

Hounding

“The year was 1995. Mankind had reached a stalemate with God and with itself.

There was neither peace or war because there never could be a war that would not bring
about the liquidation of victor as well as vanquished.”

— Robert J. Burros: *Horror of the Future* (1959, 3) —

Samuel Hertz

This essay is about doom. In a broad sense, its apocalyptic dimensions, but in another, the micro-scalings of doom. It opens space for a more precise look at where and how small ‘doomed moments’ are already underway. A space for recognizing and attending-by-feeling into the low, slow, and subtle moments of cumulative violence, the threat of disappearance that lingers just out of view—thinly laced around the periphery. As such, this essay engages with sound-based methodological and conceptual approaches to loss and disappearance at extended scales, and is also framed by performative and conceptual input from my performance *DOOM* (2020-2022), created in collaboration with Layton Lachman and alongside performers emeka ene and Caroline Neill Alexander. Taking place in a blooming apocalypse, *DOOM* encourages non-fatalistic ways of sensing slowly changing environments as four performers navigate through, and produce, a pressurised doom metal concert with non-stop movement, howls, and calls.

DOOM serves as a method that allows us to feel the parity of seriousness between the (already) on-going loss of non/human life at the hands of anthropogenic climate change—and invisible dooms quantified by slowly-changing environments—through durational sound and movement. As moments within the performance expand and contract, so do our notions of time and scale; a thundering concert all but freezes time through vibrating walls and bodies in common, yet quick and subtle events flit by in the periphery. As such, I situate *DOOM* as a shuddering that resonates through this essay with formatted text and images, a frame through which one might attune to apocalyptic temporalities as well as new, performative approaches to the spaces and timings of death. Other ways to feel time, if only for a (suspended) moment.

I. NON-EXPLOSIVE LOSS

“I’ll tell you somethin’ about your famous future...
Every day I wake up, it’s still the present, the same grimy,
boring present. I don’t think this ‘future’ thing exists.”

—Cale, *Titan AE* (2000)—

Occidental onto-political regimes are founded on the temporalities of explosion: immediate combustion and destruction. Suddenness itself constructs a specific temporal ontology of loss. Our media images of climate disasters

certainly correspond to this rule, as understandings of accelerating climate change are often limited to events such as glacial calving and weather patterns presented as uncharacteristic ‘catastrophes’. Said otherwise, we expect the experience of loss to be immediate, matching the temporal demands of the capitalist market. Humans exert dangerous environmental pressure at wide and swift bandwidths, but the cumulative effects of these pressurised interventions remain at global tempi. Events which are slower and harder to sense through destructively *virtual* webs of effects: the extent to which something is sensually intangible, yet heavily consequential with respect to its worldly interactions in the long term. /This form of latent virtuality

describes the ‘insensibility’ of losses veiled by scalar concerns, obscuring connectivity through displacement in time and space under the guise of uneventfulness. Sudden and drastic changes are simply the tip of the iceberg, concealing the grand majority of slower and more sinister violences built up over time. The “grimy, boring present” that opens this section denotes indistinguishable violence: a layered surface of infinite moments, within which the subtle damages of the everyday accumulate. The plane of *slow violence* without accountability: “delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2011, 2). In the face of an indeterminate future, consequences remain elusive.

The occulting of deadly processes by the cloak of time can be viewed with a variety of lenses through which we sense more clearly this snarled knotting of decay. The slow violences of delay, dispersion, and attrition are grounded in an ontological banality, and link purposefully obscured necropolitical practices to their entanglements within bureaucracy and infrastructure. Though this entanglement of slow violence and necro-politics is more intricately evolved elsewhere, what I wish to add are new “contours in time and space” wherein these gradual losses and disappearances can be more easily grasped, if only we knew the right places—and how—to listen (Berlant 2007 qtd. Davies 2018, 1540). It is in this sense that I introduce the methodologies of bioacoustics research as a way of recognizing the creeping combustions of slow violence through the lineations and silhouettes demarcated by a sonic materiality, in order to place them on par with the swift, explosive tempi wherein which we imagine violence typically occurs.

