



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„What Never Was“:
Listening to the Genesis of Black Metal

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2016 / Vienna 2016

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 836

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Musikwissenschaft UG2002

Betreut von / Supervisor:

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1. Introduction

The topic of this thesis started out as a joke between me and my best friend. She pointed out to me that since I listened to Black Metal, I should write about it. We had a good laugh – but the thought stuck in my mind and the more I thought about it, the more interesting Black Metal appeared as an object of study. I had been listening to Black Metal since roughly 2006, being introduced to it by internet acquaintances. Though I never considered myself a “metalhead” or dressed like one, it has remained a staple of my listening ever since. Making it the subject of a thesis also has an auto-therapeutic aspect to it: I wanted to account for my fascination with a music that frequently came with worldviews diametrically opposed to mine. Beyond this biographical motivation, I believe Black Metal to be a rewarding object of studies taken on its own. Not only does it subject many norms of popular music, from one-person bands to the lionization of poor production standards, it also is an eminently historical phenomenon. Its bloodstained history is preserved in countless publications aimed at fans of it and fans of the morbid in general.

But Black Metal is *historical* not just in that sense: When the Norwegian scene that would draw the attention of the international press with its crimes coined that music still at the heart of the contemporary Black Metal scene, they did not do so in the name of innovation. Rather, they were conservative revolutionaries with the express purpose of returning to an unholy past in the wake of Death Metal that in their eyes did not live up to its name. It was, as Nietzsche put it in *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, an attempt to give themselves “*a past after the fact*”. This thesis will provide an overview of the existing scholarly literature dealing with the history and present of Black Metal, one that does not presuppose any existing familiarity with the subject. From this, the research questions are developed. Following this, Black Metal's self-placing in relation to Death Metal is investigated based on documents from the canonized Norwegian scene. Finally, guided by statements from the scene, two analytical chapters will attempt to illustrate Norwegian Black Metal's relationship to the music it claimed to be returning to. In this, techniques used to individuate Black Metal from its chosen adversary, Death Metal, will receive particular attention.

2. Literature review

This chapter will review the most important secondary literature concerned with the history of Black Metal and the description of its musical attributes. Since I do not want to presuppose that the reader is familiar with them, I will recount essential information and the overall direction of the argument in quite some detail. The larger purpose of this lengthy traversal is to make transparent the process in which I develop the research questions meant to guide my reading of the scene's documents and the analysis of its music. Rather than immediately developing a single, integrated narrative from these various sources, I will recount them one-by-one, in order to preserve their relative autonomy. Nonetheless, cross-references will be made at various points and the reader is intended to keep in mind the questions developed in the examination of earlier sources for subsequent ones. Occasionally, I will draw on documents from the Norwegian Black Metal scene where it is pertinent, though I intend to reserve most of these references for a later point in this thesis. Finally, I will develop research questions from this engagement with existing literature, either through immanent critique of a single source, crossreading for potential contradictions between the sources as well as combination and supplementation of the sources with each other.

2.1. History I: Sarah Chaker's digest of Mudrian, Moynihan and Söderlind

Sarah Chaker's sociological study *Schwarzmetall und Todesblei – Über den Umgang mit Musik in den Black – und Death Metal Szenen Deutschlands*, based on her dissertation, investigates and compares the attitudes and practices of participants in the contemporary Black and Death Metal scenes in Germany. Chaker offers a brief history of these genres as a backdrop for her qualitative and quantitative inquiry. She emphasizes that this historical background cannot be observed empirically, but instead needs to be reconstructed from the available sources, being a matter of discourse and contention within the scene. In doing this, she draws chiefly from Albert Mudrian's *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore* and Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind's *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, crosschecking these documents with a variety of online sources, such as *Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal-Archives* (www.metal-archives.com).¹ Her account is reconstructed in this chapter in order to

1 Chaker 2014, p. 138.

introduce key demarcations in the discourse on the history of Extreme Metal, for both Black and Death Metal. Since the aesthetic of Black Metal was conceived in opposition to that of Death Metal, describing the former almost requires sketching out the latter in order to throw into relief the differences and distinctions that secure Black Metal's autonomy.

2.1.1. Historical sketch of Death Metal

The musical practice of Death Metal emerged during the early to mid 1980s, being the product of a cross-fertilization between Anarcho and Hardcore Punk on the one hand and Heavy Metal, in particular Thrash Metal, on the other. Concomitantly with Death Metal, Grindcore sprung from the same connection. Initially, the boundaries between the two were hazy, with bands of either persuasion greatly influencing each other – hence Mudrian tells the history of Death Metal *and* Grindcore.² Musical characteristics alone should not be considered the only determinant of labeling something Grindcore or Death Metal, as the choice of lyrical subject matter and visual presentation greatly contribute to how these bands are perceived, with Grindcore having particular affinities for body horror and gore subjects, as pioneered by the British band Carcass, and left-wing politics, most prominently espoused by the likewise British band Napalm Death.

Participants in the fledgling local scenes connected either face-to-face at record stores and concerts, or through the emerging tape trading networks, notes Chaker following Mudrian.³ In England, the second generation of Punk bands, including such outfits as Crass, The Exploited and Discharge, set the stage for the development of Grindcore, as Napalm Death formed in 1981, playing alongside Hardcore-influenced bands such as Heresy and Extreme Noise Terror. Aside from these comrades-in-arms, US Hardcore such as Deep Wound, D.R.I. (Dirty Rotten Imbeciles) and Siege provided musical orientation, as did Thrash bands of a more extreme persuasion, such as Slayer and Metallica from the US, the Swiss Celtic Frost and the German trio of Kreator, Destruction and Sodom.⁴ Starting in the mid 1980s, DJ and radio host John Peel began to feature Grindcore on his BBC Radio 1 show, introducing it to a wider public. The first label dedicated exclusively to Extreme Metal and Grindcore, Earache Records, was founded in Nottingham in 1985, eventually signing bands such as Napalm Death, Terrorizer, Bolt Thrower, Carcass, Massacre and Morbid

2 Chaker 2014, p. 138.

3 Chaker 2014, p. 138.

4 Chaker 2014, p. 139.

Angel at various points.⁵

In the US, the incumbent Death Metal and Grindcore scenes recruited its members chiefly from the lively Hardcore scenes, with Florida becoming one of the first hot spots for Death Metal, with bands such as Morbid Angel, Death, Deicide and Obituary hailing from the Tampa area. Producer Scott Burns' trademark sound, developed at Tampa's Morrisound Studios, would become intimately associated with the heyday of Death Metal, to a point where the Norwegian Black Metal scene defined itself at least partially in opposition to it. Compared to the earlier underground recordings, Burns' productions placed high emphasis on clarity that was meant to highlight the precision of the playing, in particular that of the drumming.⁶ Compared to the thrash-metal-influenced Florida Death Metal, Chaker highlights the hardcore influence in New York Death Metal outfits such as Immolation, Incantation and Suffocation. In the United States, Roadrunner Records emerged as one of the first labels to sign Death Metal bands, among them Obituary, Suffocation and Deicide.⁷

From 1987/88 onwards, Sweden developed a Death Metal scene of its own, with the pioneers being Dismember (formerly Carnage), Entombed (formerly Nihilist) and Unleashed. The so-called “Stockholm sound” was developed under the auspices of Tomas Skogsberg at the Sunlight Studios in that same city, which compared to the bass- and treble-heavy production aesthetic of Scott Burns featured more prominent mid-range frequencies.⁸ Chaker notes that in order to set themselves apart from the focus on brutal virtuosity prevailing in US Death Metal, Swedish bands began to orient themselves towards more easily comprehensible songwriting with catchy melodic motives, eventually giving rise to the subgenre of Melodic Death Metal, embodied by bands such as In Flames, Dark Tranquility and the later albums of At the Gates.⁹

According to Moynihan and Söderlind and Chaker's own research, Death Metal's popularity peaked between 1989 and 1993. Starting in the mid 1990s, rapid commercialization led to an over-saturation and eventually collapse of the death metal market. Waning in terms of commercial importance since then, Death Metal has now

5 Chaker 2014, p. 139.

6 Chaker 2014, p. 139.

7 Chaker 2014, p. 140.

8 Chaker 2014, p. 140.

9 Chaker 2014, pp. 140-141.

fractured into several underground subgenres, with terms such as “Progressive Death Metal”, “Old School Death Metal”, “Brutal Death Metal”, “Grind Meath Metal”, “Satanic Death Metal”, “Slam Death Metal”, etc. being present in the scene's discourse.¹⁰

2.1.2. Historical sketch of Black Metal

The decline of Death Metal in the early 1990s favored the genesis and ascendancy of Norwegian Black Metal, or what is frequently called the “second wave of Black Metal”, though Death Metal, according to Chaker, remained an important influence on the subgenre, as many of the Norwegian Black Metal bands started out playing Death Metal: Mayhem, Old Funeral (which featured members that would go on to found Burzum and Immortal, respectively and Darkthrone).¹¹ Distinguishing traits, musical and otherwise, developed slowly, with a focus on particular lyrical subjects such as Norse mythology and Satanism and visual marks of distinction such as corpse paint being appropriated and conceptually refined from what is considered the “first wave of Black Metal” in retrospect.¹²

Among these “first wave” bands, Chaker first highlights the British band Venom, therein following Moynihan and Söderlind. Their Satanism was anything but sincere and but one topic among more traditional subjects of Rock'n'Roll such as sex and drugs. Venom also pioneered the use of pseudonyms, something taken up by almost all later Black Metal bands. Their second album, released in 1982, coined the name of the genre: *Black Metal*. Citing Moynihan and Söderlind, their music is characterized as being blues-based Rock with a Punk influence. Chaker argues that since Venom cannot be considered an exponent of the new musical practice that emerged with the Norwegian bands of the early 1990s, the status of Venom being the first Black Metal band has to be considered the result of a particular historical discourse.¹³ The practice of the black-and-white face paint, commonly called “corpse paint”, was first espoused by Swiss Celtic Frost and Danish Merciful Fate.¹⁴

The Swedish band Bathory, named after the Hungarian countess Elisabeth Báthory (1560-1614), who according to legend used to bathe in the blood of murdered young women, was

10 Chaker 2014, p. 141.

11 Chaker 2014, p. 142.

12 Chaker 2014, p. 142.

13 Chaker 2014, p. 143.

14 Chaker 2014, pp. 143-144.

founded in 1983 in Stockholm and provided important influences for Norwegian Black Metal in several respects. In musical terms, Moynihan and Söderlind emphasize a great willingness to experiment, with the earlier albums' raw, unrefined sound rising to become a trademark of Black Metal, though the later, more “*epic*” compositions of the albums released in the second half of the 1980s also proved influential in their use of synthesizers and a lyrical turn towards Norse heathenism. Furthermore, apart from a handful of concerts given towards the beginning of their career, Bathory did not play live, setting a precedent for later Black Metal bands to eschew engaging a live audience for “*elitist*” or “*misanthropic*” reasons.¹⁵

In the wake of Death Metal's commercialization in the early 1990s, a small group of musicians from Norway reoriented themselves towards the ideas of these “first wave” Black Metal bands, essentially “*picking up where Venom and Bathory left off*”.¹⁶ By drawing on existing trends within Extreme Metal and radicalizing the concepts of their forebears, they created Norwegian Black Metal. Crucially – and this is backed by her empirical research – Chaker states: “*What is commonly understood to be 'Black Metal' is first and foremost associated with Black Metal of the Norwegian variety.*”¹⁷ Moynihan and Söderlind list several motives that supposedly drove the pioneers of Norwegian Black Metal: On the one hand, they argue, the Black Metal pioneers were striving for a music that would be less susceptible to commercialization than Thrash and Death Metal. On the other hand, a drive towards greater distinction might have played a role, as the Norwegian Black Metal scene strove to audibly and visually set itself apart from the neighboring Death Metal scene in Sweden, which had managed to draw the attention of a global Metal audience by the late 1980s.¹⁸ Chaker quotes Moynihan and Söderlind:

“The leaders of the Norwegian scene realized – wisely – that in order to grab the attention of minds and souls they would need to willfully take things one step further. The fanciful violence and bloodlust of Death Metal wasn't anything in itself – it must be made real, and become a means to an end, if it was to hold greater purpose.”¹⁹

The much-publicized church arsons, grave desecrations, violence, death threats, murders,

15 Chaker 2014, p. 144.

16 Chaker 2014, p. 144.

17 Chaker 2014, p. 145. „*Was heute gemeinhin unter 'Black Metal' verstanden wird, ist in erster Linie mit Black Metal norwegischer Couleur assoziiert.*“

18 Chaker 2014, p. 145.

19 Moynihan & Söderlind 1998, p. 32. Quoted in Chaker 2014, p. 145.

perpetrated by central members of the Norwegian Black Metal scene, followed this.²⁰ The media scrutiny thrust Black Metal into public consciousness, ironically fastening what its adherents had tried to prevent – Black Metal's commercialization. The early Norwegian scene, consisting originally of about ten people, was distributed among several bands, with many musicians being part of more than one band at one point or another. Thus Kristian “Varg” Vikernes, before founding one-man-band Burzum, played in death metal band Old Funeral, from which Immortal eventually emerged. Øystein “Euronymous” Aarseth on the other hand, founder of Mayhem and central figure of the scene, published the early Burzum albums on his label Deathlike Silence Productions. His record store, Helvete, was a meeting place for virtually all of the formative Norwegian bands prior to it being closed down following Vikernes' murder of Euronymous.²¹

Black Metal's popularity peaked in the mid-1990s, then it faced the same fate as Death Metal: The commercialization led to inflation and eventually collapse, leading to a similar underground existence marked by ever greater differentiation into substyles.²² For now, I want to call particular attention to the tension between the avowedly conservative aspirations of Norwegian Black Metal on the one hand and its ability to coin a distinct aesthetic inspiring more than two decades of extreme metal.

2.2. Present: Chaker interrogates the German Black Metal scene

One of the most remarkable results of Chaker's empirical research is that the hypotheses derived from her qualitative inquiry were overwhelmingly confirmed by the results of her quantitative inquiry, derived from a comprehensive questionnaire handed out to self-identified Black and Death Metal fans at scene events.²³ The accuracy of these observations must be credited in part to Chaker's self-reflexive participation in the scene,²⁴ together with the wealth of quantitative data her acute insights and interpretations challenge or disprove many of the stereotypes on participants of these scenes that persist in popular as well as scholarly works on Black and Death Metal. In her concluding interpretative remarks on the results of her study, Chaker makes an emphatic case for

20 Chaker 2014, p. 145.

21 Chaker 2014, p. 145-146.

22 Chaker 2014, p. 146.

23 Chaker 2014, p. 399.

24 Chaker 2014, pp. 80-87.

recognizing the distinctness of these two music-based scenes, a distinctness that mirrors the musical differences between the genres:

“What sounds in Black resp. Death Metal music, the constitutive moment of these scenes, inscribes itself with its specific qualities into the respective cultural contexts – into the symbols and rituals of the scenes, into lyrics and imagery, into the attitudes and habits of the followers, into their discourses and bodies. Musical-sounding aspects are what ties together the scene worlds at the heart.”²⁵

Synthesizing the results of her study, Chaker constructs conceptual oppositions that mirror both the music and the concerns of the Death respectively Black Metal scene: „*Craftsman vs. creative genius, body vs. mind/soul, collective vs. individual, equality vs. elitism, pragmatism vs. romanticism or hedonism vs. transcendence.*“²⁶ To describe this holistic correspondence, Chaker evokes the concept of “*homology*”²⁷ developed in Cultural Studies.

Summarizing the differences between the attitudes of Black and Death Metal fans, Chaker notes that fans of Black Metal show significantly greater interest in the lyrical, visual and performative contents of their music of choice than fans of Death Metal,²⁸ corresponding to a high seriousness and greater tendency to consider Black Metal a way of life, which frequently attract the ridicule of Death Metal fans.²⁹ When asked what bands they considered ideal representatives of their genre of choice, both Black and Death Metal fans named above all the progenitors of the genre,³⁰ with the bands of the early Norwegian Black Metal scene occupying the top spots for Black Metal. This strongly suggests that what is to be considered Black Metal is still chiefly informed by the aesthetic coined by these musicians in the early 1990s, though we should keep in mind that the Norwegian scene entered the greater limelight with its outrageous statements and deeds. Disentangling the crimes and infamy of that scene from success on grounds of aesthetic innovation seems

25 Chaker 2014, p. 422. „Das Erklingende in Black- bzw. Death-Metal-Musik, das konstituierende Moment der Szenen, schreibt sich in seiner je spezifischen Beschaffenheit in die entsprechenden kulturellen Kontexte ein – in die Symbole und Rituale der Szenen, in Songtexte und Bilderwelten, in Einstellungen und Verhaltensweisen der AnhängerInnen, in ihre Diskurse und Körper. Musikalisch-klangliche Aspekte sind der 'Kitt', der die Szene-Welten im Innersten zusammenhält.“

26 Chaker 2014, p. 422. „Handwerker versus kreatives Genie, Körper versus Geist/Seele, Kollektiv versus Individuum, Gleichheit versus Elitarismus, Pragmatismus versus Romantik oder Hedonismus versus Transzendenz.“

27 Chaker 2014, p. 423.

28 Chaker 2014, p. 401.

29 Chaker 2014, p. 424.

30 Chaker 2014, p. 401-402.

a futile task, though the aesthetic's lasting success in an evidently music-based scene is unlikely to rest solely on extra-musical infamy.

The top 10 most representative Black Metal bands for the German fans surveyed are as follows: 1st Darkthrone, 2nd Burzum & Immortal (tie), 3rd Gorgoroth, 4th Mayhem, 5th Emperor & Satyricon (tie), 6th Dimmu Borgir, 7th Marduk, 8th Bathory, 9th Nargaroth, 10th Venom.³¹ The first six spots are exclusively occupied by Norwegian bands associated with the second wave, whereas Marduk and Bathory are Swedish, Nargaroth is German and Venom is British. Venom and Bathory are commonly considered first-wave bands. Burzum and Nargaroth are associated with far-right politics, with Chaker's research confirming that following the Norwegian scene's flirtations with far-right politics, the contemporary scene of Germany harboring a significant minority of followers holding far-right opinions. The presence of far-right bands and opinions is, however, a point of contention within the scene, with Chaker noting that in addition to the ideals of individualism and misanthropy divisions over political matters may contribute to the fact that the German Black Metal scene regards itself as less of a community compared to the corresponding Death Metal scene.³²

Members of the German Black Metal scene are significantly more likely to participate in bands compared to those of the Death Metal scene, with nearly half of the surveyed reporting that they play in a band. While the musicianship required for this is predominantly acquired autodidactically by means of learning existing music, this fact nonetheless points to a high level of expertise and critical evaluation of musical production by members of the scene.³³ While four in five Death Metal followers agreed that their music of choice was “good” music because it was still “hand-made”, only half of the Black Metal followers surveyed shared this opinion. This corresponds to Chaker's hypothesis that mastering technical challenges, in particular those related to speed, plays a greater role in Death Metal compared to Black Metal, where the focus shifted towards the resulting sound and away from the “hands-on” production of that sound. Significantly, this coincides with the watershed where electronic media was superseded by digital media.³⁴

31 Chaker 2014, p. 335.

32 Chaker 2014, pp. 413-414.

33 Chaker 2014, p. 403.

34 Chaker 2014, p. 405.

Events with live music are more important to Death Metal followers, as is the bodily experience of their music, as reflected in headbanging or moshing. Black Metal followers, on the other hand, experience their music more contemplatively, desiring an intensive, mental engagement with their music. While fans of both genres appreciate the “aggressiveness” of their music, three in ten Black Metal followers value dream-like escapism through music, whereas only one in ten Death Metal followers reports the same.³⁵ Together with the high prevalence of active musicians, this difference in attitude may be considered an incentive to engage this repertoire analytically, ideally in terms that take into account the vernacular concepts used to describe and communicate the music.

While only half of the surveyed Death Metal followers report an interest in Black Metal, three in four Black Metal followers also listen to Death Metal. Interest in Grindcore and Thrash Metal is common in both scenes, whereas Punk and Hardcore – also part of Death and Black Metal's genealogy – are seemingly too far removed from the preferred tenets to attract significant attention. Black Metal followers also show interest in Pagan (Viking) Metal, as well as other “dark” of music such as Dark Wave, Neofolk and Dark Ambient.³⁶

Three in four Black and Death Metal scene participants were introduced to the music by friends or acquaintances, though mass-media such as radio, television, internet and print media served as the introduction for roughly half of them.³⁷ Black Metal followers, were, in general, a little younger than their Death Metal counterparts, having spent an average of 7,4 years as part of the scene.³⁸ This number is significant when we recall the paramount importance attributed to the Norwegian scene, given that its turbulent formative years significantly predate many Black Metal followers' entry into the scene. Together with the role played by mass-media in introducing people to the scene, this may be taken as an indication that the Norwegian scene plays a pivotal role in the historical narratives of Black Metal present in the scene's discourse.

35 Chaker 2014, pp. 405-406.

36 Chaker 2014, pp. 407-408.

37 Chaker 2014, p. 410.

38 Chaker 2014, pp. 410-411.

2.3. History II: Keith Kahn-Harris maps Extreme Metal's infrastructure

In his sociological monograph *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Keith Kahn-Harris advocates an approach to the phenomenon of Extreme Metal that aspires to be holistic and spatial. Holistic, in that it emphasizes the interconnections and interdependence between the part and the whole, avoiding fragmentation of the subject area. Spatial, in that it is located in particular social relations and spaces, both material and imagined, as opposed to abstractions such as discourse and genre, which are rooted in texts as opposed to social relations.³⁹ In examining the spatial concept of the “scene” as used by participants in extreme metal culture, Kahn-Harris finds it to be “*implicitly holistic in defining something that encapsulates music making, production, circulation, discussion and texts.*”⁴⁰ He calls attention to the origins of the words in theater, where it denotes the space where actions are performed, as well as its evocation of urban nightlife and leisure.⁴¹ Kahn-Harris considers the heterogenous uses of the word “scene” to be congenial to the ideals of holism and spatiality, its anti-essentialism producing a fruitful ambiguity.⁴²

Kahn-Harris argues that due to the considerable musical and institutional overlap that exists between the Black and Death Metal scenes, we are justified in regarding them as part of the larger Extreme Metal scene,⁴³ an assessment Chaker would likely disagree with, given that the results of her study document considerable differences between the Black Metal and Death Metal scenes in Germany.⁴⁴ With the fundamentals of Kahn-Harris inquiry in place, I will draw on his mapping of the Extreme Metal scene's infrastructure, which provided the framework in which Black Metal was developed, disseminated and, arguably, canonized. From the subtle interpersonal etiquette observed in tape trading to the larger and at times rapid upheavals in the institutions disseminating the music, Kahn-Harris' socio-historical sketch is intended to serve as an introduction to documents from the scene and the research drawing on it, giving a reader a sense of where the scene's discourse was located and how it was influenced by changes in its economy.

As a global network, the scene constituted itself in the early 1980s through members and

39 Kahn-Harris 2007, pp. 11-13.

40 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 15.

41 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 15.

42 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 21.

43 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 22.

