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DENIGRATA CERVORUM: Interpretive Performance  
Autoethnography and Female Black Metal Performance

Submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
At the University of Northampton

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JASMINE HAZEL SHADRACK

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## **Abstract**

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 280)

If a woman cannot feel comfortable in her own body, she has no home. (Winterson, J; The Guardian 29.03.2013).

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 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 Ysseult from White Zombie (US). This lack or under-representation of women in metal was always obvious to me and has stayed with me as I have developed as a metal musician. Women fans that see women musicians on stage, creates a paradigm of connection; that representation means something. Judith Butler states ‘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’ (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 qtd. in Butler 1) and that ‘strictly speaking, “women” cannot be said to exist’ (Kristeva qtd. in Butler 1). 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’.

This research 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.

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To my Mum and Dad who without really knowing it, raised a fierce feminist. To my friends, thank you for loving me and for being patient.

To my husband Matt, words can never do justice to your constant love, support and understanding. I would not have been able to do this without you (and Belly and George). I love you.

Lastly, I dedicate this research to all women everywhere. Do not settle, never be quiet and never do as you are told. We are the women who can wreck the infinite.

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## **Denigrata Cervorum: Rationale and Context**

The rationale for this thesis 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. The research 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 rationale and the research as a whole, Denigrata Cervorum which is Latin for blackened hart. This is polysemic in its 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, transforming the word to 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 dramatalurgical, dialogical space. Cervorum means hart, or stag and the significance of this for me is not only the direct connection to nature, that black metal venerates (as explored in chapter three), but also the antlers that I wear on stage as a perceived symbol of masculinity. Brenda Gardner-Walter writes ‘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 writ large’ (2). This quotation helps to encompass not only my role on stage but also how I use that role to subvert the dominant discourse. The phonic parallel of hart with heart is valuable because aurally it connects with way in which my heart has felt on my autoethnographic journey. Thus, Denigrata Cervorum has become the most meaningful and accurate title for my research.

The dominant structure and discourse that has underpinned and informed much of my research 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. During the course of the research I have engaged with considerable literature on autoethnography to know how to analyse my personal experiences and develop them theoretically.

Alongside this I have also engaged with literature on women and popular music and have refined it to a more specific black metal literature review. There have been nearly four decades of work on women and popular music and some of the key areas identified are also identified in my research: the masculinity of the music industry and its sexist practices (Bayton, M; Burns, L and Lafrance, M; Downes, J; Leonard, M; Marcus, S; and Whiteley, S),

the gendering of instruments (Bourdage, M; McClary, S), the gendering of aggressive music (Dawes, L; Hill, R; Kitteringham, S; Overell, R; Vasan, S), women's place within popular music as groupies (Frith, S and McRobbie, A; Leonard, M; Weinstein, D; Whiteley, S) 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 my literature review on the lesser known field of black metal literature and black metal theory. However, what I have learnt through engaging with the women and popular music literature is that patriarchy functions not only as the dominant structure and discourse but also as the subordinating enclosure inside which women are forced to navigate. I acknowledge that my research 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. How this informed my choice of theoretical frame meant that I instinctively felt the data collected from my autoethnographic research would get the most truthful rendering through the application of psychoanalysis; this has felt akin to examining my experiences whilst sat 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 with my own; not only has Kristeva's psychoanalytical work been impactive in terms of the development of cultural theory, which I have been engaging with and teaching for some years, it wasn't until I directly applied her 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. This correlation also speaks to the writing position of much of black metal literature and autoethnographic writing inasmuch as the language style and the subjective writing position often speaks of trauma and the search for subjective embodiment.

These elements have provided my research with a solid frame but also a fluid, breathable one. 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 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' (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 tenement of autoethnography that actively asks for the subjective voice to be heard. Rather than focusing

on other women's experience, which I did try initially, I realised that I was ignoring my own and that in them, lay 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.

## 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 31)

This chapter focuses on autoethnography in terms of its methodological frame and what it means to me as a researcher. As Braidotti states above, attempting to hold on to a cohesive whole in terms of identity is often difficult when one engages with autoethnography. Through certain methodological elements such as remembering, this can disrupt, dislodge and deterritorialise a subjective sense of self. However, this type of research is undertaken in order to find your own truth and that is at the heart of autoethnography.

Throughout the course of this chapter, an identification of what autoethnography is and how I use it is delineated with the performance methodology located towards the end of thesis. This structure enables me to use autoethnography to embody the research as a whole whilst applying it to the minutiae of my experiences where appropriate.

There are a number of important considerations that need acknowledging with this type of research methodology. Firstly, the application of interpretive performance autoethnography means a shift in writing position. Much of the preceding research 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 in chapters one and five. Chapters two, three and four occupy the standard academic writing position.

Autoethnography is a relatively new area of research. Deborah Reed-Danahay’s 1997 *Auto/Ethnography* is one of the earliest examples of published research and whilst this field has grown since then, it remains a comparatively modest. The main process of reflecting and engaging with one’s own subjective experiences is the foundation of the methodology. This has helped writers and researchers come to terms with their own trauma, grief and lived experiences. This is one of the central reasons why I have chosen this mode of inquiry because I am able to draw on my own experiences as data for my research. There is no separation between observer and observed which can be typical in ethnographic research. Reed-Danahay writes:

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. (30)

The significance of placing subjective narratives at the heart of research means that people get to tell their stories without fear. This is not autobiography however as it is not as simple a mechanism as saying what has happened to a person at specific points in their life. 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 enable a full account of someone's turning point events. 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. (10)

Ellis' quotation is particularly valuable to my research position. In this chapter, there are 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 living but it has been specifically because of this research methodology and my musical performance, that I can say this. She 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' (10) and in my case, that is also true.

The further into autoethnography my research has taken me, I realised that this is an umbrella term and that there are a number of variants that exist within it. When I discovered one called Interpretive Performance Autoethnography, I knew that this particular rendering would provide the exact framework I needed, especially as it included a performance element within its methodology. As part of my research has been to perform in a black metal band, having the concept of performance embedded within it has meant a valuable and empowering research approach. By adopting this way of researching, it has meant leaving other methodologies in favour of this one but I have come to know a particular *Écriture Feminine*, inasmuch that it tends to focus on women's writing. As 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' (6). And not just as a woman writer, 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 like I have in this chapter;

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. (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 and effectively tell people what I have been through. This has not been something I relished and I purposefully omitted certain details and names but 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. (59)

The same concerns also crossed my mind but the need to commit my subjective experience to research outweighed anything else. I did however notify my local police department. So, with all of this in mind, my engagement with interpretive performance autoethnography as my chosen mode of inquiry has offered me a joining of feminist autoethnography and performance, and this is the dominant model I use in my research. Tammi Spry states '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 backstory of hegemonic systems' (18-20). My interpretive performance 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' (169) and my autoethnographic narrative is no different; my epiphanic moments are laid bare, they overlap and absorb who I was in order to move forward. I must, therefore, choose a starting point; I provide three epiphanic moments in order to identify experiential markers of my domestic violence that provide a foundation to the thesis as a whole.

## **1.a. Autoethnographic Methodological Markers: Exhumation through Catharsis**

### *Vignette 1*

*Epiphany - 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 hated you doing that!’ spitting fire as he ripped the jack lead from my guitar and stormed out.*

### *Vignette 2*

*Epiphany - 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 bowed towards my ear, saying in low tones, ‘you’re behaving like a groupie. You’re disgusting’.*

### *Vignette 3*

*Epiphany - 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 stutter out a response, 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!’*

Black metal performance saved me. It has become my *gratiae salutaris percipiendae*, my saving grace. I did not expect it but I do not know what would have happened to me without it. Escaping domestic abuse was only the first part of my journey to recovery; learning to excise it from my heart and mind has meant finding ways in which to do so. For me, becoming the guitarist and front woman in an experimental black metal band and learning to write about my trauma have been crucial. The two intersect, I believe, because they both centre on the nature and narrative of the self. I am drawn so fully towards the injured, visceral heart of black metal because it matches my own and the subjective recognition that autoethnographic research provides facilitates that heart, a voice. These elements, the engagement of the self through black metal and the purging of trauma through writing, coalesce through the function and necessity of the subjective.

### **1.a.i. Exhumation: Abuse and Interrogative Autoethnography**

Writing about trauma through autoethnography is an emancipatory and liberating experience. By using interpretive performance autoethnography means I am able to revisit my subjective experience in a way that allows me analytical perspective, critical distance and

perhaps most importantly, healing or catharsis. Interpretive performance autoethnography is best understood as process. According to Denzin:

[it] allows the researcher to take up each person's life in its immediate particularity and to ground the life in its historical moment [...] Interpretation works forward to a conclusion to a set of acts taken up by the subject while working back in time, interrogating the historical, cultural, and biographical conditions that moved the person to the experiences being studied [...] Performance and interpretation work outward from the turning-point events in a person's life. The sting of memory defines those events. They become part of the person's mystory, part of her interpretive autoethnography. (xi)

This offers, therefore a model to identify and re-engage with 'turning-point events' or epiphanies that demarcate specificities in our lives that in turn shape who we become. The bipartite approach of *interrogative* (engaging with past turning-point events) and *interpretive* (working forward to a conclusion) offer a valuable axis upon which to found a framework for investigation. My turning-point events or epiphanies were traumatic but without them, I would not have been able to acknowledge what was happening to me. The real clarity however has come from a retroactive examination; I work back interrogatively to understand the abuse and work interpretively towards my musical performance as expurgation. The examples provided in the vignettes offer three turning-point moments, that when I recollect them, offer more valuable information than when I experienced them at the time; I now know that it was not my fault. There is never a reason to abuse someone. The most immediate emotion that I experienced at the time of the vignettes was fear; that became the overwhelming lens through which I viewed them. It is only with the passage of time that I have felt safe and distant enough from the way they exist in my head that I can interrogatively examine and write about them. Similarly, there are only certain epiphanic moments that I can feel I can share, whilst the darkest moments still cling with hard fortitude to my insides like festering glue. It will take time so the knowledge that autoethnographic research focuses on process, helps me sequence what I choose to examine and at what time. It facilitates control.

Autoethnography allows me the opportunity to assess my epiphanies in order to be able to acknowledge and make sense of the coalescing elements that made those events occur. It encourages examination of the self examining the self and after experiencing trauma, re-engagement with one's own subjectivity is essential. Domestic abuse serves to enforce an unreality, a questioning of self-identity that means you cannot know any truth from lies; to be able to tell the difference between what really happened and the abuser's version of events takes time. In other words, your understanding of the world and the person who you thought you were become eviscerated, replaced by an unrecognisable shadow, an imposter and in order to find some purchase, some anchor in the storm, one must revisit, interrogatively, in order to move forward; love your wounds and you will be healed. Consequently, the three vignettes provide chronological mise-en-scène of epiphanic moments showing some of my subjective experience of domestic abuse.

Of course, there is no reason to believe me but that is not the point. As the black metal band Wolves in the Throne Room suggest, I am in need of catharsis, ‘not a lily-white and guilt free existence’ (qtd. in Morton 21). I have found other people’s belief in my experiences difficult because I have not always remembered everything and any sense of time and place has been blocked out. I have tried to recall as much as I can but it is patchy; the pain caused by remembering these events does not allow for total, indexically meaningful accuracy.

According to Clough:

In the last years of the twentieth century, critical theory came to focus on trauma, loss and melancholy...[I]n taking up trauma, critical theory was able to transition...to new forms of history often presented at first in autobiographical experimental writings...[T]hese writings...call into question the truth of representation, the certainty of memory, if not the possibility of knowledge of the past...The experimental forms of writing that mean to capture trauma often present the subject in blanks, hesitations – a topographic formulation of forgetting, loss, uncertainty, disavowal, and defensiveness...[T]rauma makes the past and the future meet without there being a present. The future is collapsed into the past as the past overwhelms the present. (5-7)

The difficulty therefore in writing about trauma means that these issues dictate not only the tone and style of the writing but also the representation of subjective engagement. This in turn reaches out to black metal because trauma, loss and melancholy, as thematics function as metanarrative arcs that pierce the heart of the genre and its aesthetics. Nicola Masciandaro suggests that the ‘thrown conceptual space of Melancholic (black biled) black metal, [...] is concerned with expressing the deepest and self-dissolving relations between things, the abyssic proximities between and within entities, intimate links to the non-relatable, the fact that one is’ (90-91). Autoethnography and black metal performance act as conduits, a cannonade that uses melancholy, loss and trauma as alchemical compounds to purge the subjective and acknowledge the fact that one is. The subjective becomes the *denigrata cervorum*, the blackened he/art of being.

As a survivor of domestic abuse, being believed by others was initially crucial; attempting to convey that trauma, loss and melancholy through language was almost impossible, as Gilroy suggests, ‘[...] words were never enough to communicate the unsayable’ (37). The necessity to find a medium that represented my subjective engagement with trauma became more important than getting others to believe my story. I found that my black metal performance gave me solace in a way that other-belief did not. I discovered that the longer one deals with a life beyond trauma, one begins to question the significance of that other-belief. This is because searching for that sense of understanding is not always forthcoming, some do not believe you, wish to understand or empathise, others take it upon themselves to try and fix the past. All of these processes are redundant. However, where I do think the trauma becomes valuable is what one chooses to do with it. It will, if you let it, squat in the core of yourself, silently dictating your thoughts and actions, manipulating the ways in which you interact with your own subjectivity, other people and wider culture. In other words, it will make you rot from the inside out. I made the decision to use that rot for

creative purposes and in turn, heal myself in the process. My autoethnography facilitates a process of using black metal as a cathartic model for expurgation and sacrifice.

### 1.a.ii. Autoethnography as Praxis

There are some issues with autoethnography that require acknowledgement. Firstly, there is the problem of ‘I’ as the bearer of meaning, the performative first person pronoun. When I type these words, they are immediately invested with a particular ideological and psychological position, in other words, they are not objective. Critically identifying the subject in the text by applying ‘I’ engages in the assumption that an objective reality is somehow being circumvented or distorted. If we step back from autoethnography for a moment and consider ethnomethodology as a meta-model, recognising and identifying objective reality can often mean a problematic engagement. Stanley and Wise suggest:

While recognising that objective social reality exists, at the same time ethnomethodology suggests that what this ‘objective reality’ is will be contextually grounded and specific. It won’t be something that is objectively true for all people at all times, but is instead the result of specific sets of encounters, events, behaviours. So it recognises that many competing objective realities coexist and that we all of us [...] have methods for producing accounts-held-in-common-between-us. (142)

As the models of ethnomethodology and autoethnography firmly place the importance of ‘I’ at the heart of the analysis, holding to an objective reality as an analytical default position is unnecessary. What is true for one person is not necessarily true for another and this acknowledgement is valuable to those writing about trauma because it signifies the importance of a person’s ability to articulate their story. The power differentials that normatively place the objective in the dominant position within objective social reality become transferred in autoethnographic research to the subjective, conferring the dominant position onto it. This means that one person’s narrative is in a position to be believed, rather than picked apart and analysed by others who hold to that objective reality axiom.

Speaking about trauma can be an exhausting process, the telling and retelling of traumatic epiphanic moments for external assessment, be they friends or otherwise because there exists a fear that that narrative will be rejected, misunderstood or used against the speaker. Articulating trauma verbally is a hard-fought, raw process; it feels like your skin is being flayed as you strip back the layers of your armour to get the narrative out. Consequently, that fear of non-belief or wrong-belief from others presents a very real danger. However, realising that the only person who needs to make sense of it is you is a relief. Being able to shrug objectivity off and put faith back into your subjectivity is an important step forward. The notion of ‘other listeners’ becomes therefore unnecessary. Denzin suggests:

When sociologists and other listeners seek to find a common ground of consensual meaning within a story or to establish common meanings that extend across stories, all they end up with are glossed, indexically meaningful, yet depersonalised versions of the life experiences they wish to understand. There is no warrant in such practices. (55)

The question of who the story is for becomes an important one. The beginnings, endings and overlappings of turning-point events are for the owner of those stories to tell; any biographical or indexical cohesion therefore serves a different, non-autoethnographic agenda.

Extending from this point, the issue of dialogical space and its function in relation to performance also raises some salient issues. It is important to demarcate the difference between autobiography and autoethnography. A writer writing about themselves through a process of documenting their life can often function solely as a narrative or an account of events. These accounts function as mystery in a narrative way rather than offering a dialogical space for critique, analysis and engagement within a cultural framework, namely the ‘culture of a people is seen as an ensemble of texts...which anthropologists struggle to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong’ (Geertz 452). Then, ‘there was *performance*, the understanding that people (writers) perform culture, through their interpretive (writings) practices’ (Conquorgood qtd. in Denzin 26). It is the performative element here that alters a text from being autobiographical to autoethnographic. The ‘ensemble of texts’ becomes a multifaceted performance of cultural texts and practices that should not be understood or seen as a singularity. It could be said that autobiography is considered in this way yet it contains the myth of the unified subject, meaning that the subject of the autobiography is seen as a singular subject position that experiences life consistently, a never-changing monolith that life happens to. The focus often resides on the life events, rather than the subject’s ability to critically analyse them. Interpretive performance autoethnography holds that there is no singularity; there is only the hybridity of intersecting narratives and experiences, that ‘the unified speaking subject with full access to her thoughts and intentions is a myth’ (Denzin 39).

Autoethnography therefore functions as a hybrid of multitudinous experiences and events through the performative, meaning-bearer ‘I’, that does not require an a priori definition of objective reality to provide it with justification. In other words, if one is searching for externalised logic and by extension biographical cohesion through the lens of objective reality in interpretive performance autoethnography, it will not be found. It asserts that this is an illusion because autoethnography seeks to engage with subjectivities, the significance of epiphanies that do not always occur within a particular chronology. I offered my vignette epiphanic moments in chronological order because I chose to do so; it helped me give them a stratum denoting their escalation, as I remember the abuse steadily increasing in severity over time. This is particular to my subjectivity and may not be appropriate for other narratives. It is how I have chosen to deal with issues surrounding biographical cohesion and consubstantiation, insomuch as ‘autoethnography [...] should attempt to articulate how each subject deals with the problems of coherence, illusion, consubstantiability, presence, deep inner selves, others, gender, class, starting and ending points, epiphanies, fictions, truths and final causes’ (Muncey 15). These inexorable, enduring theatics form culturally constructed frames through which one is able to examine the chosen subject matter. These framing devices offer neither fact nor fiction; they frame our life events and offer a road in to self-examination. Autoethnographic narratives are ‘incomplete literary productions’ (Reed-Danahay 14) because we ourselves are always in the process of becoming, the subject in

process. As Kristeva suggests, '[t]he unitary subject [...] is only one moment, a time of arrest, a stasis, exceeded and threatened by this movement' (134). Epiphanies can be understood in these terms, that the turning-point events that impact our lives function and exist as moments of arrest. As life moves on, these stasis points become the moments we remember which in turn, become functioning elements that make up a person's narrative. They are often conflicted, maddening and overlapping in their recollection, dislocated in time and connected solely to the teller. Therefore, the unified subject is mythological as we are bound by shifting sands, affected by myriad experiences and life events that consistently push and pull us, affect and shape us. Therefore, there can be no concrete, definitive objective space outside of the autoethnographic text, only the subjective narrative matters. As Denzin notes, 'the [auto] ethnographer's writing self **cannot not** be present, there is **no** objective space outside the text' (26).

Consequently, for autoethnography it is instead a site of narratives, counter-narratives, experiences, events and epiphanies that make up the story of a person. The significance of epiphanies therefore, becomes the defining moments in a person's life. When one thinks back, they will struggle to remember everything yet those impactive moments never leave. If trauma has been experienced and these function as epiphanic moments, 'in bringing the past into the autoethnographic present, I insert myself into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it' (Boylorn and Orb 28). A perhaps, obvious point here is why anyone would want to re-experience trauma, to reopen old wounds. I think the most valuable process that one can have is to do exactly that, even though it may be painful. It has become necessary for me to revisit and examine those epiphanies so I can see them from a critical distance, to re-engage with them analytically in order to bring closure or at least, balance. As a procedural function, it is necessary to work outwards from the epiphany, 'to those sites where memory, history, structure and performance intersect' (32). The laceration of remembering however is great. Even writing the vignettes serve as a scourging blackness that reminds me how parts of my 'self' were broken away, destroyed and gutted. The history and structure merge into supporting roles in each episode and as yet I am still unsure of the full significance of their parts. For me, the most significant element here is that of performance because by revisiting my epiphanic moments, I release all the suffering and fear but once that has happened, it is important to know what to do with it. I decided to perform it.

### **1.a.iii. Interpretive Autoethnography: Performance and the Doubling of the Self**

When recalling my epiphanic moments, it unbolted the oubliette I sought to keep locked. I imagine it as having a heavy wooden door whose metal hinges are bowing under the weight of Lovecraftian monsters, their tentacles and tendrils piercing through the borders of my mind. For a time, I thought this form of containment was sufficient until I worked out what to do but that is not the nature of trauma. Instances, body movements, phrases trigger them to snap and ooze out of the cracks, their claws latching onto my sense of everydayness that prevented any kind of normative engagement. During the summer of 2014, I knew I needed to do something about them.

My desire to play extreme music had also reached a tipping point and so the trauma and my own music performance and composition began to coalesce. Denigrata was formed and developed into an experimental, avant-garde black metal collective that consists of two guitars, bass, keys and soundscapes/glitch/percussion through Ableton Live 9 computer programme. The vocals are screamed with backing vocals that are roared and operatic respectively. I explicate the composition of Denigrata further on but detailing the foundational elements here is valuable. A dialogical space for expression began to evolve through the birth of Denigrata. The band was founded from my epiphanic moments that were ‘ritually constructed liminal experiences connected to moments of breach, crisis, redress, reintegration and schism, crossing from one space to another’ (Turner qtd. in Denzin 53). The way each of these functions requires examination. Breach functions at the beginning of the abuse cycle where small instances of behaviour jolted my consciousness from relaxation to suspicion; this is where trust began to disintegrate and became replaced by fear. Breaches occurred minimally at first and over time became everyday events. This lead to crisis and redress as co-requisite dyads, every crisis, and every instant of physical and emotional abuse were followed by attempts at redress which were ultimately redundant. Reintegration functioned as attempts to recapture any sense of normative everydayness but was met with schism because it was not possible. Moving from one space to another was a critical acknowledgement because I took the abuse from my personal life and placed it within a performance space.

Consequently, when starting Denigrata, I came armed with these frames, ready to give them a site for exorcism, sacrifice and performance. This was a point of coalescence, where my interrogative autoethnography started to function as interpretive autoethnography because I applied my trauma experience to a new performative space. I was able to use my subjectivity from who I had become during the abuse to who I was becoming through Denigrata, to create a new plateau for self-embodiment and discovery. The band quickly became my interpretive model to excise the pain and I willingly offered the trauma up as a sacrificial expiation to my black metal performance. I no longer wanted it; I wanted to force a rupture, a severance of its ligature around my subjectivity. Denigrata gave me the knife and from our first practice, I began to cut the abuse from me and throw it into our compositions. I cast my atrocity to the wolves in my band to devour, to strip bare the bones of abasement and help me weave a new narrative from its naked corpse. Whilst I struggled to talk to others directly about my experience, I knew sewing the pain into Denigrata’s music would expedite my renihilation. This is a term that black metal theorist Hunter Hunt-Hendrix created to mean the experience of a mystical death in order to become a transformed subject (292). So rather than one experiencing annihilation or total destruction as a total collapse into finality, this can be used as a foundation into a new transcendental subject position. This has resonated with me because I have experienced that total destruction as mystical death and from it have created something new in the form of Denigrata. The path to renihilation has been from victim to survivor to black metal performer.

My epiphanies ‘represent ruptures in the structure of daily life’ (Denzin 53) and whilst this is true, I extend this notion to include Denigrata. Weekly rehearsals, performances,

recording and our album release, also represent rupture. What I mean by this is that the structure of daily life and normative routines become ruptured by creativity and performance; they are not cultural practices that everyone performs and they provide a distinct alteration to standardised modes of living. Consequently, I use the abuse cycle rupture to fill the Haptic Void rupture represented as Denigrata, the ‘maximal level of intensity [...] expressed as feeling’ (Hunt-Hendrix 55) placing one form of extremity within the hypertrophic, hopeful other.

It is during these haptic void ruptures that a doubling of the self occurs. I do not perform as me. I perform as Denigrata Herself, a representation of parts of me that facilitate access to my trauma in order to purge them on stage. It has become increasingly important to locate a specified locus to put the trauma in that incorporates interiorities and exteriorities simultaneously, providing structured access when I choose it. Denigrata Herself has become a dialogical construct that houses my subjective experience of abuse and functions as a vessel for expurgation. The performing body, my body becomes a site therefore, for black metal performance and catharsis. Self-referentiality and consubstantiation between the negativity of abuse (subjective) and the perceived negativity of black metal (objective) mulches down into a monolithic misunderstanding of what black metal performance can be; it does not have to be atrophic, it can be uplifting.

Masciandaro suggests that ‘the negativity of deixis...resolves to a deeper auto-deixis, its pointing to itself’ (5) which ties autoethnography to my black metal performance. The need to ‘point at itself’ demonstrates a need for the performative, meaning-bearer ‘I’ to be heard, for it to scream out its self-referentiality, to howl its existence into the abyss; its deitic context the wailing harsh vistas of black metal timbres. Yet this functions differently to telling someone face to face about the trauma. That for me, is too personal, I feel too vulnerable. Screaming the pain out on stage, and writing about it autoethnographically, I feel the exact opposite. Instead I feel ignited by the flames of passion as I push the trauma out through my own choice of writing and musical performance. I am able to regain control. By taking something I hate (trauma) and pushing it through something I love (black metal), recategorises the trauma, it re-encodes it as a source for inspiration, rather than a source for emotional collapse. The physical act of screaming, as a singular performative component, allows my trauma a voice. It is a vicious, enraged scream that with every cry vomits forth moments of hurt, pain and humiliation and in so doing, I reclaim my subjectivity, I take ownership. It is mine. I feel the blood hammering through my veins, the rush of air flooding me between verses, my diaphragm pushing the scream out until, by the end of the song, I am physically empty; I am nothingness. My performance body is every singular part as its whole, all working together to let loose this other-worldly, pained unsound (Thacker 179). The blood, breath and sweat, the calluses on my fingers from the guitar, the actual act of doing, facilitates the extreme shift from victim to survivor, from passive signified object to active signifying subject. My performing body ‘constitutes its own interpretive presence. It is the raw material of a critical cultural story’ (Spry 18-19).



(fig. i) Denigrata Herself. Picture courtesy of Ceri Greenwald, 2015.

Up to and including my time during the abuse cycle, I was a death metal guitarist and then subsequently I was no longer allowed to play (see vignette 1). Once I had freed myself from immediate danger however, I was consumed by a voracious hunger to create something darker and more transcendental than before, something that reflected how I felt. Death metal was not a place I desired to return. I was no longer the same woman as I was and my ravaged soul ached for a musical dark space that I could get immediate performance access to so I created one. Trauma had altered my subjective self so dramatically that I yearned for a site for performance that allowed me the dimensions to excise the roiling tar that clutched at my heart; its cloying pitch suffocated me and the only way to liberate myself was to scream it out. Unlike Grant Shipley's description of screaming in 'The Tongue-Tied Mystic': Aaaarrrgghhh! Fuck Them! Fuck You!' that states 'the Aaaarrrgghhh! of black metal is mindlessness, or rather an experimental mindlessness, the knowing that is also the end of thought, the auditory asemia of the nothingness that finds noise but not speech, the untranslatable emptying out of the mystic (206), is not at all what I experience when I scream. Yes, it is a noise rather than a melody line and the process of 'emptying out' is valuable but there rests a liminal territory in which, rather than it representing a form of mindlessness, I find a temporal voidic plateau for me to spit out my plague, its temporality becoming an extension of me for that timbral moment. It is far from mindless, it is mindful. It is a passing of epiphanies from my interiorities to the exteriority of my performance space. I find myself in alignment with Kathy Acker's notion that 'every howl of pain is a howl of defiance' ([ubu.com](http://ubu.com)), because every time I scream, I purge. It is not an 'auditory asemia of

[...] nothingness' (Shipley 206), it is a lustration, a hypertrophic clamour of tenebrosity, clawing its way out of my throat.

When I am on stage, I feel the other-worldly effects of that performance. I feel possessed by the music as it passes through me. I am a conduit of timbres, a vessel for my own subjective, traumatic message. Denigrata Herself becomes a 'symbolic declaration [...] the pursuit of embodied subjectivity' (Hunt-Hendrix 281-282). It is ritual, it is performance and it is a site for emotional sacrifice; Denigrata Herself's performance, as with black metal as meta-performance, functions as theatrical spectacle. Denzin notes 'as dramatic theatre, with connections to Brecht (Epic Theatre) and Artaud (Theatre of Cruelty), these performance texts turn tales of suffering, loss, pain, and victory into evocative performances that have the ability to move audiences to reflective, critical action, not only emotional catharsis' (54).

I cannot speak for our audience or for the rest of my band, but I can concur with Denzin and suggest that black metal performance autoethnography could be considered, in this instance, as the Theatre of Catharsis; a redemptive, fierce and courageous dialogical space whose 'tone is affirmation' (Hunt-Hendrix 55).

#### **1.a.iv. Dialogical space as Black Metal Performance**

My autoethnography declamatorily extends its arms to embrace a dialogical space in the form of my black metal performance and composition, inasmuch as the 'first creator has been hymning us from the gap between nothing and nothingness, which is itself a mere reverberation echoing across many universes and seas of dissonant temporality' (Blake 166). I am my own 'first creator'; the nothing-space of trauma renihilates to embrace the eventual nothingness of a soul purged. The joy of no longer being crushed under the weight of it all, of experiencing a kind of blissed-out nothingness, in comparison to what existed before, is something to be celebrated. My performance crosses my own bodily borders, plunges interiorities and exteriorities into the pulsing depths of black metal and makes it my altar.

My initial engagement with black metal had been rather intermittent. After the abuse, the desire to recommune with my own subjectivity found a welcome home in black metal; it matched my pain with its own 'suffering body that illustrates, in the same spring, all the human darkness as much as its vital impetus' (Lesourd 41-42). The progressive nature of contemporary black metal is what captivated me and is defined by Hunt-Hendrix thusly:

One could propose a new meaning for black metal along with a new array of techniques to activate meaning. The meaning of Transcendental Black Metal is Affirmation [...] [it is] black metal in the mode of Sacrifice. It is a clearing aside of contingent features and a fresh exploration of the essence [...] As such it is solar, hypertrophic, courageous, finite and penultimate [...] and its key technique is the Burst Beat. The black metal that was born in Scandinavia in the mode of Fortification can be termed Hyperborean Black Metal [...] [it is] black metal that is lunar, atrophic, depraved, infinite and pure. The symbol of its birth is the Death of Dead. Its tone is nihilism and its key technique is the Blast Beat. (54)

This demarcation of two black metal variants, hyperborean as fortification and transcendental as affirmation, support Lesourd's representation of black metal aesthetics as a *beau ideal* or perhaps more accurately a *noir ideal*. It could be said that black metal has become a movement that is beyond music, what Hunt-Hendrix terms as transcendental, that it is an element of a whole surging artistic paradigm that seeks to engage and represent the pain of living within a wider artistic scope. Black metal includes art, photography, poetry, music, theatre and aesthetics and as such could be considered in a similar vein to Dadaism, Futurism or Fluxus. Lesourd's essay, 'Baptism or Death: black metal in contemporary art, birth of a new aesthetic category' (29-43), documents and explores art, photography and performance that capture the aesthetic essence of black metal. She states 'black metal, as a symbolic form, aspires to an extension, a considerable propagation, a (re)birth. Art takes on the exegete function to unveil [...] a full aesthetic genre' (42). This new aesthetic genre could be understood as transcendental black metal that acknowledges the hyperborean mode as its genesis and fortification but not necessarily as its contemporary ontology. It is the contemporary surge that incorporates this 'perichoresis' (Hunt-Hendrix 279) or total art work, a desire to pull together all variants of the arts that espouse the black metal aesthetic because, as Lesourd suggests, it exceeds the musical engagement.

Tim Rayner notes that Deleuzian '[new] lines of flight are bolts of pent-up energy that break through the cracks in a system of control and shoot off at diagonals' ([philosophyforchange.wordpress.com](http://philosophyforchange.wordpress.com)). If one understands the hyperborean mode as functioning as a system of control, a checking system of what 'passes' for black metal, the line against which everything else is measured, then acknowledging this in order to move forward is valuable. Hunt-Hendrix in 'The Perichoresis of Music, Art and Philosophy' (279-292) suggests in his diagram (292) that the hyperborean mode is law, the hyperborean object, a space where rule precedes action and is consumed by the subject (292). Arguably this is the crucible in which black metal was forged, the 'black metal that was born in Scandinavia' (54) that created the archetype of the 1990s. He goes on to suggest that in order to evolve to the transcendental, the other black metal variant, one must pass through a process called renihilation in which one's mystical death becomes immortal life. Once this has occurred, transcendental law, the transcendental object, a space where action precedes rule and the transformation of the subject (292) manifest. To apply this to my own autoethnography, I enter at the point of renihilation. I suffered my own mystical death through trauma and in order to attain a life beyond this, a state of immemorial epiphany functions through Denigrata's music, the embodiment of that trauma in musical form. Recalling Kristeva's earlier notion, I apply her stasis points that function as our songs, infusing those moments with immortal life. As such, Denigrata Herself's renihilation functions as transcendental black metal because there has been too much of a subjective transformation to exist purely in the hyperborean mode; I am not interested in being consumed by the subject because this represents my trauma. What is deeply felt is how my subjectivity has been transformed.

To take this point further, Denigrata as haptic void rupture is also interesting in its function. The promise of a 'maximum level of intensity [...] expressed as feeling' (55), Hunt-Hendrix suggests is an empty gesture. He states ' [...] the promise made by the Haptic Void is

a lie. Only its absence is ever present' (56). A good example of this is the opening motif to Denigrata's 'Kyrie Eleison' (4.a.i) because it is a palm muted crotchet which creates a sonic pummelling effect. After having written it though, it still just did not feel heavy enough. As an extreme metal fan and musician, the notion of the haptic void resonates with me musically and compositionally because one always attempts to capture that elusive bodily tension that is conveyed in extreme music but it is never enough; the next song you write will be that crowning moment of heaviness but that desire is never sated, that 'it is impossible to leap into the horizon' (57) of the haptic void. However, how it functions autoethnographically, exists differently and it is not only reached but transcended. My 'maximum level of intensity' that I express as feeling in Denigrata, is the expurgation of trauma; I have already experienced it at maximum level and that was when I was still in the abusive relationship. Consequently, my performance of that trauma fulfils my autoethnographic Haptic Void because I have already felt it and it becomes necessary to move it into a different realm of extremity that at least attempts to represent it. In autoethnographic terms, the very performance of Denigrata is the haptic void in process.

## Catharsis

### *Vignette 1*

*Epiphany- I take the stage, strap my guitar on and turn up the volume. The pulsing beat swells behind me and our first song bursts into its hammering blast beats. I open my mouth to scream, staring out into the crowd. I am filled with fire, the howl erupts from my soul and I know I am healing as I play. My fingers surge with electricity across the fretboard and I give myself over completely to the music. For that moment, I am no longer me. I am transformed.*

### *Vignette 2*

*Epiphany - I am alone in the room. The mic and pop shield in front of me with the head phones balanced on one ear. A click, 'are you ready? Four count in'...one, two, three, four...my voice explodes and fills the space with an acrid, acid scream and I can't believe it is me. I am making that noise and I am overflowing with cause and clarity. I am Denigrata Herself.*

### *Vignette 3*

*Epiphany - We all stride into the water, the coldness washing our thighs as the photographer gets us into position. The leaves of the willow bow to grace our heads as we stand, affixed, amongst the liquor of nature. The shutter fires off rapid hits as I lean forward, my hands plunged into the icy depths, ready to spring forth on command. I have the strength of my band with me. I am home.*

I am on the road to recovery. The pitch that held me under has been cracked apart by the clawing hands of self-examination and black metal performance. I am no longer in servitude. I am instead, a front woman, a guitarist, a scholar and a woman, healing. My renihilation is in process and through autoethnography and black metal performance, I excise the trauma and recalibrate it, re-encode it through haptic void ruptures and expurgation. I sacrifice my abused self and eviscerate it to sculpt anew. This is my story and it is not the end.

The value of this chapter has been to identify the ways in which I use interpretive performance autoethnography in relation to *my story*, from trauma recovery to becoming a front woman. The vignettes of my chosen epiphanic moments help to provide mise-en-scènes of important turning-point events that allow for closer reading. This structure is repeated in 5.b.i. to provide the autoethnographic framework for the thesis as a whole. The significance in doing this demonstrates the efficacy of the methodology; it illustrates how important it is to acknowledge the ways in which turning-point events provide valuable research data. As chapter one and five concern my own subjective narrative, it is essential that I have the vignettes in both of these chapters to show how my autoethnography has developed. It is a ‘resistant narrative, an autoethnographic story that resists and demands telling at the same time. It is a story written and performed from a place of pain, a writing self writing as a performative I, an I, a self that resists, escapes, feels’ (Denzin 3).

Chapter one has provided a significant contribution to autoethnography in terms of marrying seemingly disparate and/or conflicting strands together; it unites the abuse, subjective embodiment through performance and its inherent processes together, offering an autoethnographic narrative of not only survival but of musical representation. This chapter also provides a new field of inquiry to black metal theory and metal scholarship inasmuch as autoethnography has not made its way into that academic area yet and much can be gained by doing so. Nor are there articles or texts written by a female black metal performer in this field. This chapter’s feminism also offers a new perspective to a number of fields, from feminist theory, black metal theory, metal scholarship, cultural theory and sociology, because it places a woman’s narrative and subjective engagement at the forefront of its study, using the surrounding cultural texts and practices to elucidate upon its meaning; this is feminist research and I use my story to speak to the truth to patriarchy through my black metal performance. This story, that I perform has moved, swayed, interrupted, disappeared and come back to me in startling brightness through the course of this chapter ‘so the account of myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or carries the living self. My words are taken away as I give them, interrupted by the time of a discourse that is not the same as the time of my life. This ‘interruption’ contests the sense of the account’s being grounded in myself alone, since the indifferent structures that enable my living belong to a sociality that exceeds me’ (Butler 36).

As the methodology incorporates conventions of performance, it is important to set out a critical study in the next chapter, that maps black metal from its inclusion under the banner of extreme metal to its more discreet existence in isolation. Chapter two addresses gender and extreme metal, audience and the black metal literature review.

## Chapter Two

### Critical Study: Mapping Black Metal

Black metal is a subgenre of extreme metal, often categorised alongside thrash, grind, sludge, doom, and death metal. It is valuable to map extreme metal's engagement with women in order to gauge the patriarchal modes of address and engagement in this subgenre. This chapter examines gender and extreme metal, its audience and concludes by focusing on the black metal literature review.

#### 2.a. Gender and Extreme Metal

In terms of mapping extreme metal's engagement with women, the two most problematic subgenres that exist are death metal and grindcore, which is largely comprised of two further delineations of porngrind and goregrind. To examine death metal primarily, two examples are provided from the subgenre to illustrate female representation. A valuable example that demonstrates sexist representation of women is the band Cannibal Corpse. Their back catalogue, whilst with singer Chris Barnes (1988-1995)<sup>1</sup> was lyrically focussed around violence against women and abuse with examples such as their 1994 album release *The Bleeding* (Metal Blade Records) showcasing song titles such as ' Fucked with a Knife', 'Stripped, Raped and Strangled' and 'She was Asking for It'. In his text *Choosing Death: the improbable history of Death Metal and Grindcore*, Albert Mudrian interviews Arch Enemy's then vocalist, Angela Gossow. She states:

I loved Cannibal Corpse's *Eaten Back to Life*, because it was so extreme at the time when I was a kid, but I didn't sing along with those lyrics...It's somehow just a bit intimidating. It's so much about violence against women. It's not a guy who's being totally shredded – it's always women. ...I just don't know how they can justify that.  
(251)

*Eaten Back to Life* (Metal Blade Records, 1990) indicates as Gossow suggests, violence against women, yet only one song, 'Born in a Casket' has sexually explicit lyrical content while the rest are the lyrical representation of a horror film that do not specifically foreground gender, whilst it is implied. Certainly, during the Chris Barnes era, Cannibal Corpse's shock value may have seemed more significant but pales in comparison against more contemporary examples, examined further on. Alongside Mudrian's text, Lee Barron's essay entitled 'Dworkin's Nightmare: porngrind as the sound of feminist fears', states that the 'patriarchal nature of metal music identified by Walser in its early days [that] has arguably been intensified in variants of extreme metal' (79).

Gossow and Barron's points are further evidenced in contemporary examples such as the death metal band Prostitute Disfigurement. This band, in particular, is highlighted because, rather than their misogyny featuring on select examples such as Cannibal Corpse, it

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<sup>1</sup> There is an ideological demarcation to note between Cannibal Corpse's time with Chris Barnes and the singer who took over, George 'Corpsegrinder' Fischer, who does not employ the same gendered rubric for his lyrical content, thus altering the ideological position of the band.

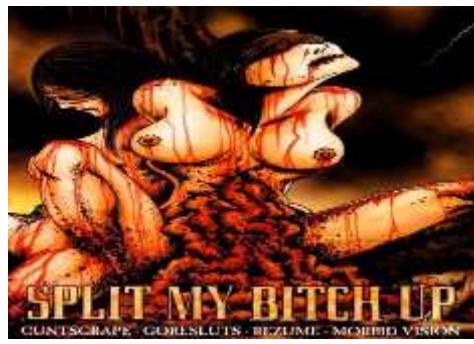
runs concurrently throughout their career. Their arguable hatred of women also extends to the homosexual and LGBT community. For example, their 2001 debut (re-released in 2003 through Unmatched Brutality Records) *Embalmed Madness*, features songs called ‘Chainsaw Abortion’, ‘On her Guts I Cum’, ‘Cadaver Blowjob’ and ‘Rotting Away is better than being Gay’. Other examples such as ‘Deformed Slut’, ‘Postmortem Devirginized’, ‘She’s Not Coming Home Tonight’ and ‘Cum Covered Stab Wounds’ (*Deeds of Derangement*, Morbid Records, 2003) also detail their ideological position.

Their 2005 and 2007 release through Neurotic Records entitled *Left in Grisly Fashion* and *Descendants of Depravity* respectively, seem to retract back into a more expected death metal lyrical format by not foregrounding gender in the song titles. However, their 2014 release entitled *From Crotch to Crown* through Willowtip Records sees a return to the misogyny and anti-LGBT position of previous records with examples such as ‘Dismember the Transgender’. Other song titles infer intimate violence where the gender is open to question such as ‘Battered to the Grave’, ‘Under the Patio’ and ‘Reduced to Stumps’ however given the context, history and name of the band, it only serves to add to the existent problematic position already established with the assumption that the victim is always a woman and deserving of brutality.

However, there exists within extreme metal, a sub-genre of grind entitled porngrind. This is worthy of inclusion because, certainly in terms of micromusical existence, porngrind, as a diminutive sub-subsection of grindcore, houses the most undiluted misogyny of all of the extreme metal variants. Barron states:

[...] if, as Kahn-Harris (2003) suggests, death metal and extreme metal forms are invariably ‘invisible’ to wider culture, and thus able to escape censorship, porngrind is especially ‘below the radar’. Indeed [...] many recordings, due to the explicitness of their cover art, have a similar ‘under-the-counter’ quality that is associated with ‘specialist’ pornography’. (79)

Musically it shares much with grind in terms of its compositional structures and riff framework; however, some specific differences are the semantics, stylistics and aesthetics. Bands such as *Cuntscrape*, *Goresluts*, *Anal Whore*, *Soldered Poon*, *Spermswamp* (Barron 66) represent and demonstrate a particularly concentrated form of misogyny in their artwork and lyrical content. For example, a collective Australian split EP entitled *Split My Bitch Up* (2011) provides a significant representation of the cultural texts of porngrind, alongside its allusion to The Prodigy’s hit song “Smack My Bitch Up” (*Fat of the Land*, XL Recordings, 1997). Two naked women are bound, gagged and disembowelled on the album cover artwork.



(fig. ii)

It would however, be lazy criticism to simply discard porngrind because of its imagery and semantics without interrogation. Barron's essay is a primary source text because he succinctly applies Andrea Dworkin's ideas to this sub-genre with some success. He states that porngrind could be said to house misogyny and anti-feminism and because 'porngrind is invariably packaged as a pornographic text, it is an example of how popular music takes pornography as its inspirational source' (70). Barron offers numerous porngrind bands that, similar to the above example, use their band names, lyrics and cover art to demonstrate their misogynist position. He suggests, 'the intrinsic connection between pornography and extreme violence that typifies Dworkin's argument can be readily located within porngrind' (70).

Barron's essay provides one of the few direct feminist/extreme metal engagements in the current literature on the subject. It is clear that the subgenre rarely represents any consensual sexual acts but does represent violence against women. It is important to ask at what stage these two terms, porn and violence against women became interchangeable and manifest in musical forms such as porngrind and death metal. From these examples, it is possible to note that we witness male musicians and composers within death metal and porngrind using their performance space to promote a violent and misogynist rubric. Therefore, understanding how women forge and maintain space within these spaces means understanding how the modes of address and modes of engagement function.

### 2.a.i. Audience

As can be understood from the previous section, the overarching gender of those producing these cultural texts and practices in extreme metal are male so it is no oversight to suggest that those attending shows, or those who inhabit extreme metal spaces online, are in the majority male. Rosemary Hill's ethnographic research into rock and metal fandom demonstrates the notion of the imagined community inasmuch as adherents of the metal community ascribe to ideas of collectivism, solidarity and universality yet the reality of women's experiences in that community differ. Hill states 'even as rock critics have peddled this myth, they have underpinned their ideology with the sexist claim that women are incapable of understanding the music as an art form. In this context, what 'universal' actually means is 'relevant to men' (4). Similarly, Deena Weinstein's research states that 'women have never been important factors in rock music' (67) and Walser notes 'metal shields men from the dangers of pleasure – loss of control' (116) which has resulted in women's excision from metal. Hunter writes 'ask a male Heavy Metal fan if he believes there's a place within its walls for women, and more often than not he'll scrunch up his face and reply,

“Yes. On her knees with my cock in her mouth” (qtd. in Hill 238). This supposed universality then, is a transparent boundary that serves its ruling elite. Metal purports to be rebellious and anti-mainstream but only for the demographic it serves and is relevant to; men.

From an autoethnographic position, my time as an extreme metal guitarist spanned seventeen years and in that time the only women in the audience have been the girlfriends of the men from other bands I was playing with. I have only shared the stage once with other women (Severed Heaven from Leeds, UK) who Hill interviews in her text but that has been all. Every show has been dominated by men and women’s involvement in the audience space has been tolerated and/or negotiated; their presence contestatory and often antagonistic to the hegemony of the audience space.

The extreme metal space is engendered masculine and by extension, any woman in that space are subject to, not only the male gaze (Mulvey 4), but an extreme metal rubric that acts as a DIY psychological decoding in order to gain in the first instance, acceptance, and in the second, patriarchal shepherding (Gutman 5) that monitors behaviour, interaction, musical allegiances and sexual attachments. In the journal article ‘Occupying the Simulation: the Sexualised Panopticon’, I state, ‘women experience a lack of connection, through patriarchal shepherding, by being islanded’ (19). The two processes at work here, patriarchal shepherding and islanding, according to Marta Gutman, suggest that social and leisure spaces are controlled, formatted and monitored by patriarchy so that any female transgression outside of the shepherding pathways will result in the subject becoming islanded, separated and exiled from ontological engagement.

How women negotiate this terrain often means being subjected to proving their authenticity to extreme metal. A rejection of both of these tropes and injection back into the hegemonic musical space through the active, such as demonstrating your extreme metal knowledge under questioning by male gatekeepers or performing on stage is often a fine balance between gaining acceptance and being rejected or humiliated. As Helen Tiffin suggests, women don’t necessarily need to, ‘...subvert dominant discourse with a view to taking their place but [should] evolve textual strategies which ‘consume’ their own biases as they expose, and erode those of the dominant discourse’ (14). This is what I did, perhaps without fully realising it at the time. I knew the best way to challenge of gender essentialism in extreme metal was to get up on stage and play my guitar, so the bias that was evident would consume itself through action, rather than allowing my gender to remain passive, waiting for that masculinised meaning to be imposed. Arguably this happened anyway but I gained some satisfaction from knowing I had an active role in that construction of meaning and to some extent was able to negotiate through my guitar playing.

Throughout this process, the recognition that I refused to be a gendered palimpsest was significant. By taking the initiative within a male dominated space, simply by the act of doing, meant that the imposition of a pre-ordained patriarchal narrative could be oppositional. By taking my place on the stage, I transgressed the shepherding and carved out my own performative space.

