CONTEMPT, ATAVISM, ESCHATOLOGY
Black Metal and Bergson’s Porous Inversion

Louis Hartnoll

The sun turns black, earth sinks into the sea,
the bright stars vanish from the sky;
steam rises up in conflagration,
a high flame plays against heaven itself.

From every distorted note and each commanding scream, first-wave black metal egests the heretical commitment to an unrealized and unrealizable history. In occupying one of the genre’s most central and palpable themes, the sustained fidelity to an eradicated Norwegian culture, cut short long before it could become, displaces its listener-subjects from the solid ground upon which they stand. As shall be explored here, the relationship between this temporality and subjectivation—or rather, a subjectivation indivisible from this temporality—develops according to three distinct but interconnected operations: Born from a pure agonistic rage against what is now, black metal looks back to what was or should have been to ask the question of what will be. Beginning with an enraged contrast of presence and absence—the why of contemporary capitalism against the where of historic paganism—it revisits, inhabits, embodies, and projects out its own deadened mythology; at once testifying to a past, future, and present that simultaneously haven’t ever, will never, and yet continue to exist. These tripartite movements attest to a polyphonic and polytemporal ontogenesis in which black metal’s sonic timescape oscillates between contempt, atavism, and eschatology. But how might it be possible to excavate the implications of these three moments and unleash them onto philosophy? to position black metal as both the problem in which and the tool with which to think? to uncover the subjective test embedded in its darkened symbolism?
In order to answer these questions, we must initially turn to Bergson's seminal text *Matter and Memory*—particularly to its third chapter—and to the theoretical optic established therein. Through a speculative treatment on the divided natures of matter and spirit, he is able to outline the various durational operations of memory, the past's necessary contemporaneity with the present, and, ultimately, the impact of time on the subject's becoming. This is to say that the ontological understanding of memory, and its subsequent ramifications, forgoes the opportunity to examine a present that is never hermetically itself; in recognizing memory as both removed from and embroiled within a plane of images, we cannot simply define the present as the pure mathematical instant situated between past and future. Preemptively echoing, in a complicated tone, the Mayhem lyrics “the past is alive,” Bergson's conceptual analysis outlines a past that in ceasing to be now has not ceased to be. Thus, in separating out matter and memory's purities in an abstracted, alchemical, and ontological experiment, Bergson then reconstitutes their division as one sustained through an inverted difference of degree. Positioned as central to both his thought and to the wider task of metaphysics, it is only as a result of this inversion that an aperture in the seemingly impenetrable division between virtual past and actual present is opened. Taken individually, matter and memory represent an unrelatable difference in kind; but, taken together, their inverted and embodied interconnection represents a contagious difference in degree. Acknowledging this instilled permeability between the two entities allows us to begin to reinscribe Bergson's speculations back onto the three temporal instances of black metal—conceptualized according to the atavism-image and eschatology-image, hyphenated to the present with the aid of contempt. In a restaging of its mythical history, its animation of an unrealized past—that is, its artificial creation in matter of memory—black metal pushes Bergson's inversion to its traumatic conclusion. Slicing the wound open, it eviscerates, inverts, and accelerates the matter-time relationship, allowing its contagious composition to infect one another.

**BLACKENED BERGSONISM**

It is only ever possible with Bergson to speak of multiple memory-s that must be considered as a set of perpetually mutating and heteromorphous relationships between the subject and spirit as past. Contrary to its usage in the vernacular, ‘memory’ here is never a memory; it is not merely reducible to the cognitive recalling of forgotten or no-longer experiences. Rather, the Bergsonian conception of memory sits in a tripartite state constituted by habit-memory, representational-
memory, and pure memory.\(^4\) To account for the variations between these three, we must first distinguish between the two different modes with which the past survives. Moving in different directions, the first takes the form of motor mechanisms, and the second the form of recollection.