44 Chaker 2014, p. 422.

fans of early Extreme Metal bands contacting one another by letter through the postal system. Growing out of the global Punk scene that had developed by the end of the 1970s and fanzines associated with it, where the addresses of scene members dispersed over the globe were published in order to facilitate contact. Dedicated Metal magazines such as *Kerrang!* and *Metal Hammer* disseminated pen-pal adverts, introducing fans of more mainstream Heavy Metal to the fringes of the fledgling Extreme Metal scene. As the number of Extreme Metal records released grew, so did the associated correspondence.⁴⁵

Tied to this network of corresponding scene members was the institution of tape trading, since for much of the 1980s there were few dedicated Extreme Metal record labels, making tape trading the primary mode of dissemination for recordings – above all self-produced demo tapes, live tapes and rehearsal tapes. Tapes were either traded for other tapes or sold by the bands on a cost price, with some particularly successful tapes selling as much as 2000 copies by the late 1980s, with further home copying ensuring even wider circulation of the material subsequently. It was also customary to include a batch of flyers advertising trade opportunities or particular tapes in the packages sent among tape traders.⁴⁶

Tape trading had its heyday in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during which the global scene included thousands of active correspondents throughout the world. Being a low-threshold way to participate in the scene, tape trading fostered what Kahn-Harris describes as “*an egalitarian scene*” with a strong ethic of reciprocity, succinctly expressed by the omnipresent call to “*include an international reply coupon or die!*”⁴⁷ Eventually, both communication by letter and tape trading were superseded by electronic media and the internet, though correspondence remained an important activity for highly involved scene members.⁴⁸ In confronting the nostalgia expressed by the Norwegian Black Metal scene in the early 1990s, we thus might be alerted to nostalgia for this period in Extreme Metal's dissemination, where considerable effort was invested in getting into contact with people who had access to valued tapes, as well as building a roster of tapes for trading oneself.

So-called “distros” emerged from the tape trading scene in the 1980s, initially set up to distribute demos, fanzines and, later, records and CDs. Having begun as photocopied

45 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 78.

46 Kahn-Harris 2007, pp. 78-79.

47 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 80.

48 Kahn-Harris 2007, pp. 80-81.

letters advertising a number of items to be traded for items of similar value or sold at cost price, by the 1990s, some of these distros had grown to be profitable firms. From these distros emerged an increasing number of labels, making more and more “professional” recordings available for sale to the scene. As many small labels could not afford to be distributed in shops, distro catalogs became the primary way of selling and buying extreme metal at that point.⁴⁹

Record shops, in turn, began to sell Extreme Metal recordings at roughly the same time as the larger distros emerged. Prior to the early 1990s, only a select few, small “independent” record shops stocked extensive rosters of Extreme Metal, until the larger distros came up with sophisticated networks facilitating the distribution of Extreme Metal to record shops. The stocking of Extreme Metal in larger chains comes at a price though, quite literally: The mark-up on the price is considerable when compared to the prices when buying directly from a distro. In spite of this commercialization, small and highly specialized distros persist, taking on the role of curators that sift out the overwhelming abundance of extreme metal records.⁵⁰

In the early to mid 1980s, the few available Extreme Metal records were usually released on larger labels and sold large quantities, resulting in a considerable rift between a small roster of visible Extreme Metal bands like Slayer and Venom and a considerably larger number of “underground” bands relying on tape trading and distros. In the course of the 1980s, a few larger labels stepped forward, beginning to release new Extreme Metal recordings: *“For example, in the US Bryan Slagel's renowned 'Metal Massacre' compilations, featuring early work by Metallica amongst others, provided the basis for Metal Blade Records, now an important extreme metal label.”*⁵¹ At the end of the 1980s, the United Kingdom's Earache and Sweden's No Fashion labels, at first dedicated to Punk, began releasing some Extreme Metal recordings, whereas formerly more traditional Heavy Metal labels such as Germany's Nuclear Blast diversified their offering with Extreme Metal.

Then came the end of the 1980s and with it a sudden proliferation of Extreme Metal recordings, with bands that had established themselves in the tape trading underground

49 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 81.

50 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 82.

51 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 82.

now releasing albums on labels that could afford them with new channels of distribution, while new, grass-roots-based labels began to sprout up.⁵² In the 1990s, an exponential growth of record companies in the scene marked the high point of Extreme Metal's commercial success, with the largest, Nuclear Blast, selling between 100,000 to 200,000 copies of their top-selling Extreme Metal releases and maintaining sub-labels and divisions in other countries. Small- and medium-sized companies sell a few hundred copies of each release. For a short window of time in the early 1990s, some Death Metal bands even were signed to “major” labels: Morbid Angel were signed to Giant/Warner, whereas Earache entertained a short-lived licensing deal with Columbia. Yet a commercial breakthrough did not manifest, today, only a few Extreme Metal bands are still signed to major labels.⁵³

The upsurge in the number of labels and CDs financed by bands negatively impacted the institutions of demo tapes and tape trading, respectively. Prior to the 1990s, the release of an album on CD virtually guaranteed that the band had spent ample time developing their sound through recording and disseminating demo and rehearsal tapes, whereas today, Kahn-Harris writes, “*CDs may be released by very inexperienced bands.*”⁵⁴ The proliferation of labels and CDs released by them fundamentally altered how bands accumulated renown within the scene, as prior to the 1990s, reputation was built up gradually through assiduous networking and quite personal relationships. This almost bucolic idyll is contrasted by Kahn-Harris' illustration of the sober mercantile reality of today's scene: “*Bands and labels have adopted business practices drawn from the wider music industry. Larger labels generally behave like large independent labels in any other scene. Bands sign a contract for one or a number of albums and are either paid an advance, from which recording costs must be met, or have their recording costs paid for them in return for a lower royalty rate.*”⁵⁵ If we follow Kahn-Harris' diagnosis that capital began to colonize what had been a largely money-free, egalitarian exchange, we might expect a veritable shock among the scene members socialized during the heyday of tape trading around 1990, as well as a nostalgia faintly echoed in Kahn-Harris' remarks.

52 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 82.

53 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 83.

54 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 83.

55 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 83.

2.4. History and Sound: Ian Reyes recollects the “Black Turn”

In his 2013 article “*Blacker than Death: Recollecting the 'Black Turn' in Metal Aesthetics*” Ian Reyes outlines a history of Black Metal, explaining it as a reaction against the aesthetic of Death Metal, which had supposedly become exhausted by the time of the 1990s. Central to Reyes' argument is the notion that Black Metal musicians reexamined and reevaluated recordings that had been buried in the wake of Death Metal's triumph, thus retrieving and reclaiming sounds that were considered emblematic of “*amateurism, incompetence, and failure*”. To this end, Reyes examines recordings and popular press articles “*through the historical and theoretical observations of academic metal studies*.”⁵⁶ In this chapter I will critically reconstruct the trajectory of Reyes' argument in order to develop further questions.

Standard accounts of Black Metal's origin, Reyes contends, place an undue focus on the outrageous creeds and deeds of the so-called Norwegian “Black Circle”, in particular their vocal Satanism, condemnation of Heavy Metal's state and the murders and church arsons that thrust Black Metal into the limelight of both subcultural publications like *Kerrang!* and an international tabloid press eager to stoke the fires of moral panic. According to Reyes, such an approach “*unjustifiably weds the success of a genre of music with the success of an ideology or events independent of material history, and stresses the dynamic between the dominant culture and the subculture while downplaying the aesthetic dynamics internal to the subculture*”⁵⁷ and fails to appreciate the “Black Turn” as a more global phenomenon. These events were “*overdetermined by material and cultural circumstances specific to the extreme metal subculture of the time. This moment of crisis and its solution will be referred to here as the 'black turn'.*”⁵⁸ It is rather opaque whether “those events” are the Norwegian crimes or the global “dynamics internal to the subculture”, an ambiguity of expression that points to a deeper vacillation in Reyes' paper.

In narrowing down the subject matter of his paper, Reyes distinguishes “true” or “raw” Black Metal as his chief interests from what he calls “*the slicker imitations riding in its wake*”.⁵⁹ Symphonic Black Metal, Folk Metal or Cascadian Metal⁶⁰ constitute “*less true,*

56 Reyes 2013, p. 240.

57 Reyes 2013, p. 240.

58 Reyes 2013, p. 241.

59 Reyes 2013, p. 241.

60 A moniker chiefly associated with recent bands from the US, above all Wolves in the Throne Room.

derivative, and hybrid styles”, as they lack what now emerges as the focal point of Reyes' inquiry: A particular style of recording, a raw sound that is allegedly less portable than other widely recognized features of the style, such as raspy vocals or repetitive tremolo-picked guitar melodies. While the success of conventionally well-produced black-metal-influenced bands as diverse as Cradle of Filth or Liturgy beyond the narrow confines of the subculture would seem to bolster this argument, we should not rush to such a conclusion and prematurely regard symphonic allures or slick production as aberrant heresy when engaging the stream of tradition from which Black Metal emerged.

For Reyes, *“the original promise of black metal, in its truest or most raw form, can be summarized as a fundamentalist solution to a crisis of metal heaviness”*.⁶¹ To illustrate this crisis, he quotes Øystein “Euronymous” Aarseth, guitarist of Mayhem, owner of the Helvete record store in Oslo, the label Deathlike Silence Productions and central figure of the Norwegian Extreme Metal scene proclaiming: *“We must take this scene to what it was in the past”*.⁶² Significantly, the quote is taken from a statement in which Euronymous blames the suicide of Mayhem vocalist Per Yngve “Dead” Ohlin on *“false black metal or death metal”*.⁶³ Reyes identifies the crisis as a hegemony of Death Metal emerging from the United States, to which Black Metal was the pointed response by an increasingly diverse, globalized network of Metal fans connected through fanzines and tape trading.⁶⁴

Reyes identifies two charges made against Death Metal by the subculture: Firstly, that it had eschewed *“traditional metal matters like fantasy, the occult, or the supernatural”*⁶⁵ in favor of political topics. He attributes this charge to the fact that international audiences would not care for lyrics dealing with American politics, a problematic assertion we should keep in mind. Secondly, that *“death metal had become too baroque, as evidenced by overproduced recordings of music that was unduly complex.”*⁶⁶ Following Harris Berger's research, Reyes' identifies the history of Metal as a continuous search for ever more Heavy Sounds. In the pursuit of such heaviness, the path taken by Death Metal had been explored to its utmost limit – a crisis to which the “Black Turn” was the solution on a global level:

61 Reyes 2013, p. 241.

62 Reyes 2013, p. 241

63 Moynihan & Söderlind 1998, p. 60. Also referenced by Hagen 2011, p. 183.

64 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

65 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

66 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

The consensus of the globalizing metal subculture of the 1990s was that death metal had exhausted the possibilities for heaviness, reaching the heaviest point imaginable within the current paradigm, a point from which the only response seemed to be to retreat to less heavy terrain. Essentially, the black turn was the alternative to retreat.⁶⁷

Citing the work of Ross Hagen, Reyes characterizes „*the 'true' black sound as 'lo-fi' and 'low-budget,' the antithesis of what American death metal had become.*“⁶⁸ Put concisely, Reyes posits the „Black Turn“ as „*a rehabilitation of the present through a revival of past values*“,⁶⁹ a genre whose past was constructed after the fact by listening to older Extreme Metal records against the grain and appropriating what had to be considered aesthetically defective from the hegemonic standpoint of Death Metal. But that Black Metal was the result of a global consensus on the exhaustion of American Death Metal's potential for heaviness (what Keith Kahn-Harris has termed „*sonic transgression*“⁷⁰) is a strong claim that ought to be qualified. Reyes laments that most accounts of the “Black Turn” muddle the distinction between the origins of the “Black Metal” label and the genre that crystallized around it.

2.4.1. “The Old Black”

Formerly a marketing category used to distinguish Christian from purportedly anti-Christian music, the British band Venom re-appropriated the label for their second album *Black Metal*, mixing tongue-in-cheek Satanic lyrics with rock themes of sex and drugs.⁷¹ Together with the Swiss band Hellhammer (which later became Celtic Frost) and Swedish band Bathory, they make up what Reyes considers “the old black”.⁷² Reyes contends that the Norwegian scene's unwillingness to accept the insincerity of Venom's Satanic act is not sufficient for explaining the “Black Turn”, as it would not account for the diversity of lyrical themes present in contemporary Black Metal nor for its audible identity as a genre, reiterating that the “Black Turn” was anti-Metal, rather than anti-Christian or anti-social.⁷³

Returning to the crisis of Death Metal, Reyes cites a 2006 study by Natalie J. Purcell where Death Metal fans voice concerns that the genre might have reached a point beyond which

67 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

68 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

69 Reyes 2013, p. 244.

70 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 30ff.

71 Reyes 2013, p. 245.

72 Reyes 2013, p. 248.

73 Reyes 2013, p. 246.

no further extremes were possible, as well as a 2002 film interview with the Death Metal band Immolation explaining their move away from the complex, hectic style of the 90s.⁷⁴ However, his argument would have been better served by critical voices on Death Metal contemporaneous with the “Black Turn” originating from Black Metal musicians. More odd still is Reyes remark that *“the most decisive proof of death metal’s aesthetic bankruptcy may have come in 2006 when the Wall Street Journal published a piece lamenting how weak contemporary death metal had become compared to its 1990s pinnacle”*,⁷⁵ since the Extreme Metal subculture is notoriously wary of the attention of established media.⁷⁶

In Reyes' historical narrative, Extreme Metal was at a crossroads: It could either roll back on heaviness, making the music lighter and more accessible, or reinterpret the nature of heaviness in the “Black Turn” by listening for new sounds in records of the past, which Reyes' illustrates with a quote from Gylve “Fenriz” Nagell of Darkthrone:

“There wasn’t a generic sound back then. [...] We had to decide ourselves what we deemed worthy of the black metal stamp. There were many “thrash” releases with a lot of “black” in them, whereas others had no “black” at all. This is not maths, so I can’t say one plus one equals 30. It had something to do with production, lyrics, the way they dressed and a commitment to making ugly, raw, grim stuff.”⁷⁷

Reyes' uses this statement to corroborate his focus on production and the amateur quality of the playing, the latter being identified with the *“ugly, raw, grim stuff”* the Norwegian scene listened for in thrash metal releases. With this, Reyes' central thesis is established: That Black Metal is a self-conscious appropriation of formerly unintended audible defects found on older records. The remainder of Reyes' article is committed to exploring such *„preferences for amateurism over virtuosity and for low-fidelity production over high.”*⁷⁸

2.4.2. “The New Black”

In surveying the initially dismissive attitude towards Venom and Hellhammer prior to the reevaluation in the „Black Turn“,⁷⁹ Reyes identifies with these sentiments when he describes the songs of the latter band as *“extremely basic, repetitive, and badly*

74 Reyes 2013, p. 246.

75 Reyes 2013, pp. 246-247.

76 Chaker 2014, p. 88.

77 Reyes 2013, p. 247 & <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/feb/20/popandrock4>.

78 Reyes 2013, p. 247

79 Reyes 2013, p. 248.

performed.”⁸⁰ Bathory, on the other hand, is exempt from such a period of “*embarrassment and failure*”, being – according to Reyes – the first band to offer something new and markedly different to an audience tiring of Death Metal, though this innovation was not entirely intentional.⁸¹ Reyes recounts the enthusiastic fan response to two quickly produced songs included on the compilation *Scandinavian Metal Attack* of 1984, an “*amateur effort stood out among a string of otherwise acceptable, run-of-the-mill thrash and death metal tracks*.”⁸² Though one wonders how Death Metal, still an underground phenomenon and in its primordial stage,⁸³ could have been perceived as „run-of-the-mill“ in 1984.

After describing the cardboard-box-like drum sound, lo-fi texture and raw performances on Bathory's first record, Reyes observes: „*By affirming these sounds, the black turn hinged on the desire to witness and create the sound of metal's putrescence. The new black was found by listening less for Satanic lyrics and more for some audible clue about alternatives to the dominant means and relations of subcultural production*.”⁸⁴ What particular insight the Marxian concept of „means and relations of production“ offers in observing that Black Metal aesthetically lionized what was rejected by death metal is Reyes' secret.

Noting that Mayhem were one of the first bands since Venom to claim the „Black Metal“ label after a period of considering themselves a Death Metal band, Reyes argues that „*the change was less in their sound than in the way they framed their sound*.”⁸⁵ He cites the 1993 reissue of their EP *Deathcrush*, the CD reissue of which featured a crossed-out picture of influential Death Metal producer Scott Burns, encircled by the words “*no fun, no core, no mosh, no trends*”:⁸⁶ a thorough rejection not just of Death Metal's production aesthetic but also of the subcultural practices associated with it.

Returning to the subject of tape trading, Reyes argues that „*for listeners to tire of death metal, it must first have become overrepresented in this network*.”⁸⁷ Additionally, Reyes

80 Reyes 2013, p. 249.

81 Reyes 2013, p. 250.

82 Reyes 2013, p. 250.

83 See, for example, Mudrian 2004.

84 Reyes 2013, p. 251.

85 Reyes 2013, p. 251.

86 Reyes 2013, p. 251.

87 Reyes 2013, p. 252.

observes that the „Black Turn“ occurred at a time when digital media in the form of the compact disc began to establish itself, coinciding with a nostalgia for the authenticity associated with low-fidelity recordings, though he emphasizes that the recollection that reevaluated what were formerly considered „bad sounds“ cannot be reduced to nostalgic impulses alone.

Concluding his argument, Reyes diagnoses:

The black turn took place for three reasons: the globalization of the subculture, the exhaustion of old aesthetic paradigms, and an upheaval in the dominant means of production and distribution.⁸⁸

Yet this conclusion raises more questions than it answers. While Reyes insists that the „Black Turn“ ought to be considered a „*more global phenomenon*“⁸⁹ than is suggested by tellings of its history focusing on the Norwegian scene, he exclusively quotes the Norwegian musicians in the proximity of Mayhem as evidence of the retrospective esteem for the sound of Venom, Hellhammer and Bathory. In that sense, „globalization“ of the subculture certainly was a precondition for the emergence of Black Metal, because the genre was first self-consciously articulated in Norway, rather than in Britain or the United States. But why should the exhaustion of the hegemonic Death Metal aesthetic, identified as „American“ by Reyes,⁹⁰ have found its musical reaction in Norway, of all places? Reyes offers no documents to support that there existed a global consensus of Death Metal having exhausted its possibilities in terms of heaviness,⁹¹ nor any to support that American Death Metal was rejected as a „foreign“ phenomenon by the Norwegian scene. Instead we should investigate the form the disavowal of Death Metal took in the Norwegian scene more closely before arriving at such conclusions, embedding both the verbalized rejection and the music's divergence into a less generalized historical context.

And what are we to make of the „*upheaval in the dominant means of production and distribution*“? Obscure in meaning on its own, we may assume that based on the preceding paragraphs Reyes' has the prevalence of tape trading in mind here, suggesting, as before, that it became over-saturated with Death Metal. But this hypothesis strikes me as problematic, since Reyes considers tape trading „*the primary network for underground*

88 Reyes 2013, p. 252.

89 Reyes 2013, p. 240.

90 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

91 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

music and musicians“⁹² while also associating Death Metal with polished performances and high-quality production in the vein of Scott Burns. Yet such production was only available to bands signed to labels with a commensurate budget and thus not necessarily „underground“ in the sense of non-commercial demos and self-produced music being circulated exclusively through tape trading. Hence we ought to interrogate the documents of the Norwegian scenes for consciousness of the differences between these distributive channels and the implications of being to signed to a label.

And while over-saturation and thus over-exposure to no doubt played a role in this exhaustion, the audible features of Death Metal may have acquired new meanings due to inaudible phenomena as well. Indeed, if Extreme Metal and in a more general sense every subculture depends on a disaffection from and with the dominant society,⁹³ gestures pointing towards assimilation into it may be seen as existential threats to one's subcultural identity. The looming specter of the “trend” is a manifestation of this.⁹⁴ Depending on how totalized one's conception of subcultural Otherness is, even visual signifiers may contribute to associating a particular musical style with the abhorred mainstream and conformism. Obviously, these concerns are intimately linked to the implications of commercial production and distribution by labels sketched out above.

In terms of audible characteristics, given Reyes' focus on production and the precision of the recorded performances, one might question if there exists a difference between the „old black“ of Venom, Hellhammer and Bathory and the Norwegian Black Metal claiming to be a return to the tenets of those bands – at least beyond the latter making a virtue out of what was a necessity for the former. Reyes does acknowledge that Black Metal may be identified by parameters other than its production elsewhere,⁹⁵ but production certainly takes precedence in his argument. But we should not presuppose that such exclusive focus on production accurately reflects or even approximates the judgment of the expert Metal fan. Hence we might ask: are Death and Black Metal indistinguishable so long as the production is low-fidelity and the performance unpolished?

Continuing his conclusion, Reyes' states:

92 Reyes 2013, p. 252.

93 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 157ff.

94 Kahn-Harris 2007, p. 130.

95 Reyes 2013, pp. 241-242.

However, despite the rhetoric of a return to heavy metal's core values, the viability of black metal ultimately proves there is no absolute canon of master works nor is there a final interpretation of them.⁹⁶

But this contradicts Reyes' prior remarks: Norwegian Black Metal did not proclaim the return to „*heavy metal's core values*“, but rather to a specific roster of bands united by Satanic, blasphemous or anti-Christian lyrics who significantly postdate Heavy Metal's consolidation into a distinct genre. Reyes' concedes that the semiotic poles Walser, Weinstein and Kahn-Harris use to describe metal hold value for synchronous analysis, but are of little use in coming to grips with historical watersheds like the „Black Turn“, since signifiers like „heaviness“ can be reinterpreted.⁹⁷ From such revaluation Reyes derives the assertion that „*echoing Ludwig Wittgenstein, there is no meta(l)-language, only a play of audible differences made meaningful by the silencing or forgetting of other differences.*“⁹⁸

But this claim that the language of Metal is volatile appears to contradict the relatively stable constellations Dietmar Elflein's analyses demonstrate in Heavy Metal's “stream of tradition”, suggesting that particular modes of non-verse-chorus riff-based songwriting and ensemble play may be used to distinguish Heavy Metal past and present from Rock music.⁹⁹ Likewise, what are we to make of the fact that Black Metal is still associated chiefly with the inaugural Norwegian bands by its contemporary fans?¹⁰⁰ More acutely put: If the audible differences are infinitesimal, how are we to explain the primacy of these bands over their supposed progenitors? While Reyes' attempt to tell a musical history of Black Metal is admirable, in lieu of an audible distinction other explanations for this primacy would have to be found: the kind of extramusical origin myths disparaged by Reyes in the first place. This question is also also raised by the last sentence of Reyes' article:

„Establishing a recognizable black metal aesthetic entailed drawing from preexisting yet undesired possibilities within the canon, opening a new arena of allowable sounds, finding heaviness where there was none before, and thereby creating a sound blacker than death.“¹⁰¹

Is Norwegian Black Metal, now recognized as definitive of the genre by its fans,

96 Reyes 2013, p. 253.

97 Reyes 2013, p. 253.

98 Reyes 2013, p. 253.

99 Elflein 2010, p. 299ff.

100 Chaker 2014, p. 335.

101 Reyes 2013, p. 254.

thoroughly explicable in the terms of the music of the bands it claimed to be returning to? Or is it distinct only insofar as it is understood as a conglomerate of signifiers extending beyond the audible?

