

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...

Manabratā 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 freezone 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 unmasks 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-anarchivisation 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.

References

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Discography

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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*, Mütilation

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 Mütilation'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 Mütilation 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.