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(Absentology)

Summoning the Black Flame.
Trepaneringsritualen's Music and Absolute Emptiness

Dark ambient ritual noise band *Trepaneringsritualen* allows the listener to contemplate the "black flame", the foreclosure of existence. The droning monotony transmits what Maurice Blanchot in his *The Writing of the Disaster* calls "the language of waiting", a silent mode of communication that is directed towards nothing other, the No-Other which is death. Noise is the infinitely dense form of silence, the recollection without object. Each object, through such dark ambience, contains objecthoods glued to its form. *Trepaneringsritualen's* "All Hail the Black Flame" is animated by a sense of basic incompleteness. In Peter Schwenger's view, the defining characteristic of objects, including the objects of love, is the impossibility of possession. We must ask what is the mysterious item of *Trepaneringsritualen's* love? What is the Thing that we pray to when we engage in black rituals, when we "hail the black flame"? that is it that blackens the flame? There is a ceaseless howling, both cherished" and despised", underlying all existents. This howling is the ever-present murmuring of emptiness (*shunyata*). Indeed, every object, we argue, may be interpreted as constituting a ceaseless howling, a manifestation of empty noise. Alphonso Lingis observes that human voices, however individuated they may seem, are indistinguishable from the murmur of the world. Rather than seeking to escape from noise, we must recognize its inherent unity with silence. To unite oneself with the murmur of the world is to "become what one is" and be dispersed among degraded ruins. This black flame is more than a mere absence: it is the absolute emptiness of emptiness. Autopoesis annihilates the world and makes room for manifestation, the irruption of volcanic emptiness.

The corpse may be seen without interruption. We try to grasp the word whereby its reality may be ascertained. We try to enjoy its fluids, ruptures, we attempt to enter into its gaping wounds. But all that remains is *shunyata* (emptiness). According to the *Suramgamasamadhi sutra*, written in the spirit of Madhyamaka Buddhism, emptiness should not be perceived as a merely limited negation, an avoidance of the avoidance of the void. Such a viewpoint would be, in itself, an overcomplication. Rather, emptiness allows us to perceive the corpse of this world, all its ruptures, openings and closings, in their limitless simplicity. What makes the blackened, rotten object of finitude simple is the absence of any absolute Outside. As the *Suramgamasamadhi sutra* notes, „all dharmas are empty, like an illusion.”¹ It is in their unreality that we must attain their reality. Emptiness is an incitement, a challenge, an invitation to view this dead world's corpse, to „corpse” our own vision. The inactive inoperativity of the nontologically-accessible world is nothing more than reality itself, albeit a reality that is vacuous, empty, a place that dissolves into the (in)finity of chaotic space. Emptiness, once perceived by corpsesed-vision, learns to see the nothingness of beings in the process of their birthing. Images, simulacra, are born constantly within corpsesed necrotic vision, not unlike the maggots generated by rotting, abandoned bodies. There can be no exception: the scripture makes very clear that *all* dharmas, *all* truths, including the truth of the text itself, are empty. Not only the receiver, the vessel that would accept the Teaching, but also the source of the teaching. The sutra goes on to make a strikingly bold claim: „all these Tathagatas are real. And why are they real? These Tathagatas, originally and spontaneously, are not born: hence they are real. These Tathagatas are non-existent in the present and in the

