

What Is Anything Anymore, Anyway?



A Column

Black Cilice, Candelabrum, Aine O'Dwyer, Yellow Eyes, Sanguine Eagle, Giulio Aldinucci (interview), Godspeed You! Black Emperor

“Happiness was never important. The problem is that we don’t know what we really want. What makes us happy is not to get what we want. But to dream about it. Happiness is for opportunists. So I think that the only life of deep satisfaction is a life of eternal struggle, especially struggle with oneself. If you want to remain happy, just remain stupid. Authentic masters are never happy; happiness is a category of slaves” – **Slavoj Žižek**

According to Austrian-born existentialist and humanist **Jean Améry** (1912-1978), cultural alienation comes fitted as standard, in terms of the ageing process. As we age, he argues, we are unavoidably faced with numerous physical, social and psychological changes in our day-to-day lives. In addition, we are inundated by a youth-oriented culture, one that promotes novelty ideas, one that continually challenges our perceptions of what we define as society itself. As we grow older, so the argument progresses, we move relentlessly toward becoming nothing: uncoordinated, unfit, unfruitful, un-young, and unwelcome. For those of us who have lived underground for much of our cultural existences, any given Saturday night in the comfort of our own homes

in the company of mainstream television can be a traumatic experience. Seemingly, the battle to remain even vaguely culturally relevant has become a war. The alleged curtailing of our ability to understand new developments in the arts, or in a changing society's values, can instil feelings of inadequacy. If we are not careful, we can lose touch with the wider world, increasingly inhabiting a world of our own, confined to our pasts, strangers to the new epoch. As Žižek rightly attests: **la lucha continúa!**

Picking up that Iberian baton, Portuguese one-man, uber-undergrowth, lo-fi, raw Black Metal army, **Black Cilice**, has been emitting transcendental transmissions from a secret cave location situated somewhere on said peninsula for the best part of the last decade. Dozens of demos, tapes, sevens, splits, compilations and four full-length outings later, 'Banished From Time' (**Iron Bonehead**) stands as his most cohesive statement to date. Breaking with established behaviour patterns subtly, in terms of both artwork and sonic palate, the album builds on what has come before, to win new friends and influence the kind of people who wouldn't normally pay attention to undergrowth black metal. The album's immediate predecessor, 'Mysteries' (Iron Bonehead), was lauded by some on its initial release as Black Cilice's breakout record, whilst being simultaneously dismissed by true kvltists as his sellout record. Whatever your position on that score, the production values of 'Mysteries' were so dense that it was almost impossible, even for the seasoned ear, to differentiate between guitars and vocals, with any vaguely discernible riffs being interred firmly in the subterranean quagmire of the mix.

This time out, however, those issues have been addressed accordingly, thus 'Banished From Time' benefits greatly from a newfound clarity. Don't get me wrong, this is still resolutely un-engineered material cloaked as hex induction that will doubtless continue to trouble fans of high-fidelity production values, undergrowth or overgrowth, but on 'Banished From Time' Black Cilice has somehow reimagined the quintessential beating blackened heart at the core of the genre in compelling fashion. This triumphant release succeeds in straddling the gaping divide between traditional and contemporary Black Metal effortlessly, retaining that singular European connectivity to the Norwegian elders in a way that much contemporary global black metal fails to realise, capturing that air of mystery missing on 'Mysteries'. Instrumentation and vocals remain submerged beneath a black sea of reverb, but the presence of an audible bass drum brings a bottom end to proceedings that has been lacking on earlier Black Cilice recordings. The songwriting continues to develop, the aforementioned vocal howls and shrieks are largely recognisable, whilst there are few more visceral guitar tones operating elsewhere in the entire genre pool. In attempting to banish himself from time, Black Cilice has instead created a timeless artefact of shamanic Black Metal artistry that will do his burgeoning reputation no harm whatsoever. You've got to admire a man who conforms incrementally on his own terms by refusing to conform.

