

**Dead is dead: Perspectives on the Meaning of Death in Depressive Suicidal Black Metal
Music through Musical Representations**

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Abstract

Death plays an important role in human life, and there have been many theories about how this inevitability affects human thought, and social life. According to anthropological studies, death and death-related phenomena, including rituals, music, the meaning of death, are based on the originating cultures. This makes depressive suicidal black metal music an interesting case study, because of its inherent involvement with death ideas. This paper focuses on this music genre and the examples existing in the repertory to investigate and provide a view on the meanings of death. Wilson argues that ‘the mourning and melancholy of black metal is essentially [...] [a] mourning of death –not the death of someone, or something or some lost past, but for death itself’, and the voice in black metal reveals that the only meaning is the meaning of death. Doom metal, when lyrically analysed, deals with ideas of melancholy, death, suicide, grief, and loss. ‘Ontological security’ developed by Anthony Giddens emerges as one of the crucial theories in order to show black and doom metal songs from a taboo breaking perspective. Mellor defines ‘ontological security’ as ‘persons having a sense of order and continuity in relation to events in which they participate’. It can be also argued that ‘the existential confrontation with death [...] has the potential to open individuals up to [Kierkegaardian] dread, shattering ontological security.’

Table of Contents

Table of Figures	4
Abbreviations	5
Acknowledgements	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Methodology and Theories	10
2.1. Methodology	10
2.2. Theories	14
3. The Genres	19
3.1. Doom Metal	22
3.2. Black Metal	31
3.3. Depressive Suicidal Black Metal	38
4. Lyrical analyses	44
4.1. Ideas of death in lyrics	44
4.2. Suicide in lyrics	51
5. Discussion and conclusions	58
6. Bibliography	61

Table of Figures

Table 3.1.1 Structural transcription of ‘Dead Emotion’.....26

Table 3.3.1. Structural transcription of ‘Någonting Är Jävligt Fel’.....42

Abbreviations

DSBM Depressive suicidal black metal

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Dead is dead¹: Perspectives on the Meaning of Death in Depressive Suicidal Black Metal Music through Musical Representations

1. Introduction

‘To take one’s life is to force others to read one’s death.

To embrace death is at the same time to read one’s own life.’ (Higgonet 1985)

Death plays a fundamental and defining role in human life, and there have been many theories about how this inevitability affects human thought, and social life. According to anthropological studies (Bloch & Parry 1982), death and death-related phenomena, including rituals, music, the meaning of death are shaped by the cultural context in question. From this perspective the cultures of black and doom metal music represent interesting case studies, due to their inherent involvement with death and grief concepts. So-called ‘depressive suicidal black metal’ (DSBM) takes this further, as a subculture primarily focused around death, with its own particular set of symbols, meanings, and music relating to death. The dissertation will focus on three music genres: doom metal, black metal, and especially depressive suicidal black metal. Examples from the repertory of this subgenre will be used to investigate and provide a view on the meanings of death among musicians of depressive suicidal black metal music.

Black and doom metal music, as well as depressive suicidal black metal music are usually categorized under the ‘extreme metal’ umbrella, which also includes genres like death metal, and grindcore among others (Kahn-Harris 2007). Thus, the genres within the extreme metal category need to be considered carefully in order to select the appropriate subset of extreme metal for querying the meaning of death in such music subcultures. While at first

¹ ‘Dead is dead’ references the suicide of the vocalist of Mayhem (Norway), and one of the most influential figures in the second wave of black metal music, Per ‘Dead’ Ohlin in 1992. It is a common way to refer to this event, it does not have any specific origins.

glance, death metal may seem to be the obvious choice for this research –due to the genre name-, lyrical themes in this genre, with their focus on blood, gore, anatomy, and bodily functions and fluids, make death metal an unfit choice for intended research purposes. These focal points, according to Butler (2010), causes death metal to have a ‘worldly orientation’ and for it to exist ‘in a continuum with impermanent matter, monstrous growth, and decay’. However, this dissertation aims to focus on death as an idea, thus death metal’s ‘worldly orientation’ does not yield as much for this goal. For the case of black metal music, Wilson argues that ‘the mourning and melancholy of black metal is essentially [...] [a] mourning of death –not the death of someone, or something or some lost past, but for death itself’ (2014), in other words black metal concentrates on death through the concept itself rather than the grieving side of death. This means death in black metal is on an ideological level, hence it rarely implies a feeling of grief; as consequences of death, even a physical one, does not exist in these representations. Because death is usually a relief, an escape, but most importantly it is mostly individual in DSBM. Furthermore, the voice in black metal strongly suggests that the only meaning that is to be found in life is the meaning of death (Wilson 2010). These different types of death are clearly observed in DSBM songs. There is relatively little scholarly writing on black metal, doom metal, and depressive suicidal black metal, so this dissertation provides new research in these styles of music and in part aims to initiate discussion of genre boundaries between black metal, doom metal, and depressive suicidal black metal as well as examining how DSBM relates to or re-signifies the concepts of death and suicide.

Because death is no longer a taboo subject in academia (Mellor 1993: 11), a variety of writing help frame the ideas present in the songs to be analysed. ‘Ontological security’, developed by Anthony Giddens, emerges as a crucial theory to explore DSBM songs from a taboo breaking perspective. Mellor (1993: 12) defines ‘ontological security’ as ‘persons having a sense of order and continuity in relation to events in which they participate’. Moreover, he

states that ‘the feelings of ontological security find their emotional and cognitive anchors in a practical consciousness of meaningfulness of our daily lives. This meaningfulness, however, is always shadowed by the threat of disorder and chaos. This chaos signals the irreality of every day conventions’ (1993: 12). The ‘irreality’ may be understood here as the artificiality of every day acts. In connection to this, Mellor argues that ‘the existential confrontation with death [...] has the potential to open individuals up to [Kierkegaardian] dread, shattering [their] ontological security (Mellor 1993: 13). This ontological security is discussed further in the light of DSBM repertoire, and lyrical analyses of these songs will show different ideas of death while the dissertation will employ ethnographic data related to the musicians involved in the scene, if such a scene can be argued to exist. Furthermore, the dissertation interprets meanings of death in DSBM resulting from these discussions.

2. Methodology and Theories

2.1. Methodology

Black metal, doom metal, and depressive suicidal black metal scholarship is relatively new, and basic issues, such as the musical characteristics of these musics, or the music scenes of the genres have scarcely been addressed in an academic setting. This research aims to examine these genre boundaries as well as the broader issue of the function of the music in relation to death, through situating depressive suicidal black metal music in relation to black metal and doom metal. This has involved archival research, encompassing the time period that DSBM music supposedly existed or exists, focusing in particular on the popular extreme metal music magazine, *Terrorizer*. This United Kingdom-based magazine is notable for its unparalleled longevity in the extreme metal music scene as a whole. As the editorial of the eleventh issue of *Terrorizer* states, extreme metal magazines rarely ‘make it’ and stay in print beyond the first few issues (1994a). *Terrorizer* magazine, as of writing, has published 258 issues.

In order to establish a better historiography of depressive suicidal black metal, interviews of bands and musicians from this scene are also invaluable sources. These interviews help to explore the roots of the subgenre, the scene, and name ‘depressive suicidal black metal’. Indeed, while printed media is important, bearing in mind the underground status of this music even within the already underground realm of extreme metal, there may have been key players that did not make it to printed media.

Beyond the history of the subgenre and its relations to the main related styles of extreme metal, namely black and doom metal, this dissertation has four main objectives. Firstly it is to explore the issue of lyrical content. It is mentioned above that the texts of depressive suicidal

black metal music mainly relate to death, suicide, and depression. However, this is a sweeping statement that requires verification through the lyrical analysis of the songs in this repertory, which in turn helps to identify further issues beyond the general concepts of death, suicide, and depression. While considering the subgenre is named 'depressive' 'suicidal' 'black' metal, it might, at first, sound redundant to identify these concepts' presence in the music. Nonetheless, since genre and subgenre names are in general marketing tools in extreme metal, usually used first by music distribution companies and record labels, it is important to identify the actual occurrences of such concepts in the music.

The second objective is to identify the philosophical schools that the lyrics of the songs in question reference or which have influenced them. This is an important step in reaching possible meanings of this music. Meanings of the music will be interpreted through the idea of death, hence philosophical and ideological background of the music gives important clues to where the intentions lie, and how the music serves a purpose in the life of the musicians. Philosophical ties will be explored through the ideas in nihilism. In relation to this, the third objective is to explore how practitioners understand the notions of death in relation to DSBM repertoire. Because death is one of the fixation points in depressive suicidal black metal, its meanings directly relates to understandings of this music. Whether death is a fixation, because that is the meaning of life, or whether it is something to which one should aspire, drastically changes people's perceptions and comprehension of the music. The idea that this style of music may be a tool or outlet to cope with the idea and the inevitability of death is not so far-fetched considering the Freudian pleasure principle and other schools of thought, including nihilism. At the same time, contrary dynamics are not out of the question either, where the music may serve as a motivator towards death, or 'sudden death' (Atkinson 1978). Furthermore, the philosophical schools, and their relation to other death related theories such as the sociology of death, and death psychology within a sociological context prove to be important tools in order

to determine the meaning of death as well. These ideas will be discussed in relation to the depressive suicidal black metal scene in the following chapters.

In the light of these objectives, the research employs several different methods. Firstly, lyrical analyses are essential because many musicians confirm their use of lyrics to convey the ideas and emotions they want the listener to relate to or think about. Another reason relates to musicians' working processes, where text often predominates over music and is approached more consciously. These themes will be discussed in chapter 3, where the genres are explored in detail.

Depressive suicidal black metal music's emergence lies around the same time as the internet's rise to prominence in the early 1990s, and according to Robinson and Schulz, 'by the late 1990s the internet user base became representative of larger offline populations, *and* [sic] normative cyberactivities expanded far beyond sites centred of identity play and gaming, [to sites] which online identities were extensions of the offline self' (2009: 689). Online ethnographies are effective tools to gather qualitative data concerning both online and 'offline' communities. In this research's case, the community began with trading networks, but quickly adjusted to the new dominant form: the internet. More importantly, because, as mentioned, the subgenre's emergence coincides with the internet, and the fact that this subgenre is an underground part of an already underground community, media-wise the internet becomes the only option for many members of this community. Thus an online ethnography of the scene in question becomes an efficient tool overall. More specifically, online ethnography entails, survey of participation on major music sharing and community websites, such as YouTube and Facebook, and survey of online media for existing interviews with musicians from the scene.

