

Sonic Doom: Decay, Disease, and Destruction in Music

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Keynote Speakers

James Deaville is Professor in the School for Studies in Art and Culture: Music at Carleton University. Most recently he has edited a collection of essays for Routledge (*Music in Television: Channels of Listening*, 2011), and he has published books also for Schott and Pendragon. He has published extensively about Liszt, Wagner and the New German School in (among others) JAMS, the Journal of Musicological Research and Notes, and has contributed chapters to books published by Oxford, Cambridge, Routledge, Chicago, Princeton, Yale, Rochester, Ashgate, Continuum, and Boehlau.

Mitchell Morris specializes in music at the fin-de-siècle, Russian and Soviet music, 20th century American music, opera, rock and soul, and gay/lesbian studies. He has published essays on gay men and opera, disco and progressive rock, musical ethics, and contemporary music in journals such as *repercussions* and *American Music* as well as in collections such as *Beyond Structural Listening, Musicology and Difference, En travesti*, and *Audible Traces*. He is currently preparing a book entitled *The Persistence of Sentiment: Essays on Pop Music in the 70s* and at work on a project entitled *Echo of Wilderness: Music, Nature, and Nation in the United States, 1880–1945*.

Paper Panel Participants: Biographies and abstracts

Amy Bauer has published on the music of Ligeti, Messiaen, the television musical, and on issues surrounding the reception and theory of modernist music. Her *Ligeti's Laments: Nostalgia, Exoticism and the Absolute* (Ashgate, 2011) provides a critical analysis of the composer's works, considering both the compositions themselves and the larger cultural implications of their reception.

For there will be blood: the “terrible, imaginary last judgment” in Ligeti’s *Le Grande Macabre*

Public sex, death, and pervasive decay play starring roles in Ligeti’s dark comic opera *Le Grande Macabre* (1974–77; rev. 1996), set in the fanciful confines of playwright Michel de Ghelderode’s Brueghelland. From Piet the Pot’s opening aria – a drunken recitation of the Dies Irae – through Act 2’s “terrible, imaginary last judgment,” musical and theatrical signifiers of decadence and the demonic prepare the listener for a culminating apocalypse. *Macabre* recognizes the blood lust of a jaded contemporary audience, one that expects every convention to be overturned, yet secretly yearns for a moral tale and happy ending. Yet the entire second half of the opera is a distorted musical and thematic mirror of the first, leading to a “failed” apocalypse and the moral is that there is no moral: Brueghelland will never know whether it has escaped destruction or already died, and gone to a heaven indistinguishable from everyday life.

As a lament for the “death of opera” – and for a modernist language and dramaturgy vanquished by postmodern nihilism – the message of *Le Grand Macabre* is freighted with irony. At opera’s close, those cultural signs that designate decay and the tragic are not so much transvalued as rendered moot. Yet they retain their power and fascination as doubly-coded allusions that function allegorically, pointing not towards a specific referent but to a telescoped history of meaning. As did Walter Benjamin’s baroque

allegorist, Ligeti recognized a certain intractable otherness and dignity about the ruins he employed. Quotations and allusions are thus never purely aesthetic, but represent ritualized invocations of grand opera's power. Benjamin located an affinity between allegory and the melancholic in this awareness of the gap – that which resists representation – between an original sign and its translation. Macabre's "terrible, imaginary last judgment" represents that modern, melancholic state: opera's ruined landscape haunted by the messages of the dead, even when – as at the close of *Le Grand Macabre* – Ligeti rewrites death's rule.

Matthew D. Blackmar is a Master's candidate in musicology and teaching assistant at California State University, Long Beach. His forthcoming Master's thesis explores the role of published sheet music in American Wagner reception. In addition to his research, he is an actively performing musician and recording artist who has contributed keyboard performances and string arrangements for several major record labels, television networks and the *Billboard*-charting death-metal band *The Faceless*. He attended Pitzer College and holds a bachelor's degree in music history from the Joint Music Program of the Claremont Colleges where he studied piano with Gayle Blankenburg.

