

# Living on the edge

## Black metal and the refusal of modernity

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The idea with Burzum was not only to make original and personal music, but also to create something new – a "darkness" in a far too "light", safe and boring world. Burzum was an attempt to create (or "recreate" if You like) an imaginary past, a world of fantasy – that in turn was based on our Pagan past. Burzum in itself was a spell. Too much "light" doesn't illuminate our paths and warm us, it only blinds and burns us. My hope would be that Burzum could inspire people to wish for a new and better reality in the real world, and hopefully do something about it. Maybe revolt against the modern world, [...] by building new and healthy communities, where the Pagan culture – and magic if You like – can be cultivated.

VARG VIKERNES

Ever since its emergence in the late 1960s, early 1970s, no other music genre has been able to generate so many and diverse forms of moral panic as heavy metal. Its history throughout the past four decades has been one of significant commercial success, but it has also constituted a primary target for many different forms of attacks and criticisms, stemming from a variety of sources, including journalists and critics, parental associations, religious groups or even political figures. As passionately supported as fiercely condemned, heavy metal has hardly been able to generate indifference; on the contrary, reactions to it have been quite as extreme as the music itself, hinting that there is probably more to it than many would wish to acknowledge.

It was during the 1980s, at the height of its inaugural commercial success, that the harshest attacks against heavy metal took place. In the United States, the

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influence of the Parents Music Resource Centre (PMRC) was convincing enough to lead to several senate hearings where heavy metal artists were summoned to discuss their music and, eventually, the process resulted in the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) being pressured to label selected albums – most of them, at the time, within the heavy metal genre – with the famous black and white sticker "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content".

Soon after, and following a similar case which had taken place just a few years earlier involving Ozzy Osbourne (lead figure behind Black Sabbath, by many considered the true fathers of heavy metal), the band Judas Priest was accused of actively contributing to the suicide of two teenagers due to the content of their lyrics and to the allegedly hidden, subliminal underlying messages in their records, which were said to spell out the order "do it" and other similar commands. The case was soon dismissed and no real evidence was ever provided regarding the existence of any such messages (although there were repeated attempts to prove that messages of the same kind were hidden in other heavy metal albums), but controversy did not abandon the genre.

Throughout the 1990s, a series of other criminal cases were judged in American courts with some degree of involvement being called upon heavy metal bands. In April 1994, four teenagers in Eugene, Oregon, robbed a convenience store and violently attacked two employees, stabbing one of them to death. The families of both the survivor and deceased employees filed civil lawsuits levelled at the record companies of the bands Deicide and Cannibal Corpse (prominent leaders among the death metal scene at the time), alleging the influence of their music had played a decisive role in the violent acts committed by the teenagers. The case was settled out of court. In 1996, in California, another group of youths brutally murdered a teenager, supposedly as a sacrifice to Satan, in whom they claimed to be firm believers. They were also devoted fans of the band Slayer, who were then at the centre of another similar controversy regarding the effects of their music and imagery, although, once more, no direct connection was ever established between the crimes and the music. More recently, in 1999, metal music was once again targeted after the Columbine massacre, where thirteen people were killed by two teenagers – who committed suicide afterwards – who were also metal fans. Marilyn Manson was, at the time, at the centre of the debate, and many accusations were directed towards his music and overall performance by religious and political forces, along with the media. Although all the controversies generated around heavy metal have not deprived it of its fans and popularity, they have very frequently tried to rob it of any possibility of holding some kind of serious cultural prestige, but, by the same token, those debates around heavy metal and all the

issues it involves "over meaning, character, behavior, values, censorship, violence, alienation and community – mark metal as an important site of cultural contestation" (Walser, 1993: X).

