On the contrary, music critics usually write about the genre as concerned primarily with performances of masculinity and powered by a phallic thrust. Some metal is indeed vested in this maintenance of the masculine; of course, some metal is also misogynistic, nationalistic, vitriolic, or homophobic; some metal can be and is discomfitting. Together, we might recognize it as moved by the sound and feeling of intensity, which, although often at play in masculine performance, cannot be reduced to that project. As a sensation, intensity is not merely penetrative but is also disjasmining, discomfitting, discomposing. Of course, it also surrounds it. To neglect the full spectrum of intensity is to delimit what is heavy about metal to what is knowable about heaviness, evading a confrontation with that which is heaviest of all: enormity—the enormity of an emittance that encompasses both the formed and unformed, an emptiness that is full insofar as it is active.

Not everyone needs to encounter this enormity. The material inheritances, civic freedoms, social and economic entitlements, and unmarked quotidian movement generally known as privilege fortify some against this fecund vacuity, creating an armory of stolen resources in which a normative subjectivity can take shelter and take root. Yet for those with less access to such resource armatures, the frontiers of emptiness—empty—the black, brown, feminine, and effeminate bodies stripped of subjecthood, denied the sustenance of citizenship, rendered mere labor, mere matter, mere flesh, such encounter is intertwined with a certain form of anxiety and terror. The absence of emptiness is not the abundance in what has been voided, the song of empty space. Some more than others live off and depend on the plentitude of our abnegated condition. Though we might at times come together under the rubric of complicit dispossession, we cannot share these stakes cannot fully anticipate whom each other are. Our commanality is not structured on a fixed and stable position, such as a shared place in a binary gender opposition; rather, what we have in common is our simultaneous struggle in the structures of power that maintain such binaries in the first place. Kannon, in her plurality of names, occurs as both a man and a woman; yet whether man or woman, Kannon is always capacious. Kannon, the figure, is formal and somically constructed by a capacity to take things in. Kannon, therefore, presents a sounding of that capacity in three parts.

Kannon begins with a soft entry—a sound that as it is sustained, swells. It cycles through ascending tones, which broaden as they continue, helping to steady the descending cycles summoned. This summons seems to reach to both the depths of an internal abyss as well as the heights of external being. Attila Csihar’s voice is at first almost indiscernible from the guitar, audible alternately as a low growl and a barely audible whisper; his howl becomes simultaneous. In his low guttural fry, we can hear the silent spaces between the glottal sounds; in the higher fricatives, we can hear the throaty hollow passage, its opening. The enunciation of the lyrics provides the tone for the lyrics, stripped of dates, times, place names. Csihar’s metonymically mouths rather than speaks each word’s meaning, manipulating the phonic excess in the phoneme. As both a low growl and a high hiss, the voice is a negotiation of air and empty space. The voice is deeply entrenched and Modes are superimposed. To sing Kannon and not canzon (as Csihar does, to vocalize a haptic mode of knowing. To make metal from Kannon and not canzon (as SunnO))) does, is to insist that intensity overpowers our familiar names for it, those phallic codes of abjection. To sing Kannon and not canzon is to refuse intensity in favor of a more capacious understanding, a more capacious body, a more capacious body, a more capacious body.

By Kannon, the openness of mercy takes another shape. First, from a small, high-pitched tone extends a deepening then wavering sound. Then, repeated over the duration of the track is a descending phrase, with each note having a more profound meaning. The note is not a cry for mercy or an expression of suffering, but a sonic extension of having mercy, of perceiving the sounds of suffering.

