

Introduction of Melancology

Welcome etc

I will read the opening provocation, and then offer a few Introductory comments before leaving the question open to the symposium.

'Earthly thought embraces perishability (i.e. cosmic contingency) as its immanent core ... such perishability ... grasps the openness of Earth towards the cosmic exteriority not in terms of concomitantly vitalistic / necrocratic correlations (as the Earth's relationship with the Sun) but alternative ways of dying and loosening into the cosmic abyss ... The only true terrestrial ecology is the one founded on the unilateral nature of cosmic contingency against which there is no chance of resistance – there are only opportunities for drawing schemes of complicity ... Hence, the Cartesian dilemma, "What course in life shall I follow?" should be bastardized as "Which way out shall I take?"' --
Reza Negarestani, 'Solar Infernal and the earthbound Abyss'

Black metal irrupts from a place already divested of nature, a site of extinction, 'a place empty of life / Only dead trees ...' (Mayhem, 'Funeral Fog', 1992); 'Our skies are forever black / Here is no signs of life at all' (Deathspell Omega, 'From Unknown Lands of Desolation', 2005). As such black metal could be described as a negative form of environmental writing; the least Apollonian of genres, it is terrestrial – indeed subterranean and infernal – inhabiting a dead forest that is at once both mythic and real

unfolding along an *atheological* horizon that marks the limit of absolute evil where there are no *goods* or resources to distribute and therefore no means of power and domination, a mastery of nothing.

A new word is required that conjoins 'black' and 'ecology': melancology, a word in which can be heard the melancholy affect appropriate to the conjunction. A new word implies a new concept and we know from Deleuze and Guattari that concepts have to fulfil three criteria. Accordingly, *the plane of immanence* of melancology is extinction and non-being. All things are destined for extinction; immanent to all being is the irreducible fact of its total negation without reserve or remainder. *The development of the characteristics* of melancology is to be addressed at the Symposium, of course, but there are already a number of apophasic determinations: it is not ecology, it is anorganic; it is not political economy, it is anti-instrumental; it is not love of nature, environmentalism, Gaia, geophilosophy ... But it implies an ethos and a style that delineates the third aspect of the concept, its embodiment in a *conceptual personae*: the black metal kvltist whose ethos runs across the spectrum of melancholy from bile and rage to sorrow, depression and the delectation of evil all the better to affirm the desolation he contemplates in the sonorous audibility of black metal's sovereign dissonance. This environment of absolute evil is exactly the same as the absolute good of black metal itself: the expenditure of a sonic drive that propels a blackened self-consciousness, a melancological consciousness without object, not even the cosmos, that is necessarily prior to any positive intervention in the environment.

The Black Metal Theory Symposium invites speculation on the blackening of the earth, landscapes of extinction, starless aeon, sempiternal nightmares, black horizons, malign

essences, Qliphothic forces from beyond ... in a general reconceptualization of black ecology.

It is interesting to note that a number of words on this list were used as evidence for various bloggers and commentators to denounce the so-called intellectualism of this symposium. In fact, every one of these terms comes from a Black Metal song title, album or lyric. And I must confess, (remembering the blogger's injunction that it is essential for metalheads to affirm their ignorance) that I have no idea what Qliphothic forces are, but I am hoping to be illuminated today. The main evidence of course concerned the title of this symposium itself: melancology. It is a word censorious heavy metal defenders of the English language (bloggers now coming on like English schoolmasters) claim I've 'just made up'. They are correct; I did just make it up. But people make up words all the time; it is one of the things that makes English such a vibrant language. If it's good enough for Shakespeare, it's good enough for me. However, seriously, I think I should say just a few more words why I think this barbarous word is necessary.

The idea of a symposium on black ecology emerged out of the last symposium, Hideous Gnosis, organised by Nicola Masciandaro held in Brooklyn last winter. Some of us, however, were dissatisfied with this word ecology, particularly with regard to Black Metal much of which, as I have already suggested, seems to envisage if not desire a world of desolation, apocalypse and extinction. The conjunction between BM and ecology would seem to be paradoxical to say the least. And yet, clearly it is a form of 'writing the environment' as they say in ecology studies.

If black metal is 'eco-mimetic', to use the phrase of Timothy Morton, it is mimetic of a place that does not exist where nothing exists. This places black metal quite at odds with all other ecological writing of whatever depth or hue, whether humanity is imagined at the centre or the margins, since all other ecological writing is essentially concerned with (restricted) economy, with the preservation, distribution and utilization of goods and resources. Ecology is concerned with the same *oikos* as economy where it is the earth itself – and by extension the cosmos – that is the supreme Good, the object of all good care and attentions. The problem with this is well known and yet intractable: goods and resources are inherently duplicitous; it is never a question purely and simply of natural goods and resources answering organic needs, but always also the source of power and the power to satisfy. In my view those concerned with the fate of the world will not get anywhere if the very ground of their thinking is economic and concerned with the world fundamentally as a resource, a site of goods to be exchanged and fought over.

I would go further, and say that ecological and environmental writing oscillates between two fantasies: intervention (mastery) and immersion (servitude), the latter all the better to sustain the principle of mastery in the chain of being itself. The absolute master, however, is death and sustainability is the slavish fantasy of an infinite deferral that is absolutely defined by the horizon of death whose work remains immanent to ecological desire.