From the very beginning, heavy metal was never quiet. The sounds that would come to define the genre were very early on crystallized around loudness and distortion, both enabled by technological advances in amplification and recording processes, with long virtuosic solo guitars and intricate riffs supported by heavy pounding beats of drums and bass, and, on top of that, strong vocals exerting their power through different forms of screaming, shouting and growling. But it was not just the sounds that set heavy metal apart as a very specific musical form; it was also the themes it dealt with, its focus on the dark side of human existence, its interest in the occult and the supernatural, its approach to Satanism<sup>1</sup> and gothic horror, its fascination with death, violence, mysticism, ancient legends, hatred, alienation and chaos. If, for some, this was all the more reason to engage with it, for others it was an immediate cause for concern and fear. Assuredly, heavy metal did not per se create any of these subjects, nor has it been the only cultural form to engage with them, but, nevertheless, it has constantly proved to be an issue the way they are articulated within it. Public moral panics around heavy metal, I would claim, have for the most part been completely unfounded. However, in the case of black metal – one of extreme metal's subgenres – the scenario was, at least for a time, somewhat different.

Throughout the mid 1980s, metal's underground scenario slowly dispersed into a set of subgenres, which never really made it into mainstream visibility as previous phenomena had. Growing out mainly of the influences of thrash metal, a series of more extreme sounds were developed and paved the way for the emergence of death metal, black metal, doom metal and power metal. It was in Europe, and particularly in Scandinavia, that black metal found its primary birth place<sup>2</sup>. Bathory, from Sweden; Celtic Frost, from Switzerland, and especially Venom, from the UK, have all been acknowledged as the leading acts of black metal's First Wave, but it was the Second Wave that developed in Norway with bands like Mayhem, Burzum, Darkthrone and Emperor that really established the conventions of the genre.

With highly distorted guitars, tremolo picking, double bass and blast beat drumming, high-pitch shrieks, unconventional song structures, sombrelly dark atmospheres and even some experimentation with elements of electronic, folk and classical music, black metal exhibited a set of common themes that were adopted by virtually every single band in the genre, with one of its main focus consisting in a harsh opposition to Christianity and its form of organized reli-

gion and values, promoting instead a strong sense of individualism and pagan pride. In fact, from the onset, lyrics very often seemed to advocate a return to ancient paganism or the promotion of atheism and Satanism, also exploring mythological/folklore narratives and death-related feelings, such as depression, misanthropy and nihilism. Seeking to affirm itself as a much darker form of metal music, pushing its extremes to the limits of what had been done so far, black metal favoured a rawer and cruder sound, along with unpredictable melodies and the absence of rigid structures, with demonic-like voices screaming unintelligibly about misanthropic hatred, pre-Christian mythology, bloody battles and esoteric occultism.

In their much acclaimed album *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* (1994), Mayhem sung in "Buried by Time and Dust":

*Visions of that no mornings  
Light ever will come  
I'm too old now  
The dark is so near  
Will I ever reach the land beyond  
This is where we go when we have to die  
I've been old since the birth of time  
Time buried me in earth  
Centuries ago I tasted blood  
Buried by time and dust  
Many years have passed since the funeral  
Missing the blood of human throats  
So many years, ages ago  
I must await, feel my body's stench  
Wandering out of space  
Wandering out of time  
A world out of light, death at the end  
Only silence can be heard  
Silence of people's fears  
No one knows my grave  
Buried by time and dust*

A similar eerie tone can be easily unveiled throughout Emperor's influential record *In the Nightside Eclipse* (1994), namely in its opening track, "Into the Infinity of Thoughts":

*As the Darkness creeps over the Northern mountains of Norway  
 and the silence reach the woods, I awake and rise...  
 Into the night I wander, like many nights before,  
 and like in my dreams, but centuries ago.  
 Under the Moon, under the trees.  
 Into the Infinity of Darkness,  
 beyond the light of a new day,  
 into the frozen nature chilly,  
 beyond the warmth of the dying Sun.  
 Hear the whispering of the wind,  
 the Shadows calling...  
 I gaze into the Moon which grants me visions  
 these twelve full Moon nights of the year,  
 and for each night the light of the holy disciples fades away.  
 Weaker and weaker, one by one.  
 Weaker and weaker, one by one.  
 I gaze into the Moon which makes my mind pure as crystal lakes,  
 my eyes cold as the darkest winter nights, by yet there is a flame inside.  
 It guides me into the dark shadows beyond this world,  
 into the infinity of thoughts... thoughts of upcoming reality.  
 In the name of the almighty Emperor I will ride the Lands in pride,  
 carrying the Black sword at hand, in warfare.  
 I will grind my hatred upon the loved ones.  
 Despair will be brought upon  
 the hoping children of happiness.  
 Wherever there is joy the hordes of the eclipse  
 will pollute sadness, sadness and hate  
 under the reign if fear.  
 The lands will grow black.  
 There is no Sunrise yet to come  
 into the wastelands of phantoms lost.  
 The lands will grow black.  
 There is no Sunrise yet to come.  
 May these moments under the Moon be eternal.  
 May the infinity haunt me... In Darkness.*

