

issue #(1.5)  
**graceless**  
a journal of the radical gothic





# GRACELESS

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preview for the upcoming full Issue Two

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we believe in free cultural exchange but intend to limit the power of capi-  
talism to co-opt our work for its twisted ends.

Adobe Garamond Pro is our body font. Colwell HPLHS serves for our most of our  
headers. Century Gothic is used for bylines, footers, and some subheads..

# RADICAL GOTHIC

## Radical

When we say “radical,” we are not speaking of a specific ideology, but we’re also not talking about politics like who’s gonna vote for whom. Radical means, to us as well as the dictionary, “affecting the fundamental nature.” **We’ve as little interest in mainstream politics as we do in mainstream culture.** We’re looking to transform our society and our lives on a fundamental level. And while we are not interested, as a journal, in promoting one specific methodology, our focus is broadly anti-authoritarian and probably tinged with left and post-left ideas. We are staunchly opposed to fascism and right-wing politics in general.

## Gothic

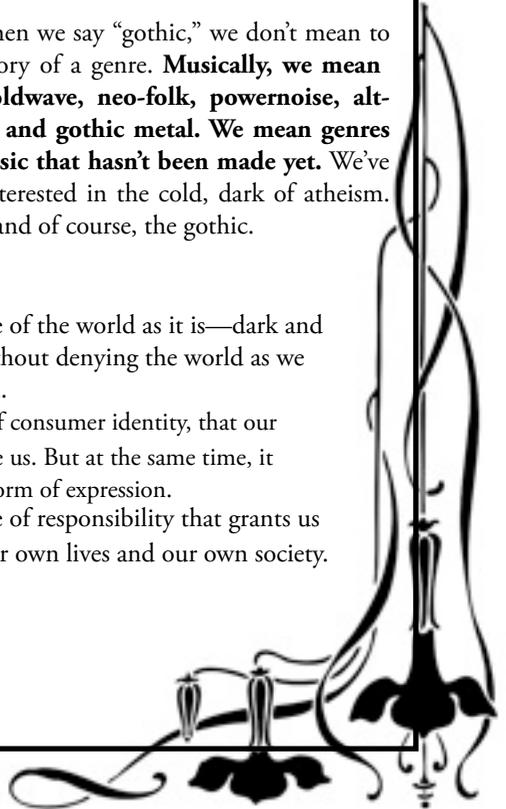
Everything dark belongs to us. When we say “gothic,” we don’t mean to speak to a specific little sub-category of a genre. **Musically, we mean industrial, gothic, darkwave, coldwave, neo-folk, powernoise, alt-country, EBM, futurepop, black and gothic metal. We mean genres that don’t exist and we mean music that hasn’t been made yet.** We’re interested in the occult and we’re interested in the cold, dark of atheism. We’re interested in the Romantics and of course, the gothic.

## The Radical Gothic

The radical gothic is the acceptance of the world as it is—dark and horrid, full of wanton cruelty—without denying the world as we might make it—dark and beautiful.

The radical gothic rejects the myth of consumer identity, that our purchases—or what we wear—define us. But at the same time, it recognizes that aesthetics are a valid form of expression.

The radical gothic is the acceptance of responsibility that grants us the freedom to define ourselves, our own lives and our own society.



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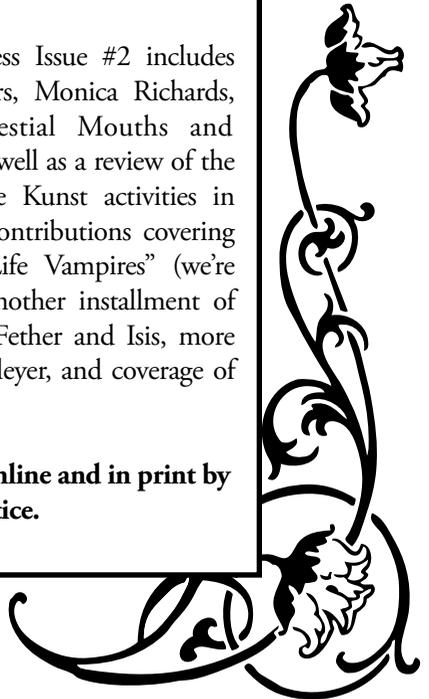
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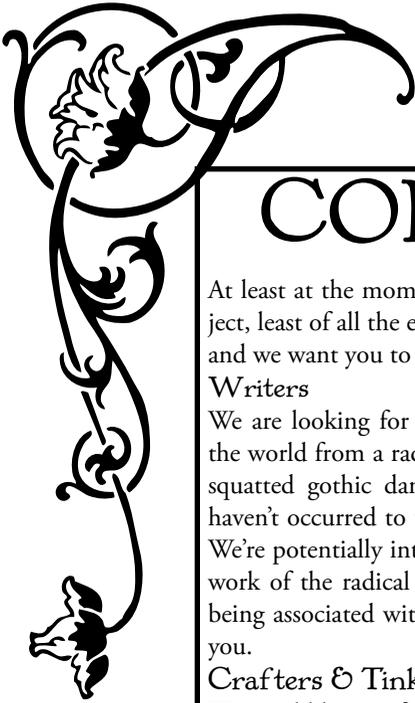
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Upcoming material in Graceless Issue #2 includes interviews with Primary Colors, Monica Richards, Nomadic War Machine, Bestial Mouths and Belltower Bats, and Darkrad as well as a review of the Laibach and Neue Slovenische Kunst activities in London 2012. We also have contributions covering "Art from Madness", "Real Life Vampires" (we're serious!), "Tarot for Goths", another installment of correspondence between Prof. Fether and Isis, more photography from Beatrice Schleyer, and coverage of recent actions by radical goths.

