

Black Metal Logos. An Examination of the Aesthetics of Extremity

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Abstract

This research paper examines the visually cryptic aesthetics of band logos in an extreme musical genre known as Black Metal.

Black Metal music and artistry generally embraces a very misanthropic attitude and is fuelled by anti-Christian fervour. The illegible Black Metal logo often endorses the use of Satanic, occult [hidden], pagan ideograms and borrows heavily from script inspired black letter forms. The often ornate letter forms in a Black Metal logo add a visual consistency, symmetry and proportion that is quite unique in terms of identity design.

The goal of the Black Metal logo is one of the creation of fear in the viewer, fear of the 'other', of antinomianism and a visual 'secrecy' that openly declares itself as the enemy. This research paper covers the roots and influences in Black Metal's development and what initially set it apart from popular music, and considers the treatment of the abject in its visual form as an expression of transgression.

The extremism in Black Metal's aesthetic incorporates the use of existing signs of radical evil such as Satanism and even elements of Nazi Germany, a discussion of the semiotic effect of these signs and their interpretation by the viewer is addressed and the possible chains of meaning formed in their interpretation.

Finally, the deeper psychological processing of the Black Metal aesthetic and its unconscious effect on the viewer is explored through the methodology of William Mortensen's *Command to Look* (1937), and how compositional decisions can theoretically make the viewer uncomfortable and ultimately fearful of the cryptic message it contains.