

OF PPLICATIONS: A SHORT SUMMA ON THE
NATURE OF CASCADIAN BLACK METAL

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‘As owl flies to cedar bough . . .’ (Fauna, *Rain*, 2006)

Where does the owl fly in Cascadia?¹ The Hegelian owl of Minerva had not so much a destination as a time: it spread its wings at dusk, seeing the completion of wisdom in a blackened hindsight. The Hegelian owl signifies a theory that always arrives too late, when the form of the world it describes is already passing (a strange inversion of the conventional reading of Hegel as a totalizing thinker).¹ Philosophy is a funeral pall, shrouding dead matter to show the form of its departed spirit.

The owl of Cascadia similarly flies at night, but at a time ‘before the stars had fled the sky’, a moment of dirt-filled dancing tongues. It is an emblem not of wisdom completed in its nostalgic decay, but of an illegible origin, born of gesture and soil. Its time is inseparable from its arrival at the ‘cedar bough’, a place of rest that is exemplary.

Which cedar tree is this? It is unlikely to be of the genus *cedrus*, whose trees (like the Cedar of Lebanon) are native to Asia and Africa. Far more likely is that the name ‘cedar’ is being used to refer to the Western redcedar, a type of cypress whose home is in

¹ ‘Cascadia’ is the name given by some to the Pacific Northwest region of North America. Precise boundaries are disputed, but it usually comprises all or most of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia, and some additional territories. It is bounded on one side by the Pacific Ocean and runs roughly to the Rocky Mountains in the east. Significant geographical features include the Cascade and Coast Mountain ranges, and large areas of forest, including temperate rainforest. It is associated with secessionism, environmentalism and alternative religious movements. The term ‘Cascadia’ was given impetus by Ernest Callenbach’s 1975 novel *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*, in which the region coincides with the country Ecotopia, an ecological utopia separated from the United States.

Cascadia. Already, origins and native soil appear important, even as names are ambiguous and veiled.

The botanical name of the Western redcedar is *Thuja plicata*, the second part of which refers to the way in which its foliage appears folded into plait-like forms. It is one of the so-called *arborvitae* (trees of life). In indigenous American culture, it was used by some Northwest tribes for many purposes, including canoe and totem carving, domestic items, and the stripping of its bark to twist into rope.²

This tree bears an imported name, but its roots dig deep into the aboriginal earth. Cascadian Black Metal betrays a similar ambiguity. It is intensely 'localist', many of its practitioners affirming a rejection of modern civilization and a return to a different kind of relationship with nature, specifically with the particular Cascadian landscapes of forests (including rainforests) and mountains. Song and album titles bear witness to this: Alda's *Tahoma* (2011) (after the mountain of the same name); Twilight Falls's *Lore from an Ancient Forest* (2004); Wolves in the Throne Room's *Black Cascade* (2009) and the songs 'Thuja Magus Imperium' and 'Woodland Cathedral' (*Celestial Lineage*, 2011); Skagos's split with Wake, *The Groan of Ancient Pines* (2009); Blood of the Black Owl's song 'Forest of Decrepitude' (*A Feral Spirit*, 2008). Cover art frequently shows forested landscapes. An ideological anarcho-primitivism is not far from the surface (cf. Skagos's call to 'accelerate industrial collapse'; Mania's anti-machine, anti-agriculture misanthropy).

This adherence to place is expressed through a musical form that is, in its 'original' configuration, imported from the very different climate and culture of northern Europe. Of course, much of the imagery of the forest and mountain is deeply entwined within European BM iconography and lyrical themes too (Hate Forest and Negura Bunget providing two of the most obvious band name references). In each case, an anti-modern pagan veneration of nature, often using art and instruments inspired by indigenous culture and natural forms, is married to the electric, droning scream of the black metal riff, a sonic force at once wandering and repetitive. This is music scouring the earth, yet staked to it, seeking a union with nature whilst burying itself in natural corruption, decay, and betrayal.

So where does Cascadian Black Metal stand? To which nature does it call us? Or does it even speak beyond the intensity of a certain

² Hilary Stewart, *Cedar: Tree of Life to the to the Northwest Coast Indians* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984).

point of place and origin? Does the owl lead us to a tree which stands for a central point of identity, inseparable from the patch of earth to which it binds itself? Or does the owl's line of flight unfold other possibilities, other complications? Does nature offer a seamless explication of an underlying One, or does its very 'plication' suggest that nature and the One are irretrievably twisted and perverse? There is of course no guarantee that we cannot choose both extremes.

Fortunately, the exploration of these questions is not left to the blunt inanity of academic style. A happy chance allows me to offer what might be a more original perspective.

In my searches on the internet for authentic and unique Cascadian black metal artifacts, I was drawn to a special edition of an album by a band who are possibly too obscure to name. It was a vinyl LP, and it came packed in a large red cedar box tied with rope fashioned from that bark of the same tree. Once opened, the box turned out to contain soil, leaves, thin strips of bark, a bundle of fragrant herbs charred at the tip: the real matter of Cascadia, encased and shipped abroad. I had to dig through the earth to reach the record but as I lifted it carefully free, something else caught my eye. At first I thought it was a poster or a flyer, but on closer inspection, it turned out to be several pages of roughly fashioned paper, covered with scrawled handwriting.

It took some time to decipher the writing. But once I had done so, I was convinced I had made a major discovery: a fragment of a theoretical exposition of the nature of Cascadian Black Metal, laid out somewhat like a cross between a medieval summa and a commentary. Its primary texts seemed to be the two full length albums by Fauna, namely *Rain* (2006) and *The Hunt* (2007).

I offer this transcription of the text for two reasons: first, in the belief that it represents an authenticity absent from much academic debate, as testified by the dirt which stuck under my fingernails as I exhumed it (now regrettably removed as it was gradually dispersing itself between the crevices of my computer keyboard). Secondly, because I believe that commentaries should not be multiplied without reason. Mechanical reproduction allows me to disseminate this work without diluting its singular voice. At least, that was my intention. Having completed the task, I wonder if something is lost in transcription—the texture of the paper, stained by soil, a truly kvlt limited edition, which only I have seen and will keep forever a secret.ⁱⁱ

A SHORT SUMMA ON THE NATURE OF CASCADIAN BLACK METAL
(*not to be circulated*)

ARTICLE 1. Is Cascadian Black Metal's worldview local or universal?

1.1 *First objection*: It would seem that it is inherently local. As stated in an interview with Wolves in the Throne Room: 'I can only speak for our band, but we don't consider our music in relation to that of anyone else. It is private, personal, and local.ⁱⁱⁱ We definitely don't consider Wolves in the Throne Room within the context of any BM grand narrative.'³ European Black Metal is inherently tied to the land, culture and mythologies of that region, and the same applies to its Cascadian relative.

1.2 *Second objection*: Moreover, the music, lyrics and art are explicitly formed by an ingestion of the Cascadian earth, in which there is a union between the presumed narrative voice and the nature which makes it possible:

Before the stars fled our sky
When we spoke the old tongue
When our mouths were filled with dirt
Our tongues danced as trees

As owl flies to cedar bough . . .
(Fauna, *Rain*)

1.3 *Third objection*: The above citation also shows that the music appeals to a primal scene of origins and to a language which is chthonic. Dirt speaks, tongues are twisting trees on which owls alight. The meaning of the lyrics is the earth in which they are rooted. The lyrics narrate the loss of this original connection to an anchoring central point in the fullness of a One. They yearn for its restoration:

Flung from our origins
Into an emptiness that consumes
We dwell within a void

The story of my people

³ 'Wolves in the Throne Room – Black Metal on Their Own Terms,' *Ultimate Metal*, <http://www.ultimatemetal.com/forum/interviews/238052-wolves-throne-room-black-metal-their-own-terms.html>. Accessed 1/10/11.

Is the agony of naught
In absence of a sun
We spiral ever outward.
(Fauna, *The Hunt*)

1.4 *On the contrary*: ‘I think that in a lot of ways our music is lamenting something deeper than the destruction of one culture—it is perhaps more universal, maybe more connected to deep ecology than myth, which is but a construction of man. To deal with this sadness, we feel that we need to forge something completely new rather than pine away for what has been lost, for what we never had. Perhaps that is our only option, as we are interlopers in this land. The logical thing would be for some disaffected youth from the local Indian nation to start a black metal band and burn my house down.’⁴ The very structure of unity, fall and return constitutes a universalising myth of redemption, which cannot be tied to a specific place. The claim to place is inherently conflictual.

1.5 *I reply*: Black Metal is always an interloper, inviting its own destruction. It presumes a ruin of origins. The ‘story of my people’ (which people?) cannot be articulated part from this sense of finding oneself thrown into a void. The sun is absent, not merely distant. The stars have left the sky. There are then, no heavenly co-ordinates. The turn to the earth is a turn to what remains in the ruin of all centres.^{iv} Black Metal turns to the earth as its inescapable margin. There it is torn between the desire to construct a central point, an origin myth, and a realization that such a myth has always undone and despoiled itself. The earth is source and curse, each reality enfolded or implicated in the other. The *thuja plicata* to which the owl flies is itself an unfolding and enfolding, a complication of origins in which the One is an effect of articulation. To return to the earth is therefore not a straightforward matter of recovering it as a lost home. The earth itself re-returns, its unity is a product emerging from the unfolding of its interior chemistry and exterior physical forces. Tracing Leibniz’s monadology to its Neoplatonic ancestry, Deleuze argues that:

The One specifically has a power of envelopment and development, while the multiple is inseparable from the

⁴ ‘Wolves in the Throne Room – Black Metal on Their Own Terms,’ *Ultimate Metal*.

folds that it makes when it is enveloped, and of unfoldings when it is developed. But its envelopments and developments, its implications and explications, are nonetheless particular movements that must be understood in a universal Unity that ‘complicates’ them all, and that complicates all the Ones.⁵

To what extent can all these plications be seen as the expressions of an underlying unity, which itself remains unaffected by change and difference? That appears to be the position of Nicholas of Cusa, from whom Deleuze derives some of this language of folding. The former’s 1453 treatise to the monks of Tegernsee, ‘On the Vision of God’, invites the brothers to take an icon which accompanied the manuscript and fix it at a point where they could all view it. Cusa notes that each monk would believe that the eyes of the holy face followed him and him alone as he moved around. This provides an imperfect analogy to the way in which God, though simple and unchanged in himself, can nevertheless appear to hold each individual in their unique specificity within the divine gaze. Immobile, God moves in all directions.⁶

For Cusa (supported by some dubious etymology linking *theos* to *theoreîn*), God becomes the ultimate seer, or theorist—always acknowledging that, for God, there is no difference between his seeing and his loving or indeed any other attribute which our poor finite minds distinguish. God’s theory is active and creative, explicating itself in material creation without being intrinsically defined by any relations to what is other than itself.^v Cusa clarifies this by use of the example of a tree in relation to the seminal power of its seed, and the ultimate power of God:

This absolute and supereminent power gives to each seminal power that power in which it virtually enfolds a tree, together with all the things that are required for a sensible tree and all that accompany the being of a tree. Therefore, this principle and cause, in an enfolded and absolute way, holds within itself as a cause, whatever it

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. (London: Continuum, 2006), 25.

⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 236-7.

gives to its effect. And thus I perceive that this power is the face or exemplar of every arboreal face and of each tree . . . Hence, I see this tree as a certain unfolding of the power of the seed and the seed as a certain unfolding of omnipotent power . . . in you my God the tree is you yourself, and in you it is the truth and exemplar of itself.⁷

God is thus ‘the nature of all natures’, but in a curious way dictated by the logic of divine simplicity. Although God is explicated in nature, God must remain both ‘beyond the wall of the coincidence of enfolding and unfolding’ and yet equally present as the power of both movements: ‘I enter when I find you as the power that enfolds all things. I go out when I find you as the power that unfolds. I both go in and go out when I find you as the power that both enfolds and unfolds.’⁸ For God ‘to unfold is to enfold’—implication and explication coincide, and God is the ultimate, and wholly simple complication of the two. As Cusa puts it in ‘On Learned Ignorance’, ‘God, therefore, is the enfolding of all in the sense that all are in God, and God is the unfolding of all in the sense that God is in all.’⁹ The one true face appears in multiple images without compromising the divine unity.¹⁰

Such Neoplatonic foldings flirt with a familiar paradox, however: how can God remain simply behind the wall, or outside of the folds, if his own nature gives rise to them? If, indeed, he is the nature, essence and exemplar of all plications? What made the one true name, the one true face legible and visible in diversity unless they were already reproducible and therefore no longer one? The ‘tree is you yourself’, *thuja plicata*, the arboreal face a multiplication of God.

Such twisting is enacted in Fauna’s lyrical journey:

This world offers no purchase
We live on dust and stone
There is no hope for us
We have lost our way

⁷ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 246.

⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 255.

⁹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 135.

¹⁰ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 137.

Great One, let my spirit soar
 Let us ascend ever onward
 (Fauna, *The Hunt*)

It seems we abandon earth and dust to climb to the One. But this ascent is hardly to be distinguished from a fall, from the outward spiral away from absent suns.

1.6.1 *Reply to first objection*: The ‘locality’ of Cascadian Black Metal can only originate from the displacement of all locality enacted through the narrative of its imported origins, the degeneration of musical form and harmony upon which it depends, and its own lyrical complications.

1.6.2 *Reply to second objection*: The ingestion of earth renders the lyricist incapable of clear and direct speech. The articulation of anything like a local dialect depends upon formal structures of iterability, the repeatability of a sign in absence of its ‘origin’. Hence the unresolvable ambiguity as to whether the dirt filling the mouth enables or impedes speech.

1.6.3 *Reply to third objection*: See above. If Black Metal is chthonic, it is a chthonic machine which eats up and spews out the ground from which it is generated.^{vi} Of course, much European black metal still attempts to bind itself to a singular point of origin, a private, auto-affective world of blood and soil; but it must do so through an appeal to ‘earth’ or ‘nature’ as such, with all their deterritorialising force. This conflict is its inescapable, defining tension.

1.6.4 *Nevertheless* it is obviously not the case that Cascadian Black Metal rejects all specific origins and contexts in favour of a universal subject and/or truth. Rather it is an aural and lyrical evocation of the co-implication of its own contingent point of origin and the immemorial Oneness of things, which it seeks both to reveal and despoil.

1.6.5 *One might compare* Deleuze: ‘even if the production of difference is by definition “inexplicable”, how can we avoid *implicating* the inexplicable at the heart of thought itself? How can the unthinkable not lie at the heart of thought?’¹¹ Difference precedes the One: but the One haunts difference as its unconditional spectral future anterior: the One is not what comes first, but what will always have been possible in the production of difference.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 2004), 286.

ARTICLE 2. Does Cascadian Black Metal prioritize music or language in its communicative act?

2.1 *First objection*: It would seem that all Black Metal prioritizes music over language, given that many of the lyrics remain incomprehensible to the listening ear, and are often not printed in any accompanying material.

2.2 *Second objection*: In Fauna's *Rain* and *The Hunt* there are long periods of music which contain no lyrics at all. The tendency to produce long tracks or suites of tracks (often utilizing ambient musical soundscapes) is a feature of Cascadian and nearby Californian artists such as Echtra, Blood of the Black Owl, Weakling, Ash Borer and Fell Voices.

2.3 *Third objection*: In 'The Door', the opening part of *The Hunt*, there are no lyrics. A single reverberating note becomes a deep drone of feedback. At 2:35, some kind of crackling or rattling begins. The music swells and breaks, leading into 'Hunger'. When the words are sung, each one is sung with separate emphasis, as if the usual conventions of syntax break down, and language becomes a succession of unrelated names, each as (in)capable as the other of naming the inexplicable ground of Black Metal.

2.4 *On the contrary*: "The imprint tells of story / A mirror through the known" (Fauna, *The Hunt*). The lyrics refer to a legible 'imprint' and to a narrative. Without this lyrical content, and the access to knowledge it promises, Cascadian Black Metal would remain at the level of sonic experimentation.

2.5 *I reply*: In *The Hunt*, the slow staccato singing in 'Hunger' section, spat out over a 'traditional' fast black metal buzzing riff, gives way to a slower break in which ethereal high end vocals scream out indistinguishable noises (not recorded as lyrics in the printed matter). This then leads into 'Setting out', in which a discordant mix of individual chords and sustained synthesized noise is accompanied by gentle spoken words that cannot be made out. At 2:45, the chords become screamlike, taking on a nightmarish atmosphere over the constant synth. Background calls or howls are heard and what may be ritual intonations. At 6:41 animal noises are clearly audible (perhaps pigs or boars and wolves). These noises are repeated until the final section consisting of a booming drum over the still maintained drone, which acts as a kind of continuous ground note for the section.

This structure suggests something other than a dichotomy of language and music. Spoken and sung words provide one ingredient

in a mosaic of sound that *tends* towards the inarticulate and even inaudible, but without ever finally arriving there. The screams and animal noises are not simply the opposite of language. They are paradoxically both parasitic upon structures of clarity and meaning, and also the inarticulate ground from which such structures arise. They act as the ruin and fulfilment of language when confronted with the inexplicable mystery of Nature and the One.^{vii}

Shadow unto shadow falls
The wrung earth stills
Smoke rises from an empty face
Inkstain from the heart spreads
(Fauna, *Rain*)

Here, shadow and earth are folded, plaited, gathered, twisted. The smoke rising from an empty face could be an act of communication, but one which defaces its own origin. The ink, with its implicit reference to writing, is disseminated as a stain: not a stain which intrudes upon the purity of the heart, as if the heart were being invaded by the poisonous artificiality of culture; but a stain spreading from the heart itself.^{viii} The heart is source of corruption and communication. If the heart stands for the essence of things, it is a possible name for the One. Language both betrays the One, and is generated by it. To paraphrase Derrida, the One spills itself in advance, because it is only ever knowable as One in its own self-dissolution into signs.¹²

We should therefore resist the duality which would be the result of certain conventional interpretations of the question of this Article, whereby language is associated with artifice and reason, and music is linked to the immediacy of unthinking nature and gesture. Hegel goes some way towards expelling this illusion in his affirmation of the theoretical superiority of hearing over sight, thus overturning the longstanding Western philosophical privileging of vision. In expressing the free inner life of the spirit, music dematerialises its material substrate and obliterates space.¹³ Of course, given that this is Hegel, this is no mere nullification:

¹² Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (London: Athlone, 1981), 268.

¹³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art Volume II* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 889.

The cancellation of space therefore consists here only in the fact that a specific sensuous material sacrifices its peaceful separatedness, turns to movement, yet so vibrates in itself that every part of the cohering body not only changes its place but also struggles to replace itself in its former position.^{ix} The result of this oscillating vibration is sound or a note, the material of music.¹⁴

Music is a trembling spatiality, a continuous folding of the body into itself, in which the inner and outer, life and death are united. Sound 'is an externality which in its coming-to-be is annihilated again by its very existence, and it vanishes of itself.'¹⁵ Music becomes a mode of expression suited to express the inner life, or, more exactly the 'object-free inner life, abstract subjectivity as such. This is our entirely empty self, the self without any further content.'¹⁶

Music occupies a curious position on Hegel's philosophy of art. It exempts itself from outer objects and structure, so that 'While therefore we must recommend the painter and the sculptor to study natural forms, music does not possess a natural sphere outside its existing forms, with which it is compelled to comply.'¹⁷ This is because it is the expression of feeling in the sense of the self's relation to itself without any externality. A natural cry expresses feeling, but music 'must, on the contrary, bring feelings into specific tone-relationships, deprive the natural expression of its wildness and crude deliverance, and mitigate it.'¹⁸

So music negates nature, whilst at the same time it must 'mitigate' it, bringing its oscillations into a differentiated form of expression which is distinct from any 'natural *shriek* of feeling'.¹⁹ This is achieved through a relationship between notes which is mathematical and quantitative. However, this entails music in a contortion, since the means it uses to express the independent spontaneity of the inner life are inevitably abstract, differential and iterable.

¹⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 890.

¹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 890.

¹⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 891.

¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 898.

¹⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 903.

¹⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 910.

The narrative dimension of works like Fauna's cannot be overlooked. However the journey charted by those narratives is one which implicates the singing voice in modes of expression which escape Hegel's strict definition of music as the expression of inner life alone:

The path sings of lives left behind
 A way of need and loss

A way toward fullness
 The whisper rises in my blood
 (Fauna, *The Hunt*)

The singing is external, evoking a 'whisper' in the blood, something barely audible. Desire and loss turn the spirit inside out. Music and language are constituted in relation to something that is nonhuman—a point we will address more fully below.

2.6.1 *Reply to first objection*: screamed, incomprehensible vocals maintain a relationship with 'clear' language (or, to use a general heavy metal idiom, 'clean vocals'). The manner in which words are distorted and howled constantly crosses the line Hegel sets up between the natural shriek and music (where music is itself 'linguistically' structured in a minimal sense), and therefore between gesture and convention.

2.6.2 *Reply to second objection*: the expansion of musical tracks in temporal length does not in itself contradict the above argument. The reasons behind such extension may include a resistance to the commodification of the music created, since it demands an investment of time and patience to listen to them with any depth of attention. However, these tracks are still punctuated by a struggle with language, and still utilize the broader musical 'language' of Black Metal to create a certain atmosphere.

2.6.3 *Reply to third objection*: It is precisely the straining and rupturing of language that constitutes the lyrical intensity of *The Hunt*. To account for this in terms of a simple suppression of language would dissolve that very intensity.

2.6.4 *Nevertheless*, we should be wary of domesticating this process by means of an all too easy dialectical resolution (music and language meet and resolve in a third, yet more spiritual dimension). The shriek and scraping metallic tremolos which Hegel sought to

dispel from music create a friction which resists the dialectical assimilation of all phenomena in a unifying concept.

2.6.5 *One might compare* this to the role of modern music envisaged by Adorno: to register and reflect the reverberating shocks created by the machinery of rational, technological society, and expose us, not to their resolution, but to their unadorned negation: ‘If music is to escape from the nullity that threatens it, the very loss of the *raison d’être* I spoke about, then it can only hope to do so if it accomplishes what Schoenberg accomplished in the *Survivor from Warsaw*—if it confronts the utter negativity, the most extreme, by which the entire complexion of reality is made manifest.’²⁰

ARTICLE 3. Does Cascadian Black Metal valorize purity or impurity of thought and speech?

3.1 *First objection*: ‘From our pure mouths / Partake of this dying fruit’ (Fauna, *Rain*). Cascadian Black Metal recognizes the decay and impurity of the world around it, but seeks a pure expression which can put its practitioners and listeners back in touch with a nature that has been forgotten and repressed.

3.2 *Second objection*: Wolves in the Throne Room sing of a ‘purifying rain’ (‘I will lay down my bones among the rocks and roots,’ *Two Hunters*, 2007) which will extinguish the fires set by the destructive, mythical ‘beast’. The rain motif is clearly central to Fauna’s first work, and suggests a process of cleansing and renewal (cf. the Wolves track ‘Cleansing,’ [*Two Hunters*] and the apocalyptic rain of Skagos’ ‘The Drums Pound Every Night in a Glorious Celebration of Life’ [*Ást*, 2009]).

3.3 *Third objection*: Images of unspoilt ‘natural’ woodland scenes dominate much Cascadian Black Metal’s album artwork, taking up a European tradition notably exemplified by Hate Forest’s *Purity* (2003).

3.4 *On the contrary*: ‘all possible music deviates from perfect purity.’²¹

3.5 *I reply*: one should note the fuller context of Fauna’s lyrics:

²⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 150.

²¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I* (New York: Dover, 1969), 266.

Hot tears spill
 From the sky's open seam
 An ash breeze pours
 From our pure mouths
 Partake of this dying fruit

Footprints fill with poison water
 Footprints toward the forest fade
 (Fauna, *Rain*)

It is an 'ash breeze' which pours from the pure mouth, a dying fruit which is offered. These are images of impurity and decay, compounded by the footprints filling with poison water. It may be that the rain comes to cleanse, but the lyrics nowhere state this—indeed, the poison water could well be a remnant of the rain.

Either way, the lyrics refer to *decay*, a word which has auditory as well as biochemical, ethical and spiritual associations. For a sound to decay is for it to simultaneously persist and falter, to live precisely insofar as it decays. The sound's reverberations continue in the absence of its source, but those reverberations occur at decreasing amplitudes until they pass beyond the audible.^x

The use of sustained reverberation and fading is pronounced in Fauna's work. It suggests that any talk of purity has to be heard within a wider auditory context, in which the technics of the music and the vocals are subject to drift and decay. These technics are exposed as the underlying articulation/disarticulation of sound becoming dispersed in time and space, an explication of the lightning fast tremolo into the drowning ambience of the drone.

It is instructive to return here to Hegel's analysis of music as the spontaneous free expression of inner subjectivity. One question which arises from our earlier discussion of his position is how he reconciles this spontaneity with the structural abstraction of harmonics (which is what differentiates music from natural cries). Hegel's answer is that the soul must animate the notes, so that in and through *melody* 'the realm of notes closes into one spiritually free expression.'²² Despite his acknowledgement of the independence of music from words, Hegel still affirms that it is the human voice which is uniquely suited to resolve the tensions within music. He does so using a revealing racial analogy:

²² G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 912.

Just as we saw, in the case of the colour of the human skin, that, as an ideal unity, it contains the rest of the colours and therefore is the most perfect colour, so the human voice contains the ideal totality of sound, a totality only spread out amongst the other instruments in their particular differences . . . the human voice can apprehend itself as the sounding of the soul itself . . . ²³

The soul sounds in the exclusion of blackness, in which non-conceptual nature and non-white races are assumed. A colonial logic is imposed upon music, an ideal unity constructed from a privileged centre, into which all is generously included precisely by being carried off into servitude. In terms which are now haunted by the spectres of Black Metal (whose own tendency to collapse into an identity compounded of ethno-nationalistic heritage myths is well known), Hegel continues:

A principal feature in this beauty is the material basis of the sound as sound, the pure metal of the voice which should not taper off to mere sharpness or glass-like thinness or remain dull and hollow; but, at the same time, without going so far as *tremolo*, it preserves within this as it were compact and concentrated sound an inner life and inner vibration of the sound. ²⁴

The black metal voice—adopted, stretched and decomposed in its Cascadian variant—resists the limits which Hegel would impose upon it. Its metallic tinge surges into ‘sharpness or glass-like thinness’, abandoning purity and living off its own decay. Its tapering to a point is also its disseminating dissolution: the point of coincidence and mutual repulsion for implication and explication.