**Issue #2 should be available online and in print by  
Summer Solstice.**





# CONTRIBUTE

At least at the moment, we aren't paying anyone involved in this project, least of all the editors. We are interested in creating a DIY culture, and we want you to be a part of it.

## Writers

We are looking for non-fiction pieces that explore the darker side of the world from a radical point of view. Whether it is a scene report on squatted gothic dance clubs or DIY fashion guides, or things that haven't occurred to us to list as examples, we're quite likely interested. We're potentially interest in fiction, as well, that is rather explicitly the work of the radical gothic. And if you're a novelist comfortable with being associated with us and our mission, then we'd love to interview you.

## Crafters & Tinkers

We would love to feature your work, particularly if you're interested in sharing a bit of how it is done.

## Bands

We're looking for bands with goth and radical themes or members to interview. We don't care if all of your songs are political, we don't care if you're famous. If you're interesting, let us know.

## Artists

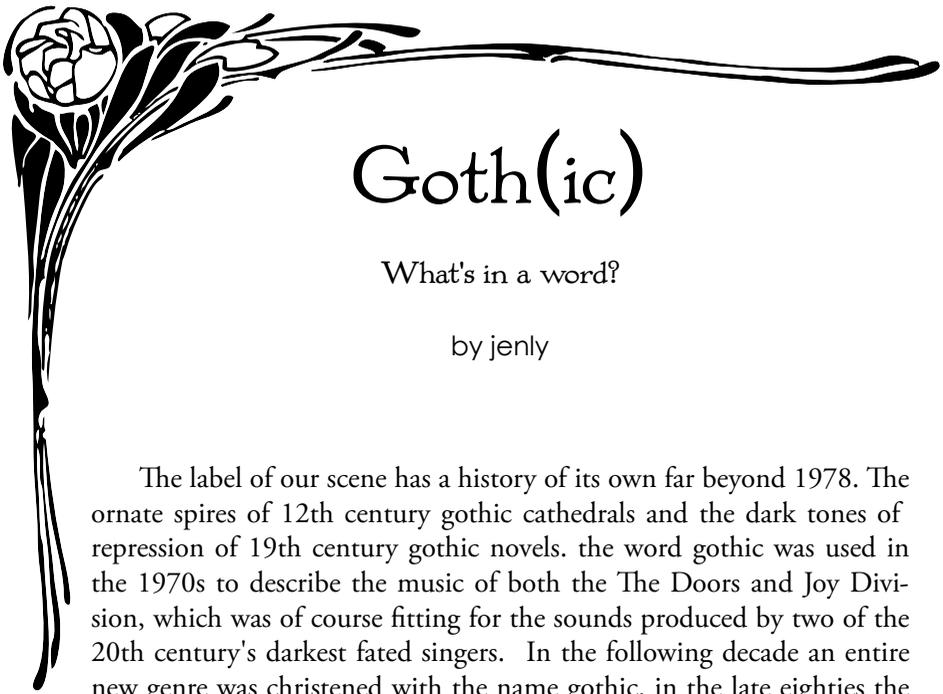
We feature the art of various radical goths in short portfolios with bios and work. Once again, the art itself doesn't need to be politically-themed. Unfortunately, the interior of the magazine is black and white, so we're looking for work intended to be displayed in monochrome.

## Reviews

We are interested in reviewing: music and art shows, albums, books, magazines, zines, anything that is appropriate for our stated purpose and our audience.

**submit proposals and/or finished work to:**

GRACELESS@GRACELESS.INFO



# Goth(ic)

What's in a word?

by jenly

The label of our scene has a history of its own far beyond 1978. The ornate spires of 12th century gothic cathedrals and the dark tones of repression of 19th century gothic novels. the word gothic was used in the 1970s to describe the music of both the The Doors and Joy Division, which was of course fitting for the sounds produced by two of the 20th century's darkest fated singers. In the following decade an entire new genre was christened with the name gothic. in the late eighties the "g" word was seen as a curse by many musicians, who rejected the label along with the pigeon holing and stereotyping which always seemed to accompany it. Gothic implied a youth subculture of mopey, apathetic kids in black. but the genre persisted and refused to die, instead growing older and growing up. The gothic scene can hardly be described as a youth subculture when the average age of visitors to its largest yearly event is 30.

Over the course of the last three decades the word gothic has often been shortened to goth. The two words are used seemingly interchangeably and with little care. Is there a difference between the two labels? I've only given this thought in the last year as I've been translating a German reference book on the scene into English. In German the overall scene is called "die schwarze Szene" or the black scene, simply a reference to the dominant colour of our clothing, or sometimes "die dunkle Szene" or the dark scene. To me these terms are somehow a more accurate description of the modern scene and all of its sub-(sub-sub)genres of music. In English speaking countries however, we are still the "gothic" scene or the "goth" scene and those terms often encompass (right or wrong) a broad spectrum of sounds and aesthetics from indus-

trial and ebm to steampunk and emo, so I've paid close attention to my translations, using the terms "goth", "gothic", "goth scene", "gothic scene" and "dark(-wave) scene", but not interchangeably. I find myself rarely using the the term gothic to describe music but reserving it for describing the dark yet sensual aesthetic and the people who feel a sense of horror when considering the realities of this world, and who reject participating in those horrors, even though some do indeed like to watch and many of them are further inspired by those horrors to produce dark music, literature and art. Over several hundred pages of translation I've used the word goth most frequently used when referring to the general dark clad masses. Goth shops, goth clubs, goth festivals, and the word goths when generically referring to the people who participate in or consume the offerings of the aforementioned. The "g" word gets tossed about quite freely these days. There are plenty of bands and individuals who no longer shy away from the label as they once did. A label which can be slipped into and out of as easily as a pair of trousers, preferably a pair with lots and lots of straps and chains, lest the passer by mistake the wearer for something else other than ... a goth. But is everything and everyone cloaked in black gothic? Or is goth the shortened and condensed end result of the gothic movement? The youth subculture which grew up, cut its hair and got a job, flew out of the nest and scattered in every direction?