How that space operates is complex. The ‘spurious charade of maleness and femaleness’ (Carter 8) is none more evident than at an extreme metal gig. A hierarchy exists but they are different depending on ‘how’ you are occupying space at the event. The way men exist in this space operates in an explicit format; they are fans or musicians and in many cases, both. The hierarchy falls that fans are lower than musicians in the band on stage, who occupy the apex of performed masculinity. The way women exist in this space is more complicated and the hierarchy functions differently. If you are a fan, and you outwardly display your insignia, your sub-cultural capital (Gelder and Thornton 148), your tattoos, and you obey the male gaze, however re-encoded it becomes, then this elevates women to a particular mid-range. If you are a band girlfriend, then you are not there because of the primary signification which is the music. You are there because of your sexual attachment and are therefore exiled. However, if a band member has a girlfriend who is also into the music that garners extra points if you will. If you attempt to transgress these two pre-ordained locales for women and attempt to perform at the apex, on the stage, then you need to be better than the boys. Weinstein notes that this is nothing new. When discussing the all-girl heavy metal band Vixen, she writes ‘despite their conformity to the code, Vixen had difficulty getting a record contract and had to play innumerable live showcases to prove they weren’t faking it’ (68). Whilst the genres differ, the treatment of women does not.

The veneer of social acceptability within extreme metal means that, even though you may have ticked all of the extreme metal boxes, as Weinstein states, adherence to the code in terms of socio-cultural and musical signifiers, if you cannot play your instrument or you make a mistake on stage, you will also be exiled. However, the exile experienced will be worse than the band girlfriend because at least they know their place.

This is the operational paradigm of behaviour I experienced, woman as the barred subject, for over a decade as a fan, audience member and performer; the only way to negotiate and re-encode that terrain was to work hard at playing the guitar so that musicianship would legitimise my occupation of space within extreme metal. I was aware of the male gaze but I was there to do my job, even if it was perceived as a man’s one. We would turn up to a venue, unload, set the stage up, get sound-checked and all the while I can see eyes on me, I can see the cognitive and psychological processes I am been filtered through in order for them to work out what I was even doing there. ‘Oh, perhaps she is just helping out, she is just ‘with the band’’ was something I was frequently confronted with. This form of excription is undeniably damaging but it is estimated that approximately one third of metal’s audience are women (Purcell 103) and there can be no doubt, as Hill notes:

[...] that their experiences are different to those of men in the genre. They are subject to a barrage of questions from male fans to prove the authenticity of their fandom [...] sidelined by male fans at rock and metal events [...] and feel they must tolerate male metal fans’ sexist attitudes towards their femininity; some choose to wear masculine dress rather than allowing themselves to appear sexually available.’ (6).

Hill’s identifies some key issues; she highlights three modes of address and engagement for women fans that are used against them. They are required to prove

themselves and justify their attendance when at festivals, gigs or online. The precursor to this form of address is cued by a woman wearing a particular band shirt with the assumption that she is wearing it to fit in or making a comment online that similarly assumes she lacks the knowledge of metal's heritage, as noted in the research of Nordström and Herz, 2013. Both of these modes function on the idea that women are not supposed to like heavy music and that when they outwardly demonstrate that they do, through clothing, gig attendance or their online presence, they are to be cross-examined to check their authenticity. Dressing like a woman in an extreme metal space means that she presents herself as 'non-metal' and belonging to the mainstream, as noted in the research of Sonia Vasan, 2010; 2011.

The ramifications of this are that there occurs an immediate judgement from male gatekeepers from the extreme metal enclave but this is juxtaposed by the evident appearance of the sexually available hegemonic feminine. Consequently, whether a woman in an extreme metal space wears a band shirt or dresses in hegemonically sanctioned clothing, there is no opportunity to exist unattended. By extension getting sidelined, pushed out and knocked into at an extreme metal show when not actively in the mosh pit, as noted by Kahn-Harris in his research from 2007, demonstrates that the physical space at gigs is also incontrovertibly male. However Gabby Riches' work on women's participation in mosh pit practices (2016) focuses on the extreme metal scene in Leeds, UK. She writes:

Female fans explained that in their everyday lives, outside of the scene, they had little opportunity to engage in risky behaviours. One female metal fan said: "when you're diving off a stage you don't know if you're going to get caught and you don't know where you're going to end up and that kind of risk is really nice" [...] Women enjoy moshing because it's an experience that is fascinating and out of the ordinary. This is reflected by one participant: "you kind of feel free, you know, you can just act in a way that you would never be able to act in your everyday life". ([Hopesandfears.com](http://Hopesandfears.com))

Whilst this sense of freedom can be liberating, I would argue women engage in risky behaviours as part of every-day life; not walking alone, navigating cat calling, inappropriate sexual conduct from those at work, domestic violence and intimate partner abuse at home. The connection to the anonymously aggressive musical space such as a mosh pit could be read as emancipatory but this is a dangerous activity women are consenting to. Given that women in mosh pits actively claim space through the physical practice of moshing, this is still framed by the overt masculinity of the invariably all male band line ups, the majority male audience demographic and the masculine need to prove a woman's metal authenticity.

Hill asks 'why then, would women choose to be involved in hard rock and metal? This paradoxical conundrum has personal import for me: I love hard rock and metal, but I am also a feminist. How can I square these two important parts of my identity? What role is there for me in metal, as a fan, as an aspiring musician, as a woman committed to bettering the lives of women?' (6). Similarly, Vasan notes 'do they participate solely on men's terms, or do they appropriate masculine power and use it to assert themselves as women? (69). Women in extreme metal could be subject to false consciousness (Coates 51) through liking the sound of the music but bypassing the associated gender essentialism because of the musical

engagement. I have done this myself. When Pantera's *Far Beyond Driven* (EastWest Records, 1994) was released, it had two different album covers, one more commercially viable than the other.



(fig. iii)

I was a huge fan at the time and was vocal about it. When a discussion came up amongst a group of friends about the alternative cover, all male apart from me, it was the assumption that the buttocks were female. Close examination of the image does not reveal a gender so what was more significant was that the male demographic I was in discourse with, thought it was a woman. When I said it was non-gender specific, this was met with dismissal. What is interesting about this particular example is not only the assumption on the part of the men, but also how this changed my engagement with the album. I felt uncomfortable about my connection with the music afterwards because I did not want to be associated with a band that would use the female body like that, even though there were no discernible gender markers. It was my male peer group that had altered my engagement and their opinions had influenced my position. Whenever any of them wore their bootleg shirt with the buttocks image on in my company, I felt interpellated into their patriarchal reading of the album art and this in turn affected the power differentials in my peer group because I felt that my gender and my body were assumed to always be in a sexually inferior position.

However, as Hill notes, 'it was not as simple as that. I loved the music, and I could not entirely hear my own subjugation in it. Summing up and dismissing the genre as misogynist left out the way in which the music made me feel powerful' (6). I echo her sentiments; extreme metal does make me feel powerful. The guitar distortion I find to be warm and organic, the drumming is satisfying and the harsh vocals match the noise in my head. All of these elements combine to provide emotional balance and sonic comfort. Hill adds 'I felt that the music gave me strength to fight sexism when I encountered it' (6). This suggests that the musical engagement can be separated from metal's dominant discourse and my own enjoyment also reflects this. As a feminist, I would not have continued listening and certainly not performing extreme metal if I did not think my involvement could change things, even only in a small way or just for myself (although I would not wear a Prostitute

Disfigurement T shirt). As my feminism has developed and my taste in metal has become more extreme, this dichotomous and potentially antagonistic relationship has found some common ground in black metal. I grew weary of death metal because its sexist attitude to gender was too overt and I never really liked the composition of grind. For about five years I was without any new musical interest until I (re)discovered black metal and whilst there are expected masculine markers, there also lies a space for creativity that is separate from my previous metal engagements, which are explored in chapters four and five.

The phallogocentrism of black metal however, is essentially no different from extreme metal's other variants and if anything, the archetype of the male metal warrior is more prevalent in black metal than anywhere else. Mikael Sarelin notes 'the black metal warrior dresses up in leather and spikes, is tattooed and wears corpse paint and anti-Christian symbols. He is a warrior of Satan [...] a blood-drinking super masculine exaggeration' (75). As is examined in chapter three of the thesis, the ways in which black metal engages with women from a musical perspective is one thing; how the 'universal male' (Hill 5) structure of the audience engages with women is different. Sarelin writes in one of his interviews with a male black metal fan:

I have never met a woman who collects black metal or metal music to the same extent as men do. I have never met a woman who has been convicted for a crime that can be connected to black metal. I have only met a few women who play black metal music and most of these women play in bands with their boyfriends. I only know a few women to whom black metal means anything else than a reason to dress up in black lace and wear rubber corsets. When it comes to black metal, its' true nature is quite masculine or even hostile towards women. This might not provide the very best atmosphere for a woman who is thinking of joining the scene. (74)

This fan not only identifies black metal as male but also highlights the previous issue regarding women's role; women are just not as fanatical about black metal as male fans and if they do like the music, they only do it to wear costumes and be with their boyfriends. Whilst the previous shepherding frame identified by Hill (2016), Kahn-Harris (2007), Nordström and Herz (2013), Vasan (2011) and Weinstein (2000) of male gatekeepers and female groupies, it can also be found in black metal with slightly altered characteristics. For example, Sarelin's interviewee states that no woman has been convicted of a black metal crime which proves that women do not take it as seriously as male fans. As is examined in chapter three, being convicted for crimes in the name of black metal provides legitimacy of fandom and musical engagement. However, as I argue in chapter four and five, black metal's heritage and legacy has a smaller impact as time goes on. Sarelin goes on to note that 'while the male role within black metal is an active one and permanent one, women just happen to be within black metal because their boyfriends are active in the scene. The role that women fill is [...] reduced to a passive, shallow and temporary one' (74). In order to better understand these gendered positions further, a literature review of black metal and its theory is necessary to lay the foundations for the subsequent chapters.

## 2.a.ii. Black Metal Literature Review

The International Society for Metal Music Studies is dedicated to the interdisciplinary analysis of the majority of metal's variants. Black metal however, has its own space. The black metal theory site states, 'not black metal. Not theory. Not not black metal. Not not theory. Black metal theory. Theoretical blackening of metal. Metallic blackening of theory. Mutual blackening. Nigredo in the intoxological crucible of symposia' ([blackmetaltheory.blogspot.com](http://blackmetaltheory.blogspot.com)). As purposefully obfuscating as this summary is, it foregrounds some of the reasons why black metal analysis sits apart from metal music studies. The mutual blackening between the field of inquiry and its interdisciplinary theories is taken directly from the effect the music has on its listeners, where one feels blackened or pulled into darkness upon hearing it. This mutual blackening therefore suggests a discrete, more abstracted theoretical engagement that does not tend to sit in metal music studies wider anthologies.

Extending from this position, two particular journals are worthy of inclusion because they house critical essays, artwork, personal commentaries and photography. Both *Helvete* and *Hideous Gnosis* demonstrate the expansive and artistic inclusivity found in black metal that is the antithesis of both death metal and grind. The essays in *Helvete*'s first issue address existentialism ('Open the Vein: Suicidal Black Metal and Enlightenment' by Janet Silk), contemporary art ('Baptism or Death: Black Metal in Contemporary Art, Birth of a New Aesthetic Category' by Elodie Lesourd) and the significance of post-black metal ('At the Edge of the Smoking Pool of Death: Wolves in the Throne Room' by Timothy Morton). Similarly, *Hideous Gnosis* also fuses the academic with the socio-musical and continues the existential theme ('Transcendental Black Metal' by Hunter Hunt-Hendrix), the significance of black metal's ties to environmentalism ('The Light that Illuminates Itself, the Dark that Soils Itself: Blackened notes from Schelling's Underground' by Steven Shakespeare) and the importance of ritual ("Goatsteps Behind My Steps...": Black Metal and Ritual Renewal' by Anthony Sciscione). Both *Helvete* and *Hideous Gnosis* demonstrate that the importance of renewal for black metal is significant because it means continual growth rather than stasis that other forms of metal suffer from. The performed hypermasculinity, closed compositional remit and gendered ideological perspective witnessed in death metal could potentially indicate its inability to self-produce because it consistently refers back to itself in order to produce meaning, sustaining an internal monologue and paradigmatic engagement rather than diversifying outside of its closed network. My source for this assertion is my own subjectivity and experience from a decade of playing, performing and composing death metal in UK touring bands. Black metal as a counter-discourse operates in opposition to death metal's musical form as examined in chapter three and four.

However, that is not to say that black metal is an open network of signification. Ideologically it functions specifically in terms of an anti-monotheistic, anti-hegemonic framework that celebrates and represents the darkness of existence. It aims to portray the anxiety of post-modernism through an artistic position, rather than solely a musical form. As such, gender is performed differently in black metal as existentialist aesthetics are at the heart of the movement, yet the excription of women is perhaps more foregrounded here than in

other variants. This is dealt with in Robert Walser's *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* which to some extent, panders to the folk-devil stereotype developed largely by the Western mainstream press. Walser does however engage with some interesting issues such as 'Metal as Popular Music Discourse' which looks specifically at the overwhelming male demographic and the demonstration of masculinity as performance. He applies cultural theory to this context by using Jameson's notion of the polysemy of textual analysis which is important when analysing popular music forms. However, using examples such as *Judas Priest* and *Van Halen* are problematic in terms of categorising them as metal because I would argue that both of these bands are NWOBHM (new wave of British heavy metal) and American eighties rock respectively. Analysing these examples in terms of gender is interesting because of sexual orientation in the case of Rob Halford and the feminine aesthetics of David Lee Roth but again female subjectivities are omitted in the most part. Walser is quick to make the same point as Keith Kahn-Harris, insomuch as 'outsiders' representations of [...] metal as monolithic stand in stark contrast to the fans' views, which prize difference and specificity' (5) which is accurate as far as musical analysis is concerned yet falls short when attributing this to gender. Whilst it is deemed acceptable for male rock and metal performers to perform co-opted feminine signifiers or hypermasculinity, however fluid it may be as in the above examples, the same rules do not apply to women. He goes on to state, 'the performers may use hypermasculinity or androgyny as visual enactments of spectacular transgressions yet [...] metal is, inevitably, a discourse shaped by patriarchy' (109). Walser applies the ideas of Laura Mulvey and has the subheading 'No Girls Allowed: excription in heavy metal' which encourages one to assume women to be the focal point, in fact the two-and-a-half-page section discusses masculine performance. Women's inclusion in Walser's text becomes foregrounded because of what is not said, rather than what is. The preoccupation with how masculinity is performed, whether through leather and studs or spandex and eye-liner, means that even though this text concerns itself with gender, women only appear on two pages under the subheading of 'sexism'.

In the edited collection *Reflections into the Metal Void* (ed. Niall Scott) there are two particularly pertinent essays on black metal. Mikael Sarelin's 'Masculinities within Black Metal: Heteronormativity, Protest Masculinity or Queer?' and Laura Wiebe Taylor's 'Nordic Nationalisms: Black Metal takes Norway's Everyday Racisms to the "Extreme"'. Sarelin's ethnomethodological research into masculinities in black metal sheds light onto how women are viewed alongside black metal's material culture that praises the 'black metal warrior's permanence and strength whilst deriding women's temporality and passivity. He states, 'the black metal warrior dresses up in leather and spikes, is tattooed and wears corpse paint and anti-Christian symbols [...] the black metal warrior is [...] a super masculine exaggeration of the typical black metal fan' (75). This is an important piece of research that is applied in chapter four to demonstrate how perceived notions of masculinity are represented in black metal. He goes on to add 'the male is seen as active and in control and the female as passive and subordinated' (74). His research is valuable because he has spent time in the Scandinavian black metal scenes and interviewed participants in order to retrieve data. This supports the thesis' identification of a masculine network of signification in which women participants are undervalued and subordinate to the men in their communities.

Laura Wiebe Taylor's research focuses on the other prevalent form of bigotry in black metal. National Socialism, as explored in chapter three, is analysed by Taylor's work as she identifies how racism functions within a form of black metal called NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal). I investigate this in relation to the second wave and the progenitors of the scene, Varg Vikernes of Burzum in particular. Taylor suggests that the far-right wing political position taken by certain bands has normalised racism into an everyday interaction between black metal bands, stating:

During the early nineties, Norwegian black metal coalesced around a raw, primitive aesthetic – low production values, piercing drone, stripped down song structures and arrangements, and harsh imagery – much of it pillaged from Norse mythology, paganism, Satanism and/or fascism. The resulting sonic and visual noise could then evoke, even enact, a particular vision of Norway, an atavistic and ruthless national imagery where social interaction is based on perpetual strife and mutual hate. (186)

This statement identifies not only the imagery but the thematics of second wave black metal and how they have come to represent a particularity of authenticity, masculinity and the notion of kvlt (see glossary for further information). This is a play on the word 'cult' but by exchanging the c for a k and the u for v, the semantics and intonation are harsher and therefore, more appropriate. If one is deemed kvlt, this is an accolade that means you are the epitome of second wave black metal but this is not something that is offered easily. The markers of kvlt fall in line with the behaviour of some of the second wave artists, Burzum, Thorns, Mayhem and Emperor in particular. These are examined in chapter three.

Scott Wilson's edited collection *Melancology: Black Metal Theory and Ecology* contains some important critical essays. For example, Niall Scott's 'Blackening the Green' discusses the significance and function of the pastoral in black metal aesthetics suggesting that the anti-human position of black metal ought to seem at odds with a pro-nature position. He states, 'it is hard to see through how a process of self-realisation leads to anti-anthropocentrism, whereas a blackening of the green in the removal of the observer can do exactly this' (67). What is meant by this is that black metal aesthetics and imagery use the pastoral as the basis for album art and promotion photography so it should seem antithesis to its general misanthropy. What Scott's essay does is reconcile the two ideas inasmuch as without humanity, nature would thrive and this idea coincides with black metal's dislike of society and desire for the abyss, something that Scott calls 'abyssstopia' (79). When I analyse the third wave of black metal in chapter three, Scott's essay supports the function of the pastoral and its juxtaposition with its anti-human ideology.

In the same edition, Ben Woodward's essay 'Irreversible Sludge: Troubled Energetics, Eco-Purification, and Self-Inhumanisation' builds on Scott's analysis of the pastoral and misanthropy. He identifies the greenness and blackness of black metal and its environmental representations and focuses in particular on Wolves in the Throne Room. I use this band as a representation of the third wave of black metal and compare and contrast them with Darkthrone (second wave) and Denigrata (my band, further analysed in chapter five). Woodward states 'a tension is immediately evident between the malignancy of black metal

writ large and the ecological concerns of Wolves in the Throne Room [...] In opposition to most “nihilistic black metal” Wolves marry radical Eco-Anarchism with a form of New Age Paganism’ (193). This is significant because I argue that the third wave represents an alteration in gendered perspectives from the orthodox masculinity of the second wave to the free-flowing femininity of the third. I also make it clear that both of these examples still function within the problematic essentialist gender binary and use chapter three to analyse this further.

Steven Shakespeare’s ‘Shuddering: Black Metal on the Edge of the Earth’ furthers both Scott and Wilson’s research but focuses more on the existential concerns of black metal. As this is an important thematic that underpins the thesis, Shakespeare’s work is important. He states ‘black metal finds a kind of rapture in horror. No doubt it will always spawn cartoonish Satanism, rabid nationalism, and pathetic declarations of kultish orthodoxy. But the evolution of its disgust outpaces such congealed forms. It buries its way into the earth, despising human parasites’ (103). I use Shakespeare at the end of chapter three when analysing third wave black metal because his examination identifies some important thematics that other theorists and I have, creating a rigorous framework. The use of Satanism, the occult, National Socialism and a syncretism of racial ideologies co-opted from pre-monotheistic spiritualities serve to sit in antagonism to the function and use of the pastoral, yet they coalesce nonetheless. Shakespeare’s work helps to extrapolate these ideas further and supports my research in being able to identify differences between the second and third waves.

Drew Daniel’s ‘Corpsepaint as Necro-Minstrely, or Towards the Re-Occultation of Black Blood’ from the same edited collection has a specific use in the thesis. The use and function of corpse paint in black metal, in the second wave in particular is an interesting and important inclusion. One of the main reasons this work is included is because Denigrata use corpsepaint which is examined in chapter five so it is valuable to identify its meaning and function in black metal’s material culture and aesthetic representation. Given the prevalence of National Socialism in black metal, many have been quick to point out racial connotations, aligning it with ‘black face’ and the Jim Crow Laws of the USA. However, Daniels points out ‘the models proposed by minstrely scholarship require a paradigmatic adjustment when performers are not masquerading across racial lines but are instead ostensibly pretending to be dead versions of the themselves’ (44). The piercing of the veil between life and death and its inherent existentialism are what underpin the use of corpsepaint so Daniel’s work on its functions is important to my research.

Eugene Thacker’s ‘Sound of the Abyss’ coalesces with the previous works from this edition but focuses the idea of the void with the sound of black metal. I use this in chapter four when I analyse the musical composition and sonic representation of three black metal bands. The importance of identifying the idea of the abyss in timbral form helps to forge an overall perspective of black metal’s desire to access the void through its music and use of noise, unsound, silence and sub-bass. He states, ‘the subsonic is the expression of an empty sound, the sound of negation that is manifest but not apparent, real but not empirical, the sound of the abyss that is not silence, or quiet, or noise, but an unsound’ (190). Thacker’s

work is important because throughout chapters three, four and five, the idea of sound as negation features in my analysis of second and third wave bands as well as Denigrata. Being able to identify this function sonically in terms of musical structure and its identification of the abyss in black metal music is important because it aligns ideological theatics with its musical counterpart.

Niall Scott's 'Seasons in the Abyss; Heavy Metal as Liturgy' is important to my fifth chapter when I analyse Denigrata's album, a hard copy of which is included in appendix i. The structure of the album mimics that of Mozart's Requiem Mass in D minor by using the same movement titles and theatics. For example, Dies Irae (track three) means Day of Wrath and this has been represented in the way the music has been composed. The liturgical nature of requiem masses historically has meant that religious bodies, usually Christian or Catholic, have commissioned their compositions. What Scott does in his essay, is posit the notion of the 'apophatic liturgy' that retains the ritual and religious markers but subverts its content to fit a darker remit. He focuses on the live performances of Behemoth, Watain and the drone metal band SunnO))), stating 'there is a goal being articulated of providing for reflective insight into the opportunity for transcendence. It is just that the matter concerns not presumption of a Christian pre-given lifeworld rather a transgressive goal that is nihilistic to its core' (23). The notion of the apophatic liturgy is particularly important to the analysis of Denigrata's album and Scott's work is crucial in delineating its form, function and meaning.

Locating academic articles on the witch in black metal, as a specifically female representation is important as this notion is used in chapter four as a feminist methodology for two members of Denigrata. There are not many critical analyses of witches and metal; I found numerous metal essays that had 'witchcraft' in the title but this was subsumed into a masculine frame of mythological analysis. For example, Helen Farley's 'Demons, Devils and Witches: the Occult in Heavy Metal Music' (2009) does not foreground or analyse the figure of the witch in relation to metal, but instead assimilates the idea into a wider discourse on the occult. Similarly, Benjamin Hedge Olson's 'I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture' (2008) also refrains from engaging with the figure of the witch head on, preferring to focus on the male as the centre of black metal mysticism. Lastly there is Gry Mork's 'With My Art, I am the Fist in the Face of God: on Old-School Black Metal' (2009) which solely focuses on Satanism. This oeuvre is perhaps unsurprising given the feminine absent in black metal so Denigrata Herself and Manea's conscious subjective embodiment of the witch presents an opportunity to alter the feminine absent to the active feminine present. A pertinent commentary to support this idea comes from Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, that states at the beginning of chapter eight, that 'it would be hard to find a woman who is neither a bitch nor a ninny – if so, she will be witch and fey. (157).

Kenneth Granholm's 'Sons of Northern Darkness: Heathen Influences in Black Metal and Neo-Folk' analyses some key issues such as the role of heathenism in black metal ideology and how this has developed from the second wave's initial stance of National Socialism. Granholm is clear in his mapping of one to the other and this is important to my

research because in chapter three, the syncretism of racial ideologies forged through artists such as Mayhem, Thorns, Emperor and Burzum are analysed in respect of the eventual shrugging off and development into heathenism. Granholm adopts a discursive approach to this subject matter, in order to best demonstrate how National Socialism coincided with the bands in their younger musical incarnations and now, particularly Varg Vikernes (Burzum) states that heathenism is more important. Granholm calls this development ‘the process of re-enchantment [...] particularly the heathen influences in black metal’ (1). This statement affirms notions of neo-paganism and heathenism in second wave bands that has developed through National Socialism into a spiritual representation in their music. He aligns the esotericism of neo-paganism with the representation of the occult in black metal and that it has far more to do with these spiritual practices than it does with the trappings of Satanism. This is examined in chapter three; Granholm’s work supporting Vikernes’ statements that the imagery of Satanism was a useful promotional tool only, stating ‘Norwegian “second wave Black Metal” can properly be characterized as heathen rather than satanic’ (10). Granholm’s work supports chapter three in particular but is also applied in chapter five where Denigrata are examined.

Karl Spracklen’s ‘True Aryan Black Metal: the Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the Construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music’ offers some quantitative research on black metal fan’s response to National Socialism in black metal. This research dates from 2007 and online responses to questions posed about NSBM bands on blackmetal.co.uk. The data gathered suggested that particular percentages of fans engaged with NSBM bands in comical or serious ways or found it to be entertaining. Spracklen states:

During my time observing the comments made by the fans on the forum, two threads came to my attention. The first was a discussion about the band Drudkh; the second was about NSBM itself. This last thread proved to be very timely and useful for this research, as the discussion was connected to an anonymous on-line poll of forum users. On 10 July 2007, after just under a month of discussions, and after the heated arguments had faded away, the poll showed a majority of the black metal fans agreeing with the statement that National Socialist ideology in black metal was stupid: 54% of respondents (31 where n=57). Only 16% believed that the ideology was ‘great’, seemingly approving of the music and its ideology; 14% believed NSBM was ‘entertaining’, a more ambivalent position to take; and 11% said that black metal was ‘supposed to be bad’, apparently supporting NSBM as an extension of the provocative nature of the scene. In addition, a further 5% believed that NSBM was ‘just a bit of fun’. (87)

Spracklen’s research provides some interesting modes of address and engagement; NSBM bands may encode their ideological perspective into lyrical and aesthetic content but this does not guarantee that their demographic will decode the information in the same way. The poll suggests that the majority of fan responses agreed that National Socialism in black metal was stupid which is encouraging given its contextualisation in the second wave. This also demonstrates however, that there is a prevailing notion that some fans think that black

metal is supposed to be bad and therefore represent something society deems wrong. This is a valuable piece of research inasmuch as its desire to represent societal wrongness has pervaded its history from the second wave in particular. I apply Spracklen's research in chapter three when I analyse the role of National Socialism and Varg Vikernes.

Ashley Walsh's 'A Great Heathen Fist from the North: Vikings, Norse Mythology and Medievalism in Extreme Metal' builds upon the work of Granholm, Scott and Spracklen, by identifying the roles of pre-monotheistic spiritual practice in black metal and how these modes facilitate a syncretism of aesthetics and imagery that focus on Scandinavian folkloric representations. In chapter three I analyse the importance of the pastoral for second and third wave black metal and Walsh's research helps support the idea that initial and potentially mistaken representations of black metal such as Satanism, actually gave way to a more folk-based ideology. That is not to say that Satanism was not used, but Walsh notes that 'the romanticization of the natural primordial world and its "dark forces". The legacy is contained within the ethnic blood of the people and tied to the land' (4). Statements such as this can easily co-exist with National Socialist sentiments so Walsh's work facilitates a well navigated route through these competing ideas and I apply this in chapter three.

Susan McClary's text *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* offers some interesting understandings of the way in which the music itself is gendered through its form and function and this is applied to specific examples in chapter four. Whilst her text does not use black metal, it does engage with a number of musical genres, from gender constructs in Monteverdi's dramatic music through to Laurie Anderson and Madonna. This follows a similar structural path as Shelia Whiteley's work inasmuch as the author takes pertinent examples from an historical lineage in order to demonstrate how masculinity has infiltrated various musical genre and composition. Whilst analysing Monteverdi, McClary makes some interesting points regarding female representation in the canon. She states that the canon *is* patriarchal and that historically, women have not featured directly in the canon because 'they strain the semiotic codes from which they emerge, thereby throwing into high relief the assumptions concerning musical normality [...] and by threatening formal propriety, they cause frames of closure or containment' (86). This is particularly interesting if we view women as the disruption to the patriarchal reproduction of canonical music forms. She goes on to reference Marx stating that 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented' (86) which is readily applicable to women in extreme metal and by extension popular music. Rather than popular music being a welcome and supporting space for female musicians and performers, patriarchy restricts access and uses them as subject matter instead, co-opting the notion of active involvement into passive representation. How gender functions in compositional form and genre will be investigated in chapter four as well as my own compositions for Denigrata (my black metal band) to see whether or not McClary's position is born out and is identifiable. Therefore, this analytical position is important because in order to investigate gender in black metal, the musical rubric must also be experienced and examined objectively and through personal practice.

The value of this chapter lies in its ability to pull together some important concerns for women in metal. Identifying the universal-as-male position of extreme metal, as stated by Rosemary Hill (4) is significant because it shows the modes of address and modes of engagement employed by variants of extreme metal in the way they choose to deal, or not deal, with women. By using the examples of Cannibal Corpse and Prostitute Disfigurement for death metal and the numerous examples for porngrind, this chapter shows some of the more problematic areas of extreme metal. Identifying notions of authenticity and its supposed anti-mainstream ethos has in fact only served to strip away this mythos and expose it for the extension of the dominant discourse that it is. Sonically and musically extreme metal is as far away from the mainstream as possible. Ideologically and aesthetically however, extreme metal demonstrates the patriarchal strategies at work to maintain its male-only enclave. The idea of woman as barred subject is an important one as it connects with Robert Walser's excision of women but this does not take into account subjective engagements of women in metal. The chapter uses the work of Gabby Ritches and Rosemary Hill, alongside my own autoethnographic experience, to show that the male story of metal is not the only one. This is the area that offers a new reading: feminism and metal. These two ideas are not as antagonistic as previous scholars have thoughts (Purcell, N; Kahn-Harris, K; Walser, R; Weinstein, D) and this new collection of feminist scholars in metal herald a different engagement.

The chapter concludes with a literature review that focuses on black metal publications. As this is a relatively young field of inquiry, the work already done is vital, up to date and not afraid of challenging and calling out the problems with the music and its aesthetic form. The work on black metal in this thesis adds a new voice to the oeuvre in the form of feminist, female musicianship. These ideas help to underpin and elucidate the story of male metal as examined in chapter three, that offers an historical analysis of black metal's origins, development and evolution from the early nineteen eighties to present day.

## Chapter Three

### Black Metal's Historical Analysis: the Story of Male Metal

In order to investigate how women are engaged with in black metal, it is first valuable to examine the subgenre itself. Black metal and its three waves are dealt with chronologically in sections 3.a.i. to 3.a.ii. This is followed by an analysis of its aesthetics and ideologies in sections 3.b. – 3.b.iv. It is important to map black metal's form and function first to delineate how musical structure and timbral representation facilitate aesthetic actualisation. Consequently, the initial sections of the study provide a demarcation and mapping of black metal from its inception to contemporary examples followed by a perlustration of black metal aesthetics and ideology.

#### **3.a. Mapping the Black Metal Epochs: Black Metal and its Discursive Form and Function**

Rev up a chainsaw. Flick on the blender and a couple of power drills. Stand directly behind an F-16, right before it blasts off into space. A jackhammer should do to set the tempo. Now, get down on all fours, contort your face into the wickedest grimace you can muster, and scream until your vocal cords collapse. If all of this makes you feel just the least bit ridiculous, hit yourself in the face with a roofing hammer until you can't laugh anymore. There now. Listen carefully. This is what black metal sounds like. (Vor Tru, qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 23)

The sound of black metal has evolved over three and a half decades, beginning with little to demarcate the genre and moving through some conservative and rule-bound formats to a more abstract contemporary engagement. Black metal is widely acknowledged as having three waves. The first began in the early nineteen eighties, the second and most controversial wave occurred during the nineteen nineties, referred to here as the hyperborean, and the third wave in the two thousands, referred to here as the transcendental. The term 'black metal' like most genre monikers, is an umbrella term that incorporates numerous variants, even though the term already exists as a subgenre. There are a great many black metal configurations that illustrate distinctions through their sonic minutiae, suggesting that sometimes only a dedicated fan and musician has the ability to distinguish between them. The signifying sonic timbres, textures and instrument function delineate the specificities accordingly and as such to an inexperienced listener, telling the difference between black metal's various waves can be difficult. The subgenre can be representative of musically conventional archetypes, like the hyperborean (second wave) for example (Hunt-Hendrix 54) whilst also housing examples of the transcendental (third wave) (54). Black metal has emerged over the last thirty-five years as the most esoteric yet obstinate of musical forms, often hailed as the aesthetic and musically brutalist movement that encapsulated a variety of concerns in its representation. According to Dayal Patterson:

Ever since its birth in the early eighties – and especially after its rebirth in the early nineties – black metal has proven itself to be the most consistently thought-provoking, exhilarating, and vital of all the many offshoots of heavy metal. Truly enduring, it is a multifaceted beast, at once fiercely conservative yet fearlessly groundbreaking, undeniably visceral yet at times thoroughly cerebral. Its combination of primal, philosophical, spiritual, cultural, and artistic qualities have allowed it to transcend even its own fascinating controversies to become one of the most important forms of modern music. (IX)

The acknowledgement by Patterson, of black metal's perichoresis (Hunt-Hendrix 279) suggests a whole artistic movement, rather than solely a musical endeavour but this is something that has evolved over time, rather than an *a priori* manifesto agreed at the start<sup>2</sup>.

Black metal's first wave exists as a schism insomuch as the birth of black metal originated etymologically with 'England's Venom [...] with their 1982 album [...] simultaneously placing themselves within, and separating themselves from, the general canon of 'heavy metal', a phrase used by the rock press since the late sixties' (Patterson 1).

Arguably, the black metal sound did not have the same origin and could be said to have resisted sonic classification certainly until the second wave. Nevertheless, some important musical foundations had been set by bands of the first wave such as Venom, Mercyful Fate, Bathory, Hellhammer and Celtic Frost. During this period, these examples demonstrated musical signifiers such as tremolo picking, use of sonata form, minor melodic harmonies usually within the pentatonic scale/Aeolian mode and the application of guitar distortion, rather than just overdrive or fuzz, as can be witnessed with previous archetypal guitar based bands such as The Who, The Kinks, The Beatles and Black Sabbath. The guitars in particular during the first wave facilitated a sonic paradigm shift that aided the separation of bands such as Venom from the existing glut of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) bands such as Iron Maiden and Judas Priest. Whilst the twin guitar minor contrapuntal harmonies can be heard in NWOBHM bands and first wave black metal bands respectively that did not differ in composition and function particularly, whilst the timbral representation and harsher edges of the above examples began to force a rupture. If one compares Iron Maiden's *Number of the Beast* (EMI, 1982) with Mercyful Fate's *Don't Break the Oath* (Roadrunner Records, 1984), there is not a great deal of compositional difference between them; the vocals exist as forte falsetto with minor pentatonic guitar top liners over syncopated and full drum motifs that suggest a similar musical categorisation. However, there is a darker engagement to be found with Mercyful Fate that is missing from the wider heavy metal canon; namely a push of the timbral envelope that signified a harsher textural engagement and more of a rasp in the vocal delivery. How these timbral representations began to evolve,

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to acknowledge the excision of women from black metal, which takes on varying forms throughout all three waves. The full significance of this is examined in chapter four; however it is important to note at the start of my engagement with black metal, that it recognises the excision and examines it in the subsequent chapter.

meant that a colder, darker position developed with the first wave and forged a more caliginous path for black metal's musical texts and practices.

During the first wave, black metal was not just an English musical and cultural production, with bands such as Mercyful Fate (Denmark), Bathory (Sweden) and Celtic Frost (Switzerland) forging ahead with their sound and sonic evolution. Whilst these bands musically sounded similar to the NWONHM, there were key sonic signifiers that demarcated them as other. As Fenriz from Darkthrone (second wave) notes, 'Mercyful Fate was really important. When I was listening to it I knew instinctively that it wasn't normal heavy metal like Queensryche you know? You can't really compare it, it had something extra and that was the black metal extract' (qtd. in Patterson 17). Perhaps a retroactive engagement from Fenriz' position is questionable because it was only with bands during the second wave, such as his that the black metal sound really found its archetypal form. However, his acknowledgment of the black metal extract is valuable. This corroborates the concept that the first wave was yet to find its sound that the first wave bands were only able to represent a shade of what the subgenre would evolve into.

The concept of the 'black metal extract' means specificity of sound in the first wave started to develop; to examine Mercyful Fate for example means to position an initial black metal signifier with them. Whilst the etymology rests with Venom, the beginnings of the sound could be said to originate with Mercyful Fate. According to Dolgar from Gehenna:

Mercyful Fate do not sound very much like a black metal band as most people define black metal today, but they were very early to incorporate the occult/Satanic aspects as an important part of their artistic expression. Just listen to 'Don't Break the Oath', the entire sound and production reeks of the occult! Truly a pioneering band and quite incomparable to anybody else. (qtd. in Patterson 17)

Aside from the ideological and symbolic representations offered in this quotation (examined in the coterminous section) Dolgar identifies two main signifiers, that of sound and production. In terms of production, contextualising the first wave means to acknowledge specific recording techniques that generated a cross-musical permeation. For example, the guitar tone found on Mercyful Fate's *Don't Break the Oath* (Roadrunner Records, 1984) does not differ, except for the evolution in recording equipment, from Sepultura's thrash album *Morbid Visions* (Roadrunner Records, 1986). This may be a label concern but sonically the only timbral difference is that of treble usage; the sonic space the distortion occupies functions in the same way. Guitar distortion takes up a lot of room in terms of textural territory and can be notoriously difficult to engineer. As such, accommodating this means that for extreme metal variants, building around this weighty sound means to craft a sonically and instrumentally balanced record. However, without large labels such as Roadrunner behind a band, attaining this type of sonic clarity is often out of reach. This is important to acknowledge because much of the defining sound of the second wave builds on this idea. A harsh, often tinny sounding guitar distortion begins to emerge with the second wave and helps to establish the black metal guitar tone that sought to annex the signifiers from the first

wave. Lack of money or access to expensive recording studios meant a more DIY approach to the birth of the second wave which is explored further on.

The link between Mercyful Fate (first wave black metal) and Sepultura (thrash), even though they are representative of different subgenres, is important. As the first wave evolved, it became increasingly able to demonstrate a more aggressive compositional style which Dayal Patterson calls ‘black thrash’ (Patterson 58). This saw a crossover and musical borrowings from thrash as bands such as Sepultura (Brazil, also on Roadrunner Records) were reaching more of a global demographic suggesting a wider engagement with their compositional style. Patterson suggests artists such as Sodom, Slayer, Sarcofago, Kreator and Destruction fused an early black metal extract with the speed and drumming ferocity of thrash. These two subgenres combined lead to a more extreme musical engagement. Slayer’s *Reign in Blood* (Def Jam Records, 1986) epitomises the notion of black thrash not only in the type of guitar distortion applied and jack-hammer drumming style but also the evolution of the forte falsetto vocal delivery. If Mercyful Fate instigated the connection between early black metal and thrash, then bands such as Slayer pushed that concept further. Patterson goes on to suggest:

The traditional division of the black metal movement into the first and second waves has long been a convenient way to distinguish between the bands from the eighties and [...] early nineties [...] However, this practice can also be misleading. Far from being two entirely separate entities, the ‘first wave’ gently bled into the ‘second wave’ as the eighties ended, and it was simply the sudden success, notoriety, and proliferation of bands in the early nineties that created the appearance of an entirely new scene. Norway’s Mayhem – the band at the centre of much of this explosion – formed in the mid-eighties, a fact highlighting some of the confusion at work. (58)

As this statement suggests, there is no definitive, clear line where one wave concluded and the next one began. In fact, it could be suggested that one of the enduring powers of black metal is its ability to retract and expand over its varying forms, in order to grow anew. It is a form of black metal bricolage that prevents the death of the subgenre; it is wholly discursive in its maturation. The sonic shift from the early examples to black thrash saw a harsher and more energetic representation that can be witnessed with albums such as Kreator’s *Endless Pain* (Noise Records, 1985) and Sodom’s *Obsessed by Cruelty* (Steamhammer Records, 1986). Interestingly, it is at this juncture, that the vocal delivery changes; rather than maintaining the forte falsetto of previous bands, or that of Slayer, bands such as Kreator and Sodom represented a different style. The vocal frequency is lower in its tessitura and gruff in its delivery. Arguably this alteration demarcates an important timbral shift away from a higher range vocal performance and dropping to a mid-range rasp. This signified a severing of any sonic paradigmatic connection that previously existed with the NWOBMH. The effect this timbral shift had on the musical engagement suggests a plunging into a darker, less typically standard sung vocal representation as can be seen with Mercyful Fate or Venom. One could suggest the vocal style of Tom G. Warrior of Celtic Frost (first wave) demonstrated some of the coming archetypal black metal vocals even if their music exhibits more of a black thrash engagement.

The function of the lower vocal rasp and move away from previous sung vocal delivery suggests a divorce from accepted forms of singing and a performance of an arguably, unarticulated sound. According to Shipley's description in 'The Tongue-Tied Mystic: Aaaarrrgghhh! Fuck Them! Fuck You!' (Shipley 201-214) which states 'the Aaaarrrgghhh! of black metal is mindlessness, or rather an experimental mindlessness, the knowing that is also the end of thought, the auditory asemia of the nothingness that finds noise but not speech, the untranslatable emptying out of the mystic'. This quotation suggests that the vocals served a different purpose, that they no longer functioned within a popular music vocal format, where the vocalist clearly articulates the lyrics as a focal point of the musical engagement. Rather, black metal vocals evolved into a timbral and textural occupation of space that added to the distortion and represents, as Shipley notes, an auditory asemia of adding to texture, as opposed to shaping a melodic line. As such, the guitar and vocal distortion created with the first wave of black metal suggests a foundation of sonic rupture, a brokenness to the music that arguably enforces an unfinished quality to it; the rough sharp edges become compositional signifiers that reinforce its position away from the NWOBHM and strengthens its own subgenre occupation.

### **3.a.i. Rages of Sepulchral Fire: the Lords of Chaos and the Second Wave of Black Metal**

The timbral combination of early black metal and black thrash laid the foundations of the explosion of the second wave. The key sonic signifiers of harsh vocal delivery, guitar distortion (mostly all-treble settings on guitar heads) and the evolution of extreme metal drumming (double bass pedals, tight tom rolls, blast beats that were borrowed from jazz and syncopated cymbal hits) meant that a different musical representation was forming by the start of the nineteen nineties. A band that dovetailed the two decades was Samael and whilst they began in 1987 it is the vocal delivery that has become an archetypal black metal standard. Their 1988 EP entitled *Medieval Prophecy* (Necrosound Records) demonstrates this lower vocal delivery with a rasping quality to it that re-encodes its function; instead of purely 'sung vocals' a deeper vocal performance occupies a different conceptual and timbral space. Gone are the recognisable arguably, pop-formatted structures of Venom and Mercyful Fate and instead a reinvigoration of early Celtic Frost and Bathory style vocals is heard that simultaneously demonstrates a past engagement but is represented anew. The vocal divorce from the sung-style to the rasping style plunges them into a timbral void, developing the function away from a musical focal point, and existing more as dynamic, textual layers. Samael are of particular importance because their vocals represent a sustainable paradigmatic signifier that has helped define the archetypal mode for vocal delivery. Whilst there is a discursive connection between Celtic Frost and Bathory from the first wave to the second, black metal in the nineties offered a more developed musical form that, controversy aside, demonstrated an advanced, more visceral representation.

Bands such as Mayhem, Burzum, Thorns, Immortal, Emperor and Darkthrone led the charge but arguably, it was Mayhem that founded the second wave. It is valuable to note that the second wave was predominantly a Scandinavian movement, that Hunt-Hendrix names the hyperborean (Hunt-Hendrix, H. 2010). Mostly developing in Norway, with some evolving in Sweden, the competition between the geographies meant there was little solidarity between

the musical movements, unlike the forged solidarity between the Norway scene and Germany but this was more concerned with ideological parity than musical representation. Much of the historical controversy associated with the second wave originates with Mayhem and as they are Norwegian, they become one of the sites that house the aesthetic and musical archetype. As Patterson suggests:

Even after clearing away the cobwebs of myth and rumour, it's hard not to conclude that Mayhem remains the most important and influential band in black metal history. Their name has become synonymous with groundbreaking music, strong personalities, Satanism, church burnings, suicide, murder, and perhaps more importantly, the unification and rebirth of the black metal movement in the early nineties. Mayhem have achieved a genuinely legendary status within the genre. (127)

The controversies surrounding the second wave are examined further on however it is important to be able to separate the music from the actions and behaviours of those within the bands themselves. Whilst the majority of black metal from the second wave is shrouded in myth, hearsay and jail sentences, the music that was generated during this time is arguably infused with an experimentalism and desire to represent an emotional void in musical form. Mayhem, as a band, was more of a loose association of musicians whose band name came to represent the monolithic brand of Norwegian black metal, regardless of who was performing for them at the time. Owing to the nature of events surrounding Mayhem, musical analysis has been a retroactive engagement as the surrounding furore has taken much of the dominant historical space. The three founding members, Euronymous, Necrobutcher and Manheim, did not stay the course, for a variety of reasons, one of which being the murder of Euronymous in 1993 by Kristian 'Varg' Vikernes (Count Grishnackh of Burzum). Interestingly more evidence of black metal's discursive bricolage is to be found in the name itself; Mayhem took its name from Venom's song 'Mayhem with Mercy' (*Welcome to Hell*, Neat Records, 1981). By borrowing previous black metal iconographic signifiers, a particular subcultural capital (Gelder and Thornton 148) is borrowed and becomes re-encoded with a new form and function.

Mayhem's first demo, *Pure Fucking Armageddon* (self-released, 1986) is worthy of focus. The release date is notable as the first wave bands were still releasing records and performing as were the black thrash bands. The mid-eighties therefore become representative of a time where musical access and tastes overlapped as fans and budding musicians were just as likely to listen to Slayer as they were Celtic Frost. The subgenre dividing lines were less conservative than subsequent incarnations, as scene progenitors became the rule-setting archetypes. Even though Mayhem were the first second wave black metal band, they are arguably responsible for some of the most ground-breaking and unusual musical engagements ever to have burst forth from any of the black metal waves. Their first demo starts with distorted feedback over a legato tempo riff in standard tuning in common time, with a now characteristic pitch bend on the upper octave, moving from D minor to C#. Overlaid is higher pitched distortion and vocal texturing that at 2.13mins into the track gives way to just feedback and stops at 2.25mins. We see a return to this subsonic unsound at 16.45mins. In his essay, 'Sound of the Abyss', Eugene Thacker suggests that this represents:

[...] a kind of sound that is absolutely subsonic. It is a negation of a sound that negates itself, while it never is totally absent. It is a negative sound that is omni-present and yet un-manifest. In short, [...] a cosmic, primordial ground-bass is less the negation of sound, and more like the sound of negation – a sound that is, of course, indelibly self-negating. Thus the sound of the abyss is not silence, or quiet, or noise, but an *unsound* [...] An unsound is akin, perhaps, to the term ‘unknowing’ in the apophatic mystical traditions, where the ‘un’ prefix is an undoing or unravelling, denoting both the negation of the ground of knowledge, as well as the paradoxical apprehension of an absolute limit. (188)

Mayhem’s performance of the voidic sound of negation and the abyss could be said to represent Thacker’s identification of the unsound. The cultivated noise and low bass frequencies that punctuate Mayhem’s first EP suggest an attempt to represent an unravelling of sonata form, of expected song structure and of instrument function. Mayhem offer moments of musical form fragmented by unsound’s unknowing and fear of a finite rendering. Whilst the half an hour EP exhibits characteristics of important black metal instrumentation and structure, the two examples included here demonstrate a valuable, experimental form that changed the way the notion of ‘extremity’ was to be performed and recorded. Coupled with the fact that there are hardly any structured vocals on it, this subverts the notion of categorising these tracks as ‘songs’. A sonic and textural abyss opens the EP and enacts a gap, or non-point, of return. The void is filled with bursts of cultivated silence interspersed with heavily textured noise, creating a juxtaposed experimentalism that presents form but not structure, sound but not music, texture but not song. Graham Harman terms this as black noise:

I have called it ‘black noise’, to emphasise that it is highly structured, not the sort of formless chaos suggested by the ‘white noise’ of television and radio [...] Black noise corresponds to the triune genero-psychic dimensions through which black metal begets itself in process. 1) Essential qualities belonging to entities under pain of no longer thinking it the same: such a quality is the domain of Occult Black Metal, which is devoted to the hidden (esoteric, orthodox, kabbalistic, apophatic etc.), to accessing what lies outside the intention but still affects it via *avenues unknown*. (qtd. in Masciandaro 90)

Whilst Mayhem’s first EP is important because we hear full use of extreme metal drumming and the solidification of a now fully recognised band and black metal musical formation, what this example offers has yet to be outdone. Not only making use of recognisable instrumentation here, we also witness the use of black noise and silence as a purposefully included sonic format to be understood alongside the more recognisable musical elements of the record. It is possible to suggest that elements of Dadaism and particularly Futurism have been brought to bear with this EP inasmuch that Luigi Russolo’s *Art of Noise* (Pendragon Press, 2005) that set out the sound framework for Futurism at the fin de siècle can be heard in Mayhem. Russolo desired the inclusion of acousmatic and industrial machinery sound to be incorporated into musical form and as such, situated Futurism firmly within the musical avant-garde. That is to not to say of course, that Mayhem knew anything

of either Dadaism or Futurism yet the sonic parallels are there nonetheless; teenagers playing around with distortions pedals in a bedroom would have been something the Dadaists would have supported<sup>3</sup>. The sonic textural and timbral correlation between Russolo's Futurist position and Mayhem's 'thrown contextual space' (Masciandaro 90) that can be witnessed with their first two releases, this demonstrates that there was always more to Mayhem than existing purely as a second wave band. An avant-garde edge to their compositional art works transcends their strict classification as second wave and a more scopic view of them is necessary.