Archival research also helps identify key issues within a community and to analyse materials created by such a community. Because depressive suicidal black metal is a phenomenon that is not bound to a single geographic region or location, online ethnography

becomes the weapon of choice. Online ethnography opens up the qualitative data of a community that exists on the internet. 'Online togetherness' is experienced within communities of similar interest, whether it is ethnic connections or leisurely interests (Schrooten 2012: 1799). Because the community in question is inherently multi-voiced, an online ethnography makes the diversity of perspectives from the community more apparent, and thus making the research fruitful (Fortun et al. 2014: 634).

Outside the limits of the internet more traditional media also incorporates important data relating to the community of depressive suicidal black metal. These media, as already mentioned, can be printed media in terms of magazines, and because documentary making in extreme metal music is becoming an important trend, video archival footage is also a useful source of data.

However, there is one crucial issue that needs to be addressed in order for a scene to make sense. It is the music. According to Fabian Holt, a genre in popular music exists in relation to its agents within the community (2007). The music itself is also an important agent in the music scene. So it is important to define the music in its varied parameters. Trying to define musical characteristics of DSBM, as well as its ancestors and neighbours, black metal and doom metal, helps to see the scene within better imagined boundaries. Even though drawing lines between musical styles cannot be definite, the main purpose of such an activity is to make further research easier as the broader issues become more visible within possible boundaries of a genre, even when the boundaries may be more artificial than organic.

Using the methodology discussed here, this dissertation interprets subgenre boundaries of depressive suicidal black metal, and more importantly, it comments on different types of meaning of death, and argues that possible functions of this type of music may be helpful in coping with the idea and the inevitability of death.

2.2. Theories

One of the main objectives of this research is to interpret - through ethnographical, sociological, philosophical, and musical means - possible reasons for incorporating death in these types of music. This involves exploring black and doom metal's role as possible tools to cope with the idea of death as opposed to the denial of death idea, which focuses on afterlife. Other relevant thought schools, such as nihilism, will also be considered.

Popular music's complex structure, in terms of extra-musical context, justifies a multi-branched approach. In popular music analysis, one needs to explore varying aspects of the music in order to achieve any analytical integrity. Different popular music scholars have made this point time and again. Dunbar-Hall states that 'traditional analysis is unsuitable for popular music' (1991, p. 128). Additionally, Philip Tagg argues that;

'Popular music cannot be analysed only by using traditional tools of art music, because it is conceived for mass distribution to often socioculturally heterogeneous groups, not stored and distributed in written form, [and popular music is] only possible as a commodity.' (2000, p. 75)

Furthermore, 'the conspicuous characteristics of a piece of [popular] music emerge against a multiply-directed background of expectations derived from listening that is ideologically and socially informed' (Atton 2012, p. 354).

Because the dissertation aims to look at two different genres and compare their content and attitude towards the idea of death, and coping with this idea, this comparative method also makes the boundaries of the said genres clearer (Dunbar-Hall 1991, p. 129) and it further illuminates the sub-styles that exist within these genres. Through the sub-styles, according to Dunbar-Hall, one reaches the life style in these scenes, and only then the belief system incorporated in the music can be interpreted (1991, p. 130).

The dissertation focuses on death in depressive suicidal black metal music along with the influences of black and doom metal's influences on the subgenre, thus an existing consistency of this issue in these musics is implied. A consistency in content points one towards the exploration of affect and mood in the text used in music. This exploration is possible through the analyses of the lyrics of the songs. The dissertation chooses to analyse lyrics of the songs because within specific genres of extreme metal, lyrics are the most visible variant between various styles of individual musicians. This is not to say the music will be ignored, but it will be investigated through other means of research, which will be discussed a little further down.

Another branch of the theory employed is sociological. Sociology of death is an important field of study concerning death and its presence, meaning and significance in communities, and how this concept, inevitability of human life, affects these communities. Popular music, Tagg argues, can be:

'assumed to be that form of inter-human communication which individually experienceable affective states and processes are conceived and transmitted as humanly organised non-verbal sound structures to those capable of decoding their message in the form of adequate affective and associative response' (2000, p. 74)

From this statement, 'inter-human communication' emerges as one of the important aspects of popular music, in this case extreme metal in the form of depressive suicidal black metal. In this style of music, the idea of non-verbal, as Tagg uses this term, can be interpreted in further ways. Notable is the inherent non-audibility of vocals in DSBM music (and much other extreme metal), vocals form a function of 'non-verbal sound structure' as well as a verbal one, as many musicians in the genre talk about how the lyrics are the actual outlets for this music, but interviewers, as well as some audience members, state that even though the lyrics are, for example, in a foreign language or they are impossible to follow regardless of the language as a

result of vocal styles, and because the band refuses to publish the lyrics –such a case would be of the band ColdWorld (Germany)-, meaning that it is not understandable by the listener, they –interviewers and audience members- still express feelings of sadness, despair etc. This will be further discussed in chapter 3. In any case, this ‘decoding’ of appropriate response justifies a sociological approach.

According to psychological research, suicidal thoughts are higher in heavy² metal listeners than others, while suicide acceptance does not differ (Burge et al. 2002, p. 501). This is an intriguing point from the perspective of the ideas of death present in black and doom metal musics. The fact that death is more present on the minds of extreme metal music listeners points to a further investigation of this. The dissertation looks at the idea of death in black and doom metal through ontological security (Mellor 1993, p. 12), and how this is challenged within the music. Ontological security is an idea first developed by Anthony Giddens, and it is:

‘persons having a sense of order and continuity in relation to the events in which they participate, and the experiences they have, in their day-to-day lives’ (Mellor 1993, p. 12)

Moreover;

‘The feelings of ontological security find their emotional and cognitive anchors in a practical consciousness of meaningfulness of our daily lives. This meaningfulness, however, is always shadowed by the threat of disorder and chaos. This chaos signals the irreality of everyday

² I am using ‘heavy metal’ synonymous here with extreme metal as explained in Kahn-Harris (2007), because extreme metal in academic literature is a relatively new term, even from the perspectives of musicological, or ethnomusicological perspectives, and sociology of music scholarship. This confusion of naming the genres gets even more pronounced in the scholarship from non-music disciplines, as perfectly exemplified in Foltyn (2008, p. 154), where Foltyn identifies Marilyn Manson as a ‘death metal performer’, while Marilyn Manson’s music is mainly shock rock –as Marilyn Manson himself states- (Dunn & McFayden 2012) with no elements whatsoever from death metal aesthetic or any other genres of extreme metal (Kahn-Harris 2007). Other clarifications will be made throughout this dissertation when similar complications arise, however the ideas of genre boundaries and aesthetics within extreme metal are beyond the scope of this research, and they will not be discussed in further detail. These ideas may be found in recent metal music studies scholarship such as Kahn-Harris (2007), Spracklen (2010), Wallach (2011), and Reyes (2013).

conventions [...] Society strives to keep this dread [in a Kierkegaardian sense] at bay by bracketing out of everyday life those questions which might be raised about the social frameworks which contain human existence. [...] The existential confrontation with death, one's own or the death of others, has the potential to open individuals up to dread, shattering their ontological security' (Mellor 1993, pp. 12-13)

When this ontological security and the confrontation of it is explored within black and doom metal music, it has the potential to point to these ideas as coping mechanisms with the idea of death.

The stages of grief help determine ways of coping with death, as 'dying has the potential to become a form of mortuary ritual renewing the hopes of the living by imbuing the experience of care, death, and grief with broader meaning' (Seale 1998, p. 92). Additionally, the ideas that 'we begin to live the moment we begin to die' (Seale 1998, p. 105), and in a way the reverse of this that 'the only meaning is the meaning of death' (Wilson 2010) point to a perpetual idea of coping with death throughout human life. Wilson further argues that:

'The mourning and melancholy of black metal is essentially [...] [a] mourning for death –not the death of someone or something, or some lost past, but for death itself' (Wilson 2014)

This is also observed in DSBM in later chapters, where the melancholic nature of lyrics usually concerns the human existence, and it is not directed towards objects or ideas that Wilson states.

Grief of death, according to Seale, can be coped within three stages (1998, p. 105):

- i. The initial stage of shock, numbness, and denial
- ii. Pining, where reality is faced, includes anger and despair
- iii. Acceptance and adjustment

In the light of these stages, and ontological security, the methodology explores 'death within the ordinariness of life' (Coombs 2014, p. 285) with examples from black and doom metal music.

In ontological security, Kierkegaardian ideas emerge as important anchors, as Mellor discusses ‘dread’ as an inevitable output of the confrontation of this security, leading to an inherent meaninglessness of life (Mellor 1993, p. 12). This brings out the third branch of the theories that are to be used: the philosophical branch. A dichotomy of schools of thought can be seen from the methods discussed so far; an existentialist approach from a Kierkegaardian point of view, and a ‘denial of death’ approach from Ernest Becker. Because the dissertation includes black metal in the discussion of death and its meaning, nihilistic views must also be incorporated to these, possibly enhancing the existentialist approach. According to Wilson, black metal may be characterized by a nihilistic view (Wilson 2010):

‘Music is no different from the indifferent howling of the wind that black metal seeks to evoke, but always for somebody, if only just for oneself, to place oneself at the very limit of oneself where one is dissolved to NOTHING [sic]’

Finally, in order to make sense of these theories, an ethnographic research accompanies these varying approaches. Ethnographic study of both musicians who are both active and inactive in depressive suicidal black metal, as well as black and doom metal scenes, and audience members who are actively vocal online in various platforms including major community websites such as Facebook or YouTube. This ethnographic study glues the above approaches together, because ethnography makes the claims made through other branches credible beyond the academic realm.

3. The Genres

What makes extreme metal music ‘extreme’ is the way the material is handled and used in the music, in the lyrics, in live settings, in the media that the music is released, in the lives of the musicians, and their personas. This final point highlights an authenticity issue, because earlier extreme metal musicians in particular stress the way their musician personas were just that –an act that they have put on to better entertain. These same musicians also accuse later extreme metal artists, especially from early 1990s, of taking the music and its ideas too seriously. This, however, is a debate that has largely dissipated since the end of the 1990s, as the events surrounding extreme metal musicians have become increasingly geared towards the genuine nature of musicians, their music and lyrics, and their actions. Authenticity in popular music is a big issue, but in extreme metal has yet to be examined extensively.³ However, it will not be developed in any depth here as it lies beyond the scope of the current research. This research assumes authenticity, or the genuineness of the music and musicians. In other words, the musicians are considered to be actually involved and engaged with the ideas and themes presented in the music rather than the music being a fad or a trend that people follow in order to gain financial or any other type of capital. Of course, there is strong evidence to support this assumption from the perspectives of the musicians, the audience, and the media. These will be mentioned in appropriate places in relation to the scene being discussed. These three excerpts from audience members’ communication from 1994 below perfectly exemplify this issue. While Carcass is a death metal band and should be considered to be unrelated to DSBM, that excerpt demonstrates how the issue of authenticity is ingrained in extreme metal in general. These excerpts also show the frictions between scenes within extreme metal as well:

³ As an example, see Spracklen 2012.

