the trenches. In its freestyle form, rap becomes even more rooted in texts through the absence of musical instruments. In these ways, *Live from Iraq* could be considered part of the trench poetry tradition. While set to music, the lyrics address a variety of experiences related to the reality of soldier life at war.

Within the rap genre, *Live from Iraq* would most likely fall into the category of reality rap. The album is framed as a poetic narrative in which the soldiers of 4th25 address the violence and painful consequences of their surroundings, as well as their frustrations with the Iraqi people and commanding officers. Given the violence and feelings of aggravation at forces beyond their control that emerge throughout the album, *Live from Iraq* demonstrates a link to the gangsta rap subgenre. Many aspects of gangsta rap ideology, such as the survival of the fittest attitude, in which death and violence are portrayed as essential components of survival and attitudes of rebellion against oppressive forces, are recontextualized in the album to depict the experience of combat violence and life/death situations in the lives of soldiers in Iraq. For example, in "Behind the Screens," Saunders expresses intense animosity toward his commanding officers who prohibit soldiers from exercising full force when their lives are threatened. He feels that officers have the luxury of controlling soldiers this way—such as restricting the rules of engagement so that car bombs and IEDs can more easily target soldiers—because they are not the ones fighting and dying. The expression of anger against an oppressive force with life or death circumstances similarly characterizes components of gangsta rap. Additionally, while "I Ride" is a song dedicated to the memory of soldiers who were killed in combat, it adopts the gangsta rap perspective of revenge as a way to honor the dead. The text

commemorates soldiers by threatening violent retaliation against those who were responsible for their deaths, a common gangsta rap outlook.

As the main composer and lyricist, Saunders not only addresses the topics of war and violence in his texts, but also attempts to timbrally represent these feelings in the music. The song "Lace Your Boots," for example, describes the experience of combat. To help convey the sense of confusion in a gunfight, Saunders uses a technique of reversing the sound wave on selected keyboard parts, so that these sounds shift unpredictably forward and backward. In addition, he sonically portrays the slowing down of time during combat by altering the pitch of the vocals so that the voice seems to move at an unnaturally slow tempo. Although the album evokes certain aspects of the gangsta rap subgenre by portraying reality as a violent condition of survival, Saunders's perspectives directly contest many of gangsta rap's defining features. He considers the album and the system of beliefs expressed within it to oppose many of the ideological elements of gangsta rap. In fact, he claims that gangsta rap does not express "reality" at all.

For Saunders, gangsta rappers are motivated by the possibilities of lucrative album sales, and they exaggerate stories about "being hard" or the violence of street life. He asserts that the preferred corporate image of gangsta rappers as violent criminals corrupts the genre and removes any reality from it. Rappers act hard because it sells, but they have never experienced the reality of life that he has experienced in war. As such, Saunders feels a responsibility to describe his life in war and express how, by way of comparison, the violence of gangsta rap glorifies a criminal lifestyle that could never be as hard as his life as a soldier in Iraq.

There is no gangsta rapper that's going to have the same—you know, it's not as real as a cat who's been to war and told the story. So I don't think they [the major record companies] want to touch it [his album] for that reason, because then you can't have all these fuckers acting hard, because they're not. Because as soon as one soldier makes it, he just made it harder for everybody else, you know, to tell the same story—the same I sell drugs on the corner shit, and I shoot people with my 45, and that crap. Majors [the record companies] have a lot of money invested in that. . . . I wanted people to understand what war really was, or what combat really was. And it's not smiles, it's not anything where people can be happy, and it's not something you laugh about. And it's not something we'll all just joke about some day.⁹⁸

Saunders's assessment accurately characterizes the tendency of some gangsta

rap lyrics to inflate violent content. While the gangsta rap genre may have emerged by exposing the violence and racial and social oppression within urban environments from a mostly African American, male perspective, many contemporary gangsta rappers—and even those who were among the first performers of the subgenre—acknowledge a "fantasy" element or exaggerated degree of violence and misogyny in the lyrics. When Saunders began to work on the album, many soldiers expressed interest in joining the group, but he refused them because of their desire to perpetuate the often-exaggerated themes of gangsta rap and ignorance of the reality of their surroundings: "Everybody else wanted to talk about rims, and cars, and girls, and then they want to talk about gunplay and carrying guns and how they were so hard. And I'm like, 'I know you. I knew you last year. I never saw you with a pistol in your lap or tucked under your jeans. And for the first time ever, here you are really carrying a gun and really shooting at people and you don't have nothing to fucking say. You'd rather make it all up.'"⁹⁹