Through an operation of prolongation, the past's survival reveals itself in its first form: habit-memory. Described as following “the direction of nature,”\(^5\) this type of memory is wholly engaged with the practical activity of the living. By prolonging and repeating, its concern is with an impulsive and instinctive utility that aims to mechanismically apply the past as a tool to accommodate the subject to their surrounding material environment. The past, here, is necessarily intertwined with the immediate activity of the present: a past that acts and reacts according to the opportunities and threats that confront a body. Accordingly, it is in this sense that habit-memory is in ongoing exchange with matter itself. Concerning itself with an immediate response, we may wish to describe habit-memory as an inactive activity: wholly inactive in the sense that no concerted effort is required to engage with its automated processes, but wholly active in the sense that it remains in perpetual dialogue with things that act upon or can be acted upon. This form of embodied memory cannot be considered memory par excellence, it is rather “habit interpreted by memory and not memory itself.”\(^6\) To uncover what Bergson is alluding, and the ontological instrument with which black metal toys, we must turn to the second form in which memory makes itself felt, in representational-memory. This second instance of the past's survival operates through a movement of conservation; irrespective of “utility or of practical application, [representational-memory] stores up the past by mere necessity of its own nature.”\(^7\) It indexes and conserves, at each and every instant, the entirety of experience in all its detailed specificity, leaving to it its position of unique particularity. Stored in the form of memory-images, as the amassed collection of singular chronological imprints, pure memory provides the ontological support for representational-memory's intricate oscillations between the ineffectual living and the nascent deadened.

As Leonard Lawlor suggests, the reason that this form of memory may be considered any less natural than its counterpart is because it involves an inattention to life, “and not to pay attention to life is in a sense not only to be dead, but to be free of life's necessities.”\(^8\) The commands of life on a plane of matter, what we may broadly term 'the actual,' thus establishes itself in distinction to pure memory, what we may broadly term 'the virtual,' as an essentially removed and inattentive structure. If we are to capture such an entity as an image in the actual, an effort is required to remove oneself from corporeal demands and immerse oneself into the dead and disinterested past. It is accordingly only
through a leap into an autonomous past—in its amputated construction beyond the throws of life—that we are able to experience it as such; it is never simply a reliving of the past as it once was, never merely another iteration of it in the present, nor even a “rendering actual what is simply virtual and making the two identical,” but can only be the concerted move to greet the past as it is. By momentarily hesitating and abandoning the exigencies of the mortal coil, we are permitted the opportunity to resolve ourselves in the depths of the virtual. Unlike habit-memory’s survival in inactive activity, representational-memory requires the subject to actively inhabit the otherwise inactive: a step from the stability of matter into the fluidity of memory. But the cardinal difference here, between that which is prolonged and that which is conserved, is fundamentally one of the repeated and the unrepeatable, or, in terminology which we’ll find appropriate to black metal, the staged and the unrestageable.

In recognizing the existence of these two surviving operations of the past, Bergson is able to subsequently expose the incoherence behind attributing to the present any ontological primacy. To conceive of the present as the instantaneous mathematical point situated between past and future, as the singular moment of existence between what no longer is and what is not yet (that is, the real between the false), is to overlook the past’s endurance. The reason for this consideration is twofold: firstly, the present in itself is always already outside of itself, and secondly, to take what is given within the present as that which is to confuse a part for the whole, a state of being for the entirety of being’s becoming. The first fallacy suggests that to perceive the present is to be placed within the liminal space between the unfolding simultaneity of the immediate past and the immediate future. Bergson’s challenge to this phenomenological presentism suggests that the experience of the present’s duration is necessarily situated on both sides of its mathematical instant; it has “one foot in my past and another in my future. In my past, first, because 'the moment in which I am speaking is already far from me;' in my future, next, because this moment is impending over the future.” To hold that the present is occupied at the threshold between past and the future is to overlook its perpetually elongated existence. Any perception of the present is necessarily the instantaneous concurrence of what temporally was, is, and can be; the fleeting permanence of itself and its alterity. The present can only be itself if it is immediately placed beyond its own boundaries, contemporaneously internal and external to its own momental occurrence. “Nothing is less than the present moment, if you understand by that the indivisible limit which divides the past from the future. When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet, and when we think it as existing, it is already past.” The second fallacy of the present’s unique reality
revolves around Bergson’s challenge to any narrow contraction of being to its mere snapshot; existence can be reduced neither to a fleeting instant nor to a set of material composites. Outlined early on in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson claims that reality is in a constant state of becoming, the totality of its unfolding state cannot be grasped in any of its divisible states. Therefore, the present as but one instant cannot be equated with the series of time’s instances; what is is not synonymous with what is present; or in its negative assertion, what has been is not no longer; what has been is. Both commonplace fallacies stem from the habitual psychological direction of the mind; that is, the catatonic inability to recognize a reality beyond objects’ present-ation to consciousness. At once it is the dual assumption made that holds the present to be that which is most alongside the past as that which both was and is not. The same belief that the past can be forgotten champions the false urgency of the present. On this point Deleuze comments:

We have great difficulty in understanding the survival of the past in itself because we believe that the past is no longer, that it has ceased to be. We have thus confused Being with being-present. Nevertheless, the present is not; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It IS not, but it acts. Its proper element is not being but the active or the useful.12

By demonstrating the two movements of memory—habit and representational—and the particularity of the present—its restriction to a part, not the sum, of the whole—the requirement to think the real beyond the actual plane becomes wholly apparent. In assertions that reverberate in Burzum’s *Lost Wisdom*, “Other planes lie beyond the reach / of normal sense and common roads / but they are no less real / than what we see or touch or feel,”13 what Bergson is indicating is that there is an existence in a past, a pure memory, that subsists beyond perception. Whilst it “manifests itself as a rule only in the colored and living image which reveals it,”14 that is, in its hyphenated tie to the actual through habit and representational-memory, pure memory must remain essentially and theoretically virtual. Pure memory, qua the virtual, may be felt in bodily motor mechanisms or glanced at in memory-images, but it is never met directly. This is because any immediate confrontation would necessarily assume the compromised form of an image, thus tying it to the actual. Once again severed from the actual, this in-itself past remains hermetically withdrawn from the praxial demands and capacities constituted within matter. But, if we are to treat the virtual as that which is devoid of all nascent potentiality, severed from the actual and accordingly confined to the ineffectual, then we would obscure the true nature of its being. Rather, it is as a
result of its “lack of interest and suspension of need that it can reveal itself as a disruptive and creative power,” thus its very distance and freedom from ‘life’s necessities’ account for an intensified and heightened strength. Because the virtual is not reliant on the actual in order to subsist, Bergson assigns to it an autonomy that adds to, not detracts from, its underlying capacities. The image, as branded with the mark of utility, seizes upon and interprets pure-memory’s larval capacity in an embodied experience; however, this very transition jointly serves to reinforce and bridge such a divide. Bergson confirms:

Memory actualized in an image differs, then, profoundly from pure memory. The image is a present state, and its sole share in the past is the memory from which it arose. Memory, on the contrary, powerless as long as it remains without utility, is pure from all admixture of sensation, is without attachment to the present, and is, consequently, unextended.

In distancing pure memory from images, Bergson must also claim that it must exist in itself and cannot, by logical extension, be contained within something else. This critique is particularly pertinent to theories that would seek to house memory solely in the brain. The logical contradiction of the brain-as-container assumption rests in the contraction of the virtual to an image in the actual; again, it is not possible for a part to retain the whole. Pure-memory itself cannot reside within the brain; it is not reducible to the neurological operations that support ordinary cognitive functioning. It is, rather, the reverse. As Deleuze notes, “the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time, grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round.”

Shaped by the amassed / amassing moments of what has passed and bearing its entire weight down on the present, pure memory subsists not in an actual, chronological, forgotten, and nonexistent capacity but in a virtual, ontological, persistent, and coexistent one. The dark fabric of the Bergsonian unconscious is one thus constituted as a “nonpsychological reality,” a realm that fundamentally doesn’t belong to and yet is heavily invested in the individuation process; a share of the subject is never itself.