2.5. Sound: Ross Hagen listens to Norwegian Black Metal

Ross Hagen's contribution to the volume *Metal Rules the Globe*, titled „*Musical Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal*“,¹⁰² attempts to explicate the musical characteristics specific to Norwegian Black Metal beyond superficial descriptors such as „heavy“ or „brutal“ and to subsequently relate them to the ideology and mythology of the surrounding scene.¹⁰³ The point of departure is a vignette of Black Metal at the apex of its commercial success, illustrated by a vivid vocation of a Dimmu Borgir performance at the 1998 Norwegian Grammy awards followed by a pan to the crimes that thrust the Norwegian scene into the spotlight of the media.¹⁰⁴

In this chapter, I will focus on Hagen's musical taxonomy of Norwegian Black Metal after giving a brief account of his historical sketch. Hagen singles out the „*raw, often minimalist thrash metal of European bands such as Hellhammer, Celtic Frost, Venom and Bathory*“¹⁰⁵ as the foremost inspiration for the self-described Black Metal scene in Norway crystallizing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, self-consciously appropriating a label that had previously been a blanket term for any kind of Extreme Metal featuring overtly „Satanic“ lyrical and visual themes. As in Reyes' article, Euronymous of Mayhem is credited with disseminating and codifying the aesthetic, alongside his bandmate and eventual murderer, Kristian “Varg” Vikernes of the one-man-band Burzum. However, differing from Reyes' account, Hagen does not explicitly conceive of Black Metal as an aesthetic developed in opposition to Death Metal, instead he describes its origins “*as an offshoot of thrash metal and death metal*”.¹⁰⁶

2.5.1. Keyboards and synthesizers in Extreme Metal

The first characteristic trait that distinguishes Black Metal from other styles of Heavy

102 The essay is based on Hagen's master's thesis (not his dissertation, as suggested in Chaker 2014, p. 104), the author described it as „*a better developed version of the research*“ of that thesis to me in an email from March 5, 2016.

103 Hagen 2011, pp. 181-182.

104 Hagen 2011, p. 180.

105 Hagen 2011, p. 182.

106 Hagen 2011, p. 182.

Metal according to Hagen is the utilization of synthesizers and keyboards by numerous Black Metal bands, occasionally with such prominence that the primacy of the guitar in the texture is challenged. The use of these instruments is allegedly “*ignored or maligned by artists in most other heavy metal genres.*” Hagen's limits this assertion by noting that “*some black metal bands, such as Darkthrone, resisted the introduction of keyboards and influences from outside the metal scene, preferring a simpler and rawer sound.*”¹⁰⁷ It is not immediately apparent what those influences from outside the Metal scene would be, but the use of keyboards not only has notable precedents in influential Death Metal releases that precede the genesis of Norwegian Black Metal proper.

When Florida Death Metal band Morbid Angel's first studio album *Altars of Madness* was released in 1989 it left a global imprint on the formerly undifferentiated Extreme Metal scene, as recounted by Roban Becirovic of *Close-Up Magazine* in Daniel Ekeröth's history of Swedish Death Metal:

Morbid Angel's *Altars of Madness* changed everything. Before that there was no clear distinction between death, speed, or thrash among regular metalheads. It was just brutal metal. But *Altars of Madness* opened people's eyes, and made us realize something new was going on. Everybody bought that record. Everybody. And thrash was executed by it – the whole genre just disappeared.”¹⁰⁸

The opening track “Immortal Rites”, starting at 1:39, introduces a string synthesizer doubling a new riff of the guitar at a higher octave, its sequenced falling semitone motive evoking horror movie kitsch. In the wake of American Death Metal breaking out of the underground with its first studio albums, the fledgling Swedish Death Metal scene called attention to itself with the release of Entombed's *Left Hand Path* in early 1990. It garnered international attention and disseminated the soon-to-be ubiquitous “Sunlight sound”, named after Sunlight studios in Stockholm and credited to producer Tomas Skogsberg and his use of the Boss Heavy Metal 2 (HM2) distortion pedal, yielding a sound that placed greater emphasis on the mids compared to the bass- and treble-focused Death Metal productions of Scott Burns at Florida's Morrisound studios.¹⁰⁹ Crucially, the eponymous opening track of *Left Hand Path* likewise features a breakdown of the texture at 3:49 where minor-key glockenspiel synthesizer arpeggios are eventually rejoined by the guitars

107 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

108 Ekeröth 2008, p. 140.

109 Ekeröth 2008, pp. 154-159.

and bass for the final round of solos and the eventual playout¹¹⁰ of the 6:39 track.

Darkthrone's first studio album *Soulside Journey* is commonly considered a Death Metal album of the then up-and-coming Swedish variety, with drummer Fenriz remarking that “*We were influenced by American bands, the key to our sound was that every riff on that album—except one, that’s like a Celtic Frost riff—you could take and play on a synthesizer, and it would be horror movie music [...]*”.¹¹¹ Conspicuously, synthesizers feature quite prominently on the album even beyond the more conventional introduction to the opening track “Cromlech”: A slow guitar section of the track of “Neptune Towers” starting at 1:55 is accompanied by a reiterated falling halftone motive with a synthetic organ timbre, whereas the slow riffs opening the track “Grave With a View” are doubled by a synthetic choir line from 0:19 onward. “Eon”, too, features a synthesized choir from 0:45 on. With all members of the band save the departing bassist agreeing that Death Metal was exhausted for them, Darkthrone scrapped the *Goatlord* material written as a follow-up to *Soulside Journey* or reworked it for what would be the first studio album from the Norwegian Black Metal scene, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*.¹¹²

However, the ten written songs of the *Goatlord* album were recorded on tape in a rehearsal session without vocals, to which drummer Fenriz added vocals – partially sung in falsetto, partially croaked – in 1994. This version was released by Moonfog Productions in 1996. The extra disc of the 2011 re-release by Peaceville Records features commentary by Fenriz and vocalist/guitarist Ted “Nocturno Culto” Skjellum over the tracks of the rehearsal tape. Fenriz names Florida Death Metal bands Nocturnus and Morbid Angel¹¹³ as some of the influences on the *Goatlord* material. Pertinently, Nocturnus also prominently features synthesizers harmonizing with their science-fiction-themed visual and lyrical presentation.

110 See Elflein 2010, p. 75 for the definition. „*Als Playout (Po) wird eine eine komplexe Äußerung abschließende Folge von zumindest teilweise neuen Riffs mit oder ohne Gesang bezeichnet.*“ (My translation: „As playout (Po) we describe a succession of at least partially new riffs with our without vocals that ends a complex utterance.“)

111 Patterson 2013, p. „*During the recording the band stayed with Swedish death metallers Entombed...*“

112 Patterson 2013, p. “*Definitely one major, major point was looking at my collection and [realizing] I had bought maybe five death metal releases from 1990,*” ...

113 Darkthrone (1996) *Goatlord*. [2011] Peaceville Records, CDVILED337X, disk 2, track 4, 0:25-1:15. „*Anyway, aah, I was talking about aaahh... inspirational sources, musically, for this album, must've been the, the usual suspects, with the additions of... Black Sabbath ... I mean they would of course have been Autopsy, Death ... ah, Morbid Angel, although we certainly never wanted to s ... have a ... if we had recorded this, it would have really organic sound, let's say more like Abominations of Desolation than Altars of Madness, that's for sure. There's some Nocturnus here, there's first Necrophagia... Necrophagia album ... perhaps even some early Paradise Lost.*“

Their debut studio album *The Key* was released before the recording sessions of *Soulside Journey* began, thus it is tempting to assume that Nocturnus numbered among the “American bands” that had inspired *Soulside Journey*'s use of synthesizers.

Contrary to Hagen's assertion that Darkthrone “resisted the introduction of keyboards”,¹¹⁴ the second track from 1991's *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, “In the Shadow of the Horns”, ends with the Metal ensemble being accompanied simultaneously by a choir synthesizer line and acoustic guitar. Fenriz considers “In the Shadow of the Horns” one of the three genuine Black Metal songs from the album:

“So we made three new black metal songs—‘Kathaarian Life Code,’ ‘In the Shadow of the Horns,’ and ‘Where Cold Winds Blow,’ and the rest would be Goatlord-ish material that was ‘blackened’ because of the studio sound we chose.”¹¹⁵

But with the more extensive synthesizer use of *Soulside Journey* in mind, the inclusion of the synthesizer on “Shadow of the Horns” should not be read as a moving away from Death Metal but rather as a vestigial remnant from Darkthrone's Death Metal beginnings, an atavism due to their particular point of departure that would be completely purged on their subsequent releases in favor of an “orthodox” Metal ensemble.

Thus, the use of synthesizers *sui generis* was not alien to influential Death Metal releases that the developing Black Metal scene was aware of. Rather the use of atmospheric, minimalist synthesizer parts, evocative in particular of horror movie soundtracks like those of John Carpenter, may be interpreted as part of Death Metal's break with the more stripped-down and “orthodox” sensibilities of the Thrash Metal that preceded it, the austerity of which was likened to that of Protestantism by Deena Weinstein.¹¹⁶ Though synthesizer flourishes were present in Death Metal's founding documents, this potential was subsequently neglected by most bands following in the wake of Morbid Angel's and Entombed's success, an omission that would open up a niche to be filled by Black Metal with ambient or symphonic allures. From this historical node we may refine our inquiry into Norwegian Black Metal, turning to the “how” rather than the “if” of synthesizer use by its bands.

114 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

115 Patterson 2013, p. 198.

116 Weinstein 2000, p. 49-50.

2.5.2. Mid-to-high-pitched screams

One of the most immediate identifying characteristics of Black Metal are the mid-to-high-pitched screams, as Hagen observes. While it is not unique to Black Metal – consider, for example, the screams on Swedish death metal releases such as Entombed's *Left Hand Path* or At the Gates' *The Red in the Sky is Ours* – the extremely low, guttural and most often indecipherable growls of Death Metal are almost not to be found in Black Metal.¹¹⁷ There currently exists no consensus on who established that vocal style, though as far as immediate influences go, most Black Metal bands would point to Bathory. When asked by Jon “Metalion” Kristiansen of the fanzine *Slayer Mag* if Venom's vocalist Conrad “Cronos” Thomas Lant had inspired him to sing the way he did, Tomas “Quorthon” Börje Forsberg, the sole constant member of Bathory, offered a peculiar explanation: “No, many people think that, but that's wrong. I used to sing quite normal at the start. Then I tried to sing through the guitar pick-up once and shit, that really did sound cool. So I picked up the whole thing. Growl and roar like a beast.”¹¹⁸ This anecdote provides a practical, hands-on illustration of the concomitant exploration of higher levels of guitar distortion and analogically or technically distorted vocals in extreme metal observed by Elflein.¹¹⁹

If Quorthon really discovered his vocal timbre through his guitar pickup, that discovery came full-circle with Varg Vikernes use of vocal distortion on *Filosofem*, recorded in March 1993. On prior Burzum albums, Vikernes had utilized a distinctive, high-pitched scream, hoarse and painful to hear. Even Metalion, a seasoned Extreme Metal fan, found it hard to stomach, remarking that “Count Grishnackh [Varg Vikernes] has a really special voice, very shrieky and high pitched which makes it different. But I must say, at the end of the record the voice have become slightly annoying, but nothing really dangerous.”¹²⁰ The “distortion” on the albums before *Filosofem* was a product of force and little regard for one's vocal chords, with a visceral, embodied intensity. *Filosofem*'s vocals, by contrast, are more spoken than screamed and distorted by technical means in the form of an overdriven headset microphone, as Vikernes recalls: “[...] when I recorded “*Filosofem*” - I asked for the worst microphone he had, and ended up using the microphone in a headset.”¹²¹

117 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

118 Kristiansen 2012, p. 68.

119 Elflein 2010, pp. 250-251 & pp. 287-288.

120 Kristiansen 2012, p. 230.

121 http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story06.shtml, accessed 6/20/2016.

2.5.3. Guitar playing, chord structures and distortion

Moving on to Black Metal's aesthetic of guitar playing, Hagen asserts that *“black metal makes relatively infrequent use of the 'power chord' consisting of a root note, its upper fifth, and an octave.”*¹²² Citing the research of Robert Walser, who considers the power chord to be one of the central techniques underpinning Heavy Metal in general, Hagen briefly explicates the acoustic properties of the distorted power chord: *“One of the cardinal attributes of the power chord is that it creates a relatively 'open' sound; its 'power' is derived from the subharmonic resonance and overtones acquired through distortion.”*¹²³ It is worth noting that the power chord as a technique of Heavy Metal should always be considered to be a distorted chord structure. By contrast, Black Metal guitarists frequently use *“full chord voicings, which produce a denser and less clearly resonant timbre when played through heavy distortion.”*¹²⁴ Producing a transcription of a riff from Norwegian Black Metal band Emperor's track “Ye Entrancemperium”, Hagen attributes to them *“a predilection for augmenting the fifth in a power chord to create a chaotic and directionless sound that also serves to highlight the contour of the guitar part when played in parallel motion.”*¹²⁵ I have to admit I am at a loss as to how a technique can create a chaotic, directionless sound at the same time as highlighting the melodic contour of an associated part through clearly directed, parallel motion.

The next aspect of Black Metal guitar playing described is *“[...] a technique known as 'tremolo picking' or 'buzz-picking', which refers to constant double-picking (striking the string with both up and down movements of the pick) at extremely fast tempos.”*¹²⁶ Hagen contends that this technique in many instances precludes the ability to play more than one string at a time, which is a practical explanation he cites for the relative rarity of power chords and a tendency to build chordal structures from arpeggios or parts divided between the instruments instead. Yet this immediately reveals a considerable problem with his Emperor transcription: Hagen collapses the guitars into a single system, giving no indication of how the parts are divided. Considering that given the high level of distortion, parallel minor sixths played by divided guitars, with one playing the upper, the other the

122 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

123 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

124 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

125 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

126 Hagen 2011, p. 184.

power pitch, would sound considerably more transparent than the same intervals played as simultaneously resonating strings on each guitar.

Hagen's second transcription is a riff (or three related riffs, depending on how you hear it) from the Darkthrone track "Natassja in Eternal Sleep", cited with the dual purpose of serving as an example of an arpeggio-based riff and one lacking significant harmonic direction, much like the previously cited Emperor riff.¹²⁷ The pedal point of the bass in the Darkthrone riff makes for a smooth transition to the echoes of Scandinavian traditional music, in the form of modal melody and extended drones. Hagen then briefly touches on techniques in other varieties of Extreme Metal that have been interpreted to obscure tonality in existing studies, such as Harris M. Berger's investigation of parallel harmonies used by the band Sin-Eater. However, Hagen makes a detour, asserting that Black Metal frequently provokes a stronger sense of tonal center by virtue of its harmonic changes being slower and less complex than those found in Death or Thrash metal, in particular in sections utilizing drones or meant to evoke the majestic.¹²⁸

Hagen's observations provide ample points of departure for this thesis, as they should be tested in engaging Black Metal's central points of reference in the stream of tradition. Are power chords indeed less frequent in Black Metal and can this be attributed to the prevalence of tremolo-picking? What chord structures other than power chords are used and how are they distributed in the ensemble play? What ramifications does distortion have for these techniques? If these traits are indeed distinguishing marks of Black Metal that set it apart from other styles of (Extreme) Metal, where did they originate? Do they appear in earlier bands such as Venom, Hellhammer and Bathory, or are they a unique feature of Norwegian Black Metal proper, are they perhaps its claim to musical distinction?

2.5.4. Rhythm and production

Using the now-established slow pace of harmonic change as a bridge, Hagen makes the transition to the next focus of his Black Metal taxonomy, its treatment of rhythm. Whereas most styles of Heavy Metal exhibit "*propulsive rhythmic drive, intended to encourage moshing and headbanging*",¹²⁹ Black Metal shuns such devices in favor of "*a swirling and*

¹²⁷ Hagen 2011, pp. 184-185.

¹²⁸ Hagen 2011, p. 185.

¹²⁹ Hagen 2011, p. 186.

indistinct atmosphere,¹³⁰ in part due to its peculiar production aesthetic. Hagen now introduces another central device of Black Metal, the “blast beat”,¹³¹ essentially a tremendously sped-up version of the familiar Rock back-beat pattern resembling the sound of machine gun fire that demands considerable stamina from the Black Metal drummer.¹³² This extreme subdivision of the music's pulse is, writes Hagen, usually confronted with musical material from the rest of the ensemble that moves hypermetrically in relation to it, effecting that “*the drummer no longer provides a primary source of rhythmic propulsion and metric structure.*”¹³³ Hagen contrasts this with a tendency among Death Metal and grindcore drummers to “*use the blast beat to accompany fast riffs and create a pummeling sense of rhythmic drive.*”¹³⁴

This brings to mind what Elflein has termed “parallel ensemble play” (“*paralleles Ensemblespiel*”),¹³⁵ a technique where, for example, the pulse units making up the rhythm of a guitar riff are reproduced by the drummer, yielding a more tightly-knit accompaniment compared to the continuous back-beat background common in Rock and emphasizing the primacy of the guitar riff for Heavy Metal's musical language. Citing a Black Metal fan, Hagen contrasts such immediate interaction with the Black Metal approach: “*blast beats add to the atmosphere in that they become a sort of pulsating, throbbing sound rather than a truly percussive sound that serves as accentuations upon rhythm.*”¹³⁶ This diagnosed lack of rhythmic momentum is, continues Hagen, further bolstered by the technique of tremolo-picking in combination with Black Metal guitarists largely avoiding palm muting, where the picking hand mutes the strings to produce, together with ample distortion, the chunky, percussive sounds associated with Thrash and Death Metal. Hagen also notes tremolo-picking's microtonal effects, where due to the wide vibration of the string the pitches produced have a tendency to be slightly sharp of concert pitch. Finally and more hermeneutically, Hagen singles out Black Metal's technique as emphasizing rhythmic endurance and stamina over sheer technical dexterity.¹³⁷ Given that Fenriz of Darkthrone is

130 Hagen 2011, p. 186.

131 Also see Elflein 2010, pp. 280-285.

132 Hagen 2011, p. 186.

133 Hagen 2011, p. 186.

134 Hagen 2011, p. 186.

135 Elflein 2010, pp. 114-118 & pp. 282-287.

136 Hagen 2011, p. 186.

137 Hagen 2011, p. 187.

not merely a drummer but “*a self-styled historian and mouthpiece for the Norwegian scene*”,¹³⁸ we might expect ample commentary on the differences between Death and Black Metal drumming to be examined in the analytical chapters of this thesis.

The remainder of the section dedicated to the musical characteristics of Norwegian Black Metal is concerned with the low-fi production interacting with the techniques laid out by Hagen.¹³⁹ The central point, that what is considered aesthetically desirable and thus “heavy” has acquired a different meaning in Norwegian Black Metal, has already been raised in the treatment of Reyes' article¹⁴⁰ and will thus be skipped here, though we should keep the interaction of guitar and drum technique, distortion and recording aesthetic in mind when engaging the central releases of Black Metal's stream of tradition.

2.5.5. Further descriptions in other sources

William Phillips and Brian Cogan¹⁴¹ characterize Black Metal as “*a subgenre of heavy metal that involves thrash style musicianship and lyrical invocations of the occult, Satanism, allegiance to the old religions of Norway, or sometimes associations with white power and Aryan pride movements*”. Venom is regarded as the originator of the genre, being “*the first to play in a style that is today considered to be the authentic black metal musical and lyrical standard*”, as well as establishing the low-fi recording aesthetic. There is no suggestion of the Black Metal aesthetic being developed further after Venom, Bathory and Burzum are briefly mentioned to have recorded “*in their [Venom's] style as well*”.

The majority of the entry is devoted to the crimes committed in the advent of the Norwegian scene. The entry on Venom reinforces the view that after their early records, no significant development took place: “*By the time of the second record, Black Metal, the overall sound of black metal had been set.*”¹⁴² The obvious limitations of the encyclopedia format notwithstanding, the absence of the normative vocal styles is conspicuous, as it is quite ubiquitous in other brief characterizations of Black Metal's technique and instrumentation.

138 Reyes 2013, p. 247.

139 Hagen 2011, pp. 187-188.

140 Reyes 2013, p. 242.

141 Phillips & Cogan 2009, p. 34.

142 Phillips & Cogan 2009, p. 255.

By contrast, a preference for high-pitched shrieks is noted in the Wikipedia article.¹⁴³ The article characterizes the guitar tone as as high-pitched, treble-accentuated and strongly distorted, typically played using non-muted tremolo picking. The bass and guitar playing is described as “*primitive and non-melodic*” and employing dissonances, in particular the tritone, in order “*to create a sense of dread*”. Solos and low guitar tunings are considered rare, whereas the description of the drumming emphasizes the stamina required to maintain techniques such as the blast beat, albeit contrasted with a quote by drummer Fenriz of Darkthrone that extols the virtues of simple and primitive playing. Song structures are alleged to frequently stray from conventional, verse-chorus patterns and to include lengthy, repetitive instrumental sections.

While the Wikipedia article mostly separates matters of the genre's history such as the fate of certain bands from the taxonomy of sound, it does note that “*they [the Norwegian black metal scene] developed the style of their 1980s forebears into a distinct genre.*”¹⁴⁴ This crystallization of the musical style is credited partly to guitar technique developed to Øystein “Euronymous” Aarseth of Mayhem and Snorre “Blackthorn” Ruch of Stigma Diabolicum/Thorns.¹⁴⁵ The Wikipedia article cites Bill Deub's 2007 feature film *Black Metal: A Documentary* and a 2005 *Guardian* article by Chris Campion. Describing Black Metal's technique, Campion writes: “*Its chief characteristic is a chilling vibrato guitar style developed by Mayhem's Euronymous and Snorre Ruch that provides an oddly harmonious counterpoint to the stark brutality of the rhythm section.*”¹⁴⁶ This attempt to grasp Black Metal's ensemble echoes that of Hagen, as “*the stark brutality of the rhythm section*” most likely refers to a continuous assault of blast beats by the drums above all, though defining the rhythm section in Extreme Metal is trickier than in other Rock music, as the bass is often inaudible and the guitar riffs frequently supply the most important rhythmic impulses – particularly in Black Metal, as Hagen observed. The “*oddly harmonious counterpoint*” of the “*vibrato guitar style*” presumably refers to tremolo-picking, though the use of “harmonious” is conspicuous and likely signifies something that is unusual that stands out against the norm.

143 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_metal, accessed 4/28/2016.

144 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_metal, accessed 4/28/2016.

145 The Wikipedia article cites Bill Deub's 2007 feature film *Black Metal: A Documentary* and a 2005 *Guardian* article by Chris Campion (<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/feb/20/popandrock4>).

146 <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/feb/20/popandrock4>, accessed 4/28/2016.

3. Literature summary, research questions and methodology

3.1. Literature summary

Chaker's historical sketch of Black Metal's history introduces the conceptual framework one will encounter in most accounts of it, starting with *Lords of Chaos*: A telling in three waves, with the first wave constituting its pre-history, the second Norwegian wave self-consciously claiming the „Black Metal“ label for itself and codifying the aesthetic and the third, global wave following in the footsteps of the Norwegians.¹⁴⁷ Reyes emphasizes that the second wave – in what he terms the „Black Turn“ – defined itself against the aesthetic of Death Metal by reevaluating and appropriating sounds of what now constituted the first wave, if only in hindsight. Yet Reyes overriding focus on production and the technical fidelity of the performances threatens to blur any distinction of Death and Black Metal beyond these parameters.¹⁴⁸ We might, therefore, probe the documents from the scene for instances where Death Metal is recognized as such in spite of unpolished production values.

