

Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound

‘Shadrack’s brave usage of autoethnography to explore how black metal is a movement beyond music presents a new and refreshing paradigm through the exploration of an often-misunderstood subculture. Her skill in intertwining methodology with her own subjective reflexivity is an important and much-needed addition to gender, music, and performance studies.’ – Laina Dawes, author, *What Are You Doing Here? A Black Woman’s Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal*

‘Seldom do we as scholars get to interact with a professional musician who sees their work as autoethnographic; even more seldom do we see that valuable and difficult work coming from women in genres such as heavy metal. With an eye on both critical theory and musical performance, Dr. Shadrack creates an interwoven story of personal experience, gender studies and women’s studies, sexual oppression and sexual violence, and brings forth deep discussions of religion, iconography, existentialism, women’s voices in and out of metal, and the many ways in which women are symbolized, represented and delimited. It is a groundbreaking work, one that continues a line of work in gender and heavy metal that represents some of the best work on gender in publication right now. The image of Denigrata Herself, the horned goddess screaming into the patriarchy, is an icon for our times.’ — Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone, Professor of Anthropology, University of Central Missouri, USA

‘Dr Jasmine Shadrack has accomplished a tremendous feat in this book: as an autoethnographic study, she has combined the rigours of academic research with an unsurpassed level of insight that sets a new standard in how reflection and experience can be expressed. Despite its complexity, the text is extremely accessible and weaves a narrative, making it a guide for others on how music and the arts can be a friend to those suffering from the effects of trauma and abuse where the two intersect. This is a book of hope and a source of healing. Even though it articulates a principled stand through Shadrack’s use of black metal, the relevance of her discussion reaches far beyond the music culture where she finds her solace. Her work will resonate with a wide-ranging audience - not only those working in the field of gender, feminism, metal studies and cultural studies, but also the many victims of abuse, marginalization and those suffering oppression.’ — Dr Niall Scott, Reader in Philosophy and Popular Culture, University of Central Lancashire, UK

Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss

BY

JASMINE HAZEL SHADRACK



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For Mum

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. (Revelation 12:1)

Hazel Gillian Margaret Shadrack
1954–2000

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Author Biographies

Dr Jasmine Hazel Shadrack is an event leader and conference curator with the interdisciplinary scholarship network Progressive Connexions. She is also a member of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars and sits on the editorial board for the International Society for Metal Music Studies. After achieving her PhD in 2017 whilst lecturing full time in popular music studies and conducting her chamber choir, she is now focused on composition, performance, publishing and curation.

Contributors

Amanda DiGioia has published the monograph *Childbirth and Parenting in Horror Texts: The Marginalized and the Monstrous* with Emerald, as well as papers on the howls of wolves in heavy metal and the inscribing of morality on women's bodies. Her research interests include diegetic sound in horror texts, feminist theory, Finnish society and culture. She is currently studying for a PhD that examines gender as a part of the complex web of cultural connections between Finnish women and heavy metal. Her latest book is *Duelling, the Russian Cultural Imagination, and Masculinity in Crisis* (forthcoming).

Rosemary Lucy Hill is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Popular Culture at the University of Huddersfield. She is the author of *Gender, Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music* (Palgrave). She is also a musician.

Rebecca Lamont-Jiggins is a legal pracademic specialising in disability. After getting side-tracked from academic philosophy by life, children and social enterprise, she eventually returned to academia by way of mid-life crisis. Retraining in law to gain her LLM, she practises in the Employment Tribunal specialising in complex disability discrimination cases, while undertaking her PhD at the University of Leeds, researching judicial decision-making on the concept of 'reasonableness' in disability adjustments.

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Foreword

It is a privilege to be asked to write the foreword for *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss*. It is a book I have waited a long time to read. When I first met Jaz in 2011 and I was researching my book *Gender, Metal and the Media* I was thrilled, inspired and delighted to befriend such a warmhearted, fierce and astonishingly talented woman. I was keen to learn more about her experiences as a woman making metal music and believed that she had a unique contribution to make to metal studies. Little did I know what lay in store for her.

Jaz began to explore the idea of autoethnography, of using her own experience as a metal musician. Reading Stanley and Wise's *Breaking Out Again*, she found a way to think and write analytically about her life in music.