3.6.1 *Reply to first objection*: Cascadian nature does not exist prior to its own decaying afterlife. Black Metal is the sonic expression of this decay. ^{xi}

3.6.2 *Reply to second objection*: Rain provides the breeding pool for disease, ensuring not just the decay of the trace, but the revelation of the trace *as* decay (‘Footprints fill with poison water/Footprints

²³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 922.

²⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 922.

toward the forest fade'; cf. 'Fungi lurch forward for a final gulping breath. / All is returned to the earth and the rain will fall and fall.' Skagos, 'Blossoms Will Sprout From the Carcass,' *Ást*). Rain portends the apocalyptic deluge which overruns the legible surfaces of the world and deafens audible sense: 'The sky gives way to great storms, / a deluge that deafens all. / Game trails run as raging torrents, / and the end is fucking nigh!' Skagos, 'The Drums Pound Every Night in a Glorious Celebration of Life,' *Ást*).

3.6.3 *Reply to third objection*: The forest unfolds from its own rotting layers, in a decrepitude that also becomes thematic for Cascadian Black Metal:

This forest of miasmal decrepitude . . .
 Covered by impenetrable fog . . .
 Unseen horrors lurk under its canopy . . .
 Of twisted & turning . . .
 Decaying branches . . .
 All of this is mine . . .
 My personal mausoleum . . .
 Sprawling woodlands of no life . . .
 My beloved putrescent kingdom . . .
 Miles . . .
 & miles . . .
 & miles . . .
 Of suffocation . . .
 Rot forever & ever . . .
 Under my sickening, dying reign.
 (Blood of the Black Owl, 'Forest of Decrepitude,' *A Feral Spirit*)

3.6.4 *Nevertheless* we should not confuse this embrace of decay with a mere negation of purity, since it is by following the poisoned traces that 'A way toward fullness' is discovered. This fullness may not be that of a pleroma of self-present, simple pure divinity, but it is nevertheless unconditional and absolute in its twisting, polluted creativity. These woodland paths lead to no clearing of being, but are the passageways of a sovereign decomposition.

3.6.5 *One might compare* the deconstructive effect of what occurs in Cascadian Black Metal with Derrida's analysis of the *pharmakon*, the trace of writing as at once remedy and poison, nonfinite and

nonsimple, a '*literal parasite*'²⁵ an accident and excess which 'grounds' and therefore eats the heart out of the substance to which belongs:

The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, the play: (the production of) difference. It is the difference of difference. It holds in reserve, in its undecided shadow and vigil, the opposites and the differends that the process of discrimination will come to carve out. Contradictions and pairs of opposites are lifted from the bottom of this diacritical, differing, deferring, reserve. Already inhabited by difference, this reserve, even though it "precedes" the oppositions between different effects, even though it pre-exists differences as effects, does not have the punctual simplicity of a *coincidentia oppositorum*. It is from this fund that dialectics draws its philosophemes. The *pharmakon*, without being anything in itself, always exceeds them in constituting their bottomless fund [*fond sans fond*]. It keeps itself forever in reserve even though it has no fundamental profundity nor ultimate locality. We will watch it infinitely promise and endlessly vanish through concealed doorways that shine like mirrors and open onto a labyrinth.²⁶

Black Metal is a shallow scraping, a face mirrored in the poison water of a footprint left by persons unknown, parasitic upon its own origin, discovering in its own 'place' a decrepit reserve without ultimate locality: 'My beloved putrescent kingdom . . .'

ARTICLE 4. Is Cascadian Black Metal humanistic or anti-humanistic?

4.1 *First objection*: Cascadian Black Metal clearly advocates a recovery of the animal origins suppressed by the artifice of human civilisation:

As animals we gather
Around the womb-hole in the ground
Shed this flimsy skin
Ignite our eyes again
(Fauna, *Rain*)

²⁵ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 128.

²⁶ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 127-8.

4.2 *Second objection*: The ritualistic celebration of the hunt in Fauna's work of that name ends with a mutual assent in which 'two become one again'. The hunt becomes the ritual realisation of a human identification with the animal other. The humanistic subject disappears, as it also does in *Rain*: 'I, great wound the wind whips, / Disappear'.

4.3 *Third objection*: The previous two points clearly fit with the misanthropic nature of Black Metal further afield in the US and elsewhere, for which 'all of humanity remains accursed but is hated from the standpoint of the inhuman The cold world of Black Metal is a deliberate freezing of the world, fixing it within a terminal image, in order that its frost-bitten surface may be shattered by anonymous, inhuman forces rising from the depths of the self.'²⁷

4.4 *On the contrary*: the narrative 'I' and 'we' of Cascadian lyrics (Fauna's two works being notable examples) is clearly human—it is only human agency (even if that agency consists only in naming our alienation) which secures redemption. Animal others remain that: others who act as ciphers for our own sovereign freedom, others who facilitate our intense experiences of the sacred through being sacrificed and assimilated. This is simply a replication of humanism in another guise.

4.5 *I reply*: the potential problem of the anti-humanism indicated above is that it remains the inverse, disingenuous image of the humanism it rejects. Prostrating itself before autochthonic forces, it nevertheless risks channeling these forces through the very human agency it is meant to dispel, with the ultimate effect of only intensifying myopic anthropocentric dreams of dominance.^{xii}

Such a critique echoes Adorno's worries about the implicit (and sometimes quite overt) identity of modernism with archaism. In 12 tone music, he witnesses the triumph of a new fate, a blind nature.²⁸ There is an infantile archaism at work in this supposed collective unity of man and nature. It is a unity in which the subject (and therefore all responsibility) is made to disappear, a dynamic with clear fascistic overtones. Bourgeois comfortable conformity may be rejected by the artistic avant garde, but it is replaced with a no less deadly

²⁷ Dominic Fox, *Cold World. The Aesthetics of Dejection and the Politics of Militant Dysphoria* (Ropley: O Books, 2009), 55-6. Cf 'Iced over, frozen in time/The clock of man halts.' Mania, *Ice Covered Sphere*.

²⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (London: Continuum, 2004), 67-8.

leveling, ‘the conformity of a blind and integral society—a society, as it were, of eunuchs and headless men.’²⁹ The self is sacrificed before a ‘machinery of adjustment’ which renders any substantial reality ‘unattainable and removed from the striving individual through an abyss of meaning.’³⁰

Adorno’s response is instructive. It is not to advocate any notion of art serving predefined ‘human’ needs and pleasures. Rather:

The inhumanity of art must triumph over the inhumanity of the world for the sake of the humane. Works of art attempt to solve the riddles designed by the world to devour man. The world is a sphynx, the artist is blinded Oedipus, and it is works of art of the type resembling his wise answer which plunged the sphynx into the abyss. Thus all art stands in opposition to mythology.³¹

This suggests a different approach to Black Metal, and particularly its Cascadian variation, from the usual association it has with a naïve rediscovery of indigenous mythology, cruelly buried by invading Christians (though it is always amusing to see an ideology which supposedly celebrates sovereignty and cruelty bemoaning the violent conquests and inquisitions prosecuted with the approval of the church). It is not a matter simply of opposing modernity to an atavistic recovery of primal origins, much as this theme clearly shapes the stance of Cascadian artists. The rhetoric of an original ontological peace or unity with the earth is problematic because it is blinded to its own complicity with what it seeks to erase. It masks a violent attempt to repress the real agonistics of history, and so collapses back into an ontology of original violence.

Consider the lyrics to Skagos’ ‘A Night That Ends, As All Nights End, When the Sun Rises’ (*Ást*):

We, who built ourselves to paradigm.
We, who wore a colossal weight with pride.
In a niche of fauna’s extravagance
we ruled a tundra of malice.

²⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 159.

³⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 172.

³¹ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 132.

Providence trades hands with exigence
as the wolves chase us in to the thicket.

Oh, the weight of it!

Here, the notion of human beings as the centre and divinely ordained telos of the world is displaced, not by a mere identification of human and animals, or by any new nature myth. Humanity is seen constructing its paradigm of dominance within a 'niche', a term used in ecology to signify the relational networks within which a species is able to sustain and expand itself. For Anthony Paul Smith, the niche cannot be defined in terms of its participation in a hierarchy or teleology governed by a transcendent, originally peaceful divine; but nor can it be reduced to a reflex of 'nature red in tooth and claw'. Smith argues that the niche 'witnesses to the underlying perversity of nature. One might even say a joyous perversity if by that one means that the creation of the niche witnesses to the species living without regard for death.'³²

Providence (the divine-human telos) does not simply disappear, but implicates itself with exigence, with an urgency of life too pressing to be ignored. Rather than a mythicized unity with nonhuman species, or a romanticized 'balance' of nature, anthropocentrism is displaced when the wolves affirmative expansion of their niche pushes human subjects into the undergrowth. It is not union, but friction which causes the subversion of anthropocentric dominion, and opens the way to another conception of sovereignty: 'living without regard for death'.

The contrast drawn by Smith is with a desire to prolong life by doing battle with death, an unholy wrestling match which only underscores death's hold upon the living. For Smith, this living death has a name: cancer. As Smith reminds us, cancer occurs when the cell refuses to die, when it refuses death and so corrupts the system of which it is part. In contrast 'The niche is an expression of protest against the necessity of death in so far as it pays no attention to death as such.'^{33xiii}

³² Anthony Paul Smith, *Ecologies of Thought: Thinking Nature in Philosophy, Theology and Ecology* (University of Nottingham: Unpublished PhD thesis, 2011), 199. Cited with permission.

³³ Anthony Paul Smith, *Ecologies of Thought*, 200.

This might seem an unlikely connection with a Black Metal form that often courts and celebrates death. However, consider these Blood of the Black Owl lyrics from ‘Void’ (*A Feral Spirit*):

You have become the cancer . . .
YOU are the dis-ease . . .
Pitch black death is all that is left . . .
FILL THE VOID WITH BLACK!

Humanity as a pestilence upon the earth is clearly standard black metal fare. Cancer, in its obsessive struggle to live, turns into its own negation. Disease becomes the purity of pitch black death. However, it is in the reverberating void of this death that a curious affirmation comes to be born, formed from the very stuff of negativity but no longer defined by and as death. To paradoxically ‘fill the void with black’ is to affirm differently, perversely creating a new mode of subjectivity that disregards teleological and providential striving away from death: a sovereign indifference to the machine that generates the boundaries between human/inhuman, pure/diseased, living/dead.^{xiv}

In Fauna’s words:

Under a ragged cloth of sky
And the moon’s blazing eye
Burrow deep in blackest earth
And break further
(Fauna, *Rain*)

This return to earth is also a breaking through—a formulation that defies reduction to either chthonic atavism or a leap into purified transcendence. There is no way beyond the earth, but the burrow, implicating itself into the blackness of the earth’s unliving matter breaks ‘further’ than materialism (which is arguably another form of the transcendent, philosophical positioning of the earth). This breaking is both rupture and folding of the subject, a subject born of frictions rather than dialectics.

The artwork to *Rain* confirms this: images not of pure ‘nature’, but of feral children, the complication of human and nonhuman.

4.6.1 *Reply to first objection*: The identification with animals is not mere union or appropriation, but more like a ‘running with’ that is entwined with a ‘running from’. It tokens a subjectivity in which unification (with animals, self, God) is no longer even a question.

4.6.2 *Reply to second objection*: The culmination of Fauna's hunt undoubtedly concerns the disappearance of the gathered I. But as in *Rain* there is still a trace and figure of the 'great wound' for which the I is a placeholder, so in *The Hunt*, we find an oscillation between the two becoming one, and the persistence of the I's trace in figures of folding, revolution and mutual generation—as we will see further in the following article.

4.6.3 *Reply to third objection*: The inhuman cannot be defined as simply the contradiction of the human, without being humanized again. Another logic of articulation is at stake, in which the human/inhuman is rendered neutral, or turned into material for folding differently.

4.6.4 *Nevertheless* the risk of announcing a new purity, a new unity, a new flight from confusion or dialectic into a 'correct' philosophical stance inevitably haunts these reflections. The language of disease and inhumanity stands as a vehicle for resisting such conceptual appropriations, even if this must always be seen as a tactical gesture.^{xv}

4.6.5 *One might compare* Adorno's argument that art cannot be given its own *raison d'être* because it suspends teleological reasoning. Music specifically is distanced from cognition of objects. It is 'an act, a becoming, and, as human becoming, a behavior . . . In music, what is at stake is not meaning, but gestures.'³⁴ For Adorno, this aspect of music tends towards pure utopian naming, a naming forever lost to us in our reflective being. But strangely, this is exactly what brings music close to what Adorno means by philosophy, which also seeks a utopian name of being (like Cusa's 'theory', perhaps). Music does not know the name—the absolute as sound—immediately, but 'attempts its conjuring construction through a whole, a process.'³⁵ It therefore participates in rationality, a rationality reconceived as 'conjuring construction' from the fertility of decay.

Adorno's insight suggests a connection with Arizmenda's invitation to 'Poison Yourself . . . with Thought' (*Within the Vacuum of Infinity*, 2009). A thinking that does not give up on the absolute and unconditional inevitably tastes like poison to the humanistic mind.^{xvi} It breaks further towards an earth no longer enchained by the absolutisms of transcendence and immanence.

³⁴ Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 139.

³⁵ Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 140.

ARTICLE 5. Is Cascadian Black Metal monistic or dualistic?

5.1 *First objection*: It would appear that it is monistic, since it advocates an ultimate unity between the human subject and what is ultimately real:

Though I dissolve
I am not afraid
For from whence we came
We shall return

My waters are one with this
There is no separation
My waters are one with this
There is no separation
(Alda, 'Adrift,' *Tahoma*)

5.2 *Second objection*: The 'two becoming one' at the close of Fauna's *The Hunt* can be read in connection with the 'Great One' to whom the singer ascends earlier in the work. Thus, the goal of Fauna's soteriology is unity with the One, in the wake of a realization of the 'emptiness' of this sundered world. The world thus exists as an illusion and prison, obscuring the oneness of all that is.

5.3. *Third objection*: The structure of unification is tracked in Fauna's musical ideas. The single reverberating note which opens 'The Door', the drones of 'Setting Out' and 'Nocturne' and the final resolution of *The Hunt* into birdsong all tell of an underlying impetus towards union with the One. The music drives us towards what Schelling referred to as the ground note of monism, and ultimately to a simple identity with Nature.

5.4 *On the contrary* 'The fold, then, and the blank: these will forbid us to seek a theme or an overall meaning in an imaginary, intentional, or lived domain beyond all textual instances.'³⁶

5.5 *I reply*: we cannot divorce the thematics of unity with nature from those of folding, the twisted implication of inside and outside. This frictional unity is not simple identity, but an exposure to the never-assimilated, disavowed condition of our desire.

Shadow opens
Nature's hands enfold
Listen: wind inside

³⁶ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 251.

Wind, harbinger
(Fauna, *Rain*)

Such is the baroque fold of which Deleuze writes: ‘Difference that endlessly unfolds and folds over from each of its two sides and that unfolds the one only while refolding the other, in a coextensive unveiling and veiling of Being, of presence and withdrawal of being.’³⁷ Deleuze goes on to cite the fold of Mallarmé’s fan, and its inseparability from wind and mist. The twisting of air and vapour curl through the plications of Fauna’s ‘Rain’. The smoke that rises from an empty face, the ash breeze, the wind inside, the wind that whips the ‘T . . . culminating here:

The ugly past curls in the fire
Shadows cast their figures
Into the swallowing mist.
(Fauna, *Rain*)

In *The Hunt*, this twisting of outside and inside complicates any ultimate resolution of the difference between the subject and nature:

Turning outward to seek the gift
That will stake me to the earth . . .
In its center.
(Fauna, *The Hunt*)

To turn outward is to turn to the earth, the constitutive inner material condition of life. The ascent to the Great One, sung of earlier in the piece, does not stand in contradiction to this *metanoia* towards the earth. It is the unconditionality of the fold, the ineluctable twist of the intimate and the absolute, which obviates any attempt to characterize this movement in terms of dualism or monism, immanence or transcendence.

Deleuze and Guattari famously contrasted the viral, coupling deterritorialisation of the rhizome with the stiff, genealogical, centralising and self-defining unity of the tree.³⁸ They state that ‘Music has always sent out lines of flight, like so many

³⁷ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 33-4.

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004), 9-13.

“transformational multiplicities,” even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it; that is why musical form, right down to its ruptures and proliferations, is comparable to a weed, a rhizome.³⁹ Is Black Metal a rhizomatic musical form par excellence, which, in its Cascadian form, does not so much occupy a defined territory as decompose that territory, destructure it, expose it to an outside which at once redefines and corrupts it?

Perhaps: but this must be qualified, since above this summa stands the *thuja plicata*, the *arborvitae* which is itself a sequence of plaits, and which, in the technics of the indigenous tribes of the Pacific Northwest, was subject to cutting, steambending, the stripping and plaiting of withes and bark. Nature and technics complicit along the lines of so many curves and folds.

Cascadian Black Metal remains a technical artform. It searches, not for the idyll of an organic holism, where all natural elements exist in balance, but for a more adequately machined nature, a nature heedlessly manufacturing gods who are undefined by death:

A mechanism is faulty not for being too artificial to account for living matter, but for not being mechanical enough, for not being adequately machined. Our mechanisms are in fact organized into parts that are not in themselves machines, while the organism is infinitely machined, a machine whose every part or piece is a machine, but only “transformed by different folds that it receives.”⁴⁰

These folds are never closed, and here is the chance for movement. Only in the non-dialectical, auto-affective supplementation of the blank/black is there an exposure to an outside, a realism as textual as it is speculative:

If there is no such thing as a total or proper meaning, it is because the blank folds over. The fold is not an accident that happens to the blank . . . The fold does not come upon it from outside; it is the blank’s outside as well as its inside, the complication according to which the supplementary mark of the blank (the asemic spacing) applies itself to the set of white things (the full semic

³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 13.

⁴⁰ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 8.

entities), plus to itself, the fold of the veil, tissue or text upon itself, By reason of this application that nothing has preceded, there will never be any Blank with a capital B or any Theology of the text.⁴¹

We recall an echo of Hegel's white voice, forever tainted black by the earth it cannot swallow.

5.6.1 *Reply to first objection*: That which is dissolved still names itself, still applies itself to the technics of making. Alda's lyrics involve a complex series of identifications, in which

I am the ocean
I rise and fall
This suffering
Sleeps within me
(Alda, 'Adrift,' *Tahoma*)

The trace of an outside, of a passivity and a passion, remain. The ocean undulates, it is not exempt from the structure of the fold.

5.6.2 *Reply to second objection*: The ascent to the One and union with the hunted animal, cannot be separated from the paradoxical movement outside which is also a violent staking to the centre of the earth

My arrow is a seal
A covenant with life
My spear is a seed
I plant in our womb
(Fauna, *The Hunt*)

A covenant exists between two or more parties. The seed planted in the shared womb harbours a promise of new, unanticipated becomings. There is no monistic closure at work here.

5.6.3 *Reply to third objection*: The music is and remains a complication of the machined and the natural: a shriek which is also a grinding of gears in the movement of Spirit.

5.6.4 *Nevertheless* a tendency to seek out some kind of reconciliation with the 'natural' and the nonhuman is undeniable in

⁴¹ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 258.

Cascadian Black Metal, as its own reaction to the superficiality and artifice of modernity.

5.6.5 *One might compare* Adorno's evocation of a spirit of music allied to tears, in which the subject experiences a certain reconciliation with the earth as unreconciled, alien and inhuman. A touching point in the ebb and flow of tides without resemblance:

Music and tears open the lips and set the arrested human being free.^{xvii} The sentimentality of inferior music indicates in its distorted figure that which higher music, at the very border of insanity, is yet able to design the validity of its form: reconciliation. The human being who surrenders himself to tears and music which no longer resembles him in any way permits that current of which he is not part and which lies behind the dam restraining the world of phenomena to flow back into itself. In weeping and in singing he enters into alienated reality. "Tears dim my eyes: earth's child I am again"—this line from Goethe's *Faust* defines the position of music. Thus earth claims Eurydice again. The gesture of return—not the sensation of expectancy—characterizes the expression of all music, even if it finds itself in a world worthy of death.⁴²

ARTICLE 6. Is the end of Cascadian Black Metal apotheosis or annihilation?

6.1 *First objection*: It would seem that its end is annihilation: the disappearance of the I.

'Globe immersed in eternal frost.

Eternal frost,
eternal cold,
eternal void.

All encompassing, for all time.'
(Mania, 'Ice Covered Sphere,' *Mania*)

6.2 *Second objection*: '[Those who love will forget they loved]' (Fauna, *Rain*). The end is only amnesia: dead, cold and loveless.

⁴² Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 128-9.

6.3 *Third objection*: ‘Modern music sees absolute oblivion as its goal. It is the surviving message of despair from the shipwrecked.’⁴³

6.4 *On the contrary*: Is there a contrary? Can we argue with annihilation? Or do we just yearn for a voice from elsewhere, a fantasy of our Other . . .

6.5 *I reply*: It might seem in our reading of Cascadian Black Metal that all that is required is a certain flexibility, a willingness to register the mutual interfolding of earth and spirit. But this is still Black Metal, and something sticks in the joints of this harmonious weave. It is still sung in the voice of those who, elsewhere, invoked Satan, evil and the beatification of hellfire. It is haunted by a denial of God and of all the gods. It scrapes the earth it purports to love.

Perhaps it is significant that in Deleuze’s *The Fold*, it is the damned who are the unassimilated element in the elegant folds of the baroque: ‘The damned narrow the amplitude of the soul, vomit out all but hate for God, stiffen into a hard fold—and so leave space for other monads to progress. Progress depends on hardened folds of the damned leaving space for development and intensification.’⁴⁴

The damned represent a standing challenge to the idea that this is the best of all possible worlds, a kind of ugly dissonance which thus threatens the harmonies of sufficient reason. According to Deleuze, the Baroque response is to resolve dissonance by excluding impossible worlds and positing the harmony of monads in one compossible world, so that ‘the only irreducible dissonances are between different worlds’.⁴⁵ Could we say that the damned—and therefore Black Metal—stand in the place of a stubborn impossibility curled up in the heart of *this* world?^{xviii} The dissonant atonality of the music would therefore be inseparable from a different, apostate, conceptuality.

Of course, even the damned are enlisted to serve Baroque harmony (much as, for Aquinas, the opportunity afforded to the saved to witness the eternal suffering of the lost only confirmed the former in their beatific affirmation of divine justice):

A counterexample would be furnished by the damned, whose souls produce a dissonance on a unique note, a breath of vengeance or resentment, a hate of God that goes

⁴³ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 133.

⁴⁴ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 84-5.

⁴⁵ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 92-3.

to infinity; but it is still a form of music, a chord—though diabolical—since the damned draw pleasure from their very pain, and especially make possible the infinite progression of the perfect accords in the other souls.⁴⁶

But what happens when this diabolical chord ceases to resonate in the enclosed spaces made available to it by classical reason? When it tracks and instigates a limitless decay?

According to Reza Negarestani, decay is a dynamic transformation, whereby the body both approaches an abstract, ideal limit, and also propagates itself beyond itself. Referring to Leibniz's remarks on the spontaneous generation of worms in the decaying corpse, Negarestani comments: 'the process of decay returns every outward twist developed from the interiorized horizon with an inner twist within the horizon itself and vice versa.'⁴⁷ Reason (the *ratio* of this dynamic) is thus wormlike, 'crooked at both ends', boring holes through which the unforeseeable may ooze.

Negarestani goes on to connect this Leibnizian putrefaction with its scholastic forerunners, in which 'The corpse, as the decaying epitome of putrefaction, demarcates the transition from the *complicatio* of a body to its *explicatio*.'⁴⁸ In other words, what is folded up unfolds, and decay unravels the body's potential. This marks the distinction of the creature, because 'For God, there is no rate of change (slope) between possibilities and actualities, since God is the complete actuation of its complete potencies or *Possest* (Nicholas of Cusa).'⁴⁹ More succinctly, 'God is too stiff to rot.'⁵⁰

God's perfection is God's stasis, which renders God 'impermeable' and unable to express the world outside of Godself.⁵¹ Perfection becomes imperfection: it is the body-as-always-rotting which is able to express the world, to make itself world. The scholastic body is thus an 'anomalous tangency' to the Divine, but one which offers a blasphemous possibility:

⁴⁶ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 151.

⁴⁷ Reza Negarestani, 'Undercover Softness: An Introduction to the Architecture and Politics of Decay,' *Collapse* (2010) VI, 379-430: 425.

⁴⁸ Negarestani, 'Undercover Softness,' 425.

⁴⁹ Negarestani, 'Undercover Softness,' 426.

⁵⁰ Negarestani, 'Undercover Softness,' 426.

⁵¹ Negarestani, 'Undercover Softness,' 427.

The consequence of the onto-theological marginalisation of scholastic bodies via the privileging of God's *possest* is that the exclusive power and use of slopes is inadvertently dedicated to beings; this power is the power of extracting worlds through differentiation, or unearthing schemas of subversions through the limits of ratios. Everything other than God is the *explicatio* of slopes . . . ; this is far too cosmically revolutionary to be fathomed.⁵²

The decaying body is the engine of creation, and God is made tangential in his immovable simplicity. Cascadian Black Metal does not need satanic overtones to perform a *better blasphemy*, a putrescent defiance all the more potent for its *indifference* to the God who is indistinguishable from Death. Its end is therefore the urgency of living without an end.

6.6.1 *Reply to first objection*: I persist in decay, in the plications that differentiate me and the world . . .

Hands blackened with my own blood
 Piece me back together
 Unburden the gutted beast
 Fill the abyssal chest with leaves
 I, great wound the wind whips,
 Disappear.
 (Fauna, *Rain*)

6.6.2 *Reply to second objection*: A 'perfect' love that could not die, that never was at risk of forgetting itself, would not be love, love of the other in their irreplaceable singularity. It would risk nothing. Only an apostate, amnesiac, mortal God can love.

6.6.3 *Reply to third objection*: Absolute oblivion is also the oblivion of the absolute in myriad spores of fertile decay . . . Black Metal is the fetid trace of this passage.

6.6.4 *Nevertheless* 'the end is fucking nigh!' (Skagos, 'The Drums Pound Every Night in a Glorious Celebration of Life,' *Ást*)

6.6.5 *One might compare* Adorno, for whom it is not art in the luminous clarity of a sublime intuition which demands our attention. It is when art throws off this non-conceptual clarity that it

⁵² Negarestani, 'Undercover Softness,' 428.