Running With The Devil Revisited: The Semiotics of Extreme Heavy Metal

In 1993, Robert Walser's groundbreaking *Running With The Devil* presented the first serious musical analysis of heavy metal, dissecting how its performers appropriated the semiotics and virtuosity of classical music and fused them with a blues-based rock sensibility, forming a style with tremendous popular appeal. Yet by focusing on the cultural implications of the mainstream popularity of heavy metal, Walser's text overlooked the progenitors of a darker strain in the heavy metal underground: "extreme metal."

Indeed, "extreme metal" performers of the past two decades have taken heavy metal's repurposed "classical ideologies of complexity and virtuosity" to their logical extremes, producing music of almost unintelligible speed and machine-like rhythmic precision, abetted by digital multi-track recording and sampling technology. When such mechanical qualities combine with a guttural vocal style whose shrieks and growls evoke the dying (or the undead), an aesthetic results that can be described as not merely industrial, but rather dystopian— "post-industrial."

Yet such performers have also widely incorporated a broad range of "acoustic" timbres into electric guitar-driven textures—not least, sampled historical instruments that commonly signify "classical music," including string ensembles, mixed-voice choirs, classical guitar, piano, organ and harpsichord. Walser rightfully argued that metal appropriations of classical music represented a "reclamation of signs...turned to new uses." This paper demonstrates perhaps the most fundamental such "reclamation"—the deliberate juxtaposition of "old" instruments with a technology-driven, dystopian-future aesthetic, extending the field of their potential meanings into the realm of hyperbole, deliberate self-parody, pastiche and a distinctly "metal" brand of irony.

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Carlos Gustavo Román. Electronic and Multimedia Engineer, Minor in History of Music (Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia). Master student in Sound and Music Computing (Universitat Pompeu Fabra,

Barcelona, Spain). Teacher and researcher at Philosophy and Humanities Department (Universidad de La Salle, Bogotá, Colombia) in courses of music, design and film studies. He has participated in different national and international academic conferences on topics of music, aesthetics and cultural studies. Member of the Barcelona Laptop Orchestra.

Violence, death and popular music in the Colombian conflict

Fueled by economic and political tensions, Colombia has been immersed in a decades-long conflict between national military forces, left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries, compounded by drug trafficking and social inequality. This armed struggle has had a profound impact at different socio-cultural levels, affecting the nature of music itself in a paradoxical way. It is the intention of this document to address the different ideas that emerge from specific popular music forms in relation to memory, identity and the ways communities perceive and understand violence and death within the context of this specific war. We refer firstly to the *corridos prohibidos* phenomenon: this popular music genre -originated outside the music industry and mass media circuits and borrowing musical structures and instrumentation from Mexican *corridos*- employs songs as a vehicle to recreate lyrically real episodes of violence and to glorify illegal actions. Such is the case of infamous Oliverio Isaza, former member of the paramilitary armies, convicted for more than 100 murders and who is now a very well-known *corridos* singer, socially and morally legitimizing through his songs the perpetration of crimes, massacres and other acts of violence. Furthermore, music has also been used during the conflict to accompany acts of brutality, not merely as background music, but also as a sonic reinforcement of deadly behaviors, as it has been reported for instance during the massacre of *El Salado*, one of the bloodiest slaughters in recent Colombian history, where 60 people were brutally executed by paramilitary forces while they perversely played local folk music. However, these acts have been vindicated by musicians such as César López, inventor of a novel instrument dubbed *escopetarra* (a portmanteau of *escopeta* (shotgun) and *guitarra* (guitar), which counteracts the original sense and purpose of the weapon creating instead a musical instrument) who by means of music addresses the collective memory of the victims, not only in issues regarding pain and suffering but also endurance and resistance against these atrocious actions.

Kelsey Cowger is a musicologist specializing in post-1950s American experimental music, with a particular emphasis on music-theater and issues of performance. She is currently a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Music at the University of Richmond. She will shortly be defending her Ph.D from UCLA, where she studied with Robert Fink and Mitchell Morris, and has also studied at the University of Chicago and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Kelsey has presented at a number of national and international conferences, including the American Musicological Society, the First Annual Conference on Music and Minimalism in Wales, the Society for American Music and the Experience Music Project Pop Conference. A version of this paper will be appearing in a forthcoming issue of the Journal of Music and the Moving Image.