And then the man who claimed to love her set about undermining her strength and sense of self through violence and abuse. It is with horror that I now read about her experiences at the hands of that man, and the terrifying impact on her health. Jaz's unique contribution to metal studies is now also a significant contribution to understandings of how men's violence against women impacts on our bodies, our identities, our art. And how those impacts do not stop when the violence stops, but continue through our lives, changing us permanently.

Freed from the abuser, Jaz found solace in black metal, taking on the new role of frontwoman in Denigrata as well as guitarist. As she details, writing and performing as Denigrata Herself provided a means to feel the pain and to navigate the trauma in order to rebuild her sense of self, which had been wrested from her. In doing so she simultaneously rewrote the meanings of black metal. At their album launch in the little round church in Northampton, with her antlers, guttural rage and ferocious guitar, I was blown away and delighted at the courage of the performers, astounded by the interplay of vocals between Denigrata Herself and Manea. And not a little starstruck. What a privilege to be there.

In analysing her musical life, Jaz argues that black metal is an art form that allows the contemplation and reflective feeling of psychological collapse or void, providing a musical immersion into crisis of the annihilated self. The horror of this is plain from the beginning. But the power of black metal and artistic creation to reconnect with self and rebuild, to move through darkness and renihilate (Hunt-Hendrix, 2015, p. 292) is stirring: it is black metal's introspective focus on the negative that enables this transcendence.

Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss is therefore a vitally important book. Black metal, the annihilated self and the blackened heart are soldered together in ways that enable us to understand how metal music allows us to examine our pain, our trauma, our obliteration. The book tells us about the power of metal to help us to comprehend ourselves, especially those painful and damaged parts of ourselves, but also the gritty, determined, angry and stalwart kernels of identity from which we can cut through the pain to emerge, moth-like, into the dark. Even if it is not enough.

The pain Jaz depicts here is not only the pain and trauma of a man's abuse, but also the pain of the sexism directed towards her by strangers and acquaintances as she put fingers to strings, chords to air, words to feelings to make art. Where metal studies contain a number of fan accounts of metal sexism, Jaz confronts head on the misogyny of the metal world based on her personal experiences as a musician with many years of playing participation. The book evidences the emotional and psychological toll of that sexism and its impact on the musician's ability to make her art as she pleases. Those who claim that the metal world is not sexist need take heed.

And yet this analysis of pain, trauma and misogyny is wrought with self-compassion, with love for metal, and generosity towards the reader. It is a fast-paced and inviting read. Jaz's voice is warm, fierce and full of courage. Like listening to black metal, this book is an intense and challenging read. It is intense because of the honesty with which Jaz writes of her experiences. It is challenging because her analysis of those experiences, of black metal and of metal culture make for discomfiting reading. And that is how it should be: reading about trauma, violence and hatred should not be easy. The rewards for the reader are profound. *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss* presents an entirely new perspective on metal from the inside. And so I am intensely moved to proffer this book to you. This book is a game-changer.

Rosemary Lucy Hill

Author of *Gender, Metal and the Media: Women Fans and the Gendered Experience of Music*

Preface

I am concerned with the performance of subversive...narratives... the performance of possibilities aims to create...a...space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated. (Madison, 2011, p. 280)

If a woman cannot feel comfortable in her own body, she has no home. (Winterson, 2013)

Black metal is beyond music. It exceeds its function of musical genre. It radiates with its sepulchral fire on every side of culture [...] Black metal is the suffering body that illustrates, in the same spring, all the human darkness as much as its vital impetus. (Lesourd, 2013, pp. 41–42).

Representation matters. Growing up, there were only two women in famous metal bands that I would have considered role models: Jo Bench from Bolt Thrower (UK) and Sean Yseult from White Zombie (US). This under-representation of women in metal was always obvious to me and has stayed with me as I have developed as a metal musician. Female fans seeing female musicians on stage creates a paradigm of connection: that representation means something. Judith Butler states that,

on the one hand, representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of language which is said either to reveal or distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. (Butler, 1990, p. 1)

Butler references de Beauvoir, Kristeva, Irigaray, Foucault and Wittig regarding the lack of category of women, that ‘woman does not have a sex’ (Irigaray quoted in Butler, p. 1) and that ‘strictly speaking, “women” cannot be said to exist’ (Butler, 1990). If this is to be understood in relation to my research, my

embodied subjectivity as performative text, regardless of its reception, suggests that my autoethnographic position acts as a counter to women's lack of category. If there is a lack of category, then there is something important happening to 'woman as subject'.