A pack of snarling dogs
travels in a twisted clump, howling at the sky,
breathing heavily,
tongues lolling out of the sides of their mouths.
A thick, yellow fog twists and curls behind them,
a rusty bike circles endlessly and
a boombox cranks out an old, repetitive tune.
The pack of dogs—wary but unwavering—crosses the scene.
Two are tangled in a chain
that seems to have undergone an alchemical bejewelling,
transmuted by radiating heat.

The chain is an appendage.

The dogs move in unison, the scene reeks of nostalgia,
a uniquely human apocalyptic scenario which at once illustrates what-
once-was and what-cannot-anymore-be...

“...And as simple as a bird, a bird that knows where to go and he knows where he can live at, so he knows he can’t live here, so he’s going that way where he can live...” (Davies 2018, 1548)

A “sermon-like address” given by the reverend in the town of St. James, Louisiana, at the end of Thom Davies’ case-study on extractive slow violence, foregrounds a way in which the sonic field creates a complex intersection of noise, silence, reproduction, and death. Though referring here primarily to the presence of pollutants (but also noise and vibration as indicated elsewhere in the article), it speaks to how both habitat and human health can be reflected in the acoustic behaviour of fauna. Understanding that this relocation of birds would be accompanied by a complex sonic shift, hearing the reverend’s statement through the reverberations of bioacoustics research can help us to understand the temporally-explosive ways in which technophony¹ alters and de-

... for a moment, the rumbling has stopped,
and four decorated creatures meet.
They form a small circle, primping each others’ plumage

¹ Technophony: broadly understood as anthropogenic electro-mechanical noise; Biophony: sound produced by non-human animals. It would be worth reiterating that these categories refer only to the way sound is produced, not to any definitional boundaries for how these classes of sound relate and interact.

And begin to call
 Quietly at first
 Mouths open
 Still calling out, even though they haven't yet received a reply
 Still harmonizing, without having chosen a song...

If the birds know where and when to go, we can then follow them flitting around the zones of extraction. Zones wherein noisy bifurcations resulting from anthro- and technophonics make slow and subtle forms of attrition abundantly clear. Indeed, a lower number of species detected at recording sites close to mining operations are to be expected. However, within those same sites coexists a 'selection' of insect "species with narrowband stridulations"—being that this allows them to "better cope with the competition from [technophonic] noise"—and bird populations with *higher* communicative bandwidths (Duarte et al. 2015, 629). An increase of technophony creates a.) large-scale shifts in animal populations by acoustically 'drowning out', as well as b.) subtle and gradual population selection for species who have (or can develop) resilient sonic communication.

Anthrophonics (including technophonics), while distinct from biophonics with respect to their production source, can never truly be separated from the larger sonic ecosystem within which they resound. Anthrophonic interferences trickle down in slower and more sinister fashions throughout a biophony within which they are also included and affected in turn. We may say with surety, for example, that acoustic communication is essential for aspects of food location, mating and reproductive cycles, and resource/territory defense (Duarte et al. 2015). Therefore, a crescendo of technophonic sound means not only relocation of species themselves, but ultimately loss in species richness, diversity, and abundance. Sound, then, becomes an agent of species sterilization through the prevention of effective acoustic communication and recognition, creating micro-selective conditions for the adaptation of animals to noisy environments:

"[animals] need to be able to come in contact so that they're able to reproduce effectively, otherwise, they [are] blocked and enclosed in certain areas, where they may have interbreeding effects, which means that they

