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‘No satisfaction, no fun, no future’: Futures thinking in black metal

ABSTRACT

In this article, we aim to think the burgeoning theoretical orientation known as accelerationism alongside black metal, particularly as black metal harnesses accelerationist strategies of negation and opposition on behalf of surveying a world out-of-step with its ‘normative’ conceptualization. We claim that the relationship of accelerationism and black metal supports a stronger understanding of black metal’s ‘futurist thinking’ in that each cultivates a comportment for saying ‘NO’ to the world ‘as it is’ while advancing futures remote to the current civilizational order and the patterning of social being that such order presumes. It is along such aspects of resistance, we claim, that black metal both disarticulates the present and creates conditions for thinking the future, although one that contravenes the presumption of human supremacy, preservation and mastery. Further, by thinking black metal alongside accelerationism, we might better understand the conceptual and quasi-theoretical force of black metal as an artistic convergence point for apprehending an encroaching world of inhuman transformation and civilizational change.

KEYWORDS

black metal
accelerationism
futures
speculation
consumer culture
Anthropocene
post-humanism

The choice facing us is severe: either a globalized post-capitalism or a slow fragmentation towards primitivism, perpetual crisis, and planetary ecological collapse.

(Williams and Srnicek 2013)

Astride the now well-established historical and aesthetic analysis of Norwegian black metal (Wallin et al. 2017; Venkatesh et al. 2015) insists the genre's relatively underanalyzed speculations on the future – that is to say that we have not dived enough into the question of what black metal might reveal in a posthuman society. In this article, we claim that such speculation is significant to understanding the aspects of both the political aim and enunciative potentials of the black metal art form. The analysis of black metal's speculative orientations to the future might help to reveal how the artistic productions of the art form articulate specific and unique political, social and ecological futurities. For instance, and as we explore in the course of this article, black metal's speculative instantiation of the future seemingly allies with the re-emergence of anarcho-primitivist attitudes that have been linked to the character of so-called accelerationist thinking (Williams and Srnicek 2013) and its proposition that the present order of life 'given' through neo-liberalism and the edicts of the state both delimit and monopolize our imagination of futures that no longer resemble the image of how life *ought to go*. Aspects of the accelerationist movement suggest that sociopolitical transformation is necessarily enjoined to the mobilization of resources and attitudes capable of altering the present conditions of oppression and banality as they mar the emergence of alternative or co-present realisms. As fans of early second-wave black metal know well, the art form has historically aimed to harness the esotericisms of social life by mobilizing the *unthought* and abject horrors of melancholia, suicide, death and isolation co-present to the mandated 'happy affects' of consumer culture. In parallel with this attitude is accelerationism's mobilization of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of 'deterritorialization' – which we refer to repeatedly in this article – as a revolutionary vector that 'breaks' from its fidelity to current orders of sociopolitical, economic and ecological organization.

In the course of our present analysis, we aim to articulate the alliance of accelerationism with black metal, or rather to think accelerationism alongside black metal, particularly as the latter has excelled in its application of negation and opposition on behalf of surveying a world out-of-step with its orthodox conceptualization. Black metal appears to ally with the futurist thinking of accelerationism in that each identifies in deterritorialization a tactic for saying 'NO' to the world 'as it is'. So too does black metal seemingly act as a fulcrum for advancing futures remote to the current civilizational order and the patterning of social being that such order presumes.

Throughout our piece, we refer to black metal's transpiration of such negativity as the 'occult', where the 'occult' entails the articulation of worlds remote to the image of reality as it is 'given' and antithetical to prevailing mores of how life follows a specific path. It is via 'deterritorialization' – or the impulse of breaking away from a pre-constituted image of how life *ought to go* – that black metal contravenes the present ardour for *bourgeois* liberalism, religious orthodoxy and capitalist monoculture, advancing antagonistic images of the future in which such institutions undergo profanation, ruin and obsolescence. In this article, therefore, we aim to think accelerationism and black metal together on behalf of understanding how black metal imagines futures distinct

and occulted from the present, and further to better understand how desire is politically and ecologically oriented within the second-wave Norwegian black metal movement. In this task, we aim to analyse black metal’s resistance to ‘happy affects’, its challenge to the imbrication of the body within the socio-economic order, and critique of identitarian thought that presumes how life will become. It is along such aspects of resistance that black metal both disarticulates the present and creates conditions for thinking the future, although one that contravenes the presumption of human supremacy, preservation and mastery. Herein, we might better understand the conceptual and quasi-theoretical force of black metal as an artistic convergence point for apprehending an encroaching world of inhuman transformation and civilizational change.