**MATTER-MEMORY INVERSION**

Once the divisions between the varying memory-s are established—that is, the ways in which the pure past in its non-chronological, self-sufficient state is divorced from the subject at the same time as it colors the actual through its connection in habit-memory and memory-images—Bergson then sets out to investigate
what the implications of a reality beyond the actual have for the conditions of existence. Ordinarily conceived, the material objects that surround a subject in the present moment are held to occupy a greater share and responsibility for the constitution of consciousness and thus, existence. Their proximity, tactility, and visibility lead one to assume their real presence, “the strictly determinate order of these objects lends to them the appearance of a chain, of which my present perception is only one link." The closer an object is to a subject on that chain, the closer it is to being acted upon or against depending on whether it presents an opportunity or threat. With this in mind, the reverse holds true for the pedestrian comprehension of memory. The same logic of extension by which space becomes immediately opened necessitates that which appears most absent, i.e., memory, seems least present. Whilst contemplating space, matter presents itself as fundamentally connected; however, with time, memory’s interlinked chain does not make itself immediately known. To get from location \( w \) to location \( z \), there is a requirement to move through \( x \) and \( y \) first, but to recall last week, one must jump over the days that stand in between—its intermediary links go wholly unnoticed. The capacity to make such leaps in the chain ordinarily leaves one with the belief that no chain exists. However, it is clear from the preceding analysis that Bergson’s articulation of memory is one that necessarily exists and coexists at the same time as the present. This highlights a primary tension: It cannot be the case that that which shows itself to consciousness in matter constitutes the entirety of existence and that the pure past, qua the imperceptible virtual, exist. The two positions are logically incongruous. This problematic causes Bergson to assert, against the habitual direction of thought, that mere presentation to consciousness cannot thus be synonymous with existence. It is clear that, due to matter’s logical connection in a chain, objects outside of one’s immediate surroundings do not cease to exist; being positioned at \( w \) doesn’t render the belief in existence of the obscured (by \( x \) and \( y \)) \( z \) moot. But why is it possible to insist upon the existence of objects beyond consciousness and yet refuse these conditions when referring to time? Rather, the nascent link between the subject’s past and their present “is exactly comparable to the adherence of unperceived objects to those objects which we perceive; and the unconscious plays in each case a similar part.” At this stage, Bergson makes an enigmatic but absolutely essential move. By pushing the comparison of the temporally past and the spatially distant further he continues to suggest that “We have not, in regard to objects unperceived in space and unconscious memories in time, to do with two radically different forms of existence, but the exigencies of action are the inverse in the one case what they are in the other.” So crucial is this assertion that he describes it as the “capital problem of existence” which, if we
were to allow it, would “lead us step by step into the heart of metaphysics.”

In order to analyze this and excavate the methods by which black metal opens up into the past, it is necessary to break the sentence down into its two composite parts: the first speaks to the forms of existence, and the second to an inversion.

What Bergson requires is to posit two constitutive conditions that jointly inform psychic reality. These are: presentation in consciousness, and logical or causal connection. With these conditions, he navigates the logical incongruity referenced earlier; now it is the case that images amongst the actual and memory within the virtual both occupy a share of existence. But the peculiarity of this move lies in that after using the preceding half of Matter and Memory to separate out and purify the various aspects of space from time, he now reconnects the two via an extended difference of degree, and not solely in kind. This is to say, despite matter and memory’s abstracted articulation as two indivisible entities, they ultimately remain joined together by a contiguous degree of difference. However, it is necessary to add, that these two conditions are unevenly fulfilled, i.e., they are in inverse proportions. Since matter, in the first instance, evidences its logical connection in the form of an unbroken and directly interlinked chain, Bergson considers it to fulfill the second condition (logical and causal connection) to a perfect degree; however, since it obeys particular determining rules, it can only ever present a small and imperfect fragment of itself to consciousness. Whilst one knows that object $z$ is $n$ meters away, when positioned at point $w$ it is obscured by $x$ and $y$. In contradistinction to this, memory’s causal connection is less rigid as we move from link to link by way of a leap, providing a level of contingency in the chain; however, its presentation to consciousness necessarily remains perfect because its entire weight is felt in the act itself. The reason for this is because “The whole of our past psychical life conditions our present state, without being its necessary determinant.”