‘participates in thought itself’.⁵³ Art registers the contradictions of world and pronounces negative judgment on them. Thus it is that ‘Music that remains true to itself would rather not exist at all . . .’⁵⁴

[Larynx twists. Divine theory of decay . . . break further . . .]

6.6.6. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must scream.^{xix}

⁵³ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 124.

⁵⁴ Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 137.

ⁱ *a theory that always arrives too late*: Because philosophy is a stand-in for suicide and “It’s not worth the bother of killing yourself, since you always kill yourself too late” (Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*).
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ⁱⁱ *which only I have seen and will keep forever a secret*: “Seul le secret voit dans le secret, comme Noir en Noir” (François Laruelle, *Du noir univers*) [Only the secret sees into the secret, like Black in Black]. Nor does one see the color black without seeing black itself. Black is the universal essential mirage. In a universe where the geologic and elemental domain recedes and melts into spectra, like the meteorite in Lovecraft’s *The Color Out of Space*, black is the visible secret place where the primordially novel—something “from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it”—emerges, something whose obscurity is at once the veil of an unknown clarity—“this new glow was something definite and distinct, and appeared to shoot up from the black pit like a softened ray from a searchlight”—and the bewildering vista of even deeper black, the unimaginably intimate vision of something “whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes” (Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*). Or, in the words of Isaiah, “Secretum meum mihi, secretum meum mihi, vae mihi” (Isaiah 24:16) [My secret to myself, my secret to myself, woe is me]. Black Metal is loved in secret. In the secrecy wherein black metal keeps its own secret, above all from itself, and below. “Love sets on fire the one who finds it. At the same time it seals his lips so that no smoke comes out. Love is meant to be experienced and not disclosed. What is displayed is not love. Love is a secret which is meant to remain a secret save for the one who receives it and keeps it” (Meher Baba). As Bathory sings in *The Return* (Black Mark Productions, 1985), “Dark as her closed eyelids / Her secret . . . She don’t fear the flames . . . BORN FOR BURNING.” Or as Marguerite Porete, burned for heresy in 1310, explains, the annihilated soul (a secret who unknown to others and itself) “is the phoenix who is alone; for this Soul is alone in Love who alone is satisfied in her” (*The Mirror of Simple Souls*). So is it true what The Scapegoat said, that “the first rule of black metal is that YOU DO NOT FUCKING TALK ABOUT BLACK METAL” (<http://www.foreverdoomed.com/forums/>). About, from OE *onbutan*, means ‘on the outside of, around’. No one speaks *about* black metal—they do not *know* what they are talking about, nor

what they are doing. Discourse on black metal is blasphemy, heresy, sacrilege. That is the condition of its truth, that it break faith with itself. “It seemed to her a kind of blasphemy,” writes the compiler of Angela of Foligno’s *Memorial*, “to try to express the inexpressible. . . . More than anyone else I ever knew, she was in the habit of saying: ‘My secret for myself.’” And this secret love (of black metal) is also precisely, perfectly, what demands discourse. “I want to speak about it,” says the Soul to Love in Porete’s text, “and I don’t know what to say about it. Nevertheless . . . my love is so certain that I would prefer to hear something slanderous [*médiscance*] about you than one should say nothing about you.” The secret is what can and must endure all blasphemy. This black metal love, inviolable in the radically immanent solitude of its negative transcendence, is *born for burning*: “She is not afraid to die / She will burn again tonight / (she will always burn) / But her spirit shall survive” (Quorthon). Do not talk about it. Speak *in* black metal, where the secret of black metal is, wherever black metal is the secret of itself. Because Black Metal is love. NM

ⁱⁱⁱ It is interesting to note that from this perspective, the ardent commitment of Black Metal to a privatized conception of locality is consistent with a curiously pre-modern line of thinking ingrained in the tradition of European philosophy culminating in Heidegger’s obsession with being rooted in an earth whose integrity shall not be disturbed. Within this trajectory of thought, privacy and locality essentially coincide since the latter is understood within the context of an axiomatic horizon whose verity and integrity can be manifestly corroborated. Accordingly, the local horizon of the earth and its regions up to the local construct of the subject are considered to be secured by way of an axiomatic or a given principle of the ground which supplies any instance of locality with an integrity that is originally and from the outset deemed to be undisturbed and accessible. In other words, the local is a domain of privacy insofar as its modality of operation can be extracted from the local horizon, its horizon is accessible to the local subject and its integrity is a matter of (establishing) a correspondence with the axiomatic principles and structures which ground and demarcate the local. Restoring the roots is, in this sense, re-establishing the correspondence between the local horizon and grounding axioms which call to mind principles of an immobile earth or anchored foundation and delude us with promises

of privacy in the last instance. But the horizon of the local is neither epistemologically given nor self-contained. Determining the local and defining our relation to it is a procedural task not an a priori datum secured by a primordial foundation to be accessed upon request. Nor is the local an invariant dimension: every act of localization—i.e. determining the local—finds the local within a new set of coordinates since upon each new investigation new defining paths for a local horizon unfold, further distancing it from its spurious roots that try to strictly demarcate it. Therefore, we can say that the local is defined not by its roots but by its ramified paths into the open and its ever-changing addresses which unfold as it is determined and brought into focus. Moreover, the modality of the local, no matter how discretely defined is inseparable from modalities of the global. For this reason, the local is always and essentially ‘vague’, characterized by its local indistinction and entanglements with the outside. Accordingly, the local is neither privatized in the past nor in the future, neither in the first instance nor in the last.

Associating the private to the local is as erroneous as it is precarious. The undeniable appeal of Black Metal to individualism originates in part from the assumed correlation between the local and the private for which the local subject (in the sense of a subject firmly conditioned by the regional) is essentially a privatized subject reducible to the self-sanctuary of the individual. Once this precarious correlation is taken to its ultimate fallacious conclusion, only the individual becomes capable of—by the virtue of its given privacy—to connect with the local or the regional. RN

^{iv} *the ruin of all centres*: Earth is this ruin, a place established in the incorporeality of place: “A: . . . place exists in the mind alone . . . N: You observe correctly. A: Then what must be said of those who declare that the habitations of men and the other animals are places; who similarly consider that this common air, and also the earth, are the places of all who dwell in them; who say that water is the place of the fishes; who think the aether is the place of the planets, the sphere of heaven that of the stars? N: nothing but to persuade them (of their error) if they are teachable [and wish to be taught]: or if they are stubborn, to disregard them entirely. For right reason laughs at people who say such things. For if a body is a different thing from place it follows that place is not a body” (John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, eds. I. P. Sheldon-Williams and

Édouard A. Jeauneau, trans. John. J. O'Meara, 4 vols. [Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1999-2009], I.475B). The inescapable telluric vector of Cascadian Black Metal is correlatively towards a singular and essentially *replaceable* Earth, not the 'renewable' once-and-future earth of ecotopic ideology, but the perfect alien *thisness* of earth that cosmically persists in its no longer being and not going to be, a revolutionary earth that spirals "in absence of a sun." The earth whose 'place' is movement in the placeless, a movement that cannot be reduced to spatio-temporal tracings, that is in no way tied to historical position. All attempts to fix earth as topos, to think it as the place of thought, bottom out in the static abyss of a radically immanent tautology—you are here, this is earth—wherein the two meanings of *earth* (geologic matter and planetary body) are fatally fused. The earth that remains in the abolition of all centers, in the ineradicable traumatic intuition that the very cosmos is grounded in ignorance, is the only earth fully open to the hyper-contingent fact of one's being on this earth. This earth, whose presence cannot be compassed by the negative projection of randomness or any other conceptual alienation, whose parameters exceed both denial and affirmation, is representable in the mode of hypothesis: if not this earth, then another. Earth is saved as place only in the index of its essential replaceability, its potential to occur at different places and times. Earth as what remains in the ruin of all centers, or more properly, as the immanence of that ruination—the ruin is always what is buildable (not by you)—is contiguous with what Eriugena calls "that invisible mystical earth and the dark intelligible abyss" [*mystica illa terra invisibilis ipsaque tenebrosa abyssus intellectualis*], the domain of the primordial causes of all visible things, which is "perceived by no intellect except that which formed it in the beginning" (*Periphyseon*, II.551A). This domain is "known only [as to] that it is, but not understood (as to) what it is" and is comparable to Laruelle's 'black universe', the chromatic darkness and cosmic ruin of being-in-universe (cf. Lovecraft's unknown Kadath). The primordial causes "both proceed into the things of which they are the causes and at the same time do not depart from their Principle . . . remaining in themselves invisibly by being eternally concealed in the darkness of their excellence, [they] do not cease to appear by being brought forth into the light" (*Periphyseon*, 552A). The invisible mystical earth is the hidden universal place that provides—in the literal sense of a before-seeing—the omnipresent hidden ocular hinge which articulates the

ecstatic union between all things and the placeless Reality. The dark intelligible abyss is the originally blackened nature, the simple-most ur-immanence through which Reality remains in being by staying beyond it. For as Dionysius says, “the very cause of the universe . . . is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything . . . and is enticed way from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself” (*Divine Names*, 712B). NM

^v *God’s theory*: The theory whose image is life itself as indiscrete animation of the Real. Cf. “Every life is some form of thought . . . while men may recognize grades in life they reject grades in thought; to them there are thoughts (full and perfect) and anything else is no thought. This is simply because they do not seek to establish what Life is . . . Contemplation (*theoria*) and its object constitute a living thing, a Life, two inextricably one” (Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna [Burdett, NY: 1992], 3.8.8). Cusa’s understanding of the human as living image of infinite art “marks a crucial link between medieval mysticism and modern conceptions of human creativity” (Thomas A. Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and Creation of the Human* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 114). As such Cusa may be an especially useful figure for reopening the question of the ontology of theory in relation to creative evolution, for reinventing theory as art of becoming, and more specifically, for the development of Black Metal Theory as contemplative practice of Black Metal. What generally prevents such reinvention conceptually is the discursive disqualification of theory’s capacity to see more than it comprehends, its delimitation to *discussion*, i.e. the parliamentary constitution of the modern subject. Seeing more than is comprehended—cf. Levinas’s thought “which thinks more than itself”—is precisely the work of *docta ignorantia*, which is “visio sine comprehensione, speculation” [vision without comprehension, speculation] (*De docta ignorantia* 1.26). NM

^{vi} Does Black Metal’s return to the earth coincide with the homecoming of narcissus and Heidegger’s asinine agony of seeing the uprooted earth as a clump of dung from the moon or is it a twisted recourse in the direction of alienating the earth? To answer this question, one should note that the earth of Black Metal is a depthwise

earth, a chthonic earth that opens the terrestrial sanctuary and the territorial lineage into the bowels of the earth. The chthonic earth however voids the social and individual contract with the land and cancels the heritage through which one roots in the land insofar as it is a depth that belongs to no one and is purely indifferent to the hereditary contracts and roots secured upon the land. In short, the depth of the earth is No One's Root and No Man's Land. The depth is irreducible to the land and roots which grow in it. Whether the irreducibility of the chthonic depth to the land undermines Black Metal's regionalism or unveils a twisted underside to Black Metal's return to the earth as a depth veneered with land is a matter of ambivalence endemic to Black Metal that at once works as a source of tension and self-aborting creativity. RN

^{vii} *the ruin and fulfillment of language*: the point impinges on the question of the relation of Black Metal to silence. The passive form of Black Metal silence is that which belongs to the astral depths, inhuman cosmic domains. It is the oppressive and misanthropic silence that falls upon man from the vast alterity of nature, silence which speaks the nightmare of being. This is the silence *out of which* Black Metal rants and moans like a derelict suicidal ghost. Example: Striborg, "Beyond the Shadow of Silence," *Nefaria / A Tragic Journey Towards the Light* (Displeased Records, 2006). The passive form of Black Metal silence is the shadow of cosmos as silently speaking the divine glory: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalms 19:1-4). The active form of Black Metal silence is that which pertains to post-apocalypse, the anti-human earth. It is the peaceful and deathly silence that fills the world when all enemies, or life itself, is finally destroyed, silence which sings in the absence of all hearing. This is the silence *towards which* Black Metal shouts and screams like a satano-fascist warrior. Example: "Silence fell / Upon the earth / All gods were dead / We killed them first . . . A silence planet / All life erased" (Gehenna, "Silence the Earth," *WW* [Moonfog Productions, 2005]). The active form of Black Metal silence is the shadow of that towards which divine wrath is ordered: "Their way has become painful to me, / By day I cannot rest, by night I cannot sleep; / I will destroy (them) and

put an end to their way, / That silence be established, and then let us sleep!" (Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: A Complete Translation of All the Published Cuneiform Tablets of the Various Babylonian Creation Stories* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951], 19). Black Metal circulates between these two ideas of silence, turning them within one sonic image.

Silence exists in the cessation of the structural mechanicity of thought, in the opening of the space between one thought and the next whose continuity is time. Expanding and contracting time, silence is absorbed and released in mutations of thought's materiality that bring into presence its intimate outside or immanent beyond. Silence is accordingly produced in six ways which correspond to the six types of transformation or phase changes among the three states of matter (gas, liquid, solid). Silence is analogous to the inverse of the presence of heat in these phase changes. It is what is absorbed and released by them as thought, binding its time to sound, allows itself to change shape. Silence is released in the melting, evaporation, and sublimation of thought. Silence is absorbed in the condensation, freezing, and deposition of thought. *Melting silence*: music produces this silence by tightening thought-space, compressing the noetic joint, squeezing the gap between thought and thought. Here silence bleeds and oozes out of the frictional grinding between thought and thought. *Evaporative silence*: music produces this silence by dilating thought-space, stretching open the noetic joint, loosening the gap between thought and thought. Here silence emerges in airy cloud forms of suspended thought. *Sublimative silence*: music produces this silence by exploding thought-space, blasting the noetic joint, momentarily destroying the gap between thought and thought. Here silence emerges as the instant flight of individual shards of thought. *Condensing silence*: music produces this silence by closing thought-space, shrinking the noetic joint, touching thought to thought. Here silence emerges as the gravitational falling of thoughts. *Freezing silence*: music produces this silence by bonding thought-space, fixing the noetic joint, fastening the gap between thought and thought. Here silence emerges as the immobility of thoughts. *Depositive silence*: music produces this silence by imploding thought-space, collapsing the noetic joint, instantly growing the gap between thought and thought. Here silence emerges in form of the crystalline film of thought.

Black Metal is weighted toward the absorptive side of silence production. It brings silence into presence primarily along the

intensive, interiorizing vector, not manifesting silence outwardly for the world, not mixing ‘sounds of silence’, but silencing world itself from within through structured speed and noise. The absorptive focus of Black Metal is reflected in its centripetal, dampened quality and in its strange cultural life as a strident music that no one really hears, that is listened to by a *no one*. As music it is perforce heard and necessarily involves all six forms of silence, yet it codes itself toward the unheard and presents itself as the ‘cooling’ dimension of transformation, releasing heat (noise, emotion, idea) in the intensive production of silence, as opposed to the extensive production of silence through which heat (noise, emotion, idea) is absorbed. This is why applause always feels inappropriate at a black metal show and why the show itself must be cognized as ritual, if only symbolically.

As the three states of matter (gas, liquid, solid) also reflect the three universal worlds (mental, subtle, gross), the six forms of silence correspond to the six products of thought, feeling, and sound (feeling of thought, sound of feeling, feeling of sound, thought of feeling, sound of thought, thought of sound). The three spaces of these products in turn correspond to the three essential dimensions of Black Metal: Profane, Melancholic, and Occult (see Nicola Masciandaro, “Anti-Cosmosis: Black Mahapralaya,” in *Hideous Gnosis* [New York: n.p., 2010], 90n41). NM

<i>Occult BM</i> ↑ sublimation	Gas/Thought ↑ <i>Melancholic BM</i> ↓ evaporation & condensation	↓ <i>Occult BM</i> deposition
	Liquid/Feeling ↑ <i>Profane BM</i> ↓ melting & freezing	
	Solid/Sound	

^{viii} *a stain spreading from the heart itself*: “When one addresses oneself to God . . . one should be careful not to write. God doesn’t read” (E. M. Cioran). Writing (to) the One is a matter of bleeding the heart. The image of the inky heart inverts the topos of heart as tablets on which the law of charity is written (2 Corinthians 3:3). It thus falls within the tradition of mystical, meta-literalization of the truth wherein the material and the divine are grotesquely confused. Cf. Henry of Suso’s experience: “In his burst of fervor, he pushed back his scapular,

bared his bosom, took a sharp stylus, and called on God to help him, saying: ‘Almighty God, give me strength this day to carry out my desire, for thou must be chiseled into the core of my heart.’ Then stabbing the stylus backwards and forwards, in and out of the flesh, he engraved the name of Jesus (HIS) over his heart. Blood gushed out of the jagged wounds and saturated his clothing. The bliss he experienced in having a visible pledge of oneness with his true love made the very seem like a sweet delight” (cited from Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 99). NM

^{ix} *the cancellation of space*: “For me—how could there be something outside me? There is no outside! But we forget this with all sounds; how lovely it is that we forget!” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 175). NM

^x *in the absence of its source*: “The products of putrefaction are to be traced to the Soul’s inability to bring some other thing into being” (Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna [Larson, 1992], 5.9.14). NM

^{xi} *sonic expression of this decay*: A lesson of the box with LP. Black Metal as reverse projection the biodegradable. Cf. “Ecotopian durable plastics . . . virtually decay-proof under ordinary circumstances . . . so long as they are not in contact with the soil. However, by chemical advances that have so far remained secret, Ecotopian scientists have built into these molecules ‘keyholes’ which can be opened by soil mirco-organisms! Once they are unlocked the whole structure decomposes rapidly” (Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia* [Berkeley: Banyan Tree Books, 1975], 84). On this model Black Metal would be the soil to the plastic of civilization, the key to its secret holes. NM

^{xii} *myopic anthropocentric dreams*: Authentic, true anti-humanism (anti-humanism which is its own agent, *autoentes*) necessarily ‘begins at home’, that is, with wholly rejecting human self-slavery, self-alliance, the monocular I/eye of all anthropocentric dreaming. The body that came into this world is not you. NM

^{xiii} But isn’t this absence of attention to death as such a token of thinking death from a temporal perspective? Anchored in the

privileged synthesis of time, the temporal perspective does not take death as an asymmetrical disjunction to life and an independent ontic possibility but instead as something that merely exists as an ontological possibility and hence always elusive at the level of actuality. Since death is presupposed as a pure possibility coextensive with the temporal time that determines and conditions life, it appears as unobtainable, indeed as something that can be done away with (always possible but never actual). But death is not simply a mere possibility, instead it is an actual occurrence independent of the temporality of dying or in this case undying (a possible-but-not-actual death is a total protraction). In other words, death is asynchronous with the temporality of life and dying and therefore, marks a gap that cannot be bridged or overcome in one way or another. The asynchronicity of death makes it irreducible to any concept of power. Death is not a power over life to be subverted, it is a gap that can neither be filled nor deepened. In this sense, death cannot be thought by the synchronicity implicit to the undying temporality of cancer. RN

^{xiv} *a sovereign indifference to the machine that generates the boundaries between human/inhuman, pure/diseased, living/dead*: This is the path of nobility. “This Soul, says Love, is scorched through mortification and burned through the ardor of the fire of charity, and her ashes are thrown into the open sea through the nothingness of will. This Soul is gently noble in prosperity, and supremely noble in adversity, and excellently noble in all places whatever they might be” (Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky [New York: Paulist Press, 1993], 160). “This world or the next, hell or heaven, we no longer bother about . . . What has value and importance for us now is to live in the active present” (*Song of the New Life*). The telluric orientation of sovereign indifference may be traced through the spiritual alpinism of medieval mysticism and the mountain sublime of Romanticism, both in terms of descent and ascent (Dante’s Hell is a negative mountain). “Now I will tell you who it is who is seated on the mountain above the winds and the rain. They are those who, on earth, have neither shame nor honor, nor fear on account of something which might happen” (Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, 141). “Der ist der Herr der Erde, / wer ihre Tiefe misst / und jeglicher Beschwerde / in ihrem Schooss vergisst” [Earth’s Lord is he who measures / her caverned depths below, / And in her lap forgetteth /

His sorrow and his woe] (Novalis, “Bergsmannsleben,” in *The Poetry of Germany*, trans. Alfred Baskerville [Philadelphia: Schaefer & Koradl, 1882], 159-60). While Cascadian Black Metal certainly continues the bergmetal tradition in some ways (see <http://bergmetal.blogspot.com>), its center of gravity is significantly deflected and twisted away from the dynamics of ascent-descent and the related dramas of overcoming, transcendence, conversion, and transhumanation. Befitting the Cascadian concept—the range is named not with direct reference to the mountains but to the water beside them, specifically, the Cascade Rapids on the Columbia River—Cascadian Black Metal locates itself essentially *beside* the mountains. Cascadian Black Metal is not alpine in the sense of dwelling in the anarchic supremacy of the mountains, not “above the winds and the rain,” but in the sense of dwelling in a zone that is vitally *subject to* the mountains—a subject that climatically present in terms of the orographic lift that goes to create the significant rainfall, as demonstrated by the cover of Wolves in the Throne Room’s *Diadem of 12 Stars* (Vendlus Records, 2006):



This precipitative subjection to the mountains is connected to the melancholic dimension of Cascadian Black Metal (see note vii) and may be contrasted to the more overtly occult and ascending-descending aesthetics of Rocky Mountain Black Metal (e.g. Nightbringer, Schrei Aus Stein, Deafest)—the occult being correlated to the passage between earth and sky, rock/ice and atmosphere, without the intermediary of liquid, which is not properly present at altitude and which indeed inhibits both ascent and descent. Where the Gathering of Shadows (an annual black metal gathering in Colorado) takes place “under the night sky, upon the heights” (cf. Deafest’s *Earth Turned Skyward* [9th Meridian Records, 2010]), Cascadian Black Metal lives in the *shadow of the mountain*:

Fear enshrouds us, scattering all of our memories
And we have become the insatiable hunger
Coiled around our roots

We are but dust
We are but water
Wandering this ravaged land
In the shadow of the mountain
(Alda, “Shadow of the Mountain,” *Tahoma* [Eternal Warfare, 2011])

“[T]he threatening ranges of dark mountains, which, in nearly all ages of the world, men have looked upon with aversion or with terror, are in reality sources of life and happiness far fuller and more beneficent than the bright fruitfulness of the plain” (John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 7.10). The vital paradox of the Cascadian shadow lies in the mountains as source of life but not of happiness, in a life whose flourishing is dampened by a kind of excessive flowing of its source, a wetness that makes of life the spiral of an insatiable and inessential growth around its own roots. NM

^{xv} *The language of disease and inhumanity . . . a tactical gesture*: The tacticity is more than dialectical, more than a preventative against the error of installing any symptom of the human-disease cure. The truth of “YOU are the dis-ease” is precisely that that the *you*—the human ‘self’ as distinct, separate identity, something with an individual or collective ‘life of its own’—is nothing other than a sickness, a

destructive identitarian error whose structural basis is not only false thinking, but *vitiating intellect*, which requires more than correction, namely, purification, “the painful process of *cutting out those desires and attachments which are responsible for vitiating the intellect*” (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, III.150-1). The disease itself demands merciless all-sided attack from within, total rejection of the idea that YOU are good or capable of good whatsoever. “The disease of selfishness in mankind will need a cure which is not only universal in its application but drastic in nature. It is so deep-rooted that it can be eradicated only if it is attacked from all sides” (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, III.19). NM

^{xvi} *A thinking that does not give up on the absolute and unconditional inevitably tastes like poison to the humanistic mind*: Likewise, any thinking that gives up on the absolute and unconditional continually is poison to the human mind. NM

^{xvii} *Music and tears open the lips and set the arrested human being free . . . reconciliation*: Let us be rightly suspicious of this image of reconciliation in light of the proper secrecy of love, which seals the lips (see note ii above). “And it was all one huge fable, one long lie; and by its adulterous caressing, my soul, which lay itching in my ears, was utterly corrupted” (Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006], 4.8). NM

^{xviii} Perhaps a question that can be posed here is that: If there is an impossibility within *this* world, then how can the true abyssal scope of nature as that which does not distinguish between *this* or *that* world be reconstructed? In other words, is impossibility able to approach an abyss that does not distinguish itself from any world whatsoever, an abyss that from a global perspective is irreducible to both compossibility of worlds and impossibility of *this* or *that* world? In *The Topos of Music*, Guerino Mazzola identifies a compossibility beyond the restricted commonalities of local differences (as in the trivial compossibility of the baroque). This is a non-trivial or non-local compossibility that grasps synthesis within the flux of invariance and protean layers of continuity beneath discreteness of fundamental impossibilities, instances of differences and their limited synthetic resources. Only a compossibility parametrized as much by local differences as by global invariance that is in asymmetry to the former is able to configure atonality. RN

^{xix} Cf. Scream as “a certain configuration of certain sounds” or “certain modulations of sounds” which allow for infinite internal deformities and through which the damned are identified and “some demons are held captive and others put to flight” (Nicole Oresme).
RN

BLACK METAL AND THE MOUTH: *ALWAYS
SERVING YOU AS A MEAL*, OR, INFECTED ORALITY,
PESTILENTIAL WOUNDS AND SCARS

Aspasia Stephanou

There are many other things that a mouth can do besides act as an outlet for what the brain thinks. As we viewers of horror films know very well, it can project vomit or spew bile, it can contaminate with a kiss, and it can issue screams. It is not a matter of speaking the unspeakable, but of vocalising the extra-linguistic or the non-verbal, and thereby letting the Outside in. (Fisher, “Gothic Materialism” 242)

The mouth gurgles forth a black matter thick and putrid. (Leviathan, “Mouth Orifice Bizarre”)

[T]he apocalypse depicted by spittle, blood and dried sperm, the sweat of clenched fists and smashed teeth spat onto the sun to humiliate the day. (Massemord, “The Madness Tongue Devouring Juices of Livid Hope”)

The mouth is a chamber of thousands of larvae, each germinating an acephalous mouth, cannibal to the other, serving the other as a meal. (Negarestani, “Acephalous Mouth”)

Black Metal is a chamber of thousands of larvae, each germinating an acephalous mouth,ⁱ cannibal to the other, serving the other as a meal. Black Metal is a sonorous, pulsing womb birthing thousands of screaming mouths, mouths spewing bile, blood, and phlegm. Black Metal is “A face without eyes, without lips . . . / Gaping sinister holes . . . / A mouth opened like a grave” (Deathmoor, “Charon”). Amidst the rotten and decaying matter, in the presence

of meat, where flesh and bones exist independently and for each other (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 16), the boundaries between animal and man break down (17). In this zone of indiscernibility animal-human mouths butcher, chew, and spew out living flesh. The nihilistic carnage of mouth consumes and discards meat, and both human and animal become potential carcasses, consumed in their mutual consummation, open to horror and the abyssal pit/mouth/womb of the earth.

