

GRADUS AD PHLEGETHON

D.A.R.G.

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INTRODUCTION

The present volume attempts to present what the author has until now formulated with regards to a vision of metal music as a proper conduct for the sinister, that is, as an authentic dark musick. It is not so much an attempt to explain what is, as to highlight the best amongst it in regards to a perceived sinister esoteric essence on the one hand, but also musical efficacy empirically tested. The nature of such an effort is limited to the individual presenting these ideas and opinions.

The sequence of propositions, explanations and conceptualizations are presented primarily through a loose methodological and conceptual abstraction with the aim to enhance the experiential practice, bringing it under control. They are not meant to be definitive, but rather to be worked upon as avenues for growth brought into conscious awareness. Such a step in the making of decidedly dark musick in the metal vein would signify a shift in evolution that abandons the mystical, that which seeks for inexplicable and unquestionable mystique, and that which is grounded in understanding, yet not devoid, but effectively leading to an evocation or invocation of the sinisterly-numinous.

The first section, *A Vision of Darkness*, is a condensed draft of an originally much longer document elaborated throughout the years 2016 and 2017. It is a description of the origins of black metal from a musical perspective, while in the meantime gleaning into it an interpretation of the aural tradition that has grown in and through underground metal in general, and

within black metal more specifically. Moreover, this has been filtered to leave out the melodramatic and self-deluding – the Crowlean delusions that have hitherto been the staple of those adhering to the name of the musical genre.

Much of what is presented throughout, especially in *A Vision of Darkness*, owes its birth, inspiration, sense of direction and nature to the writings of Brett Stevens. And so, it seems perfectly adequate, if not mandatory, to this author to include an interview with him that adds a great deal of weight to the contents of this publication. The interview, titled *Esoteric Nihilism*, is introduced with a brief article that attempts to discuss various comparisons between other works and Brett Stevens' book *Nihilism*.

The third section, *A Sorcerous Craft*, is half the length of the first, and is in essence a proposition for the handling of riff-phrases in metal as fluxions as explained by Anton Long in the *Sinister Tradition*. The conclusion is to take the idea of possession and ritual in metal not merely allegorically, but to acquire an abstract understanding from experience into further, conscious application.

We are honoured and proud to feature an interview with Ebuleb of Abyssum, alongside an introductory short essay under the name of *Ars Symphonica*. The number and nature of diverse collocations that have lead such a collaboration to be possible are so fortuitous, so synchronistic, as to cause any one to ascribe it all to an incredible chance. Others may yet see something else, unnameable perhaps, at work through and in the individuals involved.

To bring the main content to an end, a *Manifesto* is proposed for future thinking and elaboration of black metal as a

consciously and organic craft with aims outside the internally creative.

Finally, Appendix I contains two older texts which yet retain value to the purposes of the present work. Both of these texts, *Metal as Transcendental Art* and *Wallpaper Black Metal and Its Apologetics* were originally published on Death Metal Underground online, and have been freely culled in order to preserve them in a more focused context. Appendix II includes commentaries on black metal bands originally appearing on either the Death Metal Underground website or the now defunct Praefuscus Ferrum blog.

A vision of darkness

PRAELUDIUM

The present work's end is to bring about a new and higher conception of black metal art as a way to dark spirituality. It is not presumed that such a feat may be brought about by this single enterprise alone. However, the sowing of seeds in the right soil may, in time, sprout a sapling which will become a robust oak of deep roots and overarching greenery. Such an organism would be the incarnation of a futurist culture determined by a post-nihilistic super-spirituality –one that it has gone through phases of annihilation and rebirth.

In a sterile society, young artists with an insatiable appetite for life and a yearning for knowledge of what underlies our mundane existences readily, hasten art towards its inevitable consequences. Metal approached this doom in a form of dark beauty and inverted symbols within the span of fifteen years. Raw, superficial modifications had produced a rapid evolution of aesthetics whose curve was akin to a gradual depuration. The confusion which thereafter ensued was a testament to Death's arrival, as all started to crumble. The budding metal movement was about to endure its first dark age, one which would span the same amount of time that had taken Black Metal to arise as the form which mirrored its innermost essence.

If we expect a dynamic and natural movement, that is, one that is in constant becoming, then past encumbrances embedded in tradition itself must be shed. We must move beyond both the powerful yet uncontrolled rage of intuitive channelling that gave rise to a golden era of classic works, and

the disgraceful years of barren utilitarianism and technicality that followed. The admixture of internal and external, theoretical and practical, rational and emotional, and conscious and unconscious, reveals a holistic path. If we are to make use of the whole of our faculties to achieve our ends, we may not as artists disregard the intellect, nor as scientists lay aside intuition.

For black metal art in its current state, it implies the apparition of a different sphere, a more conceptualized one that allows for versatility below and focus above. Black metal artists in the past have attained such a vision through an individual illumination, but this could be part of the teachings within a tradition, a living tradition and not a set of petrified rules which demand to be followed; we must point rather towards a collected body of wisdom acquired through experience and insight. Here lies a being born of torment, assembled from the shards of a broken spiritual husk and paid for by the shedding of a soul's blood; but with Death comes Temperance, and a chance for Renewal.

FOUNDATIONS

Archetypal Origins in Black Sabbath

Black Sabbath published their first album in the midst of a rising tide of popular interest in the occult. This counter-cultural gesture was in truth a reaction to the emptiness and corruption perceived as inherent to civilization in our times. The generation who came of age two decades after the second of the World Wars was defined by the apparent truth created by that catastrophic event. To understand the cultural implications of such events, we must be able to see how the results of the conflict, and not only the conflict in itself, was a terrible thing for humanity.

As the twentieth century progressed from the catastrophe of World War II towards the end of the Cold War, young people in contact with reality sensed a discrepancy between what they were told by society and what was apparent to them. There arose a deep suspicion of a hidden reality that was being purposefully covered up by those around them; a reality which, if uncovered, could lead to liberation from the slowly consuming and spiritually void husk of the modern world.

Even though only a relatively small number of individuals remotely understood the symbols and riddles of the occult, or at least cared enough to take an interest in them, a dark

traditional influence over Western European culture could be traced back to pre-historic times; its hold over the collective unconscious was and continues to be such that its symbols never ceased to be the inner language of the West. What was now known as the occult was a perversion of what had been a living tradition that had taken different shapes and forms but whose concepts preserved primordial germs of a cosmogonic view. Druids, witches and such had preserved the esoteric line of inheritance, ensuring the survival of teachings while putting into action these principles in temporary exoteric forms.

The occult renaissance that spilt from the nineteenth century onto the twentieth was no mere fashion tide, but the revival of something which had always lingered under, not yet dead because an intrinsic part of what is European; what had really changed was that, while during the years of almost absolute Christian control the status quo considered it a danger to its own interests, the new presumptuously materialist reigning paradigm simply brushed it off as irrelevant.

Modernity as a result of the so-called Enlightenment has always been a paradox: enabled by the material benefits of industrialism, it was launched on a quest to rediscover and redefine itself spiritually beyond the petrified state in which religion found itself at the time. The obsession with the occult which became a mainstream phenomenon in the midst of the Cold War could be said to be an echo of that Romantic era. The original romantic spirit from more than a century before was a push against despotism and mechanistic cruelty; it had arisen as a horror stricken sensitive soul that saw the gradual tearing apart of a beautiful creation. The new sentiment was caused by a much graver ordeal which verged on the apocalyptic. The revival brought a form of the older Romantic ideals back, but on a more superficial level, and was instead defined by an

element surely caused by a much more sterile and explicitly threatening world: an extreme apathy, a sense of desperation beyond all hope for recovery and a premonition of calamity which spelt finality for our kind.

Out of this bleak landscape first arose metal, and its first manifestations came through Black Sabbath. In these we hear the innate metaphysician and mystic whose innate intelligence and developed skill lead him to inspect and tear down the social subterfuge that surrounds him part by part by whatever means are available to him. In Black Sabbath it is not the voice of trained philosophers, adepts or theologians that we hear, but that of the man with un-common sense facing a dreadful reality through the symbols that tradition has utilized to preserve information.

In Black Sabbath's lyrics we find a statement of crude reality, but not a condemnation of it per se. It is the human being himself who is constantly accused of weakness when placed in a world of fear and decadence that is suddenly revealed. Metal did not appeal to euphemisms nor believed the end of the world could be wished away; drugs were not embraced as a source of true happiness nor were they vituperated. Few people have understood the true meaning underlying the message of metal as a whole, which essentially has been that the problem of humanity is its own denial of reality and not the objects and ideas with which it becomes obsessed.

We must understand that popular expressions of one sort or another are only permitted when they are not deemed dangerous to the status quo. Metal contains the essence of a realist's thoughts which are poison to a delusional civilization, but it has survived for the same reason that ancient myths survive: it lies covered by layers of indirection. Myth is a

symbolic vehicle that amplifies and penetrates those minds that are fertile ground for the seeds of a message to grow.

We may, without a shadow of doubt, affirm that Black Sabbath's music as a first manifestation of metal was the only truly dark music transiting along popular channels. Preceding them were the so-called occult rock bands, which many would name as proof of the contrary. Such allegations are justified in their claim that there were artists with considerably more profound, darker and clearer understanding and projecting of occult concepts at a time before the birth of heavy metal. The error lies in mistaking intent for the music itself, and in confusing the expression of the lyrics with the actual content of the music.

It must be made clear that the words of a song themselves are extraneous to the music, though they are intimately related to the same source of inspiration, whatever that may truly be, and serve only as directors of attention. It is the melodic line on the shoulders of which they are carried which in truth is a part of the music itself. There is no absolute assurance in the transmission of information and translation of energy, so that the artist can claim certitude in the knowledge of the origin of what he channels.

There may be more evil in music that transpires tension, heaviness and fear through the actual harmony in movement and textures, even though the accompanying words reveal only a surface or a set of symbols without their understanding. On the other hand, Satanic musings and deep insights of an occultist intellectual that are carried by a music of a much more light-hearted character that is not musically differentiable from mundane popular production can make no claims to the effectiveness or profoundness of the music itself, but only of the words and the intent of their writer.

Anything coming into existence is invariably the result of forces and influences present and acting before them. So it is that in Black Sabbath's music we hear the mannerisms of blues and rock, as well as the energetic blasts of hard rock which would eventually become a defining feature of heavy metal. There was a third great musical influence which pervaded this new genre to its very marrow yet at the same time in a subtle ways which have not been properly acknowledged with a correct understanding of the matter.

Said influence was the motif-driven horror movie music which leaned on the longer phrases of classical music of the romantic period. Popular movie music was, of course, simpler than the old ivory tower art, and was made with the purpose of transmitting clear impressions to an audience rather being the subject matter of intellectual debate. Black Sabbath's integration of riff and melody into a phrase as train of thought within the context of heavy rock instrumentation was to become the bedrock of metal music.

Critical to the superior quality of minimalist acts of dark beauty were the structures Black Sabbath adopted in their first two releases primarily, which were not the standard verse and chorus compositions. Black Sabbath's songs are not constructed from a haphazard appending of riffs, they achieve a comparatively long duration in letting each section speak at the appropriate speed, tasting every note and phrase as it is necessary while introducing a new idea before natural momentum has been spent. Within each section they may display either one repetition of an alternating pair, or a recursion of the larger structure; the heavy and more lasting effect of such concrete decisions should not be underestimated.

There are two characteristics Black Sabbath boasts of which lend to its particular transmission of a sense of heaviness. In

Iommi's tendency to use of both extremes of the guitar neck we find the first of these. He would often play high and low notes in rapid juxtaposition within a same section or even within a same riff-phrase; the effect thus achieved is one of tension and destabilizing motion from jump in frequency and the associated momentum that will be either be allowed to continue or must be opposed virulently and with great impact to change its course. The use of middle frequencies is more measured and notes played in this area tend to provide a stronger sense of stability as a result of consistently more moderate usage.

A second and more subtle cause is found in the way spacing across time is managed, that is, not tempo only but note-length. Iommi will allow for whole notes, and sometimes white notes, with a few quavers to round off the very end of the consequent in phrases using a period form; it must be added here that metal seems to be incredibly fond of the period form, and it is yet another element in the legacy that classical music passed on to the genre through Black Sabbath. The treatment of the organization of notes within phrases provides plenty of room for expansion and variation within a tight musical concept, and it is also, perhaps, more of a rediscovery of basic musical possibilities arising from immutable principles than a direct borrowing.

Even though drums certainly emphasize heaviness in the same way that those of heavy rock do, it is usually achieved through the use of sheer force and simplicity. Ward hybridizes these by admixture with a jazz-like swing and technicality, proficiently choosing the moment to use one or the other approach, thereby giving us a premonition of a synthesis beyond both that would invade the realms of death metal. In so

doing, Ward, the drummer, defines a new kind of backdrop in percussion for Iommi's clever phrases.

Foundations in Bathory

In Quorthon's music we see a more convincing proposal for diabolical music that goes beyond the widespread predilection of metal artists for the mythic and the obscure. The shadow that looms over an early Black Sabbath steps forward as a consummated invocation in the presence of Bathory. The older group crossed lines while dancing back and forth in a nebulous space open to a certain manner of interpretation, but Bathory displayed an unmistakable, devil-worship music with the spiritual overtones of a European tradition bespeaking of influences called upon through the elements of nature under the moon and the intrinsic physical influences these have over human beings.

The dark presence, the Horned God, is no longer acknowledged and recognized only as a powerful influence, but he is called and presenced. In the words of Varg Vikernes: music is sorcery. Bathory's second work could be, in light of this last reflection, considered a satanic hymn book. Furthermore, the particular way in which Quorthon writes about these concepts echoes the sentiment of the European Witch-Cult as depicted by Margaret Alice Murray in her *The God of the Witches*, tying it to land and thence a deep spirituality. Here, Quorthon serves as bard and prophet of The Devil as sentient cosmic force, recounting experience in life as testimony and looking into the future through signs of unrest.

To understand this voluntary embrace of evil as lying beyond simple egotistical caprice, one must abandon any

anthropomorphic conceptions of beings of a higher order that are commonly espoused by the profane; this much should be made clear before we can proceed, although this is not the place for theological discussions on the subject of considerable length.

There is in the lyrical content of *The Return of Darkness* and *Evil* a welcoming of an apocalyptic onslaught and upheaval. For what reason this is so conceived in the mind of the acolyte, we are not told. The uplifting of destructive force, the outbreak of natural forces or human passions may be taken as one more way of worshipping a pure form of Darkness. On second thought, however, we discover that the converse may also be true; this is an illusion behind which lies the evident idea hidden in plain sight: that they are both one and the same. It is not a blind force of nature nor is it a personality encased in ego; it is sentient cosmic force, a higher order of being, existing beyond common conceptions. Bathory makes this quite patent in recounting this presencing through the senses of an influence possessed of Will which appears all around but is not what it appears to be.

Worship of sacred darkness preserves the transcendent bent of Europe's old religion, while emphasizing elitism probably to an even greater degree than tradition originally did. To be sure, elitism does not necessarily imply a higher excellence, but denser filter. The idea behind this theory is that to address a problem, the solution cannot come in a form that is incompatible to it but must rather respond to it and speak back at the appropriate level.

Human life is not seen as sacred, but only as a stage of opportunity and probation. For if the soul is immortal or, more properly in line with pre-classical European tradition, if immortality can be achieved through the transmutation of the

basic soul unit, then whence the sanctity of this carnal state? Evil becomes a synonym for unleashed Force, or that which carries forth creative energies of dissolution; and so, unbound, breaks across limits.

Out of all the elements which come to define black metal ideologically, free will and a staunch refusal to acknowledge any form of authority are universally recognized as its prime movers. It is often incorrectly assumed that for music to transmit chaos, then it must itself become chaos, while the point should be to transmit the experience of chaos to the mind of the listener; correction lies in the clear perception of the inner traits of art.

What black metal did for metal on the musical level was quite the opposite of what the more recent penchant for wild experimentation shows. Instead of outer extravagance, we find simplicity, and instead of anarchist vituperation, elitist reservation. In *The Return of Darkness and Evil*, the creator behind the music reins in the instruments and redirects them as a pointed lance towards a clear path. It may be a path of debauchery and evil, perhaps, but one that fulfils its promise. Thus, there is an effort to focus the whole in the name of an idea to a degree that had not been attempted in the history of metal. To erect an edifice of any kind, a channelling of energies must occur in a concrete way, even if the subject matter of the art be free and chaotic.

Guitars function as short carriers of motifs which through expression (id est, tremolo picking, strumming direction and intensity) emphasize energy, vivacity or repose, as befits the occasion. In their traditional black metal usage, the central guitar is lightning, it is fire and expansion; like fire, or more properly, the essence of it, it must comprehend a flow and its rupturing of space must conform to natural laws that dictate

the possibilities of this path. And because minimalist, music relies on the guitar for its proper sense of melodic cadence; freedom lies in how this is accomplished, but accomplished it must be. The guitar solo and the guitar line cease to be important personalities distinct from the rest, and becomes an extension of the character behind the music, a flicker amongst enormous energies in movement.

Drums are reduced to what some like to refer to as a metronome, but which are in truth the principal agents in charge of modulating texture. In this extremely abrasive, minimalist music, the drummer must strive to strike a balance between being the source of a constant flow of energy that sustains the strength of the whole and a sensitive receptor of both explicit and implicit gestures of the music, to then go beyond both and become what comes to life around the guitar line. Black metal drums are a monolithic organic mesh that expands and contracts by the needs of the developing spirit of the work; it becomes in the superior work of black metal the principal element that defines texture through percussive density, timber and quality in a way that is unique to the genre.

Vocals follow the example set by Black Sabbath by adhering rhythmically to the guitar lines, riding them, flattening against them, while at the same time amplifying and rounding certain contours. While vocal performance may come to be seen as unnecessary or even too rudimentary, the early work of Bathory gives us a hint of how it acts as a modifier of context; it is a kind of auditory seasoning that punctuates the narrative of the music and which can even be used to immensely enhance the expressive power of the whole as it funnels or diverts attention towards areas of sound frequency or moments in the music.

The outer is only useful insofar as it leads deeper inside. And the inner insofar as it reveals the outside universe. It is about discovering the mystery in every being, in the self, not for a mundane purpose, but to go beyond and above all that is merely human. Black metal alludes to this precisely in that it is only in relation to that transcendence that each of the instruments attains meaning of consequence that allows it to supersede banality.

Incessant blast beats throughout minutes uninterrupted by anything but cymbals for emphasis or adornment would normally appear as nonsensical in any other context. Correctly understood in this holistic art, however, they become a vessel for multiform purposes and reasoning. Bathory did not make use of blast beats, but the application of the same concept with older, more conservative percussion techniques was already laid out in *The Return of Darkness and Evil*. Textures here may become so uniform as to give an impression of a lack of content, and it is only in the recognizing of significances in the individual instruments that the door is opened to rich variations and eloquent expositions of dark and pensive trains of thought.

Hereby are the instruments sublimated, directed with purpose to a higher sphere, leaving their expression an intangible essence which forces us to step back and see shapes form and be destroyed amidst their interaction. The guitar gains propulsion as percussion provides, while the latter sees its own movement bearing unimaginable fruit on the peaks of the guitars and synths supported upon it. This act of purification and ennoblement, if we may use such a term here, is not an abstract idea to be applied to any context or readily attached to any meaning. Its great power comes from being fundamentally fused with a so-called evil intent and

A vision of darkness

mongering, the discussion of which yields abstruse ramifications that will appear contradictory to profane understanding. It is in transcending mere functionality and becoming united with meaning that the parts are melted and the whole enhanced in their name.

ELITISM

Whatever we may say black metal is, it certainly is individualistic and existentialist. Individualism is here an outlook that considers development to be a path on which he is alone, and alone he is responsible for it; in such a definition, there is no intension of alluding to that egotistic attitude of self-indulgence and blindness beyond petty selfish concerns.

Each and every attempt to understand the attitudes and approach, both in music-making as craft and as a transcendent work of art, of black metal takes us back to the highly discriminatory attitude it presents in almost every respect. There is in it an utter disrespect for almost any institution or ideology that cannot be seen as reasserting itself explicitly against weakness; which weakness is vehemently scorned and is of a spiritual and mental kind.

Self-reliance and individual worth as a result of proven mettle through strife are so essential that every aspect of black metal appears designed as a set of tests or veils that cover the grain of its underlying proposition or truth. Like traditional esoteric layering, the levels of indirection themselves contain valuable information and are beautifully wrought in their own way. Unlike other traditions, however, black metal is more of an incidental surfacing of symbols and methods that organically emerged from a closed collective mentality.

Respect and prominence is given to those who rise above the merely human. A point should be made of clearly perceiving the nuance that sets this spiritual elitism from the simple echoing of might as right. On the other hand, a decisive violence embraced transcendentally is part of which black metal embodies beyond morality.

Themes

With respect to every artistic movement there can be defined a set of themes, the expression of which ultimately becomes music. Black metal is an explicit counter culture which, while clearly at odds with modernism, is forward-looking and individualist. The focus of this particular ethos revolves around the experience of the individual and the presencing of forces and patterns behind manifestation. The garment worn by black metal, possibly unbeknownst to those original musicians who planted its seeds, related to transcendental ideas that would inspire the building of towers reaching towards metaphysical heights.

At the root of everything lay the spirit of a former romantic idealist gone rogue, turned into a misanthropist by the realization that most humans are not only delusional, but that they are so willingly. There can be glimpsed in the development of black metal artists, moreover, the realization of a path as a first stage in an esoteric journey that would rise through the seven spheres, to the solar, and thence further.

This understanding of reality as a particular choice of occult tendencies favoured the heretical and had as a prerequisite an alienation from modern civilization and society, thereby developing an extreme form of mental independence. It was assumed that the truthful individual was defined by his action

in reality. Furthermore, and in accordance with traditionally occult principles, it was and is deemed proper to keep one's plans and activities to oneself. It should not be assumed that it is being implied that this is the way everyone who is said to be a black metal musician has behaved this way, but that a reading into the attitudes, message and music as a whole speaks of this as its essence.

Music was composed not with the audience in mind, but with the intention of artists behind it producing some kind of medium, as a connection to the cosmos, that others may catch a glimpse of that experience through the concrete arrangement of notes. It was assumed that the person who was to receive them should have the capacity to perceive them properly, even if not immediately, with intuitive discernment as well as a will and patience to delve into abysmal obscurity.

Literacy

Literacy as it is used here, refers to having learned from written sources which stretch back in time and across the globe the necessary concepts and symbols that guide towards a more detailed and enriched path that is knowledgeable and not only aurally experienced. That is, a certain level of internalised education, whatever its source, is perhaps not absolutely necessary but, in this day and age, almost certainly a given amongst individuals who discover such things through their own explorations since even fewer still could even hope to have a link with an ancient living tradition of this sort.

We must here turn our attention to a widespread mis-characterisation of the Left Hand Path, which has some to adopt a deeply anti-intellectual attitude. The pretext behind

such an attitude appears to lie in the conviction that the rational mind will mislead in an excess of rationalizations. It should be clear from this that the proper application of literacy could have rescued those with the innate capacity to, sooner or later, look beyond deceptions and mirages of the kind.

The mythological bent of black metal, and the metaphysical implications which alone aid its attaining of holistic value, also imply the necessity of literacy. Discovery must still happen individually, but finding the door, even when the existence of such a door is at least suspected, takes the re-building of what esoteric traditions have already refined through generations of trial and error.

Obscurantism

The obscurantism of black metal pertains a deliberate withholding of information from the general audience. The intention is to avoid wasting energy and resources on an unworthy majority; in so doing, certain esoteric principles are upheld, whether on purpose or otherwise. The use of such an esoteric method attempts to make understanding blossom within the receiver, receptor or student, rather than providing direct information in any explicit manner.

Delivering content through an obscurantist method opens up the person trying to glimpse through it to thoughts and images that are produced within him entirely by seeds are procured elsewhere. The seed of that knowledge has always been within, existing and latent within the individual, the exterior only functions as stimulus. Instead of imposing another way of seeing the world, it turns the listener into a traveller walking into the universe within their selves.

The twist here is that it is acknowledged that reason alone is not as powerful as the whole of the mind. We need both intuition and reason; we need the feminine as much as we need the masculine within us. Hence we get the purposeful stimulation and obfuscation of elements in works of art. Instead, true art needs both in order to be accessed in its entirety.

Obscurantism, then, also acknowledges the multiplicity of paths that lead to perceptions of truth which amount to reality perceived from different angles. True works of black metal are made with such concentrated thought and intention through natural presencing, that when channelled correctly, when translated into music with an adept dominion of the craft, results in a nucleus of energy and codified communication that takes time, thought, feeling and experience outside it to be brought into focus.

In purposeful obfuscation and hiding away there is not only the veiling from the profane and the unprepared, but also a code which contains the key. It takes one who would tread its overgrown paths, one who would ponder upon it and lie on its meadows, times without end.

Experience as Trial

Those who can only see brute aggression and primal impulses, impulses which paralyse him with fear, or make him turn away in disgust, form part of the first filtered layer of mundane minds. If one is able to accept the nature of the beast and his actions in a detached way then here is a sign of potential. But it is profound empathy with the trials and proceeding of the wild being that marks those who belong to the sinister path. It is in

recognising in a part of ourselves a pure will to survive and overcome, that we connect to an inner being which has lain dormant within us.

To become civilised is to come under external control, to be domesticated. The spirit of black metal spirit sees in giving in a great weakness that is at the very base of all modern complacency and mediocrity. While the modern individual is not able to truly see himself as separate and against the artificial environment that surrounds him, he will not be able to reach the beginning of a lycanthropic transmutation.

Black metal spirit as arising and adhering to a maturing adversarial philosophy alienated from the values of modern civilisation sees in direct experience with one's own darker, hidden and wild nature are the working matter of Alchemy. Dark experiences may be of many kinds, though they must involve a degree of reflection after a raw apprehension of shocking life experience or some other path which has led to an altered state of consciousness.

Given these elements of the black path, there is a connection between them and the lunar and muliebrial qualities found in old European cults or those explained and incorporated by Hinduism as the sensitive and cunning sacred feminine. Personal experience and individual judgement are considered to be the highest authority. It is of utmost importance to have one's own perception acquired through exercised intuition and reflection. Hence the wilful obscurantism; hence the silence; hence the belief that only individual discovery and development driven by a strong will constitutes true worth.

A MUSIC OF DARK SPIRITUALITY

Aggression and Veiling

One of the foremost characteristics of black metal is that besides being abrasive in an intentional manner in order to deter certain kind of people from peering in, and luring a different kind of soul towards its depths, it covers itself with a mantle of distortion. It is clear that there is in this the function of aggression, but it also constitutes a first ring of protection around the mystery. For black metal does not simply sing about the mystery, but is, at its deepest and most honest, in itself a mystery tradition of lonely wanderers.

Even when the initial shock is absorbed and its raw impact accepted, distortion serves the function of both obfuscating and enriching content. What we would normally consider the sound artefacts of distortion come to form an important part of the identity of this music itself. It is not its defining quality as some would have it, however, as that must be found in a collective understanding of its musical construction methods as well as in a nuanced apprehension of the living culture that sustains it.

By this obfuscation, then, a greater and more beautiful art is born. It is not beautiful because it is veiled, but because the veiling material is itself created through great artistry and

communicates its own layer of meaning. The labyrinth is also a test and a defence against the profane, however, it amplifies and reinforces meaning for those worthy of it.

As one delves deeper and further into black metal, the symbols and archetypes give way to pure sensations and intimation to those who connect to it so that they ride and move through the movement of the music without imposition. This knowing comes acausally rather than causally since it is not time or explanations which make this stepping past the veils possible, but an affinity and letting go when the listener's own mind has seen some transmutation. The degree to which this change occurs dictates the kind of intimation which may be had.

The spirit of black metal stands behind all of these apparently contrasting manifestations, and these are each but windows, through which each individual, by their own dispositions, and interpreted according to adeptness, brings about intimations of a primordial knowing, the static that cuts through and vivifies and destroys. The Left Hand Path tread by black metal could be compared to that unspoken tradition that presenced raw Nature directly and without recourse to abstractions.

Stepping further into the layers of conceptual veiling also allows us to attempt an un-covering of the spiritual motions of the music. Aggression and misanthropy soon give way to idealism in a music redolent of painful empathy. Empathy of this dark form is, furthermore, holistic and heroic, and therefore supra-personal. Nihilism, which also shows itself in what first appears to be an unexplained destructive impetus, is rather a kind of doorway to be crossed as part of a process of self-immolation.

The listener who is able to burn his sensations through the fire of this rough exterior undergoes a similar process. Innate power for intimation and empathy is required, but also a conscious hunger for experience besides, and learning in an alternating rhythm that oscillates between a patient letting go and a wilful pushing forth.

