

Death by any
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BY MORTEN HILLGAARD BÜLOW

ARTIST INTRODUCTION

On the next pages you will find three song lyrics which we see as aesthetic contributions to the ethico-political conversations of this issue. We recommend that you read the lyrics first, form your own impression, and then come back to this introduction afterwards to deconstruct them a bit with us.

As you will likely (hopefully) recognise when you read the lyrics, they quote, paraphrase, and draw inspiration from parts of the feminist academic tradition that queer death studies also draw on. They are, in short, aesthetic engagements with issues of power, subjectivity and death/dying/continuing on in other forms than the human. Before we go on to explain the art (something no artist probably should do, but, hey, let's queer those conventions too), let us just make a very short introduction to our band and the genre, in order to place the lyrics in their original context.

The lyrics belong to *Kami*, a Danish metal band, and were written for our recent EP *Sun Devour All* (Kami 2017). The name 'Kami' comes from Shintoism and means spirits or phenomena that, to quote Wikipedia, "can be elements of the landscape, forces of nature, as well as beings and the qualities that these beings express; they can also be the spirits of venerated dead persons". The genre of music we play is death metal, or rather, as we describe it, 'near death metal'; a term that signifies that our compositions nearly, but not quite, fit within the music genre of 'death metal', and also a term that we take as a guide to the creative outlets, musical and visual atmosphere of the band. In general this means, as the lyrics published here show, that our lyrics and sound revolves around topics such as loss, death, transformation, futility, and anger.

When you read the lyrics, then, keep in mind that they were originally meant to be listened to, sung using the distorted vocal

technique called growling, entangled in rhythmically complex, energetic, often loud, sounds from distorted guitars, bass and drums (you can find a link to the music in the reference list). The relation between content and form matters; in this case, the 'darker' themes of the lyrics and the affective pull and push of the music supplement each other.

Often, this music genre is portrayed as gendered in a certain stereotypical way (both by some musicians/fans and especially in mainstream media), and although we fit the stereotypes in some ways – as a band that currently consists of five white assigned-male-at-birth persons – we also have intersections, motivations and identifications that run contrary to such limiting stereotypes. That is why you find us here in this journal. We are a *near* death metal band, after all. And in broader terms, looking beyond the stereotypes, what we find is that the space that this music genre creates (also) allow for a multiplicity of bodies, gender expressions, affective states, vulnerabilities and joys to be present at the same time. The further from the mainstream, the queerer and friendlier it gets. Go and explore.

In our experience, death metal is a medium for affective states and themes that do not fit the mainstream, and it is a genre that often push back or tries to rebel against the mainstream in both its form and content. It is a place to explore and add an aggressive energy to the affects and themes mentioned above that are often distant and/or intellectualised in Western culture – to make them bodily and loud, to scream and sweat them out. This is, to our minds, the strength of this particular genre, this particular way of dealing with important issues such as death and dying: that we can use the very visceral and affective qualities of the genre's energy as concrete ways of 'coming to terms with death, dying and

mourning differently’, as this issue called for. ‘Death’ by any other genre would probably not smell as sweet.

In the next part of this introduction, we will shortly describe the inspirations and motivations for the lyrics. As this is an artist introduction – and space is limited – we have chosen mostly to keep it short, political, and pointing in many directions.

FLESHRAVEN

Fleshraven was created in response to the (for lack of better words) inhuman policies regarding boat refugees in the Mediterranean that have seen thousands of fugitives drowned on the banks of ‘Fortress Europe’; this is still going on, although media coverage and refugee numbers topped in 2015 (see UNHCR website). To us, the tragedy of these deaths – of unknown human beings seeking help and shelter in Europe – can find no meaning, no redeeming or legitimising political reasons. They only make sense as consequences of specific affects, namely fear and hope: the fears that drive humans to flee combined with their hopes for liveable lives elsewhere, which clashes against the more intangible fears of economic or social disruption and related hopes of control and quick solutions in Europe. While we understand the affects that drive the fugitives, the political affective states seem to us both to be out of proportion with the actual events and, worse yet, to create more problems and meaningless deaths on both sides of the fortress walls.

The text is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s famous gothic poem, *the Raven*, which, in this case, sees clearly what is going on while also pointing to the (again for lack of better word) madness of it all and tells us of it. As it is a well-read bird, it knows about Derrida’s notion of a ‘monstrous future’, which reminds us of the futility of trying to make the future predictable or programmable (Derrida 1995, 307; see also Bülow and

Holm 2016), and it definitely also knows Michel Foucault’s critical notions about power; since, as Foucault and the Raven agree, ‘everything is dangerous’, “the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger” (Rabinow and Rose 1994, 343). What the raven sees, then, is the futility of these deadly attempts of control, and the long-term consequences of such policies: that the almost panicked attempts to keep one purported danger out at the same time builds a wall within which we will all drown. It will be – or is – ethical, political and bodily suffocation. The only ones that benefit from all these deaths are the carrion birds.

THE DARK MULTIPLE

The title of this song is a paraphrase of Annemarie Mol’s ‘The body multiple’ (2002) which deals with the multiple ontological becoming of ‘the body’ within the medical system. *The Dark Multiple* takes us in a similar but different direction, namely into the ontological multiple that humans are when we consider the microbial multitudes that resides unseen on and within us, making us a ‘we’ rather than an ‘I’. As such, it takes its inspiration from feminist posthumanist and bioethical theorisings that de-centre and challenge the hegemonic Western notions of the human (e.g. Shildrick 2002; Braidotti 2013), particularly those that draw on microbiome research and gut feminism (Wilson 2015; Bencard 2015).