Hunt-Hendrix delineates two main specificities with black metal musical form, namely the hyperborean mode (second wave) and the transcendental mode (third wave). The black noise witnessed with Mayhem, the archetypal second wave black metal band, exhibits both the atrophic, closed and 'pure' musical elements of the hyperborean whilst presenting elements of the transcendental mode with the use of black noise. Hunt-Hendrix suggests in his essay 'Transcendental Black Metal: a Vision of Apocalyptic Humanism', that there could be new ways of understanding and engaging with black metal because different performing and musical techniques have developed that indicate different ontological systems of knowledge. He calls this 'the will to power' and states:

The will to power has two stages. The first may be called Fortification; the establishment of a paradigm or set of rules and the ensuing exploration of potential that lies within those constraints. The second stage may be termed Sacrifice; an audio-destruction, a self-overcoming whereby the initial rules, having been fully digested and satisfied, are thereby mutilated [...] Transcendental Black Metal is black metal in the mode of Sacrifice. It is a clearing aside of contingent features and a fresh exploration of the essence of black metal. As such it is solar, hypertrophic, courageous, finite and penultimate. Its tone is Affirmation and its key technique is the Burst Beat [...] The black metal that was born in Scandinavia in the mode of fortification can be termed Hyperborean Black Metal [...] is lunar, atrophic, depraved, infinite and pure. The symbol of its birth is the death of Dead. Its tone is Nihilism and its key technique is the Blast Beat. (54)

To examine these delineations further, the identification of the second wave as hyperborean and the third as transcendental demonstrate some important musical and sonic signifiers. To position this in the context of the hyperborean means to acknowledge Mayhem's impact and influence. Their first EP was followed by another self-release in 1987 entitled *DeathCrush* which saw a just under twenty-minute assault, opened by a militaristic drum beat on the snare and tom twisted into ascending and descending pitch bend glissandi towards the end of a compound time over a 4/4 phrasing. This effectively acts as the opening track to the record, with the second starting with a more familiar frost-bitten guitar riff that opens into a trashy sounding rock and roll format. This form is shortly obliterated and descends into the haptic void that, as Hunt-Hendrix suggests is '[...] a hypothetical total or maximal level of intensity' (Hunt-Hendrix 55). The significance of the blast beat for the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/dada/Dada-Manifesto.html>

hyperborean model not only creates haptic void fundamentals for the sonic representation of black metal, but is coupled with tremolo picking, both serving to create a stasis or arrest in musical terms. Hunt-Hendrix notes:

The technique of Hyperborean Black Metal is the blast beat. Pure black metal, represented by Transilvanian Hunger, means continuous open strumming and a continuous blast beat. But the pure blast beat is eternity itself. No articulated figures, no beginning, no end, no pauses, no dynamic range. It is a bird soaring in the air with nowhere to perch even for a moment. What at first seems to be a great clamour dwindles to an atrophied hum. Having climbed the peak of the mountain, the climber lies down and freezes to death. (57-58)

The album mentioned in this quotation is Darkthrone's *Transilvanian Hunger* (Peaceville Records, 1994) and Hunt-Hendrix uses this album as the template to demonstrate the hyperborean mode of black metal's second wave. It is an effective example as Mayhem, whilst using these techniques, have from the beginning of their career represented an experimentalism not seen as much in other second wave bands. Darkthrone however, could be said to epitomise all of the dominant hyperborean musical signifiers from the acidic screaming and rasping vocals, the blast beat to the consistent tremolo picking of the guitar technique. One element that could be added here is the use of sonata form, a solid song structure that consists of three main sections; exposition, development, and recapitulation. This is a classical musical compositional format yet functions particularly well within popular music forms. The exposition section sets out and introduces the main motifs and moves to the developmental section where solos are usually placed. The recapitulation section sees a return to the original motifs but with overlaid embellishments. First and second wave bands predominantly utilise this structure except perhaps Mayhem who courted experimental techniques from their inception.

A combination of this dominant prolegomenon dictates a specificity of sound, of classification and of engagement. Darkthrone's album *Transilvanian Hunger* (Peaceville Records, 1994), in particular, occupies an elevated position in second wave black metal. Its release in 1994 saw it emerge into a post-apocalyptic environment for Norwegian black metal that is examined further in the aesthetics section. Nevertheless, the contextualisation of this album demonstrates that whilst the seeming controversy that erupted during 1993 had in the most part come to an end by 1994, what was left of the Norwegian black metal scene meant that this album represented the black metal extract was fully evolved and vital. It functioned as a marker, as a resurrection that declamatorily stated that black metal was not dead in Norway.

In terms of musical progression, Darkthrone are heralded as the keepers of the archetypal black metal musical signifiers with two albums in particular; the one mentioned above and also their earlier album *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (Peaceville Records, 1992) 'an opus that would become known as the very first Norwegian black metal album' (Patterson, D. 2013). When Darkthrone began, they were a death metal band and according to drummer Fenriz:

Definitely one major, major point was looking at my [record] collection and [realising] I had bought maybe five death metal releases from 1990 [...] I was so sick and tired of it, even though it was what I'd trained to play. I meant it was okay to play, but not to listen to other bands. And many other death metal bands came out with disappointing stuff after promising demos [...] Throughout 1990 it was more and more of this but the songs we made were still death metal – we had 13/16 beats and shit like that. I want to de-learn playing drums. I want to play primitive and simple. I don't want to play like a drum solo all the time and make these complicated riffs'.  
(qtd. in Patterson 197)

Fenriz offers a valuable point in his quotation. Certainly, the move from death to black metal signified not only a sonic and timbral shift, but also the compositional format itself represented and expressed something completely different – a primitivism and simplification of musical engagement that gave space and room for an emotional and psychological representation. Fenriz' observations detail a move from a closed network of musical signification to a more fluid one, removing the tightly constructed riff-centred composition and replacing it with space for a more modest and intramural compositional style.

During the second wave, bands in the most part still used sonata form for their writing, letting the aggression and coldness seep through the riffs themselves in the comfortable triadic structure. The format of these chord based structures predominantly functioned as drones over the never-ending blast beat, tremolo picked on held barred arpeggiated ostinati with the occasional rupture into virtuosic top lines. A return to the combined stasis of the speed picking and blast beat was always a reliable da capo. As such, it is possible to acknowledge this musical signifying dyad as functioning like the basso continuo of Baroque music; the harpsichord and cello together provide the foundations of much of the textural and contrapuntal format in the same way that blast beats and chordal tremolo picking does for black metal. Not only do these signifiers function instrumentally as a unit but also sonically as clear markers of the genre that offer an instant frame of reference, just as the basso continuo did for Baroque. As such this instrumental and compositional dyad is recognised as the basso continuo nero.

### **3.a.ii. Embracing the New: Third Wave Black Metal and its Musical Rupture**

The experimentalism of Mayhem offered a scopic composition as their use of black noise, unsound and voidic stasis has reverberated across the decades. The birth of the third wave of black metal has seen an embracing of this abstraction, experimentalism and a move away from sonata form. That is not to say that sonata form is not used or that there are not contemporary hyperborean bands still going and emerging with serious success: Behemoth, 1349, Arkhon Infaustus, and Watain all adhere to the prolegomenon of second wave signifiers. However in amongst this, a liminality of sound and space has begun to develop that Hunt-Hendrix calls Transcendental Black Metal (54). Typified by artists such as Blut Aus Nord, Der Weg einer Freiheit, Terzij de Horde, The Infernal Sea, Ghostbath, The Howling Wind, Wolves in the Throne Room, and Denigrata demonstrate a new boundless

and abstract engagement with the black metal extract or haptic void, shrugging off previous structural arrangements and adopting a fully textural and pan-dimensional scope.

Identifying the musical and sonic elements that demarcate the third wave as different from the previous incarnations is difficult because pinning down an essentially oblique form to a strict definition means to attempt to categorise a shifting and abstract demarcation. It is necessary however, to examine the musical and sonic elements in order to determine how the sound is created. The structure of movements, rather than songs, rejects sonata form and replaces it with a multifaceted motif driven journey that does not move from point A to point B, but rather meanders across soundscapes and textural vistas where the apex of the composition is not a final, recapitulated crescendo and has more in common structurally with prog than metal. The dynamic development is not focused on finality, or a clearly cultivated climax. Rather, the dynamics swell in intensity, expanding and contracting at various moments within a musical movement. Conjunctive motifs bleed into one another, phasing through minor pentatonic broken chordal counterpoint with the occasional augmentation of the third lifting the music briefly into a major scale, before diminishing the third, flattening the key back into its original minor melodic scale that usually remains diatonic. It is not uncommon during these conjunctive motifs for the compositions to use metric modulation where the tempo increases and decreases, recalling Hunt-Hendrix's burst beat (59) format; the blast giving way to its half time counterpart, dropping the sonic intensity.

The signifying practices mentioned here are all compositional elements of minimalism, a form of avant-garde composition usually attributed to composers such as Steve Reich, LaMonte Young and Phillip Glass. A timely example of this is in black metal is Wolves in the Throne Room's *Black Cascade* (Southern Lord Records, 2009) which details only four movements; Wanderer above the Sea Fog (10.33), Ahriamic Trance (14.05), Ex Cathedra (10.58) and Crystal Ammunition (14.20). With more standardised album releases, there are usually no less than seven tracks per release, here however, there are only four but the time is made up in terms of how long each track lasts for, emulating the notion of classical music's movements, rather than popular music's song format. This seemingly simple move away from traditional album structures and radio edit time restrictions demonstrates a differing ontological engagement with black metal. Whilst the key black metal signifiers remain, such as the screaming vocal delivery and the basso continuo nero, there are more points where these elements burst into strumming and syncopated drum patterns that traditionally sit within the shoe gaze movement. Hunt-Hendrix calls this transcendental, progressive black metal while others refer to it as post black metal, being representative of the abyss, the void and the absolute divine (Hunt-Hendrix 58; Masciandaro 86, Patterson 468; Scott 24). Given the discursive nature of black metal however, adding the prefix 'post' might suggest that the previous preoccupations have now been dealt with. This is not the case, as Wolves in the Throne Room suggest:

Black metal is about a lot of things, on the surface it's very much about nihilism, despair, Satanism, left-hand path magic, and all this sort of thing [...] but we were interested in something a little bit deeper in the music, which was an uncompromising call to destroy everything you believe and that people have told you, something that

would allow you to really gaze inwards and find some deeper, more ancient sense of truth. (qtd. in Patterson 482)

Given the subjective, insular absorption described here, the band do not out rightly reject the previous waves of black metal, rather, they seek a different engagement with the black metal extract through an esoteric and existential search for truth. And they are not alone in this conviction: Der Weg einer Freiheit's album *Stellar* (Season of Mist, 2015), Blut Aus Nord's *Odinist: The Destruction of Reason by Illumination* (Candlelight Records, 2007), and Terzij de Horde' *Self: A Rage of Rapture against the Dying of the Light* (self-released, 2010) all demonstrate more of a transcendental black metal engagement musically, politically and philosophically.

One could suggest that because of the controversies surrounding the second wave of black metal, they overshadowed the music itself. It did not receive the focus it needed thus stalling its ability to naturally progress. Those that were involved with Mayhem's first 1986 release, that roiling piece of extreme experimentalism, never had the chance for any longevity with the band. The feeling emitted through the avant-garde composition of the music was interrupted by murder, arson and arrest of those composing and releasing albums at that time. This meant that exoteric forces prevented some of the progenitors of the scene from carrying on with the music. The emotion of the musical form was held in stasis, the musical form itself was arrested until the third wave sought to re-engage with that emotional space and push it into a contemporary manifestation. In other words, those producing the music were no longer able to do so which suggests that the feeling captured at on recordings such as Mayhem and Burzum's early releases was effectively halted and the proceeding glut of new black metal musicians have sought to reconnect with that timbral representation to create something new and vital from it. Perhaps it is the third wave's desire for truth and discursive engagement with the experimental voidic structures that ensures its transcendentalism because the second wave's opportunity was disrupted.

The last band to be examined in this section is France's Blut Aus Nord. Starting as a solo project in 1994, and only really using session musicians for the first three releases, it is their combination of avant-garde musical elements with black metal that ensure this band represent that abyssic quality first offered by Mayhem. Front man and guitarist, Vindsval states:

Blut Aus Nord is an artistic concept. We don't need to belong to a specific category of people to exist. If black metal is just this subversive feeling and not a basic musical style, then Blut Aus Nord is a black metal act. But if we have to be compared to all these childish satanic clowns, please let us work outwards [from] this pathetic circus. This form of art deserves something else than these mediocre bands and their old music composed 10 years before by someone else. ([heavymetal.com](http://heavymetal.com))

Interestingly, this viewpoint directly attributes a derivative problem with the discursive, postmodern nature of black metal inasmuch as Vindsval states that to look back in order to move forward is 'mediocre'. To state that this form of art 'deserves something else',

other than the previous ideological and symbolic trappings of Satanism, the constant basso continuo nero, means that acts such as Blut Aus Nord push the black metal envelope by expanding their musical frames to include soundscapes and textural sweeping vistas that sound more cinematic than standardised black metal. For example, their 2012 release *777 Cosmosophy* (Candlelight Records) contains five tracks, entitled Epitome XIV (8.55mins), Epitome XV (6.14mins), Epitome XVI (10.18mins), Epitome XVII (9.27mins), and Epitome XVIII (11.01mins).

The album begins with a singular guitar riff played with a softer distortion and reverb from F minor to Ab, creating a movement between the tonic and minor third. A second guitar joins in counterpoint to this using the same guitar tone and together, by simply using a more gentle diatonic minor third contrapuntal engagement, Blus Aus Nord capture that black metal extract without compromising their artistic position. There is a dual perfect fourth vocal harmony that is sung in the tenor tessitura which departs entirely from the majority of vocal black metal musical history. In fact, without its harsh edges, this could be mistaken for shoegaze bands such as My Bloody Valentine and Alcest (who until 2015 were a black metal band [Patterson 479]). The French spoken word over distorted and cultivated noise in Epitome XV departs again from any identifiable black metal engagement, perhaps alluding to Pierre Schaeffer's 'Apostrophe' (L'oeuvre Musicale Recordings, 1966), rupturing the subgenre's insular discursive capabilities and allying it more firmly with the French avant-garde. Whilst there are moments of double bass drumming on this album, there are no blast beats or tremolo picking, subverting the basso continuo nero and replacing it with broken chord strumming and atmospheric sub bass textures. Epitome XVIII is a drone piece that fluctuates between constructed pitched noises and cultivated dynamic drops and swells which bring to bear Thacker's unsound to end their album, perhaps discursively referencing Mayhem's experimentalism. Therefore, for some bands, Patterson's application of the prefix 'post' to black metal fits more appropriately than with others such as Wolves in the Throne Room or Der Weg einer Freiheit.

Much like Blut Aus Nord, it could be suggested that the contemporary profusion of transcendental black metal bands move more towards a dark ambient with elements of shoegaze guitar style within a meta-compositional structure of black metal, pushing the black metal extract to the furthest reaches of the abyssic void. Patterson states:

By its very nature, the term 'post-black metal' is a loose one [...] [It] has come to have more specific meaning, one that embodies the ideological/aesthetic shifts [...] as well as a particular sound, which tends to integrate musical forms and emotions that are (at first glance) seemingly incompatible with black metal's caustic spirit. Most notably such music has made use of the introspection and emotional vulnerability found in post-punk, post-rock, and shoegaze, the latter resulting in the somewhat awkward term 'blackgaze'. (475)

Certainly, for the bands that Hunt-Hendrix's transcendental black metal label would work for, the term black gaze is also similarly relevant. The move from the hyperborean atrophic and lunar mode to the transcendental hypertrophic and solar mode represents a

picking up of the shattered pieces left by the ruination of the second wave with a more gentle tessellation of avant-garde minimalist compositional signifiers set within the cold introspection of contemporary black metal. A morphing of the hyperborean and transcendental to form an inclusion of all of the black metal traits is present in the third wave; it offers a much deeper, cosmological and introspective engagement without losing the nihilistic existentialism of its historical predecessors.

### **3.b. Aesthetics and Ideological Representations: Finding Meaning in the Pyres**

As the previous section detailed, the musical evolution of black metal was organic and agile in its development but the aesthetics and ideological development advanced and solidified arguably, with more speed. It could be suggested that much of the ideological engagement saw an exoteric borrowing from pre-existent liminal narratives that became imposed initially for shock value, then over time, with intent. The aesthetics that were present with the first wave became more focused and deliberate with the second, only to be re-encoded by the third wave almost in their entirety. In order to understand how the aesthetics and ideology function, an analysis of specific album cover art is offered by the thesis in order to set the text at war with itself, thus disrupting the flow of meaning to identify the primary determinants.

#### **3.b.i. First Wave Archetypes: Anti-Conformity as Conformity**

Much of the aesthetics and ideologies from the first wave of black metal did not seem to be assimilated with any deep sincerity as the leather, studs and Satanic imagery of Venom or the loincloth clad members of Bathory demonstrate. The first wave aesthetics were a product of their time and the sensibilities of the nineteen eighties NWOBHM's aesthetic currency had an impact on black metal's first wave. A retroactive analysis of first wave bands' promotional photos and album art offer a valuable mise-en-scène for analysis. However, to examine any kind of ideological and aesthetic genesis point for this section, the acknowledgement of Anton Szandor LaVey's *The Satanic Bible* (1969) is valuable. Bands such as Venom, Mercyful Fate (first wave), Burzum, Darkthrone (second wave/hyperborean) and Watain and Behemoth (contemporary hyperborean) attest and perform this text's significance and influence. Consequently, it is important to examine before moving on to examine its connection to black metal.

Any retroactive engagement with this text will demonstrate that it is a problematic, ego-bound scripture that attempts to turn existing Christian doctrine on its head, rather than propose any kind of well thought out and meaningful understanding of what Satanism is. For example, in the foreword to the second edition by Magus Peter H. Gilmore he states, 'the philosophy presented in it is an integrated whole, not a smorgasbord from which one can pick and choose. It is meant only for a select few who are epicurean, pragmatic, worldly, atheistic, fiercely individualistic, materialistic, rational, and darkly poetic' (Gilmore foreword). For those who seek alternative musical ontologies, this statement's appeal to an already othered mindset is clear. However, as grandiose as Gilmore's avowal is, the text offers the opposite. Sectioned into four books, fire (book of Satan), air (book of Lucifer), earth (book of Belial)

and water (book of Leviathan), each section uses biblical language to either instruct the opposite of what the Bible says or to place one's ego at the centre of all subjectivity making it a solipsistic endeavour. No unpacking or deeper research is offered so when the text suggests ideas such as 'death to the weakling, wealth to the strong!' (Book of Satan), one is left questioning how these terms have been agreed.

One could argue that this is also true of much in the black metal field, for example Hunt-Hendrix's use of gnomic, declarative language that assumes a basis of pre-existent knowledge production rather than offering clear and well-argued terms. Furthermore, Gilmore's statement that the text must be understood as a whole is problematic because it actually prevents this desired engagement. The philosophy positions itself in opposition to Christianity and uses its language against it. In so doing however, the structural linguistics co-opt existing religious language in style, tone and language choice so that a similar dogmatic inflection is used that is counter to what it professes to be; it occupies the equivalent semantic field creating an extension of biblical language, rather than forging a counter to it. I would add however that black metal provides something that LaVey cannot, a theatrical space for the pseudo anti-religiosity that facilitates more of a perceived authentic engagement and presentation. As can be seen in Scott's article 'Seasons in the Abyss: Heavy Metal as Liturgy' (19), his analysis of Behemoth, Watain (both contemporary hyperborean) and SunnO))) (drone metal who share a vocalist with Mayhem) use liturgical elements in their performance. This lends weight to the idea that by using liturgical language and ritual in order to subvert, is a powerful performative strategy. Scott states:

Authenticity is a frequently discussed term in heavy metal, in the sense that there is something sought after in being true. Expressed in black metal directly, for example in the phrase 'True Norwegian Black Metal' from the same titled live album by Gorgoroth (2008) and in heavy metal more generally, this drive for authenticity [...] rejects the postmodern subject in favour of achieving a true identity [...] Examples given from Behemoth and Watain [...] there is a goal being articulated of providing for reflective insight into the opportunity for transcendence. It is just that the matter concerns not presumption of a Christian pre-given lifeworld rather a transgressive goal that is nihilistic to its core. (23)

It could be suggested therefore that LaVey provided a foundation for the black metal performance to come but to examine the text in isolation does not provide the purposeful competency he was attempting to convey. His text also selects elements from Paganism, Heathenism, and Odinism amongst other pre-monotheistic spiritual practices, to attempt to give it some legitimacy. For example, LaVey intones:

[...] they all join hands in brotherly unity, and in their desperation go to Valhalla for their last great ecumenical council. Draweth near in the gloom the twilight of the gods. The ravens of night have flown forth to summon Loki, who hath set Valhalla aflame with the searing trident of the inferno. The twilight is done. A glow of new light is borne out of the night and Lucifer is risen, once more to proclaim: This is the age of Satan! Satan Rules the Earth! (23)

This statement demonstrates a cultural and spiritual co-option of Norse mythology applied to a satanic context rather than Satanism offering anything of its own. This is a valuable acknowledgement because the Norse inclusion in this text has had long lasting ramifications, particularly for the second wave of black metal. LaVey's use with the term 'brother' also suggests a hegemonic, patriarchal writing position that, if he was serious about providing a real counter to Christianity, would have foregrounded women in his scriptures. Of course, there are subsequent publications that attempt to do this, with various book of shadows and even a text entitled *The Satanic Witch* (Nadramia, P. & LaVey, A. Feral House, 2003) that comes in hot pink. Adding women in as an afterthought however, undermines his use of Paganism and witchcraft that outside of his application function as either egalitarian or matriarchal. The notion of a post-inclusionary strategy for women as a footnote seems lazy at best. According to Adrienne Rich, 'masculine ideologies are the creation of masculine subjectivity; they are neither objective, nor value-free nor inclusively 'human''. Feminism implies that we recognise fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male-centred ideologies, and that we proceed to think and act, out of that recognition' (qtd. in Stanley and Wise 59). As such, the patriarchal infrastructure of LaVey's miscellany of ideas dictates a male-centric co-option of pre-existent matriarchal and egalitarian spiritual practice under the banner of a masculinised Satanism to counter Christianity. There is little therefore that is actually revolutionary. One cannot beat dogma with dogma. However, that being said, the influence this text has had on the foundations of black metal is interesting, including the excision of women, which is explored further in chapter four.

Another addition is the acknowledgement of the 'Sigil of Baphomet', the iconic image (see fig. iii) that has come to represent LaVey's Satanism and its church. It first appeared on a musical recording done by LaVey entitled *The Satanic Mass* (Morgenstrumm, 1968) which detailed his preoccupation with Moog synthesisers. The connection here between LaVey's Satanism and musical performance is interesting because right from the beginning of his philosophy, music has played an intrinsic role, but perhaps not as significant a space as it would find in black metal. As an organist, and lover of classical music, his use of terms such as 'nibelungen' (LaVey 23) allude to a Wagnerian ideological and musical philosophy which would extend to more problematic race related issues for the second wave of black metal, which are examined further on. As such, Gilmore states that 'the album featured a cover graphic named by LaVey as the 'Sigil of Baphomet': the goat head in a pentagram, circled with the Hebrew word 'Leviathan', which has become the ubiquitous symbol of Satanism' (Gilmore foreword).

The various stylistic and ideological strands of LaVey's text had a cultural impact that can be identified in its embryonic form in the first wave of black metal bands and cover art. For example, Venom's *Welcome to Hell* album art (Neat Records, 1981) is arguably one of their most famous and enduring offerings, and as can be seen in fig. iii. Depicts the Sigil of Baphomet. The cover art is a relatively simple and uncomplicated lay-out with a black background and gold used for the imagery however it is the symbolism that is interesting here. The use of the inverted pentagram invokes an anti-monotheistic engagement by the band that demonstrates a conscious borrowing from LaVey's text. A traditionally feminine

Pagan symbol, the pentagram has been turn on its head, and is used in Satanic imagery. According to Eliphas Lévi's *The History of Magic* (trans. A. E. Waite, 1913), 'the star which conducted the pilgrims is the same Burning Star which is met within all initiations. For alchemists, it is the sign of the quintessence, for magicians it is the Great Arcanum, for Kabalists the sacred femininity of the pentagram' (29). As such, knowledge of this liminal, extra-hegemonic spiritual narrative has provided first wave black metal with a plentiful offering of occultist imagery that gained a new lease of life with LaVey's *Satanic Bible* (1969). Venom used this Sigil for their album cover art, thus forging a primacy of aesthetic connection and ideological reference between the two that would have long lasting ramifications for the future of black metal.



(Fig. iv)

The combination of black and gold and the Sigil of Baphomet all work together to present a specificity of representation and engagement that at once indicates a socially constructed other but also the occult. The term black, as indicative of its semantic field is associated through imagery and synonyms with darkness, negation, other and gold through the same semantic process is associated with capital, riches and alchemical intent. The two colours combined to represent this piece of album art suggests an othered socio-cultural position, away from mainstream orthodoxy and in so doing, the band position themselves in antagonism to the mainstream and hegemonic Christian doctrine. The black could be said to represent a negative, othered and therefore cool association and the gold has connotations of alchemy and occultism. It is this colour that forges the image of the inverted pagan symbol with the head of Baphomet in the centre and coupled with the album title, all of these signs coalesce to represent who Venom are and what the album contains. One of the more prominent connotative ideas is that of Baphomet. Lévi offers three understandings:

That the hypothetical idol Baphomet was a symbolical figure representing the First Matter of the *Magnum Opus*, which is the Astral Light; that it signified further the god

Pan, which may be identified with “the Christ of dissident sacerdotalism”; that the Baphomet head is “a beautiful allegory which attributes to thought alone the first and creative cause”; and finally, that it is nothing more than an innocent and even pious hieroglyph. (211)

Of particular note in this statement is the notion of thought and creative cause. This idea fastens itself well to black metal’s desire for an othered, ontological engagement. The need to foreground individual thought processes and creativity within subjectivity forges the bond between subjective embodiment, artistry and independence under a banner and iconography of separateness. The LaVey Sigil of Baphomet is an enduring image that facilitates this mode and has developed as a brand for black metal, whose relationship with the Satanic Bible has meant a collaborative, if somewhat fragmented, alliance. Scott Wilson notes in his article ‘*Basileus philosoPHOrum METaloricum*’, ‘Baphomet, otherwise known as Prince of Modifications [is] opposed to the Christian principle that guarantees the identity of the soul and the unity of being [...] the black metal circle turns eternally in a clamour for being that unfolds a process of becoming as infinite non-self-identical multiplicity beyond all figures of unity or of the One (50). This statement could suggest that the sigil represents non-identification, operating in antagonism to Christian orthodoxy that the One will provide unity and subjective knowledge. Wilson foregrounds the unfolding process of becoming that echoes both Butler and Kristeva’s subject in process (140; 54), that the Sigil of Baphomet’s representative power ‘cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject (Butler 140). The need for subjective transformation therefore becomes epitomised by Baphomet who heralds the process of becoming and self-knowledge.

The Sigil of Baphomet and its use by Venom in their album art, helped forge an ideological and image-based narrative that intended to offend, to disrupt normative popular music engagement. The use of this image is informed by Dadaism, as the last point in its manifesto is its commitment for art, or anti-art, to be offensive (manifestos.com). As such the collaborative stylistic and ideological signifiers have come to mean a rebellious anti-hegemonic engagement at the foundational level of first wave black metal. It is valuable to note however that rather than any deep rooted desire to practice Satanism, Cronos, Venom’s lead singer went so far as to tell Kerrang! In a 1985 interview ‘look, I don’t preach Satanism, occultism, witchcraft, or anything. Rock and Roll is basically entertainment and that’s as far as it goes’ (qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 14). Cronos’ comments are interesting, given the nature of their artistic decisions and as can be seen in their picture-disc album *At War with Satan* (Neat Records, 1984) (fig. v) it depicts an inverted cross engulfed in flames on the front cover, whilst the title of the album actually inverts the construct they themselves helped to create. Consequently, the occult imagery and satanic references merely served an image purpose for art’s sake rather than any serious ideological engagement. It could be said that Venom used these ideas as a marketing vehicle to sell their style of rock and roll, rather than to present themselves as devout Satanists.



(Fig. v)



(Fig. vi)

As can be seen in fig. vi, the band did not take themselves that seriously but this picture is revealing in terms of the aesthetics of appearance. Venom's choice of leather, studs, arm bands, bare chests and weaponry created an archetypal look for early black metal that would become more tightly focused and applied within the second wave; the homoeroticism and excision of the feminine (of which is examined in chapter four) is of significance. According to Robert Walser in his text *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993), he suggests:

Male bonding itself becomes crucial to the reception of metal that depends on masculine display, for it helps [to] produce and sustain consensus about meaning. Exscripting texts do occasionally refer to sexuality, but typically as just another arena for enactment of male power. Mutual erotic pleasure rarely appears in the lyrics of heavy metal, just as it is seldom discussed by men in any other context. Metal shields men from the dangers of pleasure – loss of control – but also enables display, sometimes evoking images of armoured, metalised male bodies. (116)

If one can understand that metal functions as a form of male fantasies of empowerment that operate through the excription of women, what can be seen in the Venom band picture are representations of brotherhood, male bonding and images of metalised, male bodies performing masculine music forms. As such, the combination of LaVey's Satanism and Venom's aesthetics of the armoured male offer a specificity of cultivated masculinity, in thought and image.

The other example from the first wave to apply here is that of Mercyful Fate. Their vocalist, King Diamond, was also affected by LaVey's work. He states:

I read the book and thought, hey, this is the way I live my life – this is the way I feel inside! It's not like it was a major religion or anything like that, it was a lifestyle I could relate to 500%. And it's just nice to see your own views and thoughts in words, in a book. It comforts you in some way. And that is how I felt...and you'll see it reflected in our early lyrics with King Diamond and Mercyful Fate. I used the word Satan all the time, and it had a very specific meaning for me – not the one that other people had. (qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 14)

LaVey's influence on first wave black metal has been taken more seriously by King Diamond than Cronos of Venom in terms of subjective meaning. This perhaps led to Venom being seen as musically significant but not ideologically so. Mercyful Fate however, purposefully sewed this perspective into their music. As Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind note, Mercyful Fate's [...] two more advanced albums, *Melissa* (1983) and *Don't Break the Oath* (1984), [were] brimming with stories of magical rites, nightmarish fantasies of the consequences of broken pacts, and declarations of Satanic allegiance: “*if you say Heaven, I say a Castle of Lies/You say forgive him, I say revenge / My sweet Satan, You are the One*” (14). This excerpt provides a small example of the tone and language style of King Diamond's lyrical content, highlighted by Moynihan and Søderlind in their text *Lords of Chaos: Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Feral House, 2003). They include both Venom and Mercyful Fate at the beginning of their documentary text, in order to foreground the importance of the philosophy of Satanism as the ideological vehicle for the genesis of black metal, even if it externally it was mostly foregrounded as a discursive field of images and symbols.

Another important element to be taken from Mercyful Fate is King Diamond's use of corpse paint. It is possible to attribute face painting for shock purposes back to popular music icons of the nineteen sixties and seventies such as Arthur Brown, Alice Cooper, Ziggy Stardust and Kiss, however the contextualisation of King Diamond's use of corpse paint provide some key signifying practices. Moynihan and Søderlind note that ‘adding to a cleverly conceived stage presence, King Diamond sang out such blasphemous provocations under a mask of theatrically sinister black and white face paint’ (Moynihan and Søderlind 14). The accord between face painting, musical performance and theatricality therefore already had a relationship before Mercyful Fate but the overt use of Satanism meant a darker and more sinister representation and engagement, presenting a form of occultation. In his essay, ‘Corpsepaint as Necro-Minstrelsy, or Towards the Re-Occultation of Black Blood’,

Daniel suggests, ‘corpsepaint is quite specifically about looking like a dead white person, its ultimate horizon gestures beyond racial legibility towards the species-being based project of turning the human face – any human face – into a skull [...] [it] is the cross-identification of the living with the dead, permitting the fantasy of their liminal border as a life-in-death’ (43). His statement suggests that there are echoes of racial accusations that have been levelled at those wearing corpsepaint but the point is to transgress the boundaries of life and death, to represent one whilst being the other. The act of wearing corpsepaint is to present one’s face as dead, regardless of the race or gender of those wearing it. It is a death mask that becomes performed through the theatricality of black metal performance, an exteriority of inevitability appropriated for use on stage where the falseness is obvious and its defilement at the supposed sanctity of life is clear. Daniel goes on to state:

Corpsepaint is a performative melancholic technology through which the notional certainty of a future status of being dead can be borrowed upon and brought into the lived present [...] [it] hypertrophically externalises the internal affective dynamic already implicit in what could be called melancholy self-preservation or, termed less kindly but more accurately, melancholy posturing: the social production of a legible outward display of an inward relation to death. (44)

This statement details the meaning of corpsepaint for all of the black metal variants, which suggests it is more about the subjective representation of the abyssic void, of death represented through life, than merely just painting one’s face. There are a lot of anthropological and sociological accounts of face painting, from drag to ritual use for example the work of Jack Halberstam (1997) and Erving Goffman (1967). Goffman points out in his work *Interaction Ritual: Face to Face Behaviour* the significance of being able to read and respond to face to face interactions and that face painting disrupts standardised codes of behaviour. He states ‘universal human nature is not a very human thing. By acquiring it, the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without [...] each of these persons must have something of the balance of characteristics required of a usable participant in any ritually organised system of social activity’ (45). Black metal is a highly ritually organised system of social activity to the point where it is considered theatrical (Lesourd 40) and even liturgical (Scott 25). The disruption of Goffman’s ‘balance of characteristics’ is interesting because corpsepaint transcends the notion of life by representing death but also creates a construct from a construct, if we are to take Goffman’s point that to acquire universal human nature makes constructs of us all. Therefore, corpsepaint is a metaconstruct of diametrically opposed forces being constrained to co-exist within subjective artificiality; the living dead or perhaps more appropriately, the dead living.

A useful, if somewhat comical, overview of the chronology of corpsepaint is provided by the site Metal Injection<sup>4</sup>. King Diamond’s use of corpsepaint suggests a black metal point of origin for the use of chiaroscuro theatricality that not only encompassed much of Daniel’s analysis above, but also the representation of anti-Christian ethos. As can be seen

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.metalinjection.net/video/an-animated-history-of-corps-paint>

from fig. vii, the graphology and stylistics of his corpsepaint echo Daniel's points but add to these strata of definitions; King Diamond unites it with an inverted cross in the centre of his forehead. As such, this functions as a clear demarcation of the satanic ideological position as well as melancholic posturing.



(fig. vii)

As can be examined from the Metal Injection cartoon, mapping the evolution of corpsepaint from the progenitors such as Arthur Brown and Alice Cooper to more contemporary examples, demonstrates a form of black metal performance in which the visuals function as a uniform, where the effort to not conform has inadvertently created an aesthetic that ensures conformity. It has become a clear signifier of black metal that began with artists such as Mercyful Fate but took on a whole new and more sinister meaning with the second wave.

### 3.b.ii. From Mayhem and Darkthrone Blooms the Abyss

The second wave of black metal's discursive bricolage meant that it gathered up signifiers from the first wave, such as LaVey's Satanism, the musical examples detailed in the antecedent section, and the use of corpsepaint, and cultivated a new, more concrete Gesamtkunstwerk. As alluded to previously, it is at this juncture that music, mythology and problematic ideologies-as-reality exploded in Scandinavia during the early nineteen nineties. It is therefore important to provide an overview of this in order to demonstrate how a syncretism of racial ideologies and particular personalities forged a crucible that would change the content and function of black metal. Mapping the signifiers that document the move from music subgenre to a National Socialism movement is as problematic as it is unpleasant.

Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind's *Lords of Chaos: Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Feral House, 2003) attempts to document everything that happened in Norway (with Sweden and Germany dealt with as secondary sources) but it is important to understand that this collection of testimonies and newspaper articles/gig posters is not an academic endeavour. It is written in a journalistic style and must be understood as such. To counter this text's non-academic position, a number of academic critical essays are used to extrapolate

and clarify some key points raised by Moynihan and Søderlind. Kenneth Granholm's article 'Sons of Northern Darkness: Heathen Influences in Black Metal and Neo-Folk' (1-21), Karl Spracklen's 'True Aryan Black Metal: the Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the Construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music' (1-7), Laura Wiebe Taylor's 'Nordic Nationalisms: Black Metal takes Norway's Everyday Racisms to the "Extreme"' (187-197) and Mikael Sarelin's 'Masculinities within Black Metal: Heteronormativity, Protest Masculinity or Queer?' (69 – 86) offer detailed and perceptive interrogations of black metal in academic terms.

One important factor that Moynihan and Søderlind identify is the reticence of surviving members of various bands such as Mayhem to discuss anything associated with the second wave of black metal. News that film director Jonas Åkerlund (who used to play in Bathory [first wave]) is proceeding with a 'Lords of Chaos' film about Euronymous' murder (to be produced by Ridley Scott), has elicited a vitriolic response from some, particularly Necrobutcher, Mayhem's original bassist. Rolling Stone magazine reported him as saying, 'this book *Lords of Chaos* is fucking crap and that some stupid Swedes are gonna make a movie out of it is not ok. I will do everything I can to stop this film...Tell the Swedes and the Hollywood people to go fuck themselves'<sup>5</sup>. This sentiment is supported in Nicola Masciandaro's 'Anti-Cosmosis: Black Mahapralaya' that states 'YOU DO NOT FUCKING TALK ABOUT BLACK METAL' (83) indicating not only a closed network of signification but also an insular framework to black metal's material culture. Laura Wiebe Taylor adds:

During the early nineties, Norwegian black metal coalesced around a raw, primitive aesthetic - low production values, piercing drone, stripped down song structures and arrangements, and harsh imagery – much of it pillaged from Norse mythology, paganism, Satanism, and/or fascism. The resulting sonic and visual noise could then serve to evoke, even enact, a particular vision for Norway, an atavistic and ruthless national imaginary where social interaction is based on perpetual strife and mutual hate. (186)

This statement further contributes to the shuttered and isolated community that functioned on a number of contributing factors, from co-opted mythologies and spiritualities to a surge in National Socialism. This, in contemporary terms, suggests that black metal is something only to be known from inside it, its focus on interiorities over any exoteric investigations or analysis have, and continue to be resisted. Whilst black metal can be understood as a social movement, the structure of its evolution has drawn upon a syncretism of racial ideologies that are examined in 3.b.iii.

### **3.b.iii. Mapping the Mythology: the Death of Dead, Euronymous and Grishnackh's Imprisonment**

The two bands to examine primarily are Mayhem and Burzum. Dead was the singer of Mayhem and Euronymous was the guitarist. Count Grishnackh was a one man musical project operating under the name Burzum. How these lives collided revolves around the death

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<sup>5</sup> <http://loudwire.com/jonas-akerlund-direct-lords-of-chaos-film-mayhem-euronymous>

of Dead, the murder of Euronymous and the site for black metal efflorescence that can be attributed to his music shop (Helvete) and record label (Deathlike Silence). Mayhem's front man Dead, lived with Euronymous and Hellhammer (Mayhem's guitarist and drummer) in 1991, and this marked the beginning of some tumultuous times that saw the evolution of some problematic ideological positions. Dead's chosen band pseudonym was no accident and according to Stian 'Occultist', Mayhem's brief replacement vocalist, 'Dead didn't see himself as human; he saw himself as a creature from another world. He was very much into death and the other world. He said he had many visions that his blood had frozen in his veins, that he was dead. That is the reason he took that name. He knew he would die...' (Moynihan & Søderlind 59). On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1991, Dead slit his wrists and throat and shot himself in the head with a shotgun. Euronymous found the body, supposedly taking parts of Dead's skull for jewellery and took pictures of the scene before the police were called. One of these shots would become the cover art for Mayhem's *Dawn of the Black Hearts* album (Warmaster Records, 1998), (fig. viii).



(Fig. viii)

The graphology and bleached colour of the art object connotes a number of important ideas. Authenticity is of particular value here as not only is this a dead body, but it is the body of Dead; a reciprocal semantic and authentic declamation about the rest of the band and how they wanted to be represented. The image of Mayhem's dead front-man caught in the moment of his suicide is made all the more significant when understood in relation to the album title, as if the moment Dead died captured the dawning of the rest of the band's black hearts and therefore their self-actualisation. By extension, this could be seen to have had ramifications for second wave black metal as a form of group-actualisation for all of those involved.

It could be argued that black metal did not reach a horizon point of authenticity for its own ideological position until the moment Dead's suicide became immortalised on Mayhem's album cover art. This was a turning-point event that demarcated a paradigmatic shift from the fantasy of satanic lyrical content and imagery, to a reality of using the immediacy of death of a black metal musician as art. Dead moved from active signifying

subject to passive signified object as his image represented his band's musical art object, thus elevating his status within black metal as well as the band's reputation. In 1992 Euronymous was interviewed by Orcustus fanzine in which he stated, 'we have declared WAR. Dead died because the trend people have destroyed everything from the old black metal/death metal scene. Today "death" metal is something normal, accepted and FUNNY (argh) and we HATE it. It used to be spikes, chains, leather and black clothes, and this was the only thing Dead lived for as he hated this world and everything which lives on it' (Moynihan and Søderlind 60). As Moynihan and Søderlind are quick to point out, Euronymous 'proves himself a historical revisionist of unparalleled ability when it came to anything connected with Mayhem. According to those who knew him, Dead wasn't excited enough about black clothes to ever wear them much of the time. He died wearing a white T-shirt with 'I <3 Transylvania' stencilled across it' (60). One could argue for a particular gothic subcultural capitol contained within Dead's clothing choice, but with Euronymous' interview, some key subcultural signifiers were solidified further in terms of visual aesthetics and a hatred of anything considered normative.

The main elements identified by Euronymous in the above quotation, that of spikes, leather and black clothes, meant that a more concrete visual representation of black metal had been identified. The first wave did not succeed in such an unexpurgated black metal image yet with personalities such as Euronymous the black metal uniform became far more concentrated. And this image persists in contemporary times, particularly amongst contemporary hyperborean artists and fans. Interestingly a 1998 Belgium short documentary film on black metal demonstrates some of the aesthetic and ideological positions of the black metal scene<sup>6</sup> and provides some valuable opinions on why people chose to be part of black metal. One element worthy of note here is that the young male fans in this documentary openly wish that there were more women in black metal, suggesting that women's excription may not stem from black metal itself, but may have a different source which is examined in chapter four.

Euronymous as a figure in the Norwegian black metal movement is significant. Not only was he now in one of the most famous black metal bands in Europe, he also owned and ran a black metal music shop called Helvete and ran a record label, to which Burzum were signed. There occurred a fight for hierarchical power between Euronymous and Grishnackh of Burzum within the Norwegian black metal movement, otherwise known as The Black Circle, the innermost personalities involved with the Bergen and Oslo microcosms of activity. As Moynihan and Søderlind note, '[...] the gravity of the Black Circle's forays into crime and transgression was increasing unhindered over the course of late 1992 and early 1993'(83) which included the homophobic murder of Magnus Andreassen by Bård Eithun (known as Faust, drummer for Stigma Diabolicum, Thorns and Emperor), various arson attacks on stave churches including the Fantoft stave church in 1992 of which Kristian 'Varg' Vikernes (known as Grishnackh) was later charged with and the murder of Øystein Arseth (known as

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cvltnation.com/black-metal-belgium-documentary-cira-1998>

Euronymous) on the pretext that Euronymous owed him money and was delaying on a recording contract. In an interview with Didrik Søderlind, Vikernes notes:

I was running after him, stabbing, and it was four or five stabs. The first stab was in the chest. The whole time he was trying to run away, so I had to stab him in the back. He was running down the stairwell, barefoot. I'd just been sleeping during an eight hour drive and was wearing heavy army boots. I had to run like hell to catch up with him, and at the same time I was stabbing and he was running as fast as he could.  
(Moynihan and Søderlind 127)

The severity of events meant that the music became much less of a focus whilst the genre moniker of black metal became the banner under which the Norwegian media wrote about the events. The consolidated attack on Christianity in Norway became recognised under the insignia of Satanism and black metal. Regarding the church burnings, Ihsahn from Emperor notes:

Burning churches was a symbolic act, and it proved that some people in Norway were very much against Christianity. I also have very much respect for extreme things. Things that are extreme are fascinating, as long as they don't go against me or those I care about. I like extreme things. It underlined and strengthened my individual feelings. It was one step away from normal daily life for me, as for many other people. (Moynihan and Søderlind 103)

This viewpoint underscores the previous analysis of individuality through Satanism and its counter to Christianity. The rupture of normal life by extreme practices such as church burning heralded not only notoriety for those involved but also the authentication of black metal as proof of deed. It was not simply a question of singing about Satan as Mercyful Fate did, but actually using a counter-philosophy as a narrative for active force. Kenneth Granholm writes:

In January 1993 an interview with Varg Vikernes was published in *Bergens Tidende*, in which he claimed responsibility for a number of Church burnings. Vikernes was arrested in [...] although he was eventually released due to lack of evidence. This initial article, however, led to a virtual media frenzy involving stories about "Satanism in Norway." The situation escalated later the same year when Mayhem guitarist Euronymous (Øystein Aarseth, 1968–1993) was found murdered in Oslo. Vikernes was arrested and convicted for the deed, and in conjunction with the trial several of the church burnings that had occurred in Norway in the early 1990s were resolved, with a number of individuals involved in the Black Metal scene convicted. Vikernes was himself convicted of four arsons. (8)

Vikernes was a problematic force in the Black Circle, whose desire to be at the apex of the movement led to an intersection of arson, murder and a syncretism of racial ideologies that have had ramifications in the succeeding decades. He goes on to state, 'Darkthrone realised what a jerk he [Euronymous] was. They didn't want anything to do with him. Fenriz liked Øystein, but the other guys hated him. That's damn sure. They cursed him in rituals –

they were Satanists' (Moynihan and Søderlind 125). The link therefore between second wave black metal and Satanism, seems to have been more concretely realised during the hyperborean mode than its previous incarnation. However, when questioned about the seriousness of Satanism in black metal, Vikernes is noted as saying 'I wouldn't describe it as serious at all. It's image' (Moynihan and Søderlind 161). This suggests that the Norwegian press' preoccupation with this notion created with the intention to sell a lot of newspapers, rather than documenting Vikernes' position with any accuracy. As a counter to this however, Ihsahn from Emperor notes, 'LaVey has done a very good job getting people interested in anti-Christian thinking and Satanic imagery. I also believe he is much more serious and spiritually into [...] Satan than he describes in his books' (Moynihan and Søderlind 221). Interestingly, when questioned by Moynihan and Søderlind, LaVey noted, 'many of the black metal 'Satanists' appear to me as essentially Christians – they're defining Satanism by Christian standards' (qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 258). One could argue of course, that is also what LaVey does.

Understanding how the hyperborean philosophy stemmed from Satanism and evolved into National Socialism alludes to an earlier point when discussing LaVey's inclusion of Norse mythology into his work. As such, the desire to go back to a spiritual landscape that was pre-Christian was for many black metal adherents, a necessity. Odinism in particular, that extended to Heathenism became a more tenable position than the impedimenta of Satanism. For Vikernes, the worship of Odin and Norse mythology has become increasingly paramount and he has been keen to make his separation from Satanism clear and claim Odin/Wotan as his deity. From his prison cell, he continued with Burzum and forged his own writings, such as *Vargsmål* (Varg's book, 2003). As well as this, his text *Sorcery and Religion in Ancient Scandinavia* (Abstract Sound Books, 2011), that appears as lacking in appropriate citations as LaVey's work. Whilst it is not an academic text, without wider reading to back up his points, it remains a romantic engagement with the mythology. Vikernes offers an overview of his understanding of this subject area. It does not include any of the propaganda he has been involved with in terms of cultivating a National Socialism; this he keeps for *Vargsmål*, using his fame with Burzum as an ideological vehicle.