Imperfection as Being and Seeming

Echoing manifest reality, black metal brings forth patterns and motifs in repeated riffs, but it does not try to make every single instance of a riff and note identical to those that came before it even when engaged within repetition of a same shape. This irregularity gives rise to a numinous identity that affords each moment a character of its own in the midst of its singular location.

When we refer to black metal as raw, the implication is that it is unprocessed, and thus closer to its original state and nature. It is not precisely alive on its own, for the sounds of life do not conform to human-made music. It is rather music which attempts to summon visions and memories in the mind of the individual. Discernible order and coherence must still exist in music, because it is a form of communication, but through it, chaos may be summoned.

Proper black metal, if it is to be considered music and not merely a placeholder for an ideological or metaphysical concept, will display intelligibility for humans, however buried. Variations lying and moving within iterations of fractals give us that impression of organic growth and dissolution. Black metal music accomplishes its replication of the natural flow – which is never in perfect balance, for that would represent stasis and utter death – through both imperfections in

performance, divergences in expression of each instance, as well as an unconventional liberty in terms of structural strategy that takes it through multiform arrangements that correspond to the artist's inner state.

Imperfection in the performance of black metal places it in a sphere closer to folk music, and arises consciously as part of the ideology of artists who want to create something that places emotion and expression within a logical structure; this logical structure, furthermore, shapes itself to the needs of the music rather than usurping its leading character. In short, in black metal we find an expression of life beyond notions of good and evil, beautiful as well as dangerous, painful as well as torturously pleasurable.

Spirit in the Melody

Traditionally, we see melody as the main aspect of music of the most primitive type. Here, melody and the motifs it develops dominate the direction of the content in the music as well as determine the quality and richness of the material. Textures, expressions and simple harmonies, then, come as supportive or auxiliary elements that enhance and complement the melody that lies at the very heart of the music. If one were to remove all but that central melody, a proper black metal song would still be easily recognizable.

Being modal, black metal may indulge in certain intervals that assert its motifs, but it is the overall arc described by the central tones within each riff and section that make clear a direction and narrative throughout a song. In a modal pattern, a melody will generally have a tone that serves as an anchor or pivot point (fulcrum); if it lacks this for whatever reason, then it is seriously crippled as a unit of information. These anchor

points define the centre of each section, while the amplitude of the notes, that is the range throughout which they spread upwards or downwards, adds to the weight and sense of space. The quantity and speed of the notes may provide for a manner of intensity and momentum.

All of these factors conspire to bring the melody to life and possibly provide it with a distinctive personality which may or may not prove to be appropriate. A firm warning is in order at this point, that the reader does not therefore assume that we are implying that we can simply reduce the art to a mere straightforward, systematic arrangement of notes. These are, to be sure, observations on mechanics, but they are to be seen and appreciated as the material manifestations of a coherent mind, and as such only the effects of higher processes, and which effects go beyond the simple mechanics describes and involve a much more complex aural effect than can be easily and accurately described in words.

Judgement and perception, in the proper sense, of melodies in their contexts is an ability that is only honed through experience, insight, intuition and reason. Also crucial to its description is the term 'aural', which points out its wordless nature. It is occult because it speaks of a sense that cannot be directly made manifest but only apprehended through the bringing together and stepping beyond of the characteristics of music both measurable and otherwise.

The spirit of which we speak arises from the vibration of the physical particles when the notes are played; it is not the definition nor its description, but the sequence of logical, succeeding steps which invoke something that is very much alive and which may very well infect our being. While not embodied, it may attach itself to our own sequence of thoughts,

giving rise to new patterns, evoking memories and feelings in the host.

The daemon that is born from the melody interacts with each consciousness in much the same way as a mathematical function that maps an input to an output. The input is whatever material our minds already contain and our own inherent power of drawing relations. The output spreads new patterns in the mind, creating new pathways. Thus, akin to demonic possession, the gradual descent of an open mind down the spiralling staircase and into the unknown, effects a very real change. The manner and extent of this change moreover, is dictated by the capacity and vulnerability of the listener; which vulnerability is sometimes willingness and thus a conscious, unspoken agreement to be transformed by these spirits.

Black metal percussion

Being primarily based on the sound of the electric guitar, metal music faces a limitation in that it cannot vary dynamics in the traditional way by allowing differences in attack and hand-feel to have pronounced effects on the volume, though a degree of nuance in texture and quality can, in fact, result from such manipulations; this impediment seems to negate a whole dimension of music that is responsible for making it feel alive.

Black metal developed a solution to this problem in a rather interesting manner: percussion was taken to its textural extremes without relinquishing its traditional functions. Percussion simultaneously became subordinate to the needs of the whole, while at the same time achieving greater freedom of exploration for itself and other elements of the music as their freedom was ascertained. That is, the percussive section

became a whole layer unto itself which would counterpoint and correspond with the rest of the layers instead of simply serving to emphasize or mark time.

On the one hand, in becoming first and foremost a constant textural background, percussion allowed the riff itself to be liberated to wander around melodically without losing the propelling motion that this kind of music needed. On the other, by simplifying and focusing the basic role of percussion, drummers became free to choose a wider variety of choices in how to produce the beat, thus opening up a world of possibilities when it came to textures and patterns.

The implication of the latter was that the background could take many different shapes and intensities, the variation of which would have a very strong impact on the whole, effectively becoming a modifier of dynamics by a sheer modulation of beat intensity and timbre. The result is that black metal becomes free to explore limits in both melodiousness and aggression that were previously out of bounds for existing forms of metal still dependent on the conventions of rock music percussion.

Once again, the esoteric labyrinth presented by black metal, this time at the level of percussion, serves multiple functions; at the sensual level, the immediate apprehension, it must transmit the sensation of raw, existential feeling that comes from a living on the edge or being in a life-threatening situation where the now is what matters most and everything else resides to the background so that only what is truly most essential and honest remains. Besides the feeling of impending danger, the percussion must unite with the rest of the music in inducing a trance of particularly dark character that is beyond introspective and of a rather a-personal nature. It is not the most fanciful or recondite of techniques that brings about the

desired result, but the precise and nuanced application of clear expressions that together form intelligible recounts in the form of music.

Percussion serves the important role of controlling dynamics in a music where the main melodic instrument is capable of very little of it in terms of volume. And in utilizing the density of patterns and different timber of the drums as this intensity and volume regulator, it is possible to achieve modulation without losing a sense of power or the sense of alternating tension and unleashing in the unforgiving manner that the is required. A drummer's choice of a particular pattern, and what we would consider adornments in ride and cymbal overlaid patterns, adjusts the flow of energy in the piece significantly; this is the soul vehicle of the work as a living being.

Episodic Progression

Black metal tends to structure its raw compositions without a clear template; however, there is a certain methodological proclivity which, although perhaps unspoken, gives rise to a story-telling within the music. The narrative aspect of black metal can take many forms, but it can be presumed that all proper black metal must develop it in one way or another; it may be that long stretches of repetition aiming to reach an emotional and spiritual plateau produce this effect as they are laid out in a particular sequence, or it may take on a more explicitly progressive form in trying to produce variations on motifs and directed changes of expression in a clear articulation of coherent moods.

Black metal aims to reach beyond first impressions and into settled, long-term states that allow the listener to sink into himself, perhaps even stopping or slowing down the infinitely

minute sequences of dazzling pictures that make up our immediate perception of reality. The process of those who would find pathways in the appropriate music requires of them the will to move forward, the will to let go, and the faculty of intuition that renders the soul a malleable but firm material able to react; but it must also be possessed of the power to execute its own decisions, that it may explore depths and discover secrets of all kinds, rather than be simply swept along the current.

Plateaus of aural landscapes designed to summon dark archetypes will progress in an order through which one will sense change within rather constant textures. The reader must nonetheless understand these observations as necessarily open descriptions of what knowledgeable and sensitive listeners have condensed irrespective of the opinions of the masses and less stable minds. No pretence of law or rule, but a retrospective and functional observation of what remains constant among the greatest of black metal works.

Textures and Intrinsic Meanings

Being of a predominantly homophonic texture and having developed its approach to percussion to the point of being able to relieve it from its traditional rock-music duties in a way that greatly resembles and is undeniably inspired by electronic music, black metal's textural changes become more important than anything else. Maintaining proper control of the ways changes are introduced, the time during which they are preserved and the order in which episodes occur become the greatest preoccupation of the talented black metal artist.

The character of each riff and its accompaniment by percussion go hand in hand when it comes to matters of arrangement; and lesser black metal music may be distinguished for its overt disavowal of these observations. Herein lies the trap of black metal: as it is traditionally based on extremely minimalist components, it is then thought, by some, to be easily subject to improvements through sheer and vulgar addition of note quantity and contrasts of expression and character; such a confusion, moreover, finds its origin in two misapprehensions typical of egotist minds.

The first is thinking that their emotional reaction to music is enough evaluation of the quality of art. The second is an utter obliviousness regarding the relation between human perceptions of structures and the patterns within music that give rise to a consistent set of complex laws; these laws cannot be interpreted linearly, but must rather be analysed in parallel. Such laws regarding the sound textures, moreover, play a similar role to that of the aural and cultural communication that takes place amongst humans and which goes beyond mere grammatical definitions, but which communication nonetheless remains inextricably linked with certain definitions and choices of words, so to speak.

It is clear that all melodies played on a single string without distortion will differ in the impression they make from those plucked with distortion; and that there is a considerable difference between the effects and impressions when each of these are simply plucked and allowed to ring, or when they are singly strummed with that fluttering technique commonly known as tremolo picking. As the effect of each of these is taken into serious consideration and tested aurally to identify and sense their unique effects arising from being applied to a kind melody or pattern, each of which could display wide

range of distinct characteristics, one becomes aware of the rich well of possible messages and atmospheres which can be conveyed through their arrangement.

Furthermore, and as the vibrancy and intensity is held in nuanced regard, we may realise what a delicate operation each choice in construction is. In this light, haphazard and overly eager transitions and juxtapositions in the kind of music that tends to be careless and carefree now reveal a lack of depth, perhaps even a spiritual negligence in disregarding holistic effects, or a perilous ignorance at the very least.

In alliance with considerations regarding the potency of different techniques or particular patterns is the time through which each phrase or section is allowed to extend and loop. The overall balance of all these factors must be considered, and the failure of a single one of them usually induces a crippling effect that becomes apparent to the sense given enough time and openness of the mind to its perception. That is to say, even if we do not yet hold the keys to a detailed conscious understanding of the connection between music structure and effect, or even if are never destined to receive such knowledge, being aware of it and working in accordance to its reality is the only way to transcendence and beyond: evolution.

TOWARDS A SINISTER FUTURE

The ideas outlined throughout this essay give us a hint of what black metal could become, that a power that has hitherto lain dormant may yet serve to propel individuals ascribing to it as transcendental art in ways that direct and define a future elite culture. The proposed angle of transcendental, dark alchemy that exists within strands of black metal can go well beyond the merely obfuscating, staged persona creation that has become the fetish of so many self-avowed pseudo-Satanists. Not only is such posturing completely relegated to contingency, but in its unwitting deception, it misleads many of those with dark musical potential, yet unfamiliar with this musical art, to the impression that the poseur's aesthetic presentation is the core.

That the intent is to scrape such exoteric staging, and instead move towards an honest esoteric apprehension should be perfectly clear by now. For in aligning the movement with all that is efficacious instead of what merely gratifies the senses, to unite faculties towards an understanding rather than falling into dogmatic intransigence, and taking the road of action through excellence in the breaking of boundaries the dark art can serve as a medium to the totality of reality – or as much of it as we are able to take in.

Examining the past, we may observe that the greatest works came about from a desire to open doors, to let an acausal stream of energy suffuse the area where the air itself would be

disrupted by the vibration patterns arranged to that end; in them we do not hear the artist speaking, but his lending of personal talents as a tool for an a-personal manifestation to take place.

To think that a majority would embrace the difficult path that leads to transcendent creation and immortality, would be naive, to say the least. One would have to speak of a Transcendent Black Metal; for such a distinction to become real the art by which adherents etch out these rituals would have to be weighed on its own merit; in so doing, we would be setting an impasse that would obstruct the way for all mediocre artistic works.

The intention is not to detract from any personal reputation, honour, or earned merit, but to let artistic merit be also earned as per a just and holistic weighing of the work in itself. That is, elitism is extended from a valuation of intellect and ideological stance to artistic creation, so that the art-form itself, and not merely the intent behind it, may be ennobled intrinsically, as it were, from within.

One must remember that European musical tradition followed a constructive path of discovery, where experimentation did not imply the disavowal of what had been built until that moment, but struggled in the creation of a repository of discovered knowledge. Until now, aversion towards musical tradition had its origin in a grave misapprehension of where the value of a tradition is located and how it may feed growth rather than stunt it.

Growth would be possible that would preserve an essence in transformation across time, especially if it were to become a true aural tradition. A similar phenomenon seemed to manifest itself in the analogue tape trading community that wilfully

maintained an underground status. Its spiralling into superficial collectionism is only one more way in which we see how underground black-death's great potential for mythos, and so a magickal channelling, was for the most part squandered by a lack of proper tending.

Lower intellects have been unable to separate concrete form from abstracted pattern, a confusion that has bled into the cracks of a largely unconscious culture. Learning from Tradition, correctly apprehended, would lead to a depth in understanding and practice of the nature of organized sound, which would in turn lead black metal to richer material planes; enough emphasis cannot be placed on the idea that such a learning and subsequent application cannot, if it is to have any value of its own, consist of an imitation of idiosyncratic elements in the older music; black metal must always remain, in essence, what it is: ever becoming yet never losing itself.

Stagnancy is never an option for something that is alive, and to be alive is to be in constant change and transformation. For black metal to remain what it is, it must remain connected to its bloody muse at all levels; it must cause throw one into lacerating introspection, and a horrific presentiment of life unto death, pleasure unto pain. Music itself must, furthermore, be conducive to a natural intellectual cultivation, and as such is intrinsically elitist in that such an apprehension cannot be taught but must be developed by the individual possessed of a latent ability. The purposeful cultivation of abilities should greatly aid in the bringing about of a fuller and faster development of those individuals who already possess the seed which may or may not blossom and grow into stout mastery.

□

Esoteric nihilism

A discovery of reality beyond utter destruction

I

Brett Stevens' nihilism is a compilation of thoughts collected through years of philosophical exploration, and it condenses a clarified version of what he terms nihilism, though this is not necessarily the simplified idea that the masses of pseudo educated simians would understand. Instead of being simply defined by a lack of belief in values, it offers the only sensible metaphysical exposition which could make a case for it; this is a lack of belief in inherent value, and through it a destruction of everything that is merely a human construct. The work is not so much a logical argument for the stance, but an exposition of the benefits of adopting it. In other words, it is an advocacy of nihilism, and not the opening of a dialogue or debate regarding its worth. In this, Brett Stevens parts from the assumption that communication (in the sense of imparting real knowledge rather than merely information) between human beings is impossible through direct means such as speaking or writing. Instead, it is expected that those who possess a seed of the talent or character that is required to arrive to certain realizations will do so in time through introspection and experience.

The question of necessity for nihilism such as is espoused by Brett Stevens is answered by Friedrich Nietzsche himself in the preface to the *Will to Power*, where he states that the old values have run their course by coming to their ultimate conclusions. In other words, Nihilism is used as a way to clean the slate and find new values. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, Brett Stevens does not consider that Nihilism should be an end in itself, but a tool that will allow us to be a constant state of alert, that values are discovered in a realist way; this way means evaluating how a certain idea responds to specific circumstances, rather than applying them as a matter of fact without any discernment as to whether they are suitable. One could also describe nihilism as being sceptical of everything yet at once being open to revelations of all kinds: Nothingness as a portal to Being.

The way in which Esoteric Nihilism differs from empiricism is that rather than being a reduction of truth to sensory experience, it consists in the elimination of all except that which is necessary and evident. Necessity and self-evidence, furthermore, are determined by external and internal states alike, applying them realistically, and then transcendently as well. For the esoteric nihilist, there is no absolute or relative truth, and the adjectives 'subjective' and 'objective' cease to have any relevant meaning. In essence, nihilism is an extreme realist position that adheres to input from reality; it also differs from a mere empiricism in that nihilism would even reject the materialist posture that does away with the value of inner experience as a way to truth.

To discover the grain of this Esoteric Nihilism is to realize that all philosophy, ideology and ideas in general are constructs, abstractions, even those that tend to emphasize the grosser aspects of reality to the obfuscation of the subtler psychological and transcendent ones. Some have argued (in

what is but an absurdist but quite popular logically fallacious argumentation) that the preceding definition must include the philosophy that makes the statement itself, hence invalidating itself in the process. The Esoteric Nihilist classification of said ideations, however, does not discount their contingent usefulness, but that, in a last analysis, they do not constitute reality itself.

II

In *A Book of Three Inspirations*, Tsong Khapa the Great explains a current of Tibetan cosmogonic philosophy which adopts the name of The Middle View. He says that such sects adopting this description avoid the extremes of what he calls reification and nihilism. This is achieved by keeping in mind, on the one hand, that everything is transitory, impermanent, and thus not real; on the other hand, it is observed that the universe works through consistent and infallible laws. To better explain what the esoteric philosophy of Nihilism actually consists of, the book is divided into three main parts; namely, Nihilism, Realism and Trascendentalism. From a functional point of view, these symbolize the three elements that should take an adept application of the ideas exposed. However, rather than seeing them as a series of steps to take, they are tools to utilize, precepts to apply with care, finding a balance that allows us to detach ourselves from abstraction while remaining not anchored, but in dynamic contact with our raw perceptions of reality.

Like so, in his book, *Ride the Tiger*, Julius Evola considers Nietzsche the perfect nihilist precisely because the philosopher had lived nihilism and had overcome it. He goes on to observe that Nietzsche, in fact, considered nihilism as a transitional

stage, and corresponding to a pathological mind. Even more importantly, Evola reminds us that Nietzsche already hailed the countermovement which should come to displace nihilism. Brett Stevens names this going beyond, Transcendentalism, which is not an obliteration of Nihilism, but rather an edifice built after the necessary purging which the latter makes possible.

The destruction of abstractions through the upholding of pure Nihilism can be described in the words Heidegger uses in his Introduction to *Metaphysics*, where he describes nihilism as a reduction of the universe to current beings, and thence to a treatment of Being itself as nothing. Heidegger also describes pure nihilism as the disregard for the fundamental law of thinking, thence destroying faith and undermining the possibility of constructs. This is the cleansing which Evola argues Nietzsche speaks of, and which cleansing stage is to be transcended. From the point of view of Esoteric Nihilism, insofar as the Heideggerean (cosmic) Being is unknowable, it is irrelevant, yet its existence and presumed originating or emanating role is not necessarily denied, simply set aside.

Such is the void which Brett Stevens summons forth here, a universe of possibilities strictly according to what is and can be as per an infinite yet grounded discovery at every level of consideration, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual, as all are interconnected in many ways. The way opened up by such an outlook is one dignified by self-reliance, and invested in the principle of responsibility, in the sense that each action is recognized as having consequences, whatever these might be. In the latter thought, there is no presumption of the moral kind, but rather, a stoic acceptance of the current of experiences and choices that constitute life.

III

More akin to esoteric methodologies and covert mysticism than Nietzsche, Brett Stevens embraces Nihilism as a mantra in constant declamation, a magical spell over which one is to constantly rise above in a trance-like mental action. A mirage appears, and some confuse the actions here described with empiricism, missing the Transcendentalism that Bret Stevens raises above Nihilism as if in separate, parallel universes in collision. What we see is closer to art than to philosophy, in truth, because the highest human faculties are reached through the totality of a Royal Art, and not through the purely rationalist mind.

And while shying away from outright religiosity, it appears relevant here to mention the spiritualized nihilism of which Nicolas Schreck speaks in *Demons of the Flesh*, a popular book on Tantric Left Hand Path practices. What interests us here is Schreck's description of this Path's goal, which might not be wholly inapplicable to Brett Stevens' Nihilism. Schreck says this is not the dissolution of the self into the greater whole (which is the goal of Right Hand doctrines of 'illumination') but rather a strengthening of the practitioner's psyche by way of an attack on illusions on the one hand, and a constant discovery of crude reality on the other. Individuality, rather than individualism, as Brett Stevens would express it, in the championing of the unique striving of each individual for truth through experience and inner realization. This leads to a supreme exaltation that distinguishes the excellent individual from the complacent, mediocre minds that substitute truth and holistic realization with vapid entertainment and empty accomplishment.

Lawrence Birken, in his *Hitler as Philosophe*, describes National Socialism as embodying an apparent mixture of

Traditionalism and Modernity, which does away with the superstitious exotericism of religions once and for all, while maintaining ideals of perfection to strive for endlessly towards recurring improvement in harmony with nature. Esoteric Nihilism, now explained as Traditionalist, could be compared to a National Socialism minus modernism; that is, without its Marxist-influenced elements, replacing them instead with a Traditional Western Pagan outlook. Where Hitler called for an adoption of modern methods that could respond to modern conditions with efficiency, Brett Stevens sees in this an error, a compromise of sorts that can only lead to disaster as the source of all problems is the spirit of modernity itself. In short, what must be fought are not the temporary conditions, which are the outer, the symptoms, of decadence.

It should be added to our discussion, that Brett Stevens' method is not post-modern, since at some point the thinker advocates a strict Traditionalism. This Traditionalism, moreover, is composed of an intelligent application of rules to the unique conditions of any point in time. Here is a dynamism that preserves timeless truths throughout a constantly changing set of states. As such, the ideas that Brett Stevens wishes to shine forth by the advocacy of Nihilism are but a finer, pleasant and sober exposition of truths recurrent since time immemorial. Traditionalism seen from within, moreover, is understood as the living of human life in accordance to immanent truths which make up reality, constants in the pattern language of reality.

An Interview with Brett Stevens

- 1. D.A.R.G.: Regarding ancient Indian schools of thought, Agehananda Bharati writes that these are not so much branches of philosophy, in the sense that we understand classical Greek philosophy, but rather ideology. Would you describe the esoteric nihilism you propose as philosophical or ideological? Is it both?**

B: If we were to differentiate between ideology and philosophy, it would make sense to say that ideology consists of prescriptive ideas or moral "oughts," things that we "should" do, where philosophy describes the world and offers us as a series of cause-effect postulates of the nature, "If you do X, you will receive results Y, Z and secondary consequences W, V." In this sense he seems correct to me in that schools of thought build upon a base philosophy and say that if this philosophy is understood as realistically accurate, it then implies the following interpretation which leads to prescriptive deductions. In this way, he is separating the schools of thought from the original philosophy. It seems to me that he may be only partially correct because the prescriptive reading requires an interpretation of the philosophy, which as Fred Nietzsche reminds us, is a philosophy in itself much like our mental objects are copies of things found in reality.

The esoteric nihilism that I propose takes the form of philosophy because at its core it is not prescriptive at all, and its philosophical approach is as a framework which, while being a case of the rare complete philosophy in itself, functions as a gateway to other philosophies and a means of interpreting the broader field of all philosophy. It is thus a replacement for ideology, which normally is used as a filter and interpretive guide for philosophy because ideology is closer to real-world questions – such as "What is the best life?" and "How should we live?" – and for that reason people necessarily encounter it *before* philosophy, but in itself, is the opposite of an "ought" question; it is descriptive, not prescriptive. On top of that, however, certain observations become unavoidable, leading to nihilist interpretations of longstanding historical tendencies in humanity.

Its esoteric nature prohibits it from being an ideology as we know them in the modern sense, which is where our definitions may deviate from those of Agehananda Bharati. After equality is established as a goal as happened in the West with The Renaissance, all ideas become ideas for manipulating masses of people toward the evident conclusions that follow the assumptions coded into those ideas, and then those people move *as a mass* toward those conclusions. Esoteric ideas more resemble a series of staircases and doorways, with the mass starting at the bottom and reaching only through the first couple levels, after which point only select others go on, building on each portion or broadening detail of the idea as they go, then having risen above to the point where they see their previous idea in a new context – similar to the modern idea of "retroactive continuity" – they find a new doorway at the top of the stairs from whence they are looking down on the

previous opened door. This is the process of philosophy, more than ideology.

Ideology suffers from a fatal flaw in that it counteracts natural selection. When you set out the rules for success, people can follow them without understanding them, and without the inner desire to do good that is required to understand the reasons for them. They are merely conforming to succeed. In this sense, formal and written doctrines are inferior to informal and esoteric ones, which usually begin with a few common sense ideas and expand outward, requiring the esoteric progression of staircases and doorways described above. By doing this, these philosophies "fail gracefully" meaning that they collapse at the local level, rather than perpetuating bad data wherever they exist. Paganism failed this way by, when Western civilization grew too large and successful and the rise in lower caste people meant that keeping the herd together took up too much energy for people to focus on the purpose and goals of Western civilization, simply dying out in each village but never being co-opted and corrupted as later happened to Christianity, a simplified version of Paganism codified with ideological imperatives within it. Later attempts to resurrect paganism have been almost all comedic and have not been seen as credible for this reason.

Nihilism offers a view that has been informed by The Human Problem, or why all of our organizations and groups eventually fail. Essentially, as any group succeeds, focus changes from its purpose to its maintenance so that individuals can appreciate its benefits, and these individuals create as many internal goals as there are people. A healthy organization has many paths leading to the same goal; a sick one has many paths leading to

different goals. This victory for entropy - "thermodynamics has won at a crawl," per W.S.B. - afflicts every union of two or more people over time, and is a result of a swelling of members of the group who do not or cannot understand its purpose and goals. It occurs through success, in that anything which is popular attracts more people or allows more people to survive, at which point the lack of natural selection joins the unbalanced ratio of those who understand its purpose to those who do not and those doom the organization.

2. **D.A.R.G.: Heidegger reads in some fragments by Parmenides the exposition of a threefold path, which he explains is unitary. This path, he says, consists in the first place in the way to Being, which is unavoidable; secondly, in the way to Nothing, which is inaccessible; and thirdly, in the way to seeming, which is always accessible and travelled. How does Nihilism figure into this metaphysical portrait, if at all?**

B: Nihilism possesses a similar but less formalized recognition of three layers which exist simultaneously in life. They are:

- i. The world of the senses: this has two components that it is material and physical, and that it is in the present tense. When we turn to our sensations, we become aware of this world, often yanking us back out of wool gathering or other mental experience. Most importantly, this world is tangible and thus seems irrefutable, because in the moment we can touch, feel, smell, taste, and otherwise engage in what feels like direct experience of the material world. The deception

here is that even in the present tense, we are in the past, because it takes our brains some microseconds to process input, tokenize it, characterize it, relate it to objects in memory, and then present it to our decision-making conscious minds through a complex series of balances which assess relevance and likelihood of accuracy.

- ii. The invisible world: in this world, we are looking at knowledge of logic as a means of predicting the world. This process reveals a fundamental trauma that all humans endure, which is the possibility of being wrong in our estimate about the world, whether throwing a ball and having it end up elsewhere than where we intended it to be, or making complex financial calculations that turn out to be incorrect. In either case, we risk losing rank in the social hierarchy of our peers by being revealed as less competent than others. The invisible world requires us to make logical predictions based on knowledge of how the world has operated in the past, extrapolated from disparate events, and to then apply it to the situation before us, and failure to do this shows a lesser degree of fundamental connection to reality and ability within it. Since this world exists between the present and future consequences, it implicates both long-term thinking and the ability to understand the logical principles and patterns of the world around us, especially those that are invisible because like gravity or standard distributes, they are part of the inner structure of the universe.
- iii. Underlying reality: this can never be experienced because it is not a physical thing, but an emergent property of the interaction of different forces and objects, and in this interaction as participants, we

influence the outcome. Like Schroedinger's cat, reality is not what it is until it is experienced, and even then, there is a high degree of variability, as if we move through many different iterations of this reality based on our decisions. Cause-effect reasoning comes into play here, because what we perceive is the effect, or rather an image of the effect rendered by our minds, and the causes can never be directly known to us, so we must intuit them based on our inner knowledge of how our own existence and that of reality around us share many parallels.

Contrary to what most people believe, nihilism focuses on the second and not the first. Its concern is with removing the human elements of wishful thinking, projection, tunnel vision, misunderstandings of causality, and rationalization that distort our ability to understand the world. As a result, it immediately boils down reality to its logical elements, and from those, uses pattern comparison to extrapolate what other parts of reality are like, since reality is fundamentally consistent and repeats patterns in parallel across different media - thought, information, matter, energy - because these patterns, like Plato's forms, are innate to its core process of creating and maintaining itself. Our goal is to understand those root patterns by analysis and intuition, much like someone using sonar to scope out the sea floor and understand what might be down there.