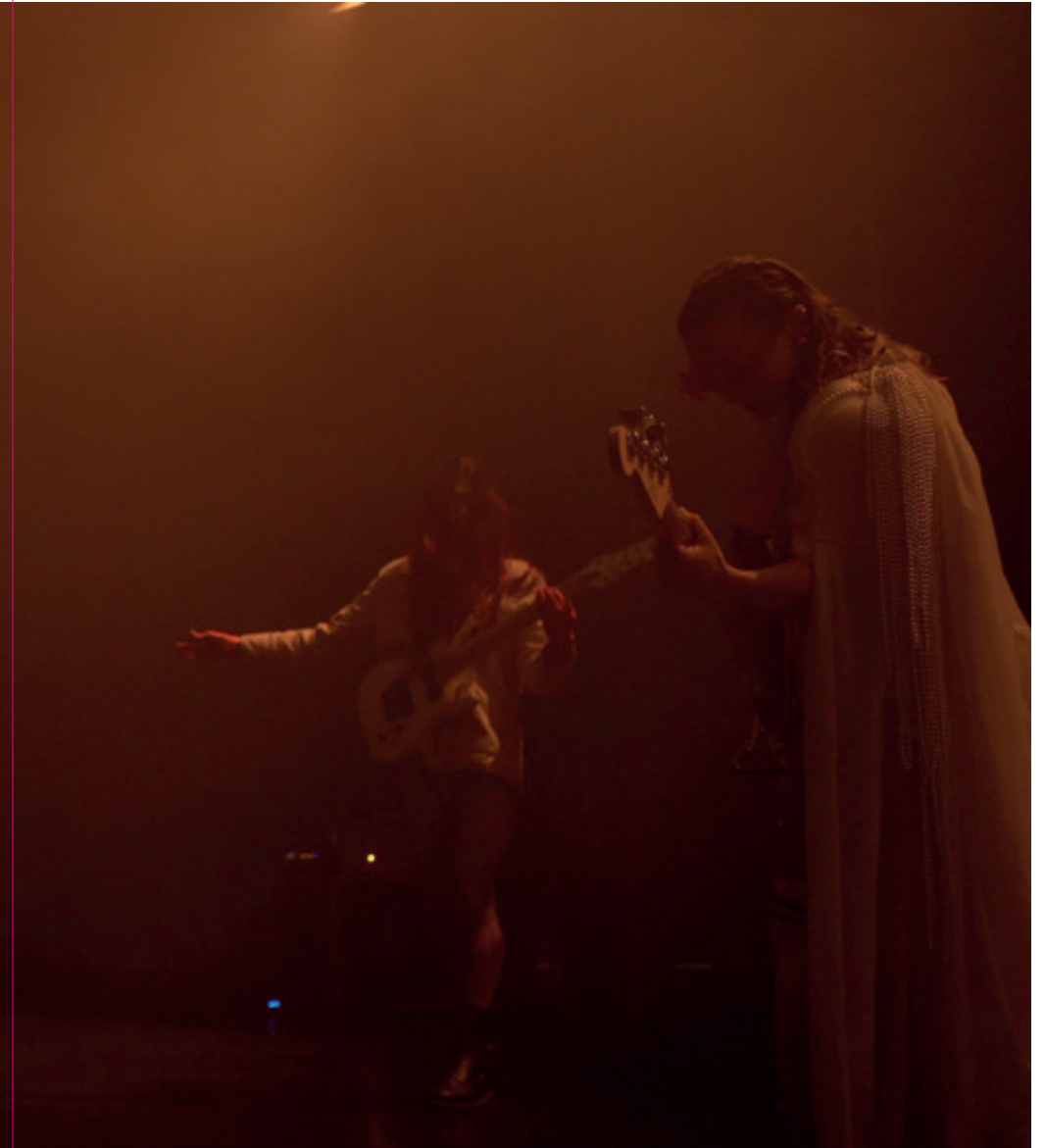
will lose their DNA diversity and they will become more prone to disease and the various other system conditions that will make their population decline" (Giannakeas 2021, personal communication).

