

Questions concerning Ideas and Thoughts

On his blog The Whim, Nicola Masciandaro writes about your album Renihilation. He talks about the *rattle* as being an important aspect of your music and he sees the rattle as a 'tool par excellence for making happen what you cannot make happen, what only happens on its own. Rain, grace, etc.' He then goes on to distinguish between the *death rattle* and its faster aggressive inversion the *life rattle*. Would you say your notion of the blast and burst beat can be distinguished in the same manner? (<http://thewhim.blogspot.com/2009/09/random-notes-on-liturgys-renihilation.html>)

Yes, I think so. What is interesting to me about the blast beat is how static, uniform, ambient it is. That's only true for black metal - in the context of grindcore or death metal the blast beat is something different, because it only gets used now and then. In death metal a blast beat is the most brutal of a number of different techniques, and has much more to do with killing than with death. But in black metal where the blast beat is the primary beat it crosses this interpretive threshold and becomes paper thin or like a whisp of smoke. The burst beat is a step above and beyond the blast beat, a resurrection, like a stopped heart that sputters back into its periodic beating

You have stated that you envision a genuinely American black metal, which would be spontaneous, chaotic and free. But how far are you willing to take that freedom in the sense of its style, aren't there certain boundaries to keep it labeled 'black' metal, or even 'metal' for that matter?

I don't mean freedom in terms of style, though. Black metal has an an orthodox style that has to be maintained. What I mean is more of a free vibe. Take free jazz as an example - the rules, the style of free jazz is actually very strict and limited, more so than most styles of music. But the freedom has to do with a certain spontaneity, an affirmative attitude, a chaos. And I don't bring up free jazz because I think American black metal should be stylistically more like free jazz - I only use it as an example of a free form that is stylistically strict. That said, the spirit of free jazz, or of transcendentalism, or of aleatoric music and the New York school, or of the beats and so on... this sort of very American affirmation of becoming is something that I am interested in tapping into using the techniques of black metal.

Some people have complained about your sound being 'too experimental', what's your opinion on that? Can anything ever be too experimental in the arts?

Ha well I guess there's no such thing as "too experimental", though at a certain point I get annoyed by experimental bands who play the same card of unplanned

noisy improvisation over and over again... like Acid Mothers Temple is an example of a band like that, though I like them a lot, I don't see the need to have more than one or two of their records. As for Liturgy, I don't really understand why someone would call us experimental. Our songs are all structured with verses, choruses and bridges, they use traditional diatonic harmony and melody... it's all very traditional in terms of the basic songwriting. I think people hear the rhythmic chaos, the burst beat and so on, and the raw recording style, and don't hear past it if they're expecting a certain kind of experience from metal. Maybe that's why we seem experimental.

Both the music and the vocals seem to be laden with an energy, with intensities. Or perhaps more the promise of intensities; virtual intensities that need to be actualized by the one who perceives. What role do these intensities play, in your view?

Yeah I mean the concept behind the music is to be a sort of mimicry of intensities in the Deleuzian sense, sort of a paradoxical effort to represent the virtual or at least to activate an experience of it or open it. I don't have such original thoughts about the intensities and their role - it's pretty similar to Artaud's vision of a theater of cruelty. Like that a performance should open up that space of impossibility or of possibility of possibility and the concomitant sense of exhilaration, the fragile pulsating life and so on. There's an ethical dimension to it because it's a fight against striated space, the enclosure of society etc, in the service of all that is currently inconceivable and the form-generating life force that allows for hope for the future. A lot of people aren't interested in that side of things, and they don't have to be. I've noticed that a lot of people who listen to any kind of rock get pissed off when someone talks about an articulated aim or theory behind the music. It makes me a little uncomfortable. For artists and for "serious music" it's ok to be articulate but not for metal. I almost hesitate to go into this stuff for that reason, ha, but I can't help it I guess.

There's definitely a sense of spirituality in your music. You have talked a lot about the transcendental powers of art in general and black metal in particular. Do you believe that music, your music, can cause a spiritual awakening, or a spiritual shock in people? That it can make them experience something, that it puts a choice in front of them, a choice of existence?