Aesthetically, black metal privileged black above any other colour, but also in a much more extreme sense than heavy metal had done so far. Black metallers, both musicians and fans, would soon develop an imagery of their own, with the traditional long black hair concealing part of their faces, often covered with sinister black and white corpse-like face paint. Album covers would frequently

display musicians wearing black leather and medieval battle ornaments, portrayed against natural settings, mostly nocturnal woods, mystic mountainous landscapes and harsh winter scenarios. Most artists would also resort to mythological stage names; band logos were so intricate and laboured that most of them verged on the unreadable with their “black lettering” (gothic letters); and the usage of symbols related to the occult was also a common feature, with the practices of subversion/inversion of religious iconography (such as inverted crosses, pentagrams, runic inscriptions or pagan pendants or amulets) becoming a commonplace among the scene. Shock tactics had always been a part of heavy metal’s symbolical provocation as it sought to establish its own forms of cultural capital and distinguish itself not just from the Others, but very frequently against those same Others, not merely in the music scene, but mainly reaching out to the wider social context. However, these shock tactics would soon be taken into a whole new level with black metal<sup>3</sup>.

At the beginning of the 1990s, much controversy was generated around black metal in Norway due to a significant number of criminal activities that came to be associated with members of the scene. Firstly, several band elements were linked to church burnings that took place throughout the country and were responsible for the destruction of more than 50 wooden churches, also known as stave churches, some of which were national historical buildings<sup>4</sup>. Then, in 1993, only two years after Mayhem’s vocalist Ohlin (aka Dead) committed suicide, Mayhem’s guitarist Euronymous was murdered by Burzum’s Varg Vikernes. Both were leading figures within the black metal scene and had, until then, worked together to promote bands, shows and independent labels. Varg Vikernes confessed the murder and was sentenced to 21 years in prison, having been recently released on parole after serving a total of 16 years of his sentence. For a while, black metal music made the headlines in all different sorts of media and seemed to provide a reason for the critics to acknowledge it as a menace to society<sup>5</sup>. As Moynihan and Soderlind recall:

As the church burning and murder trials unfolded in Norway, Varg Vikernes began to take on an almost mythical role. Endless daily tabloid stories spewed forth headlines about his alleged deeds. Varg’s artistic pseudonym of “Count Grishnackh” on the early Burzum albums provided the press with a perfect soundbite with which to deliver the nation its first real bogeyman in fifty years. The media tag of “Greven” (“The Count”) triggered just the right images in the readers’ minds: a perverse self-styled aristocrat, outside the law, who enacted his libertine fantasies of destruction with a belief in immunity from punishment for his crimes. (1998: 137)

However, as soon as these events vanished from the spotlight, black metal was able to return to its original position within extreme metal's underground, where it has so far remained, as peripheral as it was always meant to be in relation to metal's more mainstream phenomena, and met some interesting developments.