“[H]ell hath enlarged herself / And opened her mouth / Without measure” (Antaeus “Sanctus”). This blackened devouring mouth conjures up the Mouth of Hell—the entrance to hell through the jaws of a monster—that devours the sinners, and was a popular medieval convention which had its origin in Anglo-Saxon art. A gigantic monster, sometimes imagined as a whale, a lion, a dragon, or a Thing, the mouth of hell, “yawning for its prey, breathing fire and smoke, and roaring with a noise like the grunting of millions of hogs, tapped a deep spring of terror” (Cavendish 156). “Fanged jaws” (Cavendish 156) becomes a synecdoche of the Hellmouth and emphasises the devouring quality of the mouth, the horrifying opening of a mouth that can not be tamed by the head: “The mouth is irreducibly cold and demonic to the head and its sphere” (Negarestani “Acephalous Mouth”). Instead, the acephalous mouth devours its own head in an eternal cycle where all abject material is never abjected: “The human waste pooling in the bowels of the earth cannot be evacuated *literaliter*, of course, since what goes into Hellmouth almost never comes out the other end” (Miller 235). “See the suffering damned ones / Arms legs, mutilated. Flesh wounds/Eyes, ears, ripped and mangled / mouth full of the taste of human refuse (Golgothian Denial “Delight in the Pain of the Damned”).

Against Black Metal’s consuming mouth, there is the tamed mouth of capitalist production and consumption. For Reza Negarestani,

All we can understand is meal not the mouth . . . our economies are architected through the recognition, production, marketing, formatting and trade of meal; Meal (being as a meal) calibrates productions and exchanges, becomes the ground of subjectivity and its dissembling lines: ‘I’ and ‘We’ as the cartographies of (being) meal (I am a meal, therefore I exist.) . . . The

taste of subjectivity and the subjectivity of taste unfold beneath the economy of meal fastened to that which we politically obscure as consuming culture. Shackling the mouth to the so-called restricted economy, Hegelism and taste is a stupid effort to hide the nihilistic carnage of mouth, a parsimonious philosophy originating from our ‘being as mere meal’ . . . it is whitewashing our domesticating hunger, jealousy and racial segregation that we undertake against the mouth, bashing our heads to the worst aspects of subjectivity—is it just for celebrating the glory of being meal or covering our hunger for domestication? (“Acephalous Mouth”)

Negarestani attacks meal and its economies, subjectivity, aesthetic taste, and a privileged appetite that negates difference. He liberates the mouth from its associations with metaphorical eating and (the active subject’s) assimilation (of the passive object) in order to stress the pestilential butchery of mouth. For Negarestani, societies centre on meal, products and their accumulation within a bounded restricted economy where growth, production, possession, exchange and the limit are the rule. We fail to recognise the excess, loss and limitlessness of the mouth and its nihilistic consumption. All we understand is measurable commodities. As Stephen David Ross writes, the history of the West creates “a restricted economy, turning around the number two, made visible in mirrors, substitutions, exchanges, I for you, he for she . . . an exchange economy, with its transformation of women, children, and animals, perhaps including men, into commodities, transforming subjects into objects with prices and values, exchangeable for each other” (*Plenishment in the Earth* 94). The system of “anti-production” (Deleuze and Guattari) is based upon the serviceable and logical production of meal which defines the heart of capitalism.ⁱⁱ Nature and man become mere tools for producing things to be sold for profit. Against this gustatory capitalist economy, Black Metal’s mouth infects through its opening into a world of spiced corpses: “The spiced corpse remains a potent image, hovering outside the bounds of food-as-nutrition” (Morton 31). While spice¹ as a marked

¹ See Nicola Masciandaro’s “Becoming Spice: Commentary as Geophilosophy”, in *Collapse, Vol. VI: Geo/Philosophy*, (2010): 20-56, and “Getting Anagogic,” *Rhizomes* 21 (2010).

commodity is imagined as a “coat, coating, surface or appearance” bestowing “fleeting flavour” (Morton 30, 31), Black Metal’s blackened spice infects life with death, inviting one to participate in an enduring taste of undeath where “boundaries between subject and object evaporate, as they are not predicated on a dialectic of consumer and consumed” (Morton 229): “Slowly blood-flies eat me up” (Nocturnal Breed “Fields of Rot”); “living through the worms, eating the corpses”; “youth exists in our morbid kiss/ knowing the grave flesh, cold grip of life” (Black Funeral “Infernal Majesty”, “Varcolaci”); “Ravenous lust for infected flesh” (Infernaeon “Annihilating the Inner Decay of Species”).

Herbert Marcuse has expressed the integration of the individual into the capitalist system through the creation of false needs. “False needs”, he writes, “are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice” (7). Such false needs, produced and packaged, are translated and categorised according to language, swallowed as terminology (Serres 221). The whole enterprise of consumerism is built upon language, labels, and brands: “drinking is as much analysis as reading is; the label and the container carry the same series of words or substances: a formula for refreshment, abstraction in a bottle, pharmacy. The law decrees it. Imposes the fidelity of advertising. The law, written, forces the written label on us, and we are made to drink writing” (Serres 222). Similarly, the mode of subjectivity under capitalism feeds on the illusion of a self-transparent individual who has turned him/herself into a delectable dish to be served as a sanitised product of a society obsessed with surfaces and organised around the flows of currency.ⁱⁱⁱ Black Metal situates the origins of capitalism and consumption in language:

The ability to speak brings value to a life. The ability to beg, plead, rationalize. Jaws that embrace the horror of this silent holocaust. Desecrate the earth with consumption and loss.

Disrupted natural order. Ecological blasphemy. An insult to our integrity, ingest the horror, the devastation and death . . . Caged in factories and commercial shelves, the new definition of hell,

The suffering and loss. (Panopticon “Speaking”)

Subjectivity is built upon the narcosis of a closed system that produces and categorises meal, transforming the “I” into a calculable by-product of language and exchange, a thing to be badly consumed for and by the other. Subjectivity is bound and subjected to what Serres calls the golden mouth: “Speech reigns there, a queen in palatine splendour; the reign of language over lips and tongue is absolute. Imperious, exclusive” (Serres 153). Speech and language “anaesthetize the mouth, which finds the zestiest conversation tasteless” (153). Black Metal is a pestilential machine seeking to infect organisation and despotic language with excremental screams. It despises those whose language is “a barrage of lies” (Fukpig “When Will We Hear Their Cries”), “Spewing artificial dogma from their mouth” (Feral Horde “Tool of Damnation”).

The subjectivity of taste remains bound to this golden mouth. The mouth that has not tasted or smelled. The mouth that talks but does not taste: “Socrates, Agathon and Alcibiades speak of love without ever making love, or sit down to eat without actually eating or drink without tasting; likewise they enter directly from the porch, over the threshold, into the dining area, without ever visiting the kitchens. Like the Gods, slaves and women stand near the stoves, where transformations occur, while the barbarians talk” (Serres 165). For Hegel, the mouth and taste are material and thus not spiritual. Idealism cannot be associated with materiality and corporeality, the wasting away and rotting of objects, smell, and taste which destroy spiritual consciousness.² The work of art, for example, is “related only to the two theoretical senses of sight and hearing, while smell, taste, and touch have to do with matter as such” and “cannot have to do with artistic objects, which are meant to maintain themselves in their real independence and allow of no *purely* sensuous relationship. What is agreeable for these senses is not the beauty of art” (Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* 38-9). Hegel relates the enjoyment of art only to the two theoretical senses of sight and hearing, which, nonetheless, remain ineffectual

² See also Edgar Allan Poe’s *Berenice* (1835), where Egaeus is paralysed by the materiality of Berenice’s disintegrating physiognomy and the death of his former idealism. In the end he extracts her teeth, transforming them into ideas without the materiality of the body, knowledge without the corrupted body. Berenice’s corrupted beauty and flesh are rejected for the idea: the possession of the teeth. They are finally kept in a box in the library, contained and bound like the ideas in his books.

in fully apprehending art. Imagination is then considered as a third mode for a more spiritual understanding of the fine arts. For Hegel and the philosophers of Taste, aesthetic taste remains separated from gustatory taste (Korsmeyer 63). The mouth of the carnivorous philosopher negates the difference of the other and persists in a universal understanding of Taste free from desire and consumed by a privileged elite whose mode of eating is characterised by what Derrida has called carno-phallogocentrism (“Eating Well” 280). This is why, for Hegel, “one cannot think for someone else, any more than one can eat or drink for him” (*The Encyclopaedia Logic* 55). Thinking, like eating, is a self-contained act, negating the other and denying ethical reciprocity toward the other.

While the mouth is the organ of taste, it is also responsible for digestion. If Black Metal paints a blackened universe of undigested and inassimilable remains of unrecognisable substances in a constant tension that unsettles any hierarchical boundaries, then, on the other hand, for Hegel, “Eating is the assimilation of food showing the self’s power over externality and the acknowledgement that externality has no for-itself, no independent subsistence. As such it is the self’s negation of immediacy and of givenness. In this respect, Hegel speaks of the self’s sovereign ingratitude towards what gives it sustenance” (Ferrarin 82). Hegel’s desire for appropriation is evident in his example of the apple as something that can be digested and assimilated:

If the individual human being does something, achieves something, attains a goal, this fact must be grounded in the way the thing itself, in its concept, acts and behaves. If I eat an apple, I destroy its organic self-identity and assimilate it to myself. That I can do this entails that the apple in itself, already, in advance, before I take hold of it, has in its nature the character (*Bestimmung*) of being subject to destruction, having in itself a homogeneity with my digestive organs such that I can make it homogeneous with myself. (qtd. in Malabou, *The Future of Hegel* 97)

Here the Hegelian subject retains within itself the entirety of the consumed content: a violent assimilation of Otherness.³

This is what Derrida stresses when he writes in “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject” that

Discourses as original as those of Heidegger and Levinas disrupt, of course, a certain traditional humanism. In spite of the differences separating them, they nonetheless remain profound humanisms *to the extent that they do not sacrifice sacrifice*. (279)

Eating, consuming, devouring, and destroying is sacrifice, always at the expense of humanity’s victims: animals, women and children. This sacrifice is the sacrifice that Bataille celebrates and what Derrida wants to sacrifice:

The abject subordination of those who sacrifice to the authority of the institutions they have themselves constructed, or have found themselves within as subjects bearing the marks of that construction, the weight of the edifices of expenditure and sacrifice that fall down upon the subject-agents through lateral effects, all demand deconstruction and more deconstruction, sacrificing sacrifice. (Ross, *The Gift of Kinds* 119)

For Derrida in the symbolic or real experience of eating-speaking-interiorising, where the limits between living and non-living, animal and man become unsure, the question of eating is always a question of

determining the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self. For everything that happens at the edge of the orifices (of orality, but also of the ear,

³ Slavoj Žižek disagrees with such a reading that emphasises orality and, instead, turns towards Hegelian excrementation. In *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, he writes that “for Hegel, the philosophy of nature is not a violent re-appropriation of its externality; it rather involves the passive attitude of an observer: ‘philosophy has, as it were, simply to watch how nature itself sublates its externality’” (London and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012), 400.

the eye—and all the ‘senses’ in general) the metonymy of ‘eating well’ [*bien manger*] would always be the rule. The question is no longer one of knowing if it is ‘good’ to eat the other or if the other is ‘good’ to eat, nor of knowing which other. One eats him regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him. (“Eating Well” 281-22)

For Derrida the “moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the living, man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there’s no other definition of the good [*du bien*], how for goodness’ sake should one *eat well* [*bien manger*]?” (282). Eating well then implies “*learning* and *giving* to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat” (282). Eating well should be done with respect for the other: “one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized, understood ideally” (283). Derrida here takes into account the other, animals, different races, women and other minorities which need to eat and be eaten well and with respect by the other. For Derrida, the law, after it has been incorporated by the subject can become a good or bad object depending on the individual’s ethics and his/her respect for the other (Schwab 5).^{iv}

Thus, the law of eating well is alien to Deleuze and Guattari’s uncoded flows of desire, outside of the symbolic order. Even, however, when Deleuze’s earlier account in *The Logic of Sense* centres on Artaud’s nonsense and schizophrenic-paranoid performances as examples of a literature of the mouth and of depth, his analysis remains linked to ethics and to the question of whether it is good to eat or whether one can eat the good (Guyer 82). The good object, the voice, is a lost object that is already there, but also absent: “It is no longer a noise, but is not yet a language” (*The Logic of Sense* 194). It is the voice of the superego, of God. Artaud’s voracious orality, the “clappings, crackings, gnashing, cracklings, explosions, the shattered sounds of internal objects and also the inarticulate howls-breaths (*cris-souffles*) of the body without organs” (193), is the schizophrenic’s response to the threat of the voice which has stolen “the entire sonorous, *prevocal* system” (195). As Deleuze writes,

The moment that the maternal language is stripped of its sense, its *phonetic elements* become singularly wounding. The word no longer expresses an attribute of the state of

affairs; its fragments merge with unbearable sonorous qualities, invade the body where they form a mixture and a new state of affairs, as if they themselves were a noisy, poisonous food and canned excrement . . . “All writing is PIG SHIT” (that is to say, every fixed or written word is decomposed into noisy, alimentary, and excremental bits). (*The Logic of Sense* 88)

For Deleuze, and against Derrida’s introjection, there is no introjection of good objects, but only bad ones. In particular, the schizoid position denies any introjection or projection, eating or being eaten, and leads to a body without organs, complete–without orifices, without entries (188). Through suffering Artaud discovers the glorious body, an organism without parts and its “prodigious language” (Deleuze, *Logic* 93): “Sense reaches absolute zero” (Land, “Meat” 191).

Negating Derrida and Deleuze’s ethics, Negarestani attacks subjectivity at its roots, transforming the incorporation of the law into a mouthing, an openness that does not obey any rules, but inhabits an anonymous neutral space of thousands of mouths biting, infecting and annihilating selfhood. For Negarestani, Artaud’s schizophrenic attack on language does not only signify the “collapse of the surface” and the experience of emptiness and loss of sense (Deleuze, *Logic* 87), but opens up to a “terra incognita” of “delirious distributions of voids (oral cavity, etc.) and solids, ravening each other, mutating to things never complete” (“Acephalous Mouth”). In Black Metal the body is always at the point of decomposition, “Just the smell of rotting flesh” and the loss of all senses (Unpure “All Dead”). Mouths vomit (Cursed 666 “Torn Asunder”), scream and chew at flesh, and human flesh is “Just a meal for hungry crows” (Black Flame “The Curse of the Flesh”), worms and maggots.

Negarestani’s mouth cannot be domesticated or tamed. His attack pulverises Derrida’s deconstruction of ethics. If, as Deleuze points out, for Artaud “being, which is nonsense, has teeth” (*Logic of Sense* 91) and, as Sara Guyer writes, “Derrida demonstrates that ethics has teeth” (88), then it can be said that, for Negarestani, the mouth has fangs. It does not only disrupt ontology but infects: “one can find anything beside her/himself in a contaminative proximity” (“Acephalous Mouth”). In this respect, Derrida’s invitation to eat the good is cancelled by a mouth that is always

alien to the head, subjective agency and accountability. “The only production of mouth is infestation,” Negarestani writes, “a defiled space” and “a compositional mess of mouths half-chewing each other, mutating to things never complete, wandering in the route of becoming minor, of things proliferating themselves in failure of scales, dimensions and metrons” (“Acephalous Mouth”). This defilement and mess is significantly “anonymous to Man and Nature” (“Acephalous Mouth”). Unlike Hegel’s mouth that devours and digests/homogenises the heterogeneity of the Other, re-establishing thus the subject’s unity and integrity, for Negarestani and Sándor Ferenczi, eating and internalising a foreign object does not result in its assimilation, but its resistance to digestion and its persistence as an “alien transplant” and a trace that remains within (Mackay and Negarestani, Introduction 27, 28). In this respect, Black Metal serves subjecthood as a blackened meal in which one is both an object and anonymous material (25). “Wounded cadavers succumb/Motionless . . . They are dying/Worms retreating from putrid entrails/Tasting flesh, brains and skin/Feasting frenzied ravens and cockroaches/eating flesh, brains and skin” (UHL “Morbid Curiosity”). In such blackened landscapes animals devour human flesh and the human body is radically laid open: “Skin is torn apart,/flesh is torn to pieces/Lips are vomiting curses/My eyes are bleeding/Body is reeking – the price of human’s life./ Worms are eating me” (Odem “Tortured by Razors”).

The mouth is also a wound,⁴ a bleeding contaminating space that has been despotically assigned meaning, a penetrating, cold and logical language by “the priests and officials of the kingdom of lies and self-delusion that is the human social field” (Fisher 240). As Foucault writes, “If the disease is to be analysed, it is because it is itself analysis; and ideological decomposition can only be the

⁴ For Jean-Luc Nancy, “The open mouth is not a laceration...It exposes to the ‘outside’ an ‘inside’ that, without this exposition, would not exist....The speaking mouth does not transmit, does not inform, does not effect any bond; it is—perhaps, though taken *at its limit*, as with the kiss—the beating of a singular site against other singular sites: ‘I speak, and from then on I am—the being in me is—outside myself and in myself’” (*The Inoperative Community* 30-1). Here the open mouth signifies a limit where the I is exposed to the other and to the exposure of the other.

repetition in the doctor's consciousness of the decomposition raging in the patient's body . . . Disease is an autopsy in the darkness of the body, dissection alive" (*Birth of the Clinic* 160-1). The wounds on the surfaces and in the depths of the body are opened up to the sun of language, analysed, categorised by the measuring medical gaze. Black Metal envisions a different relation between the lacerated body and the master's gaze. In "The Coroner and the Death," Dark Faith confuse the boundaries between dead and living, the dominant gaze and the dead body: "I die day by day dissecting bodies/I get sick looking into the face of death." In the contaminative proximity of open bodies, the self is infected, gets closer to death.

Stigmata are equally imagined to be the insignia of God. Hélène Cixous's "Stigmata, or Job the Dog" (1998) explores writing through the body, the wound, psychological or physical stigmata. The death of Job the Dog, who is transformed to a God, bears the signs of violence and a history of racial hatred. But the dog's wounds talk also about the death of the father, a loss always remembered through the narrator's stigmata, the dog's bite marks on her foot. Her open mouth/wound always reminds the narrator of the past. This is a psychic wound that speaks, and writing is always the opening of a real wound in the past in order to talk about psychic wounds. "Traumatism," she writes, "as an opening to the future of the wound is the promise of a text" (*Stigmata* xiv). Texts are "the transfiguration of a spilling of blood, be it real or translated into a haemorrhage of the soul" (xi). The stigma resists healing, the "hole enters into my skin. The scar adds, the stigma digs, excavates" (xvi). Following Genet, Cixous finds in the wound "the founding secret of all major creation" ("Stigmata" 243). Wounds become fertile and writing is possible from this place where the subject of writing is scarred.

While, for Cixous, writing is a corporeal experience, for Negarestani, "the wound only diagrams radical butchery of radical openness: being lacerated and laid open" ("Acephalous Mouth"). For Cixous, it is a painful experience, the wound cannot be tamed or cured. However, for Negarestani, language is impossible: "A wound in its vicious irony is not a channel regime of hemodynamic traumas" ("Acephalous Mouth"). The wound, no matter how filthy and painful it is cannot be appropriated, diagrammed through language (however, in the case of Kenji Siratori's linguistic experiments, English language is attacked and opens up the space

for a different communication through the proliferation of pestilential assemblages).

The appropriation of the wound as a projection of a self being open to the outside is nothing but an artificial suffering. Baudrillard understands this well:

In a world of spectral identity, anything will do to restore a sense of incarnation—body-piercing and branding, brutishness and bestiality, stress and pressure, stigmata and excrement. Flow of blood, flow of meaning. Alas, this is all mere cruci-fiction. It is a suffering as artificial as the intelligence of the same name. All these bodies sacrificed, tormented and martyred in the name of a desire without organs are merely the rewriting of a lost identity: this is my body, this is my blood. But who is speaking? And this is exchanged for what? For nothing. They are bodies sacrificed to the idea of sacrifice. Orlan. Stelarc and all the rest—sacrificial mannequins. (*Cool Memories IV* 61-2)

Beyond the artificiality of such performances where the postmodern body is opened strategically to reveal nothing and becomes a fashionable way to play with identities,⁵ Baudrillard, in his discussion of *Crash*, considers the scar as an “artificial invagination,” a sign of exchange also witnessed in the primitive rituals of scarification:

Only the wounded body exists symbolically—for itself and for others—‘sexual desire’ is never anything but the possibility bodies have of combining and exchanging their signs. Now, the few natural orifices to which one usually attaches sex and sexual activities are nothing next to all the possible wounds, all the artificial orifices (but why ‘artificial?’), all the breaches through which the body is reversibilized and, like certain topological spaces, no longer knows either interior nor exterior. Sex . . . is largely overtaken by the fan of symbolic wounds, which

⁵ See also Renata Salecl’s “Cut in the Body: From Clitoridectomy to Body Art,” in *Thinking Through the Skin*, eds. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 24-35.

is in some sense the ana-grammatization of sex on the whole length of the body—but now, precisely, it is no longer sex, it is something else, sex, itself, is nothing but the inscription of a privileged signifier and some secondary marks—nothing next to the exchange of all the signs and wounds of which the body is capable. The savages knew how to use the whole body to this end, in tattooing, torture, initiation—sexuality was only one of the possible metaphors of symbolic exchange, neither the most significant, nor the most prestigious, as it has become for us in its obsessional and realistic reference, thanks to its organic and functional character (including in orgasm). (*Simulacra and Simulation* 114-115)

Negarestani agrees to a certain degree. He argues that the wound is “a radical (and not grounded) invagination, or vagina as an excessively enriching (extravagant) experience of the wound (experience of Zero) that knows nothing of lack, loss or castration” (“Acephalous Mouth”). The wound, as in Baudrillard’s reading, becomes a sexual symbol, a vagina, but for Negarestani, it is not the Freudian vagina, but a mouth that knows nothing of loss and passive desire. It is imagined as excess and opposed to the penis as a scar, or “wasted accumulation of solid” from the healing process of the wound (“Acephalous Mouth”).

In such epidemic openness everything is filth. “[O]piness is not so clean,” Negarestani writes. Affirmation is being laid open “in blood, vomit, contagious fluids” (“Acephalous Mouth”). Black Metal is the unground of such an affirmation, “the unground of the defiled” and of a devouring openness (Negarestani “Acephalous Mouth”). In the “Mirror of Pain” the Horde of Worms imagine a scene where the body is opened, invaginated, and reflected through a mirror. While it is the “I,” mediated through its reflection in the mirror, that performs the cuts in its attempt to rid off the meat of the master, behind the veils of representation, however, the self is somewhere else, possessed by the butchery it cannot control:

Here I stand, before the mirror, shattered
Like what is left of me, so scattered
A shard for each sin hereafter
Bleed the skin, of the master

Mirror of pain
 Unleash the wrath
 Reflected dissection
 Inflicted bloodbath
 So many incisions, upon the flesh
 There's blood on the mirror
 Yet it's me who I slash
 Possessed mutilation, with me looking back
 Possessed mutilation, with me, looking back.

For Negarestani, communication of the mouth is only possible through exhumation: “The mouth takes the gluttonous and predatory lines of openness to exhume the head, ‘I’ and the rest of their productions” (“Acephalous Mouth”). Exhumation is a “brutal ungrounding process” (“Acephalous Mouth”). According to Negarestani, the mouth-vagina-anus-piss hole-dead pixel-slot, whether colonised by the language of corrupted colonisers or decolonized by the Saviours of philosophy, never revolts against its servitude but remains attached to the body as an infecting organ. Black Metal and its pest-warfare productions vomit, expel blood and bile, scream and reach beyond the limits, towards an openness where everything becomes anonymous. Subjectivity, the body and its organs become a meal, chewed, spewed, and defiled.^v Beyond the Judgement of God.

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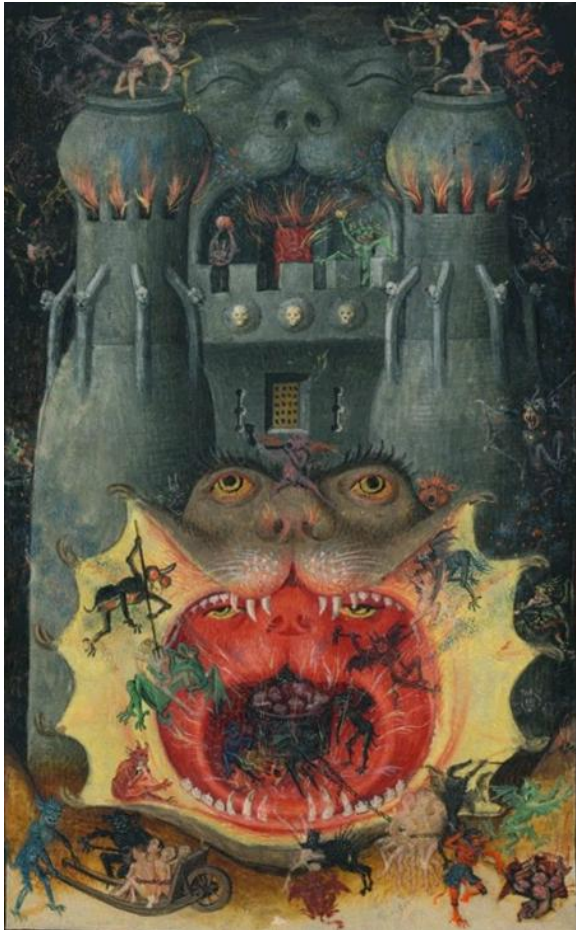
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ⁱ *acephalous mouth*: The headlessness of Black Metal as mouth is visible in the basement of Helvete, Euronymous's record shop in Oslo, which evokes the medieval representation of Hell as a mouth (Hellmouth). Opening the mouth beyond the capacity of the head to contain it, this iconographic tradition confirms the idea that the "the mouth is irreducibly cold and demonic to the head and its sphere" (Negarestani, "Acephalous Mouth").