With this broader distribution comes greater acceptance ... sounds like a good thing. While I admit that it's nice not to have insults or projectiles hurled at me by strangers—a common occurrence even in relatively progressive areas well into the late nineties—growing up weird in a far less than liberal area most certainly taught me some important lessons about remaining true to my passions and being willing to stick up for fellow weirdoes whether they were goth or gay or any other apparently egregious derivative of "normal", lessons which seem to be largely lost on the masses who use the gothic aesthetic as a carnival costume or those who use it as an excuse for glorifying violence and narcissism.

### *The black sheep within the dark herd*

I arrived at the Amphi Festival last summer late on the first day to meet friends whose band was playing the next day. Although it was still hours till sunset, the light show from the outdoor stage was blinding

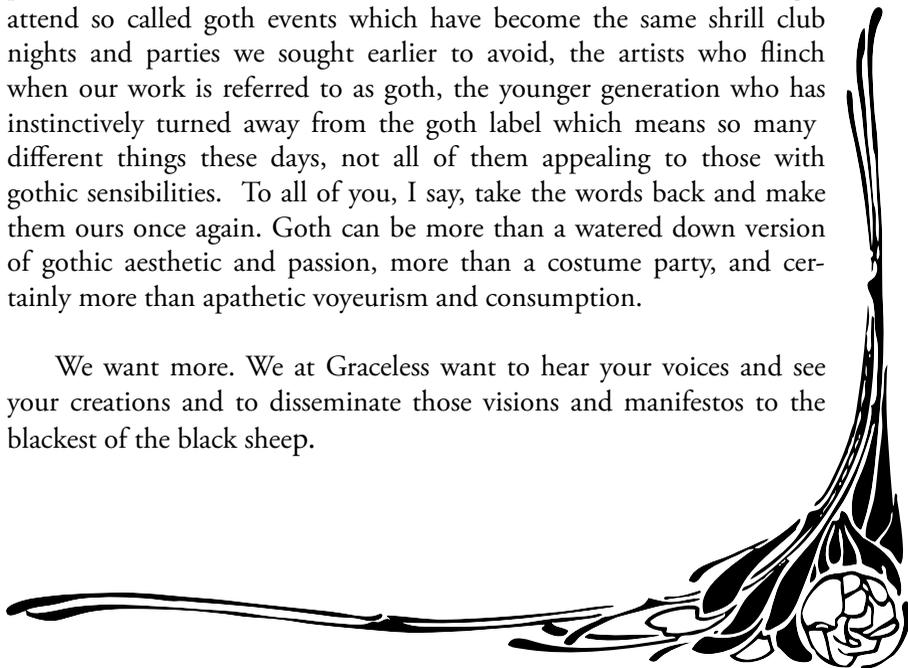
even from across the Rhine river on the approach to the fairgrounds. Upon passing through the gates, we swam through the sea of black which we've come to expect at such large events. 12,000 people. 12,000 people wearing (mostly) black. 12,000 people wearing (mostly) black, drinking and partying, seeing and being seen. Stand after stand selling unimaginative "gothic" clothing, label after label revealing that it was produced far away in countries with less stringent labour regulation and worker protection than Germany. Colourful stage shows with drum machine beats so similar that it was often hard to tell when one act had ended and the next had begun. In that sea, we found an island made up of five dark souls, our Swedish friends who'd pulled their chairs in the lounge together, the shape of which seemed to be more protective fort than seance circle. They'd been at the festival since noon time and Ronnie had had quite enough of the crowds: "Who are these people and what do I have in common with them?" he demanded, which of course would have been the perfect opening to that favourite topic of conversation amongst elder-goths: everything used to be better in "the old days". But somehow we avoided this and asked ourselves instead: if this sea of party happy black clad people are goth, then what are we and the others?