THE UNBECOMING OF BLACK METAL

The history of black metal is ostensibly founded alongside the aforementioned pulsional motors of deterritorialization, or rather a ‘breaking-apart’ of the constituted social and political formations of the contemporary world. Parallel to the anti-Christian animosity of Varg Vikernes, second-wave black metal reflects youth disenfranchisement with the bourgeois dream of happiness and fulfilment made obligatory within the religious, political and economic status quo (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003). As extensive fieldwork by metal studies researchers in Norway has already revealed, the founding of second-wave black metal exists alongside stark class tensions and the collapse of progress and optimism that hitherto marked dominant social and educational metanarratives. The musical antipathy as reified in the lo-fidelity discordant guitar production and distantly echoed vocal shrieks – while summoning a singular Scandinavian bleakness – managed to staidly reflect an antipathy to the niceties imbibed in occidental social mores and norms. As Gylve ‘Fenriz’ Nagell articulates on the origins of black metal’s second wave, the art form *begins* as an augury against the disease of social repression where ‘everything is made to be shiny’ (cited in Aites and Ewell 2008). Fenriz further articulates that black metal’s second wave consciously aimed to produce a style of thinking opposed to the possibility of the *good life*, its ‘goals, projects and preferences’ (cited in Aites and Ewell 2008; Deleuze 1995). Expanded further, second-wave black metal commences the impulse of deterritorialization in an effort to revise social enthusiasms away from the obligatory happiness espoused by symbolic authorities, to articulate a world without idols (see Gorgoroth’s Nietzschean-influenced *Twilight of the Idols*) and to think in a mode distinct from common sense, or rather that mode of thinking that everyone already knows (Cioran 2012a: 44). Fenriz refers to the prevalence of such common sense by taking the clichéd yet ubiquitous painting of a moose in the wilderness as an index of aesthetic domestication, articulating this common comportment as a problem to which black metal responds (cited in Aites and Ewell 2008). With the immolated image of the church, extenuation of negative passions, allusions to destruction, self-harm, dystopic hyper-realities and multiplication of disloyalties, black metal allies with accelerative forces of change, giving rise to an anti-prophetic image of escape from the world as it is presently constituted and maintained (Cioran 2012a: 97; Podoshen et al. 2014; Venkatesh et al. 2015; Thacker 2010, 2011; Wallin et al. 2017). Hoest – frontman and main composer of the Norwegian black metal band Taake – points to such escape as a style of withdrawal from the world of common sense and popular enunciation (ContrabandCandy 2009). Yet, black metal is not *merely* an escape, and despite

1. Against its cohesion as a flock (of sheep), Gaahl states, 'there's always room for a pack of wolves [...] there's room for a lot of packs' (cited in Aites and Ewell 2008); see also Vice Magazine-Noisey (2012).

the 'suicidal' impulse seen in some subgenres of black metal (Venkatesh et al. 2015), the genre in general often links its escape to the creation of another world. Like the wolf-vectors (see, e.g., Ulver's *Nattens Madrigal*) that multiply in its imaginary, black metal's escape is linked to the reconstitution of a 'hinterland' remote to the civilizational ardour for domestication – one resolute in its impulse to return to the present order of things the virulent forces of negation, destruction and nihilism (Land 2011: 203). In this way, second-wave black metal sought from its inception to habilitate a vector of deterritorialization from the given world on behalf of re-imagining sociopolitical life. Such re-imagining works in harmony with the investments of the accelerationist movement for its proposition that the future – if there is to be a future – is one that must be brought about through the intensification of transformative forces and affects of which the harsh and raw sounds of black metal are emblematic. Where the so-called left accelerationist project imagines the future as born through the amplification of technological advancement and the proliferation of technological potentials, second-wave black metal owes more to the developments of right accelerationism for its fidelity to the end of the 'given' world, and so too the subject of the present civilizational order it assumes.

INHUMAN FUTURITY

From its subterranean germination in the basement of Oslo's Helvete record store and live-action role-playing of scene members surrounding Bergen's seven mountains, second-wave black metal emerges along the rat-vectors of uneasy subterranean alliance, fragmented secrecy and misanthropic invectives articulated in the work of such non-Norwegian bands as Xasthur, Sin Nanna and Leviathan.¹ Such fidelities conspire to produce an oblique accelerationism stripped of its tech-punk ambitions, yet compatible with the right accelerationist appetite for an abominated inhuman future in which human life is no longer the fashion (Fisher 2014: 335–46). Where the accelerationism of Nick Land (2011) would imagine the collapse of civilization through the rise of technological singularity and the ascension of hyper-intelligent artificial intelligence, the right accelerationist project, nonetheless, shares with black metal a fidelity with inhuman vengeance and the endarkenment of the present order. The precursors of black metal – namely early death metal and extreme metal by bands like Venom (from the United Kingdom), Hellhammer (Switzerland), Bathory (Sweden), Entombed (Sweden), Sarcofago (Brazil) and early purveyors of speed metal and thrash metal – positioned scene membership as part of a larger countercultural narrative and battled for its rightful place within postmodern, capitalist society. Black metal, on the other hand, deferred its place *within* the sociopolitical order in lieu of surveying the character of its own bleak realism as an outside to contemporary civilization. Black metal rallies to its side a maelstrom of negative and destructive forms, reoccupying and leaning into occidental sociopolitical conversations and physically manifesting itself in geotags that more often than not represent a bleak, Scandinavian landscape of sparsely populated countrysides, forests and desolate mountains (Scott 2018). Herein, black metal seeks to articulate a vision of the future inclusive of both new and old imaginaries. Specifically, the genre appears invested in both rehabilitating a primordial earth *before-man* and so, too, a posterior earth after the decline of civilization and its subject – a case in point would be the cover of Emperor's debut album from 1994, *In The Nightside*

