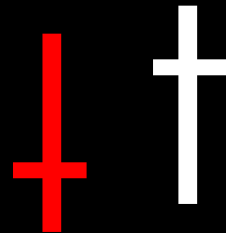


The Blackened Affect: Affect and Production in Black Metal



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INTRODUCTION

The paper presentation will map a Deleuzian 'enterprise'; an emergent set of connections pertaining to *record* and *affect* production, and their blackened dynamic in Black Metal.

This exploration is framed through questions and considerations:

- on the production processes and the musical-affective intent of Black Metal;
- the numerous paradoxes and oppositions, at play in Black Metals' (destructive)'creation';
- notions of space-time in Black Metal production and listener experience.

KEYWORDS: blackened affect; record production; creative paradoxes; space-time; Black Metal

‘One of the most important things about this violent conjunction [of Black Metal and theoretical ideas] is the way in which Black Metal **disturbs thought**, leading to the **creation of new concepts.**’

(Wilson 2011)

BACKGROUND

Q: Why I am doing this?

Important to briefly consider the dynamics associated with my 'personal' background and connection to Black Metal as:

1. A producer, sound engineer and post-acousmatic fixed media composer
2. A consumer
3. An educator

FIXED MEDIA CONTEXT

- *Empty Multiplicities. Singular Continua* (2001)
- Power of a record (fixed media) is not (only) its ability to 'document' but the ability to cut/edit/change history; reduced listening (difference/repetition)
- Corporeality of sound; sound as a body as a holistic physical (embodied) reality and thus fixed media sound as the corpus, in contrast to the 'living dead' of live Black Metal
- Whilst 'live' music making is the apex for many musicians but in this post-acousmatic context (RIIKONEN & SAARIO 2012) a record becomes the Black Metal machine, the necro-machine; connection w/this machine connects and (often) cuts(-off);
 - Record = Space intensity in time (fixed)
 - Live = Time intensity in space (fixed)
 - 'Cinematic', 'Theatrical' (experience, immersion, drama); observer; aroused (interior); passive (exterior(ity))
 - Post-acousmatic sensibility and Black Metal as a medium
 - Enhances 'in human' <>acoustic separation; acousmatic deterritorialisation as pure affect (Deleuze 1986)
 - Multiple perspectives
 - Whilst Deleuzian reading cinema frees "us from the idea of time as a connected order or sequence" (Colebrook 2002), phonographic practice frees us from the idea of ordered space (or space-time)
 - Rec-Play-Edit
- Black Metal production as a sound based composition-production praxis
 - Listening to perceivable spectromorphological qualities and behavior (Smalley 1997)
 - Collaborating with 'source' material (Harrison): shift from architectonic (quantitative) to perceivable (qualitative) and thus from extrinsic, imposed elements to intrinsic, emergent elements
 - 'Expanded listening' (Harrison, 1996)

“Spectromorphology is concerned with perceiving and thinking in terms of spectral energies and shapes of space, their behaviour, their motion and growth processes, and their relative functions in musical context.”

(Smalley 1997)

THE CONSUMER

High consumption:

- “[...]in the instant of the **affective hit**, there is no content yet, all there is affective quality, coinciding with the feeling of the interruption of the coming transition. That **affective quality** is all there is to the world in that instance. It takes over life, fills the world for an immeasurable instance of shock. Micro-perception is this purely affective re-beginning of the world in disruption.” (Massumi, 2015)

Three monitoring modes, spaces and ‘sites’:

1. **Binaural** (high resolution digital audio files and audio streaming) – as a fortification of my space; separation from surroundings through personal immersion; thinking *aide*;
2. **Studio listening** (CD, vinyl , high res digital streaming and files) – mastering grade monitoring system and environment; critical and reduced listening; focus on feel, nuances (micro-details) and sonic and affective impact; spatial translation; ‘enjoyment’;
1. **Car stereo** (CD) – familiarization; distanced perspective (non-immersive); focus on ‘music’ and song structures and larger production blocks; mix (read ‘music’) translation; ‘movement’ through space and also across the space of the music;