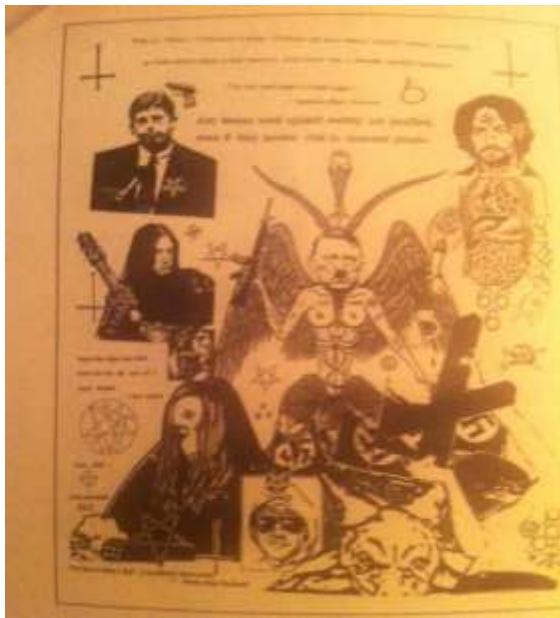
One might be able to posit a link between Vikernes, LaVey, his reference to Wagner and a syncretism of racial ideologies that have permeated a Teutonic and Scandinavian black metal perspective. In the prologue of his text, LaVey states, 'the ring of the Nibelungen doth carry an everlasting curse, but only because those who seek it think in terms of 'good' and 'evil' – themselves being at all times 'good''' (LaVey 23). The reference here to Wagner's Ring Cycle (1876) suggests a racial implication and also the desire to be free of the weight of conscience that was considered a Jewish trait (Wagner, R. *Judaism in Music*, 1869), which was a characteristic of the opera's hero, Siegfried, the Teuton warrior. Pål Mathieson, writer for Norway's *Morgenbladet* newspaper notes:

This dark aspect of human nature – to kill someone if you don't like them, to rape someone if you feel like it and to not feel bad about it – goes back much further and is older than the Nordic religion, definitely [...] Satanism says [...] do what you like to do, don't ask anybody else what they think about it [...] That is something different,

and if they try to mix that with Nordic traditions, that is very unhistorical – and it becomes extremely explosive because you can take the violent aspects of the Nordic tradition and legitimize it through this new thing. You legitimize it through the symbols of that time, which is totally incorrect, and then use it in our time as an expression of extreme individualism. (qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 237)

The combination of the conscience-free Nordic warrior and Aleister Crowley's Thelemal doctrinal caveat of 'do what thou wilt, shall be the whole of the law' (*The Book of Law*, Red Wheel, 1904, v. 1:40) have been co-opted under the banner of LaVey's Satanism and as Mathieson states, becomes explosive when applied to Norse tradition using the racially constructed language of Wagner. The rejection of conscience, of contemporary societal structures, and by extension, Christian values and belief systems that are amalgamated under the Sigil of Baphomet have come to represent a distinctly racist discourse. It could be said this was potentially instigated by Wagnerian anti-Semitism as an ideological and musical forerunner to National Socialism's preoccupation with the *volk* or folk, the necessity of pure blood and true Nordic culture. Wagner's obsession with these ideas meant that his works have been scrutinised for racist characterisations, his construction and application of the leitmotif and the promotion of the conscience-free Aryan warrior.

His racially dubious characterisations of the Nibelungen from the Ring Cycle suggest as much. Wagner casts the voices of Alberich and Mime, two of the Nibelungen or dwarves, in an abnormally high register and gives tritones and other awkward intervals to sing, which makes their voices shriek and croak, just as he described the speech of Jews in his essay *Judaism in Music* (1869). As such, Wagner's ideological position acted as a conduit to the Third Reich and Nazism; the mixing together of racism, Nordic traditions and philosophies that proved to be explosive. According to Peter Conradi in his text *Hitler's Piano Player: the Rise and Fall of Ernst Hanfstaengl, Confidante of Hitler, Ally to FDR*, Wagner's '[...] whole interweavings of leitmotifs, of embellishments of counterpoint, and musical contrast and arguments, were exactly mirrored in the patterns of Hitler's speeches, which were symphonic in construction and ended in a great climax, like the blare of Wagnerian trombones' (137). The link between Wagner and Hitler, and by extension Nazism, has been well documented by authors such as Conradi (2004), and Borchmeyer (1992). Therefore for LaVey to include the Wagnerian reference in his text, alongside grandiose mentions of Valhalla and Norse mythology, a particular whiteness to Norwegian black metal became infused with Vikernes' slant on Satanism, racism, Heathenism and National Socialism (see fig. ix). LaVey's choice of language twenty-four years before the second wave of black metal took hold of his text served to support their ideological position and justified their place as part of a longer racist tradition.



(fig. ix) 'Racist flyer circulated in the black metal underground' (Moynihan and Søderlind 372)

The armoured and metalised male body of Vikernes can be seen centre left of fig. ix, surrounded by images of Charles Manson, Christ carrying the cross and a Hitler-headed Baphomet in the centre. The various competing images here do not necessarily coalesce with any degree of synchronicity apart from the loosely bound tenets of Satanism as an overarching metanarrative. Vikernes self-referentiality in this promotional material seems to suggest a particularity of masculine representation. Mikael Sarelin writes:

The [...] masculine archetype of black metal could be called the black metal warrior [who] dresses up in leather and spikes, is tattooed and wears corpse paint and anti-Christian symbols. He is a warrior of Satan, proclaiming his belief and his readiness to fight for the Unlord sporting his electric guitar during the performance of his band, looking as threatening as possible. The black metal warrior is a blood-drinking super masculine exaggeration of the typical black metal fan. He wages war against Christianity and the surrounding society of febleminded sheep, thus showing his protest through his exaggerated masculine appearance. (75)

This statement seems as much caught up in its own mythology as actually being able to represent what a typical black metal adherent is in real terms. There is no blood drinking happening and given the results of Spracklen's 2007 study, National Socialism is not taken that seriously either. However, where Sarelin does get it right is just how appropriate his typology of the black metal warrior is for Vikernes. His attire, his ideological representations and actions all serve to support Sarelin's identification of the black metal warrior. In fact, Vikernes is most likely the archetype against which all others measure themselves for authenticity. It may be however that the National Socialism element has diluted to exist with only a handful of bands such as Satanic Warmaster, Peste Noir, Graveland and Absurd; the

aggregation of varying co-opted ideologies perhaps has not gained the ground Vikernes hoped for.

Much like LaVey, Vikernes attempted to annex a miscellany of disparate forces to forge a new and reinvigorated National Socialism movement. As Moynihan and Søderlind note, ‘at one point in time, the prime movers in black metal dreamt of *Ragnarök*, and hoped to accelerate its arrival. They attempted to light the fuse on the powderkeg of alienated resentment which lies behind the façade of twentieth-century civilisation – as their occasional allies, the right wing revolutionaries, have also tried to do. Neither of them succeeded’ (Moynihan and Søderlind 377). As a way of locating how embedded National Socialism is in black metal, Karl Spracklen carried out research on fan responses to NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal). He states:

I returned to the blackmetal.co.uk forum in 2007 to further examine the extreme ideologies of the scene [...] During my time observing the comments made by the fans on the forum, two threads came to my attention. The first was a discussion about the band Drudkh; the second was about NSBM itself [...] On 10 July 2007 [...] the poll showed a majority of the black metal fans agreeing with the statement that National Socialist ideology in black metal was stupid: 54% of respondents (31 where n=57). Only 16% believed that the ideology was ‘great’, seemingly approving of the music and its ideology; 14% believed NSBM was ‘entertaining’, a more ambivalent position to take; and 11% said that black metal was ‘supposed to be bad’, apparently supporting NSBM as an extension of the provocative nature of the scene. In addition, a further 5% believed that NSBM was ‘just a bit of fun’. This on-line poll, while clearly not representative of all black metal fans, was reflective of the ambiguity of NSBM in the wider scene, and perhaps the majority-held opinion of NSBM as something that is a provocation too far. (88)

This research was undertaken a decade and a half after the emergence of the second wave of black metal and the results are interesting. There is perhaps some hope to be found in that 54% of respondents found it stupid however the 14% who claim NSBM is entertaining, the 11% who said that black metal is supposed to be bad and the last 5% categorising it as fun, offer a more problematic engagement. Spracklen’s research provides some indication of how impactive and influential the second wave was, even so long after its initial success. It comes as little surprise therefore, that the third wave of black metal has sought to find new lines of flight away from the difficulties of the second wave, choosing instead to focus on existing environmental concerns and musical voidic representation rather than anything satanic or racist.

### **3.b.iv. Blackened Ecology: Third Wave Self-Embodiment and Charting the Hinterland**

In his article entitled ‘Shuddering: Black Metal on the Edge of the Earth’, Steven Shakespeare suggests:

Where do we shudder? On the edge, always on the edge. Between life and death, nature and spirit, where one infests the other. Black metal finds a kind of rapture in this horror. No doubt it will always spawn cartoonish Satanism, rabid nationalism, and pathetic declarations of kultish orthodoxy. But the evolution of its disgust outpaces such congealed forms. It buries its way into the earth, despising human parasites. (103)

This quotation suggests a number of important ideas. Shakespeare identifies a sense of separation and movement, an acknowledgement of the second wave's problems and a divorce from it to new ontologies. He mentions the notion of 'disgust' which certainly helps to demarcate a different specificity of engagement for the third wave of black metal and echoes Vindsval sentiments from Blut Aus Nord in the previous section. Rather than seeking to replicate the aesthetics and ideologies of its predecessors, the third wave plunges itself into the abstract and environmental, the forests and natural landscapes that infuse the music with its distinctive minimalist qualities. One could argue that the inclusion of the environmental in the hyperborean mode served a particular aesthetic function but was not wholly central to its ideological position as Satanism was. With the transcendental mode, there is no Sigil of Baphomet to be found amongst third wave bands; it is melancholy, 'black-biled' (Masciandaro 90) rearticulated black metal that appreciates a deeper occultism, situated in cold, harsh panoramas, which evoke the black metal extract rather than conserve orthodox traditions. Instead of finding any Satanism in the third wave, it is more a deference to and representation of the dark unknown of the universe.

Offering a clear demarcation in the ideological progression from Satanism, The Temple of the Black Light Order state on their website, 'a [...] motive [...] is to counteract the essenceless and materialistic filth that is spread in the name of Satan and Satanism. By presenting a spiritual and yet harshly antinomian form of Gnostic Luciferianism, we hope to contribute to the establishment of visual alternatives' ([templeoftheblacklight.net](http://templeoftheblacklight.net)). The trappings of the second wave's use of Baphomet as representative of Satanism have become re-encoded and infused with a different kind of mysticism, of Gnostic Luciferianism, and a different understanding of what the pan father-god serves to represent to the third wave. Baphomet is no longer directly representative of male-centred Satanism, but is now emblematising a reawakened occultism that speaks of an abundance and dictum of infuscation. Ian James notes, 'Baphomet, otherwise known as Prince of Modifications [...] overturns all identity and absorbs being into the principle of radical multiplicity, that is to say, into the principle of blackness (James 57). Satanism in its LaVeyan form has become decrepit and outmoded, and does not serve the same purpose for the third wave. The ideological position of the third wave is that of subjective knowing, of identifying the blackness in the self in order to create alluding to Lévi's (211) understanding of Baphomet as astral light. If the new understanding of Baphomet represents modification, then the principles of fluidity, of fragmentation and of self-embodiment create the substance of contemporary black metal engagement. Arguably however, the idol is still referenced here as 'prince', even though the image itself offers a fusion of gender; the figure itself has breasts on

a masculinised, muscular frame suggesting an amalgam of the gender binary instead of purely a masculine representation (see fig ix).

That is not to say however, that black metal's newest form is an open apparatus to anyone<sup>7</sup>. To know contemporary black metal, one must engage fully and wholeheartedly from within it. It is not just listening to music; it is a process of becoming enveloped into its heart and an acknowledgement of subjective philosophical inquiry. One cannot stand before third wave black metal without a commitment to understand one's own subjectivity. In Lacanian terms, the 'che vuoi?', the asking of 'what do you want?' (Lacan qtd. in Žižek 513) is important to black metal as it asks this exact question of those who would seek to gain entry, where the gender of those involved is not a concrete understanding that is linked to real bodies; only the subjective is of value. Callum Neill notes that this question 'is doubly directed in that it is the question addressed by the subject of the Other – what does it want from me? – but also in that it is the question assumed by the subject to be addressed to them – what do you want?' (42).

This dyadic reciprocity of questioning seeks to identify what someone hopes to gain from black metal but what black metal gains from them in return. The insular structure of the movement suggests that one cannot simply occupy its ideological space in an unknowing way because to do so means that you have not understood the ideological or psychological parameters of black metal, transcendental or otherwise. Žižek notes that 'ideological space is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, "floating signifiers", whose very identity is open, overdetermined by their articulation in a chain with other elements – that is, their 'literal' signification depends on their metaphorical surplus-signification' (513). If one can understand the chain of articulation for black metal is that of nihilism, Satanism, self-actualisation and occultism, these 'floating signifiers' are bound together within the metanarrative of black metal's haptic void or final cause and come to make sense through their surplus-signification. The 'che vuoi?' for black metal therefore, is the direct inquiry of the self examining the self; namely you must know yourself in order to know black metal and in order to know black metal, you must know yourself from inside it.

The attributed mysticism or occultation of self-embodied subjectivity is explored by Nicola Masciandaro who, in his essay 'Anti-Cosmosis: Black Mahapralaya' (86) explores the interweaving mysticism or occultism in the second wave and its reticence to openly discuss black metal or its ideological positions outside of black metal itself. He notes, 'the space relation between what cannot be spoken and the speech that destroys [...] declares that "the first rule of black metal is that YOU DO NOT FUCKING TALK ABOUT BLACK METAL"' (83). The third wave therefore, may be more fluid in terms of its musical engagement, less solipsistic in its ideological position but remains, nevertheless, a closed network of signification that requires you to answer its 'che vuoi?' before any further engagement is allowed. The music itself is the gatekeeper, barring admittance until the would-be fan has listened deeply to every element an album has to offer. It is not simply a question of liking a particular riff or rhythm; black metal endures and for the uninitiated, is hard to listen to. It

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<sup>7</sup> Women's excretion is examined in chapter four.

requires much from those willing to engage with it. Commitment, endurance, perseverance and love are necessary when listening to black metal. As is examined further on in the thesis, it often balks at standardised music structures, uses avant-garde noise forms and pushes its distortion to its fullest capacity. As Scott notes in his article ‘Seasons in the Abyss: Heavy Metal as Liturgy’:

Once the music begins, for the most part there is no room for silence, but with continuous sound (as is also the case with drone metal) it is the recognition and memory of silence that allows one to make sense of the experience. One is confronted by a totality of noise, made comprehensible by a totality of silence [...] The silence is recognised as that which existed before speech, before the band play, before the event begins and importantly the silence before creation. (20)

Owing to this level of immersion when listening or watching black metal, for it to be considered an ‘experience’ as Scott states, is important. This idea is examined in chapter five when I examine my own black metal performance which demonstrates parallels with Scott’s notion of ‘apophatic liturgy’ (21). As far as the gatekeepers are concerned, the fans have a particular representation that is examined in chapter four but it is propitious to foreground the visceral complexity of the music first as the most immediate site of knowledge and access.

The Scandinavian taciturnity and musical production prevalent in the second wave have now splintered to different musical engagements and geographical locations. The third wave is not solely a Nordic production but extends to the UK (*The Infernal Sea*, *Old Corpse Road*, *Denigrata*, *Wodensthroner*, and *Winterfylleth*), the Pacific Northwest, Seattle and Washington State in the US (*Bell Witch*, *Skagos*, *Panopticon*, *Wolves in the Throne Room*, *Botanist*) with the Netherlands producing some contemporary engagements as can be seen with *Terzij de Horde* and *Laster*. Musically, there has been a return of focus to the black metal musical form, rather than attention-driven personalities or political/religious doctrine; its inherent obfuscating darkness serving as the point of engagement for the third wave that functions through differing layers of abstraction. Aesthetically, the look of black metal has become fragmented, pushed through an alterity that becomes specified per band, rather than an archetypal rule of representation. For example, *Denigrata* choose to wear a rearticulated form of corpsepaint and stage outfits (examined in chapter five), whilst *The Infernal Sea* choose to wear plague masks on stage; the sense of theatricality for some now offers an opportunity to commune with the performance of death, rather than death itself. If the liminal piercing of the veil between existence and nothingness can be represented timbrally, then the associated abstract in its aesthetics serves to acknowledge the second wave but forge anew. Then, there are bands such as *Deafheaven* who do not adhere to any of black metal’s aesthetic signifiers, perhaps offering the most radical of representations within this frame with its multitude of surplus signifiers by choosing not to use any of them at all. The sound of the third wave, whilst exhibiting some of the key black metal musical signifiers such as blast beats and tremolo picking, exists differently and is examined in depth in chapter four when I compare and contrast examples of second and third wave songs in order to demonstrate the sonic and timbral differences.

The problem of ensuring authenticity for the third wave however, (in such a fragmented and rearticulated stratum set against the backdrop of the second wave who prized authenticity of thought and deed over the music), often means being forced to prove you are black metal when you do not necessarily look or sound black metal. Wolves in the Throne Room for example, do not look like a black metal band, Deafheaven do not look or particularly sound like a black metal band so understanding how these categorisations occur is important. In Timothy Morton's essay 'At the Edge of the Smoking Pool of Death', Wolves in the Throne Room state:

One of the many contradictions of black metal is that it is a music that decries civilisation, but relies on so many modern contrivances to exist. I don't think it is a natural sound at all. It is really the sound of paradox, ambiguity, confusion, being caught between two worlds that cannot be reconciled. I have had people throw this in my face before – "how can you play music that is supposedly anti-civilisation on electric guitars?" Frankly I find this line of reasoning boring and pointless. I remember a common line against rioters trashing a Nike store in downtown Seattle. There was a famous picture of some black-clad kid smashing a Nike sign, but zoom in and ...ah-haa!! He's wearing Nike sneakers! I say, who fucking cares? Catharsis is our objective, not a lily-white and guilt free existence. We are all hypocrites and failures.  
(21)

If this statement demonstrates anything, it is that black metal has finally reached a point of self-actualisation, meaning that it can admit to being confused, paradoxical, multiplicitous and hypocritical, rather than the monolithic, infallible and conservative force it was before. Its new self-referentiality offers a far more realistic engagement and is able to sidestep exoteric doctrine and instead, search inwards on a path towards subjective engagement. The necessity of the self in the third wave foregrounds what it means to exist within civilisation, rather than out rightly attempting to force its demise. There is a particular blackness to this endeavour, of soul-searching that presents a different ontological philosophy, that of melancholia. The poetics of interiorities have a heritage and canon in the arts, a movement that Hunt-Hendrix terms as perichoresis (Hunt-Hendrix 279), a meeting of art, philosophy, music, photography and theatre, that all espouse the black metal extract. If that extract can be defined as melancholic interiorities, its blackness is countered by the greenness of its accompanying ecological exoteric aesthetics. When considering Wolves in the Throne Room and Botanist, in his essay, 'Irreversible Sludge: troubled energies, eco-purification, and self-inhumanization', Ben Woodard notes:

[...] the aesthetic of greenness constructed by both Wolves in the Throne Room and Botanist relies on an uncritical concept of nature opposed to an equally uncritical concept of negativity (or blackness) [...] In opposition to most 'nihilistic black metal' Wolves marry radical Eco-Anarchism (or Deep Environmentalism) with a form of New Age Paganism [...] [they] keep open the possibility of both an apocalyptic nihilism (through ecological catastrophe leaving the now verdant surface of the planet to be reclaimed by the few) as well as a hopeful positivity (through a pre-modern utilization of a pagan nature). (192)

Wolves in the Throne Room and Botanist's engagement with the environment for their aesthetic and ideological artistic engagements, suggest it is not done so without interrogation. The acknowledgement of choice in the above quotation, that Wolves in particular, are prepared for the collapse of contemporary society and the annihilation of the world whilst representing a rearticulated Pagan human that reconnects, in a non-racialised way than the previous Nordic representation in black metal, with a premonotheistic spiritual embodiment is valuable; their position suggests that existence must work in conjunction with our natural world. This realisation is far removed from any of black metal's previous incarnations and yet still manages to infuse the black metal extract within it. As an example of the discursive tendencies of black metal, Sweden's Unleashed, who during the nineteen nineties '[...] made clear their admiration for the pre-Christian Norse religion' (Moynihan and Söderlind 211), their singer and bassist Johnny Hedlund stating, 'the influences that I have are actually from my ancestors and from sitting in the countryside and feeling the power of nature – just sitting there knowing that my grandfather's, father's father was standing here with his sword...by knowing that you are influenced from it' (205). This comment is from the second wave and it goes some way to demonstrate how the significance of the naturalised environment has had deep ramifications for black metal, but is articulated and performed with more sincerity with the third wave; the existent melancholia in transcendental black metal. As Scott states, 'nature throws us into darkness. The blackening of the green is a foretelling, part of a melancological claim of an oncoming darkness, an oblivion [...] The vehicles for blackening, black metal and black metal theory [...] lead [...] humanity in to the abyss' (67-68). There is coalescence between nature and melancholia in black metal that Scott analyses in his chapter 'Blackening the Green' that Masciandaro also discusses, focusing more on the melancholy. He writes:

There are the torments of each, of all who wrestle in collective solitude with its terrifying discontinuous continuities and continuous discontinuities between the reality of what is loved and the image of thought. And this pain points the way (backwards or forwards?) into the superior, more pleasurable suffering wherein the noble lover, the immoderate cogitator [...], the one who loves thinking about the loved one (black metal), who knows that "loving is also necessarily a speculation...an essentially phantasmatic process, involving both imagination and memory in an assiduous, tormented circling around an image painted or reflected in the deepest self. (86-87)

The acknowledgement of the introspective and internalised knowing of the self functions at the heart of melancholic black metal, the pain of living coalesces with the pain of knowing, of subjective enlightenment. If existentialism was only hinted at in the previous waves of black metal, it finds itself fully realised within the occultic ontologies of the third wave. The marrying together of the self examining the self and the blackness of the self situated in the greenness of the natural world, serve to present the dyadic aesthetics and ideologies of contemporary black metal. The physical engagement with walking or sitting in nature and quietly thinking is important. Whilst this can be understood as Romanticism, from black metal's perspective, a particular neo-paganism and cult of the female becomes

foregrounded. The naturalised outside space offers opportunity for self-reflection and the examination of interiorities, which suggests more of a shamanic engagement with the third wave black metal musician. The invocation of pre-monotheistic spiritual practice aligns the self with the cosmos and is able to do so interrogatively, circumventing the racial trappings of previous incarnations, to focus on the neo-pagan form as represented with artists such as Wolves in the Throne Room and Botanist. One could argue it is a kind of passive nihilism rather than existing in an active sense as it did in the second wave that is supportive of mysticism and melancholy. The significance of being in one's landscape in order to access a creative self suggests a rearticulation of the pagan musical protagonist as a blackened shaman immersing themselves in their surroundings. As David Prescott-Steed in his article 'Frostbite on my feet: representations of walking in black metal visual culture' notes, 'we will walk through walking [...] and like Nietzsche in the Schwarzwald, makes some notes along the way' (Prescott-Steed 55). Additionally, Dolgar from the hyperborean band Gehenna comments:

We spent a lot of time in the woods and in a local cave at night during those first years, trying to soak up the atmosphere, discussing our interests in the occult, talking about different ideas for the music and the band, so it all came from there. We lit a bonfire, watched the shadows and listened to the sounds of nature. Perhaps that sounds like a black metal cliché, but that is actually the way it was. (qtd. in Patterson 239)

Whilst the hyperborean established a deep connection with nature and a musician's relationship with it, the aesthetics and spiritualism have taken on new forms with the third wave. Building on the hyperborean mode, the third wave of black metal seeks to align itself with its own interiorities, with its own sense of melancholic introspection through its installation in the greenness of the forest, the open fields, and the weather-beaten landscape. Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell's black metal documentary *Until the Light Takes Us* (Variance Films, 2009) shows much of this historic engagement through black metal's heritage, including 'slow-motion footage of Darkthrone's Fenriz walking along a snowy forest path [that] seem to evoke similar notions of the shadows of former selves seeking an obscured locus of self-authenticity' (Prescott-Steed 47). Prescott-Steed entitles this 'blackened walking', the placing of the self in the natural environment whilst listening and walking to black metal. Much like the function of 'blackened' in relation to blackened theory, the function of 'blackened' here is the way it informs the self during a solitary communion. He states, 'blackened walking is less about the activity itself and more about the circumstances under which one can move through space [...] walking is capable of bringing one's focus back to a fundamental question of what a body physically needs to do in order to transition through, and therefore *go on*, in the world' (Prescott-Steed 51). The significance of this active blackness through the greenness of the environment is a coalescence of the self within nature, a meeting of the subjective within the landscape that gives birth to and destroys all life. In other words, it is a subjective intercourse with the great all mother, Mother Nature or what Barbara Creed has called the 'originating womb which gives birth to all life' (27). It

could be argued that the monstrous-feminine of the natural world functions in parallel to black metal's desire for subjective transformation. As Creed suggests:

The desire to return to the original oneness of things, to return to the mother/womb, is primarily a desire for non-differentiation [...] As the desire to merge occurs after differentiation, that is after the subject has developed as separate, autonomous self, it is experienced as a form of psychic death. In this sense, the confrontation with death [...] gives rise to a terror of self-disintegration, of losing one's self or ego [...] which becomes black, signifying the obliteration of the self. (28)

The final cause or haptic void of black metal could be said to be the embodiment of what Creed suggests here. The desire to experience psychic death in order to be reborn could be understood as Hunt-Hendrix's renihilation, the subjective experience of mystical death, the necessity of self-disintegration in order to return to the original oneness of things. By experiencing the greenness of transcendental black metal, the return to Mother Nature, black metal's haptic void can find its sense of belonging through its renihilation within the countryside. The desire for non-differentiation through a return to an origin of oneness could be understood as a metaphysical comfort. Valuable commentary on this is provided by Nietzsche, who suggests:

The metaphysical comfort – with which I am suggesting even now, every true tragedy leaves us – that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearance, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable – this comfort appears in incarnate clarity in the chorus of the satyrs, a chorus of the natural beings who live ineradicably, as it were, behind all civilisations and remain eternally the same, despite the changes of generations and the history of nations. (Kaufman and Nietzsche 7)

The metaphysical comfort of returning to the original oneness of things, the womb that cradles birth and destruction as being representative of the 'hypothetical total or maximum level of intensity' (Hunt-Hendrix 55) is the haptic void that links black metal and its ecological devotion. Whilst the hyperborean engaged with this notion as a teleological 'dimly understood but acutely felt ideal' (Hunt-Hendrix 55), the transcendental however, foregrounds and represents the ecological engagement within its own cosmic occultation and matrifocal spiritual practice that could be understood as communing with a femininity-as-nature, at once divine and obliterating. A desire to return to the womb however does not necessarily imply female focussed spirituality and it is important to distinguish such myths of merger from feminist practices. However, for the transcendental to focus more on nature is suggestive of a more matrifocal engagement than black metal's previous incarnations which arguably, opens up a space for women.

The connection between these concepts, serve to fuse together a sense of inner mysticism, contained within nature and humanity. As Timothy Morton suggests, 'if we want to go any deeper in our social and philosophical journey, we must descend into the smoking pool of death. [Black metal and] Wolves in the Throne Room provide a kind of musical antihistamine that enables humans not to have an allergic reaction to working at the depth

necessary for retracing our broken coexistence with all beings' (27-28). This pool of death, read as the 'womb as tomb' is arguably not a feminist viewpoint but I would argue this is subjective. It can be both, as Creed states, the site of birth and abominations and is therefore the site of power. From Morton's point of view, third wave artists are the 'smoking pool of death'; they represent subjective self-embodiment and melancholic introspection within the greenness and mysticism of the feminine. From a feminist perspective however, this requires unpacking to manoeuvre through the mythology and identify how transcendental black metal is empowering to women. I argue that it is through female black metal performance that a site for emancipation is located and this is examined in chapter five.

The value of this chapter has been to provide an historical analysis of black metal's development, from its British beginnings, through its troubled second wave to its new bloom as transcendental black gaze. Through this narrative differing and sometimes antagonistic ideologies and aesthetics come to the fore, such as Anton LaVey's Satanism and the desire for pastoral engagements and more ecologically driven musical forms. This chapter documents black metal's whiteness and maleness, that the male in black metal discourse *is* the totality and women are present through their absence. Extending from this I argue that black metal finally reaches its moment of self-actualisation in 3.b.iv, allowing itself to be more open about its problems. It is towards the end of this section that this chapter offers a new contribution to black metal theory in the form of matrifocal black metal performance that undergoes Creed and Hunt-Hendrix's psychic death (28) or renihilation (292) to be reborn. This idea unites my experiences examined in chapter one by placing them at the end of chapter three whilst simultaneously addressing the issue of women's excription that I examined in chapter two. Although this chapter has had to cover the historical development of the music and its scene, it comes to rest at its feminist horizon, its haptic void (291) that signposts a differing ontological engagement.

This coalesces comprehensibly with the content of chapter four that examines women and black metal, gender essentialism in compositional formats, women's representation and concludes with the witch archetype as a strategy for restorative feminism in black metal.

## Chapter Four

### Women and Black Metal

This chapter examines the gendering of black metal with a focus on the role of women. The various aspects of gender asymmetry and the different ways male dominance operates in this field are analysed in respect of the wider social context of the genre and the ways that influences fandom and audience response but also how these modes inform the structuring of the music itself. The analysis in this chapter divides the understanding of ‘woman’ into three sections; the identification of gender in black metal’s musical form, the examination of ‘woman’ as aesthetic content for black metal, and the excision of ‘woman’ as performer. This triumvirate seeks to map the feminine’s function and use by black metal to determine the subgenre’s engagement with women and the convention of the feminine.

#### **4.a. Fertile Excription: the Feminine Absent**

Given that the structure of popular music as an overarching frame foregrounds the access and success of the masculine, as examined in the previous chapter, ‘Women in Popular Music’, it is worth reiterating a number of positions. Marion Leonard’s *Gender in the Music Industry* (2007), suggests, ‘rock has variously been described as a male form, male-run, masculine and misogynist’ (19). The further into the metal subgenres one travels, the way Leonard’s statement functions becomes more aggravated. As can be understood with metal in its entirety the misogynist and masculinist closed network of signification that serves the excision of women in musical form and as performers is immediate and problematic, but retains their use as aesthetic content. Black metal however, functions with only some of these concepts. The ‘overtly macho subgenre[s]’ (Leonard 19) of rock, metal, and extreme metal, operate inside an already masculinist popular music frame. In their analysis of cock rock, Frith and McRobbie suggest that ‘cock rock performers are defined as aggressive, dominating and boastful... Women, in their eyes, are either sexually aggressive and therefore doomed and unhappy, or else sexually repressed and therefore in need of male servicing’ (373).

The way masculinity functions within the black metal needs to be broken down into musical form and function and aesthetics. The musical elements are examined further on in this chapter. In terms of understanding how masculinities and femininities in black metal are negotiated, the work of Sarelin and Spracklen are important. Both Mikael Sarelin’s ‘Masculinities within Black Metal: Heteronormativity, Protest Masculinity or Queer?’ (69) and Karl Spracklen’s ‘To Holmgard... and Beyond: Folk Metal Fantasies and White Hegemonic Masculinities’ (359), both identify and foreground much of Walser’s earlier statements regarding male bonding, fantasies of empowerment, the excision of women and the hegemonic masculinities of black metal. For example, Sarelin’s ethnomethodological research demonstrates that when talking with one particular interviewee, ‘the male role within black metal is an active and permanent one, women just happen to be within black metal because their boyfriends are active in the scene. The role that women fill within black metal is [...] reduced to a passive, shallow and temporary one’ (74). This is valuable because

this is also something my own experience suggests and is further examined in chapter five. Sarelin goes on to state:

Within black metal it is, according to several of my informants, the strong, aggressive masculinity that is the common ideal. The typical ideal man within black metal stands behind his words no matter what and is not afraid of resorting to force if he feels that he himself or his family are threatened or if he is treated with a lack of respect [...] Protest masculinity might [...] be expressed through what I have chosen to call The Black Metal Warrior, through NSBM or through excessive use of alcohol, an exaggerated heterosexuality with focus on the sexual act and through degradation of women and homosexuals. (83)

Sarelin's delineation of a heteronormative warrior-masculinity can be observed in many examples of black metal and as Walser has previously stated 'metal shields men from the dangers of pleasure – loss of control – but also enables display, sometimes evoking images of armoured, metalised male bodies (116). By extension the homoerotic elements of this are also discussed by both Walser and Sarelin, who adds 'there are however other, alternative, masculinities on display in black metal that [...] ultimately aim to shock the crowd and the surrounding society in order to keep the scene in the underground' (83). It could be said that both gay people and women in black metal exist (Gaahl from Gorgoroth's eventual coming out is a pertinent example) but certainly not as an immediate aesthetic engagement or representation. As Sarelin stated, the women are seen as passive and temporary and the preferred mode of masculinity is the permanency of heterosexual warrior.

However, foregrounding women's role in extreme metal, as the larger musical category of which black metal is a component, means to identify a purposeful exclusion that is worthy of examination. According to John Shepherd's text, *Music as Social Text* (Polity Press, 1991), he suggests that 'women often have a strong aversion to metal' (qtd. in Kahn-Harris 73) whilst theorists such as Robert Walser and Deena Weinstein acknowledge women's excision (Walser 114; Weinstein 68). Weinstein suggests that 'the anti-female posturing of heavy metal stars relates less to misogyny than to a rejection of the cultural values associated with femininity' (67). However, when one puts this quotation in the context of the above acknowledgements and previous data, the two could be said to coalesce; a rejection of the cultural values associated with womanhood and being female is a sexist position when it is produced and developed by wholly masculinist cultural production. Weinstein does however go on to echo similar points as Weinstein in terms of a woman's position in metal as 'passive and one-dimensional' (67). However, Keith Kahn-Harris' analysis of extreme metal offers a more up to date, if albeit a more problematic engagement. He notes 'the sounds and aesthetics of extreme metal can only be incorporated into the feminine with difficulty' (Kahn-Harris 76). The phrasing of this quotation is interesting and calls into question why extreme metal would be *incorporated into* the feminine at all and what indeed he means by this. If a woman performs extreme metal, then she is a musician who is performing a perceived masculine music form; she does not dilute or contaminate it because she is a woman and nor does the music become incorporated into the feminine because it is being performed by one woman. Identifying how sexism such as this functions

within an overtly masculinist music form such as extreme metal, often means identifying it in its minutiae as well as instances of internalised misogyny. Kahn-Harris goes to note two examples, one from a female drummer and one from a female fan that demonstrate some of this exception. The significance of foregrounding the term ‘female’ before the music in order to differentiate it from the default masculine position, is important insomuch as ‘female-fronted’ is an unnecessary term when it is not applied to male musicians. He states:

[...] one female death metal drummer told me ‘...when I play with other bands, it’s like I don’t know why but the drummers none of them talk to me’ (Elaine) [...] Female scene members often strenuously attempt to prove that they are ‘serious’ about the scene, to the extent that they echo sexist discourses:

KKH: Why do you think there’s so few women into metal?

R: Because most women just fucking follow their boyfriends around, do you know what I mean? And just get into metal because their boyfriends are into it and, I don’t know really, I don’t, it’s just one of those things, one of life’s mysteries I guess, no reason women can’t be into metal but it’s obviously their own personal choice. If they’d rather fuck around putting on make-up and talking fucking shit in the toilets and pushing up their wonderbras and PVC skirts, then you know it’s up them innit? (Zara). (Kahn-Harris 76)

The positions that this statement foregrounds are interesting in that they coincide with my experience of the extreme metal scene and I investigate this further in chapter five. Kahn-Harris’s interviewees identify two differing yet equally important notions; that of the female performer and internalised misogyny towards other women. If a woman is on the stage within a perceived masculine art form, the frustration of not being taken seriously is real. Coupled with women having to work harder to be given credit or visibility (see Monique Bourdage’s ‘A Young Girl’s Dream: Examining the Barriers facing Female Electric Guitarists’) this can inadvertently produce a reactionary response to other women who do not perform in the same way or only access that space because, as Sarelin states, their boyfriends are active in the scene. Both of Kahn-Harris’ participants demonstrate these viewpoints which suggest that a woman’s occupation of space is problematic whether there as performer or gig attendee.

Weinstein’s previous quotation has some traction with Kahn-Harris’ participants that obeying the masculinist rules can pay dividends for women in extreme metal willing to distance themselves from hegemonic constructs of femininity; reject the hegemonic conventions of femininity, ally with the masculine and involvement will be taken more seriously. Whilst Kahn-Harris’ choice of language regarding a feminine incorporation seems to denote a feared musical and perhaps aesthetic dilution, he does go on to point out that ‘it does not necessarily follow that women in the extreme metal scene are totally cowed by the masculine domination of the scene. Rather, the minority of women in the scene are often quietly subversive of mainstream femininity – after all, they prefer aggressive music that ‘nice girls’ do not listen to’ (Kahn-Harris 76). It is important to acknowledge and frame the language being used to discuss this as terms such as ‘incorporation into the feminine’,

‘quietly subversive’ and somehow differentiating from metal girls and nice girls, demonstrates a hitherto unacknowledged sexist position on his part that does not identify how sexism infiltrates even the smallest of interactions and analyses. However, Kahn-Harris uses of speech marks around ‘nice girls’ that suggests he is not unaware of his language use but the delineation is problematic nonetheless. It is possible to be a nice girl and like metal, women in metal are not necessarily quiet about their subversion of gender constructs as this chapter examines, and it is possible for some women in metal to have internalised some of the sexist discourses surrounding them because it is the lens through which their gender identity is forged and mediated. Aside from these examples, women’s involvement in composition and performance in extreme metal, as examined in the literature review, is minimal and whilst extreme metal offers such examples, black metal as the coldest and most closed of the extreme metal variants, functions differently.

Black metal prefers to exist as a solitary musical and cultural form that has no ties with anything mainstream. Karl Spracklen states that ‘black metal is against the instrumental rationalities that dominate Western society: it is anti-Christianity, anti-State, anti-commercialisation [...] Black metal’s essential nature is individualist. So, individuals choose to consume black metal as a way of expressing their individuality and their ability to rise above instrumental rationalities and make informed, civilised choices about consumption and leisure’ (92). The nihilistic misanthropy established during the hyperborean still exerts a powerful influence and while there is no purposeful blockade or excription against women in black metal, there is a void, an absence that suggests that women are and always have been welcome but this seems to be based on sexual conquest as opposed to a desire for gender parity. The compartmentalised elements of black metal, the riff structure, the drum motifs, the aggressive vocal delivery, have historically been written and performed by men, means the archetypal musical form is historically and performatively masculine. The elements that create the sound of black metal delineate forms of gender representation from the way the guitar riffs are written and how distortion is applied, to the delivery on stage of that music. The masculinist frames already examined in the preceding chapters yet extend to influence the architecture of black metal because it functions on the traditional guitar, bass, drums and vocals structure. However, it would be wrong to assume that because of this, black metal is sexist or oppositional towards women. There are examples of sexism within black metal, as can be seen in fig. i but unlike other extreme metal variants, they are not representative of the composite whole.

Black metal demonstrates its preoccupation with mythological spiritual practice rather than functioning within and reproducing hegemonic cultural texts and practices. For example, unlike death metal’s insistence on the domination of women, systemically, aesthetically and musically, black metal offers a different ontology. It has not been a case of ‘women cannot’ but ‘not enough women’ within black metal. The previously mentioned 1998 untitled Belgium black metal documentary states the lack of women in black metal was regrettable<sup>8</sup>. As an example of second wave hyperborean black metal, this documentary follows a small

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cvltnation.com/black-metal-belgium-documentary-cira-1998>

scene in Belgium, filming a couple of bands performing and mostly documenting personal testimonies. At 38.00 minutes, the inherent racism is discussed with one band member stating ‘have you ever seen a nigger at a show? No. If that happens, I will leave’. One can infer from this statement that their disappointment of the lack of women in black metal actually means their disappointment at the lack of white women. At 30.32 minutes one band member states, ‘I’d like [there] to be more girls listening to black metal. They think we’re schizophrenics, and they’re afraid of us. I tell you, if a black metal girl comes along, [...] whenever she wants!’ whilst another confirms, ‘it’s true, there could be more women’ at 41.14 minutes. This, whilst adhering to one form of bigotry, does not perform the sexism and misogyny in the same way as other forms of metal. This example is interesting in that it demonstrates interviewees stating that they want more women involved but this intersects with why do they and only if they’re white and heteronormative. Furthermore, when asked about women and black metal, Vikernes from Burzum stated:

The groundwork of the black metal scene is the will to be different from the masses. That’s the main objective. Also, girls have a very important part in this, because they’re like mystical things and are attracted to people who are different, who have a mystique. When a girl says ‘look how cute he is’ when she sees a picture of someone, her male friends will think ‘she likes him. If I look like him maybe she will like me as well’. They turn towards the person she admires. The way to make Norway Heathen is to go through the girls, because the males follow the girls. (qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 171)

As problematic as Vikernes’ heteronormative assumptions are, his acknowledgement of women as mystical beings is interesting in terms of how black metal engages with and represents conventions of femininity but is then undermined by his own terminology. His use of ‘girls’ instead of ‘women’ seems to indicate his perception of femininity as more appealing without the wisdom of age and experience. Furthermore, his understanding of how black metal is interconnected with his racialised ideological position problematises his thoughts on women in black metal. That is not to say that some sexism does not filter through the tight conservatism of the second wave, with band T-shirts such as Dimmu Borgir’s ‘Cunt Hunters of the Night’ (fig. x) but these examples exist as a minority and are indicative of the hyperborean mode rather than the transcendental, because as previously examined, the second wave was tightly bound within its own doctrine and used anything it could to rally against Christianity. Dimmu Borgir’s t shirt however, occupies a more predatory position that foregrounds and functions using the gender binaries of the masculine active over the feminine passive and does not overtly reference Christian doctrine at all.



(fig. x)

Interestingly, examples such as fig x demonstrate a referencing of the wider metal cultural frame, rather than black metal itself. Black metal historically has not used women in this way so for Dimmu Borgir, one of Norway's more mainstream black metal bands, to do so suggests that the closer to metal's mainstream black metal is, the more sexist and less racist it becomes. However, I acknowledge that more research on this is necessary. When discussing Dimmu Borgir's visibility, Asbjørn Slettemark, the editor for the Norwegian music magazine, *Faro-Journalem*, states:

It is my impression that Nuclear Blast [label] realised their stable of Death Metal and Speed Metal artists were starting to lag behind. It seems to me like they picked Dimmu Borgir more or less by chance, because the records that got them the contract weren't really that special. But Dimmu Borgir were still developing as a band, and they were willing to do the image and magazine poster thing. It wouldn't be possible to sell a more established band like Mayhem or Darkthrone the same way [...] they were promoted towards the mainstream press, something that almost never happens to Black Metal bands. (qtd. in Moynihan and Søderlind 267)

As noted above, black metal does not tend to court metal's mainstream, with the majority of bands existing on smaller labels such as Candlelight Records (UK) and Season of Mist (France). Engaging with smaller labels means that pitching products to the widest demographic possible is not a founding principle because the overheads are smaller, thus preserving the elitism of the movement and its subcultural capital. Being part of a large multinational label means the expenditure and investment will be significant so the pressure to sell to an already established masculine demographic that uses sexism as a mode of sale, as can be seen with other variants of metal, secures financial revenue. Black metal has no interest in this because of its closed nature; as Spracklen previously stated, exoteric hegemonic structures are to be hated, not assimilated.

In order to analyse how gender is represented within black metal's musical forms, the following section of the case study focuses predominantly on the second and third waves. The first wave exhibits the trappings of its time and as such, was not musically developed enough as a subgenre to support a clear analytical reading. Consequently, the hyperborean and transcendental modes are examined in order to identify representations of gender within musical form.

#### **4.a.i. Masculine Musics, Feminine Endings: Hyperborean Masculinity and Transcendental Femininity**

This section compares and contrasts musical examples from the hyperborean and the transcendental in order to demonstrate the ways in which gender conventions are represented in musical form; the hyperborean could be argued to represent the cold masculinity of the second wave whilst the transcendental represents the warmth of the dark, esoteric feminine, both of which illustrate an equally essentialist gender binary position. Examples that demonstrate archetypal principles of the second and third waves of black metal have been taken from Darkthrone's *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (Peaceville Records, 1992), Wolves in the Throne Room's *Black Cascade* (Southern Lord, 2009) and from the author's own band, Denigrata's *Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass in A Minor* (self-released, 2015).

Darkthrone's example comes from the heart of the hyperborean whereas the Wolves album represents the archetypes of the transcendental. Denigrata's example whilst existing within the transcendental could be said to represent elements of the both the hyperborean and the transcendental. These examples have been chosen for their representation of typical black metal conventions and their evolution, the musical structures of which demonstrate a particularity of possible gender representation.

It is valuable at this juncture to acknowledge Lacan's understanding of gendered binary opposites that exist in the symbolic order (see table 1.1), which suggests that the position of power is conferred onto the masculine. The reason I have decided to use Lacan here is because of the way he identifies these binary functions within his notion of the symbolic realm, a realm that 'formulates the elementary dialectical structure [...] by stating that 'speech is able to recover the debt it engenders'" (Žižek 126). However, this speech is not empty, it is not free of associations, as the grid below demonstrates so being able to recover 'the debt it engenders' seems to be up to the speaker to enact. The subject of speech determines its point of contact, its other, the recipient of which mirrors the power differentials laid bare by the hegemonic construction of the symbolic. The grid does not show *parole vide*, or 'empty speech', language 'conceived of as empty, nonauthentic prattle in which the speaker's subjective position of enunciation is not disclosed' (Žižek 127); it is instead, *parole pleine* or 'full speech', the language through which 'the subject is supposed to express their authentic existential position of enunciation' (Žižek 127). Furthermore, 'the relationship between empty and full speech is thus conceived as homologous to the duality of 'subject of the enunciated' and 'subject of the enunciation'' (Žižek 128). It is this dichotomous binary that underpins the language system of the symbolic, that identifies the gendered power differentials and recognises that this type of speech is anything but empty: it is a password, it is admission into the symbolic space that 'transmits signified content' (Žižek 129) from the active to the passive, from the sender to the receiver, from the male to the female.

Lacan's *Che Vuoi?* or 'what do you want?' that I use on page eighty-four of this section, speaks to the issue of identity construction within the symbolic that problematises the subject because of its reliance on the other. This can be read as the universal-as-male's dependence on woman-as-other paradigm where 'the subject, in its coming to 'be' through the mediating effects of the Other can only come to 'be' as lacking in itself' (Neill 42).

Lacan's grasp and analysis of subject identity through the symbolic order allows me to stipulate how language-based power differentials can be identified in the language of composition, which is of course, is another form of communication.

However, as problematic, reductive and subjectively inaccurate as these gendered, binary terms can be, their influence on how gender functions symbolically means that some evidenced gendered examples can be identified when analysing differing compositional signifiers between the hyperborean and transcendental. Three musical examples help foreground the perceived gendered strata of signification of the masculine and feminine that could be said to coalesce with some degree of accuracy. For the purpose of analysis, Darkthrone's opening track 'Kathaarian Life Code' (*A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, Peaceville Records, 1992), Wolves in the Throne Room's fourth movement 'Ex Cathedra' (*Black Cascade*, Southern Lord, 2009) and Denigrata's 'Kyrie Eleison' (*Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass in A Minor*, self-released, 2015) have been chosen. The Lacanian realm of the symbolic, which is the realm of language and communication, of sexual difference and gender identity is also the place where the binary opposites of language are ordered in favour of the male, linguistically and syntactically betraying hegemonic gender essentialism through its systems of communication.

As such, this understanding can aid in the proceeding musicological analysis that seeks to identify this essentialism in the minutiae of compositional formats; black metal's second and third waves respectively provide valuable evidence to support these notions. The following grid has been drawn from Lacanian texts such as 'Intervention on Transference' (Mitchell and Rose pp. 61-73), 'Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire' (Lacan pp. 292-325) and 'The Signification of the Phallus' (Lacan pp. 281-91). The grid has been constructed to lay out clearly the performative assumptions imposed upon hegemonic gender identity, that demonstrates Hill's universal-as-male position, which by extension indicates the still in situ woman-as-other categorisation (De Beauvoir, S; Butler, J; Cixous, H; Irigaray, L; Kristeva, J). Lacan states, 'the dialectic of the Same and the Other, conceived 'ontologically' under the dominance of self-identity [*identité-à-soi*], ensures the absence of the Other in effective thought, suppresses all genuine experience of the Other, and bars the way to an ethical opening to alterity' (Neill 169). Given that self-identity is constructed and formed within and through the symbolic order, the male status of dominance as prioritised through the symbolic, demonstrates its elevation over the female. These conventions function through the power differentials of hegemonic gender essentialism that places the male in the position of authority and women as characterising the 'lack'.