Here, in this open-cast mine, the temporalities of drilling and blasting set the stage for a slower form of destruction which operates acoustically: narrow-band communication, narrowband genetics. Not the blasting itself, but the reverberations through time.

...slow movements across a yellow haze background.
 More and more fog begins to fill the air,
 the scene transforms and melts away. Sometimes we are obscured,
 other times our genitals are exposed under a harsh light,
 prismatic jewellery tracing lines across the sandy beach...

The sounds of industry and toxicity additionally perform exclusionary and violent acts not only through the drowning out of animal populations, but also through the shattering vibration of humans and human infrastructures. As Davies shows, residents of St. James are themselves violently disturbed by the noise ("it's shaking me off the pillars, off the joists ... it sounds like your house about to fall down on you"), as well as the temporally cumulative effect that vibration has on their houses, causing damage to walls, doors, and foundations alike (Davies 2018, 1545). The interviewee's account shows that the durational force of these extractive sound events also curtails possibilities for livelihood by degrading infrastructural elements of daily life. Vibrational disturbances may be immediately felt as violence in one sense, and in another they take on new meanings through a broader temporal approach—not only as disruption but through degradation and dissolution.

Mining and industry extract substances and imbue them with the privilege of combustive subjecthood, at the (literally) degrading expense of lives and livelihoods. The possibility to extract precious metals from the earth through explosive practices requires the sapping of more-than-human life forces: the material dissolution of infrastructural elements and the sequestering and interference of genetic patterns. The temporal toxicity of these sites—as just one extractive example—move beyond the sudden and the explosive and into



the slow ranges of the sonic, tactile, and reproductive; an explosion so slow that it remains inaudible.

These inaudible losses, however, are rendered sensual through expansive temporal sounding. Not simply sound as an acoustic phenomenon but, rather, encompassing a *political materiality* “by which we learn of the temporality and ephemerality of bodies and things” (LaBelle 2018, 38). Whereas this might prompt some to imagine sound as a metaphor or sign *representing* the loss and disappearance of life and livelihood, we should understand it instead as an active material plane in which “a rearrangement of matter exposes the contingency of witnessing, soliciting questions about what can be known in relationship to that which is seen or sensed” (Schuppli 2020, 4)—the material intersection of biophonics and technophonics. A (slow) witnessing of these sound events² is not ‘the sound of’ disappearance, degradation, and loss, but of a material change in and of itself, echoing out into broader in/audible networks.

² This understanding of “event” operates along the lines of Schuppli’s re-articulation of Deleuze: “a change in the intensities of relations between elements that creates a relay connecting the whole to its parts” (Schuppli 2020, 6).

... creatures crawling through caked mud
and shrugging off ivy branches
The sound of wetland fowl echoes sharply
flapping metal is the ticking clock, an abandoned lakeside
hotel at the napalmed valley rings and shudders air streams through
copper pipes facing the main deserted road
sinister chirping bouncing off concrete slab
tonalhum at thick swamp frequencies mostly reeds waving in wind with
static microphone hiss stretching in flat time...

II. SLOW-GOING

In that sound amplifies a material understanding of the temporal dispersal of loss, this sonic materiality creates possibilities for new affective relations and attentiveness to slow death. Davies’ introduction of the term ‘slow observation’ as a potential counter to ‘slow violence’ accounts for a more serious understanding of the temporalities of loss, unfurling new registers and scales through which to cast our observing ear. That is to say, inasmuch as our understanding of time should slow down to match the pacing at which ‘ordinary’³ violence occurs, this concept also requires an expansive understanding

³ It is precisely the extent to which violence is embedded within the everyday or ‘ordinary’ infrastructural and bureaucratic systems that allow violence to take on a virtual mantle. That is to say, a scaling of violence which is rendered ordinary, allowing its subtle operation. (see Berlant 2007)

of what occurs in the spaces of these slower tempi: a chance to view the complex “entanglements of materials at multiple scales of reality in order to activate their narrative potential as politicizing agents” (Schuppli 2020). So long as these materials remain data points, they run the risk of relegation to metaphor. Therefore, my intention in the following section is to introduce the conceptual approach to slow observational techniques extracted from bioacoustics research, in line with the concept of an “Ecology beyond numbers” as introduced by Kilian Jörg in the Introduction to this book. These may at once lend tools to unpack dense and complex temporal networks, and form the groundwork for performative and embodied enactments of temporal sensuality.

