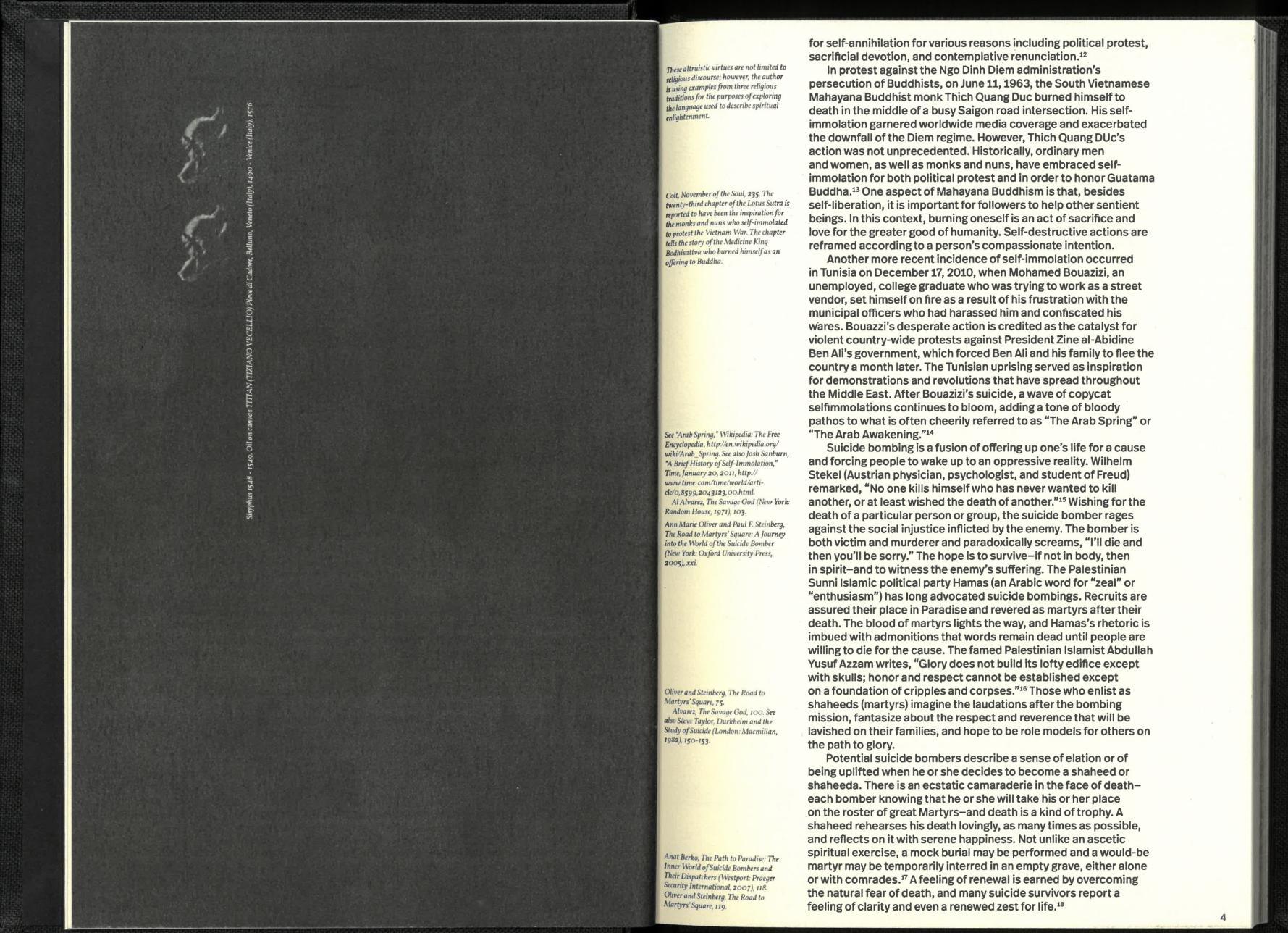




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for self-annihilation for various reasons including political protest, sacrificial devotion, and contemplative renunciation.<sup>12</sup>

In protest against the Ngo Dinh Diem administration's persecution of Buddhists, on June 11, 1963, the South Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death in the middle of a busy Saigon road intersection. His self-immolation garnered worldwide media coverage and exacerbated the downfall of the Diem regime. However, Thich Quang Duc's action was not unprecedented. Historically, ordinary men and women, as well as monks and nuns, have embraced self-immolation for both political protest and in order to honor Guatama Buddha.<sup>13</sup> One aspect of Mahayana Buddhism is that, besides self-liberation, it is important for followers to help other sentient beings. In this context, burning oneself is an act of sacrifice and love for the greater good of humanity. Self-destructive actions are reframed according to a person's compassionate intention.

Another more recent incidence of self-immolation occurred in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, an unemployed, college graduate who was trying to work as a street vendor, set himself on fire as a result of his frustration with the municipal officers who had harassed him and confiscated his wares. Bouazizi's desperate action is credited as the catalyst for violent country-wide protests against President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's government, which forced Ben Ali and his family to flee the country a month later. The Tunisian uprising served as inspiration for demonstrations and revolutions that have spread throughout the Middle East. After Bouazizi's suicide, a wave of copycat selfimmolations continues to bloom, adding a tone of bloody pathos to what is often cheerily referred to as "The Arab Spring" or "The Arab Awakening."<sup>14</sup>

Suicide bombing is a fusion of offering up one's life for a cause and forcing people to wake up to an oppressive reality. Wilhelm Stekel (Austrian physician, psychologist, and student of Freud) remarked, "No one kills himself who has never wanted to kill another, or at least wished the death of another."<sup>15</sup> Wishing for the death of a particular person or group, the suicide bomber rages against the social injustice inflicted by the enemy. The bomber is both victim and murderer and paradoxically screams, "I'll die and then you'll be sorry." The hope is to survive—if not in body, then in spirit—and to witness the enemy's suffering. The Palestinian Sunni Islamic political party Hamas (an Arabic word for "zeal" or "enthusiasm") has long advocated suicide bombings. Recruits are assured their place in Paradise and revered as martyrs after their death. The blood of martyrs lights the way, and Hamas's rhetoric is imbued with admonitions that words remain dead until people are willing to die for the cause. The famed Palestinian Islamist Abdullah Yusuf Azzam writes, "Glory does not build its lofty edifice except with skulls; honor and respect cannot be established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses."<sup>16</sup> Those who enlist as shaheeds (martyrs) imagine the laudations after the bombing mission, fantasize about the respect and reverence that will be lavished on their families, and hope to be role models for others on the path to glory.