Some of this book seeks to analyse 'woman as subject' in female black metal performance by using interpretive performance autoethnography and psychoanalysis. As the guitarist and front-woman with the black metal band Denigrata, my involvement has meant that the journey to find my home rests within the blackened heart of musical performance. Interpretive performance autoethnography provides the analytical frame that helps identify the ways in which patriarchal modes of address and engagement inform and frame 'woman as subject' in female black metal performance. The rationale for this book has been to identify patriarchal modes of address and engagement from a developing subject position, transforming it into research by using one methodological and one theoretical frame. It begins by using autoethnography to analyse my experiences of intimate partner abuse and my subjective evolution as the front-woman in a black metal band. In so doing, I have been able to present not simply an autobiographical study, but an autoethnographic inquiry that applies psychoanalysis to analyse my subjective narrative.

I have called my preface *Denigrata Cervorum*, which is Latin for blackened hart. This is polysemic in meaning: *Denigrata* is the name of my black metal band that has provided me a site for my autoethnography. The development of the term 'black' into 'blackened' means the noun becomes a verb, investing the band name with the active, rather than passive. This syntactic form also places an 'a' as its suffix, making the word appear feminine. Through my performance as *Denigrata Herself* in the band, my autoethnography has become blackened, darkening the environment enough for me to position my experiences inside it, transforming the performance into a dramaturgical, dialogical space. *Cervorum* means hart, or stag, and the significance of this for me is not only the direct connection to nature, which black metal venerates (as explored in Chapter Three), but also the antlers that I wear on stage as a perceived symbol of masculinity. Brenda Gardenour Walter writes that,

Denigrata Herself claims a female authority equal to that of men, even within systems that seek to abject the feminine. Blackened and horned, this Satanic antlered priestess gores the patriarchal order of Black Metal, the Academy, and the establishment at large. (2016, p. 2)

Gardenour Walter's words help to encompass not only my role on stage but also how I use that role to subvert the dominant discourse. The phonic parallel of the homophonic 'hart' and 'heart' is valuable because aurally it connects with how my heart has felt on my autoethnographic journey. Thus, *Denigrata Cervorum* has become the most meaningful and accurate frame for my research.

The dominant structure and discourse that has underpinned and informed much of my work has been the ways in which patriarchy's centrality has impacted

on my life, from a survivor of domestic abuse to a black metal musician, moving from immediate sexism and misogyny to its hegemonically constructed frame that filters through my musical engagement. Alongside this, I have engaged with literature on women and popular music and have refined it to a more specifically black metal literature review. There has been nearly four decades of work on women and popular music and some of the key areas are also identified: the masculinity of the music industry and its sexist practices (Bayton, 1998; Burns & Lafrance, 2002; Downes, 2012; Leonard, 2007; Marcus, 2010; Whiteley, 2000); the gendering of instruments (Bourdage, 2010; McClary, 1991); the gendering of aggressive music (Dawes, 2012; Hill, 2016; Kitteringham, 2014; Overell, 2014; Vasan, 2010); and women's place within popular music as groupies (Frith & McRobbie, 1978; Leonard, 2007; Weinstein, 1991; Whiteley, 2000) all identify patriarchal modes of address and engagement that are preventative, controlling measures that impact directly on women's engagement with popular music. As this is well established research, I have chosen to focus on the lesser-known field of black metal literature and black metal theory. However, what I have learnt through engaging with the popular music literature on female participation is that patriarchy functions not only as the dominant structure and discourse but also as the subordinating enclosure in which women navigate. I acknowledge that this work offers a different perspective on this field of inquiry by using autoethnography with female black metal performance.

Autoethnography has provided me with a concrete structure within which my subjective experience can be placed and examined. This informed my choice of theoretical frame such that I instinctively felt the data collected from my autoethnographic research would give the most truthful rendering through the application of psychoanalysis; this has felt akin to examining my experiences whilst lying on the psychoanalyst's couch. I use both Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva. Butler's work on gender and performativity has been particularly valuable, alongside one of her most recent publications, *Giving an Account of Oneself*. This text marries her theoretical position with her own voice. Kristeva's work on abjection, jouissance and the corpse are also valuable to my research. I find her work to be the most germane to my own: not only has Kristeva's psychoanalytical work been powerful in terms of the development of cultural theory (which I have been engaging with and teaching for some years), but when I directly applied her work to my autoethnography that I made a deep connection with her. Not only is it fierce and exacting, there is a darkness in her writing voice that echoes my own. As Gloria Anzaldúa notes, 'A woman who writes has power, and a woman with power is feared.' This correlation also speaks to the writing position of much of black metal literature and autoethnographic writing inasmuch as the style and the subjective writing position often speaks of darkness and the search for subjective embodiment.