¹ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 117

future: hence they are real. (...) These Tathagatas are the same and without difference at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, hence they are real.”² The very proof of the Tathagata’s reality is the absence of their revelation. When we try to enjoy bodies, their fluid-filled openings, the succulent absolute Insides, our activity gains access to nothing apart from an absolute Outside, a voidness that voids even its own (un)reality. Nothing remains within the sphere of such a corpses perception, aside from the black object of finitude. Vision corresponds to the reality of the Tathagatas, who are born-without-birth. Impotentialized, philosophy cannot remain. In a constitutive sense, philosophy informed by emptiness cannot be anything other than disaggregated; empty nontology is a succumbing to indifference. As Maurice Blanchot writes about the blackness that engulfs those never born and never killed, „when the disaster comes upon is, it does not come.”³ The infiniteness of the disaster „has in some way broken every limit.”⁴ Situated as we are – irredeemably – within the insides of an absolute Outside, we cannot remain attached to the raucous tones that correspond to the rising of nothing in particular. Nontology too, by consequence of its momentary correlation with the intentionality of necrotically-overinformed thinking agents, is dismembered, rendered indifferent to difference. Lines of thought infected by the presence of emptiness understand well that „all dharmas are the same.”⁵ How could there „be” anything, aside from the relational emptiness, a disconnectivity of agents with one another? Indifference, born from the womb of sameness, is no mere „middle way.” We are encouraged to remain the same „without difference” at the „beginning, in the middle and at the end.”⁶ If one wants to remain indifferent (hence open to the call of emptiness), one must understand well the necessity of negating every position, including that of the middle. This „middle” does not simply denote some temporal state, but rather, the false position of a dogmatic skepticism that would situate itself outside of *Samsara*. Negation, as exemplified by Madhyamaka Buddhism, negates even skepticism. Because of this negating motion, emptiness is real. To put it differently, reality is empty, therefore reality is real.

Revelation of revelation unleashes the lucidity of thought, lacerating us into silence and obscurity. There is no antagonism between obscurity and lucidity; the two terms are clouds upon an empty, starless sky. What Blanchot writes of the disaster we could very well say of emptiness: „we are passive with respect to the disaster, but the disaster is perhaps passivity, and thus past, always past, even in the past, out of date.”⁷ Emptiness is always extratemporal; time, strictly speaking, has no function, no use, no presence. It is seen without consequence. Necrological vision holds, within the interstices of bleak silence, the source of its own (illusory) horizon. No middle ground can stifle the plume of smoke that ascends from the cremation-ground. Once the divinity is held between the strong hands of its executioner, distance dissolves into the suffering of the broken Absolute. With open eyes, we must watch the moments of joyous impurity. One anthropological study relates the Chihamba ritual, an initiation in which candidates behead a cock, a symbol of the divinity Kavula. Beheading, once initiated, must come full circle: the joy of impurity is retroactive, returning to the candidates themselves: „the deity is ‘beheaded’ (ketula hamutu) by the candidates, and the following day, through his adepts, he ‘beheads’ them.”⁸ With the night of the divinity’s death, nothing is commensurate. Nothing can come into adequation with the disaster; „one cannot

² Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 117-118

³ Blanchot, Maurice (1995 [1980]) *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 118

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Blanchot 1995 [1980]: 3

⁸ Turner, Victor (1977) "Sacrifice as Quintessential Process Prophylaxis or Abandonment?" *History of Religions* 16.3, 193

believe in it.”⁹ One cannot „believe” in the god whose head rolls upon sacred ground, spilling its redness upon the earth. But this effluence, this rotten outflow is a necessary precondition of the eternal return. From false homogeneity, heterogeneity emerges: Kavula, once beheaded, becomes a beneficent entity bringing fertility to his devotees. Sacrificial movement takes us from homogeneity to heterogeneity, from the „One” to the „Many.”¹⁰ Temporality, in emptiness, is a revelation of meaning whose immanence escapes capture. Rather, the beheaded god returns to reap his reward, beheading his followers, ripping them apart to soak the earth in turn with streams of (imaginary) blood. Immanence is a ripping apart, a subduing of images and discordances. Heterogeneity is one with discord, a synonym for what Peter Schwenger, following Julia Kristeva, defines as „the abject”: „everything that betrays (...) coherence – the body’s wastes, its fluids, ruptures, and putrescences – is associated with the abject.”¹¹ The Ndembu know, or at least knew, at some point in the past, that the killing of God/s has consequences. Removal of the foundation constitutes part of a cycle, a pendulum swining between the One and the Many, the homogenous and the heterogenous. But what if we slaughter the god/s one too many times? Reality, once conceived of as „devoid”, necessitates the radical rethinking and revisal, even reversal, of sacrificial practice. The head of Kavula rolling upon the ground is empty, hence real. His presence is the absent presence of a divinity that cannot be born, hence the need to force Kavula into rebirth. This divine head, once removed from its prostrate, helpless body, comes to be saturated with the spirit of the earth. Lacerated by his executioners, the god is himself transformed into a detemporalized ecstatic entity, a process of movement that punishes the subversion of his oneness and bodily coherence through the violation of his executioner’s integrity. It is especially interesting that the Ndembu seem to equate fertility – productivity – with the return of the beheaded resurrected divinity. Not only does Kavula die and regain presence through the advent of his revenge, but also, Kavula reattaches those who have lost their heads to their land. Removal of the head is a prelude to the continuation of empty existence and nontologically embedded work.