Potential suicide bombers describe a sense of elation or of being uplifted when he or she decides to become a shaheed or shaheeda. There is an ecstatic camaraderie in the face of death—each bomber knowing that he or she will take his or her place on the roster of great Martyrs—and death is a kind of trophy. A shaheed rehearses his death lovingly, as many times as possible, and reflects on it with serene happiness. Not unlike an ascetic spiritual exercise, a mock burial may be performed and a would-be martyr may be temporarily interred in an empty grave, either alone or with comrades.<sup>17</sup> A feeling of renewal is earned by overcoming the natural fear of death, and many suicide survivors report a feeling of clarity and even a renewed zest for life.<sup>18</sup>

As explained by Shafiq, a failed suicide bomber, "It took me a long time to decide... It was wonderful to say good-bye to life. I felt like I was up in the clouds from the moment I knew I was going to be a shaheed."<sup>19</sup> According to Hamas, there are plenty of people enthusiastically enlisting for the opportunity to blow themselves up, and they insist that they only recruit people who are "normal"—not suicidal or depressed. Suicide bombers must have pure motives, open hearts, and a desire for Allah.<sup>20</sup>

Muhammad Atta is considered the ringleader of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States. His infamous document "The Last Night" is a series of reminders to his comrades, mostly prescriptions and quotations from the Qur'an, Islamic Shari'ah Law, and Sunnah (teachings from the life of Muhammad).<sup>21</sup> Ritualistic traditions are recommended along each step of the last journey, such as the need to shave body hair and wear cologne, to have sharpened knives, to make sure one's privates are covered, to wear proper socks and shoes, to think well of one's brothers, to pray and remember Allah in the taxi and airplane, and to make sure that the hostages are slaughtered comfortably (as is the practice for Islamic animal slaughter known as dhabihah). It also shares advice that, in the end, it is imperative to be calm and optimistic:

You should feel complete tranquility, because the time between you and your marriage [in heaven] is very short. Afterwards begins the happy life, where God is satisfied with you, and eternal bliss in the company of the prophets, the companions, the martyrs and the good people, who are all good company. Ask God for his mercy and be optimistic, because [the Prophet], peace be upon him, used to prefer optimism in all his affairs.<sup>22</sup>

These statements are like those from an enlightenment-seeking aspirant who hopes to arrive at a happy, calm, and expansive state.

There are many examples of religious martyrs (Dead has been called a rock-star martyr) who seek heightened states of consciousness and recondite lifestyles; they urge humanity to find authenticity in a sea of illusions.<sup>23</sup>

*It is interesting to note that the English word martyr derives from the Greek word "witness" (martyos) and that the Arabic words for martyr and witness (shahid) are identical. The martyr's gift of self-sacrifice is intimately tied with a public witnessing (by either people or supernatural beings) of the event; see Keith Lewinstein, "The Revolution of Martyrdom in Early Islam," in Margaret Cormack, ed. *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78–79. Consider also at a concert how the audience witnesses staged self-mutilation by frontmen such as the Shining's Koenraad "Joseph Allen, 'Dead' on His Last Album Cover," Rock Star Martyr, April 8, 2011, <http://rockstarmartyr.net/dead-on-his-last-album-cover/>. While the term authenticity has been challenged by postmodern cultural theorists, it is used here as a term to describe a state of being in the world in accordance with the truth and reality of one's sense of self. See "Authenticity," New World Encyclopedia, [www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Authenticity\\_\(philosophy\)](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Authenticity_(philosophy)).*

This condemnation of the material world—in contrast to the laudation of a luminous heaven or the veneration of an illuminated altered state—can be found in many spiritual ideologies, some pitting the body against the soul or spirit: the fleshly body becomes subject to mutilation and destruction for the sake of some higher purpose. The central figure of Christianity, Jesus Christ, is a perfect example of this; his submission to crucifixion and torture for the sake of humanity's salvation was the penultimate sacrifice that birthed a religion.<sup>24</sup> Later, so many willing martyrs followed his example that the Church fathers became concerned and debated the ethics of suicide for three centuries.<sup>25</sup> Christianity, like Islam, teaches that earthly existence is a grim prelude to the fantastical, psychedelic, exalted world that greets believers after they die; this certainly offers an incentive for martyrdom, or at least makes sacrificial self-killing an honorable option.<sup>26</sup> Through martyrdom a person becomes holy; the act can be both purifying and revolutionary.

"Last Words of a Terrorist," *The Guardian*, September 30, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/sep/30/terrorism.september11>.

Colt, *November of the Soul*, 155.

Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, quoted in Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self*, 155.

"Last Words of a Terrorist."

*1 Corinthians 15:54–55. Apostle Paul proclaims that Christians need not fear death because of Christ's sacrificial atonement for humanity's sins: "Death swallowed up in victory. O death, where thy sting? O grave where thy victory? The soul is victorious.*

*George Minios, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).*

*Carlton Burton, "Honor and Sacrifice in the Roman and Christian Worlds," in Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self*, 30. The etymology of the word sacrifice includes the Latin word sacrificare, "holy-making," its root meaning *sacra*, "sacred rights."*

Surah al-Ata: 16–17.

1 John 2: 15–17.

Shining, "Through Corridors of Oppression," *Through Years of Oppression* (Unexploded Records, 2004).

Colt, *November of the Soul*, 226.