While Reyes calls for telling Black Metal's history in terms of its sound, as opposed to the infamous deeds of the Norwegian scene,¹⁴⁹ his reevaluation of heaviness focused on production aesthetics alone cannot account for the empirical fact that when asked to name prototypical Black Metal bands, fans of the music give primacy to the Norwegian pioneers over the first wave.¹⁵⁰ But this does not mean we should reject a „music-based“ telling of Black Metal's history outright, especially when Chaker's sociological data emphatically supports the view that the scene is music-based to a point where significant homology exists between practices in the scene and what can be heard in the music.¹⁵¹

Instead, I believe we ought to embrace and investigate the tension between the Norwegian scene's avowed return to past values and the fact that it was able to coin a musical aesthetic that, while located in the larger tradition of Heavy Metal, was distinctive enough to act as a regulative canon for a music-based scene continuing to this day. While Reyes chastises existing approaches to the history of Black Metal and the „Black Turn“ for failing to

147 Chaker 2014, p. 142.

148 Reyes 2013, p. 247.

149 Reyes 2013, pp. 240-241.

150 Chaker 2014, p. 335.

151 Chaker 2014, pp. 422-423.

appreciate it as a global phenomenon, he himself only quotes musicians from the Norwegian scene. To me, there seems to be no way around acknowledging the aesthetic and historical primacy of the Norwegian scene. If we cannot regard the genesis of Black Metal as a global phenomenon then, perhaps we might approach it as a local reaction against the globalization of the emphatically „American“ Death Metal evoked by Reyes.¹⁵² Clearly, the perception of Death Metal in the Norwegian scene should be investigated for the charges described by Reyes: Political lyrics of little appeal to non-Americans and a „baroque“ focus on virtuosity and high-end production. Chaker raises the importance of the Swedish Death Metal scene,¹⁵³ pointing at local rivalry that is not raised by Reyes.

Problematically, the link between being signed to a label and having access to high-end production is not raised in Reyes' article. This, as well as the institutional shifts described by Kahn-Harris,¹⁵⁴ calls into question Reyes' theory about Death Metal becoming over-represented in the tape trading network prior to the „Black Turn“.¹⁵⁵ The ramifications of such unequal access to resources should not be underestimated in their impact on the Norwegian scene's opposition to Death Metal, in particular since the threat of conforming to a „trend“ is intimately related to perceived assimilation into the mainstream and its channels of distribution. Furthermore, Kahn-Harris raises possible nostalgia for the letter and tape trading network that was superseded in the early 1990s, an environment where bands spent considerable time cultivating their underground renown and contacts prior to releasing their first album. These refinements notwithstanding, I believe that the history of Black Metal cannot be told without what it reacted against. Likewise, in attempting to describe the musical characteristics of Black Metal, its deviations from prevailing norms of Extreme Metal in general and Death Metal in particular may illuminate its claim to distinction better than merely listing its characteristics.

This brings us to the questions raised by Hagen's article. Having established that synthesizers have been used in foundational Death Metal releases as well, we might instead ask how synthesizers are employed in Black Metal and if such use points to influences from outside of Heavy Metal's immediate stream of tradition. Hagen's claim that power

¹⁵² Reyes 2013, p. 242.

¹⁵³ Chaker 2014, p. 142.

¹⁵⁴ Kahn-Harris 2007, pp. 82-83.

¹⁵⁵ Reyes 2013, p. 252.

chords are relatively less frequent in Black Metal should be tested in analysis, as should the related claim that this relative scarcity of power chords is a result of the widespread use of tremolo-picking. This scarcity of power chords is opposed to a propensity for „*full chord voicings*“ by Hagen, though he does not elaborate on the nature of these chords.¹⁵⁶ Hence we investigate what chordal structures are used and how they are distributed in the ensemble play. The considerable impact high levels of distortion have on the audible properties of chords is not elaborated on by Hagen, though he does note that chords are frequently built from arpeggios or divided parts. The other traits named by Hagen and others, such as low-fidelity production, a disavowal of technical dexterity, mid-to-high-pitched screams, high levels of distortion and the „ambient“ role of drumming in the ensemble play, should also be tested in the analyses. Additionally, the question of form in Norwegian Black Metal seems to warrant greater attention, especially in the light of Elflein's sophisticated attempt to describe the musical language of Heavy Metal present in its stream of tradition.¹⁵⁷

3.2. Research questions

The overarching research questions deducted from this critical digest of literature on Black Metal's history and sound can be posed in the following terms: **First, how did the Norwegian Black Metal scene position itself in relation to Death Metal in its statements?** On what grounds was it rejected? While their conception of Black Metal is not identical to the conception of Black Metal in the current scene, the latter clearly is the offspring of this initial demarcation. **Secondly, can statements from the Norwegian scene guide a grounded analysis of its music that clarifies its relative musical autonomy from other Extreme Metal in general and the Death Metal it reacted against in particular?** Is the music of the Norwegian scene in the early 1990 satisfyingly explicable in the terms of the earlier music of Bathory, Hellhammer and Venom it claimed to be returning to? If there are idiomatic techniques associated with Norwegian Black Metal, from where and when did they originate? How does the musical style of Norwegian Black Metal relate to Heavy Metal's larger stream of tradition as analyzed by Elflein?

¹⁵⁶ Hagen 2011, pp. 183-188.

¹⁵⁷ Elflein 2010, pp. 15-38.

3.3. Documents and recordings considered

Taking the primacy given to the Norwegian scene by Black Metal followers as its point of departure, this study will investigate exemplars of the “first wave” bands named as progenitors of the style by the Norwegian scene, as well as records from the Norwegian “second wave” that demonstrate influences from and innovations over those of the “first wave”. The selection is guided by my comprehensive reading of documents from the Norwegian scene and admittedly subjective, other records could have been chosen – yet I believe that settling for Mayhem and Thorns at the turn of the 1990s is well-grounded in the historical observations originating in the scene, primarily with Fenriz of Darkthrone. Likewise, my focus on the Venom tracks covered by Mayhem serves to illustrate the intervening conventions of the German Thrash Metal acknowledged by the Norwegian scene on top of providing a snapshot of Mayhem's earliest musical efforts. In approaching the musical style of Norwegian Black Metal from a historical perspective, this study attempts to capture how these musicians self-consciously related to the stream of tradition, by adopting specific bands and techniques while rejecting other in the wake of Death Metal's increasing success and institutionalization.

These techniques are contextualized with representative documents from the Norwegian scene that clarify how these musicians perceived and related to Death Metal. Much of the Material comes from the 2011 commented facsimile edition of *Slayer Mag*, a fanzine edited by Jon “Metalion” Kristiansen, a participant in the Norwegian scene. In his contribution to *Methoden der Heavy Metal Forschung*, Dominik Irtenkauf calls for a critical examination of narratives in Metal's historiography, pointing out that *The Slayer Mag Diaries* should be investigated in this regard.¹⁵⁸ While this study cannot hope to accomplish that, it should be pointed out that a telling of Black Metal's history seems to have prevailed that seems to have originated with an unsavory person, Kristian “Varg” Vikernes of Burzum, convicted murderer of his Mayhem bandmate Euronymous, church arsonist and an unabashed racist. He proclaims, with self-admitted “*Scandinavian arrogance*”: *Together with IMMORTAL and DARKTHRONE, BURZUM changed the Norse scene completely. [...] This trinity is the fundament of true Norwegian Black Metal. MAYHEM is unessential as they did nothing, no releases, no rehearsing [...]*¹⁵⁹ This

¹⁵⁸ Irtenkauf 2014, p. 47ff.

¹⁵⁹ Kristiansen 2011, p. 293.

“trinity” corresponds to the bands now considered most representative of the genre.

As evidenced by today's scene, Black Metal's tale of its own necessity in the wake of decadent Death Metal turned out to be a viable foundation for more than two decades of music and socializing centered around it. My historical and analytical inquiry is intended to shed light on the initial promulgation of what would become the sound of Norwegian Black Metal, in particular those aspects of it hitherto somewhat neglected by existing research. It is also meant to be a modest antidote to the victor's tale told by Vikernes – to call attention to the influence of Mayhem's Euronymous and Thorns' Snorre Ruch in developing the techniques Burzum, Immortal and Darkthrone adopted and, admittedly, expanded on.

3.4. On transcription and Elflein's formal analysis

The transcriptions are meant to be representations of what is heard and not intended as playing instructions, some of them are adapted and corrected from existing fan transcriptions, some are my own. The origins are always acknowledged in footnotes. Yet the particular aesthetic of Black Metal poses unique challenges that render transcription more precarious than in other styles of popular music. The combination of low-fidelity production and idiomatic guitar techniques often make it hard to discern exactly what is happening in the music – indeed, this opaqueness is part of the appeal and desired aesthetically. By captivating these shadowed, hazy sounds into the sharp-edged black-and-white of standard notation one invariably deprives them of these appealing ambiguities. Written words meant to capture the overall effect of the texture are a poor substitute for the actual sound, hence the reader is urged to listen to the original recordings together with the analyses wherever possible. Often, decisions for or against a particular transcription are informed by trying out various options on an actual guitar to see what is viable in terms of performance, generally guided by an “Occam's razor” approach that favors the least taxing way to play something.

For the most part, my analytical concerns are informed by Dietmar Elflein's methodology in *Schwermetallanalysen: Die musikalische Sprache des Heavy Metal*. Yet my object of inquiry, Norwegian Black Metal, is not deducted from the kind of meta-list of the most important bands in the “stream of tradition”,¹⁶⁰ conceived as a repository of historically

160 A concept Elflein adopted from memory research, see Elflein 2010, p. 15ff.

available conventions, but rather from Chaker's sociological data on the current Black Metal scene and the historical documents surrounding the Norwegian scene that produced the music considered to be “most representative” of the genre by current followers of the scene. While the riff remains the central concern of analysis, the focus is shifted to specific techniques highlighted in interviews and statements from the scene as being emblematic of Norwegian Black Metal.

The formal analysis employed follows Elflein's method closely in order to permit comparison with his results. Its central unit is the guitar riff as delineated by its regular repetition, a means of segmenting the music that is reasonably close to how Black Metal musicians conceive of their music, as will emerge from the cited documents. A central assumption is that Black Metal, as a style of Heavy Metal and popular music in general, is formally hybrid. As such, larger repeated sections such as verse-chorus pairs may hierarchically structure smaller repeated units like the riff.¹⁶¹ The musical pieces are designated as “tracks” rather than “songs”, as the term “song” implies a primacy of the voice that should not be presupposed rashly in this particular genre. This has repercussions for Elflein's means of structuring successions of riffs into formal functions of verse-chorus forms, discussed below. As in Elflein's book, two hypotheses guide the segmentation of the succession of riffs into larger units: 1) A structure is considered to continue until one of its component parts is taken up again and 2) the beginning of new formal sections is marked by the end of a repeating structure of smaller musical elements (such as the riff).¹⁶²

Since riffs do not have predefined lengths, their lengths will be given in the number of pulses. Riffs are designated by lowercase Latin letters, whereas breaks that suspend the regular pulse are designated as “Br”. Identical repetitions of a riff are designated by a number preceding the letters, i.e. “3ab” would designate three repetitions of “a” followed by “b” played one time. Identical repetitions of riff groups are designated by numbers in front of brackets, i.e. 3(ab) designates the succession “ababab”. Variants of existing riffs are designated with superscript letters, with the distinction between new riffs and variants containing a subjective moment in some cases. In a second step, the riffs are grouped into larger units designated by uppercase letters, corresponding to rough sections such as introduction (I), main or ending sections. In a third step, an analysis in terms of verse-

161 Elflein 2010, p. 74.

162 Elflein 2010, p. 74.

chorus form may be tried. Verse (V) and chorus (C) are distinguished by the text of the vocals: When the text changes over retained riffs, a verse is assumed, when the riffs and the text is retained, a chorus is assumed. If both the riffs and the text change, either a pre-chorus (p) or a bridge (B) is assumed, with the pre-chorus appearing between verse and chorus and the bridge appearing after a chorus, leading into either a verse-chorus unit or just a chorus. Instrumental parts are either designated intro (I) when they precede the vocals or interludes (In) when they stand between parts with vocals. playouts (Po) may be instrumental or include vocals, they are defined by the appearance of new riffs at the end of a track. Due to the strong emphasis on instrumental parts and the unintelligible nature of many Black Metal vocals, this method may not be applicable to all music surveyed and require adoptions – such as designating an instrumental riff a chorus.¹⁶³

In lieu of colors as in Elflein's book, larger formal sections are divided by the slash symbol “/” on the level of analysis in riffs. Tables containing formal analyses include, generally, the pulse-length of the riffs (if variants of a riff do not deviate in length, they are not included separately), followed by analyses on the level of the riffs, generic larger sections and finally possible verse-chorus sections. In the transcriptions, tabulature notation will be included to clarify the motions characterizing particular techniques. Since there exists no universal convention for transcribing drums, the convention of the software Guitar Pro 6, which can be looked up easily online, will be used where drums are included in the transcription. Fingerings on the fretboard will be designated in the text as numbers corresponding to fretboards, starting from the lowest string, i.e. 0-2-2-0-0-0. Muted/silent strings are designated by an “x”.

163 Elflein 2010, pp. 74-75.

4. Documents: Black Metal's case against Death Metal

This chapter will explore how the Norwegian Black Metal scene positioned itself against its chosen adversary of “trendy” Death Metal by examining documents from central actors of the scene, both contemporary with the genesis of self-conscious Black Metal and retrospective accounts of what defined that particular moment. The selection of derisive remarks concerning Death Metal is admittedly subjective, but I believe it to be quite representative as there seems to have been a viable consensus shared throughout the scene grouped around Mayhem and the Helvete record store. Explicit commentary on musical attributes to be rejected and embraced is more rare, therefore the issue of ignoring redundant repetitions of sentiments is not as much of an issue.

In the first Mayhem interview published in the spring 1991 issue of *Slayer Mag*, Euronymous goes on a tirade against the Death Metal of his day:

“[...] creativity disappeared in the middle of the '80s. I think 95% of the bands today are worthless shit, there are just a very few who manage to capture the brutality and EVIL which the ancient bands like SODOM, DESTRUCTION, BATHORY, POSSESSED, VENOM, HELLHAMMER/CELTIC FROST and so on had. It's very important that the music is filled with dark moods and that the music SMELLS of destruction, but no bands manage to do that. [...] But instead they suddenly occur in the scene and rip off another band like ND [Napalm Death], which has made something original. Take a band like DEICIDE. They play so incredible standard, their music is really meant for all the idiot children who started to listen to MORBID ANGEL last year, before that they were only listening to METALLICA after “Master of Puppets”. The last NAPALM DEATH lp is also a part of this extremely boring mainstream which people dare to call Death Metal, I just can't stand this music at all. Standard music for standard people. [...] I don't want to see MAYHEM records in supermarkets in USA like you can do with ND and MORBID ANGEL.”¹⁶⁴

The rant continues, as Euronymous bemoans that while “*back in the day*” it was highly frowned upon to play in a band like Mayhem, whereas nowadays death metal bands were playing shows for their parents and the “*idiot children*” are able to buy death metal albums in supermarkets: “*Death Metal should not be played on MTV or be on TOP 10, because that is killing the scene.*”¹⁶⁵ There are two chief antagonists against which Euronymous constructs his “*underground*”: Adolescence (the “*idiot children*”) and the “*boring mainstream*”. Smialek's dissertation devotes an entire chapter to adolescence as the Other against which later Extreme Metal defined itself, but statements such as this suggest that such Othering was practiced long before the advent of Nu Metal and Metalcore.¹⁶⁶

164 Kristiansen 2011, p. 210.

165 Kristiansen 2011, p. 210.

166 Smialek 2015, p. 65.

The manner of distribution appears particularly important to Euronymous, as he explicitly mentions that he still pays attention to demos and tapes, i.e. material that is not commercially sold, whereas the material he rails against is invariably identified with releases produced by large labels and commercially distributed. For an argument like that of Reyes, which postulates that the “Black Turn” was the consequence of a reinterpretation of a buried segment of Heavy Metal's stream of tradition against the dominant Death Metal aesthetic, the availability of the material in question is of the utmost importance. But Reyes' argument also hinges on the “Black Turn” being a counter-hegemonic motion,¹⁶⁷ which makes the omission of the power relations implied by having your records produced and distributed by a large label versus self-produced records distributed via tape trading all the more egregious.

4.1. The first charge: Lyrics and image

While influential Florida death metal band Death switched over to socially conscious lyrical topics on their 1990 album *Spiritual Healing* (and the following ones), the main trailblazer for political lyrics set to the sounds of Death Metal was the British (albeit temporarily US-based) band Napalm Death. 1990's *Harmony Corruption* marks their first full-length release after their migration from the frantic, Hardcore-influenced Grindcore style of their previous releases to a technically tighter, “heavier” Death Metal sound that crucially retained the political lyrics.

Being Napalm Death's first release to receive widespread distribution, it also happens to be the album Euronymous singles out for abuse in the quoted Slayer Mag interview. In the same issue, Slayer Mag's editor Metalion praises the record highly in his introduction to an interview with Napalm Death – on the page just before the Mayhem interview.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, Napalm Death's 1988 Scandinavian tour left a tremendous impression on the nascent Swedish Death Metal scene, vividly recounted in Daniel Ekeröth's *Swedish Death Metal*,¹⁶⁹ an event that is likely to have made an impression on the young Norwegian metalheads that would soon rise up against Death Metal with Euronymous at the helm. Yet in spite of such documented local impact, Napalm Death is never discussed as a “foreign” band – even when political lyrics are brought up. Rather it seems to have been the subject

¹⁶⁷ Reyes 2013, p. 244.

¹⁶⁸ Kristiansen 2011, p. 208.

¹⁶⁹ Ekeröth 2008, p. 140ff.

matter of politics in death metal *per se* that did not sit well with the likes of Euronymous:

[Metalion:] Since you (Euronymous) have a certain political view, would you ever to consider to write about that in some lyrics?

[Euronymous:] (D.) - “No, that will never happen. Even though I'm active in the most extreme communist party here (Albania inspirations), I leave to the Punks to write about that in the the lyrics. Nowadays tons of bands are writing “social awareness lyrics, and they still dare to call it Death Metal. BULLSHIT! I play in a Death Metal band, or maybe you should call it Black Metal, and the most important thing then is Death! Bands who claim to play Death Metal and are not into Death itself, are fakes, and can start to play Punk instead. It's a big trend today to look totally normal with these goddamn jogging suits and sing about “important matters”, and call it Death Metal. These people can die, they have betrayed the scene. Death Metal is for brutal people who are capable of killing, it's not for idiotic children who want to have a funny hobby after school. I'll write more about this later. I'll just end up saying that even if I'm personally very much into studying the great works of Mao, Stalin and so on, I think the band is much more important, and Death and Black Metal is my life.”¹⁷⁰

Once more it is apparent that the subject matter of death is held high as a necessity to avoid the threat of assimilation of the subculture and its music into the dreaded monolithic mainstream. Likewise, visual assimilation is frowned upon and linked with the heterodox shift towards “socially conscious” lyrics. Euronymous is not the only member of the Norwegian scene to espouse such views. In another interview published in *Slayer Mag*, vocalist Dead explains the purpose of transgressive stage shows: “*If someone doesn't like blood and rotten flesh thrown in their face they can FUCK OFF, and that's exactly what they do. We are trying to turn the scene back what it once was, when no Death Metallers were wearing Adidas shit and looked totally normal.*”¹⁷¹

The association of Death Metal and a particular style of clothing seems to have had considerable currency in the Norwegian scene, as it likewise features in Euronymous lambasting a trend of “Life Metal” (Euronymous term of abuse for Death Metal with “socially conscious” lyrics) in a 1992 interview with the fanzine *Close Up*, which also includes various death threats against perceived threats to the true scene.¹⁷² That outward appearance and a rejection of comfortable casual wear should be so emphatically shunned suggests, like so much else about the Norwegian scene, high value being placed on overlap between everyday life and art. Chaker's research suggests, as mentioned before, that this is a tendency that persists to this day in the Black Metal scene,¹⁷³ likely inspired by the myth

170 Kristiansen 2011, p. 209.

171 Kristiansen 2011, p. 290.

172 http://true.mayhem.free.fr/interviews/interview_6.htm, accessed 30/7/2016.

173 Chaker 2014, p. 424.

of the Norwegian scene fueled by interviews such as these as well as the cataclysm that eventually tore apart the “Black Circle”.

Euronymous touting the importance of the adequately death-themed Thrash Metal bands of the earlier 1980s, Sodom, Destruction, Bathory, Possessed, Venom and Hellhammer/Celtic Frost, against Metallica is telling in how it suggests that the transition from *Master of Puppets* to the Death Metal derided by Euronymous would be all too easy. This is particularly significant since with the exception of Slayer, the most successful Thrash Metal bands from the US all featured lyrics dealing with pathologies of society, the kind of „politics“ Euronymous wanted to expunge. This animosity towards such lyrics seems impossible to separate from the mainstream success of the Thrash Metal bands and Death Metal that was too close to the themes, looks and most likely also sounds of those bands. The abject promise of the death- and Satanic-themed Thrash Metal must have seemed unfulfilled to Euronymous in the light of the most successful Death Metal outfits such as Death or Napalm Death receiving record deals and wider distribution with lyrical topics familiar from the Thrash Metal that preceded them.

4.1.1. The “religious” definition of Black Metal

As has been noted before, prior to the appropriation by Euronymous and the Norwegian scene, Black Metal was a looser term that was liberally applied to any kind of Extreme Metal with Satanic themes. In the chapter of his dissertation dedicated to Metal genre taxonomies, Smialek quotes Glen Benton of Deicide recalling the original use of the label:

“I listened to everybody in the 80s, man. Black Sabbath, Venom, Sodom, Destruction, Possessed. There was no such thing as death metal when we were listening to this shit, it was just metal. It was either black metal or it was metal. And what was black metal back then is considered to be death metal now: anything that dealt with Satanism we called black metal, like Venom.”¹⁷⁴

Euronymous' self-conscious appropriation of the label in the wake of Death Metal gaining increased institutional foothold was likewise concerned with the topical content of the music, which constituted a means of selectively approaching existing Extreme Metal, much of what is nowadays considered Thrash Metal, and claiming allegiance to it. What was new in this revival was a level of seriousness and commitment that even the Norwegian scene knew had never existed. Infamously in the *Kerrang!* interview that first

174 Smialek 2015, p. 29.

drew international attention to the Norwegian scene, Euronymous and Varg Vikernes proclaimed that they knew that Venom were not committed to Satanism, but they “*chose to believe otherwise.*”¹⁷⁵

From this embrace of theological commitment Euronymous derived his understanding of “true” Black and Death Metal: Black Metal was defined by worship of Satan (and not individualist philosophy such as LaVey's Satanism), whereas Death Metal was defined by similar worship of death: *If a band cultivates and worships death, then it's death metal, no matter what KIND of metal it is. If a band cultivates and worships Satan, it's black metal. And by saying 'cultivating death' I don't think about thinking it's funny, or being into gore. I'm thinking about being able to KILL just because they HATE LIFE. It's people who enjoy to see wars because a lot of people get killed. How many bands think that way?*”¹⁷⁶ This particular definition, overriding all musical distinctions made it possible for Euronymous to claim that “*there exist no death metal bands today*”,¹⁷⁷ even though they might be making good music. Likewise, for Euronymous, Immortal were not a proper Black Metal bands because they were not committed to Satanism, whereas “*those who have cared to read the lyrics of Darkthrone's Soulside Journey will know that they are the same Satanic lyrics, which means that Soulside Journey IS a black metal album.*”¹⁷⁸

This “religious” definition of Black Metal remained in currency even after Euronymous' murder, with Emperor's Bård "Faust" Eithun essentially echoing his attitude in a 1995 interview in *Slayer Mag*:

“Some people misunderstand Black Metal and think it is the music which decides whether it is Black Metal or not. They believe it is Black Metal as long as the guitars are non down tuned, the vocals are screamy and the production is bad. [...] Bands like BLASPHEMY, DEATH SS, MAYHEM, MERCIFUL FATE, are all Black Metal bands, and musically they are different as day night and day (well, almost at least). And yes, it is wrong to call bands who follow the path of Anton LaVey for Black Metal. [...] This has absolutely nothing to do with the classical and original sort of Satanism (whom the Christians presented). Satanism is a religion on the same level as Christianity and LaVey says that his philosophy is anti religion and he also says you have to be an atheist to be a Satanist.”¹⁷⁹

While this definition of Black Metal seems to have been shared by the core Norwegian

175 Patterson 2013, p. 150.

176 Patterson 2013, p. 151.

177 Patterson 2013, p. 151.

178 Patterson 2013, p. 151.

179 Kristiansen 2011, p. 275.

scene it clearly is not the understanding of Black Metal that has the most currency among today's fans of the music, otherwise many of the bands considered most representative of Black Metal, such as Immortal, would have to be rejected on ideological grounds. Benjamin Hedge Olson has admirably investigated the implications of such fundamentalist religious opposition to the mundanity of modernity in his master's thesis,¹⁸⁰ hence here only fundamentals necessary to understand the opposition to Death Metal are expounded.