<b>Man</b>	<b>Woman</b>
<b>Active</b>	<b>Passive</b>
<b>Hard</b>	<b>Soft</b>
<b>Sharp</b>	<b>Curved</b>
<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>Cold</b>	<b>Warm</b>
<b>Culture</b>	<b>Nature</b>

Rational	Irrational
Logical	Emotive
Potent	Castrated
Complete	'Lacking'
Agents of speech	Objects of speech
Agents of the look	Objects of the look

(1.1)

Many various theoretical positions have proven this stratum to be deeply problematic and lots of theorists have contested these binaries such as Lacan, Kristeva and Butler's psychoanalytical readings, Derrida's Post-Structuralism and Feminism; their impact and influence however can still be identified in contemporary social structures. As is examined in the following autoethnographic chapter, the subjective experience of these binaries can be evidenced through the examination of epiphanic moments, that examine how musical motifs can be understood particularly in relation to the strata included that suggest a gendered engagement with particular timbral, textural representations and certain intervallic changes. For example, the active, hard-edged coldness of the compositional style of the hyperborean could be said to reflect the type of masculinity composing and performing it whereas the softer intervallic changes and use of the burst beat in the transcendental mode can be understood as a feminine convention manifest through musical representation.

To examine Darkthrone first, as 'an opus that would become known as the very first Norwegian black metal album' (Patterson 192), means to analyse the quintessential black metal album. Rather than offering a similar analysis as the previous chapter, this examination identifies masculinist musical markers that gender the musical form. For example, the introduction to the Darkthrone album presents a soundscape of textural abyss with a Gregorian chant to help forge a particular atmosphere. Plainsong or Gregorian song was a religious endeavour, sung by monks for doctrinal purposes. To include this at the beginning of the album confirms Darkthrone's subversive, counter-response to the hyperborean's hatred of Christian doctrine but also centralises phallocentric engagement. Male vocals are spliced over this section, creating a voidic representation before the first track begins. The basso continuo nero begins with tremolo picked guitars over semitonal shifts, creating sharp, angular motifs that are hard –edged, active and singular. The guitar tone is not interested in sounding warm or organic, as that does not represent the coldness and preoccupation with the snowy vistas of hyperborean black metal. The guitar technique coupled with a harsher, tinnier form of distortion seeks to represent the coldness of heathen masculinity, a Nordic manifestation of riff structure and delivery that evokes and invokes an articulated, black metalised form of masculinity in musical form. Similarly, the extreme metal drumming provides, through its cannonade of double bass drumming and blast beats, a persistent masculine authenticity of active, strong warrior-like performance.

The two elements together present the basso continuo nero that underpins the whole of the hyperborean mode, infused with a particular Scandinavian mediating filter. Susan McClary, in her text *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (University of

Minnesota Press, 1994) states, ‘the mediating filter of masculinity creates something like the grilles that used to be put over the windows of asylums at the time when gentlefolk liked to witness the spectacle of insanity for entertainment. These grilles permitted voyeuristic access and yet ensured security’ (89). Much like the orthodox nature of the hyperborean, examples such as Darkthrone maintain and keep the principles of the second wave, encased within the secure construct of Nordic masculinity and produce music that represents it.

As can be seen from example one, the basso continuo nero is evidenced between the tremolo picking in the guitars and the blast beats on the drums. From the beginning of the track to 1:22 seconds, contains the Gregorian chant overlaid on singular floor tom semi-breve hits before the full song begins. The notation below begins where the song proper starts. The voidic space that exists from 0:00 to 1:22 mins initiates not only the timbral character of the album but also the necessity of the hyperborean to represent the abyss in musical and textural form. From the moment the song proper begins, the listener is presented with the archetypal hyperborean signifiers of the basso continuo nero and the screaming vocal delivery that has been recorded with reverb. Coupled with the voidic space at the start of the track, the reverb on the vocals helps to present the idea of echo or a sense of vastness, as if the vocalist has recorded this in a cave or within nature that emulates the abyssal quality in the voice recording recalling Thacker’s unsound. However, thinking about the function of the scream one can argue that this appears sonically ungendered and the masculine markers exist in the basso continuo nero.

There is the gendered representation that screaming historically and extra-musically has been attributed to women which one could infer becomes subverted within the hyperborean, re-encoding the sound as masculine. However, there is no definitive characteristic of being able to define gender within the timbre itself because it defies classification. Any attributed gendering of the vocal delivery therefore assumes a cultural position rather than a musical one. Below is an example of musical notation taken from the Darkthrone track, specifically the instrumentation that makes up the basso continuo nero, the guitars and the drums. The following musical analysis works in conjunction with the Lacanian binary opposites to aid the identification of gender within the musical motifs.

**Example i.** ‘Kathaarian Life Code’ (*A Blaze in the Northern Sky*, Peaceville Records, 1992), song length: 10:35 mins. Drums: bars 1 – 12, 19-21, 211-218 as demonstrated by bars 1-4 show the kick drum led blast beat, the percussive element of the basso continuo nero. The bottom semiquaver represents the kick drum, the top semiquaver represents the snare with the x representing cymbal hits. Guitar 1: bars 1-12, as demonstrated by bars 1-4 that show the tremolo picking in the Aeolian mode of chordal semitonal shifts which provide the other half of the basso continuo nero.

## Darkthrone - Kathaarian Life Code

The musical score for 'Kathaarian Life Code' features two staves. The top staff is in common time (indicated by a '4') and shows a continuous open strumming pattern on a guitar-like instrument. The bottom staff is also in common time and shows a continuous blast beat pattern on a snare drum. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 144. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

As previously examined, Hunt-Hendrix's delineation of this dyadic structure (Hunt-Hendrix, H. 2010) is worth reiterating. He states that the '[...] continuous open strumming and a continuous blast beat [...] is eternity itself. No articulated figures, no beginning, no pauses, no dynamic range'. It also provides an example of performed masculinity that, as Butler notes, 'in ritual social dramas, the actions of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimisation' (140). If one understands a performance or gig in ritualistic terms, which is explored further on, the singular monotonous function of the blast beat depends on its repetition. The re-enactment and reexperiencing of the blast beat suggests not only the continual performance of that style of drumming but also the gendered signifiers that become associated with it.

Recalling the Lacanian delineation of gender binaries, the terms used to describe extreme metal drumming are masculine. Kahn-Harris notes that 'tempo is one of the most transgressive elements of extreme metal [...] bands drumming at 300-400 BPM (beats per minute) and above [...] the drummer is generally restricted to simple bass-snare-hi-hat sequences' (32-33) which suggests a foregrounding of gender specificity in terms of strength, persistence, self-control and active potency which are statuses that are engendered masculine. Furthermore, Walser goes on to suggest that 'western constructions of masculinity often include conflicting imperatives regarding assertive, spectacular display, and rigid self-control' (116). If blast beats signify anything, it is that it is impressive to watch because of the demonstration of exact time keeping, physical brute force, virtuosity and stamina that demonstrates Walser's 'spectacular display' alongside the 'rigid self-control' required to perform this style of drumming. The embedded masculinity in extreme metal drumming

therefore, foregrounds metal's preoccupation with the performance of the masculine and is typified by the Darkthrone example above. As the score excerpt shows, blast beats function as the underpinning of the majority of the song, only altering slightly to change the dynamics rather than the intensity or tempo. As such, the masculinised signifiers coalesce not only with the drumming but with the performance itself that function within a masculinised network of signification.

To examine the other half of the basso continuo nero means to analyse the guitars. The construction and movement of the arpeggiated chordal ostinati, from the tonal centre of A minor, through A#, B natural to C natural, creates a chromatic descending sequence within a 4/4 time signature. The connotations of this format sounds melodically and timbrally sharp, hard, cold and singular in its composition and execution; its performance functions within a metric time signature that consistently pulls the chromaticism back to the tonal centre at the start of each bar, suggesting the self-control elicited by the drumming style is mirrored in the guitar performance. It is possible to infer from these signifiers a particularity of gender that is attributed to the masculine.

Not only can the semitonal shifts' sharp, hard qualities coalesce with how masculinity has been hegemonically constructed but it can also be evidenced in how tightly controlled the riff itself is by the common time rendering. If, as Walser stated previously, '[...] metal shields men from the dangers of pleasure, [the] loss of control' (116), then the example examined here correlates with his quotation. The tightly controlled tremolo picking of this motif is overlaid on top of the blast beats creating the archetypal basso continuo nero that demonstrates all instrumentation is synchronised around the metric, solid beat of 4/4. This connotes that the composition and time signature frame are restrained and disciplined; every element is carefully contained within the rigid common time architecture. Even though the song is just over ten minutes long, it still retains its sonata form, meaning the orderly progression of the music returns to its origins, preventing any deviation from its triadic structure. This tonality and use of sonata form also represents a gendered engagement that foregrounds masculinity by presenting the female as other. Sonata form, as a classical and operatic mainstay suggests a particularity of gender in its characterisation. For example, Susan McClary states:

The paradigms of tonality and sonata have proved effective and resilient in part because their tensions may be read in a variety of ways. I do not want to reduce two centuries of music to an inflexible formula. Yet the heavily gendered legacy of these paradigms cannot be ignored either [...] To conquer an enemy is to "emasculate" him as he purged or domesticated. Similarly, chromaticism, which enriches tonal music but which first must be resolved to the triad for the sake of closure, takes on the cultural cast of "femininity". The "feminine" never gets the last word within this context: in the world of traditional narrative, there are no feminine endings. (16).

McClary's example of sonata form references classical and opera forms but as this compositional structure is also prevalent in black metal, its use suggests a historical foregrounding of the masculine and any compositional accidentals, as are found in

chromaticism for example or developmental sections in sonata form are to be gendered feminine. The most main motifs, such as the exposition and recapitulation are engendered masculine and the deviation away from this in the developmental section, is feminine. Similarly, the triadic structure found in Darkthrone's example shares the closure of McClary's statement, presenting a solid, tonal finality that, in essentialist gender binary terms, is the preferred masculine form.

The developmental section in the middle of Darkthrone's track demonstrates this, offering a specified location within the music for any alterations to the original concept, a feminine other in the midst of the masculine frame. After this section has concluded, the track returns to the opening section with embellishments to signal the end. Whilst tremolo picking does not require the same physical fortitude as the drumming style, performed masculinity exerts itself through the composition of the riffs themselves. Whilst the virtuosic performance of guitarists is noted, this does not apply roundly to any of black metal's variants. A chordal ostinato is favoured with occasional virtuosic top lines that add to the dynamics rather than using the guitar to exhibit dramatic displays of technicality and therefore, a masculine convention.

A key compositional trait of the hyperborean is the use of semitonal shifts, as can be evidenced with the Darkthrone example, creating sharp, angular and hard timbral engagements. These terms, as can be seen with the Lacanian binary opposites, are not socially constructed as feminine, suggesting that the masculinity of the hyperborean guitar is displayed between the tone and the semitone. The way the basso continuo nero functions in the hyperborean, demonstrates a particular type of performed masculinity that at once exists within an alterity and is influenced by the hegemony of metal as a wider socio-musical practice; namely it is consciously separated from the hegemony but is still informed by it. The physical musical performance correlates with the performance of masculinity and can be corroborated by the Darkthrone example.

In contrast to the hyperborean, the transcendental references some elements of the hyperborean but does so in order to fracture them, their surplus signifiers offering a different engagement. Because of some of the compositional techniques used by the third wave, a differing gendered engagement is also evident. For the purpose of this analysis, the thesis includes an excerpt from Wolves in the Throne Room's 'Ex Cathedra' (*Black Cascade*, Southern Lord, 2009) as example two. Bars 1-2 are referenced as (i) and bar 14 is referenced as (ii).

**Example. II.** 'Ex Cathedra' (*Black Cascade*, Southern Lord, 2009). Guitar and drum sections bars 1-2 (ii) and bar 14 (iii) that demonstrate the basso continuo nero followed by the burst beat.

## Ex Cathedra

$\text{♩} = 110$

Guitar I: Treble clef, 12/8 time, dynamic *f*. Playing eighth-note chords.

Guitar II: Treble clef, 12/8 time, dynamic *mf*. Playing eighth-note chords. Measure 2 includes grace notes indicated by '3' with lines.

Drums: Common time, 12/8 feel. Playing sixteenth-note patterns with various strokes (x, |, -) on the bass drum and snare drum.

2

Gtr: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Playing eighth-note chords.

Gtr: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Playing eighth-note chords. Measure 3 includes grace notes indicated by '3' with lines.

Dr: Common time, 12/8 feel. Playing sixteenth-note patterns with various strokes (x, |, -) on the bass drum and snare drum.

(ii)

14

Gtr: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Playing eighth-note chords. Measures 14-15 show sustained notes followed by rests.

Gtr: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Playing eighth-note chords. Measures 14-15 show sustained notes followed by rests.

Dr: Common time, 12/8 feel. Playing sixteenth-note patterns with various strokes (x, |, -) on the bass drum and snare drum. Measures 14-15 show sustained notes followed by rests.

(iii)

The first example of compositional alteration is that this piece is in the compound time of 12/8, rather than the rigid 4/4 of the hyperborean example. In (ii), the introductory section uses loose kick drum led blast beats, playing triplets on the cymbals which immediately demonstrates a differentiation in the way the third wave is choosing to articulate its interpretation of black metal. As Woodard notes, ‘a tension is immediately evident between the malignancy of black metal writ large and [...] Wolves in the Throne Room’ (22) suggesting that the rupture from the hyperborean is a conscious and acknowledged decision. With this move, the ‘[...] repetition [that] is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established’ (Butler 140) becomes shattered by the use of compound time and the loose blast beat, which by extension also shatters some of the previously associated perceived masculine signifiers. The construction of compound time suggests that the time signature itself is a more complex than those used in the hyperborean using intricate time signature models, meaning that unlike simple or common time (4/4) which is metric, or always ‘on the beat’ and within the frame, the function of compound time sees a more liberating, free form time signature with more beats to the bar, which also do not function with the same rigidity as the metric. This then creates more space for the inherent noise of black metal to exist more freely. In *Noise: the Political Economy of Music* Jacques Attali suggests:

This *order by noise* is not born without crisis. Noise only produces order if it can concentrate a new sacrificial crisis at a singular point, in a *catastrophe*, in order to transcend the old violence and recreate a system of differences on another level of organization. For the code to undergo a mutation, then, and for the dominant network to change, a certain catastrophe must occur, just as the blockage of the essential violence by the ritual necessitates a sacrificial crisis. (34)

If the ‘catastrophe’ or ‘crisis’ in black metal composition is the evolution from the hyperborean to the transcendental, the shaking off of orthodoxy to embrace new ways of writing as ritual, then that ritual necessitates the sacrificial crisis of offering up the main compositional signifiers of the hyperborean and developing them into the transcendental. As can be seen with the Darkthrone and Wolves example, the way the blast to burst beat functions is critical to the compositional formatting and could be read as the catastrophe that occurred to the dominant network. The move away from the strict blast beat to the use of metric modulation in the example shown here, suggests a move away from the rigidity of the associated masculine signifiers. The beat is now more fluid and curved, dynamically phasing between loose blast beats and dropped syncopated burst beats.

The softer timbral percussive representation could be understood as a letting go of the tightly controlled masculinity of the hyperborean and move towards a manifestation of socially constructed feminine signifiers. In (iii) the burst beat is evidenced which also moves at 08:00mins in, to incorporate sextuplet hits on the cymbals, creating phasing conjunctive motifs that are not strictly monitored by the time signature, which allows for a more fluid and softer engagement. Hunt-Hendrix suggests ‘the backbone of transcendental black metal is the burst beat [...] [which] is a hyper blast beat that ebbs, flows, expands and contracts, breathes.

It replaces death and atrophy with life and hypertrophy. This transformation is accomplished by two features: acceleration and rupture' (Hunt-Hendrix 59). The acceleration can be evidenced in (ii) and the rupture can be seen in (iii) suggesting that the ebb and flow of transcendental drumming cultivates and disrupts the stasis of the hyperborean with a softer and therefore feminine conventions. He goes on to note:

The burst beat expresses an arc of intensity. It responds to and supplements the melodic flow rather than providing a rhythmic container or backdrop. The burst requires total expenditure of power and its very exercise fosters growth and strength. And yet the burst beat never arrives anywhere, eternally "not yet" at its destination, eternally "almost" at the target tempo. Like a nomad, the burst beat knows it will never arrive. (60)

Aside from the socially constructed feminine signifiers that can be attributed to the transient burst beat, another key point noted here is that of the nomad. One can interpret female subjectivity in nomadic terms as Jeanette Winterson notes, 'if a woman cannot feel comfortable in her own body, she has no home' (The Guardian, 29.03.2013). Given the patriarchal, hegemonic network of signification of society and by extension the popular music industry, women's excription musically and her controlled engagement socially, suggest that the concept of the nomad is particularly relevant for women. The knowing of the self through interaction with black metal's 'che vuoi?' suggests that this may function differently for women. The normative and standardised orthodoxy of the hyperborean mode perhaps only asked 'what do you want?' of the male in any immediacy; the music's confrontational sonic representation is enough to proffer this question to its assumed male listeners. In the transcendental however, the Lacanian 'che vuoi?' could be said to have evolved into 'tu chi sei?' or 'who are you?' for women in black metal. Judith Butler notes:

Though the social theory of recognition insists upon the impersonal operation of the norm in constituting the intelligibility of the subject, we nevertheless come into contact with these norms mainly through proximate and living exchanges, in the modes by which we are addressed and asked to take up the question of who we are and what our relation to the other ought to be. (30)

If one can understand the norm in this quotation as the hyperborean mode, through which the constitution and convention of the male subject has been understood, the question of who we are when applied to female subjectivity, and by extension the potentiality of the feminine compositional structure-as-burst-beat can be understood in nomadic terms. Braidotti notes 'nomadic theory's central figuration expresses a process ontology that privileges change and motion over stability' (Braidotti 29) suggesting that the very nature of the transcendental is nomadic in its function.

This speaks more widely of the nomadic agency of women, as Winterson's statement suggests, a wanderer or wayfarer, uncomfortable in their body, who has no home. Braidotti's states 'I become, therefore I will have been' (29) which implies a fluid, temporal agitation that speaks of a sense of moving forward and backwards simultaneously, not housed in one

place. This echoes the methodological framework for interpretive performance autoethnography applied in chapter five that acknowledges the important of the past as well as the present; as I become, I need to have already been. This, one could argue, is subjective time travel, journeying through one's own nomadic territories in order to locate a narrative. And more than that, this is woman's subjective time travel because as Braidotti states 'man represents the majority, there is no creative or affirmative "becoming-man": the dominant subject is stuck with the burden of self-perpetuating Being and the flat repetition of existing patterns' (29). If man is represented thusly, as stuck and repetitious, then woman is the nomad, the wayfarer who travels between times and exists fluidly. This movement could help counter the essentialist binary of fixed notions of gender, as detailed in the Lacanian diagram, because of the nomad's resistance to being confined. Whilst Winterson's statement has traction, the woman-as-nomad turns this on its head by using her wandering to prevent hegemonic dichotomous categorisation. Braidotti states:

The process of becoming, which aims at decolonising the thinking subject from the dualistic grip, also requires the dissolution of all sexed identities based on gendered opposition. Thus the becoming-woman is the necessary starting point for the deconstruction of phallogocentric identities precisely because sexuality as an institution structured around sexual dualism and its corollary – the positioning of women and sexual "deviants" as figures of otherness – are constitutive of Western thought. (30)

Braidotti builds on the work of other post-structuralists such as Deleuze and Derrida in terms of acknowledging deterritorialisation as a strategy of resistance to the gender binary. Rather than the vision of woman as a being who is forced to navigate the masculinist hegemony, they and Braidotti note the 'transformative vision of woman as "becoming [...] and] nomadic"' (30). Consequently, her wanderer appellation serves to deterritorialise her subjectivity from the essentialist gender binary by celebrating the notion of movement and motion.

How this is reflected in the third wave of black metal is in the lack of temporal stability used by compound time and the metric modulation of the burst beat that connects the convention of the feminine nomad to the notion of movement. The third wave's commitment to expose and erode the hyperborean's monolithic masculinised and compositional singularity and replace it with compositional strategies that supplement the melodic flow, suggests a rejection of orthodox masculinity and an adoption of perceived feminine conventions. If as Adorno suggests, 'the value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar' (qtd. in Butler 3) then the transcendental can offer that distance through its rupture of the hyperborean's masculinised conservatism. What I mean by this is that the hyperborean can be seen as the continuity of the familiar, musically and aesthetically. New bands must replicate the compositional and sonic signifiers in order to prolong the longevity of that form. The value of thought therefore can be measured in the transcendental's distance from it because although there are recognisable markers that reference the hyperborean, its form, sonic representation and structure are different; it's fluidity breaks the metric control of the

hyperborean, blackening it further through its resistance to stasis. Scott notes that ‘the vehicles for blackening, black metal and black metal theory, take on the role of the ferryman, both blind and deaf in leading humanity in to the abyss’ (69). The sense of journeying this statement conveys helps demarcate the third wave as motion towards the void, the wayfarer at the hands of the ferryman moving always towards the blackened interstice. The transcendental therefore, is the nomad.

Further evidence of the nomadic feminine as the musical subject in process, can be found in the guitar motifs. As can been seen in the opening riff, the ostinati consist of the Aeolian tonal centre of B minor, strummed to last the length of a dotted minim, that moves to D and C#, followed by a B melodic minor descending cascade from E back to B. There are no semitonal shifts unless they occur diatonically within that key, namely B and E as there are no sharps or flats at these junctures. What this means is that unlike the Darkthrone example, that functions on the sharpness of the semitonal shift, the main riff ostinato of the Wolves in the Throne Room track functions diatonically and tonally creating the melodic flow through its fluidity and tone colour. As can be evidenced in example two, the use of broken chords instead of standardised barred chord structures also offers something different. If the standardised barred chord structure (arpeggio of root, fifth, octave root or i, v, viii) represents a solid structure that offers two notes of the same tone colour a perfect fifth apart, this houses a powerful sonic engagement. This is why barred chords are often referred to as power chords because they are sonically and timbrally powerful.

The associated gendered representation of this power can be understood in masculine terms, the sonic power correlating to the socially constructed seat of physical power being associated with the male. The broken chord however, whilst based on this structure, ruptures it by including different and sometimes augmented/diminished notes within the scale of the power chord, breaking the formation and using the space to include other diatonic or non-diatonic passing notes. This suggests that by fracturing the standardised structure of the power chord, the player is able to use the space provided to add more tone colour. In short, broken chords create a space that is not there compositionally with standard power chords so it can make the barred chord more intricate and interesting, offering subtle additions that adjust and embellish what would otherwise be an orthodox structure. Standard power chords offer a block-chord homophony that is ruptured by the broken chord, which offers fragmented-chordal polyphony.

In addition, the phasing and counterpoint between both guitars, bass and the drum motifs, suggest a wider dialogue or communication between all of the instruments that shifts and sways within Wolves’ chosen time signature. This plurality can be understood as constructed feminine convention because of the gender associations of fluidity, motion, curvature and softer timbral edges. Coupled with the fluid temporality of compound time, the burst beat and the use of broken chords, the wandering, meandering ebb and flow of the metric modulation in the transcendental can be understood to present a feminine nomad in its musical and contextual arrangement that differs significantly from the masculine hyperborean, that are clearly operating within the gender binary structure. These

transcendental musical, and by extension, feminine signifiers, create as the name suggests, an other-worldly experience that offers music that does not function within standardised, rigorous structures but outside of it, rupturing the solidity into timbral bloom. The transcendental is a process of becoming, of motion, of flow and with this acknowledgement comes the parallel understanding of ‘becoming woman’ (de Beauvoir 727; Butler 33); the unfinished, ever-becoming function of the transcendental connects with the unfinished, ever-becoming function of woman thus forging a dialogue between both nomadic elements. This might sound like an essentialist position but the analysis is dealing with some fixed, albeit problematic ideas. Both de Beauvoir and more recently Butler have analysed the notion of becoming woman, of the feminine subject in process which sounds like a particular fluidity functioning within a fixed gender binary.

This flux within a static gendered space serves to highlight the nomad, the inability for ‘woman’ to claim or know her own femininity outside of the hegemony because there is no sense of home or belonging that is not mediated through the hegemonic lens. Within black metal, the timbral flow of the transcendental could be viewed in similar terms inasmuch as the way the fragmented chordal structures wander through a heritage of past hyperborean orthodoxy and present as softer intervallic changes and use of the burst beat, serve to connect with the nomadic territories of how the notion of woman is perceived socially and subjectively. I make the connection between the two because the hyperborean is sharp, hard and angular and could be seen to represent Sarelin’s black metal heterosexual warrior whilst the transcendental could be seen to represent the gender binary proposed in the Lacanian diagram, that of the feminine as unfixed, impressible and nomadic. Interestingly the transcendental’s flow only stops to coalesce at certain points, using techniques such as successive counterpoint to do this, but then resumes its nomadic journey. There is a cosmic sense of the transcendental, as previously examined in the third wave analysis, that speaks of a more centralised and focused transformation of the feminine, or the ‘cosmic womb of the abyss’ (Masciandaro 83).

Denigrata’s ‘Kyrie Eleison’ (*Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass in A Minor*, self-released, 2015) functions in sonata form in terms of its structure; the exposition establishes the basso continue nero and the hyperborean compositional signifiers, the development section demonstrates avant-garde glitch and soundscapes whilst the recapitulation demonstrates examples of transcendental compositional signifiers. Excerpts have been taken from the exposition and the recapitulation sections in order to provide evidence for analysis. The exposition is referred to as (iv) and the recapitulation is referred to as (v).

## Denigrata - Kyrie Elison (Opening)

$\text{♩} = 130$

Guitar pitch bend down

Gtr - Cændél

Gtr - Denigrata Herself

Drums

4      Guitar pitch bend down

Gtr      Guitar pitch bend down

Gtr

Dr

5

Gtr

Gtr

Dr

(iv)

Guitars one and two are situated in the first two sets of staves with the drums positioned on the bottom stave. The key is A minor and the bpm is set at 130 which is indicative of hyperborean percussive tempi. The first four crotchet hits are a C major third played at the lower end of the octave that is played using palm-muting. This is a technique where the palm of the plectrum hand rests on all of the strings by the bridge, creating a dampened ‘chug’ sonic representation. The second bar’s instructions dictate ‘guitar pitch bend down’ as this is from the musician’s perspective; the actual effect of this is a raising of a semitone so the C and E natural major third are augmented to a C# and F, creating an inverted tritone. The fifth bar shows a tremolo pattern over crotchet kick drum hits.

In the drums, the first bar shows a matched crotchet hit pattern with the guitars and under the pitch bend, the stave demonstrates the blast beats last the same amount of time as the guitar modulation to the tritone. The effect of these elements combined is an aggressive ‘punch’ of the first part of the guitar riff, punctuated by the same crotchet pattern on the kick drums followed by a sonic modulation that pulls the ear away from the tonal centre to a semitonal engagement. As can be seen in the Darkthrone example, the use of semitones has a sharper and harder edged intonation and therefore can be understood as being representative of a more masculinist convention. Denigrata’s use of the semitonal shift as a pitch bend from a tonally metric equally spaced and pitched major third could be read as a fracturing of an established hyperborean aggression, into a sonically liminal space where its tritonal function not only alludes to the hyperborean’s anti-Christian position but places the intonation in an arguably less patriarchally constructed space.

The overall effect of the introduction to the ‘Kyrie Eleison’ establishes an historic knowledge and heritage function of hyperborean black metal within the riff and drum structure that is suggestive or a more masculinised musical engagement. However, one of the most significant elements here is that Denigrata do not use a drummer, they use a computer programme called Ableton Live 9 which uses an Imac and launchpad in order to perform the music live. As such, the perceived masculinity of extreme metal drummers examined previously becomes immediately subverted because the accolades associated with the performed masculinity are now performed by a computer programme. The decision to use Ableton instead of a drummer fractures not only the traditional male structure of a band but it frees up the percussive space to be able to function as more than just drums, transcending the masculine to become more differentiated. I argue this is representative of a re-encoded, vestigial masculinity ruptured by the removal of the drums from a physicality associated with masculine performance and positioned in a non-gender specific space such as a computer programme. Ableton is also responsible for the more avant-garde elements of the ‘Kyrie Eleison’ in the development section but do perform more of an expected function in the recapitulation as can be seen in example (v).

## Denigrata - Kyrie Eleison (Coda)

The musical score for the coda of "Kyrie Eleison" by Denigrata. The score is written in 6/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features three parts: Gtr - Cændél, Gtr - Denigrata Herself, and Drums. The guitars play dense, repetitive chords, while the drums provide a steady rhythmic foundation. The score is divided into two staves, each consisting of six measures.

(v)

The song has now modulated its key from A minor to B minor and the chordal structures on the guitars are at the opposite end of the range from the beginning of the song. The chords modulate from the barred chord of B, E, B (i, v, i arpeggiated ostinati) to broken chords that include C, A, G, E and F. These are accidentals that are placed within the existing barred ostinati to soften and fragment the intonation and intervallic changes that also create a diametrically opposed ending, even though it is still a recapitulation section. The time signature alteration from common time seen in example (iv) to 6/8 in example (v) suggests a more loose, syncopated representation and the guitars match this by moving from tremolo picking to strumming; five strum hits per bar, the first as a crotchet and the subsequent four as quavers. The use of broken chords and strumming techniques that incorporate tonal intervallic changes, rather than the sharpness of the semitone, could be read as foregrounding a sonic representation of feminine conventions that are indicative of transcendental black metal. These techniques are mirrored in the Wolves in the Throne Room example and are a recognised musical representation of some of the main differences between the hyperborean and the transcendental.

To echo this softer representation, the drums perform the burst beat as its previous engagement with the blast beat now collapses into its half time tempo counterpart. This bursting effect means that the aggression and rigidity of the song up until the moment of collapse (bar 1, example (iv)) transforms the composition from its masculine convention to a

more curved, metric modulation that could be said to represent a more feminised sonic intonation.

Denigrata's example includes both hyperborean and transcendental elements that could be said to represent the gender binary, the tension and release of the hyperborean and transcendental. However, there is fluidity here: there are two guitarists in Denigrata, one female and one male. It has been assumed, and one can infer from the position of the language in figure xi below, that the broken chordal structures have been written by the woman and the sharper, semitonal structures have been composed by the man. This is not the case. Denigrata Herself is responsible for the first half of the 'Kyrie Eleison' riff composition and structures and Cændél is responsible for the recapitulation section. As such the female guitarist has composed the hyperborean riffs and the male guitarist has composed the transcendental ones. This is interesting because of the gender binary assumption that is made and this can be evidenced by the Terrorizer Magazine review of Denigrata's album below, shown as example (xi).

**DENIGRATA**  
**'Missa Defunctorum'**  
SELF RELEASED

All the petty, random hatred being directed towards Myrkur or Deafheaven right now might soon find its way to Denigrata, and we mean this as a compliment. All the characteristics are here in this debut – an intimidatingly powerful, guitar-wielding frontwoman; intelligent, unusual structuring in the songwriting; a sort of serious playfulness with some of black metal's standards, including a remarkable interplay of two very different but wildly complementary different guitar styles (of Denigrata Herself and Cændél) that often make the riffs feel velvety soft and ruggedly harsh at the same time; a well-thought out concept... In short, a delightfully adventurous and high quality first album, the sort that pushes genres forward leaving confused haters in their wake.

[8] JOSÉ CARLOS SANTOS

**DIATONIC**  
**'Hidden Pieces'**  
INTO THE NIGHT

Diatonic is the of Joakim Ar of old school death Overture and Bl The Ugly) who han instruments on this album except drums are provided by Fredrik Widrigs from M clearly rooted in death metal, it also in progressive elements and is quite a de what he does in his other bands. The s a lot of twists and turns through the o the album and grandiose melodic flour musical technicality is given priority ov brutality here. Fellow Swedes The Proj and earlier Opeth spring to mind as we death metal sounding Meshuggah. Fan bands will find this appealing overall, a definitely more rough around the edges.

[7] H

**DEVIL YOU KNOW**  
**'They Bleed Red'**  
NUCLEAR BLAST

**ENFORCER**  
**'Live By Fire'**  
NUCLEAR BLAST

(xi)

The moment of recognition of the assumed gender binary in figure xi occurs where Santos mentions the 'remarkable interplay of two very different guitar styles (of Denigrata Herself and Cændél) that often make the riffs feel velvety soft and ruggedly harsh at the same time'. One can infer from the name placement here that the first band member mentioned and

the first adjectival response are connected through the gender binary, and similarly with Cændél and the ‘ruggedly harsh’ description when it is the other way around. Given that the hegemonic construct of the feminine is to be ‘velvety soft’ rather than ‘ruggedly harsh’ is supported by the patriarchal format of the language itself as well as its application and use. The descriptors used in this review suggest an already forged path that makes linguistic connections between perceived notions of the gender binary.

What this example demonstrates is that whilst the hyperborean could be said to represent masculinity and the transcendental, femininity, these are very clearly conventions that are socially constructed and they recall the limiting and problematic Lacanian binary opposites. What the Denigrata example shows is that what one composes has very little to do with gender convention yet the binary persists in how others engage with the music and make assumptions accordingly. Stuart Hall states:

[...] while in no way wanting to limit research to ‘following only those leads which emerge from content analysis’, we must recognise that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange (from the viewpoint of circulation), and that the moments of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’, through only ‘relatively autonomous’ in relation to the communicative process as a whole, are *determinate* moments. (91)

Consequently, for the reviewer to assume that the transcendental riffs belong to the woman and the hyperborean riffs belong to the man, demonstrates Hall’s ‘relatively autonomous’ determinate moment in that the assumption was made on the way the gender binary exists socially and by extension, musically. The narrow field that this offers is both restricting and redundant; a man should be able to compose a softer intervallic chordal structure and a woman should be able to compose a semitonal, hard motif without the associated assumptions becoming foregrounded in their decoding. However, the fact that this assumption was made in the first place serves to demonstrate how pervasive the gender binary is within extreme metal and its musical decoding.

The purpose of analysing these pieces of music has been to demonstrate how gender can become associated with and come to represent compositional styles and formats. The hyperborean can be understood as being cold masculinity that is lunar and atrophic, whereas the transcendental can be seen to represent fluid femininity that is solar and hypertrophic. The delineation of such a stark contrast between the two black metal variants facilitates understanding how gender has become attributed to the second and third waves of black metal, and how these gendered ideas are reflected in compositional terms. This in turn affects not only the musical engagement but indicates that there has been a paradigmatic shift from the masculine to the feminine which could suggest that the transcendental is more of a welcome, yet expected space for women in black metal.

#### **4.a.ii. Women's Representation in Black Metal: Feminine Absence and the Cosmic Womb of the Abyss**

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 a language which is said either to reveal or distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. (Butler 1)

Given metal's preoccupation with using women as artistic content as an islanding and shepherding apparatus (Gutman and de Coninck-Smith 5) to embed pathways of controlled female engagement, it is valuable to interrogate black metal for similar processes that exist hegemonically. Gutman and de Coninck-Smith identify modes of control and separation of the material culture of children in urban spaces stating, 'the islanding of children [is] detrimental and destructive of the potential for a socially integrated life world in modern society' (5). I apply this to the hegemonic structures that police women's material culture that shepherd and island them into restrictive locales to prevent freedom of movement. This can be seen in black metal's material culture where women's participation is viewed as an anomaly or at the very least, a surprise. This is evidenced by Sarelin's ethnomethodological research and his identification of the hegemonic heterosexual black metal warrior who wants women to be present for sexual purposes only which is also supported by the 1998 Belgian documentary. This illustrates the hegemonic control of women's involvement in black metal as sexual objects rather than active participants and the female black metal performer transgresses these boundaries even further, as is evidenced by Kahn-Harris' interviewees.

Women do not feature as heavily in black metal aesthetics or content as much as other variants of extreme metal or metal as a wider cultural practice. The results of which indicate a feminine absence, a void that represents nothingness rather than anything concrete; the 'cosmic womb of the abyss' (Masciandaro 83). In order to demonstrate how women have been engaged with aesthetically, the thesis offers three album art examples that exhibit the female in a blackened format. An analysis of each is applied to set the text at war with itself in order to identify the latent determinants.

The majority of black metal album art represents the void within a pastoral setting. As previously examined, the significance of occultism and the environment for album art is the dominant mode of aesthetic representation. Consequently, finding examples that use women in black metal art is a relatively short exercise. Typical examples of black metal album art can be seen with Darkthrone's *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (Peaceville Records, 1992) (fig. xii) which uses the empty space to represent the void as much as the image of the band member that is uncentralised to the graphology, displacing the importance of the musician with the importance of emptiness and Burzum's album of the same name released on Deathlike Silence in 1992 which illustrates a cold wasteland with an abyssic figure fragmenting into its environment (fig. xiii)



(fig. xii)



(fig. xiii)

Both of these examples demonstrate a specificity of engagement for black metal aesthetics inasmuch as the depiction of the abyss and the pictorial representation of negation that the music encapsulates becomes one of the most immediate and important points of identification. Arguably the Darkthrone image contains a male band member and the Burzum example is ungendered, with the assumption that it is male. The masculinised frame in which both examples have been produced, suggests that ‘the traditional male emphasis [...] on objectifying experiences and so ‘getting away from’ the personal into some transcendental realm of knowledge and ‘truth’’ (Stanley and Wise 63) could determine not only the primary, dominant and assumed male engagement but also black metal’s need to step into the void. These examples do not necessarily suggest the excision of women from black metal aesthetics, but potentially represents a feminised void, a non-representation or totalising negation of women for black metal. As the two examples included here are landmark albums that are lauded as ‘True Norwegian Black Metal’ (Spracklen 87) the black metal heritage they command is significant. Whilst they are not the majority, both Darkthrone and Burzum are principle artists that cemented hyperborean orthodoxy. As such, women’s use in black metal album art is minimal; however, there are some pertinent examples. Perhaps one of the more obvious cases in point is Marduk’s five track demo *Fuck Me Jesus* (Osmose Productions, 1991) whose album art depicts a woman anally penetrating herself with a crucifix as can be seen in (fig.xiv).



(fig. xiv)

The position of the naked woman is a provocative pose that alludes to hegemonic pornographic representations. However, other key signifiers suggest there is more to this positioning; she is in the image alone and there is an inscribed autonomy of her own pleasure and sexuality. The vagina remains in shadow whilst the breasts are coloured white and visible which could suggest a fear of the seat of female sexuality as the art work displays of the part of a woman's body patriarchy deems as belonging to it. Alongside this, the fact that she is penetrating herself with a crucifix indicates an independence of will and choice, the position of the crucifix is suggestive of an anti-Catholic or Christian representation as Christian scripture dictates that anal penetration is against God and coupled with the direct antagonism to hegemonic Christian doctrine in the album title, the use of 'me', rather than 'her' also suggests an ungendered representation in the title.

When examined as an art object in its entirety, the aim of this album art is easy to identify. The point of aggravation for Marduk seems to be the hegemony, so it uses trigger signifiers that will offend the mainstream. As detailed above, a woman experiencing sexual pleasure anally with a crucifix means that an iconographic image of Christianity is being used in a subversive way, by a woman for pleasure without a man's involvement. It would be easy to categorise this as sexist, because it remains a cultural text produced by men within a masculinist structure that could be argued, uses a naked woman to sell a record. However, by examining the latent meaning, more information exists that suggests a polysemic engagement. This example suggests a particular agency with the female representation because she appears in the artwork by herself; there is no body trauma that is unexplained or caused by other forces. Therefore, the woman's sovereign self remains intact. Instead of foregrounding the patriarchal domination of the female, Marduk's example offers a different, more autonomous representation.

The second band that uses women in art almost exclusively, seen as an anomaly in black metal, is Cradle of Filth. This UK band have a total of eleven albums to date, only two of which do not have women on their covers, *Damnation and a Day* (Sony, 2003) and *Godspeed on the Devil's Thunder* (Roadrunner, 2008). Whilst there may not be many examples of black metal bands that use women as art, Cradle of Filth seem to focus the majority of their artistic vision on them. Nine albums feature women in the album art that are all stylistically similar and one of their most famous albums, *Dusk...and her Embrace* (Music For Nations, 1996) has been included here. As can be seen in fig. v, the graphology and colour scheme is indicative of black metal aesthetics is the inclusion of the occult and environmental depiction.



(fig.xv)

The graphology of the album art illustrates a pastoral setting that is set in winter, which evokes the black metal extract in its colouring and layout. The gothic building in the top centre of the piece alludes to the British Gothic Tradition and evokes a specificity of location that references gothic architecture and more specifically, literature. The image of the gothic building is an enduring one, featuring in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to name only a few. These texts helped forge a specifically British notion of the gothic that is clearly represented in Cradle of Filth's album art, with the woman featured wearing the heavy material which evokes the Victorian era that coincides with the texts' imagery and gender representation; Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra from *Dracula* in particular. These images used together confer legitimacy onto the album art in line with the British Gothic Tradition.

In so doing a dark engagement and representation is relayed onto the album art, conferring upon it some cultural legitimacy. The woman is situated centre left of the image and is dressed in a horned headdress which evokes a pagan representation that is replicated by Denigrata Herself's use of antlers on stage; this is examined further in chapter five. This image of the woman presents her in an empowered position; namely she is clothed wearing a headdress but her non-centralised position could suggest she is there to represent the pastoral rather than be the focal point of the art or the band. However, she is standing within nature, with her hands up to her face, away from the building which foregrounds the link between women and the natural landscape. This also references the ideology that states women are historically excluded from culture because of their ties to nature; their universal devaluation as being isolated from culture. Sherry B. Ortner's 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture' (70) discusses the universality of female subordination through hegemonic gender binaries that force a rupture of women from culture through their biological ties to nature. She states:

There is something genetically inherent in the male of the species, so the biological determinists would argue, that makes them the naturally dominant sex; that "something" is lacking in females, and as a result women are not only naturally subordinate but in general quite satisfied with their position, since it affords them protection and the opportunity to maximize maternal pleasures, which to them are the

most satisfying experiences of life. Without going into a detailed refutation of this position, I think it fair to say that it has failed to be established to the satisfaction of almost anyone in academic anthropology. This is to say, not that biological facts are irrelevant, or that men and women are not different, but that these facts and differences only take on significance of superior/inferior within the framework of culturally defined value systems. (72)

As this statement suggests, biological differences only become oppressive when they are positioned in a hierarchical system that foregrounds the importance of the male over the female. It could be argued that this idea is what underpins the Lacanian gender binaries included previously. It should come as no surprise therefore that the woman in the album art is positioned away from the building and in the pastoral setting, because seemingly, that is where she belongs. Orton goes on to state that ‘we may broadly equate culture with the notion of human consciousness, or with the products of human consciousness (i.e. systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature’ (73). I correct the use of the term ‘humanity’ and replace it with ‘man’ as the systems of control over nature are patriarchal, not egalitarian and the control over nature is therefore also the control of women. What can be seen in the album design is an art object that has been produced by a masculine process that positions control of the female through her placement within the pastoral, not the cultural. This data when couple with the album title all serves to foreground a specifically British engagement with black metal, that seeks to represent the gothic tradition through the representation of woman, nature and the gothic.

Sarah Jezebel Deva joined Cradle of Filth in 1996 to sing their operatic vocal lines thus fracturing black metal’s monolithic masculine performance but she was still a woman ‘added in’ after the fact, rather than the band starting out with a woman. This recalls Stanley and Wise’s position of the problem of simply adding women in to serve a specific function that is a little deterministic in terms of role taking. What is meant here is that for a woman to sing soprano is inherently a role coded as feminine in the western classical canon. Consequently, Deva fulfilling this ‘added in’ role for the band suggests a role taking procedure rather than a role making one; if she had been involved from the start, the opportunity for role making is arguably a more empowered position than role taking. According to Stanley and Wise, ‘role-making’ emphasises the importance of situation, personality and context in influencing events and behaviours’ whereas ‘role-taking’ is seen in functionist terms [that] describes a determinate reality in which absolute order exists’ (106). One can draw from this that for a band to begin with women involved from the start means an emphasis on process and on female subjectivity being invested in that process. Role taking therefore is not as powerful a position as role making, where a woman can be involved in the process from the start. This is a particularly important point in Denigrata, where Manea (keys and operatic vocals, who occupies the same musical role as Diva) has been involved in all band process from the beginning. This contrasts with Deva’s involvement with Cradle of Filth; hers is a polysemic one that can be read as determinant and constructed but also eventually empowering and rupturing when she was ‘added in’.

Deva's role can be understood in terms of Susan McClary's work in her text *Feminine Endings: music, gender and sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994). In the chapter 'Excess and Frame', McClary analyses Monteverdi's *Lamento della Ninfa* (lament of the nymph) from his eighth collection of madrigals, suggesting 'the premise of the libretto of this piece is that [...] men have observed the nymph [...] flourishing and floundering in her madness on the Renaissance landscape. Yet as they "represent" her to us, they enact the confining frame that turns her into a seventeenth-century exhibit' (89). A similar reading could be applied to Deva's involvement with Cradle of Filth, as they construct and represent her coloratura soprano, feminine role to their demographic and to black metal. They provide the confining frame for her to perform a specifically feminine within this masculinised black metal context. Nonetheless her involvement in a famous black metal band suggests at least, a female representation in the album artwork but also on stage. The 'objective and restraining reality' (Stanley and Wise 116) for female representation in classical music and black metal alike, suggests that Cradle of Filth subvert hegemonic forms of engagement specifically by adding Deva in. However, to complicate matters further, their most infamous piece of merchandise (fig. xvi) seems more of a plagiarised allusion to the above Marduk example, but pushes further in its antagonism whilst using women in a problematic and sexually deterministic way.



(fig. xvi)

There are slight changes when comparing this example to Marduk's (fig. xiv) inasmuch that the masturbation has moved from the anus to the vagina, the woman now wears a nun's wimple (the vagina still in shadow with the breasts exposed remains the same) accompanied by 'vestal masturbation' with 'Jesus is a Cunt' serving as the back print. Arguably, she maintains the artistic space by herself by not sharing it with anyone else, but the added religious clothing connotes fetishism rather than a more potentially honest engagement that we see with the Marduk cover. Rather than the inviting 'Fuck Me Jesus', Cradle of Filth opted to marry a patriarchally constructed 'offensive' vaginal word to Christianity, thus serving the same purpose as Marduk's crucifix. However, the Christian iconography's end point with both examples remains within the female (anus, vagina/cunt) suggesting that the most offensive place for Christianity to reside is within the body of a woman. Consequently, one could argue that whilst Cradle of Filth exhibits more of a

romantic representation of women, it is not wholly free of patriarchal ideological construction.

It is worthwhile to include a third wave example of women's representation because there is a clear shift away from the two previous examples to a more transcendental engagement. The Howling Wind's album artwork *Of Babalon* (Profound Lore, 2012) captures the current movement's ability to articulate the black metal extract in a New Age Pagan artistic style. As can be seen in fig. xvii, the function of the female body is part of a pagan triadic configuration, coupled with a chalice and the moon.



(fig. xvii)

The art object depicts a naked woman lying in repose; she is reclining with her hands resting on her stomach. She is also faceless which could suggest she could be any woman or all women. By her not having face; it removes the subjective and makes the image objective. The chalice above her is a representative symbol of the vagina and womb which could be said to echo Masciandaro's 'cosmic womb of the abyss' (Masciandaro 83). At the top of the graphology sits the moon which is a symbolic representation of the female, her connection to the natural world, her menstrual cycles, the tides and her affiliation to nature, rather than culture. The colours used here are particularly pertinent as the red used has a copper hint to it which is suggestive of blood which could be menstrual blood, life blood or soil.

