

## The Becomings of Satanist Musicianship

A study of how black metal musicians describe their learning processes

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Research in music education has in the last decades become more attentive to musical learning through informal contexts. This article adds to the body of research by investigating the musical learning in a genre that is considered unacceptable and bad by most of society: black metal. Through interviews with five young black metal musicians from Sweden and Finland an interesting image was revealed of a musical practice that aims to fight evil by being evil, that worships enlightenment and the fulfilment of the individual potential and also detests religious organisations for suppressing people. The sonic is considered only a part of a *gesamtkunstwerk* where all parts of a performance are supposed to work together to create a feeling of fear or horror in the audience. The material opens up for interesting paths in music education when working with musical *bildung* and criticism of taken for granted truths, but at the same time presents a milieu where what is considered good by society is questioned. Keywords: black metal, informal music education, the sublime, Bourdieu, subculture*

## Introduction

The last twenty years, the focus of music educational research has widened to involve more than institutional settings for learning music. In Europe, researchers such as Lucy Green (2001), Even Ruud (Berkaak & Ruud, 1994), Anna-Karin Gullberg (2002) and Göran Folkestad (e.g. 2006) have paved the way for a wave of research of “informal learning processes” in/of music. Musical learning has later been studied in varied settings like Hip-Hop communities (e.g. Söderman, 2007), Punk (e.g. Hannerz, 2013), online learning of Folk music (e.g. Waldron & Weblen, 2009), Country & Western (Waldron, 2013), Opera (Partti & Westerlund, 2013) and so forth. Studies have even been performed where learning processes inspired by these less institutionalised settings have influenced traditional classroom pedagogies (Green 2008). The main body of research through informal learning practices has been based upon music genres and practices that always had, or lately have acquired, a somewhat higher level of cultural capital in Western society and are accepted as fairly politically correct expressions. This study will instead focus on one of the more extreme genre – both sonically and in ideological terms – of music around today: black metal.

We consider black metal to be one of the genres that are not welcome in music classrooms (Kallio, 2015). While music can be nice, it can also represent and/or enforce dangerous forces. Some genres are considered less suitable for a musical classroom at particular times by the broad mass of music teachers and schools. As Kallio (2015) discusses, to exclude such genres can be considered musical censorship. The music that is excluded changes through time and musical genres can be subject to *musical gentrification* (Dyndahl et al., 2014), something that has happened to youth culture such as the jazz of the 1940s, the rock of the 50s and 60s, hip-hop and so forth. For a genre to be welcome into the music classroom can therefore be a double-edged sword: It means acceptance and being spread more widely and at the same time it might lose its identity.

Some research has been made on black metal, mainly from a sociological and/or religious perspective (e.g. Faxneld, 2015; Granholm, 2011), but also with some musicological/philosophical perspective (Bogue, 2004). Bossius (2003) and Kahn-Harris (2007) are two pioneering researchers with their studies on the extreme metal scene, with its equally extreme expressions related to violence, Satanism and fascism. Whether or not Satanism can be defined as a religion is disputed. It might just as well be understood as a collection of ideologies or ideological practices defined by their anti-Christian or anti-religious focus (e.g. Dyrendal, 2008; Faxneld, 2014) – often portraying Satan,