‘The answer to the question of who ended up getting egg on their faces must be the Norwegian Dark Throne [black metal band] who made the death metal masterpiece “Soulside Journey” and have now joined the Norwegian black metal trend (which suuuuuccckkkkssss) [sic]. –Mikkel Westenholtz, Denmark’ (Terrorizer 1994: 31)

‘Forget that some bands may have been hyped by mainstream mags, and that death metal wagon jumpers (who only like it because of the image) like them, and enjoy the music for what it is – excellent! Keep the underground going – but still support the bigger bands. –Darren Parkinson, Halifax’ (Terrorizer 1994: 31)

‘Have Carcass [death metal band] wimped out? I wouldn’t say that they have sold out big time. They are still death metal and still that Carcass feel to them, but they will never be the same as they were in ’89... “Symphonies [of Sickness, Earache Records, United Kingdom, 1989]” IS [sic] a masterpiece Bassem [sic], but try and like Carcass for what they are now, you still have fond memories of what they used to be like and you can still listen to their old “Platters of Splatter”. –Corporate Hatred Death, East Sussex’ (Terrorizer 1994: 31)

Especially, the last excerpt shows the expectation of the audience from the musicians of being genuine, and not ‘wimping out’ down the line. Before going into the imagery of the genres within extreme metal, thus the decision made in this research to include certain genres, and exclude others when looking at them through the lens of the idea of death (as all metal music, including earlier heavy metal, thrash metal, and different genres of extreme metal use death in one way or another in the music), one needs to define the terms mainstream and underground clearly in the context of this dissertation, as it will come up in later sections as well. Mainstream bands or music will refer to bands within only extreme metal that have bigger exposures in printed magazines, and underground will refer to bands again within only extreme metal, that either does not or has little exposure in the printed media. It is important to note that, however,

compared to the bands and musicians who are considered mainstream in popular musics⁴, the entirety of extreme metal would be considered underground. It is also important to note that, this is a preferred identity for most extreme metal bands, musicians, and audience members. The editorial of Terrorizer from 1994 exemplifies this attitude with this sentence: ‘...like it or not, more people are getting into extreme music...’ (Terrorizer 1994: 3)

Death is a prominent and fruitful subject in extreme metal, so it is necessary to narrow the scope down in order to achieve keep this study manageable, especially as approaches to death differ significantly between individual genres and subgenres. One such example will help to illustrate this point better. The beginning of this research pointed towards death metal music as the obvious choice of subject, as the genre name itself has the word ‘death’ in it. However, as discussed above, death metal takes the theme of death in a more literal sense, and focuses on the anatomy of death and dying rather than the philosophy of it, and the ideas connected with the concept of death. An excerpt from example from brutal death metal subgenre clarifies this point:

‘Prepare to witness a place of gore
Of legal dissection and blood on the floor.
Carved up corpses, in the corner,
Sliced up by a psychotic coroner.
Slice, dice, chop them haphazardly,

⁴ Situating extreme metal in popular music context is problematic to begin with in author’s opinion and it needs to be discussed further and much more in detail than this dissertation allows spatially, and this issue is well beyond the scope of this research. This situation is problematic because while there are certainly trends existing in extreme metal scenes, or there are trendy genres, such as death metal (late 1980s, early 1990s), black metal (mid-1990s), or occult inspired doom metal (early to mid-2010s), these trends rarely stem from the prospect of financial capital gains. This results from the fact that apart from the bands who make it to the actual ‘mainstream’, the bands who appear in larger charts, who appeared in music channels etc., as this ethnography as well as previous ethnographies of the author show, the bands and musicians do not earn enough to just focus on music as a full time job (The Charm The Fury interview 20.11.2014; SSS interview 23.11.2014, Pet the Preacher interview 02.12.2014, My Dying Bride interview 18.04.2015). Thus beyond the ancestral relationship of extreme metal and heavy metal music and rock music, the issues start to differ significantly. The contextual similarities between extreme metal and heavy metal are mentioned when it is appropriate, however assuming any relationship between extreme metal and rock music, especially after mid-1990s, -without concrete examples- would be misleading at best.

Like laboratory mice, splatter brain matter.

Pound on the skull until it shatters.’ (Cannibal Corpse 1990)

As one can easily observe, death metal is much more anatomical, and it takes the standpoint of gore when it is compared to previous examples of doom metal, black metal, and depressive suicidal black metal.

Before looking more closely into depressive suicidal black metal, its characteristics, and the DSBM scene, its relationship with the related genres of black metal and doom metal will first be discussed. It is important to show these relationships, because DSBM has close ties to these genres, and the approaches within this subgenre may be said to be a combination of these genres in different aspects.

3.1. Doom Metal

Firstly doom metal is discussed, because while it is sonically –concerning musical parameters- further away from depressive suicidal black metal –as the name DSB(lack)M(etal) suggests-, the themes explored are more closely related to D(epressive)S(uicidal)BM. Doom metal genre is a wide genre that derives its roots from early heavy metal of the late 1960s and 1970s, especially Black Sabbath and their first album Black Sabbath (1970). Starting from this album doom metal expanded into different themes, and while it has usually remained an underground genre⁵ (Terrorizer 1994d: 12), the doom metal music scene continued and continues to thrive in terms of musical activity.

⁵ This is not to say doom metal was never in the mainstream, in fact, the band Black Sabbath is a good example of doom metal’s mainstream status, even though the genre name ‘doom metal’ is not as well-known as the music itself. It is also important to note that recent trends, as of this writing, also point to a resurgence in the doom metal interest.

In order to get a good picture of doom metal, various themes from its history are discussed due to their influence on other genres such as depressive suicidal black metal. However, focusing only on those themes would give a restricted view of the genre. Doom metal references themes as diverse as horror, epics, politics, philosophy –especially existentialism and nihilism schools-, occultism, drug use, meditation and religious experience (Coggins 2012), melancholy, death and grief, loss, lost love, depression, and suicide. Particular themes have dominated the scene in specific eras of the genre, however these themes do not tend to disappear completely.

English band Black Sabbath is conventionally identified with the origins of doom metal, sonically and lyrically (Stainthorpe 2015). This band is important because, even though one may argue that they were the sole representative of doom metal throughout the 1970s and they were not labelled ‘doom metal’⁶, the band’s influence can be easily observed until today. The first doom metal song that may be discussed is from *Black Sabbath* (1970), and it is titled ‘Black Sabbath’. This song sonically marks a turning point, because it is one of the first to employ the tritone intervallic relationship prominently. When this song is analysed, throughout the song, the tritone is featured throughout the song, thereby creating a dissonant soundscape which conveys the ominous atmosphere desired. This nature is also well known and discussed among the fans, as well as heavy metal musicians (Dunn & McFayden 2008). More importantly, the lyrics of this song points to one of the doom metal themes’ emergence: the horror theme.

‘Big black shape with eyes of fire,
Telling people their desire,
Satan sitting there he's smiling,
Watches those flames get higher and higher,

⁶ The origins of the label ‘doom metal’ are currently unclear as confirmed by Martin Popoff (2015). This is part of a forthcoming research by the author, and beyond the scope of the current research.

Oh, no, no, please God help me.’ (Black Sabbath 1970)

This verse from ‘Black Sabbath’ demonstrates the horror theme present with the imagery such as ‘eyes of fire’, and the desperate plea to ‘God’ shows the helplessness of the narrator; another popular tool in horror literature. ‘Satan’ is embodied here as a torturer, with ‘his’ enjoyment of the flames rising. The album as a whole uses magic and witchcraft themes as well, although this is used here as part of the horror paradigm. Occultism was part of the doom metal text from the very beginning.

‘Vision cupped within a flower,

Deadly petals with strange power,

Faces shine a deadly smile,

Look upon you at your trial.’ (Black Sabbath 1970)

The song ‘Behind the Wall of Sleep’ depicts a dark environment with ‘deadly petals with strange power’ –suggesting metaphysical involvement. The ‘deadly smile’s of the accusers imply that the encounter is with ‘devilish’ people, which can be interpreted in the context as witches. This song also continues in a vein similar to that of ‘Black Sabbath’ in terms of using horror as a theme.

After Black Sabbath’s first five albums until and including *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (1973), doom metal imagery and sonic tools were not employed in a Sabbath-ian way until the 1980s, when an aesthetic for the genre was established (Terrorizer 1996a; 1996b; 1996c). The Swedish band Candlemass’ first album, *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus* (1986) may be identified as an example of such an establishment (Terrorizer 1996b). To give an example, the song ‘Solitude’ opens with an acoustic section and a pseudo-operatic tenor voice, only after the first verse switching into distorted electric guitars and the full four-piece band. This interplay of acoustic and distorted sections continue throughout the song, exhibiting one of the essential aspects of doom metal. One can also hear the down-tuned guitars, and the prominence of the

bass guitar, thus an emphasis on the lower frequency spectrum along with a significant slowing of the tempo. As Niall Scott and Tim O'Boyle discuss doom metal brings a 'deceleration' in both frequency and tempo (2015) compared to earlier metal music, including the music of Black Sabbath, thus Black Sabbath should be considered an earlier and different style of doom metal.

Candlemass' music also furthers the themes present in Black Sabbath's lyrics, and it adds 'depressive solitude' (Scott & O'Boyle 2015), death, and epic stories to the gamut of themes.

'I'm sitting here alone in darkness,
Waiting to be free,
Lonely and forlorn I'm crying.
I long for my time to come,
Death means just life,
Please let me die in solitude.' (Candlemass 1986)

One detects the melancholy in this verse from the line 'lonely and forlorn I'm crying'. It is also important note that this state of the narrator is perpetual or 'forlorn'. Death as a theme emerges here as well. Death is depicted as 'life' and in other verses as a 'sanctuary' and something that is sought 'with pleasure'. For an example of epic stories, the second album of Candlemass, *Nightfall* (1987) provides a good example:

'With sad emotions, I sing this epitaph,
My swansong, my headstone, the farewell of my heart,
The hills of Tyburn, up where the gallows stand,
Only the vultures will come to see me hang.' (Candlemass 1987)

The song 'At the Gallows End' depicts a scene in Tyburn, a village in London where executions took place from as early as 12th century to 1783 (White n.d.). It assumes a first person point of

view, and the hung person is depicted emotionally ('sad emotions'). This, the depiction of emotions from the 'feeler's perspective, also becomes an important aspect of doom metal in later years.