*See, for example, James Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul* (Woodstock: Spring Publications, 1997).*

The martyr's theater reveals the benefits of self-mutilation and the rewards for choosing physical or spiritual death in order to attain something grander than life. Through his masochistic self-torture, Saint Simeon Stylites (one of the most famous stylite, or "pillar-hermits") set an example for chronic suicide as a road to spiritual advancement. He stood on one leg for a year, atop a sixty-foot pillar that was exposed to the elements, while the other leg mushroomed into sores filled with pus and worms. Saint Simeon would ask people to put any fallen worms back in, coaxing the worms to "eat what God has given you."<sup>27</sup> Gustave Flaubert's Saint Anthony boasted, "those who are decapitated, tortured with red hot pincers, or burned alive, are perhaps less meritorious than I, seeing that my whole life is but one prolonged martyrdom."<sup>28</sup> There are numerous accounts of Christians who begged to be martyred throughout the history of ancient Rome. Because death was only of the body, not of the soul, they would rush to the pagan judges, proclaiming their faith, and when sentenced, they would hold hands and sing as they faced the lions in the Colosseum. The crowd bears witness to the passion of Christian faith, ennobling its creed, and inspiring believers. The Christian martyr conquers death—the body is only a means to an end, a vehicle for the martyr's desires.

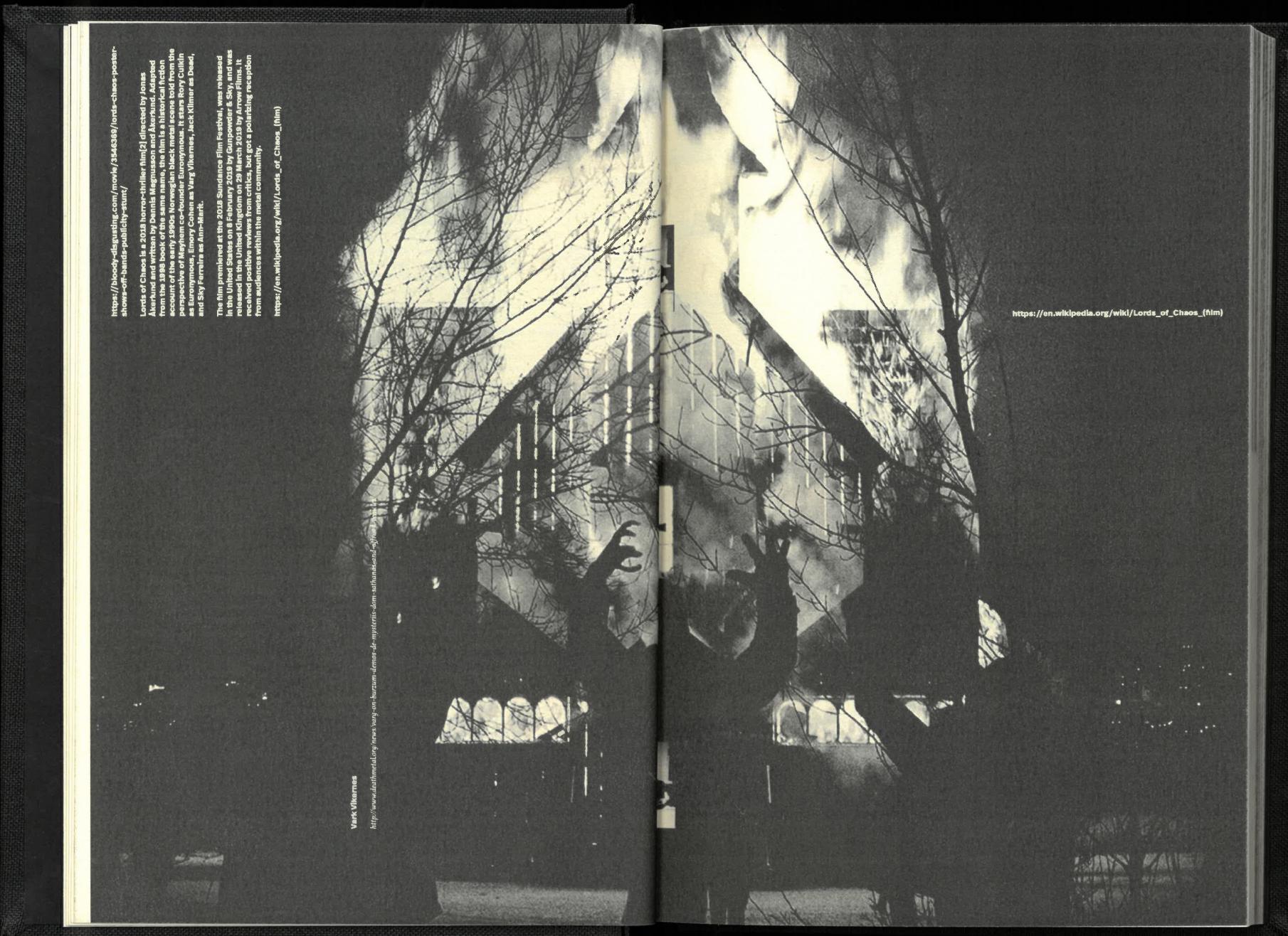
SBM's themes, such as self-mutilation and the renunciation of life, relate to some of the ascendant aspirations of religious suicide. *Make a Change... Kill Yourself* invites the listener:

*My great salvation lies within  
This suicidal mind of mine.  
Join me in this wicked state of suicide.<sup>29</sup>*

This renunciation reflects concepts in Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity that cast doubt upon the benefit of the corporeal world. In several Hindu and Buddhist traditions, maya is defined as the alluringly hypnotic, superficial illusion of physical reality, and the goal is to break the spell and to realize numinous truth.<sup>30</sup> Existence on earth is ephemeral, the body temporary, and biological life is not only meaningless but filled with suffering. Death is also the point of contact with the eternal.<sup>31</sup> In Islam, the Arabic word *dunya* means "lower" and connotes all that is worldly and temporal. The *dunya* may be beautiful and pleasurable, but it is fleeting, and it is better to turn one's gaze on what is immutable. Everything is a test that can lead to paradise or hell. The Qur'an is clear: "Nay (behold), you prefer the life of this world; but the Hereafter is better and more enduring."<sup>32</sup> Christianity warns against sinful worldliness: "Do not love the world or anything in the world."<sup>33</sup> This sentiment is echoed in Shining's lyrics "Through Corridors of Oppression":