<http://www.ironbonehead.de>

Originally released back in 2016 in stunningly limited numbers, this two-track-twelve-inch re-release from Black Cilice alter-ego (citation needed!), **Candelabrum**, is strikingly different to the artist's previous recordings, belatedly collated elsewhere on 'The Gathering' (**Altare**): "Candelabrum music deals with the

world of the dead, a dimension out of most people's eyes, but present in the life of many. The vastness and the utter darkness of such a dimension is so incredibly violent that any kind of representation through my music is just a pale dream in comparison" – **Candelabrum**

Where previously Candelabrum forged atmospheric instrumental pieces at funereal pace, 'Necrotelepathy' features a brace of compositions shaped by high pitched vocals, resonant guitars, shimmering keyboards and insistent drumming. Part I, 'Distant Voices In The Darkest Night', had me from the get-go, there's something instantly engaging about this song that will pierce the dark heart of lovers of mournful melancholia the world over. Within one listen, I was genuinely considering purchasing a copy on Discogs there and then, exorbitantly priced at the time at sixty of our English Pounds. Thankfully, I resisted that temptation, to be eventually rewarded for my parsimony by Altare several months later with this timely reissue. Part II, 'Prayers For The Damnation Of Man', meanwhile, is somewhat heavier than Part I, but retains the spectral qualities of all true devotional music. As a companion record to Black Cilice's 'Banished From Time', 'Necrotelepathy' offers relative contemplative relief. Alongside the equally mediative material collected on the aforementioned 'The Gathering', Candelabrum shine a light in the abyss that becomes ever-brighter the more your eyes become accustomed to the dark.

<https://altare.pt>

Originally scheduled for a March 2017 release, subsequently issued six-months-later due to paternity leave on the part of MIE head-honcho, Henry, Irish polymath, multi-instrumentalist and former **United Bible Studies** member **Aine O'Dwyer**'s eighth release is of an altogether more beguiling darkness than the black metal visitations examined above. Recorded between 2013-2015 in the shaft of the Brunel Tunnel, 'Gallarais' (MIE) could lay literal claim to being authentically more underground than Black Cilice or Candelabrum. The shaft itself is apparently 50ft deep, with an acoustic delay of around 3/4-seconds, and the record exploits this natural ambience to haunting effect. Further to this inbuilt echo, a square window in the ceiling of the shaft allowed the seepage of incidental noise: from tube trains 14ft-below; planes hundreds-of-feet above; and the mechanical noise of water pumps situated in the vicinity. O'Dwyer herself described this manmade cavern of industrialisation as her "mystic cave of transmigration sound". O'Dwyer had previously launched an earlier release, 'Anything Bright Or Startling', in the tunnel back in 2013, to mark its 150th-anniversary, simultaneously commemorating the deaths of six Victorian construction workers killed during the original installation. Following reflection on said launch led her to approach the tunnel's director, **Robert Hulse**, and she was duly granted permission to carry out her 'investigations' over the next two-years.

'Gallarais' (the record's title translates from the Gaelic as 'church of the foreigner', a funereal chapel in the shape of an upturned boat cited on the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry) sets out to recreate the 'abstract heritage' of the fine art of 'keening', Irish professional mourners employed by families of the recently deceased for their incredible improvisational vocalisation. O'Dwyer sees the record as an imagined reenactment of a keening ceremony, using site-specific found-sounds, drones, feedback and additional instrumentation as dirge. Opening with the gorgeously delicate harp work of 'Underlight', and gradually hardening towards the extended

choral keening of the closing ‘Hounds Of Hades’, ‘Gallarais’ stakes its claim to uniqueness through 8-accompanying pieces that experiment with, and extrapolate, individual aspects of O’Dwyer’s approach. Following the organ-based density of ‘Music For Church Cleaners’ (MIE), ‘Locusts’ and ‘Gegenschein’ (**Penultimate Press**), ‘Gallarais’ offers up sparse esoteric ambience that connects the shadows of the departed to the mourning energy of their families, playing the role of audio Kubler Ross model. After living with these recordings intimately for the past six-months, I can attest that their stature only grows with the passage of time. Tagann rudaí maithe dóibh siúd atá ag fanacht.

<https://aineodwyer.bandcamp.com>

‘Immersion Trench Reverie’ (**Gilead Media**) is the seventh release (forth long-player) from Brooklyn’s psychedelic black metal horde, **Yellow Eyes**, one that further refines and expands their intricate art. When I began **trakMARX**, back in 2001, I was resolutely of the opinion that a band’s debut LP was invariably its finest hour, and that trajectories mostly continued on a downward spiral after that fact. Sixteen years later, much has changed, if not everything, and its thanks to bands such as Yellow Eyes that that perspective has been reversed, allowing me to fully appreciate the concept of progression, and the reality that the exact opposite of this maxim is true outside of the confines of punk rock orthodoxy.