There is a big and obvious danger with the topic of ecology when it is regarded as a form of political ecology especially in relation to Black Metal. It is precisely when ecology is understood as a kind of political economy that the question of fascism arises. It is not just the spectre of National Socialist Black Metal – although you just have to

look at their websites to see how very 'green' and ecological they are or claim to be. It is not just NSBM: ecology brings out the fascist in all of us. It is always a question of deciding who or what lives and dies usually on an aesthetic/utilitarian basis. We should absolutely and fundamentally reject this approach.

This is why we need to reject ecology in favour of a different term that denotes above all an ethos. This is why I coined the term 'melancology'. This ethos, or style, is of course related to an ethics, but it is not the same as ethics. So I would like to re-iterate what the ethos of melancology is not: It is not a form of morality; it is not a set of rules relating to social behaviour, civic duty, code of conduct, biopolitical governance, nor does it relate to any form of socio-political order dedicated to organizing and improving human survival or the survival of any other form of (inter-)planetary life. Neither does it, nor should it, set out to legislate for or produce new rules for the revolutionary transformation of society or the world. It is not a call to order; it is not a *savoir vivre*.

On the contrary. It is supremely indifferent to all the above, indeed it is, at least in the first stage, vehemently hostile to all the above. It is pure negativity: implacable hostility towards the whole *chain of being*. I like this phrase, chain of being. It reminds me that *for us*, us speaking beings, the chain of being is nothing other than a chain of signification. From whence does this negativity come, if not from the chain of signified being itself? Yes and no. This where stage two comes in, because good is not entirely absent from the Black Metal universe even if it is absent from the chain of signified being, the whole slavish fantasy of symbolic reality that everyone grovels in their pursuit of the goods.

Since, for black metal, the environment is a place of absolute evil, there are no *goods* to distribute and therefore no means of power and domination, but there is the sovereign good of the music itself. Stage two, therefore, involves the question: what is that musical good, that BM Good, that sole and only good in which or in relation to which I apprehend in non-knowledge my relation to myself and all that which is exterior to the chain of signifying being (which is to say my death and my intimate continuity with the being that does not signify)?

The answer then is black metal since in black metal we glimpse something that is otherwise and better than being, the very possibility of beyond. Black metal delineates the locus of desire upon which we do not give up, and from which we critique/theorize everything – including ecology, the environment and so on. That then is the starting point: the pure self-consciousness without object produced by the experience of black metal's sovereign dissonance. Since it is directed both from and towards this notional position **beyond** [under erasure], the desire of black metal theory has no interest in the chain of being; there are no interests at stake in the **environment** that is the reference point for conventional (restricted as opposed to general) ecology. Black metal theory is completely indifferent to the goods and resources that provide the source of power and the power to satisfy and determine life-and-death (and the fascism inherent to restricted ecology).

But there is a further stage, where from this position beyond the chain of signified being whereto we are conveyed in being bound above all to the sovereign racket of music, we are confronted with two hypotheses: 1) the chain of being is breaking up, disintegrating, coming apart, engaged in a terminal process of unbinding and exteriorization. [This is

the case whether we are talking about the chain of signified being – the main symptom of disintegration being general psychosis (just look around you) – or the cosmos itself, knowledge of which is breaking up at the limit of mathematics in the expenditure of that *dark energy* that lies at the beyond of mathematical knowledge as its essential supplement.

We are in the territory of Funereal doom metal:

‘The burning corpse of god shall keep us warm in the doom of howling winds. For we are a race from beyond the wanderers of night. — Xasthur

[Death’s night / All is forsaken / Only a song of mourning ...] -- Nortt

The universe is doomed, it is Godforsaken. And where God goes be sure that Satan follows. All there left is to do is to mourn Satan; he died a long time ago along with God, believe me. There is nothing left but to mourn him in a state of melancholy. Mourning and melancholy. For Freud, ‘the complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies ... from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished’. (Freud, 589) Sick, wan, as pale as death, the melancholic, corpse-painted figure of the BM kvltist presents him or herself as an undead memento mori to the extinction of the universe. In the melancholic refusal of nourishment, of the consumption of goods, the oral drive of the melancholic is displaced by the invocatory drive of song, or rather BM’s rasping death-rattle battle-cry, the call and invocation of the cosmic abyss that is inseparable from the radical impoverishment and dissolution of ego. The melancholic invocation is an effect of binding with the locus of sound itself, the acosmic sonic drive evoked by black metal.

Ray Brassier ends his book *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* on Freud's notion of the death drive suggesting that Freud was on to something viz-a-viz the unbinding of the cosmos. It seems to me that we can take a Schopenhauerian line on this (as Eugene Thacker reminds us Schopenhauer is in the pantheon of Black Metal theorists) and correlate the death drive to *wille* and argue, *pace* Schopenhauer's view of music generally, that black metal is the direct 'objectification and copy' of the *wille* or so-called dark energy that is posited as the force of unbinding, the force of extinction in the cosmos. In the exigency to regard the extinction of everything [and it is only in this sense that there are multiple extinctions: extinction being the plane of immanence of the multiple], in order to regard extinction as a speculative opportunity, black metal provides the locus of *amusical* extimacy, the later term (another made up one) here denoting the intimacy of and with exteriorization, with cosmic unbinding, the notion that infuses the work of Reza Negarestani, who unfortunately is unbinding somewhere in Malaysia. Black metal is therefore the locus of speculative opportunity in the affirmation of (the extinction of) the cosmos.

It is only at this point, then, that the question of intervention in the environment arises, and the articulation of melancholy with ethics, in deciding 'which way out' we should take, in deciding with what surplus(es) to dwell, with what waste, what detritus or decay in a process of unbinding that traverses an earth choking in wealth and death.