Note: Last attendance at a Black Metal gig was Darkthrone performing at Kasisali, Lahti, Finland on 4 May 1991

THE EDUCATOR

A lecture developed in response to the concept of *Dark Sound* and module *Dark Sound: Reading Desire in Popular Music* developed by Dr D. Ferrett (2012)

- *'Could not care less. Could not hate more': Nihilism, Misanthropy and Black Metal* (2012)
- Approaching Black Metal through the philosophical (conceptual) perspective of the various modalities of nihilism
- A teaching tool and a tool box

For our purposes of considering Black Metal intent, affect, production and experiencing of space-time we should note:

- Emergent ‘anti-values’ and dynamics of nihilism in relation to the four complex (and interrelated) categories of nihilism after (Haatanen, 2008)
 - Epistemological nihilism
 - Existential (metaphysical) nihilism
 - Moral and ethical nihilism
 - The ‘field’ of impossibility of truth
- Notions of *active* and *passive* nihilism
- Nietzsche and nihilism as links to Deleuzian concepts and paradoxes as a creative/destructive force
 - The desire for ending *nihilistic dualisms* (e.g. transcendent-immanent; internal-external) by driving the nihilistic ‘tradition’ of Western philosophy as far as possible – until the dualisms breakdown
- Nietzsche as a case study of (mis)appropriation (*)
- Nihilism as a state (e.g. psychological), condition, context, symptom, approach, critique (“elite”) and/or condition
- Advocation of, celebration, purposeful driving towards (depression OR as ‘way’) ,calling forth,...
- Foregrounding and celebration of **choice** as the only radical or free moment (in existential philosophies)

The above are also useful for re-situating of Hunt-Hendrix’s (2012)
Transcendental Black Metal: A Vision of Apocalyptic Humanism

“Nihilism is ... not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one’s shoulder to the plough; *one* destroys”

Nietzsche, F. (1901) *Will To Power*

Annihilate (v.)

“Reduce to nothing”, 1520s, from Medieval Latin *annihilatus*, past principle of *annihilare* “reduce to nothing”

from www.etymonline.com

MISANTHROPY AS COROLLARY

- Misanthropy 'follows' easily as a response or a reaction to a nihilistic context (or a 'revelation') through the *other*
- Misanthropy as the 'easy' (or 'natural' as sold) follow-on
- Production of hate (and soundtrack to and of hate)

“...because this sub-genre has its roots – as the name clearly suggests – within “Black Metal” *tout court* (and its ramifications), and does not possess a unique stylistic character. It is therefore impossible to discern which bands play NSBM based solely on their sound.”

(Maspero & Ribaric, 2015)

COMPLEXITY IN AND OF BLACK METAL

Plurality of sub-genres, themes, philosophies, ideologies, intents and associated *blackened* value economies:

- Black Metal as an ‘assemblage’, ‘multiplicity’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) and a ‘complexity concept’ (Massumi, 2015)
- Nomadic in relation to the ‘state’ apparatus of mainstream popular music
- Whilst there has been a tendency to promote a sense of arborescent lineage to, and a ‘dark genesis’ of Black Metal, am approaching Black Metal as a rhizome; it is in part this ‘rhizomatic quality’ of Black Metal that has lent ‘itself’ (its affect and effect) to the *blackening* of numerous other musical expressions (‘genres’, ‘styles’) (e.g. *blackgaze* of Deafheaven or the Black/Death/Doom Metal of Death Fetishists)
- Interaction of art (affects and percepts) and philosophy (concepts) **produce** difference/divergence NOT agreement/common sense (Colebrook, 2002)
 - Not on content level (e.g. can be same chords, drum beats, melodic lines,...) but differences of tone, intensity and space
 - Differences within the spectromorphological (Smalley 1997) ‘swarm’ can be undecipherable from ‘outside’
- Black Metal-as-noise-as-multiplicity and “raw, formless potential” (Ishmael 2015); sum of individual signals as noise (Pröll 2015);
- It is and deals with *extremes* and as such ‘challenges’ (‘resists’) easy theorization of the praxis
- Driven by sense of *authenticities* (‘purity’ of ideology, sound, identity, image, actions,...) which manifest in *intensities*, *percepts* and *affects*
- Sensationalism, contradictory histories and accounts; media ‘intervention’ in the forging of the myths and ‘setting fire’ to the scene (Grude 1998, Vikernes 2017)