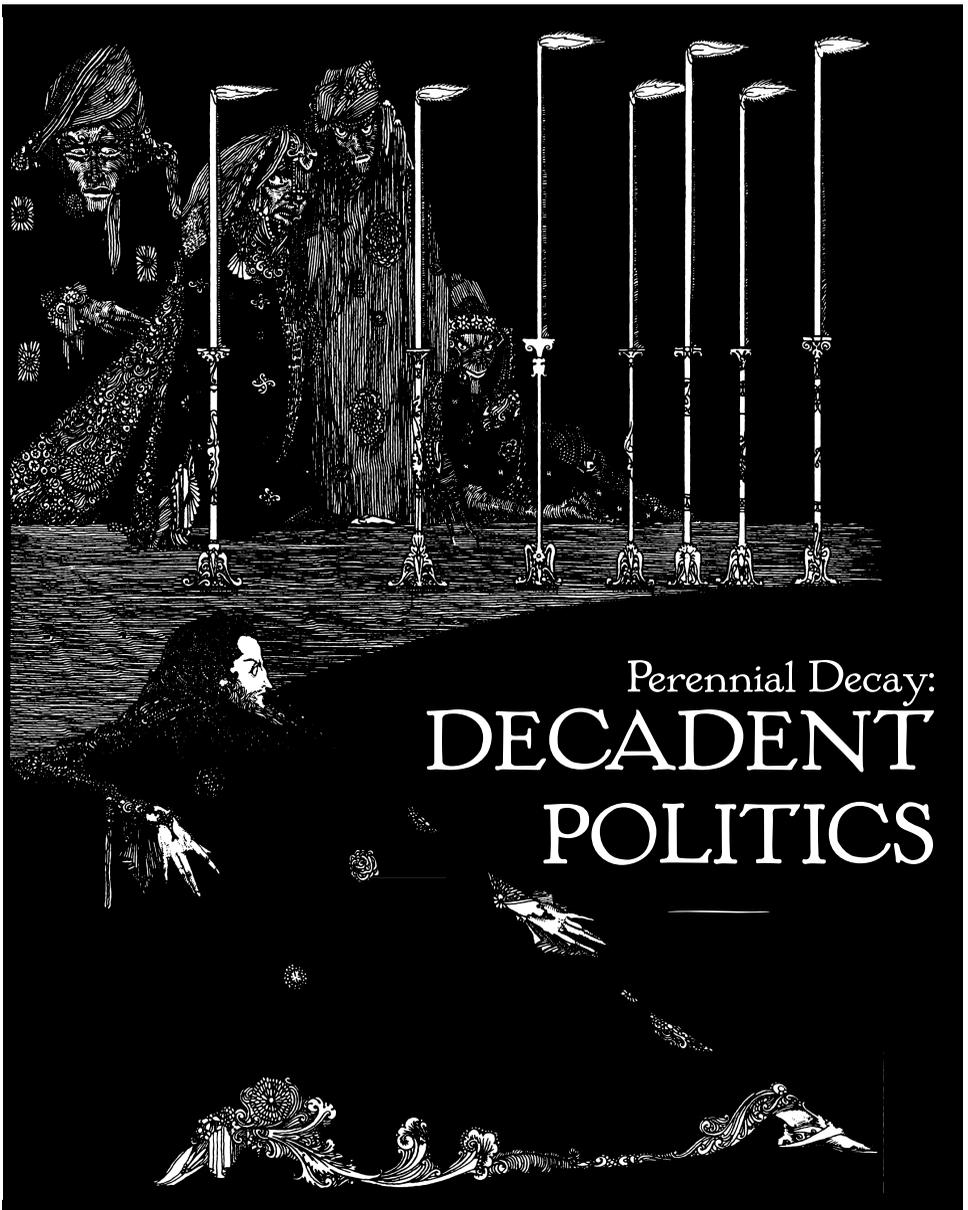
While I'm personally well aware of the dark nature of the world we live in, I do not revel in it. As I admire the beauty of the carved stone facade of a medieval church, I cannot help but think about the generations of underclass workers who gave their labour and lives to its construction over decades and the centuries of repression the building represents. I clothe myself in black, not as a carnival costume to attract admiration and attention, but rather as a signal to the world that I am in retreat and avoidance of it, much in the same way that a mourner in the Victorian era used her black clothing to signal the reasons for her avoidance of social gaiety. Our position as gothic observers and admirers of darkness is generally one of privilege from the first world. I'm not content to observe and consume without question.

After working on *Graceless* for the past year, I now know that I'm not alone. The blackest sheep are still to be found. We've received email from many of you expressing your joy in finding *Graceless* online or in print and therewith discovering that you are not alone. Although what we've discovered is that many of us have retreated further, refusing to

participate in the current goth scene which often shows itself as merely a parody of “normal” society. We are the older music fans who no longer attend so called goth events which have become the same shrill club nights and parties we sought earlier to avoid, the artists who flinch when our work is referred to as goth, the younger generation who has instinctively turned away from the goth label which means so many different things these days, not all of them appealing to those with gothic sensibilities. To all of you, I say, take the words back and make them ours once again. Goth can be more than a watered down version of gothic aesthetic and passion, more than a costume party, and certainly more than apathetic voyeurism and consumption.

We want more. We at Graceless want to hear your voices and see your creations and to disseminate those visions and manifestos to the blackest of the black sheep.





Perennial Decay:  
**DECADENT  
POLITICS**

*This article appears originally in Graceless Issue #1, which is available in its entirety at [WWW.GRACELESS.INFO](http://WWW.GRACELESS.INFO)*

Decadence—the aesthetics of decay, the embodiment of deranged but heightened senses—is undeniably a political stance. The romantic can never find satisfaction in the truly dead worlds of the suburban subdivision or the garish fluorescence of the stripmall. Those that seek the whispering splendors of the sepulcher are the ones who seek to live despite the throngs of the lifeless surrounding them. The zombies wear business suits, and they are not satiated only with the brains of the living; they also hunger for our hearts and souls. There is a difference between the cobwebbed and entombed wilted rose and the styrofoam trash that spills from the McDonald's dumpster. They are both discarded and left behind, but one whispers of a once-living and the other never knew true existence.