With such developments in the genre, the early 1990s show an important break from the traditional metal aesthetics with the influence of other extreme metal genres. From this point onwards, several strands of doom metal become more explicit in their lyrics, the sound becomes even lower in pitch, and grunt vocals begin to predominate (Mesla 2015). From the beginnings of the genre darkness looms as an important aspect of the music and lyrics, but with the extreme metal turn this aspect becomes more pronounced. Two advertisements from different companies (Pinnacle Distribution, Peaceville Records) published in the magazine *Terrorizer* portray the albums from Solitude Aeternus, Solitude, Anathema, My Dying Bride, and Paradise Lost as 'The Dark Side', 'Tales from the Dark Side' (1994c; 1994d). It is under this umbrella of extreme metal that the various aforementioned themes became absorbed by doom metal music.

Within extreme metal, doom is usually seen to have acquired its influences from death metal and black metal, as well as carrying its own musical or lyrical features to their extremes. An example is the music of English band Paradise Lost, in whose first album, *Gothic*, the lyrics openly portray a dystopian world where darkness prevails.

'The light is dim before us,
Shadows appear and fall,
A barrage of savage ways,
Only the darkness can filter through.' (Paradise Lost 1991)

The song 'Gothic' talks of a future without much hope ('the light is dim before us'), and this is further elaborated with the emphasis on the hopelessness of the world by describing it as a place that 'only the darkness can filter through'. Musically, this album is also one of the first

in extreme doom metal to use grunt vocals. The grunt vocals here are in the style of death metal of late 1980s onwards, meaning that the vocals are distorted to reduce the clarity of timbre, with an artificial reverb effect added. The tempi in this style of music is also more varied than earlier doom metal. There are usually fast ‘death metal sections’ (Stainthorphe 2015) within the songs in contrast to the usual slower sections. Paradise Lost’s ‘Dead Emotion’ from the same album is an example of this structure:

Start time (m.ss)	Section
0:00	Fast instrumental section
0:30	Grunt vocals over the fast section
1:00	Female choir and slowing of tempo
1:45	New fast instrumental section
2:15	Grunt vocals over the fast section
2:23	Guitar solo
2:36	Slow section
2:51	Slow orchestral section
3:03	Grunt vocals and new slow section with guitar solo
3:26	Guitar solo over fast section
3:50	Guitar solo over slow section
4:30	End

Table 3.1.1 Structural transcription of ‘Dead Emotion’ (Paradise Lost 1991)

Starting again in this era, song durations increase and this becomes the norm in doom metal. Examples include Anathema’s ‘Crestfallen’ (10m:08s) (1992), My Dying Bride’s ‘Turn Loose the Swans’ (10:17) (1993), Skepticism’s ‘The Everdarkgreen’ (12:15) (1995), Sunn O)))’s ‘Black Wedding’ (19:17) (1999).

The themes in the lyrics of doom metal began to become more varied from the early 1990s and became increasingly varied over the decade. As an example of the drug use theme is the English band Orange Goblin's first album *Frequencies from Planet Ten* (1997):

'Kaleidoscope of colour from the fountain jubilee,
Atomic rays of sadness shine beyond the silver tree,
The distant sound of chaos and brings the warriors to be,
A ride upon the carpet and it takes me to my fantasy.'

The song 'Magic Carpet' depicts a hallucinogenic mushroom experience with the 'kaleidoscope of colour' and saying that this ride on the carpet is the way to reach to a fantasy. It is important to also notice the 'rays of sadness' showing the overall darkness theme's persistence even through a supposedly colourful experience.

Doom metal also uses political themes to depict the 'darkness' in human existence. Such an example is from Anathema's first album *Serenades* (1993):

'Surely without war there would be no loss,
Hence no mourning, no grief, no pain, no misery,
No sleepless nights missing the dead... Oh, no more,
No more war.'

In the verse from the song 'Sleepless', the narrator strongly opposes the concept of war, without any allusions to a specific one, and connects war, first hand, to the idea of loss, and the cause of mourning, grief, pain, and misery.

With the extreme metal turn of doom metal, an unprecedented (in doom metal) emphasis on the human existence is found as seen so far. This stance on existence usually takes its cues from the philosophical school of nihilism and existentialism. Finnish band Shape of Despair shows a viewpoint of nihilism in their second album *Angels of Distress* (2001):

'I did not want to live my life,

Nor did I even want to live for my death.

Strange it is indeed,

Life, strange to be born for death.'

The idea to 'live for [one's] death' or 'to be born for death' are strong and influential concepts that can be found in black metal, and more specifically depressive suicidal black metal occurring frequently.

Another theme that demonstrates other extra-musical influences, such as gothic literature, is the lost love theme. One needs to consider this as a separate theme rather than including it in the death and grief one, because specifically the loss of a lover is a persistent theme in doom metal after 1990s, which also brings different musical qualities along with the lyrics (Terrorizer 1996c). Lost love-themed doom metal songs rely on clean vocals and spoken text more, moreover, the traditional five-piece band (two guitars, bass guitar, drums, and vocals)) sound is usually altered with the addition of a female voice, and/or an instrument that's not traditionally used in metal music in general such as violin, choir, or orchestral arrangements. An example of this is materialised in My Dying Bride's 'For My Fallen Angel' from their fourth album *Like Gods of the Sun* (1996):

'As I draw up my breath, and silver fills my eyes.

I kiss her still, for she will never rise.

On my weak body, lays her dying hand.'

It can be further commented that the narrator shows extreme emotion that was not as explicit in the previous themes discussed. With 'And I draw up my breath, and silver fills my eyes' line, the narrator shows the devastation it is experiencing through tears and breathlessness.

The last two themes discussed in this context are death and grief, and suicide, as they directly relate to depressive suicidal black metal. Specifically the death theme, while existing from the earlier stage of doom metal such as Candlemass discussed before, starts getting more

attention with the 1990s turn, and discussing suicide is completely new to doom metal after the early 1990s. Grief examples include those of Canadian band Woods of Ypres from their posthumous album, released shortly after the death of their vocalist David Gold, *Woods 5: Grey Skies & Electric Light* (2012):

‘When words become irrelevant,
And you start to feel as though you've been misled
Keep me out of sight, leave me out of mind.
When the thought no longer serves you, when I no longer serve you,
Just let the memories die (...and move on).’

The song ‘Kiss My Ashes (Goodbye)’ can be considered almost an instruction on how the narrator wants the griever to behave after his death. The line ‘and you start to feel as though you’ve been misled’ can be interpreted as a suggestion to the ‘sudden death’ (Atkinson 1978) of the narrator meaning suicide. However, suicide is not always this veiled in doom metal, as evident from Swedish band Katatonia’s song ‘Gateways of Bereavement’ from the band’s first album *Dance of December Souls* (1993):

‘Farewell life and all I died for.
Now my time is over on earth,
Another journey has begun.
Alone I died, not praying for mercy,
Nor praying for salvation.’

This theme and surrounding musical world, especially used in this album can be seen as one of the major influences on depressive suicidal black metal’s emergence, as the vocal style in this album is different than all of the doom metal music discussed so far, and it is a clear precursor to the dominant vocal style of DSBM, which is the high-pitched screaming vocal style however

with hints of desperation and plea embedded into it making it apart from the black metal screaming vocal style.

3.2. Black Metal

Black metal can be considered the direct precursor of depressive suicidal black metal, because sonically, especially early DSBM bands, were rooted in the black metal sound. While DSBM term came to mean a more specific type of music as it developed, DSBM musicians as well as advertisements and writing observed in the ethnography of this research were in agreement that the roots of this subgenre were in black metal music. The term 'black metal' is usually attributed by listeners and music journals (Dunn & McFayden 2008) to English band Venom's first album *Black Metal* (1982). Early black metal bands such as Bathory of Sweden, and Celtic Frost of Switzerland started to use this type of sound, and they are quoted countless times as the major influences by the so-called second wave of black metal bands (Dunn & McFayden 2008; Lundberg 2008).

I try to identify four different eras in black metal history building on Dunn's classification of black metal (Dunn & McFayden 2008; Dunn & McFayden 2012). The earliest era, the proto-black metal era, is comprised of bands such as Venom, Mercyful Fate of Denmark, and Hellhammer of Switzerland all formed around early 1980s. Sonically, proto-black metal is rarely distinguishable from 1980s thrash metal. The tempi are extremely fast, and a male bellowing vocal line is employed without the use of grunts or screams. The attitude and image of musicians are also reminiscent of thrash metal with leather attire, long hair etc. The concert culture is similar, and more importantly the individualism of second wave black metal is nowhere to be seen. This era introduced the essential imagery that was embedded deeply into later eras of black metal, namely Satanism. However, the discourse in proto-black

metal, in terms of the lyrical content and overall imagery, is fundamentally different from the ones after 1990s. Venom, for example, repeatedly states that their early satanic imagery as well as lyrics were mostly intended to go against the grain of 1980s heavy metal, and they were considered as having shock value, rather than ideological or even religious value (Terrorizer 1997d). Indeed, Damien from Venom also stated that second wave of black metal became to obsessed about such ideology that they would become angry with Venom for not genuinely identifying with the ideas presented in the music (Terrorizer 1997d: 15). To give an example of this era, one may look at the song 'Black Metal' from Venom's *Black Metal* (1982):

'Black is the night, metal we fight,
Power amps set to explode,
Energy screams, magic and dreams,
Satan records the first note.'

This also shows the relatively superficial involvement of the idea of Satan, among other elements, compared to subsequent years. The idea of the narrator being a warrior ('metal we fight') is one of the most influential ideas from Venom's music. This also shows connections and common origins with 1980s heavy metal. The line 'Satan records the first note' illustrated the involvement of Satan, however superficial and as mainly a (anti-)Christian phenomenon at this point in music.

Starting with first wave of black metal in mid- and late 1980s, the lyrical themes get more varied, along with the music becoming more 'black metal'. While the speed in the music continues to remain unchanged, minor-chord based progressions gain tract in this era. Themes involving elements such as folk-influenced warrior tales, more intimate relationship with Satan, hatred, and misanthropy are observed in this music. Bathory's second album *The Return...* (1985) provides a case for this point:

'I lacerate your body I slit and tear your flesh,

I got you in my vicious circle and poison your last breath,
I make the damned earth quiver I make the heaven burn,
I live in sin and lust and await Lord Satan's return.'

As one may observe, the 'I' is strongly emphasised, rather than 'we' observed in Venom's music, and the 'I' is active in its hatred and violence towards a hypothetical 'you' while swearing allegiance to 'Lord Satan', as opposed to 'Satan' of Venom. One can also comment on the graphic nature of the line 'I lacerate your body I slit and tear your flesh', seeing the explicit nature of the violence present.