The acoustic mining pit survey referenced above is a perfect example of the ways in which Bioacoustics and soundscape ecology⁴ are used to “analyze variation over space and time [to reflect] important landscape processes and human activities” (Rodriguez 2013, 5). Focusing on a particular site with a macro-approach to time allows the researchers to understand the complex interactions between bio-, and technophonics through sounding networks. The importance of bioacoustics research also rests on the presupposition of the impossibility of closed systems—a “circular continuum of variability” in research areas reflecting overlapping soundscapes which continuously blend and fade into each other (Rodriguez 2013, 5). Not only are multi-species communications premised on networks (Sueur, Farina, Gasc et. al. 2014), but the notion of ‘repatting’ details the extent to which broader acoustic networks alter and adapt to changing environmental conditions (Lacey 2013). As all tendrils of this sonic web constantly intersect, they do not just simply adapt. Instead, the materialities of their adaptations—the specificities of the sonic intensifications, compressions and divergences—provide additional information about other processes and effects at work.⁵ Through this slowness unfolds complexity. Taking time allows for broader sonic networks to come into listening range.

Attending to the loss of natural habitats by reference to the material loss of sound only makes sense if we understand that the loss of sound is caught in this same fabric through which violence is woven. There are, of course, many reasons accounting for the changing of sound within a particular environment; mining noise, for example, causes alterations and bifurcations in

⁴ Sometimes referred to synonymously as Acoustic Ecology

⁵ e.g. Krause and Farina’s “Using eco acoustic methods to survey the impacts of climate change on biodiversity” (2016)

the richness and diversity of sound-making populations—not necessarily *direct or immediate decreases* in population. Further, these alterations are not uniformly applied or observed. There is not, therefore, a 1:1 ratio between the loss of sound and the loss of life in the short-term. A veil of supposed dormancy shrouds the slow temporalities of disappearance that operate behind the scenes. The slow observational addition of extensive temporal layers shows that it is not necessarily the loss of sound, but the *transition of sound material* that already illuminates slowly changing habitats. As seen above, the species using narrowband communication have no (acoustic) issue remaining near mining sites. The inflicted violence is durational and cumulative, more akin to starvation than outright death itself. Just because there is no dramatic drop in sound, it does not indicate that deathly operations are not at work; slow observation eliminates the need to wait until sudden death in order to record the sound of loss—the exclusionary acoustic barriers measured by sonic analyses already signify ongoing destruction.

If the above methods resonate as a way to hear loss through slow observation, how is it that sensitivities towards slower, fuller understandings of the violence of ever-so-gradual decomposition can be developed? The development of *DOOM* points towards embodied, performative, and sounding practices that heighten and make available sensitivities and affective relations to time, disappearance, and nuanced observation.

III. BORING TEMPORALITIES

...the high-volumes build between our bones, our guts—
vibrations of the passage of time over us.

Our room throbs, shudders, creaks. The veil of a metal concert,
or a club, drapes over our skin, beginning to shake and twist our small
hairs, moving inwards towards our organs. Each quiver and twitch ex-
citing ripples outwards in space, every slight change an event, growing
with more and more amplification.

Our non-stop movement stretches time, and our concert holds it firmly
expanded, a trembling void within which we sit and tremble
together as well...