Repetition is an elementary desire; in the shadow of the death/s of the god/s, we feel a strong desire to make the world whole again. This need is a constant itch, an anguishing feeling of inadequacy as compared with the divinities whose blood we spill. Secretly, even the most fanatical atheists, deep down, feel the need to be subjected to absolute power. „Repetition” is, essentially, „un-power.”¹² The un-power of a beheaded demi-god illustrates all too clearly that „abstinence is the definition of divinity.”¹³ What is it, after all, that characterizes, first and foremost, the Tathagatas? It is the circumstance of their emptiness that guarantees their „reality.” Their reality is one with the emptiness of the world, as perceived by corpses perception. One important characteristic of true Tathagatas is their „being at ease with the sounds of Brahma.”¹⁴ In other words, those enlightened by awareness of emptiness are capable of listening to repetitive recitations. Emptiness has an irreducible aural dimension. Perception is not exclusively visual, but a holistic process of opening up and lacerating oneself to the vacuity of this universal black cemetery otherwise known as the multiverse. Realities present themselves in the mode of dirty multiplicity. Empty relationalities, exterminated in their groundlessness, exude maternal melodies interspersed with unpredictable swings and gyrations. Indifference and sameness, when understood in a nontological sense, need not lead to the ignorance of relations. It is „with a perfectly calm

⁹ Blanchot 1995 [1980]: 2

¹⁰ Turner 1977: 193

¹¹ Schwenger, Peter (2000) "Corpsing the image." *Critical Inquiry* 26.3: 399

¹² Blanchot 1995 [1980]: 9

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 120

mind” that we must, if we are to ascend to knowledge of singularity, dwell on „emptiness and signlessness.”¹⁵ This dwelling upon is also, of necessity, a dwelling-within. Experiencing empty signlessness is as much an aural experience as it is a visual one. It is actually much simpler to feel the absence of the beheaded Absolute upon our tortured, anguished bodies than to envision divine abstinence. All views, in the absence of both absence and presence, must be abandoned. In a later section of the *Suramgamasamadhi Sutra*, the Buddha makes the stunning claim that „all dharmas (...) are perverse views.”¹⁶ Because of its radical impurity and heterogeneity, this thought is one that the Buddha, significantly, cannot announce directly; it is imputed to Gopaka, a minor divinity, somewhat akin to what we would consider a demon. It could easily be dismissed as an incidental remark of no great significance, were it not for the fact that the text makes clear it is Gopaka who represents the accepted Madhyamaka position! Gopaka is capable of changing bodies, of going outside of himself and transforming into a woman and back again.¹⁷ Yet this change, when viewed from the perspective of emptiness, must be regarded as itself illusory. As Gopaka maintains, „dharmas do not consist of either 'fulfilment' or 'changing.’”¹⁸ Truths, in their metastability, are indifferent and „free of duality.”¹⁹ Not only is divinity characterized by abstinence, but fulfilment also exterminates itself into ecstasy. Such a position would be akin to the condition of solipsistic wholeness described by Nicola Masciandaro: „I, effect of the universe, am enclosed inside of myself, I am forced away from my transcendent dwelling place and come to abide outside of all things, and I do so by virtue of my supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, without myself.”²⁰ To remain, albeit without oneself, is persistence after removal of every single duality.