Eclipse that presupposes a seemingly endless glacial Nordic landscape mirroring the vocal shrieks on album opener ‘Into the Infinity of Thoughts’: ‘as the darkness creeps on the northern mountains of Norway’. Speaking to the production of Darkthrone’s seminal black metal album from 1992, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, Fenriz articulates a commitment to extremity and darkness as new affective resources for expression (Peaceville Records 2011). Against the decadent compositions of technical death metal and its day-glo aesthetics, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* would palpate a style of expression libidinally allied with bleakness and merciless negativity. Linking with the pulsional motors of deterritorialization or rather the dissolution of constituted social forms, black metal would accelerate libidinal intensities linked to both the destruction of the organic body and the obliteration of the body’s investment in capitalism (Lyotard 2014). Such a disposition of obliteration is evident not only in the dramatization of subjective death figured in the corpse-painted faces of black metal artists, but the furious intensification of ‘raw sound’ as it rends the listener open to a new sensorial experience unaccounted for within the ‘glossy aesthetics’ of popular art forms. Although in many ways distinct from the political intentions of accelerationism, black metal nonetheless aims at the obliteration of the *embourgeoise* (that is to say – to make bourgeois) and the ‘[n]ew [s]incerity’ of capitalism’s ‘kitschy cutesy pop’ refrain (Fisher 2014: 344). For beneath the veil of affirmation that marks the affective standard of capitalism, black metal secretes a persistent negative impulse emblemized in the mantra: ‘no satisfaction, no fun, no future’.²

2. Lyotard’s adage is redoubled by Euronymous, whose critique of the Florida death metal scene is distilled into the black metal epithet ‘no mosh, no core, no fun, no trends’.

NO SATISFACTION: THE MADNESS OF THE HAPPY LABOURER

Although black metal generally withdraws from overt political involvement, it is *always already* political in its libidinal investment. While the church burnings that brought Norwegian black metal global recognition in the 1990s were quickly associated with Satanism and neo-pagan antipathy for Christianity, they concomitantly marked the rise of a sceptical militantism and anti-prophetic indifference to the slow suicide of bourgeois life and mediocrity of hegemonic monotheism (Grude 1998; Land 2011: 204). For ultimately, the precursor of the Norwegian church burnings may have had less to do with the aspiration for a renewed attachment to folk mythologies obfuscated under Christian colonization than a confluence of disgust and boredom towards an increasingly obsolete universe of metaphysical and moral reference reified in the ‘good sense’ of state thinking. The razing of the Fantoft stave church posthumously captured on the cover of Burzum’s *Aske* (*Ashes*) figures at a moment of ‘supine tolerance’ for the futilities of social orthodoxy (Land 2011: 204). Against the ideal of the happy labourer, Ihsahn and Samoth capture the libidinal investment of black metal’s second wave on Emperor’s 1994 song ‘Into the Infinity of Thoughts’, wherein they write that ‘[d]esperair will be brought upon the hoping children of happiness’. Here, black metal’s militant scepticism extends beyond the church, implicating an entire social field suffused by ‘saviours’ whose beliefs, programmes and aspirations aim to ‘remedy life’ (Cioran 2012a: 5). By contrast, black metal aims to make *life more difficult* by levying the pulsional motors of negativity against the church, the decadence of academia and bureaucratic reformers. This impulse is articulated by many black metal artists who we have spoken to at festivals across Europe and North America, who are quick to deride the albeit varied epistemological lenses applied by writers, academic or otherwise, in identifying

a schizophrenic form of black metal. From the perspective of these performers, black metal is quite simply a hateful and destructive form of music and a soundtrack for the end of the world as it is presently 'given'. Moreover, and according to the artists who we have interviewed, black metal is less a thing to be encyclopaedically named (an impulse of western metal studies) than an engine for social, metaphysical and ontological becoming. Modern black metal artists such as Scot Conner of Xasthur and Jef Whitehead of Leviathan draw from their personal experiences of depression, loss, self-harm and relationship troubles to create a suffocatingly horrifying brand of extreme music (Vice Magazine-Noisey 2012) in which the becoming of the subject is drawn into nuptials with profound negativism and scepticism towards the constituted world and its subject. Such negative passions create in black metal an anti-prophetic impulse that attempts a break not only from the remediation of life under the logos of (state) authority but of the directions, prescriptions for happiness and pre-masticated meanings regurgitated by its priestly masters of reality.