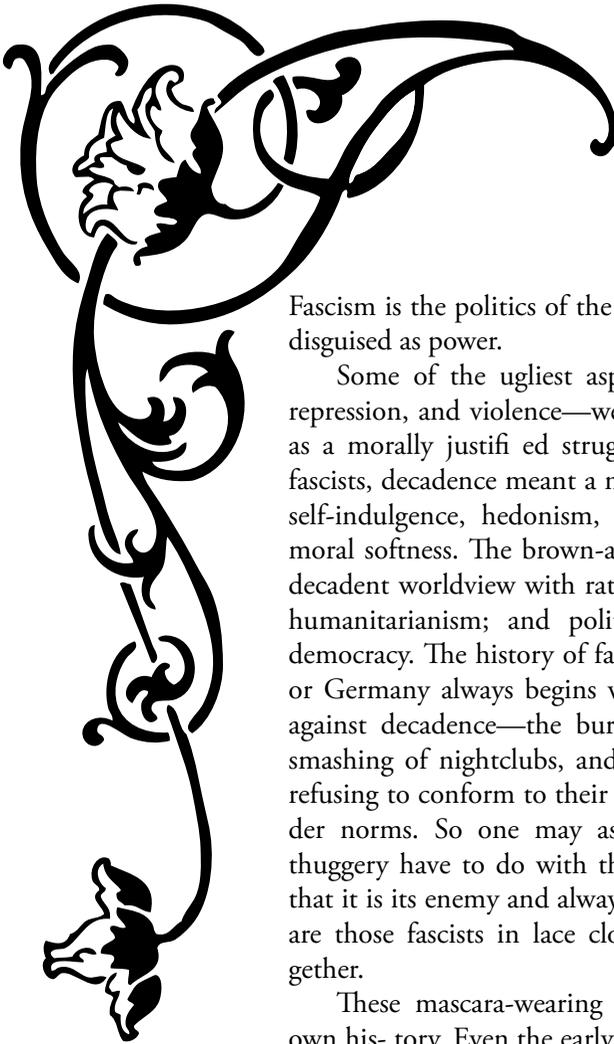
All politics is a form of imagining. It's a truly creative act, in that it seeks to reanimate the world. We are like poor Roderick Usher, shuffling through society in silken slippers, alone in our ability to hear the decay of the house we have inherited. It will surely fall, that is beyond question, the only question is: will we be entombed by the plastic rubble, or will we face our own sister who we have unknowingly encrypted alive and out of sight? Who is this sisterly wraith we cannot ignore, she who rattles the crypt's gate and calls our names through crumbling linoleum halls? She is no other than our own liberation, our abandoned political spirit.

Decadent politics is the realization that today's real-politic is in ruins. The poetry of liberation has been replaced with paranoid legislation. Restriction has attempted to bottle the imagination and suffocate our freedom. To reject politics is to grow a "vicious garden" that consumes itself and leaves us in the sand.

Politicians have a similar relationship to politics as record executives do to music: they are parasites, seeking a vulture's feast on our living desires. Only the timid, those who say their evening prayers and wait for dawn, allow themselves to be without politics. Politics is not the choosing the evil of two lessers, but becoming truly ungovernable. Only in this space, this electoral darkness, can we be allowed to fully create not just art, but our lives.

If these politics are necessary for us, then how do we conjure them into being? Where do we find this dire conspiracy that allows us freedom?

Foolishly, some of our brothers and sisters have turned to the hollow pageantry of fascism, which is the very opposite of a decadent politics.



Fascism is the politics of the high-school bully, brutishness disguised as power.

Some of the ugliest aspects of fascism—intolerance, repression, and violence—were fueled by what fascists saw as a morally justified struggle against “decadence.” For fascists, decadence meant a number of things: materialism, self-indulgence, hedonism, cowardice, and physical and moral softness. The brown-and-black shirts associated this decadent worldview with rationalism; skepticism; atheism; humanitarianism; and political, economic, and gender democracy. The history of fascism, whether in Italy, Spain, or Germany always begins with the same bestial violence against decadence—the burning of depraved books, the smashing of nightclubs, and histrionic attacks on anyone refusing to conform to their boorish representation of gender norms. So one may ask, what does this intolerant thuggery have to do with the goth milieu? The answer is that it is its enemy and always has been. Despite this, there are those fascists in lace clothing that insist they go together.

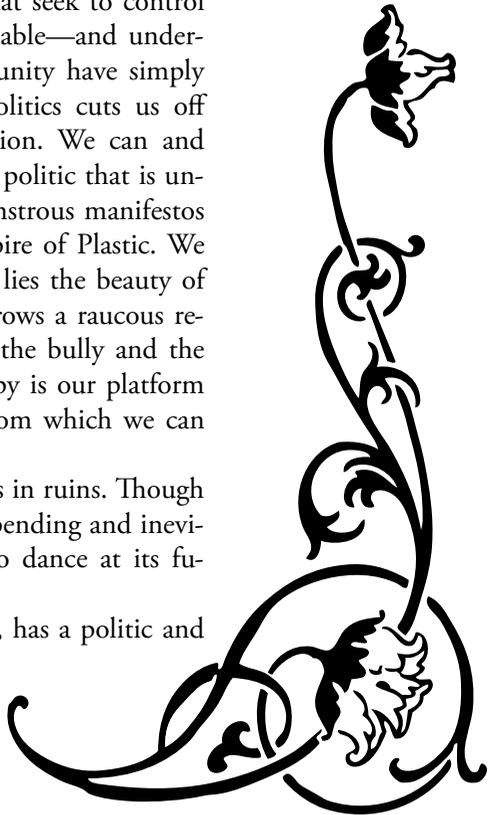
These mascara-wearing fascists are ignorant of their own history. Even the early fascists that embraced subculture and gender fluidity were most ruthlessly oppressed by their own “comrades.” The Night of Long Knives exorcised homosexual and other deviant elements from the Nazi Party with a merciless but unsurprising bloodletting. Among the first off to the concentration camps were not Jews or Gypsies but fellow occultists who had supported Hitler’s rise to power. Mussolini imprisoned the avant-garde artists who had joined him on his march to Rome within a year of taking power. All of these groups fatally

misunderstood the irreconcilability of free expression with the homicidal conformity of fascism. Today there are those that say fascism is simply fashion, that to strut around in a SS uniform and festoon our lace with the Nazi death-head skulls is meaningless and should cause no concern. Saying this is to ignore what they represent on a symbolic level. We would never wear a McDonald's golden arches to a goth club because it represents mass conformity. So does the iron cross.