Yet in spite of the importance afforded to unity of life and art by the Norwegian scene, it would be rash to reduce their quarrels with Death Metal to an insufficient commitment to death or Satanism, as the other Death Metal band he singles out for abuse is Florida Death Metal band Deicide,¹⁸¹ known for their theological Satanic and anti-Christian subject matter, as well as a brand of transgressive stage theatrics to rival that established by the Norwegian Black Metal scene.¹⁸² Significantly, the early 1991 diatribe against Deicide precedes the infamous late 1992 show in Stockholm that left many in the audience direly disillusioned for a number of reasons, one of them being a bomb attack which fortunately only resulted in damage to property.¹⁸³

4.2. The second charge: Sound

Euronymous' particular charge against Deicide is that *"they play so incredible [sic] standard"*, breaching his postulate that *"it's very important that the music is filled with dark moods and that the music SMELLS of destruction"*.¹⁸⁴ Euronymous appears afraid

180 Hedge Olson 2008, p. 26ff. However, interpreting the lyrics of "I Am the Black Wizards" as "Satanic" is a possibility raised by later positions of Emperor. Their lyrics were written by Håvard „Mortiis" Ellefsen and deal with a fantasy saga he has created for himself and the musical projects he was involved in. Faust comments on the lyrics of the track: *"The lyrics is written by Mortiis anno 92 and belongs to the saga of Mortiis. All lyrics written after the departure of Mortiis [i.e. properly "Satanic" lyrics] has nothing to do with this concept."* in Kristiansen 2011, p. 278.

181 Kristiansen 2011, p. 210. Also compare Moynihan & Søderlind 2003, p. 60 for another attack on Deicide by Euronymous, where claims Mayhem's vocalist, Per "Dead" Ohlin, killed himself due to the sorry state of death metal. Of the named bands, Benediction and Deicide feature "traditional" death metal lyrics, whereas Sepultura and Napalm Death feature "political" ones.

182 *„The flamboyant singer of Deicide, Glen Benton, ceremoniously branded an upside-down cross into his forehead, threw bloody entrails into concert crowds, and sported homemade armor on stage [...]"* Moynihan & Søderlind 2003, p. 28.

183 Ekeröth 2008, pp. 241-242. Both black metal fans and animal rights activists, enraged by Benton's boasting about animal sacrifice and use of animal blood and intestines, have been blamed for the attack. That there might exist some overlap between those groups is suggested by the manifesto published with Ildjarn's final release *Ildjarn is Dead*, where the sole member Vidar Væer expounds misogynist, racist and misanthropic views alongside the confession that he would sacrifice his life to save any cat from harm.

184 Kristiansen 2011, p. 210.

that a progression from Metallica, a Thrash Metal band that achieved mainstream success with *Master of Puppets*, to Death Metal like Morbid Angel and Deicide might be all too easy for the adolescents he so maligns. That there were broader discontents with the Death Metal label in the Norwegian metal scene is suggested by Slayer Magazine changing its subtitle from “*Death Metal 'Zine*” to “*Alternative Death Metal 'Zine*” for the 1992 issue, coinciding with a greater focus on what is now firmly considered Black Metal.¹⁸⁵

The central fanzine of the Norwegian scene seemed keenly aware that Extreme Metal had reached a turning point, with Death Metal bands being lifted out of the underground with record deals: The front matter proclaims “*It's 25 o'clock*”, past midnight, locating the trends to be shunned to be “*Especially in Sweden where SUNLIGHT PUKES OUT MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF TREND SHIT*”.¹⁸⁶ The back matter continues this evaluation of a turning point, being titled “*Black Metal Revisted*”, which I will quote at length as it succinctly captures and summarizes the prevailing attitude of the Norwegian Black Metal scene that is manifest in interviews from its central musicians as well:

“A lot of people writing to us are asking about the Black Metal scene here in Norway, or should I say Black Metal explosion???? [...] The last few years we have been infected with trendy, shitty Death Metal bands and all of sudden Death Metal was normal and so called Death Metal bands started to sing about normal things..... So the real meaning was lost..... All we saw was idiots running around in bermuda shorts calling themselves 'Death Metal' singing about the cruel world.... All this sounded WRONG and I think after Dead of MAYHEM committed suicide I think people started to see how bad things were..... Of course the godfathers of all evil (MAYHEM) here in Norway are a big influence on the new bands.... It seems like the new bands take big influence from MAYHEM and also DARKTHRONE! (But Fuck “Soulside Journey”!!) But the thing is the bands here in Norway have something unique... ORIGINALITY!!!! Where in SWEDEN all bands do their best to clone ENTOMBED, the Norwegian bands fight for their originality!!!! [...] We Hail MAYHEM – BURZUM – DARKTHRONE – ENSLAVED – THOU SHALT SUFFER – EMPEROR – THORNS – ARCTURUS – and even IMMORTAL (But there are some doubts about them.... we shall see!!)”¹⁸⁷

Like Euronymous in the *Close Up* zine interview,¹⁸⁸ *Slayer Mag's* editor Metalion is particularly concerned about the influence of the Swedish Death Metal scene, apparently the rivalry with Death Metal was not one of Norwegian rebellion against a globalized, American Death Metal culture, but a far more local quibble. To the actors of the Swedish Death Metal scene, the sudden fundamentalist turn of their Norwegian neighbors appears

185 Kristiansen 2011, p. 216.

186 Kristiansen 2011, p. 224.

187 Kristiansen 2011, p. 258.

188 http://true.mayhem.free.fr/interviews/interview_6.htm, accessed 30/7/2016.

to have been a baffling surprise, as evidenced by the quotes in Ekeröth's *Swedish Death Metal*. Nicke Andersson of Entombed remarks: „*I never understood what black metal was all about – why suddenly everybody wanted to be so angry and 'serious'.*”¹⁸⁹ Uffe Cederlund, likewise of Entombed, recalls the early cooperation with Darkthrone: “*I got to know Glyve [Fenriz of Darkthrone] early on, and had a great relationship with him and Darkthrone. They in fact stayed at my place when they recorded their first album [Soulside Journey]. Then suddenly all the guys in Norway just turned their backs on us, and I have hardly spoken to any of them since. It's all just so strange.*”¹⁹⁰

Darkthrone's first album, *Soulside Journey*, bears the mark of the “Sunlight Sound” in part due to the then-collaboration with Entombed, whose debut *Left Hand Path* had coined and popularized that sound – much to the dismay of the Norwegian scene, as evidenced by Metalion's comments. Hence *Soulside Journey* it seems only natural that it would be shunned as being contaminated by the Swedish trend of not sufficiently serious Death Metal. But the doubts Metalion voices about Immortal are conspicuous. On the one hand, this may reflect the attitude of Euronymous, who stated that “*Firstly Immortal is NOT a black metal band, as they are not Satanists*” in the *Orcustus* fanzine.¹⁹¹ But Metalion's interview with Immortal in the same issue of *Slayer Mag* suggests that it may have been their sudden conversion away from Death Metal that roused suspicions:

“Take this band IMMORTAL for instance, their demo which I got the summer of '91 was pretty much MORBID ANGEL/IMMOLATION like Death Metal (with killer guitars!!!) and now in '92 they are signed to OSMOSE (LP [Diabolical Fullmoon Mysticism] out now!) and they sound nothing like their earlier material.”¹⁹²

Considering the production of the demo in question, it is apparently that for an expert listener like Metalion, Death Metal meant much more than the kind of high-quality production associated with Morrisound or Sunlight Studios, but instead was intimately related to the guitar playing, as well as the deep, growled vocals exhibited on the demo. Hence we may assume that the trend emanating from Sweden that was to be opposed went further than production. Immortal essentially state that they were converted to Black Metal through their association with Varg Vikernes of Burzum and go on to exalt a similar roster

189 Ekeröth 2008, p. 248.

190 Ekeröth 2008, p. 248.

191 Patterson 2013, p. 152.

192 Kristiansen 2011, p. 225.

of new Black Metal bands as hailed by Metalion in the back matter. Likewise, they shun music they perceive is too accessible for “*the stupid kids*”, much like Euronymous.¹⁹³

4.2.1. Von and electronic music against “hectic” Death Metal

Recalling his personal dissatisfaction with Death Metal and Darkthrone's move away from it following *Soulside Journey*, Fenriz states:

“Definitely one major, major point was looking at my collection and [realizing] I had bought maybe five death metal releases from 1990 [...] it became apparent that what we got a kick out of was, to put it simply, Celtic Frost, Motörhead, and Bathory. Throughout 1990 it was more and more of this but the songs we made were still death metal - we had 13/16 beats and shit like that, it was almost jazz – and I was thinking in my head, ‘this professionalism has to go. I want to de-learn playing drums, I want to play primitive and simple, I don't want to play like a drum solo all the time and make these complicated riffs.’”¹⁹⁴

This sentiment against “baroque” complexity obviously echoes through Reyes' account of the “Black Turn”, but Fenriz' discontents with Death Metal were not confined to the technical challenges posed by the elaborate fills manifest on records like Entombed's *Left Hand Path* or Darkthrone's *Soulside Journey* and the scrapped *Goatlord* album, a rehearsal tape of which was later released in 1996. On the audio commentary of the special edition reissue, Fenriz reminiscences about the attitude of the band at the time of writing the material, finding that he still holds reservations about it that played into the band's decision to move away from this style of Death Metal: “*Now that was a little blast beat that should never have been there... I took too many vitamins that day. Basically, we were really, really fired up about a little bit more complex songwriting, but I still think there's... too much stop and go, it's too spastic... a lot of the material.*”¹⁹⁵ “Technical complexity”, then, is not only associated with the physical challenges of performing the material, but also with the rate of changes and the juxtaposition of considerable contrasts of rhythm and texture.

Recalling how he single-handedly came up with and recorded Darkthrone's fourth album, *Transilvanian Hunger*, Fenriz looks back on the history of Heavy Metal in the 80s as a whole and locates an impulse against its “*hectic*” nature, identified with quick tempo and riff changes, in the American band Von:

193 Kristiansen 2011, p. 225.

194 Patterson 2013, p. 197.

195 Darkthrone (1996) *Goatlord*. Moonfog Productions, FOG 013. [2011] Peaceville Records, CDVILED337X, disk 2, track 4, 2:40-3:20.

“Von was extremely important for Burzum, but not for Darkthrone - only on the Transilvanian Hunger album was Von important. Yeah, because we have to see the '80s as a whole now. Would you say the '80s was a decade when metal was really monotone, or was it really hectic? I mean, everyone knows it was damn hectic. You'd have like, riffs and riff changes and tempo changes from the NWOBHM [New Wave of British Heavy Metal, e.g. Iron Maiden], until death metal and even grindcore. What was the world ready for? More hectic stuff? I don't think so! So, when Von started doing their thing, we're all clicking like, 'Holy shit! They're doing the monotone thing!' That was the freshest thing [we'd] heard since we were born. Suddenly the monotone thing was allowed, and we would be like, 'Yep, we will open up to that.' And with all due respect, it was Count Grishnakh [Varg Vikernes] who understood this monotone thing first, and he understood it from Von.”¹⁹⁶

What this then-novel monotony entailed is clarified by another interview with Fenriz: *“Von was a big hit among us up here when it hit us in 1992. Monotone stuff was very fresh after 10 years of hectic metal styles. Remember all the metal styles, basically from early '80s and upwards, were damn hectic. There was no time to play a riff eight times for instance...not until Burzum and Von came and changed things. Although Bathory did it in the '80s, but people weren't ready for it then to the same degree as in '93 and onwards.”*¹⁹⁷ Identifying the “monotone” with repeating a riff eight times instead of the far more common four times, Fenriz not only suggests that large-scale rhythm and form out to be approached from the riffs and their repetitions in Metal, but also elucidates that such repetition present in Bathory was re-evaluated in the light of the dominant (Extreme) Metal styles in the early '90s.

Summing up the Norwegian scene's opposition to Death Metal, Vikernes recalls: *“The main objective was to be anti-trend, and to show all the trendy Death Metal bands out there - and at the time there were a lot of them - that it could actually be done differently.”* While Fenriz credits Von's demo tape *Satanic Blood* as making Varg Vikernes of Burzum catch onto the “monotone thing”, the latter offers yet another source for this shift away from the rapid changes and contrasts of Death Metal in an interview given to *Guitar World* in 2010, located in the experience of electronic dance music:

“In 1992 and 1993 I spent a lot of time alone, because I was sick and tired of the follower mentality of the metal scene in Norway. If I went out, I only rarely went to the metal pubs or places like that. Instead, I went to an underground club in Bergen, called “Føniks”, where they played rave and house music really loud until six o'clock in the morning. None of the metalheads could stand the music, so I was left alone. I stood there, in a dark corner, all by myself and listened to the mesmerizing music until they closed the shop. Then I

196 Mudrian 2009, p. 184-185.

197 <http://www.revolvermag.com/uncategorized/web-exclusive-interview-darkthrone-fenriz-part-3-his-thoughts-on-panzerfau.html>, accessed 7/30/2016.

would go home, inspired to play the guitar. I think underground house music influenced my music a lot in this period. It made it more monotonous, and the tracks became longer, which made it sound different from most other metal music.”¹⁹⁸

This was not the only electronic music Vikernes was exposed to, in a 1995 interview he also cites “*WHEN, SOFTWARE, VANGELIS, HLIDSKJALF, DAS ICH, GOETHE ERBEN and some other electronic music*” as music he listens to.¹⁹⁹ Nor was his interest in electronic unique in the Norwegian scene. Though he does not bring it up in his statements on the Metal scene, Fenriz acts as a DJ and curator of electronic dance music in his spare time, recalling his introduction to this music in a now-archived online interview.²⁰⁰ Finding Klaus Schultze was a “*major breakthrough for him*”, and EBM samplers by Norwegian label TATRA further exposed him to music that was then hard to access in Norway. Fenriz is likely referring to, among others, 1992's *Sex, Drugs & EBM – A Norwegian Electro Compilation*, a glance at the names of the featured artists makes it quite obvious why this music might have been particularly palatable to a Black Metal musicians: “Apoptygmata Berzerk”, “Agressiva”, “Hexacon” and “Teutonic Knights” might very well have been Black Metal bands judged solely on their choice of name.

One of the more well-known stories concerning electronic music in tellings of Black Metal's history is how Conrad Schnitzler (formerly of Tangerine Dream) ended up composing the dark, electronic percussive introduction to Mayhem's *Deathcrush*. Euronymous was a fan of his music and decided to seek out Schnitzler on a trip Mayhem and Metalion made to Germany, giving him a tape of the record which in turn inspired the sympathetic Schnitzler to contribute the track “Silvester Anfang” to it.²⁰¹

Snorre “Blackthorn” Ruch, often credited as originating the Norwegian Black Metal style of guitar playing, likewise incorporated German electronica into the material of his band Thorns, citing extensive influences from genres outside of Metal:

“We [Thorns] have never accepted to be influenced by other metal 'cos we wanted to sound unique, so we say we're influenced by children's music and classical music and computer game music and try to recode it into metal to get a new sound from it. I do remember that on 'Home' I had a lack of parts, so I took one of my favorite songs of

198 http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/2010_interview_guitar_world.shtml, accessed 7/30/2016.

199 Kristiansen 2011, p. 293.

200 <https://web.archive.org/web/20140923043817/http://www.jux-ta-pose.org/juxtape-036-fenriz/>, accessed 7/30/2016.

201 Kristiansen 2012, p. 54 & <http://thequietus.com/articles/14975-mayhem-interview-necrobutterer>, accessed 30/7/2016.

[German synthpop act] Alphaville - 'A Victory of Love' from the *Forever Young* album – and stole a part from that.”²⁰²

The pattern introduced at the very beginning of the Alphaville song first appears at 2:30 in the track “Home” from the *Grymyrk* demo tape recorded and released in June 1991, the succession of falling fifths integrating seamlessly into the somber fabric of the track due to the minor mode implied by its pitches. “Home” would eventually become “Ærie Descent” on the second demo *Trøndertun* of 1992, now without the Alphaville quotation. However, the influence of Synthpop and Alphaville's “A Victory For Love” in particular might still be present on that demo's second track, “Funeral Marches to the Grave”, in the form of guitar leads echoed with an effect pedal, panning from left to right in the stereo space – just like the formerly quoted riff travels across the stereo track in the Alphaville track. Highly esteemed in the Norwegian scene, Thorns' contributions will be explored further below.

202 Patterson 2013, p. 184.

5. Analyses I: Elements of the 1980s “first wave”

In this chapter, representative elements of the so-called “first wave” of Black Metal are investigated in an attempt to illustrate common conventions of Extreme Metal and techniques that would be adopted by the Norwegian scene at the turn of the 1990s.

5.1. Mayhem, Venom and German Thrash Metal

During the 1980s, Mayhem recorded and released two Venom covers: “Black Metal (Total Death Version)” on the *Pure Fucking Armageddon* demo tape released in 1986 and “Witching Hour” on the *Deathcrush* EP, first released in 1987. The former is the first track from the eponymous second Venom album *Black Metal* of 1982, whereas the latter opens side B of their 1981 debut album *Welcome to Hell*. Given that they were recorded by Norwegian Black Metal's first and institutionally central band, the idiom of those cover versions – how they differ from their models – provides a unique insight into what Mayhem listened for in Venom, what they appropriated and what they rejected or modified for their own ends. Thus, rather than engaging in a comprehensive analysis of Venom's most-cited output, I will focus on two tracks that may be considered particularly influential by virtue of being covered by Mayhem, with the covers reflecting the intervening influence of German Thrash Metal.

5.1.1. Locating Venom's idiolect

Locating themselves in Heavy Metal's stream of tradition, Venom has cited different inspirations throughout the years. In *Lords of Chaos*, drummer Tony “Abbadon” Bray cites Judas Priest, Deep Purple, Motörhead and Black Sabbath as influences.²⁰³ In an interview originally published in the Greek *Metal Hammer*, guitarist Jeffery “Mantas” Dunn names Kiss as an inspiration for their stage presence, while praising Motörhead for their “heavy sound” but lambasting them for their image.²⁰⁴ Moynihan and Söderlind remark that “on close analysis, Venom was still playing fast Blues-based Rock, but with the primitive aggression which at that time was generally considered the property of the Punk bands.”²⁰⁵ Contrary to this verdict, the traditional harmonic progressions associated with Blues are absent from Venom's songwriting, instead their musical utterances are riff-based, in the

203 Moynihan & Söderlind 1998, p. 10.

204 [https://web.archive.org/web/20081225104247/http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/sunra/315/venominter
viewmantas.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20081225104247/http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/sunra/315/venominterviewmantas.html), accessed 7/18/2016.

205 Moynihan & Söderlind 1998, p. 10.

of Extreme Metal in general.²⁰⁸

and time again may be heard in the first riff of the track.

E-Gt

P.M.

TAB

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 9 7 7 5 9 7

Music example 1. Venom – “Witching Hour”, riff a, 0:35.²¹⁰

pulse.

a=8, b=24, c=8, d=72, e=32, f=16	6a / 2a b 4c / 2a 4a b Br / d / 2a 4a b / 2ef	I / A / A ¹ / B / A ² / C	I InVCIn / InVCBr / S / InVC / Po
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Table 1. Venom – “Witching Hour”, duration 4:06.

206 Elflein 2010, p. 73.

207 Elflein 2010, pp. 193-197.

208 Elflein 2010, pp. 287-289.

209 <http://www.allmusic.com/album/welcome-to-hell-mw0000268406>, accessed 7/18/2016.

210 Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/v/venom/witching_hour_guitar_pro.htm.

Riff (a) serves as an introduction (I) respectively interlude (In) before the vocals enter and also sounds during the verse, whereas the chorus is represented by a lengthy riff of descending fifth power chords, riff (b). The first verse-chorus (VC) unit is followed by an instrumental interlude, riff c, which is replaced by a break in the second one just before the solo prior to the final iteration of verse and chorus. Up to this point, the only vertical sonorities heard were fifth power chords, only with riff e a new sonority is introduced – a major third, which is moved in parallel whole tones during the ployout (Po). Such verse-chorus-based songwriting places Venom closer to the tradition of the “*hard rock'n'roll*” analyzed by Elflein, due to the prevalence of such songwriting in Motörhead and statements from Venom it is tempting to assume direct influence here.²¹¹

The second track covered by Mayhem, “Black Metal” from Venom's sophomore album, is formally similar to “Witching Hour”, though it features a proper bridge with vocals instead of a solo section. It may be diagrammed on the level of its riffs as:

a=16, b=16, c=16, d=16, e=8, f=4, g=4	2(2a 2aba 2cc ¹ Br) / dd ¹ e4fd ² 4fgBr / 2a 2aba 2cc ² Br	A A B A	InVC InVC B InVC
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Table 2. *Venom – “Black Metal”, duration 4:06.*

Riffs (a), (b), (c) and (d) are closely related and all begin in a very similar fashion with a higher power chord followed by a lower, tremolo-picked and palm-muted pitch, though the pitch level changes from riff to riff the overall effect is highly homogeneous. With the exception of riff (c), the chorus riff, only power chords appear as vertical sonorities.

E-Gt

Music example 2. *Venom – “Black Metal”, riff c, 0:45.*²¹²

The beginning of riff (c), which echoes the beginnings of riffs (a) and (b), represents the typical extreme metal combination of longer, higher power chord and tremolo-picked, palm-muted single pitch described above, whereas what has been transcribed as measures

211 Elflein 2010, pp. 183-187.

212 Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/v/venom/black_metal_ver2_guitar_pro.htm.