[Hours of Catherine of Cleves, Morgan Library & Museum MS M.945, f. 168v.]

Hell is a mouth that eats its own head forever, a hole that seeks to contain the head within itself. Frozen in auto-consumption, submerged beyond alimentary relation, Hell is a body from which nothing comes out: “what goes into Hellmouth almost never comes out the other end. Shit happens a lot in Hell, but infernal shit never actually gets flushed away. It just collects” (James L. Miller, *Dante and the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression* [Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005], 235). Inside the bottom of Dante’s *Inferno* one sees scenes of head-eating as never-ending indigestible malnourishment: Ugolino eating, “as bread is devoured for hunger” (*Inferno* 32.127), the head of a body joined to his own, “frozen in one hole” (32.125); Satan, his lower body frozen into the eternal ice, chewing on the head of Judas Iscariot (34.61-3). Opening this space beyond openings, the iconography of Black Metal’s basement origins refuses all infernal *passage* (hell as alimentary canal or digestive path of transformative suffering through which one passes spiritually to the Godhead) in favour of hell as nest and original terminus, the occult locale from which Black Metal, eternally closed on itself, forever radiates outward upon acephalic, non-directional, and inordinate paths.



[Helvete basement with graffiti by Euronymous. Photo by Mararie.]

It is crucial, therefore, that the Helvete basement becomes Black Metal's early iconographic space in the sense of a pure interior, a domain without reference to entry or exit. Neither orifice to hell nor any kind of inversely capital infernal command central, the basement of Helvete is the place of Black Metal as pure or lipless mouth, the open domain of its terminal beginning wherein the head is always already dispensed with, where mouth leaves behind all capital mediation (blackening of orifice as such).



This is also why, in the picture of Dead's corpse used for the cover of the Mayhem's *Dawn of Black Hearts*, Dead seems close to eating his own brains and why rumors circulated that Euronymous actually did. NM

ⁱⁱ *production of meal which defines the heart of capitalism*: The complicity between meal and capitalism is scripted in the fact of *spice* as the first global commodity, a material flow or currency that exploits or unfolds to advantage the primordial unity of substance, appearance, and value (*species*), turns it into a particular 'kind' of thing. For the consuming body, spice is the object of the mouth as food is the object of the stomach, in the formal sense of that to which a power is related. Mouth is the alterative of spice. Where

the stomach is satisfied in being filled, the mouth delights in movement, its own movement around what moves within it. Stomach, throat, mouth correspond to Death, Doom, and Black Metal, respectively. Like the echoing cough that opens Black Sabbath's *Master of Reality* (1971), metal begins in the natural vibrational locus of the voice, the throat. From there it bifurcates, downward and inward into the corpus where it becomes Death, upward and outward towards spirit where it becomes Black—as indexed by the correlative differences in vocal location (guttural vs. raspy), aesthetic themes (viscera vs. landscape), etc. What then is spice to Black Metal? As sonic acapital blackening of the consuming mouth, a turning of mouth into what has eaten the head, Black Metal naturally has no place for the mercantile-orientalist love of spice, no relish of the 'spice of life'. "No spice shall ever silence my hunger / No wine shall ever silence my thirst / No delight shall ever satisfy my senses" (Avatar, "A Most Excellent Charm in Solemn Endurance," *Memoriam Draconis* [Shiver Records, 1996]). The adulterate and mutated forms of appearance-substance (flavourings) come to nil in the northern wastes wherein everything knows how to preserve itself, where life is its own spice. This means not that Black Metal has no relation to spice but exactly that Black Metal, corporeally sited in the mouth, is saturated with a kind of pure negative spice, that the cold breath of its voice amodernly inverts the ingestive flows of gustatory economy—capitalist modernity is precisely the age of flavouring—and spreads itself as blackened *species*, a cleansing pestilential *spice of death*. Black Metal spice is the flow of an inverted anagogy, a foretaste of apocalypse or acceleration of the imminent End, the sonic blasting open of the global tomb or cadaverous zone of human 'life'. Its mouth opens cosmos to the "eternal horror of its nether world of catacombs, where to the end of time millions of stiff, spiced corpses will stare up in the blackness with glassy eyes, awaiting some awesome and unrelatable summons" (H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*). NM

ⁱⁱⁱ *the individual exists as long as s/he . . .* : Not how the diagnosis is no different from the disease—this being the same as the lie on which the capitalist subject feeds: I only exist insofar as . . . But why describe oneself at all? Better to refuse all solicitations of self-repetition. NM

^{iv} *the law*: This is how to eat well: “When Saint Francis sat down at table, he used to pour ashes or cold water or something else like that over his food, making it virtually tasteless. This used to upset this brother very much, so one day he said to the blessed Francis: ‘Look, father, I work hard to prepare a good meal so that you might find a little enjoyment, and you ruin it right away, which makes me feel very bad.’ The saint responded: ‘You do well, and you will have your reward with God. You do what you should with a good intention; but I too do with a good intention what I think I should do’” (*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, eds. Armstrong, Hellman & Short, 3 vols. [New York: New City Press, 2001], 3.801). NM

^v What are the distinctive traits of an imagination that is as much haunted by the business of the eye and the ear as it is fed by the labour of the mouth? For Hegel, the mouth is characterized by its exterior and deep or internal functions. While on an apparent level, the mouth is the organ of taste, its internal task is that of supporting or leading to digestion. Understood dialectically, digestion is a process whereby the organism brings its relation with regard to the already internalized food/external object to a resolution. The subject cannot reclaim the totality of its identity unless it fully overcomes its food, or more accurately, the external object that now resides within the subject. The presence of a modally and structurally unalterable external entity within the horizon of the subject is deemed as a source of corrosion against the overall integrity of the subject. Although the totality of the subject/organism is effectively preserved by a uniform outer protective layer, it lacks an internal shield or a uniform means of protection in the circuitous horizon of the inside. Therefore, the defensive solution of the subject against an invasion is digestion. Since the organism lacks a uniform protection on the inside, it digests that which has already found a way into its internal domain. Food signifies the epitome of such an invasion in the wake of no inner protection. If food is never interpreted in terms of invasion, it is because the moment of eating is a subterfuge through which the organism claims its mastery over an external force that cannot be repelled: It wasn't X that invaded me, it was me who ate X. Digestion is but the traumatic materialization of this moment of

self-preserving subterfuge. Through digestion, the organism converts and incorporates the food into its own biological sequestration cycle. The subject assimilates the external entity within its horizon and thus renders the object qua food synchronous to the temporal sphere and laws of itself. Part of the external entity that is not fully assimilated is expelled from the horizon of the subject. Digestion, accordingly, exercises assimilation and ejection at the same time. It is crucial to ensure the internal integrity of the subject and the complete obliteration of the internalized object as something independent. From a Hegelian perspective, to eat food is to decimate its anonymous history in its entirety: Once the food enters my body, it should no longer matter where it has come from. That which enters the mouth must abandon its history in favour of the history of the organism into which it is assimilated. It is through digestion (i.e. assimilation and ejection) that the subject concludes its dialectic with the food qua object and reclaims its integral identity. The mouth is a singularity toward such conclusive dialectic, simultaneously a gate and a processing stage in the direction of an integral horizon (built upon sublation of all tensions) and a concluded relationship with the food (free from lingering traces of something exterior and diachronic to the subject).

In this regard, the Bataillean war against Hegel is a testament to its utter fatuity, insofar as its vector of transgression is set to cross a false and imagery boundary. Bataille's mouth as the vehicle of animality only goes so far as questioning the affinity between the mouth and the fragile subjectivity implicit to taste. Mouth is the organ through which the animal masticates the gustato-transcendental sphere of taste into shreds . . . and animality usurps humanity in the last instance. Whilst for Hegel, the mouth is the portal to the subject and its history, for Bataille the mouth is the vestibule of animality or what leads to the unmanned organism. It is precisely in leaving the conclusive dialectic of digestion implicit to the mouth unchallenged that Bataille remains true to Hegel in the last instance. Without interrogating the digestive dimension, an imagination fed as much by mouth as by eyes, ears, etc. is still an imagination restricted to the private ownership of an antiquated conception of subjectivity that has not synchronised itself with the inassimilable residues of the object. A creativity driven by such imagination is too sterile to be fertile in any direction whatsoever.

In contrast to both Hegel and Bataille, the delicate organ of human aestheticism and the vehicle of animality, it is Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi—himself an inassimilable insider within the edifice of psychoanalysis—who discovers an undercurrent dynamic within the dialectic of digestion. The truth of the food qua internalized object, Ferenczi suggests, is not to be found in its capacity for assimilation or ejection but in its natural propensity toward ‘existence and persistence in residues.’ The cosmological trajectory of evolution delineates a trajectory of eating and being eaten wherein digestion is always incomplete: the human subject is defined not by its putative internal integrity but by the internal tensions enforced from within by ancestral foods (inorganic, vegetable and animal) which were never fully assimilated or ejected in the first place. These inassimilable traces or persistent and active residues are “alien transplants” (Ferenczi) whose insurmountable tensions within the subject spark eccentric synthetic solutions along which thought and imagination asymptotically synchronize themselves with residues of an outside from which the subject could never, in the first or the last instance, separate itself.

In line with amplifying the internal tensions and problematicity of Black Metal toward a senseless and meaningless but much needed implosion (on the levels of lyrics, sound, imagery and sensorial excitation), the desire for a refined as well as a transgressive (animal) Black Metal must be discarded. A Black Metal that has conceived itself by devouring and assimilating its enemies (auditory-musical or otherwise) so as to secure a zone of refinement for itself or attain a certain level of transgression against what has already been done is an impotent delusion rightfully entitled to endless contempt and derision. Just as the antiquated conception of subjectivity built on the dialectic of assimilation and ejection should be garbaged without hesitation, a Black Metal whose formalism is conceived upon the elimination of extraneous elements should also be remorselessly trashed. From a certain formalist perspective, the reality of Black Metal is that of a vast liquid surface with no canonical depth. Neither turbulent nor stagnant, the bizarrely shallow surface is made of a non-uniformly coagulated serum which is under omnipresent tensions between forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity, absolute liquefaction and cold calcification. On local levels, however, this surface is endowed

with sharp regional tensions engendered by irregular and asymmetrical systolic and diastolic parametrization of forms and sound structures which allow for the well-known ‘textural thickness’ of Black Metal that resembles a rotten metaphor for ‘musical richness’. Devoid of a canonical depth and teeming with residues of forms which have hardly anything to do with their proper former selves (i.e. ideal impositions), the thick and fattened structure of Black Metal is a bad abstraction of complexity. It is a product of tensions between at once incommensurable and emptied forms incorporated—or less formally, snatched and eaten—but never assimilated, infinitesimal residues of innumerable forms whose influence over the surface does not remind us anything like a well-curated collection of cultural heritage but a gastrointestinal system terminally upset by countless residues of undigested forms . . . or junk foods: the operatic, the tonal, the folk, the harmonic, the atonal . . . It is this space of tension that distinguishes the thick but empty integrity of Black Metal from noise, its tension-spaces and residual formalism from the schizduction of atomized randomness of noise. RN

THE BLACKISH GREEN OF THE GREENISH BLACK,
OR, THE EARTH'S CORUSCATING DARKNESS

Ben Woodard

(A Shimmering Radiance) Diadem of 12 Stars

The strength that resides in contemplation
Bathes me in silver starlight
I will lead this beast on a chain of flowers
Fear not the jaws that devour soul

Between two pillars I have sat
Great oxen in the periphery
I ride in full course swift
Through the dark night and the rain pours down

You are a daughter of heaven
12 stars circle your brow
But you do not see them and the rain pours down
Our time in this garden is past¹

Vastness and Sorrow

Behold the vastness and sorrow of this empty land
A dark and fell rider clad in garments of shadow
Is the lord of this place
A cruel and wanton king,
A priest of a black religion is he

The hoof beat of the rider's steed pound a mournful drumbeat upon
the dry cracked earth
To this rhythm the world moves

¹ Wolves in the Throne Room, *Diadem of 12 Stars* (Vendlus Records, 2006).

The sun blasts down upon the earth
Until the soil turns to powder and blows away

Lifeless chaos is the order for the rider has mastered the seasons
Ancient kings cairns now have been defiled
The gates of strongholds long breached left swinging lifelessly in the
fetid wind
The pillars of holy places lie dead
He rides day and night
The relentless hoof beats echoes²

Cleansing

Behold all that you now know... evil, evil

Let's to the darkest place we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places
To the clearing in the forest enchanted

Yes, to the darkest place that we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places beyond the briar thickets

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

Our skin drum and rattle
Know the tune
Jaw bone driven through
The skull of a great foe
Bested with wooden spear
The tip hardened in fire

Bathe in the clear cold stream
Fresh water from the unsullied endless spring that flows from the
mountain
We will sing the most ancient song
Spark the fire upon dry tinder

² Wolves in the Throne Room, *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2007).

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

Our skin drum and rattle
Know the tune
Jaw bone driven through
The skull of a great foe
Bested with wooden spear
The tip hardened in fire³

I Will Lay Down My Bones Among the Rocks and Roots

The torment has ended
The beast has done his work
Great fires rage outside of this wooded sanctuary

But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
The embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
I am alone here no more

The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness
The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
This will be my new home
Deep within the most sacred grove
The sun god is born anew

I will lay down my bones among the rocks and roots of the deepest
hollow next to the streambed
The quiet hum of the earth's dreaming is my new song

When I awake, the world will be born anew⁴

A Looming Resonance

Staring onward,
As time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,

³ Wolves in the Throne Room, *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2007).

⁴ Wolves in the Throne Room, *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2007).

While time stands still.
Starlight breaks this darkened haze,
Filter through decay.
Moonstruck children indisposed,
Malignant culture thriving on.
Defile the sanctum,
Of this place.

Winter now converges,
Drenched in all its blackness.
The last stalks of light are devoured,
Shadows
And so they march on hallowed ground.
History repeating,
Behavior that has been burned into the bone.

When time stands still.
A thousand years of fruitless searching,
Object of desire beyond the reach,
Of old and brittle hands,
with bated breath, anticipate the end.
Voices of the vanquished echo in the dreams

Where is the fire
That dwells inside,
Darkness returns with cold embrace.
Staring onward,
When time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,
Time stands still.
Staring onward,
Time stands still⁵

The above surfeit is the lyrical totality of *Wolves in the Throne Room*.ⁱ The question that improperly dogs the listener (or reader) is *from where?* Cosmological lightⁱⁱ radiates from starlight and fire that seems to transport itself across the bounds of the interior and exterior as satellites around the rebooting of a sun god. Forms of light that dissect darkness and blackness, that individuate shadows, thickets, briar patches, and woods. A shimmering radiance that, like a clumsy lantern, seems to only point forward as the givenness of its light accelerates the expiration of its fuel.

⁵ *Wolves in the Throne Room*, *Malevolent Grain* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2009).

Yet, is this radiance intentional or accidental, is it all too human or completely alien? How does this radiance continue to be, in a state of ruin, on the ancient and dusty earth on which it barely maintains dominion?

The strength that resides in contemplation
Bathes me in silver starlight
I will lead this beast on a chain of flowers
Fear not the jaws that devour soul

It's already there in four lines (but hopefully not always-already),ⁱⁱⁱ thought-light-dominion (contemplation-starlight-chain of flowers) where thought lights the light on the chain of flowers (though maybe on a marble corpse) somewhere between a festoon and the bind between thought and nature, that which leads soul eating jawed monster. But is the beast natural or unnatural? Is it that monstrous nature banned from the garden, enlightenment-caused banishment, that which would crush all the flowered growths of the earth into dust? Passage from one regime of ruin to another, the non-fabricated to the fabricated, the strand of a partial technology. And, in the end, the jaws of nature devour the unnatural attempts to escape it.^{iv}

Between two pillars I have sat
Great oxen in the periphery
I ride in full course swift
Through the dark night and the rain pours down

You are a daughter of heaven
12 stars circle your brow
But you do not see them and the rain pours down
Our time in this garden is past

Amongst the ruins there remains the technology (first technology?) of domesticating animals. Or more, the modesty to the immodesty of technology, the rearranging of the earth to burying the earth under the heavy stones of civilization. The garden that is to be left behind, the edenic, is to be churned, and broken, and covered in rain, and with a dozen stars burning down on it.

Behold the vastness and sorrow of this empty land
A dark and fell rider clad in garments of shadow
Is the lord of this place
A cruel and wanton king,

A priest of a black religion is he

The geological burns out the astral, or maybe merely pulls away from it in the obscurity of its particular corner, one inky fold of the cosmos.^v The sublunary is corrupted by riders, and yoked beasts or was there some kingdom, tethered to Gaia, which did not war against the earth in any way?⁶ Vastness is a field of magnitudes and sorrow is either the inability to center oneself in that field or the willful atomization of the illusion of the self in that endless continuum.^{vi} What is the black or dark religion? Is it only the salve to the creeping magnitudes of darkness hopelessly pecked at by the luminous. The black or the dark is not an obfuscation—lightness becomes the obscuring act. There becomes then a covered blackness and in that cover (that shade of lightness) a greenness and a blackness both of which stitch together that nature which is not human and those strange structures, those massive stones which keep back that darkness which, we convince ourselves, is not part of the stone.

The separation, of wolves and thrones, of vastness and sorrow, of the green and the black, allows for kings which can empty the land.

The hoof beat of the rider's steed pound a mournful drumbeat upon
the dry cracked earth
To this rhythm the world moves

The sun blasts down upon the earth
Until the soil turns to powder and blows away

With these lines maybe we've struck a balance or admitted the non-separation of a nature and not-nature, non-nature, as they share "a mournful drumbeat" and the rhythm which binds them together. Yet there is still the mastery of the horse, the luminous plague which purports to ply the animal from the animal that thinks it is not an animal. And the worst light of all, that sun, the rotten gelatinous creature, is turned to as that aspect of nature which will undo all others, undo all kings and thrones—the dominion of the earth becomes a temporary and laughable exercise. Dominion becomes simply another aspect of the earth turned to powder, destroyed within the solar economy.

Lifeless chaos is the order for the rider has mastered the seasons
Ancient kings cairns now have been defiled

⁶ They are, after all, Wolves in the Throne Room and are thereby an invasion of animality into non-animality, so-called nature into so-called non-nature.

The gates of strongholds long breached left swinging lifelessly in the
fetid wind
The pillars of holy places lie dead
He rides day and night
The relentless hoof beats echoes

Chaos draws what would be said in the previous lines. The stratifications and layers of the scorched earth muddle the kingdom and the rock. The defiling of a cairn, of a man-made pile of stones, man-made only to the slightest degree, a mere rearrangement of hunks of hardened earth. The stronghold, is the same, only on a different magnitude. The rotten light of the sun falls clumsily on ten thousand degrees of stone, with some hope that the force-of-thought makes a difference that is neither found in stone or in light.

Behold all that you now know . . . evil, evil

Let's to the darkest place we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places
To the clearing in the forest enchanted

The rider, the rider. The rider is the wretched man, the human with one of the first technologies—the object of burden and flight, the first invasion machine. The rider is a doubled invasion (invasion and burdening of animality artificially separated from human(imality) and into the woods, the nature to be carved up for the manufacture of items, of the flesh for saddle, bridal, on and on. How does the enchantment of the wood hold this back—is the lure of the wood inseparable from the pleasure of digging up the roots?^{vii}

Yes, to the darkest place that we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places beyond the briar thickets

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

But immediately the outside intrudes, but leads us to the same but different place where the enchantment becomes a more materialized thicket. But does this merely physicalize the outside, make the outside somewhere the rider can go. Or is the radical (imperfect) internalization of

the outside into the inside, the invitation of the cosmic butchery in tension with the ecological?

Our skin drum and rattle
Know the tune
Jaw bone driven through
The skull of a great foe
Bested with wooden spear
The tip hardened in fire

Maybe before there was some possibility of understanding nature, some slight turn back towards the briar but instead we jump into war—between human and human or human and beast seems unclear, unclear as to whether a human can be a great foe. And that technology, is dug up from around the roots, taken out of the trees—is it the birth of the worst technologies, those that come out of fire? Is the only technology not that far removed, that of the caveman or the post-apocalyptic survivor's dog? Is domestication less hardened in fire than technology?

Bathe in the clear cold stream
Fresh water from the unsullied endless spring that flows from the mountain
We will sing the most ancient song
Spark the fire upon dry tinder

But from elsewhere there remains the aesthetic. That clear water. That water which grants that nature somewhere else is clear though we have pulled ourselves away from it.

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

There's no ecological time left for repetition.

The torment has ended
The beast has done his work
Great fires rage outside of this wooded sanctuary

But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
The embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
I am alone here no more

The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness

The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
This will be my new home
Deep within the most sacred grove
The sun god is born anew

What beast can work out the suffering, one that does not think? The beast that burns the world but leaves out a separate piece, a bit of ecological separatist piece, the assertion of a soft nature, of a nature that changes at the hands of some or some unthinking or perhaps thinking beast. Does any work, a work of burning or otherwise, possess nature – is there any work that could end torment (an operation of twisting) of changing but not quite breaking the world?

But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
The embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
I am alone here no more

The earth will turn (and twist) and release the deluge, quench the fire, the fire which rages but is ceremonial in its origin, in its compartment. Started with intent or just by the rage of the earth itself. If the latter, then it is to be followed by an aquatic self-canceling. The survivors come and heap praise upon the new Sun God, or on themselves, or merely stay close to the fire. Are the beasts caught in the fire, is the torment that's ended only every ended through death and never for the survivors in the light of their new sun god? The outside fire is canceled by an inner fire. Let the world burn.^{viii}

The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness
The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
This will be my new home
Deep within the most sacred grove
The sun god is born anew

The external world becomes a microcosm, the inverted world, the wilderness is internalized and made sacred, what's the construction of the sanctuary, from what are the brambled walls made? Birds ash black, the signaling out of the worshipers, perhaps only one can worship, a self-worship, the creator that seems to escaping destruction in their particular grove.

I will lay down my bones among the rocks and roots of the deepest hollow next to the streambed

The quiet hum of the earth's dreaming is my new song
When I awake, the world will be born anew

And again, the withdrawal into the one, the self-sun-king, or the one that worships, or the fire starter. And perhaps even a suicidal gesture, or just that of the self-destroyed body which claims its givenness to nature but stands apart, but is held in protection by the grove, by the brambles and the thorns. The earth is given a life, what that invades so dreamily, one that does not seem to change as the surface burns, as the roots die out.

Staring onward,
As time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,
While time stands still.
Starlight breaks this darkened haze,
Filter through decay.
Moonstruck children indisposed,
Malignant culture thriving on.
Defile the sanctum,
Of this place.

The place of no place, the natural earth, the earth which is untouched but defiled. The detached thought stares onward through eternity to grasp and maybe corrupted by the decay mediated moonlight. An onward on nothing, floating out in the eternal black, but a black peppered with spheres of burning gas, giving the onward a place, a particular location, this 'sanctum' of the earth.

Winter now converges,
Drenched in all its blackness.
The last stalks of light are devoured,
Shadows
And so they march on hallowed ground.
History repeating,
Behavior that has been burned into the bone.

The cosmological darkness is spread out by the winter, drenched in blackness and drenching the light pouring up from the earth and that pouring down from the unset heavens. The cosmological outside illustrates the internal darkness of the wanton marches, or does it merely mark an altogether different form of difference. Those bones, those not laid among the rocks and the roots, are corrupted by the burn of desire, the fire of that desiring blackness now engulfing all light?

When time stands still.
A thousand years of fruitless searching,
Object of desire beyond the reach,
Of old and brittle hands,
with bated breath,anticipate the end.
Voices of the vanquished echo in the dreams

Again the negation of the staring-from-place but this time in a temporal sense. But then the metrics of time creep in, the thousands of years of the bone burning, that strange monster desire, that strange desire which is separated from the desire to have a sanctum. There is only this desire which eats away at the human being but then this is turned outward, this is the falling darkness, the long winter?

Where is the fire
That dwells inside,
Darkness returns with cold embrace.
Staring onward,
When time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,
Time stands still.
Staring onward,
Time stands still

There is a self-burning desire, which is somehow separated from that desire which has burned the bones of the desiring masses, that has not been corrupted by the blackness of winter, the cosmological blackness. Time burns but will not burn out, but why, what of the sanctum of the earth?^{ix} Won't this burn, won't this all burn without us?