- 3. D.A.R.G.: In relation to the aesthetics of art, can Nihilism help us extrapolate from reality at large in order to narrow down a methodology for assimilating, channelling and organizing (in other words, composing) works of art?**

B: A friend of mine once opined that art was not the art-object, but two stages of a process: the artist conceptualizing the experience that was to be communicated, and the observer using their own creative imagination to understand what the artist was communicating by noticing where it was "profound," or expressed something of the core attributes of the human experience of life. Nihilism helps art by redirecting us from sensual experience, social experience, and solipsistic mental experience toward a perception of reality, and then by denying that communication exists, allowing us to instead make gestures that require the audience to meet us half-way and by going through the interpretive process, undertake the same artistic journey made by the artist and through that, intuit the same knowledge of reality, life and humanity that the artist encoded in the work. This could be expressed like the computer science notion of "Model, View, and Controller"; the art is the data, artistry the controller, and both artist and observer are experiencing views of that underlying model, just like we do with life itself, deriving suppositions about a world we can never directly experience, and then comparing them to other knowledge to knock out inconsistencies and discover the pattern language of reality.

- 4. D.A.R.G.: Correctly understood, one could say that Nihilism escapes the trap of utilitarianism and individualism only by virtue of the fact that only minds capable of grasping the need and way to parallelism and transcendence can make use of it in the first place. Could you walk us through the long, and wide, range of vision that the devastation and free fall of Nihilism makes**

necessary in order to survive it and properly make use of it?

B: Nihilism fits the profile of a fall from grace. That is, we start out in life believing in a warm and nurturing universe, and after being introduced to the human world, become cynical and somewhat hopeless when we see how most people think, what motivates them, and the endless corruption of their behavior in groups. In order to accept nihilism, one must come to desperation with this world, much as one must to undertake any serious religious, occult or transformative philosophical experience. The narrative that people advance through social behavior – that humanity is a better order than nature, and that for us all to get along, we must accept everyone regardless of their relevance to purpose or internal degree of force of intellect and force of character – must reveal itself to be fundamentally toxic, not just wrong but a direction away from all that is good in life.

At that point, great despair and aimlessness settles over most people. Few go any further, and instead attempt to distract themselves with the physical and sensual, as the 1960s hippies did. But for those who push further, a great calm awaits. This is the death of the neurosis that compels most people to move frenetically through life and to obsessively pay attention to the social environment around them. The budding nihilist lets this fall away, and instead begins his or her study of the parts of reality that are closest to personal experience. From there, patterns emerge, and these can then be applied elsewhere, which starts to open doors to similarities and through that, to a deeper look at the implication of those patterns and the type of language of patterns that they imply.

From there, the new nihilist can move on to more challenging things. Generally, this stage exhibits a hunger for "real" data as opposed to that which is socially-mediated, so there are many walks in ancient forests and reading of classical texts, but most importantly, as Bruce Charlton writes, a process of spending time alone and in silence *thinking*, as a means of discovering the linkages between intuition and reality and creativity, seizes the initiate. It is worth mentioning that we are speaking of the top eighth of the population by intelligence here as those eligible to make it to this stage. Beyond it awaits a challenge, and then gradual but not linear expansion of knowledge.

These challenges appears because of the collision between the newfound knowledge and not the world, but our own inclination to rationalize, deduce, filter out the unsafe, explain the world as good, and inflate our own ego. After the ego-death that comes after successfully defeating this challenge, the initiate undergoes the process of transcendence, by which the universe starts to make sense not just on a minimal functional level, but as an optimization for beauty and greatness, and at that point it becomes not just logical, but aesthetically and morally beautiful. This stage requires crossing a great void of fear, and afterwards, nothing can ever be the same.

- 5. D.A.R.G.: Is an esoteric nihilism better understood in the context of full Tantric practices and indications, beyond the cliché of sexual, amoral practices, that is. If not, what can it be allied or compared to?**

B: Tantra presents one form of an eternal way of thinking which is inherent to esotericism, and which Varg Vikernes

describes as "syncretic eclecticism." It means an interweaving of knowledge from different sources, comparing the patterns, and finding the principles and framework that is suggested by those, much as Plato describes the discovery of forms. At some point, the initiate is left with a profound sense that the universe is comprised of mathematical or informational principles, and that the physical is merely an effect of those, which opens the door not just to monistic metaphysics but also an understanding of relativity. Esotericism describes a process by which learning is cumulative and found in all areas of existence, meaning that there is no specific discipline, only a generalized use of the intellect, creativity and intuition to explore what is found in the world and derive its principles, then compare those in a matrix of cycles to what is known and what else is being known, allowing those patterns to emerge. This corresponds to the third and fourth paragraphs in the previous answer.

- 6. D.A.R.G.: As far as our conversation goes, Nihilism is a portal, but it is also a method, once it is understood after the first stage, in which we "fall" and see everything fall apart in front of our eyes. How can this method, which some would relate to and indeed reduce to scepticism and empiricism, indeed make room for mysticism? If it does, is pantheism the only logical result since, in your own words, "the underlying world can never be experienced"?**

B: There is an awakening and "fall from grace" period in which one becomes aware of the human world which is composed of false universals based on lowest common denominator concepts of truth, values, and communication and how incorrect it is regarding both the natural, logical, and physical world and the metaphysical world implied by logic which exists enclosing that physical world. Nihilism

launches us out of a world of universal absolutes which are actually human desires and wishful thinking, and instead makes us accept a focus on reality and therefore, a study of nuance as opposed to boxy, broad, and controlling categories and moral absolutes.

Once this fall from grace is accomplished, however, we have attained a gateway philosophy. We now know how to think about things as a starting point, and from that, there is some degree of implicit purpose depending on the initiate and the degree of his abilities and desire to push forward. For most, the initial realization of nihilism is enough; the human world is lies, so we pay attentions to the patterns of reality instead and see what we can notice, realizing that if another person is talking to us they are most likely lying and at best, are using symbols only they understand in the hope that we can approximate their tokens, meet them halfway, interpret their meaning, and, by going down a similar path ourselves, reach the same conclusion.

When you and I talk, I have a well-founded expectation that you are trying to communicate something that you have learned, are excited about it and attempting in the fullness of moral goodness to be accurate, and are hoping that I am also excited about it. I do not have the same expectation with others; I anticipate them to be using some game theory of their own, which is a tripartite: (1) trying to advance themselves to a top position while (2) attempting to conceal this fact behind illusions of being human, utilitarian, and pluralistic but (3) simultaneously trying to send the rest of us down the rabbit-hole of human wishful thinking. Every good con man knows that the game is to use the momentum of the mark — the target of the con —

against him. You pitch him a vision, but you are careful like a lawyer or politician to use words in their technical meanings, instead of how you know he will understand them. You tell him that a product will improve his sex appeal by 500%; he tries and cannot get laid in a whorehouse, so he comes back to you and you say, "We did improve your sex appeal from a tenth of a percent to fifty percent, but that's still too low to even seduce a herpetic goat, but we have another product that might help." The mark, greedy for power and wealth, conned himself and you just led him on. Nihilism involves recognizing that most human conversation, like 99% of it, is simply a con job and that the way to avoid being conned is to look at language as exactly what it is, shared tokens with boundaries known as categories, and to realize that people are cleverly playing with those categories (sex appeal by 500%) in order to sell their product, idea, or personal power while making *us* the victims of ourselves. If you ask me, this is why people fear nihilism: it means the gig is up for your average human, which is basically just a talking monkey with car keys trying to convince other monkeys to do something for it so that it can increase its standing in the troupe. For most people, this nihilist realization is the greatest utility they will find from the philosophy.

However, some will want to push onward. At this point, we have to ask whether there is a conflict between nihilism and beliefs, values, cultures, customs, gods, or a belief in an afterlife, and the answer is that of course there is not; nihilism simply commands that we realize that there is no universal truth, values, or communication.

What does that mean, in the context of metaphysics? First, that individual humans do not share the same

understanding of the world, and the same applies to metaphysics; even more, since understanding creates attraction per the law of attraction and allows for realization in the world of quantum physics, to use a modern metaphor, we will not get the same results out of metaphysics. Someone who has focused mental state and clarity of intuition may encounter different levels of existence much as they are able to visualize different structures in the physical world. Others may look deep into their minds and find a lump of mud.

We have different destinies, all of us human individuals, just as plants and animals do under natural selection. Some go farther than others. This also applies to values and communication. What we understand as important and can apply with self-discipline constitutes our values. Some men are finer than others, as Jane Austen would say, on the level of behaviour, which reflects an underlying distinction of intellect and intuition; they see more, and respond to it, where the ordinary person is just another animal stumbling along looking to eat, fornicate, defecate, and agitate for more power without regard to whether he can use it well or even if he needs it.

Every prole wants to be a king; every king just wants a kingly decision made. A king can be a nihilist and have a profound understanding of metaphysics and spirituality, but for your average person, the situation has already become too complex to be anything but a muddle. What this means is that the primary conflict with nihilism and religion is between nihilism and the exoteric, egalitarian, and individualistic doctrines through which most people understand religion; a nihilist will take an entirely different approach and reach different places.

Ultimately, nihilism commands that we study reality including humanity instead of the other way around, and so we see the brutal truth of what humans are, but at the same time, are open to studying anything which is real. That gets complex when we talk about the esoteric, where different people not just receive different results but trigger different results.

What might a nihilist view of metaphysics look like? As Plato pointed out, our existence is the *effect* of more complex causes. In this way, multiple "worlds," dimensions, levels, and layers can exist within the same logical structure, with our physical world being one of them. It turns out that the Earth is not the center of our planet cluster and therefore we rotate around the sun and not vice-versa. The same is true of metaphysics: our physical world is not the ultimate condition, but one of many, and they are all united by the same logical rules and principles.

This viewpoint, called "monism," shows up everywhere from Johannes Eckart, Immanuel Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer through the true ancients, the Hindu sages, Nordic poets, and the Greco-Romans who codified similar principles. Those views in turn are ten to twenty thousand years decayed from the original Indo-European religion which was probably as cryptic as the Nords and Greeks but more clarifying like the Hindus.

On the other side, however, humans have a tendency to corrupt anything they can with their desires for a human world; we call this tendency "crowdism" and when applied to religion, we get "dualism," or the notion that there is one set of rules and logical postulates for this world, and then another better world where all of those are turned upside down. In saner times we would call that ironism or

contrarianism as a philosophy, but people love the idea of a perfect heaven of doing nothing which is their reward for being obedient to the morality of the herd, and a fiery hell full of sodomy for those who violate the rules of the herd.

This means that the nihilist navigates a difficult path between atheism, which relies on the material to predict the broader monist world, and dualism, which is an exoteric vision of the spiritual. As with all things, understanding nuance and structure instead of the categories which humans use to contain their fears is essential here.

- 7. D.A.R.G.: Veering into the practical would need this philosophical outlook, which of necessity is suspended above particulars enough to sustain validity throughout times, to have a distinct praxis. It is understood that what elitists would call worthy minds should be able to discern and derive such methodologies on their own to apply a philosophy pragmatically. However, would it be possible to create layers around Esoteric Nihilism so that it could be used as a practical guide over a more generalized demography? If so, what would this entail?**

B: One of the most enduring ideas from Spengler was his observation that the ancient Greeks were healthiest when they built their monuments and temples of wood and not stone. Their understanding was that there is only one form of tradition, a living one, and that the more one makes it exoteric by writing it down and building permanent conditioners of it such as statues, the less alive it is and therefore it will not fail gracefully by fading away but will instead become a zombie version of itself, much like Catholicism and libertarianism did as described in the

answer to the first question in this interview. The pagans wrote nothing down and formalized nothing, and so we have no record of them, but at the same time, we do not have a robotic undead Pagan church which has become a tool of the crowdists; Christians, conservatives, and libertarians cannot say the same. For this reason, I suggest a twofold approach: first, that our praxis be encoded in stories, where we can see the *why* behind certain general types of practices, and second, that it never be formally encoded as procedure, only symbol. This allows those who should be practicing to do it and excludes most of the others.

8. **D.A.R.G.: What does Esoteric Nihilism tells us about what reality asks of our character as humans in order to not only survive but excel? What of our species, in order to evolve towards higher capacities, in every area or, more completely and as ancient Vedic philosophy would express it, "in the three worlds"?**

B: We could see esoteric nihilism as the ancestor of Tradition and conservatism, meaning that it is both (a) focused on results in reality over human feelings, desires, and judgments and (b) has some transcendental aspect, meaning that if you seek to conserve the best of the past, you must know what "best" is and therefore need to know "excellence." These two things keep themselves in balance; instead of the prescriptive, we have a general outlook toward the qualitative, and a transcendental goal of excellence, goodness, truthfulness (realism), and beauty, and to balance the tendency to launch off in pursuit of unrealistic ideals, we partner it to hard realism. These two can only exist in parallel, which is part of their beauty. One

without the other becomes self-neutralizing, much like nature makes homosexuals or ugly people out of bad genetic combinations, ensuring that those genes die with them.

This general approach leads toward certain realizations of a timeless way of life that maximizes humanity by, like an accelerated natural selection, pushing us toward greater excellence and therefore, producing more people of genius; as esotericists, we believe in the necessity of people of genius because only they can go further along the esoteric path in terms of ability, and we need a large number of them because only some of them will have the second component of esotericism, which is the will to learn in this area. Some geniuses will turn toward martial arts or the natural sciences, but among the rest will be found those inclined toward philosophy, literature, and leadership, all of which require some steps taken on the path. The "genius pump" made Western Civilization great, and probably existed in other times as well, but when those civilizations turned from it, they fell into decay.

A classical civilization begins with the idea of social order as a component of natural order. We see that predation and hierarchy exist in nature so instead of opting for a different quantity, meaning an alternative to those, we instead seek to position them in the right places within the natural order so that these inevitable things work for us instead of us against us. For example, when the strong and good subjugate and enslave the weak and bad, this is a victory; when the good do good to the good and bad to the bad, this is natural selection and morality in parallel union; when as a result, the best rise above the rest and more of the best are produced, this is evolution instead of "progress"

toward a Utopia through equality. This is why classical civilization tends to be rigorously undemocratic, ignorant of humanism, and geared toward understanding the natural world and its metaphysical component.

Within that civilization, you tend to find an aristocratic leadership, a caste system based around the homes of the aristocrats as employers of the lower castes, a strong culture and religion expressed as customs and not ideologies, a vigorous internal competition balanced by a horizontal hierarchy where most find a place unless they are bad, and a notion of the transcendental as a means to appreciating natural order and also opening the doorway to the faint light of the metaphysical, so that those who possess a genius aptitude and moral attraction to such things can follow. It is not unknown to us moderns that these are the best societies; we simply refuse to indulge in them because of our pretence of individualism and the political philosophy of egalitarianism that we use to enforce this pretence on others.

Our path toward this saner world involves first an inward conditioning to see that what our intuition knows is true is more important than our fears for ourselves, and through this, to realize that a more orderly civilization and more balanced/harmonious world will benefit us to a greater degree than any direct reward to ourselves ever can. This will start with a few lone thinkers, spread to the top 2-5% of the population by natural leadership ability, and eventually become a cultural norm. As we watch liberal democracy collapse in a spreading mire of corruption, ineptitude, social decay, misery, atomization, and libertinism, this future in the past becomes inevitable.

9. **D.A.R.G.:** Is it possible to name a few individuals that would come archetypally close to a practical and successful application of Esoteric Nihilism, heroes or exemplars, so to speak? What and how does each of them achieve this place? More importantly, what can we learn from them, not only in terms of what they did, but of what they left out?

B: Let me speak only of a few, since most live and die anonymously, having been content to influence those around them locally. Marcus Aurelius, Johannes Eckhart, and William S. Burroughs come to mind, with the latter two being intensely focused on the monist metaphysics of the universe and the former an archetypal genial agnostic. Their thinking was to avoid the innate mental control exerted by the herd, to separate what was actually true from what we wished would be true so that our fears would go away, and then to apply that through knowledge of both the law of attraction and the underlying generative structure inherent to our universe. Our best strategy is to emulate that example, but in the interest of esotericism, that statement alone should suffice. Those who want to know will find a way to know and by knowing, they will meet the universe halfway and it will do the same, making incarnate what they desire that is also in parallel to the logic of the world. Interestingly, none of them would have identified as anything like an "esoteric nihilist," which shows us why the nihilist theory on language is superior; you and I, and maybe some of our readers, understand what these tokens mean, but others use other tokens to mean the same thing, and what speaks to us across history is how those understandings are expressed through works and deeds more than statements of prescriptive logic.

A sorcerous craft

Fluxions

In his quest for accuracy and rigour eventually leading to his contributions to Calculus, Sir Isaac Newton borrowed terminology from an area of classical mechanics called Kinematics. The terms *fluent* and *fluxion* incorporated eventually came to be known as *variable* and *derivative*. Each set of terms has its advantages in describing the object in question, highlighting one or another aspect. *Fluxion* in particular is quite useful in poetically illustrating an ‘instantaneous rate of change,’ and may serve us outside the realm of pure mathematical abstraction to bring attention to such immediate movement at each point in time. So, while the change from a measure to the next, from an idea to the next are changes in *fluents*, there can be said to exist *fluxions* in music which describe movements across a separate dimension – that of the inner experience. But such a transposition into the realm of musical description is only metaphorical, if useful to expand perception, and should be taken as a flexible mental aid.

Metal can be reduced to musical phrases, around which percussive patterns of different timbres and complimentary effects are added. In its most natural state, divested of rock and blues voicings, metal music is monophonic. Many bands from the original underground throughout the eighties, constructed monophonic textures consisting of a guitar and bass playing the same notes, differing in any case by an octave, and only carefully and sparingly resorting to a separation of a fifth between the instruments. The other most common technique

along this narrow bridge to the expression of power is the organum, albeit used in its most simplified form only, allowing for a sense of space and relative movement while limiting any weakening effects over the main phrasal line.

Metal inherited the guitar riff from rock n' roll music, which had in turn received it from blues music. Phrases were already present in blues, but as short rhythmic bits that cycled ostinato-style under the characteristic explosiveness of African vocalizations. The riff passed on to rock music, which dilutes the powerful and raw effects of the blues riff. It brings these effects under the umbrella of ready-made chord-cycle recipes over which a melody line is highlighted, and which melody line is the true centre of rock music. The hard blues rock of Jimmy Hendrix brought back the crudeness, & informed hard rock, as well as the earliest proto-meta, on the folk use of the guitar-riff. Black Sabbath finally took the riff and turned it into a technique in the service of a longer, more expressive phrase with echoes horror music soundtracks.

From the early phrasal music of Black Sabbath and its revival in eighties underground music we can see how the guitar-riff, in its phrase-oriented usage, can be made to create textures that create both ambience and decisive movement beyond melodic-harmonic distinctions by focusing on its modal aspect. It can be said that when metal attempts to break into the melodic-harmonic paradigm of mature European classical music, the power of the guitar-riff is taken away, quickly dragging down metal into a mediocre form excelling at nothing. The strength of metal music lies in preserving the integrity and power of the phrasal-riff through strict commitment to balance among an overall monophonic texture, a sensible use of organum, sensible use of doubling ('harmonizing') and an extremely measured use of polyphonic

techniques. Introduced through the medium of the phrasal guitar-riff, the movements, motif-relations and motif-variations wield an immense power.

Less obvious is the discovery that the essence, and hence potential, of metal lies beyond the guitar-riff or the phrase in itself. That is, the inner experience which metal phrases induce in themselves and in sequence is connected to a sense of both movement and permanence, relative change through immanence –change not only through time but in-time– the universe in a drop of water, eternity in an instant. This is the black fluxion that is active within and throughout albums such as *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss* and *Transilvanian Hunger*, eluding as they do all concrete analysis against them but also in their favour – the bulk of which remain poetical allusions. The creation of fluxions appears to involve the testing and careful development of phrasal guitar-riffs. Effectual bringing about of the appropriate fluxion needs the clearest self-honesty of the artist regarding the rise of their inner experience and its circuit-like reflection with the musical passage created. The re-discovery of said fluxions lies beyond the first threshold of experience of the corresponding phrasal guitar-riffs, and many listeners are able to sense them while remaining unable to verbalize their experience because of the lack of an abstract and theoretical framework the terms of which can be referenced.

Against first appearances, we are not entirely contradicting the non-referentialist position. The idea of the centrality of a fluxion in the metal dynamic pertains the fact that there is an element of living (as opposed to dead, static, or reduced) music that involves the inner experience in-time. The inclusion of the inner experience within a rational discussion on music aesthetics may appear to revive an empty metaphysical tendency to cite objects and events beyond perception or

description, but rest assured that this is not the case at the present. The fluxion in question is specifically the perception of a rent opening, a space created, a movement realized, by the phrasal guitar-riff as a unit. Furthermore, this helps us come to the realization that historically, and in essence, metal music moves towards pieces composed of 'flows'. Reductions of the music in metal analyses to 'riffs' or simply 'phrases', while well-founded, are always unable to approach the aforementioned essence. The concept of *fluxions* and their role in the concept of a music consisting of *flows* may provide the abstract basis for a more encompassing understanding.

Anton Long's Fluxions of Time and Alchemical Seasons Applied

In a highly relevant essay titled *Alchemical Seasons and the Fluxions of Time*, Anton Long lists a set of postulates concerning the concepts spelled out in the title. The idea stems from a certain time-relativistic point of view deriving from the theory of causal and acausal universes, if one wills, though one may also imagine they are different sets of dimensions in the existing universe we know. In one way, the implication is that every single thing follows its own pace, developing according to its nature and, in the case of living beings, in symbiosis with the acausal intrusion they allow as gateways.

We will proceed to take from the postulates that concern our concise and direct presentation of metal riffs viewed as fluxions, but the reader is encouraged to study the pertinent text in full. It should be clear that these extemporizations on the original themes are to be taken as creative explorations of concepts that may or may not yield a logical extension of the ontology, but which are primarily aimed at reinforcing a conscious

understanding of organic, intuitive, processes that could (and probably have been) brought under sorcerous activity.

The following discussions use ample use of the Greek word *φύσις*, transliterated as *phusis* by Martin Heidegger, and as *physis* by Anton Long. A recommended text to be properly introduced to this concept in a modern philosophic treatment, we may recommend Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The following is the philosopher's basic statement regarding the term *phusis* in page 15:

Now what does the word phusis say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging-abiding sway.

We will hereafter transliterate *physis* as per Anton Long, whose text we will be discussing.

In the third postulate of his essay *Alchemical Seasons and the Fluxions of Time*, Anton Long writes:

Time is a Fluxion. That is, time is already inherent in living beings, part of their physis.

From which follows that if what is contained concealed, in metal riffs are fluxions, it means that these are to find their source in the artist / performer / guitarist themselves as living beings. It emanates from them, with the impediment being their incapacity at the instrument on the one hand, or an encumbering analytical consciousness of what is coming forth. Furthermore, the technical ability distorts or changes the presentation of the emanated physis of the music as fluxion, though in no definitive way. That is, a higher dexterity or dominion in the technical field does not necessarily result in

greater clarity or purity in the expression of the art, and may indeed be the cause of obfuscation or artificial embellishment, where 'artificial' refers to a conscious construction not necessarily directly guided by that inner flow beyond the individual as a gate to the acausal.

Following from the previous, we read:

Each living being has a Fluxion appropriate to – which represents/manifests/presences – its physis and thus which is appropriate to/manifests its type/species of life.

The implication here is not a revelation in regards to art, when we modify this to refer to the birth of metal riff-phrases emanating from the individual. The resulting music is an expression of what that person is, rather than simply what they want to say, the latter being the most popular conception. In short, in exposing their art, the artist reveals a part of themselves in a particular state. What is interpreted thereof by an audience or critic is the subject matter of a different discussion. Also, what is interpreted about the method as a causal expression more or less conducive and appropriate to communication is different from a judgement on the fluxion, and thus on the individual's physis itself. The latter is moralistic, while the former is pertains the craft of music-making as an intelligible medium.

Then,

Thus, linear time - as measured by a fixed causal calendar and/or as defined by such things as the ratio of distance and velocity of a physical object – is Appearance/Abstraction not Reality.

In relation to the analysis of music, we may take this to mean that the individual physis is reflected upon the art, the

music, independently of points of view, of nurturing culture, or even of training. Also, that this expression of the fluxion comes out at the pace appropriate and commensurate to the physis of the artist.

A gross distortion of the previous point might have been interpreted as if the determination of the 'correctness' of music, whether it be by its orderliness or its adherence to a certain narrative expectation, are simply illusions, and that the essence of it lies somewhere in a space entirely inaccessible to consciousness out of touch with some gnostic revelation or trance. But such would have been a misapprehension of what the original postulate refers to, as they specifically pertain to constraining the riff-phrase fluxion to a speed of unveiling or development, and to the notion of points of view being only apparent to the one reality of what the fluxion is as part and parcel of physis.

Consequently,

Such linear time thus re-presents only the causal physis/nature of material objects/matter and thus manifests the physis/nature of the causal.

That is, whatever part of the riff-phrase in question that is measured with respect to its quantifiable ratios is not that ulterior intrusion from the acausal that we are expecting from the artist as gateway, but only a gross, materialist, causal attempt to somehow measure it. This we may perhaps even apply to the repetitiousness of a riff-phrase.

And so,

A Fluxion manifests what is a-causal. That is, how a particular living being changes/develops/manifests.

The riff-phrase as a fluxion of the artist's physis is reflecting of 'how' that person is, rather than 'what' they are.

From this last point, we may take that the artist can only express what manifests through him, as something they have absorbed, made their own, and brought forth again. That is, the individual as a result of a cosmic collocation of intermediary stellar generator agents, and not the ultimate essence that perhaps is a thread beyond the initial cause and into the preternatural void. Consequently, whatever he will express authentically, he must first invoke, embody from within and through actions flowing because they are necessary to the individual, and thus, temporarily become by unveiling.

Possession

Eschewing the discussion of whence the different phenomena which have throughout history been identified as possession, whether they are psychological, physiological or paranormal in origin, we are interested here only in the effects of such altered states. More specifically, we are concerned with the use of the possessed state of mind as a way to enter into a space where communication is made possible in a way that facilitates the by-passing of the rational, judging mind, by opening a back door, through which non-discursive information can be passed between artist and audience. This implies two things: that the artist must be possessed during the birth of the work, and that the audience must be possessed as well at the moment of reception. The latter may be accomplished either through independent preparation, or by the work of art, in this case music, inducing such a state by purposeful design.

It may be posited that this leads to true expression, as opposed to mere exercise, invention or imitation. In order to

justify such a claim within our currently developing framework, let it be noted that in the state of possession, by definition, something beyond the individual interacts with him. By way of explanation, we are saying that during possession there is a coincidence of the human mind and whatever entities or forces inhabit such acausal spaces beyond our own causal one. It remains unclear whether the artist thus operating also injects something of his own individuality into such spaces, so that music is a function of a commingling. A more enticing, because more inclusive of other observations and explanations, is that humans acts only as gates which, once opened or activated, suppose a passageway between acausal and causal spaces. The implication might then be that what we identify as individuality is simply the effect of the unique location of the human being upon an interdimensional topography where specific acausal forces irrupts into a particular causal point.

In the first part of his book *Understanding Music Philosophy*, Roger Scruton writes,

We must see music as an act of communication, which crucially depends upon placing within the listener's first-person perspective a state of mind that is not his own.

He arrives at his conclusion as a synthetic addition to a logical cascade culminating with a correction, an expansion, of Wittgenstein's comments on music and the first-person perspective. The tacit crux of the matter is that this communication can only be effected from the inside of mind, of being, without core, non-discursive information being deformed by the parsing of the filters that enter into action in perspectives other than the solitary, inward-looking one.

Scruton paves the way by identifying what he calls the *acousmatic* experience of listening to sounds, whereby they are

perceived as “animated by a continuous movement”. As he tirelessly makes it known to us, no such continuity is physically extant in the sequence of tones that make up music, which more often than not can be described as discrete events. We may add here that while training and conditioning can facilitate a number of types of perception, it is most likely that the capacity for *acousmatic* perception is inherent in human beings as a species, and which capacity most likely gave rise to music as a form of communication as well as an art form – and certainly not the other way around.

Scruton continues to elaborate by describing the *quasi-semantic* structure that can be perceived in music, and which the reader may interpret as a direct consequence of the aforementioned *acousmatic* experience. Now, not only do we hear continuity, but discursive significance. Scruton at least implies a comparison to narrative by his choice of the term *semantic*. However, we may venture to replace the narrative interpretation with a more flexible, abstract one that sees not grammar, punctuation marks and story-telling, but non-discursive events that do not necessarily align with a linear cause and effect sequence.

Having entered a state of possession, what sounds and images are produced should not merely appear as something else, nor should they be defined by how different from other things they sound. It is not in appearing to be one thing or another that music acquires value, nor is possession itself an immediate voucher for value, depending on what one is looking for. What possession enables is the communication of analogous states of mind that may be experienced by the artist. What exactly this artist opens, and transmits are a function of what that person is and accomplishes causally, and what that opens acausally. That is to say, the ability, or the experience of

an artist in being possessed, as it were, does not confer upon them anything beyond the ability in itself, as a worthless being might only be a gateway to rubbish, however ethereal that rubbish would be in essence.