Likewise, Saunders criticizes other soldier rap groups for trying to blend their experience of war with elements of popular culture and allowing themselves to be exploited by small record companies that assemble and produce the groups in the United States:

It happened there. It's not like I waited, cheated, and came back home and did it. It's not like some guy had to tell me, "Hey, Neal. Here is what you need to do, now go do it." And that's what's happening now is, none of these soldiers are doing this on their own because they feel that way about it or the music is so important to them. They are doing it because they are trying to make a dollar off of that shit, not because they care. And that is totally bad. And I feel like, I definitely feel like that's not why I did it. . . . and I listened to it and I just wanted to fucking throw up because a dude is talking about "he can't wait to come home" or something like that, which you can do a good song about that. But then he is talking about "he can't wait to get home and ride on chrome." And I was like no, no you didn't. The rest of these people are taking something that, man, I just put so much emotion in and they are just fucking me.¹⁰⁰

Saunders recalls that, in many cases, he was first approached by record companies whose producers wanted to control his public image and marketing in order to increase sales. He felt that his musical voice was too "sacred" to allow others to manipulate it for the sake of profit or for the media's glamorization of the war.

The rivalry Saunders creates with gangsta rappers and other soldier rap

groups recalls the typical enmity associated with gangsta rap. For as much as he claims to be different, gangsta rap is about claiming to be different and questioning the authenticity of other rappers.¹⁰¹ In this sense, Saunders seems to be acting within the framework of gangsta rap—a genre that he claims to oppose. However, gangsta rap rivalries are usually waged in terms of power, through threatened violence, strength, and the possession of money, alcohol, drugs, and women. Gangsta rappers claim superiority by asserting that they are more violent, wealthier, and more able to obtain physical gratification. On one hand, from the perspective of violence and power, Saunders engages in this type of rivalry. He challenges the legitimacy of gangsta rap's frequently exaggerated texts by comparing them to the violence of his life as a soldier in Iraq, and casts doubts upon the authenticity of other soldier rap groups. On the other hand, he refuses to compromise his image or inflate the levels of violence he experienced in order to personally profit from lucrative record contracts, and this refusal runs counter to the practices of most gangsta rappers.

Additionally, Saunders opposes many elements that define gangsta rap. The rhetorical position most often expressed in gangsta rap involves mostly African American, male youths lashing out against a society that has oppressed them through poverty, racism, and the conditions of street life into adopting a nihilistic perspective. Some members of the African American community e-mail Saunders, calling him a murderer and saying that he is naïve for not recognizing the ways he is being used by the government and white society in the Iraq War. They claim Saunders has been a pawn in white society's war for oil in Iraq.¹⁰² However, Saunders, himself an African American, believes that their depiction of his victimization results from an unwillingness to accept personal accountability for one's actions and situation: "Black people really piss me off more than anybody. Because, oh my goodness, I think they have a huge history of never taking responsibility for themselves what-so-fucking-ever. If you're black, nothing is your fucking fault. So when they e-mail me, I get all kinds of propaganda-type shit from them. They talk about how the government is using you and 'the man' got you over there fighting for some oil that you'll never see money from. It's all just a bunch of crazy shit."¹⁰³

Concerning the portrayals of life in gangsta rap, Saunders feels that it is easier to claim to be the victim of a racist society than to initiate a positive social change. For example, he confronts the popular gangsta rap topic of police profiling, in which rappers express hostile and violent attitudes about being unfairly targeted by the police due to their African American ethnic-

ity. Saunders argues that police profiling has less to do with race than with breaking the law:

You can do what you want, but whose fault is it when bad shit happens to you? People are just like, "It's not my fault." Like a little kid that wants to ride spinners and drive, and be like 17 or 18 and smoke weed like Snoop Dogg. And act like he's a fuckin' gangsta and shit. But as soon as the police pull him over man, he's talkin' about profiling. Whether the police profiled your punk ass or not, if they pull you over and they find something, shit, maybe there is something to profiling. Maybe it fuckin' works. And maybe people just need to become a whole lot smarter. It's like I never knew a gangster from back in the day, the gangster era, that was just tellin' everybody he's a gangster—this is all the dirt that I do—because that stuff attracts attention man. And just nowadays that is what they [rappers] seem to be doin'. They want everybody to know what they have and how they get it—we break the law. And when they get caught up for it, it's like "Oh, got me because I'm black."¹⁰⁴

Saunders believes that the claims of gangsta rappers and those who emulate the gangsta rapper image regarding this form of racism are hypocritical. While they position themselves as victims of racial profiling, the glorification of violence and criminal behavior characteristic of gangsta rap draws attention to these illegal acts. For Saunders, if they are being true to the reality they articulate in their lyrics or in the image of that lifestyle by breaking the law, then they deserve the measures taken against them. Saunders views such cases as issues of personal responsibility, rather than racism, because they have knowingly and publicly glamorized a criminal lifestyle. He interprets claims of racism as ways to avoid responsibility, even when gangsta rappers call attention to the fact that they may be breaking the law.

Another way in which Saunders stands ideologically opposed to gangsta rap is through his emphasis on moral values like honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility; he consistently stresses the importance of assuming responsibility for one's actions. "Integrity is a big thing to me and understanding the truth and being able to decipher that from all the bullshit that gets passed along. . . . And just tell people basically, man, empower themselves. And stop waiting on somebody else to do something for you because they are going to do absolutely nothing for you especially if you won't even attempt to do anything for yourself."¹⁰⁵ Saunders expresses his belief in personal integrity by openly criticizing his superior officer in the 4th25 song "Pussy." The song recalls a day in combat when a rocket-propelled grenade

attack left numerous soldiers injured and the staff sergeant did not leave the Humvee to fight or apply first aid to the wounded soldiers. Upon arriving back at the base, the staff sergeant went to the aid station with minor scrapes and was later awarded a purple heart. Saunders objects to the fact that the staff sergeant received the same award as other soldiers who lost limbs in the attack and killed ten insurgents. As a result, Saunders refused to attend the ceremony in which these purple hearts were awarded. Below is an excerpt from "Pussy":

Now how the fuck did y'all get that
Cause you ain't do shit
Look I was there when Marion went down
And you ain't get hit
And if I recall you ain't bleed at all
He almost lost a limb
Now how the fuck do you deserve
The same purple heart as him
And when they presented you with it
You accepted it proudly
And if I ever see you wearing it
Oh it's coming the fuck off don't doubt me.

These beliefs in integrity and personal responsibility, which motivate much of Saunders's criticism of his superior officers and gangsta rappers, oppose many of the ideas professed in gangsta rap. Whereas gangsta rap represents life as a violent, nihilistic pursuit, many of the songs on *Live from Iraq* and Saunders's personal beliefs emphasize moral values of honesty, integrity, and personal accountability. For Saunders, the violence of street and gang life depicted in gangsta rap is socially irresponsible because it glorifies a criminal lifestyle and is motivated by record sales, where greater violence translates to better sales.

Through the music of 4th25, he undermines many of the fundamental ideologies of gangsta rap and challenges the authenticity of gangsta rap's reality by comparing it to the life of a soldier in Iraq. Many of the textual themes explored in *Live from Iraq* resemble those of gangsta rap, such as the establishment of rivalries, hostility against oppressive forces, violence, and survival of the fittest. Unlike the factors of gang life and social and racial oppression that typically motivate gangsta rap, however, the album's themes are often driven by values like integrity and responsibility. Saunders adopts the rhetorical framework of gangsta rap to attack many of the ideological

beliefs on which the genre is based. In this way, Saunders employs a trope of the genre to challenge it, and his oppositions to gangsta rap are expressed through the gangsta rap genre itself.

BEYOND METAL AND RAP

This study represents one of the first examinations of the complex relationship between music and American soldiers in Iraq. Clearly, music plays a significant role in the lives of many American soldiers. I have focused primarily on metal and rap music within the contexts of military recruiting, soldier inspiration, psychological tactics, and soldier expression, but my research represents only one perspective on a variety of ways in which these topics might be pursued. In this final section, I propose a few areas for further analysis, among many, that emerged during my research period but did not fit within the scope of the book.