Following the paradigmatic model set out by the Swedish band *Bathory*, black metal's second wave sought to rehabilitate and interrelate a variety of territories, including but not limited to an occulted Nordic mythos steeped in battle, the presence of elemental forces, earth powers and death. Gaahl – ex-frontman for Gorgoroth and present frontman for Gaahls Wyrð – articulates this investment as a necessary bane on the Christian church and its systematic separation of Norwegian culture from its mytho-historical pagan roots (cited in Dunn et al. 2006). Herein, black metal's acceleration of pagan myth-history figures, in part, as a desiring investment in anarcho-primitivism, or a reconceptualization of life in relation to pagan myth-history anterior to institutional religion, bureaucratic governance and the dream of the *good life* proffered under neo-liberal capitalism. While such black metal bands as Burzum and Gorgoroth have plied such myth-history in support of National Socialist and neo-Nazi commitments, black metal elsewhere accelerates its archaic world in creation of a future-anterior occultism or noumenal (or supplanted) realism it then seeks to inhabit. Erik Danielsson of Swedish black metal band Watain alludes to a 'place' that controverts the 'mundan[ity]' and 'hollowness' of present-day society (cited in Bååth 2012). Danielsson describes an 'abyss' that separates the present order from a 'divine' world summoned through occult ritual (Podoshen et al. 2014). Such ritual forms a centrepiece of Watain's live performance, which evokes negation and destruction through an alliance with the 'scent of death [...] an open tomb through which the spirits of the damned can pass freely' (cited in Bååth 2012). Betraying a libidinal investment in the world as it is *given*, black metal's occulted realism, or rather its impulse to force an encounter with 'unthought' worlds, is made to transpire against the monotonies of civilizational consciousness and habit, for alongside civilized life and its institutionalization of instincts persists for black metal an occulted world of the undead or, rather, of barbaric *oskorei* nomads poised to sow catastrophe upon the 'true' world of men (Cioran 2012a: 90). For alike the barbarian hordes that have throughout history threatened the safe enclosures of civilized life, black metal aims to materialize an antagonism against the refrain of the 'good' life and so, too, those concepts that reify the 'good' life as the ground of present sociopolitical reality. Herein, black metal labours in resemblance with a host of forces at the periphery of society poised to overturn and complicate the world as it is. It is in this way that black metal becomes thinkable as a form of acceleration in that it mobilizes from the occulted world

conditions for overturning the present one, allying in this way with the rise of horrific climatological and biological realities that withdraw from preferred human futures advanced by such idealisms as the interminable progress of civilization conceptualized within advanced capitalism.

THE FUTURE REVERSED

When considering the ‘divine’ world of decay imagined by Watain’s Erik Danielsson (as cited in Bååth 2012), the anarcho-primitivism of black metal imagines both the reversibility of the ‘apparent world’ unto barbaric nomadism³ and so, too, the horrific revelation that beneath the dream of a *higher world* exists a reality composed of implacable glacial cruelty and pitilessness. Here, black metal does not simply mark the allegorical return of repressed libidinal urges, but rather an ecstatic libidinal investment in the destruction of the ‘true’ world given to ascension, goodness and moral value. In this way, black metal figures as the unbecoming or deterritorialization of the ancient idea that we are destined to a higher world and not, in truth, ‘*a much, much lower one*’ (Nietzsche 2005: 150, original emphasis). In this will to death and expression of negative passion, black metal espouses the accursed wisdom that beneath the world given to contemporary man lurks an indifferent reality of shapeless cataclysm and horror. To wit, early work by Norway’s black thrash band Aura Noir has approximated such chaos in their churning brand of music that suffocates listeners through repetitive riffs that blend into a state of impeded noise limited only by the small frequency range of the production’s mixing console. Such aural wisdom harbours grim truth, particularly in the contemporary moment of biological risk and the rise of ‘inhuman’ orders of life. For where the celebration of human life as the ‘centre, cause and conclusion’ of reality rests on anthropocentric blindness and planetary exploitation, black metal transpires the implacable revelation of our ‘infinitesimal presence’ (Cioran 2012a: 6). It is not that there exists a time *after man* in black metal inasmuch a potential time unhinged from man’s contemporary activities, interests and desires. The image of a world withdrawn and yet co-present to the contemporary moment is closely linked to black metal’s vision of a terrifying civilizational and subjective transformation. For the secret earth of black metal is not only a counter-actualization of a planet that is made to reflect in the face of man, but an investment into the conceptualization of a barbaric nomadism whose fluxes are no longer drawn into the neurotic circuits of the capitalist subject or ambivalences of postmodernity (Land 2011: 205). The corpse-painted face and hewn bodies of black metal already suggest the schizodilation of the body’s libidinal flows splayed across the labyrinthian wolf-vectors of a fragmented and alien world.