These elements have provided me with a solid frame that is also fluid and breathable. Speaking the truth to patriarchy through feminist autoethnography and feminist black metal performance has enabled my subjective embodiment to develop in such a way that it presents my narrative as a performance text. It is a sublimating discourse that identifies patriarchy's fear of me as a woman, as a

survivor and as a black metal performer. I have been ‘an exile who asks “where”’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 8), but through my research: through my

discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against*, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise. Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me as loathing. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 10)

Whilst I fully acknowledge I am just one voice with one set of experiences identifying and calling out patriarchy for its bigotry, I have been greatly encouraged by the tenet of autoethnography that actively asks for the subjective voice to be heard. Rather than focusing on other women’s experiences (which I did try initially), I realised that I was ignoring my own. It became clear that they contained important information that needed to be explored. In so doing, I realise my voice is just as vital and angry as other women’s. This is my time.

Acknowledgements

My thanks and love go out to the warm and welcoming ISMMS and Trans-States/ Occulture scholarship groups. Particular love and thanks to Rosemary Lucy Hill, Amanda DiGioia, Niall Scott and Cavan MacLaughlin.

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To the band, what would I have done without you all? I love you guys. To my friends, I know you watched me sweat over writing this! I'm glad you persevered and I love you all.

To Jess Farr-Cox and Rebecca Lamont-Jiggins, there aren't enough words to convey my thanks and gratitude. You will run the world; I have no doubt.

And lastly to my incredible husband Matt, and our fur son, Mr George Edward Pants, esq. You are my world.

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Introduction

There is no easy way in or out of this narrative. I have asked myself why I decided to write it all down and was left with only more questions. What if I *don't* write it all down? What if I continue to keep my story to myself? No. This book represents me drawing a line in the sand. The inward spiral of trauma has such an awful beginning and such an unsatisfying end (if there is such a thing as an end). This book holds its struggles close: sometimes competing, often surprisingly incompatible issues writhe together. Its heart is a dark one and its soul incandescent. Together they form the story of my survival: a story that is honest, impassioned, angry, feminist, psychoanalytic and above all, real. It is a story of a woman who survived domestic abuse and used black metal to deal with the resulting C-PTSD and Fibromyalgia. It is a difficult story, but it is mine.

Make no mistake: writing about your own trauma hurts. Natalie Goldberg puts it like this:

Go for the jugular. If something scary comes up, go for it. That's where the energy is. Otherwise, you'll spend all your time writing around whatever makes you nervous. It will probably be abstract, bland writing because you're avoiding the truth. Hemingway said, 'Write hard and clear about what hurts'. Don't avoid it. It has all the energy. Don't worry, no one ever died of it. You might cry or laugh, but not die. (2005, p. 54)

You must relive it to expel it. You may not remember everything in order; trauma has a way of hiding in the gaps only to re-emerge at a later, less convenient time ('oh yeah, and *that* happened too'). If any of this speaks to you, please know that it's OK. It is OK not to recall everything in a scientific, objective manner, because trauma is not objective. It can never be. It is OK to feel confused, unsure, and weighed down. I hope that there are things in this book that help you to unpack some of these concerns. That leads me to the way this book is written, which is part academic analysis, part raging scream, and it is based on my PhD research. At every stage, I have been honest. That is all that is left to us: our own truth. Not everyone will want to listen; some will be committed to misunderstanding; and some will choose to believe the abuser's fake narrative. That is their story, not yours, and not mine. Fuck them. Writing about my experiences in a meaningful and analytical way that prevents it from being just an autobiography or solipsistic navel-gazing has been a challenge. This is not a memoir, but an analysis. The usual and expected academic objective writing position has been abandoned where

appropriate in favour of the autoethnographic performative, meaning-bearer ‘I’ because there can be little use for cold objectivity when you are engaging with trauma. It comes from me, so my voice deserves centrality.