ⁱ There are more lyrics (and lyrics within lyrics). Or perhaps it is better to conceive of lyric corpus, with its more and less obscure layers of legibility, audibility, and dissemination, on the model of non-totalizable palimpsest, a la Derrida's *Choral Work*: "this structure of the non-totalizable palimpsest which draws from one of its elements the resources for the others . . . and which makes an unrepresentable and unobjectifiable labyrinth out of this play of internal differences (scale without end, *scaling* without hierarchy): this is precisely the structure of *Choral Work*. Its structure of stone and metal, the superimposition of layers . . . plunges into the abyss of the 'platonic' *chora*. 'Lyre', 'layers' . . . the truth which *lyre* or *layer* says and does and gives is not a truth: it is not presentable, representable, totalizable" (Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* [London: Routledge, 1997], 344). The co-intimate impulses to collect, order, and comment upon lyrics are inherent to lyric tradition, from the troubadour anthologies of the thirteenth century, to the auto-commentarial works by Dante and his inheritors, to Continuum's *33 1/3* series of album commentaries. The musical album itself is grounded in this continuity. When will the album die? NM

ⁱⁱ The cosmological light is a connective operator that weaves the incommensurable regions of spacetime into a web of electromagnetic radiance. Its scope of illumination is that of a vast web of entangled connections that approximates the scope of the open and represents its abyssality not through commonalities between different regional horizons and points of subjectification but by the irreducible and real lack thereof. The illumination of depth as the index for the coherency of the abyss—that is, a cosmic feat of enlightenment—proceeds via an indifference to the common ground: Light breaks and enters on its own accord and so does that which is universal. In this sense, illumination reclaims the abyssality of the universal by liberating its coherence from the logic of the common. If the lumpenism of the common is the transcendental enforcement of commonalities as a myopic means to approach a universal depth, the task of the enlightenment is to restore the coherency of the abyssal by accentuating the lack of such commonality and by shedding light on systematic entanglements and connections implicit to complicities, that is to say, coalitions without commonalities. Only in following the global logic of light, one can approach that which cannot be commonly shared because it belongs to no one . . . and sing the hymn to the abyss. What is a Black Metal fully acclimatized to the thought of the abyss not through darkness but instead a global conception of light that reveals the scope of the abyss and reestablishes its coherency? RN

ⁱⁱⁱ *but hopefully not always-already*: “Every experience of eternity presupposes a leap and a transfiguration, and few and far between are those capable of the tension necessary to arrive at the blissful contemplation of the eternal. It is not the length but the intensity of contemplation that matters. The return to normal will not impair the richness of this fertile experience” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 64). NM

^{iv} The moral lesson of predation: Preying is distinguishing yourself from your food. Escaping predation is distinguishing yourself from both your food and the predator. Underlying both is the gesture of self-identification. One who preys is as much bound to self-identification as the one who is preyed upon, and therefore, susceptible, to the same degree, to an abrupt shift of position in the chain of predation: Yesterday a predator, today a prey. To this extent, what is the nature of a nature endowed with self-identification, if the qualitative homogeneity of nature is indifferent to self-identification? Is it indeed nature or thought? . . . a sheep in wolf’s clothing who is again in sheep’s clothing *ad infinitum* . . . the circularity of predation and self-identification that simultaneously marks the peculiarity of thought and its unnerving relation to nature, the blank sheet of assertion against which the line of predation is formed before once again—together with its hypothetical preys and predators—sinks back into the bottomless environment. RN

^v The local image of the correspondence between the stellar light and the planetary receptor is more concerned with heat than light. The evolution of the planetary and its differentiation to contrasting regions—upon which the prevalent but twisted regionalism of Black Metal is anchored—is determined by the conversion of light to heat in the planetary environment. The planetary can then be understood as a spatiotemporal/regional obstacle against light which converts the global scope of light into the local environment of heat. Within this regional ambit of light—wherein light is converted to heat—the geological appears to burn out the astral and the stellar pitilessly engulfs the planetary in light. Light is embedded within the dynamic of thought as heat, its scope is reduced to that of organic vision and its ability to chromatically differentiate regions of spacetime (the food from itself from the predator). In this sense, we can say that heat is the manifest image of light insofar as it mirrors the heat principle ingrained within life and respectively thought . . . and in doing so it truncates the full scope of light to that which is relevant to the regional ambit of the planetary. The ambivalent attitude of

Black Metal toward light must be located in the aforementioned archaic confusion between heat and light embedded within planetary contingencies—namely, life and thought. It is this confusion that equates the insurrection against the hegemony of life and the wholesome earth with the dark (a universe devoid of light) and darkness with the cold (loss of heat). But just as the light is not equal to heat, the dark is not equal to the cold either. Evocation of one in the face of another is simply a conformity to the ingrained myth of ‘light = heat’. In the same vein, the insurrection against the wholesome earth in the context of reestablishing an earth devoid of heat and therefore, incapable of integrating the inorganic, life, and thought together into a wholesome sanctuary does not mean to surrender to the reign of darkness. To go beyond the planetary myopia preserved by heat and accustomed to the narrow spectrum of light, it is imperative to embrace the global conception of light that connects the regional to the planetary to the stellar to the galactic to the abyssal. RN

^{vi} The relation between vastness and sorrow is the expansive domain of lyricism. “Why can’t we stay closed up inside ourselves? . . . to be tormented by a sense of inner infinity means to live so intensely that you feel that you are about to die of life . . . One does not become lyrical except after a *total organic affliction*” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, 4-5, my emphasis). NM

^{vii} A tactical scheme to disenchant the woods: Reinvent the trunk as the ratio between roots and branches. The ratio is accordingly the relation between the enchanted immobile earth (the rooted earth) and the enchanted firmament (the inaccessible sky) whose blueness or gloominess are equally the expressions of its impenetrable uniformity. In other words, ratio is the relation that translates and transfers the immobility of one into the inaccessibility of the other and vice versa. By infinitely expanding and twisting roots, the earth can no longer be posited as the topos for roots but itself a ghoulish edifice without integrity and support. In the wake of the infinite twist and entanglement of roots, the supposed necessary correspondence between the root (the heritage, the family, the nation, the territory) and regions of the earth will collapse. At the other extreme, by growing and gnarling branches, in the same fashion, the inaccessible sky—the lattice of gods—loses its correspondence with the root (that is, the heritage). Marked at two ends by the endless twist of the root and the infinite gnarl of the branch, the trunk becomes no longer a trivial translation of the root-earth to the branch-sky, a relation through which the heritage and gods can enchant the tree of the woods. It instead

becomes a configuration of all possible twists, a ratio endowed with torsion that corkscrews the immobile earth and the impenetrable sky, abolishing the difference between them. An earth within the sky is a perpetually descending earth, a sky opened to the earth a navigable—hence, disenchanting—abyss. Only once this tactical scheme is collectively exercised upon all trees, the woods is thoroughly disenchanting, the heritage is swallowed up by the abyss and gods collapse, once and for all, upon a dancing speck of dust, namely, the mobile earth.

What is the shape of a Black Metal that commits neither to the twist of the root nor the gnarl of the branch alone but conceives itself as the relation between one twist to another, a convoluted earth and an open abyss which cannot be separated from one another in the first or the last instance? And what is the relation of this chimeric Black Metal to a modern conception of reason (ratio) that celebrates the abolishment of the difference between the ‘world below’ and the ‘world above’ on the wreckage of heritage and corpses of gods? RN

^{viii} Why not? No use in living here if it is *not* burning. “There are so many ways to achieve the sensation of immateriality that it would be difficult, if not futile, to make a classification. Nevertheless, I think that the bath of fire is one of the best. The bath of fire: your being ablaze, all flashes and sparks, consumed by flames in Hell. The bath of fire purifies so radically that it does away with existence. Its heat waves and scorching flames burn the kernel of life, smothering its vital élan, turning its aggressiveness into inspiration. To live in a bath of fire, transfigured by its rich glow—such is the state of immaterial purity where one is nothing but a dancing flame” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, 45). NM

^{ix} Time burns but will not burn out, but . . . what is time without space that allows for the translation of indifference into non-qualitative difference? A frozen fixity, a universal englaciation, an aborted flame? RN

DAY OF WRATH

Eugene Thacker

Abstract: This essay argues for a “blackened” understanding of the Requiem Mass. Focusing on the section *Dies iræ*, the essay explores the aspects of both liturgical text and musical form that lead the Requiem to ultimately negate itself both as text and sound.

1. PREAMBLE

Music has an intimate relation to death. Existing in time, music gives testimony to the melancholy brevity of existence; music *is* in fact this ephemeral, transient quality of everything that exists. E.M. Cioran writes, “I know no other music than that of tears.”¹

At the same time, we also know that music never ceases, even when the music’s over. There is something in music that also resists time and temporality, that flails itself against the brevity of existence, its sound waves stretching out across the finitude of our hearing. Often music is composed of words, and yet the words the music expresses often transcend them, turning against the words, mutating them into something non-linguistic and yet communicable. It is no wonder music is often tied to ritual, the sacred, and the divine. But even this wanes. Music subsists in memory, often resurfacing, like a refrain, at the most unexpected moments—before again fading away into oblivion.¹ Cioran again: “Music is everything. God himself is nothing more than an acoustic hallucination.”²

But if God is an acoustic hallucination, then what of the Devil? The Devil’s music is, of course, heavy metal. Should we then say that the Devil is not the smooth veneer of an “acoustic hallucination,” but the disharmony of feedback and noise? It has

¹ E. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

become a truism that Satanism operates on a logic of inversion, and this has undoubtedly influenced the way we culturally view harmony and disharmony, consonance and dissonance, signal and noise. The Satanic Black Mass, for instance, inverts the Catholic Mass nearly point for point (the inverted cross, the desecration of the Host, and so on). Given the import of the motifs of divine light and divine life in the traditional Catholic Mass, it would seem that the pinnacle (or lowest point) of the Black Mass would be the inversion of divine light and divine life—an affirmation of demonic darkness and death.

If this is the case, then what does one do with the Requiem Mass (*Missa pro defunctis*), the Mass that in fact commemorates, even celebrates death? To simply invert this into a “Mass for Life” would be tantamount to affirming the traditional Mass itself. In a sense, to negate the Christian Mass is all too easy, since the motifs are laid bare in their dualism—sanctity, chastity, transcendence, light, beatitude, and the afterlife. One has simply to systematically invert them via a kind of demonic algorithm. The problem, then, is the way in which opposition itself frames both the Catholic Mass and the Black Mass—life vs. death, divine vs. demonic, form vs. chaos, harmony vs. cacophony.

However, a look at the development of Western sacred music reveals numerous elements in early and medieval Christianity that would make even the most devout attendee of the Black Mass jealous—resurrection and the living dead, cannibalism and vampirism, corporeal metamorphosis, demonic possession, and a sophisticated poetics of eschatology.

In a sense, the Requiem Mass already is an inversion of the traditional Mass, full of ambiguities, spiritual crises, and a world rendered as sorrow and despair.ⁱⁱ *The Requiem is already a Black Mass*. Ostensibly a religious rite memorializing the dead as they pass on to the afterlife, the Requiem is unique in the repertoire of Western sacred music, in that it is an extended musical meditation on death, finitude, and—as we shall see—on the horror of life itself.

The Requiem occupies a special place in the sacred music tradition in the West. As a central part of Christian ritual, the traditional Mass is dedicated to the affirmation of the divine; as a Mass for the Dead, however, the Requiem is also an evocation of a whole host of apocalyptic elements, from the images of the *Dies iræ* (Day of Wrath), to corpses turning to ash, to warnings of evil spirits and “demonic reports.” If the Requiem is a celebration, it would

appear to be a celebration of death—or, more accurately, an affirmation of the life-after-life that death signifies in the apocalyptic tradition. While Requiems were composed throughout the classical, Romantic, and modern periods, it is in the emergence of the Requiem itself as a musical form that one witnesses the basic dichotomy that defines the Requiem—a celebration of negation, the exuberance of the void, the life-affirming ritual of death.

Named after the first verse of its liturgical text, *Requiem æternam dona eis* (“Grant them eternal rest . . .”), the Requiem has been a core part of Western sacred music for centuries. Growing out of a set of disparate burial services in different regions, the Requiem was formalized as an official liturgical service during the Council of Trent (1545-1563). By 1570, when Pope Pius V issued a new edition of the Roman Missal, the Requiem text became part of the official liturgy that was to be used in all religious services. This textual standardization dictated, among other things, the order and the parts of the Requiem Mass, along with the corresponding texts.

This standardization also opened the door to a thorny issue during the period, which was how the liturgical texts were to be rendered musically. Thus the emergence of the Requiem Mass exists alongside a musical innovation that was not without some controversy—the introduction of polyphony. The gradual introduction of polyphony into sacred music not only challenged the symbolic unity of monophonic chant, but it also introduced a plurality of voices that threatened to descend into cacophony and noise, if not handled properly. If the polyphony was excessive or too complex, then the words of the text would be unintelligible, and the religious message lost among dense, shifting, clouds of sound. One of the earliest polyphonic Requiems—now lost—has been attributed to Guillaume Dufay (c.1397-1494), and an extant version by Johannes Ockeghem (c.1420-1497) was also produced around the same time. These early works demonstrate the uncertainty of the role of polyphony within the Requiem—should polyphony suggest the multitude of the voices of the dead or the voices of the not-yet-dead? Should polyphony suggest the sublimity of divine beatitude or divine power at the moment of the End Time? The choice to introduce polyphony in sacred music hints at a whole hermeneutics of the divine and demonic—for instance, polyphony in the *Dies iræ* might have a different effect than polyphony in the *Lux æterna* or Communion. While the religious controversies have waned over time, this decision—how to

musically render the music of death—has continued to be a challenging question for later examples, from Mozart's energetic *Requiem* (1791), to Brahms's use of German in *Ein deutsches Requiem* (1865-68), to the modern variants of the Requiem by Maurice Fauré (1887-90), Toru Takemitsu (1957), Benjamin Britten (1961-62), or Hans Werner Henze (1991-93).

The *Dies iræ* section was originally incorporated into the Requiem Mass around the 14th century, taking its title from the first line of the text, *Dies iræ! dies illa*. Around 1570, after the Council of Trent's standardization of the Mass, the *Dies iræ* is designated as "proper," meaning that it is among those parts of the Mass that may or may not be included, according to the context (as opposed to "ordinary" sections that are standard for every Mass, whether or not it is a Requiem). Importantly, prior to the Council of Trent, the *Dies iræ* is usually monophonic, sung as plainchant. However, as the influence of the Notre Dame school spreads across Europe, one starts to see versions of the *Dies iræ* performed in polyphony. Thus in the early 16th century, the French composer Antoine Brumel (c.1460-1512) composes a Requiem that contains what is often considered to be the first polyphonic treatment of the *Dies iræ*. Musically speaking, this is interesting because the *Dies iræ* is one of the more dramatic movements of the Requiem Mass, speaking as it does of apocalypse and the resurrected dead. The combination of this rather gothic text with the widened palette of polyphonic choral settings, results in a spectacular theatre of the apocalypse, as one finds in the bombastic, even orgiastic Requiems of Luigi Cherubini (1816), Hector Berlioz (1837), and Giuseppe Verdi (1874).³

Despite the long history of the Requiem in classical music, there is surprisingly little in the way of writing and scholarship. There are, certainly, in-depth studies of particular works by particular composers, mostly within the context of musicology. There are also numerous college-level textbooks on the history of music, in which there are sections or paragraphs on the Requiem. But the lack of reflection on the Requiem is noteworthy, considering its uniqueness both in classical music, and its relation

³ The striking images and *pathos* in the *Dies iræ* have also prompted later composers to produce stand-alone versions, as one finds in Liszt's *Totentanz*, Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*.

to theological ideas of life and death, order and disorder, harmony and disharmony.

This is, then, less a commentary in the strict sense, a more a prologue to one. The commentary below is simply intended to tease out some of the philosophical and theological ambiguities of the Requiem—to, in effect, “blacken” the Requiem.ⁱⁱⁱ While the text of the Requiem can certainly be read in isolation, ideally a Requiem commentary would also necessitate an awareness of how that text is rendered as musical form—especially important given the contentious status of polyphony during the early modern period. This relation between textual and musical form is also important in the context of the modern Requiem, which often departs from the traditional Mass and invents completely new forms. This is the impetus for the brief meditation that follows the commentary, which concentrates on the modern Requiem by Transylvanian composer György Ligeti.

2. COMMENTARY

The author text of the *Dies iræ* is still disputed, though many scholars agree that it is largely the work of the Italian Franciscan Thomas of Celano (c. 1200-1265), a writer who produced several hagiographies of Saint Francis of Assisi, as well as theological treatises and religious poetry. However, it is likely that Thomas drew inspiration from existing liturgical texts and hymns, including the responsory *Libera me* (which contains the verse *Dies illa, dies iræ*), as well as *Apparebit repentina dies magna Domini* (“The great day of the lord will suddenly appear”), a seventh century hymn for Advent.⁴ Thomas may have also borrowed from early Biblical writings, particularly the ‘hell-fire’ type of sermons, replete as they are with apocalyptic imagery. One in particular, a gloss by the seventh-century-BCE prophet Zephaniah, notes with dramatic urgency that “the great Day of the Lord is near . . . Even the voice of the Day of the Lord,” the Day in which “the mighty man crieth there bitterly.” With a grave solemnity that suddenly shifts into verse form, Zephaniah then pronounces the following:

⁴ Alec Robertson, *Requiem: Music of Mourning and Consolation* (London: Cassell, 1967), 15-16. Much of this historical information is indebted to Robertson’s book, as well as to Robert Chase’s *Dies iræ: A Guide to Requiem Music* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

That Day is a day of wrath [*Dies iræ, dies illa*]
 A day of trouble and distress,
 A day of wasteness and desolation,
 A day of darkness and gloominess,
 A day of clouds and thick darkness,
 A day of trumpet and alarm
 Against the fenced cities,
 And against the high battlements!⁵

No doubt images such as these, made all the more forceful with the refrain “A day of . . .”, gave *Dies iræ* a melodramatic touch that it still finds in the version by Thomas of Celano. Thus, while the text of the *Dies iræ* borrows from different sources, already in its genesis one can see emerging an overriding tonality of apocalyptic dread, infused with equally-horrific, juridical themes of sin, judgment, and retribution.

As a poem, the *Dies iræ* is condensed, concise, and even punchy, with each verse composed of three short lines of eight syllables, shot forth in a kind of incantatory and delirious, chant. Each line in each verse is also rhymed, reinforcing the *gravitas* of the words themselves, like a hammer (a hammer of judgment, no doubt) incessantly resounding the stark and gloomy imagery of the last days.

The text of the *Dies iræ* is reproduced below, with a late-17th century English translation, thought to be by the Catholic scholar and writer, John Austin (1613-1669).⁶

1. <i>Dies iræ! dies illa</i> Solvēt sæclum in favilla: Teste David cum Sibylla!	<i>Ah, come it will, that direful day</i> <i>Which shall the world in ashes lay</i> <i>As Daniel and the Sibyl say.</i>
2. <i>Quintus tremor est</i> futurus, Quando iudex est venturus, Cuncta stricte discussurus!	<i>How men will tremble and grow</i> <i>pale</i> <i>When Justice comes with sword and</i> <i>scale</i> <i>To weigh the faults and sort the fates</i> <i>of all!</i>

⁵ The translation is from *The Modern Reader's Bible*, ed. Richard Moulton (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1943), reproduced in Robertson, 16.

⁶ Both the text and translation are reproduced in Robertson, 17ff.

3. Tuba, mirum spargens
sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum. *A trumpet first shall rend the skies
And all, wherever laid, must rise
And come unto the Bar in prisoner's
guise.*
4. Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Iudicanti responsura. *Nature and Death amazed will
stand
To see each one rebodied, and
Brought to reply, himself, to each
demand.*
5. Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus iudicetur. *A written book lie open shall
Containing each one's charge; and
all
By those grand evidences stand or
fall.*
6. Iudex ergo cum sedebit,
Quidquid latet, apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit. *Then the Judge seats himself and
tries;
No shifting from all-seeing eyes
Nor 'scaping, then. Who e'er deserves
it dies.*
7. Quid sum miser tunc
dicturus?
Quem patronum rogaturus,
Cum vix iustus sit securus? *O then, poor I! What shall I do?
Which friend or patron take me to,
When saints themselves are scarce
secure from woe?*
8. Rex tremendæ maiestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis. *Dread King, to thee thyself run I,
Who savest the saved, without a
why,
And so mayest me, thou source of
clemency.*
9. Recordare, Iesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ:
Ne me perdas illa die. *Think! Who did once thy pity move
And drew thee from thy throne
above?
Cast me not off, at last, thy former
love!*

10. Quærens me, sedisti
lassus:
Redemisti Crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus.
- Thou tired'st thyself in seeking me,
For my sake didst die on a tree:
Let not in vain such pains and
labour be.*
11. Iuste iudex ultionis,
Donum fac remissionis
Ante diem rationis.
- True: thou art just and repayest love!
Yet acts of grace mayst deign to save
At least, before that day of reckoning
come.*
12. Ingemisco, tamquam
reus:
Culpa rubet vultus meus:
Supplici parce, Deus.
- And I am guilty, ere thou try me:
My very looks, and blush, descry me:
But mercy, Lord, do not deny me.*
13. Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.
- Thou, who didst once a Magdalen
spare
And of a thief condemned took'st
care,
Bid'st me by these examples not
despair.*
14. Preces meæ non sunt
dignæ:
Sed tu bonus fac benigne,
Ne perenni cremer igne.
- Nay, not that my prayers aught can
claim
But thou art good! Be still the same,
That wretched I burn not in
th'endless flame!*
15. Inter oves locum præsta,
Et ab hædis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra.
- When from the goats thou shalt
divide
They sheep, let me with thee abide,
Placed in eternal bliss on thy right
side.*
16. Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis:
Voca me cum benedictis.
- And then, those great Assizes done,
And all the cursed i' the fire thrown,
Say: 'Come ye blessed', meaning me
for one.*
17. Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis:
- Lord, this I beg on bended knee,
With heart contrite as ashes be:*

Gere curam mei finis.	<i>That thou take care both of my end and me.</i>
18. Lacrimosa dies illa, Qua resurget ex favilla Judicandus homo reus.	<i>Alas, that day fulfilled of tears When man before his throne appears Who makes and only can appease our fears!</i>
19. Huic ergo parce, Deus: Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem. Amen.	<i>[Therefore spare them, God.] Gentle Lord Jesus Give rest to them. Amen.</i>

On an initial read, there are a number of motifs that characterize the *Dies iræ* text. There is the dramatic scene of the apocalypse, filled as it is with sound and fury, noise and mayhem. The trumpets in the third verse (*Tuba, mirum spargens sonum*) serve as a musical cue for scenes of destruction, and both the world and the self are reduced to ashes (a theme announced in the first verse, “the world in ashes lay” and repeated near the end, in the seventeenth verse, where a prayer is sent forth with a “heart contrite as ashes”).

Such scenes are also the occasion for a further motif that is brought forth with great clarity in the third and fourth verses—that of resurrection and judgment, the living dead and the “sword and scale” of God. Importantly, this drama of divine sovereignty is first announced sonically, and then elaborated in the many cries and whispers of despair that follow. In fact, one of the over-arching themes in the *Dies iræ* text as a whole is the way in which the apocalypse is predominantly a sonic event. Borrowing as it does from the apocalyptic tradition, the *Dies iræ* imputes to sound a supernatural causality. The *Dies iræ* suggests something about the Requiem Mass as a whole—the sonic is *supernatural*. This is stressed in the third verse, where the divine resounding of trumpets/horns instigates the resurrection of the dead. In a sense, the sudden intrusion of this supernatural cacophony not only signals the beginning of a ritual act (the resurrection and judgment of the dead), but it is the ritual itself, the means by which the dead are brought back to life and brought before divine judgment.

The apocalyptic sound (*tuba*; “trumpet” or “pipe,” but also more generally “noise” or “sound”) of the third verse serves several functions. It first enacts a dramatic gesture of clearing the way,

laying waste to all that is, so that the theater of the apocalypse can begin (“A trumpet first shall rend the skies”). This clearing gesture is tied to another function, which is to spread and disseminate this supernatural sound, something made clearer in a literal translation of the line *Tuba mirum spargens sonum*—“A trumpet spreading the sound of wonder.” At once terrifying and wondrous, horrific and sublime, this supernatural sound spreads—like a disease—throughout the world, seeping into the cracks and fissures of graves (*Per sepulcra regionum*, “throughout the tombs of the regions”). It is this miasmatic spreading of supernatural sound that then causes, by mysterious means, the resurrection of the dead and the supernatural revitalizing of the corpse, leading to a double terror—that of a transgression of the laws of nature (“Nature and Death amazed will stand”), and that of the living dead realizing they have been brought before divine judgment (*Cum resurget creatura*, “the creature that will rise again”; the corpses that, “wherever laid, must rise,” that become horrifically “rebodyed”).

In these verses, supernatural sound is a *clearing*, a *spreading*, and a *rising*—a cataclysmic clearing of the world, of all that exists and lives, an inauguration of the theater of the apocalypse; a spreading of a sound both enchanting and terrifying into the depths of graves; a raising of the dead that both transgresses the laws of nature and affirms the terror of divine law.

While the opening of the *Dies iræ* is cacophony and noise, this gradually leads to a more sullen, solemn mood of despair and sorrow. The result of the supernatural sound is not just a day of wrath, but also, as verse eighteen puts it, a “day of tears” (*Lacrimosa dies illa*). As one traces the spiritual contours of the text, one of the strongest impressions of the *Dies iræ* is the way that the exterior turmoil of destruction and resurrection is gradually transmuted into an interior turmoil of despair, trembling, and misery. What begins with a third-person account of horrific events is transformed into a first-person expression of despair.

Already, in the second verse, the very expectation of the apocalypse causes all the living to “tremble and grow pale,” in effect already transforming the living into the ghostly pallor of corpses. The text then makes a shift from an external description of events to an internal monologue of suffering and despair, a monologue spoken by an anonymous, spiritual subject, a subject subjected to the mystical de-subjectifying event of spiritual dereliction. In the sixth verse, the terror of sovereign divinity is

expressed in the frozen, trapped state of mortal finitude (“No shifting from all-seeing eyes”). Everything is uncertain, even divine judgment, which seems arbitrary and without reason; the poem appeals to a “Dreaded King . . . Who savest the saved, without a why.” By the seventh verse, the text wholly shifts into a penitential mode, a mode of *miser*, asking “O then, poor I! What shall I do?” Self-doubt, guilt, and dereliction follow; the end of the ninth verse declaims, “Cast me not off, at last, thy former love!” This dereliction eventually overcomes the entire being of the poem, reducing the subject to a cowering, crumbling shell made of ashes (“With heart contrite as ashes”). With the subject spiritually emptied and cast adrift, all that remains is the rest of non-being and silence, the overriding theme of the Requiem itself (*Dona eis requiem*).

While it opens with great spectacle, the *Dies iræ* is really a *song of despair*. Despair is distinct from anxiety, dread, terror, or horror. It has an affective dimension, one that has to do with a certain sense of being trapped in a dilemma, constrained by reflective thought, walled-in by contradiction.^{iv} Despair is, in a sense, the affective dimension of contradiction. For Kierkegaard, despair is primarily a condition of the subject, split between its existence and its reflective awareness of its existence. But mere self-awareness is not enough to evoke despair. For, existing in time, the self is never and can never be fully or completely self-aware. There is always tomorrow, another time, another place, another night in deep sleep. And it is uncertain whether even death would be this point of culmination where self and self-awareness would perfectly coincide. All that remains is the awareness of this uncertainty, which Kierkegaard describes as a sickness:

The despairing person is mortally ill. In a completely different sense than is the case with any illness, this sickness has attacked the most vital organs, and yet he cannot die. Death is not the end of this sickness, but death is incessantly the end. To be saved from this sickness and its torment—and the death—are precisely this inability to die.⁷

⁷ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 21.