Yeah I don't think it's so controversial to say that music has spiritual power. I mean when the counterculture revolution really got started, everyone saw it that way. First with Ginsberg etc and then the huge rock acts, Jimi Hendrix and so on. That movement was all about a sort of spiritual and political utopia that would be activated by poetry and music. A totally Blakean utopia. These days people don't take that seriously, but I'm much more into that vision of what music is about. In the 80s and 90s counterculture meant something very different. It was more tribal, pissed off, negative, and most importantly it was about identifying with a particular subculture. I'm a punk, a skin head, and intellectual indie rocker, an emo kid... all these kids defining themselves against the mainstream and with a subculture. And music was the vehicle for that. That's how I was as a kid too. But I see that as a

fallen version of counterculture, I see it as sort of toxic. What's weird is that these days that attitude is still around to a degree, except the subcultures are more like brands or lifestyle choices, because everyone kind of likes everything. It's all so meaningless, it isn't really political like it was... I think that's a sign that the punk attitude is dying and that rock will go more back in the direction of utopianism in the next decade.

Does it hurt you, emotionally or intellectually, that there are people who believe your music to be a pastiche of black metal, an ironic commentary of the genre?

Ha no it doesn't hurt... or not too much. These things are so strange. We recorded *Renihilation* without a label, and then 20 Buck Spin, and underground metal label picked us up. And that led to reviews of the record in all those blogs and magazines etc. If that hadn't happened, it's possible the true metal scene never would have even found out about us or taken us seriously enough to even voice criticism. We had no idea what was going to happen, because until then we were never playing shows with metal bands, it was always with like noisy experimental bands. So I'm grateful that kvlt metal dudes even know about Liturgy. I mean I don't think there's anyone who thinks the music is actually ironic, like *Impaled Northern Moon Forest* or something. I think there are just people who resent that we don't identify with all the signifiers of being a metalhead - and we don't, so that's all there is to it.

You have talked about transcending individuality, about overcoming oneself and one's hatred, sorrow and isolation. I don't know if you are familiar with the work of Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher, but he advocated a true understanding of the self, an individuation of the self, in order to obtain a better world. How do you see the self, and what place does it have in black metal?

Well if we're going to talk about Jung and individuation, I'd put it in the context of the previous question. The idea of individuation is what keeps me going when it comes to the issue of criticism about Liturgy's formal and aesthetic choices. Individuation is the painful and violent process of breaking through a currently active social form and allowing some living force, the true self and so on, or an aspect of being that is currently recessive and that society needs or whatever, to realize itself and establish itself on the basis of its own paradigm - to break out of orbit and make use of existing forms to establish your own system. I'm all about that, and the existence of Liturgy is my own little individuation, for whatever its worth to create a rupture with a tiny subgenre of extreme metal. That said, I am less interested in Jung and more interested in the sort of French Lacanian version of the same thing, separation, or the Event, because with the French we have the absolutely new, whereas with Jung the individuation is always giving birth to something that already exists in a way.

Black metal, as you have aptly described yourself, is one of the

most esoteric forms of extreme metal. What does esoterism mean for you?

I think there are two aspects of the esoteric. First, in the most general sense, it's something secret, meant only for a small elite. Second, there's the more actual history of esoteric cults, the pythagoreans, hermeticism, kaballah, the perennial philosophy etc. Black metal touches on both of these. I reject the former, the abstract esoteric, the elitism, and affirm the occult side.

With transcendental black metal you aim some sort of purification of black metal. Can it ever be completely pure considering its socio-historical background of 'the corrupt'?

No I don't think it can ever be completely pure.

Black Metal has often focused on natural and historical concepts, on archetypal imagery. Do you think that that's a necessary element of the genre?

I could imagine someone making black metal, using the musical technique, and entirely rejecting the concern with history and that whole aesthetic. But in a way, yeah, it wouldn't be black metal. To me it is very important that black metal is so history oriented, because most rock is so amnesiac, which makes it shallow.