*Slowly,  
passing the oppressed,  
innocent,  
sons,  
and daughters lost,  
trembling  
in the bottomless depths of darkness,  
successfully,  
failing  
in their search.  
To search the light, to search, salvation.<sup>34</sup>*

Self-destruction or self-harm opposes the ego's natural inclination for self-preservation (physically and experientially) and serves as a testament to a person's non-attachment to illusory life: one destroys oneself, and in doing so one destroys the world.<sup>35</sup> This connects with psychoanalytic theories by James Hillman,



<https://bloody-disgusting.com/movie/346389/lords-of-chaos-poster-shows-off-bands-publicity-photos/>

Lords of Chaos is a 2018 horror-thriller film[2] directed by Janus Metzger and starring Dennis Magnusson, Alvaro Morte, and Lars Løkke Rasmussen. The film is a historical fiction based on the memoir of the same name by Lars Mikkelsen, which details his experiences of Metallica's career during the early 1980s. It stars Bryce Dallas Howard as Wang Wenfang, Jack Kilmer as Deuce, and Sky Ferreira as Zara Markt.

The film premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, was released in the United States on 9 February 2018 by Gunpowder & Sky, and was released in the United Kingdom on 29 March 2018 by Arrow Films. It received positive reviews from critics, but not a polarizing reception from audiences within the metal community.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wikil/Lords\\_of\\_Chaos\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wikil/Lords_of_Chaos_(film))

Valkyries

<http://www.iachthmetal.org/news/valkyrie-lurum-silence-de-mystrini-jim-soothsawad-50th-anniv/>

Moon's The Nine Gates is an ecstatic, mystical trip of an album (see our review here). It's a release that deliberately leaves questions unanswered, though I couldn't help but act on the chance to clear some of the fog surrounding the mysteries therein. Here are some of Moon's driving force Miasmyr's thoughts on the occult, what embodies Australia's metal artists, and why he doesn't have plans to retire any time soon.

Luke Henley

January 2014

ech((10))es and dust



To start off, you debuted Moon in 2008 after playing in a few different bands. What led you to start a project over which you had complete control rather than collaborate with other people?

Originally it was a side project for ideas that didn't suit the bands I was playing in and it was also a platform for experimentation. After a while it developed a sound of its own as I noticed a growing interest from others in hearing it. This led to a few demo/EPs being released and some splits.

Both of your full-length releases have a sound that seems insular when compared to the rest of the black metal landscape right now. Is this deliberate? Do you pay much attention to what other people are doing or do you try and block that out during your writing/recording process?

I've got a good idea of what sound I want, but I'm always open to experimentation. I listen to a lot of black metal and various other genres such as doom and ambient but I've developed my own style and direction I want to head in being a blend of atmospheric and hypnotic black metal. I haven't found too much of late that I've found striking but I go through periods of listening and taking things in and times of productivity where I like to be absorbed in what I'm working on.

How important is lyrical content to you? It seems like your lyrics hold personal and emotional weight for you, based on your vocal performance, but the production makes your voice seem more like a musical instrument or element of the general atmosphere rather than a means to clearly communicate ideas.

The words are secondary to the expression and effect they have. On earlier recordings I often didn't use any lyrics as sometimes I found they inhibited the more primal form of expression. I gave more detail to the lyrics on The Nine Gates to give the songs a conceptual backbone unifying the musical themes. Whether you can understand the vocals or not it is intended to serve as guided imagery similar to how I experience much of the black metal I listen to. The instruments sometimes serve as voices themselves giving way to a non-verbal oration. Overall I like to keep details hidden and undefined for stylistic preference.

Your music is often described as occult black metal. What personal meaning does "occult" hold for you, both in how you define the word and how the concept of the occult informs your music?

Ultimately the music serves as guided imagery for astral projection using symbols and analogy to illustrate the shadow world. I don't follow any specific paradigm but draw from a range of left hand path sources; I don't like to identify too specifically with any pantheons to emphasize the primordial nature of the content.

With Moon being a product that is so singularly of your own expression, how much control do you have over the art design of the albums, merchandise, and photography based around the project? To me, the art ties in so

Interview with  
Miasmyr of Moon



Moon  
The Nine Gates  
2013

perfectly with the themes of the music - is it important to you that Moon be experienced with senses other than hearing?

I usually direct the artwork, the visual aesthetic can strongly influence how one interprets the music so I'm always looking for artists who will complement the music appropriately. So far I've had the most luck with people I know who have a stronger understanding of where I'm coming from musically and aesthetically, otherwise I look for people who already do a style I think might work. Winterkalt's minimalist 90s cover for the split with Xerbitter was a good break from the standard artwork I'm used to putting forth, whereas The Nine Gates is a good example of the style I usually go for, its symbols and imagery are integral to the music.

At the risk of interfering with the mystical aura of your music, where was The Nine Gates recorded? Is this a studio album or do you have the ability to record your music at home (or a mix of both)? What are the artistic benefits behind the process you use to commit your ideas to a recording?

Usually I record in a home studio and master the material in a professional studio. Recording at home gives me more time to work on getting the right sound and subtle nuances. On the negative side I would sometimes rather have a system running better and a limited timeframe can sometimes encourage faster production.

Has Moon always been a project you expected/wanted to translate to live performance? What are the major differences between how you feel about a song you've recorded and how you feel about a song while playing it live with a band?

I've been involved with other bands on the live front for quite a few years. After my output of recordings became more prolific with Moon the band I was in changed over to play those tracks. It was in a way a progression to the next phase in my mind idealistically. This was in part to streamline the output into something more raw and primal. I plan to always play live, it's where one can connect most directly to an audience and it gives the music another facet. It's hard to always get the sound we're after at local gigs since the engineer doesn't always know what we're going for. Generally we play the more involved, less ambient tracks live to maintain a strong energy although we maintain its evocative and bleak sound.