As the subject acts, they act with the magnitude and contingency of the past. With this metaphysical inversion, Bergson invites an exchange. The body, situated between extended space and enduring time, is positioned at the very heart of the inversion. Located at the intersection, the subject acts as the gateway with which matter and memory open onto one another. Bergson has recourse to diagrammatically represent these doubled and interrelated conditions of reality—constituting a true difference of degree fulfilled in inverted measures—through his image of the cone.
Motionlessly situated at the base of the cone is AB: the totality of the subject’s past, pure memory. At the peak of the cone is S, denoting the subject engaged in sensori-motor activity located at the point of present and immediate consciousness. Restlessly shifting, the subject is shown at the intersection on the plane of matter, P. The levels A'B' and A"B" provisionally constitute two of an “infinite number of possible states of memory” in a more or less contracted or dilated form. Point S is the instance in which, through the body’s privileged position, the images which can be affected and the memory which can affect exchange; it is the dialogue between that which is rigid and that which is contingent, it is the collision between that which presents only a part and that which presents itself perfectly to consciousness. The difference in degree is shown not by means of a linear scale, moving from time on the one side to matter on the other; rather, it is demonstrated along two different axes, space along the horizontal and time along the vertical. To begin to bear the relationship this has to the sonic—and to darken, distort, and amplify Bergson’s inversion—we must return to the speculations outlined earlier: black metal and all of its temporal intricacies.
CONTEMPT, ATAVISM, ESCHATOLOGY

As we briefly noted, black metal can be understood to move through three divided but interlinked temporalities: The first moment begins with a contempt for the present, the second moves into the atavistic past, and the third projects an eschatological to-come of the future. Passing sequentially from the question of absence, through the exploration of history, to the “hermeneutic horizon” by a difference of degree, as we shall see, it displaces its subjects into an actual—virtual past—virtual future—actual . . . (∞) cycle. Mimicking the Bergsonian method of distillation and compounding, these distinct stages can first be understood individually before outlining their unfolding connection.

During the first moment of the black metal circuit, what we find is a move analogous to the Bergsonian ontological exposure of the fallacious habitual primacy of the present, driven in this instance, however, by the political motives of far right- and left-wing agendas. It is out of a pure contempt for both “liberal capitalism's eternal present” and for the Christian Church’s destruction of Norwegian pagan ancestry that we can come to see its own hate-fueled challenge to the primacy of the actual. Its vexed disdain, that is so attentively aggravated by the historico-cultural analysis which fails to locate the pervasive whereabouts of its mythological inheritance, condemns the contemporary to the unbearable scar of a lie. The present is not the momentary existence of the real, but rather the pervasion of the false after the real. The unending Now and the marked absence of what-should-be centers black metal’s agonistic focus, its “permanence of conflict attests to the ever-receding utopian hope of the abolishing of the present, whilst also preserving a consistent and stabilized enmity to that present that gives the supplement of identity and integration.” In forming a simultaneous acknowledgement and rejection of the images that comprise the material composite of the actual, black metal adopts two tactics in its strategic attack on the contemporary Now; both beginning from the actual, one—through acknowledgement—remains, and the other—through rejection—departs. The first tactic is found in the construction of the music and in the events associated with its emergence. In black metal’s impenetrable distortion can be found a sonic battle that seeks to turn the pure noise of its sound against the impure noise of capitalism / Christianity; “It is a static war, restless and bristling, but it is also a war of static. A war both by and against static: the buzzing howl nearly drowned out in the constant growl of late capitalist totality.” This destructive-materialist tendency is mirrored through the various church burnings, associated murders, and stylistic adoption of corpsepaint and other anti-religious iconography that constitute its inaudible composition.
The cacophonic negativity is thus the utilization of material to destroy material, the internal collapse of the actual onto itself, the amplification of matter’s autophagic tendencies. But it would be wrong to assign to this arsenal a purely limp and self-constricting efficacy; rather, it is from these points that black metal can make the movement into the second tactic and, accordingly, the second moment—atavism.