Lucifer, Antichrist or whatever the entity is called, as they rebel against false happiness and oppressiveness of authoritarian systems such as churches, the national state and so forth. Lucifer is turned into a symbol of individual freedom (Faxneld, 2014) and fulfilment of the fullest human potential, and is therefore sometimes also referred to as a self-religion (Dyrendal, 2008). Organisations such as La Vey's Church of Satan have not had any major impact on the black metal scene, probably because leading black metal musicians have described La Vey's philosophy or religion as being too humanistic, hedonistic and even nihilistic (Hagen, 2011). Some scholars have analysed black metal ideology as being more of an intellectual game and role play than being "for real", but as Faxneld (2015) stresses, such a simplification is dangerous. In the black metal milieu, there were, and probably are, people who live according to the ideals of destruction, oppression and anti-happiness and thereby live to make life as miserable as possible for themselves and others. This is however not representative for the majority of black metal fans and musicians who live and believe that some variety of an ideology pursuing the good life through worshipping the devil and evil. Granholm (2011) and Forsberg (2010) investigate the black metal scene from a religious perspective and use Partridge's (2005) concept of *Re-enchantment* and *Occulture*. The concept of re-enchantment can briefly be understood as a description of the post-modern era as characterized by a spiritual rebirth that focuses on personal development and well-being rather than institutional worship. Partridge also argues that the perception of today's Western society as being secular, to a great extent is misleading when religious practice has taken on new forms. Society can be understood as moving simultaneously, paradoxically towards both disenchantment and re-enchantment (Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014). The other term, Occulture, can be considered as a mixture of *occult* and *culture*, where culture primarily should be interpreted and understood in the meaning *popular culture* (Hollywood movies, pop and rock music et cetera). Mysticism, Neopaganism and the paranormal "is constantly feeding and being fed by popular culture" (Partridge, 2014: 116).

This study departs from a wonder of how young people choose to play a genre that is considered bad on all levels by the majority of the society, as well as how the young people have chosen to play black metal. This paper describes the learning processes, musically as well as socially and intellectually, that leads up to becoming a black metal musician. As in the previously mentioned studies on learning music outside of institutions, learning is in this article considered a broad concept involving all areas of life where one changes. This includes socialisation, formal education, autodidactic learning, "Bildung" and so forth. There have been several attempts to translate the concept *Bildung* for an English speaking audience, since the concept is important to

understand education in Germany and Scandinavia, but has no equivalence in English (e.g. Nielsen, 2007; Tängerstad, 2014; Varkøy, 2010; Vogt, 2015). The concept of *bildung* somewhat resembles the concept education in the broad sense that Dewey (1897) wrote about when he formulated the famous phrase: "I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (Dewey, 1897: 7). Another attempt is to say that *Bildung* is cultivation – to become cultivated. As Tängerstad (2014) says, *Bildung* can be described as something in between cultivation and education – but being neither.<sup>1</sup> These stories of self-cultivation and socialisation will be used to discuss possible implications for more formalised music education.

The aim is to analyse the musical learning stories of five young black metal musicians from a music educational perspective inspired by the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu.

### Black metal as a musical and philosophical concept

Black metal is a genre that evolved from "the godfathers of Heavy metal", *Black Sabbath*, through the English band *Venom* and the Swiss band *Hellhammer* (later named *Celtic Frost*) before it was finally defined by the Swedish group *Bathory* in the first half of the 1980's (Hagen, 2011). The musical foundations of black metal as a genre can be described as a mix of Thrash metal and Speed metal, performed by bands like *Slayer* and the early *Metallica*, but also with the thematically dark musical and lyrical ingredients from the likes of *Black Sabbath* and *Slayer*. The lyrics often deal with occultism, Satanism and paganism and can generally be described as anti-Christian and anti-establishment. Within the field of black metal there is also a celebration of idealistic traditionalist/perennialist values not far from the ideas that can be traced back to the Scandinavian and German romanticism (von Wachenfeldt, 2015) or connected to the nationalistic and pan-European spheres (for example GRECE, Identitarian movement and Alternative Right) of today.

As a follow-up to the Death metal wave around 1990, the second wave of black metal had its epicentre in Norway with acts like *Mayhem*, *Burzum* and *Darkthrone*. The visual concept and imagery formed by the early black metal bands were consolidated and the genre turned more and more into a religious satanic sect where death threats, homicides and church burnings were not uncommon. Some of the black metal musicians

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<sup>1</sup> The topic of black metal, education and *Bildung* is discussed in detail in paper for the ISPME (International Society of Philosophy in Music Education) conference in Greece summer 20017 called "Black metal Pedagogy as *Bildung*" by Thorgersen and von Wachenfeldt.

from the second wave were sentenced to long imprisonments due to murder, violence and/or church burning. This period can be described according to Bourdieu (1992) that the genre, as a sociological field, had reached its own autonomy with fairly well defined rules and institutions like specialized record labels, as well as magazines like the Norwegian *Slayer magazine*.