You are based in Australia, which has been steadily gaining attention in the metal community for the past decade or so for producing high quality metal bands. I personally remember the Pestilential Australis compilation of Australian black metal bands being a sort of holy grail when I first began listening to the genre - featuring other one-man projects like Striborg and Elysian Blaze. Is there a reason in your mind that there is such a concentration of highly-regarded black metal in your country? Is there anything about your music that you feel is specific to where you come from, geographically or culturally?

Australia doesn't have a strong cultural past heritage like places such as Norway and Poland. Black metal doesn't have a unified sound here as such. Geographically Striborg is in a very green part of Australia and he embraces that in his lifestyle and music whereas I use black metal as a means of communicating with the inner world. My home town, Brisbane has offered some strongly unique bands over the past decade or so. From the retro thrash/black bands like Spear of Longinus,

By J. Bennett

Oct 24, 2019

## "BLACKGAZE" LEADERS ALCEST ON "LIVING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS," EMBRACING DARK SIDE

As a child, Stéphane Paut had visions. "It only happened a handful of times, in a completely random moment," he explains. "I had these images and feelings and sometimes even sounds coming to me in my mind – of a place that didn't look like anything that could exist here. It was a spiritual experience that changed my life forever."

In 1999, at age 13, the French guitarist and vocalist assumed the stage name Neige, and formed Alcest, a black-metal-influenced shoegaze band, to try and express the feelings he got from his childhood visions. "It made me think about things like life after death and 'What is a soul?' and 'What is the meaning of life?'" he offers. "All these big questions."

The visions stopped when he was 10 years old, but Alcest's entire catalog has been influenced by these experiences to one degree or another. The band's sixth and latest album, *Spiritual Instinct*, is a soaring, shimmering exploration of the light and dark and all the big questions in between.

"The good side is that it made me a hopeful person because I feel my real home is waiting for me when I die," he says of his youthful reveries. "But at the same time, I've always felt disconnected from the world, because I felt I was from another place. So I've always been living between two worlds. That's what Alcest is: bringing a tiny piece of that world into this one."

What inspired the title of the new album, *spiritual instinct*?

We spent almost three years touring for our last record, *Kodama*. We were away from home for a long time. When that happens, you kind of lose touch with yourself because you can't do the things you like to do usually. You are always around people, so there is no way to reflect on things. So I kind of lost myself and I started to feel really bad.

I've always been into introspection and spirituality, but it kind of disappeared from my life at this point. But I really needed this thing back, because being into spirituality is not something I choose – it's something I've needed in my life as much as breathing. It's really like some kind of instinct. So that's why the title. It's kind of a summary of my journey up to that point.

You've mentioned that the album is also about coming to terms with your dark side.

Yeah, I put a lot of darker things on this album for once. I tend to preserve Alcest from this side of me, but I was feeling really not so well, so I thought it would be more honest to also bring a little bit of this darkness into the music. A lot of these things I did not have the courage to really look at [in the past]. It's not easy to look at yourself as you really are. We have this idea of who we are, but maybe we realize at some point that we may have been wrong. It's not easy to admit, but it's necessary if you want to grow as a person, to be a better person for those around you – and for yourself.

Is there anything specific that you felt you needed to confront?

For me, one of the most difficult things I have to live with is that I have very low self-esteem. I don't like myself very much, and it's really not cool because you are always putting yourself down and this is not a normal way to live. People say, 'Are you listening to what you're saying about yourself? It's horrible.' So that's also something that was part of this darkness.

This album is full of doubts, full of questions. But I'm in a better place now, I think. The album was part of the healing process.

Tell us about the lyrics for the single, "protection." What kind of protection are you talking about?

**Protection from yourself and your own demons. In the text, I'm using nature as a shield, something I like to wrap myself into to protect myself. It's like some kind of inner fight. That's why the violent dance in the video – so people can see the inner struggle.**

The dancer in the video, Susanne Engbo Andersen, gives quite a performance.

**Yeah. The director told me that she gave everything. He wanted someone that could really dig in and connect to deep stuff, and wow – she is great. We had many different candidates, but the director had a very good feeling with her and I felt that she looked very Alcest-ian. [Laughs] She has this look, you know? She's not completely from here in some way.**

**I understand the title track also has a special meaning for you.**

**A friend of mine committed suicide. He was a painter and he was starting to be very successful. He was one of the very few people in Paris who could actually make a great living from painting. He was very talented. An art book company is actually making a book about him now. He was about to become very important – and**

**maybe he will, because the paintings he's done have been very successful. He was not one of my closest friends, but I knew him for many years so of course I was devastated. I wrote the song maybe one day after it happened, so I don't think it's a coincidence.**

**You've been doing yoga for the last couple of years. How has that affected your music?**

**I'm not sure I was doing yoga when I was writing this album, because I think I started after or quite late in the process. But it will have an impact on the next album for sure, because it's had a very big impact on my life. Yoga can be many things – it can be something that just helps with stress or helps you connect with your body if you are just living in your brain – but it also has a very spiritual meaning. It's amazing for people with low self-esteem, because you are just living a moment with yourself and you don't think about anything else. You are just there in the moment doing your yoga and it's magical because you are fucking alive. It's a great way to be present.**

# The Throb of the Anthropocene

In emergency, what do we hear, and how?  
When time<sup>1</sup> of the essence, what sounds keep us honest?  
What rolls our ears in the imperative, "now"?  
If sound at heart is nothing but a commotion of air,  
what happens to hearing when all is upended, in despair?

-Hillel Schwartz<sup>2</sup>

Black-noise phenomena govern natural and unnatural catastrophes, like floods, droughts, bear markets, and various outrageous outages, such as those of electrical power. Because of their black spectra, such disasters often come in clusters.