Yellow Eyes’s previous record, ‘Sick With Bloom’, was equally revered here in these pages back in 2015, and has continued to resonate wildly in my collection throughout the ensuing two-years. I’m not going to mince my words here, I’m somewhat of a Yellow Eyes devotee. For me, they take me back to my pre-punk teens, to the sense of wonderment that gargantuan dinosaurs **Led Zeppelin** used to instil in my then-impressionistic mind. The emotional involvement of listening to Yellow Eyes, for me, has become ritualistic over the years I have been following the group’s development. If this suggests that I am heading for my second childishness and mere oblivion, then turn up the treble, pipes and whistles, I’m coming home.

Sam Skarstad, guitar, **Will Skarstad**, guitar and vocals (**Ustalost**, **Sanguine Eagle**, **Vilkacis**), **M. Rekevics**, drums (**Fell Voices**, **Vanum**, **Vilkacis**, **Vorde**) and **Alex DeMaria**, bass (**Anicon**, **Obaku**), returned to the their Connecticut recording cabin earlier this year to record ‘Immersion Trench Reverie’, directly to tape, as is their wont. Having recently returned from a trip to Siberia, the brothers Skarstad came loaded with field recordings capturing the sonic essence of Russian winter, and it’s these field recordings that shape the record’s animating principles. Teeming with melancholic melodiousness, the twin guitars of Sam and Will duel freely in a manner that would doubtless cause a nation of banjos to hang their fretboards in shame. With M.Rekevics drums higher in the mix, a new sense of space emanates from the speakers. Yellow Eyes core elements may have once been forged in the smithies of Asgard, but they are now resolutely adapted for use here in Midgard.

The record flows like the Yenisei across the Siberian plains. The journey is one blessed by a highly defined sense of melodic continuity. Contrasts between refrain and dissonance, tempo and temperance, and luminescence and shadow, create both tension and relief. ‘Blue As Blue’ and ‘Shrillness In The Heated Grass’ feature the close harmonies of a Siberian women’s choir, bringing a sacral component to an already

atmospheric ambience. Elsewhere, bells chime, gravel is trampled underfoot, doors creak, locks engage, dogs bark, and Eastern winds howl around the edges of the finest set of songs Yellow Eyes have created thus far. With an ever-growing roster of side-projects orbiting around the **Sibir Records/House Of First Light** milieu, there's every chance that the purity of 'Immersion Trench Reverie' will be further enhanced again in 2019. In the meantime, hold this one close to your chest, and play it extensively, with the lights out: 'Immersion Trench Reverie' is released on October 20th on CD, digital and LP, via Gilead Media, and on cassette, via **Sibir Records**.

<https://yelloweyes.bandcamp.com>

One of those aforementioned satellite-hordes is **Sanguine Eagle**, who also count Yellow Eye's Will Skarstad amongst their ranks. Sanguine Eagle regard their particular brand of dark art as devotional music, exalting an unfolding magickal current they describe as 'storm mysticism': "The practitioner becomes a personification of the storm itself as he experiences the long and painful process of becoming severed from the dream or banal realities. Embodying its rapturous ability to devastate as well as bring remarkable resurgences of life, the storm is a perfect exemplification of the mercurial power that can be harnessed from knowledge of nature's mysteries, wielded of course by one who knows, wills, dares and keeps silent. Knowledge of this frightening totality is so volatile it presents as much risk and danger as it does progress. While led through these vestigial mysteries, existence will persist as a subservient entity and all of perception becomes his temple. As the spirit goes through this harrowing castigation, one finally gazes upon the fruits of strength contained at the zenith-heart of the storm".

With two cassette releases available digitally through the band's Bandcamp page, 'Individuation' (**House Of First Light/Psychic Violence**) and a split release with **Oppression (House Of First Light/Productions Haineuses)**, Sanguine Eagle are establishing a reputation for pushing black metal in an ever-further down the left hand path. The stand out track from 'Individuation', 'The First Storm', is a psalm of epic proportions, and the ideal place to experience 'storm mysticism'

<https://sanguineeagle.bandcamp.com>

Giulio Aldinucci's 'Borders And Ruins' (**Karlrecords**) is a record born of it's time. A symphony of subliminal beauty forged as sacred sound. A collection of hymns to the dispossessed, the dispersed and the divided, the lost and the wandering, playing out in a gothic cathedral of union already falling into disrepair. Descriptors ultimately fail to do justice to the complexities of Aldinucci's art, but I hear it as dark ambient, acting as the juxtapositional foil to much of the black metal espoused above. 'Borders And Ruins' towers as a stain glass reflection of the instability of borders; borders as weapons of discrimination; leaking chaos and cultural ruin on both sides; impacting detrimentally on the relationship between people and territory.

trakMARX – How would you describe your music to someone who had never heard it before?