According to psychiatrist Dr Bessel Van Der Kolk,

the essence of trauma is that it is overwhelming, unbelievable, and unbearable. Each patient demands that we suspend our sense of what is normal and accept that we are dealing with a dual reality: the reality of a relatively secure and predictable present that lives side by side with a ruinous, ever-present past. (2014, p. 35)

For those of you in therapy, or even sitting with a trusted friend or partner to talk about trauma, this is true. We are trying to narrate, analyse, deconstruct and extrapolate sense, or reason, some overarching justifying causal trigger that made the abuse occur. We are trying to verbalise pain and violence *in* a controlled environment. The two do not match up. I am in therapy and when I am in a session, the comfy seat, the calm environment collapse around me as I open my mouth to speak. Reality only reasserts itself once I leave. The antagonistic juxtaposition of reality versus ‘a ruinous, ever-present past’ needs negotiating. It is hard work and exhausting, but I would argue, absolutely necessary.

This is a record of my journey through trauma and what I have done to survive. It is, of course, not for everyone. Why would it be? I would most certainly not have chosen this for myself. No woman would. Yet here we are. Here we all are.

Chapter One

Interpretive Performance Autoethnography

The line of becoming for the majority is consequently an anti-memory, which, instead of bringing back in a linear order specific memories (*les souvenirs*), functions as a deterritorialising agency that dislodges the subject from her sense of unified and consolidated identity. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 31)

I want to focus on autoethnography as both a methodological frame and what it means to me as a researcher. Reaching back into past trauma is, in and of itself, traumatic.¹ As Braidotti suggests, attempting to hold on to a cohesive whole in terms of identity is often difficult when one engages with autoethnography, and this is even more difficult in the face of trauma. Certain methodological elements such as remembering can disrupt, dislodge and deterritorialise a subjective sense of self. This type of research is undertaken in order to find one's own truth and the search for that truth lies at the heart of autoethnography. Throughout this chapter, autoethnography is intended to sit alongside the performance methodology described in Chapter Six. This structure enables me to use autoethnography to embody the research whilst also applying it to the minutiae of my experiences. There are several important considerations that come with this type of research methodology, the first of which is that it requires a shift in writing position. Much of what you will read operates from an objective writing position in order for the analysis to be as unbiased as possible. However, because autoethnography foregrounds the subjective over the objective, the personal pronoun 'I' is the dominant writing position when I speak directly of my own experiences.

Autoethnography is a relatively new area of research. Deborah Reed-Danahay's (1997) *AutoEthnography* is one of the earliest publications in this area, which remains comparatively modest. The process of reflecting and engaging with one's own subjective experiences is the foundation of the methodology, a process that has helped writers and researchers come to terms with their own trauma, grief and lived experiences. As is characteristic of, and specific to, autoethnography, there is no separation between observer and observed. Reed-Danahay writes:

¹ Good sources of help are listed at the back of the book in Further Reading.

Our work as autoethnographers challenges scientific approaches to inquiry that intentionally separates the Observer and the Observed. In challenging this received wisdom that ‘science’ has to equal ‘separate’, we have re-framed the boundaries and relations between Self and Other(s), Actor and Acted-Upon, Author and Story, presenting instead a genre of writing that [...] places the author’s lived experience within a social and cultural context. (1997, p. 30)

The significance of placing subjective narratives at the heart of research means that people can tell their stories without fear. This is not autobiography, however, as this methodology is a more complex mechanism than saying what has happened to a person at specific points in their life. Rather, autoethnography is the process of identifying subjective experiences and placing them within the socio-cultural frames of the time in order to expose the truth of those experiences. It is not just a way to know the world or a way to know ourselves: it is precisely the parallelism and conjunction of those exteriorities and interiorities that enables a full account of someone’s turning-points. Carolyn Ellis notes:

Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over again if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defences, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in this process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living. (2013, p. 10)

This statement is important because Ellis says, quite rightly, that we must undertake some degree of self-examination. We must dig deep, however painful. It is through this process that healing can be found. I have had to do this. I include three vignettes that detail the start of my story and I offer these as turning-point events for analysis. I can now mark myself as a survivor of the story I am telling but it is specifically because of this research methodology and my musical performance that I can say this. Ellis also states that, ‘for many of us, autoethnography has enhanced, even saved, our academic careers. It might not be hyperbole to say that sometimes it has saved our lives’ (ibid.). In my case, that is true.