Fascism is just another face of the same deadening, lifeless politics used by all the parties that seek to control and regulate our passions. It is reasonable—and understandable—that so many in our community have simply rejected all politics, but discounting politics cuts us off from our own imagination and liberation. We can and must imagine a politic outside parties, a politic that is uncontrollable and capable of creating monstrous manifestos of fierce freedom that threaten the Empire of Plastic. We know behind this soulless, shiny façade lies the beauty of haunted, living ruins. In the shadows grows a raucous resistance of the imagination threatening the bully and the banker as the lights start to dim. Entropy is our platform and freedom is our secret conspiracy from which we can never be dissuaded.

Everything dies. Even Ozymandias is in ruins. Though those among the status quo fear this impending and inevitable end, we are preparing ourselves to dance at its funeral.

Decadence, the celebration of decay, has a politic and its name is anarchy.



# Reviews

by Robert Inhuman, enola & jenly

## No Red Seas (2012)

No Red Seas is a 53 track compilation featuring previously unreleased tracks from a number of major dark genre artists which is raising funds for the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) helping their direct action campaigns to stop whaling, combat the mass slaughter of dolphins, and protect marine life around the world. The list of contributing artists includes number of neo-folk projects including a first-time collaboration between PETER BJARGO (ARCANA)



& MATT HOWDEN (SIEBEN) and a new and unreleased track by SOL INVICTUS, but stretches through the broad spectrum of dark music toward the harder side including a new piece by MERZBOW inspired by Sea Shepherd's campaign against Japanese whale hunts. The compilation was produced by Lesley Malone and Caroline Jago of SEVENTH HARMONIC and SOL INVICTUS. The album was ready to release less than a month after its initial inception, such was the enthusiastic and immediate response from fellow musicians wanting to support the cause. NO RED SEAS is available for download on a minimum donation basis from [WWW.NOREDSEAS.BANDCAMP.COM](http://WWW.NOREDSEAS.BANDCAMP.COM), with all proceeds going direct to SSCS.

## Haus Arafna - New York Rhapsody (2011)

The Arafna's continue with this more minimal and even, at times, poppy quality of 2010's album YOU (actually one of my absolute favorite's by this duo, for real). This is a lot less harshly noisy than earlier albums, with no yelling over crushing distorted pulses, just charismatic mumbling and speaking. The tracks flow very well as a unified body of work. I don't dig this nearly as much as the

beautiful YOU album (there are no songs as great as "Judas Kiss" on this newer one) but still an interesting listen for anyone who has followed their development over the years. Don't worry, it's still miserably dark. "I Did It For You"  
[WWW.HAUSARAFNA.DE](http://WWW.HAUSARAFNA.DE)

### Primary Colors - Fading Collapse (2012)

The 2nd album by an awesome synthpunk and scrapyard percussion duo outta Oakland! Both have been cassette format! Great classic approach to dancey industrial songwriting in every way - the structure, lyrics, synths, recording style, etc. If you grew up rocking Nitzer Ebb's old That Total Age tape, you really won't be able to resist Primary Colors. It's just that simple, haha! This is the band that makes it not as bad that Babyland broke up. Don't miss it if you have the chance to see these guys live - it's played just as cool as the recordings, and it's a whole lotta fun in any DIY space! [WWW.PRIMARYCOLORS.BANDCAMP.COM](http://WWW.PRIMARYCOLORS.BANDCAMP.COM)  
*Graceless Issue#2 will include a full length interview with Primary Colors*

### ohGr - Undeveloped (2011)

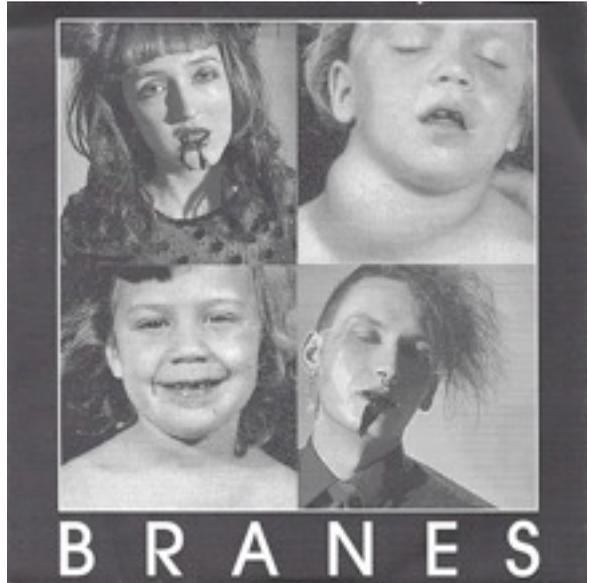
I remember seeing ohGr around the turn of the millennium, as an 18 year old who thought it was basically the closest I'd get to seeing the then-disbanded Skinny Puppy. The way this project with Mark Walk started back then was a lot more quirky awkward pop than what I was interested in at the time, but it's really grown on me. Undeveloped is ohGr's 4th album, and by far the one I have most enjoyed, in terms of musicality or dark weird pop or whatever it should be called. The production has by now really honed the integration of vocal with very catchy synths and beats. The content is still much goofier and less politically-charged than that found in Skinny Puppy, and I'm not prone to listening



to the album as a whole because of this, but honestly I can't tell you how many times I listened to "Tragek" as summer was arriving right after its release. There are some beautiful moments here, and also the actual 911 phone call from when Michael Jackson died, if you ever wanted to hear that for some reason...  
WWW.WDIHTF.COM