In the midst of this battlefield, black metal finds its kin in the ‘raven [...] inspired by [the] scent of carrion’ (Nietzsche 2005: 162). For where the contemporary world circuits desire to comfort and remedy, black metal accelerates the realism of a world born of death and decay. It is in this way that black metal envisions an ecological sensitivity towards those maligned aspects of sickness and fragmentation that constitute the undetected ‘dark ecology’ of the planet, for the wisdom of black metal follows from the speculation that life *as we know it* is founded upon both its reversibility unto monstrosity and the reliance of capitalism upon the materiality of planetary dead matter (i.e. oil, minerals, elements) for its economic pulsion (Morton 2010). Where the accelerative forces of capitalism rehabilitate the depths of planetary dead matter

3. We are indebted here to Andrew Culp’s formulations and glossary pertaining to the ‘Dark Deleuze’ (see Culp 2014). Culp’s developments, we believe, counteractualize the joyous Deleuze in ways that more adequately engage with the occult and, further, less affirmational modes of enunciation that nevertheless constitute an anathema to the world ‘given’ to man.

upon the body of capital itself, black metal harnesses the non-recuperable excess of death by summoning a devastated and cataclysmic world into the contemporary imaginary. While ostensibly romantic for its anarcho-primitivist reiteration of an untouched wild, the chthonic forces summoned in black metal exceed romanticism through its denuded vision afterlife: 'an ill without prestige, a fatality without luster' (Cioran 2012a: 90). Herein, to conceptualize black metal's archaic futurity as backward-looking fails to recognize its speculative force for imagining the rise of an environmentally devastated, diseased and fragmented earth delinked from – and averse to – the pursuit of hope, joy and remedy. It is this decrepit earth that black metal salvages and accelerates from under the 'happy affects' of capitalism, giving expression to a grim and fatal future-anterior vision of the given world.

OUTSIDER THINKING

In acceleration of an occulted world recalcitrant to its representation in either the image of man or nature 'for man', black metal delinks from a future that repeats in the image of a 'given' world. That is, the wilderness evoked throughout black metal's accelerative occultism functions not only as contact zone through which to rethink life in nuptials with the wild, but as an evocation of an *outside* hinterland thought in secret nuptials with the occult. Such wedding is nascently explored by Tasmanian black metal musician Sin Nanna of Striborg, whose compositions reify the raw and violent force of an 'everlasting portal of discomfort', which is interred in the wild (Vice Magazine-Noisey 2012). Through sinister and decrepit instrumentation, Sin Nanna accelerates an archaic aural realism in which the human is enveloped by the deterritorializing forces of undomesticated nature. Such expression is significant, for where accelerationism takes contemporary life (under capitalism) to its 'vertiginous depths', black metal therein locates a dark 'vitalism' dissociated from capitalism's orthodox vectors of reterritorializing life upon value (i.e. abstract capital). Withdrawn from the world 'given' to man, black metal's inhospitable and endarkened world becomes occupied as the staging point for the disillusionment of contemporary life. Where today we are fatigued by an overabundance of information and profusion of academic concepts, black metal enables us to map out a 'rudimentary physics' of elemental forces and earthly powers as the centrifugal forces for rethinking the emergence of new futurisms (Cioran 2012a: 50).

NO FUN: BETRAYING THE SELF

It is against the backdrop of its implacable world that black metal cultivates new powers of enunciation, for where the 'New Sincerity' of capitalism regulates libidinal fluxes through the recapitulation of happy affections and their investment in the 'I' as the ostensible locus of consumer desire, black metal aims to extol the 'advantages of debility' and self-betrayal (Fisher 2014: 344; Cioran 2012a: 96), thereby exposing capitalism to its 'crisis' points (Nelson et al. 2019; Nilges 2008) and ensuring the fulfilment of its self-destructive potential. Such debility is manifest, in part, via black metal's misanthropic withdrawal from both common sense and, more pointedly, from the libidinal organization of the body under capitalism, wherein desire is continually harnessed in perpetuation of capitalism *itself*. Black metal's withdrawal from the political sphere is figured in the remote forest, twilight and endarkened milieu that

constitutes its lupine-rodent imaginaries. Along the lines of such withdrawal, the body is thought in a manner delinked from constituted social relations and convictions. For such black metal composers as Sin Nanna, Xasthur and Leviathan, misanthropic withdrawal is literalized through their flight from human society, reiterating a desire for escape figured throughout Peter Beste’s photo documentary *True Norwegian Black Metal* (Beste and Kugelberg 2008). Such withdrawal is almost always beset by the paradoxical presence of humans in society; take, for example, the photograph of a corpse-painted Einar Selvik in a street in Bergen, Norway, at the very instant an older woman walks past glaring at him, piercing his veil of cult obscurity in one fell swoop.

