***WHITE NOISE***

In America today, anyone can engage in spiritual surrender. Performing the rite is simple: one first gathers with their community in a room of mirrors (in peripheral vision these mirrors appear as windows). Next, the agendas, hopes, and grievances of each individual are written down and cast along pulsed radio frequencies to data centers. From here they are automatically sifted through a neural network of graphics processing units, and contributed to an artificial intelligence engine. The principal aim of the ritual is to preserve the cosmic movement of collective perception. Secondary aims include catharsis, prosperity, and (occasionally) procreation. Because of the persistence of social stresses and mounting political dread, the ritual’s cyclic performance is necessary (twice daily, once at dusk and once at dawn).

Paradoxically, even those who question the efficacy of this tradition must do so from within the same framework, in the form of status updates, tweets, or blog posts. In the early part of 2017 Noah wrote:

“This is our voice. The Aether. An invisible platform. A maze of wires and boxes safely containing our proclamations… While white men with pens close their doors, stuff their ears with cotton, and break the world... we piss in the ocean… we drown in white noise.”

(Once upon a time, Noah Gundersen poetically sang that the storms which make us tremble also “fill our organs up with air,”...allowing us to sing “honest songs”. What of our songs now? Are they just piss in the ocean? White Noise?)

A longtime fan responded via Facebook, referring to the entry as “a goddamn dumpster fire of a post”.

“Your early records are masterpieces,” he commented, “...but this scramble to be anything but what your parents are is killing your authenticity.”

Authenticity can be a fickle mistress it seems. Noah has been peddling sincerity and introspection in musical form for almost a decade; songs that give listeners a taste of the emotional nectar in the pit of another human’s gut. He’s been dredging up viscous fistfulls of his own being and shaping them into little waxen votives, candles meant to illuminate the territory between shameless confession and hopeless redemption, for all of the other twenty-somethings who’ve been groping around in that long existential shadow.

At some point this whole process must have lost its charm. It was two years ago that Noah, like some artistic ouroboros, began to sing the words *“Am I earning the right to live by looking in a mirror? There’s nothing more sincere than selfish art?”* The cyclic ritual of self-induced nausea, staring in the mirror mouth agape, waiting to wretch new words and sounds, was catching up with him. Not long after, in the early part of 2016, he sat down for a show and felt like he was dying.

“Instead of my life up to that point flashing before my eyes, it was my future. A future playing songs I didn’t believe in... pouring my soul out into a vehicle I no longer recognized or loved.”

Noah turned to a fellow songwriter, who shared this mote of reassurance from dancer and choreographer Martha Graham:

“No artist is pleased... There is only a queer divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.”

This crisis was an opportunity for the serpent to relinquish hold of its own tail, for forward motion. To turn his gaze away from reflection, and maybe instead at the mirror itself, alternate voices and distorted perceptions that throw their weight onto the human psyche in powerful ways, but evade expression in introspective storytelling.

So, that’s *White Noise,* I think*:* the fluorescent glow of queer divine dissatisfaction. The distorted buzz manufactured by dumb metal phalluses thrust into a vacuum of waves and signals. It doesn’t dwell on (and in fact seems uninterested in) introspection. Not a guiding light. Not the reasoned problem-solving of the ego, but the muddled demands of the id. It’s a myriad of interpolated signals, symbols, and voices, like a tube-TV greedily flipping through channels on auto-program:

“Heavy Metals” is cosmic dismay that’s been pasted over with a sugary synth veneer. “Cocaine, Sex, and Alcohol (From a Basement in L.A.)”, like a messy public broadcast, leverages a din of drunken band sounds and disoriented muttering, “*I’ve got all this alcohol… do you wanna see my show*?”

The decadent yearning of “Bad Desire” sits between the other songs of dissolution like a soap opera broadcasting alongside the evening news. Just as Noah finishes crooning the final honey-sweet chorus, *“...and I wanna see you tonight, one last time,”* we transition into night sweats, the frantic yelling of sleep terrors, all heralding the cathartic industrial funeral dirge of “Wake Me Up, I’m Drowning”.

Noah is no longer lighting votives, but dumpster fires—big, bright, symbolic and chaotic. Musical vignettes of combustion, rubbish, degeneracy and, perhaps most comfortingly, warmth; because sometimes overlooked in the mad grasping for heady, introspective Authenticity is music that’s heartfelt. In “The Sound”, Noah scourges a source of entitlement that is entirely ambiguous, but does so with a sort of exasperated conviction that is only ever reserved for one’s nation, one’s God, or one’s self. The words *“How many times will you shit on what you’re given? How many times till you shut up and listen?”* escape his throat with a desperation that (bafflingly) surpasses even his most vulnerable songs about heartbreak, addiction, or loss of faith.

Whether the voices he channels are symbolic or literal, paralyzed with fear or pushing a manic brand of salvation, each amounts to something laced with warm, ruddy veins (I have a feeling that Noah’s music always will). If you listen closely you’ll hear the spiritualist, who takes solace in the fact that when he’s gone, the water in his body may be the beginning of something new. There’s also the doomsayer, certain of his fate, but still so afraid, who can’t help but ask of his own violent trembling, “Are these my feet attempting to dance?” Then there’s mortality, trying to shout through all of the noise, “Send my love to everyone.”

*White Noise was produced by Nate Yaccino and features long-time band-members and collaborators Abby Gundersen, Jonny Gundersen, and Micah Simler. It will be released into the Aether on September 22nd, 2017.*