Autoethnography is an umbrella term that houses a number of variants. When I discovered interpretive performance autoethnography, I knew it would provide the exact framework I needed, especially as it included a performance element. Part of my healing has been to perform in a black metal band, so having the concept of performance embedded within the methodology has been a valuable and empowering research approach. It has meant leaving other methodologies aside but I have come to know a particular *Écriture Feminine*, inasmuch as it tends to focus on women’s writing. As P. T. Clough states, ‘I made a choice to abandon the

writing of ethnography of other women. I chose instead to set out again to know myself as a woman, as a woman writer' (2007, p. 6). I now see myself as a feminist autoethnographer, a survivor of domestic violence, a musician and an academic.

In Marilyn Metta's 'Putting the Body on the Line: Embodied Writing and Recovery through Domestic Violence', she structures her essay much as I have. Epiphanic moments are presented as vignettes surrounded by feminist autoethnographic engagement. This format offers a useful arrangement of subjective experience. She states:

As contemporary feminist scholars, we are constantly wrestling with how we create knowledges in an era where personal stories collide with the cultural, the historical, the political, the embodied, and the imaginary [...] Women's autoethnographic writings provide critical spaces for women's silenced experiences, voices, and stories to be told, mapped, and shared, and hence, contribute to the ways in which we make knowledge about the world and our senses of place in it. (2013, p. 491)

There is definitely a sense of urgency and significance that autoethnographic texts ask of us: they demand that we pay attention, that we listen rather than respond. My journey from victim to survivor to feminist autoethnographer and black metal performer has not been an easy one and I knew that using my subjective experience would cause me pain as I told people what I have been through.² This has not been something I relish, and I purposefully omit certain details and names, although the rest appears unabridged. Metta notes:

In breaking my silence about my experience of domestic violence, I inevitably have to disclose my ex-partner as a person who has perpetrated domestic abuse. This has always been a huge risk that many women who have experienced domestic violence face in any disclosure about their perpetrator. While I have taken the necessary steps to protect my ex-partner's identity in my research, it is impossible to conceal his identity to people who knew of our relationship. This is one of the many relational ethics that I have had to negotiate between duty of care as a writer/researcher and my relationships with the people involved in my research. (2013, p. 59)

² This work specifically addresses violence against women. I fully acknowledge that any gender can be an abuser, and any gender can be abused. I do not in any way seek to minimise this, but to examine the dominant structure that facilitates that violence, and specifically violence against women, as that is my topic here. Nor is this work 'man-bashing' (I would not have been able to complete this work without the extraordinary men in my life): rather, it examines the societal infrastructures that aid and abet toxic masculinity, which damage people of any and all genders.

4 *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound*

The same concerns also crossed my mind (and I notified my local police) but the need to commit my subjective experience to paper outweighed anything else. My engagement with interpretive performance autoethnography has offered me a joining of feminist autoethnography and performance. Tammi Spry speaks of,

the body in performance is blood, bone, muscle, movement; the performing body constitutes its own interpretive presence, a cultural text embedded in discourses of power [...] disrupting the status quo, uncovering the understorey of hegemonic systems. (2011, pp. 18–20)

My autoethnography, presented through my stage performance as physicality and movement, has provided me not only with a healing opportunity but has also enabled my voice to be identifiable amongst the brilliance and hegemonic difficulties of black metal.

Kristeva notes, ‘any text is the absorption and transformation of another’ (1986, p. 37) and my autoethnographic narrative is no different. I must, therefore, choose a starting point. Here are three epiphanic moments that identify experiential markers of my domestic abuse, which overlap with and absorb who I was with who I am becoming.

Autoethnographic Methodological Markers: Exhumation through Catharsis

Vignette 1: I was playing my guitar, working out some new riffs and loving the way my fingers tripped across the fretboard, the agility and dexterity of my hands sculpting the music into differing shades of darkness. Suddenly the amp went quiet. I looked up and saw him towering over me, a heavy scowl across his face. ‘What are you doing?!’ he snapped. ‘I told you I hate you doing that!’ He spat fire as he ripped the jack lead from my guitar and stormed out.

Vignette 2: My friend’s band were great. Watching them perform released an excited energy I hadn’t realised I had missed. I hadn’t seen live music for a while and I was really enjoying myself. I felt him then, standing behind me, face bent towards my ear, saying in low tones, ‘you’re behaving like a groupie. You’re disgusting’.

Vignette 3: The door slams. ‘Why have you got make up on?! Who is it for?! Who are you trying to impress?! Nobody will have you except me. I’m the best you’re ever going to have and you know it!’ I try to respond, my eyeliner shaking in my hand, dripping black drops onto the bathroom floor, pooling at my feet. He backs me up against the wall, hands either side of my head. Suddenly his fist lands a punch on the plaster, just next to my face. ‘Bitch!’