On Hearing Ghosts: Sound and Image in Decasia

In the world of contemporary experimental filmmaking, few works have capitalized on the extraordinary expressive power that comes from the fusion of sound and image like *Decasia*, the joint effort of composer Michael Gordon and filmmaker Bill Morrison. The close collaboration between Gordon and Morrison is evident in the unusual interconnection between the visual and sonic aspects of

the seventy-minute project, a wordless, lyrical meditation on the concepts of mortality and decay. Morrison assembled the film from decaying vintage nitrate film stock, a decision that had a profound effect on the projected images. Ghostly figures (a boxer, a geisha, a girl on a swing) appear out of the nitrate blur and move about onscreen, only to be obscured by the undulating, amoeba-like shapes that form as the film breaks down. Michael Gordon's music provides a crucial counterpoint to the projected images, both conceptually and in terms of the specific relationship between sound and image. Gordon's hard-edged minimalism is complicated by the fact that *Decasia* is scored for an orchestra of detuned instruments, many of which lose pitch gradually over the course of the piece. As the audience watches the film stock physically decay before their eyes, they hear Gordon's instruments slowly decaying in pitch; this extraordinary synesthetic effect is responsible for much of the film's expressive power.

In this paper, I will explore the fluid boundary between sound and image in the film, and the ways in which the Gordon's score works to both organize and guide the audience's affective response to Morrison's open-ended nitrate images. On paper, Morrison's archaic, neo-Victorian images and Gordon's intense, unyielding score would seem an uneasy pairing, but in practice, the film and the score work in extraordinary tandem; the twinning of sound and image in *Decasia* creates a remarkable form of experimental music theater that resists narrative and teleology while remaining achingly grounded in the temporal. I will close with a broader discussion of the changing face of experimental music theater in the late 20th/early 21st century, particularly the ways in which it has evolved in response to technological innovation and changing audience dynamics.

Lena Delgado de Torres graduated in 2010 with a Ph.D. in Sociology from Binghamton University in upstate New York. Her dissertation entitled "Queens, Kings and Swagga: Gender, Kinaesthetics and Fashion in Jamaican Dancehall" focused on the production of masculinities and femininities in the popular music genre of Dancehall Culture. She also holds a master's degree in Anthropology from Binghamton University. She specializes in Latin American and Caribbean history, as well as the archaeology of the African Diaspora.

Art as Life in Jamaican Dancehall

The news headlines in Jamaica today read like a macabre catalog of horrors. It is an island known for its beautiful, tourist-filled beaches, as well as its exceptionally high murder rate. Jamaican state power is protean in its ability to absorb urban poor, Black working-class cultural expressions, meanwhile exploiting them. In this, it is typical of peripheral nation-states under neo-liberalism. While the official news stories supply bleak facts and accounts of death and chaos in the society, there is no honest explanation of how the situation has reached such a critical juncture. For such an explanation we must turn to the artists and intellectuals. Dancehall music's political anthems are startling in their ability to put to music the same conclusions reached in academic and intellectual circles concerning the problems in Jamaican society. The observations spelled out in the tunes of three artistes -- Mavado, Bounty Killa and Busy Signal -- give especially astute, nuanced, historical analyses of the situation at hand, enveloped in indigenous Jamaican cultural references. These references are often considered "vulgar," "sexually explicit" and "violent" when judged by conventional norms. Jamaica has the highest murder rate in the Western hemisphere, however, revealing that nothing is "normal" in contemporary Jamaican society. This would seem to indicate the need for alternative criteria from which to judge, which we find in Dancehall song lyrics. The cultural authorities in Jamaica represented by the Broadcasting Commission spend considerable time criticizing, condemning and censoring Dancehall's political messages, demonizing the music as "hypersexual and violent." Here we have an old-fashioned sound clash between social classes. This paper will examine the aforementioned Dancehall artists' lyrics and visual material from their videos telling of murder and mayhem, in order to give a socio-political and historical account of the violence gripping the society.

Marcus Desmond Harmon received his PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2011. His dissertation, "Harris/Cash: Identity, Loss, and Mourning at the Borders of Country Music," explores depictions of grief and mortality in the work of country stars Johnny Cash and Emmylou Harris. His other scholarly projects include a study of nostalgia and material Christianity in the music of Gillian Welch and an examination of melancholy and American exceptionalism in Laurie Anderson.