The title of Mayhem's cover of "Black Metal" includes the addition "Total Death Version"



Mayhem's "Total Death" version of "Black Metal", then, takes the radicalization of Venom at the hands of Kreator one step further. If one takes the same quarter-note beat as a reference, the Mayhem cover is almost twice as fast as Venom's original: Mayhem thrashes away at around 300 quarter-note beats per minute compared to Venom's more stately 160 beats per minute. It clocks in at just 2:07, compared to the 3:35 of the original. The track is instrumental and one cannot help but feel that eventual vocals would not have been able to cut through the cataclysmic, over-driven sound. The guitar's distortion is so extreme that identifying the pitch levels of the riffs is quite challenging, a circumstance exacerbated by the incessant pounding of the drums' tom threatening to drown it out. Indeed, the sound of the *Pure Fucking Armageddon* demo is infamously tough to stomach and almost no fan review of it fails to mention it.²¹⁴

The verse's riffs and their succession are replicated faithfully, though owing to the higher tempo, the tremolo picking most likely takes place on what I would transcribe as the eighth-note level as opposed to the sixteenth-note level in my Venom transcription. The first major change appears in the chorus' main riff, where – unless my ears deceive me – the intervals transcribed in music example 2 are replaced by parallel fourths, the upper note of which retains the same melodic outline as in the Venom original. There might be several explanations for this: One could attribute it to Mayhem's lack of skill, either in terms of listening or playing. If one has more faith in their ability, the higher gain and extreme distortion of Mayhem's version might explain the choice of the fourth power chords: Compared to the tritone and major third, they sound considerably clearer even at high levels of distortion. The elaborate bridge of the Venom original is considerably abridged, though one still recognizes the model.

The cover of "Witching Hour" on *Deathcrush* is adapted according to similar sensibilities, being sped up considerably, though this time the guitar, bass and drums are joined by hoarse vocals recorded with reverberation. Verse and chorus are reproduced faithfully, as are the breaks that emphasize the return to the verse. In the cover of "Black Metal", the section intervening between the second and third iteration of the verse-chorus unit is shortened and simplified, with Euronymous' solo being a short burst of almost toneless shredding. The most significant alteration, though, is the omission of the original's playout and its riff based on major thirds being transposed in whole-tone steps. The avoidance of

214 http://www.metal-archives.com/reviews/Mayhem/Pure_Fucking_Armageddon/, accessed 7/19/2016.

imperfect consonances and vertical sonorities other than power chords based on the fifth, fourth and octave is conspicuous and holds true for the original tracks on Mayhem's *Pure Fucking Armageddon* and *Deathcrush*. The Venom covers blend in easily Mayhem tracks on those records, which likewise employ verse-chorus structures and restrict themselves either to single notes or power chords, with the exception of the bass intro to *Deathcrush's* version of "Pure Fucking Armageddon", which employs a minor triad at the end.

Though the two Venom tracks are the only two covers released by Mayhem during the 1980s, accounts from members of the scene mention other bands covered by Mayhem at the time. Recalling his first jam with Euronymous, Mayhem bassist Jørn "Necrobutcher" Stubberud remembers that they "*knew the same cover songs - some Black Sabbath, some Motorhead, some Venom.*"²¹⁵ Metalion believes they covered tracks by Extreme Metal bands S.O.D., Celtic Frost (the former Hellhammer) and Bathory in early 1986.²¹⁶

5.2. Bathory

Recalling the formative musical influences of his youth, Tomas "Quorthon" Forsberg, founder, guitarist, vocalist and sole consistent member of Bathory, singles out Black Sabbath and Motörhead.²¹⁷ When asked if he listened to music similar to his own in 1985, Quorthon asserted that he had listened to Slayer's first album and some Sodom, Destruction and Hellhammer/Celtic Frost, the latter of which he denigrated by calling them "*Wimphammer/Celtic Compost*". He asserted that he was not a fan of Venom, though he loved the album *Black Metal*.²¹⁸ In a later interview, he was more open about the formative influence of Venom, recalling telling his friends that on *Black Metal* "*they're doing exactly what we want to do on our record!*"²¹⁹

Bathory's first two albums then, the self-titled *Bathory* of 1984 and *The Return.....* of 1985, follow the Venom described before in fitting pulse-based riffs into verse-chorus structures with a bridge and/or solo section. The major departures from Venom are the harsher vocal timbre, higher speeds and an exclusive reliance on power chords – basically the differences observed in Mayhem's appropriation of these Venom songs. For his third album, *Under the*

215 <http://thequietus.com/articles/14975-mayhem-interview-necrobutcher>, accessed 7/19/2016.

216 Kristiansen 2012, p. 40.

217 Kristiansen 2012, p. 286.

218 Kristiansen 2012, p. 68.

219 Kristiansen 2012, p. 685.

Sign of the Black Mark, eventually released in 1987, Quorthon had big plans. Not only did he want to push further in terms of speed in an effort to out-do Slayer, but he also intended to diversify musically, giving his music a medieval atmosphere: “*It will be partly recorded in a church. I’ll use a ten girl choir, instruments from the 14th century. You can expect a lot of surprises!*”²²⁰ Though these remained unfulfilled promises, the following Bathory albums introduced innovations that would prove seminal for Norwegian Black Metal.

5.2.1. Bathory's “*moving finger technique*”

In a 2013 interview on the website Invisible Oranges, the reviewer asks Fenriz, drummer (and later multi-instrumentalist) of Darkthrone, about the origin of a particular type of riff he considers to be definitive of Norwegian Black Metal's aesthetic:

“[Interviewer] Similarly, the melodic riffing on “Transilvanian Hunger,” along with some of Varg’s riffs on “Hvis Lyset Tar Oss” have pretty much defined the “Norwegian black metal” aesthetic. Where did this sense of melody come from?

[Fenriz] It came from Bathory’s 1987 *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* (only a couple of riffs) and especially *BLOOD FIRE DEATH* in 1988 where there were more riffs with that finger moving technique. Now, later on, it would be disputed who brought it to Norway, but it’s safe to say that Euronymous, Snorre Ruch from Thorns, and Varg did try to evolve that riffing over the next few years. I think Darkthrone kept the progress to a minimum, using a rather Bathory-ish style. I’m not a good enough guitarist to elaborate on any style, so I rather make it work instead.”²²¹

This is not the first time Fenriz has referred to this “*finger moving technique*” originating from Bathory. In an interview dedicated to the making of *Transilvanian Hunger*, Fenriz recalls his work flow in composing the first song “*this sort of technique was one of the styles that became known as Norwegian black metal.*”²²² Far from claiming sole responsibility for its dissemination and further development, Fenriz highlights the mutual exchange and shared musical language in the Norwegian scene: “*I’ve always said that everyone in the Norwegian scene of '90, '91, '92, '93, '94 – everyone was doing these kinds of riffs. Gorgoroth was doing them, Enslaved was doing them. Emperor was doing them. Immortal was doing them. And I was making some sort of riffs like Mayhem and Burzum and those guys.*”²²³ This rare and direct reference to a shared, definitive technique demands to be studied both in Bathory and the later Norwegian bands.

220 Kristiansen 2012, p. 68.

221 <http://www.invisibleoranges.com/interview-fenriz/>, accessed 7/19/2016.

222 Mudrian 2009, pp. 183-184.

223 Mudrian 2009, p. 192.

What is meant by “*finger moving technique*” becomes clear when one makes oneself aware of how a guitarist's fingers typically move when playing the Extreme Metal the Norwegian Black Metal scene claimed allegiance to, with its near-total domination of power chords. Thus, when such power chords are played, the fingers typically move in a parallel on the fretboard, their posture is retained while the motion comes from the arm. The “*moving finger technique*”, then, refers to a departure from this norm, against the background of power chord motion, we can infer that it refers to independent motion of the fingers, such as with one finger remaining in place while another moves, or two fingers moving simultaneously but not in parallel motion, for example: One finger moves one fret, the other moves two frets. This technique shapes large swathes of *Transylvanian Hunger* and will be examined in more detail in the chapter on Darkthrone's development. For now, we ought to test Fenriz' memory of Bathory's *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* of 1987 and *Blood Fire Death* of 1988 as the origin of this technique, with the technique allegedly being more prominent on the latter.

It turns out that Fenriz' account is remarkably precise, both in that the technique is wholly absent from earlier Bathory releases and considerably more prominent on the latter album. On *Under the Sign of the Black Mark*, the technique first appears on the track “Call From the Grave”, a gloomy mid-tempo departure from Bathory's earlier Venom-influenced Thrash Metal, accompanied by a relaxed back beat in the drums.

Music example 4. Bathory – “Call From the Grave”, riffs a and b, 0:32.²²⁴

Though the first of the two riffs only utilizes power chords, it may be considered an example of the technique nonetheless, as the “middle-voice” of the power chords at its beginning moves a whole step, turning a 4-8 power chord into a 5-8 power chord. This produces a remarkable effect due to the difference tones created by the distortion: The fourth *g-c* produces a difference tone *c* two octaves below the played *c*, making it possible to perceive the middle-voice *c* as the fundamental of the chord.²²⁵ By contrast, the fifth *g-d*

224 Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/b/bathory/call_from_the_grave_ver3_guitar_pro_915040id_01022010date.htm

225 Lilja 2009, p. 108.

produces a difference tone of *g* one octave below the played *g*, producing the effect of a new fundamental and altogether different harmonic color in spite of the retained enclosing octave. The pitches played by the bass reflect this, as in 4-8 power chords the middle note is doubled by the bass, whereas in 5-8 power chords, the lowest note is doubled. Thus, due to the distortion, the riff actually sounds more animated and rich in contrast than the transcription would seem to suggest.

The second riff, on the other hand, in the first two transcribed measures, contains imperfect consonances, which, aside from the audible appeal of being rendered quite discordant by the distortion, may be explained as arising from the haptic experience of the guitar's fretboard. Contrapuntal terminology derived from common practice harmony seems a surprising fit for this phenomenon, in this instance the *c* first heard on the last eighth-note of the riff's first transcribed measure indeed seems to be an anticipation: The point of departure is a 5-8 power chord, *e-b-e*, the goal another 5-8 power chord a semitone higher, *f-c-f*. Even without making reference to the physical characteristics of strongly distorted power chords, the sheer prevalence of these sonorities should allow us to conceive of them as a stable norm.

The vertical sonority of *e-c-e* arises since one of the fingers moves to the fifth of the goal power chord while the other fingers sustain the old enclosing octave. Depending on whether we focus on the octave instead of the fifth we might also illustrate it as a “suspension”, though the figure of “anticipation” seems less complicated and more apt to describe the effect. At any rate, the fingers moving independently, after one another from one power chord to another produces a dense, discordant sonority that sticks out from the clear “power” of its surroundings – and what is common in Extreme and Death Metal in general.

The image shows a musical score for a guitar riff. The top staff is labeled 'E-Gt' and the bottom staff is labeled 'T, A, B'. The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (Bb). The guitar part consists of two measures of eighth-note chords. The first measure contains the notes E2, B1, E2, and the second measure contains F2, C2, F2. The bass part consists of two measures of eighth-note chords. The first measure contains the notes E2, B1, E2, and the second measure contains F2, C2, F2. The notation is in 4/4 time and includes a key signature of one flat (Bb).

Music example 5. Bathory - “Chariots of Fire”, first bridge riff, 1:29.²²⁶

226 Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/b/bathory/chariots_of_fire_guitar_pro_1516693id_02092014date.htm.

The beginning of the bridge section in the track “Chariots of Fire” represents yet another type of riff that may be considered representative of the “*moving finger technique*”, this time wholly unrelated to power chord sonorities and consisting exclusively of imperfect consonances and a tritone, all rendered considerably rougher and less transparent by the heavy distortion. The resulting timbral density and incessant tremolo-picking prefigure the kind of riffs discussed in the interview at the beginning of this chapter, the much-emulated signature sound of *Transilvanian Hunger* in particular. Hagen's assertion that tremolo-picking and playing more than one string might come in in conflict²²⁷ has to be considered disproved by now. In two-voice riffs such as this one, a comfortable way to achieve these high strumming speeds is to mute the strings one does not want to sound with the remaining fingers while strumming across all strings. This technique is equally applicable to such riffs incorporating intervals other than the perfect respectively power chord ones and those consisting solely of power chords.

On *Blood Fire Death*, new varieties of such riffs incorporating independent movement of the fingers and imperfect consonances appear, such as on the first track, the expansive “A Fine Day To Die”, here transcribed with the two unisono guitars, the bass and the drums:

The musical score is written for three parts: E-Gt, E-Bass, and Drums. The E-Gt part features a complex riff with triplets and a tritone. The E-Bass part shows a simpler bass line. The Drums part shows a steady backbeat. The score is transcribed for two unisono guitars, the bass, and the drums.

Music example 6. Bathory – “A Fine Day To Die”, “finger moving technique” riff, 2:40.²²⁸

Relaxed back beat is typical of the “epic”²²⁹ style cultivated by Bathory starting with “Enter the Eternal Fire” on *Under the Sign of the Black Mark*, where the pulse was likewise divided in triplets. The polyphony of the guitar riff is underscored by the bass doubling the lower voice, most noticeably at the *f#* passing note on the last triplet eighth-note in the first transcribed measure. The riff is remarkably sophisticated, as the repeated top-voice neighbor-note melody is repeated in a harmonically re-colored version before the

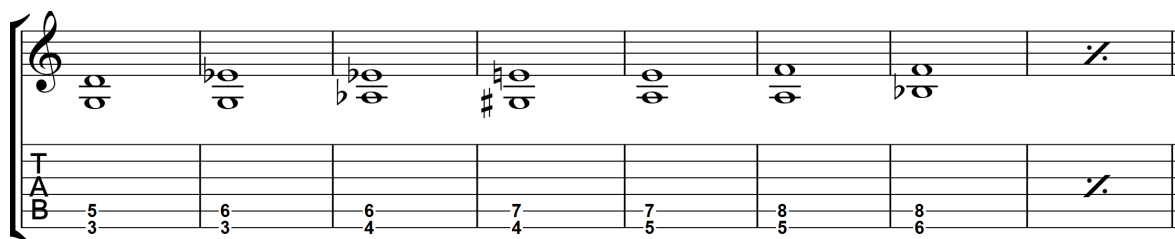
²²⁷ Hagen 2011, p. 184.

²²⁸ Author's transcription.

²²⁹ Moynihan & Söderlind 1998, p. 19.

first measure is transposed a whole-tone higher. The widest interval so far, a major sixth – proof that Quorthon had remarkably long fingers – is reserved for the final transcribed measure, for the first time introducing an imperfect consonance on a metrically strong position, which is then resolved into a power chord that segues back into the repetition of the riff.

On “The Golden Walls Of Heaven”, a fast Thrash Metal track, the solo is accompanied by a mixture of power chords and imperfect consonances, tremolo-picked as in the example from “Chariots of Fire”. Keeping with the tendency for this unusual – at least in the context of power-chord-saturated Extreme Metal – material to appear in transitional, contrasting sections such as the bridge or the solo, is the bridge from the track “Holocaust”, which instead of being composed of repeated riffs is a through-composed section that is once more best explained in terms of what is convenient in terms of the possibilities of the guitar's fretboard, paralleling the phenomenon of so-called “optic scales”:²³⁰



Music example 7. Bathory – “Holocaust”, bridge (simplified excerpt), 2:00.²³¹

The chromatic sequence consists of an alternation of augmented fifths/minor sixths and perfect fifths, similar to the “anticipation” in the second riff from “Call From the Grave” one of the fingers moves a fret before the other does. This tremolo-picked progression slowly builds tension in its creeping chromatic ascent and is overlaid with a pitch-shifted voice sample of a countdown. On a motivic level, the lengthy chromatic ascent in the bridge mirrors the chromatic ascent introduced in the opening riff of the track. Though not an example of the “*finger moving technique*”, another feature of “Holocaust” deserves attention is the prominent vertical tritone of the main riff first heard at 0:16, taking the place of where most Thrash Metal guitarists would place a conventional power chord instead. Together with the bridge, this makes “Holocaust” by far the most timbrally rough

230 Elflein 2010, pp. 120-122.

231 Author's transcription.

entry on *Blood Fire Death*, though power chords still feature prominently.

Another riff that does not neatly fit the definition of the “*moving finger technique*” but likewise foreshadows keystone techniques of the later Norwegian scene appears on the final metal track of the album, the eponymous “Blood Fire Death”. Like “A Fine Day To Die” it is cast in a style that is considered equally influential for Symphonic Black Metal and Viking Metal, respectively, featuring an acoustic intro, synthesizer use and somewhat less harsh vocals than the shorter thrash metal tracks sandwiched between them. Its main riff, introduced at 1:02, is essentially composed of power chords, but merits closer scrutiny nonetheless. Transcriptions necessarily represent my perception of these tracks and are not to be understood as playing instructions. Yet the combination of high levels of distortion, reverb and intervals other than perfect consonances, among other factors, frequently force one to recur to what is plausible on the fretboard. In transcribing hard-to-hear riffs, I tend to settle for variants that require the least finger movement and lend themselves to recurring strumming patterns. Consider this riff taken from an anonymous fan transcription of “Blood Fire Death”:²³²

Music example 8. Bathory – “Blood Fire Death”, main riff (fan transcription).²³³

The tablature implies a strumming pattern with twelve strokes for each transcribed bar, with single notes on the third string being strummed as lower notes are kept ringing, yielding a steady eighth pulse that de-emphasizes the long-short rhythm both in the audible result and the appearance of the notation. Additionally, measures 3 and 4 are transcribed as 5-8 power chords, which do not reflect the strong presence of the *d'* respectively *c'* in the recording. My transcription is as follows:

²³² https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/b/bathory/blood_fire_death_guitar_pro.htm, accessed 20/7/2016.

²³³ Reproduced from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/b/bathory/blood_fire_death_guitar_pro.htm.

a single guitar. Parallel imperfect consonances split between „twin guitars“ are to be considered a staple of heavy metal's musical repertory at least since Iron Maiden.²³⁶

This technique became a hallmark of Swedish Melodic Death Metal, exemplified by At the Gates' *Slaughter of the Soul*,²³⁷ which developed from the legacy of the Swedish Death Metal the nascent Norwegian Black Metal scene was highly aware of. As will be shown in the chapter on Swedish Death Metal and Darkthrone, this technique was readily available in the stream of tradition for Death Metal. Hagen calls attention to Berger's ethnographically-guided analysis of Sin-Eater's music, arguing the parallel augmented fifths/minor sixths in his Emperor „Ye Entrancemperium“ transcription „*serve similar functions to the parallel thirds that Berger discusses*“,²³⁸ namely to obscure tonality.

Tonal hermeneutics aside, unlike Berger's, Hagen's transcription collapses the guitars into a single system with no clue as to which guitar plays what part. In the light of one of the scene's central members highlighting guitar techniques that combine more than one part on a single guitar, this is a particularly unfortunate way of representing Black Metal. It is also problematic in the light of the considerable impact distortion has on the perception of harmonic phenomena in virtually all extreme metal, as a minor sixth played on a single guitar produces combination and differences tones a minor sixth split between two guitars won't, as elaborated by Lilja.²³⁹



Music example 10. Hagen's transcription of Emperor - „Ye Entrancemperium“²⁴⁰

Given the difference in register and the capabilities of the guitar, it is unlikely enough that a single guitar would play both of those lines – the recording confirms as much. More problematic are the quarter-note sonorities transcribed by Hagen, as the first one in particular gives the impression that it might be split between two guitars, as the voicing

236 Elflein 2010, pp. 235-239.

237 Elflein 2010, p. 236.

238 Hagen 2011, p. 185.

239 Lilja 2009, pp. 101-151.

240 Hagen 2011, p. 185.

would be quite cumbersome to on a single guitar, most probably 0-2-x-x-1-x, with numbers designating frets from the lowest string up and „x“ signifying muted/silent strings. Yet in practice, this chord voicing seems unlikely even before consulting the recording, as the name-giving power of the fundamental power chord and the additional harmonics produced by it drown out the single, isolated *c* at the levels of distortion used by Emperor.

Yet the *E-B* power chord in one guitar and the *c* in the other would provide a more distinctly divided sound, set into relief by the minor ninth – even examining the recording with Sonic Visualizer's melodic range spectrograph I could find no trace of a *c* there. More probable, in particular when ease of playing is considered, is the variant transcribed in music example 11 below. The 5-8 power chord can be played comfortably with a downstroke following the tremolo-picked *e*, in this register it produces as sound that is for me hard to distinguish from a 0-2-2-0-0-0 E minor triad, slightly less facile to produce but still quite comfortable, albeit very dense and rough in its sound.

Music example 11. Emperor – „Ye Entrancemperium“, 1:58.²⁴¹

The second quarter-note sonority is to my ears not a tritone, but a variant of the other power chord. This calls into question how much the parallel sixths really „obscure“ the tonality here, given that they are to Hagen's ears „*dynamically faint*“.²⁴² Given the dynamic prominence of the lower part it is tempting to hear it as a chromatic motion from the root of E minor to its third and back, followed by the chromatic neighbor-note motion *B-C-A#-C-B* around its fifth. The reiteration of the initial power chord in the same register lend a strong phenomenal accent to it, imbuing the passage with a sense of tonal stability

241 Author's transcription.

242 Hagen 2011, p. 185.

animated by chromatic flourishes. This effect is, of course, inseparable from the effect of distortion that is ill-represented by the transcription and instead has to be presupposed as knowledge of the commonplace setup in the style.

Returning to the Bathory riffs in question, though some of them are ambiguous with regards to tonal center and/or highly chromatic, the riffs of examples 6 and 9 have a strong sense of tonal center, the former implying consecutively E Aeolian, E Dorian and finally E Phrygian (in terms of the modal system widely used by guitarists, and Allan Moore²⁴³), the latter being strictly diatonic and implying E Phrygian throughout. Considered in abstract terms, the greater wealth of vertical intervals made possible through the independent „*finger moving technique*“ pioneered in extreme metal by Bathory opens up both opportunities for tension and resolution dynamics – as in the neighbor-notes of example 6 – recalling functional counterpoint and harmony as well as new kinds of ambiguity, as hinted at by the disjunct riff in example 5.

Yet they are united in their exploration of intervals that, when played on a single guitar, produce considerably rougher timbres than the perfect consonances and single notes widely used by other extreme metal bands contemporary with Bathory. Of course such muddy timbres are not a mark of distinction of Black Metal against all other popular music utilizing high levels of distortion, one need only recall say, Nirvana's Grunge and the dissonant, distorted barre chords of „Smells Like Teen Spirit“.

Yet such styles were not the frame of reference for the musicians of the Norwegian Black Metal scene, nor are they likely what Extreme Metal connoisseurs will compare and distinguish from Black Metal. But within its limited frame of reference, the extreme metal of the 1980s and beginning 1990s, such exploration of rough, muddy and occasionally hard-to-hear distorted intervals was a means to set one's music apart from extreme metal that was increasingly transparent, precise and, to the ears of the Norwegian Black Metal scene, sterile. However, in Bathory's *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* and *Blood Fire Death*, these riffs were still isolated phenomena waiting to be expanded on in the wake of Extreme Metal increasingly restricting itself to power chords in order to preserve clarity at high levels of distortion.