As a positive condition for fleeing the yoke of domestication, black metal’s misanthropy is rather permanently enjoined to a militant scepticism towards the telos of human civilization. For black metal, misanthropy becomes a weapon for severing convictions to the ‘given’ world and habilitating an occulted ‘teratology of solitude’ (Cioran 2012a: 58). Here, black metal’s ostensible reterritorialization on the ideal of solitary individuality overlooks a more radical desire mirrored in its misanthropic withdrawal. For the very act of misanthropic withdrawal postulates an alternative nuptials alien to the compositional arrangement of social life under capital. For instance, black metal harnesses the impulse of deterritorialization as an opportunity to overturn capital’s pre-constituted relation to anthropocentrism – the centrality of human life and agency. For unique to black metal’s detachment from socio-political life is its habilitation of nomadic contact zones with animality (see Ulver’s album *The Madrigal of the Night: Eight Hymns to the Wolf in Man*), the monstrosity of the wild (Darkthrone’s *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*) and abyssal horror of darkness (Emperor’s *In the Nightside Eclipse*). Such occult relations constitute lines of escape from both the overdetermination of expression according to the happily neurotic subject of capitalism and, further, the ‘genetic relationship’ of the organic body to the affective labour of post-Fordian capitalism (Larsen 2010; Nilges 2008). Betraying the Oedipalized subject through the eradication of normative social bonds and genial alliance, black metal creates affective nuptials with the monstrosity of a non-human ‘dark vitalism’ that corrupts the dominion of affirmationism and protagonism. It is here that black metal proliferates a vile host of occult and occulted alliances, including the multiplicity of the wolf pack, the labyrinthian dark of subterranean earth and the undifferentiated and vague horror of darkness subverting the *all-too-human* perspectives of both common and good sense. This is to say that the withdrawn and misanthropic subject of black metal functions as a mode of both self-betrayal and a betrayal of the species whereupon black metal’s nomadic barbarism is enacted to suggest the emergence of a new people.

A desire for the annihilation of servitude is apparent from black metal’s exaltation of Satanism and paganist debasement of priestly wisdom. Herein, the countersignifying regime of black metal’s second wave mobilizes an attack on subjugation through the inversion and blackening of religious iconography and ritual. Further, black metal’s fabulation of an occult barbarianism born through the acceleration of misanthropic and negative forces break from social servitude and conformism to populist fashion. The occult, weaponized and corpse-painted bodies of black metal’s second wave are directly opposable to the servile bodies of churchgoing masses and mall-walking consumers. This posed, black metal aims not merely at annihilating the conditions of servitude through the destruction of masters but, more indicative to its accelerative impulse, the destruction of the organic body driven by the affective

motors of capitalism itself. In parallel with the repetitive affective gestures of factory routine, black metal's second wave fetishizes the accelerative repetition of the refrain through both composition and in its approach to instrumentation. From the mechanical gesture of blast-beat drumming, 'decibels of carnal shrieks', repeated action of tremolo picking and recurrent and protracted compositional refrain, the *jouissance* or conjoinment of pain and pleasure particular to black metal inheres a desire for the *repetition of the same* (Lyotard 2014: 216). Paralleled in the acceleration of factory gestures, black metal might be thought of as less an act of production than a form of endurance (Lyotard 2014). Yet, through the acceleration of repeated gestures commensurate with the affective demands of contemporary work, black metal aims at the joyous 'mad destruction of [the] organic body' (Lyotard 2014: 212). That is, the interminable and habitual productivity impelled under capitalism is accelerated in black metal into a delirium of unbearable musical intensity. It is here that black metal's desire for self-betrayal targets the investment of the organic body itself, which is decomposed and reinvested in fragments ostensibly delinked from the fantasy of unity and identity absorbed within the infrastructure of capitalism (Lyotard 2014; Fisher 2014). Beyond its debasement of transcendent masters then, black metal aims at a form of murderous self-betrayal that deposes the investment of the organic body in the machines of capital, extolling in this way both a misanthropic refusal of identity while exalting the advantages of fragmentation and debility as an antithesis to capitalism's 'happy labourer' (Cioran 2012a). As black metal's auto-induced schizophrenia suggests how the contemporary subject is ripe for disappearance and adaptation to pre-constituted social assemblages.

LEARNING TO DIE

'God can only redeem the universe from its servility by burning his creation into ash and annihilating himself' (Land 2011: 215).

While alliance to the figure of Satan is common to black metal's second wave, it is in league with Georges Bataille's 'self-butchered divinity' (Land 2011: 215) that black metal is more accurately allied. Herein, black metal seems less an admonishment of belief than the harnessing of *belief* in support of its inexistent, occulted directions (Reed 2014). While the 'Satanic' inversion of religious iconography in black metal continues to labour within the eschatological confines of Christian metaphysics and moralism (Podoshen 2018; Unger 2018), black metal does something more interesting for its fetishization of a speculative cosmology where to break from servitude to God, or rather from the image of God invested in man, necessitates the dismantling of the body itself. This is, in part, the savage conditions black metal advances for *believing in this world* put otherwise in Emil Cioran's question whether 'it is too late to relearn [...] dying out?' (2012a: 155). Counterpart to the deterritorializing forces of capital, yet discorporated from the organic and fully adapted body of the labourer, black metal functions as a focal point to accelerate the process of the body's annihilation and fragmentation. In lieu of adaptation, black metal is founded upon a love of debility in collaboration with a lineage of twilight thinkers for whom disease and decline mark a rejection of life's 'utilitarian trickle' and who, for their emphasis on defect, are harbingers of civilizational exhaustion (Cioran 2012a: 36). The 'advantage of debility' figured throughout black metal might be linked to the emergence of an occulted body subtracted from the overcoded and regulated expressive potentials defined

according to the image of Jesus Christ or that of ‘typical European’ faciality (that is to say, the ‘normative’ face) spread by Renaissance and colonial missionaries (Watson 2008: 178). Beyond the sorcerer-barbarian guise of black metal corpsepaint and its occult reference to a-people-yet-to-come, black metal becomes oriented to the creation of an occult face.