Within the context of soldier life in Iraq, music often provided soldiers with a vehicle for expressing personal nostalgia. Svetlana Boyrn points out that nostalgia has historical roots in the longing of soldiers for home.¹⁰⁶ In *The Future of Nostalgia*, she traces the term nostalgia to the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer, who used it in his 1688 medical dissertation to describe a condition among Swiss soldiers involving a sad longing for one's homeland.¹⁰⁷ While nostalgia was thought to be a treatable and even curable disease, music was identified as a profound trigger for nostalgia among soldiers. Boyrn explains, "Supposedly the sounds of a certain rustic cantilena that accompanied shepherds in their driving of the herds to pasture immediately provoked an epidemic of nostalgia among Swiss soldiers serving in France. Similarly, Scots, particularly Highlanders, were known to succumb to incapacitating nostalgia when hearing the sound of bagpipes—so much so, in fact, that their military superiors had to prohibit them from playing, singing or even whistling native tunes in a suggestive manner."¹⁰⁸ For many soldiers in Iraq, music operates nostalgically as a psychological escape from their surroundings, especially as they listen to music associated with happy memories or loved ones. As Johnson recalled, "Sometimes a song would come on that was a big hit in my high school days and that would take me back to that time and it would make me feel better for a few minutes."¹⁰⁹ Atkinson was separated from her husband for close to thirty months and listened to "Here Without You" by Three Doors Down, a song she describes as their theme song; it was a way to "lose yourself in a little bit of home."¹¹⁰

She also recalled that another soldier, "Dave," who is a "big, Blackhawk crew chief," would listen to children's songs and nursery rhymes to remind him of his young son.¹¹¹ Dave made recordings of himself reading Dr. Seuss stories to his son and stored them on his iPod. Erik Holtan listened to pop singer Jessica Simpson as a way to create an emotional connection with his wife, but also to regain his sensitivity to romance and love within the context of war.

Jessica Simpson probably impacted me the most because I missed my wife and a lot of those songs were love songs. And those were the songs that impacted me the most as far as just having the void of my wife not being there. You know what I mean? And a way to kind of feel like I had still maybe that—I wasn't all macho in me. You go over there, you know, everything's a hard shell. You're a hard shell and you're hard to crack, and you don't have a lot of people to talk to about the sensitive side. . . . Maybe you don't know how to explain it to anybody, but having you listen to the song is a way to cope.¹¹²

Holtan would occasionally listen to songs that his children enjoyed as well, even if he was not particularly fond of the music.

DeNora's work on musical memory provides a useful interpretive context for understanding these types of relationships. She proposes that music can be more than a source of psychological "priming," in which moods or emotions are connected with music; music can "serve as a container for the temporal structure of past circumstances. . . . Musical structures may provide a grid or grammar for the temporal structures of emotional and embodied patterns as they were originally experienced."¹¹³ By listening to music associated with past events, these events are more than simply recalled; they can be reexperienced. Just as music can have a transformative influence on the mindset of soldiers, so too can it transport soldiers to a different, imagined time or space, away from their surroundings. The music leads them back into the experiential framework of memories usually associated with loved ones or happy experiences. While not all soldiers experience this interaction with music and memory, music seems to have a strong impact in this way for many. One soldier interviewed, "Major Pain," effectively speaks to this power: "Music can help you escape the terror and terrible things you may see. Make you think and see things back home or bring smells of a Christmas morning from home to you in a hellhole. Music can take you through a time warp and even though for a second, can make forget the hell around you."¹¹⁴

The transportive influence of music can also work in the opposite way, returning soldiers to their deployment to Iraq. Miner said, "I hear songs that we played in our Humvee and it takes me right back to Baghdad."¹¹⁵ Similarly, Grisham said that specific metal and rap songs return him to the psychological state he experienced in Iraq, and he cannot listen to these songs because of these associations.¹¹⁶ Buzzell also felt transported back to Iraq when he awoke one morning in his wife's home in Brooklyn, to the sacred recitations being broadcast from a nearby mosque:

It's just one of the noises that I heard out there that I'll never forget. And the weird thing is, my wife was living in New York and I got out of the Army. I moved into her place in Brooklyn. She has to go to work and she leaves for work and I'm sleepin'. All of a sudden, I hear this, "buh, buh, buh." I wake up and I'm like, "What the fuck?" I distinctly hear it and I go outside, take a look around, and she lives right around a mosque—there was like a little mosque right there and they did that too out there. I was all excited to leave Iraq, hoping to never hear that sound and then I move to New York and there is a mosque right around the corner. I was like, "Jesus Christ!" They would blast it several times a day. It's like background music to a lot of people, but for me, whenever I hear it, I'm just like, "Bam!" I'm instantly reminded of Iraq.¹¹⁷

For some soldiers, music also contributes to physical or psychological recovery from the experience of war. Revak stated that working on *In the Hours of Darkness* was a vital factor during his time on convalescent leave after being wounded. The emerging field of music therapy shows promising work regarding music in response to trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For example, the American Music Therapy Association, largely funded by The Recording Academy, ran the New York City Music Therapy Relief Project aimed at providing music therapy services for children, victims' families, and others, to help them cope with the 11 September 2001 attacks. Preliminary evidence shows that these programs were highly successful. Similar music therapy could prove effective for soldiers recovering from physical and psychological trauma. In my own fieldwork, however, I found it problematic if not impossible to gain access to major military medical recovery facilities and wards, like Ward 57, the amputee wing of the Walter Reed Medical Center. As such, research on music and soldier recovery may be difficult to pursue from a nonmedical perspective.

There are seemingly innumerable ways to examine music and the Iraq War. As I have shown, soldiers' interactions with music vary considerably

depending on factors like personal preference, ethnicity, geographic background, Military Occupational Specialty, rank, among others. Issues ranging from gender, sexuality, race, and religion to soldiers' acoustic guitar music, military bands, and the impact of USO-sponsored concerts would benefit greatly from further investigation. Over the last few years, the scholarly academic community has begun addressing these and other important issues surrounding the more general topic of music and conflict. Conference themes, such as the 2007 meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, "Music, War, and Reconciliation"; the 2008 Experience Music Project (EMP) conference, "Shake, Rattle: Music, Conflict, and Change"; and Stonehill College's 2008 "The Music of War: An Interdisciplinary Conference," have brought many scholars together to present recent work on music and war. Much of what has been presented, such as Lisa Gilman's "An American Soldier's iPod: Layers of Identity and Situated Listening in Iraq," J. Martin Daughtry's "A Symphony of Bullets: Towards a Sonic Ethnography of Contemporary Baghdad," and many others, seems very promising for future research, and I eagerly anticipate the great variety of forthcoming scholarship.¹⁸ My hope is that this book will provide a platform from which others might engage their own areas of interest and will contribute to the growing literature on music and war.

Postscript

As mentioned in the introduction, this book raises more questions than it answers. Many of the ideas proposed in this study suggest that the influence of music may be more potent in the context of war than in daily life. Songs expressing power, violence, death, patriotism, home, the memory of loved ones, and more operate in intensely influential ways for soldiers, but there are still many questions about music in soldier life that could be addressed. Can we understand soldiers' interactions with music as less intense ways of listening when compared to our own? Or do they represent fundamentally different listening experiences? Many athletes, for instance, listen to music before competitions, and in some sports, like football, players are frequently seen leaving buses plugged in to mp3 players or iPods. During the 2004 Summer Olympics, NBC broadcast American swimmer Michael Phelps's pre-competition iTunes playlist and invited viewers to listen along as Phelps listened to his iPod in preparation for races. Is this similar in some way to the process of soldiers inspiring themselves through music for the possibility of combat? To be sure, no one would argue that the contexts of sports are similar to combat, but clearly sports uses much of the descriptive language of war. In football, for example, we analogize to war when discussing "the battle in the trenches" of linemen, the "field general" quarterback, and even the "blitz" (derived from the German "blitzkrieg"). There has been a backlash in some cases, however, as when ESPN aired and later removed a commercial describing college football games as "Saturday soldiers fighting for every touchdown." Music is often used as an inspiration by athletes; how, then, does it compare to soldiers' preparations, particularly in instances