The open door and gaping shadowy halls stand wide in cold splendor of marble and stone / And from pulpits appear faces that stare, cruel mockeries of the closest in life now gone

This is an opening.

These are the first words, the opening text, of a project I conceived late in the winter of 2011. *Melancology*, the second iteration of the Black Metal Theory Symposium, had recently oozed through London, and the internet-lurking underground’s immune reaction to the intermingling of Black Metal and theory was seemingly at its most captious. In a way, the forumites and blog commenters were right: Black Metal theory *is* an infection in danger of becoming an epidemic. Brooklyn’s *Hideous Gnosis* was patient zero, and Dublin’s *P.E.S.T.* has brought the count of infected to three. But these were relatively controlled environments, bounded to a particular point in space and time—*Helvete* is a metastasizing agent that threatens to spread through the venous pathways of the internet.

This is an opening. It is a tear in the skin, stretching wider and wider to expose the erstwhile sterile cavities of the body. The infection enters. But whose skin is torn? Who is the infector? Who is infected? The web is awash with a repeated answer: Black Metal theory is the infection of Black Metal by theory; it is the brutal vivisection of Black Metal’s heretofore incorrupt body.
Here we have only half of one side of the wrong story. Instead, we should observe how, even if only in ideal cases, Black Metal and theory interpenetrate. They are like two questioning ichneumon wasps bonded in coital embrace, speared upon each other's alloyed ovipositors, each depositing putrefying seeds into the other's body. They are no longer individuals, but neither are they identical now that they are forcibly conjoined in nigredo. As the masthead at Black Metal Theory intones: “Not black metal. Not theory. Not not black metal. Not not theory.” Standing far from pretensions to devise some Grand Unified Theory of Black Metal, the practitioner of Black Metal theory engages in the mutual blackening of theory and Metal.

I open the doors to the other side and step beyond mortality

With the publication of Incipit, I have moved from conception to pregnancy to birth. The wasps' bodies have been hollowed out as their children have glutted on organs they too are developing, and finally the larvae emerge. Like the wasps, the varied works in this volume have consumed me. My body is opened, I am poured out in print. I mingle now with the authors and artists whose texts and images follow. While critics may call this venture a hipster's fad, Ovid reminds us—and the massive redundancy of the printed and digital versions of this journal assure us—we step beyond ourselves and into the text, and the text makes us immortal. Helvete is the sign of a fulfilled promise: Black Metal theory will not die.

And so this is an opening. The portal gapes, and we cross from one side to the other. It is a door through which many further iterations of Black Metal theory may enter. It invites possession. In turn, possession invites metamorphosis.

Helvete, I hope, will change. My short tenure here has taught me a great deal about organizing and producing a publication. Much of this is mundane, but I expect to apply these lessons with a particular eye to publishing more works that fall outside the purview of the established academic genres. We are a para-academic journal! We should not be beholden to rigid and arbitrary norms, but rather we should use our freedom to encourage fecund experimentation. The journal's future, then, is open, awaiting only the intervention of whatever forces or unclean spirits may enter to further blacken its pages.

No beginning, no end / Words beyond words / Lead us in / Acts beyond acts

Critics and supporters alike have overlooked this waiting potential, and thus they tend to approach Black Metal theory as merely the production of dense, somnolent academic texts about Black Metal. Although this is certainly an aspect of Black Metal theory, it is not
the whole, as it represents only the blackening of theory by Metal—or, in the worst cases, the mere imprisonment of Metal in theory. Black Metal theory is a practice composed of many possible component practices. It is an artistic practice, a musical practice, a literary practice, a theoretical practice. When it comes to us as theory, its words are an occult intervention, the acts of theory possessed by the outsider spirit of Metal. When it comes as music, its dissonant clangs and shrieked lyrics summon forth the dark avatars of theory to haunt us. It acts—upon us, yet mostly upon itself.

Black Metal theorists reject any approach that privileges one of these practices above its fellows, and we especially refuse to countenance any call to return to the music itself. Black Metal theory is an impure practice, aiming to destroy the integrity of Metal and theory’s protective membranes. There is no essence, but only an opening. Whatever demonic or unclean forces that may lodge themselves within are welcome.

Bear this in mind as you pass through this opening and move onward to the squalling pages that follow. Starve the inclination to categorize a given work of Black Metal theory as “true” or “false,” and instead allow yourself to be caught up in the practice. As I have said elsewhere and seemingly in another life, the results of this experiment cannot be known in advance. Leap through the opening. Taste and see.5

* * *

A word or two of thanks are in order. Many, many people contributed to getting Helvete to print. First and foremost, I am grateful to this volume’s contributors for taking a leap of faith and joining this little enterprise. The same goes for Eileen Joy and her staff at punctum books—it is a brave publisher that takes on such an offbeat project in its youth. A hearty thanks also to our editorial advisory board for their comments and suggestions, and in particular to Nicola Masciandaro for encouraging me to start the journal. Furthermore, I am indebted to my co-editors, Amelia Ishmael, Aspasia Stephanou, and Ben Woodard. Without your dedication and occasional willingness to prod me back to life, this dead mote of rock we’re flying on may never have been subjected to Helvete. To all of you mentioned above, this journal is as much yours as it is mine—I hope you can be proud of it.

Zareen Price
Portland, 2012

NOTES
Nicola Masciandaro, *Black Metal Theory*, http://blackmetaltheory.blogspot.com. Details about all three Black Metal theory symposia mentioned above can also be found here.