In the rejection of the actual, first-wave black metal drifts towards the purity of the dead past, a virtual-negativity. By looking to the material surroundings, it examines its cultural inheritance; the histories it emerges from come to greatly inform the history that it lives. Ulver’s Erik Olivier Lancelot outrightly draws upon this connection by stating that his band’s theme “has always been the exploration of the dark side of Norwegian folklore, which is strongly tied to the close relationship our ancestors had with the forests, mountains, and sea.”32 It is from the geographical and spatial coordinates that they, as hyphenated subjects, are positioned within that an access to the atavistic virtual becomes possible. The harsh climate that Ulver emerges from makes itself known not only in its territory, but also in its temporal extremity. As positioned within the Arctic Circle, there is an experience of winter’s relentless polar nights and summer’s unsettling midnight sun that gives the Norwegian months a certain degree of atemporality or lack of periodicity.33 If there is an air of geosynchronicity to this music, then it must be thought of within these durational extremes. Darkthrone’s track “A Blaze in the Northern Sky” has this to contribute:

Where the days are Dark  
And Night the Same  
Moonlight Drank the Blood  
Of a thousand Pagan men34

These lyrics at once highlight the intersection between the darkened days of the Norwegian actual and the direction of the pagan virtual towards which it heads; it is from the material environment in which it emerges that admits the flight beyond its locale. Although most familiar to the music and writings of Varg Vikernes, throughout the entirety of first-wave black metal extensive references to pagan mythology can be found.35 Songs and albums such as Enslaved’s “Heimdallr”, Forlorn’s The Crystal Palace, Immortal’s Pure Holocaust, and Mayhem’s De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas are just some of the iterations of this pervasive and palpable theme. Evan Calder Williams, with reference to the Finnish band Vordr, suggests that the black metal can be thought of as “the restaging of a
past war that was to have happened yet which missed its chance. (The beginning of the end that didn't take place, the failed start.)”36 This restaging of the unrealized develops an artificial memory-image, *qua* atavism-image, that urges the subject to jump into the virtual; artificial because it has never existed, memory-image because it's an embodied past that exists. A past that was never but still is; the histories that couldn't become but which breathe through fiction; an artifice more real than the real it attacks. Mayhem’s “From the Dark Past” testifies to such a commitment; it opens:

A face in stone . . . decayed by age
A man who has returned to tell of his damnation
Fears so deep, the mouth wide open
The dream has died away before the dawn of this time37

Lines two and four speak to this restaging via the atavism-image: the leap into the mythic retold virtual, felt through a deceased and unrealized dream, and the greeting of the dark past from the specifics of the present. It is precisely here, in this transition from actual to virtual, from present to past, and from contempt to atavism, that it is possible to note the junction between Bergson's two disproportionately fulfilled conditions of existence. Taken in their pure, abstracted state, matter and memory remain both contradistinctive and alienated from one another, their ontology is comprised of two fundamentally different kinds of entities that cannot engage in dialogue; but, as has been noted, by rearranging their lived qualities into the two conditions of existence fulfilled to inverse degrees, Bergson pierces a hole in the impenetrable barrier between them. This is to say that the subject, from its position of privilege, sits at the centre of an inversion in which matter and memory collide. In its retrocausal move from present to restaged past, in its interconnection between contempt and atavism, in its embroiled tie of actual to virtual, black metal slashes the wound between these variously estranged entities open. By separating and reconnecting, via an inverted difference of degree, Bergson begins to expose the influence of one plane to another; but again, it is because of its contempt for the present and via its generated atavism-image that black metal starts to amplify this porous inversion. The fictions drawn from the remnants of history, the mythology displaced into the past simultaneously as past and absent present, and the active virtualizing of a reconstructed real navigate the matter to memory threshold. Constituted from and in the present, the atavism-image doesn't pass from actual to virtual but leaps into it; the already passed past is produced in its present; a past that coexists and is created with the unfolding
present. The experimental negativity born through rage seeps through the immediate to contaminate the pure; the plane of the living spills into the weight of the dead. However, it is at this stage that the third moment is encountered; the movement towards the eschatological. Once relocated in an artificial, unrealized past the call then becomes to realize a projected Ragnarök of the future. It is worth returning to Williams on this point:

Above all, black metal is war. It is fought under the banner of a desired final war to come: the striving march from *impure apocalypse of the present* to the *Pure Armageddon of the end*. To leave behind the messiness and imprecision of the Now, not by dreaming about the future but through a constant return to buried antagonisms . . . To become a fierce and directed manifestation of shared hatred toward the assumed positivity of what the order of the day is.\textsuperscript{38}

At first this may seem to stand contra to the analysis so far presented, as is noted, the future is not dreamed. But rather, William's assertion testifies specifically to the unfolding sequential present-past-future-present circuit. First-wave black metal does not project immediately from the actual towards the eschatological future, but it is via buried antagonisms that it can “march to war,”\textsuperscript{39} as a step backwards before moving forwards. That is, it is a desired future which makes itself felt in the call to action only after it is experienced via an atavistic return. The unrealized world that should have been is mapped onto a world that will. “If it can't recreate Baldr's world it would rather humanity have no future.”\textsuperscript{40} Projecting the war-like *to come* of the future beyond the immediacy of the actual’s what can be acted upon / against, black metal incites the eschatology-image. At once *felt* in the march and *distanced* in the towards, the eschatology-image is sustained not in the immediate opportunities and threats that surround the subject but rather it is constituted in its deferred arrival.\textsuperscript{41} Hovering between a self-abolishing eschatology *qua* unrealizable abstraction and an embodied image *qua* realizable action and thus again, between a virtual- and an actual-negativity, the eschatology-image engenders a futurity that completes black metal’s temporal cycle.\textsuperscript{42} What is accordingly observable is an extended circuit: starting from a position of contemptuous agonism towards the present, moving through the intersection of Norway's material histories that, in turn, are propelled towards the future only to return to the actual in a call to action. Contempt, in this equation, acts as the maddened negativity both drives and anchors the departure, it does not constitute a contempt-image in itself but acts as the hyphen which links atavism and eschatology to their -image. Locat-
ed very much within the actual, it is the angered knot which renders the solitude of past and future coherent. black metal's enduring hate, its disdainful detest for the immutable present, its agonistic attack on liberal-capitalism's Now drives the perpetual cycle in which it functions; its underlying, indissociable, and immediately recognizable negativity is the fuel that transitions and connects each sequential stage. In order to encapsulate this exchange, what is needed is this sequence reinscribed onto the order of blackened Bergson cone; the below diagram accordingly seeks to chart this topographical move along the mathematical coordinates of a Klein bottle.

![Diagram of the Distorted Cone]

Figure 2. The Distorted Cone
Points S, P, A through A” and B through B” remain the same referents as in Bergson’s original cone: the subject, plane of matter, and the various states, levels, and contractions of pure memory. The first additional point of note, S’, shows the subject directed along black metal’s present-past-future-present circuit; moving from actual towards virtual past, from virtual past towards virtual future—shown in the second additional point, F—only to fold back onto the actual by way of the contemptuous call to action against the Now. At the extreme of one axis is the rhythmic haunting of a history that simultaneously has never existed and yet still exists; at the other extreme is the projection of a cadaverous past onto the battle cry for the future. Its intersecting axis bears the force of these movements, the virtual-negativity now surrounding the subject in their hyphenated position. Taken together, these two isolated virtuals jointly constitute a non-psychological ontology that converses with the mechanics of individuation; pure past and pure future are fundamentally separate from and linked to the subject’s becoming. The centre of the inversion, located at the virtual-actual-virtual junction above, subjects past and future to the influence of matter and vice versa; positioned as separate yet inseparable conditions, neither one being a weak version of nor entirely divorced from the other. Upended and reversed, the actual and virtual have their insides turned out and outsides in; reconnected together by a true, inverse difference of degree they are now shown in their capacity for radical, contagious permeability. It is an exposure of matter to memory as well as memory to matter. In black metal’s subjection of pure past to the artificial images drawn from matter, Bergson’s cone mutates to allow interiority and exteriority to converse. Through it, the gates open both to a spectral and speculative past and an unwritten future that is jointly constituted from, prior to, and against the contemporary present. The subject of / to / in black metal is pulled between these extreme temporalities—mythic past and war-like future—that stretch out beyond the plane of matter only to come crashing back in a tirade of rage. In displacing matter as memory and using memory against matter, past, future, and action expose themselves and becoming exposed to the another; Bergson’s porous inversion, the very fissure that admits memory-matter reciprocity, is pried open to allow the radical contagion between an artificial virtual and a disdained actual. Matter, here, does not become pure past, just as pure past does not become pure future—all have uniquely distinguishable characteristics—but together they become the momentary hesitations in a cyclical flow of blackened being. With its feet on the ground and its head tilted back, black metal howls the command of time.
NOTES