### BRANES - Anatomically Correct (2011)

Very fun 7" from another new spooky Californian synthpunk duo. Basic drum machine rock beats backing great layered synths and catchy energetic singing. I'm pretty sure this is the band Lydia from Beetlejuice (or Betelgeuse) started after she finished school, but I haven't got confirmation on that yet. Their live show is a lot of fun too; great presence! These days, when spiders are sick of crying in the shadows, they put on this record and dance until another unwanted dawn!  
WWW.B-R-A-N-E-S.COM



### Skinny Puppy - Handover (2011)

It took me a few years to give the re-united Skinny Puppy albums a fair chance. Like many people, it was difficult for me to accept this new decade of cleaner production and a somewhat less creepy atmosphere in general. But like with any great artist's work, it's best to avoid wishing for them to make the same thing over and over for decades - even an album like Last Rites! This recent work is something different altogether, and I listened to it with an optimism it deserves. A super-digital, glitchy quality continues in Handover, even into moments referencing elements of contemporary breakcore which I can appreciate. You get the sense that cEvin Key keeps up well with current trends in electronic music, while

maintaining still his signature strangely unsettling vibe that always helped Skinny Puppy stand apart from the cesspool EBM / industrial dance world overall. Ogre's vocal work and lyrics also maintain this quality, even through a perhaps more accessible structure than earlier periods of the band. It's all still quite personalized and unlike anything else; abstract and provoking even if not what you may initially go to Skinny Puppy for after getting through high school via Vivisectvi or even The Process... "Cullorblind" is a great song I'm happy to play this year at a local goth night! WWW.SKINNYPUPPY.COM

### March Violets - Love Will Kill You E.P. (2011)

in 1980, joy division told us that love will tear us apart. and eleven years after that, we learned that love that will save you, but it will never ever save michael gira. and finally, the march violets have come out of hiding to settle the score and give us another update: love will kill you.

it has been four years since march violets' last surprise attack, and they are hitting us again, hard, with the music that outlines our walking nightmares, our heartbreaking realities and our gorgeous dance moves. other than an E.P. and a reunion tour in 2007—after which rosie garland developed, but has since overcome, throat cancer—march violets had not been around much since the early 90s. what inspires their return? simon denbigh put it like this in an interview with peek-a-boo magazine: "The Right Wing Greedy Capitalist "fuck you I'm alright, greed is good" mentality [margaret thatcher] started, that led to today's utterly rotten corrupt banking/financial situation, had a massive part to play in getting us angry and active. They are back in power, again, in the UK .... And guess what? So are we!"

i could not be happier. i have been listening to this CD on repeat for longer than i would like to admit.

the title track, road of bones, with its botanic versesreminiscent sound that sets the feel of the rest of the E.P., is a sad song of heartbreak, caution and avoidance, with one-liners that make me want to go and get more words tattooed on me. this is the only track with lyrics available at the time of this review so the others i have tried my best to guess at.

the political slant of the band simon has been mentioning in interviews is obvious, but not too obvious, in the following track, london's drowning. weaving in and out of radical riffs are words of resistance, punctuated of course by the drum machine. said slant is also there in the track a little punk thing. have always said that the best goths are also the punks, so thanks, march violets, for admitting to being the punks. a little punk thingis my favorite song lyrically on this album.

it begins with a sample of, guess what. police sirens! “hey, you, what you gonna do? like like a bastard[/banker]?” it’s very catchy as well. in fact, this is my favorite song on the album.

the song with a video available for view online, dandelion king, actually my least favorite song. the vocals seem a little ill-fitted to me in some parts and it’s just not as compelling as the rest of the album. the video is very beautiful, though, and you may as well check it out yourself! i can see why this is their first release, as it’s kind of a back-together song.

the final track on the album, we are all gods ii, should note, is six minutes and sixty seconds long. i thought they were wrong when i saw the play time on my housemate’s cd player going over seven minutes, and then i slapped myself on the forehead. this is the song that DJs should be playing at clubs. it’s got a very pronounced beat and is more atmospheric and, not repetitive or predictable, but rational, as it burns the eardrums up and creates the connection to rest of the body. this is my favorite song musically, and it also has excellent lyrics. “some of us are dying, some of us don’t care, we’re all gods.”

*March Violets are gearing up for a new album with fundraising and a U.K. tour. Check their homepage for updates: [WWW.MARCHVIOLETS.CO.UK](http://WWW.MARCHVIOLETS.CO.UK)*

### Monica Richards - Naiades (2012)

This is an album is a treasure for the ear as well as the eye, one that demands to be held in the hand, a downloaded mp3 copy simply will not suffice. The CD itself is tucked into a hardbound art book lushly illustrated by a number of talented visual artists including Jim Neely (illustrator of Monica’s Anafae comic series), Miran Kim and James O’Barr. Guest musicians on this album include Steve Niles, Paul Mercer and Marzia Rangel. Monica’s familiar voice takes the listener on a floating voyage through decay and rebirth from the ethereal title piece through tribal influenced pieces to the more rock based. The third track in particular, “EndBegin”, could be a gothic anthem to modern collapse: “The trees are burning and the wars unseen, what we know and what we believe ... When the oceans die, your tears will fill the rivers.” [WWW.MONICARICHARDS.COM](http://WWW.MONICARICHARDS.COM)

*Graceless Issue#2 will include a full length interview with Monica.*





*Monica Richard on stage at Wave-Gotik-Treffen, Leipzig Germany, 2011. Photo by jenly*



## “Wipe that shit off your face”

by Sascha (Photos by s.Alt)

“Wipe that shit off your face, you look like a faggot.”