Still With Every Turn the World Becomes a Sadder Place": Emmylou Harris's Duets for One

Emmylou Harris's musical career began with a death. On September 19, 1973, her mentor and duet partner Gram Parsons (then a little-known figure), died in his hotel room of a drug overdose. After his death, Harris positioned herself as the keeper of Parsons's legacy, using his music as a key part of her own vastly more successful solo career and returning to themes of mourning and widowhood in her later work. In the songs she writes and the songs she performs, Harris obsesses over the concept of grief: how one survives devastating loss, and how life is changed irrevocably as a result.

Harris initially rose to fame as one half of a duet—Harris and Parsons, like such country duos as Tammy Wynette and George Jones and June Carter and Johnny Cash, created a musical partnership that implied an off-stage relationship between the singers. The aural and physical closeness of their duets presupposed the existence of romantic desire between Harris and Parsons, as evinced by performances like "Love Hurts" (1972). Gram Parsons's death left Harris as probably the only duet singer in country music singing intimately to an absent partner. By examining the ways in which Harris negotiates this absence in her solo work in songs such as "Boulder to Birmingham" (1975) and "O Evangeline" (2003), this paper illumines some ways that music can articulate loss—especially a loss that may not be immediately apparent from lyrics or surface context—as well as the power that accrues to the widow even (or especially) in the rigidly gendered conventions of country music.

Kiri Heel will receive her PhD in musicology from Stanford University in June 2011. In addition to her analysis of Tailleferre's *Six chansons françaises*, which is also forthcoming in *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* (volume 15), her dissertation also includes a lengthy study of Tailleferre's ballet *Le Marchand d'oiseaux* (1923), which presents the results of extensive primary-source research undertaken at the Dansmuseet (Dance Museum) in Stockholm, Sweden. She holds a master's degree from Stanford University and a bachelor's degree in music from the University of Victoria.

Trauma and Recovery in Germaine Tailleferre's *Six chansons françaises*

In June 1929, Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983) endured the unimaginable. After her mentally unstable husband learned of her pregnancy, he decided to shoot her in the stomach to kill the fetus. Recounting the bizarre events in her 1970s memoir, Tailleferre describes hearing shots fired while hiding near their home in southern France. Though not injured by gunfire, the stress of the experience resulted in miscarriage. Tailleferre also never saw her husband again – he returned to New York, she filed for divorce, and he later committed suicide. Tailleferre immediately turned to music following these disastrous events, composing her *Six chansons françaises*, which set texts exploring marital unhappiness in the *mal mariée* tradition. As such, the *Six chansons françaises* offer a rich subject for this paper, which analyzes the songs from a biographical perspective, situating them as central to Tailleferre's recovery from the trauma of her turbulent marriage and devastating miscarriage.

Passages from Tailleferre's memoir indicate that she was conscious of the healing power of music

after these traumatic events. I argue, furthermore, that her specific textual choices and the dedication of the six songs to six different female friends and colleagues – a unique feature of the cycle – indicate that she was negotiating the necessary facets of recovery, namely narrating the trauma and reconnecting with community, as outlined by prominent trauma theorist Judith Lewis Herman. Additionally, I address the conflicts between public and private that arose from performances of the songs, finding that the while the songs' texts offered Tailleferre an opportunity to voice her experiences, the restraint of her neoclassical musical setting masked their potentially controversial messages and prevented a biographical interpretation, as evidenced by performance and recording reviews. I argue, however, that this opacity neither obstructed Tailleferre's community reconnection nor diminished the songs' recuperative purpose.

Jamie Patterson is a cultural anthropologist and library enthusiast currently working on a master's thesis in folklore from the University of North Carolina entitled "Extreme Identities: Empowerment, Resistance, and Identity Construction among Women in Death Metal." She lives in Asheville, North Carolina.