Mesmerism

Having established the way in which the artist may access a state of mind that allows for a communication beyond the day-time ego, as well as the ways in which what is musically discovered and produced while in that state can be perceived as having clear vectors of force, the next step entails the efficient delivery of experience to an audience. Now, Music is based in the capacity of human beings to perceive it through an *acousmatic* experience, and thereby sensuously, and inwardly, feel the movement of fluxions, more profoundly even than what could be described as a narrative. The latter presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with the forms, so that there may be barriers that require a certain acclimatization period to the sonic affront first of all, but also to the inducement of pain on humane sensibilities. After this has been accomplished, the individual in the audience may become the receptor of the acausal disruption potentially to be enacted by his giving in to the fluxions of the music. To that end, the musician can design the music structure so that it facilitates this process further, organizing the passages so that the fluxions therein act in collaboration with each other beyond technique, and rather in an organic discovery that assembles them together.

First is a stage of preparation, in which the listener is presented with something utterly intelligible, which communicates something that is known to the listener, in one way or another. It does not follow that the presentation, the

idea, or the introduction, whatever name one chooses to give it, should be something derivative or mediocre. It is intelligibility, perhaps expressed in clarity, and good simplicity. At this stage, we are trying to bypass the defences, the prejudice and calculation, of the receptor. And so, disarmament of objections and judgements should be first carried out. Compounded with the aforementioned disarmament by the exposition to not necessarily safe, but identifiable queues, is the effect of luring in, whereby we have active listeners that may “walk into” the fog on their own, as it were. For this to succeed, familiarity is not enough since interest must be aroused to the point of desire.

Once the listener’s conscious attention, his willingness to cooperate, to allow himself to be lead somewhere, has been secured, the music may proceed to a step that Milton H. Ericksson has called *induction* in his book *Hypnotic Realities*. Induction entails helping the conscious to relinquish dominance, so that communication with the unconscious, which in any case always takes place, can occur without interruptions and objections. Ideally, we want to induce a trance, by which we do not mean that any kind of overt outward symptoms would have to be necessarily visible. It simply moves the conscious portion of the mind into a kind of automatic mode in which some direct control is relinquished to the unconscious. Our efforts to do this must flow from the previous stage of familiarization and luring in, that we may send away the conscious mind into its own reverie within an individual realm of *phantasia* that is now being sustained by the music.

The listener is not merely sent into any trance, but into a trance in the direction of the musician’s election, though within the constraints that each individual in the audience will allow,

giving the latter a handle over what can possibly occur next. Once the subject has been entranced, development and complexity are given their rightful place, but at first with the explicit aim of deepening the current state of mind. The musician strives to crystallize an aural vision of a world down the path that the listener at first took consciously, and which then grew of its own accord. The purpose of this step is to entirely bind the receptor, to effectively bring them into a different reality from which what they normally understand as reality appears simply as a perspective, or a distant land they once inhabited but have left far behind in lieu of more wondrous possibilities, however dark these may appear at first, for they are also immensely pleasurable even when they bring copious amounts of pain.

Finally, the crucial matter can be transformed into melodies and structures that are to be unleashed upon the subject. Here is where *suggestion* takes place, where evocation takes place in earnest by planting seeds that will later grow of their own accord. Here where the most powerful, insidious, and more difficult to comprehend passages can be exposed, though not without careful consideration. The mind is now open for invasion by a contaminant that will soak its ground. To fully take advantage, musical fluxions of the most jarring find place in the shape of climaxes, the full building of which entail not just the progression of previous stages, but an ascent of its own. This way, it attains independent personality and weight, though care must be taken not to divorce it from the previous material, which would suppose a disruption of the kosmos already created.

Once satisfied with the work done, the listener should be led away, outside from this particular *phantasia* which must remain sacred, even if forgotten, and should not be approached

nonchalantly, which would, if not void, at least undermine the integrity of the contents communicated. This outro, so to call it, is a controlled resurfacing or exiting, which must be firm but also reassuring of what has previously occurred, concentrating on driving stability.

Dure and Sedue

From the channelling forth of acausally inspired, motivated fluxions manifest as riff-phrases through spells of invocation or even possession, we moved towards their conscious, calculated arrangement in accordance to the Ericksonian style of mesmerism. The third stage in the exposition of the sorcerous sonic art is its performance, by which is not necessarily meant the performance in front of an audience, and includes its performance at the time of recording as a definitive impression upon the chosen media. It is clear that what at this point is most important is how to achieve the best possible performance that the already arranged expressions for the fluxions' manifestations can be communicated to the receivers, the audience.

In an article titled *Ritual Magick - Dure and Sedue Ceremonial*, the obscured contributor to the Order of Nine Angles collection *Hostia* makes the following distinction:

Basically, there are two types of ceremonial workings in magick: dure ceremonial, and sedue ceremonial. The first is essentially ritual used for internal magick - to produce/provoke/inspire changes within the consciousness of those participating/attending. The second is (or rather should be) a performance which transports the individual participants to another realm and which engages their whole being.(...) A ceremonial ritual is a seduction - of the

participants/congregation by he/she/they conducting it or the power of the rite itself because the rite captures or transforms an aspect or aspects of the acausal. This seduction is subtle if the ritual is a sedue one, and obvious/overt/harsh if it is a dure one.

The latter concerns participants in a theatrical ceremonial setting, while the former matches the purposes of communicating through inner change, by becoming internal magick. The recording or performance of the fluxion-suffused arrangements approached this way becomes a conscious, measured, sober yet highly involved effort at crafting real sonic sorcery.

Drawing attention to the nature of the *dure* ceremonial, that it is used for internal magick, implies active participation on the part of the audience. In the case of music, it necessarily means that the sorcery in question will not be effective without the audience not simply 'listening' to the music as it plays in the background or through a cynic's rationalizing filter, but rather welcoming it as a swaying to and fro of the total experience.

The total experience being firstly the perception of the raw sound 'materials', whether their abrasiveness or their smoothness; secondly, the directly resulting emotions from any source, be that the acousmatic experience of an imaginary flow through space, or the emotional processing of the raw materials; thirdly, the rational perception that encompasses appreciation for structure, as well as narrative and extra-musical elaborations and interpretations; and lastly, the incipient alterations in willpower and willingness towards courses of action, seeds which, if watered and tended, flower into new states of being and the possibility of a further unveiling of the individual physis.

Ars symphonica

Poison from the Abyss

A commentary after Ebvleb's Poison of god

I

In giving birth and nurturing Abyssum's second great work, Ebvleb became keen on a mystical concept he termed *the poison of god*, a name with which he baptized the musical work itself. At first glance, it might seem apparent that there is an anti-religious posture implicit in this name, and while this is true to some extent insofar as Abyssum is opposed to organized cults and the god mythos as a whole, the nature of the work under discussion is strictly mystical.

A closer knowledge of the materials should suggest to those with sufficient intellectual power that there is a more nuanced interpretation to be found, and which interpretation necessitates an apprehension of Abyssum as dark and sinister mysticism channelling forces from a different dimension – from the acausal universe. Brett Stevens has provided a more nuanced interpretation of the codification of Ebvleb's mystic exposition of what this poison is. Correctly understood, the poison in question is not a substance concocted for the demise of god, its existence not being recognized in the first place. Instead, the words of Ebvleb reveal a double meaning: our

poisoning by the lies of the god mythos turns those rare, superior minds possessed of reason to become hardened against the delusions that hold the common man of simian mind in their grasp; in turn, those thus changed become a poison for a society based on illusions and mediocrity.

Abyssum, as representation of the forces driving it, is then said to be a poison for all that is mundane, but as a poison it is at once lethal to unworthy minds incapable of its proper handling but an elixir of liberation to a very few who may in time become one with it. We may understand Abyssum's mystical conceptualization as the condensation of two different substances into a single symbolic term: the poison of lies and delusion, and a cleansed poison that is itself an antidote to them. What separates them, what brings forth the second substance, is the filter through which the initial poison is distilled, and which filter is a particular human essence unique to each individual.

II

In his work *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche refers to Christianity as a poisonous substance that breaks the strong, dissuading them from their natural tendency to courageous action and replacing pride with constant doubt to the point of sickness. We find in these words a description of Ebvleb's first poison, received from a sick and deluded humankind. The German armchair thinker steps further and states that ideals are poisonous because they distort what is real. He admits, however, that ideals are indispensable as temporary measures.

To understand the full depth of Nietzsche's words, one can see them in light of the dark elitism of Abyssum. Nietzsche was a philosopher that insisted on a nobility of the mind, of reason,

rather than one of birth. He also favoured the idea that most people are simply incapable of understanding, a thought that permeated and defined the way in which he graciously expressed himself, uncaring and dismissive of having to justify himself in ways that contemporary intellectuals could understand, not to speak of the common rabble.

Given these and other observations regarding Nietzsche's exposition of the excellence of the superior man on the one hand, and the mediocrity and incompetence of the majority on the other, the perspicacious reader may see that Nietzsche does not mean to do away with ideals or values. Nietzsche tells us that these are as dangerous as poison can be, yet they are also a necessary antidote to be utilized in a certain way.

III

A further unveiling can be sought behind Nietzsche's reference to Plato as the destroyer of paganism. Plato is paralleled with moral fanaticism, and is accused by the German of poisoning the innocence of paganism by a re-evaluation of its values. Here, we must go beyond the prejudiced intellectualism of Nietzsche and dismiss his misrepresentation of Plato as a moral fanatic.

We should agree that Plato was indeed the evil of which Swedenborg spoke as the poison of the serpent, antagonistic to innocence. Upon inspection, the origin of the word *evil* reveals something interesting. It resides in the Gothic *ubils*, which implies *beyond* and *going beyond due limits*. In evil is the excellence of the strong, of those possessed of discernment and courage.

It is only with discernment that we can look beyond the materialistic understanding of the Myth of the Cave as dualism, and which discernment alone can take us beyond mere words and reconcile Plato's idea with a transcendental monism that sees the universe as one whole in which opposites are correspondences with a common origin. Thus through monism is the Judaic idea of the good god poisoned beyond salvation, and the infernal torment of living correctly understood as a delight in strife and overcoming. Innocence is the mark of animals and brutes; superior man is a demon of transgression.

IV

An allegorical counterpart to the Poison of god may be found in the mystical understanding that European Tradition has regarding the plant Henbane. Grimassi writes about Henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger*, that it is associated in magickal workings with the creation of barriers and fixing things in place, and thus to blocking, stopping activity and disrupting communication.

Henbane has a double effect as it disconnects the victim's perceptions of the physical world around him, while increasing internal bodily activity unto hallucination, delirium, heightened emotions and convulsion. It is a dangerous plant that estranges and kills most, but which in the hands of a few knowledgeable and daring individuals becomes an instrument that turns the eye, through delirium and trauma, towards the stars and away from this planet in its mundane aspect. Henbane is both a cure to ailments and a lethal poison, depending on usage.

In a short but valuable document titled *Herbs in Black Magick*, written by the Traditional Satanist Hagur, we find references to

Henbane as having a powerful, oppressive and nauseous odour, and whose effects are hypnotic and convulsive. Hagur quotes Culpeper warning to the reader, to only use Henbane externally as ointment but never to ingest it. Such a warning can further illustrate the metaphysical Poison of god, which the average man can only appreciate superficially and is undeserving to ingest.

The raging depth in subtlety of the music and aura of Abyssum's *Poizon of god* could be described in a similar manner by those of us who have attempted to establish meditative and empathic connections with the work. One might note that Benedictus Crispus mentions Henbane under not only its well-known name, Hyoscyamus, but also, more obscurely, Symphonica.

V

Hagur also implies how, in the Sinister Tradition, Henbane is connected to Saturn. Hagur helps support the validity of this connection by quoting the opinion of Culpeper, who states that an observation and inspection of Henbane in its natural environment and its effects should yield the conclusion that it is a Saturnine plant, rather than one connected with Jupiter, mocking contemporary astrologers for said confusion.

Among the incense blends mentioned by Hagur as appropriate for working on the planetary spheres of Hebdomadry, Henbane is also seen as common to the blends for Mercury and Saturn, exclusively. Mercury is individualized by the presence of Sulphur in its blend, while Saturn likewise acquires its character by the inclusion of Ash. Sulphur and Ash are considered traditional links to either of the two planets, and so Henbane could be said to be a catalyst to their interaction. It

is worthy of commentary that the set of incenses to which this indication belongs corresponds to the Sulphur stage of Sphere Workings, which aim at the subtle perception of a more experienced practitioner (as in those glimpsed in MSS *Hostia I, II, III*).

In analysing the link between Mercury and Saturn in the Sinister Tradition, we are called to inspect the dark pathway and corresponding Dark God which embodies it: Abatu. The corresponding Sinister Atu image is XVI: The Tower, also formerly known as War. A passing mention could be made here that the Basque word *abatu* means *to support a house*, while in Latvian and Lithuanian, it is a noun-form of the word *father*, meaning a Catholic abbot. Now, both the conventional image and the Sinister image of this Atu imply the destruction of an edifice by lightning – a natural force, a Satanic presence descending in full force to behead the figurative abbot as a symbol of the materialistic cult of the Jewish god.

In the description of Sinister Atu XVI in the book *Naos*, there is mention of a woman in white standing at the gates of a castle whose tower is toppled by lightning. It is implied that she is working the magick that brings down the lightning upon the said edifice. A similar figure is found in Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm*, where a pale and seductive lady, who always dresses in white and who we intuit has a manner of mental powers, belongs to a family that possesses giant serpent-like monster. The monster is a white wyrm kept hidden underground by this family with ancient ties and an unmistakable sinister aura.

Lightning descending and a serpent ascending are both well-known symbols of illumination, and of Lucifer. But in relation to the more pure and Sinister work of Ebvleb, we should refer specifically to the Promethean Satan: the way of

lonely and independent illumination through strife and suffering given only to a very few, perhaps those very few who alone are worthy of the Poison of god. This Poison from the Abyss is a portal through Mercury unto chaotic forces from beyond Saturn.

VI

The aforementioned derivations and systems all relate to the Hellenic mysteries and to Alchemy. With this in mind, a few pertinent references may be found in Alasdair Forsythe's *Alchemy Deciphered*. The author quotes from Baro Urbigerus' 1690 Alchemical Tract, where Urbigerus talks about a Philosophical Distillation that is the right Separation of Mercurial Water from its purely poisonous substance, which is useless to the Art itself. This distillation of originally poisonous Mercurial Water is carried out successfully only by Adepts, or those on the way to becoming one. In other words, those with the knowledge, spiritual acumen and intellect to do so will achieve this transcendental victory. The power of Will that only a few possess, or which only a few may kindle, are referred to as Fire that alone has the cleansing power to remove poison and stench.

In Alchemy, the first step in a spiritual purification, or what Hellenic Gnostic thought would identify as the beginning of the journey towards the realms beyond the stars, is called Calcination. Forsythe further refers to alchemical tractates which describe how this process causes a terrible stench, likely to be poisonous. Said process should therefore be carried out in an open space, away from people. Transposing exoteric instructions to an esoteric understanding of a mystical path, it becomes clear that what is required is utmost care and

separation from other people, since the transformation process is volatile and conflictive.

VII

The Acephalic mystic, Von Sanngetall, writes in an article published on June 12, 2017 titled 'Look for the interior of Eorthe!' that Calcinatio is the process of Fire or Purification. His brief exposition is consistent with our own understanding of the inner fire that can distil value from dangerous poison itself, a process which in itself incurs in learning. Von Sanngetall goes further here and gives us a necessary condition for that Fire to become lit inside of us. He talks of the necessity of taking in the living water of the Greater and Unresolved Mysteries, a statement that could be interpreted simplistically as faith, but which most likely refers to the opening up of mystic sensibilities, which in turn may also make one receptive to a greater reality.

Von Sanngetall continues to explain that the resulting purifying fire detaches us from a mundane mentality and all that comes with it, including blind habits and ideologies that are merely functional but cannot give provide us a complete understanding. In this rejection, he says, we also do away with utilitarian, materialistic and anthropocentric views that plague modern civilization.

Thus we heed what Ebvleb once referred to as Thy Call Beyond the Stars, and which call we now can understand as intimately connected to The Poison of god. Stepping inwards through the seven spheres reunites us, completes us and makes us ready for the two final stages crossing the Abyss and towards the stars.

An Interview with Ebvleb

- 1. D.A.R.G.: Did growing up in a geographic region where Catholicism predominates somehow affect your thought and, therefore, your art?**

E: What truly affects me are the characteristics of the territory which I inhabit, and of which I am proud to enjoy day to day; this country has no reason to envy foreign landscapes. I have volcanoes, mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, 'coldness', and a brain which connects to this. There are some details missing here, like snow, but this is quickly forgotten when being enveloped by the dense fog of my country's plateau; the volcanoes which I now see every day show me their power and transmit occasional arrangements that crackle like natural explosions. Being in contact with the Earth and the cosmos, my mind not only transmits my thinking and my feeling; it transmits my discussion with what is called NATURE of the planet and of the universe as far as I can reach. Theology cannot go by the hand of intelligent persons.

- 2. D.A.R.G.: From your viewpoint, what is black metal's reason-to-be? Has the panorama changed in these twenty years in a way that, the conditions which made its birth possible being now extinct, it is no longer plausible as an ideological movement in action and philosophy?**

E: Time has marked mutation, there is some melancholy and a great hate for the loss of those days... but the way I see the order of things this is normal, nobody could have expected that so much musical quality would not inspire new generations, and the empty space had to be filled with what the current would bring. The fault with the bands of the past is now being popular conformists in their majority; the market grew and they did not oppose it in the minimum; all those who complain were at the same time keeping zines and interviewing each other for their respective publications. There was no way of avoiding the popularization of the genre, it is only little poser boys to possess melancholy for something that was only a mirage.

This misstep by the "great bands" has motivated those of a more profound soul to find an interest in affairs of greater import and therefore there arises the occasional proposal imbued in some kind of occultism or obscurantism. I cannot say that there exists no ideology and/or philosophy because I would be denying my own existence, but I can say that common humans are a majority; there have always been, there always are, and there will always be more thinking human beings who will enter the superior labyrinths inside that which we call Black Metal.

Personally, I have lost interest in what happens in the so-called scene; I simply follow my musical and ideological experiment; I hope to occasionally encounter some musical piece that shakes me energetically, because dark and hidden music captivates me. I will continue to dig among demos hoping to know how to choose what can interest me; otherwise, it will be allowed to pass into the hands of those with lower demands.

3. **D.A.R.G.: Handling different musical projects at the same time, each with differing characters and exterior forms, what is the central axis, if there is one, around which all of them circle, to which they refer in your personal cosmogony? Or, are they enterprises disconnected from each other like mental experiments in completely separate dimensions?**

E: Everything circles around each idea, no project has leadership in anything since that is a human standard and this goes beyond that. I take each idea into experimentation and it becomes a spiritual matter, if it is necessary, or in a compositional, emotional matter. I have the tendency to keep in permanent experimentation certain projects specifically like Cruel, Abyssum, Nigromante; these are part of my personality and artistic spirit, although the others which I have created along the way have remained in final states or simply resting before a next musical composition.

Nigromante will continue to elaborate sonorous orgies for master minds and Abyssum will continue exploring violence and obscurantism, while C.R.U.E.L. comes for the horns of musical bestiality.

4. **D.A.R.G: The nature of the purest art makes it inaccessible to those humans who exercise the grossest thinking, and to those who some call homo hubris. This is why speaking of bands that should be famous but which were not lacks any real meaning for who seeks transcendental art. Could you give us a couple of examples of magnificent albums from the golden era of**

underground metal which were kept away from mundane hands and ears?

E: I do have a few titles in mind, but they are DEMOS; the masterpieces were dispersed mercilessly, and rarities come out into the light in the present. But I can vouch for the fact that there still exists a fine layer of recordings in cassette that are not obtainable even when excavating in the graves of the creators themselves; these recordings of which I have some, I would never mention in a magazine or in public; but if there was an opportunity to visit my sewer and, among the calls of the night, invade thought with these recordings which in my opinion are jewels of BLACK-METAL.

5. **D.A.R.G.: So-called scenes are usually an excuse for aiding mutual delusion; however, when these are the natural result of honest ideological and spiritual brotherhoods, they reflect a sense of purpose which crystalizes in unique works of art of great power, these having been emanations from beyond normal human consciousness.**

E: I have nothing to say on this matter; I care little about belonging to something; I am independent in every sense and I intend to continue being so: a black point within the black, an underground within another underground hides me and there I pretend to continue for some time...

6. **D.A.R.G.: Letting fall an intentional veil over musical works, from not allowing wide physical or electronic division, to purposely releasing in favour of certain groups or individuals based on personal experience with them has been part of the modus operandi that**

characterizes you. What are the motives behind it? How could it be possible for those foreigners who are capable of appreciation and respect for dark sonic art to obtain physical copies of recordings of your different projects?

E: In these times it is difficult for me to see all this so-called elitists, I do not see many of the so-called 'illuminated', and interesting Black Metal in terms of MUSIC and IDEOLOGY is difficult to find. While I have not started vinyl productions, it will be difficult for the world to find our TEMPLE OF PERVERSION; only producing vinyl can we make this stable, since only in this way will shipping costs be justified.

I despise the great majority of labels that dedicate themselves to edit garbage; I have created pseudo enemies for myself among individuals who are not worthy. Those who I could respect cannot comprehend, and those with whom I am in contact and who are REAL, are very few. So I am not motivated to fight with the economy to disperse music in the world; however, I always hope that some label will once in a while approach with adequate intentions to our way of looking at production and distribution of our art.

I can only recommend that when you see our first 7" production then you should contact us and from there we will start our new era of productivity; we have unedited and upcoming recordings, besides pacts with bands that subscribe to our way of looking at the underground.

Evidently, we will also be within the reach of the populace and its vulgar appetite for rare vinyl, but this is part of what cannot be avoided if out in distribution.

You can only be underground if you really hate communication with inferior beings, mentally and spiritually speaking.

The few exceptions, like you, will be able to give faith that I am not easily accessible to the world and that I do not like to complicate myself with distribution; I am obsessed with being able to retake my paths and create the temple that BLACK METAL needs in the present to start a regeneration of BLACK SPIRITUALITY.

Before this happens, I am not available to the world and those who inhabit it.

7. **D.A.R.G.: What is behind the connection between ambient and black metal, which in your work appear to fuse naturally, erasing borders in such a way that the illusion of differentiation becomes evident?**

E: This, I suppose, is emotional and sensory; Black Metal made with integrity manages a sinister structure that awakens black emotions, which are energies which can also be made to surface by Ambient made for spiritually dark beings; Black Emotionality.

It must be clarified that we are talking about Obscurantist music and separating whatever clone or imitation since if it is pure, the Art will be unique and unparalleled, just like each Master Mind is So.

8. **D.A.R.G.: Some artists appear to find in pure improvisation the seeds which later dictate content, while others have a vision and dark energy that surrounds them**

in a way that leads them to seek a sound. I have the impression that the latter occurs in your case. In general, how relevant is this order of causes?

E: None of them is, in themselves, relevant. What happens in this case is not improvising or composing, this is the expression of a moment that is lived and that is translated in sensation and emotion to a cumulus of humans, which can be either in a live setting or in private; each composition must be understood as a Being or an Entity that emanates and that expresses when it is interpreted.

During rehearsals one seeks, eternally, arrangements to the music and one finds more than are needed; the same must be selected and not all of them can remain in the final recording of a piece; however, those of us who experiment during concerts can maintain those arrangements which we liberate for our own satisfaction while at the same time transmitting new sonic figures.

Personally, I detest and abhor interpreting a piece in the exact same way two consecutive times; whichever the project that I am managing, my boredom is evident and I reject the absence of permanent interest in finding new forms and ways: nothing with life and energy of movement would remain always within a same sonic choreography, so to speak.

At the end of the path, I decide the forms and ways of my work in private; everything arises from my personal contact with the cosmos and its black energy that enters into contact with my thought at the moment of combining the same intentions and interests.

Another way, less mystic and ideological, would be for you to build a musical skeleton and then to play with its bones; besides that, you have spare bones for it, for any situation in which they are needed since they are all different and they fit each other perfectly (the segments).

What is transmitted through music must be absolutely, and in its totality, a SINCERE projection, and one that is very demanding with the individual, their possibilities and qualities of expression; if they are able to take comprehension of Darkness to a superior level, they may find a gap through which their chants and desires are expressed.

9. D.A.R.G.: In concerning the themes and methods of Abyssum and Nigromante, are these musical projects a spiritual medium acting as channeling?

E: Presently, insofar as I handle the threads of composition in a total manner, I can say, write and clarify the following:

This is a conversation with dark energies through the music; in the case of ABYSSUM, my discussion is with the Cosmos, labyrinth of mysteries which only some of us can touch and thanks to this I am heard and it answers in various ways to my curiosity, for I have been able to understand through my personal madness. This language could be taken by some idiot like telepathic but it is not so, these are energies to which we provide movement; with these I establish the conversation and it answers me through natural understanding, from which emanate the chemical reactions that they are able to transmit through my body, and in a very few times through 'the natural'... as

you see, it is difficult for me to try and explain this through specific words for a publication, so he who understands should consider himself privileged for his understanding is superior to that of common humonkeys.

What must remain clear is that ABYSSUM is not "Thy Call"; that album was inspired by forests, storms, our nocturnal incursions into the mountains of our country; and we will clarify that "Poizon of god" is a darker album in regards to the absolute concept, the forests are far away from this atmosphere that relates more to closed and lugubrious environments, where solitude and candlelight accompany us more often than not; "Cvm foeda sanie ex ore" attempts to show Black Metal as a channel which, besides black emotion, can also transmit artistic superiority, and distances itself from that which are the ordinary bands, because orchestration is sought and Black Metal is thought of as an element that can be combined perfectly with Orchestrated music, and so this album is composed for it to be shown in some theatre with violins and other stringed instruments.

ABYSSUM handles diverse energies in composition, which, along with the basic and elemental matrix, is all that represents the dark and not sweet side of nature, and not absolute nature.

NIGROMANTE is a conversation with energies that have remained after having been created in humans; I consider that it is possible that we can leave behind energies that are captured, energies which are imperceptible when we attempt to locate them in specific places, but where they lie their bodies remain dispersed for whom makes themselves Medium; they must not be thought of strictly as energies as they are known.

Upon sensing these energies, I condition them to transmit emotions, messages which must be expressed so that those who are lost in death may go on along their way, if it exists, when liberating someone in some way in life, or they simply allow their energy to be diluted across the cosmos once more through asserting themselves by communicating me their laments in sonorous ways.

I repeat: we are cosmic dust and energy that mutes and transmutes. I consider that we are a cumulus of information which after having lived, returns, leaving behind data in the universe to it may nourish itself with knowledge that it cannot obtain by itself after having possessed a different form of life, but it may create forms, in this case like those of humans, which in their turn will create others from which the Cosmos will learn through their creation; so, using ordinary words: "receiving antennas" of information, we become non palpable veins.

10. D.A.R.G.: You have previously mentioned that intelligence and theology are incompatible. Are you referring to Christian Theology or is it applicable to all kinds of dogma, be it the crude idolatry of aboriginal Guatemalans or the new fashion in nordic countries and among black metal fans to seek refuge in a "spiritual" satanism?

E: Theology, in general, is like believing in The Lord of the Rings, in superhumans, communication from gods to humans, but with a stupid and impulsive behaviour to justify itself; all that which misleads, and makes human beings avoid themselves is solely a matter of weakness.

A superior human being does not conform; he will believe in nothing else but himself and that which manifests in his life in an evident manner; he will find himself and will know what and how, during his existence, to allow his spirit to be contented to LIVE, which is a term that must be taken more deeply than that husk of the normal human being of wanting to be happy, and which is only a way of giving in to banality and all that which makes us retrogrades.

I am not someone who focuses on belonging to any specific zone on the planet, however, I am fortunate for the variety and comfort of nature in my country; but what the common Guatemalan is, I define as INFERIOR; all those who seek refuge and belongs to everything that surrounds them or a part of it, are in conclusion fearful of being alone with themselves, and this will remove him from true spirituality. My own personal way of living is one of dark tones; my taste is personal and not necessarily correct or incorrect, it simply is. I please my Spirit first; I use my body for that.

One does not need to look far to find an explanation for human weakness, they are simply not so intelligent or capable as they believe they are, neither those up nor those down. They are the same no matter how you look at them; very few superior human beings exist in the present, they are far too scarce to be distinctly noticeable, but little by little a thought is dispersed which will take many to understanding, and they will act more logically and less stupidly.