It's 1994, rural, rust-belt Pennsylvania, I just came home from middle school wearing make up and this is my mother's response. The Cure and Nine Inch Nails are my favorite bands. They are both led by enigmatic, tender men who are not afraid to be angry, but also not afraid to cry. They wear makeup and play with gender presentation. I sneak into my mother's room on the rare occasions she isn't home and steal her makeup, to go out at night, always hurriedly, and maybe a little shamefully trying to wipe it off before I get home. I sneak out into the woods by myself and play in borrowed dresses and tights. Small town Pennsylvania, and the alpha male attitude reigns supreme. I'm bad at sports, I don't want to play them, and I want to read or write. I cry easily. My mood swings become more severe

as adolescence drags on. I hear my friends' parents whisper about medication when they think I can't hear. My mother will have none of it. I just need to toughen up.

My room becomes a refuge. The homophobic jocks at school and indifferent teachers can never reach me here. Music by bands like Skinny Puppy, Front Line Assembly, and The Sisters of Mercy inspires me. That harsh duality I so crave is ever present in the music. There is sadness, yes, but also that undercurrent of revolt against a world which we have no control over. I see it in punk, and I'll see it again in a few years when I escape Pennsylvania and immerse myself in the Anti-Globalization/Anti-Capitalist movement of the late 90s/early 2000s.

Sites of desolation and almost unbearable loneliness start to feel like home. The world feels quieter, safer, I feel more at ease. I wish I could go out only at night. The cemetery, abandoned houses, the woods, abandoned buildings, the remnants of weird, rural, rust belt machinery from an era past. I haunt it all as a teenager, in my head; I like to imagine myself as similar to a small town British Punk Rocker in the 80s, living in both a world of "No Future" and one of endless possibilities at the same time.

In the music, I find that tenderness I can find almost nowhere else, it's okay to be sad, to cry. The state of the world is enough to make anyone despair. It's okay, the music holds me through long Pennsylvania winter nights. I can't sleep, and there is nowhere to go, and nothing but snow and scary rednecks for miles. My adolescent brain finds it analogous to living behind enemy lines. I have the music, I put on my make up at night, get my tights and dresses out of their hiding places. In this space, I feel safe. I don't have to be such an angry boy all the time; I don't have to be a boy at all.

Punk is changing my life forever too, but the type of punk I'm finding seems to offer me more cynicism and anger than anything else. It's a survival tool. My friends think anything beyond the scope of emotions offered in Black Flag songs is stupid and weak. I want to listen to The Cure or the Sisters of Mercy at night after the show, or the party, much to the derision of my friends. I wear make up to see the Oi bands that were so popular in the American north east in the mid to late nineties, again much to my friends' derision.

“Why do you have to look so Goth, to go to a PUNK show?”

I’m wildly in love with punk too, but I feel limited. I want to feel. I am unashamed. I want it all, tenderness and pretty boys singing softly in make up too. I feel grounded in my sense of justice that something is wrong with our culture, and all the ways people find to express that sense of injustice, of anger, of sadness, seems valid to me.

It’s like I can see beauty for the first time ever, not some preconceived, prescribed notion of it that exists only on television. I see the world as a beautiful, wondrous, place that I live in, instead of survive in. I see it in my friends, in everything, like being awaked from a long sleep. Most all, I see it in my skinny, awkward, body that everyone has been telling me is inadequate, and shameful for as long as I can remember. I can see myself through smeared eyeliner, and ripped dresses. Though I doubt it, and struggle with self loathing still, it’s like my body can feel my genderqueer future ahead of me, and is begging me to hold on, to stay safe, to stay alive inside.

I’m glad I did.

Now it is 17 years later, and I’m near 31 years old. The Pennsylvania rust belt and my mother’s hateful words are behind me forever. The cold, dark, void of dogmatic Christian spiritual desolation is banished forever. None of them can ever touch me again, never reach that all holy, vulnerable core of my being. I am free; I am born again every night, in eyeliner, in ripped tights, in black lace, in glitter. I see the androgynous divine peering back at me in the mirror. On some nights I can still see that wounded kid who made it through. Mostly, I see our wild, unfettered genderqueer future, and it looks amazing.

In a sense, I owe so much of it Goth movement. It provided a safe space for me to explore, to play with gender, to subvert that fucker. Goth helped me learn how to feel, how to not stifle any emotions that do not make you immediately tough, like so many of us who are socialized as male are taught to. It was a much needed refuge growing up, in what felt like a teenage warzone. It provided a space to explore the feminine aspects of myself in the midst of homophobic death culture. The seed of revolt against the

gender binary, that was planted when I wore smeared black eyeliner for the first time as a teenager, has taken root and become the well rounded, fierce, genderqueer adult that I am today. The desire to subvert masculinity in what initially seemed superficial ways grew into an open sense of revolt against patriarchal death culture. Even through moments of doubt, I've never looked back, and never felt so blessed that I had finally come home.



we demand that the goth  
scene be more than a  
black-clad reflection of  
mainstream society

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