These signs together align femininity with nature and the cosmos that when coupled with the album title, serves to represent the female in a way not previously done in black metal. The title 'Of Babalon' means 'Babalon' - /'bæbælən/ (also known as the Scarlet Woman, Great Mother or Mother of Abominations) is a goddess found in the mystical system of Thelema co-opted from Mesopotamian spirituality by Aleister Crowley in *The Book of the Law* (Weiser Books, 1904). 'Of' suggests that the music is from the Great Mother and by extension the musicians are also from this source which could be understood as humanity's origins. The art object in its entirety could be seen as the amoral female as the site of origin, the archaic mother. If she is symbolic of the abyssic void, the womb and black hole, the vaginal entrance to the void, then Babalon is her female symbolic and spiritual representation. The Howling Wind's example suggests a different, more transcendental engagement with women as the source of unknowable infinity, of the site of the void, the cosmic manifestation in humanity. If we compare it to the previous examples, there is no sexual act being undertaken; it appears more as a representation of woman, albeit still a

hegemonic one. This example could be read as the meta-sign of the Great Mother or Mother of Abominations represented the archaic mother. According to Creed:

The central characteristic of the archaic mother is her total dedication to the generative, procreative principle. She is the mother who conceives all by herself, the original parent, the godhead of all fertility and the origin of procreation. She is outside mortality and the law [...] At times the horrific nature of the monstrous-feminine results from the merging of all aspects of the maternal figure into one – the horrifying image of woman as archaic mother, phallic woman, castrated body and castrating parent represented in a single figure [...] What is common [...] is the voracious maw, the mysterious black hole that signifies female genitalia which threatens to give birth to equally horrific offspring as well as threatening to incorporate everything in its path. This is the generative archaic mother, constructed within patriarchal ideology, as the primeval ‘black hole’, the originating womb which gives birth to all life’. (27)

The above quotation identifies the myriad ways in which the figure of the All Mother can be understood. The Howling Wind’s example suggests that the Great Mother of Abomination as a thematic has been used to present the ‘black hole’, the primeval centre of the void as the origin point for creativity. Creed’s point of the originating womb which gives birth to all life could also be read as giving birth to creativity, by having the ability to create. One could argue this engenders the notion of creativity as being female, that giving birth to an idea means to pass through that same originating womb.

Unlike the two previous examples, there is much less of a ‘vulgar policing of the space’ (Masciandaro 85) here; whilst this art object is the product of a male band within a masculinist structure informed by patriarchal ideology, fig. vii offers a Neo-Pagan, cosmological reading that foregrounds the esoteric, matriarchal occultism of the third wave, rather than the more conservative and sexually hegemonic representations from Cradle of Filth and Marduk. Masciandaro states, ‘impossibilizing black metal discourse in the paradoxical mode of a tiny, pathetic illumination that might expose its primal night as a cave-dweller’s fantasy, such anxious refusal of the blackening, darkness-deepening potentiality of thought betrays faithlessness in the awesome reality of the abyss, which, whatever anyone names it, is absolutely divine’ (85-86). I connect this absolute divinity of the abyss with Creed’s statement that woman ‘is the generative archaic mother, constructed within patriarchal ideology, as the primeval ‘black hole’, the originating womb which gives birth to all life’ (27) because the unknown, abyssic quality of the vulva and womb represent a patriarchally unknowable space that at once mystifies and repels. The abjection at work here offers a Kristevan sublimating discourse that states ‘I/Other, Inside/Outside – an opposition that is vigorous but pervious, violent but uncertain [...] This fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confronts the otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject’ (6). This discourse is aesthetic and mystical, rather than scientific but as Ortner’s previous statement suggests, even biological understandings fall short in being able to provide any objective understandings away from the dominant phallocentric discourse.

From this, one could posit that hyperborean black metal's previous engagements with women's representation in art, is the pathetic cave-dweller's fantasy, bound together with problematic understandings and engagements with women. The transcendental form of black metal instead, constructs a cosmic reading of the womb, of the Great Mother of Abomination, the archaic mother. The third wave idealises and consciously presents the female as the site that houses the abyss and is therefore divine. The supplanted and hated Christian divinity that the hyperborean rallied against so vehemently has transformed into the mystical, all-powerful feminine divine but this is not necessarily better than before as it still reinforces binary essentialist gendering. Arguably as the previous section analysed, third wave transcendental black metal is representative of the female, the 'lovely, speculative hideous gnosis of an essentially [...] erotic consciousness, the unnameable entity who, sitting in the medieval chained library of the body, practices loving things in the intellectual mirror of his ownmost cosmic abyss' (Masciandaro 87). Masciandaro may be speaking from his own position in this statement but the use of 'his' seems to reference a more general masculine position that he is speaking of and to a perceived male demographic. For third wave transcendental black metal therefore, women are not the demographic and are to be perceived as divine, pastoral others whose function is to represent nature and the abyss, not themselves. It could be argued that because of this, the transcendental is preferable to the hyperborean but neither modes represent women as human beings; they are either sexualised or pastoral.

However, the function of The Great Mother's place, as abomination and divinity, in the aetiology of the female condition (Carter 6) within the transcendental could suggest that it simply reinforces a different kind of binary. Women's representation in black metal aesthetics is arguably preferable to the representations in other metal variants, but to place the female as the seat of the divine abyss, is to remove her humanity, as 'she is subsumed immediately into a universal' (Carter 7). The removal of humanity from women in transcendental black metal representations suggests the notion of the absent female becoming the present feminine void, as she represents a universal, divine abyss rather than a human woman. Carter notes that:

If women allow themselves to be consoled for their culturally determined lack of access to the modes of intellectual debate by the invocation of hypothetical great goddesses, they are simply flattering themselves into submission (a technique often used on them by men). All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place.' (5)

As the above quotation suggests, the alignment of women with a divine (be it mother or virgin) representation does not free women to claim their own place and space within black metal, if the representations they are surrounded by depict the Victorian notion of divine femininity (The Howling Wind/Cradle of Filth) or whore (Cradle of Filth/Marduk).

Both Donna Haraway and Jasbir Puar take Carter's notion further by stating 'I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess' (14; 4), meaning that an assemblage point for women should not be to accept a miscellany of patriarchal constructs in order for women to claim identity, jumping straight to a technological hybridity that transgresses notions of gender and women's apparent ties to nature. Haraway notes 'the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations [...] nature and culture are reworked' (151). Whilst Haraway's points are important in offering a strategy through which to re-encode gender relations through technology, for me the same problem remains in that a woman's right to her humanity is not addressed, merely sidestepped; offering these assemblage points for women, as Cyborgs or goddesses, do not deal with the issue of a woman's identity as human. Similarly, then, in terms of acknowledging women as abject, which is examined in chapter five, Kristeva notes that there is 'the tendency toward interiorising and spiritualising the abject' (118) which supports Carter's point that any desire to position women as divine, is an abjecting process that assembles within a sublimating discourse of mythology and otherness.

Assemblage as an interconnecting relationship to ideas builds on Deleuze and Guattari's initial idea of Agencement, meaning graphology, layout, relations, design, and arrangement, insomuch as these relationships are more important than content. A woman's supposed relation to the assemblage of the goddess is a strategy through which to remove the category 'woman' from her humanity; the design, arrangement and layout's relationship to this construct is constructed through the patriarchal lens as divine and therefore unattainable. It is a romanticised idea that serves to separate 'woman' from the body and material culture of 'woman'. The imposition of such ideas however can be subverted performatively as Karen Barad states:

A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve. (19)

Drawing from Judith Butler's work on performativity, Barad states that performative strategies offer asseveration as opposed to assimilation of the dominant patriarchal discourse on women's identity. Just because artists such as The Howling Wind choose to represent women as divine, does not mean it cannot be countered by female black metal performers such as Dr. Mikannibal from Sigh and Myrkur who are examined further on in this chapter.

As noted in the following section, the ways women in black metal choose to present themselves can be located in the triadic virgin, mother, whore patriarchal structure which alludes to the pagan triple goddess of maiden, mother, and crone. These enduring and culturally embedded female representative modes seek to dehumanise and remove agency from women, and women's experiences or represent them as sex objects and as Carter states, obscures the reality of the everyday. Consequently, any sacerdotal representation and engagement of and with women in black metal inadvertently problematises their access and space further. Women's occupation of space in black metal is problematic and a way to transcend at least some of these concerns is to become a performer. In so doing, her agency and narrative position become foregrounded because she has transgressed and exceeded the shepherding and islanding present in the rest of black metal's material culture. By stepping onto the stage, she is active signifying subject in her own right and although this is not without complications, it can become a subjectively constructed space that facilitates freedom of movement and freedom to create. Whilst Masciandaro's notion of the cosmic womb of the abyss' (83) regenders existent conceptualisations of black metal, any contestatory strategies for women are to be located within female black metal performance.

#### **4.b. Excription and Performer: Mater Omnium ad Feminam**

As we have tried to show, adding women in to existing theory without subjecting this to any more critical examination than noting and deplored the absence of women from it [...] is not enough. (Stanley and Wise 118)

According to the above quotation attempting to add women in and by bemoaning their absence or lack of engagement, as seen in the 1998 untitled Belgium documentary and comments from Vikernes, is insufficient. There have been women involved in black metal, as part of the movement, as performers and composers or behind the scenes as promoters and in public relations but little focus is given them in terms of accreditation and visibility. However, because black metal is a masculinist structure, the problem becomes less about gaining access and more about maintaining space. Unlike death metal, which presents as an entirely closed cultural and gendered network of signification, black metal's closed network is musical, more than cultural. As a particular example of this structure is Norway's hyperborean black metal band Tsjuder's liner notes for *Desert Northern Hell* (Season of Mist, 2004). Their proclamation "no synthesizers, no female vocals, and no fucking compromise!" offers perhaps one of the more declamatory statements regarding black metal and women musicians. Their hyperborean position of orthodox conservatism suggests that any acknowledgement of women performers serves to dilute the sanctity and masculine force of black metal, that female sung vocals somehow represent the purest form of the feminine in music and therefore the most rupturing. It could be argued that this notion draws evidence from the western classical canon; the historical representation of women as sopranos or altos within opera demonstrates clear gender definitions. McClary suggests:

[...] musical delineations of "the feminine" or "the masculine" in early opera were shaped by attitudes prevalent in the societies in which the composers lived. And these delineations of gender in turn participated in social formation by providing public

models of how men are, how women are – much as film, television, and popular music do today. Some of the early gendered types in music have survived along with the attitudes that first gave them voice and are recognised relatively easily by present-day listeners. (37)

McClary notes clear demarcations were drawn early on in musical form and have reverberated through the succeeding centuries, whose images of femininity and masculinity endure. Any resolution to these binaries can be forced by a post-structural engagement of fluid, non-fixed signs and meaning, exploding the static understandings of gender and their representation in music. Whilst Tsjuder hold fast to their orthodoxy, their engagement with masculinity is just as constructed and problematic as their conceptualisation of femininity. If they do not like female sung vocals, then this could be understood as a matter of taste; to include it in their liner notes for the album, suggests they are elevating their particular doctrine as the representation of authenticity in black metal, in both masculine and musical terms. The hyperborean mode's preoccupation with being pure or *kvlt* echoes this position. Both terms perform and reproduce a juridical male subject invested with the musically appropriate masculinity and therefore gains access to the hyperborean. Whilst this example demonstrates an obstructive, impassable architecture of hyperborean black metal, there are spaces and places that women occupy.

The construction of a predominantly masculinist environment, that Tsjuder would clearly wish black metal to maintain, ignores the occupation of space that women have achieved within the movement. The landscape historically and in contemporary terms, is occupied in the most part by men but that does not mean that women have not or do not engage with it. Black metal does not explicitly prevent women's engagement but nevertheless preventative measures are articulated within specificities and minutiae such as Tsjuder's line notes. Hyperborean black metal therefore, is not an unmediated window into the music and culture; it is just as tightly constructed and policed as popular music. As McClary notes, whilst 'music gives the illusion of operating independently of cultural mediation, it is often received [...] as a mysterious medium within which we seem to encounter our "own" most private feelings [...] music teaches us how to experience our own emotions, our own desires [...] for better or worse, it socialises us' (8). From this perspective interrogating the socialising force of music enable identification of how 'woman' is constructed and dealt with by female black metal performers<sup>9</sup>. Three examples of female black metal performers are offered in this section, Gehenna, Sigh, and Myrkur. These artists are some of the only signed female artists. Space, place and gender therefore, are key signifiers that enable a critical analysis of women's absence or in fact, women being discounted or vilified in black metal and the wider metal community. According to Massey:

The only point I want to make is that space and place, spaces and places, and our sense of them, (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through. Moreover, they are gendered in a myriad of different ways,

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<sup>9</sup> Fandom is clearly an important factor to consider and whilst the thesis does not examine this specifically, as previously stated, because theorists such as Hill (2014), Overell (2014), Riches (2012), and Vasan (2011) already do this, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which this engagement occurs.

which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in societies in which we live. (250)

As previously examined, the ‘boys club of rock’, and by extension metal and extreme metal, means that a closed network of masculine signification is embedded and functions on an axis of patriarchal heritage and contemporary reproduction, the place and space of which is male. Bayton, 1998, Brown 2016; Burns & Lafrance, 2002, Dawes, 2012, Downes, 2012, Frith and McRobbie, 1990, Leonard, 2007, Reddington, 2012, Scott 2016; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000; Whitely, 2000, all attest to the masculinised structure of guitar based music and culture. The patriarchal heritage of black metal can be identified by simply examining the metal press, Terrorizer, Decibel, Zero Tolerance and Metal Hammer magazines to see the proportion of women featured. Arguably they can only report on bands that have albums coming out or are on tour so if there are no women in those bands, then there is no representation. There have been ruptures to this structure but they only exist as temporary breach, rather than a new concrete platform.

As such, it is valuable to examine female black metal performers from the hyperborean and transcendental and while the musical evolution of black metal could be argued to have softened, and therefore be seen as more feminine, the ways in which black metal female performers have been engaged with has become more problematic over time. When female keyboardist Sarcana joined Gehenna in 1994 (fig. xviii), there was no problem with her involvement from the band, fans or from her.



(fig. xviii)

According to guitarist and front man Dolgar, ‘[...] Sarcana wrote a lot of the music, instead of her being presented mostly finished songs to write keyboards to’ (Patterson 240). This suggests that she functioned in the same way as the men in the band. Her role taking became role making as she wrote and co-wrote with other band members. Any assumptions based on gender binaries that women are passive or incapable of composing extreme music was not a concern for Gehenna. The anti-Christian position of the band instigated more of a focus than any gender concerns. The band note ‘the church citycommision protested our gig, but they lost [...] they protested because we were a death cult, and we were against all the good forces that protect life, etc., and because of our ‘satanic’ stage act’ (Patterson 238). Gehenna were found to be problematic lay with their ideological and anti-religious position, rather than any sexist engagement. Whilst it could be argued that, as with Diva and Cradle of

Filth, Sarcana was ‘added in’ she carved out her own compositional and performance space co-opting a formerly solely masculine space and breached it with her own. Sarcana’s involvement with Gehenna functioned within a previous era, meaning that other than touring and promotions through magazines and venues, the interaction of Gehenna’s fans with the band was a reciprocal and dyadic format. In 1994, the internet did not feature in black metal performance, engagement or promotion yet this has become important for future female black metal performers and the way they have been treated by the associated wider culture.

In addition to Sarcana, Japan’s Sigh are an experimental black metal band that incorporate many disparate influences and instrumentation. Their saxophonist and vocalist, Dr. Mikannibal has ‘generated a good deal of interest in the group from fans and the media, which is perhaps unsurprising given her eccentric character – eating insects, drinking cow’s blood, and recording naked for example [...] [also] a strong element of sexuality thanks to her scantily clad live performances’ (Patterson 434). Recalling Walser’s earlier point regarding male bonding and the excription of women, he notes:

Metal shields men from the danger of pleasure – loss of control [...] the seductive woman who sometimes intrude into otherwise Excripting [performances] signify in several ways. First these [...] function just as they do in advertising: to trigger desire and credit it to the appeal of the [female] image. But the sexual excitement also serves as a reminder of why excription is necessary: the greater the seductiveness of the female image, the greater its threat to masculine control. Moreover, the presence of women as sex objects stabilises the potentially troubling homoeroticism suggested by the male display. (116)

Mikannibal’s representation in Sigh, (fig. xix), enacts her sexual power in more self-embodied ways. As in the below figure, she wears what she wants on stage and does not seem to find the male gaze problematic, does not care or enjoys it; her engagement with hegemonic masculinities does not seem to penetrate her on stage persona. The polysemic dyad of the male gaze versus a woman’s right to wear what she wants is a problematic one. How constructed her image is, whether it purports to convey any authenticity of self is a salient issue and whether or not this actually matters. With Sigh, metal or in this case experimental black metal is not shielding men from the danger of pleasure, as Walser suggests; the seductiveness of the female image is performed by a real woman instead. It is possible to suggest that Mikannibal’s performance exceeds Walser’s categorisation by occupying space within a masculine place on her own terms by not caring. There is significant weight to this notion that female performers are there to do a job as a musician rather than be passive and temporary in black metal’s material culture as Sarelin suggests. The act of playing an instrument or being the vocalist supports the action needed to make the performance happen; the binary essentialist gendering of passive women is ruptured by those performing black metal on stage.



(fig.xix)



(fig. xx)

She takes up space, her saxophone playing, vocals and on-stage performance but there is also a conscious performance of gender with Mikannibal that is not apparent with Sarcana. Sarcana wears typical black metal or gothic clothing which tends towards the covered body. Mikannibal on the other hand, is representative of the fetishised body, using patriarchally constructed, sexualised clothing because she wants to. As can be seen in fig. xx, a similar outfit is worn but is now covered in blood. Her on-stage presentation is more aggressive than when she is playing the saxophone as she is able to confront more directly because she has the microphone, a direct amplified link straight to the audience. Arguably this is more of a disruptive force as her mouth is free to shout and scream, rather than concentrating on the embrasure for her saxophone playing. Therefore, her engagement changes and perhaps as a way of drawing focus to her disruptive capacity as a female black metal performer, any patriarchal codes imposed on her can be negotiated. This disruption is understood as ‘code manipulation’. Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance suggest that ‘as with any interpretive reception of [socio] musical conventions, the conventional readings do exist, but they may not be intended to bear that conventional meaning in a given musical composition [or performance]’ (48). The potential conventional readings of Mikannibal would be hegemonic and sexualise her but it is possible to read her performance as code manipulation. She is representative of what Burns and Lafrance call ‘the patriarchal beauty aesthetic’ (102) further exocitised by her nationality. Her aesthetics and choice of clothing that would provide the conventional reading of her femininity are manipulated through her performance and choice to cover those sexualised clothes in blood. I find these two competing images of Mikannibal interesting because we can see how the normative patriarchal engagement portrayed in fig xix is disrupted in fig xx, investing the second image with more authenticity of her subjective performance.

When compared with Sarcana, any contesting authenticity between the two women suggests a negotiation in identifying what realness for women means. Butler notes:

The contest (which we might read as a “contesting of realness”) involves the phantasmatic attempt to approximate realness, but it also exposes the norms that regulate realness as themselves phantasmatically instituted and sustained. The rules

that regulate and legitimate realness (shall we call them symbolic?) constitute the mechanism by which certain sanctioned fantasies, sanctioned imaginaries, are insidiously elevated as the parametres of realness. (89)

What Butler is suggesting here is that constructions of perceived female realness are phantasmatic, illusory constructs that are hegemonically engineered and imposed on women by patriarchy that are foregrounded as a woman's modus operandi. Conventional readings either Sarcana or Mikannibal's 'woman-ness' is constructed by illusory regulations that have little to do with women's direct engagement with creating and maintaining it so it is possible to read both of their performance as code manipulation. Arguably it is more a case of using what already exists to one's advantage. Both Sarcana and Mikannibal's self-actualising gendered performance speaks of a polysemic encoding of patriarchal ideals that become disrupted through their code manipulation.

Walser's suggestion that women are mediated through metal as sex objects negates any argument about realness, in order for the homoeroticism to flow uninterrupted. Whilst Sarcana did not overtly perform or acknowledge this gendered function, Mikannibal fully realises it, subsuming it into her on-stage persona. Arguably she represents a breach or crisis point for black metal insomuch as she is authentic in her appreciation of black metal, she is a black metal performer but can also be perceived as a sex object by the masculine structures of black metal, phantasmatic or otherwise.

The perceived authenticity of hyperborean black metal can be understood as a juridical system, a patriarchal conservative structure with set rules for gender and gender performance, Foucault points out that 'juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent' (Foucault qtd. in Butler 2). In this sense the second wave's orthodoxy and preoccupation with purity and kvlt, as a juridical system, produces subjects in its own image rather than creating opportunity for differing ontological engagements. One could argue that 'the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame – an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject' (Butler 140). Sarcana and Mikannibal, in their own ways, rupture that juridical system by using their gender to create a breach or crisis point, even though it serves to consolidate the gender binary in doing so. What I mean by this is that their performance as black metal musicians creates a breach in the patriarchal structures of black metal because they are women. Furthermore, this breach is accelerated by Mikannibal through her code manipulation of her appearance, aesthetics and performance. This creates a crisis point for black metal inasmuch as the boy's club has been disrupted.

Sarcana was performing a hyperborean template, regardless of gender, in that the anti-Christian position of the hyperborean was more important than the acknowledgement of her gender. Mikannibal on the other hand, and by extension Sigh, do not adhere to the juridical orthodoxy of any of the black metal variants, because they have a saxophone (not a naturalised black metal instrument) and a woman performer so the band can be understood as a totalising crisis point that is exceeded by her gendered performance. Butler goes on to note:

The effects of performatives, understood as discursive productions, do not conclude at the terminus of a given statement or utterance, the passing of legislation, the announcement of a birth. The reach of their signifiability cannot be controlled by the one who utters or writes, since such productions are not owned by the one who utters them. They continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against their author's most precious intentions. (59)

It is worth keeping this quotation in mind as the last example, Myrkur, exists in contemporary terms within the transcendental third wave and unlike the previous examples, is a solo artist, not as a band. Therefore, she is the sole role maker and is in charge. She does not share creativity with anyone else and does not require the masculinised frame of black metal for legitimisation. Therefore, she has experienced a specificity of online engagement with her black metal performance in ways that have not only foregrounded the juridical nature of black metal, and metal as a wider cultural practice but also women's place within it. Her solo artistic status may offer some valuable insight into why black metal fandom in certain geographies has responded in aggressive ways.

Myrkur (fig. xxi), whose real name is Amalie Bruun, is a one woman black metal project from Denmark who is signed to Relapse Records. She released her first album, *M* in 2014 to critical acclaim. She enlists some significant hyperborean musicians from Mayhem and Dødheimsgard to facilitate not only live performance, but also to secure her some black metal credentials. For a one-woman project to achieve the levels of coverage, festival bookings, and label interest that she has, securing a strong live performance is critical to success and by using these musicians she is accessing and demonstrating black metal heritage for her own agenda arguably co-opting their subcultural capital for her own gain. The metal press, for the most part have been supportive (fig. xxii), claiming 'the future of black metal is here' whilst the online metal community have demonstrated a different response.



(fig. xxi)



(fig. xxii)

As can be seen in the following article, 'Stangry Manchildren Send Myrkur Death Threats' ([toiletovhell.com](http://toiletovhell.com)), one online source has sought to deal with Myrkur's vilification with an attempt to curb or rectify the preceding behaviour that forced her to shut down the messenger function on her Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The article notes:

You probably don't need this, but just in case, here's a friendly reminder: Don't send people death threats. Even if you really don't like their music. It just appears that a number of men are really, really angry that Myrkur exists and releases music. Why is that? What would drive American males to go out of their way to threaten the life of a female Danish musician? Is it because they think her music sucks? If so, I wonder how many death threats Steel Panther gets. Is it because Myrkur's strain of black metal isn't eeeeeevil? If so, I wonder how many death threats Panopticon gets. Is it because she's creating music in a genre that is traditionally known as a conservative boy's club? You might be on to something! [...] Black metal often attracts fans who voice strong opposition to censorship. If you are opposed to censorship, yet attempt to silence a musician by sending death threats, you are a hypocrite. If you consider yourself a fan of metal in this, the year of our lord 2016, and still prescribe to outdated ideals that no one but white men may participate, you are a pathetic relic of the past. These toxic attitudes can no longer be tolerated. If you send hate-filled messages to musicians that don't ascribe to your perceived views of what metal should be, it is you that is ruining metal. And if by off-chance you happen to be the kind of person who DOES enjoy sending death threats, please let me know below so I may cyber bully the shit out of you. (toiletovhell.com)

As the above identifies, there is a geographic consideration. Black metal, particularly the hyperborean mode, is most successful in Scandinavia and Europe. There are some American examples of the transcendental, as examined previously, but in the most part black metal is not seen as belonging to the US. One might make the connection between Men's Rights Activists (M.R.A's) occupying space within black metal fandom in the US, as Myrkur herself notes further on, she has not had abuse, death/rape threats and active trolling from elsewhere. As the MRA movement is American, one can potentially identify a connection between the two factions. As suggested by Joe Thrashnkill, it is predominantly American men who have been directly engaging with Myrkur to attempt to silence and shut her down. The article also identifies the boy's club as previously examined and its dominant whiteness, both of which the author attempts to foreground as a problem. The hegemonic patriarchal structure of black metal and by extension, metal as a wider cultural practice, has become so transparent to its adherents that the way in which Myrkur's reception by some fans, has in fact only served to highlight its own bigotry. As Helen Tiffin suggests, 'we should not seek to subvert dominant discourse with a view to taking its place, but to evolve textual strategies which "consume" their own biases as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse' (96). This is what Myrkur has done. Her femininity, her musical performance and image has instigated a breach or crisis point for the masculine juridical system exposing its discriminatory practices and behaviours. Kim Kelly in another article notes:

Black metal is negative, anti-life, anti-human music; it's controversial, it's unapologetic, it's harsh, it's not politically correct and never will be – that's another simple truth, and one that any fan of the genre needs to accept. But if you're the kind of person who thinks that your love for this music gives you the right to abuse other

people whose background or skin colour or gender or chord progressions offend you, you are unworthy of black metal. You're just a shitty nerd with mommy issues, and god (sorry – Satan) knows the world could use a fuckload less of those.  
(noisey.vice.com)

As Kelly suggests, a specified mode of engagement by predominantly US male fans sees female extreme metal performers as a problem. This raises two important issues, namely her music and image. Myrkur's music is positioned within the transcendental mode, evoking an ethereal, other-worldly representation not dissimilar to Wolves in the Throne Room. The floating essence of her music, which incorporates the screaming vocal delivery but also mezzo-soprano sung delivery, amalgamates the black metal extract with a folkloric representation vocally and aesthetically. The struggle for meaning between these co-axial modes suggests that those who have negatively responded to her are encountering a problem with image rather than music. As both of the above excerpts attest, if one does not like the music, it is simple enough not to engage. However, when a woman who appears to represent aesthetic signifiers of femininity within a masculinist frame, the mode of address and response Amalie Bruun has experienced suggests a deeper and wider problem. It is possible to understand Myrkur's representation of femininity as rupturing the hegemonic strata, facilitating a sexist and misogynist response to her.

To examine this notion further in terms of her aesthetics and performance, Myrkur heralds an interesting collaboration between the representation of the environment and the folkloric with the transcendental representation of herself and the music. Musically, her album exhibits signifiers of both the hyperborean and the transcendental, bridging the gap in similar ways that Wolves in the Throne Room do. Her image, on the other hand, alludes back to McClary's analysis of Monteverdi's *Lamento della Ninfa* inasmuch as she has constructed an angelic, ethereal aesthetic that is ghostly and almost insubstantial in its occupation of space. But occupy space she does. In figures xi and xii, her clothing, hair colour and lack of make up or rejection of corpse paint, indicates she is not performing to the standards set by the juridical nature of the hyperborean, which still represents authentic black metal. To recall Butler's earlier point, that 'in ritual social dramas, the actions of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation' (140). Bruun ruptures the discursive re-enactment of black metal's meaning, preventing the legitimation from reproducing itself. As a direct response to her engagement, she released a statement saying:

I have decided long ago not to publish any screenshots or names of the people who threaten/hate me, because I don't wish to feed it or give them their 15 min of hater fame. That is the truth, I could have done it a million times, but they don't deserve the attention and a lot of them also use fake profiles. The ones who use real profiles are more often than not in a band themselves, so if I publish anything about them, I would also involuntarily be promoting their shitty bands. Another reason not to do it. If anyone is interested in showcasing the hate I get. There is PLENTY shit about me on

the internet they can find. Hate videos on YouTube, scroll a comment section from an article about me or even my on Facebook etc etc. There is enough to go round! (and Twitter, some writers tweet passive aggressive tweets about me, poorly hidden hate, while discrediting my talent as ‘just marketing’ or ‘just because she is a woman in a man dominated genre’. ([metalinjection.com](http://metalinjection.com))

As she explains, there is no available evidence of the content of the messages she has received for the thesis to include. However, Reynold Jaffe, label manager at Relapse records, stated ‘Myrkur is categorically controversial and challenging. She’s not someone who discovered Ulver or Burzum 18 months ago; she grew up on it and channelled her passion into a very authentic-sounding Scandinavian black metal record. It is unfortunate for anyone to dismiss a great record simply because it came from an unusual source that contests the typical narrative’ ([heavyblogisheavy.com](http://heavyblogisheavy.com)). Here Jaffe identifies one of the problems, that of perceived inauthenticity, as if she is deliberately misleading black metal fans by selecting elements of black metal in order to create her own rearticulation. However, all musicians do this, the exacting discursive nature of black metal means that bands allude to signifiers of their influences in their own music. Myrkur should be allowed the same opportunity. She is being refused entry into black metal not necessarily because of her gender, but because of the way she chooses to perform her interpretation of black metal. If she wore the designated attire and donned corpse paint, her detractors would have one less point to argue in terms of her perceived black metal authenticity.

Instead, she presents herself clean-faced in a dress, an almost fairy-tale, and folkloric representation of femininity within the masculinity of black metal; its ‘che vuoi?’ is angrily shouting at her to prove why she is there. However, it is important to note; it is not black metal itself asking this of Bruun, but a segment of online fandom that is threatened by her occupation of space. Her label and the metal press readily acknowledge yet cannot prevent the hatred from occurring. The male fan fantasy of their conceptualisation of black metal, as noted in the media excerpts above, is ruptured by Myrkur, suggesting that the most revolutionary thing one can be is the hegemonic representation of ‘woman’. This then, produces another set of problems. To exist within the hegemony, a woman must enact the gender constructs prescribed by it. To exist in black metal, a woman must enact the masculinity prescribed by the hyperborean in order to gain respect. There leaves little room for Myrkur to exist yet by crossing one construct over into an alterity, this disruption of two sets of prescribed rules for women creates a crisis point for metal’s cultural practice. If you perform hegemonic femininity within black metal’s material culture, you will invite hatred because you are not obeying the rules.

For Myrkur therefore, her subjective experience of music and of its associated culture is of success on one side and subjugation on the other. Recalling Massey’s earlier notion that, ‘space and place, spaces and places, and our sense of them, (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through (250).

It is clear that the space and place that women black metal performers exist within is mediated by either the rules of aesthetic engagement prescribed by the hegemony or those

prescribed by black metal. If you choose to keep yourself covered, such as the Gehenna example, but you wear black and are in a legitimised male musical space, you may proceed. If you wear sexualised clothing and do not care, like Mikannibal from Sigh, you may proceed. If you do not perform the aesthetics of black metal and you willingly present yourself without make up, either the sanctioned corpse paint or the make-up prescribed by hegemonic constructs of femininity, you will be subjected to abuse for daring to break the rules. None of these options are acceptable ways for women to engage with music. Therefore, foregrounding women's subjective experience is valuable in order to establish a workable structure to release music and exist as a woman without reprisals. Interpretive performance autoethnography as a theoretical and methodological frame therefore, offers the subjective space to investigate and analyse how this can be used for women's black metal performance.

#### **4.b.i. Malefica: the Witch as Restorative Feminism in Female Black Metal Performance**

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. (qtd. in Grey 14)

Through my performance as Denigrata Herself, something 'other' has been advancing in parallel with my on-stage persona. She has made herself known in our perichoresis or total artwork (Hunt-Hendrix 279), through our promotional pictures, artwork, and video. Whilst I had no a priori desire or conceptualisation to create Denigrata Herself in these terms, she has evolved this way nonetheless. Denigrata Herself is a witch, a patriarchally loathed female archetype who embodies freedom of will, sexual desire and power. Witchcraft as a matrifocal ritual practice (Sonnex 35) has developed, particularly for Denigrata Herself and Manea, into a feminist strategy of resistance that 'evolves [performance] strategies which "consume" their own biases as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse' (Tiffin 96). Denigrata Herself and Manea's embodiment of the witch archetype on stage and in our perichoresis offers restorative feminism within black metal, subverting its juridical masculinity from inside its dominant discourse. It is valuable to acknowledge that the term 'witch' is not a singularity, but a complex and multifaceted ontology that has shifted and changed depending on its historical context.

Attempts to define the term 'witch' are met with numerous problems. Russell and Alexander's *New History of Witchcraft* (2015) go to great lengths to identify the variables caught up historically in the term's etymology but provide the following summary:

[...] Historians distinguish between European alleged witchcraft, which was a form of diabolism – that is, the worship of evil spirits – and worldwide sorcery, which involves not worshipping spirits but exploiting them. The English word *wicca*, which appears in a ninth-century manuscript, originally meant 'sorcerer', but during the witch-hunts it was used as the equivalent of the Latin *maleficus*, a Devil-worshipping witch. (15)

Similarly, in Laycock's *The Complete Enochian Dictionary* (1978) the term 'witch' is aligned with the goddess Babalon stating '*Bab – power, ability, possibility; Babalon – Wicked; Babalond – Harlot*' (qtd in Grey 84). She exists as an anti-patriarchal apotheosis that perhaps unsurprisingly, has come to represent a free woman. Denigrata Herself's development has allusions to the maleficus which aesthetically ties in with much of black metal's imagery and symbolism. However, this could easily be performed as a construct, as something created simply for performance purposes. What has surprised me is that it has not been a case of 'I want Denigrata Herself to look like a witch because it can be the female in black metal and it looks cool', it has come from within as 'a force, not an order. Witchcraft is rhizomatic, not hierarchic [...] [it] defies organisation, not meaning (Grey 15). Simply put, the way Denigrata's music makes me feel when I am on stage as Denigrata Herself, equates to feeling like a powerful woman who acknowledges the weight of patriarchy's gender essentialism and chooses to corrupt it. As the front woman, Denigrata Herself impels the performance and 'in witchcraft it is the woman who initiates' (Grey 15). This matrifocal locus positions the active, free, and powerful notion of womanhood at its centre, something that as previous sections demonstrate, is the antithesis for black metal and its excription of women.

The term 'matrifocal' means 'an emphasis on the feminine in modern paganism without it being a matriarchy' (36). This idea is relevant to Denigrata because there are women and men in the band. However, there is a focus on Denigrata Herself and Manea in terms of lyrical composition and the artistic elements of the perichoresis. Both of us, particularly whilst filming and curating the video for 'Kyrie Eleison', instigated a reimagining of ourselves in matrifocal, witchcraft terms. The video meant that we did not want to present ourselves as hegemonic constructs of femininity, to be subject to the male gaze and even if we could not prevent this, to at least disrupt it by code manipulation. Burns and Lafrance offer this term as a way of understanding othered meanings in a piece of music but also, because of their study on women in popular music, is connected to the representation of female musicians. They state that 'as with any interpretive reception of [socio] musical conventions, the conventional readings do exist, but they may not be intended to bear that conventional meaning in a given musical composition [or performance]' (48). I apply this to Denigrata Herself and Manea's ability to manipulate the masculine musical and aesthetic codes by consciously presenting ourselves as witches.



(fig. xxiii) Denigrata Herself: Ester Segarra 2015. (fig. xx iv) Manea: Ester Segarra 2015.

Manea and Denigrata Herself certainly evoke this folkloric representation in different ways as can be seen in the above figures. In Peter Grey's *Apocalyptic Witchcraft* its manifesto states that 'witchcraft is the art of inversion [...] it is revolution and of the power of woman' (16). To say that we felt this in our bones may sound romantic, but it has a real resonance for us. A spiritual path, forged through Denigrata has brought us both to this point. Grey adds 'witchcraft is the recourse of the dispossessed, the powerless, the hungry and the abused. It gives heart and tongue to stones and trees' (14). This speaks to the pastoral of the third wave of black metal, my autoethnography and to my performance as Denigrata Herself. Manea differs from me as she wears a long grey wig with different corpse paint; she concentrates on linear specificities around the eyes and mouth and whites out the rest of her face. We have been told at performances that we look like witches, so whatever image these people have in their minds from popular culture is aligning with what they see in us. We did not start out with this in mind however, it has developed as Denigrata has, finding traction and evolution along the way. It is a nomadic deterritorialising of hegemonic femininity, of black metal's masculine frame and has found a home with the most patriarchally hated of folkloric female figures represented by and through us.

In Denigrata's video for 'Kyrie Eleison' we both appear as glitches and clipped images, the camera only resting on us for a few seconds before cutting to a different shot. This adds to the transient nature of us as witches, existing at the edge, as Grey notes 'thrive[ing] in this liminal, lunar, trackless realm' (14). The band emerging from the water at the end of the video, could be said to represent an inverted baptismal embodiment because not only does the water represent a liminal, moving body, it is also us emerging from its waters, not us being immersed into it. Throughout all of Denigrata's perichoresis, we are crossing the borders between noise and silence, fluidity and stasis, life and death. This also coalesces with our use of corpsepaint, the act of looking like a dead person in life which mirrors the cold dead landscape of the video. The presence of band members as witches alongside witchcraft symbolism serve to locate a specificity of occult femininity whereas usually in black metal, this would be a masculine engagement only.

Interestingly, there is a polysemy to Denigrata Herself as being perceived as a witch. Brenda Gardner-Walter, an academic who writes for Dirge magazine, ran an article entitled 'Goring the Stag: the Satanic Antlered Priestess' (Nov 2016; appendix ii) in which she compared Denigrata Herself's role and appearance with Kay Walsh, the protagonist from Hammer Horror's film *The Witches* (dir. Frankel, C; 1966). She writes:

In the scrotophilic musical subculture of Satanic Black Metal, Denigrata Herself claims female authority. Performing as an antlered priestess, she gives voice to the feminine abyss. She is not a plaything for male desire, not a "groupie" or a "girlfriend." Neither is she a witch at her cauldron in the forest, waiting in puerile obedience for the arrival of Baphomet or Beelzebub. Instead, she is herself the Sacred Stag, the great Horned God, the ruler of the night. It is she who commands the ceremony and begins the dark dance. (1)

Gardner-Walter identifies some of the enduring problems for women in black metal and in popular music in general; the categorising of women as groupies or girlfriends, never the musician. She also states Denigrata Herself is 'not a witch' who is subject to the rule of a male deity. Here I identify a difference in understanding the notion of the witch that recalls Thames and Hudson's earlier point that understandings of this female archetype vary depending on location and time period. For my understanding and engagement with Denigrata Herself as witch it is specifically matrifocal, not as maleficus as understood in the Dirge article.

In an article by Anne Theriault called 'The Real Reason Women Love Witches', she writes:

These days, the terms *witch* or *witchy* cover a broad spectrum of things—it might mean someone who practices witchcraft (who may or may not align with a particular pagan or neopagan religion), but then again it might not. In some ways, 2016's version of "witchy" might seem to refer to more of an Instagrammable aesthetic choice than anything else—wearing dark lipstick and crystal pendants, growing cute kitchen herb gardens, and arranging household altars of dried flowers and animal

skulls. It's tempting to write these things off as being merely superficial affectations, but to do so would be a grave underestimation. Beneath all that glossy packaging hums the same idea that has tantalized girls for millennia: the fact that to be a witch is to be a woman with power in a world where women are often otherwise powerless. (everydayfeminism.com)

Whilst perhaps some audience members or those in the black metal community might write off Denigrata Herself and Manea's on stage appearance as superficial, as Theriault states, this would be an underestimation. The 'universal as male' (Hill 4) demography and behaviour of the masculinity of black metal can attempt to disregard this performance but the music of black metal is a space that celebrates the blackened crossing of boundaries. To recall blackmetaltheory.blogspot.co.uk's summary, the 'mutual blackening; nigredo in the intoxological crucible' of its music and its theory, infers a dark space that exalts transgressions.

The alignment of black metal and my performance translates to Denigrata Herself performing with power in a musical subgenre that does not want to give her any. The witch as restorative feminism means that Denigrata Herself can be read as a powerful woman existing and resisting in a masculine closed network of signification.

Whether Denigrata Herself is seen as a witch or the satanic antlered priestess, I call this restorative feminism because through my application of this powerful, othered female archetype to my black metal performance, I am able to exist and perform in that space with a more thorough understanding of the overt and covert patriarchal strategies and discourse that inform and inscribe that space. The archetype of the witch as performative mode means that Denigrata Herself and Manea can take up black metal space not just as women that are understood in patriarchal terms, but as witches whose performance erodes and corrupts its masculine, juridical laws. The witch is our code manipulation (Burns and Lafrance 48) and our restorative feminism. Through the witch as ontological representation, we bring feminism to black metal through active, matrifocal performance as fierce, terrifying women; 'we are the witchcraft, the practice of [it] is one of revolution and of the power of women' (Grey 16).

The value of this chapter is substantial because I have been able to get to the heart of the matter: women and black metal. The historical analysis of chapter three was necessary to lay the foundations and contextualise the field of inquiry in order for the content of chapter four to have traction. 4.a investigates women's excription by referencing some of the work already done in popular music, rock and metal but is yet really to examine women in terms of black metal. This positions the research on the precipice of tackling gender essentialism in the minutiae of black metal, from its aesthetics and representation to its compositional formats. Building on the work done by feminist musicologist Susan McClary, 4.a.i. offers new research for musicology, black metal theory, feminist theory and psychoanalysis. A compare and contrast between three musical examples represented by their sheet music allows the opportunity to extrapolate the building blocks of black metal composition, including a term coined by the research that expands upon the Baroque musical technique of

the basso continuo, that I call the basso continuo nero that occupies the same function as its Baroque forerunner but is specific to black metal composition.

In 4.a.ii, I examine women's representation in black metal by examining album art and what that means for modes of address and engagement which speaks to their artists themselves. In 4.b, women's inscription as performers is investigated by examining three differing examples that foreground women's involvement or creation of black metal and the problems that have become exposed through their engagement, as can be seen by the Myrkur example in particular. In 4.b.i, I bring the chapter back to my autoethnography and examine the archetype of the witch as a strategy for restorative feminism in black metal performance. This section offers new research in the fields of black metal theory, performance theory, feminist theory and occult studies.

This connects with the coterminous chapter through my interpretive performance autoethnography that examines my black metal band, Denigrata. The aesthetics, album art and photography, lyrical content and performances are used as the data for the research that examine black metal signifiers, Denigrata's perichoresis (Hunt-Hendrix 279), album structure as Niall Scott's apophatic liturgy (24) and imagery. The chapter concludes with the feminist psychoanalytic reading of Denigrata.

## Chapter Five

### Denigrata as Performance Analysis

This chapter has two sections; the first examines Denigrata in terms of the band's function as subversion of the black metal hegemony, its associated musical rupture and the art that has been produced. As the band has provided the data for my autoethnography and psychoanalytic analysis, it is valuable to document its meaning, representation with the correlate perichoresis (Hunt-Hendrix 279).

The second applies psychoanalysis to the band and my autoethnography in order to fully examine my experiences. By applying Butler and Kristeva I am able to achieve a deeper understanding of my role, of the band's performance and reception.

#### **5.a. Deterritorialising Black Metal Signifiers**

Much of what Lesourd, Hunt-Hendrix and black metal theory suggest resonates with Denigrata's desire for a structure, composition and aesthetic that incorporates some elements of the hyperborean but exists in the transcendental mode, a form of acknowledgement and gathering up in order to move forwards. The bipartite approach of interrogative and interpretive autoethnography can be seen in process in Denigrata as the hyperborean and transcendental; the hyperborean functioning as interrogative (past) and the transcendental as present/future (interpretive). The instrumental foundation is a key marker in terms of Denigrata's black metal delineation; it is not traditional and certainly would not be sanctioned within the orthodox hyperborean mode primarily because of the decision to use Ableton Live 9 instead a drummer. This has perhaps been the most recalibrating force of all and has already invited some invective from those who do not like or understand the decision. In gig reviews, it has been stated that because there is no drummer, the performance itself constitutes a problem because the function of Ableton was misunderstood. This therefore, led to confusion for reviewers as the drums represented some level of authenticity that Ableton did not. However, Denigrata do not compose or perform to please a crowd and, why should we? Why should anyone? Hunt-Hendrix questions, through his experience with Liturgy, whether or not to '[...] keep my mouth shut, so fans could have a more palatable experience overall' (284) but to do that would be to cast your own soul into the chthonic tar without the gratiae salutaris percipiendae of black metal to at least accompany you.

Extending from this, Denigrata use some recognisable hyperborean elements that function as timbral, phasic moments of stasis, momentum and intensity through the blast beat. To use it consistently however, creates intensity in perpetuity that exceeds its extremity by becoming audio wall paper, a backdrop only to the rest of the music. Hunt-Hendrix suggests that 'the pure blast beat is eternity itself. No articulated figures, no beginning, no end, no pauses, no dynamic range' (57-58). Denigrata's use of the blast beat is already a subversive (and therefore provocative) process as the action and timbre are removed from a traditional format and repositioned within a computer programme. Add to this glitch and soundscapes through the same programme, and we are instantly categorised outside of the hyperborean and therefore outside of the already sanctioned. The guitar texture and structure are more

recognisable in terms of the hyperborean because of my own compositional style. I am greatly influenced by the song structure and guitar technique of Arkhon Infaustus, Mayhem, Immortal and Darkthrone (hyperborean) whilst falling in love with the softer intervallic changes, broken chords and polyrhythms that explode into the burst beats of Wolves in the Throne Room, Der Weg einer Freiheit and Downfall of Gaia (transcendental). The liminal void that exists between the two black metal variants, where renihilation occurs offers an opportunity to deterritorialise black metal compositional signifiers, to precede the rules through creative action and transform the subject instead of being satisfied with a template already fixed and immovable. The timbres and function of the guitar patterns, the glitch and soundscapes along with the blast and burst beat recall Harman's 'black noise'.

This concept is crucial for Denigrata as the way glitch and soundscapes function compositionally and performatively force a rupture of traditional band structures by replacing the drummer with Ableton and its controller, its timbral alchemist. It is a breach that forges new lines of flight that bear temporal abyssic interstice, permeated with textural acousmatic and industrial samples launched live, investing the controller with conjuring potency, spinning and weaving sonic vistas that merge and intertwine with the melodic counterpoint of the guitars and bass. The black noise that this births, as Harman notes, is highly structured and controlled by shared incantations from the timbral alchemist to the other rhizomatic instrumentations, particularly the guitars.

The tremolo picking in Denigrata often hold over octaved chordal structures that incorporate elements of minimalism such as phasing and polyrhythms which is arguably more indicative of transcendental black metal; Wolves in the Throne Room and Der Weg einer Freiheit particularly. For example, in the last section of our 'Kyrie Eleison', B minor melodic arpeggiated chords are augmented on the octave every second and fourth bar to include a C natural whilst the rest of the chord remains in B minor. This timbral shift echoes transcendental compositional techniques and gives the effect of movement and stasis simultaneously. The beat shifts from blast to burst beat where the tremolo picking shifts to strumming to match the percussive bloom. Similarly, the riff structure of our 'Agnus Dei' echoes the minor melodic motifs of hyperborean black metal, much more cutting and harsh as broken chords and softer intervallic changes are exchanged for minor lead lines; Arkhon Infaustus and Darkthrone particularly. The two guitar parts playing single string melody lines that function contrapuntally in minor third intervals against a snare led blast beat that blooms into a blackened doom riff for the last section. Consequently, elements of both the hyperborean and transcendental modes are evident, moving from the '[...] atrophic [...] infinite and pure' of the hyperborean to the 'hypertrophic, finite and penultimate' of the transcendental (Hunt-Hendrix 54). Auyogard and Torgue characterise tremolo picking as, '*tremolo – a fast pulsation characterising the diffusions of a sustained sound, in the form of multiple repetitions articulated in discontinuous frequencies*' (qtd. in Blake 150). The dissonance created by phasing between augmented and/or diminished intervals against the temporal stasis and bloom of the blast-to-burst beat function autoethnographically as a sonic representation of my renihilation, of moving from the stasis of abuse to the bloom of subjective transformation.

### **5.a.i. Denigrata as Perichoresis**

Hunt-Hendrix defines perichoresis as ‘a total work of art, called Art Work, whose functioning, called perichoresis, maps music, art and philosophy onto three moments of dialectical becoming. Synthesising practices and concepts from different domains and traditions, the Perichoresis is an art/life process’ (279). The notion of the art-life paradigm is not a new one, as Dadaism demonstrates but the significance of Hunt-Hendrix’s hypothesis is that he is speaking from an intrinsically black metal *and* I believe autoethnographic position that not only facilitates the foundations of an emerging black metal artistic paradigm but also connects to autoethnography. His essay in *Mors Mystica* (279-292) speaks from his personal experience and subsequent critical engagement with his genesis and demarcation of black metal variants and the journey of his band. I identify with this duality, that of the black metal scholar and performer binary. Whilst he does not use autoethnographic models, he talks from his subjective experience. Consequently, his work contains key signifiers of autoethnography in all but name. However, what I draw from this position is a musical and conceptual framework to apply to my own autoethnography and black metal performance.

It is important therefore to examine Denigrata aesthetically because the imagery, album art, video and photography have been constructed with the music as the fundamental source of ideas. What I mean here is that the sonic and timbral representation and occupation of space has greatly influenced the associated perichoresis so that anything associated with Denigrata mirrors what is heard in the music. Matching the sonic to the visual is not something all popular music artists do but it is certainly an important thematic for black metal.