-Manfred Schroeder<sup>3</sup>

Due to the dominance of coal within our energy systems there is a blackening; a blackening of stock markets, a blackening of landscapes, a blackening of the air. Drilling, blasting, heavy trucks, crushers, excavators, coal trains, bulldozers, front-end loaders, and the throb of machinery all create a black noise. For those living by coal mining sites, these are the dark vibrations of night "us" removed from the immediate proximity of the extraction and manufacturing of coal—their distant noises. Yet, even though the mining may be out of hearing range, we still experience these noises and vibrations in other ways: the practices that generate these disturbances are impacting the climate in chaotic ways that we both see and feel.

With my blackened hands on these pages, I reflect here on "Black-Noise,"<sup>4</sup> an installation I created in 2013, in response to open-cut coal mining in Australia, specifically within the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales.<sup>5</sup> The installation was placed at Kudos Gallery at University of New South Wales, Australia, from 18-22 June 2013 and consisted of a row of four large aluminium trays filled with a slurry of coal dust and water lying a few inches over the floor, set on top of subwoofer speakers which blasted audible infrasound noise and vibrations into the slurry. The sounds emitted from the speakers were generated from recordings, collected from open-cut coal mining sites in the Hunter. The vibrations emanated from the speakers moved through the trays and rippled and collided on the surface of the coal-dust slurry, causing the coal dust to settle into patterns—visualizing the black noise.

This essay uses the installation "Black-Noise" alongside discussions of noise within twentieth-century art and music, namely Black Metal, to explore the potential of noise to act as a productive force—not as a means of redemption, but rather as a tool for raising generative problems. I will first outline how noise has been used within art to emphasise the materiality or presence of the medium and the inherent mutability of communication. Then I will describe the installation "Black-Noise" in relation to its development through field research in the Hunter Valley. Next I will contrast Black Metal, specifically work by the Eco-Black Metal band Wolves in the Throne Room (WITTR), with the installation "Black-Noise" to discuss ways in which noise can force a system to rearrange, to become more complex, from responding to and mixing with the noise.<sup>6</sup> Finally, I will conclude with a conception of black noise that acts as a proposition for inhabiting and reimagining mined and undermined landscapes—practices that do not state how things should be, but disrupt existing practices and imaginaries that blacken our hands, scream in our heads, and enact worlds.