The second wave of black metal after these influential bands discussed brings the majority of musical, lyrical, and ideological origins of depressive suicidal black metal into the discourse. With this era, individualism becomes crucial, and along with individualism, misanthropy, death as an idea, and nihilism also come into play. Because this wave is mainly Norway-based, Scandinavian cultural heritage is also frequently alluded to in the lyrics. Anti-Christian voice, as well as theistic and atheistic Satanist ideas become the norm. The band Necromayhem of Rotting Christ (Greece) states that black metal is 'satanic and mythological' (Terrorizer 1995f: 17). One may argue that starting with early 1990s, black metal music becomes a pro-Satanic religious music, and while the scene reaches mainstream with infamous acts, such as murders and church burnings, the majority of black metal musicians remain non-criminalised apart from the most well-known musicians, like Varg Vikernes of Burzum (Norway), Gaahl of Gorgoroth (Norway), and Euronymous of Mayhem (Norway). However, an aura of sinister behaviour becomes widespread as well (Quorthon [Bathory], Terrorizer 1995c: 22). This era may also be considered the most fruitful era of the black metal genre, with amateur bands appearing in different parts of the world⁷.

⁷ One may observe this trend in Terrorizer magazine issues, in especially demo reviews from the magazine's inception (1993) through to the end of the decade.

Musically, second wave black metal brought about radical changes as well, alongside the lyrical extremity, individuality, and religious ideas. The vocals become exclusively high pitched and distorted screams, regardless of the gender of the vocalist. The minor-chord progressions also become the norm. The tempi rarely slows down, and tremolo guitar picking technique gets employed frequently, thus slowing the perceived melody without slowing the rate of the individual notes.

The individualism that is prevalent in this era also points to a radical change in music production. Many bands begin opting to be studio bands, because ‘the stress [of live performance] made the live performance disadvantageous’ in comparison to staying in studio and only producing music without the live component (Peter [Abigor], *Terrorizer* 1997c: 18) or because concerts seemed ridiculous and depressive (Varg Vikernes [Burzum], *Terrorizer* 1996a: 14), or because the music started being the product of individuals rather than full bands. This is expressed by black metal musicians as the result of the music being intensely personal to them (*Terrorizer* 1995g: 58; *Terrorizer* 1996a: 14; *Terrorizer* 2004b: 50; Noisey 2012), or the detrimental effect of having ‘too many wills involved’ (Patterson 2015: 260) in the music making process. Vikernes states that ‘Burzum is too a personal a thing to be ruined by other people’ (*Terrorizer* 1996a: 14) in a similar vein. Another change in music production comes in the physical way music is produced, and the technology used in this process. Because second wave of black metal is propelled by underground bands who neither have access to proper – thus expensive- studio equipment at their homes nor have any connection with big record labels that can afford to have their bands record in studios with such equipment, the sound shifted in a drastic way. This ‘black turn’ in aesthetics of recorded sound is popularly termed as the ‘necro sound’ (Reyes 2013). It involves using low quality recording and production equipment to achieve a low-fidelity sounds. Even though the ‘necro sound’ started out of necessity, it quickly became a prerequisite for ‘genuine’ black metal music, as proper black metal albums are

required have low production qualities, and having better sounds were seen as selling out (Terrorizer 1997a: 33). This anecdote by Vikernes illustrates attitudes during the music production of second wave black metal in the mid-1990s:

‘I asked Pytten (the producer) to give me the worst microphone he had, and he gave me a pair of bad headphones. This is the secret! (Regarding the sound of the album *Filosofem*)’ (Terrorizer 1996a: 14)

Along with the change in music production, the lyrics also further distort the themes present from the first wave, and become more explicit in the expression of ideas, ideas that are relatively more extreme to begin with. As discussed, the religious-turn can be observed in the music of this era, such as Swedish Dark Funeral’s second album *Vobiscum Satanas* (1996):

‘In the name of He who reigns in the kingdom of fire and ice,
Arise ye creature of Satan Lord.
Ascend your storms across this world,
And answer to our summoning o Satan Lord.
[...]
Evil Lord of the darkest flame,
Arise from your grave.
O Immortal God.
Slava Satan.’

The song ‘Slava Satan’ may easily be considered a prayer showing the degree of religious activity within the lyrics of the second wave of black metal. The approach to Satan also poses an interesting paradox; as it is observed from these lyrics, there is a clear allegiance present with Satan, however, in the second wave individual also becomes important and expressed with song titles such as ‘Non Serviam’ (I will not serve) of Rotting Christ (1994), or the line from Emperor (Norway)’s ‘I am the black wizards’ (1994): ‘I am the ruler and have been for

eternities long.’ Along the same lines, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1668) is usually quoted in interviews, especially the following verse:

‘Here at least we shall be free; the Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
to reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.’

This verse, specifically the line ‘better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven’, strongly alludes to the relationship between self and Satan, equating musicians to Satan while insisting on the idea of discrete existence as opposed to right hand path religions, such as Christianity.

The death theme acquires greater importance during second wave of black metal. In this era, lyrics approach to the idea of death in different ways. Firstly, death resulting from a battle, depicted in Naglfar (Sweden)’s *Diabolical* (1998):

‘We will come to you like thieves in the night,
To extinct, to erase you,
Filled with pure darkened wrath,
Filled with passion to murder,
Sons and daughters of Christ,
On the night of all nights die.
Feel the kiss of the scythe,
In your horror-filled eyes it gleams bright.’

This battle can be against Christianity, as it is in the song ‘Blades’ above, or it can be a mythological battle, especially taking place in Norse mythology. Another approach to death is through the metaphysical representation of death. This can be observed in Emperor’s ‘The Majesty of the Night Sky’ (1994):

'Too long I have suffered the desert sands of time.
But as I drown in darkness it will release the sign.
My soul will leave this mortal coil of flesh and earthly life,
To fly into the mist of night, into the nightside eclipse,
And experience existence on the other side.'

An existence beyond human existence is achieved here through death, as the narrator's 'soul' leaves the 'mortal coil of flesh and earthly life. A final approach that is discussed is suicide. This is the same theme that is discussed in the next section under depressive suicidal black metal and historically fits into the same period with DSBM, however it is different in terms of the sound, thus some of the black metal bands who employ suicide as a theme should be discussed under the second wave of black metal rather than DSBM. For example, Carpathian Forest (Norway)'s second album *Strange Old Brew* (2000) includes both indications and propositions to suicide in different songs:

'Razorblade baby,
Kill yourself girl,
You Christian women,
You can't live like this,
No.' ('The Suicide Song')

'He withered,
He's not the only one,
Come on get it over with,
You're not the only one,
He's turning blue,
And nobody cares.' ('He's Turning Blue')

As it will become clear in the next section, lyrically these songs have striking similarities to depressive suicidal black metal in terms of approach to death, and suicide. However the vocals

in these songs are second wave black metal screams, and these songs follow common second wave black metal structures, tempi, and musical features.

3.3. Depressive Suicidal Black Metal

In the light of previous sections, depressive suicidal black metal may be seen to draw on influences from both black metal and doom metal. Before going into the specifics of this subgenre, however, it would be beneficial to discuss the origins of the term itself, as it is a descriptive term in itself which helps to pinpoint the beginnings of DSBM. The subgenre can be pinpointed historically to mid-1990s, thus making it a more or less contemporaneous with the second wave of black metal. With the extreme turn in doom metal, bands became more vocal about their emotions as observed in the previous section; this new focus onto the personal side of musicians' feelings allowed for advertisers –such as record labels, and distributors- to be more descriptive in their advertisements. It is no coincidence that an interview with the doom metal band Solstice (United Kingdom), in which members stress their emotional input to the music appeared in a 1994 issue of *Terrorizer*: 'it is a kind of outlet of everything we see and feel, just like despair and fuckin' fear and hate, [...] conveying how we feel' (1994d: 19). Also, in a *Terrorizer* issue ten months later, the record label Avantgarde Music, advertising the black metal influenced doom metal band Ophthalamia (Sweden), present their music as 'intense suicidal doom' (1995h). This advertisement is noteworthy, as this is the first time an advertiser uses the adjective 'suicidal' to describe any type of music belonging to either to the doom metal or black metal genres. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the 'suicidal' music in the advertisement consists of doom metal with black metal influences. However, it is characterized as 'suicidal doom', rather than 'suicidal black', implying the involvement of black metal in the 'suicidal' tendency of the music, rather than the bigger structure. Even though the first

appearance the term ‘suicidal’ music in *Terrorizer* was with a doom metal band, depressive suicidal black metal music is deeply rooted in black metal. Genre terminology, and confusions surrounding it, can in part be seen to be grounded in policies of labels and distributors advertising in magazines such as *Terrorizer*. With the growing popularity of black metal during mid-1990s (*Terrorizer* 1995b: 6), the term black metal became an important tool to sell records. Thus the earlier retroactively called depressive suicidal black metal bands such as Strid (Norway) (Patterson 2015: 204) are labelled as ‘black metal’ without any additional description. However, with the emergence of Bethlehem (Germany), the band’s conscious effort to distance itself from the black metal scene in general, because the band was not ‘following a Satanic principle’ (Patterson 2015: 231), the newly developing subgenre – although admittedly it was not the intention of the originators of depressive suicidal black metal for their music to become a separate sound, scene, or subgenre (Patterson 2015)- needed a new term to proclaim this difference in the style. As a result, Bethlehem adopted the genre label ‘dark metal’ (*Terrorizer* 1996c: 49; Patterson 2015: 231), with the release of their first album *Dark Metal* (1994). Bethlehem’s record label, Adipocere Records, also went along with this, hence one starts to observe this music being advertised as ‘dark metal’ (*Terrorizer* 1996b; *Terrorizer* 1996d). The term ‘dark metal’ can also be found in *Terrorizer* as late as 2003 describing another pioneer of depressive suicidal black metal, Herr Morbid’s Forgotten Tomb (Italy), it characterises the album *Springtime Depression* (2003) as ‘finally [embodying] the band’s “Depressive & Manipulative Dark Metal” tag’ (*Terrorizer* 2003d: 67). In other issues of *Terrorizer* at this time the confusion - or rather ‘birth pains’ - of the subgenre label are evident in references to the music of Xasthur (United States of America), Leviathan (USA), and Woods of Ypres (Canada), that all fit neatly into the depressive suicidal black metal genre, but are simply presented as ‘black metal’ (*Terrorizer* 2003a: 35, 81; 2003b: 69; 2003c: 71). There are other attempts to describe the music starting from 1994 (the release of *Dark Metal*); such as

the USA band Tearstained's first album *Monumental in its Sorrow* (1999), which is described as 'gloomy black metal' (Terrorizer 1999). The first use of the term 'suicidal black metal' is by Shining (Sweden) in the back cover of the band's first album *Submit to Selfdestruction* (1998) (Terrorizer 2007c: 46), and the subgenre full label as depressive suicidal black metal does not appear until 2007 in an advertisement for Shining's *V: Halmstad* (2007) album, describing it as 'utterly suicidal and depressive black metal' (Terrorizer 2007a: 61). After 2007, the labels 'suicidal black metal', 'depressive black metal', 'depressive suicidal black metal', or 'DSBM' began to be used interchangeably to reference this subgenre in both music journalism and advertisements (Terrorizer 2009: 40; 2010: 21; Patterson 2015).