3 The term ‘memory-s’ is used here to denote ‘memory’ as a shifting plural, a set that contains distinguishable particulars united by a common relation. Not, for which the term ‘memories’ would suggest, as in the collection of a series of different but consistently similar singulars.


6 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 84 [sic].


14 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 133 [sic].


17 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2012), 80. With this comment, we are able to correct Jean Hyppolite’s assessment that the Bergsonian thesis can be reduced to “I endure therefore I am.” It is not I that endures but endurance that is I; I am allowed to endure; endurance conditions the I. Endurance is therefore I am. Jean Hyppolite, “Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson,” trans. by Athena V. Colman, in Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 112 [112–127].

18 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 56.


21 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 146 [italics added].
22 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 146.
23 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 146–147.
24 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 148.
25 Adapted from: Bergson, Matter and Memory, 162.
26 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 168.
29 Noys, “Remain True to the Earth!”, 120.
30 Williams, “The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” 141.
31 It is not my intention to elaborate on these well-documented points further. For a more detailed examination of the role of black metal’s sonic aesthetic as a duplication of the impure noise it struggles against, see the Williams article referenced below. ’A war both by and against static: the buzzing howl nearly drowned out in the constant growl of late capitalist totality. For despite its hailing back to the absent origin, black metal is the sound—and politics, for there is no divorcing of the two—of this infernal and eternal present turned up and back on itself.’ Williams, “The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” 141 [sic].
34 Darkthrone, A Blaze in the Northern Sky, CD (Peaceville Records, 1992) [sic].
35 This is not to suggest that pagan referencing cannot be found elsewhere—references can also be found in the work of Behemoth and Enthroned for example—but that in first wave Norwegian black metal there is a very particular movement that cannot be found elsewhere precisely because of its geographical specificity.
36 Williams, “The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” 134 [sic].
37 Mayhem, From the Dark Past, CD (Deathlike Silence, 1994).
38 Williams, “The Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” 130 [sic].
41 Elsewhere I have argued that the eschatology-image begins to allow the possibility of thinking through of a pure future not found in Matter and Memory. A pure future, that following Deleuze’s crystal-image, contorts the present as it is its future. It is necessary for a new present to arrive in order for the old present to pass, and to do so simultaneously as
it is present.
42 In Noys' aforementioned article he articulately outlines the dialectical consequences of unrealizable war, the antagonistic impossibility of an unobtainable Ragnarök; suggesting that "On its own criteria should Black Metal triumph as the recovery of a true aesthetic politics of the 'impossible past' it would then disappear . . . The fact that this does not and cannot occur is what maintains Black Metal as an abstract aestheticisation of politics in the service of a dialectic that can only produce further 'concrete abstractions.'" Noys, "'Remain True to the Earth!'," 120 [sic].
43 Bergson's original cone is here low-lighted for reference—of which the peak has been dilated and the base folded in on itself. For ease of demonstration it has been drawn as a 2D cross section.