When I met him, it was at a local meeting of the socialist party. I thought that because he identified as a socialist that he had forward-thinking ideologies and praxis. I thought we had a lot in common; we were the same age, liked alternative music and were left-wing in our politics. Within the first month together, I found out he was a final-year student in a different department. I did not like this, as it was a conflict of interest with my job. I tried to end the relationship; I thought calling off such a new relationship wouldn't be particularly traumatic. I was wrong. He employed all manner of tactics, from tearful pleading to threatening to hurt himself. He followed me to work and stopped me on the street, pleading with me to take him back. It was then I knew something was very wrong, but not how bad it was going to get. I also didn't know that he'd already started gaslighting me.

In the year-and-a-half it took me to get out (with the help of the police, friends and a local domestic abuse advocacy centre), I experienced the whole gamut of controlling and manipulative behaviour. Other trauma events that I make mention of here and that I don't wish to remember as vignettes are:

That time he raped me in Barcelona; that time he threw my phone the full length of the lounge because I tried to call the police on him and when I took it into the Vodafone shop the next day and they asked me incredulously what I'd done to trash my phone, how much I wanted to scream at them for help but didn't; all the times he got jealous of my dogs and refused to let me be with them; that time he screamed in my face that I was nothing; all the times he accused me of cheating; all the times he demanded to check my emails; that time he said I couldn't use social media anymore; that time he humiliated me in the middle of Morrison's; that time he threatened my housemate; all the times he controlled the finances; that time he grabbed the back of my trousers as I was leaving for work and demand I change my underwear because he didn't like what I was wearing; that time in Scotland where he grabbed my wrist hard and whispered 'don't you dare' to stop me from saying hello to a friend I hadn't seen in years; that time he punched someone in a night club and swore it wasn't him (it was); that time he knocked a guy out in a pub for giving me a hug and blamed it on me; that time I caught him hiding in my garden; all the times he stalked me; all the times he scolded me for laughing and 'being loud'; that time he accused me of being a groupie at a gig (I was dancing and laughing with friends); that time he slammed the lid of my piano down when I was playing it (I moved my hands just in time); that time when he said that nobody would ever love me; that time he said he was the best I was ever going to get because I was such a disgusting person; that time I was cowering on the sofa as he was shouting at me and my dogs sat with their bodies against me, blocking him and protecting me; all the times he raped me at home; that time when, that time when, that time when ... I have

never known fear like it. I tried to get out so many times and if I hadn't got out when I did, he would have killed me and my dogs.³

Turning from the specific and individual to the broader picture for the sake of context, the cycle of domestic violence happens in stages: love-bombing, gas-lighting, coercion, abuse/violence/sexual violence and finally remorse. Love-bombing is the initial honeymoon phase: utterly overwhelming, smothering and suffocating. Flowers, chocolate, surprise gifts and surprise visits, endless texts, social media interactions, phone calls and a clear desire to know everything about you from your hopes and dreams to your fears. This is the beginning of the 'bait and switch' that tries to convince you that this is who they are; kind, loving, attentive and focused on you. Academic and counsellor S. Degges-White suggests, '[the love-bombing] surprise appearances [are] designed to manipulate you into spending more time with the bomber – and, not coincidentally, less time with others, or on your own' (psychologytoday.com, accessed on April 10, 2020). Love-bombing very quickly begins to feel like stalking. Love-bombing can be understood as a form of grooming, overwhelming the victim with romantic signifiers so as not to raise any alarms. Degges-White goes on,

When someone tells you just how special you are, it can be intoxicating, at first. However, when a person uses such comments to keep your focus trained on him or her, or to keep bringing you back in if you've started to back off, it could be a case of manipulation. Not everyone who whispers sweet nothings in your ear is a narcissist or predator, of course, but if you're feeling that something just isn't right about the person or your relationship, these constant reminders of 'how good you are together' – when you suspect that you really aren't – can be an effort to keep you tethered. It's often the first line used by a potential abuser.

Love-bombing (also known as glamour gas-lighting) becomes a point of reference as the abuse develops: it acts as a safe haven for the person you still hope the abuser is, deep down. Abusers are also fast movers. They will want to solidify their hold on you, quickly and permanently. Shared bank accounts and a shared home may quickly lead to the victim losing financial independence. This positions the abuser to take greater control: the victim's comings and goings, who they see and contact will be monitored, and the devices that help them to do this will become a point of contention.