Depressive suicidal black metal music shares many aesthetic features with second wave of black metal, including low fidelity sound and highly distorted guitars. The way that musicians work is again similar, although with more emphasis on the single-musician 'band'. DSBM bands typically comprise a single multi-instrumentalist musician, sometimes with a drum machine. This is a clear indication of the individuality of the music, however it is also a sign of the financial non-viability of DSBM. Larger music labels⁸ rarely produce DSBM albums, and most of the music is released independently, through small and niche record labels (e.g. Depressive Illusions Records [Ukraine]), or through record labels that are founded by the bands themselves (e.g. *Selbstmord [Suicide] Services* [Sweden] by Niklas Kvarforth of Shining). As a result of single-person bands, the concert culture only revolves around a minority of bands, which have full bands. Accordingly, these multi-person performing bands tend to achieve greater recognition than home or studio 'bands' that are either unwilling or unable to give concerts. This duality also results in an intriguing hierarchy that is perceived within the scene. For example, Herr Morbid of *Forgotten Tombs* states that he does not want

⁸ It is important to note here that in this dissertation, when 'larger' labels are mentioned, it should never be understood as major labels, such as Sony, EMI etc., but as better-known, and better-resourced record labels who specialise in extreme metal music, such as Prophecy Records, Season of Mist etc...

to be associated with the term DSBM, because it is a ‘silly, childish thing, and it has nothing to do with what I wanted to do in the first place [arguing that DSBM is the music that came after Forgotten Tombs and other early DSBM bands]’. He adds that ‘luckily, most of these one-man bands usually disappear once they find a girlfriend’ (Patterson 2015: 271). Such a statement might be seen to reflect a musician trying to establish a hierarchy based on seniority, and the ability to give concerts⁹. Acceptance of this hierarchy may also be observed from audiences. For example, certain Youtube comments on the documentary *One Man Metal* (Noisey 2012) characterize a sole individual making ‘depressive’ music by himself as being a ‘loser’. Similar statements are not observed under full bands’ videos. One may argue, however, that for the majority of participants, DSBM (from when it began to become a discrete scene in around 2007)¹⁰, exists on the Internet and out of sight and involves groups on social networks for music trading and sharing, and uses streaming services such as Bandcamp, and YouTube as the music distribution networks.

Use of acoustic instruments such as steel-stringed acoustic guitar as well as non-distorted timbres of electric guitar - which can be considered an influence of doom metal - emerge as among the main differences from second wave black metal. Unlike doom/death metal music though, DSBM song structures do not always show clear-cut contrasts and distorted and non-distorted instruments may be used simultaneously. Furthermore, DSBM structures often use extra-musical elements as contrasting sections. These extra-musical features may be spoken sections, or recorded bodily sounds –like choking, vomiting, crying, someone being tortured etc.-. The vocals contrast significantly from the various eras of black

⁹ Forgotten Tomb started its career as a one-man band and then became a full band after the release of *Springtime Depression* (2003).

¹⁰ Beginning meaning after 2007-8 here, when the term depressive suicidal black metal started to mean a discrete music scene from black metal. The originator bands like Strid, Bethlehem, Shining, Forgotten Tomb etc. began their careers in the pre-Internet era.

metal and doom metal. Regardless of the gender of the vocalist¹¹, screaming vocals are used, while switching between very high-pitched wails and lower screams, as well as grunt vocals lacking of energy, depicting the hopelessness of the narrator. The following table shows the structure of ‘Någonting Är Jävligt Fel’ (Something’s Fucking Wrong¹²) from *IV: The Eerie Cold* (2005) by Shining:

Start time (m.ss)	Section
0:00	Clean electric guitar arpeggiated riff with full band
0:42	Distorted guitars with slow riff, and vocal grunt
0:46	Slow riff
1:12	Scream vocals over tremolo picked chords
1:29	Vocal grunt
1:32	Slow riff
1:43	Scream vocals over slow riff
1:57	Arpeggiated solo distortion guitar
2:10	Coughing, choking and indeterminable bodily sounds
2:27	Fast tremolo picked melody over the sounds
2:41	Scream vocals over fast riff
3:25	Indeterminable emotive sounds
3:50	Scream vocals over fast riff
4:27	Slow riff
4:40	Wailing vocals over slow riff
5:11	Solo bass guitar

¹¹ However, it is crucial note that as of the current state of this research, the author was unable to find any female musicians, and/or vocalists present or active in depressive suicidal black metal scene.

¹² Translation by the author.

5:14	Spoken section
5:23	Grunts over the spoken section
5:24	Guitar solo over fast riff
6:00	Guitar feedback
6:20	End

Table 3.3.1. Structural transcription of 'Någonting Är Jävligt Fel'

As observed from this transcription, besides the arpeggiated sections, the guitar riffs consist of slower 'doom'-like sections, and faster tremolo picking of either melodies or chords, which can be considered as black metal. The extra-musical aspects are also very important in conveying the emotional intensity of the music.

The lyrical themes in depressive suicidal black metal, as one might expect, mainly revolve around depression, suicide, and death. The idea of grief does not exist in the lyrics. This tendency to think of action without consequence is described as psychopathic in one instance in relation to Herr Morbid of Forgotten Tombs (Patterson 2015: 272). The lyrics as well as these issues are further discussed and analysed in the final two chapters of the dissertation.

4. Lyrical analyses

4.1. Ideas of death in lyrics

Depressive suicidal black metal uses themes mainly of death, and suicide, however, DSBM songs, in their approach to these subject differ considerably, resulting interesting movements within the subgenre. In this chapter, the lyrics and representations of death and suicide in these lyrics is discussed chronologically, without the categorisation of ideas present in these lyrics, giving the opportunity to discuss and relate them further in detail in chapter 5.

First of all, according to the brief history of DSBM, one should look at the earlier discussion of death in the subgenre, which was yet to be defined in any way at this point in time. Bethlehem's *Dictius Te Necare* (1996) is one of significance in DSBM music, because it is the earliest example of the specific DSBM vocal style, and at the same time, this album is one of the first ones to use death as an inner personal phenomenon rather than the battle or mythology related death themes present in the second wave of black metal. While the black metal voice in the second wave of black metal is one of a corpse in its essence (Daniel 2014), this corpse has a powerful agency which is usually actively and more importantly externally violent. The main difference in DSBM, thus emerges as forcing this agency into a more passive one –justifying the 'depressive' adjective. This approach depicts the narrator as the helpless one, rather than the dominant one. 'Die Anarschie Beifung Der Augenzeugenreligion' [*The Anarchic Liberation of the Eyewitness Religion*] may be analysed as an example of this:

'Den Tod vermeiden heißt/das Spiel der Verbannung verlieren/mein Geruch ist die Verkommenheit/all' die leeren Milchflaschen spiegeln sich/in meiner Oberfläche./Ich wurde an den Fluß ausverkauft/an den roten, austauschbaren Sklaven/und die Erzählung wurde immer schneller/den Grundriß hat man hingerichtet/die schwarze Flagge schreit/und alle Bücher wurden zerkoht./Denke an eine Zahl/teile sie durch mich/irgendetwas ergibt nichts/und nichts

ist nights. [Avoiding death is/losing the game of exile./My scent is decay/all the empty milk bottles reflect/in my surface./I was sold at the river/to the red, replaceable slaves/and the story became faster and faster/The map was planned out,/the black flag cries/and all books are cooked up./Think of a number/and divide it by me/something results to nothing/and nothing is nothing.]’

The narrator has the smell of decay, which suggests a rotting corpse. It also shows it as a powerless one, so much so that it is sold to the slaves. Another figure of powerlessness comes with the final three lines. A self is portrayed in these lines as a nothingness, interestingly a nothingness in a mathematical sense, which can be interpreted as a sense of worthlessness if one takes numbers as an indication of quantitative worth, which can be supported by many languages, including English, and German as a ‘zero’ or ‘Null’ in these languages can mean an insignificant person. In this sense, through a decaying narrator, death is a state of nothingness, which in turn causes worthlessness.

Leviathan in his album *Tentacles of Whorror* (2004) uses death in a more violent context, and with more agency than what is observed in Bethlehem. Considering this is the second album of Leviathan, it shows a lyrical transition period of the band, thus the violent death talked in ‘A Bouquet of Blood for Skull’ shows the influence of both the second wave of black metal, and death metal.

‘Crush the dried petals of roses that bore light brandishing talons at the sun,
Yawning and empty the petals wither, only greyed stem remains.
Revive the silence that the stars will again shine,
Weep not for chalice and not for lurking inspiration,
But for relief from grace, finally with grasp.’

Death here is passive, even though it is conveyed through violence and agency. The active voice orders to ‘crush’ the petals of roses, however interestingly the petals are already ‘dried’,

thus dead. Furthermore, the withering petals point again to a decay similar to Bethlehem's approach.

The idea of death can sometimes become the object of desire in depressive suicidal black metal. Make a Change... Kill Yourself (Denmark), for example, delves into this desire in their self-named album (2005) as follows:

'Only death is real.

Strangle me. Stab me to death. Poison my scars.

Death is so profane.

Death is what I hunger to experience.

A lifeless body with a soul rotten of wasted years, in this they call life.' ('Chapter 4')

Three interesting points emerge from these lyrics. Firstly, in the line 'death is what I hunger to experience' presents death as beyond a desire; as something for which the narrator 'hunger's. One may deduce from 'hunger' that the experience of death is something essential, a physiological need without which one cannot live, so to say. This fervour for death is motivated here by the sole reality of death in the first line, as opposed to 'wasted' and 'rotten' experience expressed in the last line. Death, here, is also intriguingly referred to as 'profane'. This may stem from societal conventions, as it is later indicated in the song: 'I drag myself outside to die in public,/Hopefully giving these humans trauma.' Because of the taboo state of death in the perceived society of the narrator, it aims to use death as a tool to traumatise 'these humans'. Furthermore, the way to achieve and experience death is again a passive act here, with the pleas towards an unknown entity to 'strangle', 'stab' or 'poison'.

Similarly, the lyrics portray death as an escape or a release from life that is unbearable. Shining uses a sound clip from Sean Penn's character as he was crying in the movie *She's So Lovely* (1997), describing this idea:

‘I think we ought to start our life old. And we have all the pain, and we're feeble. And we look at our friends, and they're feeble, they're 100. But every day we get younger, and we have something to look forward to. No need to kill yourself, there's hope. And then when you reach 20, 19, 12, 10. Every day is really a new day. And it's really a miracle. And then you're a baby, and you don't know your life is ending, you just suck on your mother's tit and then you die.’
(2005: ‘The Eerie Cold’)

‘No need to kill yourself, there’s hope’ is an important part of the monologue that gives one possible explanation to the suicide advocacy in Shining’s music. Also, death is a necessity here again, because according to the monologue, only if the described human condition were the reality, then there would be ‘no need to kill yourself’. However, in the recognised reality of the album, it implies the fundamentality of suicide to achieve the release of death. This is a more active death idea than it is discussed so far, yet the character is intensely helpless at the same time, and desires death to consume without effort or even consciousness.