Two of *DOOM*'s primary influences are the genres of doom and drone metal. These musical forms speak to the need for immersive, low, and slow sounds, which have the capacity to amplify material connections: the connective tissue and fascial linkages between architectures, spaces, places, and times. *DOOM* and metal alike create a performative, complex sonic space, within which, each subtle derivation or variation is amplified to the point of tactile excitation, making “time palpable as sensation” (Weheliye 2005, 92). Sound performs time on the body; the possibility for feeling the stretching of time, rather than watching time tick away.

One way to approach feeling time comes from the dense, slow, genre of doom metal, of which Bongripper's album *Terminal* (2018) very literally maps a glacial walk through

“S”
“L”
“O”
“W”
“Interlude”
“D”
“E”
“A”
“T”
“H”

Through the course of these 10 songs—continually doubling/halving in tempo, and thickening/lightening in density—both time and complexity have an especially porous and slippery feel. No matter how regular the tempo might seem at any one moment, one gets the feeling that there is a constant possibility of zooming-in or out. Accumulation and suspension permeate the rhythmic feeling of this album: time stretches as repeated guitar riffs reappear across vastly different tempos, re-articulated and revealed to contain more and more sonic information as they slow and build simultaneously. The force of slowed listening makes itself known.

Similarly, their song “Doom” off of the album *Satan Worshipping Doom* illustrates this same sort of slow accumulation: repetitive and rhythmic walls

of sound continue for almost the entire length of the song, only to act as a mask for an ever-increasing wall of noise slowly building in the background. Its observational efficacy results from the rhythmic markers, through which the small yet ever-increasing changes can be felt. The thickness, complexity, and noise occur as a function of time—one is attuned to the slow crawl of doom and its (eventual) climax.

... a slow build as guitars are switched on, some squeal, some hiss
a long, low tone emanates from stacks of feeding-back speakers
They begin to shriek and howl.

More and more sound accumulates as a solitary growl bursts out
all dogs of the apocalypse suddenly in sync
chiming the twelve chords of an infinite present.

Our time oscillates slowly now, expanding and stretching at
our pull, each thundering moment bubbling and clawing outwards as
our gazes tune and narrow ...

Doom's sonic analogues can also be transposed into a more subtle flavour, yet one which retains its affective temporal power and heaviness—doom jazz. Perhaps illustrated best by the German trio Bohren & der Club of Gore (whose website addresses visitors as “Liebe Freunde ereignisarmer Musik, Dear friends of uneventfull [sic] music”⁶), doom jazz might be understood as glacially-paced metal expressed through the volumes and instrumentation of jazz. What the genre may ‘lack’ in decibels, it more than makes up for with a temporal texture one might categorise as *anticipatory*. Often, the sustain of the instruments disappear into the background before the next rhythmic marker appears. Instruments synchronise, then dissipate. In-between: nothing—constant fade-outs. Though the tempi tend to be ‘regular’, they often appear so slow that one might forget them entirely as sound slips from one moment to the next. The music progresses almost without thinking, but of course it is not *thoughtless*—in fact, the opposite—it is incredibly deliberate. As time stretches outwards, the in-between moments and continuous passages become all the more significant, a tangible suspension of time. Though perhaps self-described as ‘uneventful’ (and admittedly not barreling towards the same distortion-induced climaxes as doom metal), the ‘event-ness’ of doom

⁶ <https://www.bohrenundderclubofgore.com/> Accessed 17 May 2021

jazz is contingent upon the spacing of events in the first place—an almost terrifying pressure predicated on a constant negotiation of disappearance, memory, and glacial rhythmic movement. In an interview with Deutschlandfunk Kultur's Ina Plodroch titled “Die langsamste Musik der Welt / The slowest music in the world”, Morten Gass of Bohren & der Club of Gore remarks ““Other bands play, Bohren⁷ bore,” to which Plodroch comments:

⁷ German for “Drilling” or “To Bore (into)”

“Bohren langweilen. Was natürlich auch kokett ist, denn so langweilig wie Fahrstuhlmusik sind ihre Songs längst nicht. Sondern so schleppend langsam, dass eine kaum zu ertragende Spannung entsteht. // Bohren [Drilling] bores [is boring]. Which of course is also coquettish, as their songs are by no means as boring as elevator music. But they drag on so slowly that an almost unbearable tension arises” (Plodroch 2016).