The third wave that evolved during the second half of the 1990's was more focused on music rather than (quasi-)satanic violence and expressions. This third wave was also characterized by symphonic and epic song writing with more complex chord progressions, arrangements and rhythmical structures, which in many respects can be seen as a reminiscence of Bathory's later works of the eighties. Some of the leading bands in the third wave were the Norwegians *Emperor* and *Dimmu Borgir*.

Today's black metal scene is quite diverse and accommodates a large variety of musical and ideological expressions. In Norway, the genre has become a big musical export and some bands are considered fairly mainstream. For example, *Satyricon* performed at the prize ceremony at the FIS Nordic World Ski Championships 2011 in Oslo. Some of the Norwegian black metal musicians have even received awards from official institutions. The guitarist and singer in Emperor, Vegard Tveitan (a.k.a Ihsahn), received the Notodden kommunes kulturpris (Notodden Municipality's Culture prize) in 2002. Nonetheless. Despite these recent signs of acceptance, the genre still represents an ideology and a musical expression that is considered unacceptable by most parts of society.

### Within the Bourdieuan Spoon

Black metal as a genre can in most respects be regarded as a *Field of cultural production*, according to Pierre Bourdieu's definition in his *Les règles de l'art* (1992). In the book, Bourdieu describes the formation of the literature field in France with its structures and values. The description is made from a few authors and poets that Bourdieu has pointed out as crucial for the development of the literature field. In a field of cultural production, with its sub genres, there are fairly well-defined norms (doxa) and common interests that the agents are struggling for. Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* and *symbolic capital* are well suited to understand how values of good and bad are defined within the genre and what is considered as desirable; at the same time, it provides tools to understand the genre as understood by society.

Symbolic capital can be understood as a value system, or a set of value systems, similar to economic capital within a field where things and phenomena are assigned to different values according to a logic defined within the field. Symbolic capital, in other words, defines what is considered to have value and have importance, as well as what is considered to be of little value and unimportant by the field's participants (or agents). Some participants have the power to (re)define what is considered important and of value, while others are subject to following the always already defined values of the field. Who gets to define, and who does not, is connected to the participants' habitus. The term habitus can simplified be described as the sum of the parts that makes up a person; their heritage, genes, social upbringing, name, education and so forth are the factors that provide the agent with their social status that defines the power to act within the field. Bourdieu defines different kinds of symbolic capital, but in this article, cultural capital is particularly interesting. Cultural capital defines what kind of art; cultural and artistic expression is valued within the field. In this case – what kinds of music and other expressions are considered good by the black metal musicians as representatives within the field. The field, although somewhat autonomous, always refer to surrounding fields and society as a whole. The value system within and outside the field are not the same but refer to each other. This can be done in a similar way to what Erik Hannerz (2013) did in his thesis *Performing Punk* where he used the metaphor of a spoon to analyse how cultural capital is produced within the genre (the concave side of the spoon), as opposed to outside the genre (the convex side). What is being learnt will be understood in relation to these parameters of what is considered good black metal as well as how black metal is considered as a musical genre by the surrounding society.

## Method

The results of this study are based on in-depth interviews with a small sample of five young male black metal musicians spanning the ages 17 to 26 years old. They were recruited through different internet based forums for extreme metal music and are all active performers within the genre. Four of the participants come from different parts of Sweden and one from Finland. They represent all the instruments typically found in the genre: Guitar, bass, vocals and drums (even if none consider bass as their main instrument). The interviews were done during the first months of 2015. To our knowledge, none of the participants know each other and they describe the qualities in black metal music differently, but we have been able to find cross-references between

at least three of the bands. Two have a planned concert together while a second connection is one participant is praised by another. Four of the interviews were done via teleconferencing software such as Skype™, Adobe Connect™ and TinyChat™ and one was done in a café. Two of the interviews were done by Thomas and three by Ketil. The transcriptions were done using the software Transana™. Ketil transcribed the interviews done by Thomas and vice versa, and then shared to ensure full transparency and possibility for a cooperative process of analysis.