Happy Days (USA) characterises death as a wish, thus a desire, although in its approach to the subject, the lyrics are more introverted than the examples so far.

‘Withered weed in a base, old wooden table remembers the days of fame.
Cold is the way, paying with pain,
Like thousands of useless coins that ring in my pocket.
Morning rises, and I dream to have the ability to keep my eyes closed,
Just when sun stops, hating all my dark dreams.’ (2008: ‘Hurt, Destroyed And Torn... There’s Nothing Left’)

‘Withered weed’ sets the scenery that inherently has death. The idea of decaying, and withering is used as a strong stimulant in depressive suicidal black metal. One can see further allusions to death such as ‘cold is the way’, which can be inferred as the idea of death being a necessity. The death wish comes with the yearning for the narrator’s eyes to stay closed. In a comparable way to the Shining example, death here is a semi-active idea. Rather than longing for death to

come externally, the narrator is willing to chase it –through acquiring an ‘ability’ to remain its eyes closed’-, however it is helpless towards this goal, as it is only expressed as a wish. ‘All my dark dreams’ may be interpreted as the undesirable state of life as well, because it is suggested that the ‘keeping my eyes closed’ action will result in the release from the hated ‘dark dreams’.

It is also possible to see examples of death being engaged in a distant way. This type of death representation is more common in doom metal, nevertheless some bands choose to express similar ideas through a DSBM sound, which further suggests the influence of doom metal on this subgenre. The distant death in question, is the death of external existence, in many cases a lover, similar to examples that can be found in Gothic literature. The idea of grief also comes into play in this type of representation. ColdWorld tells the death of a loved one in ‘My Dead Bride’ (2008):

‘Your eyes, so cold,
I touch this pale white skin,
Let sorrow catch my soul,
Emptiness so deep within,
The time will come,
When our souls are together as one in eternity.’

From the title of the song, one can see that the death concerns a bride, where the counterpart of the marriage is left living. Death, again, is something desired, because the fact that ‘the time will come’ is stated in positive, gratifying, and even preferable undertones resulting from the line ‘emptiness so deep within’. One may argue that there are two sides to this case of death, where death is the cause of emptiness instead of life, at the same time it is craved.

In DSBM, death, contrastingly, can be a communal experience as well, suggesting another significant doom metal influence, as black metal usually has a strongly individualistic voice that limits the perspective of the issue or emotion in the songs to a single person.

'Every breath I take pollutes and poisons my lung, this decrepit air.

Is there no escape to this?

It's so thick, I can't breathe.

Please make it stop, I don't want to suffer anymore.

I just want to be left alone, to die.

Because that's the truth about life.

We are born alone, and we die alone.' (Happy Days 2009: 'Dying Alone Done')

The cause of pain here is again life, for which death provides a relief. Another passive death is seen here, because death is called upon without any intent of agency on the narrator's part. It becomes a plea with the line 'please make it stop', becoming so desperate and helpless, the narrator begs: 'I don't want to suffer anymore'. The bringing together of people comes towards the end of the excerpt with the use of 'we', suggesting the view that this experience (of dying alone) is one that belongs to everyone, rather the internal suffering of a single individual.

'Life is the impact of a falling brick wall of rain,

Coming down on your long walk home when your thoughts are sobering.

Life is your consciousness as you tame your wild beasts,

When exhaustion is the currency that you must pay for sleep.

Life is just pain and piss, it's nothing that I will miss.

Life is just pain and piss, it's just temporary.

Life is the madness of a drunken city night.' (Woods of Ypres 2009: 'Wet Leather')

It can be said for death, in this example, to be the destination where life is the obstacle one that one needs overcome. This stems from the lines saying that it is a 'falling brick wall of rain' when one is trying to gain one's thought composure back, and it 'comes down' at the right time

to interrupt the process. Death is wanted here, and it is seen as a way of relieving one of the ‘pain and piss.’ The voice, where it calls upon a ‘you’ that is in a similar state as the ‘I’, in this song also shows another example of different types of addressing the subjects. It can be argued that this ‘life’ is conveyed as a common experience, however death is individual as it is only mentioned with ‘I’ as the voice.

As observed so far, death is usually a desirable state, however it is important to note that it is mainly a state, rather than an occurrence, except for the Leviathan example. Leviathan example shows the sadistic ideas relating to death, on the other side of the same strain of thought, one observes a masochistic approach to death as an occurrence without mentioning the deadness state.

‘Claws and kicks are beating me, violating my bitter body.

I scream and enjoy this suffering, till my blood colour the ground.

From above, the black snow is falling around me.

Lost and mutilated in a world I can't understand,

The children laugh about my own misery,

Spread your wings, angels of misery.’ (Nocturnal Depression 2010: ‘Dead Children’)

It can be seen in this example the ‘I’s declaration of the enjoyment of the violation of its body. ‘Lost and mutilated’ along with the colouring the ground suggest the occurrence of death. It is a death caused by external entities, and the longing for this occurrence is only enjoyed throughout its progress. Death is longed for because the body is ‘bitter’, and the dissemination of ‘misery’ –which is caused by the ‘angels of misery’ with their ‘claws and kicks’ is resulting in a ‘lost and mutilated’ body- ordered.

Finally, in DSBM, death is described as the constant state of human existence. In the following example, any form of afterlife is also rejected.

‘Between the fields of darkness, before and after we exist

Earth is a spiritual place but there is nothing after this.

We were nothing for a billion years before our time

And we will be nothing more again for an eternity yet to come

Death is not an exit, death is the flick of the switch.’ (Woods of Ypres 2012: ‘Death is not an Exit’)

The last line declaring death as a ‘flick of the switch’ rather than an ‘exit’ asserts the finality of death, as an exit would mean a passage, however a switch has two discrete states of zero and one. Furthermore, human existence is depicted as a finite and mortal phenomenon specifying the constancy and omnipresence of nothingness independent of this existence.

4.2. Suicide in lyrics

The longing for death analysed in the lyrics of DSBM so far has been one that is strong yet inactive. This only showed one side of the picture, because on the other side, one can see the lyrics talking about doing something about this desire, or relief. An interesting dichotomy in the main approaches to suicide emerges in lyrics. It is important to note here that lyrics are analysed and discussed as they are without considering the compositional context, as it has been done in the previous section. The implications of the lyrics, the motivations, and possible meanings of these representations are now discussed in a case study in the light of ethnographic data gathered in the music’s social context. This will be followed by a section that considers the DSBM scene as a whole. First approach is one only concerns the voice in the text, an internal monologue, which does not address anyone, and one which presents the suicidal thoughts on different levels engaging with the idea variably.

‘I bid the body farewell.

Slumped down and cold history,

A voice to drown out,
Taken in mine own hand.
A blade, a rope, bitter poison,
Climb into the nil realm,
Beyond mortal pain.' (Leviathan 2003: 'At the Door to the Tenth Sublevel of Suicide')

Climbing into the 'nil realm' suggests a different idea of death than previously discussed; in this case, death is seen as the nothingness, rather than life; however, life is still a source of pain, and death could arguably be viewed as a relief. The idea of suicide and the intention is undeniably present in this example, because possible methods are listed, to be taken 'in mine own hand'. However, this is a distant engagement with the idea, as it is ambiguous whether the narrator is actually doing the actions listed. The excerpt starts with a sense of immediacy, not one of future or past with 'I bid the body farewell', yet then this presence is destroyed with 'a blade, a rope, bitter poison' line and further distanced from the action of suicide, and suicide becomes a suggestion, and an idea where one may reach 'beyond the mortal pain'.

One may see an interchanging voice between 'I' and 'you', especially concerning lyrics about suicide. The Leviathan example was subtler in this way, however Xasthur uses this interchange in an obvious way, which can be interpreted as a distancing from the idea of suicide, and at the same time building a camaraderie with the audience through suggestions.

'Kill the human nature inside,
Internal force says goodbye.
Let your soul die.
Using death to silence my thoughts,
Cannot live in the human way,
Remaining alive to feel regret.' (2004: 'Murdered Echoes of the Mind')

The first part of the excerpt is externally directed, and the second part turns inwards. One can see that, in this example, suicide is more a metaphoric killing of the self, as it is suggested to

‘kill the human nature inside’ all the while ‘remaining alive’ as in the previous example. Death is seen as a relief from the constant regret that is brought on by, possibly, life. The same song ends with ‘loss of all love, hate for love, end of life will break the chain and cause you to be free’. This is significant, because suicide is treated as a cleansing act that will free the self of the baggage of the recognised life.

‘I want to spill their blood./Nothing shall remain holy./Body parts and severed,/Heads shall fill the landscape./Above the corpses we shall stand proud,/And laugh at their disgrace.

Our veins we shall slit,/Spilling our blood on the butchered bodies./Laughing till death./We were masters of life and death,/In that specific moment./And we chose death.’ (Make a Change... Kill Yourself 2005: ‘Chapter I’)

This example has a striking contrast of the death of self and other. The first verse has anti-religious undertones with misanthropy as the dominant idea. However, there is a sense of communal behaviour as well, when the subject turns to suicide at the second part. More importantly, final part of the excerpt talks of the misanthropes, even in the act of suicide, as the ‘masters of life and death’; this shows a crucial desire for control. In addition, the death depicted here has no reason except for an appetite to control; there are no indications to any suffering –besides the one caused by the depicted characters- resulted from the ‘agony of life’, so to say, or death is not an escape or a relief. The killing in question results from pleasure (‘Laughing till death’). It is also important to note the use of ‘we’, when the lyrics are about suicide, while it remains the feeling on a single individual before. The misanthropic inclinations seen in this example, can be considered the second main approach to suicide in DSBM. However, the paradox of misanthropy and the idea of togetherness present here should be taken into consideration.

‘The score of my soundtrack is written by blood,/Music of suicide written in red,/I did it myself,/My wrists are also opened,/And like my tears, it's cascading,/Everything has been lost

behind us./On my knees, hands on my face,/The sun is appearing into the spring morning,/Where I'm lying there's just nothing than my dust./Now you don't care about him./You live on the other side of feelings./But our February snow is now covering my lifeless body.'

(Nocturnal Depression 2006: 'Nostalgia')

This example uses a poetic suicide, which has no real connotations of actual physical harm, but rather a killing of the self to deal with extreme grief resulting from a loss, which also seems to be unrelated to death. The narrator talks of a 'now' which is implied to be after the implicit suicide, where 'my wrists are [...] opened', this suggests that the loss of a probable lover is not caused by death. Suicide here seems to be motivated towards hurting the other, in almost a demagogic sense. One may argue that in this example, suicide is a tool for revenge over another action of an external being.