All that which leads humans to be conformist is a sickness; all that which looks beyond what is had and touched will be a mind that dedicates itself to be one with

the cosmos, it will be the force that drives one to control the current and not allow one to be carried by it. It will be understood as an important part of the universe since we are living the flowering of that which human beings can become as a species if it survives its capacity of creation in addition to inferior behaviour.

Personally, [I believe that] nothing is correct or incorrect, it applies depending on the circumstances, but humans are banal par excellence and they hide themselves from logic, acting in coarse ways against all that which could make them take everything over paths more serious.

11. D.A.R.G.: Your observations regarding the mirage which is the idea of the glory of the old times echoes observations made by Varg Vikernes of Burzum with respect to the same. This person has also being marginalized by the same community that calls itself perverse and dark, judging him by an act of violence. Is it necessary for a scene to exist in order for transcendental art to be born? Is there any relation between an independent mind that looks for something precise yet wordless, and the concretization of that in great art? Is there a dichotomy between those who fight to maintain appearances and those who act to bring things into being?

E: The desire of wanting to belong to something is already mediocre; transcendental Art sprouts from pure thoughts; the new has nowhere to fit since it is creating the cast; wasting time in [discussing] if the music had a moment of glory or a fall is to generalize; a solitary being who creates for himself cannot be made to fit among those who are appearances and who pretend to belong to something, to a

herd; they do not strive to be the leader of that herd but to belong to it, and in my thinking, to be a leader in that herd is already unnecessary if one speaks of that which is Dark Spirituality; solitude is the basic and necessary magic.

The existence of a scene serves to generate an exchange of ideas; they allow thoughts to flow and intermingle; now, the term is so general that it admits the mixing of imitators, and human beings are by nature imitators, basic human behaviours are like this. An artist who places all kinds of impediments to growth before themselves is no artist, so it is no Superior Art which will sprout from Him, it will simply be art for humans, and those who value you are only inferior without [you] being able to gratify those of superior understanding; since there is Black Art in this planet which Honours with Integrity the exercise of this musical genre.

I will not deny that being able to meet human beings with whom it is a pleasure to exchange thoughts is enabled by the so-called scene; this fluidity of ideas among connoisseurs of similar tastes nourishes thought and catapults those who search to continue the search more intensely. In my case, I continue in solitude because I see that many paths are being taken and I seek my own, similar in some details to some currents but definitely taken to the inside, to the Abyss.

Disclaimer: This character you mention, I associate him with the fairy tale for children and nerds whose name I do not remember now but which he even relates in the cover art of his work. So I will not go into the details of such stupidity; what could such a man think, a human being who submerges himself in fairy tales and takes them to music, seems to me to lack depth; an absolute lack of black

spirituality and is, instead only music, burning churches, orcs, "impulsive murder", "watch my video on youtube" ... fuck, "fuckin impostor."

It was due to that kind of human being that I decided to leave the term BLACK METAL since I was not able to endure feeling in some way that I belonged to that world of clowns; ABYSSVM fathoms in a musical experiment of a very spiritual kind focused on the solitary and dark side on the human side, called "NEKROSPIRITUAL RAW METAL" and if I shall belong to something i will be along a very few brothers with whom we share similar tastes in music; the quality of music has very little to do with THE BLACK SPIRITUALITY OF THE ARTIST WHO CREATES MUSIC; and it is alright for there to be black metal for teenage rebels, but when that time passes or when you are simply intelligent, you desire to deepen and enter denser paths, beyond considerations of whether or not it is art or not, the manifestation emanates from human beings, it must reflect what the human being who expresses it is in themselves.

12. D.A.R.G.: Before, you have spoken about returning to a path or a way of thinking that existed in the past, which I interpret as an attitude of mystic discovery. Are you referring to your own methodologies, or to those of the genre or to a dark tradition, older and which goes beyond art in itself?

E: If we speak about creating a temple for dark music, I am referring to that in itself, without pretending who is more or less; but it is obvious that I consider that there are certain characters in this planet who deserve to be taken in by something that dignifies them beyond and which rewards

them in banality, and what better than a Thinking circle. Besides, it should not be kept secret that personally, being able to help artists worthy of the genre grow would be something that would reward me personally; musically there are great beings creating incredible art and grounding their own beliefs, aside from my sharing them or not, they dignify themselves on their own, even with their mistakes or successes.

If it is a questioning that seeks a tradition, it is INCORRECT; I do not share the idea of looking into something that is already done, this is like taking what was left behind and picking it up; that which is mystical in a natural way in its behaviour does not belong to a before or an after, it does not enter dreams and it only sees the present reality with a different lenses. In past times, man looked more toward the inner since he did not have so many mirrors upon which to look at himself physically; all this has malnourished man's behaviour, and so he who does not yet know himself is always considering that in some past there existed an answer that is no more, which is ridiculous and stupid. To seek in the distant past which is not known by a personal experience the answer to something: it is mediocre.

13. D.A.R.G.: How does your art differ from what many now-popular bands do with symbols, terminology, customs and religious postures?

E: I do not seek to express anything through symbols or religious systems. The collective can go fuck itself (I say it again); it is for that same reason that I do not listen to that kind of music; the big bands, excepting Inquisition, I do not

respect. It is not that I share their [Inquisition's] way of thinking, but their behaviour is that of authentic Dark gentlemen and that should be respected even though our way of thinking differs.

Whosoever wastes their time in so much paraphernalia does not search too deeply, and is only into music for music in itself; this will be confusing for those who are merely normal.

14. D.A.R.G.: Could you summarize the black spirituality and temple and what they could give to black metal as a source with foundations beyond the mundane and pretentious?

E: I do not seek to give black metal anything; I have distanced ABYSSVM from that term, now we are beyond, not necessarily better or worse; we are simply in a musical path which we travel in solitude. From the beginnings of this musical experiment we have expressed that ABYSSVM needs to be felt more than understood; if you allow yourselves to flow with the whole of the musical ideas and you are able to perceive the Dark Energy, we will all be satisfied; contrariwise, you will not be attracted to what we do and what we try to transmit.

15. D.A.R.G.: Is the obscurantism inherent in the musical essence of Abyssum construed on purpose? Are the subtleties hidden deliberately or are they simply hidden by virtue of finding themselves buried under layers of elaborations that occur naturally during the composition of eloquent and perfectionist music?

E: I do not consider that ABYSSVM should be seen as a musical band; it is itself a matrix that creates beings who come alive and who make themselves. I cannot explain how a theme creates itself, not accepting the fusion in a sincere and honest way without compassion or pity, the only thing I need to do is to find that matrix riff whence everything shall arise; in making itself, it will know where to accrue itself.

Obviously, I consider myself to be an exceedingly intelligent person, which gives me a deeper spirituality, and which spirituality seasons my honest behaviour since I am not afraid to face that which surrounds me. To apply this to music is to enter in passion, which in this case causes in me dark music; and it is dark because that is how it feels, there is no better term to describe it, or at least man has not invented one yet. For many it is wickedness, aggression, perversion, etc., human behaviours, all too human.

I must repeat that this thing called composition is a conversation between the cosmos and the understanding which it gave me; the conversation is the expression of my way of feeling it, and I understand rendering gratitude to it for having been given the opportunity to be in life what I am. The Infernal Guide, in my own terms, not what human beings necessarily understand as infernal... I am the Voice of the Cosmos; Wrath from a beyond.

- 16. D.A.R.G.: We could say that art possesses an essence and an aesthetic; aesthetic being the form in which essence is encapsulated and transmitted, and which essence is then recreated within the human being that receives the form. Could any aesthetic be used to transmit any essence, or**

are aesthetics (form, structure), seen esoterically, an inseparable part and medium of all that is music and, therefore, essence and aesthetics are inseparable?

E: I do not believe in rules, compositional norms in any sense; each Artist has the option of choosing the path and manner of his ART; making it clear that I am speaking about artists, [in regards to] some vagabond rocknroller I am not sure they can transmit more than that which can be observed in themselves, nor is it important for me to judge the behaviour of others to distance myself from the discomfort that they may cause for me. The chants of ABYSSVM are beings with a different life, they have nothing to do with "aesthetics" or esoteric tendencies. This which we create is essence of our belief, and how it is seen, expressed, listened, is nothing more than expression of that which is created in the moment, which in my case is an entering into conversation with the Universe, [myself] being scientist devoted to exploration through the inhabiting for a time this species called "human"; I search and will search for that which produces Obscurantist curiosity.

17. D.A.R.G.: If we completely removed lyrics, names, imagery and any other extra-musical reference, should the essence and musical character be perceivable, or does this latter depend on the aforementioned elements?

E: Music is to be felt, a medium of expression to transcend life; if Music is created as ART, it will by itself express what will be inevitably felt as its essence; the character will logically be perceived if one is not the creator, as a result of the spiritual essence of who "listens", [but] this is already a

posteriori to the important thing which is the moment of creation.

- 18. D.A.R.G.: Can black metal become, as obscurantist music, in an esoteric tool, the study of and meditation upon which without need for words, symbols or abstractions, may promote in one a conscious development of human potential?**

E: IT DEPENDS ON EACH INDIVIDUAL; I CAN ONLY SPEAK FOR MYSELF. Through music and in all that is "CREATION" emanating from me, I do not see symbols that are even similar [elsewhere]; I simply express myself for an entity called UNIVERSE / COSMOS; nothing that is human can help me with this, beyond that which sprouts from my being as a living creature that breathes and thinks.

- 19. D.A.R.G.: Does music reveal aspects outside the artist's control, perhaps even unconscious aspects, in a way that music itself expresses truth more than the words, explanations and lyrics by said artist?**

E: A weak artist can only create weak music, but only those who are superior to that weakling will see the truth for themselves, and those who are equal to that weak being will believe it as the truth; everything must be taken in accordance to its source. In my case I am rarely fooled by false expressions; in many cases they reveal themselves on their own account. In others cases, one must pay attention, but I well know what kind of humans they are just by listening to their music; before me many things are revealed which evidence them.

20. D.A.R.G.: Given that reality is what it is, independently of the screens and illusions that humans place before it, is it more probable that a logical order and organization of the universe exists, even if we have not deciphered it completely yet? Or is it all, as some religious devotional currents (self-denominated black or white) say, all chaos and irrationality beyond human comprehension? Is our present condition an intermediate state that is discovering and partially capturing the cosmic system?

E: I like to think that we are an extension of the universe itself, its creation but at the same time that we are Him/That; we are a simple process; in my case I do not doubt the existence at a distance of forms of intelligent life, even superior to humans; I believe that each cosmic system captures through us, we are united for the better or the worse, the process of.

We are simply a species on this planet who dominates by force; according to how we will develop ourselves as a species, we will be given the rewards of slowly opening up the unending mysteries of life and the universe. Personally, I apply myself to being grateful for inhabiting on this occasion such a strange species in its development, an arrogant species that feels superior and is simply a part OF; but I am allowed to feel this way and I take advantage of my moment in life to enter the chasms of the Spirit, whose existence is an absolute mystery.

Now, when you say OUR, I step aside since I am obviously not the same as the vast majority of humans; I distance myself from a simple simian evolved and I intend to be a DEEP SOUL.

21. D.A.R.G.: What does the aforementioned nature of the cosmos imply about the music that lies within it, and which consequently follows its rules just as our minds and bodies?

E: I do not know if music lies within Cosmos, or if the music sprouts from it creation to self-marvel of what it cannot create and study on its own but through what humans call Nature; it is obvious that music is not exclusive to humans. Furthermore, for me music has no rules, rules were set by humans to be able, so to speak, to give shape to music and reinterpret it in diverse ways.

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THREE APPREHENSIONS OF BLACK METAL

Some considerations

It is futile to try and have a discussion on whether black metal should be regarded as pure music, as myth or as entirely subservient to some ideology. Yet, each of these three views are held by different camps of people who believe theirs is the only ultimately valid appreciation of black metal. The contention held by us is that black metal is all three: mythic/archetypal art, metal music, and enactment of sorcery; and perhaps more. This is black metal at its best, and not when robbed of any of these aspects by the incompetence or ignorance of the artist.

Among the few who, perhaps instinctively, saw these three in one were Mayhem, Burzum and Darkthrone. Whatever eventually became of each of them is a singular story, but the great power found in varying degrees within each one of them depends upon the upholding of all three views. The mistake of followers and non-followers alike is to have interpreted them in light of only one or at most two of these views. The reasons for this may lie in religious predilection, modern-minded callousness leading to presumptuous arrogance, or just good, old-fashioned idiocy.

Typically, Mayhem maniacs of the Left Handed Path forget all about music form, and its relation to what lies behind –

based on and perhaps misled by some unknowing Gnostic or Hebrew dictate. Those who tuned into Burzum first and foremost tend to be aware of the power of myth and symbol, while the most awake among them may even delve into the Jungian theory of archetypes, while oblivious to the fact that Vikernes himself has hinted at the very literal sorcery enacted through music. Darkthrone types tend to have followed Fenriz down the road towards the beer metal hall, and away from the intimations of evil that the earlier work grasped at, even if faintly and only over brief lapses of time.

It is even easier to forget that all source of doom-like and black ambience, the liberty of form boasted by the underground, the powerful use (rather than the ignorant abandonment) of metal as a chosen styling while intrinsically communicating a sense of meditative ritual, was densely packed into the demented work of Hellhammer's *Satanic Rites*.

Black metal as metal music

It must be remembered that black metal is metal music, born from its form and context, if only as a beginning. Within that, it must be remembered that metal is music, and so it is also subject to the wider laws of music. These laws are properties discovered through the experience of generations of musicians, and which properties can be rediscovered anew and singularly bent by those wishing to go back to the void through rudimentary materials. Said laws are neither arbitrary rules set by authorities, nor are they constructs to be changed and challenged in the name of some ideology, be it political or religious.

Just as we are encased in a physical body subject to certain forces, defined by certain transcendent formulas of which our

own human scientific theories are but echoes and grasps, so is music as a whole under the watchful eye of gods, of unified and interacting forces, of physis ultimately. Metal music is no exception, and black metal in particular should be, as a genre filled with artists aware of the occult nature of reality, even more aware of what goes on here. Alas, most flock towards religious dogma, theoretical lore or absent-minded exciting of the senses and so, idiocy's subterfuge reigns supreme.

It is not that the artist must submit to the will of an arbitrary metal authority, or that they be made subject to the human scenes around black metal, but that he realize that music can possess a life of its own and form independent of the wishes of ignorant masses and pretentious individuals. A Platonic ideal for metal music, and more precisely for black metal as its ultimate transcendent refinement, arises apart from the blunders. Reject not form, but let form and its study be the tool that brings forth a communication of essence, a representation of eternity and the infinite into a succession of momentary sensations.

Black metal as archetypal space

Yet, the cultist power that black metal can sway over a mind that has turned the gaze of its inner eye towards a point of contact bespeaks the creative essence that builds and connects to the Shadow, and deeper still. This is a region, or a dimension of the reality of black metal, that remains entirely unknown to those who see "only music" in the grossest sense of the expression. Opening oneself to the symbol, allowing it to speak rather than setting up a protective layer typical of modern mental cowardice against the sacred – the violence of Bataille.

As a region where dark archetypes, namely, those that modern society has managed to shun after centuries of repression and materialist Judeo-Christian taboos, black metal holds the keys to drastic and effective mental liberation. How far this liberation goes, of course, depends on the individual: how much the schemata are allowed to shift away from safe space, towards increasingly unbound and dangerous looming realities. The danger is felt when the individual finally starts to realize that these dangers are tangible, whatever modern societal programming has convinced them of.

Black metal as enactment of sorcery

Furthest from the safe space of work, order and civilization lies the ostracized, forgotten and ignorantly ridiculed sacred world – the place where *homo sapiens* can go to reconnect with nature, Earth and *kosmos* at large. How and when is black metal a tool of sorcery, lies entirely on the triangle that composer, artwork and audience create. If any of the three fail, this cannot take place: this goes for any property of art as well and is only here extended to its use for tuning in to a different state of consciousness, and whatever that may bring on its own (which is in itself up to each individual to discover and evaluate according to the sensibility and intelligence of each).

According to some of the more reliable (as in direct and logical, but also serious and non-reductionist) sources, sorcery is the conscious influence of the individual over some aspect of the *kosmos*, be that the mind itself, an external relationship, or large-scale changes beyond the individual scope. Whether or how each of these works also remains in the domain of speculation and empiricism – hopefully empiricism and rationality above content speculation without action.

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Purposeful black metal, enacted as such, as having a power of its own, as unrestrained but directed emanation of will, can be the object or the medium even of sorcery itself.

This level of apprehension can only be reached once the archetypal has been considered, accepted and taken to its limit. Once the individual stands on the outer edge of the that circular region, looking towards the dark expanse in front of them, away from human rationality and into the chaos, the beginning of a suspicion, a longing and a need to step through rises like a black flame, eventually engulfing all if allowed to grow through diligent cultivation and honest discrimination.

Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy; around the demigod everything becomes a satyr-play; and around God everything becomes – what? perhaps a “world”?

– F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Apophthegms and Interludes

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BLACK METAL CELLS

The present are open suggestions to be moulded and modified by any individuals; this is a first push. Work in quiet, work in secret, work strictly locally. But spread the ideals of elitism above the simians.

A Pathetic Present

Historically, black metal arises from the realist (a-social, a-political) view presented by early Black Sabbath (which was quickly perverted into money-making and covered up), the rebellious and harsh reactions of a young Tom. G Warrior (which disappeared as his music became more “acceptable”), and the satanic presentation symbol-layer enforced by Bathory. The strongest results and artists were born from inward-looking individuals sharing in an elitist but anti status quo mentality. This was fostered through organic though unconscious counter-culture.

The counter-culture that is necessary as a basis for black metal to develop is opposed by a globalized and commercialized world. Pseudo black metal of the globalized present misses centrality and an inward-looking isolation; when thought of consciously, this usually can be boiled down to an ideology; ‘ideology’ is usually misunderstood and correlated with politics, but the word simply means “science and system of ideas”.

The opposite present problem is those groups effectively trying to separate themselves from the dross of humanity but which forget all about a holistic approach that brings about a flourishing culture capable of producing quality. Elitist mentality is left behind and instead a partisan and tribal mentality is adopted where sharing in a religion or political stance is enough for mediocre art to be accepted.

Black Metal Counter Culture

A Black Metal Counter Culture starts with antinomianism. The term comes from the Greek anti-nomos: 'anti' = 'against'; and 'nomos' = 'law'. Antinomianism = 'against the law'. In the context of black metal as a counter-culture, it means believing to be outside the common 'human-made' law, or not recognizing it as relevant or valid.

Secondly, misanthropy is needed. The term comes from the Greek misos-anthropos: 'misos' = 'hate' and 'anthropos' = man / human. Misanthropy = hatred for humanity. In the context of black metal as a counter-culture, it means feeling disgusted by the acts and nature of the majority of humanity as mediocre, dishonourable and all around foolish, weak and undeserving. This misanthropy is an opposition of what is 'merely human', or complacent and so mediocre; here is also cut whatever pseudo art is merely pandering to a religious or political tendency, or whatever is uplifted on the basis of authority rather than merit.

Thirdly, an embracing of mysticism beyond posturing or affectation is paramount for the future of such a counter culture. Mysticism stems principally from the Greek 'mystikos' = 'secret' / 'undercover' / 'underground'; part of a group that requires membership to share information; typically a group

sharing esoteric knowledge. In the context of black metal as a counter-culture, it means closing off circles to outsiders in the understanding that to understand the art and other in-group values, it is necessary for someone to (i) be part / participate of the counter-culture, and (ii) have certain necessary personal qualities that make a person receptive to the experience and knowledge that comes with it – that is, an esoteric knowledge that cannot be transmitted directly but is absorbed by several levels of experience.

Strategy

The purpose of creating a black metal circle is to foster the results of black metal counter-culture: the fundamental shift of mentalities through the creation of transcendental art. Taken to its logical serious consequences, black metal presents and needs a change of vision and mind with respect to society, taking the individual to stand at odds with it from a spiritual, not a political or even merely social, stance. The purpose is artistic, but beyond the artistic, and in the understanding that the essence of human experience underlies the social and the political, and does not consist of it. The purpose is transcendental, and forward-looking, to foster a different attitudes towards life and reality among those who are brave and intelligent enough.

We can briefly divide the methods to carry this out into in-group and out-group activities. In-group activities must focus in the creation of common experiences, and that these lead to common understanding particular to the group, as well as the creation of art that arises from them. This takes time. Out-group activities consist in the things that are projected towards outsiders, with the intent of artistic expression and survival,

but also so that outsiders, who contain the potential, can have the opportunity to know we exist. The out-group activity includes 'propaganda', which is commonly misunderstood by most people as meaning 'political'. Propaganda is only the art of projecting a message towards groups of people, rather than simply individuals.

To foster and maintain a form of its own, a counter-culture group must have a separation from the larger group it inhabits. Therefore, there are several measures that should be taken in order to prevent pollution. These could range from only participating in larger activities that align with our purposes and work for them: for instance, we do not get involved in the musical activities of others who do not share our values. We attract and make others come to us, thereby promoting a change in them, rather than compromise our bases.

Tactics

A fanzine is the first consistent, cheap and convenient way of out-group activity: the creation of short but catchy content that informs the local population. It can help inform those interested about black metal to form a historical basis of the underground, so that they may get in touch with the real roots in Hellhammer and early Bathory. It can also help foster the three bases for a black metal counter culture previously discussed: antinomianism, misanthropy and mysticism.

It is crucial that music itself, the centre of the art and culture, is also born of this enterprise. It is a faster and more effective means to lead by example rather than simply encourage others to do it. The styles must be limited to those sounds that reflect the dark features of the genre both inside and outside, that is, both in attitude and their perceived feeling, in lyrics as well as

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in music. Visual artwork must, of course, also be consistent and reflect the deeper and darker intent.

While music making should be at the heart of the group's mentality, culture-fostering activities should also be prioritized to increase dynamism. These include the different music-project rehearsals and in-group performances, but can be extended to extra-musical activities such as walks in the mountain / forest, joint work-outs, gatherings, or participation in other psychological group experiments that can also create common experience. Start with two or three people, and only carefully and very slowly increase the number of in-group members. Divide activities strictly so that those inside know and partake in what outsiders do not, thus effectively creating the space that insulates from decadent modern culture.

Appendix I - Articles

METAL AS TRANSCENDENTAL ART

Music for the sake of...

In Book I of Plato's *The Republic*, Socrates is engaged in an exchange of ideas with Thrasymachus regarding the nature of justice. In this debate, Thrasymachus is noticeably anxious to drive a point that justifies his views rather than finding out the truth. In between the sarcastic remarks and false humility that characterize Socrates, the older philosopher puts forward questions and comparisons that shed light on the topic in interesting angles.

One of the most interesting arguments came after Socrates' opponent declared that justice could be defined as "the interest of the stronger". Socrates' response came to a point where he postulated that all art (which he uses as an equivalent to "talent" or "occupation") acts rather in the interest of the receiver of his work. So the true art of the physician is neither in the receiving of money nor in a perfection of medicine in itself, but in the curing of maladies and keeping the body healthy.

Socrates then extrapolated this to illustrate how justice was what a ruler imparted in the interest of the people. A ruler is given power to lead and impart justice to the best interest of the

people they govern. That rulers may often become corrupt is a different matter.

This got me thinking, what about music? What is the *purpose* of music? What is music for? From history, we know music has served different roles, from religious expression, conducive to a form of indoctrination, to aristocratic caprice, to romantic ideology, nationalist propaganda and every other conceivable use of music as ambiance or a vehicle for anything else.

We should make it clear that not only were these approaches different, but not all were equally close to the truth about music. Most do not understand that it can only evoke sentiments, even if detailed and vivid, but not particular scenes. It can speak to the human subconscious through the filter of the conscious (which is why you cannot “get” a music that is completely new in style to you – for example, the “learning process” one goes through when getting into death and black metal). More importantly, it cannot speak of individual ideas without the aid of words because it belongs to the instinctive understanding of humans as a species. Human nature and education mould these perceptions.

The most empty of all the interpretations was that art should be done for its own sake. A laughable oxymoron, if ever there was one. As Socrates correctly argued, art is done for the sake of the less powerful that receives it, the object of its mercy. For music, that is the human spirit, the subconscious and the conscious as a whole, your state of mind, whatever you wish to call it.

The options that metal has at its disposal

In his Fifth Heretical Essay, "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?", Jan Patočka briefly goes over the topic of pre-history (which he clarifies does *not* mean non-history), its transition into history and humanity's ascending from an animalistic lifestyle to one where one's considerations extend beyond personal immediate necessities.

Pre-history for humans was characterized by having survival itself as a main preoccupation. Life for life's sake. Setting the conditions for historical life, humans moved into settlements and gradually were able to afford independence from the every-day fight for one's life. The price of this was *work*. This work became a *responsibility* in exchange for safety and space to indulge in pleasurable activities. Patočka refers to the second one of these as the *the orgiastic*, a release and exchange from the toil of responsibility that provides an escape from a life of pure survival.

This sort of life could still be considered as life for its own sake. The clever reader may observe that in the previous description a full circle is described. Each activity on the stack is concerned with an individual trying to escape the previous state in order to keep going, to ensure survival.

It is then that the transcendental, the sacred, the divine, the ulterior, makes an entrance into human awareness. This is not to be confused with religion, which is only a systematic arranging of rituals and beliefs which may or may not be a way to the divine. Independently of the system chosen or the disavowal of all systems, keeping something larger than ourselves in perspective can make us redefine the way we see our individual lives. Our lives are no longer lived in redundancy, just in order to keep living, but are charged with

energy and will power to build or attain something without the intention of receiving personal reward. (Remark: It is common for people to have kids in order escape their mundane lives, but their intentions are equally mundane and selfish, mostly bringing children they cannot properly raise to an overpopulated world in order to satisfy their empty lives. The transcendent ideal goes beyond such gimmicks of self-deception).

Thus we can descry three possible avenues for music:

1. For mere function in context (responsibility)
2. For pleasure itself (the orgiastic)
3. As a medium to perceive and keep in sight something larger than our individual human lives (the transcendental)

The nature and goals of different music, perhaps to different degrees rather than in straight-up black-and-white distinctions, can be classified using these three elements. Music that is deemed superficial is that which lacks in transcendence. Mainstream (a term that only makes any sense from the 20th century on) music, specially, can be said to work in the primitive paradigm of responsibility on the side of the artist and pure orgiastic pleasure on the side of the listener. In most music, this activity is usually a combination of both on the side of the musician, responsibility to norms in order to get his pay and an attention to how much pleasure the music provides him. A reflection of life for life's sake in an empty music devoid of any transcendent meaning.

Transcendental music and art in general would imply musicians being invested in the music for something larger than their own personal profit (monetary or otherwise) and an audience similarly invested and discerning of music that gives

them that sense of going-beyond their individual lives. All the songs about common love, friendship and equality notwithstanding as they only serve to comfort weak individuals in their self-pity, not propel them forward to greater heights were the self is at least partially dissolved.

An example of a middle-of-the-road agreement would be Johan Sebastian Bach, who, like any man living off of music has to fill certain requirements. At the same time, he is renowned to have constantly searched for an ideal in music that would reflect the divine through proportions and relations, guided as well through a crystallization of rules in smoothness and logic that results from a fastidious attention to natural human perception of intervals (artists two hundred years later did the opposite...). In practice, he often got into trouble and wasn't the best "worker" in the sense that what he produced was seldom exactly what was expected of someone in his post. But he survived, was honoured by the clergy and royalty alike and his music outlasted him because the society in which he lived (Germany in the late 17th and early 18th centuries) valued the transcendent, the divine, above anything else. Cynics can stop laughing, of course Germans at the time also fought wars and had to take care of business, and so did Bach. Following a transcendental path does not mean you are exempt from the toil and eventualities of life.

That metal's nature is that of a transcendental art can be proven by pointing out the way in which it developed. As we have previously described before, each metal stylistic development had to do with a shedding of aesthetics in which it lurched forward away from the mainstream and into more distinct characteristics that would set it apart from rock music and in a rebellious statement of intention that stated its anti-establishment position. But in contrast to punk and other

protest music, metal was not anti-authoritarian out of a social revolutionary sentiment, but from a nihilist-realist point of view. It was a reducing of humans to ants in an uncaring universe by using Satanic, pagan or occult imagery to depict concepts that stay true from antiquity to this day. This is the same reason why metal is so prone to using fantasy fiction themes. Metal is not an escape, it is reducing of this pseudo-reality to what it actually is: one of many possible constructs.

Individually, this or that artist may believe or use the imagery and language they adopt, but as a whole, metal is none but that transcendent essence that refuses to bow to the arbitrariness of present human status quo. In its place it does not propose anarchy or freedom, but calls for an awareness of reality as existing outside human expectation, want, need or hope. It is a confronting of reality instead of a twisting of truths for the shielding of and maintaining of mundane activities for the sake of staying alive peacefully and pleurably. More importantly, this confronting of reality does not imply a fatalism, but a way to emerge triumphantly, seeing through individual situations and times, recognizing our place in *nature and our dependence on it*.