243 Moore 2012, p. 72.

5.2.3. „Epic“ tracks on *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* and *Blood Fire Death*

In addition to fast Thrash Metal tracks in the vein of the earlier albums, *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* introduced tracks that hark back to the tempos of earlier Heavy Metal like Black Sabbath, such as the track „Call From the Grave“ cited above. Clocking in at 6:58, „Enter the Eternal Fire“ is considerably longer than all previous Bathory tracks and most likely the prime example for the „medieval“ sound Quorthon claimed to aspire to in the interview cited above, featuring both acoustic guitar parts and choral synthesizer patches, as well as the occasional bell sound. On a formal level, the track departs from Bathory's earlier material and the straightforwardly verse-chorus-based variety of Thrash Metal in general by framing a verse-chorus-based central part with distinct introductory and closing material. While less complex than much of the material analyzed by Elflein, „Enter the Eternal Fire“ recovers distinct formal complexity from Heavy Metal's stream of tradition.

a=16, b=8, c=12, d=12, b¹=4	2aa¹a² / 4b c2bcbcb2bcbcb2b dbdb¹e /	I A	I InVpC
e=32, f=16, g=8, h=8, b²=8	4b 4(cb)b dbdb¹e / 4b2fg / 4bdbb¹ /	A¹ B C	InVpC In2 S
	2h2h¹2h² / 2(b²b³)	D E	B Po

Table 2. Bathory - „Enter the Eternal Fire“, duration 6:58.

The instrumental introduction (I) consists of a riff and its variants (a) that is not repeated later in the track, though it shares with riffs (d) and (e) and (h) an exclusive use of fifth power chords. Riffs (b), (c), (f) and (g), by contrast, exclusively use fourth power chords. As noted before, the lowest note of the fifth power chords is taken up by the bass, whereas in fourth power chords the top note is doubled below by the bass. If one takes the even quarter note as the reference, the track clocks in at a very moderate 110 bpm, with this pulse being consistently divided into triplets. Riff (b) is near-omnipresent throughout the song and juxtaposed with new ideas in a manner similar to the blues-derived call-and-response forms observed by Elflein in the music of Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin.²⁴⁴ Its primary function is that of an instrumental interlude, a *idée fixe* that stays essentially unchanged and guarantees affective unity across the duration of the track.



Music example 12. Bathory - „Enter the Eternal Fire“, riffs (c) and (b), 0:57.²⁴⁵

244 Elflein 2010, p. 109.

245 Author's transcription.

Riff (b) is rarely sung, respectively screamed, whereas the riffs (c), (d) and (e), associated with verse (V), pre-chorus (p) and chorus (C) are characterized by longer, sustained power-chords that do not provide a steady pulse like riff (b). This privileges the vocals in a way unusual for Bathory's earlier output, though vocal melody is still absent. Occasionally, riff (b) is shortened to riff (b¹). Following the introduction, verse and chorus are stated twice. Then, a new instrumental interlude (In2) follows, succeeded by a synthesizer and guitar solo over riff (b) and the pre-chorus riff (d). Riff (h) and its variants, each transposed a whole-tone higher, represent the climax prepared by the solos and resemble the Thrash Metal riffs where power chords serve as accents over a strummed single note. The vocals quickly recite new text over this, making this a bridge in the sense of Elflein – yet it does not lead back to a verse-chorus pair or even a chorus. Rather, the aggressive climax prepares the instrumental payout (Po) of the track which transforms riff (b):



Music example 13. Bathory - „Enter the Eternal Fire“, riffs (b²) and (b³), 6:33.²⁴⁶

This formal layout parallels the narrative of the first-person lyrics, the verses telling of the narrator following the lure of the voice described by the chorus: „*And He calls my name / First a whispering then louder / And he wants me to follow / And to Enter the Eternal Fire...*“²⁴⁷ The brutally thrashing bridge represents the cataclysmic consequences of the narrator falling into the fiery pit and being consumed by the inferno. Repeating the call of the chorus after this point would obviously run counter to the teleology of the track and its lyrics. This departure from the conventional course of the verse-chorus scheme is further accentuated by the transformation of the *idée fixe* riff past this point of no return – it is not clear whether we should identify it with the narrator, the Mephistotelic call or the fire itself, what's important is that it undergoes development through the fiery climax.

In sum, we may note a development in Bathory's idiolect that recovers a formal complexity and focus on intelligible lyrics, highlighted by the accompaniment of sustained chords, and narrative design echoed in the formal structure of the track. The loftier aspirations of the composition are also reflected in a sonic palette incorporating synthesizer sounds and

²⁴⁶ Author's transcription.

²⁴⁷ Bathory 1987.

acoustic guitar. The two lengthy tracks on *Blood Fire Death* continue this mid-tempo expansion of Bathory's former thrash metal idiom, notably both songs widely employ – as seen in the transcriptions above – triple divisions of their basic pulse. Both continue the tendency towards giving the voice greater prominence, as Quorthon's delivery moves away from raspy recitation on a single pitch towards appreciably melodic contour.

When asked about the origins of what the interviewer calls a “*symphonic sort of feel*”, Quorthon explains his laying the foundations for Symphonic Black and Viking Metal through his dissatisfaction with other bands picking up the style of his earlier releases, as well as former idols moving away from the style he enjoyed:

„It all started when I felt that too many acts were picking up on this Black Metal thing to be a part of something that was happening at the time while at roughly the same time bands that you followed as a fan (like MOTORHEAD for instance) had change beyond recognition [...] I got in touch with Wagner in '85 roughly and I started to collect classical music on LP's CD's and taped literally hundreds of classical compositions on MC.“

Yet, beyond the choice of particular synthesizer sounds modeled on acoustic models, these changes in Bathory's style may as well be explained as reviving material from Heavy Metal's stream of tradition.

6. Analyses II: Early 1990s Norwegian Black Metal

In this chapter, the earliest demo and live recordings of Mayhem and Thorns are investigated for techniques adopted from earlier bands, as well as innovations of technique that would subsequently gain currency in the scene, as demonstrated with Darkthrone.

6.1. Mayhem at the end of 1990: Live in Leipzig

In recalling Darkthrone's shift to Black Metal, Fenriz emphasizes that Euronymous of Mayhem did not push them to change their style, but instead it was the experience of the new Mayhem tracks first heard on the tape that would eventually be released in 1993 as *Live in Leipzig*: „*The thing is that Mayhem were well into doing new stuff and we had on tape the Live in Leipzig show. It wasn't released until later but we had it on tape, that was one of the stuffs [sic] we listened to and it was very, very good. Top-notch black metal.*“²⁴⁸ It is reasonable to assume that everyone in the circle around the Helvete record store was exposed to that tape and the tracks created after *Pure Fucking Armageddon* and *Deathcrush*.

Distinguishing his allegedly simpler style of guitar playing on *Transilvanian Hunger* from that of Vikernes, Ruch and Euronymous, Fenriz calls attention to their use of chords:

„Because I don't really use chords like Euronymous and Snorre [Ruch]. Euronymous from Mayhem and Snorre from Thorns were the ones that made the typical Norwegian thing, you see - they made chords, and they would play all the strings, like more than one string in the chord, but would they be clean together? No, they would resound together. That was their style, and that you can hear on Mayhem's *Live in Leipzig*, and Mayhem's *Deathcrush*, and on the Thorns demo - and the Thorns demo was really, really important. And I guess also Count Grishnakh or Varg, we all [listened] to the early and new style of Mayhem and Thorns stuff. But I am not a good guitarist, so instead I use the technique that Quorthon already did in '87 and '88. OK?“²⁴⁹

The technique used by Quorthon is the „*finger moving technique*“ investigated in the prior chapter and singled out as an older, simpler technique compared to the more recent of chords with „*all the strings*“, though given the context of the „*finger moving technique*“, the new technique may be assumed to include playing more than two strings at the same time. What is meant precisely by „*they would resound together*“ is not immediately clear, as it could refer to anything from quickly strummed chords with a very immediate attack to more leisurely arpeggiated chords. At any rate, however, the choice of „*resound*“ suggests

248 Patterson 2013, p. 199.

249 Mudrian 2009, p. 184.

that the phenomenon of distortion is of pivotal importance in the effect embraced by the Norwegian scene, as it calls attention to the cumulative effect of the chords played through distortion.

In the first Mayhem interview in the spring 1991 issue of *Slayer Mag*, likely conducted around the time of the November 26th 1990 show, Euronymous reports on the progress made on their first LP: „*We have five new songs now („Funeral Fog“, „Buried By Time And Dust“, „The Freezing Moon“, „Pagan Fears“ and one new one without any lyrics).*“²⁵⁰ All of these new songs would eventually appear on the posthumously (in the case of Euronymous) released *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* in 1994, albeit with some changes compared to the *Live in Leipzig* performance. The instrumental parts were apparently finished before the lyrics, a practice that is common in Extreme Metal to this day.²⁵¹ Precisely dating the genesis of those songs would prove very difficult, though a certain progression may be supposed based on the resurrection of Bathory's „*moving finger technique*” and the use of chords other than power chords, considering that to Fenriz, both became definitive of the Norwegian scene's sound, with the latter being a more recent contribution.

Contrary to Fenriz' recollection, my listening did not turn up any non-power-chord chords on *Deathcrush*, apart from the single minor triad in the bass introduction to the track “Pure Fucking Armageddon” on it. On *Live in Leipzig*, the earlier tracks are faithfully reproduced with no “updates” in terms of technique. However, one of the most iconic Mayhem tracks, “The Freezing Moon”, exhibits isolated instances of the newly found interest in sonorities that do not project the powerful clarity of perfect consonances. A recording of it was included on the 1991 compilation *Projections of a Stained Mind*, representing the only officially released non-live performance of Mayhem with its vocalist Dead. The version analyzed here is from the *Live in Leipzig performance*.

250 Kristiansen 2011, p. 209

251 Chaker 2014, p. 403-404.

6.1.1. Chords and rhythmic variation in “The Freezing Moon”

Though employing only five distinct riffs and slight variations of them, the track is defined by vivid contrasts. It may be diagrammed as follows, in spite of its relative simplicity it does not fit easily into verse-chorus schemes due to the fact that there is no recurring chorus with consistent text. This is a general problem with Elflein's method of diagramming songs: It relies on intelligible vocals and lyrics, in spite its focus on the riff.

a=16, b=16, c=2, d=8, e=8	8a4b8c / 4d4d¹4d²4dBr /	I A	I V1
	8e8e / 8e / 8e / 4d4d³	B C B¹A¹	InV2 S V2 Po

Table 3. Mayhem - „The Freezing Moon“, Live in Leipzig, duration 7:06.

The introductory riff exhibits perhaps the simplest possible full triad playable on a guitar in standard tuning, an E minor triad fingered 0-2-2-0-0-0 on the fretboard. Its lower three tones form a power chord, left ringing as the top four tones are arpeggiated downwards.

Music example 14. Mayhem - “The Freezing Moon”, riff a, 0:26.²⁵²

The second riff of the introduction includes a minor third belonging to an E minor triad on a metrically weak position, the dynamically faint sound of the distorted interval making the resultant sound particularly weak. Significantly, the 4-power-chords are also dynamically fainter than their 5-power-chord counterparts, with their inner notes *d*[#] and *f* sounding most prominent, resulting in the effect of chromatically circling in *e*.

Music example 15. Mayhem - “The Freezing Moon”, riff b, 1:30.²⁵³

252 Author's transcription.

253 Author's transcription.

The rhythmic acceleration of the instrumental introduction culminates in the short Thrash Metal riff (c), which leads into riff (d), consisting of tremolo-picked power chords. While the use of the tritone and so-called optic scales is not a new phenomenon in Heavy Metal's stream of tradition, the naked simplicity of this riff is outstanding, as it exclusively alternates 5-power-chords on E and B-flat. In the course of the track, the riff is primarily varied in its rhythmic distribution.



Music example 16. Mayhem - "The Freezing Moon", riff d, 2:17, riff d¹, 2:30, riff d², 2:45.²⁵⁴

At first the harmonic motion takes place at an evenly spaced half-note level in this transcription, accompanied by sixteenth-note blast beats in the drums. Once the voice enters, the first power chord is prolonged to a whole note, whereas the last two are compressed to the duration of a quarter-note in riff (d¹). The effect is one of tension within stasis: The harmonic colors remain the same, but their temporal weighting changes. The arpeggiated version, (d²), increases the surface rhythm to the eighth-note level. While the harmonic rhythm now essentially conforms to the first version again, the rhythmic and melodic motif constitutes a rhythmic diminution of the end of riff (d¹). One might be compelled to see an analogy between the obsessive reiteration of the furthest possible harmonic distance between two power chords and the morbid obsession with the "Freezing Moon" that forms the subject matter of the lyrics.

Such rhythmic variation on the basis of a sustained harmonic pattern has no precedent in Mayhem's earlier tracks, which, in spite of also exhibiting a great deal of repetition and relative monotony, do not make an effort to animate a riff in such a goal-directed manner. One might even consider this a simple instance of Schoenberg's *developing variation*, insofar as the surface motif of riff (d²) references the intervening variant of riff (d¹), representing both a climax in surface activity and a synthesis of the two preceding versions of it by combining the first's harmonic rhythm with the second's rhythmic motif.

²⁵⁴ Author's transcription.

6.1.2. Tritones and the “moving finger technique” in “Pagan Fears”

Unlike “The Freezing Moon”, “Pagan Fears” represents a relatively straightforward verse-chorus form with fewer contrasts in tempo, if one allows that the chorus is represented by a riff that consistently follows the verse riff. The track's title appears during the bridge, however. Another conspicuous feature is that the riffs belonging to the verse-chorus units are exclusively composed out of power chords, suggesting that for Mayhem, imperfect consonances and dissonances still constituted outstanding sonorities that appear, as in Bathory, more often in accessory parts of the track, such as the introduction, the bridge or instrumental interludes.

a=16, b=11, c= 8, d=16, e=16, f=16, g=32	4a2b2b¹4a4c / 4d4d4d¹ / 4d4d¹4d / ee¹ee² / 4f 2g2g¹ / 2d²2d4d¹	I A A¹ B C A²	I InVC VCIn B In2 InVC
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Table 4. Mayhem - “Pagan Fears”, duration 7:01.

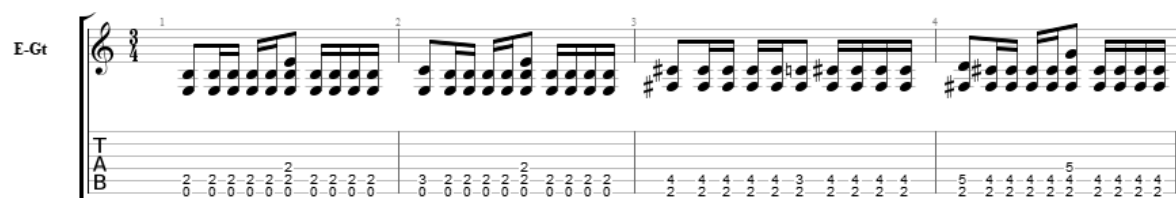
In terms of its construction, the similarities of riff (a) to the first riff of “The Freezing Moon” are readily apparent: After three repetitions of a figure based on *e*, a power-chord figure segues back into the repetition of the riff. The individuating feature of this riff is the vertical sonority consisting of a tritone and a diminished fifth. Related to the phenomenon of optic scales, the fingering 0-1-2-3-x-x and its equivalents produce stacked tritones/diminished fifths, a sonority one often encounters in other music from the Norwegian scene following the pioneering uses by Mayhem and Thorns.

Music example 17. Mayhem - “Pagan Fears”, riff a, 0:12.²⁵⁵

The final riff of the introduction, riff (c), is composed of 5-power-chords and a minor third, which are tremolo-picked much like in Bathory's “Chariots of Fire”. Still one possibility among many in Bathory, this combination would go on to become almost stereotypical in later Black Metal – to a point where Fenriz of Darkthrone has voiced regrets popularizing the predominant use of it with *Transilvanian Hunger*, which will be quoted below. The

²⁵⁵ Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/m/mayhem/pagan_fears_ver2_guitar_pro.htm.

bridge riff (e) and its variants embellishes 5-power-chords with upper and lower neighbor-notes for rhythmic emphasis, resulting in tritones respectively minor sixths. This seems to be the origin for the practice of “*augmenting the fifth in a power chord*”²⁵⁶ Hagen has observed in Emperor. Riff (f) likewise embellishes a 5-power-chord with a minor sixth in this fashion.



Music example 18. Mayhem - “Pagan Fears”, riff e, 3:52.²⁵⁷

Riffs (g) and (g¹) represent an instance of figurative variation of a retained harmonic pattern, as observed in “The Freezing Moon”, providing both additional harmonic color through the neighbor-notes in the *f#-a#* and *f#-c#* dyads. Additionally, and this is a departure from the technique present in Bathory, full triads and power chords with more than one tone are combined with dyadic power chords and imperfect consonances, resulting in an even richer palette of vertical sonorities and different degrees of timbral roughness produced by the distortion.



Music example 19. Mayhem - “Pagan Fears”, riff g, riff g¹, 4:11.²⁵⁸

These examples notwithstanding, power-chords and single notes are still the dominant sonorities encountered, even among the new Mayhem tracks in 1990. Nonetheless, both in terms of “harmonic material” and rhythm, these passages would seem grossly out of place in Death Metal. The last example in particular exhibits a lack of percussive, varied phenomenal accents when viewed from the vantage point of Death Metal and the archetypal Thrash Metal riffs pioneered by Venom.

²⁵⁶ Hagen 2011, p. 184.

²⁵⁷ Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/m/mayhem/pagan_fears_ver2_guitar_pro.htm.

²⁵⁸ Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/m/mayhem/pagan_fears_ver2_guitar_pro.htm.

6.2. Thorns

Unlike the bands treated so far, Thorns (which was founded as *Stigma Diabolicum* in 1989) does not feature in the roster of bands considered most representative of Black Metal among today's scene participants. This is most likely due to the fact that because of his incarceration for being an accomplice in the murder of Euronymous, Snorre "Blackthorn" Ruch did not release any official material during the early 90s. Yet the influence of two demo tapes circulating in the underground is widely acknowledged by members of the Norwegian scene. In the September 1992 issue of *Slayer Mag*, Metalion offers a glimpse of the high esteem given to Thorns' musical individuality then, observing a unique expressiveness in its riffs:

„When it comes to Norwegian bands there is nothing quite like THORNS.... The thing with this band is that they have not recorded any demo's or anything yet, so that is a bit sad. Anyways, what we got here is some reh[earsal] stuff and a tape where you can hear only bass + guitar, and it is this tape I'm totally mad about. I never heard anything like those riffs, they are really unique. They are so full of emotions.“²⁵⁹

The guitar and bass tape referenced here is the *Grymyrk* demo, recorded and first circulated in June 1991, predating the earliest Norwegian Black Metal releases of the 1990s, eventually released alongside other material on the *Stigma Diabolicum* compilation in 2007. Tomas „Samoth“ Haugen, guitarist of Emperor, recalls that „*back in the day we used to play the so-called Grymyrk rehearsal tape a lot... it became an inspiration for many bands in the scene.*“²⁶⁰ Fenriz of Darkthrone credits Euronymous, Varg Vikernes and Ruch with developing the trademark riff techniques of Norwegian Black Metal,²⁶¹ significantly, Ruch was in close contact with Mayhem and the attendees of the Helvete record store since the late 1980s, store being where he made me contacts that led to the founding of *Stigma Diabolicum* – renamed to Thorns in the wake of Latin band names becoming a trend. Eventually, Thorns became a dormant project prior to Ruch's arrest and conviction, partly due to the considerable distances between the band members hampering rehearsal and recording session. Eventually, Ruch became Mayhem's second guitarist alongside Euronymous, collaborating closely with the latter and giving advice to fledgling bands.²⁶²

259 Kristiansen 2011, p. 237.

260 Patterson 2013, p. 181.

261 <http://www.invisibleoranges.com/interview-fenriz/>, accessed 7/19/2016.

262 Patterson 2013, p. 156.

6.2.1. Parallel minor triads and wide-ranging arpeggios in “Home”

The June 1991 *Grymryk* tape features six tracks, five of them created prior to the band's change of name in the latter half of 1990: “Fall”, “Thule”, “Fairytale”, “You That Mingle May” and “Into the Promised Land” (under the curious new title “Lovely Children”).²⁶³ These older tracks still exhibit prominent influence of Death Metal with palm-muted riffs and downtuned guitars. The new track, “Home”, would eventually be reworked into “Ærie Descent” on the 1992 *Trøndertun* demo tape, eventually appearing on the *Nordic Metal: A Tribute to Euronymous* compilation in 1995. Emperor guitarist Samoth calls attention to one of the most striking features of the *Grymryk* tape apart from the fact that it includes only guitar and bass: “*Snorre has a very unique style of playing. I love the use of weird eerie chords and disharmonies, as well as the often very strict and dominant way of executing the riffs.*”²⁶⁴ Indeed, the track “Home” would seem to fit Hagen's judgment of Black Metal being prone to eschew power chords in favor of “*full chord voicings, which produce a denser and less clearly resonant timbre when played through heavy distortion.*”²⁶⁵ This is immediately apparent in the track's first riff, which juxtaposes a low open string with barre-fingered minor triads in parallel motion. Minor triads with roots a semitone apart would go on to form an integral part of the sound of Norwegian Black Metal, being easy to play breaching the confines of diatonic functional tonality.

♩ = 60

E-Gt

Tune down 1 step
① = D ④ = C
② = A ⑤ = G
③ = F ⑥ = D

1-3. f

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Music example 20. Thorns – “Home”, riff a, riff b, 0:02-1:02.

²⁶³ Patterson 2013, p. 183.

²⁶⁴ Patterson 2013, p. 181.

²⁶⁵ Hagen 2011, p. 184.

The transition between triple and duple meter by splitting off part of the riff and extending it with new material should also be noted, as such smooth, composed-out transitions also appear on Burzum's *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss*, which takes up the contemplative atmosphere of “Home” in addition to further techniques exhibited on it. The pulse becomes twice as fast with riff (c), which continues the juxtaposition of minor triads a minor second apart, now with the full barre chord fingering. As in Mayhem's “The Freezing Moon”, the strings are left ringing to resonate through the distortion. The fingering of the wide arpeggio riff (d) represents a more challenging fingering of a minor triad that is likewise shifted a semitone as the arpeggio changes direction from ascending to descending. Compared to tremolo-picked Death Metal riffs, which frequently feature angular changes of direction and seldom unambiguously imply full triads, this particular riff projects a more hazy, searching affect, exploring a higher register not associated with the pummeling heaviness of Death and Thrash Metal. Riff (d¹) varies the riff by moving the fingering a major triad lower, again avoiding the kind of fourth and fifth relations central to functional tonality. Additionally, the open lowest string results in the arpeggio now implying a triad first with a major, then with a minor third.

The image displays musical notation for three riffs from the song "Home" by Thorns. The notation is presented in three systems, each with a treble clef staff, a guitar staff with tablature, and a bass staff. The tempo is marked as 120 bpm. Riff c is marked with "let ring" and "4x". Riff d is marked with "4x". Riff d1 is marked with "4x". The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

Music example 221. Thorns – “Home”, riff c, riff d, riff d1, 1:02-1:34.

6.3. Darkthrone

Considered by German Black Metal followers to be the band most representative of the genre, Darkthrone's progression from Death Metal to Black Metal over the course of their first four albums will be considered in this chapter, highlighting the adoption of techniques observed in Mayhem's newer tracks, the Thorns demos, and the “first wave” bands.

6.3.1. Entombed, Swedish Death Metal and Darkthrone's *Soulside Journey*

Even a cursory listen to the eponymous opening track Entombed's breakthrough debut *Left Hand Path* suggests that it embodies the kind of “hectic” Death Metal the 1980s were over-saturated with according to Fenriz: The vast majority of the riffs are repeated only twice before they are either substantially varied or, and this is the more common case, abandoned in favor of a new, contrasting riff. The overall form is sectional, littered with solos and defies easy categorization into an overarching verse-chorus scheme. As was the norm for the vast majority of 1980s Extreme Metal, the most common sonority is the 5-power-chord, though the timbrally fainter, denser 4-power-chord also appears. In terms of production, three guitars – one left, one center, one right – project a formidable wall of sound, the riffs are crisply articulated and the drumming is dynamic and rarely confined to mere accompaniment for the guitar riffs.