An initial content analysis was then done by both researchers by creating a shared mind map in the online software Prezi™, where themes were constructed as clusters of similar topics and citations from the interviews. A secondary analysis followed where theoretical questions were posed to the mind map and the interviews. The following result was organised according to the most prominent themes from this mind map. The article is collaboratively written in a Google™-doc without us physically meeting. All communication between the researchers has been via phone, chat, video conferencing and e-mail.

The respondents have been ensured anonymity and were also informed about all aspects of the research process. To ensure anonymity, we have decided not to mark out which of the participants says what in the results chapter. The participants have been allowed to read an early sketch of this article to be able to react to whether or not our interpretations of their statements seem reasonable. The reactions have been positive.

## Results

### Beginning to play

The participants all describe that their interest for black metal as well as their first steps towards playing the genre started in their early teens. While some of them had previous experience from playing an instrument, others started to explore playing from what can be described as a peak experience from encountering black metal. As one of the participants put it:

I guess I was around 13 years old when I heard Mörk Gryning and I thought: Hell that sounded good! I want to play that.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with what other research (e.g. Green, 2001) has shown, the boys then started to work on getting together a band without any external help from adults or institutions. So far all the stories are fairly similar, but the backgrounds and the continuation of their stories differ. One of the participants describe a musical upbringing in the Pentecostal church with his brothers. His mother would not allow him to play anywhere but in the church and the instrument was chosen to complete a functional trio for playing when the congregation had meetings. For this participant, metal music in general and eventually black and death metal, represented a teenage riot against the church and maternal control. The others describe fairly easy introduction to the genre, even if they describe a certain feeling of stigmatisation after having assimilated a visual image and aesthetics inspired by extreme metal.

They all describe the initial attraction to black metal as experiencing a certain feeling. The labels they give the feeling differ slightly, but are all feelings that can be considered unpleasantly thrilling such as fear, darkness, uneasiness and danger. At the same time, black metal is described as providing a potential pathway to freedom. This reveals some important values within the field – the dark night of the soul and the minds' liberation is an overall ideological intention that serves as a crucial part of the genre.

None of the participants describe themselves as completely autodidact, but their level of formal education ranges from having attended music in upper secondary school and studied musicology at university, to the Finnish guitarist who: “[...] had some guitar lessons. But I didn't really enjoy them. They were forceful. So mostly I have been just practising by myself.” Those who have a more extensive schooling describe it in more positive terms though, and there are few signs that reveal an experience of a split between formal schooling and the more autodidact learning practices in the band or at home. As an interesting result, some even describe the relation between these two arenas as almost symbiotic as in this example from a youth club (after school activity for youngsters where the activity can be chosen according to interest):

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<sup>2</sup> All quotes are translated by us except the quotes from the Finnish participant. The originator of the quote is only revealed where we consider it important to know who said this particular statement. The rest is blurred for anonymity reasons.

The band's method was to develop by playing different covers by amongst others Gorgoroth's song 'The Ritual' which was dark and awful. The band got help through a guitar teacher from upper secondary school to learn the song.

This could be taken as an example of a Swedish music education which has been shown to have a focus on playing songs in rock band in several studies (e.g. Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Ericsson & Lindgren, 2010).

The participants all describe a learning process in the genre where the boundaries between the compositional process and the practising process is blurred to the point where it is difficult to see the difference. One of the participants, a drummer, is not himself directly involved in the compositional process, but is still present during writing of all new material and describes himself as the only one not actively composing in the band. Songwriting is also described in collective terms where different members have different roles and responsibilities, where the process starts as an organic activity which is hard to describe since it looks different every time. The music is often constructed around guitar riffs and therefore the guitarists often have the responsibility to come up with the initial idea for the composition. This is then collectively developed, and the musicians get a larger responsibility to create their instrument's part. The vocalist often write the lyrics.