Implications in Practice

How does this translate into music? Is art more than just its intention or its random interpretation by an audience?

In his discussion, Patočka made three important distinctions in order to better attack the problem of *the decadent*. The separation between *meaning*, *significance* and *purpose* was stated functionally different. Meaning is the most difficult of these to grasp. It is not a value, nor is it the same as *purpose* although they could fill a same role in certain circumstances. Meaning is

said to make something open to reading, to a sense, to understanding of something *that is* as it is. Purpose itself is the reason or intention why something is carried out or why it is brought into being. Significance is concerned with its relative role or function in relation to a particular context.

Purpose and significance are subject to times and context. Meaning is not. The meaning of something can be *interpreted* to have different *significance* in different places, or it can be used for different purposes. But what it is does not change, and so its meaning does not. The distinction between purpose and significance is of the utmost importance when it comes to understanding and judging music. The purpose of musical devices is often confused by individualists and relativists to be one of the other two. The purpose of music matters little to the music critic who is charged with judging its quality and not its good intentions. The music critic cares only about significance.

But I propose a slightly different mapping in which the human mind, not the rest of the universe, is *the world of action* for music. After all, music is artificial, it is made by us, for us and it is its effect over us that matters. Therefore, *meaning* can be redefined in the context of universally perceivable effects in patterns, textures and intervals. Universally, as in *across the human species*. It is to be expected that there is a variance in the effect, but that does not detract from the existence and relevance of a mean.

The definition of *purpose* need not change; it still lies in the reason why a certain kind of music would be made. Now, *significance* would shift to being the acquired role of structures and relations in different music paradigms, different genres, and different traditions. That means that just as different spoken languages, music can have its own rules arising from conventions between human perception and

arbitrary organization. But the more arbitrary it is and the less it conforms to natural human perception, the less capable of transcendence a music is. This does not mean that education cannot be involved. But education can reinforce and deepen what comes naturally and follows the path of human potential (Common Practice Period), or it can be capricious arbitrariness arising from the fallacy of the human mind as a blank slate (see Serialism).

Two things need to happen for a transcendental music tradition to be sustainable. The first is artists that are devoted to the transcendental aspects of music. The second is a discerning audience. Part of this discernment is a certain trust in musicians, their own vision and values as well as their abilities. This is the same sort of trust we have for leaders of any kind, be them rulers or scientists.

The reason why we do not have this trust in musicians in modern times is because as a result of historical processes, they have come to disgrace themselves. The sort of respect for artistry and trust in their distinction above ours survives today only in very dark corners of human action like specific classical music niches and extremely underground metal and ambient circles. In metal, these are the sort of circles that remain willingly untouched by labels in order to keep their art at away from vulgar and unworthy reception. These remain the last bastion of metal against the taint of the mainstream.

It is in understanding there is something more to human nature and human experience that is both innate to us and that we share with other human beings, that we can also come to respect the power of transcendental music: music that taps into these aspects; music that has the power of directing human conscience in a particular direction, as well. Today, underground metal is one of the few kinds of music that go

beyond the merely functional or the pleasurable. This is music that has the power of cultivation, of expanding the mind, of looking beyond your own fear of the unknown, of inevitable death and into the future of humans as a species and not just you as an individual, but as an individual channelling the species into a more aware future.

The Transcendental: Art for the Sake of Human Evolution

It is no surprise that we can trace a very clear line from the 18th century to the 21st at the beginning of which art is universally sponsored by the ruling classes and institutions of power that through gradual changes becomes increasingly independent (19th century) and later on less connected to human nature (20th century). This culminates in a complete stagnation in the 21st century, our times...

The question of true transcendental art being underground or not depends on the current values of society. In the case of our modern society, it is purely materialist and ultra-democratic outlook that dictates that personal caprices matter more than reality is the antithesis of the environment where a transcendental — one that reflects enduring *meaning* — art can be fostered.

By definition, a materialist civilization that attributes no meaning to anything except the massing of perceived riches or power cannot produce such an art. That is to say, such a civilization does not even believe there is such a thing as *the transcendental*. Furthermore, this materialist outlook is based on an absurd pushing of boundaries through a rational point of view taken to an extreme. But anything taken to any extreme

loses contact with reality, which is itself an amalgam of degrees of many different qualities – compromises between opposites.

A rejection of reality in favour of an artificial extreme such as materialism is then enabled to brush aside and subvert anything that does not conform to itself. This includes human nature itself. In fact, the materialist position claims there is no such thing as human nature. This enables the power-hungry, the greedy and anyone else to try and clean their conscience through a pandering of the idea that we are only the result of the cultures into which we are born and values are only social constructs. The dogma then becomes: power is the only objective measure of success. A side effect of materialism is the idea that everything we perceive is subjective and therefore not subject to judgement or control. All that matters is if *I* think this or *I* like that. The weakling's alternative to the dogma becomes: happiness is the only subjective measure of success.

Both of these emphasize an enlarged “living in the moment” that favours egoism that, as proven by history, results in an almost complete disregard for others' living in this same present and those yet to be born – unless an immediate reward/punishment is offered to the materialist individual. The transcendental provides precisely the opposite: a view into the characteristics that make you human, that dictate our nature, that both *unite* us and make us different. As Steven Pinker summarizes in his book *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, the latter flies in the face of modern research; research that has in turn been suppressed and vilified by an establishment eager to maintain the status quo in a similar gesture to a superficial Church censoring scientific discoveries centuries ago.

Also contrary to a short-sighted reading, this should not result in us embracing the *understanding* of one's own nature as

licence to *indulge* in it, but rather a precise knowledge of how to control it and channel it in order to become better. A transcendental view of time and values applied to our species may pave the way for not only a widespread search for individual enlightenment but a species-wide one. One in which humanity works together for its own good, which at this point would translate into a caring for the planet it is destroying in the vulgar self-interest dictated by materialism.

The importance of metal as this transcendental art is its power to maintain this knowledge and to promote universal values and even more importantly, their understanding. The reaction of materialism and the religion of scientism against the notions of transcendental value are emotional to their very core but also based on observations of how values defined arbitrarily in the past lead to social disasters. This, combined with their own superficial and strictly functional misunderstanding of the values prevented them from fully becoming aware of the underlying human need and impulse to reach for something beyond the material and the every-day.

This is why those who understand such transcendentalism treat the mainstream with opprobrium and an extreme disgust. As with anything else, the attitude of those who understand can be confused with that of those who follow and do not understand. That is, those who adopt attitudes – even pseudo transcendental ones – with the ulterior motivation of immediate reward for themselves. And thus elitism and the upholding of all that is truly excellent is marred and disgraced by a civilization of insecure and selfish individuals who cannot see past their own self-interest, a selfishness that is then projected onto those who they judge because they cannot conceive of anyone *actually* believing and acting for the sake of something larger than themselves.

Nietzsche is reviled by the religious (who, in general, have never read him, let alone understand him) and by the materialists (or at least those have read him, those who haven't or do not understand seem to think him some sort of atheist hero). The main reason why materialists despise him is because he is a realist. Realism flies in the face of extreme and delusional reality-deforming conceptions of life such as materialism. As a realist, Nietzsche recognizes the inherent human need to believe in something outside himself. For those who have been paying attention, it is obvious this does not *necessarily* imply some sort of superstition or dogma.

Nietzsche's Übermensch (the "superman", the "overman", the superior human) as described in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is one that sees and goes beyond his own times. One that is not trapped by the paradigm of his contemporary society and that furthermore excels himself above his peers in a work. This sort of talking can be taken metaphorically, but it is not meant to be. Going beyond one's own times has to do with recognizing history as a set of changing variables within a timeline on an unchanging or slowly-changing human nature where a set of set *meanings* remain constant for us but are, perhaps, difficult to see.

It is in the *going over* and overcoming of common man who is little more than a tamed beast, that we humankind can continue on their learning and growing path *as a species*. This is the nature of the transcendental. The individual transcends in his perception of his people and time and contributes to a flow of which he is only a part. Only then can the species attain a transcendental vision in which it is not only looking at its immediate problems but at its long-term development ten or twenty generations in the future. Would that we could see such a civilization arise, it would be a beautiful sight to behold.

The Transcendental in Action through Metal

Arising from the context of popular rock music in the late 1960s with a different musical method and a realist mentality, metal veiled its message behind mystic frontispieces that became whole with the dark romantic aura behind its motif-driven music. The classical romantic tradition that so influences it has as one of its focal points the return to an intelligibility and “naturalness” that was most readily searched for in taking hints from folk music melodies and rhythms from different rural landscapes around the world (primarily from Europe, unsurprisingly). This did not mean a ridiculous simplification of music to banal catchy lines, but the simplicity of which Plato’s Socrates spoke.

Then beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity,—I mean the true simplicity of a rightly and nobly ordered mind and character, not that other simplicity which is only an euphemism for folly.

— *The Republic, Book III*

Musically, what is transcendental must necessarily be a-temporal, it must have the capacity to communicate with human beings from any historical (or pre-historical, for that matter) period, age or walk of life. This does not mean that the connection has to be *instant* or that the listener does not need to go through a “learning process”. In fact, in the particular case of metal as a veiled teaching, it is only through maturity in understanding it in a *holistic* manner that one comes to understand the truths that several great musicians with piercing views about what it is to be human reflected through it.

Despite the influence, there is a very sharp contrast between classical romantic music and metal. The difference is a consequence of the historical context, particular social class and

sentiment out of which they each arose. Romantic art came from both the need of the individual to find a place and expression of his own, not in the modern selfishness of the individualist, but a place in nature and in reverence to it. A connection to what it is to be human. As classical music, its prestige and the station of those making it allowed it to pursue such things in broad daylight. To this, we should add the nontrivial matter of the nonexistence of recorded music or other conveniences that flood and distract listeners. The expression of the romantic artist could be full and undisclosed.

Metal, on the other hand, comes in a time where popular culture reigns in saturation of kitsch: superficiality and banality for the immediate pleasure of the distracted and manipulated masses. Less important but worth mentioning is that it originated in strong and independent-thinking middle-class individuals who saw through the deception of their times. Several choices in its underground character come from this. As an art form that subverts the ruling falsehood, it is not allowed to be displayed directly. The fact that being an intellectual resistance also means that not all can understand it and that its concerns go beyond the present manifestation of human society and its dogmas require that it is not fully out in the open. It must assume a mask that reflects an outer and simple intent that keeps most at bay to guard what it contains. Its identity must be more distinct and defined than its predecessor and so, willingly, metal takes on a much more limited range of expression than classical romantic music from the 19th century.

Of the harmonies I know nothing, but I want to have one warlike, to sound the note or accent which a brave man utters in the hour of danger and stern resolve, or when his cause is failing, and he is going to wounds or death or is overtaken by

some other evil, and at every such crisis meets the blows of fortune with firm step and a determination to endure; and another to be used by him in times of peace and freedom of action, when there is no pressure of necessity, and he is seeking to persuade God by prayer, or man by instruction and admonition, or on the other hand, when he is expressing his willingness to yield to persuasion or entreaty or admonition, and which represents him when by prudent conduct he has attained his end, not carried away by his success, but acting moderately and wisely under the circumstances, and acquiescing in the event. These two harmonies I ask you to leave; the strain of necessity and the strain of freedom, the strain of the unfortunate and the strain of the fortunate, the strain of courage, and the strain of temperance; these, I say, leave.

– The Republic, Book III

It is also important to understand the outer and the inner manifestations of the spirit of music. There is a learning process to each kind of music, because outside is manifested the tropes of a region, culture, group, perhaps a particular “language” or set of conventions. By basing itself on patterns and harmonies the human ear feels naturally drawn to, the music is aligning itself to what is permanent to human perception, at least in this point of our evolution. But all these are developed, “discussed” in a music that speaks a very particular mind. Just as Plato might have spoken in ancient Greek about similar things we would speak of today in modern English, so it is that transcendental music from music separated by centuries might be speaking the same message under different grammatical guises – tropes and conventions of times and style. The act of the Dionysian manifesting itself through the Apollonian as the young Nietzsche described to us in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Someone might ask if it isn't better to disavow all conventions and try to speak in "plainspoken transcendental". The innocence of such a suggestion comes from the incorrect belief that what is felt, what is understood and experienced wholly as a human being can be put purely, clearly and unambiguously into words. Necessity dictates that emotion and experience be transmitted to the innermost core of the individual- a penetrating of various layers of prejudice and consciousness in order to move the primal and ripple back through to the higher, if possible. Neither mere words in their plain meaning nor musical structures on their own, in the beauty of orderly symmetry and mathematical correctness can achieve this. These only speak to the higher intellect, which may or may not translate this to the deeper self.

Reaching the innermost sanctum of metal, though, requires much more than being touched by it. For that to happen, metal cannot just be a passing entertainment or the object of devoted fanhood alone. It needs to be taken seriously and read correctly in its contradictions and flagrant imagery that bespeak a connection to the transcendental beyond mere unambiguous pattern codification. It is not a science in the modern sense and is more akin to occultism and its voluntary hiding-away. Following from that, we may infer that it is far more esoteric than exoteric, this latter being ridiculous or incomprehensible when taken at face value. Only treading the serpentine and treacherous paths through cycles of internalization and externalization does the metal fan become the metal initiate.

WALLPAPER MUSIC AND ITS APOLOGETICS

Pointless repetition of an entire rhythm or riff, as opposed to reusing a theme in a different context, occurs when a composer has one of several possible aims. Traditionally this has been to let the listener get familiar with an idea, to let it sink in, as some would say. The most popular aim of repetition in the more ambient-oriented black metal field is to create atmosphere. The aim of the latter is to lead the listener beyond familiarity with the riff and into a kind of stupor. The listener is taken into this state with the purpose of preparing him for something else: a deeper dream level, as it were, which would follow. But apologetics of wallpaper music claim that all ambient-oriented repetition, even the one they themselves may admit to being meaningless, achieves its goal if it brings the listener to the aforementioned state of stupor without necessary deepening of mood.

Pointless contrasting ideas serve to redirect of a musical path or modify the nature of the stupor in which the listener is in, such as from an anger-fueled one to another infused by sadness or even happiness. The use of a contrasting idea makes sense if it interacts with its context and primarily with its adjacent riff sections, much as in writing each sentence in a paragraph must relate to the topic and the sentences before and after it. When contrast lacks that purpose in context, it becomes a technique for distracting from the stupor so that the listener does not realize that the trick behind the stupor is repetition

alone and it will lead nowhere, which converts a dream-state into a state of boredom in instants.

Wallpaper Music

Wallpaper is defined as: “paper that is pasted in vertical strips over the walls of a room to provide a decorative surface.” It provides a decorative surface only without reference to what surrounds it. Its *context* does not matter so long as it covers a blank surface and provides something to look at. It is not meant to have any meaning. The frescoes, carvings or statues of classical art, on the other hand, were meant to be both pleasing to the eye and to convey a certain meaning, inviting the visitor into a different dimension (in the mystic-spiritual metaphorical sense).

Now the following question assails us, would someone completely unfamiliar with Western art become induced into the mental state that the authors of such art intended? Not necessarily. The degree to which that person’s reaction to art approaches that which was intended depends directly on the similarity of the background in culture and experience of the subject to that whence the artwork sprung from. This, like context, comprises the memories that give a new musical figure meaning.

In fact, herein lies our key to reverse engineering intention (of the author) and/or purpose (which may be independent of the author’s conscious intent) in music. This key is *context*. Let us be clear here that this does not refer to Epistemic Contextualism, which does not lead to a discussion on inherent meaning arising from some original intention but to that of attributed meaning as interpreted in any situation, even alien contexts to that which gave rise to the original product. The

intended meaning of context in this article is precisely the conventional one described in the previously linked article as:

...certain features of the putative subject of knowledge (his/her evidence, history, other beliefs, etc.) or his/her objective situation (what is true/false, which alternatives to what is believed are likely to obtain, etc.)...

This allows us to appreciate the sense and coherence of a work independently of if we agree with its tenets. On a separate but related note, it is also from this vantage point that its connection to a more transcendent nature can be gauged, since the particular context (that which is temporal) is known.

Analyses, use, limitations and power

Perceiving context in a particular way and analysing a problem in the real world is the subject of studies that produce methods to approach them. Everything that is perceived is subjective in the sense that depending on our experience and background we may highlight and give importance to different factors. After that, methods are devised to point out objective qualities that are pertinent to the aspects we want to analyse. This is true of mathematical analysis, and even of scientific analyses in chemistry and physics.

Of course, there is a catch here. The complexity, in terms of scope, of what is being analysed matters in no small measure to the objectivity of the results. In the case of the sciences, the scope is reduced to what is known while assumptions are made about what is not known and then, given the reduced and strictly defined boundaries of what is being analysed (which is usually not the whole system but rather a *model* of the system), completely objective results are obtained *in the context of the*

reduced-system model. As a more knowledgeable person in the field would put it:

The larger the scope of the analysis of a system becomes, the more assumptions regarding the conditions that enable the system to behave in a certain way become present. Sometimes these assumptions are made deliberately, but sometimes they are present unknowingly. This is due to the complexity associated with an increasing scope of analysis, which makes it unfeasible to obtain a straightforward solution. Furthermore, complexity is associated with the relationship among the different factors (variables) and the system/phenomena being observed.

– L. Garrido

The error factor grows alongside this scope and it may even become unmeasurable if we do not know how to *precisely* quantify a particular element like *purpose* or *intention*, which is precisely why they are not included in the scope of any scientific analysis. It must also be clarified that the error factor of a problem does not represent its concrete error, but the maximum magnitude of all *possible* errors. Meaning our analysis could indeed be perfect, although this is unlikely.

Analysis in Music

In music, a very wide scope must be admitted into its analysis. This is necessarily so since we acknowledge that music is much more than the notes themselves, than the organization of these notes alone, than the context in which they are perceived, or the intentions of the artist. Musical quality encompasses all of them at the same time and, in a Renascentist-Magical holistic view, ultimately engenders a separate entity altogether which

is none of these elements and is rather born from all of them. Any music analysis consists on the breaking of music down to its components *with the aim of understanding how they function as parts of a greater whole.*

One of the most intriguing techniques for the analysis of “conventional” tonal Western music is called Schenkerian analysis. This was a system named after the theorist who devised it, Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935). It consists of demonstrating how music can be divided into a hierarchy of notes which range from background indispensable notes to more those of a more “auxiliary” nature, although the terms “neighboring” and “passing” are more suitable since they do not carry such a strong connotation of these notes being less part of the music. Before him came Arnold Bernhard Marx (1795-1866) whose revolutionary way of analysing music included judging the purpose, character and direction in music *independently* of the composer’s conscious awareness through the subdivision of sections until one finds indivisible components. These can belong to one of two kinds: the self-sufficient and assertive *Satz* or the motion-oriented, forward-moving *Gang*. Schenker’s method is, in a way, a formalization of the more intuitive process of Marx, who used a more holistic approach (and a wider scope, more assumptions), into a more mechanical approach – though still subjective to a certain degree.

Despite wild claims by detractors of this way of analysing music which want to reduce Schenkerian analysis to subjective make-believe so as to dismiss any objective value in it, an argument is to be made in favour of its objective and logic and characteristics. The user of this analysis at his best, can be compared to a detective following clues. The best detectives are not clueless idiots blindly following a manual. Detectives first

take note of context, use psychology and decipher motives and even subconscious processes that the criminal himself might not be aware of. There is a lot of guessing involved, but educated guessing, which while being subjective interpretation cannot just be dismissed as simple opinion (in the passive-derogative and dismissive sense) since it follows a *method based on objective points*. It is important, of course, to point out that the detective also relies heavily on experience.

It is here that we turn again to the idea of context. The ideas of direction, stability, instability and character, inherent to these styles of analyses are born out of concrete knowledge of the development of music during the Common Practice Period (roughly 1600s up to 1900). These are “concrete” in the sense that they were not just an archaeological approach to understanding the past, in which the theorist is separated from the data in question and is always forced to look at it from the outside. Rather, the theorists who developed these analyses were part of the musical “subculture” (and the culture at large which encases it and is an audience to it) which engendered the music they studied. So their subjective views and experience are, in my opinion, validated as relevant by that same fact that places them as insiders.

The reader might rightly question this last claim denouncing that this in itself cannot possibly give the theorists and historical critics license to judge the music at the subjective levels previously mentioned. I will address this by calling attention to the music theory “standard”, or rather a “musical language”, that came into being in the first half of the 17th century thus producing what we know now as the Common Practice Period. This language is based on harmony that is built by contrapuntal norms, avoids certain musical effects and favours a narrative style. From its very beginning up until the

19th century, a significant meaning was attributed to musical phrases, melody direction and movement, harmonic tension or instability, together with rhythm. What is relevant about this is not that these beliefs existed, but that they were part of the music education and culture of that time. The rules and conventions (even the ones relating to extra-musical implications) by which these theorists and critics measured and judged music were the same that the composers themselves ascribed to. This does mean that some of the less talented critics would see superficial aspects as set in stone, but this was not true of A.B. Marx who saw music as an ever flowing, ever-evolving transformation of styles whose steps beyond what he knew in his time were only as visible as vague shapes in the horizon.

Is the application of Western European analysis and philosophy to metal music really justified?

Now, if this analysis belongs to the Common Practice Period, would it be fair to apply it to metal music? After all, the processes that produced Metal music are different. It would not make sense to apply the same analysis to Iranian or Indian music which follow their own systems, whose musical constructions have inextricable spiritual and religious significance in the culture that engendered it. Neither would we thus judge jazz, which is the result of African-American music borrowing European art music notions to produce a language and a more sensual purpose of its own. My opinion is that we can say jazz gets excused because the ultimate product is more African-American than European.

When taking a look at music and judging its “coherence” one can metaphorically refer to it as its *logic*. When taking a

look at a logical argument, we first take look at the premises or assumptions and from there follow it through its process. If the argument fails to make sense *based on its premises* we can say it has failed. The same applies to music. We can judge musical construction according to the premises it sets for itself. The style it chooses, yes, but more importantly, the general music language (Iranian classical music has different harmonic notions and goals, for example, as does jazz) it chooses for itself.

Metal starts with Black Sabbath taking rock-based music (which itself subscribes to the use of Common Practice Period harmony, but used in a more mechanical way to produce simple verse-chorus music) and bringing back the more theme-based approach of horror movie soundtracks. Soundtracks which were themselves inspired on 19th-century Romantic music. From then on metal develops as this rock-and-dark-Romantic musical hybrid and at different points borrows elements from other music genres but always distinguishing itself as Metal by always keeping an entrenched Romantic music orientation. One can then distinguish deserters who fled to the rock camp by abandoning of this orientation (*Metallica* is a clear example). The more the genre evolved the more marked the difference between rock defectors and those who remained metal became. This is because the latter would try to distinguish themselves more from the rock element which was so prominent in the former. This is the process that originally gave rise to the terms *sell-out* and *underground*. It must be clarified that what is meant here is not that the rock element in any music is bound to produce poor music.

The only constant at the heart of metal then, is the Romantic sense of theme-based music with a serious and heavy character. From this point it follows that the “premises” that metal has chosen for itself stem directly from the Common Practice

Period in general. This does not mean that we should try to read metal music as we would read a Beethoven symphony – at least not on the surface. The characteristics that metal has borrowed from classical music affected the genre at multiple levels and thus surfaces in different bands in different ways and to different degrees. We cannot judge all metal in the same way either because just as different musical genres choose different languages (different premises for their arguments), so it is that different bands choose dialects of their own which require us to understand them and part from there on. But they must be seen as precisely that: dialects of the broader language of metal. Thus they still fall under the umbrella of our discussion (Ildjarn would be a particularly interesting case to discuss as its surface and the first impression it gives one leaves no room for obvious comparison to Romantic traits).

One understands the intense repetition of some black metal as stemming from the same purpose it has in electronic music. Black metal remains metal because it still ascribes to the dark-Romantic principles metal is defined by. Part of this is tonality and how harmony is used to create movement, which along with rhythm creates pulse and is tied by theme and the large-scale interplay of sections. Part of it is the more complex interpretation of how the *character* of each section and song speaks out and relates to the other sections or songs.

This character was an important trait during the Common Practice Period and it plays an important role in metal. When it goes unchecked, even if the outer technical aspects of music were all carefully crafted, the *inner* sense is perceived to be empty or messy. This thinking was very evident in the thoughts of both great composers and historical critics from the Romantic period such as Philipp Spitta (1841-1894) whose biography of Johann Sebastian Bach reveals extensive

discussion, analysis and critique that encompasses everything from historical context and evolution of genres along with their influence over the German master, to detailed score analysis and explicit separation of what he refers to as “inside” and “outside” musical traits. The latter being musical expression itself, the structures, and the former being the character/aura/personality of not only the music pieces themselves but also of individual sections and their relation to the whole.

Modern metal unknowingly fails catastrophically by trying to create interest out of pure contrast. Still, some of the best modern bands keep a constant style and even use theme to tie a song together, but little or no evident thought is put into the aura of each section of a song and its balance with the rest of the song.

The modern variety of metal bands which identify as “technical” (as opposed to Atheist, Immolation or Gorguts which were dubbed so after the fact) try to create interest by approaching this as if it were a textbook exercise, playing with the theme, placing it in different contexts, creating smart texture changes and witty variations. Since all that was cared about was the technical correctness of the piece, the evocation power of the music is negligible as it is *not born out of Idea*, but out of technical exploration (see Ara). The apologist comes in at this point and says that “emotion” is also in the process and that all parts are judged by passing them through this emotional filter. This is never denied here. But this statement would actually reinforce the notion that this music follows a backwards process: outside to inside, rather than inside to outside. The writer of purely technical music uses hard logic to drive his music creation and then judges it from an emotional

vantage point. This works for science, but it spells out *death* for art.

Whereas in all productive men instinct is the truly creative and affirming power, and consciousness acts as a critical and cautioning reaction, in Socrates the instinct becomes the critic, consciousness becomes the creator – truly a monstrous defect.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Chapter 13

This general idea has been understood in the European classical music traditions for centuries and awareness of it has given the world some of the most refined and whole works of art music. It is only in our post-modern era that we erroneously want to strip everything away from its original meaning and validate poor art by arguing that all that matters is the writer's own intentions, which nobody can guess or question.

Defences for Wallpaper Music

The most stalwart wallpaper music apologist is bound at this point to support the previous statement by stating the fact that our modern culture (and even more specifically, that our metal subculture) is very different from that which engendered classical Romantic music. While I consider this argument to be debatable, I will concentrate on the biggest issue that comes out as a result of this reasoning as a whole. This is the idea that because modern artists are free to choose how to express themselves they can pick from any musical-philosophical camp and just smash it together, twist it around in whatever way they see fit or their limited organizational skills and inspiration allows them to, with little or no justification other than their "need" or "right" to express *individuality*.

Allowing that artists are, indeed, free to choose their means of expression, their music can be rubbish in the context of the language they choose if they attempt to use it in ways it was not meant to be used. Can a previous “musical alphabet” give rise to a new “musical language”? Yes, and this is precisely what jazz and metal (separately and in very different directions, the former separating itself far more from a philosophical perspective while the latter remained akin in spirit) have done with Common Practice Period theoretical knowledge or general concepts.

A “smart” wallpaper apologist remark here is that we at DMU “fetishize” the European classical music outlook. But we do not ask bands to ascribe to the metal language which has explicit ties to that European tradition. If a band does not want to be judged from this perspective, then choose a different set of premises, a different language to speak. I would be very interested in witnessing attempts at using metal instrumentation to play music built on the principles of traditional Indian music. It would not be metal, but it would be a thing of its own with coherent expression.

Does it mean that everyone making music has to subscribe to already-existing musical languages and that there is nothing new to be had so that we can only indulge in superficial variations? This is what post-modern short-sightedness would have us believe and in doing so somehow justify the trivial superficiality of the so-called experimental bands. But then you can turn to great composers such as Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) and Olivier Messiaen (1908 - 1992) who effectively created brand new musical systems for them to express the music they wanted. They were both world-renowned advanced composition professors, which says a lot about how difficult it is to single-handedly accomplish such a task. Furthermore, as

Uri O'Reilly's article "Developmental variation and underground metal" implies, defined constraints and limits that guide genres and the languages they speak do not themselves imply a prison for the mind or shackles for creativity, but rather a tool much like a sniper rifle's scope to reach precise and far-off targets. Bands that build incoherent music out of disparate musical languages or fail to use their chosen language effectively and expect the listener to submit to the purely emotional shock of the music, or worse, listen to excuses and rationalizations to "explain" the art, have missed the point: context is meant to be referred to, much as we expect language to have consistent approximate meaning. To ignore that meaning is communicate with no one, whether in music or the written word.