“If you could hear the beauty in my ears:” Female-Identified Fans on the Aesthetics of Death Metal in Everyday Life

Death Metal has often been called the sound of torture. With its high-voltage low-tuned guitars, machine-gun double-bass drums and blast beats, and signature growled vocals, critics of the genre may not only detest the sound but may have a visceral reaction against it, as though the music were an assault on the body. Words like “brutal,” “intense,” and “raw energy” used to describe the sounds of death metal allude to feelings of violence, chaos, and an overwhelming loss of control. But proponents argue the same music has the potential to evoke a sense of “freedom,” “beauty,” and “self-mastery” or “power” in connection to this brutality. Deleuzian scholar Ronald Bogue argues the music's non-narrative structure, its jolts and fits, combine with other sonic elements to decenter the listener, creating a feeling of the “dissolution of the self” (2004; 88), which may be described as liberating. But what do fans have to say about this and how to they interact with the music?

This paper explores death metal aesthetics through the voices of female-identified fans in the Southeastern United States. Whether citing the lyrics, dark imagery, or the overall sounds the music produces, these fans use death metal to engage in and express elements of the grotesque, the comic, and the sublime in everyday life. Drawing on fieldwork and interviews, I examine how women in the scene experience these tropes in death metal in the context of the walk to school, operating the lighting in the rafters at the ballet, doing artwork for fliers, or dealing with emotional trauma.

This research builds on extensive fieldwork conducted in Raleigh, North Carolina and incorporates my own reflections growing up as a death metal fan in the same region.

Gary Powell is a first-year master's student in the performance studies department at Texas A&M University. Despite his current academic focus on heavy metal culture and humor, he also serves as Production Director for *DanceCult: The Academic Journal of Electronic Dance Music*. His other works on the band GWAR have been presented at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting and the Popular Culture Association National Conference.

A Little Bit of Blood Goes a Long Way: Why GWAR Mosh Pits are “Friendlier” Than Others

The mosh pit is a tumultuous space. This violent dance form, to the observer, would be a surprising place to find the development of long-lasting friendships and camaraderie. In my research on

humor in heavy metal culture, I have spent a significant amount of time paying close attention to the humorous, thrash metal band, GWAR, who sprays its audience with “body fluids” on its audience during live performances. In interviews with fans of this carnivalesque band, I discovered that most fans I interviewed described the mosh pit at GWAR performances as consistently friendlier than any other mosh pit my interlocutors had experienced. In this paper, through participant observation and interviews with GWAR fans, I dissect some of the politics of the mosh pit and the reasons why GWAR mosh pits are friendlier than others.

Using interviews and my own experiences as a participant observer at a GWAR performance in Houston, Texas, I use the Bakhtinian notion of the “carnavalesque” as a differentiating point between the GWAR performance and performances by other bands. Complicating this with a generalized theory of the carnivalesque in heavy metal culture, I present Bateson’s metacommunicative “play,” to explore the tolerance of transgression in the mosh pit space. Using these two notions, I tie them together with Douglas’ exploration of “dirt,” “purity,” and “the body,” as a means by which the carnivalesque performance cues the concept of “play,” and through Bakhtin’s definition of the “carnavalesque,” the dirtiness of body fluids used in GWAR’s performance become a blood-based baptism into the carnivalesque mode in which the mode of play reigns high. This mode of play, compared to other heavy metal shows, makes for a more jovial atmosphere in which the audience takes the transgression of the mosh pit less seriously, resulting in a friendlier mosh pit.

Susanne Scheiblhofer was born and raised in Austria, and received a master’s degree in historical musicology at the University of Vienna. Thanks to a Fulbright scholarship in 2007/08, she was able to begin a PhD programme in musicology at the University of Oregon. She is in the early steps of preparing a dissertation on the topic of musicals with a historical background.

Der Tod, das muß ein Wiener sein - How Wienerlieder Reflect Death in Viennese Culture

As the conference title suggests, death is usually associated with decay, destruction and disease, presenting a rather bleak and grim aspect of life. This is not the case in Viennese culture, where death has always been embraced as an inevitable part of life. This ambiguous relationship to death is nowhere else better expressed than in the music of the *Wienerlieder*. This genre often depicts death as the reunion with a long lost friend, which consequently draws almost a positive image of the Grim Reaper.

In the first part, my paper will contextualize the *Wienerlied* within the larger framework of German folk songs and Viennese culture. Ever since the decadent years of the fin de siècle the Viennese have displayed a strong affinity to death, which has found its way into the Viennese lifestyle, for instance, the beloved Sunday strolls among the honorary graves of the *Zentralfriedhof* in Vienna.