# Grotesque Indexicality, *Haus* And The Cryptology Of The Sordidous Horrorfication T.O.M.B.

HELVETE  
A JOURNAL OF BLACK METAL THEORY  
ISSUE 3: BLEEDING BLACK NOISE  
Kyle McGee

57

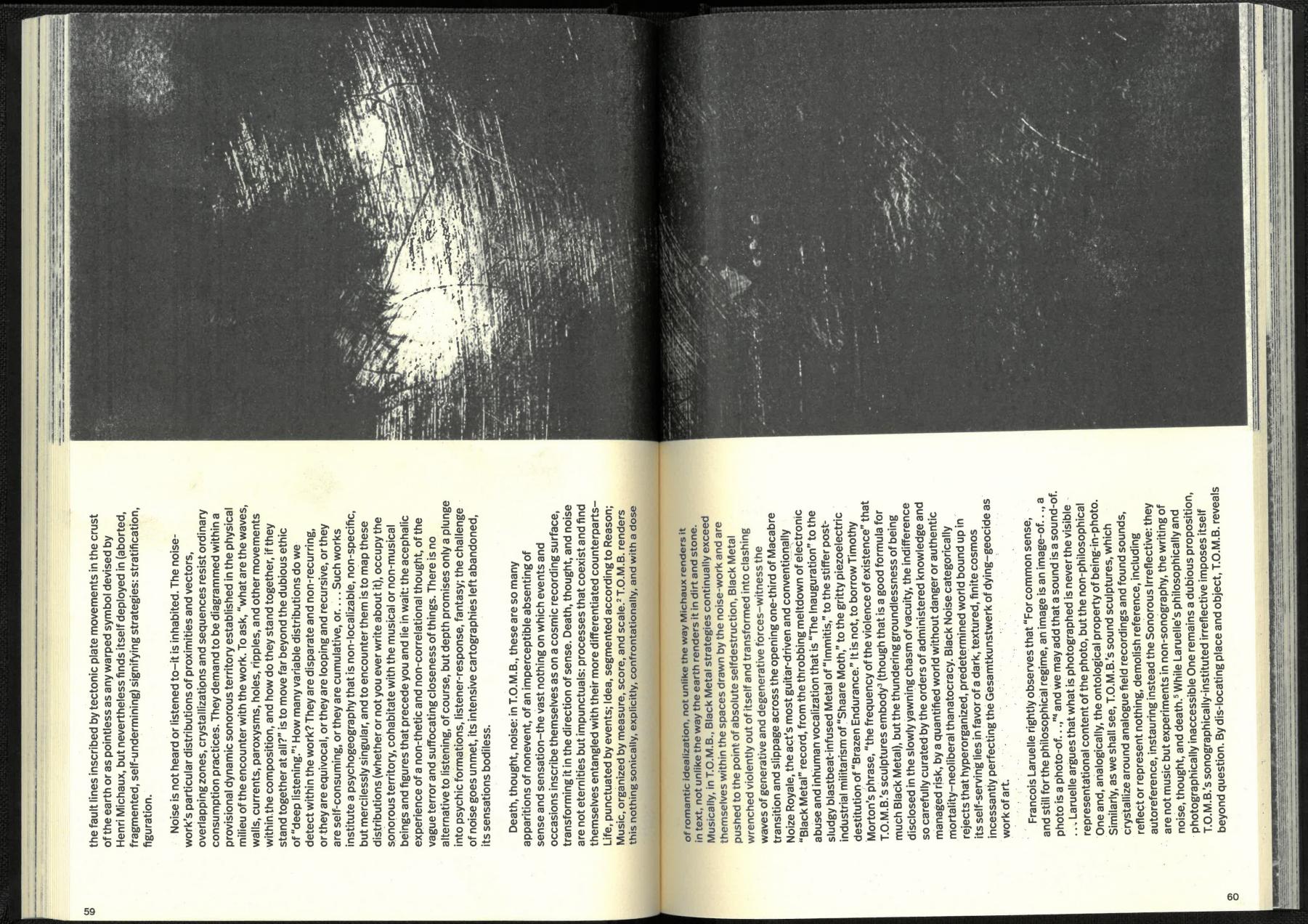
## J DECAY, DEATH, NOISE

Thought is a corrosive force. Its systems are mere byproducts, remainders of what it has passed through, cinders: residues lingering uselessly, casties of ash ever ready to scatter when the winds change direction. If noise—not speech, not information—is its only possible adequate aural iteration, or reflection, or record, Black Noise registers its deformed, hyperbolic, sinister underside, its recursive nightmare of self-abuse, depthlessness, radical dissonance, arrhythmia, and untruth. Black Noise is the voice of thought as death, utterable only by the undead and the inorganic: the morbid exclamations of gnarled wood, battered stone, and rusted iron—exclamations that compose what I will call black sites—exhibit a kind of active penitising rather more threatening than the kind envisioned in Alfred North Whitehead's Process and Reality, disclosing (with apologies to Eduardo Kohn, How Forests Think) exactly how cemeteries and abandoned processing plants, schoolhouses, sanitariums, prisons, and other industrial death factories “think.”

The medium of noise is the expressive residuum: part of all sound, receding ground of all communication, essential ingredient of all information, the pluriversal hum of diverging states and series, infinitely dispersed and virtually imperceptible, routes through the Expressed, infiltrates it, invades it, conditions it, transforms it. As an artistic practice, noise is sonic unbinding, the sound of bonds dissolving into anonymous, shape-shifting masses, constructing a fractured geometry of alien intensities. The noise-work captures the wholesale dissolution of musical form, meaning, logos, and this is precisely what allows the Black Noise act T.O.M.B. (Total Occultic Mechanic Blasphemy) to occupy a bizarre position within the discourse and

practice of noise, for in these works uncannily coherent—if inconstant and threateningly dissonant—figures madly proliferate. In T.O.M.B., noise doesn't cease to be asemic, as meaningless as

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the fault lines inscribed by tectonic plate movements in the crust of the earth or as pointies as any warped symbol devised by Henri Michaux, but nevertheless finds itself deployed in labored, fragmented, self-undermining) signifying strategies: stratification, figuration.

Noise is not heard or listened to—it is inhibited. The noise-work's particular distributions of proximities and vectors, overlapping zones, crystallizations and sequences resist ordinary consumption practices. They demand to be diagrammed within a provisional dynamic sonorous territory established in the physical milieu of the encounter with the work. To ask, "what are the waves, walls, currents, paroxysms, holes, ripples, and other movements within the composition, and how do they stand together, if they stand together at all?" is to move far beyond the dubious ethic of "deep listening." "How many variable distributions do we detect within the work? They are disparate and non-recurring, or they are equivocal; or they are looping and recursive, or they are self-consuming, or they are cumulative, or . . . Such works institute a psychogeography that is non-localizable, non-specific, but mercilessly singular, and to encounter them is to map these distributions (whether or not you ever write about it), occupy the sonorous territory, cohabituate with the musical or non-musical beings and figures that precede you and lie in wait: the cephalic experience or a non-thetic and non-correlational thought, of the vague terror and suffocating closeness of things. There is no alternative to listening, of course, but depth promises only plunge into psychic formations, listener-response, fantasy, the challenge of noise goes unmet, its intensive cartographies left abandoned, its sensations bodiless.

Death, thought, noise: in T.O.M.B., these are so many apparitions of hovenent, of an imperceptible absenting of sense and sensation—the vast nothing on which events and occasions inscribe themselves as on a cosmic recording surface, transforming it in the direction of sense. Death, thought, and noise are not eternals but impunctuals; processes that coexist and find themselves entangled with their more differentiated counterparts—Life, punctuated by events; idea, segmented according to Reason; Music, organized by measure, score, and scale.<sup>2</sup> T.O.M.B. renders this nothing sonically, explicitly, confrontationally, and with a dose

of romantic idealization, not unlike the way Michaux renders it in text, not unlike the way the earth renders it in dirt and stone. Musically, in T.O.M.B., Black Metal strategies continually exceed themselves within the spaces drawn by the noise-work and are pushed to the point of absolute self-destruction, Black Metal wrenching violently out of itself and transformed into clashing waves of generative and degenerative forces—witness the transition and slippage across the opening one-third of Macabre Noize Royale, the act's most guitar-driven and conventionally "Black Metal" record, from the throbbing meltdown of electronic abuse and inhuman vocalization that is "The Inauguration" to the sludgy blast-beat-infused Metal of "Immittis," to the stiffer post-industrial militarism of "Share a Molt," to the gritty piezoelectric destruction of "Brazen Endurance." It is not, to borrow Timothy Morton's phrase, "the frequency of the violence of existence" that T.O.M.B.'s sculptures embody<sup>3</sup> though that is a good formula for much Black Metal, but the thundering groundlessness of being disclosed in the slowly yawning chasm of vacuity, the indifference and so carefully curated by the orders of administered knowledge and managed risk, by a quantified world without danger or authentic mortality—neoliberal thanatocracy. Black Noise categorically rejects that hyperorganized, predetermined world bound up in its self-serving lies in favor of a dark, textured, finite cosmos incessantly perfecting the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of dying—geocide as work of art.

François Laruelle rightly observes that "For common sense, and still for the philosophical regime, an image is an image-of... a photo is a photo-of..."<sup>4</sup> and we may add that a sound is a sound-of, . . . Laruelle argues that what is photographed is never the visible, representational content of the photo, but the non-philosophical One and, analogically, the ontological property of being-in-photo. Similarly, as we shall see, T.O.M.B.'s sound sculptures, which crystallize around analogue field recordings and found sounds, reflect or represent nothing, demolish reference, including autoreference, instaurating instead the Sonorous Irrefective: they are not music but experiments in non-songraphy, the writing of noise, thought, and death.<sup>5</sup> While Laruelle's sound sculptures, photographically inaccessible One remains a dubious proposition, T.O.M.B.'s songographically-instituted irrefective imposes itself beyond question. By dis-locating place and object, T.O.M.B. reveals

## Notes

1995 (Semiotext(e), 2007).