From the moment of its inception, black metal has been defined by its ability to take most of the defining features of the whole heavy metal genre to the extreme. Its transgressive practices, encompassing the sonic, the bodily and the discursive elements, have been able to sustain its identity upon a consistent narrative that is never far from its deep incursions into the darker side of life, its incorporation of violence, evil and the occult, its remediation of ancient or sinister mythologies, and its fascination with the abject, approaching the concept as it has been conceived by Julia Kristeva:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. [...] what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain "ego" that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. [...] Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. (1982: 1-2)

In her highly influential writings on the *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva has used the concept of the abject to refer the haunting experience of the absence of meaning when the distinction between the subject and the object, or the self and the other, is somehow lost. The main example provided by the author of such an experience is that of the traumatic encounter with the human corpse, which is neither the subject, as it is no longer living, nor the object, as its materiality is still reminiscent of he who once was subject but is no more. The encounter with the corpse is the ultimate event that makes our own death become strangely but tangibly real. In this sense, the abject is, thus, removed from the symbolic order, as it does not refer neither to the knowledge of death nor the meaning of it, which are both contained within the symbolic, but to its very materiality, which we seek to resist and reject: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from

which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (Kristeva, 1982: 4).

In an attempt to purify the abject by means of catharsis, Kristeva advocates its relation to the fields of religion and art, where it is primarily explored and dissected via practices and discourses which seek to articulate it to the realms of the transcendent and the sublime. Examples of such practices can be easily unveiled in the world of black metal, where the listener is consistently confronted with the original place of the abject. Darkthrone have written on their "Under a Funeral Moon" (1993):

*On the day of my final sacrifice  
The chilling steel opens my veins  
Blood stains my skin  
Silver chalice must be filled  
Drinking the poisoned blood  
I enter my shadowed coffin  
Two goat horns in my hands  
I raise my arms and close my eyes  
To receive the infernal hails  
From my brother in the land of the damned  
The howling wind blows in the naked trees  
Moonlit fields are glowing in the dark  
Below me, the path to the cemetery  
Where my spiritual brothers take me  
They halt at the shadows of an oak  
My nocturnal funeral commence  
Lying in my blasphemous sleep  
I am lowered down to the pit  
A raven sings my last song  
As the wolves howl their goodbyes  
The funeral moon glows strongly now  
For I am nearly there  
This night of late October  
The dark side opens its gate  
Morbid souls wait for me  
For satanic conspiracy  
Flowers of doom  
Rising in bloom  
You will see  
Our immortality*



The discourse of black metal, which has been disseminated through a whole range of media, from song lyrics to bands' names, record sleeves, logos, artists' pseudonyms, websites and blog designs or the theatricals of live performances, has taken on a multitude of forms over the years, but its chore foundations have not been significantly altered—black metal is still the most radically transgressive and elitist of all heavy metal subgenres. Keith Kahn-Harris analyzes the extremity in these forms of metal via the concept of transgression, affirming that practices in extreme metal are "excessive, testing and breaking boundaries, invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, while simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and potency" (2007: 30). From its inception, black metal's ideology has been based upon the themes of misanthropy and hatred, radical individualism, universality of pessimism, grimness, mysticism, sorrow, nihilism, anti-Christianity, atheism, antitheism, paganism, Satanism, death, all that is dark, gloomy and obscure. Probably more so than any other of metal's subgenres, black metal is founded upon a stance of opposition, an opposition that takes the features of modernity and life in modern times as its main target.

Black metal seeks to reject modern life in its alleged undifferentiated mediocrity, extreme rationalization and confidence in techno-industrial advancement and progress, its dependence upon practices of consumption, the prevailing order imposed by governments, public institutions and organized religions, and the modernizing forces of global advanced capitalism and neo-liberalism – in sum, black metal has come to represent an iteration of metal's original relationship with evil, darkness and anti-conformity, positioning itself against the instrumental rationalities that dominate Western modern society.