In a microbial perspective, the title and points of Shildrick’s (1999) paper *This Body Which is Not One*, take on new meanings. If we, as Shildrick suggests, stop trying to live up to a particular norm of selfhood and ideas of the well-demarcated, singular, subject, and instead take as a starting point that we are always already ‘monstrous’ – in this context meaning: multiple and open to our context and its unavoidable microbial encounters – this might

make us think differently not only about what kind of creature we are as humans but also about the relations we have to the world around us, to difference, relations, connections, networks, and the ethics of being in a world without human exceptionalism. To paraphrase Shildrick (1999, 90-91), if such singularity is a myth of modernity, the attempted limitation of the monstrous body is doomed to failure, and we need, then, to not only reconfigure ontology, but also to create a new form of ethics. We need such new configurations of our relationship to the world in order to better deal with our place in it in a way that, hopefully, creates less suffering.

One suggestion would be to think about our relationship to the microbiome in terms of ‘rhizomatic agency’ – a Deleuzian term that, among other things, can be used to emphasise multiple, non-hierarchical trans-species connections; in *The Dark Multiple* this term is placed next to ‘parasitic symbiocyty’¹ which might relate to a more Pasteurian-like notion of human-microbiome interaction as a kind of battle where bacteria are seen as invading, parasite-like, creatures that we might need some of, but where we should try to keep them out and destroy most of them, if possible. Thinking in these terms might also change our ideas about death, since the unseen liveliness that is also ‘us’, continues long after we are dead and already now is spread in every interaction we have with the world and others around us.

THE END

Relating this to the issue of death and dying, the final lyric, *The End*, offers a, somewhat, comforting thought we might also take from Deleuze and microbiome research: namely that dying only stops certain of our lively processes, but not all. In fact, to think of ‘death’ as an end is a limited perspective on what actually happens; parts of what makes us *us* already lives on in peo-

ple around us, and our death brings life to new multitudes. The Marxist heritage is clear: there can be no production without destruction.

The End is about death and transformation. The inspiration for this song was threefold: First, it came from a sense of acute political despair, irredeemable trouble, and impending ‘end-of-the-world’ feeling, which in turn is echoed, inspired by, and articulated within feminist scholarship such as Anna L. Tsing’s *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015). Second, as mentioned above, the Deleuzian idea about death as transformation forms the greater part of the text, which in the final stanzas is combined with the notion of final heat death, as described in the entropic theory of (world) decay. Third, *The End* was inspired by the artwork of British art duo French and Mottershead who explore the materiality of what happens to the dead human body over time in different contexts in their art series *Afterlife* (2016). French and Mottershead kindly gave permission for us to use a short extract of one of their early *Afterlife* pieces in an introductory composition called *Putrefaction*, which can be found on the EP right before *The End*. This artwork describes the bodily processes of putrefaction of a dead body left in a wood. This process, like the music, is far from still.

NOTE

1. Yes, you are right, the correct word is ‘symbiosis’ but that does not rhyme with ‘agency’, so we invented our own word. That is art’s privilege.

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Kami consists of:

Erik Ulrik Kirkegaard: lead vocals

Henrik Ståhlberg: guitar, vocals

Andreas Behrendt Lau: bass, vocals

Kristian Nessa: guitar

Morten Hillgaard Bülow: drums.

Lyrics on *Sun Devour All* and this introduction written by Morten Hillgaard Bülow

FLESHRAVEN

The night is nigh, quoth the raven
 The end is near
 Abandon both hope and fear
 Corpses rot on the shore
 Its autumn tide
 Feeds flesh to fear
 Of monstrous futures
 Unpredictable, unprogrammable
 Control, quoth the raven
 Won't get you far
 Everything is dangerous
 Don't try to deny
 The anxiety that makes you build
 Futile dreams

Of walls and autonomy
 Of ignorance of suffering
 Soon I'll feed, quoth the raven
 On flesh of hope and fear
 Autumn leaves on carcasses fall
 Winter sharp and discontent
 I'll feed, you'll see
 On your enmity
 You'll drown behind walls
 of dark attempts
 To not let me in
 But I'll come, quoth the raven, in the end

THE DARK MULTIPLE

We who are not one
 Spread out and transform
 Change and engage
 Become multiple

From the norm of singularity
 To post-pasteurian ecology
 Where are we now?

Rhizomatic agency
 Parasitic symbioticy

Let me shake your hand
 And share your unseen liveliness
 That spread out and continue
 Long after we're dead

Pluralistic ontology
 Infested diversity
 Eternal biotome

Under the skin
 beneath and within
 homeostatic microbiome
 this is more us than us

We who are not one
 spread out and become
 the dark multiple

THE END

This is the end
 My friend, don't forget
 Death is near
 The vanity of yesterday
 Leads us onto hollow fear

Species extinct,
 Blink, don't miss out
 Not just dragons, my dear
 Memento mori, vanitas
 Soon the time is here

My body cools
 Fool, cells digest themselves
 Molecules break, my friend
 Oxygen depleted in my veins
 Feast of a-bacterial blend

Gasses bloat my skin
 Within, body swelling thin
 Process of putrefaction,
 face stiff, dissolution

The end, my dear?
 Fear (not), small scavengers
 away with flesh and bone,
 liquids seeping into ground
 feeding sapling, not alone

Death is life,
 Strife, changing form
 Reconfigured matterings
 Death life brings
 To flies with glitter wings

Until the end,
 my friend, you will see
 When the sun devour all
 Planets becoming mist again
 No life is here, no recall

The end, will last,
 Blast, blinks of creations,
 Until the arrow strikes time,
 and final heat death arrives
 Then, my dear, we die