All images within this essay by Adrian Warner, 2014, courtesy of the artist.

1. Paul Hegarty's universally lauded study *Noise/Music: A History* (Continuum, 2007) endorses a variant of this ethic. Pauline Oliveros and has been endorsed by several others, such as Stephen O'Malley of Sunn O))). A similar line of idealist thinking is developed in Salome Voegeli, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Continuum, 2010), with emphasis on the subjectivity of sound art and the constructive function of fantasy. For a set of thoughtful reflections on the aesthetic, ethical, and political implications of different ways of listening in the specific context of industrial music's mobilization of noise, see S. Alexander Reed, *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 305–319. Reed does not argue for any particular ethic of listening, but contends that the deployment of noise in industrial music should be understood not as an attempt at "confounding the conscious mind" but "submerging it" (309), a metaphor that, as a description of what happens to "the conscious mind," casually places his thought in this current. This point winds up supporting his argument against avant-garde elitism (which, in untaggly contrasting establishment modes of thought, in his view damns the artist to ineffectuality) and in favor of degree of assimilation, or musicalization (widening the horizons of the musical mainstream), as a necessary step along the way to industrial music's (fantasized) revolution. These points are related to the ethic of deep listening, which claims to have a political dimension, and I address their substance in the last part of this paper, though without specifically engaging Reed's line of argument. A mode of listening that runs partly counter to the depth school is elaborated in Joanna Demers, *Listening through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (Oxford University Press, 2010), which, on the basis of its convincing argument that Electronic music broadly conceived (from musique concrete to Acid House and sound art) has succeeded in breaking down the "frame," through which music is consumed, considered, and produced,

advocates what its author calls "aesthetic listening." Aesthetic listening rewards the meditative nirvana-hunting, Oliveros-inspired practices as well as more intermittent exposure, while insisting on the aestheticity and thus the specificity of the artwork in its distinction from non-music (which, thanks to the dissolution of the frame, it now more easily melts into). But for Demers, who invests heavily in the cognitive and perceptual mechanics of listening, this specificity derives from the agency of the listener, rendering aesthetic listening a new, more rarefied brand of fantasmatic engagement with sound.

2. Death is not an event. For a contrary perspective, see Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, trans. Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 412.

3. Timothy Morton, "At the Edge of the Smoking Pool of Death: Wolves in the Throne Room," *Helvetia* 1 (2013): 24.

4. Francois Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay (Sequence / Urbanomic, 2011), 46.

5. Sonor in Latin, from which sonography derives, is noise or sound.

6. Trevor Wishart, English composer and sound theorist, is known, justly or otherwise, for his insistence on the traceability of sound sources despite, or more often through, immense analogue and digital transformations. His notion of "masking," for example—say nothing of his conception of "transformation"—itself trades on the problem of identifying sound sources in their presentational immediacy, even as it calls for the imposition of ever more heavily coded distortion matrices. The reference in the text above to Wishart relies on the composer's association with indexicality as a mu-sicological theme.

7. On spatial music see Edgard Varese, "Spatial Music," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, eds. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs, (Da Capo, 1998), 204–207. See also Gilles Deleuze, "Occupy without Counting: Proust, Roulez, and Time," in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–*

Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Noise," in *Studies in Pessimism*, trans. and ed. T.B. Saunders (Macmillan, 1908), 127–133.

9. Alan Montrosé, "Human," in *Inhuman Nature*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Dilophant, 2014), 59.

10. No One provides background in an interview: "This [‘Cadaver Transmissions’] was the first recording session completed using a ‘corpse’ as an instrument, I was able to obtain access to a morgue for a certain period of time and used certain recording tactics against the cadaver, in a very aggressive, ‘spell’ like fashion. The ability to conduct this recording confirmed the project’s true intentions of actually using death as a means to create music." Kez Whelan, "Terrorizer Speaks to T.O.M.B.’s No One," *Terrorizer*.com (August 28, 2014), <http://www.terrorizer.com/news/features/2/terrorizer-speaks-to-mb-one>.

11. Aside from the pages of this journal, a definitive statement of Black Metal's status as a progressive or experimental medium is Black Metal: Beyond the Darkness, eds. Louis Pattison, Nick Richardson, and Brandon Stosuy (Black Dog, 2012), which catalogues recent innovations in Black Metal by drawing attention toward under-represented Black Metal cultures outside of Northern Europe. However, the most striking recent work is that which has been done on Black Metal's imbrication with ecology, politics, and religion; see, for example Melancology: Black Metal Theory and Ecology, ed. Scott Wilson (Zero, 2014).

12. It goes without saying that this conservatism has little to do with the reactionary positive politics of any particular practitioner of Black Metal; instead, it suffuses the genre as such and places concrete limits on Black Metal experimentation, only indirectly grounding the national and heathenism associated with Black Metalists. But I think it has everything to do with the rejection of Black Noise in most Black Metal circles.

13. Nevertheless, theory should demand more of this—relationship than what is afforded by the "narrow aperture of science's unthought," in Wilson's formulation ("Introduction to Melancology"), which seems to grant scientific truths an extensivity unwarranted by the fragile chains of reference that constitute facticity. Generally, Black Metal theory, like other speculative theoretical practices, remains too much in thrall to an indefensible set of ontological commitments inherited from twentieth century philosophy of science. This essay has attempted to offer an alternative viewpoint capable of registering the agency of a multitude of beings without regard to their epistemological credentials.

14. Cf. Roberto Esposito, "Nihilism and Community" in *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford University Press, 2010), 137–138.

15. The Problem of Christianity, Vol. II: The Real World and the Christian Ideas (Macmillan, 1913), 86.