Some informants also describe the importance of seeking help by a more experienced musician in their initial search to become skilled musicians. A guitarist describes how they strived to find the right sound by listening to records and trying to imitate what they heard, when an older guitarist came by and showed a few tricks such as drop-d tuning (tuning down the low E string a major second): "It became so much darker. Aaah Cool!!", whereby they repeated the riff for a very long time until it was internalised.

Aside of taking the guitar riff as the starting point, the idea, feeling or philosophical concept are described as useful outsets for a compositional process.

Because to me when I make a song it's... it's a really big process of experimenting and... for a release I need to find the sound and I need to know how do I describe what the concept is about. Because it starts from the concept when I make music.

This participant represents an act that is more or less a solo project and he describes a different process of composition from the collective.

I remember the last project I had before [band name], [...], but the drummer called me a dictator and didn't want to play with me anymore.

He also describes how he writes everything himself and that this is an important consequence of the individualistic ideology of black metal.

The varieties in the approaches to learning black metal is not surprising, seen in the light of other research on rock music except the focus on ideology. It is like one participant points out:

The musical side never differs to any other musical side. When you need to learn to play guitar, you pick up the guitar and you play and you practice and you become better at it. But it doesn't differ what music you are doing.

So how do they explain that it wasn't just any other music they chose to pursue?

Why just black metal?

Ideology plays a central role in black metal to the extent that in a few of the interviews it was hard to get the participants to talk about anything else. Several of the informants came back during the interviews, speaking of various topics grounded in an interest of improving themselves intellectually and spiritually – not only in music, but also historical, philosophical, and above all: in esotericism and occultism. One of the informants describes his educational journey:

[...] and I think that knowledge will take you damn far in the spiritual work. It feels as though mankind has entered a kind of stupidity – a large boulder of idiocy. And for every scripture I read, it's like taking a chisel and hit away a piece of idiocy [from the boulder]. That's how it feels to me anyway. I try to read all the books that are available, even if it is a book of crap, so then at least I learned that this is crap.

The impression is that the informant through the formal school system, the common mainstream media and public discourse considers himself to have been misled, and that through self-education he is exploring an alternative to the established worldview. All the participants stress the importance of ideology in black metal – an ideology which is rooted in what could be labelled as occultism and/or Satanism, mixed with popular culture (*occulture*), but which is described in several different ways. All respondents

except one have a philosophical approach to the concept of *evil* and interpret it as a metaphor for individualism, as well as spiritual and cognitive boundlessness. One of the informants, however, interpreted evil in a more “grey-everyday-term” and endeavours for a world of chaos and war. For the participant quoted above, black metal is about developing to his fullest potential as a human being with help of philosophical and theosophical tools that can aid in removing barriers and imagined borders for possible insight into existence.

For another, exposing mankind’s darkest sides are considered important in order to help resist and conquer evil: “Black metal is about the negative parts of the human psyche and the world”, one participant explains and continues: “and it makes me feel safe”. Humankind is not only good and it is art’s (black metal’s) responsibility to demonstrate the darkest sides of humanity in the safe environment of an artwork so that man can face their inner fears without risking their own life. One of the participants describes his work with alchemy and magic, but is rather careful in his esoteric work when he does not want “demons all over the place”.

A third theme that is lifted as ideologically important by several is the focus on individuality – and on the collective and society as potentially and actually oppressive. Satan is therefore considered more of an idea or an ideal than a living entity by these participants, even if they point to others who actually believe in Satan as the fallen angel that lives on – despite the uprising for freedom against the suppressing God.

[...] that’s why I believe that the general theme is Satanism and to follow the Devil as well, because he is sort of a pillar for – for the individual – to not budge under anyone or to be dominated by anyone, but to be your own master. And you find your own path. And anyone who opposes this can go to hell.

This freedom from oppression is a central theme that also manifests as important anti-religious ideals. Organised religion is by these participants considered as social structures constructed to limit man, and to keep people in their positions and at the tasks that best serve the church as an organisation, at each and every human being’s expense. Therefore, Lucifer, the bringer of light, the illuminator, et cetera, serves as an archetype and role model in the quest for more knowledge and insight, or to put it in theological terms – *gnosis*<sup>3</sup>.