About the treatise Transcendental Black Metal

In the prologue you write about transcendental black metal being a mode of sacrifice, in the sense of the Nietzschean will to power. Through a (self)destruction, it could transform into the basis of something new, much like Abraxas and the destroying of the egg (its world) in the work of Herman Hesse ("The bird fights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Who would be born must destroy a world. The bird flies to God. That God's name is Abraxas.") My question is though, transcendental black metal could be de destruction, the sacrifice, what to what does it give birth?

Nietzsche talked about the destruction of Christianity and then a "moral interregnum" that would follow during which people could freely and experimentally generate new value systems. He was pretty enigmatic about whether the moral interregnum would ever end, or whether there might be some kind of new universal system created for future humans... e.g. at the end of Daybreak, about flying out to sea and possibly activating something new, finding a new continent. That's sort of where I see counterculture. It's a destruction of everything that was considered moral in the west for the past millennium, but there is a lot of

confusion... drugs turn out to not be so awesome, aging rockers regret their life choices and so on. But I think it's really important to affirm the idea that something new could come, that all the mistakes were worth it. Like "Weak Messianism" in Benjamin in a way. So openness to the absolutely new, to the inconceivable, is very important... and the inconceivable happens more and more often these days.

You see a break in American black metal with the European, or Hyperborean black metal. Do you think European black metal still has a future, or will it slowly choke in its own excrement if it doesn't evolve?

Ha, this really does not have so much to do with geography or even style. I don't think European metal needs to shape up or ship out or something like that. I mean, there is something tongue in cheek about the whole manifesto, to be honest. I mean, who writes manifestos any more? In a way part of why I wrote it is that I'm interested in how it's possible to present a vision, make a strong claim, and have people react positively and negatively, to like watch blogs digest it. Part of me is very inspired when it comes to Liturgy and all it represents, and another part of me is just kind of watching curiously. It surprises me that I take this so seriously.

You also talk about a new, hidden relationship between art, politics, ethics and religion. Are you familiar with the work of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who advocated an interdisciplinary approach of art, science and philosophy? To him, each discipline should reach out to another when it encounters problems that it can't resolve with its own matters. Do you see something similar happening in black metal? That it needs to reach out towards other genres, or other disciplines even outside art?

Yes I am a fan of Deleuze. And I tend to accept his view of creative evolution in terms of assemblages of multiplicities, with deterritorialization etc. I think that black metal is - and it amazes me that more people don't make note of this - a trading of code between death metal and the Romantic era in western classical music. In a way that's totally obvious, and there are awful bands that exemplify this in a way that makes it seem disgustingly cliched (Old Man's Child etc, bands playing along with string orchestras - which misses the point). It connects both musically and culturally to Romanticism, and I think that is very important because in doing so it reaches outside of rock altogether in a very real way. Why is that important? Because it isn't meaningful any longer for counterculture to be anti-west. Everyone knows the USA and Europe will very soon no longer dominate the globe, and that the real enemy is nihilism, abstraction etc, so that opens up a whole treasure trove of western culture to politically minded musicians.

The Haptic Void to which you refer, the horizon of the teleological history, promises a lie, you say. A horizon cannot ever be reached. But in the longing to fulfill a lack, in the trying to

reach the horizon, new life can be obtained. Do you see this happening right now in American black metal, is it reaching for the horizon? Do you think it can also be dangerous, that it can try to hard and ends up becoming the death of itself?

I think American black metal should be about dying to the haptic void, accepting its nullity, and moving forward in a different way.

The blast beat of hyperborean black metal is a machinic throbbing that doesn't stop, goes into one direction. The burst beat that you have introduced, both in theory and in practice, seems to be more of an organic machine, one that goes forth, stops, changes speeds, refuses to be plugged into as the sole rhythm. It seems to be a form of continuous becoming, never reaching its final destination, always following lines of flight in a becoming intense. Do you think this is the key ingredient of transcendental black metal, and could this key also be used in a less extreme fashion in other genres?

Yes that is exactly what I think!