The omnipresence of death, combined with the impossibility of experiencing it fully, is what Kierkegaard enigmatically calls “eternity.” There is a strange religious horror in Kierkegaard, as if what is to be feared is not death (in fact, death is precisely what one hopes for), but instead life.^v As Kierkegaard notes, “to despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man. But he cannot rid himself of the eternal—no, never in all eternity. He cannot throw it away once and for all, nothing is more impossible . . .”⁸ Nor does this mean that one can turn back towards a reaffirmation of life as it is, in its being haunted by eternity. “Thus to be sick *unto* death is to be unable to die, yet not as if there were hope of life; no, the hopelessness is that there is not even the ultimate hope, death.”⁹

But despair is not simply a psychological or emotional state. It is inherently relational. As Kierkegaard notes (in a subtle parody of Hegel): “Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself.”¹⁰ The most basic philosophical relations here come into play—the relation between self and self, self and other, self and world. Common to all them is the fact of their existence, however static or dynamic, however prodigious or impoverished. Despair is a problem of existence—the problem of always being something; in effect, the problem of always being (it matters little whether it is “being with,” “being the same,” “being different,” “being for,” “being against,” or some other variant). As a philosophical problematic—and indeed as a religious one as well—despair infuses the very fabric of being, at whatever level or scale. Despair is not the problem of *what* one is, but the problem *that* one is. Beyond the dream of being-another or being-something-else there is the further dream of losing oneself, of being neither a self or an other, of negating both self and world. Despair thus speaks to the further dream of not being anything, of being-nothing (which of course entails its own dilemmas). Ultimately, despair is the problem of not being nothing.

Viewed as a song of despair, the *Dies iræ* becomes a profound example of mystical poetry. Not only does the text shift registers (from representation to presentation), but it also undergoes a kind

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

of emptying of the self that is indicative of many mystical traditions.

In the first third of the text (verses one to six), the *Dies iræ* depicts despair turned outwards, external despair. This is despair rendered objective and consonant with the very existence of the world—*eschatological despair*. Here we see descriptions of the apocalypse (verse one, five and six), the dead rising from graves (verses two and three), and the transgression of natural laws (verse four). The world itself is despair and disorder, uncertain and crumbling beneath the divine terror of a sonic event that rends the world apart at the seams.

But this takes a turn in the middle part of the text (verses seven to sixteen), where the *Dies iræ* becomes a poetic testimony of spiritual crisis. Here the *Dies iræ* is despair turned inwards, internal despair. This is the more familiar variant, despair incorporated into the modern subject, a subject perpetually in crisis—*existential despair*. The affects range from the dread of divine sovereignty (verses eight, nine and sixteen), to spiritual dereliction (verses nine and twelve), to confessions and appeals (verses ten, fourteen, fifteen), and prayers for an eroticized, spiritual union (verses nine, eleven, twelve). The crumbling external world of the first part of the text strangely disappears, and all that is left is this quivering, crumbling subject who makes desperate appeals to the divine while at the same time questioning everything, including the arbitrariness of the divine.

The final part of the *Dies iræ* text (verses seventeen to nineteen) *are both closure and a shift to a new mode*. Following the external despair of the world, and the internal despair of the self, the *Dies iræ* doesn't leave much left, for both world and self have crumbled beneath something enigmatic, arbitrary, and transgressive, some entity that the voice of the text can only call "divine." The world, governed by "Nature and Death," has been turned upside down, the graves emptied and the dead walking the Earth. The self, governed by the hierarchy of body, mind, and spirit, has likewise fractured into shards of doubt and dereliction. What remains to be done is to see this despair—of the world, of the self—followed to its logical conclusion, in which nothing is left—*ontological despair*. In verse seventeen the despair of the self reduces the subject to their knees, a humble, supplicating, hunched-over mortal coil that is ultimately reduced to ashes. Then, in verse eighteen, the text circularly returns to its descriptive voice, the

despair of the world reduced to “days of tears,” a world that has been nothing other than this despair of self and world.

The despair of self and world ultimately become the crumbling and the emptying of self and world, where nothing remains except tears and ashes. In the orthodox context of the Requiem Mass, this is the pretext for salvation and redemption. Hence the final verse, with its formal closure of prayer. But the final verse also re-states the governing theme of the Requiem Mass—“rest.” The closing prayer is that rest—eternal rest—be granted to the dead. But what is “rest”? Rest is a hovering, a stoppage, a silence, a void within everything that is. It would seem that, following the despair of self and world, and their reduction to ashes and tears, the final step would be their strange transmutation into pure nothingness. On the Day of Wrath, rest is the dual negation of self and world, despair turning inward and outward, and finally despair turning against itself, in a contemplation composed of tears and ashes.

3. MEDITATION

While the Requiem is part of the history of classical music, its form has radically changed over time.¹¹ Many modern versions of the Requiem have in some way or another attempted to “update” it in different ways, by the choice of text, language, or by the setting of current or recent events. In addition, the modern Requiem is not just for a prominent individual, but for a more pluralistic group, sometimes defined nationally and sometimes defined even more broadly. Originally a choral music, the modern Requiem includes a variety of instruments, ranging from chamber ensembles to large-scale orchestras. The form has also changed, with Requiems being re-cast as opera, jazz improvisation, or musical theater. In short, the modern Requiem is much more than the early modern Requiem, and its effects have steadily been maximalized in all these ways (setting, instrumentation, musical form). The result is that, while the modern Requiem displays an incredible amount of innovation, the Requiem idea itself has gradually become indistinguishable from any other form of musical spectacle.

One of the ideas central to the Requiem is the relation between music and death, a relation that informs both the religious content and the musical form of the Requiem. But what makes the

¹¹ The website <requiemsurvey.org> contains an exhaustive list of Requiems from the Middle Ages to the present.

Requiem interesting is the way in which both content and form fail to completely hold up. In the text of the *Dies iræ* we witness a despair that ultimately turns against itself, negating both self and world in an ambivalent–blackened–reduction to ashes and tears. Such a process would seem to necessitate at once an effusive and a subtractive approach to musical form, a contrast between the cacophony and disharmony of the world and the enigmatic silence of the emptied, ashen self.

Interestingly, this dynamic is played out in the earliest Requiem compositions. The *Requiem* (c. 1461) by the Flemish composer Johannes Ockeghem has become a canonical example of the early modern Requiem.¹² Borrowing from the Gregorian chant tradition, it intersperses brief segments of monophonic phrasing with somber, luminous, carefully controlled polyphony that one can still hear in contemporary composers. Scored for only four voices, Ockeghem’s use of polyphony is noteworthy for the way that the four voices are often treated as equals, weaving in and out of each other, sometimes in unison, sometimes in counterpoint. In addition, there is great variation between five sections of the Mass—while some sections (such as the *Graduale*) the polyphony is undulating and gently flowing, other sections (such as the *Kyrie*) burst forth with a kind of somber energy, alternating between singly-sung lines and groups of two or three voices.

This type of writing for music reaches its pinnacle in the work of the Spanish composer Tomás Luis de Victoria, whose *Officium defunctorum* (1603) raises polyphony to a complex art form.¹³ Victoria too uses elements of monophonic chant, but differently than Ockeghem. With Ockeghem, monophony often flows in and out of polyphony, a phrase rendered in Gregorian chant that then effortlessly flows into a two or three part polyphonic section. In the *Introitus* Victoria uses monophonic chant almost as a lure. A part of the chorus sings, in unison, the *Requiem æternam* opening. The isolated, even solitary effect of the opening chant gives way to a vast, choral polyphony, until there is a great mass of sound—the

¹² An award-winning performance by The Clerk’s Group is available on the Gaudeamus label.

¹³ There are several performances of Victoria’s Requiem available. The performance by the Choir of Westminster Cathedral (on Hyperion) uses a full boys chorus to great effect. However, the recording by the renowned Tallis Scholars (on Gimmell) is equally powerful, and in many ways more detailed.

acoustic equivalent of majestically moving clouds. In the very next section, the *Kyrie*, Victoria drops the monophonic chant altogether, and the entire chorus itself emerges from silence, but this time in unison, creating this time a monophonic wall of sound.

While the Requiem has a long history of being treated polyphonically, the story with the *Dies iræ* section in particular is different. Many early modern composers omit the *Dies iræ* entirely, while others, when they include it, tend to set it as Gregorian chant. However, Antoine Brumel's *Missa pro defunctis* (c. 1510) does something different—it is generally noted as one of the first instances in which the *Dies iræ* section is set to polyphony.¹⁴ The difference is striking. Accompanied by a small ensemble of horns, the chorus begins with a rich polyphonic rendering of the opening *Dies iræ* verse. These are contraposed with other verses sung in traditional, unaccompanied Gregorian chant. For instance, after a polyphonic treatment of verse three, there is a stark and almost stand-still chant of verse four, which begins *Mors stupebit, et natura* (“Nature and Death amazed will stand”). This sort of back and forth continues throughout Brumel's *Dies iræ*. There are even short instrumental passages of the horns alone, as happens just before the despairing verse seven (*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?*; “Oh then, poor I! What shall I do?”). The polyphony signals movement, and the movement is abruptly stopped by the somber, declamatory style of the monophonic chant. The effect is of a rhythmic complexity not found in Ockeghem or Victoria. One feels that a wash of sound envelopes the listener, only to have the ground give way to silence and solitary chant.

In each of these early modern examples of the Requiem, there is a subtractive element at play. With Ockeghem the Requiem becomes a study in structural minimalism between different voices and their combinations, their point and counterpoint, voices that emerge into the polyphony and then fade away. With Victoria all boundaries are eliminated, everything is a lush wash of sound, a kind of spectral field in which voices easily blend into each other monophonically, and then distinguish themselves polyphonically. And with Brumel the juxtaposition of monophonic chant and polyphonic chorus produces a different

¹⁴ A good performance of Brumel's *Dies iræ* is by the Heulgas Ensemble (on Sony).

type of subtraction, a somber, rhythmic polyphony of sudden presence and absence, of acoustic movement and stillness.

It is these subtractive aspects that distinguish the early Requiem from its modern cousins, the latter which frequently opt for an additive, maximalist approach, culminating in large, theatrical, epic orchestrations of musical spectacle. But not all modern Requiems belong to this additive approach. The Requiem of the Transylvanian composer György Ligeti (1923-2006) is an exception to this rule. One of the most profound and otherworldly Requiems produced in the modern era, Ligeti's *Requiem* is, at first listen, decidedly modern and avant-garde. Coming of age during the flowering of the European postwar avant-garde, Ligeti's works, with their characteristic sound clusters, rank alongside contemporaries such as Krzysztof Penderecki, Giacinto Scelsi, and Iannis Xenakis, and his influence can be seen in a generation of later composers, including Ana-Maria Avram, Iancu Dumitrescu, Julio Estrada, Gérard Grisey, Francisco Guerrero, and Tristan Murail, to name a few.¹⁵

Ligeti's fondness for abstract, dense clusters of sound characterizes his best known pieces, including *Atmosphères* (1961), *Ramifications* (1968-69) and *Lux aeterna* (1966; famously used in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*). Influenced early on by Béla Bartók and Zoltan Kodály (Ligeti studied ethnomusicology with the latter in Budapest), Ligeti's works in the 1960s began to explore the textural aspects of sound.¹⁶ By-passing the traditional musical concerns of melody, harmony, and rhythm, Ligeti began to produce works based on massive chord clusters, producing floating, dense, sound clouds.¹⁷ Ligeti has mentioned as inspiration

¹⁵ While Ligeti's music is largely identified with this aesthetic of abstract sound clusters, it is also important to note the composer's diversity, which ranges from pieces influenced by Romanian folk music, to wildly absurdist theater (e.g. his opera *The Grande Macabre* stands out in this regard), to neoclassical pieces, to electronic compositions.

¹⁶ In the 1950s, Ligeti fled his native Hungary, traveling to Cologne, Vienna, and Paris. Along the way he met Pierre Boulez, Mauricio Kagel, and Karlheinz Stockhausen (producing electronic music with the latter at the WDR). During this period he also attended the Darmstadt summer sessions, which introduced him to a range of postwar music, from electronic music and musique concrète to total serialism.

¹⁷ In 1962, Ligeti produced the work *Poème Symphonique* to illustrate this idea. An array of one hundred metronomes were set off at the same time.

the sound of a field of cicadas, or the sound of raindrops on a roof—instances in which a stochastic distribution of sounds produces a field or a texture, in Ligeti’s words a “cloud of sound.”¹⁸

Written between 1963 and 1965, Ligeti’s *Requiem* is unique in that it incorporates musical elements both old and new.¹⁹ There are elements that identify it as a traditional Requiem in the style of Ockeghem—the decision to predominantly use the chorus, in effect going back to the early sacred music of Ockeghem, Dufay, and others. Ligeti’s *Requiem* also borrows from the liturgical text of the traditional Requiem, composed of three basic parts—an *Introitus*, a *Kyrie*, and a two-part *Dies iræ* (which, interestingly, is split into the “Day of Wrath” and the “Day of Tears”). In fact, Ligeti has noted that for him the *Dies iræ* lies at the center of the Requiem, evoking for him the apocalyptic images of Bosch, Memling, and Dürer.²⁰

The *Introitus* is the emergence of sound from silence, a dim luminescence from an abyss. The chorus begins faintly, almost inaudibly, almost whispering the text against backdrop of low, almost sub-sonic orchestral wash. What is striking about the *Introitus*—and indeed about the Requiem as a whole—is the way that Ligeti extends sound. Similar to the way that individual words and syllables are drawn out in Gregorian chant, Ligeti draws out each sound so that the words spoken by the chorus are all but unintelligible. One has the sense that Ligeti has taken the first few seconds of Ockeghem’s *Requiem* and extended it to ten or twenty minutes or more.

Gradually, over time, minute differences would emerge, until eventually the unison of a single sound became a field of sounds. Needless to say, the piece caused a scandal when it was first performed (though it was the ‘60s and the audience should have known better).

¹⁸ For more on Ligeti, see Richard Toop’s *György Ligeti* (London: Phaidon, 1999) as well as Richard Steinitz’s *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ There are two major recordings of Ligeti’s *Requiem*, a recording for the Wergo label (Michael Gielen conducting the Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks), and a more recent recording for the Teldec label’s Ligeti Project (Jonathan Nott conducting the Berlin Philharmonic with the London Voices). Both are good performances, though the Wergo recording suffers from excessive surface noise on the recording itself.

²⁰ A series of interviews with Ligeti is collected in *György Ligeti in Conversation with Peter Varnai, Josef Hausler, Claude Samuel and Himself* (New York: Da Capo, 1984).

With the *Kyrie* the funereal drama of the piece begins. Ligeti provides an example of polyphony that is so convoluted and dense that it nearly breaks apart. The chorus spreads itself forth, quivering in minute polyphonic shifts, with the orchestra bolstering the voices, adding weight or producing the sense of weightlessness. The voices of the chorus—drawn out, trembling, quivering—become unhuman, ghostly, and ghastly, their words reduced to decaying phonemes. At moments Ligeti makes polyphony so dense that it ironically becomes a kind of monophonic cloud. Ligeti has referred to this technique as “micropolyphony,” the point where the polyphony has so many voices, making so many changes, that everything becomes a dense meshwork of sound.

The *Dies iræ* starts—or intrudes, really—with drama of a different kind. The horns and screeching voices of the chorus interrupt the abstract, ghostly washes of the previous sections. Suddenly the Mass for the Dead becomes something like an absurdist, Black Comedy of the Dead. Everything is abrupt, fragmented, chaotic. This is the terrain of Bosch or Rabelais. The chorus is hysterical, delirious, contradictory (whispering loudly, singing at the extremes of the vocal register). Whereas in the previous sections the Requiem text is stretched to its breaking point, here in the *Dies iræ* it is shattered and scattered into a thousand shards. This is the Day of Wrath, but rendered satirical—a Day of Judgment ruled over by King Ubu.

The Day of Wrath part of the *Dies iræ* then gives way to the final section, the Day of Tears. The grotesque and the absurd gives way to an eerie calm, in which the orchestra slowly sounds the highest and lowest registers, a quiet hum. This then paves the way for the meditative, melancholy closing of two female vocalists accompanied by the orchestra. The Requiem begins as it ends, the shadowy din of the orchestra and voices receding back into silence.

There is a kind of black chemistry at work in Ligeti’s *Requiem*. The voices, along with the orchestra, spill out, crystallize, foam, bubble, and then evaporate again into silence. All of this is predicated on the mesmerizing incapacity of the voice to in effect contain the Requiem. In Ligeti’s *Requiem*, the voice, in making a sound, negates itself as a voice. The voice becomes decoupled from being a means of linguistic communication or personal expression; that is, the voice separates itself from speech, but also from any form of subjective expression. The voice becomes something other than a voice, and certainly something other than a speaking,

communicating voice. It becomes a sound, a texture, a field of trembling waves, the murmur and hum of silence, a cloud of sounds. This is, I would suggest, a mystical gesture, but a mysticism of the darkest order. The voice that enunciates only its downward dissipation, its own unhuman transformation: this is the core of both Ockeghem's and Ligeti's variants on the Requiem. The voices in Ligeti's *Requiem* quiver, whimper, screech, shout, and cry, and these are not simply the expression of human psychology or personal feelings. Beyond this, the voices also do everything that voices are not meant to do, resulting in a kind of choral deep time—either they enunciate in such a drawn-out, extended manner that all that remains are abstract, de-humanized phonemes, or they are shattered into so many disparate pitches and tones, all but incommunicable to anyone who should listen.

What makes Ligeti's modern take on the Requiem unique is not its avant-garde techniques—it is its premodernity. Much of the compositional effect of Ligeti's *Requiem* is already nascent in the earliest Requiems by composers such as Ockeghem, Josquin Desprez, Pierre de la Rue, and Johannes Prioris. In examples such as these, the chorus is already performing this incapacity of the voice to transcend itself, this mesmerizing failure of the voice to exit from itself and become something elemental.



Funerary scene from Carl Th. Dreyer's 1943 film *Day of Wrath*.

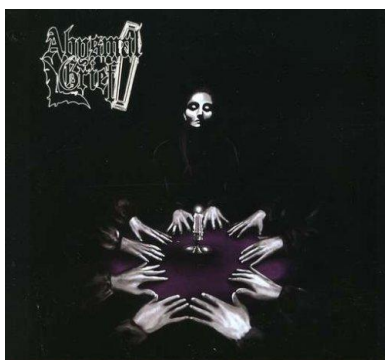
ⁱ *Like a refrain . . . oblivion*: The unexpected irruption and fading of music in relation to ritual, the sacred, and the divine is indexed by the harmonic *sortes* which serves as the fulcrum of Augustine's conversion: "And suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, a boy's voice or a girl's voice, I do not know: but it was sort of sing-song [*cum cantu dicentis*], repeated again and again, 'Take and read, take and read.' I ceased weeping and immediately began to search my mind most carefully as to whether children were accustomed to chant these words in any kind of game and I could not remember that I had ever heard any such thing." (*Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006], 8.12). The musical status of the spontaneous imperative is mysterious. The harmony occurs via repetition, yet it is spontaneous. It is recognized, yet not found in memory. Ergo: music involves the memory of what has not happened, what never happens. It occurs as an event of what is beyond event. That is its divinity, its being a manifestation of the Reality wherein nothing happens. With regard to Black Metal's ritual genealogy, the musical moment in Augustine's spectacle of conversion exposes the necessity of considering the relation between metal and divination, particularly in light of the inverse structural resonance between the Requiem Mass and the forms of divination involving the souls of the dead (necromancy). Where such divination summons the souls of the dead to speak to the interests of temporal life, the Requiem commends the souls of the dead to rest in anticipation of their final summoning to eternal life at the Day of Judgment. As the Eucharistic Mass sublimates sacrifice within the final and uniquely acceptable murder of the God-Man, the Requiem Mass sublimates necromancy within the final summoning and resurrection on the *dies irae*. A thesis of the Requiem is that God is the true necromantic diviner, the only one who really raises the dead and causes the soul to truly speak: "Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?" [What am I, miserable, then going to say?]

There is a profound and subtle musical affinity, then, between the Requiem Mass and the experience of conversion charted by Augustine—a very natural affinity given the parallels between the scene and Augustine's exegesis of Lazarus as figure for resurrection from the tomb of habit, prison of the fractured human will. The music of the Requiem summons and 'divines' the day of doom, playing in time the sound of the end of time in order to effect conversion before it is too late. Similarly, the significance of the song

that moves Augustine lies precisely its being a kind of magical medium between the new permanent present to which conversion is ordered and the mutable finitude of temporal events which are always coming to conclusion. The music of the refrain—"tolle lege, tolle lege"—is the *imperative of the imperative* which permits spiritual transformation. The song is the threshold between the intensity of the will which needs the future to be present (let it be now) and the peace of the will which can pass into the past (it is accomplished): "And I continued my miserable complaining: 'How long, how long shall I go on saying tomorrow and again tomorrow? Why not now, why not have an end to my uncleanness this very hour?' . . . I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away" (*Confessions* 8.12). The music of conversion or personal apocalypse is the sound whereby one passes from spiritual nigredo or the hideous gnosis of hellish self-knowledge—"But You, Lord . . . turned be back towards myself, taking me from behind my own back where I had put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself. And You set me there before my own face that I might see how vile I was, how twisted and unclean and spotted and ulcerous" (*Confessions* 8.7)—to freedom. On Augustine's conversion and the Etruscan corpse-bride torture, see Nicola Masciandaro, "Come cosa che cada: Habit and Cataclysm, or, Exploding Plasticity," in *French Theory Today: An Introduction to Possible Futures*, ed. Alexander R. Galloway [New York: TPSNY, 2011], 24-3).

A question to consider is how Black Metal, inasmuch as it holds a heterodox relation to the Requiem, is also heretically bound to divination, a practice which has an a significantly vexed status in Christian ritual, being both prohibited and practiced within the church, as in the *sortes biblicae* and *sortes sanctorum* (see Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Rutgers, Horst, Havelaar, and Teugels [Leuven: Peeters, 1998], 143-74). Suggestion: Black Metal is a musical form divination without object, divination in the absence of a to-be-divined. Black Metal summons and communes with itself as an auto-immanent 'anti-divine' sacred, a pure religion of itself wherein every repetition is the original, where ritual is redeemed from all memorial function. It summons in a way that reveals there is nothing to remember, no voice from the Outside

that can speak to the present. This is in contrast to doom metal, which seems generically doomed to summoning the original Black Sabbath in the hopes that its mystical fifth member will reappear. Doom Metal, ethically apocalyptic from the start—"Oh no, no, please God help me!" (Black Sabbath, "Black Sabbath," *Black Sabbath*); "Hand of God has struck the hour" (Black Sabbath, "War Pigs," *Paranoid*)—divines a voice from beyond that will wake the world and make the dead speak. The difference between Doom Metal and Black Metal with regard to divination may be illustrated by comparing two songs by Abysmal Grief and Mayhem.



For Abysmal Grief, funeral communion offers resurrection, renewal, and experience of the mysterious "link between life and death": "We proclaim the presence of a spirit light / In relation with the living before us / Their words are subject for the study on life / Consider the Funeral as a new birth rite / A new birth rite . . . The Necromass" (Abysmal Grief, "The Necromass: Always They Answer," *Abysmal Grief* [Black Widow Records, 2007]). For Mayhem, communion is impossible, yet in a strangely actualized and forceful way wherein the truth of the dead is present in the unspeakable form of a stony, silent scream: "A face in stone . . . decayed by age / A man who has returned to tell of his damnation / Fears so deep, the mouth open wide / The dream died away before dawn of this time / Ancient times legends stories so dark / Blackened his sight now / Not even the memories are left / Back after such a long time / The stone is cold as death / But what formed its true fears / Only the wind is able to tell / Tell me - what did you see there / In the darkness - of the past / The

eyes - stares so empty / The mouth - screams so silent / Tell me - what did you see there / In the darkness - of the past” (Mayhem, “From the Dark Past,” *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* [Deathlike Silence, 1994]). There is an outside, a depth to be divined, but the divination communicates nothing, nothing other than its own advancing vector of musical force in which something unsummonable is powerfully heard. With respect to the Augustinian drama of conversion, this implies that Black Metal constitutes a rigorous, *akairic* prosecution of conversion’s inversion, the inside-out dilation of its most open, non-determined musically seductive moment into an endlessly original repetition that stands equally outside time’s depth and beyond its end. As Andrew observes, it is this necromantic drive which makes Black Metal a truly modern—perhaps the only authentically modern—art: “Every time you open a book or listen to a song you are raising the dead. What black metal does is openly embrace this fact. There is the fetish for the rotting, the unholy, the magical, and the ‘necro’ because it understands that living in the modern world means living within a history that grows upon itself constantly. We are living our lives and conducting our affairs on a mountain of human corpses, and as a true art, black metal embraces this metaphor of our existence today” (“Necromancy in Black Metal, *Cosmic Dreamland*, <http://cosmicdreamland.blogspot.com/2010/11/necromancy-in-black-metal.html>). NM

