

OF PLICATIONS: 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).ⁱ 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-turns, 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.¹⁴ 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*). NM

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. Jeaneau, 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

Occult BM ↑ sublimation	Gas/Thought	↓ Occult BM deposition
	↑ Melancholic BM ↓ evaporation & condensation	
	Liquid/Feeling	
	↑ Profane BM ↓ 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