If Kannon 1 invokes, Kannon 2 intones. The low rumbling sound that opens this second track gives way to a dexterous movement between higher notes. The drones are not only held but actively played; the words are not only sung in a choral manner but also manipulated. One might say this is a shift in tone, an overall melodic effect. The chant as a vocal technique allows Csihar to render his singular voice plural, to conjure a sense of plenticitude and fatigues that fractures and multiplies at the same time. In his chant, the lyrics are multiple divalents as words, and in this legibility we can read a structure or pattern. Over the course of the song, we hear five verses describing the life and works of Kannon sung and then sung again in reverse order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. This reversal creates a subtle shift of chiasmus at the center of the composition—a type of crossing, a reversal of a structure that produces an inverted parallelism. Chiasmic structures are often punctuated, as this one is, by a cossaeura: a type of active empty space, a pregnant pause, in which the meaning turns. In this song, the cossaeura occurs not as silence (as a cossaeura in classical musical composition might), but can be heard as an active interplay between sounds and words, mirroring a cossaeura’s poetic function in a line of poetry. Csihar’s song builds in the empty expanses between the repetition of the 5th lyric “And turns hell/into paradise.” Of course, this empty space is not empty, but sonorous. It musically sounds the type of transformation the lines describes: the concept of hell is defamiliarized and replaced by paradise, but not at all opposed. Like the transformation of hell into paradise, the chiasmus turns one form of intensity into another. It does so through the formal intervention of the cossaeura, which allows for the activation of nothing as something, or more precisely as nothing.

Csihar’s chanting, insofar as it is reminiscent of monks or organized religious practice more generally, also bringing to mind Kannon’s false cognate, “canon.” Canon, from the Latin canón in the Ancient Greek canón in the Ancient Greek and Hebrew kanón, means “straight” or “rule” of a body of accepted scriptures, ecclesiastic or legal codes. It also means, by no coincidence, to that body of literary, philosophical, or artistic works deemed the most important, culturally valuable, worthy of study—works that become the measure or standard of judgment. As a whole the canons are long argued, the highly Eurocentric and patriarchal compendium of knowledge that obscures its historical conditions of power, specifically the relationship of cultural production to institutional authorities such as the Church or State, it is the great project of modernity to achieve the separation of church and state through armed conflict and colonial conquest. To mishear Kannon as canon is to be reminded of how mercy exists in relation to its opposite—punishment—and how quickly the measuring rod can become a tool of its own destruction, not of the destruction of those being measured but instead of the measurement itself. To sing Kannon and not canzon (as Csihar does), is to vocalize a haptic mode of knowing. To make metal from Kannon and not canzon (as SunnO))) does, is to insist that intensity overpowers our familiar names for it, those phallic codes of abjection. To sing Kannon and not canzon is to refuse intensity in favor of a more capacious understanding, a more capacious body, a more capacious body, a more capacious body.


5. An example from commodity culture: The camera company Canon was originally named Kannon, reflecting an alternate Japanese phonetic pronunciation. The term Kannon is a Buddhist Goddess of compassion, depicted in a 5th century statue in Inari, Japan. Upon the arm of Kannon emerges from flames. We might assume that the company name reflects the desire to associate itself with this more benevolent deity, a reflection of the socialist hope that a camera could be an aperture through which to take in the world. However, in 1935, when the company began global marketing, they changed their name from Kannon to Canon. "To take a picture," means to "take in," or "to take" in Japanese, "to think," "to reflect," "to consider," and famous such meanings as "holistic" and "opportunities." The English word "camera" comes from the Latin term for "room." In Japan, camera is an abbreviation for cameraia or camera technology, which is the standard for advanced technologies and service while becoming a citizen in the "industry to which others will aspire." The camera quickly became known as a camera of compassion, and the company began a crusade to make cameras available to all, and in 2010, Canon published a document outlining their policy of preventing corruption and standardizing it. The visual paradigm of photography proved too close, promoting the disciplinarian techniques of the modern state. Thus, as discipline and punishment are entangled. In this series, the Canon camera corresponds to a space to easily make Kannon and canzon— the sale through which the taboos are made. Kannon 2 presents a complex and fluid concept of possibility around the disciplinary stick. For more on the institutional history of Canon, see www.canon.com/Corporations/legal.html