Dwelling within the non-dual, one becomes indifferentiable, a cloud of nonsuffering inexistence. Alphonso Lingis, in a way not unlike that of Buddhist ethics, connects enjoyment with death. „Every enjoyment”, writes Lingis, „is a death”, a process of disaggregation, a „dissolution into the beginningless, endless, and fathomless plenum of the elemental.”²¹ This dissolution returns us to the earth. As with the Ndembu people who sacrifice their heads to Kavula, enjoyment in general allows the subject to blend into the elemental plenum. Exterminated reality reveals the advent of the plenum in all its emptiness. The plenum is nothing but the original oneness of time, the event of our own advent. Existence is a tendency towards sacrifice, the stained tiled floor that unsleeves us from ourselves. Located within suchness is the return of cremation trenches, supporting access to an alterity offered in suspense. The other is nothing, nothing other than the elemental itself: „the face of the other is a surface of the elemental – the place where the elemental addresses, appeals and requires.”²² Located within the elemental, we are immersed in enjoyment of the solar, albeit a solarly tainted with rotten decay and cold, frozen Arctic liquidity. It is not we who make demands upon the anonymity of the elemental; quite the reverse: the elemental approaches us, demanding veneration.²³ Meaning is exclusively relational. Individual human voices are, for Lingis, continuations of the elemental plenum, resoundings, repetitions of „the murmur of the

¹⁵ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 126

¹⁶ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 156

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 157

²⁰ Masciandaro, Nicola (2010) „Anti-Cosmis. Black Mahapralaya”, in: Masciandaro, Nicola (ed. 2010) *Hideous Gnosis. Black Metal Theory Symposium I*. (Charleston: CreateSpace), 77

²¹ Lingis, Alphonso (1994) *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 75-6

²² Lingis 1994: 78

²³ Ibid

world.”²⁴ Their purpose is to repeat this murmuring anonymity. Offered within suspense, communication reveals a troubled land of negative interpenetration, a hoarse, raucous tonality, a world of aural stripping away, a naked exposure that corpses bodily perception and sense. Exposure is the incoherence of everything touched by surfaces of mourning, resonating with the sinister murmur of trans-appropriation. *Trepaneringsritualen*'s music is, according to our thesis, precisely such a persistent reverberation, trans-appropriating the non-dual maternal melody of the dark abyssal matrix. Leon Marvell has speculated upon the necessity of opening up discourse to the substratum he chooses to call „the matrixial void.” This opening is at once the original oneness of a corpseslike vacuity and an element that organizes itself, a „Receptacle” whose formlessness constitutes an invitation to violation and violent laceration.²⁵ Maternal melodies allow us to open up the non-dual space of the substratum. Autopoiesis is „immanent and virtual”,²⁶ the immanence of an image whose impure contemplation is always linked to the melancholy act of mourning. Unclean existence allows the user of auto-annihilating mutilation to read the Outside of non-substantial simplicity. To envision a lacerated, corpseslike image is to simply be, without clarity, without content, without god/s. Presentation, when it is transformed into the constant underlining of repetitive negativity, reminds us of visual pervasiveness.

What is seen at the end may also be seen at the beginning, but this devastated scenery attains its pinnacle in a Middle that is distant from everything, including the middle itself. As one study relating to the aesthetics of corpses emphasizes, the (re)presentation of corpses reveals „an affinity between theater and death”, while also serving as a reminder „that the etymology of the word morgue in French derives from an archaic verb that means 'to stare.'”²⁷ Vision is inherently corpseslike; the morgue is the place of liberating vision, a place wherein exposure meets with the funerary character of all existents. Abjection wins out, producing encapsulations that never cease to shock with their subversive promises of extermination. Returning to the morgue, we are confronted with an abyssal, insane reversibility: those who sacrifice can never be sure of whether the sacrificed shall return or not. Extermination reverses itself through autosacrificial praxis. To visit the morgue and stare at corpses is to look at the infinite absence of time. Within the catastrophe, we remain within the ecstatic realm of extratemporality. Searching for a set of sensory accidents, the cursor of the mouse happens upon *Trepaneringsritualen*'s „All Hail the Black Flame.”²⁸ These ambient noises formulate the desperation of life, a vitality whose finitude is constantly underlined by the bleakness of these dark melodies. *Trepaneringsritualen*'s musical world is a negativity that strips away the richly resonant skin of the listener, until nothing, not even emptiness, is left intact. Neither emptiness nor its contrary may be restored. Once we are situated in the vicinity of the „black sun”, our immanence is exemplified, flayed and burnt at the stake. Neither extreme may be followed: the body's wastes are thrown into indistinct coagulation. Outside of communicative exteriority is a communication through which „we make contact with inhuman things by embracing their forms and matter.”²⁹ What else, after all, could vision do, but become-corpsed, once it embraces the abject forms of rotting, helpless corpses. The sacrifice is committed to itself and nothing else. Within „All Hail the Black Flame”, there is an implicit heliocentrism at work, an abyssal veneration of a decaying, rotten celestial star and its incestuous relationship with a dying Earth. The Earth apparent „warming” is, in truth, a