³ Pets may seem of little concern in this context, but threatening, hurting or killing pets (particularly dogs, which may attempt to protect their mistress) is common in domestic abuse, as is disproportionate jealousy of the bond a partner may have with a pet. See, for example, the murder of author Helen Bailey in 2016, whose beloved dachshund Boris was also killed in order to support the spurious notion that she had left the house of her own volition.

Shea Emma Fett's article '10 Things I've Learned About Gas-Lighting as an Abuse Tactic' for EverydayFeminism.com offers a personal and succinct account of how gas-lighting unfolds. She states, 'gas-lighting is the attempt of one person to overwrite another person's reality'. When I have attempted to describe my experience of gas-lighting, I've tended to borrow the term 'palimpsest' from post-colonial theory, meaning an original manuscript that has been rewritten by a colonising and imperialist force. The abuser washes away the script of you and rewrites it with their version of events. You become a haunted house, visited by ghosts of who you once were.

Gas-lighting is not just straight-up manipulation, as Fett notes:

manipulation usually centers around a direct or indirect threat that is made in order to influence another person's behaviour. Gas-lighting uses threats as well but has the goal of actually changing who someone is, not just their behaviour.

Gas-lighting cocoons manipulation inside a shifting notion of reality. We may not be able to recall the details of an argument as clearly as the abuser appears to, or they may accuse you of saying something that you don't remember. Your perception of self, other and material cultural reality becomes warped and you may cease to trust yourself. Your subjectivity, your 'self' is being purposefully eroded. Sander Gilman in *Difference and Pathology* (1985) states:

Because there is no real line between self and the Other, an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self. This can be observed in the shifting relationship of antithetical stereotypes that parallel the existence of 'bad' and 'good' representations of self and Other. But the line between 'good' and 'bad' responds to the stresses occurring within the psyche. Thus [the] paradigm shifts in our mental representations of the world can and do occur. We can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. (p. 18)

If, as Gilman states, notions of good and bad shift in our psyches, then what happens when that shift is being purposefully moulded by the other for their own ends? We have been forced to move from love to hate, from security to fear, and this places a great burden of stress and confusion upon the (real) victim. As James Baldwin noted in the *New York Times* (1962), 'It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck'. Fett continues,

in another type of gaslighting, the gaslighter is always transformed into the victim. Whenever you bring up a problem, you find yourself apologizing by the end of the conversation. *For me, these were the worst exchanges.* (everydayfeminism.com)

According to Susan Brownmiller,

From the humblest beginnings of the social order based on a primitive system of retaliatory force – the *lex talonis*: an eye for an eye – woman was unequal before the law. By anatomical fiat – the inescapable construction of their genital organs – the human male was a natural predator and the human female served as his natural prey. Not only might the female be subjected at will to a thoroughly detestable physical conquest from which there could be no retaliation in kind – a rape for a rape – but the consequences of such a brutal struggle might be death or injury, not to mention impregnation and the birth of a dependent child. One possibility [...] was available to woman. Those of her own sex whom she might call to her aid were more often than not smaller and weaker than her male attackers [...] they lacked the basic physical wherewithal for punitive vengeance; at best they could maintain a limited defensive action. But among those creatures who were her predators, some might serve as her chosen protectors. Perhaps it was thus that the risky bargain was struck. Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination towards monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating. (p. 16)

I have included this quotation to foreground the precarious position women are in under patriarchal rule. It defines the dominant structure, the hegemonic interpellation and gender essentialism that we are all forced into. It is the Lacanian Name of the Father: ‘that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law’ (Lacan, 1977 a (iii): 67/É278). The law is male. It is written by men, for men. As the bastion that supposedly houses justice, we assume (read hope) that our societal superstructure functions as Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus. It does not. For those who are outside of the hegemonic remit (POC, LGBTQ communities, differently abled people, neurodivergent people, women, animals and the environment) the law functions as the Althusserian Repressive State Apparatus. The way the law views rape is a good example. Brownmiller adds,

A female definition of rape can be contained to a single sentence. If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is the criminal act of rape. Through no fault of woman, this is not and never has been the legal definition. The ancient patriarchs who came together to write the early covenants had used rape of women to forge their own male power [...] Women were wholly owned subsidies and not independent beings. Rape could not be envisioned as a matter of female consent or refusal; nor could a definition acceptable to males be based on a male–female understanding of