ⁱⁱ *Already an inversion*: Inversion of the divine is identically internal to Christianity and Black Metal. God reveals himself in the form of a crucified human. The Church is built upon a man who denies God and is crucified upside down. According to the *Acts of Peter*, the inverted crucifixion signifies the fallen condition of human nature whose redemption requires being raised up, reversely, on the upright cross. Cf. Horde, “Invert the Inverted Cross,” *Hellig Usvart* (Nuclear Blast, 1994). As the shadow of Christ’s passion, Peter’s crucifixion figures the killing of the incarnate divinity as God’s becoming upside down for man. The cross is an icon of the upside down-ness of the created world: “I beseech you the executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward and not otherwise: and the reason wherefore, I will tell unto them that hear. And when they had hanged him up after the manner he desired, he began again to say: Ye men unto whom it belongeth to hear, hearken to that which I shall declare unto you at this especial time as I hang here. Learn ye the mystery of all nature,

and the beginning of all things, what it was. For the first man, whose race I bear in mine appearance (or, of the race of whom I bear the likeness), fell (was borne) head downwards, and showed forth a manner of birth such as was not heretofore: for it was dead, having no motion. He, then, being pulled down—who also cast his first state down upon the earth—established this whole disposition of all things, being hanged up an image of the creation wherein he made the things of the right hand into left hand and the left hand into right hand, and changed about all the marks of their nature, so that he thought those things that were not fair to be fair, and those that were in truth evil, to be good. Concerning which the Lord saith in a mystery: Unless ye make the things of the right hand as those of the left, and those of the left as those of the right, and those that are above as those below, and those that are behind as those that are before, ye shall not have knowledge of the kingdom” (*The Acts of Peter*, trans. M. R. James [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924], ch. 37-8). Satanizing the Petrine state, the denial of God in which religion is grounded, Black Metal inverts the inversion by repeating it—an *intensive* negation that overrides the dialectical and affirms the negative beyond all opposition to the positive via essential confusion. The meaning of the Black Metal cross lies in the fact that is Christian, anti-Christian, and Satanic all at once in an permanently problematic way. Intensive negation works through confusion of opposites, via wielding the process of negation into a labyrinthine space against which counterattack is impossible. This is simultaneously Reality’s tactic with itself (in ‘creating’ universe and so forth) and the Satanic strategy—the only possible one—in the ‘war’ with God, namely, to destroy decidability as to creator and created, to advance forever in a third zone between eternal contest and permanent victory in a kind of endless crushing of Christ’s body: “Lord of destruction I summon thee / Grant us your powers of annihilation / Crush the Jewish prophet, death to Christian faith / Crush, Crush, Crush . . . Jesus / Crush, Crush, Crush . . . Jesus” (Inquisition, “Crush the Jewish Prophet,” *Magnificent Glorification of Lucifer* [No Colours Records, 2004]). As the body of the God-Man incarnates not merely God (who is omnipresent anyway) but the singular *unity* of creator and creation, crushing the body of Christ means both obliterating this unity and perfecting it (releasing it from number, singularity), pressing the ideal intersection of infinity and finitude into an supremely incomposite real mess indistinguishable from one’s own corpus. “Ahriman writes

creation on himself, and ironically his anti-Demiurge monstrosity is the result of his life-modelling himself to be the creator, the created, and creativity all together” (Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia* [Melbourne: re.press, 2008], 191). The inverted cross of Black Metal is not a reversal of the upright Christian cross, but a *profanation* of the Petrine cross that reestablishes confusion between human and divine. It is a purer, non-dialectical manifestation of the cross as always already upside down. “*Religio* is not what unites men and gods but what ensures they remain distinct. It is not disbelief and indifference toward the divine, therefore, that stand in opposition to religion, but ‘negligence,’ that is, a behavior that is free and ‘distracted’ (that is to say, released from the *religio* of norms) before things and their use. To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use” (Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort [New York: Zone, 2007], 75). The focus of the profanation is the moment of inversion itself, the fulcrum point that inversion reveals as immanently outside all possibility of reversal: the infinitesimal center that never entered into opposition and survives its total confusion. With regard to the cross-symbolism established in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, this moment, identified as the nail which holds the cross together and joins human and divine nature, is identified with conversion. Peter continues: “This thought, therefore, have I declared unto you; and the figure wherein ye now see me hanging is the representation of that man that first came unto birth. Ye therefore, my beloved, and ye that hear me and that shall hear, ought to cease from your former error and return back again. For it is right to mount upon the cross of Christ, who is the word stretched out, the one and only, of whom the spirit saith: For what else is Christ, but the word, the sound of God? So that the word is the upright beam whereon I am crucified. And the sound is that which crosseth it, the nature of man. And the nail which holdeth the cross-tree unto the upright in the midst thereof is the conversion and repentance of man” (ch. 28). The intensive inversion of this non-invertible moment is the impossibility of conversion itself, the non-locatability of its infinitesimal point, which Black Metal hypostasizes into absolute needlessness around the eternal irreconcilability of word and sound. Black Metal sings the truth of an inverted word to which conversion is neither necessary or possible. It tortures the idea, the logos, and plays the sound of its scream as a revelation exceeding all hearing of it. NM

ⁱⁱⁱ The potential of the Requiem to be ‘blackened’ or positively decayed into a darker aliturgical power resides within the twisted temporality of its voice. Like a Möbius loop, the voice of the *Dies irae* hymn is a singular double composed of: 1) the living prophetic voice of the present that sings the day of wrath to come in the future tense: “Dies illa / Solvet saeculum in favilla” [that day will dissolve the world in ashes]; and 2) the supplicant, penitential voice that, moved by the prophecy, is virtually ventriloquized by the voice of the to-be-damned: “Ingemisco, tamquam reus” [I groan like a guilty one]. Moving from the first to the second and back again, the hymn passes from the future tense, to the present, and back again so as to chart the imminence and immanence of the End, the apocalyptic sense in which the Last Judgment is already upon the world. This looped voice thus marks out a providential space for the possibility of salvation within the paradox of a musical preemption of apocalypse, singing the end of time into a present in which it is not yet. Its two sides correspond to the two voices in which the term ‘day of wrath’ occurs in the Old and New Testaments: the prophetic voice of Zephaniah who indicates the day to come—“That day is a day of wrath” (Soph 1:15)—and the voice of the terrified multitudes on that day: “And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the tribunes, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondsman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains. And they say to the mountains and the rocks: Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev 6:15-6). The voice of the *Dies irae* hymn is thus a kind of mirror image of the terrible voice of divine judgment which to the prophet is already audible as a voice or sound of the coming day itself: “The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and exceeding swift: the voice of the day of the Lord is bitter” (Soph 1:14).

The temporally twisted openness of the *Dies irae* voice, a kind of singing of the very limit or impossibility of song—“Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?” [What am I, miserable, then going to say?]-renders it the host of other ‘outside’ sonic and vocal forces. Within its music one may hear, for instance, the sound of the apocalypse itself, the powerful voice of God, the cries of the damned, or an unspeakable noisy confusion of all these and the many other sounds and voices that fill the terminal. As doomsday prophecy necessarily flirts with

absolute and irrevocable condemnation of the world to which it speaks, the *Dies irae* hymn also wields a dark power, a kind of negative apotropaic force that *wards off life*. To this principle may be compared the use of the Requiem Mass as part of anchoritic enclosure ceremonies: “The bishop then began to perform rites which were designed to impress upon the devotee the fact that in a strict sense he was henceforth dead to the world. The office of extreme unction was performed, with the commendation of the soul, lest death should anticipate the last rites. ‘These things being done, let the grave be opened, entering which, let the recluse himself, or another in his name, sing : This shall be my rest for ever’. Dust was scattered with the words : *From dust wast thou created*, etc. Before going out, the bishop made a final exhortation, and the door of the house was built up” (Rotha Mary Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites of England* [London: Methuen, 1914], 95).



More sinisterly, there is record of the medieval use of the Requiem Mass as a death weapon: “At the seventeenth council of Toledo (694) . . . The bishops . . . censured the conduct of certain priests who

celebrated a Requiem Mass for a living person with the intention of procuring the death of this individual” (Stephen McKenna, *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* [Washington: Catholic University of America, 1938], 133-4)—a potentiality which Spanish death metal band Ataraxy are familiar with (*Curse of the Requiem Mass* [Memento Mori, 2010]).



To ‘blacken’ the Requiem Mass means, then, to expose its inherent blackness to thought and by this exposure to darken thought itself before the impossibility of its own finality, the impotence of thought before the totality of reality, or, the universal book by which the world is to be judged: “Liber scriptus proferetur, / In quo totum continetur, / Unde mundus iudicetur.” Lucky for us, Black Metal accomplished this blackening as one of its seminal works, setting us free at the end of time back in 1988: “Creed of eternal life I swore / Held my candle of life to the void / Risen from the dead I deaths powers wed / In the name of the one with horns on head . . . Even the heavens shall burn when we are gathered / Now when the flames

reach for the sky” (Bathory, “Dies Irae,” *Blood Fire Death* [Black Mark Production, 1988]). NM

^{iv} *trapped . . . constrained . . . walled-in*: Despair is especially figured by *swallowing* as in 2 Corinthians 2:5, which correlates with the hellmouth. And the same word (*absorbere*) in the Vulgate text of Revelation is applied to the earth’s swallowing of the river that comes out of the dragon’s mouth (Revelation 12:16). On the day of wrath, God swallows the world. Inversely, in Svierg’s anti-Christian visions of cosmic disaster, the infernal universe swallows God and everything else: “Jesus will wish he never rose from the dead” (“Christ Devoured by Supermassive Black Hole,” *Gullveig/Svieg* [Spiteful Spire, 2009]); “and we are all crushed together / into a twisted masterpiece” (“Swallowed by Celestial Darkness,” *Demo MMIX* [self-released, 2009]). NM

^v *a strange religious horror*: In relation to the inability to die, this horror may be traced through those figures of sin and despair cursed with deathless wandering: Cain, Judas, the Wandering Jew, Oedipus (whose story was transposed onto Judas in the Middle Ages). On Kierkegaard and this tradition, see George Connell, “Knights and Knaves of the Living Dead: Kierkegaard’s Use of Living Death as a Metaphor for Despair” and Simon D. Podmore, “To Die and Yet Not to Die: Kierkegaard’s Theophany of Death,” in *Kierkegaard and Death*, eds. Patrick Stokes and Adam J. Buben (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2011), 21-64. The paradox here is that the one who is spiritually swallowed by despair lives on in a body which the world will not consume, that one swallowing is the condition for the suffering of the impossibility of the other. The obvious reflection of the horror of life or life as horror has many specific ramifications, for example, life as wasting or dying, as expressed by the Old Man in Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Tale*—“Leeve mooder, leet me in! / Lo how I vanysshe, flesh, and blood and skyn”—or life as a frighteningly involuntary extra-vital force that lives malevolently against life, as communicated in the inexorable influence of the Wandering Jew’s visage in Lewis’s *The Monk*: “He put his hand to the velvet, which was bound around his forehead. There was in his eyes an expression of fury, despair, and malevolence, that struck horror to my very soul. An involuntary convulsion made me shudder. The stranger perceived it. ‘Such is the curse imposed upon me,’ he continued, ‘I am doomed

to inspire all who look on me with terror and destation. You already feel the influence of the charm, and with every succeeding moment will feel it more . . .” (Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* [New York: Dutton, 1907], 134). The idea that life is influenced to destruction by a malevolent supplement or internal shadow that destroys life by doubling it upon itself is legible in the exegesis of Judas’s despair as disproportionate *extra sorrow* added by the Devil to the sorrow repentance: “Origen: ‘But when the Devil leaves any one, he watches his time for return, and having taken it, he leads him into a second sin, and then watches for opportunity for a third deceit. So the man who had married his father’s wife afterwards repented him of this sin, [1 Cor 5:1] but again the Devil resolved so to augment this very sorrow of repentance, that his sorrow being made too abundant might swallow up the sorrower.’ Something like this took place in Judas, who after his repentance did not preserve his own heart, but received that more abundant sorrow supplied to him by the Devil, who sought to swallow him up, as it follows, ‘And he went out, and hanged himself.’ But had he desired and looked for place and time for repentance, he would perhaps have found Him who has said, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked’ [Ezek 33:11]” (Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Gospel of Matthew*, tr. William Whiston [London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1842], Matt 27:1-5). The principle of extra psychic pain that seemingly comes from *outside* the situation may also be correlated to the idea of hell as the doubled interiority of evil, the auto-presence of sin—“every disorder of the soul is its own punishment” (Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.12)—which existential philosophy generalizes as the ‘disorder’ of being someone. From this perspective on horror as supplementary outsider (as opposed to primal fear), the horror of life is precisely not something on the order of a reaction to life-as-situation, but is itself an inevitable eruption of a perverse negative vitality, indeed a vision of being-alive as grounded in a negation of living that inexplicably exceeds its own evident parameters. What is marvelous about the undying, wandering figures of despair is how clearly they know their own state, how absolutely and almost insensately familiar they are with the trauma of being themselves. Cf. “Forever I wander, forever alone / Until the Judgment Day I must walk here / On this piece of shit you call Earth / But I don’t fucking care because the end is near . . . Ha!” (Reverend Bizarre, “The Wandering Jew,” *Harbinger of Metal* [Spikefarm Records, 2003]). NM

APPENDIX: ABSTRACTS¹

Venomenology
Dominic Fox

When I first began to take an interest in black metal, I invented the “one-man band” Spiral Jacobs as an investigative sonic probe: an attempt at cloning, imperfectly, the practices of such USBM solo artists as Xasthur and Leviathan. In doing so, I understood that I would be creating an imperfect clone of an imperfect clone. What I call “late black metal”, especially its US variant, is a distorted homage to the music of the Norwegian black metal scene of the early 1990s, a scene already devoted to mythic fabulation and degenerative imitation. An underground culture of tape-swapping and fanzines, C90s taped from C90s and photocopies of photocopies, spawned an aesthetic of decay which went far beyond the lyrical preoccupations of the genre. The more corroded and indistinct the sound or image, the more it became imbued with cultic significance. Black metal glosses itself, produces itself as the perpetual refabulation of an always faded and degraded (non-)original: the restoration not of the artifact but of its malevolent aura.

Spiral Jacobs is a character in China Miéville’s *Iron Council*, a sorcerer in the guise of a vagrant who wanders the streets of New Crobuzon inscribing spiral figures on the walls of the city. These inscriptions are part of the summoning rite for a demon that will annihilate New Crobuzon and all of its inhabitants. As the rite progresses, “haints” or apparitions start appearing which are temporal preimages of the coming destruction, an event so cataclysmic that it casts shadows backwards in time. The first collection of songs I recorded as “Spiral Jacobs” was accordingly named “Haintology,” and heralded an immanent, unspecified apocalypse. Particularly influenced by Xasthur, Striborg and Nortt,

¹ The following abstracts, among others, were accepted by the editors for this volume.

recording “Haintology” gave me an invaluable insight into the generic machinery of late, “depressive” black metal.

I am now preparing a sequel, to be titled “Venomenology,” which will attempt a transversal reading of black metal from its (retroactively posited) roots in the music of Venom and Bathory to the new fusions with shoegazer and post-rock represented by Deathspell Omega and Wolves in the Throne Room. I propose to supplement the process of researching, composing and recording this sequel with the writing of a commentary on its name. “Venomenology” names the self-poisoning of consciousness, the necrosis of phenomena seeping out into toxic adumbrations. Black metal is imagined there as a form of insidious chemical waste leaking from its buried containers, a lethal/vital residue that, as in John Burnside’s remarkable *Glister*, both corrupts and revivifies the landscape. An ever-fruiting rot.

My commentary on “Venomenology” will explore the self-fascination of black metal, the bleak narcissism of its loathing, through the degraded imitation of my own performance as “Spiral Jacobs.” It is my hope that producing the commentary will act as a creative spur to the composition and recording of the music, deepening its involvement with the genre it mimics and introducing new eccentricities into its orbit. It will ultimately form a set of “sleeve notes” for the finished CD: a gloss on its creation, and an apology for its existence.

As the war machine keeps turning...

Manabrata Guha

“War Pigs,” in the genre of Metal music, is considered to be one of the classic sounds produced when ‘metal’ first met ‘meat’. At the same time, however, it is also a sonic signature of an offensive vector along which a mechano-in-organic war-machine arrives thirsting for the annihilation of the Human who, till then, had presumed to own war.

Recorded, in 1970, at the height of the Vietnam War, Ozzy’s wailing vocals echo over a holocaustal scene (admirably co-constructed by Iommi’s and Geezer Butler’s riffs and Bill Ward’s flat and inhuman percussion arrangement) where the Human makes its last stand as a prelude to its being thrown over “Luke’s

Wall” (which is the title of the *outro* to the song) into a terrifying void of irrelevancy and, ultimately, of non-belongingness.²

The casting away of the fragmentary Human remnants into the darkest and long-forgotten recesses of the inscapes of the Void is no doubt a powerful imagery invoked by Sabbath’s “War Pigs,” but like a gnawing demon, it is the mechano-in-organic tactical vector (alternatively, the war-machine—for the two are so inextricably complicit with each other that they cannot, in any sense, be referred to individually) that rips away at our attention.

This tactical vector/ war-machine, which is more contingent than evolutionary, is in no way similar to the difference-engines devised by the “Evil minds that plot destruction” or of those “Making war just for fun”; contrarily, it is a Nietzschean Monster “...a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller...without loss or expense...without increase or income...an ebb and a flood of forms...a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness....”³

If Sabbath’s “War Pigs” is a darkly mournful recollection of crumbling structures (ending with Humans being ablated at Electric Funerals before being wafted in the form of ashes into the Void), then this contribution is a fragmentary account of our (un)becoming-complicity with the mechano-in-organic tactical vector/ war-machine as it spikes and triggers the collapse of difference-engines thereby inaugurating a condition of Absolute War!

Melanlogical Subjectivity

Reza Negarestani

This contribution will be written against the absolving neurosis widespread in musical analyses which manifests either as a

² Note that this ‘sense’ is missing in the Dio-led version of “War Pigs” from the *Live Evil* album. Though one must in all fairness add that Geezer Butler’s ‘live’ bass lines are simply ‘out of this world’!

³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kauffmann, #1067, pp. 550. I am aware that there have been recent and perhaps more faithful translations of Nietzsche’s works, including the aphorisms that are collected under the title “Will to Power.” I have opted to remain with Kauffmann’s version simply because there is an implied ominousness to his translation, particularly of the aphorism being referred to.

compulsive obsession with exonerating forms of music or a wishful search for musical entities freed from human interests, experience and illusions.

Musical, vocal, ambient and ‘noisesome’ entities are often absolved or castigated according to an inherently utopianist pattern of emancipation which targets either human or the music, aiming at unshackling one from the other or establishing an affective freezezone between them. Whilst the frequent use of justificatory terms in support of Black Metal (such as ‘it is a misunderstanding ...’, ‘it is too complex to ...’, ‘it defies reductio ...’) conforms to such emancipatory pacifications, the cautionary or reactionary reprimands against Black Metal adhere to the rectifying negativity inherent to the models of emancipation which *never have time* for problematical elements. While the former attitude strives for whitewashing ‘problematical problems’, the latter approach seeks to dismiss the power of problematicity because it is instinctually aware of the danger posed by the twists that the problematic brings with itself: Twists implicit in problematical entities are capable of overturning the course of emancipation.

Refusing to undo such neurotic pursuits and therefore impairing the pattern of humanist emancipation, this contribution affirmatively turns emancipatory obsessions inside-out, in-flecting them so as to reveal an ideal commentator for black metal instead. If Black Metal presupposes an inherent problematicity whose problems and conditions cannot be absolved or resolved, then where can we find a commentator who can impersonally embrace the problematicity of Black Metal? And even more importantly, what does this ideal commentator of ‘Black Metal as the *fuscum subnigrum* of problematical problems’ look like?

This contribution seeks—and to some extent reconstructs—the nigrescent (putrid) or black glossator of the Black Metal music and culture. Adapting the notoriously confrontational spirit and problematic nature of Black Metal, this contribution presents a form of commentary set in motion as a fable which is told entirely in the form of dialogues. ‘Melanlogical Subjectivity’ simultaneously takes form according to the principles of two different worlds (with their respective conjectural, narrative and problematical resources):

1. The self-deluded fantasy worlds of Black Metal where parallel worlds of mythic creatures such as humans, elves, orcs and abyssal demons are pitted against each

other according to a predetermined course of events. Everything unfolds according to an underlying twist which only surfaces at the peak of the story—an apocalyptic scenario of senseless battles between parallel worlds with their respective problems which have been set in motion only to bring about an unimaginable apocalyptic twist. Black Metal's Nordic mythology is the epitome of such worlds of senseless events which culminate in yet an even more senseless twist.

2. The dialectical world of Greek philosophy on which numerous commentaries have been written and the dialogue-ridden texts of scholasticism in which the swinging movement of arguments between the scholars suggests a form of 'live commentary' that embraces and perforates each problem with more problems.

Adapting these two resources which belong to Black Metal and commentary genre, 'Melanlogical Subjectivity' is a dialogue between two figures: a problematic archetype of Black Metal and a figure called *Ur-human*. While the Black Metal's archetype speaks in a language which is entirely recomposed of lyrical fragments, musical analyses of black metal, factual pieces and actual interviews with Black Metal artists, the Urhuman recounts its ideas as problematical comments on Black Metal. Oscillating between absolving and pejorative, the Urhuman often lapses into an emancipatory approach in its confrontation with the archetypal Black Metalist. As the conversation between the two spreads out on different levels of reciprocal commentary, we notice a terrifying change is brooding within the Urhuman. From within, something nigrescent and melanlogical presses hard against the surface of Urhuman's commentaries, bringing about the culmination of the piece where the so-called Urhuman is unmasked as the ideal black glossator of Black Metal.

Archive Evil

Benjamin Noys

enlisting the in-finite, archive fever [*le mal d'archive*]
verges on radical evil.

–Jacques Derrida

Black Metal (BM) realises the paradoxical desire that lies encrypted within every archive, to achieve “an archive that, in a vertiginous movement of self-abolition, threatens to coincide entirely with its own destruction” (Heller-Roazen 133). Instead of repressing or exteriorising “*le mal d'archive*” (Derrida), as the usual forms of the archive attempt, BM tries to instantiate or archive that “evil” in its own impossible purity, in practice that is, simultaneously, absolutely serious and absolutely comic. Forming a singular archive BM is also a commentary on the essential ruination of *every* archive. My own commentary is not the futile attempt to embed BM within the archive, to provide a meta-archive, but rather a writing of and on the margin in which BM stages its vertiginous self-abolition that threatens, but never entirely, coincides with its own destruction.

BM’s practice of an-archivisation operates in a double register: on the one hand BM indexes and tries to instantiate violence, destruction, the diabolic, and evil, as the apocalyptic end of the archive. On the other hand, BM also tries to preserve this destruction, to inscribe it within a counter-tradition, another history, another archive, that has been radically repressed by the hegemonic political orientations of liberal-capitalism—archiving the apocalypse. This archivisation depends on a nostalgia for tradition, precisely as the archiving of a “lost” or “mythic” tradition of destruction, war, and evil, from paganism, Odinism, Nazism, heretical “traditions”, and Satanism, to nature, the earth, and the chthonic. In this vertiginous indexing of tradition as ruptured, broken, and fragmentary BM makes alliance with philology and commentary, which know “only one concept of the past, and that is a past that is essentially suspect, distorted, and, in the final analysis, corrupt” (Heller-Roazen 151). BM and commentary coincide in the moment of “necrophilic enthusiasm” (Heller-Roazen 151) to recover tradition from out of the abyssal grave into which it has been cast. I am particularly concerned with the direction of this “necrophilic enthusiasm” to Christianity—itself the

religion of the death of God. In its traversal of the archive of Christianity BM confronts the essential risk that “radical evil can be of service, infinite destruction can be reinvested in a theodicy, the devil can also serve to *justify*” (Derrida 13). It is in this instability that BM replicates the position of Bataille: creating a “hyper-Christianity” that coincides with the destruction of Christianity.

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Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit

Zachary Price

“. . . anarchy still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order.”

—*Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, F.W.J. Schelling

“When night falls
She cloaks the world
In impenetrable darkness”

—*Dunkelheit*, Burzum

“Nothing is all”

—*Cosmic Seeds of Anger & Dementia*, Mütiilation

Black metal has only become possible since Nietzsche's madman announced the death of God, that singular act of metaphysical upheaval that destroyed the very order allowing Nature to be called *cosmos*. With the support of absolute divine simplicity removed, no grand act of ordering arises, but rather nothingness remains in its most primordial state: chaos, darkness, night. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Black metal grapples with this mystery, inscribing it in sound and lyric, revealing itself as the godless successor to Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*.

In Burzum's "Dunkelheit" and Müttilation's "Cosmic Seeds of Anger & Dementia", this struggle is brought to the foreground, as they together constitute a burnt *Timaeus*, a nigredo that is itself the destruction of the Platonic dialogue, and from them arise a black world and a new meaning to "life". In them, we will see that anarchy has indeed broken through imposed order, as Schelling predicted. Our vision of broken order—of the death of God—encompasses the relationship of darkness, chaos, and infinity, the philosophical difference between Zero, One, and Many, and the Greek distinction between *ok on* and *me on*. Upon reflection, this will ultimately lead us to a renewed understanding of the meaning of the commentary's titular phrase *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

Standing next to each other, these works will speak their minds as I give each an associative close reading, largely in the style of a student's disjointed marginalia. The insights of each work will be extracted and rarefied, cut into shape with the many tools provided by classic and contemporary literatures, philosophies, and other miscellaneous media. It is at the point of their purest distillation that the insights gleaned from Burzum and Müttilation will coalesce, here that the fecundity of their atonal counterpoint will emerge. Collapsing into a single scholion, a swirling mass of static, the final vision of a blackened Nature will be born of their union. In proceeding as such, I seek to construct a commentary as much like its subject matter as possible, mimicking in commentarial form the sound and spirit at play in black metal.

Xasthur and Ambient Inhumanism

James Trafford

‘For I dug a mass grave in abysmal depths / For this
wasted human race shall never be reborn again / Cold
burial, their blood stains the snow / Eyes that will never
see the same again, after I’ve shattered your mirrors
forever / I will not be kind in the torture you desire /
Walking through genocidal remnants / With a hate filled
heart / Stabbing even at the tears of withering corpses /
Will there even be a word known as death anymore, /
When left is nothing to kill?’ (Xasthur, “Abysmal Depths
are Flooded)

Xasthur invokes an ambient sedition with respect to the musical conventions of black metal. Metal’s oft obsession with superficial occultic pretence and political individualism has stymied its latent interference in capitalist-production: even here experience is king. Moreover, the commodification of experience obfuscates the fine-grained achievements of metal’s potent ambition to an abrasive inhumanism.

Xasthur calmly transforms this entropic slump, defying atrophy. The ambience of twisted tonality, layered over structural discord in purposeless sonic shifts effects a slow, dawning hallucinatory claustrophobia. Gradated possession. Summoning the inhuman into the fleeting shadows at the edges of vision: *telepathy with the deceased*.

‘Opening to a horror unseen / Our reality dwells in your
nightmares.’ (Xasthur, “Telepathic with the Deceased)

If Xasthur subverts the myth of experience; “eyes that will never see the same again, after I’ve shattered your mirrors forever”; its corollary is the engineering of experience in neurotechnologies. In so far as contemporary theory is concerned, there is no “horror unseen,” only constructed anthropocentric socio-cultural formations. However, the “vulgar” materialism of neurotechnology may even dissolve our notions of ourselves as epistemic agents, precluding the recourse of theory to its foundations in the critical subject. In this respect, Xasthur potentiate the release of reality

from both aesthetic humanism, *and* the nostalgia of Marxist materialism.

In fact, the obduracy of theory is neutralised as far as capitalism is concerned in so far as the capitalist horror-reality is beyond the reaches of theory's "eye." As Xasthur hold the void ajar, perhaps an intellectual revolution is possible, bootstrapping our adolescent achievements onto neurotechnological prostheses. A truly materialist revolution, in which experience is simply a mutable physical reality that has been intoned into the profligacy of reified subjectivity. Suspended over the grey void, semantic reference destabilised, metal's ability to excoriate the substance of the human might be restored.