We chose our photographer and album artist very carefully and had long conversations with them about what we wanted to evoke, particularly the requiem mass format of the album that needed to reflect the album art. Both of them are prominent in the extreme metal scene for their work; Ester Segarra is the main photographer for Terrorizer, Metal Hammer, Decibel and Zero Tolerance magazines. She is also responsible for the album and live event photography for Mayhem, Gorjira, Opeth, Darkthrone and Myrkur. Matt Vickerstaff has done various art pieces for Trondheim Metal Fest, Earache Records, Peaceville Records, Listenable Records as well as the album art designs for Darkthrone’s upcoming album release, Morbid Angel, Behemoth, Thorns, Cradle of Filth, Mayhem and Deicide. We were lucky to work with two such prestigious artists considering Denigrata are an unsigned band, but it was done because it not only extended the perichoresis by using well known figures from extreme metal but it also lent a legitimacy to our art work and ensured a high level of quality. This quality assurance is important in terms of producing art that has been thoughtfully constructed which extended to Denigrata’s video as well. We could have opted for less expensive versions of our art works, for example not deciding to use a digipack for the album presentation or opting for a digital rendering for the video, instead of using black and white film. We have been clear from the outset that everything Denigrata produce, would be at the same level as a signed band because we wanted to produce the best perichoresis possible.

The intersecting concerns that coalesce within the perichoresis for Denigrata have meant a syncretism of potentially divergent yet consolidating elements such as gender representation, imagery, use of chiaroscuro, the pastoral in the photography and the video whilst acknowledging the key signifying markers of black metal and using them without falling into any clichéd traps or issues to which we are ideologically opposed, particularly Satanism or National Socialism. We were clear from the outset that our vision for Denigrata would be free from any NSBM associations and that fair and equal representation of band members was vital. Whilst various promoters have wanted to advertise us as ‘female fronted’, we have asked them not to do so because by foregrounding one gender over the other for promotional purposes does not do us any favours. The same is not done for bands that have a male vocalist, because it is a male dominated music form; the male becomes the default position and its masculinity becomes transparent.

By promoting us as ‘female fronted’, it foregrounds the gender of Denigrata Herself and Manea (keys and operatic vocals) and we are not the focus of the band when it comes to the reception of our live gigs. For our promotion, we wanted Denigrata to be understood as a unit, rather than a gendered pedestal. There is also a practical reason for this because from my experience, bands function better when they are a democracy, rather than a dictatorship; we did not want to elevate one band member over the others. Fair and equal say in decisions go hand in hand with fair and equal representation and this, we believe is the cornerstone not only of feminist practice but of a band that works well together. However, as Denigrata has developed, the two band members who have naturally taken control of the artistic direction have been Denigrata Herself and Manea. This has not been a conscious foregrounding, more a point of getting things done. We ensure that our promotional material and performance is understood as a unit, as stated above but in the artistic part of the perichoresis, both women have had very clear ideas about what was to be included.

### **5.a.ii. Denigrata’s *Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass in A Minor* as Apophatic Liturgy**

Recognising specificities of the hyperborean and transcendental modes in Denigrata demonstrates the fundamental value of renihilation as an artery for subjective transformation that reverberates with the fundamental values of autoethnography. The concept of renihilation itself offers a transformative process of moving from one state to another, from a position of stasis to dynamism. This notion is connected to Denigrata’s perichoresis through autoethnography because by surviving domestic violence I moved from victim to survivor and I understand this in renihilative terms. This then informs the total art work for Denigrata because as Hunt-Hendrix states ‘whatever name you want to give the pursuit of embodied subjectivity’ (282) underpins the way the art has evolved. I call my subjective embodiment my black metal performance; the nomadic shift from one negative space to a performative positivity happens through Denigrata.

When applying the concept of perichoresis to Denigrata, the aesthetics we employ require some focus. As a rhizomatic point of autoethnographic and musical engagement that speaks to an embodiment of black metal aesthetics, or Art Work, our album art and album photograph are included here. Denigrata’s album release *Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass*

*in A Minor* (21.11.2015) showcases seven songs that follow a canonically traditional requiem format; Requiem Aeternam (Rest Eternal), Kyrie Eleison (Lord, have Mercy), Dies Irae (Day of Wrath), Rex Tremendae (King of Glory), Confutatis Maledictis (from the Accursed), Lacrymosa (Lamentation) and Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).

The inspiration for this decision came from my obsession with requiem masses. Having performed three different requiems with my chamber choir at the University of Northampton (Mozart's Requiem Mass in D Minor 2013, Vivaldi's Gloria 2014, and Saint-Saëns' Requiem Opus 54 2015), the one that affected me the most was Mozart's. A requiem mass is 'a mass for the dead, its point is to pierce the veil between life and death' (Kennedy 527). Mozart knew he was dying whilst he began composition and it outlived him; his wife Constanza and his students finished it for him. This is why the whole requiem is in sonata form, the Lux Aeterna and Angus Dei mimicking the form and motifs of the opening Aeternum and Kyrie Eleison because they wanted to retain as much of his writing as possible, and this provided a cyclic closure to the piece. His fear of death, his sorrow and joy at life are woven into each musical motif and vocal line and having performed this myself in Chichester Cathedral as a soprano, I understood subjectively the effect this piece can have; conducting it gave me a different subjective experience. Denigrata wanted to take the meaning of each of the movements and ensure a similar representation was evoked in order for some sense of verisimilitude to be attained musically. This has also meant that the original Latin words from the four part harmony choir in the original are used in Denigrata.

Each of the seven movements has its own thematic and characteristic and we wanted to replicate that but on our own terms. I always wanted to compose a requiem but I had never thought it would take the form it has. The meaning of each movement has meant that our Aeternam is the least musically complex of the whole album, using a clear sonata form, chordal structures for the guitars and bass with the percussion using blast beats and one half time drop for the second part of the main motif. In relation to the rest of the music, this is the most 'restful'. We interpreted this in musical terms as 'standardised' or uncomplicated; this is the only time we use sonata form on the album. The Kyrie Eleison is hard to listen to, it offers little respite and this was one of the reasons we chose this track for our first single release through Pioneer Music Press and for our video. This track has been analysed in chapter four and its unrelenting blast beats only give way to an equally sonically harsh glitch section half way through. The only timbral respite comes right at the end of the track which is underpinned by Manea's opera line. The original's meaning of 'Lord, have Mercy' has been represented here as a sonic bombardment to the point of saturation which means when Manea's voice comes in, the beat drops to half time and the tremolo gives way to strumming patterns on the guitars and bass, 'mercy' is delivered at that point only, and not before.

The Dies Irae is our magnum opus on the album: it does not follow any traditional compositional structure and its main riff in the first half could be categorised as doom rather than black metal. This represents the 'Day of Wrath' insomuch as the complexity of the inverted minor triad in the verses, played one semitone apart between both guitars offers a jarring, uncomfortable engagement. When the chorus riff comes in it moves chromatically from Ab to C, G to B, F# to Bb to A using the rhythm of crotchet followed by a dotted

minim. The overall structure of this track is the most avant-garde on the album because we wanted to inject as much anger and fear into it as possible; by using non-standardised compositional formats and removing that familiarity, it destabilises the listener and makes them feel angry and unsafe. The musical affects of non-standard composing formats in canonical terms can be best represented by the first performance of Stravinsky's dodecaphonic *Symphony of Psalms* that 'had people fighting in the aisles' (Grundman 54). The use of semitones that the dodecaphonic system encourages steps away from tonality and evokes strong reactions from listeners. It was this sense of anger and fear that we wanted to capture and as one of our reviewers actually said, our Dies Irae frightened them.

The Rex Tremenda is the shortest piece but is the most reliant on Ableton. The key parts are embedded in the programme rather than having Manea play them because her vocals are the main focus. Denigrata Herself only plays guitars on this leaving the sense of 'glory' of the original to be carried by Manea's vocal lines, that see her hitting a top C (two octaves above middle C) as well as the A below middle C. This track has minimal key movement, starting in A and only moving to F. We wanted to keep this song somewhat restricted to allow the textural thickness of Ableton to be foregrounded alongside Manea's vocals. This is perhaps the darkest, most cinematic song on the album. This track flows straight in the Confutatis Maledictis (from the Accursed) and for me, the most complex to perform. The palm-muted down picking of the verses corresponds to syncopated screaming lines which are difficult to get right. I have to concentrate the most on this song because the syncopation between voice and guitar has to be in the pocket of the beat or it does not work. The original meaning is represented in this track by one of the only times English is used; in the bridge, I scream 'you're all gonna fucking burn in flames' which corresponds with the Latin used in the rest of the song where 'flamis accribus addictis' (you will perish in fierce flames) is screamed by Denigrata Herself and sung by Manea.

The Lacrymosa or lamentation is a slow, sorrowful piece that uses syncopated drop tempi throughout except for two verse sections where blast beats are used. The most significant part of this track is the break half way through where William Butler Yeats' *Second Coming* (1919) poem is whispered, pitch-shifted and sonically reversed (first inversion) underneath it to offer a sad yet twisted religious recrimination of lacrymosa's original Christian frame. The end of the track fades out with Manea singing 'lacrymosa' three times on her own, using semi-breves in a descending sequence from D, C, B and ending on the tonal centre of A. This stylistic foregrounds the lament element from the original. The final track, 'Agnus Dei' consists of two main sections; the first is hyperborean in its constructions, using tremolo picking and blast beats and a gruff delivery of the vocals by Denigrata Herself and Legivn (bass and backing vocals) whilst the main vocal line falls to Manea. The second section is a guitar and time signature counterpoint between Denigrata Herself and Cændél (guitars). One performs one melody line in 4/4 (common time) whilst the other plays a counter melody in a 3/4. This initiates the ending of the song that sees Manea singing 'e-is Domine' on a top E.

The liturgical frame for Denigrata's album is important and has been misunderstood by some reviewers. As can be seen in appendix ii, one reviewer from Absit Omen Zine, asked

us if we were Christian and that if we were, he would refuse to have anything to do with us. This was a very important point for us. Whilst our love for traditional requiem masses was more of a musical and existential engagement, the religion was something we aimed to subvert. The liturgical signifiers on the album are clear; the use of the original Latin, the movement structure and meanings could all be understood as praising God. However, it becomes subverted, or blackened through its relationship with Denigrata. Even the album title is a play on words: requiem mass or mass for the dead in Latin is *Missa pro Defunctis*. Denigrata however changed this to *Missa Defunctorum* or black mass, subverting the original and blackening its meaning<sup>10</sup>. This is a notion that I have constructed from working with Black Metal Theory and understanding how the perichoresis of black metal has a direct effect on the art it comes to represent; it becomes ‘blackened’. As David Prescott-Steed notes, this can happen when applying black metal to the everyday such as walking and listening to black metal, which he states, ‘fosters a kind of blackened walking’ (51) as the music directly effects your understanding of your immediate environment. I apply this notion to Denigrata’s version of the requiem mass; it has become *blackened*. Any recognisable elements of Christian liturgy in the album are to be considered blackened or as apophatic liturgy. Niall Scott states:

I am using the apophatic in the sense that black metal directs one to an understanding of the transcendent value of absence, nothingness and ultimate meaninglessness grounding one’s experience; where the enveloping noise of heavy metal refers to silence, rather than silence and absence having utility to refer back to liturgy. Where one may be confronted with inadequacy of language because of the obsession of trying to refer to things, in black metal, there is then no inadequacy in this use of noise and articulation as, there is no claim be made of trying to refer to something (i.e. God). (24)

This statement represents what the requiem has been for Denigrata; it was never intended to be a replica of Christian worship or orthodoxy, rather we wanted to access the music, silence and emotion and turn the dogma on its head. The blackening of the requiem through apophatic liturgical modes therefore, has been the intention. We were mindful of black metal’s preoccupation with Christianity and Catholicism but we were not prepared to be as obvious as bands such as Marduk or Mayhem; we wanted to confuse listeners ideologically so they really had to think hard and listen critically to identify what we were trying to achieve. To take Scott’s point further, the inadequacy of language is important; the noise of Denigrata and the use of a dead language have meant that the only way to identify with the album is through facing the difficulties in the music itself. The traditional use of a requiem is to try to refer to something, i.e. God, as stated above. Black metal is the antithesis of this idea; it is not trying to refer to anything except its own noise and its self-referentiality.

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<sup>10</sup> To echo this point, Latin is used frequently in black metal perhaps as a response to its anti-Christian position. Extending from this, the thesis uses Latin in some of its subheadings, exceeding its allusions to liturgy and marking it as apophatic.

I wanted to push the apophatic liturgy further for the album launch which took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2015. Denigrata performed the whole album by candlelight in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Northampton which is one of the only round churches still in existence in England. We performed our apophatic liturgy in a 900-year-old religious building and we were conscious of how this could be taken as blasphemy of ritual and of Christianity. Sonically, we used a 12K PA rig, which was an enormous speaker system because as Scott notes, the ‘distorted sound and volume envelop those present to such a degree that some leave the performance space physically not able to deal with the noise’ (25). As can be seen in the following figures, we also used a projector screen that sat at the back of the stage, in between two pillars that comprised of static, chiaroscuro images and glitch to make the event more immersive. As Scott suggests, we wanted people to feel they almost could not deal with what they were experiencing which meant we aimed at blackening their experience of a gig by the use of the setting, the volume of the music, the music itself and the blackened religious ritual. The aesthetics were carefully constructed and are represented in all of Denigrata’s perichoresis. In figures ii and iii our costumes, corpsepaint and other ritual accoutrements such as bird feathers (Manea) and antlers (Denigrata Herself) are there to build upon the piercing of boundaries, like the requiem mass itself. Wearing reified animal and bird parts (not real but replicas made from material and resin) embodies a notion I refer to as the *animalium*, the shrugging off of the human condition and returning to nature. It is the two women in the band that wear these adornments and this is examined further on. They are however, always worn at our live events.

Scott goes on to note that ‘the black metal event, the scene, the movement, persists in dealing with the misery of the human condition where Christianity gave it over to be privatised, individualised and removed from the public sphere into the confession box where one is neither alive nor dead, but suspended surrendering control’ (223). Denigrata’s use of the requiem mass also persists in dealing with misery and its clear subversion and blackening of Christian liturgy and ritual at performances and in our perichoresis, keeps it open and public. However, I would argue that individual listening through headphones shares some parallels with Scott’s demarcation of the confession box insomuch as existing and not existing in the world at the same time, for example walking whilst listening to black metal (Prescott-Steed 51), means a suspension of the everyday and a surrendering to sonic control of the music. Scott goes on to state:

In Black Metal in contrast to the Christian confession and absolution, there is no soul to be atoned, no restoration to God needed; instead it is an incantation into the void. The black metal event is a confession without the need of absolution, redemption, it is a venting, a bloodletting with no prospect of consuming blood [...] This is the Black Confession and the absence in black absolution [...] It is a move from the sin consumption and its loss to the stranger-void, from a worshipful liturgy of enslavement to a discourse, through a return of the sin to [...] abyss. The Black Metal event is a stranger returning from the void to collect and consume the misery of mankind. (231)

This statement summarises the necessity of black metal performance to be a consuming one, its venting offers an antithesis of the confession and positions the catharsis as subjective. This is something I examined earlier in this chapter where the very act of screaming is a purging of everything I want rid of. The act of screaming in a church is even more potent because it makes the confession consume itself. As Scott states, the black metal event is an incantation into the void; a black metal event in a church is welcoming the void into a Christian space, blackening any chance at absolution. This idea is also represented in our album art by two vulture headed priests placed in the centre of the layout. They are wearing ritualistic robes that allude to Christian liturgical symbolism but they are, like Denigrata Herself and Manea, merged with the animal world.

This connects with nomadic theory, examined in chapter four because it focuses on the act of becoming and aims to remove the sacerdotal authoritarianism of the hegemony and repositions that power with minorities. Braidotti states ‘nomadic thought [...] implies that the various empirical minorities (women, children, blacks, natives, animals, plants, seeds and molecules) are the privileged starting point for active and empowering processes of becoming’ (29-30). The vulture headed priests therefore, represent this removal of hegemonic power and shows its new placement nomadically. In our video for ‘Kyrie Eleison’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVr0rbXk25Y>) we extended the foundations forged through our album art and the album launch by setting it in the English pastoral in winter. We filmed using black and white film instead of digital so we were able to create a grainy, textual quality to the images. We also used forty-year-old camera lenses that were not cleaned to further add to this. We filmed on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2016 at Delapré Abbey, Northampton.

The director, Cavan McLaughlin, had already listened to the album and after many discussions with the band, knew that a narrative was not the way forward. Instead we focused on occult imagery, witchcraft and sigils (wood casting, black mirror scrying, walking through the wet soil) to provide continuity. The final scene of us emerging from the water is the same location where we did the photo shoot which provided us art object and biographical cohesion, rather than the video appearing as something separate. To build on the occult symbolism, we were lucky enough to have Alan Moore as a cameo in the video. He considers himself a magician and as he is Northamptonian, it was also important to locate our music and perichoresis as belonging here. The occult history of Northampton is something that I am currently researching so to have Alan involved was perfect. Alan lent a sense of authentication to the occult practice in the video and his understanding of their connection to our town, particularly *Voice of the Fire* (1996) and *Jerusalem* (2016), both of which are based in Northampton. The sense of occult ritual that the video presents speaks more widely of occult practice in black metal. Kenneth Granholm’s ‘Ritual Black Metal: Popular Music as Occult Mediation and Practice’ states:

Ritual Black Metal [...] [is] characterized by explicit, systematic, and sustained engagements with the occult. Members of this scene, particularly the musicians involved in it, not only demonstrate an interest in occult subject matter that surpasses

most of what came before, but explicitly claim their artistry to be an expression of the occult in itself—as divine worship or communion, an expression of and tool for initiatory processes, and/or an explication of seriously held beliefs. (5)

This statement offers evidence that Denigrata are not the only band who understands the occult in our music as something beyond imagery or symbolism. The occult ritual representations and apophatic liturgy in Denigrata's perichoresis coalesce with similar representations with bands such as Mayhem, Behemoth, Watain and SunnO))) (Granholm 23; Scott 16) however a significant differentiation is that of womanhood as represented by the witch in Denigrata as examined in chapter four.

The glitch-style editing of the images is perhaps the most startling element; it serves to fracture and fragment the visuals and time does not seem to behave in a normative way. This, we all felt, was important to the destabilising effects of Denigrata's perichoresis overall, to provide an immersive yet convulsing experience. To recall Scott's earlier point of creating a black metal event that is hard to endure, the video also functions this way. The scenes are cut to the beat of the blast beats and even I found that my heart was racing by the time video finished. The overall effect of the video is something we are overwhelmed with and we have had a positive response from the metal press (see appendix ii).



(fig. xxv) Album launch image 1. 2015.  
2. 2015.



(fig. xxvi) Album launch image



(fig. xxvii) Denigrata, *Missa Defunctorum*, album artwork by Matthew Vickerstaff, 2015.



(fig. xxviii) Denigrata's album photograph by Ester Segarra, 2015.

### **5.a.iii. Aesthetics in Denigrata**

As key artistic signifiers and representations of Denigrata that desire to emblematisse black metal aesthetics, both the album art and photograph seek to marry the visual with the audio, to provide artistic cohesion. As with Denigrata's music, evidence of the hyperborean and transcendental modes of black metal needed to be represented in our associated art so a clear aesthetic arc can be made from what is heard to what is seen. Chiaroscuro, corpse paint, the grotesque/abject, layered textures, stasis and movement, ritual as spectacle and the embodiment of nature offer the verisimilitude or authenticity of the foundations of Denigrata and black metal aesthetics.

Examining how each of these functions means identifying the modes through which the concept of Denigrata performs. The importance of chiaroscuro historically and in contemporary terms speaks to the hyperborean as the crucible of the art work formation. Nicola Masciandaro's notion of 'thrown conceptual space' (90-91) speaks to the bleak, melancholic un-colour that the harsh contrasts provide. The absence of colour grabs hold of the nothingness through the chiaroscuro of the conceptual space evident in both the album art and the photograph. Whilst the album art is a collage of gothic ritual and images of cruelty and nature, the abyssic proximities between them is also prevalent in the photo; the closeness of the images in the art and the closeness of nature to us in the photo connects us to the naturalised, voidic abstract of black metal.

Whilst Masciandaro uses his term in relation to melancholic (black biled) black metal, I extend its use to include the aesthetic function of Denigrata. Our thrown conceptual space is comprised of abyssic mise-en-scène that portray an unsettling, crawling feeling in the album art that then becomes more tightly focused in the photo. The positions of band members in the photo composition are imbued with a force of voidic ascendancy that chiaroscuro facilitates through its use of shadow. The chiaroscuro is also a physical transformative embodiment that has elevated my autoethnography through wearing corpse paint. Rather than desiring to emulate the immaculate and harsh lines of Immortal or Darkthrone, very much at the heart of the hyperborean aesthetic, the abstract messiness of Denigrata's corpse paint represents the burst beat in painted form. The locatable specificities of hyperborean corpse paint did not work for us because it did not mirror what we felt or what we performed.

Well known black metal performers have easily recognisable corpse paint, for example Abbath from Immortal or Fenriz from Darkthrone so in order to create something different, staying away from anything that emulated them was important. I also felt that the clean lines of Abbath or the tree like branches over blacked out eyes of Fenriz epitomised the masculinity of the second wave of black metal because they have become aesthetic archetypes. Denigrata Herself's corpse paint consists of blackness at the top of the face and covers the neck and is drawn down over white across the cheeks and chin. Black lips get smeared downwards and antlers are worn, piercing the veil of human construction and embracing the animal. This construct has helped me form the site for Denigrata Herself's representation as the chaos of trauma through a more impressionistic re-encoding of the corpse paint ideal; by creating an on-stage persona comprised of antlers and corpse paint, I

can put all of my abuse experiences inside it and use it for my performance. These aesthetic markers help me assume the character and take ownership of the catharsis. Consequently, the use of chiaroscuro and abstract corpse paint work towards creating Denigrata's thrown conceptual space.

The grotesque is important and is tied into the abject but both function dyadically in the album art and the photograph. The grotesque is visible in the vulture heads of the ritualistic priests, the merging of species within the recognised form of religious gowns and staffs in figure xxvii. The fragmented bodies and faces that appear in large and smaller forms portray subjective pain through the grotesque forms of their expressions and positions. Abstract brush strokes pull them together, 'expressing the deepest and self-dissolving relations between things' (Masciandaro 91). I locate the abject more firmly in the photograph. Denigrata Herself and Manea are already abject because of the hegemonic construction of gender and categorisation of women as other. The subversion, and therefore power reclamation seen here function autoethnographically as renihilative subjects of transcendence. Denigrata Herself's bearing of teeth fractures and causes a breach of patriarchy's gender essentialism because not only is the mouth active but the animalistic scream is ready to explode forth; the bearing of teeth is an invite to war, it is not a representation of hegemonic sex appeal where women in photographs are sexualised and passive. Wolf writes:

Why do women react so strongly to nothing, really – images, scraps of paper? Is their identity so weak? Why do they feel they must treat "models" – mannequins – as if they were "models" – paradigms? Why do women react to the "ideal," whatever form she takes at that moment, as if she were a non-negotiable commandment? [...] It is not that women's identities are naturally weak. But "ideal" imagery has become so obsessively important to women because it was meant to become so. Women are mere "beauties" in men's culture so that culture can be kept male. (59)

I was aware of this, as a woman being photographed and I wanted to confront this beauty ideal. I wanted Denigrata Herself to be read as having a strong identity, not a mere addition to the men's culture of black metal. The way I chose to stand and position my mouth were important; my legs are open but not sexually as is my mouth and I actually felt empowered by these realisations during the photo shoot. The positioning of the mouth is also indicative of the scream in the music and the autoethnographic subjective embodiment of trauma, represented by the facial contortion of haptic void rupture. Kristeva suggests '[...] does not fear hide an aggression, a violence that returns to its source, its sign having been inverted?' (38). I read Denigrata Herself as showing no fear here, the inversion has been consumed by aggression as the violence experienced subjectively is housed in a blackened performance conceptual space. The photo represents my intention to demonstrate the abject inverted, reconstituted and used for reclaimatory purposes; this is renihilation.

Stasis and movement, so prevalent in the music, is also represented in Denigrata's perichoresis. The stasis of the concrete images in the album art work is set against the movement of the crows and the lines emanating from the base of the circle, offering concepts of fluidity against the unyielding, motion against the motionless, the burst against the blast. In

the photo, the stasis is represented by the four band members standing as blackened monoliths under the swaying willow branches. The light reflecting off the water and the water itself, swirl and churn around the concrete arcs of our legs but where the main focus lies is the fluid arc that extends between Denigrata Herself's hands, as she apparently conjures a voidic potency from the waters she stands in. The function of water, the liminality of its surface abandons the more standardised hyperborean mode of 'snow-weighted pine forests, static mountains light cross-whipped grey with ice fog, tundra expanses, a *paysage d'hiver* of stagnant lakes and blizzard burials' (Sciscione 172). Instead, the water looks vibrant and alive, the black and white photography capturing the shades and movements in the ripples; I see this as the source for resurgence and renihilation subverting the hyperborean and transforms it to an affirmation of ritual spectacle and renewal. In Anthony Sciscione's 'Goatsteps behind my Steps...black metal and ritual renewal' (171-177) he states, 'the conductive violence that drives a system toward over-excitation or exhaustion is motivated by a dissatisfaction with medial states and a manifest lust for the intensity of transitions, ceding or forcing a system to cede to a radical alterity that reconfigures identity by destroying and overtaking'. Denigrata's album photo converge assemblages of trauma and violence and manifests its lust in renihilation, the magnitude of flux as we stand in the water, flooded by the rejection of medial states and the cradling of subjective transformation; the ritual renewal as spectacle is captured in the photo by the embodiment of nature.

Denigrata has been forged from love by every member of the band. The need to capture the abyss that recalls Scott's 'abyssstopia' (79) as perichoresis is at the blackened heart, the *denigrata cervorum* of Denigrata. Its apparent negation of positive emotions is typical of black metal but it exceeds its boundaries, making them fold in on themselves. As Brad Baumgartner notes 'black metal performs an apophasis of ontological arguments for love, unknowing them to their meontological brink. Being itself, must enter the Eternal fire in order to scorch itself into non-being, where divine love radically opens onto everything' (80).

### 5.b. Denigrata: The Parallax View

This section draws on the work of Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva in order to identify and analyse autoethnographic epiphanic moments that foreground specificities of engagement for me as Denigrata Herself. I have called it 'the parallax view' because 'parallax can be defined as the apparent displacement of an object, caused by a change in observational position' (Žižek 8). As I am applying two theorists to Denigrata, this dichotomous position serves to offer a differentiation in how the content for analysis is to be understood. Butler's subject as representation, performativity and corporeality are of particular importance alongside her text *Giving an Account of Oneself* that I believe can be read in autoethnographic terms. She states, 'that the gendered body is performative [which] suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (136). This position informs and analyses what Denigrata Herself does in terms of performance but also how the associated corporeality of that performance 'disrupts the regulatory fiction of hegemonic coherence' (137).

Furthermore, Kristeva's abjection, the corpse and theory of the deject, are applied in order to focus the analysis on the fear or phobia that is generated by matrifocal black metal performance. As Kristeva notes, 'a dark, abominable, and degraded power when she keeps to using and trading sex, woman can be far more effective and dangerous when socialised as wife, mother, or career woman. The unbridling is then changed into crafty reckoning, hysterical spells turn to murderous plots' (168); Kristeva's choice of language is of particular note as it uses the same semantic field I use in 5.b.iv to discuss Denigrata Herself and Manea; fear of the self-embodied woman as an active force is an important part of this analysis and is aided by Kristeva's work on woman as abject. This relates to my research because if I identify with any of Kristeva's categories, it is career woman. I can be far more dangerous and affect change in the role of musician.

Both theorists' positions are feminist psychoanalysis and their work on gender binaries, identity and horror serve to support the analysis of matrifocal black metal performance.

### **5.b.i. Butler and Denigrata: Subject Representation**

*Vignette 1.*

*I just had confirmation from [redacted] at Eradication Festival in Wales about Denigrata playing on the Friday evening. I sent over our tech list that showed what equipment we used and who used it. I get a message from the organiser straight after this, knowing he'd just been on our social media page saying sorry, we could no longer play. When I asked why, he was unable to give me straight answer. Having friended him a week before on Facebook, I'd been pretty horrified by some of his posts' outright sexism but left it because we wanted the gig. Now however, it seemed clear to me why he'd pulled us from the bill.*

*Vignette 2.*

*We were playing with a band we all really admired at Scruffy Murphy's in Birmingham. The other two bands sound checked and everything seemed well. We sound checked and it was problematic; we kept asking the sound guy to change the volume on the monitors, the vocal mics and the guitar but he just wasn't listening. I asked him directly over the mic to sort the sound out. I was trying to keep my mounting frustration out of my voice but still, he clearly didn't give a shit. He was, however, great with the other bands. During our set, I noticed him sat in the sound booth, playing on his phone, rather than actually engineering our sound. After a terrible gig sound-wise, I asked him why he hadn't even turned the monitors on. His response was dismissive at best.*

*Vignette 3.*

*We got to the Unicorn in Camden to sound check and discovered the sound engineer was a woman! We were so happy about this, I even went up to her and said how great this was, gave her some feminist spiel about lack of representation yada yada. She seemed cool and we did a good sound check. We were all enjoying ourselves and the time had come to put our outfits and corpse paint on, ready for the gig. When it was over, I went back and shook her*

*hand to say thanks and she blatantly did not want to do this, she actually pulled her hand away. I thought this was weird but carried on loading the kit out of the venue, A few days later, some video footage emerged of our set and not only were my vocals turned down but so was my guitar; everyone else's sound was great.*

My autoethnography focuses on ‘woman as subject’, on ‘me as woman as subject’ and whilst this does not constitute a category, it does provide a narrative of experience and representation in a field that is masculinist, which would serve to obliterate that experience. Black metal, as previously examined in chapters three and four, is a masculinist network of signification and women’s lack of category and visibility is present because of its absence. Whilst this frame ‘questions the viability of the subject as the ultimate candidate for representation’ (Butler 1), women’s representation in black metal matters. It matters because I ‘do’ black metal, I perform it, I compose it, I engage with it and it matters to me. Black metal’s juridical system is visible whenever Denigrata perform live, get reviewed or interviewed. It is even more visible in the smaller performance-related minutiae shown in the vignettes. At first, I thought they were singular events that I could shrug off but now that I have nearly two years of experiencing this, the patriarchal orthodoxy of it is undeniable, visible and pervasive.

As I examined in chapter three, the second wave of black metal provides the juridical systems of power through its musical and aesthetic signifiers, against which Denigrata are judged. Foucault states that ‘juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent’ (qtd. in Butler 2) which suggests that second wave orthodoxy functions in parallel with the way the hegemony reproduces subjects in its own image. Those who do not perform to these standards are to be ridiculed, hated and dismissed. I naively thought that being a musician was enough to disrupt this hegemonic production, but it is not. Butler states:

Juridical power inevitably “produces” what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of “a subject before the law” in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalised foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law’s own regulatory hegemony. It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of “women”, the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought. (2)

This statement demarcates the paradox: the production capabilities of juridical power produce subjects in its own image. How one understands the category of woman within this frame will inevitably produce a dead end as one cannot seek liberation through the same system that created the subjugation.

Whilst I can argue that women’s representation in black metal matters, and that subjectively it is something I actively do something about, acceptance by that system is

unattainable because Denigrata disrupts more than it reproduces. There are two key signifiers in Denigrata that represent juridical disruption; having Ableton instead of a drummer and having women in prominent musical and performative roles. Butler asks, ‘do the exclusionary practices that ground feminist theory in a notion of “women” as subject paradoxically undercut feminist goals to extend its claims to “representation”?’ (5) but I would argue that ignoring those exclusionary practices is done so at a cost. For example, we do not go to a gig consciously prepared to deal with personally experienced sexist behaviour or elitist metal attitudes but we encounter them nonetheless; of course, we are always aware of the juridical nature of black metal but it always comes as a nasty surprise to experience it first-hand. We are then left to navigate them in order to get the performance done and not waste our time.

As the vignettes illustrate, ‘these domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes’ (4). Playing music is emancipatory; it is a liberating experience, whilst you are in the practice room. Once that activity is removed from an isolated, self-regulated environment and placed within the male-controlled live event roster, those domains of exclusion reveal themselves as regulatory and coercive. The regulatory can be applied to all three vignettes because our tech line up differs from every other band on the underground extreme metal scene therefore creating a problem as far as gig organisers and sound engineers are concerned. They regulate in terms of what they are prepared to deal with. The coercive can be applied to vignette two and three because sound engineers, regardless of what I ask of them, will give us what they think is needed sonically and we are therefore coerced into capitulating in order to get the performance done.

Sexist behaviour intersects the pragmatics of the live event because as in vignette two, the other all male bands were listened to by the sound engineer and Denigrata was not. In vignette three, a much more complex female to female internalised sexism occurred that demonstrated that having a woman sound engineer does not guard against sexist interactions. Since the Unicorn gig, I have tried to analyse the interaction to see whether or not I can understand it. During the sound check, I did not identify any problematic behaviours or interactions from the sound engineer towards me or any other band member. After we had played however, was when I located the difference which leads me to conclude there was something about the live performance that triggered this change. It is not as simple as not liking the music, I am sure in her professional capacity she has had to engineer a great many bands she does not like or is indifferent to. That does not prevent the sound engineer doing an effective job. As was evidenced by the subsequent video footage, it was only my role that was turned down in the front of house mix, nobody else’s. Her behaviour towards me, as shown in vignette three helped me to identify it as a moment of problematic engagement. I do not know whether to classify it as sexist, perhaps it was that she simply did not like me or what I was doing musically. I certainly came away from the encounter wanting to categorise it as such because it made me feel the same way when I have been treated poorly by male sound engineers. Nevertheless, I had made a mistake in assuming any sexism at the gig would be ameliorated by women in structural positions such as event organiser or sound engineer.

Butler states that ‘the suggestion that feminism can seek wider representation for a subject that itself constructs has the ironic consequence that feminist goals risk failure by refusing to take account of the constitutive powers of their own representational claims’ (4). This statement suggests that even though I had unquestioningly invested solidarity with a woman in the scene who was in a position of power, this was not a guarantee of any feminist reciprocity. I therefore, identify this as a failure in feminist goals to recognise and take account of the constitutive powers that we were both functioning within. Butler adds ‘this problem is not ameliorated through an appeal to the category of women for merely “strategic” purposes, for strategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended [...] by conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation’ (5). I had assumed that the female sound engineer was a feminist, I had assumed that through representational politics (her in a traditionally male role as sound engineer, me as in a traditionally male role as front person and guitarist) that this coalescence (female position of power = feminist) meant an articulated stable subject. I was wrong. My feminism may not have been her feminism and thus it has become open to gross misrepresentation, which by extension asks, ‘what sense does it make to extend representation to subjects who are constructed through the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject?’ (6).

As a point of comparison, Manea’s subjective experience differs from mine and she has not experienced what I have. We have discussed this at length. Whilst the impacts of examples in the vignettes were felt by the whole band, the sexist minutiae were directed at me. This could be because I am the front woman and as such could be considered the spokesperson for the band, although this is an external assumption as this has not been agreed internally. Extending from this however is the notion of musical roles. For example, Manea performs musically engendered feminine roles in Denigrata, that of soprano vocals and keys. Both of these historically have signified a feminine engagement in terms of musical constructions of gender and sexuality. Susan McClary states:

Beginning with the rise of opera in the seventeenth century, composers worked painstakingly to develop a musical semiotics of gender: a set of conventions for constructing “masculinity” or “femininity” in music [...] Moreover music does not just passively reflect society: it also serves as a public forum within which various models of gender organisation (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated. (8)

Manea’s role as a soprano coloratura would suggest that she carries with her, in her performance and representation a gendered legacy whose specificities in historic examples demarcate the femininity of the soprano role. That representation has also been characterised by madness, hysteria and erotic mania. Effective examples of these constructions can be found in Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, Monteverdi’s *Lamento della Ninfa* and *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. These examples, as McClary suggests, present and re-present over time the construction of femininity as other in opera. In Denigrata, Manea’s performance serves to re-encode this

gender essentialism by using the representation of the witch to reclaim power, which is of course her assertion. However, in terms of how she is engaged with at our live events, she is seen to perform a historically encoded feminine role. She has said to me that she has not experienced any negativity but similarly has recognised that my role seems to invite it. Again, this is a gendered engagement because I am fulfilling a perceived masculine role and I feel the pressure of ‘you should not be doing that’ whenever we play live.

This has led me to identify relationships between dominant masculinist structures that are visible through specificities of engagement. The domains of exclusion that are made more complicated because the domain that presents itself as emancipatory, the live gig, is actually a domain of exclusion, only revealing its regulatory and coercive structure when directly engaged with by a band like Denigrata. Butler states ‘the identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics, if the formation of the subject takes place within a field of power regularly buried through the assertion of that foundation. Perhaps, paradoxically, “representation” will be shown to make sense for feminism, only when the subject of “women” is no-where presumed’ (6). This statement supports why Denigrata refuse to be promoted as ‘female-fronted’ because this categorisation presumes the subject of woman, that this representation takes place within a field of power that regularly seeks to bury it through the assertion of that foundation. We are emancipated from this representation only when ‘the subject of “women” is no-where presumed yet it is down to us as a band to ensure this happens otherwise Denigrata would be known as a ‘female-fronted’ band and its matrifocal (Sonnex 35) structure would be ignored. The difference between these two terms is that female fronted means female vocalist/front woman and the rest of the band are male. Whenever this term is used it carries with it a number of assumptions: the woman is there to sell the music, she sings because she cannot play any instruments and that the music is probably bad as a result (Loudwire.com). Matrifocal on the other hand, means that there is a mix between men and women in the band but men do not get the final say. As the term suggests, the structure of the band focuses on the women. Woman as subject in black metal and autoethnography means to focus these points of convergence by giving an account of oneself.

### **5.b.ii. Giving an Account of Oneself: Butler and Autoethnography**

Judith Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself*, offers an important addition to my research. This is not a purposeful theoretical text but more of an autoethnographic reading of her life and work. This resonates with me because of how I can see my own performance through her theoretical positions but also because here, she embraces a subjective writing position. She does not call it autoethnography but it is a personal, honest and open text that shares parallels with my own autoethnographic research position. Her work identifies the pitfalls, problems and hesitations in critically commenting and researching, or me-searching one’s own self as data. She states:

If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognisable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life. But this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or not mine alone. And I will, to

some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognisable. The narrative authority of the ‘I’ must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story’. (37)

Butler identifies some of the key issues facing autoethnographic research; the problem of the meaning bearer ‘I’ that I analyse in section 5.a.ii, the narrative authority that faces temporality issues, forgetfulness and gaps and the problem of making yourself recognisable. These are all things I have experienced in my own autoethnographic research, something Butler calls ‘the irrecoverability of an original referent [that] does not destroy [the] narrative’ (37). The telling and re-telling of your subjective narrative is often subject to change, alterations, embellishments or omissions, depending on who the listener is and finding effective ways to critically engage with your own subjective narrative demonstrates how necessary autoethnography is. Butler adds ‘the story of my origin I tell is not one for which I am accountable, and it cannot establish my accountability. At least, let’s hope not, since, over wine usually, I tell it in various ways, and the accounts are not always consistent with one another’ (17). Autoethnography suggests however that accountability, verisimilitude to an exact original story and alterations in mystory-telling is part of a significant process; it is not biographical illusion as Butler seems to suggest, but more a bibliographical system of production. The ‘self’ is a consubstantiation with autoethnographic writing; it co-produces rather than presents a story of a person that life happens to. Montaigne states:

In modelling this figure upon myself, I have had to fashion and compose myself so often to bring myself out, that the model itself has to some extent grown firm and taken shape. Painting myself for others, I have painted my inward self with colours clearer than my original ones. I have no more made my book than my book has made me - a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life. (qtd. in Denzin 504)

This statement highlights one important idea that demonstrates that Butler’s text is perhaps nearly autoethnographic, but not quite. She seems to show a reticence for the difficulties of mystory-telling, the hesitations, gaps and alterations in telling her story prevent a strict linear narrative that holds up under close examination. That is not what autoethnography is. Biographical cohesion ignores a ‘person as a cultural creation’ (Denzin 43), overlooking the ways that people and their stories constantly evolve and any illusory signifiers are just as important as verisimilitude. The multiple narrative model that Butler appears to be struggling with, offers a ‘triangulation or combination of biographical methods [that] ensure that performance, process, analysis, history, and structure receive fair and thorough consideration in any inquiry’ (Spry 35). It is impossible to engage with autoethnography without recognising the issue of ‘which self am I performing?’ (Burke 274). This is something I analyse in chapter one whilst the doubling of the self creates as many problems as it tries to solve, the ultimate concern of the myth of the unified autoethnographic subject is valuable to my research and perhaps more generally. Lather suggests ‘the unified speaking subject with full access to her thoughts and intentions is a myth’ (22) and in fact to support this idea, Butler herself notes in 1990, that even though ‘performance appears to

express prior intention, a doer *behind* the deed, the prior agency is only legible as the effect of that utterance' (227).

Denzin states that 'the mystory is simultaneously a personal mythology, a public story, a personal narrative, and a performance that critiques' (60). The importance of the subjective narrative as autoethnographic data means a foregrounding of 'mystory' over the dominant discourse that favours objectivity. This seems to herald a differentiation in Butler's understanding or conceptualisation of objective reality as objectively constituted. Stanley and Wise state:

We have characterised [...] approaches to women's experience as positivist and structural and involved in 'adding women in' [...] These [...] approaches have at their heart the belief that experience is frequently wrong or not objectively true. For them, social reality can be conceptualised and researched in much the same way as physical reality can – for them it exists as 'out there' as objectively constituted and discernible [...] From the perspective of women and women's realities, this is disastrous. This is precisely what we have been on the receiving end of for too long: other people, 'experts', telling us how it is and we *should* be experiencing it, if only we weren't failures, neurotics, stupid, *women*. (136)

Whilst Butler generally makes clear that her work is contingent and part of a wider conversation between theories and theorists, the objective-as-true writing position from this statement can be seen in Butler's writing position in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* from 1990. Her autoethnographic text was published in 2005 and the shift from academic objective to autoethnographic subjective is significant. This alteration mirrors my own change in theoretical positioning, as being able to foreground my own experience as *meaning something* is a crucial part of feminist practice and research. It allows women to recover the 'irrecoverability of the original referent' (37) and for a personal mystory to gain credibility. It can be argued that Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* shows the 'intrusion of self into the role' (Stanley and Wise 108) of an established gender theorist.

The importance of Butler producing a text such as this means it provides a syncretism of feminist psychoanalysis with an autoethnographic response to her position that is similar to my own. The significance of the self recognising the self in feminist research foregrounds the value of the subjective narrative, that as Stanley and Wise previously noted, is vital when "experts" [are] telling us how it is and we *should* be experiencing it, if only we weren't failures, neurotics, stupid, *women*' (136). Butler's previous work on gender as corporeal performance connects deeply with autoethnographic research. Tami Spry states 'the body in performance is blood, bone, muscle, movement. The performing body constitutes its own interpretive presence. It is the raw material of a critical cultural story. The performed body is a cultural text embedded in a discourse of power' (18-19). This statement connects Butler's position to autoethnography and coalesces with my own research position through the meaning constructed through and on the surface of the performing body: the various acts that make up the reality of a gender performance autoethnographically offers meaning as a performative, cultural text.

### **5.b.iii. Performativity and Corporeality**

It can be argued that a person outwardly expresses the gender they choose to perform. Butler identifies that gender is performative, and that gender expression is not necessarily the same as gender attribution. That performance, however constructed, is the exterior manifestation acted out on the surface of the body, in other words, it becomes represented corporeally. She states:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause. Such acts [...] generally construed are performative in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs [...] that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (136)

I understand this in terms of not only gender as corporeal performance but also how I perform that gender on stage. I extend Butler's concept here to include a corporeality of a physical stage performance that is a total corporealisation that exceeds and confuses the essentialist gender binary. I am a woman who wears a costume on stage that exaggerates some feminine markers such as make up (albeit in the exaggerated form of corpse paint) and long hair (a feminine marker adopted by men in the scene as a subversive, anti-hegemonic symbol). Added to this, the animalium of antlers serves to exceed hegemonic constructs of femininity by aligning the gender performance with an animal representation. Then there are the black metal markers such as corpse paint, and screaming vocals which impose a historically masculine frame onto the composite.

The final confusion is represented by my function on stage, as front woman and guitarist, in that I usurp a traditionally masculine role. All of these various acts that constitute my performance function as a hybrid that exceeds my ontological status as 'woman' or 'musician'. As Denigrata Herself, I do not consciously foreground the masculine or the feminine yet I seem to embody a composite on stage, some of which is about presentation and some is about activity. My corpse paint and antlers speak to a performance of appearance and women's representation on stage inasmuch as I'm not wearing a dress, make up that enhances my features or high heels. My face is essentially covered in messy chiaroscuro, my wig hides my real hair and I wear biker boots. In terms of my activity, my guitar playing occupies the majority of my movement on stage and as I am the main vocalist, this means I cannot move far away from the microphone which is usually directly in front of me. The activity therefore is focused directly on my hands and mouth, the perceived masculinity encoded into both of these activities is subverted by a woman performing them. These various markers constitute my reality for the time I am performing with Denigrata.

I acknowledge an antagonism between Butler's statement and the importance of autoethnography. If, as suggested, the various acts that constitute reality are removed from the gendered body, then that body has no ontological status. What constitutes that reality

then, needs unpacking. The various acts that constitute my reality on stage as Denigrata Herself are the performance of that construct. The various acts that constitute my reality as me, I find to be much more difficult to navigate; I am quite an introverted person so negotiating my normal every-day life feels more complex. However irrespective of which one I am at any given time, this does not remove my ontological status simply because those acts that constitute my reality change. There is a nomadic fluidity to these signifying acts that have more in common with the understanding that objective reality is subjectively manifested. Stanley and Wise suggest:

While recognising that objective social reality exists, at the same time ethnomethodology suggests that what this ‘objective reality’ is, will be contextually grounded and specific. It won’t be something that is objectively true for all people at all times, but is instead the result of specific sets of encounters, events, behaviours. So it recognises that many competing objective realities coexist and that we all of us [...] have methods for producing accounts-held-in-common-between-us. (142)

If objective reality cannot be ‘objectively true for all people at all times’, then Butler’s understanding of what constitutes a gendered ontological reality is open to interrogation. That is not to say that an ‘interior and organising gender core’ (136) is not present but how that manifests itself corporeally does not necessarily mean a lack of ontological status. Given Stanley and Wise’ observation on the nature of objective reality, the accounts held in common between us can be understood through the gendered body as nomadic. It is through these accounts that ontological status is conferred. Simply because a person does not perform their gender corporeally at all times as a constant, does not remove their ontological status or mean they are performing a fantasy. Butler does acknowledge that reality can be ‘fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject’ (136).

I would argue however, that this position does not fully take into account the significance of the subjective narrative foregrounded by autoethnography. For example, my performance as Denigrata Herself can be understood as a type of quasi-drag performance but not because I am dressing up as a man. I wear a wig and stage make-up that can be understood as male to female drag but this invites another layer of subversion because I am a woman doing it. I acknowledge that this would not constitute drag to most people but they perhaps would not understand the way I feel as Denigrata Herself. The wig enhances feminine signifiers (long hair) and the stage make-up demarcates black metal aesthetic markers (corpse paint). I perform a masculine role on stage because I am filling a traditionally masculine activity, as guitarist and vocalist. These acts, whilst I am on stage, constitute my reality for that moment, as a gendered hybrid or compound that I understand as Butlerian fantasy; my interiorities and my exteriorities finding for that one moment on stage integrity of the subject. Instead of a public regulation of that fantasy through surface politics of the body, my gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, institutes the “integrity” of my subjectivity. I feel at one with my performing body.

For me at that moment, that is my subjective reality and as is examined earlier in this chapter, this creates the importance and value of my autoethnographic performative text. This recalls the earlier section in 5.a.iii that analyses the doubling of the self and it is this recognition that prevents the various acts that constitute my reality to remain fixed and static. Interestingly, this doubling is a layered practice that uses my existing body as a foundation to build Denigrata Herself and arguably my body presents some fixed gender issues. I identify as a cis woman in my every-day life and it is upon my identification that my stage performance is constructed. I recognise that even categorising myself in these terms is problematic but my gender performance as the normal every-day me is not my focus. Denigrata Herself presents a complex gender composite that, I feel, is more of a unifying subject, than a discrete or exclusionary one. Denigrata Herself's ontological status is nomadic, moving between the various acts that constitute reality of the gender binary and the 'fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs' (136) in order to create a unifying subject. When I am Denigrata Herself, I am not female or male, I perform both. The binary co-exists within a matrifocal frame, the fabrications are themselves sustained through the various acts of my corporeal signs.