“Black Metal has always been so diverse in musically that it may make sense to think of it as defined more by its visual conventions than by sonic variables.”

(Richardson 2012)

“Our ears drink this disharmonious black pile and our bodies suspend in its intoxicating formless complexities.”

(Ishamael 2015)

ASSAULT ON THE SENSES:
BLACK METAL AND
PRODUCTION

When I recorded my album, you know I told the producer “give me the worst microphone you have”. We set up the drums and we didn’t do anything to make the sound to sound special. Ten minutes, everything was ready. You know. [...] It was a rebellion against this ‘good production’.

Burzum (Until the Light Takes Us, 2008)

“Deathspell has never commented on technical matters but just lets the records speak for themselves” [my translation]

Mikko Aspa (Deathspell Omega, 2018)

PRODUCTION AND 'PRODUCTION'

- Interested in the production machine and not the production mechanics *per se* (albeit interesting in the kind of 'tasting notes' sense)
 - Not what production is (mechanic) but what production produces (machinic)
 - Active/Reactive production
 - *Blackened* production should be machinistic
 - Production and experience of excess and/or extreme musical intent

PRODUCTION 'VALUE'

Q: What role or value does 'production value' hold in the *blackened* economy of Black Metal, which encompasses everything from purposeful low-fidelity ('necrosound') to high-fidelity, high impact major label productions)?

- The high value of demos as 'landmark' or seminal 'releases' (e.g. Thorns 'Trøndertun' (1992), Mayhem 'Pure Fucking Armageddon' (1986))
- Low-fi as sub-cultural capital and signifier of authenticity
- Low or high production as a necessity of underground 'existence' (e.g. NSBM productions) or as an expectation of an artist on a major label's roster, respectively
- Big sounding low-fi (e.g. Weakling *Dead As Dreams* (1999))
- Contextuality of effective 'bad' production (Dring 2018) (e.g. *Nattens Madrigal* (1997) and *Bergtatt – Et Eventyr I 5 Capitler* (1995))
- Longevity

"I think the less 'hifi' a record sounds, the longer it's going to last in the minds of listeners, even if it's just as a talking point." (Dring 2018)

SURPRISE OF THE NEW

- Aspa, Denigrata and Dring, all referred to the importance of a sense of progression and ‘production’ of a new in each production
 - This sense of the production of the new is at the ‘heart’ of Massumi’s affect theory
- Where does surprise come from?
 - Micro-variations and detail. Lo-fi production in fact brings attention to the ‘tone’, space and *difference*
- Clandestine Blaze makes reference to the relationship between the minimal microphone setup, 4-track recorder and “in the heat of the moment” production approach and the “harrowing sound” of the debut album.
 - Nihilism in production: total rejection of production values and standard
 - Focus is on being able to access a moment/potential/intensity
 - Aspa proposed that number of early classic albums become such production-wise because the studios were not (yet) specialist metal studio or specialist in metal production and “did not know what they were doing”

“Over the years, I’ve tried to build an ideological framework for black metal, but it’s more a question of spontaneous energy that has several forms. You can’t really rationalize or limit it. It lives a life of its own.”