In opposition to it, black metal has not only proclaimed its rejection of Christianity, governmental practices and materialistic consumption habits, but has also favoured instead a solid portrayal of a certain heathen romanticism, with many Nordic bands writing songs about their pagan cultural heritage, their ancient myths and pre-Christian history, pursuing the re-enactment of an imagined warrior past and the reestablishment of an idealized fondness of nature and its wild, pure, uncontrolled and threatening harshness<sup>6</sup>. Visions of dark forests, majestic mountains and sombre landscapes, where impending dangers are concealed in an inhospitable and untamed environment, have been offered by album titles and artwork, as well as song lyrics or artists' pseudonyms. On their *Diabolical Full-moon Mysticism* album (1992), Immortal sing in "A Perfect Vision Of The Rising Northland":

*Winter of the ages so dark so cold that flames turn to the bluest frost  
 Mountains of ice rise above a dead and frozen ground  
 The ravens returns to the hills  
 And the millenium black bells of eternal frost  
 Chain through the Northern lightning  
 Upon the mountainside I stand  
 The floods of black runs below  
 Hair of a cold goat scalp I kiss  
 Eyes taken, mountains still breathes  
 At one with the poisoned ground  
 Midnight dark sky open up  
 A blast of red lightning rides the night  
 With doom winds death angels fly  
 Across a nearly closed skyline  
 And the sun freezes at one with the infernal holocaust frozen clouds  
 Centuries of doom reigned by the Goat throne of desire  
 Raised by sorcery to the Holocaust sky  
 North black hordes storms  
 Through invincible cyclones of frost winds  
 I lift my hands  
 And join the ceremonial circle of one wind  
 Eyes of stone now sleep into eternal night  
 This winter is forever  
 A wind of red I rode  
 A wind of evil cold  
 For the years that have passed in the North  
 Brought me visions of the Goat throne of desire  
 On the hillside where I stood left for another world  
 Tragedies blows at horizon  
 The sun freezes to dust  
 A perfect vision of the rising Northland*

This fascination with an ancient past, at the expense of a disillusioning present, is based upon an attempt to denounce the negative conditions of modernity and favour a return to an unspoiled, pristine and unpolluted landscape, evoking a somewhat transcendental retreat from civilization. A part of black metal's appeal has, thus, resided in the way it has been able to articulate, within this imaginary, a distortion or loss of the self in the face of overwhelming forces, be them of natural or supernatural origin. Many black metal records culminate in a more or less explicit death of its narrator, or at least his subjection, at the hands of not very clear or defined cosmic forces.

Black metal has sought to conjure up intensely private, intimate, personal experiences, evoking the possibility of dismantlement and transformation of the individual self, through the endurance of elements that stretch beyond the human, that move towards the extreme, involving decay and destruction. Black metal has been concerned with those extreme limits of human experience and thought, which are a part of the unknowable, its practices being uncompromisingly negative by definition. More than a political force as such, which would seek to confront or revolt against societal structures and organizations, black metal assumes itself as a force that is removed from society and takes on a deconstructive stance in its search for the expansion of the very possibilities of human experience beyond those options that have become available for the individual in modern everyday life, offering instead a gateway to a more sacred experience of reality.

Such has been the purpose at the core of a more recent development in the black metal scene, this one located in North America, with the band Wolves in the Throne Room assuming the role of lead figures of the movement. Wolves in the Throne Room are an American black metal project, formed in 2003 in Olympia (state of Washington) by two brothers, Aaron and Nathan Weaver. From the very beginning, they have claimed their music to be focused on, and drawn upon, the specific energies of the Pacific Northwest landscape and how these translate into sound. The band has lived, since its inception, in a deserted farmstead, pursuing a rural lifestyle based upon an ideology of radical ecology and a worldview that simultaneously privileges nature and the occult. There is no corpse paint here, no enigmatic pseudonyms, no satanic imagery or bloody depictions, but their lyrics maintain the privileged themes of personal transformation, world death and the loss of the intimate connection with the natural world that has been a central mark of modern society. Rather than the aggression, they privilege meditation:

*The strength that resides in contemplation  
 Bathes me in silver starlight  
 I will lead this beast on a chain of flowers  
 Fear not the jaws that devour soul  
 Between two pillars I have sat  
 Great oxen in the periphery  
 I ride in full course swift  
 Through the dark night and the rain pours down  
 You are a daughter of heaven  
 12 stars circle your brow*

*But you do not see them and the rain pours down  
Our time in this garden is past*

"(A Shimmering Radiance) Diadem Of 12 Stars" –  
Wolves in the Throne Room, Vendlus Records, 2006