Defenders of wallpaper music will react in a populist manner and say that all that matters is that one *likes* the music, and ask rhetorically and spuriously who is to judge music otherwise. To assume that art should have meaning is to judge one subjective experience over another, they say. Some might say that in that case, anything deemed to be wallpaper from a point of view might be seen as meaningful from another. While this may be *theoretically* true, in application it is the same as claiming that spewing random syllables cannot be labelled as gibberish since they may, in fact, mean something in some hypothetical human language. The next wallpaper apologist complaint here would consist of pointing out that while language has hard and precise meanings (which is actually, not entirely true), music appeals to general emotions and moods and so, if the work accused of being wallpaper achieves some sort of reaction in the listener that produces coherent thought, then it has "meaning". But this, again, is just the same as the random syllables reminding anyone of something in his own

language and thereby acquiring a *meaning provided from the outside*.

Appendix II - Black metal reviews

ABYSSUM

The present essay consists in the portrayal of Abyssum through their work as outstanding, living examples of the spirit within genre and as creators of transcendental art; that is, interpreted as more than a performance art in the modern sense of the term. These are also works of black metal that go well beyond the excellence of art as a craft independent of the religious or mystical spirit; in these there is a return to – or perhaps there never was a departure from – the concept and action of music as an essential part of the mystical action: that which transforms or enables to transform reality itself through the laws of nature.

It has already been established that the mentality of black metal presupposes an attitude towards reality that is at odds with modernity. It is at once ancient and futuristic, seeing the present as one more superficial variation, a set of conditions within a larger, evolving reality. In its disbelief in man-made value as inherently real, it is also nihilistic. Different artists within the genre have gone about this in different ways, as befits a way of thinking that favours individualistic, solitary and independent development.

What follows is an interpretation of the work of the artists behind an exemplar through an intuitive apprehension of the music, as well as based on an opinion on the little hints known to the author regarding the words, lifestyle and methodology that leads to such a creative production. There is no intention

whatsoever of revealing what is meant to be hidden, nor is there power in mere words to do so, for what is transcendent is beyond words and must be presenced; words, however, can signal a way. There is also no conscious presumption of absolute certainty of the veracity of the descriptions and interpretations found herein, for impressions and knowledge remain in motion.

A natural spirituality

The methodology of the mystic is characterized by an attempt to presence the sacred, the other-worldly; in short, whatever currents and existences hidden from most human beings attuned only to a direct and superficial way of sensing and thinking about the universe. The methods of the mystic are direct because there is no formal ritual involved, no particular names used, no visualization of gates being opened, no illusions; rather, and simply, a constant sensing, an opening to the pure influence by persistent observation of sensations while consciously seeking occult influence and contact.

We can observe in the work of Abyssum that compositions tend to resemble a constant flow of living energy, represented musically by adherence to a clear, central melodic idea that goes almost uninterrupted throughout the piece. More follows from this simple idea, but a useful remark here may help further aid our cause in convincing the reader of the plausibility of this thesis. If one takes note of the names given to the compositions, it does not take much effort to derive a few simple conclusions thence.

Firstly, although we may see some passing references to terms formalized in certain occult traditions, these are only done in passing and without relying on them for the emotional

landscaping commonly used by the composer to name his creations. For instance, 'The Sacred Abyss... (of Thelemic Mysteries)' relates the reader to the T.O.T., while 'Illusion of Pan (The Spirit of the Woods)' rides an archetype from ancient Hellenic traditions.

What stares back at he who explores and attains a certain understanding of the art of Abyssum is a world of relations that only makes complete sense by understanding it all, but lying out of the reach of those who have not the mental means of finishing the inner quest of this discovery. The success of this experience is further aided by taking into account every single clue left for us, be it inside the music, the titles and words, or the images chosen. For this, we may take a look at the front cover art of the two official albums published under the name of the project.

The first of these, *Thy Call*, bears the image of a tree line behind a yellow field. It is not a photograph, but a painting, impressive in its large strokes yet blurred in its details, giving it a foggy impression that emphasizes the unity of the hills and forests. The front cover artwork of the second, *Poizon of god*, is a monochromatic blue over grey-white depiction of a bare hand pouring liquid from a cup apparently made from a sturdy material such as wood or metal. None of these images reflects a complex system of symbols, or an adherence to any other kind of system of abstractions, but rather each provides a natural, so to speak, reference to a picture of commonplace reality holding numinous overtones, silently concealing a world within its borders.

The titles hold the same kind of balance between mystic reverence, emotional outburst and landscape painting. The resulting impression belongs to none of them and thus appears incomplete or cryptic when the mind attempts to grasp it by

standing on any one of them. Trying to rationalize or derive a complete concept of the three together yields distorted, morphed images that do not seem to completely conform to an interpretation.

Yet, the mind is impacted by them, and their single and incomplete messages are revealed as complimentary, though not like pieces in a puzzle. It would be safer to compare them with augurious signs, blurred tracks in the snow and incomplete markings leading us through a long-abandoned trail through the wilderness.

Music, by its very nature, is hard to grasp in terms of its significance; a combination of experience, mindful study and technical acquaintance opens the doors, slowly, though never to see through them clearly. The more one explores the music of Abyssum, the more the embedded phantasms in words and images previously described become discernible, while they remain difficult to describe in their totality. For such is the way with the shifting of symbols and meanings of mystic expression, that can only becoming perceivable by accepting their often bizarre and contradictory succession of backgrounds and locations.

When under careful scrutiny and appreciated as formal composition, this music betrays a knowledge and deftness of craft applied with painstaking attention to detail. Perfection is seen in the way the expression and structure approaches sentiment and not with a rigid theoretical template. The methodology revealed is reminiscent of that truth discovered by every gifted man of the craft who transcends schooling and discovers the natural rules of organized sound.

This art of dark spirituality is not a rejection of natural law in itself. For what is rejected is the distortion of it through human

interpretation and a necessarily incomplete communication. The art lies in the direct and continues re-discovery of such laws and truths that hold the universe together and determine its flow from singularity to expansion, from a breaking down to the Night. This is an occult discovery, however, and science enters only as a tool.

So we see Abyssum following its own discovery of particular rules, parting from the template of the Western Tradition, though disregarding the complications beyond the Medieval Era, and into transcendental, timeless black metal. We find in Abyssum one of the purest incarnations of the night-time mysticism inherent in the essence of black metal. Not rebellion or self-indulgence for its own sake, but the carving out of a singular path with a unique method that evolves along with the adept of the craft that guides it. The whole of the method is not systematized or killed by its formalization, and thus the mystic himself is seldom fully aware of it; this happens not out of ignorance or ineptitude, but because it is contained within him, and its flow is his own, changing through time, bringing and birthing as a gate between worlds.

The synth as emanation of the soul

The stylistic choices of Abyssum serve as platform and parting point for a personalized musical language. This basis consists of basic, pure black metal instrumentation with only one guitar voice and synths. The duty of each instrument follows a foreseeable partition, with the synths taking care of creating a feeling of wideness, while the guitar provides power, thrust and penetration.

There is also much to be said about the very sensitive and mindful percussion arrangements that reflect traditional black metal drumming filling in much more than a metronomic function, and rather showing the good taste with which these can enrich the content of the music as texture and dynamics mediators.

An originator as an emanation of the voice of the soul, the synth carries the bulk of the expressive content. It is difficult to tell just from listening of the completed recordings which of the three instruments came first in the creation process. For as soon as one focuses on any one of them, one discovers, at length, that each is possessed of an independent role and personality while, at the same time, being intimately related to the other two. That is to say, each is a guiding light until itself, with figures, gestures and curves finding significant correspondences and complements in the others.

The great twist lies in that this braid-fashioning requires a third string that is found in the percussive agency; thence the unsuitability of conventional of conventional means of analysis and music interpretation which relegate percussion to a different domain. Without the need for encumbering complications and without any explanations given, this black metal breaks barriers naturally in search of a proper voice that brings something from beyond, that gives birth to a spirit new to this world.

Wherefore and whence do we arrive at the conclusion that the synth is the major or main instrument in the music of Abyssum? The arrangements of the synth span a wider range than the other instruments, sometimes even splitting into two voices, often carrying more melodic content than the guitars, and being almost solely responsible for harmonic contextualization. The synth does not dominate tyrannically,

and the leading command passes from hand to hand amongst the instruments, often being comprised of a veritable multi-instrumental attack. However, the greatest breadth of expression and dramatism undoubtedly lies in the synth.

In the early work of Thy Call, we hear the synth carry the melody while also providing the main transitional material between main sections, each of which have their own distinctive theme. This distinctive and section-identifying melody retains a narrative link with the rest. Thus, the main thematic and unifying aspects of compositions belonging to this first work lie in the expressions of the synth.

Compositions refined, rearranged and realized for the second album, *Poison of god*, present a more complex relation between the instruments that now do not appear so much layered in a clear top-to-bottom assignment of functions, but rather as flexible elements within a series of relays and tags where any of the instruments can take the lead, depending on the effect and nuance wanted by the composer. Nonetheless, when the music is in full gallop, there is an unmistakable impression that the synth precedes or leads everything. In short, we can see the rest of the instrumentation as extending and contracting from the fluctuating content expressed by the synth.

Again, however, this apparent centrality is not obvious and only reveals itself when the listener performs this test and analysis on each of the parts and throughout all the pieces. Otherwise, the organic interaction between the delicately balanced, flexible composition imparts a commanding illusion of tenuous and almost ungraspable centre without actual location.

When referring to the synth as the soul of the music, the preceding argument may illustrate the physicality of the

phenomenon, but there is also something to be said for the narrative sentimentality that develops through these instruments. While not relinquishing its duty within the black metal ensemble, the composer behind Abyssum applies the type of thinking one would associate with a dungeon synth kind of ambient project to the expression of the synth within the black metal context.

Such an integration of uncommonly seen techniques in a personally developed manner is done with great care and not in the vulgar manner which would allow us to point this out simply by pointing out interruptions and interludes. For the interludes themselves, composed of either synth voices or chords arpeggiated on an acoustic guitar, do not differ in their basic presentation from the standard black metal interlude. The ambient synth techniques are seen applied to the needs of the music at hand, therefore never breaking out of character or introducing outright extraneous elements.

We find, at times, the simple application of the synth in the manner used by Emperor; for instance, in ‘Be Thou Bliss Forever’, although the dynamics and development of the music as a whole proceed by very different avenues. ‘Thy Call Beyond the Stars’ commences with an extended interlude that foreshadows the themes of the main body, and although somewhat indulging in repetition, careful attention reveals subtle variations and micro developments that justify that repetition when everything is captured in total attention.

One would be remiss to speak of this second piece from Thy Call without mentioning, at least in passing, the absolutely exquisite handling of the drum arrangement that is only made possible by grace of the spaces created and left open by the interweaving synth melodies.

Poizon of god's 'The Sacred Abyss... (of Thelemic Mysteries)' sometimes displays more flat repetition sequences that are balanced by elaborations towards the middle of the piece. This middle section sees the synth subtly transitioning between its own voices and moving between themes, brining riches or more humble textures as per an organic dictate that allows for no rigid division. A more thorough and diffused application of such an approach to theme-weaving may also be observed throughout the development of 'Illusion of Pan (The Spirit of the Woods)'.

As with all great music, all that can be provided here are clues and insights attained through a combination of methodical observation, aural openness to reception, emotional surrender; and thence an intuitive elaboration tested and refined by subsequent appreciation; a repetition of the process in a natural, non-systematic way in concentric circles until the eye of storm is reached.

It remains the great pleasure of the avid reader and explorer of aural mysteries to try and fathom the elusive expanses of one of the most accomplished, and still developing black metal projects to have ever existed. Obscurantist in its disposition and esoteric in its revealing method, its external logic will reveal its internal richness indirectly as it becomes alive in the expanding mind of the listener.

Thy Call, A Journey Across Night-Robed Wilderness

As if walking into the forest domain of an ancient mountain god, one sees the vibrant symbiosis and inter-dependent life forms, so insignificant in themselves but meaningful and majestic when brought together. Simple acoustic guitar picked passages, arpeggios that complement synth chords and

melodies in a loop followed by episodes born *through* them. Some of these originating passages serve as starting points in pathways into this wilderness; not complete in themselves, but without which the magic of the next distinct moments would be without significance as all manner of relative points of departure or reference would be missing.

The perfect balance of parallel worlds, one of the physical, the other of the energetic and spiritual, is portrayed vividly in *Thy Call*. The music is taken to the extreme of what respectable metal can indulge in ambient repetition, while keeping it relevant not only with respect to the rest of the music, but a healthy, though minimalist, movement in harmony guided by a leading melody is ever present. Life is manifested in the inseparable *music*. Its nature is not rhythmic, neither is it based on the hanging-on of one harmony either, and it definitely is not the pop indulgence of a single melody line without any other merit. It is neither and yet it is all. Take away one, and it is utterly destroyed. It is a perfect balance of the three in which a holy, indivisible yet distinguishable trinity of elements which would be for naught without each other.

Treading through this dreamy world reached by walking through a portal created by Abyssum, we come by all these scenes of lush greenery among the autumn pigments of melancholy. Here and there animals rush to and fro – an electric guitar and drums disturb the calm, calling out in cries that rip through the whistling wind. Well into our journey, we finally come face to face with the lord of the realm, an old, powerful beast crowned with leaf, moss and flower. Screeches fly over among powerful but controlled black metal drumming, supported by tremolo-picked melodies rushing under echoing synths.

This is the atmosphere that envelops one in its presence; this is your shuddering under its gaze. If it were prone to violence, there would be no escape. But the old one is the guardian and centre of life and its benevolence is abundant towards those who do not come with destruction. And so, quietly, gracefully, it departs and fades into the vegetation. Distorted guitars and drums vary in patterns that bring it closer to a state of calm. Acoustic guitars, voice and cello synths come in to see peace setting in as passages continue in singular impermanence, forming a continuous and uninterrupted existence as they die and are born (and reborn). We walk away and out, with only a lingering note and the whistling of the wind in our ears.

Appendix II – Black metal reviews

ALTAR OF PERVERSION

Altar of Perversion return with *Intra Naos*, a post-black metal album taking this limited and confused style to its best, though still inefficient, results. We start by stating that this is not a black metal album because it is not a metal album in the first place, although its instrumentation, general use of imagery and screeched vocals may give us cause to think it is. Rather than being based on actual riffs to form phrases which themselves give rise to a sequence of flows, *Intra Naos* displays the shortcomings of what we have in the past characterized wallpaper black metal . The overall experience of the album is one of somnolence brought about by the lack of musical content in an extremely long recording full of ‘sounds’.

In the particular case of Altar of Perversion’s new album, the wallpaper reference means that sections are based on the rock technique of chord outlining, being dragged out through time by repeating small bits of chord-tones across the frequency spectrum. Most melodies in the present album are little more than three-note patterns repeated *ad nauseam*, and so simply constitute another layer in a sonic wallpaper tower. Stylistically, when creating the longer melodies that become the salient points in an ocean of sameness, we see sometimes the band flirt with a kind of Mortuary Drape influenced Scooby-Doo chase music. Fortunately, this is kept at a minimum, sublimated under the purposes and overall schemes of Altar of Perversion.

That the album is painstakingly crafted is not denied, but effort does not necessarily pay off on its own, and four layers of stringed instruments (being three guitars and a bass often heard going on its own to produce contrast for distraction) arranged does not guarantee an efficient result. In fact, because the parts are seemingly made to fill up space in the frequency spectrum, they are often chord-noise, so to call it, while very basic, short themes are used to create the only coherent link throughout the pieces. Unfortunately, the full power of motifs for creation through variation and creation of strong themes is not explored by virtue of following the post-metal chord-mist approach instead of the metal riff-phrase one.

At its best, *Intra Naos* does show a strong perception and will towards creation of flows in and between different sections, and this is something that the listener can clearly feel. The problem is that the production of the necessary *fluxions* in each section is arrested by the drawn-out, diffused technique of wallpaper post-metal. It is incumbent here to repeat that the strong phrasal-riff of underground metal has proven to be not only the core of the intended genre and its power, but the most efficacious way for it to transmit and communicate.

The album has a great production-sound, and the instruments all come through clearly and have an amazingly pleasant sound. Presumably, a lot of this has to do with the tuning being purposefully chosen for the instruments. In the album's favour, and despite our disagreement with post-black metal methods as a method towards depth, the layering of parts and the attention to bringing back motifs in different layers is actually done with due attention to craft. The musicians are obviously proficient in instrumental performance and appear to be, moreover, involved esotericists.

The latter brings us to the hidden and true highlight of this release: the lyrics. In these, a whole cosmogony is explored spanning different ancient mythologies and funnelling into a newer and darker labyrinth. Unlike other modern esoteric formulations, this appears to be an evolution of older traditions, as if it were living. Although wordy and making dense references that require the reader to both research and decipher, the resulting outlook appears focused and transformation oriented: Nietzschean in action and timeless in contrast to the flabby, empty and vain occultism or theism of most black metal bands (or so-called ‘entities’, as they like to call their musical projects).

Alongside with the visual stimulation of its enigmatic front cover image, the lyrics of *Intra Naos* could be read while keeping the music on as soundtrack. The whole experience brings the lyrics to the forefront, and reveals them as the central actor. At the same time, the music fulfils a role for which it is actually apt: as background modifier for moods and ideas more efficiently transmitted through words. If impaired as a pure and evocative listening experience, the present album may work in a compound listening experiment that helps the listener direct attention and organize content.

In the final analysis, Altar of Perversion *Intra Naos* is highly inefficient music that is better suited as a platform for the lyrics. The root of this dilemma might lie in that this project might have been brought about with the intention of channelling the ideas in a cosmology, first and foremost, with the actual craft of music being subservient to the conceptual abstraction. But art is seldom a good mistress: she asks for total devotion, and through that devotion it is *she* that channels the artist’s dark, unconscious essence.

In due praise to the musicians, the instrumental performances, the recording and the production are delightful in the utmost. The arrangements itself, if considered for their smoothness and quality of impact, can be described as sensually sinister, seductive and embracing. Where they fail to produce a clear trace of phrasal communication, they succeed in an amazing feat of maintaining an atmosphere across incredibly long periods of time through textural solidity. Were it fuller of distinct content, *Intra Naos* would have marked an epoch.

BURZUM

Det Som Engang Var

Much like Darkthrone's *Under a Funeral Moon* preceding *Transilvanian Hunger* or Immolation's *Herein After* before *Failures for Gods* and *Close to a World Below*, Burzum's *Det Som Engang Var* (roughly translatable as "What Once Was") before *Hois Lyset Tar Oss* ("If the Light Takes Us) puts on display all of Varg Vikernes' faculties as a composer in a way that is still relatively easy for a listener to make out the different things he is doing, unlike the next album where a convergence and purification that only a minority are able to grasp in all its excellence and magnificence. As Brett Stevens commented not so long ago in reference to Immolation's *Close to a World Below*, some bands make the same album again and again until they are able to solidify their vision in a magnum opus.

Many metalheads who respect this album may do so out of a respect for how influential it is, without truly understanding that even if this album came out today, after all the others they are said to have influenced, it would still be as impressive and worthy of high praise – but perhaps it would not be noticed by the same people who today profess to appreciate it. Contrary to common belief, its worth is musical, not historical only. This is not very different from people who "enjoy" Black

Sabbath or Celtic Frost, but fail to see the monument that works like *Master of Reality* and *To Mega Therion* are. In great part this error lies in associating or equating technical prowess on the instrument and an apparent “complexity” of notes with a complexity of thought and excellence in composition. These albums display an astounding clarity resulting from the exquisitely fused elements of music (harmony, melody, rhythm...) in a way that may strike the unaware as “simple”. Confusing *intelligibility* with *limitation/blandness/simplicity* is the greatest sin one can commit against masterworks of music, because the *greatest* works all share this as a common trait.. While this is even truer of *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss*, it bears bringing into question the undue musical disrespect of which Burzum in general is the victim.

The album contains tracks that make use of abrasive and extremely dissonant intervals, very consonant and relaxed harmonisations of melodies, synths as support and synths as the main instrument in ambient tracks all together and mixed in different ways and given the spotlight in different tracks. It is, perhaps, this up-front “complexity” of having so many distinct colours that at least attracts the attention of and mention by even those who do not understand black metal. The composition itself is technically nuanced but like any proper work of art, comes off as intelligible to the point of being confused with “simplicity” in its negative connotation. The complexity of the works like Burzum lies in the seamless unfolding of a story, a masterfully woven tapestry blending all sorts of disparaged puzzles and meanings within its frames not unlike Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. The importance of discussing *Det Som Engang Var* is that it is here that his thinking is most easily and obviously seen. Without understanding this album, monumental works like *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss* and Burzum’s stepping-into ambient (or as he

described it, *Anti-Black Metal*) territory, *Filosofem*, can never be truly appreciated.

Regarding its little-mentioned lyrical topics that are actually worth mentioning in any integral metal work, they consist on a mixture of melancholy and longing for a grand and fantastic past that exists more in the mind of a romantic than in historical reality (but which makes the values and traditions it longs for no less meaningful or real), and an existentialist questioning of the self's position in a world of men that makes little sense and which launches the brave man in search of truth behind, or rather *past*, human constructions. In addition to that, the tendency towards nature worship and an attraction towards the forest as the archetypal home of homes, a safeguard from the evil of men and their perversions motivated by greed and thirst for power, is ever present in Varg Vikernes' language and allusions. These have also been the target of cynical contempt by the petty minds of postmodernists who are unable to make a connection with nature and are rather too fond of themselves as creatures of a decadent society, leading them to denounce anyone pointing at obvious truths about its breaking-apart.

Restoring the pride and respect that *Det Som Engang Var* has never had in truth, just as Burzum hearkens to a grand past that has never existed here on Earth but that through an evocation of opposites rather points to an idealist future, so we attempt here to find a direction for future metal to grow in undreamed of ways that do not diverge from the essence of metal and that stand on the firm example of the greats that did exist but have never been duly studied.

Hvis Lyset Tar Oss

1994 marks the turning point in metal history when innovation stops and a gradual degeneration starts to take place. This year is also the highest point in black metal, seeing the release of what we can consider the quintessential genre masterpieces. First among them is Burzum's *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss*.

The meteoric ascent of Vikernes' previous works from varied yet focused ideas to the purest synthesis of elements in *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss* could only have one possible outcome. The ground-breaking impact this had on the genre can only be compared to that of albums like *Onward to Golgotha* or *Legion* on death metal. While some argue that Vikernes single-handedly "developed" or "defined" black metal, the truth is that he brought it to an end in this album. It is the kind of album that has the words "This Is It" written all over it. There is nothing for us, mortals, beyond the incognizable infinite.

While there is much dark beauty in other works in the genre, works that may serve as veritable portals to hidden corridors of existence, when it comes to the art of composition, there is no other that brings this black romanticism to a more perfect incarnation. *Hvis Lyset Tar Oss* addresses all facets of black metal and gives them an equally important place in a masterfully balanced music.

The often-used descriptor "ambient black metal" falls criminally short of what this album has to offer. That this "atmospheric" feeling is the only thing blind men can perceive is empiric evidence of its extant layers penetrable to their last consequence only by esoteric means. The least trained will only hear repetition (variation details are lost on them), while those into ambient music will sense the fog around them. He who decries structures and can, to some extent, understand their

relations, will be able to delineate muscle fibres and bones – an objective confirmation of content. Further and higher lie realms to be walked but never shared.

Dauði Baldrs

A worthwhile commentary on this puzzling album would entail a discussion of the mystery of Baldr's death, it is possible to appreciate this album purely on its musical numinosity. It would not be inaccurate to say that this is one of the most powerful, pure and clear statements by Burzum; second in that sense only to Filosofem. This qualification is not a reflection of the preference of the writer himself, who rather leans towards Det Som Engang Var, for its use of ritual and melodic metal to formulate a unique voice in black metal; it is simply the categorization of the art works based on their own qualities and a judgement as to their strength and return to purity. What this means exactly is left for the thoughtful reader to study and ponder.

Dauði Baldrs consists strictly of keyboard-produced melodies and synthetic effects such as timpani and cymbals. While extremely repetitive, it is not formulaic in the least; that is to say that each of the individual pieces follows a distinct plan that does not display traces of any structural template in particular. Consistency of style is preserved not only in the narrow selection of material sounds from the synthetic library of the keyboard, but in the way a minimal texture is handled.

The music very rarely expands beyond two voices, and it is often a kind of homophony with a melody of few notes over eight bars in period form (antecedent-consequent) that runs over a few root tones or chords. We also find something of a more monophonic (only one melody line) character with added

root tone that only varies enough to provide a sense of movement but which for all intents and purposes does not leave the root for too long. Sometimes, two melodies occur at once, but this is reserved for highlight, transition and a kind of climax.

Dauði Baldrs should probably be considered a synthesis of the spirit of Burzum in its condensed and mature form. If one can bear with the repetition and take it as a meditation then the music works its magic. The character of the music is both melancholic with a tone of the mysterious more than the explicitly mystic, which is often not the point but a quality of Burzum's music in general. It takes the supra-personal, transcendental, concern of Det Som Engang Var for an individual's inner connection to an ancient past for which keys lie strewn around in nature, and thus also in correspondent places within himself, and filters it through the atmospheric pensiveness of the more settled treatment found in Filosofem.

The resulting work of art is further affected by the material shortcomings that afflicted Vikernes at the time of its writing and recording. This limitation did not stop the artist but rather worked to further purify the music into its clearest manifestation thus far. As it was clearest, it was also the most obscure in the eyes of a mundane audience for whom the mystery of transcendental music is invisible when it is most visible. There is something else for which the superior artist cannot be commended enough: the music speaks for itself and brings a universe into being; whatever other qualities it has and descriptions that, however accurate, are simply abstracted ways of communicating something about it, and are never a substitute for the clear emotional and spiritual essence found in it.

INFAMOUS

Infamous is a black metal band from Sardinia, an island in Italy that speaks a variation of Latin and which has its own particular history stretching back to the Nuragic civilization and into the distant past beyond the time of the dolmens. Its rich land speaks through the traces of human culture that lived in symbiosis with the land and the forest around it. To be more precise, the peoples that developed were affected directly by the magic of the environment while leaving their own stamp on it as a native blood that gives back to its soil and nurtures it. This is also what we hear in so raw a fashion being translated from the land, air and water of Sardinia into black metal for us by S.A., the man behind Infamous.

What we hear in the music of Infamous is a sad longing for the remnants of the Golden Age, and a virulent rejection of the dejection of modernity. These reflect the general posture of someone who knows there is something wrong with our times, but who still has to live in them and is thus resolved to triumph in spite of it but promoting higher, and therefore more real, ideals. Comprehending such a point of view is not easy, for it is so very far removed from what the modern human being is used to perceiving. Only a de-programming and a return to a purity of vision that allows for reconstruction may open doors shut by neglect and hubris.

The black metal template adhered to by S.A., the mind behind Infamous, is close to a rock music simplicity, mainly

using the guitars for cyclic, simple, consonant melodies. The nature of it all remains, however, on the metal camp, as these melodies are thickly enunciated phrase-themes at the very centre of the arrangements. The drums themselves are a sometimes punkish, sometimes heavy metal affair that supports the guitars as needed. Howling and screaming graces the foggy storm of the instruments that brings ice and water crashing against stone, a nimble ghost haunting the grounds where streams of living power continually re-create.

A Poetry of Shadows

The music of Infamous, as well as the titles which describe them, bespeak a deep sorrow that is nonetheless profoundly joyful as the grief of a healthy soul that turns into an almost infinite hope for what is to come. It is an inner light shining on and through the surrounding darkness of a putrid age. However paradoxical it might seem to the reader, this movement upwards is generated by a black vortex of negative energy. Consumption, misery and hunger come together to awaken something in the superior individual. As this drives deeper into him who has this seed, the further toward the stars and beyond them he reaches as far as his arm will allow him.

The lower man escapes any glimpses he might catch of a consuming darkness by running back to the crowd, getting lost in its delusions that attempt to change reality with vain arguments, and in the inebriating vices which appear to come closer than ever to a Huxlean soma. The confrontation with the Shadow never occurs for most even at the most basic of levels, leaving them prey and slave to lower forces while remaining utterly bereft of a contact with the higher. All this in spite of the Aphrodisiac delusions of the horrible era which promise

illumination and liberation by proxy, an impossibility given that such gifts can only be attained through wilful and sustained transmutation.

Perhaps it is in conveying these concepts that Infamous chooses its colours, its images and words, though we cannot venture to claim to know the mind of S.A. with unshakable certainty. The music also suggests this is the music of someone who through isolation seeks something larger than himself. Here, solitude is the result of the purposeful retirement of the hermit into a space where he may both search and create. It is the antidote to the benumbing social blanket that seeks to normalize and sacrifice quality for the sake of the illusion of safety. Thus, the hermit as an ascetic embraces life and nature as it is, lunging into darkness, beyond despair and fear.