²⁴ Lingis 1994: 15

²⁵ Marvell, Leon (2011) „The pineal eye and the matrixial void”, *Column*, vol. 7, 86

²⁶ Marvell 2011: 87

²⁷ Wigoder, Meir (2012) "The Acrobatic Gaze and the Pensive Image in Palestinian Morgue Photography." *Critical Inquiry* 38.2: 268

²⁸ *Trepaneringsritualen* (2012) „All Hail the Black Flame”, album: *Deathward, to the Womb* (label: Release the Bats Records, producer: Thomas Ekelund)

²⁹ Lingis 1994: 15

mere prelude to the coming Arctic cold. Or rather, a Marslike unbecoming of the terrestrial atmosphere. *Trepaneringsritualen*'s music is a message from a cold, dead Earth, an Earth bereft of all life, with the possible exception of bacteriological agents. These sounds are indifferent, committed to nothing apart from the abyss. One could only imagine „Alone/A/Cross/Abyss”, for instance, being played on the surface of a completely abandoned, desolate, barren planet, a piece of rock destined for subsumption within an irrupting, doomed star.³⁰ All existence is doomed to disappearance; even the Sun that would consume Earth is indistinct from the blackness of the universe, hence the necessity of recognizing blackness within its bright, hellish flames. Aspasia Stephanou compares the aural strategies of black metal musicians with Orpheus' descent into Hell: „Orpheus' katabasis or descent into the subterranean realm can be paralleled to the (...) schizotragedy of the black metal musician whose 'becoming chthonic' entails a non-escapist flight into the chthonic earth and a radical openness, seeking to devour and be devoured.”³¹ Melancology is a „double movement” that conjures a „black ecology and a black logos.”³² The desire that would transcend even transcendence itself is a flaying of exposed, vulnerable corpses, a tendency whose dissolving powers are unappropriable in their impropriety.

Sacrifice cannot be contrasted to anything. What black metal (and – it should be added, industrial drone) music does is sacrifice the pleasure of the listener to the indistinct inhumanity burrowing itself through industrialized noise towards the blasphemously ignored receiver of this nihilating message. Contamination is the rule within indistinct aural coagulation. Exposure, in this deathly droning, refers to plurality transported to the state of anguished self-surrender. Within the realm of mutual interpenetration, as exemplified by the morgue (the place wherein we stare), „the sun of life and the darkness of death are mutually contaminated.”³³ Rebirth takes place constantly, betraying the hiddenness of torn veils. Truly, desirous vision is corpses through the indifference that subsist within the blackened gaze. As Schwenger reminds us, all images are inherently corpseslike dead remnants, the final dregs of ruined beings: „the 'living image', whatever its subject matter, is always the figurative corpse of what has been alive.”³⁴ No image, even the „living image”, is ever truly animate. Every image is a reification of living reality; between the two, no correspondence is possible. It is through their unreality that images are alive, and through their reality that the (re)presented are (and remain) dead. Depiction is dereliction. Reza Negarestani has called for a renewed embrace of the Earth, albeit in a non-nostalgic manner. Rather than thinking of it as a permanent, bright object, a place for optimism and futurity, we must think of Earth „as a fractal clump”, „a passing oval meteorite whose crater has already bored into the skin of astral corpses.”³⁵ Our substratum may, when viewed from an impossible extratemporal perspective, be perceived as a nonsuffering being-thrown of waste, a power of suicidal auto-dissolution. Of Earth, there quite possibly shall only remain one or two traces, disaggregated asteroids that crash into distant planets. Negarestani's vision, for all its temporal distance, is by far the most realistic one. From an ecological standpoint, heliocentrism is unsustainable. Once „heliocentric slavery” is abolished, once the Sun is disregarded altogether, discursive space opens up to the renewed appreciation of the Earth's „aquatic vitality”, an abyssal liquidity, an

³⁰ *Trepaneringsritualen* (2014) „Alone/A/Cross/Abyss”, album: *Perfection and Permanence* (label: Cold Spring, producer: Thomas Ekelund)