Lyrics

In the lyrics, the theme of renihilation seems to return in several songs. The 'spark with no cause / (...) the incantation uttered by no one' in Pagan Dawn. 'O absent law / (...) O mirror that does not reflect / (...) oh shadow that never was' in Mysterium. 'I claw through veil after veil' in Renihilation. How exactly do you place the negation of nihilism in this world? Do we go from a nothing through a nothing to a new nothing, a no-nothing, which therefore is? How does renihilation intertwine with existence?

I think of renihilation as an ethical stance, a negation of negation, which is a yes, but a sort of complicated one.

Do Beyond the Magic Forest and Behind the Void both refer to life beyond the Haptic Void? Is there a life possible there or would there be a true nihilism behind it, the degree zero, the absolute absence of intensities?

Yes I guess they're about the same thing that the idea of the Haptic Void from the manifesto is all about, though in the manifesto its more about a musical feeling and in the songs more about life in general. Yes I'd wager that there is life possible there.

Your lyrics are barely audible in the intense screams with which you deliver your vocals. How important is the content of your vocals in relation to the form? (“form gives way to form” in Ecstatic Rite).

I read in an review about your singing: “Hunt-Hendrix suffers for his words when he howls.” How much of yourself do you put into your singing? Is it the content or the style and intensity that demands the most of your inner self?

Screaming is a strange thing. Some times I wonder: what the hell am I doing? It feels very natural to do, I scream pretty easily. Honestly I wish there were a better way to do vocals than to scream. I'm beginning to feel too old for it.

Music

I've read a lot of references to your music being 'ghost-like', in its way of dealing with violence and beauty. There certainly seems to be an ephemeral quality to your songs, is that something you aim for consciously?

I wouldn't say we want the songs to be ghost-like, that sounds like the opposite of what we're going for. Visceral, ecstatic, alive.

There is a feeling of a coldness in your music, but one that seems to be cloaked in a warm shimmering of hope. The feeling that one should never give up, that one should always try, always become. Your music feels like a negation of catatonia. Do you consciously put something like that in your music?

Yes that sounds very much like renihilation to me.

There's a subtle brutality in your songs that recall influences outside metal. You have also stated that you get inspired by other artists, avant-garde music, free jazz. Do you think you could make music under the Liturgy moniker that is not black metal per se? For example a more noisy postpunk direction like

A Place To Bury Strangers, a band that came to my mind when listening to Liturgy?

I imagine that Liturgy will sound very different in a few years from the way it sounds now. Already our new record is very different from Renihilation. Definitely not interested in ever making the same record twice.

What's your view on the current American scene of black metal? Which bands do you think are the ones that are pulling the scene forwards, towards a renewal? What contemporary artist do you admire, in and/or outside the metalscene?

I really don't follow the black metal scene much. I love Krallice, they are great guys and their music is inspiring. Other than that I mostly listen to black metal from the past. Graveland etc. As for death metal, I think Portal is doing very interesting stuff. Honstly right now I listen to Lil Wayne more than anything else. I'm really into rap.

The material for Renihilation has been written by you, solo, a couple of years ago. Now that Liturgy is a band, does that influence the writing process? Are you already working on a new album?

Yes we've recorded a new one and are currently mixing. I still write the music, but knowing what the bandmembers are capable of influences the process... and we also have a sort of focus-grouping process in a way when I teach them the songs that influences aspects of the final form. The drumming is different on the new record, because on the last record Greg was in earnest trying to do the impossible things I'd try to get him to do, but now he has a whole set of techniques that approximate the ideal burst beat. It's less energetic but more controlled and detailed.

In April you will be performing at the Roadburn Festival in Holland. Are you familiar with this festival? They always program a lot of interesting bands, and even have one band be the curator of one day. This year it is Sunn o))) and they get to program the bands for a day and decide on extras such as lectures for example. What do you think of such an approach to a festival? If Liturgy would be curator, what kind of day could we expect?

Yes Roadburn is a very well known festival and we are excited to play it. I'm glad Swans is playing too, they're one of my favorite bands of all time.

Thank you very much for your time Hunter, I am much obliged!