Dark Heroism

As a consequence of the realization of the present state of affairs, the man with a seed of the heroic in himself must decide whether to confront the world and carve out his own Wyrð. In confronting a decadent world, the inner must also be brought into alignment. Perhaps it could be said that it is of the utmost importance that in order to fully come to terms with the inner, the outer must be exposed as well, not only thought and meditation, but through effective and purposeful action. It is action and danger which permeate black metal as a whole, and which Infamous congeals to concrete auras and feelings under precise and descriptive titles. This dark heroism implies deeds outside the limits of society, self-knowledge beyond good and evil, and a willingness to reach one's own limits in mind, soul and body.

To these ears, the collection of demos presented in *Shadows from the Past* is one of the strongest reflections of the murky and elusive ideals that dimly shine through the emotional music of *Infamous*. In saying this there is no intention of expressing an absolute preference or favouritism of the superficial sort. It is very usual that a band's most transparent expression can be found in their rehearsals and demos, because they were not originally meant for anyone to hear; thus, there is an undiluted and honest simplicity and even straightforwardness with an open heart that is not usually replicated again when recording official studio releases. That said, one of the things that makes a project like *Infamous* stand out, for those intent on basking on black metal of an authentic kind, is that S.A. has developed a style and sound of his own which always sounds fresh and presents a different facet in what seems like an evolving yet consistent musical personality with a mature and well-defined core.

“...esalava forse l'oscura aspirazione a trascendere l'angustia della vita volgare e a raccogliere i doni dall'eterna Poesia sparsi su le pietre e su le acque.”

– Gabriele D'annunzio, Il Fuoco

KAECK

Stormkult

Kaeck is technically a side-project by members of different active projects, but since conventional mainstream metal band evaluations do not apply to a true underground (where each project is carried out for a reason and with a very clear purpose), the result of the present album is outstanding and well-defined. Kaeck is not Kjeld, Noordelingen or Sammath, nor does it sound like an admixture of these, although the relationship is there to see. When it comes to the quality of the content and form of the music themselves, we can consider Kaeck a musical project in its own right.

Stormkult is evidently a product of this particular Netherlands circle, consisting of a very aggressive but controlled guitar attack with a dominating lyricism in the melody that is the centre of all the music. All of the instruments cluster around it and give it strength. Part of this trademark sound also revolves around a feeling and slightly eerie feeling that will indulge in some sentimentality at times. In this sense, Kaeck displays a genre purity in conception and realization that places it in a direct line of inheritance under Bathory through the more violent and occult elements of the *Germanics*.

Since the prevailing melodic influence here is Sammath, which is the harshest of the three contributions, Kaeck consistently drives into a destructive sound that, while percussive in nature, remains highly atmospheric. The presence of a synth melody that arises from the guitar line adds to the music a simple layer that is nevertheless extremely effective in driving the nail deeper in its crucifixion of the listener's soul. The writer would venture to say that the reason for this is that the synth itself is not an extra addition, it acts and speaks out when it needs to, and so the rest of the music is balanced in the same way. Furthermore, nothing seems to be missing, the music is self-contained conceptually and musically.

Listen to music records as you would read a book

A problem many people seem to have when listening to black metal is that they expect music to do one of two things. Either they judge it by its lyrics and imagery and then convince themselves that the music is related to it, telling themselves that the music in fact is delivering what they want. Or they listen to music as if it were a brute's drug, a mere tool for sensual stimulation. These are both extremely pop-world ways of looking at music, and it places black metal under the umbrella of popular culture. While much wayward and worthless black metal is, in fact, a product of and for popular culture, and while several classics of the genre have been superficially taken in by the popular world, the core and spirit that breathed through the black metal ideally is elitist and underground par excellence.

This elitism does not reside in words or mere attitudes but in actions and results. But these very concrete characteristics cannot be gauged correctly by an audience bent on reducing

the art to mere entertainment. Sadly, even people who are very knowledgeable when it comes to literature and even philosophy treat music as if its function lies entirely in a sphere that can only be captured sensually and therefore is under a purely ‘subjective’ law. Music does encompass this sphere, but it expands even more regions, some of which can be affected by training as well as perception and deductive skills that can be honed. It is only through this respectful and more knowledgeable way of approaching music that we can start to interpret it as it deserves.

When it comes to a musical project that displays no indulgence in musicianship for its own sake, and which does not make use of whatever fad of “catharsis-inducing” techniques, that does not speak to those looking for an image or posturing that speaks to their ego, it is to be expected that it fly over the heads of most. Such is the case with *Stormkult*, an album that perhaps needs no repetition, as it concentrates on a very precise area in what it *says through the music*, but this is articulated with grace and in meaningful variations, thereby actually taking us through different avenues in a consistent world. The power that the listener can tune into here lies in the narrative itself. By latching on to this lyrical stream of *sound* one is taken through an underground tunnel to visit lonely and terrifying places haunted by shadows and latent with untapped energy.

The way to go about actually listening to music records and tuning into their wealth, rather than floating on the surface of their appearance, is to approach the experience of listening as a serious reader would approach a book. Of course, we do not *read* music in the same way that we do books. But just as the reading of a book necessitates previous knowledge of a context and posterior meditation and consideration of not only

its content at face value, but the relationship of its parts and symbols, so does music of a higher kind need a many-sided and holistic approach. We are not talking about reducing music to a crude literary analysis, for that is not the way to go about feeling and understanding a book, but to understand that music as an actual repository of information and perspectives not limited to the verbal is a complex web. In doing so we also receive the power to distinguish between what has depth and what is mostly just an appearance.

Dissolution of the parts

It has been mentioned that in the music of Kaeck the instrument's lines collapse into a central, guiding line that moves melodically with a very lyrical voice. Everything in *Stormkult* clusters around a clearly visible and very much alive entity, not as appendages that merely give body to a spine, but rather as components that make up the exoskeleton of the thing in itself. In this we should appreciate an upholding of the original black metal *method* that was instituted, discovered and exemplified by It has been mentioned that in the music of Kaeck the instrument's lines collapse into a central, guiding line that moves melodically with a very lyrical voice. Everything in *Stormkult* clusters around a clearly visible and very much alive entity, not as appendages that merely give body to a spine, but rather as components that make up the exoskeleton of the thing in itself. In this we should appreciate an upholding of the original black metal method that was instituted, discovered and exemplified by Bathory in *The Return...*

The only part that diverges from this central current are the vocals, the performance of which is varied and extremely

expressive despite remaining within one personality. Being able to say so much without diverging into several different characters is the ability of an accomplished artist that knows his craft and provides subject matter in discernible forms. The vocals ride the wave of the main melody and then twist to form their own independent contribution to the body. A balance between efficient (minimalist but fulfilling) and eloquent expression is found that can also be seen in the rest of the instruments if one knows how to appreciate the craft of holistic music. A hierarchy is respected, and most of the time the role of the instrument achieves meaning by beautifully fulfilling its own role therein.

In contrast, we may find music of a lower quality that floods with sounds of all kinds throughout the spectrum, extending pieces throughout long expanses by appending meaningless or redundant variations. Many are the black metal projects that work in an inverted way, from appearance and pretence to trying to bring a concrete image to life. The result of this almost always a cardboard-thin, but colourful and dashing to the sight, puppet that can entertain at first but is soon after revealed as lacking depth and actual content to those who look for actual treasures of mind and spirit in the music. The music of Kaeck, on the other hand, flows distinctively in the opposite direction: from a clear concept, a feeling that gives a direction, which then gets multiplied, developed and stamped onto specific instantiations that together form a logical series of consequences in a coherent train of thought.

KATHARSIS

A brief recount of a sinister musickal discovery

As a reflection of their name, Katharsis have composed a black metal of frenetic urges maintained by an organic stream of spontaneous creativity. In action, this urgency is but the surface of the music, while deeper layers hide the detailed sensibilities of a mind decidedly giving in to the calls from the unconscious. It is to be expected that music produced in flirtation with chaos will be riddled with noise, especially in its initial phases when the musicians are still inexperienced in dealing with the fountain unrepressed natural energy. What remains relevant as an element of coherence is that the central conscious hand retains a sense of narrative that lends intrinsic meaning to the storm of ideas which pour through that rent between universes.

The approach exercised by Katharsis renders their music inconspicuous, and the resulting style focuses on a narrow and rather unvarying usage of power chords to form phrases, which phrases in turn stress rhythm in order to attain a whole value. It is thus that this music acquires the quality of a rabid and inhuman sinister chant: its centre being constituted of melodic traces expressed through affirmative themes are then enhanced and adorned by the savage beating of drumming more appropriate for destructive meditation than for uplifting heroism.

The collection of publications by Katharsis evidences the minds of artists in a continued discovery of the strengths of a style after the manner of a seed that has been plated deep within the soil of the psyche, beyond their own conscious control. It flourishes and is tended by an increasingly focused attention on the horrors brought forth by that contraposition that gives Katharsis its name; slowly and secretly spilling black the black tentacles of a monolithic dark god.

The first complete appearance of Katharsis was named 666, and it made use of the different variations on the style that had been explored throughout their demos, thus bringing them together into a rather unorganized yet directed effort. The words and themes used reflect an initiatic flavour full of mythological colourings bathed in darkness. As a whole, it is a series of impressions, rushed images and inspired flights with a definite direction, but which do not yet fall into place as the musicians struggle with its force.

As a musical approach solidifies, so does the lyrical concept: we advanced from a novice stage into an apparently initiatic one. With *Kruzifixion*, Katharsis leaves behind the speed metal mannerisms reminiscent of *Possessed*, embracing the phrasal, theme-creating potential of a driving, moving power chord. While the music is clearer in its expressed articulation, as each section attains a function in context, there is a heightened sensation of madness which was expressed only roughly and superficially before; a true journey in darkness – an experience concreted where before only faith stood.

The music on the red-cover record, *VVORLDDVVITHOUTEND*, has turned from the phrasal, almost orchestral, emphasis on a Wagnerian thematic drive, and is now pushed down and forth into militant black metal trance. The visions are now more refined, perhaps even more

studied and clarified through a deeper study of a dark tradition –darkness made wholly conscious. Great refinements have gone hand in hand with a passionate fever increased through growth in all pertinent directions to a sorcerer, deceptively avoiding all illusory superficial changes of form into what others would call refinement.

Having diffused the grandstanding thematic gestures to focus on the darker, more aggressive expression of a raw black metal, Katharsis finally sink into their ultimate incarnation, proficiently economical and unapologetically reductionist. The concepts in the words, now driven beyond the myths, experiences and erudition, into a visionary wisdom, reveal a new invocation of dark forces for a violently apocalyptic end to this world at every level of reality. There appears to be a heightened sense of purpose, an anti-hero crazed, a zealot engulfed in ascetic single-minded battle frenzy.

Ever since Katharsis reached that last peak of the epitomized aesthetics they cultivated, nothing more has been heard from them by the world at large. A dignified adept perhaps knows the time and season for each thing; few are the black metal endeavours that dissipate into immortality in a final ritual that crystalizes their archetypal being in the way that Katharsis has done so. Great experimentalists of demonic voices and sinister auras, the inhuman beings who have contrived this essentially post-necromantic apocalyptic summoning show, throughout their varied yet consistent work, that there is no one single entrance to the domain of shadows, but that any effective method to procure the necessary keys must rely on a tangible link and an unleashed psyche procured by powerful volition.

Black Lust

In order that we may proceed in a clear and unambiguous manner, let us set the hard facts on the table: the first of the two songs in this split is the weakest by far, at least musically speaking (though one could argue it appears lackluster in terms of energy and inspiration judging by Antaeus' standards). At the very least it maintains a certain spirit, but Antaeus here does not even present a deserving shadow to the monstrous presence of Katharsis.

The other side of this split LP is a concentrated and significant manifestation of dark energies which can only be understood from the point of view of an ascetic actively carrying on an antinomian praxis that goes well beyond metaphor and so beyond the intention of enamelling a message in pure music structures displaying a beauty of mathematical proportions. Rather consistent with the practice of savagery towards a transgression into the realm of the sacred.

Musically speaking, we may take *Black Lust* as a great example of black metal piece-making in the style of Katharsis, which is aggressive and riff-driven, but with an atmospheric transformation mind set rather than a contrasting carnival or a mere show of attractive riffs. It leaves behind such metal composition styles such as the so-called 'riff salad' or a building of atmosphere in place of a kind of communication. The transmission of thoughts, or rather intuited aural exchange that occurs in musick proper, needs here as well as in the sphere of the real, a common ground of experience, a shard world so to speak.

Such a common world was spoken of elegantly and beautifully by Heidegger¹, and which world is one made of experience – that is, it can only be lived, and not the result of

armchair quantization². The last is taken by some over-rationalizing individuals to be the real, when it is simply a reduction of experience to a mathematically representable set of dimensions and relations. The same oversimplification may mislead to the disregarding of the role of drums in the music, simply because they cannot be analysed or perceived in exactly the same way that pitched note-values are.

Guitars are wielded like swords of death, instruments that breach the fabric of reality, bringing phantasmagorical visions in an evolving succession of scenes that achieve narrative consistency by virtue of their topic (musical, not only lyrical) and stylistic adherence, driving forth a ritual knife into the flesh of wave frequencies. The experience amounts to much more than an arrangement of notes, and only a non-reductionist approach can be taken here, so that distortion is as a necessary part of the communication as is percussion, not to speak of the wild-man crazed vociferations that propel this and other Katharsis recordings to newfound heights of ritual frenzy.

“But in the rending tumult of passion we can at least perceive the tumult and hence focus our intention beyond mere objects on the deepest truths of our passion. (...) A gentle light, not the full glare of science, shows us a reality difficult to come to terms with compared with the reality of things; it makes possible a silent awakening.”

– Georges Bataille.

The Red Eye of Wrath

The humble beginnings of what would later become an unhinged source of a pure torrent of black metal energy are heard in *The Red Eye of Wrath* in their simplest form. Katharsis

begins their story by constructing powerful songs that ride on simple power-chord phrases with mannerisms inspired in the style of Possessed, while stripping it down to essentials and propelling it to fully-formed black metal. In doing so, Katharsis adopts here an extreme taste for shocking passages without making the contrast of sections the main attraction, for they still remain related through perceivable, though perhaps murky, motif patterns. This style also relies on the dynamism of the drums to provide a great part of the content, allowing for the simple melodic riffs to stay for a longer time without need for modifications.

While possessing the endearing aura of the most primal and stripped down records of black metal, the initial expression of the budding Katharsis leans towards the doom-like ambient effect that black metal can sometimes rely on to carry a sense of cadence. These are alternated by frenetic charges of also extremely minimal and more often than not dissonant horizontal sequences. The use of pauses greatly enhances articulation power, allowing for the energy of riff to be funnelled, retained or simply smoothen transitions. As whole, however, the realization of songs remains rather incomplete, given the scant nature of individual sections in terms of their melodic communication structures, so to call them.

The shortcomings of this first release are made up for in the debut album, while hidden potential continues to grow from this same model over several albums until a maximum expression is arrived at before rock conventionalisms start to take over more often than a raw black metal should allow to retain its otherworldly nature. *The Red Eye of Wrath*, while full of energy and working towards an honest and effective satanic eloquence, still appears under the strong influence of older bands, and not yet how to balance compositions as to fully

utilize the power of expression latent in the style. In between the lines, however, we can grasp the veiled personality of Katharsis, that is never fully revealed even in later times, as befits an esoteric communication. That is to say, Katharsis' face here, as always, remains somewhat elusive through its own technique.

If one is to recommend the highlights of this first album, the experienced listener should not fail to appreciate and enjoy the impulse towards expressive purity in the riff construction which strives at once for both a stripped-down, bare-bones nature and a destructive power in harmonic contrast of a sort. In this department, one should always include praise to the drums which do not fail to play more than a small part, thus beginning to build on a music that will later afford as almost as much importance to the drums as to the guitars. Where many other satanic black metal bands fail at the musical level to construct a proper and respectable music that alludes to and moves one to feelings of destruction and dissolution through works of sinister terror, Katharsis' beginnings as heard in *The Red Eye of Wrath* builds the bases of the unique, and surely immortal, monument that their unfolding work has become despite its being relatively unknown as a work of 21st century *underground* musicians.

MASTEMA ~ THE GRAND HOLOCAUST OF FLESH

Wordless

Upon discovery of the present work, what may first make an impression is the utter disregard for names and appearances. It is not only that the executors behind the work are themselves veiled in anonymity, at least as far as the publication in itself is concerned, although their identity is probably known through third parties or private correspondence to some. Words are probably howled in improvised inspiration, and their particulars and meanings also remain unrevealed to us. We must avail ourselves singly of the music.

The presentation, the hiding away, the detachment, the sending out of this poisonous beverage in a bottle, is the mark of a predatory mind, a reaper who seeks to obtain things beyond adulation and the monetary hold that effectively seals the “selling out”, which starts by the openness of the artist and its being psychologically, then functionally appropriated by the masses and the medium. Independent and prudent minds in this regard, the people behind Mastema remain masters of their artistic destiny, sending out but the dangerous lance that is *The Grand Holocaust of Flesh* as a veritable destructive, maddening trance.

Mostly the result of a mechanically functional drumming to support razor-sharp, focused guitars, the distinctive flavour, however sublimated under the guise of what could be described as raw black metal (without descending into box-labelling without reason), is accentuated and lead by a decidedly perverse vocal performance, every bit the uncaring and transgressive spirit that entirely defines this release.

Anchored Spontaneity, The Revealing of Character

Something that comes through any kind of work, but especially through works of Art, is the character of those behind it. This may be felt in one way or other, and sooner or later; most of the time sooner than later, and usually through the attitudes that development say about the patience and thoughtfulness that went into the craft in question. For, as Heidegger would teach us, there is something to learn by looking at art from the vantage point of craft, that its quality as art may become therefore clearer. In chosen technical constraint Mastema carves a direction, avails itself of specialized tools, and in allowing improvisation and wild spontaneity to rule, they turn those tools into weapons that clear a path.

It is in this sense every bit the correct kind of minimalism, where each of the parts is essential yet performing barely necessary functions, without that implying a lack of taste or sensation of energy. On the contrary, despite the uniformity in style, and the clear subscription to a genre, each of these tracks is quite a unique spirit. Moreover, each of these spirits appears undoubtedly the brother or sister of its neighbours, particularly within each of the two volumes of which this album is comprised.

In its blatantly and naturally demonic presentation, Mastema achieves a hiding away; by dint of the overt display of a savage side, in every aspect musical and extra-musical, their humanity is shielded; it is thus also that we discern a disdain for petty social graces and gratuitous showmanship of other “artists”. A character that is naturally moved away from the need for social attention can place substantial more attention on the welling up of sorcerous energies and their occasional channel through, and so transmit, Black Metal.

The Art as Sorcery, not Cosmetic

Sorcery can take many forms, but it is essentially though generally speaking individual sets of techniques through which humans attempt to interact with the hidden properties of the universe. Hidden in that they are not apparent to the sensations, or perhaps even measurements, and thus may refer to a mechanics of relations and information sets behind what are known to the natural sciences as ‘forces’. In an efficient black minimalism that acts like a weapon upon the mind rather than the customary ‘artwork’ that is valued for its forms alone, or more pathetically, for its social component.

Yet not all effects are equal, and in Mastema we seek and find an urge towards the primal, towards the beast beyond man; that is, not the one from the past, but the one into which can be evolved by embracing a way to power through the fire of action, a devotion to timeless precepts and not the passivity of a religious subscription, whatever its kind. Simple yet powerful, discrete yet unique, *The Grand Holocaust of Flesh* is a treasure for the few, a monstrous riddle for the many.

SATANAS VOBISCUM ET SPIRITUM TUO

Scarification of Soul

S.V.E.S.T. is one of the very, very few bands around that one should feel sure of calling Satanic. This is not to say that the writer is aware of the degree of sincerity of a devotion to religion, ideology or spirituality of the band members in their life beyond the artistic, but that the music appears redolent of a conceited and well-planned journey into darkness. A path that would perhaps lead many to madness or at the least towards illusion but which remains highly logical to the mind and body ready and able for it. The music and their expression is stripped down yet highly expressive, allowing for an established black metal aesthetic to serve as vocabulary for eloquent tongues to express their own experience in pondering, imagining, or living – who knows? – a more vivid, rawer and perhaps truer existence, closer to what really is without abstractions.

There appears to be an inspiration that could base this music in a space somewhere between the raw mentality of Hellhammer and early Bathory, while learning from the experience of more complicated elaborations that were made possible later during the early nineties. There is more use of the high-pitch melody and the second-grade Norwegian power-chord phrasing, concentrating everything in a kind of

monophonic texture. Despite that, and no matter what other comparisons we may draw, S.V.E.S.T. appears fairly independent of any particular influence apart from its allegiance to black metal. It extends number of repetitions with changing chord backgrounds, guitar expressions or drum patterns, thus creating a heightening sensation within a single riff; it advances either to a highly-related section, or introducing a new concept as a new episode, which when inspected up close usually reveals itself as related in one way or another by motif.

While the band does not have a strongly defined melodic personality that jumps out as differentiated, it does show a strong character and sobriety through destruction through the organized and controlled way in which this maelstrom is wielded. Rather than madness itself, this is the lonely superhuman treading through inhospitable territory, living nightmares in the flesh, commuting with demons, challenging god and taking for himself what seems fit. S.V.E.S.T. brings in *Scarification of Soul* an example of metaphysically pure black metal that may sometimes slip into different rock-isms nonetheless subsumed under black metal expression, but which ultimately unifies the whole under strong sound themes. As such, this is not only a viable future and exemplary standard-bearer of the musical genre, but also as the black art it constitutes in the occult sphere beyond the merely sensual or technical.

Urfaust

Playing a style of black metal that became more prominent and perhaps common after the turn of the century, S.V.E.S.T.'s *atmospheric* approach is of the sort that creates a fog out of different layers of instruments playing different notes to form dissonant chords and having the drums by a vehicle for

intensity. Although black metal per se has inclinations towards minimalism and ambience, this explicit brand of atmospheric black metal stretches song durations as long as it is necessary to induce the sense of evaporating time and alienating experience they are looking for. While many different bands can claim to be part of this, very few retained an anchor in reality and still building something meaningful. S.V.E.S.T. *Urfaust* is such an album.

The way this balance is achieved in a style of black metal attempting to create a chaotic semblance is to always have one element that is static in proportion to how much other things vary or lash out wildly. For example, this band always keeps some sort of diffuse organ-like notes playing in the background, either with some kind of synth or with tremolo-picked guitars, while the drums change slightly more freely, but always responding to changes in the music as a whole, and the lead guitars are allowed to roam around more freely creating the and blending the motifs that lend each piece its personality in a background that is a raging maelstrom.

Of course, the counterpoint between instruments needs to be maintained, it will not do to have a heavy riff underscored by drum patterns that take away the attention from a centre in the music, and rather give us two shows in one. Such an event spells out incoherence. The controlled way in which such chaotic force is wielded strongly calls to mind the prophetic work of Colombian pioneers Parabellum.

Urfaust is a gem of an offering whose music lends itself to an esoteric interpretation. Listened to, from afar or in a distracted manner, the music may be perceived as a simple repetition of ideas throughout a long time. In part, this effect is intended as the listener is expected to lose himself in the music, instead of counting measures and the number of times this or that theme

comes and goes. Furthermore, the density of the layers covering the details is such that to pierce the uniformity, the listener experiencing this must become acquainted with it in an almost meditative state in repeated visits.

All this leads to an effect in which content is blurred from an un-attending audience but revealed to a focused attention that can both let the music flow and attend to the relationships within it. Masterful music that achieves this must embed these details, progressions and variations behind a strong veil of consistency that also serves to preserve coherence in a rather forceful manner that is vindicated by the overall balance achieved.

This album has an art music work orientation with respect to its overall orientation in concept and publication. First of all, this is a three-song full-length album in which the songs are movements that belong together and not a collection of three songs. The relationship goes beyond a very clear and distinctive choice in voice and is made explicit in motifs throughout the album, with its most obvious gesture being that the opening section of the album in the first movement is the same as the closing one in the third.

The element of chaos is, of course, a metaphorical one, represented in disorienting rhythms that quickly come back to a stable state and are safely supported by anchors. It is their repetition, variation; combination and alternation between different motifs along with the unrelenting percussive attack that create the picture of crumbling sanity from compositions that are technically firm and delineated.

This is where a band like S.V.E.S.T. far surpasses the uncontrolled madness of later Deathspell Omega which incurred in a common mistake in nu-black metal: the attempt

of *becoming* the atmosphere itself. The so-called experimental disorganization and the disavowal of rules for the sake of breaking conventions displayed by Deathspell Omega leads them to the lazy decision to try to portray chaos by actually making a huge mess out of the music. Unfortunately, S.V.E.S.T. later took from this band the idea of uncontrolled freedom in fits of post-modern delirium.

The vulgar idea of attempting to imitate what is being portrayed in an overtly obvious and direct manner is not new, although in our era the clowns doing it come out to the unaware as being original thinkers of some kind. Great masters of music like Ludwig van Beethoven and Johann Sebastian Bach played in this line and warned themselves and others of the dangers of falling to either side of the narrow wall that music forms between evocation and aesthetics. S.V.E.S.T *Urfaust* stands proudly and firmly as a monument to this balance where music is preserved in its formality yet evocation and idea envelop it as the non-destructive organization and manipulation of the aesthetics themselves become the door and medium to the experience.

“(...) a symphony of Beethoven presents to us the greatest confusion, which yet has the most perfect order at its foundation, the most vehement conflict, which is transformed the next moment into the most beautiful concord. It is rerum concordia discors, a true and perfect picture of the nature of the world which rolls on in the boundless maze of innumerable forms, and through constant destruction, supports itself. But in this symphony all human passions and emotions also find utterance; joy, sorrow, love, hatred, terror, hope, etc., in innumerable degrees, yet all, as it were, only in abstracto, and without any particularization; it is the mere form without the substance, like a spirit world without matter. Certainly we have a tendency to realize them while we listen, to clothe them

in imagination with flesh and bones, and to see in them scenes of life and nature on every hand. Yet, taken generally, this is not required for their comprehension, or enjoyment, but rather imparts to them a foreign and arbitrary addition; therefore it is better to apprehend them in their immediacy and purity."

– Arthur Schopenhauer

Veritas Diaboli Manet in Aeternum

In perhaps one of the most musically accomplished black metal recordings of all time, S.V.E.S.T. puts forth a two-step thesis that gracefully springs across the stepping stones of theological speculation, culminating in bouts of mystical visions and philosophical open ended questions. The resulting amalgam dances seamlessly over these, while it remains clear that at the center of fluctuating symbols lies the persistent existential question which haunts and feeds the dark libido of a mind that looks down on the mundane.

The first chapter in *Veritas Diaboli Manet in Aeternum* alludes, in words and organized sound, to the principle of division, rupture and destruction which marks cycles of existence. In contrast to less refined interpretations, we find here that, although apparently unpredictable, the chaotic force embodied in the person of Satan conspires to make Life possible, along with its illusory opposite pole, Death. Beyond the mechanistic metaphor, however, and contemplated from a holistic vantage point, said division is the realization of potential through dynamism and volatility.

The second, culminating chapter descends upon the more psychological implications of the diabolic principle, without in any way stripping the whole of its necessary mystical

expression, and there is a hint here that a rational understanding is attempted despite it all. In truth, the grain of demonic intrusion which manifest through the human mind as one of its many portals is brought into focus; its being made the locus of forces of transgression simultaneously calls forth a flowering plethora of realizations and a deepening of the mystery. In spite of this, the mystery is now the source of a certain transcendent meaning, and the possibility of the discovery of a dark purpose becomes patent.

Balance and inertia mean a continuation of present changes and transitions which are illusory in the sense that the underlying state of affairs which sustains conditions remains the same despite all movement and apparent progress. Such a movement may lead to accumulation or depletion, or the natural entropy which many have come to associate with the principle of evil. This development may be imagined as a line making its way across a space of two dimensions.

Following this metaphor, let us put forth a differing picture containing a transcendental satanic force operating from a third dimension in the same diagram just described. If Satan is the personification of evil, and thus represents the truest transgression, that breaking of all boundaries, that transcendental violation of the rule, then upon it may lie the keys of creation and destruction.

Regular movement in the universe may lead from stasis to stasis through entropy, while cosmic intrusions provide true destruction and recommencement. One may further theorize a latent ability within human beings which microcosmically mirrors the macrocosm's transcendental mechanics responsible for alpha and omega events. That is, true creation of new, rather than merely morphed, states of being are not just the logical consequence of the sum of the present conditions; a

Appendix II – Black metal reviews

chaotic originator, which may also be a black hole of destruction –an abyss, brings forth unique meanings and purposes beyond archetypes and aeonic tidal waves.