GA – It is very difficult for me to try to describe verbally something that I try to push beyond words. When someone asks me, I usually just give a few basic cardinal points to orient (like ‘electroacoustic’, ‘soundscape’, ‘experimental music . . .’), and a link to my Bandcamp page:

<https://aldinucci.bandcamp.com>

trakMARX – **Considering your involvement in making music for theatre, film, and as creative art itself, which discipline do you consider to be your main passion?**

GA – My greatest passion is definitely music, and I consider myself both a composer and a curious researcher/listener. I have loved visual art since I was a teenager; I fell in love with art-house cinema and contemporary art very early; my passion for Italian Mannerism came a bit later, during the university years when I also started to appreciate theater and ballet. Sometimes I think that if I had not become a composer, I would have tried to become a film director. A few years ago, I also started to learn the basics of photography (in which I find many analogies with the work and the research on the soundscape) and I am getting more and more directly involved with this art.

trakMARX – **‘Borders And Ruins’ is your first LP for Karlrecords, and seemingly your first vinyl release. How did you get involved with the label, and is vinyl important to you as a medium?**

GA – The LP’s story began with a demo submission to Karlrecords: the label really enjoyed the album from the first listen, and we soon started talking about a vinyl release. I do not have a univocal preference about a specific format: I buy a lot of vinyl and CDs, sometimes cassettes, and I recently added to my music listening equipment a hi-quality music file player. In my opinion, the ‘best’ format always depends on the type of music, and I think the perfect medium for ‘Borders and Ruins’ is undoubtedly vinyl.

trakMARX – **The vinyl edition of the album is a joy to behold, the silk screen print is truly beautiful, whilst the red vinyl adds that extra something – how important to you is it to present a complete package as an artefact, and what’s the significance of the points of the compass on each of the record’s labels?**

GA – Thank you! It was a real pleasure to work with a label that curates every single detail of a release like Karlrecords perfectly does: the whole process, from discussing with Joe Gilmore about the artwork, to the choice about the sticker color, was very interesting and constructive. Everybody nowadays can buy or stream digital and, in my opinion, the physical format should be a piece of art by itself that shows how much care and love was put into the music, not only a ‘music container’. The inverted points of the compass on each of the record’s labels remind us how relative the description of geography can be, and consequently that no country or continent is the centre.

trakMARX – **Italy is blessed with a stunning lineage of precedents in the field of experimental music, how important to you is the work of the likes of Giusto Pio, Lino Capra Vaccina and Claudio Rocchi?**

GA – As a musician based in Italy, I really feel that my country has a strong tradition of experimental music: there is a constant worthwhile exchange between contemporary musicians, and it is not so uncommon to meet someone who worked together with important composers of the past. I think the strong point of Italian experimental music is its variety, its pluralism . . . that it is also one of the most positive aspect of my country.

trakMARX – **In these times of mass migration, xenophobia and fear are being employed by neoliberal administrations all over Europe to lock down opposition to austerity and challenges to elite minorities, what does ‘Borders And Ruins’ offer in terms of political commentary in this regard?**

GA – ‘Borders And Ruins’ was born while traveling around Europe: I’m always fascinated by (natural and political) border areas, where the boundary between different cultures becomes ‘porous’. When I think about this, I’m mindful of a statement by George Siemens that defines learning and knowledge as grounded on difference of opinion. The album was also born from a reflection on the instability of borders, seen as an extreme attempt to discriminate and rationalize that turns into a source of chaos and cultural ruins on both side, and their impact on the relationship between people and territory. The more I was working on the music and field recordings material, the more I was feeling the need of underlining the human presence element. I see this album as an opportunity to observe the nature and to ponder if the human being is at the centre of our society or not: everything seems to revolve around profit and statistics to prove how profitable something or someone is (from Facebook likes to the stock market), but emotions are not easy to convert into money or numbers. Very briefly, my album is an invitation to the knowledge, to go beyond our physical and psychological borders; the alternative will produce just ruins.