The misanthropic depictions of suicide usually have the mood of anger and forcefulness, which is characteristically distant from the helpless and weak voice observed in the representations of death as well as the first suicide representation style discussed. This shows the intimate relationship with the ideas from black metal, and it may serve as an additional explanation to why the subgenre is considered under black metal, rather than doom metal beyond sonic attributes.

'Hear my voice into your head, don't try to stop it,/The poison streaming into your veins is me./The cold you can feel is my revenge,/You're just a scum, a creeping filth, you inspire hate./Take this poisoned blade or are you so cunt that you can't end your life?/Everyone has the right to kill himself./Families and friends are only excuses./It's stupid to say, I want to die,/When you don't have the courage to kill yourself./I watch your blood flowing to my feet./I smile watching you creeping like the worm you are.'

(Nocturnal Depression 2007: 'Hear My Voice... Kill Yourself')

This excerpt shows an aggressive voice, and suicide as a brave act. Suicide is seen as a bravery as it requires 'courage to kill yourself'. It is also similarly a source of pleasure ('I smile

watching you [...]). The 'you' here is indeterminate, however this voice is suggestive of 'you' being the listener, fitting well with the misanthropic tone. However, considering the previous oeuvre of the band discussed, the 'you' might also be a lost lover.

'The clock's hands fold, I feel pulsing in my chest all the agony of one more day, in this world of darkness./Through my nostrils runs the smell of my own death, printed, on the grey Sunday sky./I kill myself, take my life.' (Thy Light 2007: 'In My Last Mourning...')

Along the lines of death representations discussed in the previous section, suicide in this song is portrayed as a relief from 'the agony of one more day, in this world of darkness'. The main contrasting feature is the fact that while desiring death is a passive, almost apathetic act, suicide and taking one's life can be seen as doing something about that desire. Suicide here again is an individualist act without any external factors except for human life.

Suicide can also be, in DSBM, a way out, which cannot be said to be a relief as previous examples, but a last resort combining the depressive nature of the majority of death representations with the power of activity:

'Men, min resa bort är inte salig./Min försummelse blir er medalj./Jag lämnar efter mig ett moln av besvikelse, tvivel och förundran./Medan ni alla försöker hitta er mening i en värld, där ingen ny mark kan brytas. [*But, my journey away from here isn't happy./My negation will be your medal./I leave a cloud of disappointment, doubt, and wonder behind me./While you try to find your meaning in a world where no new ground can be broken.*]' (Lifelover 2008: 'Bitter Reflektion [*Bitter Reflection*]')

In this example, the narrator lacks energy, it conveys despair and disappointment. Life and its futility, and the frivolous nature of trying to find meaning in life with the last line. This idea of death and suicide can be interpreted as a nihilistic thought.

The next two examples fit into the second approach discussed, with slightly different angles. In the first one, the narrator craves overpowering the listener, unlike 'Hear My Voice...

Kill Yourself' example, the 'you' in this excerpt is clearly intended as the listener. The second example takes the same stance, however where Forgotten Tomb talks about becoming a hero as a result of suicide, Shining focuses on the agony of life, and shows suicide as a way to end the 'misery'.

'Like a needle in your vein,

Injecting perversion, spreading disdain,

Obey to me, follow me.

Let me show you what I see.

Your words to me count less than zero.

Slit your wrists, become a hero.' (Forgotten Tomb 2011: 'Reject Existence')

'Dina tankar ett fullständigt kaos av de tusen minnen du bär,/Och att var dag återuppleva denna inhumana misär./Så kom nu, följ min röst till den andra sidan bron,/Där dyrkan utav döden är den enda sanna tron./Den enda sanna tron./Se nu hur alla dina minnen formas till en magnum 357./Och jag tror du vet någonstans där innerst inne att självmord är den enda vägen ut./Tveka inte, skjut, skjut, jag sa skjut, skjut. [*Your thoughts are a complete chaos of thousands of memories you carry,/And that was the day to relive this inhumane misery./Come now, follow my voice to the other side of the bridge,/Where worshipping death is the one true faith./It is the true faith./Now see what all your memories forming into a magnum 357./And I think you know somewhere deep down that suicide is the only way out./Don't hesitate, Shoot, Shoot, I said shoot, shoot*]' (Shining 2012: 'Tiden Låker Inga Sår [*Time Doesn't Heal Wounds*]')

In 'Tiden Låker Inga Sår' the narrator is trying to be more manipulative, and in Niklas Kvarforth¹³'s words 'force-feed' the idea of suicide to the listener. While the narrator is not ordering the suicide, it is suggesting that it 'is the only way out'. In 'Reject Existence', however, the narrator demands the suicide, and sees itself as the required poison to convince

¹³ The vocalist and lyricist of Shining.

the listener to this act. Furthermore, suicide is portrayed as a perversion, and not as a necessity but as something that needs to be forced.

‘Happiness doesn't last./Depression and negativity will always triumph./So why continue on living,/Why not just end it already?/Jump in a pool of razors./Hang yourself./Jump off a building/Review your entire life,/Realize what a great waste it was.’ (Happy Days 2012: ‘No Point in Living’)

The final example takes suicide again as the only way, however the examples gives method suggestions similar to the Leviathan example. The imagery is more direct here, and manipulative voice can also be observed with the line ‘why not just end it already’, the ‘you’ here is different than previous examples, and it is the narrator talking on its own. This interpretation is derived from the first part of the same song, where the narrator states: ‘Agony and suffering is all I know./Am I meant to commit suicide?’ So the manipulative voice is actually a voice that is trying to convince the suicide as the redemptive path. This example also shows an intimate engagement with the idea of suicide, as there is no elements that can put distance between the narrator and suicide, as it was the case for each example. The representations of suicide and death in depressive suicidal black metal are, as observed, are plentiful, however these sections tried to give a representative set of different types of these representations.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Depressive suicidal black metal as discussed takes death and suicide themes in an intimate capacity, however these analyses would not mean as much without the lyricists¹⁴ and their intentions in writing these texts. Similar to that of suicide representations, two approaches to creating DSBM music emerge within the lyricists or musicians from archival research, as well as common traits that can be observed. Before going into these however, many of the musicians with interviews published admittedly either were pathologically depressed for at least part of their lives, or expressed themselves as depressed during the particular interview (Azhidahak 2004; Blackwulfaz 2013; Hensley n.d.; House of the Whipcord 2012; Khaosis 2012; noktorn 2007; Sun n.d.; Terrorizer 2003d: 67; Terrorizer 2011b: 44; Woodlum n.d.). Another trait is that some of these musicians have experienced suicide, suicidal tendencies, self-destructive behaviour in one way or another throughout their lives (Hensley n.d; Terrorizer 2003d: 67 Terrorizer 2011b: 44). However, it is important to note that none of these musicians have actually committed suicide, and only one musician (Niklas Kvarforth) admits to having tried such an act (Terrorizer 2008a: 64; Terrorizer 2011b: 44). Moreover, all the musicians from these examples state that the music that they create is intensely personal, and they try to convey what they are feeling in lyrics (Azhidahak 2004; Blackwulfaz 2013; Haan n.d.; Hensley n.d.; House of the Whipcord 2012; Khaosis 2012; noktorn 2007; Sun n.d.; Terrorizer 2003d: 67; Terrorizer 2011b: 44; Woodlum n.d.). Considering these, the lyrical analyses conducted in this research become possible interpretations of the intentions of the authors. In the light of the analyses, these approaches to suicide can be categorised as one that is misanthropic in nature

¹⁴ In all the cases and examples discussed in this dissertation, the lyricists is the vocalist, and all the bands from the lyrical analyses started as one-man bands, and when and if it turned into a full band, the control of the lyrical direction remained in these band's originators according to interviews. Because this emerges as a rule without exception in these examples, it is redundant to discuss the fact for each band.

and more forceful, at the same time more external and distant to the actual idea, and one that is introverted, desperate and giving death a more positive spin in the form of relief.

To better understand these lyrics, one needs to consider the ontological security (discussed in chapter 2). Ontological security can be interpreted as the inherent tendency to give human life a meaning through actions of a particular order and continuity, where death is a clear interruption. Mellor also argues that this security may be shattered when existentially confronted (1991), leaving a nihilistic perspective of the world. One may argue that depressive suicidal black metal is intended to force this confrontation for all the parties involved, furthermore it can be argued to provide a tool to question the self (Shining 2005: 'I Och Med Insikt Skall du Förgå'). What this confrontation in this context achieves is to reach the 'dread' hence destroying the inherence of any security in order to arrive at a form of existence beyond the symbiotic –in DSBM framework parasitic rather than mutualistic- relationship between meaning and order. With dread and temporary meaninglessness, one may argue that death is accepted as belonging to the continuity and order.

After the continuity is re-established without death as an interruption, meaning that is required for life to continue is also re-found, a meaning which can be expressed through a blackened version Meher Baba's reading of life (Connole & Masciandaro 2015): 'life is dying'. This can be pointed as the cause of the very much living state of the DSBM musicians. Furthermore, as expressed by these musicians (Azhidahak 2004; Blackwulfaz 2013; Haan n.d.; Hensley n.d.; House of the Whipcord 2012; Khaosis 2012; noktorn 2007; Patterson 2015; Sun n.d.; Terrorizer 1994-2011; Woodlum n.d.), DSBM is an outlet for negative feelings and thoughts, which helps the musicians deal with these. Importantly, the case of Niklas Kvarforth shows exactly this progression between the interviews of him, conducted in 2003, where he says 'All those people or bands that are supposedly black metal or whatever, they should try a day or two to live my life then believe me, they wouldn't be so enthusiastic about darkness.

Shining is a mere reflection of me only and I'm a pretty sad figure.' (Terrorizer 2003c: 24) and 2011, where he is quoted as: 'I want to live a life and I want to continue with Shining as long as I can.' (Terrorizer 2011b; 44). Considering the lyrical content of Shining discussed close to 2003, and taking this as the reflection of Kvarforth's mental state, 2011 quote shows a drastic change in the world view. Besides Kvarforth, other musicians repeatedly state that they would not want to be the cause of someone ending their lives, but rather DSBM is a way of pouring that 'poison' outside, and dealing with the idea of death easier. An example is Georg Börner (ColdWorld); he states regarding his music: 'It's medicine for the soul. I don't want to drive somebody to suicide or something. I feel good when I am listening to my music and that's why I'm doing it.' (Haan n.d.)

In conclusion, this dissertation argued that depressive suicidal black metal music is a way to engage and cope with the idea of death for musicians. This, as presented, comes from the representations of death and suicide from many different angles, and the resulting provisional shattering of the ontological security of the person.

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