Wolves in the Throne Room have also been associated with the Cascadian movement. Cascadia is the name of a region located in the Pacific Northwest of North America. Its potential borders are not clearly defined, but have for long been based upon a set of bio / ecological / cultural boundaries, which have been claimed by a movement that strives for the recognition of its independence as a proposed country, consisting mainly of British Columbia and parts of Canada, along with portions of a few other states of America, stretching from the coastal regions of Alaska to the north, and to the south down to Northern California, moving inland to include some parts of Western Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho, as well. According to the Centre for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, the term Cascadia was first used during the 1970s in the context of natural sciences to describe a specific geological formation in the area, but throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century, the concept acquired a wider range of meaning, as it became commonly used to refer to the region not only in geological and ecological terms, but also cultural and social ones. One of the most significant promoters of the concept was David McCloskey, a well-known professor at Seattle University (also founder of the Cascadia Institute and co-chair of Seattle University's New Ecological Studies Programme), who started teaching a course on "Cascadia: Sociology of the Pacific Northwest" at the end of the 1970s. McCloskey believed Cascadia could be seen as a particular region that went far beyond its common natural features, simultaneously integrating a cultural and social sense of unity, with an identity shaped by more than just geographic or political limits<sup>7</sup>.

Throughout the past decade, Wolves in the Throne Room have sought to display a holistic commitment to an alternative lifestyle, which is claimed to rise from the very soil of this specific place with which they sustain a grounded relation that moves towards an ancient, primal spirit that enables the loss of the self through a transcendental retreat from civilization. That may be the main reason why this fairly recent American black metal scene has been frequently termed as transcendental, owing its chore ideals to the legacy of authors such as Henry David Thoreau, and in particular his reflections in *Walden* on natural history and man's relation with the natural elements, or Emerson, who was the leading figure of the Transcendentalist movement throughout the mid nineteenth

century, advocating the importance of sustaining the original profound relationship between the human soul and the natural surroundings, and developing his philosophical beliefs around the notion of the infinitude of the individual and his inner freedom. This worldview centred upon a radical environmentalism and, at the same time, a peaceful anarchism, has come to define the new American black metal scene, apparently far removed from the much more hostile Scandinavian scene and its worshiping of battles, pagan gods or Satanism, but still the ideals of transgression and removal from modern civilization lie at the basis of both.

Black metal was founded upon a vision of destruction and darkness, but one that has never ceased to be complex and often even conflicted, and there can be no greater evidence of such statement than the very recent creation, just a couple of years ago, of what has now become known as Black Metal Theory. At the forefront of this new "discipline" are professors Eugene Thacker and Nicola Masciandaro, both scholars in the areas of philosophy and philosophical theology. Nicola Masciandaro has argued that Black Metal Theory "[...]expresses a need to reopen music to the philosophy of music and philosophy to the music of philosophy in a black way. If philosophy is thought practicing the love of wisdom (philo-sophia), black metal theory is thought practicing the love of black metal" (Masciandaro, 2012). Black Metal Theory seeks to look in-depth at what exactly is the black in black metal, departing from its simplistic equation with evil or Satanism, and moving instead to the notion of a "cosmic pessimism, with its dark metaphysics of negation, nothingness and the non-human" (Thacker, 2011: 20).

Black Metal Theory takes on a phenomenological approach to music; that is, it focus on the study of music as the object of a direct experience. Black Metal Theory operates, then, a contamination of black metal music by theory, and of theory by black metal, as it enfolds the suspension between life and death and the openness to infinity. It aims at looking into the darkness, the blackness, the horror of the void as a way of thinking about the unthinkable. It stares deep into the cosmic abyss and the omnipresent darkness of the observable universe, with its negative mirages of black holes, dark energy and dark matter. It takes black as a necessary and unavoidable object of contemplation, for the horizon of the universe itself is nothing other than black. It articulates cosmic evolution and annihilation with the vision of something whose presence is non-visibility.

