Higgonet discusses suicide as an obsession with projecting an image, whether to permit aesthetic contemplation or to provoke a revolution in thought. When we think of music, we can see that it is a fruitful art form to express obsession with many tools including repetition and its various uses. The repetition I talk of in this presentation, points to it as a concept rather than the literal repetition of musical objects, or text. Repetition as a concept may be observed in music over larger musical structures or the art worlds in which the music exists. The repetition on a larger scale, thus, can be interpreted as an obsession or a compulsion.

Yale School of Medicine OCD Research Clinic defines obsession as recurrent and persistent thoughts, images and impulses, and compulsion as repetitive behaviours or mental acts. The ideas of obsession and compulsion emerge as important phenomena in different popular music scenes, in the music, in the lyrics, and in the listening habits of the audience members. In an attempt to answer Richard Middleton’s question ‘why do listeners find interest and pleasure in hearing the same thing over again’, I will discuss Freudian repetition compulsion in the music of the Swedish depressive suicidal black metal band, Silencer considering the concepts of death and suicide present in this music, as well as how these are treated, and why death is fixated upon in Silencer’s only album *Death – Pierce Me*. The research I will present today is part of my ongoing research in representations of death in depressive suicidal black metal music.

Before going into repetition compulsion and Silencer, I should try to describe what depressive suicidal black metal music or DSBM is. Black metal as described by Erik Butler is comprised of references to the enduring, the abiding, and the transcendent which was born out of a response to the ‘bane of so-called “hair metal” which vulgarised the art and sought commercial
success’, and it represents an orthodoxy. DSBM is a sub-genre of black metal. While the name’s origins are unclear, the Swedish band Shining’s Niklas Kvarforth may be considered as one of the first ones to use the term suicidal black metal.

According to Kvarforth, it is called suicidal black metal because it is about suburban misery, it is not about religion, unlike some of the other black metal music, and this music results from the destruction of the self, and the object of the music is to teach people to destroy themselves, or force feed self-destructive and suicidal imagery and lyrics.

Musically, DSBM aesthetics are similar to that of black metal. The so-called ‘necro sound’ with extremely high gain guitar tones, blast beats, and low recording and production quality is the predominant sound of DSBM. The aesthetic also includes the frequent use of tremolo guitar playing, or swift repetitions on single notes, and employing the middle range of the tessitura. Harmonically, the music is usually built on minor chords, with harmonic progressions similar to that of Phrygian or Locrian modes. The vocal styles range immensely, they go from clean singing, to screams, shrieks, grunts, and other humanly produced sounds, such as crying, and vomiting. The songs are usually long in duration similar to doom metal rather than black metal, a song usually lasts between six and twenty minutes.

These are some of the bands and album titles from this sub-genre. As you can see from this first look, there is a very clear fixation on death and suicide in this music. However, one band in particular, looms from DSBM scene with a notorious story, Silencer.

Silencer is a Swedish band formed in 1995 by the guitarist Leere as a solo black metal project, which is a notably popular band structure in DSBM. However, the band became a duo with the
vocalist Nattramn’s involvement. Silencer recorded only one demo and one album, both titled *Death – Pierce Me*. The story of Silencer is notorious because of three main events surrounding the band’s existence. First one is the rumour that Nattramn was institutionalised after the recording of the album. Second one is the rumour that Nattramn attacked a five year old girl with an axe, and begged the police to shoot and kill him. And finally, as you can see from these photos, there is a rumour that Nattramn tried to cut his hands, and instead attach pig’s feet to his arms. While black metal scene in general has no shortage of sensational and shocking events, Silencer still emerges in the forefront.

The album I will discuss, *Death – Pierce Me*, was released in 2001, and it is comprised of five songs between six and twelve minutes and a three-minute instrumental outro. It is one of the most expressive albums in the DSBM repertory, with reviewers calling it insane, sick, twisted, hopeless, and terrifying. Every song of this album, without exception, is about death and self-destruction. Some examples from the lyrics of these songs can be seen here.

I would like to especially point out the title song, ‘Death – Pierce Me’. You can observe from this song alone the desperate cry, the frantic plea for death to consume the narrator’s existence. I would like to also mention the varying vocal styles here. The vocal styles are repeated in certain emotions throughout the album. For example, the high pitched shrieks are used when the lyrics point to desperation. More importantly though, the insisted repetition of the concept of death in the album points towards a compulsion.

Freud discusses compulsion in relation to the pleasure principle. In the mind, there exists a strong tendency to pleasure, and as Freud notes, people tend to crave the repetition of pleasure when the pleasure is reached. He also states that unpleasure can be tolerated as long as it leads
to pleasure. And it will lead to pleasure because unpleasure is just pleasure that cannot be felt as such for a particular domain. One may argue that death belongs to unpleasure rather than pleasure.

I will look at the repetition compulsion from two interconnected perspectives to interpret possible functions of the obsession and compulsion of death in this album, because repetition—like any other good tool—may serve a variety of functions simultaneously. Firstly, if we are to accept the assumption that death is unpleasure, the compulsion of death can point to several things. Peter Brooks states that repetition is a way to work through repressed material. Freud also discusses repetition compulsion as related to repressed thoughts. In this case, the function of repetition compulsion emerges as a way to deal with the idea of death. As familiarity increases with repetition (Hargreaves), the repetition of death familiarises the idea further, thus making it more acceptable. This is also supported by Freud in his notes about a one and a half year old child and a game the child enjoyed playing. In these notes, Freud states that even though the game included the child’s mother’s disappearance for brief moments, the child kept wanting to play the game. Stating further that, the disappearance was mandatory for the joyful return of the mother. In a similar manner, a repetition compulsion of unpleasure, in Silencer’s case death, ensures the pleasure that will result out of it. In other words, one starts enjoying life only when death is embraced. Obsessive thought is also, according to Hadda, a manifestation of psychological self-protection, and it fills an empty place for the fragmented self, creating order and stability required for the ontological security of a person.

Secondly, Freud articulates that repetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is in itself a source of pleasure. If we consider a Kierkegaardian repetition, we should say that ‘repetition is a movement in time: re-take, re-peat, re-turn, re-verse means going back in time
and to what “has been”. But still, in spite of this movement backward, “repetition” makes it new and is there a movement forward: it is “the new”. Repetition is the new so we can say that the repeated material is similar, not identical. According to Rogers, similarity signifies, rather than sameness. This improves Freud’s definition of repetition as the re-experiencing of something identical, to the re-experiencing of something similar further explaining the reason why the repetition in itself is a source of pleasure as it is the experiencing of pleasure in a similar but not the same way.

In conclusion, I tried to interpret to possible functions of repetition in music, using Silencer and the death obsession and compulsion of the vocalist and lyricist Nattramn. Repetition of a larger concept rather than micro musical structures may have been employed here in order to achieve the reasons I mentioned, but additionally, it can also be interpreted as a conjuncture for the album, as well as the DSBM sub-genre as a whole. I will leave you with a few minutes of, in my opinion, the beautifully haunting music of Silencer just to give you an idea of the music and the sub-genre DSBM.

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