³¹ Stephanou, Aspasia (2014) „Black Sun”, in: Wilson, Scott (ed. 2014) *Melancology. Black Metal Theory and Ecology* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books), 50

³² Stephanou 2014: 49

³³ Stephanou 2014: 50

³⁴ Schwenger 2000: 396

³⁵ Negarestani, Reza (2010) 'Solar Inferno and the Earthbound Abyss.' in: *Our Sun (Pamela RosenKranz)* (Milan: Venice Branch & Mousse Publishing), 3

„earthbound abyss which erupts in the form of corrosive oil.”³⁶ Not only is oil corrosive, it is also flammable. This flammability refocuses us to the inherent message of „All Hail The Black Flame”: the flame’s dark nature shows the possibility of a subterranean non-transcendence, a transcendence-in-reverse. The music of *Trepaneringsritualen* constitutes a ladder leading downwards, into the labyrinthine mess which is the underworld. To create black flammability is to unleash the corrosive power of the „earthbound abyss.” Revelation allows agents to release the possibility of mirroring. There are literally billions upon billions of hidden realms, functioning as cremation trenches, consuming agents caught within Earth’s grip. There can be no escaping the black flame. As opposed to views that would place the Sun in the position of a royal sovereignty, Negarestani asserts, not unjustifiably, that „Sun itself is a contingency whose interiorized conception is in the process of loosening into the abyss.”³⁷ Such a dead star, once it explodes, cannot be speculatively sewn back together. Eternalism is nothing other than the purity of a moment that has attained existence within the substratum here and now. Being lowered into the advent, perception must return to the richly resonant pluralism of its forms.

There are many ways of dying, of lowering oneself into the ground, of becoming an inhabitant of a morgue. Not even the greatest of suns is capable of dictating our own death, in spite of the ambitions of ostensibly bright heliocentrism. Suspense tears open perception, until the return of form becomes the advent of inexistent indifference: „we have to look into the core of blackness.”³⁸ How can one observe a black sun without becoming blinded, without becoming ground down into mincemeat? One possible aesthetic solution to this dilemma is that attempted by Jean Des Esseintes, hero of Joris-Karl Huysmans’ decadent novel, *A rebours*. In a scene of great importance, Des Esseintes decides to decorate the shell of his tortoise with the most expensive and brightest gems. This experiment is apparently a conventionally heliocentric one, a method of producing an excess of light that would bathe Des Esseintes’ chateau in solar light. Indeed, the bejeweled tortoise is explicitly compared to the sun. We are informed that it „blazed as brightly as any sun, throwing out its rays over the carpet, whose tints turned pale and weak.”³⁹ What else could this be, if not the triumphant procession of an oppressive, sovereign Sun, a phallicized celestial emperor who rules over his emasculated subjects? Des Esseintes’ decorated tortoise seems to be a paradigmatic solar monarch, a benevolent emperor spreading enlightenment to all entities subjected to the influence of his patriarchy. But the truth is far more complex. As opposed to the bright, white Sun, the Sun/tortoise constructed by Des Esseintes is designed to spread death, to deaden all other sources of color, to drown out all alternative lightsources: the tortoise is intended by the bored aristocrat to be „a brilliant object that would kill everything around it, drowning the gleams of silver in a golden radiance.”⁴⁰ Even silver must be displaced by the gleams of this dark sun. Yet Des Esseintes’ tortoise is far more Satanic than divine. The awakening that accompanies the return of form to formlessness is a source of anguish, the opening of the skin to the radiance of a subterranean plenum. Through his decoration of the tortoise, Des Esseintes condemns himself to damnation. The tortoise, it turns out, dies, unable „to bear the dazzling luxury imposed upon it, the glittering cape in which it had been clad, the precious stones which had been used to decorate its shell like a jewelled ciborium.”⁴¹ From a dark creature, Des Esseintes attempts to create an object that shines, destroying everything with its blinding light. The flaming colors of the tortoise constitute a black flame, a dissolving astral entity that

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Negarestani 2010: 5

³⁸ Stephanou 2014: 49

³⁹ Huysmans, Joris-Karl (2003 [1884]) *Against Nature* (London and New York: Penguin), 41