trakMARX – **Could you tell us a little about what you mean by the term ‘sonic diary’?**

GA – Since I started making field recordings, I named the files with a brief description of the soundscape, name of the place, and date. When travelling I use mostly a small recorder, in order not to be noticed, often my only travel diary is made by those files alone. I can easily say that my whole field recordings archive, with hundreds of hours of sounds, is my diary . . . a sonic diary of which every second can be modified and re-invented in endless different ways.

trakMARX – **‘Borders And Ruins’ is, we believe, the second episode in the PERIKLAS series – how many further instalments have you planned?**

GA – At the moment, I’m fully concentrating on new compositions that are a direct evolution of ‘Borders and Ruins’, nobody has listened to them yet!

trakMARX – **And, finally, how does it feel to have your music described as ‘an ambient masterpiece of sublime beauty and sacral majesty’?**

GA – I feel extremely honored, it is the highest praise for my music, a kind of ‘reward’ for all the energy I spent working everyday on this album.

<https://karlrecords.bandcamp.com/album/borders-and-ruins>

Returning to our keynote theme this month by way of conclusion, the ageing process not only informs individuals, it also informs groups, and consequently, the art they make collectively. In the case of **Godspeed You! Black Emperor**, this leads less to the kind of distortion and confusion cited above, but conversely to an ever-expanding clarity that in some quarters has been mistakenly labelled ‘conformist’. This concept itself is somewhat perplexing, given that GY!BE have made an anti-career out of resolutely refusing to conform for nigh on twenty years now. Ironic then, that in the same issue that Britt Brown mourned the death of the negative review in an article entitled ‘Collateral Damage’, another Wire scribe alluded to ‘Luciferian Towers’ (**Constellation Records**) as having all the artistic merit of a late-period Beatles pastiche. Granted, this was not a deconstruction worthy of the lauded Robert Christgau, but it was illustrative of the “dialectic between artist and appraiser” that seemingly “functions very differently in the 21st century”. It could be suggested, therefore, that ‘Luciferian Towers’ is illustrative of the dialectic between the radical left and the commentariat right, one that functions very differently in the 21st century.

To this writer, GY!BE represent a rainbow bridge to the (admittedly) naive idealism of the radical punk rock left of the late-70s/early-80s, which has (nevertheless) served as the core economy on which I have built a (fairly) robust ideological perspective, and in that respect they are peerless. With ‘Luciferian Towers’, GY!BE have set aside their sixth long player to exhibit their most rounded, composed and considered music to date. Gone are the apocalyptic samples of yore, the middle-eastern motifs of ‘Allelujah! Don’t Bend! Ascend!’, the guttural drones of ‘Asunder, Sweet And Other Distress’, and the at-times over-bearingly metallic nature of the group’s post-hiatus guitar arsenal, revealing instead a consistent pastoral sensitivity not normally associated with the collective. The addition of free jazz sensibilities, spaghetti western melody, mariachi horns, orchestral dissonance and reflective glances back over the collective shoulder to the lonesome twang at the core of the group’s 1997 debut LP further enhances the sense of absolute maturation at the heart of this record. Whilst it could be argued on some levels that GY!BE have spent the best part of two decades perfecting the crescendo they achieved with aplomb on ‘Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas To Heaven’ (Constellation Records), over eight movements here they universally reignite every touch paper they’ve ever lit in a firework display of emotion that triumphantly signifies change, growth and, ultimately, love, in its purest form. Admittedly, the filth and the fury are notably absent on ‘Luciferian Towers’, but in step with the world-over, circa now, the left are reconfiguring narratives. As **George Monboit** suggests at the outset of his indispensable new tome, ‘Out Of The Wreckage’ (**Verso**), “you cannot take away someone’s story without giving them a new one”. Whilst GY!BE may well be evolving away from the modus operandi of their radical past, they are developing a new story, and learning how to tell it. As Monboit asserts, “a new era has begun, loaded with hazard if we fail to respond, charged with promise if we seize the moment”. We need artists with vision at the vanguard of such a future, not lying on the sidewalk outside the Dakota building, shot full of holes.

<https://godspeedyoublackemperor.bandcamp.com>

Jean Encoule - October 1st, 2017