Where ‘[h]istory is the product of a [forward-looking] race that *stands*’ (Cioran 2012b: 50, original emphasis), black metal imagines a subterranean people cathected to the miasma of its ‘dark ecology’ and abominated fauna therein. While black metal is from its inception seemingly backward-looking, its gaze is distinct from the Renaissance renunciation of animal life and transcendent elevation of the *human’s* gaze towards heaven. Where in capitalism persists a similar elevation of the gaze above and beyond the material fragility of organic life, black metal refashions the gaze⁴ along an occult trajectory turned towards graveyards teeming with death and negation, and perhaps, more significantly, a blackened outside thought impregnable to the light of rationality or programmatic faith in anthropocentric futurity. However still tied to the anthropocentric notion of a darkened nature *for us* (or, more accurately, *in us*), the gaze of black metal is made sensitive to an occulted *outside* thought towards which the future-anterior is continually drawn. Exemplified in the receding eyes of the corpse-painted face, black metal speculates a gaze that is ‘at best’ neither alienated nor adolescently marginalized, but potentially subtracted from an *all-too-human* metaphysics that presumes anthropic supremacy above and beyond the immanent inhuman futurity of civilizational collapse.

4. Intimate to the magical notion of *glamour* is the deterritorialization of the eye from its automatic link to a ‘given’ referent or to modulate the very appearance of the world.

SOUNDING THE FUTURE

As an often unrecognizable referent for a litany of second-wave black metal (see both Bathory’s seminal *Twilight of the Gods* and Gorgoroth’s *Twilight of the Idols*), Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols* suggests a toolbox for the ‘*re-evaluation of all values*’ (2005: 155, emphasis added). That Nietzsche’s thought draws upon the force of the hammer blow is evinced throughout black metal (albeit where the physician’s hammer is supplanted by the sword, cudgel and mace), which enjoins Nietzsche’s philosophical approach to the values and predilections of pagan gods not simply to rehabilitate an in-existent mythical *brotherhood*, but much more interestingly to ‘sound out’ the vigour of contemporary life against which black metal seems counterposed. Yet, despite the speculations offered by the proverbial hammer, black metal’s occultism draws upon a corollary weapon of Nietzsche’s *revaluation* in the form of the *tuning fork* (2005: 155). The vitality of ‘idols’ that might be ‘sounded out’ via the *tuning fork* is a marker to the occultism of black metal, which sees the creation of new eyes and aspires to illuminate ‘[n]ew ears for new music’ – evil *ears* for an occulted milieu, as Nietzsche suggests. Closely tied to the function of the tuning fork, black metal’s ‘sounding out’ functions as a symptomology where ‘things that want to keep quiet are *made to speak out*’ (Nietzsche 2005: 155, original emphasis). While such purpose can be detected via the bleak melancholia, suicidal depression and embittered despair summoned in black metal, it more radically pertains to the revelation of a horrific *event horizon* whereupon reality is pushed to the limit of thought and life. From its experimentation with low-fi atmospherics, degenerated recording qualities, productions verging on complete anonymity and compositional velocities that stretch the limits of human capacity, the aesthetics of black metal ‘sound out’ an occulted world

at the precipice of a black hole. Herein, black metal's 'sounding out' speculates on a world yet 'unknowable' to us. That is, the occulted milieu to which black metal develops auditory sensitivity is not 'simply' a world of melancholy and despair sublimated under the vertiginous kitsch-pop of the contemporary marketplace, but of the vague and unimaginable horror of 'absolute deterritorialization' (i.e. suicide) upon which its repetitive gestures both endure and yet disintegrate in ecstatic madness (see Aura Noir's *Broth of Oblivion* or Striborg's *Black Apparitional Void*). Herein, black metal's 'sounding out' of reality attends not only to the melancholic and occult-like affects sublimated within contemporary life, but of the prospect of a suicidal line of deterritorialization that suggests, as accelerationism does, that *we might go further still*. The edict that we might go further still is both embraced and resisted in black metal, which for hearing the call of 'the great Zero' persists to repeat in abeyance of a fated commitment to self-destruction. Herein, we might detect as a remarkable feature of black metal its dual fidelity to both exploration and nostalgia, or rather its relationship to both deterritorialization and reterritorialization given expression through its nascent critique of neo-liberal capitalism's affective register, and yet its quasi-stabilization upon anarcho-primitivist tendencies.