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3 More about this in the discussion.

The participants all give an inviting, open and honest impression, but still advocate this music as a music of darkness, hatred, fear and – surprisingly – love. One participant says “Plenty of Satanists see Satan as good”. Another, and the most surprising confession of what black metal was, came from the participant with an upbringing in church, he thought for a little time and almost shyly said that he “believes more in love than in any supernatural entity because love is more real”. He explains that their love to each other and to the music is why they make the music and that in his latest songs, his lyrics are about love as well. At the same time, he elaborates over the more classical themes in black metal ideology and explains that he toils with occultism and reads about magic and Satanism because it is interesting. This kind of curiosity for the paranormal seems to be vital for the way they construct themselves as individualistic and at the same time conformist black metal artists: The almost scientific approach to their beliefs, where they read a wide variety of sources about the topic and experiment with different kinds of rituals and ordeals to search for a more authentic view of existence. One of the participants had studied philosophy at university but all of them referred to philosophical or religious concepts and ideas. To believe in Satan is to believe in God and therefore to define what God is must hence be of importance. One participant puts it like this when he is asked how to learn black metal:

Books about occultism and religion. Something that is useful is to read the bible or the Quran or whatever. But read it from an unbiased stance. You should forget all you have learned and interpret it literally instead.

Based on these reflections, black metal ideology can be described partly as a defined progressive force, fighting for the individual, for love and freedom – and – often through exposing the darkest parts of existence, but also just as much defined as being opposed to Christianity and other religions – primarily Abrahamic religions who are seen as doing evil, like war and oppression in the name of some claimed higher good called God. Some of the informants then replace one church with another when they enter an order or another organized cult to enact their belief, but at least two of these participants regard this with great scepticism. One has a New Age approach, where he picks and chooses ideas and ideals from everywhere, while another describes organised Satanism and similar organisations as “[...] being back to square one in Christianity – that this must be followed. It is kind of like a law”. The same respondent describes the work on the next album as an album about war. He exemplifies with a

song that he is currently writing about the actions and emotions on Utøya<sup>4</sup>. His war is against Christianity.

### How black metal is described

Black metal's sonic and musical qualities are described by the participants as tightly connected to the ideology described above. To the casual listener, it may be difficult to distinguish between death and black metal and when asked to describe to an uninitiated, they all start off by referring to a feeling, function or ideal. One of the informants uses an allegorical approach: "If death metal is like a splatter movie, then black metal is like a psychological thriller".

When pressed on what they would do to sonically and/or musically achieve the aforementioned feeling, function or ideal, certain musical parameters show up. Some are presented as being typical, some desirable, while the same parameters can be viewed in completely opposite ways by another. What becomes evident is that there are different sub-genres and different preferences.

They all agree that typical characteristics of the music is that it is based on a traditional rock instrumentation with bass, guitar, drums and vocals as necessary ingredients with keyboard as a possible addition. Typical musical identification marks are described as the music being fast, guitar- and riff-based, using double bass and blast beats on the bass drum played in fast 2/4-time signature, and a screaming or growling vocal which is slightly higher pitched than in e.g. Death metal. The arrangements are supposed to be "epic" and they should not follow a predefined pattern. Basically, the musical expression is supposed to bring forth the message the band wants to communicate.

So, where do they disagree? There are two important differences between the participant's description of quality conceptions in black metal: The level of musical experimentation allowed and the view of the necessity to be serious in the music.

On the one side, black metal is described in archaic or even reactionary terms: Black metal is then a genre that was defined once and for all during the 1990s and is supposed to develop in deep respect for the godfathers of black metal such as the Norwegian Mayhem or Swedish Bathory and that only little should deviate from the norm set by these bands. So, as a musician you should:

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to the massacre at Utøya 2011 where one man killed 77 people, mostly youngsters.