We should not undervalue this double meaning of boring: the drawn-out sensation of under-stimulation, as well as the extractive boring-into-earth alongside its durational violences and observations. Drilling (Bohren) *is* boring, precisely in the sense that it is ordinary. Extraction is a glacial process as well, especially in its temporally-displaced web of effects. The pacing of loss is so slow as to be boring or ‘uneventful’ at face-value. The “unbearable tension” however, is exactly the affective relation to complexity that a slow observational technique implies. And while drilling may be ‘uneventful’ in its regularity, tuning a slow ear to drilling temporalities reveals that nothing could be further from the truth. It is no coincidence that the genres of doom—regardless of their volumes and instrumentations—are slow. Sudden, climactic loss is the exception, not the rule: the rest fade into the realm of ‘ordinary’ inaudible dooms. Slow observation is an extractive practice in its own right, of course: one predicated on the mining of material relationships from new temporalities, if only to highlight the violences and scales of loss embedded in these material relationships more clearly.

Understanding the spacings and timings of change is a slow process of refusing to let things slip away. The notions of embodiment, intimacy, and attending to time, however, constitute the power of sense impressions to “trump vicarious experiences or abstract data,” and affirm that “the sensory regimes of art works can enable a remapping of the complex spatialities and



Fig. 1-3: Performers are
Samuel Hertz,
Layton Lachman,
emeka ene,
Caroline Neill Alexander



⁸ With reference to her film "Ojos para mis Enemigos" in which a portrait of a hybrid, scalar environment emerges as an abandoned military base is reclaimed by nature.

temporalities of climate change, rescaling those distances that are seen as barriers" (Hawkins and Kanngieser 2017, 5). These "sensory regimes" turn the data of 'uneventful violence' into something tactile—something that can "change time and space scale [in order] to see with and next to others"⁸ and recast the loping ordinary as significant (Muñoz 2014).

IV. BORING LIVES

The capacity to 'see/hear with and next to' is not only something which preserves the memory of, but *reifies* in the material sense. The seemingly insignificant or overlooked "responsiveness of matter to external forces demands an acute and renewed sense of material specificity in order to grasp the full political implications that such ongoing changes or interactions might yield" (Schuppli 2020, 4). Attending to temporality with heightened sensitivity towards networks of material changes and effects gives proof of registers of loss lower and slower than everyday observation. Taking this same temporal approach, however, also shows a manner of coming to terms with death which, in its re-enactment, proves to be an embodied addressing of these ordinary violences. Shaking and displacing time to turn time back on itself, observing how exploding and extracting the momentary calls the future back into the picture—back into the realm of possibility that there might be one in the first place.

... therefore, we bore. Two performers watch,
slowly eating an orange, preparing, a glittering necklace lowered around
throbbing and sweating skin.
The apocalypse requires preparation...

...Or, for a time, nothing happens.

The necklace carefully clasped,
we lay on the floor, or strap into harnesses. And wait.
Chains drag mercilessly across the ground.
The guitar is untouched and rests at full volume,
its coils crackle as the poorly-grounded circuitry nears our skin...

The apocalypse is boring, after all: it was already here the whole time, playing out slowly in the periphery. Doom occurs when everything seems to have remained the same from one moment to the next, only to find that the ground underneath our feet has been eroding, that the hum of the insects has taken on a narrower tone. In *DOOM*, we would turn on our shrieking and howling guitars to the shuddering point of maximum amplification, only to perform this doomed-time directly on the body, to remind each other that there are no small dooms at all—only slow ones.

... four dogs circle
They travel in a twisted clump, howling at the sky, breathing heavily,
tongues lolling out of the sides of their mouths.
A thick, yellow fog twists and curls behind them...