In the second part, I will illustrate through selected examples how the issues of mortality, death and the ephemerality of being are tackled in these Viennese songs especially through the use of humor. Songs discussed will include *Wann i amal stirb*, *Das Hobellied*, and *A schene Leich*’ (transl.: When I die, The Ploughing Song, A Nice Funeral). The *Wienerlied* highlights a close relationship between death and the joys of life – wine, women and music.

Ideally this paper will not only contribute a unique perspective to the dialogue on music and death but also stimulate further scholarship on how these areas interact off the beaten track of mourning, decay and destruction. The morbid and macabre *Wienerlied* represents just one of many ways how different cultures deal with death through music.

Lindsey Strand-Polyak is a Phd/MM candidate in Musicology and Violin Performance, working with

Elisabeth LeGuin, Movses Pogossian and Guillaume Sutre. She is working on her dissertation entitled *The Virtuoso's Idiom: Spectacularity and the Seventeenth-Century Solo Violin Sonata*, and has presented at numerous conferences, including the AMS in 2011. Her recent research on Heinrich Biber can be read as part of Julia Wedman's recording of *The Mystery Sonatas* on Dorian-SonoLuminous, available February 2011.

Meltdowns and Mad Scenes: Pathos and Dissolution in the Seventeenth-Century Spectacle Sonata

From around 1620-1650, North Italian violin virtuosi began putting their technical prowess into print by publishing their own compositions. These sonatas represented a new level of virtuosity, featuring techniques such as upper position work, scordatura, and double and triple-stopped chords. Lyrical and recitative-like were interwoven into this music, mixed together in sequences designed to leave their audiences astounded and breathless—reinscribing the violinist as the master of virtuosic display.

However, occasionally these same violin virtuosi published sonatas that told a very different story. Rather than imbue the violinist with the persona of a conquering hero, in these sonatas the soloist breaks down into fits of chromatic meltdowns when he should be achieving the dramatic climax. These moments leave the violinist crawling around his instrument, languishing in pits of aimless chromaticism, finally limping off to a cadence. If seventeenth-century violinists were just beginning to establish themselves as masterful performers, why would they stage such dramatic failures?

In this lecture-recital, I argue that violinists used the trope of chromatic meltdown as a way of expanding their performing personas. By composing and performing these 'failed' sonatas, I argue that early violin virtuosi created an instrumental analog to the tragically flawed hero that appeared in so many contemporary operas. I will perform several of these works, enacting the kind of staged failure that the early virtuosi themselves performed. I will present Carlo Farina's "Sonata Desperata" from Op. 5, Marco Uccellini's Sonata III from Op. VII and Giovanni Antonio Leoni's Sonata IX from his Op. 3. These sonatas present an alternative narrative by demonstrating the violinist's ability to perform rhetorical prowess, enabling him to go beyond technical spectacularity and perform affectual virtuosity instead. By performing imperfection, pain and failure, the violinist in turn proves that he is even more of a master of humanistic rhetoric, and worthy of being honored as such in court.

Morgan Woolsey is a current doctoral candidate in Women's Studies at UCLA. Her work explores the politics of representation in film music/sound, as well as the intersections between sound and subjectivity in film and music.

The Sounds of Racial Anxiety in *Candyman*

In this talk, I analyze Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992, Score by Philip Glass) in order to get at the ways in which race, class, and gender intersect in the soundscape of a film that deals with the supernatural in an urban space (the Cabrini Green housing projects in Chicago). While horror films often unfold in pastoral settings, places where peace can be disturbed, urban spaces tend to inflect horror in ways that collapse the distinctions between the fantastic and the ordinary.

Focusing on the interplay between the somewhat unusual diegetic sonic portrayal of the urban space and the minimalist score by Philip Glass, I attempt to get at the core objects of horror in the film. *Candyman* presents us with a murderous Black killer who passes the torch of his gruesome acts to a white woman, but it is clear that these "monstrous" subjects have been created by societal forces, and are not in themselves essentially monstrous. However, I will be focusing on the way that the sounds of the film facilitate the reading of *Candyman* as a fantasy of liberal white guilt, one in which the white subject (Helen) is placed simultaneously as the cause and solution for the problems of the inhabitants of Cabrini Green.