(Clandestine Blaze, cited in Ikäheimonen(2017))

RE-BLACKENED

- Rereleases and remasters as indicators of 'value' assignment to production;
- Remixes and remasters as (affective) ear training tools for critical and affective listening of micro-differences
- Micro-perceptions and production of micro-shifts, within a larger whole, are a key mastering approach/technique/skill
- General tendencies in remasters and the importance of micro-inflections towards musical expression (affect and meaning production)

PRODUCING SPACE

- Guitars (often) become space (and hence have no or little 'edge'), whilst at the same time leaving or negating space' (e.g. in Mayhem's *Esoteric Warfare* 'Into the Lifeless')
- 'No articulated figures, no beginning, no end, no pause, no dynamic range' (Hunter Hunt-Hendrix)

Weakling *Dead As Dreams* (1999) "is just appropriately mixed, the drums are barely processed, I particularly like the kick sound as it's very mid heavy, almost no low end on it. This can be quite beneficial for such long tracks with drumming that is so constant. There's no listening fatigue with pummelling low end or too much attack. It creates a more **immersive experience** in my opinion." (Dring, 2018)

BLACK METAL SPACE-TIME

- Smooth space (haptic perception of space; space of affects)
- *Overlay* of multiple space-time continuums, percepts and *affects*
 - Stasis and speed co-existing
 - Immersion and suffocation
 - Movement and suspension
- The notion of paradoxes/tensegrity/oppositional forces at play: reversal, inversion, negation
- Space as empty and full
- Black Metal as space, landscape writing and ecology (Shadrack 2018, Wilson 2011, 2014)
 - The schizoid projection to landscape (Ballantyne 2007)
 - Create, destroy, negate, invert, occupy,...
- Black Metal as space-time

IN THE HEART OF PARADOX

- The myriad of seeming, and ‘sounding’, paradoxes and oppositional forces (‘tensegrity’) at play within Black Metal’s diversity of forms, value economies, modus operandi and manifestations, are not taken, read or heard, as something to be resolved but as the beating black heart of ‘creation’ (‘destruction’) in Black Metal.
- Seeking to understand Black Metal through its (production of) paradoxes, pseudo-paradoxes and antimonies (w/explicit thesis-antithesis)
- Paradoxes as a machine for the production of new intensities, ways of thinking, concepts, and ways to of experiencing of the *blackened* world
- Draw focus on critical thinking; focus on the impossible (impossibility) and thus the ‘given’ possible
- Driving of nihilistic dualisms to breaking point; encouragement of continual questioning of difference; difference and repetition,...
- The Black Metal *body* as a tensegrity (not synergistic) model
- Oppositions, paradoxes... ‘call’ for (to) us to (be) open, (to) new experiences, ways,...intensities
 - Black Metal as intensities; *blackened* intensities (blackened/blackening focuses on what is/not)
- Stasis/speed; ‘inversions’; heavy/light; cold/fire’; ‘final’ solutions; create/destroy; leader/follower; sovereign/enslaved (Shakespeare & Scott 2015)
- Follower-leader; the paradoxical desire for the Oedipal (‘named ‘father’) as opposed to Anti-Oedipal desire and identity forming (‘emergence’ from the flows of ‘life’ (or ‘death’ if so wished)

'We knew that if you want to build something new, you have to destroy the old first.'

*Varg Vikernes in *Until the Light Takes Us* (2008)*

BLACK METAL AND AFFECT

AFFECT

In simple terms, am interested in the intent and manifestations of Black Metal as sound, over (musical) content (words, notes, rhythms,...).

In [adapted] words of Claire Colebrook from her book Colebrook, C. (2002) *Gilles Deleuze*: “[Black Metal] may well have meanings or messages but what makes it [Black Metal] is not its content but its affect, the sensible force or style through which it produces content”.

- Black Metal as affective not representative
 - Not a representation of evil, say but affect of evil (whatever produces 'evil')

“Neither art or philosophy are about representing a world that is already there, they are about making connections or becoming ‘desiring machines’” (Colebrook 2002)

Intent to ‘disrupt’ (affect of dislodging – Colebrook p.23)

Q: What are the productive (‘destructive’) forces in Black Metal; destruction as creation in Deleuzian sense?