My autoethnographic subjectivity means that whilst some of what Butler states is true, the nomadic nature of my subjective reality means what constitutes my gendered performativity changes. Butler states that 'drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender' (137). I find that through my on-stage performance, my psychic interiorities become my exteriorities, because I put so much into my screaming. However, this is not done to subvert any distinctions and nor is it done to mock the expressive model of gender, I do it more as a merger to present a unified and signifying subject. This is what I call total corporealisation and it is also subjective. Other people may not connect with this idea or take it seriously, but it is about how I feel when I am on stage. I understand that it can be understood as Butler's 'parodic identity' (137) but I do not feel that I am attempting parody or pastiche of gender in my performance. Rather, it is about my corporeality, of the way I move my body with my guitar on and the way my composite gender representation is conveyed that constitute the markers of my ontological status whilst I am playing. I am a woman exceeding some feminine markers whilst occupying a masculine role by using black metal performance as my performative vehicle. This quasi-drag nomadic decussation does not prevent my ontological status, it means that the various acts that constitute my subjective reality change whether I am Denigrata Herself or I am me.

This is perhaps why I get such specified behavioural and attitudinal responses, as evidenced in the vignettes. Denigrata Herself, as a liminal gendered performer invites negative reactions because the construct exceeds and complicates the essentialist gender binary as 'accounts held in common' by those at Denigrata's live events. The dual function of guitarist and front woman is important because I feel if I was just a vocalist or I went back to being just a guitarist, the gendered response would be less complicated. I have been a metal guitarist for the last fifteen years and I have never had such complicated interactions with people at gigs as I do now. It is as if by putting two traditionally masculine roles (guitar,

vocals) into one woman however constructed, it is too much and invites invective. I have examined my own behaviour in relation to the vignettes, I have asked my band whether or not I behaved unprofessionally and they have all said no. This leads me think therefore, that, just like Myrkur's example in chapter four, Denigrata Herself is disliked not because of poor performance. The musical performance is well-crafted, in time and well-executed; Denigrata rehearse every week and are always prepared for live events. This then, leaves the aesthetics as the point of negative coalescence. Denigrata Herself's corporeal performativity as a unifying gendered subject disrupts gendered expectations and creates a 'disorganisation and disaggregation [that] disrupts the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence' (Butler 136) and the essentialist binary of gender construction. The performative corporeality then, is the nexus point.

I extend Butler's definition of corporeality to identify with avant-garde composer, Harry Partch's use of the term. According to Navid Bahrizan, 'He conceptualized "corporeality" as an art form where music joins dance, acting, voice, gymnastic, staging, lighting, and the sculptural beauty of the musical instruments to depict the essence of the drama' (23). The physicality of Partch's position coalesces with Butler's use of the term to mean physical performance and creative transcendence. She suggests that to 'consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an 'act', as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning' (139). This connects with Partch's definition through body performance as a significant site for the construction of meaning that can occur on 'the surface of the body' (136). Denigrata Herself represents the conjoining of both Butler and Partch's definition and application of corporeal performativity not only in terms of gender performance but the musical and corporeal representation of that gendered performance and how it becomes an art form on stage. For me, that art form performed on stage has created a theatre of catharsis as it is my 'performed text is lived experience [...] the performance doubles back on the experiences previously represented in the writer's text. It then re-presents those experiences as an embodied performance' (Denzin 60). Through writing about my experiences that lead me to starting Denigrata, it has facilitated embodied subjectivity that I realise through my corporeal performativity. It has not been an easy task because writing and performing do not represent my whole discourse.

### **5.c. Denigrata as Abjection: Fear and Loathing in Black Metal**

Between the subject and the object, lies the abject. Not 'the object facing me, which I name or imagine [that] makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it; what is *abject* [...] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses' (*The Powers of Horror* 2). For Kristeva, the abject is fear and disgust as a response to a signifying system of feminised processes, the repugnance of bodily functions that prevent a clean and proper body being maintained. It is patriarchal revulsion at the female body as the point of origin and its ability to 'disturb identity, systems, [and] order' (4). The female body abjects and causes abjection, that abjection is 'a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who

sells you up, a friend who stabs you...' (4). It is a dark, seething liminality that 'does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules'.

Much of Kristeva's work in *The Powers of Horror* re-reads Freudian psychoanalysis in order to ameliorate its masculinist orthodoxy by providing a different theoretical position. She states:

To each ego its object, to each superego its abject. It is not the white expanse or slack boredom of repression, not the translations of desire that wrench bodies, nights, and discourse; rather it is a brutish suffering that "I" puts up with, sublime and devastated, for "I" deposits it to the father's account [...]: I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other. A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. (2)

This statement highlights patriarchy as the dominant structure and discourse against which Kristeva's 'I' suffers, the uncanniness of a woman's body as home and lover and site for devastation. I feel that devastation, that patriarchy has left me as a nomad. She states that the 'abject and abjection [...] are primers of my culture' (2). They are also mine.

Kristeva's use of the performative, meaning-bearer 'I' in her work means that subjectivity is foregrounded in her theoretical analyses. Butler separates her arguable autoethnographic 'I' between her texts, Kristeva uses her subjective writing position to speak directly to and from her emotional self. What I find particularly engaging is how her use of 'I' merges the theoretical with the autoethnographic, allowing an immediate identification of her 'self' in the text. And it is a furious self that declamatorily states 'not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing significant, and which crushes me' (2). Through my analysis in sections 5.a to 5.b, I had to work hard to move from one place of abuse to another, more liberating space and whilst that has offered me musical meaning, the vignettes in 5.c.i show that perhaps the meaning or validation I was seeking is not there, and it too, crushes me.

### 5.c.i. The Corpse

Much like Kristeva's use of the corpse, that functions as the epitome of the abject, I feel that at live shows, 'the most sickening of wastes, [...] a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled' (3-4). The corpse abjects, as my performance as Denigrata Herself, also abjects. I have had to ask myself whether I lose more than I gain by performing, and whether or not this is an abjection of the self, a form of 'abasing herself' (5) that goes too far.

Semantically, Denigrata Herself as a stage name means 'to denigrate herself' and initially I took this title as a means to create a strategy of resistance, to perform back to the masculinity of black metal and wider culture; if I give myself that name, then I deny any potential haters their ammunition. After two years of this performance however, it is the

Kristevan corpse that is forming, through rejection and negativity of that performance. In my desire to be the ‘I ‘who expels, I have screamed so much that in so doing, I feel that I am trying to grasp hold of what’s left. Benveniste states “” I” signifies the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing “I”” (218) but the ‘I’ has become exhausted by my containing discourse, it now exists as an empty signifier. My referentiality in this statement is constructed through the use of the performative ‘I’, and as Elbaz suggests, ‘my personhood is not in this line. The pronoun “I” is a shifter, and its only reference is in the discourse that surrounds it’ (6). My ‘I’ has shifted from meaning something to meaning nothing.

Even the corpse paint does not protect me from the negativity of the live event, although as a mask it helps to deflect. As Denigrata Herself, I am ‘the corpse, seen without God [...] the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life’ (4). And I suppose that is what black metal is meant to be, death masquerading as life. As Drew Daniel writes ‘corpse paint is a performative melancholic technology through which the notional certainty of a future status of being dead can be borrowed upon and brought into the lived present: an epidermal vacation into the future’ (44). The suspicion I experience at gigs feels like a removal of my existence in that space, so the dead-as-living-as-dead function of corpse paint at least provides me with a barrier, a necrotising stronghold from inside which I endure. To recall Masciandaro’s statement from chapter three (3.b.iv) that:

There are the torments of each, of all who wrestle in collective solitude with its terrifying discontinuous continuities and continuous discontinuities between the reality of what is loved and the image of thought. And this pain points the way (backwards or forwards?) into the superior, more pleasurable suffering wherein the noble lover, the immoderate cogitator [...], the one who loves thinking about the loved one (black metal), who knows that “loving is also necessarily a speculation...an essentially phantasmatic process, involving both imagination and memory in an assiduous, tormented circling around an image painted or reflected in the deepest self. (86-87)

My self-as-corpse in corpse paint, represents ‘terrifying discontinuous continuities and continuous discontinuities’ in my gendered hybridity that forces a rupture of engagement, that invites negative responses forming Masciandaro’s tormented circling around the image painted, and that image is me as Denigrata Herself. I have, for the purposes of my analysis, been clear about my doubling of the self, the separation between me and Denigrata Herself, but as my love for the music intensifies and that love is a connection between the two constructs, my metaphysical comfort dissipates. I am angry that sexism blocks the receipt of our live show and I am angry that abjection-as-fear is so identifiable; the way I feel at our gigs is not feminist paranoia as I have examined in my vignettes. Initially, corpse-paint was worn as a black metal aesthetic signifier, now I wear my corpse-paint as armour, something Daniel accurately calls ‘melancholy self-preservation’ (44) and that is accurate. Kristeva’s corpse that infects life with death is born out on stage through my body in corpse-paint as a self-preservatory mode. It is the ‘the social production of a legible outward display of an inward relation to death’ (Daniel 44) that exceeds its black metal signification and obliterates

its subject, where ‘the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverises the subject’ (Kristeva 5). And I do feel pulverised.

I feel that Denigrata Herself has been rejected by the juridical black metal male from the live event, something I have always felt deeply connected to because she represents a threat; ‘it is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us’ (Kristeva 4). Since I started the band, I have felt that I was so intrinsically connected with it, that it has been something from which one does not part, and that I did not need to protect myself from. Now however, on stage, I feel I want to hide at the back, behind the other band members, because I have come to represent the abject, rotting corpse that signifies the ‘place where meaning collapses’ (2). My intentions and corporeal signifiers meant something, to me at least. To suddenly embody a void where those meanings and signifiers become exhausted indicates that my interiorities (intentions) and my exteriorities (corporeal signifiers) and their distinction become irrelevant; they become fragmented under the scrutiny of black metal elitists and sexist attitudes. Denigrata Herself crosses multiple borders, she is a borderline subject that ‘constitutes propitious ground for a sublimating discourse’ (7) and that discourse leaves me in exile. It is Hunt-Hendrix’s haptic void in subjective form, the ‘total or maximal level of intensity expressed as feeling [...] but [its] promise is a lie. Only its absence is ever present’ (56). In my desire to be an active presence I have ended up as its inversion and at our gigs, I am the obliterating corpse whose substance subtracts. And in black metal terms, Denigrata Herself can be understood as the sublimating haptic void in process.

I feel exiled from the rest of the band because they do not experience the negativity of the live event as I do. I feel exiled from the music I love because I represent a deviant form that is deemed unacceptable and I feel exiled by the totalising effects of this isolation. I am the stray, I am the deject. I covet that which is denied me and in so doing, I am a nomad, existing on the margins of ‘a land of oblivion’ (8) where I constitute a ‘non-object, the abject’ (8). Kristeva defines the deject as ‘one by whom the abject exists [and] is thus a deject who places ([her]self), separates [her]self, situates [her]self, and therefore strays instead of getting [her] bearings, desiring, belongings [...] the deject is in short a stray. [She] is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding’ (8).

### **5.c.ii. She who can Wreck the Infinite: Jouissance and Sublime Alienation**

As sites of abjection, Denigrata Herself and Manea co-exist within the same performative space but the abjection functions differently. As Manea performs a more consolidated and outwardly identifiable ‘feminine’, her abjection exists *because* of her feminine performance within a constructed masculine musical frame. As stated previously in this chapter, her musical role informs that reading by enacting a gendered representation through her soprano coloratura and keys. It could be argued then, that her abjection is identifiable by her presence *within* a normative feminine absence, in a conspicuously masculine artistic form. Denigrata Herself however, forces that abjection further, by

presenting an ambiguous gender performance that represents a ‘place where meaning collapses’ (2).

Perhaps both Manea and Denigrata Herself are two sides of the same coin, both castrated and castrators negotiating the ‘precocious narcissistic wound’ (158) of female abjection. Both figures can be read as Kristeva’s ‘two-faced mother [who] is perhaps the representation of the baleful power of women to bestow mortal life’ (158). I extend this concept to include the creation of music, instead of life, the power shifting from one to the other. Through the performative meaning-bearer ‘I’, the shifter whose nomadic function ‘takes meaning only within the parametres of the discursive event’ (Elbaz 6) implies that Denigrata’s discursivity creates a deviating and abject performance by splitting the mother in two; two representations of the feminine from one patriarchally constructed singular category of ‘women’, a category that feminist theory states does not exist (de Beauvoir 37; Irigaray 23; Kristeva 209; Wittig 4) whilst juridical hegemony continues to construct and perpetuate it. And black metal represents this producing and reproducing systemic gender essentialism. Women are not the phallus so we must move aside or become the mother.

Both Manea and Denigrata Herself are without and yet have the phallus, the castrated female body with the power to castrate through our performance on stage. We *lack* the phallus because we are women and are therefore an abjecting force rather than a stabilising, masculine one. We *have* the phallus because we inhabit an encoded masculine space on stage. This emasculating potentiality disrupts black metal’s normative practice; performing black metal reinforces our position as rejects in this patriarchal stratum; we have strayed somewhere we are not supposed to be. There is a phobic response to this performance that only reveals itself in the minutiae of interactions, as shown in the vignettes. There are countless other examples I could have used but these epiphanic moments are the turning-point events that have me to examine what these responses mean. It is fear that tries to preserve black metal as a domain of exclusion for women performers and my subjective experience supports this. The orthodox, juridical nature of black metal enacts a paternal prohibition for women performers that tells us we are only ever tolerated. Subjectively I can feel like a gendered unification all I want but that does not prevent prohibition at live gigs; objectively I am treated as a woman who is in the wrong place. Kristeva states:

What we designate as “feminine” [...] will be seen as “other” without a name, which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity. Assuming that any Other is appended to the triangulating function of the paternal prohibition, what will be dealt with here, beyond and through the paternal function, is a coming face to face with the unnameable otherness [...] implied by the *confrontation with the feminine* [...] Abjection, or the journey to the end of the night. (58-59)

Denigrata Herself and Manea’s performance does not stop at appearance, they transcend it. In so doing, our abjecting performance permeates black metal’s paternal prohibition by forcing it to confront the ‘feminine as unnameable other’. Black metal’s confrontation with the feminine at Denigrata’s shows reveals its narcissism and phobia as an ‘obsessional and paranoid structure’ (60) that identifies woman-as-threat and consolidates to

protect itself against perceived opposition. As Gayatri Spivak notes, it is only ‘when one takes a whack at shaking up the dominant structure, one sees how much more consolidated the opposition is’ (16). This perhaps, goes some way to explain my subjective experience highlighted in the vignettes.

Whilst my live gig experience is represented by the Kristevan corpse, my engagement with Denigrata in a live environment turns this on its head. I have been a writer and metal performer for the last fifteen years but there are a number of reasons why Denigrata is special. The three men in the band identify as feminists, they have been happy to foreground the matrifocal focus of Denigrata, believing that it offers something new to black metal and they enjoy the disruption it represents. In pragmatic terms, this also means important interior machinery of the band does not function through a gendered hierarchy. This is very important because we all believe that a band should function democratically, that everyone’s voice is equal and respected.

This is the first time I have been in a band with another woman, as everything prior to Denigrata was always a masculine space where my presence was mediated and diluted by the patriarchal frame inside which I performed. In Denigrata, the matrifocal structure engages supports and focuses woman as subject. This has evolved over time and with it has come a fierce and loving friendship with Manea that I describe in terms of sisterhood. It extends beyond the boundaries of a normative woman to woman friendship because we write and play music together; we are involved in creating and working towards our conjoined perichoresis for Denigrata. This is my *jouissance*, the creativity I take joy in (*on en jouit*). *Jouissance* can be a complicated idea that is not only about representing passion. Kristeva states that ‘it jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through *jouissance* [...] one does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it (*on en jouit*). Violently and painfully. A passion’ (9). It is through this abominable *jouissance* that Denigrata’s matrifocal position has come to mean ‘she who can wreck the infinite’, the ‘she’ representing a parallax view on the supposed category of woman as represented by the witch-femme of Manea and the witch-hybrid of Denigrata Herself.

My *jouissance* in Denigrata is nomadic, at once existing as the fiery scream as ‘I spit myself out’ (3), and occupation of the corpse that ‘shows me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live’ (3). There is no reconciliation between the polemics, they co-exist violently and painfully, so that my ability to be part of Denigrata’s performative text is realised. I am treated suspiciously at our live shows for being too much; too much a man on stage, too much a woman for disrupting black metal’s juridical orthodoxy. I am, as Denigrata Herself, too much. My yearning for that performance is the drive that enshrines and perpetuates it, just as black metal’s hegemonic structure enshrines and perpetuates its masculinity. When I began this performance, I could not have known my performative gender excess because it had ‘yet to appear to me as a thing [...] laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me’ (10). I was unable to identify those structures of meaning in black metal because my yearning for Denigrata’s perichoresis blinded me. Now, however, it has revealed

itself as paternal prohibition, telling me that I am rejected; I am the abject jettisoned for my corporeal performative excess. Kristeva states:

When I seek (myself), lose myself, or experience *jouissance* – then “I” is *heterogeneous*. 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 [...] I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be “me”. Not at all an Other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. A possession previous to my advent: a being-there of the symbolic that a father might or might not embody. (10)

In black metal, the father is a perpetuating constant that throws his abject shadow onto me, possessing me whenever I seek myself through his music. My revolt against him, in my performance in Denigrata, reveals the painful violence conferred upon me for my disruption. Jouissance, as the ‘frontier, the repulsive gift of the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that “I” does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence’ (9); my passion for Denigrata’s music persists and in so doing, I find myself in black metal’s domain of exclusion, an abject within a subject that does not want me there. My sublime alienation that forces my forfeited existence in black metal is my *jouissance*. Denigrata Herself is my alter ego, my Othered self that I constructed and sacrificed to black metal, ‘sacrificing the law to maintain it’ (Masciandaro 83) only to have it projected back to me through black metal’s paternal prohibition that tries to block and mediate my performative liberation. My *jouissance* is a bitter, impassioned rage against the black metal ‘progressive despot [who] lives at the behest of death, [who] establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss’ (Kristeva 16). Black metal is the pretender whose access to the abyss is mediated by the ‘special generic authority of black metal, its grottophilic space of absolute refusal’ (Masciandaro 83) and that refusal is demarcated through the abjection of the female black metal performer.

This refusal however, has a resistance. My relationship with the band and its matrifocal focus is the counter to my subjective experience of black metal’s desire to force my sublime alienation. My fierce sisterhood with Manea is the epitome of this, existing ‘outside of the sacred, [where] the abject is written’ (17). The third wave of black metal attempts to cast women as divine but we are witches to black metal and to ourselves, never goddesses; we seek a ‘demystification of power’ (210) in order to re-present ourselves as powerful women whose representation signifies revolt. Black metal’s attempt to prohibit and mediate women, trying to control our image, representation and performance is met by sorority and solidarity. Black metal can attempt to prohibit and negate Denigrata’s performance but we are still there. We are still producing music and performing live, even though the refusal of that performance is ever-present. This will not stop us. We are not ‘the chora, [the] receptacle of narcissism’ (13); we reject this construction of us as women in black metal and we will not accept its narcissism. As shown in the vignettes, the black metal

elite's attitude towards us shows its narcissism and paternal prohibitive actions. We stand counter to this because it will not stop Denigrata from composing and producing black metal.

This disharmony I acknowledge as a vigorous part of my *jouissance*, that Denigrata Herself and to a lesser extent, Manea, are recognised as black metal mimesis, as secondary imitators of the masculinity of black metal. But 'even before being *like*, "I" am not but do *separate, reject, ab-ject*. Abjection, with a meaning broadened to take in subjective diachrony, is a precondition of narcissism. It is coexistent with it and causes it to be permanently brittle' (*The Powers of Horror* 13). We reject being *like* black metal because through our performance, we *are* black metal. We inhabit, occupy and perform it and in our covetousness of black metal, through our *jouissance*, the uncertain nomadic status of the deject becomes a totalisable abject-as-subject that claims a rightful place in black metal as an 'abominable real' (9). The abject is subsumed into our subjectivity through our performance and thrown back in the face of black metal's paternal prohibition. Denigrata Herself and Manea's performance is a dramatalurgical strategy that forces disruption into black metal through abject-as-subject, whose 'performing bodies disrupt the status quo, uncover[ing] the understory of hegemonic systems' (Spry 20). And through this uncovering, the 'despot' has revealed himself. We do not 'decay in abeyance' (141), we bloom in our mutiny, occupying the 'land of oblivion' (8) 'between nothing and all' (141).

In my *jouissance* as Denigrata Herself, I suffer through my passion for black metal and witness the horror of my treatment at its hands, Denigrata's theme is 'the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation' (141). I extend Kristeva's use of 'narrative' here to include performance, 'abjection within a *performance* representation'. Denigrata's live show performs back to the empire of black metal's masculinity, by evolving 'textual strategies which "consume" their own biases as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse' (Tiffin 96), its fragile borders uncoupled from its juridical orthodoxy by women performing black metal. It is fragile because it can be so easily disturbed simply by women, performing. As Kristeva states, 'we have lost faith in One Master Signifier. We prefer to foresee or seduce; to plan ahead, promise a recovery [...] to make art' (209), and make art we will. I have lost faith in the one master signifier of black metal; I no longer need to access the music through the heritage and promotion of the black metal warrior archetype when I can get direct access through Denigrata.

Denigrata's perichoresis, its art, photography, live performance and its music, is beauty. It is 'a *hypersign* around and with the depressive void' (99); black metal's abyss or haptic void (Hunt-Hendrix 55) serves as a totalising force through which Denigrata are constructed. That construction is abjection, the corpse and sublime alienation where we learn that 'totality is indistinguishable from nothingness' (57), that my abject subjectivity represents an excess, a 'dead, static place [whose] status is atrophy' (57) because in its nimiety, it is shut down. And even though my live performance as Denigrata Herself feels like it is indistinguishable from nothing *because* of its totalising force, the melancholic beauty of Denigrata's perichoresis withstands its ignominy. Denigrata Herself and Manea's performance, in the face of their imposed sublimating discourse, stands firm. Any sadness or

depression I experience because of the live show is mediated by the art object we are able to produce. Kristeva states:

Sublimation alone withstands death. The beautiful object that can bewitch us into its world seems to us more worthy of adoption than any loved or hated cause for wound or sorrow. Depression recognises this and agrees to live within and for that object [...] the way of speech given to suffering, including screams, music, silence and laughter [...] This is a survival of idealisation – the imaginary constitutes a miracle, but it is at the same time its shattering: a self-illusion, nothing but dreams and words, words, words...It affirms the almightyess of temporary subjectivity – the one that knows enough to speak until death comes. (101-102)

Denigrata's album, our stage performance and our video, are our 'beautiful object' that has bewitched us. All parts of our perichoresis contain my screams in the music and moments of silence where our unity as a band and our laughter reverberate through the charred halls of black metal. We are the survival of our own blackened idealisation that 'manifest[s] lust for the intensity of transitions, of ceding or forcing a system to cede to a radical alterity that reconfigures identity by destroying and overtaking' (Sciscione 176). And that radical alterity for black metal, is Denigrata...

...until death comes...

The value of this chapter lies not only in bringing my autoethnography full circle, but by providing the mirror narrative to chapter one. These chapters use autoethnography to tell my story from its starting point to its current position that speaks to the development of my subjective embodiment through my performance in Denigrata. This offers new research for autoethnography and black metal theory by forging the two fields together through my performance. Extending from this is my performance analysis that incorporates an investigation into how my band deterritorialises black metal signifiers, an analysis of Denigrata's perichoresis in terms of a track by track breakdown, the connection of the requiem mass structure to Niall Scott's apophatic liturgy (231) followed by an analysis of the aesthetics used in our album, photography and video. This section concludes by recalling Scott's 'abyssstopia' (79), that as Baumgartner states 'performs an apophasis of ontological arguments for [...] divine love [to] radically open onto everything' (80). This is a valuable quote from black metal theory to draw this section to a close because it encapsulates and forges the abysstopic notion of finding joy in the celebration of the void through black metal, that I experience with Denigrata.

Extending from this is my final analysis in 5.b that uses feminist psychoanalysis and applies it to my black metal performance. This has been difficult but certainly one of the most rewarding sections of my research because I have felt that I was treading on new ground. Applying feminist psychoanalysis to black metal is a different way of reading it but because it is my own autoethnographic experiences, this lends a brand-new field of inquiry that psychoanalysis, feminist theory or black metal have yet to incorporate. I am very excited by this section and I have gained much in terms of my chosen theorists' different engagements.

Judith Butler's notion on subject representation allowed me to include three further vignettes to illustrate how my subjective representation in black metal has been underpinned by juridical systems of patriarchy and internalised misogyny as demonstrated in vignette three in 5.b.i. This set up an interesting contrast between myself and Manea which is something that continues in this final section. In 5.b.ii, I connect Butler with autoethnography through *Giving an Account of Oneself* that demonstrates some key signifiers of autoethnographic writing. I apply this methodology to this text to foreground the value of her position in relation to mine. In the last section on Butler, it focuses on performativity and corporeality, from how I move on stage and occupy space to the representation of my alter ego, Denigrata Herself as a form of drag.

From 5.c until the end of the chapter, my focus is on Julia Kristeva's abjection, the corpse and finally jouissance and sublime alienation. Applying abjection to Denigrata, has been an interesting process that aligned in myriad ways, from my stage name to the ways in which abjection functions differently between myself and Manea. In 5.c.i, I apply Kristeva's corpse to my self-as-corpse-in-corpse paint, that acts as a buffer to unwanted attention at shows, through its ability to function as 'melancholy self-preservation' (Daniel 44). In the final section of this chapter, 5.c.ii, I discuss jouissance and sublime alienation. This builds on the work done on Denigrata Herself as corpse in the previous section but extrapolates the problematic joy that comes with performing as a woman in black metal. I state that my jouissance in Denigrata is nomadic; a moving, shifting love that is homeless in black metal because it is rejected but exists nonetheless. My sisterhood with Manea counters this dramatically and dramatalurgically by offering solidarity in the face of 'the progressive despot [who] lives at the behest of death, [who] establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss' (16). This quotation from Kristeva encapsulates Denigrata's engagement with the juridical, patriarchal systems of black metal.

This chapter has a much longer concluding summary than the previous ones, because it is here that much of my new research lays. Chapter five has provided me the chance to create an end point to the thesis, through performance analysis and psychoanalytic application. This chapter is the apex of my research.

## Conclusion

### Liber Sum: Restorative Visibility and Feminine Presence

We don't always recognise ourselves, we are haunted...by other voices, other bodies, other selves, other experiences. We are haunted...by those who are no longer with us and who we were or could have been. You and I are in transition. We are liminal beings, witnessing the passing, circling back, feeling the pull of history and the weight of culture, experiencing the shock, surprise, wonder, confusion of releasing. Reimagining pieces of identity, abilities, old/new anxieties, priorities, ways of thinking, ways of working, ways of creating, ways of engaging/resisting/intervening, transforming relationships with friends, family, lovers, communities, and others we have not met yet. There are urgent new desires and needs TAKING HOLD OF US! (Carr and Shoemaker 518)

I have reached my haptic void, my 'hypothetical total [...] [its] orientation towards [...] expressed as feeling; this final cause' (Hunt-Hendrix 55) in my research. In reaching my final cause, I feel I have attained emancipation from the way my experiences held on to me and whilst I will never forget, they no longer have control. I am free and so I name my conclusion 'liber sum', its Latin counterpart. The final cause functions as the subjective crowning of my own embodiment that does not claim an errorless journey, but asserts a puncturing of the 'linings of the sublime' (Kristeva 11). I know now that I am and can be. From victim to survivor to performer, my subsistence has been painful and necessary. There is no one part of my research that has not been of value; that is not to say that I wish some of it had not happened because I do but then I would not have written what I have. The first part of Carr and Shoemaker's autoethnographic free verse poem above, encapsulates the essence of my methodology which in turn takes me to its second half: 'where do you hold your sorrows? Your losses? Your loneliness? Where do you carry your joy? Your desire? Where do you lodge your anxieties, your fears? How do you carry your unspeakable secrets? Your heartbreaks? Your wildest laughter? Can you feel it? (519).

Their questions can be answered in my methodology and my theoretical frame; through autoethnography I have found my writing voice that has not only provided data for my research but has helped me come to terms with my own narrative. Through my application of Butler, I have a deeper engagement with my performativity, my on-stage persona as Denigrata Herself and what that means in a masculine space. Through my application of Kristeva, I have a better understanding of how I am being engaged with on stage and it has returned my power back to me as I claim my status as abject, as a sublimating discourse. Through Denigrata, I found my voice through performance. Kristeva states 'I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being' (11). I have not remained in the same moment either but through the

engagement with my epiphanic moments, Denigrata has become a theatre of catharsis that foregrounds my body's 'dramatalurgical presence [as] a site and pretext for...debates about representation and gender, about history and postmodern culture' (Birringer 203).

This research started at the lowest point in my life and has come to a close at its most vital. The opportunity to engage, revisit, analyse and speak from an initially 'unshareable position' (Denzin 55) means that I get a much deeper meaning of the phrase 'the subject in process' (Kristeva 7); the constant yet imperceptible shifting of time did not help to begin with, it has only been through using autoethnography alongside the application of a feminist psychoanalytic frame to my performance that I have been able to make sense of my turning point events and use them for my renihilation (Hunt-Hendrix 292). Denzin notes 'we are as Heidegger reminds us, talking beings, and we live and talk our way into being through the poetic, narrative structures of our language. It's not that our language tells our stories for us; rather, we appropriate language for our own discursive purposes' (55). This is what I have done.

Through the course of my research, I have engaged with my own trauma and the trauma of others; women researchers, women in black metal and in the music industry, the lives lost and those who remained from the second wave of black metal to an extreme ascendancy, a climacteric capstone. I have become increasingly aware of women's representation in black metal and in turn my own as Denigrata Herself and of my band mate Manea, as abjected performers occupying male space. Our performing bodies disrupt the dominant discourse through abjecting performance through the reclamation of that representation from patriarchal gender essentialism. We occupy and embody a breach, an abjecting interstice converted for our own perichoresis (Hunt-Hendrix 279). Kristeva notes in a subheading in *The Powers of Horror* titled 'perverse or artistic', 'the abject is perverse because it neither gives up or assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them' (15). This is how I feel as Denigrata Herself. It may look like we are playing by the black metal rules, corpse paint, blast beats, tremolo picking, distortion, but those constructs are subverted because I am Denigrata Herself, the thing on stage that is not allowed; patriarchal prohibition is enshrined all about me and I spit it back out.

I have identified the patriarchal dominant structure from interpersonal violence and through women's representation and engagement in black metal, as an extension of that dominant structure. In so doing, I wanted to foreground the efficacy of the hegemony's ability to reproduce its subjects in its own image whilst giving the impression of an institution in perpetuity. My performance in Denigrata subverts that sense of masculinity-as-constancy through the active every time we perform, or someone buys our album or merchandise. This is not the only way that the subversion occurs. Extending from this, I also wanted to highlight how gender essentialism is present in the minutiae of creativity by examining three pieces of music and providing a musicological analysis that shows how notions of masculinity and femininity have come to be understood in compositional formats. Any attempt to think that patriarchy only exists as an overarching, externalised frame that does not seep into the cracks of our everyday lives, including how we compose music, is shown to be false.

I survived an abusive relationship to seek a space for catharsis through black metal to find that it was just an extension of the dominant discourse. This was not going to prevent me from making music so I have navigated it, whilst fully acknowledging how other women in black metal have been treated, in order to attain a position of total abjection and to be the most subversive I can. My presence on stage and in the black metal community is a sublimating discourse and I am glad that it is. I call this restorative visibility because I am taking up space and using that space for creative purposes. I understand how problematic black metal's history has been and it is not without its issues but I find it to be a space where I can push back. Denigrata Herself composes back to the empire of black metal and of patriarchy as a whole. As Brenda Gardner-Walter writes, 'Denigrata Herself is the personification of denigration, or blackening, as her name implies. She wears black and white corpse paint—signs of alterity and decay—as well as white antlers that protrude from her long black hair. Wielding a phallic guitar and screeching out in Latin, she is the high priestess in a Black Mass of sound' (1). This I take to be the goring of the stag of black metal and of its patriarchal system of representation and replication.

I conclude my research by offering Denigrata as music of resistance. Be wary of male artists making artwork about nihilism; the void does not belong to you. Women own it because we live it. The abyss is ours; it exists in our bodies and in our lived experience. So, to all women: make music, be loud, get on the stage.

## **Appendix i.**

Denigrata. *Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass in A Minor*. Northern Darkness, 2015;  
Carvetii Productions, 2016.

## **Appendix ii.**

Metal Press Reviews and Interviews for Denigrata.

### **Album Launch.**

21.11.15. Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Northampton, UK.







### **Album Release.**

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1077210822358567&id=695477373865249](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1077210822358567&id=695477373865249) 25.05.16.

### **Art Installation.**

Trans-States Conference: the Art of Crossing Over. The University of Northampton, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2016. <http://www.trans-states.org>

### **CD Compilations.**

*Blasphemy by thy Name*. Vol. 3. Track: ‘Dies Irae’.  
<http://www.metalmusic.at/shop/> 21.04.16.

Ultraje, Portugal. Track: ‘Agnus Dei’. <https://www.facebook.com/ultrajept/> 16.10.16.

UKEM Records, UK. Track: ‘Dies Irae’. <https://ukemrecords.bandcamp.com/.../disciples-of-extremity-vol-2...> 09.07.16.

Zero Tolerance, UK and EU. Track: ‘Dies Irae’. <http://www.ztmag.com/current.html> 01.01.17.

### **Interviews.**

<http://absit-omen.com/denigrata.html> 20.01.16.

<http://www.metal-impact.com/index.php?name=Interviews&req=showcontent&id=694>  
07.01.16.

*Mouth Noises* Conference, Kings College, London.

[https://www.northampton.ac.uk/news/jasmine\\_shadrack\\_mouth\\_noises\\_london](https://www.northampton.ac.uk/news/jasmine_shadrack_mouth_noises_london) 29.09.26.

<https://thursdayaddams.wordpress.com/2016/08/18/denigrata-interview-with-johnny-doom>  
18.08.16.

Interview with Johnny Doom.

<https://www.madeinbirmingham.tv/player/?playercat=94491&v=2> 03.01.17.

## **Radio.**

<https://www.facebook.com/andy.barnes.3720/posts/1798254863748809:0> 25.11.16.

<http://www.metalmessiahrecords.com/index.html> 05.07.16.

<http://www.sonicbandwagon.com/.../118-sonic-bandwagon-radio-.../> 30.05.16.

## **Reviews.**

<http://absit-omen.com/denigrata-missa-defunctorum-requiem-mass-in-a-minor2015-independent.html> 11.12.16.

<http://www.avenoctum.com/2015/11/denigrata-missa-defunctorum-sr> 24.11.15.

<http://echoesanddust.com/2015/11/exclusive-stream-denigrata-missa-defunctorum> 20.11.15.

Metal Hammer Magazine. Issue 278. January 2016.



<http://www.metal-impact.com/index.php?name=Reviews&req=showcontent&id=6464>

05 01 16

<http://www.nocleansinging.com/2015/12/08/shades-of-black-part-2-blot-denigrata-lustration-nocturnal-degrade> 08 12 15

<http://noizzeuk.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/denigrata-missa-defunctorum-album-review.html>

26.01.16

Terrorizer Magazine Issue 266 December 2015

## DENIGRATA

### 'Missa Defunctorum'

SELF RELEASED



All the petty, random hatred being directed towards Myrkur or Deafheaven right now might soon find its way to Denigrata, and we mean this as a compliment. All the characteristics are here in this debut – an intimidatingly powerful, guitar-wielding frontwoman; intelligent, unusual structuring in the songwriting; a sort of serious playfulness with some of black metal's standards, including a remarkable interplay of two very different but wildly complementary different guitar styles (of Denigrata Herself and Cndel) that often make the riffs feel velvety soft and ruggedly harsh at the same time; a well-thought out concept... In short, a delightfully adventurous and high quality first album, the sort that pushes genres forward leaving confused haters in their wake.

[8] JOSÉ CARLOS SANTOS

## DIATONIC

### 'Hidden Pieces'

INTO THE NIGHT



Diatonic is the project of Joakim Arehn of old school death metal band Overtortion and his band The Ugly. He has instruments on this album except drums which are provided by Fredrik Widigs from My Dying Bride. While clearly rooted in death metal, it also includes progressive elements and is quite a departure from what he does in his other bands. The album has a lot of twists and turns through the course of the album and grandiose melodic flourishes. Musical technicality is given priority over brutality here. Fellow Swedes The Price and earlier Opeth spring to mind as well as death metal sounding Meshuggah. Fans of such bands will find this appealing overall, though definitely more rough around the edges.

[7]

## DEVIL YOU KNOW

### 'They Bleed Red'

NUCLEAR BLAST

## ENFORCER

### 'Live By Fire'

NUCLEAR BLAST

<http://toxiconline.co.uk/unsigned-missa-defunctorum-denigrata/> 06.01.16.

<https://vdhordes.org/2017/01/19/nihilism-darkness-and-filth-missa-defunctorum-requiem-mass-in-a-minor-by-denigrata/> 19.01.17.

Zero Tolerance Magazine. Issue 70. January 2016.

office toilet with the seat down.

**DENIGRATA MISSA DEFUNCTORUM XTREME**  
Denigrata made quite an impression on me when I saw them perform in Birmingham earlier this year. Two female vocalists, one belting out sweeping opera-like sopranos, intertwined with the other who snarled and screeched like a banshee in Latin. *Missa Defunctorum* may not carry the visual impact of the Northampton outfit's compelling live show, but as a first step into Denigrata's dark and disturbing universe it's a good place to begin. Best described as ambient avante-garde black metal, such is the demonic power unleashed on songs such as 'Confutatis Maledictis' you're almost tempted to sign up for Latin nightschool.

**DESECRESY STOIC DEATH XTREME**  
Desecresy create atmospheric death metal but manage to bring an even more crushing



## Video Release.

<https://www.bleedingcool.com/2016/05/24/what-else-has-geoff-johns-been-hiding-under-our-noses-the-whole-time-dc-universe-rebirth-1-spoilers> 25.05.16.

<http://planetmosh.com/?p=214281> 24.05.16.

<http://Terrorize.it/KyrieEleison> 23.05.16.

<https://thursdayaddams.wordpress.com/2016/05/25/denigrata-release-new-video> 26.05.16.

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[http://www.navidbargrzan.com/uploads/5/4/8/1/54814981/harry\\_partch\\_abstract.pdf](http://www.navidbargrzan.com/uploads/5/4/8/1/54814981/harry_partch_abstract.pdf) (Date Accessed 24.02.17).
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## Glossary of Terms

**Aeolian Mode** – A musical mode or a diatonic scale named the natural minor scale.

**Atonality** – No tonal centre or key signature.

**Augmented** – Sharpened note a semi-tone up from the nearest tone.

**Barred Chords** – A barred chord is played on the guitar and consists of either a perfect fifth (i, v) or an arpeggio (i, v i) that contains the root, fifth and octave (tonic, dominant, octave). The effect of this structure is to provide a thick, full texture for melodic and harmonic lines. Otherwise known as a power chord.

**Basso Continuo** - Baroque musical form where the cello and harpsichord play melodic and harmonic contrapuntal structures, or figured bass, that create the foundations of a piece of music. They create an instantly recognisable marker of Baroque music.

**Basso Continuo Nero** – Black metal musical form where the guitar and drums play contrapuntal tempi structures through tremolo picking and blast beats that create the foundations of a piece of music. They create an instantly recognisable marker of black metal.

**Black Metal** – A subgenre of metal that started in the 1980s and has three acknowledged waves. The noun ‘black’ is added to the genre of ‘metal’ to indicate a darker representation than anything else within that field.

**Black Metal Theory** – An academic school of thought and criticism that developed around 2009/2010 to analytically engage with black metal music and its associated subcultural texts and practices.

**Blackened Theory** – A tangential affiliative of Black Metal Theory proposed by the thesis that suggests that the act of applying theoretical positions to black metal, means that the process itself ‘blackens’; existing theory becomes blackened when applied to this artistic form. This proposes that the theory itself becomes affected by the music and so too becomes moved to a darker state. So rather than its parent, Black Metal Theory which suggests theory about black metal, Blackened Theory suggests a darker rendering and philosophical interaction and engagement that is immersive and is represented through language and aesthetics (Lesourd 42).

**Black Metal Extract (see also Haptic Void)** – A teleological development in black metal that non-verbally ascribes to what black metal seeks to represent.

**Blast Beat** – An extreme metal drumming pattern that exists within death metal, grind, thrash and black metal. There are two main variations; the kick drum led blast beat and the snare led blast beat. Given that the compositional tendency is towards either 4/4 or 6/8 time signatures, the blast beat is the fastest hit that can be performed within the bar, syncopated with either the snare (kick drum led) or the kick drum (snare led). There is also the gravity blast, where the drum stick bounces off the rim of the snare onto the snare skin but this is usually found in

grind and death metal only. The blast beat is an instantly recognisable marker of hyperborean black metal and is usually used in conjunction with double bass drumming.

**Broken Chords** – Broken chords differ from barred chords by adding either augmented or diminished notes, or other notes from the scale or related scales, within the barred chord structure. The effect of this technique is a more complex timbral representation that includes notes that are not usually found in barred chords.

**Burst Beat** – A drumming technique that exists within third wave, transcendental black metal. This is a dropped beat drumming pattern that often follows the blast beat. Where the blast beat forms a metric bpm (beats per minute) that fills the entire bar, the burst beat fractures that structure by reducing the hits to half of its previous tempo. This gives the sonic impression of the blast ‘bursting’; this is also recognised as metric modulation.

**Coloratura** – Elaborate vocal ornamentation specific to sopranos.

**Compound Time** – Complex time signature structures where each beat is divided into three components, forming a one-two-three tempo or pulse. Compound time signatures tend to obfuscate any metric engagement, meaning the tempo is more difficult to discern.

**Corpse Paint** – A face-painting design specific to black metal performance and theatricality. This process involves using black and white face paint to make the wearer look like a dead person.

**Counterpoint (contrapuntal)** – The relationship between different instruments and voices that are harmonically interdependent (polyphony/polyphonic) whilst functioning independently. There are two main variations; dyadic and successive. Dyadic counterpoint creates an interweaving of different instrument and/or vocal lines whilst coalescing harmonically. Successive counterpoint offers a repeated introduction of instrument and/or vocal lines whilst altering the intervals between them.

**Diatonic** – The diatonic scale, otherwise known as the Heptatonia Prima, is the scale comprised of seven precise pitch classifications. For example, on a keyboard, from middle C to the octave above, is called a diatonic scale.

**Diminished** – Flattened note a semi-tone down from the nearest tone.

**Dissonance** – A process by which tonally unrelated pitches are used together to create clashing note clusters. This format is used particularly from the late Romantic period onwards (*Symphony of Psalms*, Stravinsky, Neo-Classical period, 1930).

**Distortion** – A sonic and timbral effect used mainly on stringed instruments in popular music forms. Distortion pushes the existing electronic sound from a guitar to its amp to maximum capacity, simultaneously creating an aggressive yet warm and organic medium that melodic and harmonic lines pass through. It is the perceived aggressive tone colour that metal uses consistently but with certain specificities. For example, there are different kinds of distortion;

the warmer sounds are attributable to grind and death metal. The cold, harsher sounding distortion is indicative of black metal.

**Double Bass Drumming** – A drumming technique that incorporates a kick drum hit for each foot. This can be produced by using one kick drum with a double pedal or two kick drums with a single pedal each. The purpose of this is to illicit a crotchet, quaver or semi-quaver hit per bar that gives the effect of a percussive drone with a particular sonic impact that fills the compositional space with an aggressive constant.

**Drone** – A musical technique that uses sustained or repeated notes, sounds or tone clusters. The effect is a constant timbral line or wave that occupies sonic space usually for an extended period of time.

**Enharmonic** – An enharmonic is a note with two titles, dependent upon the key signature of the piece of music or whether the motif is travelling up or down a key or fretboard. For example, an Eb is also a D#, an A# is also a Bb and so on.

**Glissando/Glissandi** – A glide from one pitch or note to another.

**Haptic Void** – A term taken from blackened theorist Hunter Hunt-Hendrix. He states, ‘the Haptic Void is a hypothetical total or maximal level of intensity’ (Hunt-Hendrix 279). He breaks this notion down into four concepts; muscular clenching, musical representations of aggression, physical effect and paradoxical dissatisfaction. The haptic void is at once the search for the essence or final cause of the music being composed whilst also being consistently out of reach. The void element represents the liminal space in which desire for and loss of the final cause, co-exist.

**Hyperborean** – A term taken from blackened theorist Hunter Hunt-Hendrix that delineates the second wave of black metal that existed in Scandinavia in the 1990s.

**Kvlt** – An etymological and semantic play on the term ‘cult’. Kvlt means the most extreme manifestation of black metal ethos; the use of a ‘k’ and a ‘v’ in place of the ‘c’ and the ‘u’ is meant to represent this underground lore. If a band or a fan is deemed ‘kvlt’, this is considered an accolade.

**Metric** – Tempi that are on the beat in 4/4 (common time) and its variants. The beat is easily identifiable as four crotchet beats in a bar.

**Metric Modulation** – Otherwise known as tempo modulation, it is a change in tempo that shifts the beat from one rhythmic value to another.

**NWOBHM** – New Wave of British Heavy Metal, typified by bands such as Judas Priest and Iron Maiden., specific to the nineteen eighties.

**Ostinato/Ostinati** – A repeated melodic line.

**Pentatonic** – A scale that uses five notes per octave.

**Perichoresis** – A term taken from blackened theorist Hunter Hunt-Hendrix that supposes a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ or total art work in the form of music, art and philosophy. See ‘The Perichoresis of Music, Art and Philosophy’ (*Mors Mystica: Black Metal Theory Symposium*, Schism Press, 2015. pp 279 - 292).

**Prolegomenon** – A critical or discursive introduction either to a cultural text or practice.

**Renihilation** - A term taken from blackened theorist Hunter Hunt-Hendrix that suggests a transformative movement from the second wave of black metal (hyperborean) to the third wave (transcendental). It is the experience of a mystical death in order to be renihilated into immortal life.

**Sonata Form** – A type of musical construction (otherwise known as compound binary form) that contains three sections. Exposition (which contains an introduction to the main melodic motifs), development (in which motifs from the exposition are explored further) and recapitulation (where the exposition’s main motifs are repeated often with modifications, variations and embellishments).

**Sonic** – Involving sound, relating to or using sound waves.

**Tessitura** – The range in which the vocal parts exist.

**Tetrachord** – A chordal structure that incorporates four pitches within the space of five notes.

**Timbre/ Timbral** – Tone colour.

**Tonality** – The perceived character of a composition that is attributed to its key or tonal centre. Tonality is a system that functions on whole tone motifs centred on the pitch or triadic chord with the greatest stability, the tonic or root of the piece which in turn is taken as the key signature. Tonality also refers to whole tone, diatonic engagements and is used in opposition to atonality.

**Transcendental** - A term taken from blackened theorist Hunter Hunt-Hendrix that delineates the third wave of black metal. This is also known as post-black metal or black gaze.

**Triad/ Triadic** – A chordal structure that involves three notes in a major or minor scale, which is commonly but not limited to, the use of the tonic, mediant and dominant (i, iii, v). The mediant’s natural or sharp delineation dictates whether the triad is major or minor.

**Tremolo** – This is a guitar playing technique that is specific to the plectrum-holding hand. If the guitarist is right handed, the left forms the note structures on the fretboard whilst the right punctuates and gives form to those notes. Tremolo or speed-picking follows the same format as the blast beat inasmuch as it is its job to fill the bar with as many strict tempi hits using a strumming structure as possible. The effect of this is to fill a sonic space with a consistent yet tonally altering drone.

**Tritone** – Otherwise known as The Devil’s Chord or Interval or Diabolus in Musica (see also *Diabolus in Musica*, Slayer, American Recordings, 1998). The tritone is a chordal structure whose interval has either been augmented or diminished. For example, given that the root or tonic note is C, the tritone would be an interval of C and F#, fracturing the accepted format of the perfect fourth or fifth by either raising or flattening the enharmonic to F#. Historically, the Catholic Church banned the use of the tritone because it was seen as a tonal aberration of the perfect nature of the fourth and fifth intervals. Music was created to worship God and should be beautiful, not clashing by using sonically awkward intervals. As such, popular music forms such as black metal, particularly the hyperborean, use the tritone extensively because of its sound and also its religiously inscribed meaning.

**Unsound** – A term taken from blackened theorist Eugene Thacker that delineates a negation of sound, a subsonic rather than no sound at all. He states, ‘the subsonic is an expression of an empty sound, the sound of negation that is manifest but not apparent, real but not empirical, the sound of the abyss that is not silence, or quiet, or noise, but an *unsound*’ (Thacker 187).