After more than two decades around, black metal music is not only thriving but also offering a whole new range of possibilities for new critical apparatuses being deployed from within and outside the music itself. If music is indeed the language of the universe, black metal does seem to play a significant role in it.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Throughout the past four decades, heavy metal has had a complex and often controversial relation with the theme of Satanism, which is, in itself, plural and diverse as it can refer to several different approaches and perspectives on the nature of evil, Satan and religion. The most common association of Satanism is that of it being merely an inversion of Christianity, and therefore, still dependent on that which it seeks to oppose, namely Christian rituals, symbols and values. Another recognizable form of Satanism is that created by the Church of Satan, founded by Anton LaVey in 1966. In this case, Satanism is no longer religious but mainly secular, as it does not relate anymore to other religious traditions. In fact, in his *The Satanic Bible*, LaVey contends that his modern Satanism does not assume the reality of supernatural phenomena, but suggests instead the figure of man himself as a deity, in the sense that there should be no other authority but that of the self. The issue of the devil, evil and demons has also been addressed by Eugene Thacker, in his "Three Questions on Demonology", where he claims that in black metal in particular, the figure of the demon might occasionally be associated with Satan or pagan deities, but it is mostly a symbol of those forces that can act upon humans without ever really being understood by them, allowing the individual to go beyond the borders of rational knowledge.
- <sup>2</sup> Several attempts have been made at relating the black metal scene with the specific scenario where it originally developed, namely describing the relation in terms of the natural environment: "The North, rigidly controlled by the natural elements, its seasons dominated by darkness and cold, ironically provided the desolate environment which would spark Black Metal to marshal its forces and gather up weapons in a coming unholy war" (Moynihan & Soderlind, 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Although, at the time, heavy metal music had already established a reputation of its own, which was, regardless the criterion, far removed from the most acceptable standards of cultural production and still a cause of concern in varying degrees for a series of social entities, the fact is that, until then, real proven criminal activity had never actually been a part of the scene. As noted by Keith Kahn-Harris, "The black metal scene produced dramatic musical and discursive innovations. Criminality, racism and associations with the far right were new phenomena in metal" (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 132).
- <sup>4</sup> Retelling the story of how black metal first made its appearance in mainstream media in Norway, Michael Moynihan and Didrik Soderlind have noted that it happened precisely through a front cover story published in the daily newspaper *Bergens Tidende*, on January 20, 1993, where an article entitled "We Lit the Fires" first gave visibility and a voice of his own to the figure of Varg Vikernes, at the time also known as Count Grishnackh and leader of the project Burzum. With this article, the authors claim, "Varg Vikernes set the tone for the Black Metal scene's subsequent interaction with, and portrayal by the media" (1998: 93).
- <sup>5</sup> Although the brutal assassination of Euronymous by Varg Vikernes was the most notorious crime in black metal history, it was not the only one. In August 1992, Bard Eithun (at the time known as Faust), who had played in bands such as Stigma Diabolicum, Thorns and Emperor, and was also responsible for the edition of the fanzine *Orcustus*, killed a man in a park in Lillehammer. The crime was described by Bard himself as a random act of violence, committed on the basis of his victim being an homosexual and him feeling the sudden urge to experience murder (Moynihan & Soderlind, 1998: 105-112) He was only accused of the murder more than a year later, as the police were initially pursuing leads within the gay local community. The victim, Magne Andreassen, died from blood loss caused by 37 puncture wounds.

- <sup>6</sup> One of the most controversial elements of black metal lies precisely in the very thin line that resides at the basis of the separation between a certain national romantic idealism and nationalist, racist, extreme far-right ideologies. For more on black metal's difficult associations with Nordic Nationalisms, see Noys (2010), Spracklen (2010) and Wiebe Taylor (2010).
- <sup>7</sup> Interestingly, in 1975, author Ernest Callenbach published a utopian novel based on ecological principles, titled *Ecotopia*. The story unfolds around an American reporter, named William Weston, who goes on a trip through a secret republic 20 years after their separation from the United States (the republic comprises Washington, Oregon and northern California). Weston discovers a society that has been designed in order to meet the specific demands of environmental sustainability.

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