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Huysmans 2003 [1884]: 49

produces nothing apart from incoherence and funereality. Luxury is the antithesis of life; luxurious light is pure darkness, desubjectivizing and dismembering vitalism. Squashed by the oppressiveness of luxury, the tortoise becomes an infinitely dark spot, a beacon shining with black light. As Rodolphe Gasché writes, „the traditional symbol of the tortoise represents an animal of darkness and evil, struggling against spirit, light, and everything elevated.”⁴² The tortoise is a black animal, an agent opposed to everything spiritual. It is the impossibility of elevation that prevents this dark spot from becoming anything other than what it is. And yet, Gasché believes that Des Esseintes’ experiment is a success, in that he succeeds, against all odds, in producing light from darkness. This light is a murderous emanation, a negativity that cannot be expressed, not even in the form of photographed corpses. Desubjectivation removes the possibility of any middle, of any distance separating perception from its incoherent object. Visibility only pertains to a small slice of the empty multiverse. One recent study has mentioned the possibility that „the lightest supersymmetric particle will not reside in the visible sector” of the multiverse.⁴³ A phenomenology of dark matter should, ideally, take into account the possibility of hiddenness. The „lightest visible supersymmetric particle” (LVSP) is, according to the authors of the report, „very likely unstable. It is non-generic to avoid sizeable kinetic mixing and light hidden sector states.”⁴⁴

Removed from plurality and mixing, the lightest of particles, the darkened Tathagatas remain real in their unreality. Everything, once collapsed into lightness, becomes corrected, that is: withdrawn. Obscurity is a place outside of textuality, outside of language. There is not outside, save that which is outside of itself. Excess is the betrayal of objects that present themselves as images. Everything touched by the black light of Des Esseintes’ tortoise is killed, gutted, deadened, obscured by the light of a Sun that shines from *beneath*. Speech and rhetoric, as emanations of the elemental, outlive their subjects. Similarly, the black light emanating from the tortoise outlives its usefulness. We read in the *Suramgamasamadhi Sutra* a description of a prototypical bodhisattva: „he never sees the self-nature of beings but, in order to ripen them, he speaks of beings. He does not see either a living being or an individual, but he speaks of a living being and an individual.”⁴⁵ Such a mode of perception, far from constituting a failure of vision, is actually a method that gains access to the obscurity lying outside of possibility. There is no duplicity in such an apparently hypocritical position: coherence is maintained within the wasteful incoherence of a speech delivered to vacuity and chaos. Instead of forgetting the Thing, melancholic language actually delivers us to the relentless acceptance of blackened, necrotic beings: „language stages the melancholic void, emptiness and loss by giving presence to the Thing.”⁴⁶ This „giving presence” is the utmost revelation of bodily incoherence. In *Trepaneringsritualen*, there is a complete lack of enjoyment, so to speak. Most certainly this does not mean that Thomas Martin Ekelund’s music is unenjoyable: quite the obverse! What we understand under „the lack of enjoyment” is a jouissance directed towards the darkness of a matrixial void. Such sounds transport us to the desubjectification of detemporalized incoherence. As disaster, Ekelund’s aural world is a form of aural skepticism, albeit a skepticism that hates itself, a negation that negates the possibility of both neutrality and engagement. Even indifference is not indifferent enough to the truly empty ones: „skepticism is indeed the return of the refuted, that which erupts anarchically, capriciously, and irregularly.”⁴⁷ Skepticism, at least in the mode of self-

⁴² Gasché, Rodolphe (1988) "The falls of history: Huysmans's *A rebours*." *Yale French Studies* 74, 201

⁴³ Acharya, Bobby S., et al. (2016) "The lightest visible-sector supersymmetric particle is likely to be unstable." *arXiv preprint arXiv:1604.05320*, 1

⁴⁴ Acharya 2016: 4

⁴⁵ Lamotte 2003 [1965]: 133-4

⁴⁶ Stephanou 2014: 51

⁴⁷ Blanchot 1995 [1980]: 76

referential suicidal necrophilia, the love of one's (dead) Self, is volcanic, an eruption of that which should have disappeared. One has not the faintest idea of where *Trepaneringsritualen*'s sounds emerged. To be sure, there are a variety of musical predecessors too many to enumerate in the context of this brief investigation. Ours is not an exercise in musical theory, but rather an attempt to conceptualize the sheer annihilating emptiness that presents itself in the form of this necrological aural atmosphere.