...keep it at such a serious level and not water it [black metal] out as certain other bands do, who experiment to the extent that they almost destroy.

On the other end of the scale two of the participants celebrate the satanic freedom with respects to what is permissible in black metal. When the French band *Deathspell Omega* is described, it is being praised for their innovative style and experimentation:

I think they are ingenious and they... they are just so far ahead from anybody else, because they have this greater view about creating music

“Everything can be black metal as long as it conveys the right feeling”, one participant puts it. On a direct question, as to whether a simple song could be black metal he replies: “There are obvious examples of this. On Watain’s latest album there is an acoustic song with clean vocals.”

The same participant also explains that humour and irony can be used as long as it is dark humour, while the participant representing the archaic discourse regards such means of humour to be destroying the genre. This divide can be seen as expressions of the maturing of a genre, which has developed into several sub-genres and like in, for example, folk music there are strong advocates for a conservative and preservative role as well as advocates for extending the genre and merging it with others.

One thing they do agree on, is the importance of the visual aspects of black metal. The visual and the auditory are described as equally important in conveying the message – as a part of the “complete package”, as one phrases it. A typical visual imagery mentioned is stage scenery consisting of altars, chandeliers, blood and symbols. The face is often painted with “corpse paint”; black and white make up to resemble a skull, and there are often clothes inspired from religious ceremonies or typical leather jackets. Album covers are always carefully thought through, often with occult symbols. All this to create the image of who you are – or who you want to be...

### Theatre or Life Style?

As aforementioned, the none-musical appearance is also crucial within the field of black metal. One informant told us that:

...when you play black metal, it is my view that you should always keep up appearances. It is not a requirement for a black metal artist that, when

they take off the corpse paint and walk off the stage, that they are who they propagate to be. But everything should suggest that you are. So, what you are as a civilian is not too important as long as the audience can believe that you can eat their child.

As in the perceptions of musical quality, there are also here two opposing views that can be seen as a continuum where one of the participants is clearly on one side of the extreme and another, most of the time, on the other side. The one cited above sees the purpose for the audience and the artist to feel the dark emotions and experience the human fears. Whether or not it is real does not matter as long as the audience believe it is. This connects well with a postmodern view of reality and truth as constructions. On the other side, there is the authenticity and true discourse that is hegemonic. To connect to Erik Hannert's (2013) spoon analogy we can see the contours of two insides of the same spoon. There is different symbolic capital within the black metal spoon. The conservative, preservative that believes in authenticity and one singular identity and one more late-modern view where we can have parallel identities that we use and switch between for different purposes. Most of the participants refer to the visual aspects connected to trustworthiness, but for most that means putting on a persuasive act. Interestingly even the most conservative participant happens to slip out a similar view after having insisted that you have to be true and that black metal is a lifestyle:

[...] When I perform I want to get as far away from my usual character as possible because my usual character is an ordinary human being, and this music is not ordinary for me. So, the more I take off my usual identity and go over to my music identity.... It is almost the same when you enter the stage and take off your own identity

The Gesamtkunstwerk seems to be the ideal and is also a distinguishing factor towards neighbouring genres – classical music, philosophy and the big questions of life, death and existence are in focus. How is this not pretentious?

## Discussion

While there are obvious logical breaches in the totality of the ideological mashup presented here, this is not necessarily grounds for a critique of the black metal culture,

as an investigation into any culture probably would show inconsistencies. Based on informants' statements the study acknowledged some ideological positions that revealed parts of the field's norm system. Though the informants' hails individuality and freedom from dogmas, there are some essential expressions uncovered that connects to the field's doxa. The corpse paint and stage performance, the jargon that emphasises a kind of "noble evilness" and almost a pretentious and philosophical way of reasoning about life and how artists and music should be, act and sound like to be granted authenticity. Besides that, in order to acquire social and cultural capital, it is important to listen to and be aware of the "right" performers, which in many respects are early bands like Bathory and Mayhem, but even newer acts as Watain – bands which in the field are what Bourdieu (1992) terms as *culture princes* and *taste makers*.