In many ways, the same applies to *Soulside Journey*, released in January 1991 and recorded in late 1990, although its riffs are more repeated more often, usually four times, with variations being largely confined to Fenriz' drumming. When vertical intervals other than fourth, fifth and octave appear, the constituting notes are invariably split between the two guitars. As on Entombed's *Left Hand Path*, the guitars are downtuned a fourth to B, something Darkthrone would abandon in favor of standard (E) tuning under the influence of Mayhem in their transition to Black Metal. The material written between *Soulside Journey* and *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, later released as *Goatlord*, is arguably even more “hectic” than even Entombed, with stark contrasts of rhythmic motion and almost no penchant for repetition in its not excessively long songs averaging between three and four minutes in duration. As noted before, the band grew disenchanted with this style, coming to the conclusion that “*what we got a kick out of was, to put it simply, Celtic Frost, Motörhead, and Bathory.*”²⁶⁶

266 Patterson 2013, p. 197.

6.3.2. *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* and *Under a Funeral Moon*

Darkthrone's second album, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, recorded in August 1991 and released on February 26th, 1992, ended up being the first album of the “second wave” of Norwegian Black Metal. Though the band no longer identified with the Death Metal composed for *Goatlord*, they used some of this material for *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, as Fenriz recalls:

“But we had to use some of the [*Goatlord*] material for the *A Blaze* album, 'cos we didn't want to make an EP with just three new total black metal songs. So we made three new black metal songs—‘Kathaarian Life Code,’ ‘In the Shadow of the Horns,’ and ‘Where Cold Winds Blow,’ and the rest would be Goatlord-ish material that was ‘blackened’ because of the studio sound we chose.”²⁶⁷

The three Death Metal tracks of the album, then, are “Paragon Belial”, “A Blaze in the Northern Sky” and “The Pagan Winter”. “A Blaze in the Northern Sky” is preserved in its original version on the special edition reissue of *Goatlord*, the changes made to fit it in with the new tracks are small: The first riff, instead of consisting of power chords strummed once is instead broken up by tremolo-picking, the complex drum fills are replaced by constant blast beats and the solo over it is completely scrapped. The biggest change though is not evident from the two recordings, as the rehearsal tape sports similarly thin, treble-rich sound as *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*. In terms of distortion, the album explores new extremes, the shrill, noise-saturated texture and reverberation making it hard to identify pitch classes in riffs that utilize something other than perfect consonances in particular. The tremolo-picking turns fast passages into a wash of sound, though one knows that the pulse present in the guitars is similarly fast as the blast beats of the drums, it becomes a timbral feature – a kind of indistinct, audible shimmering. To maximize this effect, palm-muting, as it is common in Death Metal, is avoided almost completely.

The first track, “Kathaarian Life Code”, exceeds conventional duration, though some repetition exists within the smaller, rhythmically contrasting sections, larger riff successions are not repeated as they would be in a verse-chorus-derived form.

a=4, b=8, c=8, d=8, e=16, f=16, g=16, h=16, i=16, j=16, k=8 ...	4a4b 4a4b 4c 4c ¹ 4d / 4e ff ¹ 2g 4e ff ¹ 4h ff ¹ / 6i / 8j 4k 2l 2l ¹ 2l 4 ...
---	--

Table 5. Darkthrone - “Kathaarian Life Code”, up to 6:00, total duration 10:35

²⁶⁷ Patterson 2013, p. 198.

What is perhaps the greatest departure from Death Metal apart from the thin production and lack of palm-muting is the sheer minimalism of the final riff starting at 8:56, which is at first only an alteration between a treble register c and b, which is eventually underlaid with 5-power-chords on f and e, repeated no less than 12 times in total, resulting in a long stretch of over a minute where the guitars supply virtually no rhythmic demarcations. Riff (e), a series of equal-duration, downstroke power chords with slides on the fretboard, may be heard as a homage to Celtic Frost and Hellhammer, when asked about the origin of a similar riff on a more recent Darkthrone album, Fenriz responded: “*That’s pure ’84 Celtic Frost! And also stuff like MESSIAH by HELLHAMMER. It’s the kind of riff I’m best at making, and I’ve always done it.*”²⁶⁸



Music example 22. Hellhammer – “Messiah”, first riff.²⁶⁹



Music example 23. Darkthrone - “Kathaarian Life Code”, riff e, 2:24.²⁷⁰

Compared to the linear, stream-of-consciousness “Kathaarian Life Code”, “Where Cold Winds Blow” is closer to verse-chorus forms, though the vocals are so unintelligible that the sections need to be inferred from the repetition scheme rather than changes or correspondences in text. Additionally, wordless screams can sound quite similar to recitation of text, contributing to the disorienting experience of trying to follow the lyrics in the music when reading them. The structure of the track may be diagrammed as follows:

a=32, b=4, c=4, d=8, e=16, f=16, f'=8, g=14	4a8b4c6d / 4a8b / 8e3ff'4d / 4a8b4c / 10g	A A ¹ B A ² C	VC VC B VC Po
--	--	--	------------------

Table 6. Darkthrone - “Where Cold Winds Blow”, duration 7:21.

Compared to the predominance of power chords on “Kathaarian Life Code” and the resulting proximity to Extreme Metal in general and Death Metal in particular, “Where Cold Winds Blow” exhibits material that is closer to Black Metal's exclusive property.

268 <http://www.invisibleoranges.com/interview-fenriz/>, accessed 8/5/2016.

269 Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/h/hellhammer/messiah_ver2_guitar_pro.htm.

270 Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/d/darkthrone/kathaarian_life_code_guitar_pro.htm.

The first riff of the track parallels the wide arpeggio observed in Thorns' “Home” in that it is based on a transposed, arpeggiated fifth, i.e. on parallel motion on the fretboard, which is embellished with either an upper or a lower semitone. The rhythmic pattern implied by the melodic outline is retained for all transpositions, this homogeneity and the internal repetitions give the riff its hypnotic, regularly oscillating effect, free of the rhythmic contrasts and varied interjections that give Death Metal its physical, fitful corporeality.

Music example 24. Darkthrone - “Where Cold Winds Blow”, riff a.²⁷¹

Music example 24. Darkthrone - “Where Cold Winds Blow”, riff a.²⁷¹

The bridge, represented by riffs (e) and (f), is – following a trend observed in Bathory and Mayhem – characterized by its use of dissonances and imperfect consonances in a Bathory-like instance of the “*moving finger technique*”, though the hitherto unprecedented level of distortion makes it a considerable challenge indeed to transcribe the bridge. The resulting transcription, obviously, cannot capture the shadowy impression of this bridge.

Music example 25. Darkthrone - “Where Cold Winds Blow”, riff e, riff f, 2:44.²⁷²

Music example 25. Darkthrone - “Where Cold Winds Blow”, riff e, riff f, 2:44.²⁷²

271 Author's transcription.

272 Author's transcription.

Yet these uses of chordal structures are still very much the exception, with quickly tremolo-picked 5-power-chord being by far the prevalent building block of Darkthrone's riffs on *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*. It's distance from Death Metal is a relative one when considered in terms of guitar technique – the lack of palm-muting and production render even riffs one might also expect to find in Death Metal tracks into something of a different gesture altogether. There is less aversion to simple riffs and repetitions of riffs for more than four times. All of these trends apply, generally, to the follow-up 1993 album *Under A Funeral Moon*, as well, though it shows an even greater propensity for verse-chorus structures when compared to *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*: This return to the structural simplicity may be understood as a nod to the first wave prior to Bathory, in particular to Venom, Hellhammer and the early Mayhem.

The opening track of *Under a Funeral Moon*, “Natassja In Eternal Sleep”, partly transcribed by Hagen, represents the exception and essentially follows in the path of “Where Cold Winds Blow”: A wide, sweeping arpeggio riff is juxtaposed with an instance of the “*finger moving technique*” familiar from Bathory. “Unholy Black Metal” relishes in the repetition of its verse-chorus pair, the first a riff based on a falling, tremolo-picked semitone, the latter on a simple alternation percussive of power chords on b and c – i.e. a rising semitone. This change of direction and the simple correspondence in the materials is underscored by sliding on the fretboard: A short glissando from above for the 7 b-power-chords, one from below for the c-power-chord. But this is not the sleaze conveyed by the sliding and imperfections of intonation in Hellhammer or Venom, but rather artificial, deliberately cultivated embellishment, a conscious homage for those in the know.

The most expansive track of the album, “To Walk the Infernal Fields”, with its calm back beat figure, contrasts power chord-based verse and chorus sections, where 5-power-chords embellished with off-beat octaves (as observed in Mayhem's “Pagan Fears” bridge section), with an instrumental interlude that once more employs the “*moving finger technique*” for an expressive climax in a section without vocals. The final track “Crossing the Triangle of Flames”, employs open strings strummed into a power chord riff in its closing section from 3:45 onward, a means of enriching the texture that also gained currency in bands like Burzum and Emperor.

6.3.3. Radical simplicity on *Transilvanian Hunger*

In his introduction to an interview on the creation of *Transilvanian Hunger*, Mudrian calls it “*the most emulated [album] of Darkthrone's seemingly endless canon.*”²⁷³ Fenriz composed all the instrumental parts in his living-room studio, “*humming the riffs in [his] head*” as he recorded the drums.²⁷⁴ He intended to emulate the longing and trance he knew from Burzum's music up to then (i.e. up to *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss*, not yet released, but recorded and likely circulated on tape) and Von – the already discussed antidote to the “hectic” nature prevalent in Extreme Metal up to then.²⁷⁵ Musing on the character of one-man-projects, Fenriz remarks: “*And you can also hear that it's very monotone, very concept album, and usually that sort of music is made by one person. Whether it's electronic or not, when it's really sounding a bit totalitarian, then you know it's the work of one guy, one dictator.*”²⁷⁶

Validating the adequacy of analytical approaches based on riffs and their repetition, Fenriz recalls: “*I'd sit down and play it on guitar, and I'd decide for myself, this would go eight times, this will go 12 times, because in the '80s you would never play a riff more than four, six or eight times. Burzum and Von were also experimenting with playing stuff 12, 16, even 32 times before changing, and that would mean the change would be of the essence, the change would be really noticeable.*”²⁷⁷ Fenriz emphasizes the novelty of maintaining a single tempo for an entire side, until the track “Graven takeheimens saler”, though what changes in this track is not the tempo but rather the drum figure: Hitherto consisting of undulating blast beats with equal duration between bass and snare drum, the second riff in this track is accompanied by a dotted rhythm paralleling the guitar riff.²⁷⁸

Confronted about if he considered *Transilvanian Hunger* particularly unique, Fenriz remarks that other bands were on the brink of recording something in that vein and that the riffs he was using – the “*finger moving technique*” combining varied intervals – were common currency in the Norwegian scene.²⁷⁹ Reflecting on the conceptual unity, Fenriz

273 Mudrian 2009, p. 180.

274 Mudrian 2009, p. 183.

275 Mudrian 2009, p. 184.

276 Mudrian 2009, p. 185.

277 Mudrian 2009, p. 186.

278 Mudrian 2009, p. 186.

279 Mudrian 2009, p. 192.

states: “I had to make all those choices, but to me they weren't like choices at all. It was made, it had to be that way – there was no other choice. I realized I had made an album that was entirely in one tempo.”²⁸⁰ Though being little more than an accessory in his tale, Fenriz appears somewhat remorseful in retrospect, as he feels that *Transilvanian Hunger*'s then-original expressive content was eventually perverted by those emulating it. In a particularly striking passage, he describes the entrainment into its monotone droning and an effect of “humming along” with the riffs due to hearing them so often, emphasizing the importance of the merely implied, unheard for the aesthetic of Norwegian Black Metal:

“You'd see people from other countries really tuning into what we were doing and trying to do it, but misunderstanding it. And making it with better sound, more synthesizers. Where before, the riff – and you would sort of hear the riff so many times that you would sort of make the synthesizer sound in your head, but then people from other places would take that tone that you would get in your head while listening to that riff long enough – they would put a synthesizer on top, and I was sort of like 'That wasn't really the intention.’”²⁸¹

In retrospect, Fenriz feels he contributed to Black Metal that was overly sentimental, inspired by the “sadness” that permeates *Transilvanian Hunger* and foregoing the intensity and power associated with the “Metal” as opposed to the “Black” for Fenriz. Vocalist Nocturo Culto provides another insightful association: That of “misanthropy” and the “monotone”, where misanthropy is equated to not accommodating the listener through the sheer barrenness of simplicity and extensive repetition.²⁸²

Like most of the tracks on the album, the title track “Transilvanian Hunger” restricts itself to three riffs in the course of its 6:10 runtime. The beats per minute implied by the guitar riffs and the incessant blast beat diverge greatly: The alternation between bass and snare drum clocks in at approximately 280 beats per minute, whereas the fastest rate of melodic motion in the guitars could be interpreted at 70 beats per minute. Though it appears nowhere explicitly in the track, the pulse has been set at 140 beats per minute for the analysis and transcription.

a=16, b=16, c=16	8a8b8 / 4a4b / 6c / 4a4b / 8a2a'2a'2a	A A' B A' A'	VC VC B VC Po
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Table 7. *Darkthrone* - „*Transilvanian Hunger*“, duration 6:10.

280 Mudrian 2009, p. 193.

281 Mudrian 2009, p. 193.

282 Mudrian 2009, p. 194.

Riff (a) is the classic example used by Fenriz to explain Bathory's „*moving finger technique*“ and moves at a gentle half-note pace, bearing unusually strong functional tonal associations due to the lower notes being a and b, i.e. I-V. The c in the second transcribed measure acts analogous to a syncopation in strict counterpoint, with the only difference being that the „dissonance“ is a minor sixth – albeit one rendered far more discordant by the high level of distortion, increasing the difference with the perfect fifth following it. Riff (b) slows down the rhythmic movement in its first three transcribed measures, like riff (a) its melody is stepwise, though this time with ascending motion overall – and the only chromatic material in the entire track, represented by a d# 5-power-chord. Speaking of the two riffs as a verse-chorus unit is not without problems, as the primacy of the voice is by no means clear in this repertoire.

Finally, the bridge riff (c) employs the longest durational values in the song, as well as the climax of its simplicity – it merely alternates two low-register power chords a semitone apart. Yet its most prominent contrast with the surrounding riffs cannot be adequately captured in transcription: The strumming pattern, which is markedly more irregular than before, creating a shimmering, unmeasured timbre that is a far cry from the more regular strumming of the other, more melodic riffs. Riff (a¹) retains the guitar part verbatim, but the bass – which is audible throughout – now is shifted to a higher register. From there on, the fade-out begins. Crucially, variant (a²), the melodic apex of the track, appears far into the decreasing volume, suggesting that the track might continue to develop even as it trails off into the distance, seemingly unconcerned about the listener.

Music example 26. Darkthrone - „*Transilvanian Hunger*“, riff a, riff b, riff c, riff a².²⁸³

²⁸³ Adapted from https://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/d/darkthrone/transilvanian_hunger_ver4_guitar_pro.htm.

7. Conclusion: Resisting the trend and reviving what never was

The historical narrative circulating in the Norwegian scene and disseminated and conserved in countless interviews as well as publications such as *Lords of Chaos*, *Black Metal – Evolution of the Cult* and *The Slayer Mag Diaries*, takes the form of resistance to Death Metal perceived as pandering to the reviled mainstream – Death Metal that was insufficiently marginalized and hence insufficiently extreme. To this day, the word “trend” draws up exclusively negative connotations in the Extreme Metal scenes, the threat of assimilation being an existential threat to the subculture and community associated with one's music.²⁸⁴ The association of Death Metal's sound and a particular style of clothing and fan should not be forcibly torn asunder in the name of supposedly “autonomous” factors such as brought forth by Reyes in the form of “over-saturation” and a wear-out of the aesthetic, as the increased institutional foothold of Death Metal, such as airtime on MTV or record deals affording the bands high-quality production and wide distribution of their records, was a major concern to the Norwegian scene.

7.1. The trend...

This total conception of “trendy Death Metal” is intimately related to the total conception of Black Metal, with its imperative of tearing down the walls separating art, scene and daily life – to catastrophic results. All this was done in the name of reviving a past that was truly committed to Death and Satanism, a past that never existed. But this willful ignorance may also account for the aesthetic innovations and individualization of Norwegian Black Metal vis-à-vis not only the popular Death Metal of its day but also the “first wave” of Black Metal respectively the older Thrash Metal the scene claimed allegiance though. If one can take liberties with regards to the sincerity of the Satanism of the past in the name of delineating one's scene in the present, why not take liberties with the sonic materials of the past if it serves this individuation and dissociation?

Furthermore, the quasi-religious ideals not only opened up new topics framing music but also allowed for new exploration of topics inherited from the past – possibly extending consciously to music and at the very least affording a new horizon for post factum interpretations of the music's sounding aspects, as hinted at by Vikernes' embrace of a contemplative listening position towards electronic dance music that ended up informing

284 Smialek 2015, p. 67.

his contributions to Black Metal in his view.

7.2. ...and the techniques to resist it

That discontents went beyond simple rejection of high-quality production and high-precision performance has been argued with documents from the scene, hence I have focused on differences that are not yet captured by Reyes' production- and precision-centered approach. Since Black Metal's chosen antagonist was Death Metal, it seemed prudent to establish at least some norms of the latter against which Black Metal's deviations from them gain their significance. Additionally, the aesthetic trajectory from Venom through the Extreme Metal of the 1980s has been sketched out in the following chapter, guided by the perception of the Norwegian scene represented by tracks they covered as well as retrospective considerations of particular techniques appropriated from their progenitors. Departing from this shared heritage of Death and Black Metal, the second analytical chapter attempted to illustrate the technique of Black Metal in the light of both the "first wave" of Black Metal and the Death Metal that seems to have been most disconcerting to the Norwegian scene around Mayhem and the Helvete record store: The recent upsurge in Swedish Death Metal, spearheaded by Entombed.

Bathory's *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* and *Blood Fire Death* introduced something to the Norwegian scene that had been lost in Extreme Metal's overall trajectory during the 1980s: Vertical sonorities other than perfect consonances played on a single guitar, yielding dynamically faint, opaque timbres when played through high distortion. This opaqueness ran counter to what had become the norm in Death Metal: Transparency and the power radiated by the aptly named power chords. While the latter still play a considerable role in the inception of Norwegian Black Metal, they are employed to very different ends. Contrary to Hagen's claim of being hard to combine with tremolo-picking, this combination is one of the prevalent techniques of Norwegian Black Metal in the early 1990s, contributing to its signature washed-out production aesthetic that shunned the percussive, chunky sound of palm-muting commonplace in Death Metal. It is tempting to assume that the experience of the dyadic riffs in Bathory eased the Norwegian scene into adopting minor triads and stacked tritones based on the 0-1-2-3-x-x fingering following the lead of Mayhem and Thorns. Exact transpositions of these chords resulting from parallel motion on the fretboard continue to play a major role even when such non-power-chord

sonorities are employed. In a video I was alerted to by Dietmar Elflein only after developing much of the material for this study, Vegard “Ihsahn” Tveitan of “second wave” Black Metal band Emperor teaches many of the idiomatic techniques observed in Thorns and Mayhem,²⁸⁵ confirming the importance afforded to them here.

The Norwegian scene draw additional influences from outside of Metal and from outsiders like Von, resulting in a greater openness to repetition and music meant for contemplative, trance-like listening, paving the way for so-called Ambient Black Metal inspired by Burzum's *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss*. Yet Norwegian Black Metal is a hybrid style when viewed from the vantage point of Elflein's formal analyses. While some musicians consciously shunned verse-chorus structures,²⁸⁶ such “rock-like” forms also constituted a nod to the Thrash Metal following Venom in the 1980s. Yet structures transcending the confines of these schemata were also present in the stream of tradition present to the Norwegian scene, in particular the mature efforts of Bathory and Celtic Frost. This diversity may be part of the reason why Black Metal was viable: Norwegian Black Metal not only self-consciously reflected on and related to existing Extreme Metal but also opened up to influences from electronic music that would hitherto seemed outlandish – but now seemed viable as an antidote to the “hectic” pace of Death Metal.

While non-power-chord sonorities are still used as highlights in the first two Black Metal albums of Darkthrone, the fundamentalist formulation of *Transilvanian Hunger* not only raised Bathory's “*moving finger technique*” to the norm but also exaggerated the simplicity of the verse-chorus heritage to a point where it undoes itself. Like Burzum's *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss*, it represents a particularly extreme departure from the concerns of Death Metal – in some ways, it is “more” Black Metal than other efforts by Darkthrone simply because of how explicitly it shuns its Other. Black Metal was made viable by Death Metal: It could not have existed in the 1980s. More than just a turning back of the clock to a revered past, it was a critique of present that revived what never was.

285 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6s7KSDdzG8>, accessed 8/9/2016.

286 http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/2010_interview_guitar_world.shtml, accessed 8/9/2016.

Appendix

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Abstracts

English:

This thesis investigates the genesis of Norwegian Black Metal, still considered definitive of the genre by its current fans. A comprehensive summary and critique of existing literature on the history of the genre results in two main research questions: 1) How did the Norwegian Black Metal scene position itself in relation to Death Metal in its statements? 2) Can statements from the Norwegian scene guide a grounded analysis of its music that clarifies its relative musical autonomy from other Extreme Metal in general and the Death Metal it reacted against in particular? The results can be summarized as follows: The Norwegian scene developed a totalized, quasi-religious ideal of “true” Black or Death Metal under which the sound of contemporary Death Metal was connoted with the abject “mainstream”. In its totalized rejection of Death Metal, the Norwegian scene adopted and developed a production aesthetic and style of guitar playing from older recordings, expanding on the use of intervals and chords that when played with distortion produced obscure, indistinct timbres in an effort to distance their music from Death Metal's focus on transparency and precision.

Deutsch:

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Genese des norwegischen Black Metal, der bis heute für Fans das Genre definiert. Eine umfangreiche Zusammenfassung und Kritik bestehender Literatur zur Geschichte des Genres ergibt zwei Forschungsfragen: 1) Wie positionierte sich die norwegische Black-Metal-Szene im Verhältnis zum Death Metal? 2) Können Äußerungen aus der norwegischen Szene eine adäquate Analyse ihrer Musik leiten, die sowohl deren relative Unabhängigkeit vom Extreme Metal generell und dem abgelehnten Death Metal im Speziellen klarstellt? Die Resultate können wie folgt zusammengefasst werden: Die norwegische Szene entwickelte ein totalitäres, quasi-religiöses Ideal „wahren“ Black oder Death Metals, von dem aus gesehen der Sound des zeitgenössischen Death Metal mit dem abgelehnten „Mainstream“ konnotiert war. In der totalen Ablehnung dieses Death Metal übernahm und entwickelte die norwegische Szene eine Ästhetik der Aufnahme und des Gitarrenspiels, bei der Intervalle und Akkorde eingesetzt wurden, die durch Verzerrung in undurchsichtigen, unklaren Klangfarben resultierten um sich so vom Augenmerk auf Transparenz und Präzision im Death Metal abzugrenzen.