Q: What boundaries (fortified values, systems, thoughts, sounds,...) are destroyed by Back Metal and thus what spaces/openings are crated/produced (as a result/corollary/...)?

AFFECT AND INTENT

“The intention in black metal is not to please anybody – including the other people in the genre – but rather to do precisely what you yourself want”

(Wrath (True Black Dawn), cited in Ikäheimonen 2017)

- One could say that the early second wave Black Metal ‘campaign’ was about the conceiving Metal differently; the blackening of metal (away from Death Metal’s mainstream ‘grip’), and that production of difference has become a key ‘constant’
 - REPETITION not of meaning but its power to disrupt (a sense of space-time)

VOICE, TEXT, MACHINE(s)

The DISRUPTIVE power and potential of *affect*:

- Black Metal vocals are typically unintelligible (w/o lyric sheet) and such tend toward affect production rather than semantic meaning production;
- The affective dislodging (Colebrook 2002) of the (typical) Black Metal voice, has physical, mental and/or emotional impact, despite no semantic meaning. (Pröll 2015) reads this negation of information as fundamentally more important to the Black Metal expression than the presence of information; absence over presence
- This enables one to listen to Black Metal without any conscious understanding of lyrical content; focus on vocal expression, energy, tone (incl. space) and transmission;
- References to and use of 'other', and multiple, languages can be seen as "Devil's work" (Pröll 2015) and thus as a *blackening*; similarly with the deployment of other Texts (referential; intertextual);
- Also, "without the superstructure of concrete, denotative semantics in verbal communication, we are left to interpret the visceral, emotive proportion of the message to greater avail" (Pröll 2015)
- Paradoxically voice/words/lyrics/text become both IMPORTANT (unintelligibility) and UNIMPORTANT (intelligibility); dynamic tension

"I see vocals in black metal as another instrument, almost like another layer of guitar in some aspects, and I try and treat them as such." (Dring, 2018)

AFTER THE AFFECTIVE TURN

- Micro-shocks, micro-perceptions, affective hits
- Affect is trans-individual but not social *per se*

“Affect must be socialised through mechanisms of mediation. Affect is the openness to being effected as directly relational.”

(Massumi 2015)

THE POWER OF INTENSITY

“Affect is not prescriptive, it is a promissory. **What it promises is intensity.** It is neutral, as well, in relation to political criteria of judgement. **Affect could be fascistic, or progressive, reactionary, or revolutionary.** It all depends on the orientation of the trans-individual desire, speculatively gestured in demotion. The evaluation of affect bears on these tendential orientations. That evaluation has no power of prescription. It is not a judgment that can justify an orientation. It is a diagnosis that maps a promise of an encounter. The diagnosis is in an eventful dimension of the speculative gesture it is included in its enactment. The ethics of affect are therefore experimental. It operates on the level of acted technique and like all technique, it is honed through trial and error. **Given the trans-individual nature of affect, the techniques must be effectively, if speculatively, collective.**”

(Massumi, 2015)

EXTREME INTENT

‘How to ‘deal’ with such a condition where we cannot believe in anything? ...**by increasing the amount of pain and suffering...**’

(Haatanen, 2008)

Extreme intent and paradoxes
(e.g. Kvarforth, NSBM)

"Selbstmord Services is not a black metal label, as we release and support anything we might find usable in matter of the effect to manipulate, and preferably audially harass the listener. For it is our main purpose..."

•

'Submit To Self-destruction' from *Submit To Self-destruction EP (1998)* by Shining

*A solid trip with a dark desire to deprave the
(remaining) chastity of my haunted soul*

Pale, hungry I wait for his command...

*Bitter is the journey to hell - for I must bow
before the fires of hell*

NIHIL BECOMING NIHIL

*Have ye courage, o my brethren?
The signs are everywhere.
Some did not see it coming,
others refused to see.
I can feel it in the tingle of the air,
in the heartbeat of the earth
And I can tell that the storm is
coming all down on me.*

MGLA With Hearts Towards None (2012)
Northern Heritage

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