This study shows that these young black metal musicians are using black metal as an art in several ways: It connects to the meaning of art as experience posed by Dewey (2005), but also to a view of art as the sublime as described by Edmund Burke (2007), as well as connect to notions of art as criticism<sup>5</sup>. These young men have chosen a path to express themselves and to become who they wish to become through active change. Active, deliberate change could be a description of what education is – and as such, black metal could be understood as educational *per se* according to these respondents. They are actively engaging to make a difference for themselves and for society. The usefulness and success of their endeavours are hard to predict as the cultural capital of the genre is fairly low, but the genre is "by nature provocative" as one participant expressed it. The description they make of black metal can be seen as emancipatory: They are striving for freedom *from* evil, or *through* evil, in different ways.

Another thing to notice is that all the informants have a non-christian or even anti-christian view of the world. The impression is that it is rather about an *occultural* view (Partridge, 2005), or strive for a mystical and a higher meaning in a secular world – a phenomenon described by Partridge (Ibid.) as *Re-Enchantment*. To put it in other words: The informants collect their own bricolage of popular cultural expressions, mixed with older occult symbols and expressions. The outcome is an unconstrained aesthetic, occult and philosophical mix that serves both as a musical and ideological beacon.

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<sup>5</sup> Interesting, but beyond the scope of this article, is how the participants in the study express opinions of mass culture and the cultural industry as means of mass deception and pacification, as opposed to enlightenment and real value, that (ironically) fits in well with how Adorno analyses the relationships between art and mass culture (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007; Adorno, 1975).

So, becoming a black metal musician is far more than learning to play the right notes and construct the right arrangements: It involves a high degree of socialisation or perhaps even *bildung* through critical thinking and a broad orientation concerning art, theology, mysticism and philosophy. To become a black metal artist involves trying to inherit an idealistic position and be willing to change this if proven wrong. As the respondent who cherished love in black metal showed clearly: Black metal for him helped him change to become a better human being.

We want to argue that the field of black metal, with its provoking values and aesthetics, can be interpreted as what we would call a *Luciferian principle* within the society – a concept close related to the Jungian *Trickster*<sup>6</sup> archetype (Griswold, 1983). The Luciferian principle connects to the original meaning of Satan as *The Accuser*, who points his finger at the hypocrisy in society and works as the chaos factor that challenges accepted truths, prevents stagnation and move “the plot” forward.

Black metal will probably not be welcomed into music classrooms for a long time (Kallio, 2015), and would probably not want to be there either, in fear of losing its luciferian identity. But if we could just forget about the hatred and evil for one second – black metal pedagogy would be a perfect candidate for our music classrooms – a celebration of the will and ultimately a quest to reach one’s own full potential. How can school music, similarly to black metal pedagogy, engage a total engagement in technical excellence, aesthetic communication and sublime existential fulfilment without it? A conclusion could be that formal music education should seek to engage students to engage in these features of musical communication from their own perspectives to lighten the individual’s spark for musical excellence. It is not only tempting, but also in its place to round off and epitomize this study with a familiar sentence within the field – the philosophical law of Thelema as formulated by Aleister Crowley: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the law, love under will” (Crowley & Crowley, 2004: 3).<sup>7</sup>

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6 The Trickster is a frequent ambiguous archetype in fairy tales, myths and religions. The archetype is mainly characterized by individualism, duality, shrewdness, poor impulse control and a constant desire to challenge the established power structures. The Trickster may, because of the his/her often low social status, use creativity and cunning to achieve their aims. Well-known characters who are often linked with the archetype is Prometheus, Lucifer and Loki, but also characters from popular culture like Han Solo from the *Star Wars* saga and Gollum/Sméagol from *Lord of the Rings*. The Trickster often contributes with a role in *the story* which means that, despite their moral shortcomings, they still perform acts of a positive nature.

7 The sentence is from the book *Liber AL vel Legis*, originally written 1904 by the magician and cult leader Aleister Crowley (1875–1947). The word *will* should here be interpreted as the quintessence and possibilities of personal development in every human.

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