To listen to *Trepaneringsritualen* is to let one's head be trepanned so that one may learn to see with the pineal eye, the organ René Descartes so feverishly searched for. Neutrality is the irrefutable voice that gives presence to the community of nothingness, to that which is „other than being, and draws near unordered, unchosen, unwelcomed.”⁴⁸ Descartes held that the pineal gland was the source of spiritual movements and the alternation of passions: „the part of the body in which the soul directly exercises its functions is not the heart at all, or the whole of the brain. It is rather the innermost part of the brain, which is a certain very small gland situated in the middle of the brain's substance and suspended above the passage through which the spirits in the brain's anterior cavities communicate with those in its posterior cavities. The slightest movements on the part of this gland may alter very greatly the course of these spirits, and conversely any change, however slight, taking place in the course of the spirits may do much to change the movements of the gland.”⁴⁹ The imageless interiority of the brain is the middle path to nothing apart from the shock of chaotic fascination. Elusive rags of flesh are animated by the fascinating Third Eye, this innermost place that is devoid, derived from a cyclopic primordial origin. Immanence, viewed by the inmost pineal eye, is the absolute zero of the inverted Outside. The pineal gland is the infinitely accidental shunyata that breeds intersectional space, „the space of relation between what cannot be spoken and the speech that destroys.”⁵⁰ Dissonantly accommodative, the tones of *Trepaneringsritualen* open our Third Eyes to the absolute spillage of this nontological innermost space. Our pineal glands are the inmost sacrificial dear hearts, circulatory organs installed within our Logos. *Shunyata* strips away the absolute of both Inside and Outside. O, this black object, let it awaken! Negativity without god/s, decaying into the abyss of ancient diversions: this tendency to sacrifice is a blackened, dried gland inserted into the brains of unknowing apes... So indefinite is the originary violence of intelligent installation, that we can only wish to return to a family of Tathagatas situated within an obscure cloud-palace. Our heartfelt wish is to be incinerated within the infinite revelation of one hundred thousand bodhisattvas. David Tibet of *Current 93* sings hauntingly of this abyssal, twinkling stripping away of exteriority:

„And I wished to die inside of you
And push up into your heart so violently that
Face to face with matrix creatrix am
The inmost light
The inmost night”⁵¹

Face to face with the vaginal disaster of the sacrificial matrix, we are rendered one with the inmost night, the indefinite silence of a substratum without language, without words, without, in the final instance, accomplishment. Nothing is accomplished, nothing is attained. Only the

⁴⁸ Blanchot 1995 [1980]: 87

⁴⁹ Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R., Murdoch, D. (1984) *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol I.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 340

⁵⁰ Masciandaro 2010: 83

⁵¹ *Current 93* (1996) „The Carnival is Dead and Gone”, album: *All the Pretty Little Horses* (label: Durtro, producers: Steven Stapleton, David Tibet, Michael Cashmore)

Third Eye, opened to the infinitude of neutrality, is capable of ridding itself of doubt. Any attributes that formerly remained have been burnt away in the inmost fire of the dark night. How could any karmic inheritance pertain, in the inmost depths of the mind's middle path? Whatever traces can be picked up from the rottenness of this ground are shards of glass, remnants of shattered mirrors. This world of decadence we have left was truly no more than „a room, where mirror echoed mirror.”⁵² But in the absence of a mirror, what possibly could remain of that which was – formerly – reflected?

Music

- Current 93* (1996) „The Carnival is Dead and Gone”, album: *All the Pretty Little Horses* (label: Durtro, producers: Steven Stapleton, David Tibet, Michael Cashmore)
- Trepaneringsritualen* (2014) „Alone/A/Cross/Abyss”, album: *Perfection and Permanence* (label: Cold Spring, producer: Thomas Ekelund)
- Trepaneringsritualen* (2012) „All Hail the Black Flame”, album: *Deathward, to the Womb* (label: Release the Bats Records, producer: Thomas Eklund)

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⁵² Huysmans 2003 [1884]: 11