THE VOICE OF THE OUTSIDER

Where the bodily organs of black metal are remade with an *evil* eye and ear, black metal transforms the tongue through its creation of an occult language for an imperceptible world. The secret language summoned in black metal is no doubt significant for its deviation from communication, where language is made to reflect a *given* world, or rather where language is made to dutifully represent the world's given dimensions. Black metal's scepticism of language's representational function extends not only to the representation of the world in the priest's sermon or ad man's pitch (see Bathory's *Twilight of the Gods*), but in the philosophical thinking of the academic, their definitions and exposition of secrecy. The occult language mobilized in black metal portends an anti-philosophical mode of creation that maintains the force of magical realism and the *potential* emergence of nomadic formations out-of-synch with the practice-inert or highly patterned subject presumed in the priest's sermon and ad man's lure. Alongside such attempts at representation, black metal organically produces an inexistent referent by summoning through secretive languages and expression an accelerated universe in becoming (see, e.g., Absu's *Abzu*). Harnessing the language of the occult, black metal enacts resistance to representation not unlike Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *sorcerer-becoming*, delivering the world upon a multiplicity of mythological resources and minoritarian impulses from which might be mobilized new conditions for 'escaping the boredom of the understood' and unleashing desire from the dominant mythemes of Protestantism and Oedipalization informing upon contemporary sociopolitical life (Cioran 2012a: 90). Indeed, the voice summoned in black metal is no longer recognizable as part of the *given* world, but constitutes a sound from the outside – a hinterland chthonic scream as both a taunting battle cry against the *given* world and, further, as an acceleration of occulted affective intensities sublimated under the institutionalization of instinct.

NO FUTURE: THE BECOMING-OTHER OF THE FUTURE

If black metal can be thought of as an accelerationist project or as a style of thinking that inheres the dispositions of accelerationism, it is one, no doubt, transpierced by failure. Foremost amongst such failure is the cataclysmic and

neo-fascist apocalyptic desire of National Socialist black metal where the acceleration of mytho-occult forces aims not at the formation of new post-capital political practices, but as a bulwark for the cultivation of white supremacist dogma and, elsewhere, the intolerances of typically juvenile hypermasculine ideologues. Regardless, black metal remains speculatively attached to the idea of the future characterized by ‘slow fragmentation towards [anarcho-] primitivism, perpetual crisis and planetary ecological collapse’ (Williams and Srnicek 2013). Perhaps worse still is the defanged character of contemporary black metal now absorbed into the circuits of the marketplace, wherein its negative passion is revisioned in perfect adaptation with an indolent celebration of individualism and nonconformism that reek of neo-liberalism: to praise Satan with one hand and (with tongue firmly planted in cheek) *Hot Topic* with the other. Swedish black metal band Watain, for example, has not been spared criticism for being perceived as too commercial after having seen increased record sales and releasing steeply priced limited-edition box sets of their newer albums. Scene members are known to ridicule Watain for the elaborate allusions to a hyperreal dystopia in their stage design for their live performances, and dismiss band leader Erik Danielsson as pretentious when he refuses to answer interview questions about Watain’s philosophy by saying that ‘regular [metalheads] and scene members [cannot] understand the depths of Watain’ (Dare 2013). This is, of course, not to condemn black metal as practiced by Watain unequivocally, for their art form continues to offer non-philosophical resources for the accelerative decay of civilizational stagnation and obsolescence. Black metal remains, in particular formations, an ally to secrecy and occult experimentation as does it endure in its desire for the speculative imagination of a cataclysmic future opposed to the futility of piecemeal or fashionable reformism (Mackay and Avanesian 2014: 13). This said, it occurs equally that black metal remains an experimentation with *dosage* in that negativity and destruction might be taken too far and onto that suicidal line of absolute deterritorialization.

Black metal remains compelling for its power to (dis)enchant the world in such a way as to reveal its difference. That such (dis)enchantment is mobilized through the art form’s speculation on an imperceptible yet immanent world is not as removed from politics as black metal producers would otherwise suggest. For in its dark vision, black metal sets out strange vectors for desiring-production that aim to betray the passive inscription of human life into the machines of capital; and further, by imaging inhuman forces other than capital in alliance to which life might *become*.⁵ ‘There are libidinal positions, tenable or not’, Lyotard writes (2014: 214). On the one hand, black metal fixates on the past, with its dominant ideologies drawn from Tom G. Fischer’s seminal 1981 declaration ‘only death is real’ (Fischer 2010) and its music rooted in a raw, inorganic, harsh sound that rejects the structure and slick production that other forms of extreme metal embraced during the 1980s. On the other hand, black metal bands like Taake are able to shrug off the leaden shroud of black metal authenticity and cloak themselves in opaque innovations with lyrics that speak to backlashes against multiculturalism in Norwegian society (see ‘Orkan’ from the 2011 album *Noregs Vaapen*), visual art that focuses on the dark tapestry of Norwegian forests (see the music video for ‘Nordbundet’ [2011]), and musical inspiration from 1980s new wave bands such as Joy Division and The Cure. While black metal has undoubtedly been characterized as something of a vaudevillian absurdity for the theatricality of its performativity, this is to overlook that worldwide black metal continues to function as a

5. Nascently, black metal commences resources for thinking a darkened posthumanism, a line of potential that has drawn much attention in black metal scholarship (see, e.g., Thacker 2013; Noys 2010).

transversal intersection point for the re-launch of negative passions and cultivation of a nomadic barbarism against the image of life impelled by the ideals of the *embourgeoise*, the banality of postmodern passivity and bloated mesh-work of capital descended upon the body of the earth.

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